

English 216: notes for Chapter 3 and 4

Chapter 3: Culturalism

- various breaks from previous Marxist & Leavisite ideas

Breaking from Classical Marxism

- **E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class***
 - the working class created itself as a reaction to its context
 - an example of **culturalism**: shift towards agency rather than determinism

Breaking from Leavisism (i.e., creating left-Leavisism)

- **Richard Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy***
 - working-class culture is realistic/active; mass culture is fanciful/passive
 - looks at history from working-class point of view, inverts class perspective\
- **Raymond Williams, “The Analysis of Culture”**
 - pop culture works out problems in culture
 - i.e., “magical” solutions to real problems
 - **structures of feeling**: what it would be like to be in a time/place
 - doesn’t define people by just documents or just consumption patterns
 - **selective tradition**: representing a time/place via our preferred examples
- **Stuart Hall & Paddy Whannel, *The Popular Arts***

- **popular art**: product of culture industry, but can still be enlightening
- **mass culture**: industrial/degrading; **high culture**: individual/enlightening
- youth culture & music:
 - must the study whole of cultural activity (not just the “text”)
 - audience appears to get something out of it (not just top-down)

Chapter 4: Marxisms

Classical Marxism

- **base**: material surroundings and ability to work with them
 - creates the terrain for the superstructure to happen
- **superstructure**: politics, economy, society that results from activity at the base
 - not determined by the base, contains lots of internal activity
- **class**: a group’s social position relative to activity at the base
- popular culture is a product of base and of interactions w/in superstructure

William Morris

- expands Marxist idea of **alienation**:
 - i.e., if you only ever sell your labour for money,
 - you’ll never develop a relationship with that labour
- **creative labour**: when labour and art are same thing (i.e., making something)
 - class distinctions would collapse into each other

The Frankfurt School

- **culture industry**: for-profit entertainment (capitalist); i.e., popular culture
- conforms to industry needs and also promotes conformity
- **mass culture**: standardized content, pseudo-individualizes audience
 - claims we're in the ideal world, thus negates need for rebellion
- **art**: by definition, resists or critiques the culture industry (i.e., capitalism)
- problem: the culture industry not this effective or monolithic

- **Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction"**
 - **aura**: the specific, contextualized meaning of a signifying object
 - mechanical reproduction obliterates the aura: new contexts, new meanings
 - so meaning is made in the act of consumption, not determined by production

- **Althusser**
 - **ideology**: practiced; reality is what you do, ideology is how you represent it
 - these representations perpetuate class domination
 - dominant classes are also convinced; they see their domination as natural
 - **ISA (ideological state apparatus)**: institutions that perpetuate ideology
 - **RSA (repressive state apparatus)**: institutions that enforce ideology
 - **problematic**: when ideology tries to represent something outside of itself
 - **symptomatic**: looking for the traces that (futile) effort leaves behind
 - **interpellation**: when you subject yourself to ideology via discourse
 - problem: it's presumed to always be successful & never conflict

- **Antonio Gramsci**
 - **hegemony**: dominant group tries to naturalize its own ideology

- **compromise equilibrium:** subordinated groups agree with hegemonic values (against their interests)
 - RSAs held in reserve in case of actual rebellion
- **organic intellectuals:** represent hegemonic values; can be ISAs
- **bricolage:** youths use hegemonic culture for resistance,
 - but resistance gets incorporated into the power structure

Post-Marxism and Cultural Studies

- **articulation:** making meaning in the contextual connection of text & reader¹
- **culture:** is when groups of people tend to articulate in the same ways
 - culture defines what is “common sense” or “natural”
 - i.e., what the physical world is made to mean by ideology
- **mass culture:** not always convincing, the people are not always duped

NB: these notes are compiled from John Storey's *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture*, 7th Edition. They are for studying purposes only.