Lecture 8

27/03/19

Subculture and the meaning of style

Term goes back to the 1800's, early studies referring to deviant groups or urban underclass

Prefix sub suggests a lower rank

"Gin Lane" 1751 William Hogarth is indicative of this definition

Post 1945 youth subculture (mods, rockers, ect)

Refers to minority group with shared set beliefs, values or lifestyles. That resists main stream culture.

Main stream culture

The organisation of society into hierarchical structure

Found in

- State institution
- Government
- Laws
- Authorities
- Bureaucracy

Reflects interest of mainstream social groups

The Constructors of Myth (semiotics > abiding cultural ideas/trends etc)

"a subculture… signals a breakdown of consensus." [Hebdige - the meaning of style 1979]

They look to subvert/parody/disrupt mainstream culture

Case Study 1 – The Beats

Sub cultural elite: mostly male, young, white, educated, middle class, sexually ambivalent

Writers: William Burroughs

Frame of Reference: post WW2, 1950's America, alienation from mainstream society

Beat as in beaten

- Anti-straight culture
- Anti 1950's materialism
- Anti-censorship

- Anti-military complex
- Emphasis on individual autonomy
- Spirituality/ecological consciousness
  - Links to Buddhism
- Iconoclastic in form
- Kicking back against cold war paranoia

Naked Lunch by William Burroughs

Square values vs Beat Values

Square	Beat
Mainstream	Counter cultural
Deferred gratification	Short term hedonism – leads to personal enlightenment
Conformity to bureaucratic rules	Spontaneous action/new experiences
Fatalism	Non conformity
Strong work ethic	Self autonomy
Consumerism = status	Distain for work ethic
Family as moral centre	Anti materialism
Defined gender roles	Spiritual > eastern belief system interests
Deference to religious belief	

Exported to Europe

Vilified in American media

Beatnik

Sloppily groomed goatee

Turtleneck sweater

Prone to nonsensical slang

Convinced in intellectual superiority

Beatcik

Oversized sweater

Lots of eye make up, unkempt hair

"weird and spacey"

Beats in the 60's began getting associated with crime in media

It is the nature of subcultures to have a resurgence and recessions

Case Study II – Punk

"no subculture has sought with more grim determination thatn the punks to detach itself from the taken for granted landscape on normalised forms" – Hebdige

Frame of reference: Britain mid 1970s, economic recession = youth unemployment, articulated the frustrations and alienation of the young working class

Cultural capital

- The creation of artefact indicative of their culture

Cultural Elite: London based, youth

Mainstream	Punk
Regularity of jobs – the "clockwork soul"	Authenticity
Television	Subversion of cultural signs
Magazine that treat their readers like idiots	Non-uniform
Pop star that are thick and useless	Anti-taste
Good fun entertainment when it's not good or not funny	
consumerism	
"All those fucking Saints"	

Dress code: took elements of other subcultures

- Reflecting social dislocation
- Collage & bricolage (the safety pin)
- Anti taste > ugliness
- Original > non uniform
- Provocative > adopting fetishist wear and sexual imagery

Subcultural rituals

- Sarcastic patois
- Nihilism
- Speed logic
- The "pogo"
- Participation in the spectacle
- Gobbing etiquette
- Participation in the spectacle

Demystification

- Iconoclastic > destroying idols
- Anti-corporate/anti-elitism
- Amateurism
  - "Sniffin' Glue"

o Sleeve written and designed by Hipgnosis

DIY Culture and Cultural Capital

- DIY Culture
- Participation
- Primacy of the punk 45 single
- Development of a visual lexicon
  - Zine
  - Anti-aesthetic
    - Energetic/urgent
    - Deliberately crude – but well composed
    - Cheaply produced and printed, restriced use of colour
    - Mix of photomontage/collaged elements
    - No rock star posturing
    - Themes
      - Class and suburbia
      - Anti-consumerism
      - Urban decay
      - **Linder Sterling**

Detournement

"Aping" the parent culture, appropriation of an existing cultural artefact

The graphics of **Jamie Reid**

Reid and Suburban Press (1970-1975)
- A radical printing presses
- Based in Croyden, London
- Low level political agitation
- Sticker campaign
  - London transport

Reid and the Sex Pistols

- Provocative, using anti-monarchy and anti-national imagery
- Taking words out of comic strip and putting the lyrics into

The Absorption of a sub culture

A subculture over time becomes by the main culture when the power of the subcultural elite wanes. This is due to mainstream knowledge of the subculture; conflict of values among the elite; when it becomes commercialised, commodified and exploited; losing its edge or danger, becoming contained; the member of the subculture gains mainstream power.

Task - definition of sub culture, find a subculture and write about and provide visual capital