

BAIMP Media Concepts Essay 1 –

Assess the view that popular culture is an expression of resistance against the prevailing order. Refer in your answer to academic sources as well as contemporary cultural artefacts.

The concept of ‘popular culture’ could be observed as resistance against Government, politics, mainstream culture or parents although as shall be discussed it is more complicated – it could be argued that ‘pop culture’ may not even be able to be a rebellion, let alone a forceful resistance due to appropriation. As quoted by R Williams, ‘popular culture is rarely put forward by those who enjoy it’, however ‘Punk’, ‘Rave’ and ‘Goth’ youth subcultures of the late 1970’s, early-1990’s and mid 1990’s respectively all illustrate in either case, it still represents a highly diverse and seemingly deviant strand of society. The most current example of resistant popular culture is the Internet, which is contemporarily displaying similar behaviour characteristics to those above.

The best all encircling description of ‘pop culture’ is

‘such a generic term it presents a difficult task in deciphering in just what it proposes, however it can plainly be summed up in George Lipsitz’ Time Passages as historian Ramon Gutierrez ascribes the term "popular culture" as a refinement dictated by outside forces. Popular culture is inclusive in the sense that it appeals to the mass market. Many Americans are supplemented in this group. Popular culture involves fundamental needs of human beings. It has no set position, it is constantly changing since it is an element that is part of an ongoing cycle.’

(<http://www.evilmonito.com/001/popcult.htm>)

Even as quoted popular culture appeals to the mass market, it undeniably never begins in the mass public conscience; rather it is usually a consequence from resistance of one or more forms of a general uniform order that has been imposed. Whether these cultures were born through mutual personal boredom, suppression or depression they all share the same common trait of struggling against an authoritarian system having a presence in their individual lives.

However subtle and imperceptible music is a popular method of advertising different cultures (as many as there are genre), and accordingly is a powerful medium for expressing ideas. It can even mould personality to an extent and motivate, yet ultimately music itself can not intrinsically offer a solution or transform the world; rather only people can change any leading system of control. ‘Punk’ first started evolving with the arrival of Elvis Presley, but the English Punk revolution was born out of the monotony and tediousness of the British Depression of the 1970’s with the ethos being placed firmly on simple and direct proletarian motivation to voice the anger and frustration of a bored, forgotten section of society. Punk ‘challenged the dominant culture often through inversion of stylistic messages associated with fashion and dress codes’ (Expressions of Identity, Hetherington, Sage Publications, p.54). The reaction of the Punk way of life produced two notable effects against any prevailing order, ‘Iconoclasm’ and ‘Nihilism’ –

‘Iconoclasm is the desire to smash all that’s gone before and kill your idols, and Nihilism is the rejection of current moral and established beliefs without offering or seeking solutions to change it. Its the domain of the young who hope to die before they get old’

(<http://www.punk77.co.uk/punkhistory/punkhistinto.htm>)

Those opposed to this irregular youth culture were often from a higher segment of society and/or older; fearful of cultural change and consequently famously poured scorn, disdain and contempt upon this resistance.

The Rave and Goth cultures also went to similar lengths to get their styles noticed although their political messages were far more subdued than that of the Punk

culture; with Punk they share extremities of emotion and passion dispensed into their music and the obligatory extremities of fashion. Both are at opposing ends of the musical spectrum and so are their reasons for rebelling against the politics of society; Rave culture began in Great Britain at the conclusion of the 1980's -

'Rave culture was born and developed in an urban environment, as part of the urban lifestyle. The main point about the rave culture in a drug use context is its focus on music and dance as well as aesthetics and comprising decorative surroundings with the help of lighting and trendy clothing that accentuates the participants' figures.

Drug use that is connected to rave culture can be seen as rebellious behaviour. It is rebellion for the freedom of the individual, against parental authority and especially against the rules and norms of society. The use of drugs within the rave culture is a form of invisible rebellion. It does not aim at provocation but acting according to one's choices and desires, in secrecy.

Even if the drug use part of rave culture is rebellious, in its deepest core it is not about mere rebellion. Rave culture represents those values that are most prominent in the western society: emphasis on individuality, faith in technology, aesthetics, desires to experience things.' (http://www.paihdelinkki.fi/english/infobank/400_drug_line/462e.htm).

This form of upbeat 'secret rebelling' is juxtaposed against the palpable subdued 'open rebelling' of the Goth culture -

'We're not depressed all the time. It just seems that way sometimes because our culture at large tends to discourage expression of any dark or negative emotions. A certain darkness of character and emotion is common in gothdom, however, though not constantly manifested. There are a few reasons for this:

A sort of "fashionable angst," a reaction to our culture which tells people that being constantly happy and never showing distress is the only acceptable way to behave. A form of rebellion.

A fascination with the forbidden, the darker side of life, which is generally thought of as distasteful and disturbing by the culture at large. Although this can once again be rebellion, there are also people who are genuinely interested in this, by nature, and enjoy exploring it both for the sensations it carries and to examine why it exists and why we keep trying to deny it.' (<http://www.ice-princess.net/gothmood.html>).

It could be argued that whilst masquerading as rebellion, Goth culture is actually an indirect emotional result of an over imposing and pressurising society; producing reserved introversion and the 'genuine interest' in 'the forbidden and the darker side of life' as quoted above. Clearly Punk, Rave and Goth can be seen in their individual traditions as resisting politics, beliefs and values enforced and attempting to change in one way or another that they believe to be immoral or erroneous. Marginal cultures have grown online and flourished as a result of the Internet - it similarly gives those who have a message the space to publicize their viewpoints and attitudes regardless how moral or immoral.

A good example of resistance using the Internet was the latest Prince Charles scandal where the Internet was the only media outlet in this country to reveal 'the full picture' behind the recently suppressed story about His supposed sexuality; it could be argued therefore that Republican's manipulate the Internet as a tool to undermine the monarchy. The reverse to the positive act of revealing censored information lies in the negative act of terrorizing via the abuse of the free speech and space that the Internet has to offer from an unknown remote location. Both forms of behaviour point towards defiance of mainstream wishes, and as described will continue to expand as a form of popular culture

'The Internet may be the ultimate expression of popular culture. Perhaps since I have little confidence in being able to foresee new hardware or software, I should say the Internet is the most irresistible and uncontrollable expression of popular culture seen thus far' - Norman R. Luttbeg, Texas A & M University (http://www.popcultures.com/reviews/rev_0040.htm)

The difference between a new media such as the Internet and the pop cultures of Punk, Rave and Goth is that any music genre and subsequent culture only have their peers to influence, as one must first have access to the cultural scene or at least have been informed about it; the Internet represents cultures with opinions as diverse as the

human mind itself, and with debatable subcultures flourishing all within easy and relatively simple access. As with any new culture some opposition from the existing pop culture is expected as seen with the previously analysed disapproved subcultures; the 'Daily Mail' newspaper (The Daily Mail, Oct 16, 2003) was recently responsible for branding the Internet for the sordid pursuit of paedophilia by a few in comparison to the overall users. This struggle between self-expression and the prevailing moral order can be captured not only in paedophiles against parents and Government, but also with the case of Harry Knowles, the creator of 'Aintitcoolnews.com' against the film industry. Famous for having Hollywood worried to the point of whether certain films would be successful or not based on his reviews, Knowles became known for his brutally honest reviews and they in turn struck a chord within the Internet culture. Yet his bile and vitriol aimed at substandard Hollywood projects is not so apparent on his website now he has been reworked back in by Hollywood employers; they bought him. Comparable are the insurgent users of peer-to-peer file sharing programs against the wishes of the music or movie industry, although their 'selling out' is far subtler. The download may be free, but the original technology is still paid for; the hardware and software – created and divided between Microsoft and Apple Macintosh. It is not clear whether one can escape or rebel against a cultural system dominated –today – by corporate business.

Sociological perception of this struggle against any prevailing authority, whether Hollywood or Government, can be looked at successfully. The theory of Marxism

'Has played an important role from the beginning of cultural studies... it has seen society as a system of domination in which institutions such as the family, schooling, church, workplace, media and the state controls individuals and provide structures of domination against which individuals striving for more freedom and power must struggle' (Media Culture KELLNER, Routledge, p.32).

These 'individuals' form the basis of a pop culture as a means of rebellion against these 'structures of domination'. Yet when examined ideologically the role of pop culture can be seen as far from a rebellion and certainly not a powerful, dynamic resistance.

'Hegemony' is the dominant ideology, and proposes desperate cultures resist, but are ultimately then reworked back into mainstream culture for profit what was once underground. Groups in power make the cultural rules, which then legitimise their authority in schools and workplaces; the notion exists that education is empowering, and not just about producing workers on a proverbial conveyer-belt. The lifestyle and clothing of a particular subculture can be seen as a forced consciousness, parallel with impressionable publications aimed at the individual sexes; to popular culture the dominating classes let an individual believe they are resisting but then over time the original concept is copied repeatedly and worked back into society - 'The 'culture industry' is... a well-oiled machine producing entertainment products in order to make profit'. It is a system of government that works through absorption of fresh culture into the mainstream; there to indoctrinate people and to get them to accept ideas and values which ensure the dominance of people in power; 'It is not a culture produced by the people. Instead the culture consumed by the masses is imposed from above – churned out by the culture industry'(Media, Gender and Identity – An Introduction) p.20-21. Analogously to Hegemony is the expression of 'Appropriation'

'The process by which often innovative or resistant cultural forms are taken up, incorporated, and commodified by the culture industry. One of the most frequently cited examples is that of punk, which, though it developed as a dissident movement in working-class England, was quickly marketed by major fashion designers, music labels, and other producers of mass youth culture. In analysis of popular cultural forms, appropriation is often viewed pessimistically as evidence of the power of late capitalism to absorb dissent into itself and turn it around for a profit; however, it is important to remember that

resistance continues to circulate and change in form, even as its products are co-opted by a dominant culture'. (Nelson – 'Popular Culture: A User's guide', 2004, Susie O'Brien, Imre Szeman,)

This profit culture of the elite class is evident, and their absorption of pop culture even more so. 'Media nasties' of a few years prior become popular and normalised, and ultimately stand for profit as quoted 'Marilyn Manson and Eminem may be scary to middle America, but in Wall Street terms they are embodiments of the American capitalist dream' (Media, Gender and Identity – An Introduction) p.20-21. However innovatively rebellious these forms of popular culture are, as illustrated with avant-garde 1990's dance and electronica artists suffering financially as a result of pop culture moving forward, even media rebels such as Massive Attack now advertise Adidas trainers and similarly Richard D James of Aphex Twin now aids advertisement of BMW automobiles.

With the advent of 'pop culture' it has become far more uncertain whether an escape from a cultural system dominated by elite corporate identities prevailing could ever become reality. To forms of rebellion, the concepts of appropriation and hegemony suggests in time when there is something for anyone and everybody's resistant streak; there really is no escape.

Academic texts

Surname	Initial	Date	Title	Publisher
Hetherington	K	1998	Expressions of Identity	Sage Publications
KELLNER	D	2003	Media Culture	Routledge
Gauntlett	D	2002	Media, Gender and Identity – An Introduction	Routledge
O'Brien	S	2003	Popular Culture: A User's guide for 2004	Nelson

Newspapers

Surname	Initial	Date	Article Title	Newspaper Source
Bayley	M	October 16 2003	Web pervert who lured schoolgirls must serve an extra 18 months; Appeal judges respond to the anger over lenient sentence.	The Daily Mail, Oct 16, 2003

Websites

Site name	Web address
EM Magazine – Popular Culture	http://www.evilmonto.com/001/popcult.htm
Punk History	http://www.punk77.co.uk/punkhistory/punkhistinto.htm
<u>Drugs and Rave Culture</u>	http://www.paihdelinkki.fi/english/infobank/400_drug_line/462e.htm
Why Are Those Goth	http://www.ice-princess.net/gothmood.html

People So Depressed All The Time?	
Popular Culture Meets Democracy	http://www.popcultures.com/reviews/rev_0040.htm)
Cultural Appropriation and Subcultural Expression: The Dialectics of Cooptation and Resistance	http://www.rtvf.nwu.edu/people/kleinhans/cult_and_subcult.html