

**Forum-Protokoll:**  
**\*\*\* Mass Culture / Popular Culture \*\*\***  
**Study Questions / Discussion**

# Discussions - Mass Culture / Popular Culture

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## **1. Bourdieu - art for art's sake par excellence...**

*Tiziana (29.01.2011 14:58)*

...Vivian Maier <http://vivianmaier.blogspot.com>

### **1.1. AW: Bourdieu - art for art's sake par excellence...**

*Tim Elmo (30.01.2011 11:54)*

I really like the photographs, and I agree that they seem to have been created without a political, commercial or social motivation. Still, this could be interpreted to mean that anything done purely "for fun" is real art. We don't really know why Vivian Maier took these photos and the images themselves together with the information on the blog do not really engage in a constructive way with the discussion that has been going on in our forum by themselves, so it might be helpful if you further elaborated your point.

#### **1.1.1. AW: AW: Bourdieu - art for art's sake par excellence...**

*Tiziana (31.01.2011 10:06)*

Several things about Vivian Maier's work and style of working led me to see her work as artistic. First of all she didn't just take pictures on occasion, but had a daily routine of taking pictures outside her work schedule as a nanny. Her job, working for an upper-class family gave her the means to be independent from funding. There is a certain development in her work as well, which speaks for her artistic interest in the work she did. These pictures weren't taken at random, they are not just snapshots, and they are not the kind of picture you would take for a photo album to remind you of something in your own past, either. So all in all I would assume she fulfills Bourdieu's criteria. There is more info about her work and how she did it in this article <http://www.taz.de/1/leben/kuenste/artikel/1/das-maerchen-der-vivian-maier/>

## **2. Lears: Ideas for application?**

*Kathrin (31.12.2010 11:44)*

Dear all,

though I find Lears' expansion of Gramsci's theory to the field of linguistics highly interesting, I can't really think of ways to handle this text in a classroom situation. Does anybody have an idea?

I find the point he makes about rhetoric as a means of force AND consent relevant for a discussion in class, as well as his claim that the ambiguity of consciousness corresponds with the ambiguity of meaning / discourse, but I'm not bringing about a sensible didactic concept.

In my opinion it would be a little thin just to single out and simplify some quotes, but nothing else comes to my mind.

I'm curious how you would handle this?  
...and, of course, a Happy New Year to you all :-)  
Kathrin

### **2.1. AW: Lears: Ideas for application?**

*Tim Elmo (31.12.2010 16:32)*

I think the concept of consent could be used to discuss e.g. how human rights are being cut down in the name of fighting terror, both in the U.S. and in European countries such as Germany.

#### **2.1.1. AW: AW: Lears: Ideas for application?**

*Kathrin (01.01.2011 15:56)*

Dear Tim,

that sounds like an interesting idea. Would you use the Lears text or parts of it to introduce the idea of consent to the class, or would you merely use it as teacher's source / background reading?

I think that the reciprocity of force and consent is rather hard to grasp for the learners, especially when introduced through Lears' text, which I'm sure would be an extreme challenge even for classes with a good language competency (if not to say unmanageable).

##### **2.1.1.1. AW: AW: AW: Lears: Ideas for application?**

*Victoria (25.01.2011 13:22)*

I think that in using the Lears text your best bet for classroom use might be to pick out and define some of the key terms he uses. I am not sure how much of the Marxist base/superstructure idea is taught in German schools, but I think some kind of background in that would be necessary to

then move onto ideas about negotiated power and hegemony. For class work I could imagine that the idea of divided/contradictory consciousness (pg 12 ish) could be interesting in analysing various cultural texts from a fresh perspective, and as a theoretical basis this article could generate some interesting discussion about, for example, the Bordo article. Perhaps texts concerning the microcosm of high school politics (anything from Glee to Mean Girls etc etc.) might provide a good example of how these structures work, alternatively, a class dealing with texts from post colonial and poverty themes would brush up against the weirdness which these contradictory choices are negotiated. The film *Precious*, or the *Blind Side*??

**2.1.1.2. AW: AW: AW: Lears: Ideas for application?**

*Tim Elmo (05.01.2011 16:05)*

I do not have a fleshed-out concept for how this would work in the classroom, but one set of examples that could be used to show the difference between domination by consent and by force would be Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* and George Orwell's *1984*. I think it was Fjellman's *Vynil Leaves* (an analysis of Disneyland) which uses the two as polar opposites to create a scale of the means of oppression.

**2.1.1.2.1. AW: AW: AW: AW: Lears: Ideas for application?**

*Kathrin (08.01.2011 15:00)*

Dear Tim, thanks for your great ideas. Lears' concept could surely be of great use when reading Huxley or Orwell in class.

Maybe the text is just too bulky to be taught on its own - but I totally agree that his basic idea of the reciprocity of oppression would be a promising topic for discussion in a literature class on (one of) the works you propose. Probably it should then just be cut down to its basics, though I still find that a pity.

### **3. response to Justin Lewis's "Public Arts Funding"**

*Xi (20.12.2010 14:21)*

Regarding the term “cultural competence” in Justin Lewis’s “Public Arts Funding”, I agree with the critique of it in group 1.1’s response. When trying to analyze what separates one group of audience from another, his argument is neither adequate nor unproblematic. Lewis uses the reactions in two working-class discussion groups and interviews of women living in council estates to show that there is “alienation” from traditional art forms felt by working-class people (446) and “people’s desire is distinguished from their perceived ability” (447). He gets to the conclusion that the factors should be explained by the “quality” or to say, the “cultural competence” that varies in different groups. However, it seems to me that the examples which he uses tend to demonstrate how people’s idea of their social position and the “proper” behavior that they should take in order to “fit” in that position (like the working-class people felt that if they went to a classical concert, then they would not fit in the “middle-class” or “intellectual” audience) plays a major role in their less participation in traditional arts forms, rather than that they do not “like” the supposedly “high arts” or do not want to participate. The working-class’s perception of their status, or to say their sense of “being inappropriate to get involved in the traditional art forms” is more influenced by factors such as the social expectations on them than their inability to appreciate the art. For one thing, the concept of “cultural competence” itself could be problematic (like group 1.1 puts forward). For another, I do not think the examples and the analysis are appropriately related to the argument of “cultural competence” and its role in the audience formation of art forms.

#### **3.1. AW: response to Justin Lewis's "Public Arts Funding"**

*Tim K. (22.12.2010 19:03)*

I agree to your criticism of Lewis’ notion of “cultural competence”. Showing an interest in some form of art is also a way of creating and expressing one’s identity... and going to the opera seems not to be part of “proper” working class behavior...

##### **3.1.1. AW: AW: response to Justin Lewis's "Public Arts Funding"**

*Kathrin (30.12.2010 17:10)*

I agree that Lewis' explanation of why specific classes don't attend specific artistic events seems a bit superficial.

What I personally find more interesting, though, is his highly ambitious attempt to propose a new, less elitist / exclusive set of values to redirect public arts funding, which I think is his main point.

Starting from the notion that the current distribution of public arts funding follows principles that don't serve public purposes, he suggests some "new" values that are in my opinion partly disputable.

Lewis says that diversity in the arts should be supported through funding to avoid a concentrated representation of richer people's interests in cultural production. This contradicts his earlier identification of the "rich" with the "educated" and his argument that their artistic interests ("high" arts) are publicly funded and thus not subject to the principles of the free market, while the interests of the "less educated lower classes" are reflected in commercial arts production (cinema etc).

This is also valid for value 2, "innovation": If untrodden paths in the arts were financially promoted, the problem of commercialization might arise, which would again evoke the problem of diversity in a free market.

It would then be equally hard to prevent a trend to mainstreaming concerning Lewis' "value of arts in the environment", as German "Kunst am Bau" ambitions have sufficiently shown in practice. The values of diversity and innovation would again be challenged.

The financial aspect also plays a role looking at the "value of social pleasure" - though quite a different one: I doubt that the trend to "home-based entertainment" or "cocooning" is based on lacking public safety and infrastructure, I'd rather relate it to restricted household budgets, especially in those households that already don't participate a lot in art events, as Lewis's research examples show. The concept of a "Bildungsgutschein" being hotly debated in our country these days shows that we have the same problem in Germany: the exclusion (here: of children) from cultural participation, be it piano lessons or whatever, on the grounds of families' disadvantaged financial situation.

I'm not saying that Lewis' proposals don't make sense, but he is certainly right when he says that further thinking and development are needed to make them practically applicable.

What I think is the most practicable concept he proposes is the last one, "creative expression". Through a stronger public funding of artistic participation / action, people's cultural competence could surely be developed, a social experience should be included and through the inherent quality of widening participant's horizons, artistic innovation and diversity might ensue (leave alone the environmental value of arts projects for the neighborhoods that they take place in).

Though I'm not quite sure how to rate Lewis' argument of an economic justification of public arts funding in relation to his attempt of ruling out commercial aspects in the development of the arts, I find his claim of "art for all" highly commendable, and I think that his central claim of public investment combined with a promotion of popular involvement opens a viable perspective.

### **3.1.1.1. AW: AW: AW: response to Justin Lewis's "Public Arts Funding"**

*Kathrin (30.12.2010 18:02)*

Though I seem to compensate my lagging behind in time by writing half a novel here (sorry), I'd like to add one last point:

I think that several aspects of this text offer promising possibilities for the classroom. Firstly,

students could try to define the term "cultural competence" according to the research examples Lewis gives and discuss the concept.

They might do some research to find other definitions.

Secondly, the practicability of his "new values" could be discussed, which might lead to a little classroom project à la "Which arts projects / groups / etc. in your area would you promote? Which of the proposed values / criteria do they fulfill?".

Thirdly, if the three texts of this set were used together in a classroom project, students could be asked to find examples of "contradictory consciousness" (Lears) in Lewis' "qualitative research".

Group 1.1's criticism of Lewis' methods of research is certainly qualified, so why not let the pupils analyse this part of the text and let them come to the same conclusion?

Of course it would be necessary to use abstracts of the texts or give the pupils only some relevant excerpts with annotations, since I'm sure that the complete texts would overtax them.

Amen and a Happy New Year to you all ;-)

Kathrin

#### **4. 1.1 - Pierre Bourdieu's theory in the classroom**

*Sonja (18.12.2010 23:11)*

Group 1.1's disapproval of Bourdieu's theories and their street art example could be turned into a great "take-home learning moment" for pupils.

As you pointed out, street art seems to be "art for its own sake" at the first look. But when you think about for a longer time, you can actually make out a lot of functions: negating the mainstream (as you said), communicating with people, competing with other artists, marking of territory, breaking laws...

Realising this might help to turn pupils into critical consumers.

Using street art for this purpose is certainly more motivating than talking about texts ("What was the intention of the author...?") over and over again.

#### **4.1. AW: 1.1 - Pierre Bourdieu's theory in the classroom**

*Carina (14.01.2011 21:28)*

"What is art?" And "How can we define art?" These central questions have been discussed intensively by all kinds of people in the past and still are nowadays. As it seems to be such a central topic in society, students should be given the opportunity to discuss it in class. I found a video clip by Michael Sullivan on youtube that could serve as an introduction for a lesson on art.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gZXOL-HUfWM>

In general, the clip is quite funny and ironic, but it also bears a truth and a message that made me think. This is why, in my opinion, it would be suitable for the entry part of a class session to give students food for thought and discussion.

The conclusion Michael Sullivan draws from his piece of work is highly possible to initiate a nice and controversial argument later on. The assumption that "art is in the eye of the beholder" might come up quickly, but what about "creativity" and "imagination" which Michael Sullivan also mention as major characteristics of art in his video clip. Where would students draw the line of what is and what isn't art. Or would they agree with what Sullivan says in the end: "Do we even need to draw a line at all?"

What should also be mentioned and discussed are the different areas/fields where art can be perceived. Talking about art, students should become aware that art does not only refer to paintings and drawings, but also includes pieces of writing and movies. Art can be found in music and architecture as well.

My question is: How can we find a true definition for art if art seems to be so multisided and is (almost?) everywhere?

In a lesson, the teacher should furthermore address the issue of “Why is art being produced at all?” “What functions are there?” and “Does something like art for art’s sake exist?” Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of the three kinds of writers and his view that art for art’s sake does exist could lead the students to a deeper discussion on the topic.

#### **4.2. AW: 1.1 - Pierre Bourdieu's theory in the classroom**

*Tim K. (22.12.2010 18:35)*

Hi Sonja,

thank you for your reply :-)! You’re pointing out something very interesting: art always seems to serve a specific function or purpose. This function may lie in the expression of the artist’s feelings, marking a territory (street art), changing society,... So the question arises if “art for art’s sake” actually exists? Art is something fundamentally social, so can there be such a thing as art for art’s sake?

If every form of art serves some sort of function and if there is no such thing as “art for art’s sake”, “art for art’s sake” cannot be a criterion to determine whether art is of high artistic value or not. Consequently, one would have to evaluate either the specific function of the work of art (however, we don’t always know what was intended by the artist) or some kind of characteristic that is inherent to the work of art to be able to determine whether it is artistically valuable (we tried to do the latter by saying that artistically valuable art seems to have a “stimulating” effect).

Concerning street art: I’m not quite sure if I get your point there... could you elaborate a bit on the relationship between street art and turning pupils into critical consumers?

#### **4.2.1. AW: AW: 1.1 - Pierre Bourdieu's theory in the classroom**

*Anna H. (28.12.2010 14:55)*

The concept of art as ‘art for art’s sake’ is very interesting and was already pointed out by Group 1.1 as a problematic concept: According to Bordieu, artists who produce so called ‘art for art’s sake’ negate the mainstream and one can argue that by negating the mainstream a piece of art has a function or purpose (as Tim and Sonja mentioned) and thus can’t be called art for art’s sake.

I agree with Tim that ‘art for art’s sake’ can’t be used as a criterion for determining the artistic value of a piece of art, because the term is problematic. But how can we determine the value of art? And who is allowed to create guidelines in order to judge art? These questions are not easy to answer and perhaps can’t be answered at all. However, they should be discussed in class.

I very much enjoyed the discussion about art with Frank Stella, Andres Serrano, and street artist Shepard Fairey at Stephen Colbert’s show. I browsed the Internet and found another interesting clip of Colbert interviewing Thomas Campbell, director of the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

They talk about the point of art, why people come to visit the Museum and who is to say what is art and what isn't.

The question how we can determine the value of art is answered by Stephen Colbert very ironically: We have to lick and taste art. Of course, he makes fun of the criteria used to determine art, but his joke shows how difficult and arbitrary it is to say what is art and what isn't.

Thomas Campbell states that experts in museums decide the value of art and later adds that also the press, auction houses and the audience contribute to this decision. I think that museum experts are surely well-informed about the skills of an artist, his or her cultural background etc. and are hence more trained to compare different pieces of art, but still I would say that every person has his or her own opinion of art and we can't generalize it.

<http://www.colbertnation.com/the-colbert-report-videos/255201/november-09-2009/thomas-campbell>

#### **4.2.1.1. AW: AW: AW: 1.1 - Pierre Bourdieu's theory in the classroom**

*Anna S. (29.12.2010 18:39)*

The fact that you pointed out that art and its value is hard to judge and sometimes seems to be almost arbitrary and depend on what a majority believes art to be seems to be the recurring basic problem.

If we cannot say what "good" or "valuable" art is and even what art is not or what is not art, how can we fund art programs or art projects in an unbiased way? I would say it basically always comes down to people "in power" deciding on the grounds of majority opinion and their own opinion what should be considered art. If you look at the funding in Baden-Württemberg, for example, it mostly goes to "traditional" forms of art like orchestras. Not that I am saying it shouldn't, but it reflects the "narrow" view of the "high" arts.

But even looking at structures like school this hegemony can be found. Teachers decide which "art" is to be read or seen or heard by their students, but they themselves have the regulations made by someone in the ministry that treats some works as more valuable than others. Maybe not without reason, but I would openly question the additional value in the classroom because, in my opinion, that is something students think about as well. Why do we need to read this? Why is it important? Why can we not read something else? All this leads back to: How can we judge art? I think I agree with Anna that this a question that we might not be able to answer.

#### **4.2.1.1.1. AW: AW: AW: AW: 1.1 - Pierre Bourdieu's theory in the classroom**

*Johannes (12.01.2011 19:47)*

I like Anna's idea of letting the students judge on their own about what they read. But if you want to make a specific point in a literary piece of "art" you, as a teacher, have to make a selection beforehand. So the teacher chooses certain pieces and proposes a hand of books to the students.

You might even give out as homework to read about those books and have an opinion when they come back to class. This idea democratizes your teaching and increases the students vested interest. The teachers selection avoids stupid ideas or books the teacher does not like and hence does not want to read it in class.

#### **4.2.1.1.2. AW: AW: AW: AW: 1.1 - Pierre Bourdieu's theory in the classroom**

*Tim K. (04.01.2011 18:27)*

I'm hesitant to accept that we can't define and/or judge art. Even though it might be difficult to do so, saying that we can't do it somehow seems to be the "easy" option (the other extreme of an "easy" option would be to say "everything is art (of artistic value)").

Perhaps we won't find universally valid answers to the questions "what is art?" / "how can we judge art?" Nevertheless, I think it is important to ask these questions and think about them. If we say that we can't answer the questions, we stop thinking. Actually, asking the questions and reflecting about them might even be more important than finding a definite answer... and in the end, that's what we are doing here :-)

#### **4.2.1.1.2.1. AW: AW: AW: AW: AW: 1.1 - Pierre Bourdieu's theory in the classroom**

*Kathrin (08.01.2011 15:14)*

I agree with both points - we might not find the ultimate answer to the question what qualifies something as art, but this might not be necessary. I'd even say it would be quite sad if we succeeded in answering it, not only because we would "stop thinking", but also because it would mean that art was a closed concept, which would deny any new artistic developments (if those are still possible is another topic for discussion).

I think the aim of discussing concepts of art - both here and in the classroom - is not to find an ultimate definition, but to raise our and the pupils' awareness of art as an open concept subject to historical, social and cultural differences in its reception - which I think is the foundation not for the judgment, but the conscious and critical reception of art. And that alone I find enough of an objective.

#### **4.2.2. AW: AW: 1.1 - Pierre Bourdieu's theory in the classroom**

*Sonja (24.12.2010 13:07)*

Yes, that was exactly what I wanted to say!

It doesn't have to be street art in particular, just take any piece of art that is not found in a museum and that is not for sale. Then you could ask your students why the artist created this piece of art, although he knows it will never be sold or acknowledged as "art" by the majority of people. It could be a good starting point for a discussion, showing the pupils that there is ALWAYS a purpose.

As to the link to "consumer awareness":

So maybe when someone offers them a for example a Payback card or a free Google e-mail account, they will remember that lesson and ask themselves: "Why do they do this if it isn't for cash?"

#### **4.2.2.1. AW: AW: AW: 1.1 - Pierre Bourdieu's theory in the classroom**

*Tim K. (04.01.2011 19:26)*

thanks for the clarification - asking about the purpose / aim / function indeed has great potential for a "take home lesson" for the students!

#### **4.2.2.2. AW: AW: AW: 1.1 - Pierre Bourdieu's theory in the classroom**

*Tim Elmo (28.12.2010 18:47)*

"Art for art's sake" does not work mostly for conceptual reasons, i.e. it is closely bound to the question of "what is art?". If art is expression, art for the purpose of expression can be called "art for art's sake". The possibility here is to say that if something becomes part of the category "art" because of its function (or indeed if the function or purpose of a piece plays any role at all in its categorization as art or not art) it can always be called "art for art's sake", because it is this function which makes it art. However, the opposite is also possible, rhetorically: One can always take those functional criteria used to define a piece as art and proclaim them to show the supposed "impurity" of a piece because of its connection to a cause extraneous to art. In summary: The boundaries of art are partly drawn between different functional purposes of a piece, which means that an ultimate positive judgment of "art for art's sake" would only be possible if art were a completely empty signifier, containing no other purposes and function (which is arguably impossible, since purpose is not intrinsic to a piece and can thus always be seen in any object at any point in time; this would make "pure art" a way of looking at a piece without recognizing any purpose, a somewhat bleak vision).

#### **4.2.2.2.1. AW: AW: AW: AW: 1.1 - Pierre Bourdieu's theory in the classroom**

*Kathrin (30.12.2010 18:09)*

I know I'm coming in a bit late, but what I can't really see is how you come to the conclusion that Banksy's works / works of other street artists can generally be labeled "art for art's sake"?

I consider Banksy a highly political artist / activist in is challenging "traditional" concepts of art and audience. Thus I would have thought him to do what Bourdieu defines as "social art", because he's clearly critical and challenges dominant systems.

But maybe this little disagreement bears some relevance for the classroom:

The pupils could be confronted with Bourdieu's three "labels" and then asked which they think is the right one for Banksy (or any example of choice). This might lead to a nice discussion on art-

ists' intention / motivation (aesthetic, critical or economic).

Principally I'd prefer to use this text as a historical case study rather than a general approach to different art categories.

If we read Bourdieu's text in class as an exemplary study of the 19th century arts scene in France, pupils might be asked if they see any parallels to our concept of "high art", which could then lead to a reading of Lewis, thinking about the practical consequences of that concept.

Bourdieu says that one criterion of "art for art's sake" is its attempt to not be understood by the bourgeois, which is mirrored in Lewis' argument that funded "high" arts require a high degree of education / cultural competence to be understood.

For sure students would be interested in Bourdieu's thesis that this concept was developed by a group of 19th century elitist, narcissist French snobs - though this point is of course disputable ;-)

A Happy New Year to you all

Kathrin

**4.2.2.1.1. AW: AW: AW: AW: AW: 1.1 - Pierre Bourdieu's theory in the classroom**

*Tim K. (04.01.2011 19:34)*

I think you're right in classifying Banksy as a political artist... and as the discussion has shown, it seems to be hard to find any work of art that qualifies for the concept of "art for art's sake" (in a strict sense)...

## **5. History - Spectacle - Resistance (Potter)**

*Susanne (18.12.2010 10:45)*

Reading Potter's article I instantly had to think of Curtis James Jackson III, better known as 50 Cent. Discovered by Eminem, a white rapper, he has become one of the most successful rappers at the moment. He gained his credibility not only through his talent but to a great part also to his criminal past and "hustling on the streets of Queens, NY". Now, however, he is presented as a successful businessman who makes millions with his music, movie(s), G-Unit Records and collaborations with companies such as Reebok and VitaminWater. However, he is not convicted of "selling out", as Potter puts it, but highly respected. In his own MTV show "The Money and the Power", young people compete for money in order to realize their business idea, in the process learning how to "hustle". Combining language and sayings from "the street" which are associated with rap with the values considered necessary to be successful, 50 Cent relates his identity as a black rapper to being a successful businessman. Also, the "judges" of his show are mostly people from the hip-hop and rap scene. I know this digresses a bit from Potter's essay, but as you said in your comment and as this example may show: the essay is not really up to date anymore. Now, people like P. Diddy, Jay-Z and 50 Cent are the most successful rappers and at the same time businessman, often seen wearing suits, owe a big part of their success to fields outside of hip-hop and rap, but still always returning to music, rapping about „the streets“, „the ghetto“ and social issues closely related to racial issues. I find this an interesting development. Especially because these rappers stress their past and their success at the same time pointing out that they, as black, originally poor and often criminal people from „the streets“ had to work much harder for their success than the average white person (in the U.S.).

[http://www.mtv.com/shows/50\\_cent/series.jhtml](http://www.mtv.com/shows/50_cent/series.jhtml)

### **5.1. AW: History - Spectacle - Resistance (Potter)**

*Xi (02.01.2011 23:21)*

I find it most inspiring that Potter points out what an important role hip-hop plays in forming the identity of the 'black' community (here we need to put aside the facts that there are white rappers whose background may be not related to the black identity). Besides the suggestions in the responses above, I think it is also interesting for students in the classroom to discuss how hip-hop combines communities of different interests together through its "cultural nomadism", forming the "landscape of resistance" (472). Beyond the States, the UK and areas where the struggle for the black identity is most prominent, hip-hop can take the message and reach to people of varied backgrounds, forming at least an awareness of the 'black' community's resistance of the hegemonic culture and its construction of the identity.

### **5.2. AW: History - Spectacle - Resistance (Potter)**

*Mona (19.12.2010 12:43)*

I agree with your group statement that Potter's essay isn't really up to date anymore.

Nevertheless, I found the text very inspiring as well. It is interesting to see how hip hop developed over the years. As Susanne pointed out, successful rappers are nowadays businessmen rapping about the streets. This development could be quite appealing for students to talk about, especially because hip hop seems to be rather popular among students at the moment and I am sure most of them do not know where it comes from. I particularly like the idea of letting students listen to and discuss the contents or messages of hip hop music in class. This can lead to conversations about race, class and gender, which makes students reflect on society. One could even have students write and present raps about aspects of particular classroom lessons. Or point out how raps are used effectively in television or radio commercials today, for example in the Taco Bell advertisement.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aCK7pdHcFm0>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nQaEWEtc4s0>

It would be also interesting to talk about the connection between art and hip hop. For example, is graffiti recognized as a visual expression of rap music? But is graffiti art? For me yes, but I am sure some people would disagree.

### **5.2.1. AW: AW: History - Spectacle - Resistance (Potter)**

*Johannes (12.01.2011 14:58)*

The connection of art and hip hop is very up to date already. Not just graffiti art (I think we can consider that art as long as if it's not only vandalism in tube stations). We have had this discussion of prose in music. Even most classical poems can be used to perform on stage with a musical background. And, there we go, we consider it hip hop. As an example we could mention Justin Kim's "The Road not Taken" (on the base of Robert Frost of course). But there are hundreds of even better examples.

For the usage in classroom it's probably not a new idea and I am sure most of the young teachers would agree that they have used certain rap songs already.

### **5.3. AW: History - Spectacle - Resistance (Potter)**

*Julia (19.12.2010 11:55)*

But Potter's argues that rap stars don't have to sell out, that many of them have been successful in both. Being a rapper and a businessman. "Ice Cube intones: 'I'm platinum, bitch and I didn't have to sell out.'" (461); "There has been exploitation; to be sure, but the deal is on, and rappers who have learned the ins and outs of the business have been able to gain both financial reward and increased creative control." (460) So I didn't get your point here.

I found Potter's essay totally inspiring. While reading lots of ideas came to my mind how to use this essay in school. It is definitely not outdated and definitely the American society is still torn apart by racism and injustice.

A lot of my students are hip-hop fans but I am sure that they don't know much about the Afro-American cultures who were "deprived by the Middle Passage and slavery of a unified cultural

identity" (456) and they are definitely not aware of songs that hint at this history "Public Enemy's "Can't Truss it" (464) They also wouldn't know about the strong bonds of hip-hop's "posses" (463).

So I could imagine using this text e.g. for a "Seminar" ; either the text as such or parts of it or discussing several of the mentioned songs and referring to the Middle Passage.

### **5.3.1. AW: AW: History - Spectacle - Resistance (Potter)**

*Susanne (21.12.2010 16:36)*

I agree that there is still racist injustice going on in the US. And I also agree that it is still a topic in hiphop and rap. However, many successful songs are simply about sex and money, concentrating on consumerism (cars, "bling bling"...). (see Elmo's comment below) Also, there are several collaborations with people like Katy Perry and Beyonce that are not really critical of Afro-American problems, but rather mix hiphop and rap with pop, house and other music genres. I find this an interesting development.

I also agree that the text is an useful text for school (especially because it is a topic that would interest many students). But it would be good to also find a more recent article about today's status of hiphop in order to see the development and changes of the genre.

Good idea to talk about references to the Afro-American past in the US in hiphop songs. I think many students would be surprised!

#### **5.3.1.1. AW: AW: AW: History - Spectacle - Resistance (Potter)**

*Anna H. (03.01.2011 18:15)*

I enjoyed reading Potter's essay and I would also agree that the topic hip hop / rap music is a good one to talk about at school, because students will be interested for sure and we as teachers can link hip hop to the cultural background of the US and also encourage students to listen to the lyrics and follow the topic.

Just recently I have seen a rap medley of Justin Timberlake, Jimmy Fallon and the Roots on YouTube. They chose different rap songs of the last 30 years and performed them at a TV Show. Here is a list of the songs:

Sugarhill Gang – "Rapper's Delight": (1979)  
Run DMC – "Peter Piper": (1986)  
Beastie Boys – "Paul Revere": (1982)  
A Tribe Called Quest – "Award Tour"  
Digital Underground – "Humpty Dance"  
Snoop Doggy Dogg – "Ain't Nutt'n But G Thang"  
2Pac – "California Love"  
Notorious B.I.G. – "Juicy"

The Roots – “The Seed (2.0)”: (2003)  
Eminem – “My Name Is”  
Missy Elliott – “Work It”  
Soulja Boy Tell’ em – “Crank That”  
T.I. ft. Rihanna – “Live Your Life”  
Kanye West ft. Jamie Foxx – “Gold Digger”  
Jay-Z ft. Alicia Keys – “Empire State of Mind”

Unfortunately, I do not know every song, but we as teachers could use this short clip to start our lesson about the development of hip hop and the Black American culture. I am pretty sure students would be motivated because they know Justin Timberlake and artists like Rihanna or Alicia Keys. The class and the teacher can talk about songs they already have listened to, if they know the topic the musician is talking about. Some lyrics can be discussed in class and students can reflect on the language rappers use and why they use it. This discussion about the often violent and misogynistic language in rap music and the concomitant attention to hip hop will lead to the idea of rap as a tool used first by Black American rappers to criticize the social problems in the US.

Here, topics such as educational and economic problems of the inner cities in New York and LA, discrimination, segregation, slave trade and triangular trade can be discussed. Possibly, the students will enjoy this approach more than the chronological one from slave trade to the slums or inner cities in which many Black Americans nowadays live.

I would suggest carrying out an internet research to find songs with lyrics that definitely criticize the situation Black Americans are in. Probably, the research should be done at home.

Ex: Public Enemy: “Party for your right to fight”, “Can’t Truss it”

On the contrary, we can talk in class about Jay-Z and Alicia Keys: What’s the topic in “Empire State of Mind”?

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QkB9P815Jn4>

#### **5.3.1.1.1. AW: AW: AW: AW: History - Spectacle - Resistance (Potter)**

*Johannes (12.01.2011 15:24)*

I really liked the compilation Anna provided us with, but I doubt students would know most of the songs. Too bad I couldn’t watch the whole clip (just the short piece youtube offers us). But do students now-a-days know Sugarhill Gang at all? They do know 2Pac but not the whole story behind it. Most of the songs are really great pieces of music I love listening to, but how could we incorporate a song like “gold digga”? It only deals about young women looking for older, rich men...

Your last example, Jay-Z’s and Alicia Keys’ Empire state of mind is a great song as well and you

could use it as an example of inner city life and for the topic “New York” or American cities, but there’s hardly any connection to white suppression or racial discrimination. The lyrics consist mostly of name dropping connected to the Big Apple. But it’s a great idea to start the topic “New York”.

#### **5.4. AW: History - Spectacle - Resistance (Potter)**

*Sonja (18.12.2010 22:48)*

I think your comment is absolutely valid - some rap stars manage to be mainstream and rich but still authentic at the same time. It seems to be vital to never forget "where you come from".

The biggest development, though, is that hip-hop ceased to be "an instrument of empowering BLACK resistance to white consumer capitalism" when Eminem entered the stage in 1999. Nowadays, "street credibility" does not require blackness anymore.

#### **5.4.1. AW: AW: History - Spectacle - Resistance (Potter)**

*Philipp (31.12.2010 11:50)*

Similar things could however be said about hip hop acts integrating other music styles into their music (and I don't mean just what Susanne mentioned above, I'm referring to a more "activist" approach): the band BodyCount, for instance, consciously made use of heavy metal guitar riffs, and they used this blend of rap and heavy metal as a statement, effectively becoming one of the first Crossover bands:

"Here come them fuckin' niggas  
With their fancy cars.  
Who gave them fuckin' niggas  
Those rock guitars?  
Who let 'em in the club?  
Did you make 'em pay?  
Who let 'em on the stage?  
Whose lettin' 'em play?

Don't they know rock's just for whites  
Don't they know the rules?"

BodyCount - There Goes the Neighborhood (1992)

So here, we have a conscious effort of breaking race boundaries.

#### **5.4.2. AW: AW: History - Spectacle - Resistance (Potter)**

*Tim Elmo (19.12.2010 19:05)*

I think there are definitely points of tension in this view of Rap music. While it might have been

directed against "consumer capitalism" at some point, the majority of Rap music, including those artists mentioned in your discussion, seem too embrace "consumer capitalism" completely, even fetishize the concept itself, not only its manifestations in fur coats and jewelry, etc. It is important not so simplify the issue of black identity by assuming cultural homogeneity. I am sure there are many black people who are appalled at the profanity and shallow personality evident in much of Rap music. I am aware that there are also complex and well-articulated Rap lyrics that deal with important topics, but the genre seems to revolve around money and sex a lot, too.

#### **5.4.2.1. AW: AW: AW: History - Spectacle - Resistance (Potter)**

*Anna S. (29.12.2010 18:16)*

I agree with you that hip-hop or rap music is not homogeneous and that there are a variety of subjects addressed in the songs. For me that is exactly what makes it so interesting in the classroom, because it could be useful in school to actually show the students that art is diverse even in such a narrow genre and enable a discussion on what we perceive art to be. Can we consider songs like "Candy Shop" by 50Cent to be art? And if we don't does that automatically exclude the whole genre?

What about songs that are popular and that sell well, should we exclude them because of that or only if we think that was the only intent behind the song and how can we judge that? Something that might bring us back to Bourdieu.

I think there is an enormous potential in the genre hip-hop for class room discussions. Most of the students have an interest in it, know something about it, and can be experts in the classroom, which can boost their self-esteem. But it also allows, as it has been pointed out in previous posts, for the introduction of cultural studies through the back door. I'd imagine that talking about the history of African Americans in the USA through the means of music is more interesting than reading dry information in a school book.

And because of the diversity of the song topics the classroom discussion can vary. Why not use recent songs like "Not Afraid" or "Love the Way you Lie" by Eminem to talk about drug addiction or domestic abuse. Those are topics that should be talked about in school and can also lead back to a discussion about art as a vehicle of self reflection or as a way to inform or help others.

Even songs that are homophobic or that demean women can be turned into useful educational devices. Maybe it would be possible to let students suggest songs they want to discuss in class as a way to further their interest even though we as teachers will end up with a few not so decent songs on the list?

#### **5.4.2.1.1. AW: AW: AW: AW: History - Spectacle - Resistance (Potter)**

*Johannes (12.01.2011 15:40)*

If you check the list and the students know that there won't be any songs proposing drug abuse or homophobic parts on it, ok! It's a great way to include their interest into your lesson plans. In

most cases the students taste in music is not the same the teacher has. So, why not try something new. But I doubt you could really do that with every class!

#### **5.4.2.1.2. AW: AW: AW: AW: History - Spectacle - Resistance (Potter)**

*Christina (30.12.2010 20:40)*

Well, after finally finishing my part of the assignment - which was to consider our texts for classroom use - I find it quite interesting to follow the discussion unfolding here about the relevance of hip hop for students in German high schools.

I'd have to agree with those who argued before me that our students are generally not truly aware of the lyrics and hence the content of most hip hop / rap songs. Also, I noticed that only very few students actually are familiar with American hip hop not broadcasted on German radio. Mostly they are mainly familiar with German hip hop (wannabes)...

Nevertheless I think it is a fantastic idea to use this text (or at least the ideas in the text) in class - which I am actually planning to do with my J1 group (Kursstufe). Someone argued before that this might give students the chance to present their knowledge of the topic and thereby gain self-confidence. I was also thinking of considering the different fields of interest (e.g. history, music industry, crime & street violence, etc.) and have the students organize a hip hop afternoon (class from 2pm-3:30pm) where we get information on the different aspects of hip hop in tiny work shops. Of course the students would need to be prepared in class - with the help of the Potter text - and given some time for research. But I am sure this approach will help them understand new aspects of American culture usually left out in the "American Dream" discussions.

As a final assignment I'd have the students write an additional chapter to the Potter text to bring it up to date. For those of you who argued the text wasn't up to date - it actually says so in the foreword ;-) but with our students being up-to-date after such a hip hop project, it should be not problem to fill in the blanks.

#### **5.4.2.1.2.1. AW: AW: AW: AW: AW: History - Spectacle - Resistance (Potter)**

*Carina (14.01.2011 22:48)*

I like the idea of your hip hop workshop a lot. I'm excited to hear how the students have done their work and what they have contributed to the topic.

Another aspect that came to my mind while I was reading all the comments was the distinctive style of the hip hop culture in fashion and dancing. As we have talked about the use of language and the contents of the hip hop lyrics already, I think it might also be interesting to consider the physical aspects. Break dancing (or B-boying) is one of the major elements of the hip hop culture. As in its early form, people were showing off their skills and/or held battles during their dancing contests (usually on the streets).

Here's a video clip with a quite early form of break dancing:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0zu0dmom4og&feature=related>

Hip hop has become a real youth subculture, which we will surely talk about again later on in connection with group 3.

## **6. group 1.2 Meaghan Morris, Banality in Cultural Studies**

*Julia (17.12.2010 11:51)*

I also think it is really difficult to comment on or even criticize theories of renowned scholars of cultural studies. But having read the Morris text one should consider that Meaghan Morris is a woman, a feminist and an Australian, that might help thinking about her being biased. (139)

### **6.1. AW: group 1.2 Meaghan Morris, Banality in Cultural Studies**

*Sonja (18.12.2010 23:04)*

Thank you for your comment - we accidentally ignored her gender in our summary/comments! Sorry for that.

In my opinion she might well be biased - I didn't really get her point why feminists should disapprove of De Certeau's theories.

#### **6.1.1. AW: AW: group 1.2 Meaghan Morris, Banality in Cultural Studies**

*Kathrin (31.12.2010 12:40)*

I think that Morris' disapproval may be rooted in the old problem that some groups are represented in the canon - or today in the mass media - while others are not.

If, as Certeau claims, "those in control of the written record cite and contain the 'voice' of the people" (p.119, l.15 f.), it's clear that those who have historically often been restricted to the private sphere and not been heard in public (e.g. women) are underrepresented, since "those in control" were mostly men.

A classical feminist point of criticism: in a male-dominated system, the "written record" and what's on it are determined by men.

If we read Morris' text against this background, it also becomes clearer why the "private sphere" plays such a strong role in it. And her "being biased" actually makes sense.

## 7. Bourdieu Banksy

*Albrecht (29.11.2010 17:27)*

OK! I am obviously the first to try this and I have no clue whatsoever who is going to read this?! All in my group? That is 3 people! All of those in charge of digested reading for the next session or everybody in the course?!!

So, let's have some feedback!!

Thanks!

About the first text which I have read - Bourdieu!

It is obviously from a historical perspective and I have some doubts about its relevance for our topic, since it follows class lines and class differentiations in order to establish a counter-culture to the established bourgeois kind of art. He even talks about partisans, which for me doesn't at all go along with the concept of art for art's sake. Or let me put it that way:

By so strongly rejecting bourgeois art, aren't the so-called "art for art's sake artists" ("partisans") at the same time confirming and revalidating the very field they seek to contradict (which is so often the case with dichotomies). I think that we aren't encountering art for "art's sake", but rather anti-bourgeois art.

And to be more constructive in my criticism I want to add: One artist today who comes to my mind and fits Bourdieu's idea of partisanship and "art for art's sake" is Banksy.

He is truly beyond commodification of art or any kind of instrumentalizing art for the purposes of politics. His art is dissolving its seemingly politically radical positions the very moment it brings them forth. But I haven't thought this through, yet...!



## **7.1. AW: Bourdieu Banksy**

*Tim Elmo (01.12.2010 17:31)*

Sorry about the late reply,

I very much agree with your criticism of Bourdieu, with every point really. I also have the feeling that his notion of "field" is not sufficiently clear in this article: Bourdieu describes the "literary field" as a "separate social universe" (89) and as "autonomous" (90), but his descriptions of the individual categories inside the literary field all refer to extraneous groups like the bourgeoisie and 'the people' (cf. 92/93).

Similarly, the dimensions of the field and their meaning are not clearly defined: He talks about a "centre of gravity" without ever referring to any gravitational effects and it is unclear on which axis his two poles, economy and art, are located (93; cf. 95). The horizontal axis of the field is never talked about at all, and the vertical axis also makes limited sense: Locating the pole of economy as 'up' makes sense because that is where the bourgeois art is located. However, this mapping would mean that social art is closer to the pole of art than art for art's sake, which would necessitate an explanation.

Considering Banksy, I would hesitate to identify his art as unpolitical. While it surely defies classification into the usual terms of mainstream party-politics, a certain radicalism (of ideas) seems to be present which brings along political implications. But I would have to look at individual pieces of his art longer to come up with something solid.

### **7.1.1. AW: AW: Bourdieu Banksy**

*Kathrin (31.12.2010 11:57)*

Ok, obviously I've failed to find the right thread before I posted my comment on Bourdieu yesterday, I should have read this first. I strongly agree with Tim regarding Albrecht's labeling of Banksy.

I agree with both of you that Bourdieu's classification is partly contradictory and in other bits a little blurred, but I'd like to propose another perspective on this text.

I don't read it as an attempt of a timeless classification of art and artists. In my opinion it should be seen more restrictedly as an exemplary study of the French 19th century arts scene.

This doesn't solve problems we might have with Bourdieu's terminology, e.g. his use of the term "partisans" that Albrecht refers to, neither does it explain his ambiguous use of the concept of independence of the field of arts. But Bourdieu's view of this specific historical situation is surely open to a diachronic comparison. To me, this is the light in which the text is most interesting.

If Bourdieu's theory that art for art's sake developed as, in Albrecht's words, an anti-bourgeois tendency, which impact does this have on our concept of high art today?

We shouldn't neglect that e.g. Flaubert's work is today thoroughly canonized as "high art". I must admit that my knowledge of 19th century French literature and arts isn't too profound, but where are Bourdieu's "social artists" in our canon?

Bourdieu's point that (in 19th century France) art for art's sake is an exclusive, elitist form of art produced by artists who are highly educated and financially not dependent on the success of their work, as well as his observation that due to its exclusive quality the range of consumers is more or less restricted to people involved in artistic production, are especially interesting when compared to Lewis' findings on which arts events are publically funded and who attends them.

Though the concept Bourdieu develops is disputable, it seems to have its successors. That's why I find the text relevant, despite of flaws that might be found in the consistency of Bourdieu's "field of arts" idea.

#### **7.1.1.1. AW: AW: AW: Bourdieu Banksy**

*Tim K. (04.01.2011 18:00)*

I agree that, to a large extent, Bourdieu takes a historical approach. Insofar, the questions that you point out are relevant and very interesting (Which impact does the development of art for art's sake have on our concept of high art today? Where are "social artists" in our canon?)

However, Bourdieu's essay also is an attempt of a timeless classification of art and artists and this classification has its flaws. Bourdieu makes a couple of claims that, according to him, are valid regardless of the historical context. One example of these would be his premise of the "law of disinterestedness", which is supposed to govern the "literary field". This law is problematic as it can't explain the existence of artifacts of high artistic value that were popular in their time, which makes both the historical analysis and the timeless classification problematic... so I still doubt if these are sensible tools of analysis...

#### **7.1.1.1.1. AW: AW: AW: AW: Bourdieu Banksy**

*Kathrin (08.01.2011 14:47)*

Dear Tim, certainly you're right that Bourdieu's approach has its weak points, though I see the main problem in the field of terminology. I didn't mean to question that.

What I tried to point out is that there are parts that can be used in the classroom and that, read as a historical approach, the text might be more useful than has been stated here before.

Surely the historical perspective is not the only one present in the text, but in my opinion it's the one most promising for a use in class - so I wasn't attempting a general reduction, but a didactic one.

**7.1.1.1.1. AW: AW: AW: AW: AW: Bourdieu Banksy**

*Tim K. (10.02.2011 19:22)*

sorry for the late reply... I guess I didn't get the aim of your reduction right :-). I agree that, applying didactic criteria, the historical analysis is the most promising part of Bourdieu's essay for classroom application

**7.1.2. AW: AW: Bourdieu Banksy**

*Philipp Fidler (13.12.2010 12:36)*

I consider Banksy a highly political artist. This doesn't always come out in the artwork as such, but often in the locations. Take, for example, the balloon girl on the Israel / Palestinian border wall, or the "One Nation Under CCTV" mural right next to a CCTV camera.

**7.1.2.1. Group 1.1 general response**

*Julia (15.12.2010 12:00)*

Group 1.1, you did a great job! I was really impressed with what you achieved in this very short period of time: Reading, understanding, analyzing complex, abstract texts and then finding out if and how one can use them in classroom - compliment!

When using "Public Arts Funding" of Justin Lewis in class I would suggest to make a comparison between Public Arts Funding in Great Britain, the USA and Germany because I think there are significant differences in all three societies especially in terms of socio-demographic structures and thence in "alienation...from traditional art forms" (446). One could find data of Germany and the USA and compare them with those mentioned in the text (443, 444),

Philipp, thanks for sending us the video link of the Colbert Report, it is hilarious! I would use it to introduce the topic of public arts funding in my Cultural Studies lesson. Lessons learned from all three texts can be found here. e-g-:"no art form...has a particular value to itself...criteria of value can be debated and agreed upon (Lewis 441);

**7.1.2.1.1. AW: Group 1.1 general response**

*Tim Elmo (19.12.2010 18:43)*

A cross-cultural comparison sounds like a very good idea, great suggestion!

**7.1.2.1.1.1. AW: AW: Group 1.1 general response**

*Tim K. (22.12.2010 18:53)*

yep, I very much like the idea of a cross-cultural comparison! This comparison would probably reveal that the values attributed to certain forms of art are (among other things) culturally constructed - a conclusion that could be used to argue along Lewis' lines. If artistic value is constructed, it can be changed / agreed upon.

**7.1.2.1.1.1. AW: AW: AW: Group 1.1 general response**

*Kathrin (31.12.2010 12:25)*

I also find Julia's idea of a comparative approach great.

In discussing criteria for art "worthy of funding" and finding out how these differ in the cultures looked at, pupils can develop a critical and analytical perspective on arts and learn a lot about cultural differences at the same time.

I'd like to use Lewis' text as basis for a little project in which students could find artists, projects, groups etc. in their area that they personally think should be promoted and argue which criteria they fulfill to make them "worthy" of funding.

This would be a lot more effective if the comparison was done first. Students would broaden their perspective and have a more profound basis for developing their own criteria / arguments.