

Forum-Protokoll:
***** Class and Culture *****
Study Questions / Discussion

Discussions – Class and Culture

1. Time and Class (Zygmunt Bauman)	2
2. Invention, Memory, and Place (Edward W. Said)	3
2.1.1. Re: AW: Invention, Memory, and Place (Edward W. Said)	3
2.1.1.1. AW: Re: AW: Invention, Memory, and Place (Edward W. Said)	5
2.1.1.2. AW: Re: AW: Invention, Memory, and Place (Edward W. Said)	6
2.1.1.2.1. AW: AW: Re: AW: Invention, Memory, and Place (Edward W. Said)	6
3. Subcultures.....	7
3.1. AW: Subcultures	7
3.1.1. AW: AW: Subcultures	8
3.1.2. AW: AW: Subcultures	8
3.1.2.1. AW: AW: AW: Subcultures.....	9
3.1.2.1.1. AW: AW: AW: AW: Subcultures.....	9
4. Bourgeois Hysteria and the Carnavalesque (Stallybrass and White).....	10
4.1. AW: Bourgeois Hysteria and the Carnavalesque (Stallybrass and White).....	10
4.1.1. AW: AW: Bourgeois Hysteria and the Carnavalesque (Stallybrass and White)	10
5. A New World Disorder (Barker)	12
5.1. AW: A New World Disorder (Barker)	12
5.2. AW: A New World Disorder (Barker)	12
5.3. AW: A New World Disorder (Barker)	13
5.3.1. AW: AW: A New World Disorder (Barker)	14
5.3.2. AW: AW: A New World Disorder (Barker)	14
5.3.2.1. AW: AW: AW: A New World Disorder (Barker)	15

1. Time and Class (Zygmunt Bauman)

Julia (31.01.2011 17:09)

I actually think that Bauman didn't move his elite physically to another place but that the elite has got the possibility to move virtually around the whole globe in no time because of our blessed www.

What I found really interesting was his mentioning of laundromats as public spaces where people had time to talk to each other and which are now replaced by shopping malls where people don't have the opportunity to really meet and talk to each other. Laundromats have disappeared and with them wonderful films like "My Beautiful Laundrette" by Stephen Frears.

I could imagine using this passage (p66) of the text in my lesson after having watched the film in class and analyzed it.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/My_Beautiful_Laundrette

2. Invention, Memory, and Place (Edward W. Said)

Xi (28.01.2011 17:48)

Yes, I have the same feeling with yours that the text seems to be “less-objective” due to the pro-Palestinian argument given by Said in the latter part. But I also have this question about the theory itself: if “collective memory is not an inert and passive thing, but a field of activity in which past events are selected, reconstructed, maintained, modified, and endowed with political meaning” (263), is there any position which is totally ‘impartial’ to talk about any ‘true history’? It seems that there will always be different stories given by opposite sides, such as the history told respectively by Israel and Palestine, or by pro-Israeli and pro-Palestinian discourses. So maybe it’s more important to perceive from various angles than try to find an entirely ‘objective’ story which is likely impossible.

2.1. AW: Invention, Memory, and Place (Edward W. Said)

Anna S. (29.01.2011 17:20)

I agree with you that it seems unlikely to have an objective history. I tend to agree with Said in saying that all historic accounts are tainted (maybe also for other reasons than politics) and that events are rearranged to the fore- or the background. Your solution seems plausible to then compare different views on an historic event and somehow get an idea what could have really happened. But are we then susceptible to various conspiracy theories about historic events? Another point is that one probably brings a pre-formulated opinion on certain things to the table as well and how does that influence information gathering and its comparison.

So my conclusion is there might never be a true history.

What I find important is “spreading the word.” It is important that students know that history can easily be tampered with. If you look at school textbook changes in Texas, you can see selection and therefore tempering and modifying at work (<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/03/13/education/13texas.html>) and with it comes the questions: Are the modifications justified? I guess, depending on which side of the American political spectrum one stands the answer is different. Maybe this story about slight changes in history textbooks and their big consequences could also be an interesting story to discuss in school.

2.1.1. Re: AW: Invention, Memory, and Place (Edward W. Said)

Angela (31.01.2011 16:29)

I agree that it is important to “spread the word” about the potential of tampering with history based on political views and cultural backgrounds. Your example and idea of discussion in the classroom on the modifications made in Texan history books could bring up many different points of interest.

First of all, and not saying that I agree with the specific curriculum changes in Texas, but I do

agree that it's important for these history books to be updated, meaning "new history" is added to the current history books. I looked into the history texts used in the classroom in Wisconsin (the state I call home) and found this article: <http://www.wpri.org/Reports/Volume15/Vol15no4.pdf>. The Executive Summary gives insight into the problems found in history books used in Wisconsin. What I found most interesting was this:

"Some schools are using very outdated texts from before 1990 and as far back as 1981. In these texts, the Cold War rages on. The Soviet empire still exists. Mikhail Gorbachev and Ronald Reagan are still in power. Nelson Mandela is still in prison. The Gulf War and Bill Clinton don't exist."

This article is from June of 2002, and it goes to show that even in the past 9 years, more history has been made and should be added to current history texts. This will show students that history is not only what happened 100 or 1,000 years ago, but also what happened yesterday (I realize money is an issue with updating new editions...). A question that arises is; who is going to write these new parts of history in an objective form? This refers back to Said's tainted view of history and what was asked before: is there really such thing as true history?

I think recent history is always going to take a more emotional bias whereas old history will most likely have a more diplomatic view. Using the example from above, a history book from a US curriculum that was written in the 80s is going to have a different emotional view on Russia, and the Cold War in comparison to a history book written in 2011, which by my guess will write more objectively about Russia and the Cold War, yet more emotionally on the Bush administration, the Obama administration and the War on Terror. And perhaps 30 years from now, the aforementioned historical phases may be written more objectively than what is happening in 2041. I'm just wondering when do these historical phases move from the "emotionally objective" to the "fact-based objective"? As time passes, whose emotional view are we taking on as an objective view?

As far as activities in the classroom:

I think students could analyze and compare other states' history to the history currently taught in Texas (the Confederacy vs. the Union during Civil War times - I think this is one of the biggest differences...). This could also be highlighted on an international level of comparing/contrasting the history taught in different countries; emphasizing the same historical event, yet comparing the different national points of view - this going back to viewing history from many angles rather than one objective stance.

<http://www.wpri.org/Reports/Volume15/Vol15no4.pdf>

2.1.1.1. AW: Re: AW: Invention, Memory, and Place (Edward W. Said)

Tim K. (04.02.2011 15:19)

I also agree that it is important to “spread the word” and challenge the notion that history provides us with “objective facts”... which is certainly not the case. History is what we make out of it.

And I also think that history should be an up-to-date subject – well, this sounds paradoxical... let me explain: During my time at school, the Second World War was the most “up-to-date” historical event that we talked about. I think that the fact that history is a construction can be revealed more easily by using recent events as examples (e.g. the fall of the Berlin Wall or 9/11). These events are closer to the student’s real life and by analyzing them, the different perspectives can be discovered and the construction of history can be revealed in a more credible way.

Angela, I find your distinction between "emotionally objective" and "fact-based objective" quite useful and think that you’re probably right in saying that there is more of a bias in texts about more recent events. However, I doubt if an “objective” and “fact based” state is ever reached (cf. Said’s example of the denial of the Armenian genocide in Turkey). I really like your idea of analyzing and comparing the different “histories” in class! This would be a hands-on opportunity for constructivist learning!

Possible suggestions for further information: while reading Said, A.D. Smith and Raymond Williams came to my mind.

Anthony D. Smith is a Professor Emeritus of Nationalism and Ethnicity. According to him, there can be no identity without memory and history is very much a matter of conscious choice. Historical events which are significant to the formation of a common identity become ‘real’, even if they are subjectively interpreted. (see Smith, Anthony D. (1986), *The Ethnic Origins of Nations*, Oxford, New York, Basil Blackwell.)

In addition to this, I had to think about William’s concept of the three levels of culture. He distinguishes between the lived culture (culture of a certain place and time) and the recorded culture (the remnants of a particular lived culture; we can access the lived culture of past times via the recorded culture). In the transition from “lived culture” to “recorded culture” a process of selection (the “selective tradition”) takes place: not all literary works become canonised, not all historic events are deemed to be relevant. Applying Gramsci to William’s concept, one could analyse which hegemonic segments of society influence the process of the selective tradition...

(see Williams, Raymond (1973), *The Analysis of Culture*, in: *The Long Revolution*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 57-88.)

2.1.1.2. AW: Re: AW: Invention, Memory, and Place (Edward W. Said)

Tim Elmo (01.02.2011 14:31)

I think it is problematic to speak of a "potential of tampering with history ", as the writing of history is necessarily a kind of tampering, which however we will only conceive of as somehow faulty or problematic if the resulting history clashes with our own ideological world-view.

2.1.1.2.1. AW: AW: Re: AW: Invention, Memory, and Place (Edward W. Said)

Julia (04.02.2011 06:07)

Having read the comment on Said's text I want to argue in favour of such a strongly biased text by a Palestinian. Considering his main study field it seems natural for me that he uses "strong wording and is harsh". Why do you think that his "obvious pro-Palestinian stance seems to discredit some of his theoretical arguments"? He exactly uses these arguments and develops his theory in the beginning to state his case. Of course his text is "less objective", it doesn't claim to be objective.

What I found very important was the fact that the holocaust was the justification for founding a Jewish state at the expense of the Palestinians. Taking into consideration our own history we Germans must be careful in judging the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Another crucial point for me is the role of Great Britain in this conflict and during 1948. So, instead of concentrating on whether Said is biased or not (which he is of course) we should also focus on these historical facts which are extremely important.

Where did you find that only Jews can be Israeli citizens? I understood that "non-Jews, especially Palestinian citizens (!) are simply forbidden to buy, lease and sell land." (267)

3. Subcultures

Sonja (28.01.2011 14:36)

You are absolutely right saying that subcultures are a very relevant topic to talk about in class and I am sure that pupils would be very interested.

The most interesting things about subcultures in connection to classrooms are in my opinion:

1. People exclude themselves from a society they feel they don't belong to (anymore) to be integrated into another, but smaller society. This is especially attractive for teenagers. They may not be able to be the most popular boy/girl in their class, but as soon as they learn the rules of a subculture they can just follow them and are usually accepted. They can have a fresh start and get the feeling to truly belong somewhere.

During my Praxissemester I met a punk girl who really stuck out in her class, but I met her again in Freiburg with a group she fitted in perfectly. She seemed happy.

I think it is important to accept the decision of those individuals. There is no need to integrate every single pupil in a school - as long as the pupils themselves found a place where they get the self-affirmation they need to develop.

2. In some classrooms a form of subculture can be predominant, e.g. in many classes boys just have to be a part of the hip hop culture to "survive". In that case it would be interesting to let them explain their "thing", although the teacher should be truly interested in their lifestyle and remain authentic at all times.

3.1. AW: Subcultures

Anna H. (02.02.2011 19:13)

The topic "youth subcultures" is an interesting one that can lead to a fruitful discussion in a classroom situation.

My guess is that at least one student of each class belongs to a certain subculture and that most of the students are familiar with some youth subcultures or even have friends who belong to a particular subculture. That is why students will probably be motivated to take part in a discussion about the topic, furthermore, because several popular subcultures exist at the moment and thus it is something students spend their time thinking about out of their own interest. Teachers might benefit from the discussion, too, because they get "up to date" information about youth subcultures from their students and show that they have an interest in how their students spend their free time.

Now that the relatively new youth subculture "emo" has become quite mainstream I think it is a perfect time to approach the topic. "Emo music" comes from the hardcore punk of the 1980s, also

called emotional hardcore or just emocore. The music has changed until today having more elements of pop punk and indie rock. Studded belts, black wristbands, tight jeans, black dyed and straight hair and in general black colored clothing are distinctive features of the emo style.

Having pointed out the dominance of the emo subculture, one needs to add that there are still more subcultures that are popular at the moment. The group mentioned the hip hop subculture which is closely connected with graffiti, then there is the hippie and the skater subculture, that are still popular among students. Wikipedia gives a long list about different subcultures (Hackers, Bodybuilders, Bikers etc.) and this list can be used as a starting point to get information about the various subcultures.

My last point is that I would probably not talk about a gay subculture in a lesson, because homosexuality has been accepted by society over the years and hence, one can argue today if the gay culture should be still called a subculture or not.

3.1.1. AW: AW: Subcultures

Julia (04.02.2011 10:06)

Thank you for your meaningful summary and comment as well as your suggestions for the classrooms, e.g. 8 Mile or Quadrophenia.

Perhaps again it would be interesting to look into the differences of youth culture in the USA, GB and Germany. What about "The angry young man" or the "working class hero"? Is a young person with working-class background different in the mentioned countries? What is the difference?

3.1.2. AW: AW: Subcultures

Johannes (02.02.2011 21:06)

I think your ideas about subcultures are very interesting and definitely worth talking about! But I do have my difficulties with parts of your arguments.

First of all, I believe (and this might be very subjective) that many of the students who try to fit into one of these subcultures just try to rise up against the establishment. Many just want to shock their parents, teachers and even their peers. In doing so, they separate themselves from the group and just want to appear cooler. "Look at me, I'm different!" But this might be only my opinion.

Talking about homosexuality in classroom, I partly agree. Even though society mostly accepts homosexuality in public I would definitely argue that there is such thing like a gay subculture. Many gays (especially under age) rather hide their likes and dislikes in order not having to argue about. This topic also pushes bullying in class.

3.1.2.1. AW: AW: AW: Subcultures

Sonja (06.02.2011 23:05)

Johannes schrieb:

First of all, I believe (and this might be very subjective) that many of the students who try to fit into one of these subcultures just try to rise up against the establishment. Many just want to shock their parents, teachers and even their peers.

I agree with you on this point - asking those pupils about the aims and values of "their" subculture might lead to nothing but embarrassment and your behaviour as prepared teacher might seem schoolmasterly.

The question is: Would those discussions just be learned-centred or maybe too intimate?

3.1.2.1.1. AW: AW: AW: AW: Subcultures

Tim Elmo (07.02.2011 08:47)

I don't think that there is anything wrong with wanting to distance oneself from others, for whatever reason. Just because the members of a subculture might not necessarily be able to express the values of their group does not mean that it does not have a certain meaning to them. Also, every subcultural habit of dress marks not only separation from one group but also belonging to another. While that other group might not always be physically present in the town where a student lives, they might identify with people who dress similarly in the media and thus feel part of a kind of imagined community (which incidentally is also true of every community of a certain size, including most nations). I think it is important not to be too hasty about judging someone's subcultural self-identification as shallow, it is likely that there is something like a structure of feeling which antecedes the sartorial manifestations of a subculture.

4. Bourgeois Hysteria and the Carnavalesque (Stallybrass and White)

Susanne (27.01.2011 13:14)

"In the process, the popular festivity is actually transformed and integrates into the bourgeois culture. The rejected 'low' turns out to be part of the defined identity of the bourgeoisie itself."

I find this point very interesting and immediately had to think of events that I would also count as some kind of carnival: the infamous Bad-Taste-Parties, for example, that are very popular among students. At these kinds of parties, "bad taste" is often understood as the taste of people at the bottom of the social hierarchy. It is allowed and explicitly supported at this occasion because it is automatically marked as a costume. People laugh about each other's "crazy" outfits, simultaneously distancing themselves from certain groups of people. With their outfits, they indirectly state: I would never dress like this in real life and I look down at people who do. At the same time, we have events like, for example, the concerts of "Die Atzen" where two groups meet: on the one hand people who follow the presented lifestyle and fashion statements in- and outside of the concert hall and on the other hand people who just want to have fun for a few hours but actually lead a rather conservative life and would look down at the other group.

I don't know if this is going too much off topic, but it immediately came to my mind when reading your summary and commentary.

http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Die_Atzen

4.1. AW: Bourgeois Hysteria and the Carnavalesque (Stallybrass and White)

Johannes (02.02.2011 20:34)

I agree with you on the part of the „bad-taste“ parties, but I am not so sure about „Die Atzen“. Since this band probably developed in a way that first of all, the so-called “urban prolls” (please excuse the term but it just suits the situation best) hyped the band. But later on it developed to a mass phenomenon. As we can see in the given Wikipedia article, at first, the band was mostly appreciated by “prolls” (starting in 1999 already), often indexed and without any recognition by the mass media. It received a better reputation no earlier than in 2009 (“Das geht ab”). From this point in time I believe it has lost attraction for their traditional fans and has gained a great reputation even among (university) students and the educated, young middle-class.

Are we getting way off???

4.1.1. AW: AW: Bourgeois Hysteria and the Carnavalesque (Stallybrass and White)

Tim K. (04.02.2011 00:22)

Susanne, I find your point about “bad-taste-parties” very interesting. Considering the fact that most students come from a middle-class background, such parties could be interpreted as tempo-

rary bourgeois re-conquest of the carnivalesque. I once listened to a radio broadcast about the concept of “Proll”. In this broadcast, the claim was made that the middle classes actually envy the “Prolls” / lower classes for their freedom. The Prolls don’t need to control themselves as much as the bourgeoisie, they can drink, they can shout, they can let out the more animal-like Id-side of human existence. Middle class values are very much determined by the super-ego, which takes away certain kinds of freedom. By celebrating bad-taste parties, you can be “proll” for a day...

5. A New World Disorder (Barker)

Susanne (20.01.2011 11:02)

I think some of the key terms you explained in your summary are a great base for discussion in the classroom. Especially the postmodern patterns of consumption are interesting to discuss. "Prestige and social value are now more important than a product's actual purpose." It would be interesting to discuss this statement looking at the students' cell phones, for example: There are so many features and "Apps" available that one wouldn't usually associate with a cell phone right away and that are probably not really necessary. Even if you do not use the navigation system on your iPhone, it is "cool" to have it. Even if the iPod shuffle (an mp3 player) is somehow unpractical because it does not have a display, it is "fashionable" and "in" because of the brand name. I think "Apple" could be discussed as a phenomenon of this thesis in many ways.

The article below might be interesting in this context.

<http://www.pcwelt.de/news/Trend-Apple-ist-die-neue-Weltreligion-517584.html>

5.1. AW: A New World Disorder (Barker)

Didier (03.02.2011 12:05)

Great idea, took the article into class, used it for mediation (great word!!) and didn't have to ask for discussion. Students just started. So there is some awareness, but has to be prompted.

5.2. AW: A New World Disorder (Barker)

Julia (30.01.2011 09:47)

What I found really interesting is the chapter "Hybridity and complex cultural flows" (p116). In South Africa it is visible that young urban people are more interested in hip-hopping or rapping together without thinking about the roots of the music instead of chewing on problems along the lines of black/white, English/Afrikaans or American/South African. When studying cultures it is extremely important to consider that "culture" for our students means something totally different than in the 1990's. It is important to take the history of „culture“ into account, of course, but also that it is a term which is very flexible. I would like to recommend the film: "Gangster's Paradise Jerusalem" for the classroom:

“Lucky Kunene wants to escape life in the slums, to a dream house by the sea. His plan is to hijack buildings from landlords of Johannesburg tenements by winning the favor of the tenants and then holding their rent hostage from the landowners. Of course this leads to trouble with the law, coupled with an escalating war between a local drug lord and Kunene must stay one step ahead. A mixture of languages can be heard throughout the movie. Much of what the main characters speak to each other is township slang known as Tsotsitaal (literally 'gangster

language') which is composed of vocabulary from Zulu, Sotho, Afrikaans, English, other African languages and invented slang. It is generally associated with young township-dwelling men, though some terms have entered mainstream South African parlance."

(<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0783532/>) (see attachment)

Attached you can also find examples of South African township music for the classroom.



5.3. AW: A New World Disorder (Barker)

Tim Elmo (20.01.2011 12:34)

Well, there is always a tension between different interpretations. Of course something like the Ipod Shuffle seems to be especially dysfunctional, but generally Apple products are also bought because they are said to have far less technical problems than other (read: Windows-based) products. I agree that the function has "lost ground" to other factors, but it still plays an important role most of the time, and examples of unpractical commodities have been around longer than "post-industrial" society, e.g. in the field of dress / fashion.

5.3.1. AW: AW: A New World Disorder (Barker)

Carina (10.02.2011 23:02)

Talking about fashionable things like apple products, I think this topic is very closely related to the problematic around status symbols and prestige objects: people wear brand clothes, drive certain cars, have expensive furniture in their homes and houses etc.

In a classroom situation, I could well imagine discussions on why people buy expensive designer or brand name clothes – a phenomenon that is not only restricted to upper classes, but can be observed in everyday school life. (A discussion on school uniforms could maybe follow this argument.)

I think that students should be able to make out what the actual or original purposes of certain products are/were. Teenagers are often not aware of what they in fact need for real life. The question is: “Which products are luxury goods and which ones are not?”

In connection with this, I would also ask students: Has the overall perception of a certain good, i.e. cars, changed over time or has it remained fairly the same? (What purpose/function did cars have 100 years ago and how is it like today?) I would also let students analyse how some prestige objects are connected to certain class values. In which households do we for example find expensive electronic devices (TV, Playstation, X-Box, ...)? What values could possibly be interpreted into this kind of consumer behavior?

5.3.2. AW: AW: A New World Disorder (Barker)

Tim K. (22.01.2011 23:30)

First of all, thanks a lot to the group for the vast collection of material - really great!

In your criticism of the text, you (= the group) mention that Barker is talking about the weakening of the state whereas people feel increasingly more national. Perhaps people feel more national because the states are weaker than they used to be. In a time of globalization and uncertainty, people are searching for something to cling to. As the institution of the state is not as strong as it used to be, the identification with the nation / one's own culture might serve to counterbalance this weakening.

When reading Barker's text, I found the summary of Baudrillard's analysis of commodification particularly interesting. He seems to take Marx' analysis one step further – neither use value nor exchange value are relevant anymore, but prestige value is the central category. For certain products / lifestyles, this is certainly true. And this not only applies to commodities in a strict sense, but also to other components of daily life (e.g. the radio station you listen to: SWR3 or DeutschlandRadio Kultur?). These are all codes that are used to convey something. However, I doubt whether this is a core characteristic of consumer societies. Tribal communities use such codes, too. Consumer societies might intensify the use of these commodity-signs... but I don't think that

consumer society is at the root of this phenomenon.

Concerning Apple products. This “better than Windows / Microsoft” thing once was really important, but I think it’s just a marginal issue today. I think, Apple products can’t be considered “best in class” anymore; just one example: you can’t exchange the battery of an Ipod (you can do this with other mp3-players). So if the battery of your IPOd is defect, you can throw this little thing away... Bravo!

The design seems to be much more important than such practical issues... which used to be important.

5.3.2.1. AW: AW: AW: A New World Disorder (Barker)

Lisa (26.01.2011 10:19)

First, thanks to the group for your extensive and good summary.

One thing that struck me as odd however, was the mention of an increasing tendency of people to feel more 'national' due to sporting events such as the world cup. It might just be my personal opinion, but I personally think that the feelings displayed at such events have very little to do with actually feeling 'national' or 'patriotic'. Most people waving flags during a soccer game of their national team probably don't think twice about the symbolic value of openly displaying their country's flag. Everybody does it, it's part carnival, part fan-culture, part summer-euphoria. People walk around with black-red-gold wigs and plastic leis. Of course, all these things disappear right after a world cup. It's simply an event and the 'national feelings' displayed everywhere actually not much more than a (well working) marketing strategy.

I don't see any harm in a bit of flag-waving during a sporting event, however I would not want to confuse wearing the colors black-red-gold on a soccer t-shirt with actual patriotism. They are different things.