

Forum-Protokoll:
***** Education as Cultural Practice *****
Study Questions / Discussion

Discussions – Class and Culture

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1. Kahn and Keller: Theoretical Issues

Tim Elmo (07.02.2011 11:34)

The text has some theoretical issues that revolve around the concepts of "culture" and "subculture", which can ultimately be traced back to the problematic practice of using them as countable nouns, implying discreet groups with distinct boundaries.

My first issue would be with the initial definition of a subculture as striving to transform the dominant codes and especially as trying to "capture media attention" (217). This seems to me to be a generalization, as not all subcultures seek an engagement with the dominant culture and certainly not all do this to a similar degree. While the case of seeking media attention could e.g. be made for the Merry Pranksters, Timothy Leary's Milbrook crowd or a number of other groups advocating the use of drugs in the 60s, the desire for media attention displayed by the Hell's Angels would surely have to be constructed in a different manner. While it is still possible in the latter case, it would be very difficult to show how the Hell's Angels tried to transform the codes of mainstream society. The identity of the "biker outlaw" revolves around and depends on the difference between the in-group and the outside. The Hell's Angels probably never envisioned or pursued a world populated entirely by motorcycle gangs. A similar point could be made for other subcultures which base their identity on a strong opposition to mainstream culture, such as Black Metal. The other way around, there are also subcultures which try to avoid media coverage. I am thinking here mostly of different sexual orientations that are being oppressed culturally or even legally. This would include the past of homosexual subcultures in Western nations but even the present of homosexual subcultures in certain countries around the world, as well as basically any sexual practice that is seriously illegal and/or stigmatized somewhere (a subculture is likely to form around such practices, if only for reasons of logistics).

Later in the text, Kahn and Keller emphasize the difference between online and offline subcultures, maintaining that online subcultures take more of an interest in political issues such as globalization than pre-Internet subcultures did (cf. 221). However, when talking about the role of online organization and independent media in various anti-globalization movements, they mention that most of the protesters in fact belong to one of a variety of political subcultures which existed already before or apart from the Internet (cf. 222).

1.1. AW: Kahn and Keller: Theoretical Issues

Tim Elmo (07.02.2011 11:36)

The text works with a certain set of quiet assumptions like a difference between online and offline subcultures which are not sufficiently fleshed out in a systematic manner. This is partly due to the problematic way in which different cultures are distinguished in general: Although every subculture will have certain traits that distinguish it both from the mainstream and from other subcultures, there will always also be differences within this subculture and there are often differences in nomenclature and division of different strains of a subculture depending on whether the observer is part of the mainstream, a different subculture or the subculture in question itself.

On the Internet matters are possibly even less clear, as the boundaries of subcultures could be marked along a number of axes: political views, shared hobbies, musical taste are the common denominators for various subcultures, however there are also different ways of determining these, through self-proclamation, through user-statistics of various sites of services (chat rooms, games, etc.) or through hyperlinks between different sites. However, some cultural formations on the Internet, while they originally had a specific topic like Counterstrike or Anime, have developed into more or less open spaces where almost any topic is discussed while there is still a distinct sense of identity which stems from either a constant user-base or particular discursive modes which set one community apart from the other. Also, the technical setup and design of a forum can have a huge impact on the form of social interaction that develops in it, as is the case in a comparison between bulletin boards and image boards, for example.

2. Giroux

Pinar (06.02.2011 11:24)

Thank you for summing up the main aspects of this text so nicely.

I also think that militarization is an important part of the US history and not only of the Bush era. I think, however, that the Bush administration was comparatively more aggressive in dealing with international issues like for example fighting the "rascal states" and starting "the war on terror". 9/11 on the one hand and the aggressive foreign policy on the other were both "evidence" for US citizens that there is an immanent danger somewhere out there and that they have to protect themselves.

But, this fear belongs to the history of the United States, too. Why, do you think, is there a constitutional law that allows every US citizen to own a gun?? Because of some potential threat, back then of Indian attacks, today of Al Qaeda. So, in my mind, producing fear in some way or the other has always been a major part of US politics and is therewith nothing new.

Giroux's claim, that the militarization of the Bush era lead to a more violent/ aggressive youth culture is doubtable. This trend of a more aggressive youth culture is observable in all industrial states because of several reasons, the overwhelming amount of possibilities how to live your life nowadays, the bombardment with all kinds of different media and the resulting difficulty of judging what's real and what not are, among others, reasons for young people to feel insecure. And insecurity leads to aggressiveness....

I definitely think that militarization through politics should be dealt with in the classroom situation, but in combination with topics like "insecurity of modern life", "violence through media influence" and "aggressiveness" in general.

School years are the time when you start thinking about and forming your own reality, which is a difficult thing to do and which causes a lot of fear, too. Students need to be aware of the political, societal and psychological processes that cause fear and aggressiveness. And more importantly, they should become aware of how they can express themselves other than through aggressiveness.

2.1. AW: Giroux

Tim K. (08.02.2011 22:04)

Pinar, I very much agree to your statement that fear somehow seems to belong to the history of the United States. Related to this is the rather strict distinction between "friend" and "enemy", between "good" and "bad"... which probably can be traced back to the pilgrim fathers – they were members of the "true church", as opposed to the rotten church community of those guys on that small island way over the Atlantic. The harsh distinction between "friend" and "enemy" can also be found in Lockean thought, which heavily influenced the discourse about and the creation of the US-constitution.

In my opinion, Giroux essay does not give too many new insights, but rather casts light on a trait of American mentality that is renewed in different ways in the course of time...

2.1.1. AW: AW: Giroux

Pinar (09.02.2011 10:15)

Dear Tim,

Locke...oh yes, I totally agree that he was - and still is - a huge influence on US American mentality. I also totally agree with the friend-enemy concept that has always been part of the US history.

But, I also think that fear is a phenomenon tightly connected to migration. It is a big step to leave the secure "homeland" and start a new life in a country that has had a (in the case of the USA a completely) different culture from yours. This causes insecurity and insecurity causes fear.

The majority of people living in the US come from all kinds of different backgrounds and thus have all kinds of different fears, I assume. To integrate and manage all these differences is very difficult and it takes a huge effort to prove yourself as a united country to the rest of the world. I think that could be part of the reason for the existing "fear policy" of the US.

What do you think?

Pinar

2.1.1.1. AW: AW: AW: Giroux

Tim K. (09.02.2011 22:37)

Dear Pinar,

I totally agree to your statement that the phenomenon of fear is tightly connected to migration – especially if the destination is considered to be “wild” / “rugged” / “hostile”.

As you pointed out, people from many different countries and backgrounds, who did not share a common history, migrated to the US. These people had to find a way of constructing a new national identity. If your new group is heterogeneous, it's probably “easier” to create a common identity by defining some sort of “other” (in the extreme case: an enemy)...

Tim

3. Study questions 4.2, Text 5

Philipp (05.02.2011 14:35)

1. Williams is known to be a socialist thinker. In how far does this reflect in the text? Is his focus on exploitation of men by other men still topical?
2. Williams claims that God and natural law cannot serve as a reason to aim for a just society anymore. Which ideas and thoughts have taken their place or should take their place?

3.1. AW: Study questions 4.2, Text 5

Susanne (11.02.2011 10:57)

Paraphrased from the text: Capitalism has relied on the terms of domination and exploitation. Conquest of nature includes domination and exploitation of some men by others.

Williams' text includes socialist ideas by pointing out the interrelation of social and natural relationships, our products and activities while referring to Marx. He then draws on the socialist idea of the conquest in nature including the exploitation of some men by others on which Capitalism relies. I think this is still topical. The need of organizations such as Fair Trade shows that there has to be some active work done in order to fight the exploitation of "the little guy." This is also an organization that could be discussed in class since it became more and more popular in the last years but is still criticized by skeptics.

The ideas and thoughts that have taken place of God and natural law are numerous. Our society relies on the socialization of each and every individual in order to work successfully as a whole. Thus, we have public institutions that enforce the law and educate children according to certain guidelines. Taking this topic into schools, we can see that students have to be taught how to be a successful member of society without just referring to the Bible, for example. Hence, we find subjects such as Ethics or Social Sciences that offer space for a reflection on moral issues and the structural issues of society and economy. Besides religion as a basis for why we aim for a just society, there are now many alternative motives in our society. Widely respected organizations such as Amnesty International fight for human rights worldwide on a daily basis and have an exact agenda on what they see as just and unjust in a society. In the end, students have to realize that they should act socially responsible not because someone tells them to but because it is the basis for a successful overall society from which everyone will profit eventually.

3.2. AW: Study questions 4.2, Text 5

Tim K. (08.02.2011 23:39)

Ad 1.

Apart from his stance on the exploitation of men by other men, Williams's socialist thinking is very much reflected in his account of the relationship between nature and capitalism / private

property. Like Rousseau and Marx, he seems to see the “invention” of private property as the root of a negative development towards capitalism (and an exploitation of nature).

Ad 2.

I think that, after the presumed “end” of natural law / transcendental references, two new lines of argumentation for a just society have developed: discourse ethics (Habermas) and Rawl’s concept of the “veil of ignorance”.

3.3. AW: Study questions 4.2, Text 5

Julia (06.02.2011 11:33)

Definitely men are still exploited by other men, especially when we have a look at the development of our world becoming a "global village". Our own prosperity in the Northern hemisphere is built on the exploitation of 3rd World countries.

Globalization also forces us to accept our responsibility for "natural" disasters (most of which are caused by mankind as we know) anywhere in the world.

It is still the case that we push back troublesome thoughts to the back of our minds when it comes to "by-products" as nuisance, e.g. disposal of nuclear waste instead of seeing these as products as well and start coping.

4. Study questions 4.2 Text 2

Anna S. (02.02.2011 22:43)

Text 2 Giroux

Has the “culture of fear” already influenced the authors when it comes to their way of dealing with the subject?

In my opinion the “culture of fear” has influenced the author insofar that he only sees the bad i.e. the militarization as reasons for things. I think he is so stuck in his fear of militarization that he forgets to look for other reasons for things and he also loses perspective. As the group has already pointed out there were GI Joe dolls long before Bush and the U.S. has had a long military history. I would add that the U.S. in some way also has a different relationship to armed forces that stems from a certain kind of patriotism.

I disagree with the Giroux in many things: For one, his points on video games that depict war themes might fit well into his militarization theme, but you could also say that it is a modern and admittedly very realistic version of playing “war” or “Cowboy and Indians.” And I do not agree with the common opinion that playing those games makes a person more violent or would convince them of joining the army. Giroux also says that many who played the games and then joined the armed forces wouldn't know that there are negative sides to joining the forces as well; I sincerely doubt that in a time where the U.S. is at war.

There were many things that bothered me while reading the text, but it would make this response way too long and all over the place, but I want to comment on one more thing:

Giroux interprets the overall atmosphere and flying flags or having flag stickers on your car as a result of the militarization of the public sphere and he says that troop visits by politicians are also a way to bring the military theme into everyday life. Maybe my reluctance to agree with that lies in personal experience, but I never felt that these things have been done to militarize the public. It was first and foremost a symbol of unity and especially a show of support for the troops – the yellow ribbons even more so than the flags. Maybe soldiers and their perception is special in the U.S.; the general public seems much more interested in their well-being and their stories, and their sacrifices are more valued as well (I would say this is where stories on soldiers like on “Extreme Makeover: Home Edition” originate), but that doesn't mean that war is glorified since most people know what the soldiers face. Let's be frank: a soldier's job is to kill.

But is a public that is more aware of its armed forces necessarily militarized and bad? Isn't it worse to be a nation at war but ignore that it is actually taking place, that there are people risking their lives and their mental health for a maybe doubtful cause. Isn't awareness better, also an awareness of troubles that soldiers face after they come home? And support for the troops is never the same as support for a war.

Can the developments described in the text have positive side effects on popular culture? Film

makers like Michael Moore found their main target in the Bush administration, actors like George Clooney or Brad Pitt (currently working on the funding of a satellite system safeguarding the Sudan peace process) became politically active, bands like Boy Sets Fire, System of a Down or Dixie Chicks stood up against and became famous for their fight against the Bush administration.

I don't know if that counts and answers the question, but there now are more stories and books written by journalists and soldiers themselves about their experiences in war and also read by people. They offer an inside in a soldier's life and what war looks, feels, and means on a daily basis. And more often than not these stories lack heroics.

4.1. AW: Study questions 4.2 Text 2

Susanne (10.02.2011 22:59)

Thinking about the side effects of the developments described in the text, I immediately had to think of campaigns such as "Vote or Die" or "Rock the Vote." This article might be interesting. It deals with the turnouts of the 2004 presidential election in the US.

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A35290-2004Nov8.html>

4.2. AW: Study questions 4.2 Text 2

Xi (10.02.2011 14:44)

I can see Giroux's worries about the militarization in the US, if that is what your phrase "culture of fear" mean that. But I don't think he "fears too much" of the militarization. On the contrary, I think his worries are necessary, especially in face of the extreme speech such as "We should invade their countries, kill their leaders, and convert them into Christianity", etc.etc. There's nothing wrong to defend your country and act against attack, but if this leads to an ideology of 'revenge is so justified that I should crush you all who are different from me and bring the "good faith" to you'. Besides, I regard it as a good point to think about the relation between militarization, culture, and pedagogy and its impact on schools. If the issue of "national security" actually deepens the bias towards certain 'races' or working-class people, then the process of militarization is not unproblematic.

4.2.1. AW: AW: Study questions 4.2 Text 2

Tiziana (11.02.2011 12:02)

I'm sorry if I didn't explain the "fear" idea better - what Giroux is actually referring to is the concept of always keeping a society alert when it comes to a threat from the outside, e.g. the terrorist threat alarm levels or announcing an immediate threat and using the fear caused herewith in order to make people succumb to the "Patriot Act", for example.

4.3. AW: Study questions 4.2 Text 2

Tim K. (08.02.2011 21:55)

I'd like to say something about study question 2...

I definitely agree to the statement that developments such as the ones mentioned in the text can have a positive effect on (popular) culture. I started studying in Passau - a city which, to put it mildly, used to be one of the more conservative ones in Germany (and perhaps still is). This led to a thriving community of political cabaret. Bruno Jonas, Siggi Zimmerschied, Walter Landshuter and his "Scharfrichterhaus", Rudolf Klaffenböck - they all grew up in an environment governed by CSU, church and the Passauer Neue Presse. Admittedly, this has nothing to do with militarization. However, I think that it is quite a good example of how "bad politics" can have a positive cultural effect...

4.4. AW: Study questions 4.2 Text 2

Julia (05.02.2011 22:28)

Aren't "military" and "democracy" contradictory per se? Does it make it any better that being besotted with national symbols and the army have always been present in the USA (and not only in the Bush era)? Perhaps the makers of military politics have been successful in convincing you that everything is alright. Have you ever observed the sight of Stars and Stripes in ghettos? I always connect this sight with WASP neighborhoods.

I am really glad that we have a Mr Henry A. Giroux to open our eyes, someone who is not paid by the US army and is not interested in money but is non-material. I agree with him that we "cultural workers" should always be aware of developments in society in which benefits are not on the side of the normal, let alone the underprivileged person.

This text can be used in the classroom because it contains valuable information but uses a relatively simple language.

4.5. AW: Study questions 4.2 Text 2

Tim Elmo (03.02.2011 17:40)

While I agree that Giroux seems to be a bit overzealous at point, sweeping up every kind of evidence in his attack on militarization which fits the bill at first glance, I do not agree with your reading of U.S. culture.

You "never felt that these things have been done to militarize the public", but would this not precisely be the desired result? That the military is presented as natural, as a necessary and formative part of life as an American? This would actually dovetail with what you said about American patriotism and the relationship to their armed forces. I see this not as an explanation that dimin-

ishes the spectre of militarization but rather as evidence of how deeply entrenched institutionalized murder is in U.S. society.

"But is a public that is more aware of its armed forces necessarily militarized and bad?" I think the problem here is not "awareness", but the image of the military which is created. Talking about valuing the soldiers' "sacrifices" seems to be a way of glorification - if possibly unconscious - regarding e.g. the origin of the term. You said yourself that a soldier's job is to kill. How is it not morally wrong to support that? As far as I know, American soldiers since the end of the Vietnam war have been people who embrace killing as a choice of career. Why not support the homeless instead?

4.5.1. AW: AW: Study questions 4.2 Text 2

Tiziana (03.02.2011 18:48)

I read Anna's entry at school but didn't find time to answer back then - but I really her ideas and comments (just wanted to mention that first).

While I do not want to engage in the "soldiers are murderers" debate, I still can't separate glorification of soldiers from glorification of warfare or militarization. Germany in imperial times, which was clearly a militarized country back then, had its "Flottenverein", and soldiers were admired and supported in every part of society. So for me, these things are inseparable.

But what I found astonishing is the fact that after Vietnam there was a rather widespread antiwar movement in the US, which led to a lot of protest against the Washington memorial for the soldiers killed in combat - while today this memorial is one of the most visited sights in D.C.

4.5.1.1. AW: AW: AW: Study questions 4.2 Text 2

Victoria (06.02.2011 08:34)

The Vietnam memorial is covered in a great article in the Visual Cultures Reader. The article is by Maria Sturken-"The Wall, the Screen, and the Image". It is such a good article and shows just how military is located within the culture as separate, mainly white, male etc. That is very brief, but the article is GREAT and you can see it on Google books.

4.5.1.1.1. AW: AW: AW: AW: Study questions 4.2 Text 2

Tiziana (08.02.2011 19:07)

Thanks for the hint on the Sturken text! I just finished reading it and found it touches a lot of important aspects of our topic. (And Anna, I recommend you read it, it discusses just what you wrote about in the forum, concerning the role of soldiers).

Several aspects I find worth mentioning here:

As I had been struggling with the question why the Memorial is visited by so many people every day, Sturken posed a very good answer. Due to the fact that the Memorial is so very different in its shape, placing and form from all the other monuments on the Mall gives visitors the chance to inscribe their own memories and opinions on this "screen". It doesn't give foreclosure, but enables the individual to contribute to the developing national narrative of this war.

Another important point (even though I usually dislike the whole phallic/Freudian stuff) is that the form of the memorial can be read as a castration wound. War, and soldiers, are still mostly perceived as male (as the story of how female veterans were excluded from marches etc. illustrates). Hemingway used this idea in *Fiesta*, the castrated soldier, unable to find his way back into a normal, everyday life - something I already discussed in class and found my students were quite interested in.

What I didn't know was that the architect was actually a young, Chinese-American woman. Her being perceived as an "outsider", shedding light on the "American" discussion of how to commemorate this war, reminded me a lot of how yet another "outsider" today, also a woman and Asian-born, sheds light on the fear of the US losing their status as the leading economy: Amy Chua - and her concept of the "tiger mother".

When it comes to the "soldiers are killers" discussion the view in Sturken's text that soldiers function as scapegoats made a lot of sense to me. In a time, when the individual and its loss in war gets a lot more attention than in World War I or II, the deeds of the individual become more transparent as well. Thus can the deeds of one single person be singled out as "barbaric" or "vile" - while the overall idea of leading a righteous war can remain intact. From this point of view it became clear to me, why the US never reacted as strongly to the leaking of the helicopter-tape on Wikileaks as they did to the leaking of their diplomatic protocols: While the first helps to single out the soldiers in that helicopter as a "barbaric few", the second endangers the narrative of the "good state".

4.5.1.2. AW: AW: AW: Study questions 4.2 Text 2

Anna S. (04.02.2011 21:49)

I don't want to get into this debate (one of the reasons why I was reluctant to post my answer to that question and even more reluctant to post this), but yes, I said being a soldier means killing, but it is either that or be killed, that is the truth of war and if you want to imagine a world where there is world peace that is fine and I wish it were that way, too. But in our reality there are people that make the choice to protect their country - they don't make the career choice to kill as you put it - and they accept that that might mean they have to go to war and kill someone (and, no, that is not a contradiction because they don't just join the armed forces because they like killing). They trust their government to only send them to a war that is justified and history, even recent history, tells us that there are veterans speaking up against unjustified wars. And let's please not

start a debate on how war can be justified.

And I intentionally chose the word "sacrifice" because it is what - in my opinion - they do. They spend a long time away from their family, often missing important things, spend that time in constant danger, doing horrible things (they too have a conscience believe it or not), and sometimes losing their life because they entrust their lives to a democratically elected leadership as a way of protecting their country. That is something I can't imagine doing, so for me that is sacrifice.

I agree with Tiziana that it is difficult to separate glorification of soldiers and glorification of war. Because often the first one is politically used to achieve the second one. Maybe my view stems from personal experience (and I in no way want to say that somebody else can't see it differently), but I have met many soldiers that don't think the war they are being sent to is right, but they still have to go. So for me there is a difference between supporting the person that goes there and needs the support and supporting the war. Maybe it's also because I know them in private "mode" and value their company that I feel there is a difference. And I at least feel - and I know other people that feel the same and again I'm not claiming to be right - that the slogan "Support the troops" means just that, support the people not the war that they might not want to fight. And I hate whenever politicians try to mix one with the other and use it for their personal gain. But if they visit troops without a huge media coverage to boost morale and remind them that their struggles are not forgotten, then, no, I don't think that is militarization.

In writing this I probably stepped on a lot of toes - this is a really touchy subject and I know what I'm writing is not a typical German perspective so there are probably a lot of people who disagree. I just wanted to put my opinion out there and I'm totally fine on agreeing to disagree.

4.5.1.2.1. AW: AW: AW: AW: Study questions 4.2 Text 2

Tim Elmo (06.02.2011 20:59)

I agree that we should probably abstain from discussing individual wars and their justifications, but I would like to point out that, although you want to draw a line between "support for the troops" and "support for the war", this may not be possible that easily. By emphasizing that these people join the forces in order to protect their country (which has not been necessary since Pearl Harbor) you are defending the persons by reference to the combat activity - by talking about protecting the U.S. you are in fact mixing support for the troops and support for the war. Unless of course one assumes that the soldiers who fight e.g. in Iraq could never have guessed when they joined that they would be sent to a foreign country which has not attacked the U.S. nor is in any position to do so in the near future - which after all has been the general pattern since WW II.

4.5.1.2.1.1. AW: AW: AW: AW: AW: Study questions 4.2 Text 2

Anna S. (08.02.2011 09:51)

OK, so you are saying that 9/11 was not a reason to sign up to protect their country? Is it only

protecting one's country if another has attacked you with official military forces?

It's very polemic and quite Anti-American to say that soldiers joining should have known they were going to fight in countries that have not attacked the US. That brings us back to justifications for war...

Many of the soldiers serving in Iraq joined in peace-time "just in case," so to say. Many joined after 9/11, when their country came under attack. Many joined the National Guard. Some were stop-lossed. = Many are fighting a war in Iraq that they think is not justified, so, yes, you can support the troops but not the war.

Look at entertainers (e.g. Robin Williams) doing USO shows even if their are against the war - they do it to support the troops because they get the difference.

(<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2005/dec/24/usa.iraq>)

4.5.1.2.1.1.1. AW: AW: AW: AW: AW: AW: Study questions 4.2 Text 2

Kathrin (09.02.2011 18:48)

Looks like there'll be interesting discussions in the weekend.

What I don't get, though, is the relation to the study questions group 4.2 has posed - and on which this thread has been opened.

Maybe there should be a separate thread on the question if soldiers are killers and if you can support troops without supporting the war? Then I could decide if I want to read it or not (not).

Nix für ungut ;-)

5. Study questions 4.2 Text 1

Anna S. (02.02.2011 22:42)

Ok, so I guess I'm the first one to try this new format. I hope I did it right...

Text 1 Kahn, Kellner

- What would be questions or topics related to the text in subjects other than History and English?

Maybe the text could also be used in ITG (computer classes) discussing topics like “Does the internet make societies more democratic?”. Examples like Stuttgart21, e-petitions or even the revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt that relied on sites like Twitter or Facebook for communication would support the claim, but what about extremist views that can reach more people because of the internet?

I could also imagine discussing Facebook, for example, and its advantages (see Tunisia or connecting with people from other countries) but also its cost of privacy.

- As students always find it hard to phrase a “Leitfrage” for GFS or Präsentationsprüfung, what could be good ones and what would you expect students to cover when answering these questions?

An interesting topic for a GFS (especially in “Mittelstufe”) could be Wikipedia. A “Leitfrage” could be “Can information from Wikipedia be trusted?”. I would expect a short overview on how it is constructed, what makes it interesting (e.g. free, fast, and easily accessible encyclopedic information, knowledge compiled and shared by many), example why in itself it is not reliable, and how you can still nevertheless use it (e.g. go to the linked sources and get your information directly).

5.1. AW: Study questions 4.2 Text 1

Susanne (10.02.2011 22:39)

This topic could easily be discussed in subjects such as Social Sciences or Pedagogy.

Some possible points of discussion:

- the false feeling of anonymity allowing users of the internet to act criminally (for example downloading music and movies illegally) versus the actually big extent of personal data shared with every click
- being aware of underlying capitalist messages on the internet → how can this awareness be taught to children?

- how far should democracy on the internet go regarding information distributed → wikileaks?!

I think wikileaks would be a great topic to use in a GFS. The student could discuss the issue whether wikileaks is important to provide information to everyone (since we live in a democracy) and the dangers resulting from this sharing of political/confidential information.

5.1.1. AW: AW: Study questions 4.2 Text 1

Tiziana (11.02.2011 12:08)

Actually one of my tenth graders asked me just yesterday, if he could do a GFS on Wikileaks, not dealing with Julian Assange but the concept of Wikileaks itself - so this is definitely a topic that meets students' interests.

5.2. AW: Study questions 4.2 Text 1

Xi (10.02.2011 17:06)

Since I don't have a good answer to the second question, I'll mostly talk about the first one. It seems to me the text related more to the role internet plays in subculture and thus the activism via internet than to historical issues. Undoubtedly, internet gives people much more freedom than the space formed by traditional media (even in China, as a Chinese, I feel the much freedom to have access to various information and resources, and many people actually use internet to criticize social issues). It's worth discussing that when facing so much information, some of which is even contradictory to each other, which should we believe? Or internet itself actually offers a means to identify the 'true' from the 'false'? It reminds me of the topic 'conspiracy theories' in the US, concerning different incidents from the assassination of Kennedy to 9/11. People use internet to 'uncover' the 'conspiracies' behind the official stories. Concerning 9/11, 'netizens' even made movies, for example, the Loose Change, to argue that the 9/11 attacks were "planned and conducted by elements within the United States government". I think it's an interesting topic for students to talk about.

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Loose_Change_\(film\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Loose_Change_(film))

5.2.1. AW: AW: Study questions 4.2 Text 1

Tiziana (11.02.2011 12:11)

A girl in my KS 1 English class did a GFS about the conspiracy theories regarding 9/11. I found it very problematic and had to give her quite low grades because (apart from her language competence) she failed to make clear these are theories. She also didn't attempt to verify any of the sources she relied on (which were only pages like YouTube, not even a newspaper's webpage). So that made it very clear to me how the net and its contents can shape ideas and opinions in a

very critical way.

5.3. AW: Study questions 4.2 Text 1

Tim (08.02.2011 21:33)

I think there are quite a few questions related to the text that surround the concepts of power and legitimacy and could be tackled in “Gemeinschaftskunde”. The internet makes it much easier for pressure groups to organize themselves and exert influence on other actors in the political sphere. Examples would be Avaaz, Campact or Rettet den Regenwald. These groups are not exactly sub-cultures, but I think they are related to questions of culture and identity, too. Presumably, the so-called “Lohas” are a majority in these groups... so one could ask if there is an increasingly intense discourse about ethical and “green” issues, which might alter the hegemonic cultural values.

Concerning power and legitimacy, interesting questions arise, too. The internet is considered to be a democratic medium – but insofar is the influence exerted by these group “democratic” as they only represent a rather small part of society which has the “cultural capital” and motivation to act...

5.3.1. AW: AW: Study questions 4.2 Text 1

Monika (11.02.2011 11:01)

Another aspect in the context of the “democratic” character of the internet and the influence of cultural capital is the question about new “cultural gatekeepers” who decide which and where information is published and therefore widely accessed by users. This aspect could be also covered in a GFS about the influence and power of Google or Social Networks.

5.4. AW: Study questions 4.2 Text 1

Anna H. (04.02.2011 15:13)

1) Other Topics and Subjects:

I am not sure in how far the subject’s history and politics are linked to each other in the Oberstufe, but I think that most of the topics mentioned in the work related to the Kahn and Keller text could also be used in a politics class.

Some examples are politicians and the internet, the organization of protests and the internet, Wikipedia, Facebook and Google.

2) GFS:

Now that social networks like Facebook and the German versions of StudiVZ and SchülerVZ are very popular among students, it would be interesting to have a student assess how advantageous Facebook is and how the company is making its money. A Leitfrage for this GFS could be “Why Facebook and who profits by it in doing what?” The content of the piece of work should encompass a brief outline of the social network, why it is used (free, staying in contact, seeing what others are doing, putting forward information, games) and how it is financed (ads, personalized advertisements). Additionally, the GFS should also address the problem of different agreements on how private data is used by the company that came up in the last few years.

5.4.1. AW: AW: Study questions 4.2 Text 1

Carina (09.02.2011 20:13)

1.)

In a social studies class or in political science, I could imagine students discussing questions such as “How do political parties make use of the Internet”, or more specifically “US elections: campaigning on the internet – How the candidates use(d) ‘the new medium’”.

I also like the idea to discuss how people organize political protests - today and in the past. A provocative question in relation to this matter is: “Does the internet support democracy or does it rather promote political extremism/terrorism?”

In computer sciences, students could research the beginnings of the internet as a military device and how it has developed ever since.

2.)

Good topics for a GFS could be:

“The history of the internet: How and why has it become the powerful device it is today?”

I would expect students to do research on the origins of the internet; they should be able to outline what it was originally thought for and how it has developed to such an important instrument over time. What are the opportunities and which possible dangers does this invention bring about?

“Governmental control: internet and censorship”

Students are expected to understand the instrument of governmental censorship. They should create arguments to explain where, how and why it was/is in use.

“How anonymous are we? - Is ‘Big Brother’ really watching us?”

Students should analyse how people have become more and more transparent today. Who watches us and why? Who profits when we display personal data on the internet?

“Social networks and their popularity: How social networks have become popular and why people use them every day”

In this context, students can also include their own experiences with Facebook, twitter, studivz etc. What is it that makes social networks so popular? Why do people of almost all ages join such networks? What opportunities do they provide and what risks are there?

5.5. AW: Study questions 4.2 Text 1

Tim Elmo (03.02.2011 17:12)

I'm not sure whether these are particularly helpful comments but I feel compelled to make them:

While I agree that Wikipedia should be consumed with care, I think this is more a general attitude towards media consumption that should be taught to students. Unfortunately Wikipedia does not have a monopoly on unfounded, biased or simply wrong information. The systems at work on Wikipedia which enable the reader to look "behind the scenes" at the discussion about the individual articles seems to me to provide at least the possibility for a more transparent construction of knowledge. Some people are quick to mention how unreliable Wikipedia is, often forgetting that e.g. even some books in a university library will give the reader no more accuracy and reliability.

Concerning democracy on the Internet: I am unsure as to whether this topic could be constructively discussed in a computer class. I am not familiar with the BaWü Lehrplan for this subject, but in Berlin we did almost exclusively formal structures, algorithms and actual programming, which is about as close to questions of democracy as math or physics. Although I agree that certain issues about larger network architectures and information policy are very important for politics, I fear that they might not be space for them in the curriculum and maybe neither a strong connection to what is already in it.

Concerning radicalism on the Internet: I think any democracy that deserves its name should be able to confront inimical political positions on the basis of argumentation. Letting political opponents utter their ideas (within certain limits) is a necessary condition for democracy to mean anything. That the internet gives voice to the voiceless is important, and I deem it an important part of this phenomenon that it is (beyond specific economic and political restrictions: see e.g. China) equally accessible to all, however unpleasant their message may be.

6. 4.1: Another study question (Gramsci)

Kathrin (01.02.2011 11:43)

Gramsci criticizes the traditional Italian school system as being divided into schools for the upper class and schools for all the others. Is our system of education (Grundschulempfehlung, dreigliedriges Schulsystem, allgemeinbildende vs. Berufliche Gymnasien) democratic?

6.1. AW: 4.1: Another study question (Gramsci)

Xi (09.02.2011 20:05)

Since I'm not as familiar with the German educational system as most of you are, my response to this question is more like a 'question' than an answer. The first time I heard about the categories of Gymnasium, Realschule and Hauptschule and students have to make the decision of which school they will go, I couldn't help wondering: how can a child know which to choose at such an early age? If their teachers and parent help them make the choice, how do they know it is the right one for the students? Besides, when they go into different schools, do they take an exam, or they just decide on their own? I'm curious to know these things because when I was a student in primary school and secondary schools in China, everyone had to take exams to go to the next studying phase. If you want to go to a "good school" with better reputation and teaching facilities, you have to work hard and have a good performance on exams. Despite of all the defects such as great studying pressure, exam-oriented teaching, etc, 'exam' was and will remain a method of making educational opportunities fair in a country with large population and relatively insufficient educational resources. I think Gramsci is very right when he argues for a "single type of formative school (primary-secondary)" for every child before he or she chooses to be specialized in a certain field. What he tries to advocate is not making everyone the same, but giving everyone the same opportunity. But the problem is that it can hardly be achieved to make every school at the primary and secondary stage the same 'good', and all the teacher the same 'qualified'.

6.2. "Hauptschüler" in Bavaria, "Gymnasiast" in Hessen...

Sonja (08.02.2011 15:37)

One thing I'd like to add to this very interesting discussion is that in my opinion it is completely absurd that each federal state has its own regulations for the "Grundschulempfehlung".

Recently I watched a documentary about a boy who crosses the border from Bavaria to Hessen every morning in order to go to the Gymnasium - in Bavaria he would just be a "Hauptschüler". And he's not the only one!

This shows that there's not just a division between social classes but also between regions and I really don't know why this is still tolerated.

6.3. AW: 4.1: Another study question (Gramsci)

Tim Elmo (02.02.2011 12:36)

The question seems to have a certain area of overlap with question number two. The adjective "democratic" seems to be difficult in this context. For the school system to be democratic, what does that mean?

Is the functioning of the school system governed through democratic modes of decision-making? Certainly not. There is no political equality inside the school apparatus between different teachers depending on their position, or between teachers and parents and most of the stakeholders in what goes on are the children who as the primary "subjects" of the educational system have very little say at all.

Is the structure and functioning of the educational system the result of a democratic process of decision making? Hardly. As far as I know, educational strategies are only one point in a whole bulk of issues voters have to consider in the respective elections. This means that the educational system which is implemented in the end is not only a choice between a very limited number of solutions offered by those parties with a realistic chance at governing, but this is not really an independent choice at all but rather the by-product of a weighed consideration on the side of the voters.

Does the school system treat students fairly and equally, turning them into conscious citizens capable of forming a proper democracy? Not in my experience. First, there are studies showing that equally intelligent students with the same grades in school will get a "Gymnasialempfehlung" or not based on their social background. While this primarily affects the cultural capital these students can acquire and their later economic position in society, one could argue that such a treatment is not likely to result in a society which is capable of generating political consent based on a generally accessible culture of discussion. Furthermore, my personal experience in school was one where actual critical discussion and original thought was not welcome. Students' participation was only desired if it followed one of a few pre-determined lines of argumentation and there was hardly ever any actual discussion in the form of reasoning and providing evidence. Part of this is that, for apparently didactic reasons, teachers never actually tell students that they are wrong or when something makes no sense, which means that discussions can never properly develop but the teacher only lets pupil after pupil have their say until someone's answer matches what the teachers guide to <current topic> says. I am sorry if this sounds bitter and I am sure that not all teaching (and hopefully not the majority) works like this, but this was the case for 95% of my time in school.

6.3.1. AW: AW: 4.1: Another study question (Gramsci)

Anna H. (04.02.2011 12:20)

Unfortunately, Tim's "bitter" statement that critical discussions seem to be not welcomed in class is often true. I only had a few teachers who accepted and appreciated different opinions and gave

feedback. In this case we can hardly talk of a democratic system.

There are also various results from researchers showing that children from academic parents and from the upper / middle class tend to be sent to the Gymnasium even when they did not as well at school as their migrant classmates or classmates from the lower class, who are sent to Realschule.

According to PIRLS (Progress in International Reading Literacy Study), students from the upper class have to reach 537 points (in reading competence) and students from the working class / lower class need to have 614 points in order to be sent to Gymnasium by a teacher. This is not democratic.

Additionally, even though there are institutions supporting migrant and weaker students (I visited a "Lesewerkstatt" of the Grundschule in Schwäbisch-Gmünd), I think there is still much more improvement possible. Upper class children are supported by their parents and often the mom checks homework and revises for tests together with the child. Lower class children's parents coming from Turkey, Italy etc. often do not know German as well as their children and cannot offer that kind of support. In conclusion, only if both weaker children and upper class children are equally supported in their school career and the teacher doesn't consider a social background anymore when sending a child to Gymnasium, one can speak of a fair and democratic education system.

6.3.1.1. AW: AW: AW: 4.1: Another study question (Gramsci)

Kathrin (09.02.2011 18:30)

First of all I find it interesting how we all seem to agree with Gramsci and Giroux. That's how in our group we came to the conclusion that Gramsci's theory remains timeless as long as social inequalities exist.

Elmo, you're surely right that our questions do overlap. We tried to open different perspectives, though. Question 2 was actually aimed at discussing the aspect of educational diversification, while this thread would be more focused on selection in educational processes. The question if our school system is democratic is, as Tim points out, very much the question of equal access to education.

I find Sonja's point that standards vary locally interesting. Such inequalities, also what Anna describes looking at Grundschulempfehlungen, e.g. the disadvantaged situation of children with a migratory background, seem to pervade our school system.

The "Erster Bildungsbericht Baden-Württemberg 2007" for example shows that the vast majority of students with a migratory background who acquire higher educational qualification do so in the vocational school system, i.e. not "on the direct way".

Here I find it very interesting to ask if the A-levels acquired on this way are a general qualification for university entrance to the extent those from "usual" grammar schools are.

Teaching at a vocational high school myself, my impression is that the professional qualification has top priority for a majority of students.

This should more or less automatically lead to a different emphasis on "general educational" subjects. In consequence, the percentage of those who actually go on and study subjects not related to the profile of their vocational high school is comparably low.

On the other hand, students from vocational high schools would of course be advantaged in studying their profile subjects.

We thus have a school system pretending to offer everybody equal access and opportunity, but in the end some courses of education are just "more equal than others" - depending on what you're aiming at. Which, again, brings us back to question 2.

I doubt, though, if Gramsci's idealist claim to wipe out all socially determined differences is realistic. I'd personally prefer Giroux' notion that "cultural workers" should be informed and aware of such inequalities and bring them into public consciousness.

The question if this actually happens in our educational institutions is a different one. I wouldn't call this insight "bitter", Elmo - I guess you're just being realistic here. If it could be a lot different, though, is an issue related to study question 4 ;-).

6.3.1.2. AW: AW: AW: 4.1: Another study question (Gramsci)

Tim K. (05.02.2011 14:31)

A school system which is divided along the lines of class is definitely not democratic / just (in the sense of equality of opportunity). As mentioned by Elmo and Anna, the "Grundschulempfehlung" very much depends on the social background of pupils, which is a shame. In the lecture on "Schulpädagogik", Prof. Nückles said that, on average, only 30-40 % of the "Grundschulempfehlungen" are correct – a very low, a too low proportion in my opinion. Furthermore, Nückles argued that the amount of schooling levels out differences such as the support children (do not) get at home. He argued for a Ganztageschule and for shorter holidays, as the reading ability of students whose parents do not support their children severely deteriorates during the summer vacation ("Leseschere").

In my opinion, four years of schooling together are just too short to determine whether a pupil can go to the Gymnasium or not. In this case, I'd define "democratic" in the sense of "equality of opportunity" and say that our school system should make sure that every single child gets the opportunity to develop their potential to the full. In my opinion, a division / specialisation that is done too early is counterproductive in this case.

6.3.1.2.1. AW: AW: AW: AW: 4.1: Another study question (Gramsci)

Carina (09.02.2011 23:40)

I also think that the ‚Schulempfehlungen‘ after grade 4 are way too early; it is really hard to decide at this young age which school is best for a child.

On the other hand, however, I would like to stress that our system (as a whole) is not so unfair after all. I think that even though the decision which school a child will attend for the next couple of years is made in 4th grade, students still have the opportunity after their finals to decide whether they want to achieve a higher level of education or not. After finishing Hauptschule or Realschule, students can decide to take another/a few more years of school in order to get the level of education they want to. A graduate from Hauptschule, for example, can also make their way to the top. He/She can do Realschulabschluss, Abitur and then study at university. There is always a way to achieve whatever you want to in life.

Attending schools like the Abendgymnasium might in general be more stressful than the Normalgymnasium, but in the end, you get the very same degree. It might not have been the fastest and easiest way but there IS a way. And later on when employers see that you have worked hard and are willing to put effort into your career, there’s maybe a good chance they will hire you.

In conclusion, I would like to say that I of course know that our school system does not give equal opportunities to everybody (somebody show me a place where this IS even possible!?) but it DOES in fact give opportunities! And this is what’s important, I think and what makes our system a bit more democratic than we might think first.

6.3.1.2.2. AW: AW: AW: AW: 4.1: Another study question (Gramsci)

Kathrin (09.02.2011 18:35)

Sorry, of course my post was supposed to appear last in the thread - after Tim's, but apparently I messed that up.

7. Group 4.1 Study Question 2

Lisa (01.02.2011 00:39)

Hey everybody!

As we worked through our assigned texts, we couldn't help but ask ourselves:

Is specialization in the educational sector an anti-democratic development?

What do you think?

7.1. AW: Group 4.1 Study Question 2

Susanne (11.02.2011 10:50)

I do not think that specialization should be seen too negatively. It offers students the opportunity to concentrate on their special interests and talents. However, I do not think that students should be pressured into specialization too early because everyone should have a relatively equal basic education and the opportunity to look into different subjects even if they do not seem interesting to them at the beginning. I think the degree of specialization plays an important role - what can be neglected in favor of something else?

7.2. AW: Group 4.1 Study Question 2

Xi (09.02.2011 19:31)

I think Gramsci is pretty clear about this point. The reason why he describes the multiplication of vocational schools at his time as "anti-democratic" is that it deprives people of their choice of doing what they really want to do "from the very beginning of the child's educational career" (56). If specialization means uneven distribution of funds, facilities, resources among the school for "the ruling class" and the school for "the ruled", then it can hardly be 'democratic'. And the argument from page 56 to 57 shows that he is very careful in not being absolute when evaluating the unfairness caused by specialization.

7.3. AW: Group 4.1 Study Question 2

Sonja (08.02.2011 15:45)

I agree with Tim - specialisation is not anti-democratic as long as everyone has got the opportunity to choose/to go to a specialised school, that's what's crucial about it.

7.4. AW: Group 4.1 Study Question 2

Tim K. (05.02.2011 13:49)

I don't necessarily think so. People are different and specialisation can also give pupils the opportunity to get an education which fits their personal needs. If somebody has a good grasp of technical issues, why shouldn't they be allowed to go to a technical college? Actually, one could argue that specialisation is very democratic as it gives pupils the chance to develop their capabilities in the subject areas of their interest (which probably would be difficult to realise in a comprehensive school; unless the school is really big and all subject areas are covered).

Whether you agree to Gramsci's statement probably depends on your concept of what a just democracy is. Marxist theorists tend to equate justice with equality (in a strict sense). So they often ignore individual differences, they often argue in collectivist terms (we are all humans, all humans are the same) and they favour a system that makes sure that everybody is treated in the same way (again, in a rather strict sense). However, I think there is more to justice than equality. Justice also is about performance fairness (Leistungsgerechtigkeit). But to be able to consider performance fairness, you have to admit that humans are different... and, in general, Marxist's seem to be reluctant to do this...

7.4.1. AW: AW: Group 4.1 Study Question 2

Tim K. (05.02.2011 13:55)

I have to add something: Gramsci argues that social differences should be leveled out. In my opinion, this aim is ambiguous.

Again, we find the concept of equality / sameness. As a matter of course, social differences should not be too extreme as a society with huge social cleavages runs the risk of falling apart and does not fulfill the criterion of equity of needs (Bedürfnisgerechtigkeit).

However, to a certain extent, social differences are functional to a society. A society only works if there are dustmen, physicians, teachers... and if you pay these all the same, well, look what happened to the economy of the Soviet Union... (no "Leistungsgerechtigkeit" -> low productivity).

This leveling out of social differences and the idea of collectivist education very much makes me think of the creation of a "New Man", the brainwashing of individuals for the better of everybody... which seems to be inherent to Marxism and is bound to end up in an authoritarian / totalitarian system...

8. Group 4.1 Question 1

Angela (01.02.2011 00:15)

Do you think that Gramsci argues partly in favor of the classical educational system to avoid censorship?

8.1. AW: Group 4.1 Question 1

Xi (09.02.2011 18:49)

I don't think Gramsci makes the argument to avoid censorship, because his advocate, or at least partly, of the classical educational system is a coherent part in his overall statement. In the selected text, Gramsci calls for an educational system which offers a "single type of school" to students from different social classes. The classical education, especially the "mode of teaching", fulfills the task better than the system that consists of different types of vocational schools. Since multiplying and grading vocational schools further strengthens the social division, it makes sense for Gramsci to argue against it by presenting the merits of the classical educational system.

8.2. AW: Group 4.1 Question 1

Tim Elmo (02.02.2011 13:54)

While Gramsci is said to have sometimes coded his meaning in the Prison Notebooks in order to his message past his fascist jailers, I think he would have no reason to support a position he did not actually believe in. Especially his ideas on education seem to have a relatively small potential for being censored compared to the rest of his ideas. If he endorses a certain kind of educational policy in his writing it can be true that he would have preferred to phrase his meaning differently, if he had lived in freedom. However, it can also be assumed that his writings are the closest thing we have to his convictions, since after all he still decided to write down his thoughts in their present form. If the text we have today did not in some way reflect his actual intentions, that is if his fear of censorship had led him to distort his ideas so far that they become other ideas altogether, Gramsci would probably have chosen not to write them down at all.

9. Study Questions Group 4.1, 4 + 5

Julia (31.01.2011 23:34)

Study Question No 4:

How can state schools fulfill Gramsci's aims, while at the same time being state institutions (of a political system he criticizes)?

Study Question No 5:

Does the NCLB ("Nicklebee") act of 2001 offer equal chances for everybody by means of standardized tests or is Giroux right arguing that this act should be renamed into "Every child left behind"

President Obama wants to modify the act. In the mentioned links he states the reasons why:

http://www.education.com/magazine/article/Obama_Child_Left_Behind/

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SsVimwm6xQ4>

Do you think these changes will be sufficient to give every child the same chance?

10. Student's GFS

Tim Elmo (30.01.2011 13:26)

Google is a very interesting case and some of the problems mentioned are very important. What can happen when search engines abuse your data is shown here:

<http://www.nytimes.com/2006/08/09/technology/09aol.html?ei=5090&en=f6f61949c6da4d38&ex=1312776000>

One possible way of protecting your privacy would also be to use encryption/proxies, or to use a peer-to-peer search engine like YaCy.

Looking deeper into Google's search engine mechanisms is also important, since the GFS deals only with one half of the Google problematic: Not only can search engines help other people access your private information, but they can also keep information from you! Such was the case for a few years after Google banned xenu.org from their search results in 2004 (I think), a site which offers material critical of Scientology.

10.1. AW: Student's GFS

Sonja (08.02.2011 15:27)

Thank you for sharing this article with us, it is really interesting how fast you can track down a person by looking at his or her Google searches...

Lately I really felt like in 1984 when pictures of a pair of shoes I had been looking at popped up on a completely different website!