Basic Concepts to Understand Society/Culture

“Traditional” perspectives to understanding Society/Culture

Karl Marx- generally thought to be an anticultural theorist
Historical Materialism- this position was a basis for his theories
**Base/superstructure** model of society- the major driving force in a capitalistic society was posited to be the **mode of production** or the economy
Culture in industrial society is that of the **Dominant Ideology:**

- **Bourgeoisie:** the ruling class, or the class of owners in the capitalistic system, the culture in this system reflects the views and interests of these people
- **Class consciousness**- was prevented by religion that tied people together and acted as a drug by which they did not realize the classist system
- **Alienation**- sense of isolation people of the working class feel in capitalistic society

Emile Durkheim- an advocate of functionalism and positivism

- **Solidarity**- feelings, thoughts, or values of morality that hold society together
- **Mechanical solidarity**- in a non-industrialized society people tend to think alike because the people tend to perform similar tasks on a day-to-day basis, deviation from norm is not welcome
- **Organic solidarity**- people in industrialized societies are more open to diversity because of the specialization of day-to-day tasks realization that difference can be productive
- **Collective conscience**- public morals demonstrated by public decisions on issues
- **Functionalism**- way society deals with its own needs
He said religion was not only a collection of practices and ideals but a way to “explain the world”

Max Weber- thought humans were “meaning-driven”

- **Wertrational**- an action that is driven by cultural beliefs or goals, like religion
- **Protestant ethic**- predetermination lead(s) Protestants to look for signs they were chosen by God, hard work followed because fortune was a possible sign of being chosen
- **Disenchantment**- people have become trapped in “an iron cage” of meaningless bureaucracy and rationalism, often occurs when routine and production replace religious or symbolic meaning behind activities

Georg Simmel- society is interactions between people, how they form into groups, and how those groups interact
fashion allowed people to express their individuality and to be able to emulate others by wearing the clothes they do, allowing for a feeling of collectiveness
Individuality vs. an increasingly urban climate in many areas that did (does) not allow for much expression of self, surrounded by people we don’t know

**Basic Concepts to Understand Society/Culture**

“Alternative” perspectives to understanding Society/Culture

Jean-Francois Lyotard- Postmodern Theorist

“knowledge has become the principle force of production over the last few decades” Stated in 1984.
Not many people still believe that science or some greater truth will provide answers to social problems
No single theory will be able to unify all knowledge and experience
With the **decline of grand narratives**, where traditionally larger ideas have been viewed as possible explanations for life, people will shift to a more “instrumental” existence

Jean Baudrillard- postmodern theorist who believes society is no longer based on the exchange of material goods

“the code”- a “collective grammar of signifiers”, people attempt to develop and affirm their identity, to separate themselves from others, and to please themselves by acting as consumers by purchasing parts of the code as symbols they can get at stores or even live in

**Simulation and Simulacrum**- words used to speak of the dynamic relationship he posits between reality and neo-reality
Uses examples of housing developments with “themes”, reality TV shows, the televising of the first Gulf War as examples of how interaction between reality and neo-reality have blurred

**Hypersimulation**- will lead to the downfall of social interaction as we know it, we risk interacting with one another in this sea of the code, made up of symbols, rather than in any traditionally “real” way

Daniel Bell- postmodern theorist shift from industrialization in 20\(^{th}\) century
Expansion of capitalism in the 2\(^{nd}\) half of 20\(^{th}\) century dependant on knowledge and information technology produced by research
There was a great increase for goods by the consumer
Contradiction between rational, Protestant ethic espoused by government, and the pleasure seeking motives of consumers
Consumers now drive the market, in production and demand

Fredric Jameson- Neo-Marxist, postmodernism as the cultural logic of late capitalism

**Hyperspace**- form of space that separates one from society as can be seen in post-Modern architecture

**Waning of affect**- failure of artistic expression to generate “powerful and authentic emotions”
Flow of symbols in our society along with “hedonistic consumption of images” represent late stages of capitalism
David Harvey- Neo-Marxist and advocate of concept of Flexible Accumulation
Authenticity, history and narrative in life replaced by superficiality because of consumerism

Eric C. Blomstrom

Cell Summary for HBSE SW 5101

11/22/03