

Subcultures as symptoms of the new dimension of class conflict

Reading Cohen (1972) and
'Resistance through Rituals' (1976)

Problematic changes – task 1

- Instead of improving the living conditions of the working class, the set of changes presented as ‘modernization’ caused number of problems.
- Put down a list of problems as suggested in Cohen’s text.
- You can proceed by filling in a provisional table of two columns: CHANGES => PROBLEMS

What went wrong? – task 2

- P.87-88 “If someone should ask why the plan to ‘modernize’ the pattern of East End life should have been such a disaster [...] the reasons are complex. They are political in so far as the system does not allow for any effective participation by local working-class community in the decision-making process at any stage or level of planning.”

What went wrong? – task 2

- P.88 “[...] the plans are unconsciously modelled on the structure of the middle-class environment [...]”
- What difference does Cohen draw between the middle-class and the working-class way of living?
- Why should these two distinct life styles be in conflict? (see RTR p.11-13)

Between cultures

- What is the meaning of the 'dominant culture' and the 'parent culture'? (consult RTR p.10-12, Cohen p.89-90)
- Observe some of the influential ideas on so-called 'mass culture' (RTR p.18-19, see quotes!)
- Finally, consider how are young working-class boys positioned vis-à-vis the dominant/parent and mass culture.

Youth Culture as a threat



Youth Culture as a portent of a more just society?

- “the persistent and insistent ‘never had it so good’ ideology” (RTR p.22)
- OR
- “the affluence-consensus-embourgeoisement thesis” (RTR p.31)
- How do you understand these terms? How does Cohen’s study problematize them?

Understanding subcultures

- Find in Cohen's text potential definitions of subcultures (p.89-91)!
- Let's clarify these propositions and link them into a coherent explanation – What is the meaning of subcultures for Cohen? How do they emerge? What solutions do they propose? Why are they seen as imperfect solutions? Etc.

Beyond understanding... analysis and critique

- Concept-theory-argument-discussion...
- Locate weak points in Cohen's understanding of subcultures!
- Think of examples that prove his explanation wrong... Show inconsistencies in his reasoning... What are the limits of his subculture theory? Etc.

Youth Culture – a threat or promise?

Exercise in interpretation

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8LvCe38CsVU>
- Offer an interpretation of this video – or rather couple of interpretations: 1) you may think in line with ‘mass culture’ critiques, 2) argue as a proponent of subcultural resistance (winning the space, staging an underlying conflict with hegemonic forces, using mass cultural items creatively...), 3) or ?