

Instructions:

In this exam task, I would like to invite you to consider two approaches to thinking about subcultures (or culture in general). One approach proposes that culture – as a mode of expression, meaningful practices, way of living etc. – can be appropriated. To put it simply, one group (being more powerful) takes culture from another group and makes it its own. For example, Madonna's 'Vogue' could be seen as an example of cultural appropriation of Latino and black gay cultural practice of 'voguing'. Another approach would claim that culture does not 'belong' to a group but rather it is always relational, a matter of constant exchange, contact, borrowing and combining. For example, gay men who practice 'voguing' mimic Madonna as she imitates Hollywood actresses of the '50s and so on in a chain of borrowings.

I'd like you to turn to the texts we read and see how these two arguments could be supported/refuted with the help of examples from the texts. Below are some suggestions which you may or may not follow. Put together an essay of 5 pages minimum (double-spaced) in which you discuss issues of cultural appropriation vs. hybridity using examples from the texts. You can consult other sources as well.

Possible lines to follow:

Rozsak perceives the media as enemies of the promising social experiment of hippies (pp.36-38). What does he mean by saying that "the problem is a new and though one: a kind of cynical smothering of dissent by saturation coverage, and it begins to look like a far more formidable weapon in the hands of the establishment than outright suppression" (p.37). What strategies did the young dissenters develop in order to remain hidden from the media attention?

See an example of "commercial vulgarization" proposed by Rozsak on p.38. Could you relate it to Hebdige's perspective on Mods? What is to be said about their stylistic strategies? How do they use mass-produced items to signify their unique style and territory? Moreover, how do media interfere with their originality?

The issue of originality is a problematic one. See Hebdige p.88-89 and observe how the Mod style was crafted out of various influences: American pop culture, traditional street figures of petty criminals and vagabonds, immigrants from the colonies etc. Inspiration emerged from the street but also from media images; it was both local and global.

Cressey's taxi-dancers changed their Polish names (of second generation immigrants) into Hollywood-inspired pseudonyms – Christina Stranski became DeLoris Glenn...

Mailer's "The White Negro" celebrates marginalized types and groups as powerful sources of inspiration for the dissenting youth ('50s hipsters and '60s hippies). Whether it is a psychiatric patient or an oppressed 'racial' group, their imagined characteristics are transferred onto the dissenter. In this way an alternative to the despised 'normal' way of life is created.

Etc.