We will spend most of today’s lecture reviewing the Hall’s ‘Two Paradigms’ so you can all reevaluate your papers.

[How can we better understand] the complex orientation b/n thinking and historical reality? (Hall)

Key Themes and Concepts
1) Review of Hall’s ‘Two Paradigms’
2) Introduction to the Frankfurt School

1) Review of Hall’s ‘Two Paradigms’

Summary of Key Points

Cultural Studies, as a modern discipline, emerged out of contested traditions—the ‘two paradigms’

• 1) culturalism
• 2) structuralism

Debates b/n these paradigms were increasingly polarizing in the 1970s

Hall finds neither paradigm fully adequate to the study of culture

Hall emphasizes the strengths and weaknesses of the ‘two paradigms’ because he is looking toward the future of Cultural Studies as a discipline. He wants to carry forward the best, and dispose of worst in order to strengthen the conceptual toolkit of Cultural Studies.

A basic point made by Hall: to understand culture we need to do two things:

• 1) distinguish the content of culture (cultural texts and practices) from its context (its social, political, and economic conditions of possibility)
• 2) dvlp a model adequate to understanding the determinate r/ns b/n those two elements
In short, to better understand culture, how can we theorize the relationship between structures and agency?

Or, as Hall writes: “[how can we better understand] the complex orientation between thinking and historical reality”?

Where does ‘experience’ fit into this complex relationship?

An A-level paper must engage the debates around the role of experience.

- First, early Cultural Studies brings the experience of working class people and everyday life into focus.
- Later, structuralists question the explanatory value of ‘experience’ as it is an ‘effect’ of contextual ‘categories, classifications and frameworks’

1) Culturalist paradigm

A focus on the experience of culture (cultural texts and practices)

Historical/disciplinary overview
a) Richard Hoggart; b) Raymond Williams; and c) E.P. Thompson as the key practitioners

We can summarize the initial disciplinary orientation for Cultural Studies as follows:
1) taking contemporary culture seriously
2) reconceptualizing the term culture
   • something expressive of its social, political, and economic context
3) a focus on ‘the politics of intellectual work’
   • partially expressed in Thompson’s humanist perspective which emphasizes agency
   • this agency included the political/ Marxist agency of the scholar—the ‘settling of accounts’ with the traditional perspective of culture (w.c. culture as ‘anarchy’ or a ‘problem’ to be contained)

Nonetheless, there was never a single or unproblematic definition of culture (even w/n the culturalism paradigm)
Williams: two definitions of culture

1) Ideas
- builds on the Arnoldian/Leavisite tradition (‘the best that has been thought and said’) but a democratized and socialized version
- i.e. not just ‘art’ or the pinnacle of ideas
- the ‘ordinary’ is also culture and worthy of study—not categorically different from ‘high art’

2) Social Practices
“Culture as a whole way of life”
- a descriptive, ethnographic or anthropological emphasis
- culture documents everyday life
- culture is indissolubly related to social practices
- an eventual challenge is how to categorize this interrelationship
- in this context, the ‘theory of culture is defined’

‘Theory of culture’
In categorizing ‘culture as a whole way of life’ Williams deploys the concept ‘structure of feeling’—the interaction b/n the lived cultural practices and patterns of thought

But how can their organization be categorized?
- how are the two interrelated?

Structuralism, for many, was able to better address this question than culturalism

Williams emphasizes the collective dimension to the ‘structure of feeling’

Gramsci’s influence on Williams
- Williams was increasingly influenced by Gramsci in the 70s
- Hall would be even more influenced by Gramsci
- hegemony would become a central concept in Cultural Studies by the end of the 70s
- Williams takes up Gramsci thru. his model of ‘dominant, emergent, and residual cultural practices
- this emphasizes how cultural practices are always in process

Differentiating Thompson from Williams
- Hall notes the many variants w/n the ‘culturalist’ position

Thompson
- Unlike Williams, Thompson’s cultural focus is resolutely on class, and class consciousness
- He is interested not in an all-inclusive ‘whole way of life’;
rather, how the working class ‘way of life’ is always in struggle the dominant ‘way of life’ (bourgeois/capital)
• Thompson also deploys a rather “mechanical metaphor” of base/superstructure which Williams finds inadequate and reductionist

Thompson’s bottom line: capitalist society is founded on economic, moral, and cultural forms of exploitation
• Culture, thus, expresses capitalist exploitation

Finally, Thompson emphasizes ‘experience’ (which will be harshly criticized by structuralism which will find it theoretically unsophisticated)

SUMMARY: For both Williams and Thompson, culture is a whole way of life
• but for Thompson the whole is determined by an exploitative economic base

SUMMARY of the Disciplinary significance of Culturalism
• moved decisively beyond the Arnoldian/Leavisite tradition of ‘the best and brightest’ in ‘minority keeping’
• culture is not merely a rarefied set of privileged texts

Culture is the systems of meaning embedded in all social practices
• thus the collective experience of those social practices is the authenticating source through which to understand culture

Characteristics of culturalism
a) culture as interwoven in all social practices
b) those social practices include common forms of human activity
c) opposed to the base/superstructure model
d) both social being and social consciousness are interrelated
e) culture includes both meaning and values and lived traditions and practices
f) ideology is a minor concept not central to this paradigm

2) Structuralist paradigm

A focus on the conditions of possibility which structure the experience of culture

Key practitioners are Claude Levi-Strauss, and Louis Althusser
Levi-Strauss
- an anthropologist strongly influenced by semiotics
- he applied the ‘structural’ model of semiotics (the ‘linguistic paradigm’) to develop a ‘human science of culture’

Althusser
- gave structuralism a more ‘classical Marxist’ orientation
- also gave it a psychoanalytic focus—the unconscious

How does this ‘structuralist’ approach to culture differ from culturalism?
- Althusser wrote that the mode of production was ‘structured like a language’
- like culturalism, structuralism also rejected the mechanistic model of the economic determination of culture
- instead, he focused on the structural (and complex) relations between the economic and cultural
- this is an ahistorical approach
- this is counter to the contextualization of the culturalist model

Levi-Strauss vs. Williams
- 1) culture as the categories and forms through which societies classified from their particular conditions of existence (human-nature r/n important for L-S)
- 2) asked how those categories and frames are transformed—structural changes to signifying practices
- 3) focused mainly on just the signifying practices

In short, he examined the logic of arrangement, or, the structural causality

All of these features were present in Althusserian structuralism

Althusser
Ideology as ‘imaginary r/ns’ (themes, concepts, representations through which we live) to the real conditions of existence

KEY QUOTE:
[Ideology] not as the contents and surface forms of ideas but as the unconscious categories through which conditions are represented and lived.
The key difference b/n structuralism and culturalism

1) EXPERIENCE (the role it plays and how it is understood)

   a) For culturalism
      • the terrain of the lived, where consciousness and conditions intersected

   b) For structuralism
      • not the ground for anything since:
        “one could only ‘live’ and experience one’s conditions in and through the categories, classifications, and frameworks of the culture.”

These categories did not arise from experience

Instead, experience was an effect of these categories

2) (UN)CONSCIOUS

   a) For culturalism
      • consciousness and culture as collective

   b) For structuralism
      • a more radical proposition—culture as an unconscious structure

      The subject is spoken by categories of culture in an unconscious structure.

The role of the concept ‘ideology’
Within the structuralist paradigm, ‘ideology’ is often deployed in the place of ‘culture’

Ideology is a concept with a more Marxist orientation

For Althusser, ideology is an unconscious structure

SUMMARY (experience, structures, and ideology)

A) Culturalism
   • i) culture as collective categories (conscious)
   • experience is an authenticating source for understanding culture
B) Structuralism

• i) culture as unconscious structures

Indeed, consciousness itself was an ideological form (BONUS marks for anyone who can clearly identify this point)

ii) experience is an effect of culture (‘imaginary r/ns...’)

experience is not an authenticating source (or an accurate ‘reflection’ of the real)

Imaginary r/ns (a.k.a. ‘experience, a.k.a. ideological effect) do not merely reproduce r/ns of domination but also reproduce the mode of production (hence the m.o.p. is ‘structured like a language’) by conditioning labour power in a form fit for capitalist exploitation

This is the key role that ideology plays (hence the need for a ‘symptomatic reading’ of cultural texts

What about ‘agency’?

a) Culturalism

• For Thompson, ‘agency’ was a key category
• Remember that he was responding to the top-down reading of culture (the Arnoldian-Leavisite tradition) which negated (or at least fully devalued) the cultural agency of the working class
• Thompson was also a Marxist of the ‘humanist’ tradition and (working class) agency was a perspective necessary for revolutionary emancipation

b) Structuralism

• no role for agency
• people are ‘bearers’ of structures—a structural logic which ‘speak’ and position them

What does Hall like about structuralism?

1) determinate conditions
• it moves beyond ‘naïve humanism’ or an analysis of ‘bare individuals’

2) more theoretically sophisticated
• recognizes the continuous and complex mvmt b/n different levels of abstraction
• abstractions, analysis and concepts are needed to:
...cut into the complexity of the real in order precisely to reveal and bring to light relationships and structures which cannot be visible to the naïve naked eye, and which can neither present nor authenticate themselves.

3) reality not ‘reflected’ in thought
   • thought does not reflect reality; thought is articulated on and appropriates reality

4) “the whole”
   • it recognizes the necessary complexity of the unity of structure (over-determination)
   • and it helps us to conceptualize the specificity of different practices without losing sight of ‘the whole’ they comprise

5) decentres ‘experience’
   • Hall endorses the turn to ideology as a filter thru. which we can better position and understand experience
   • while ‘culturalism’ references ideology, it is not a key concept

[Without ideology] the effectivity of ‘culture’ for the reproduction of a particular mode of production cannot be grasped.

   • thus the importance of the Althusserian ISAs

It is here that Hall begins to turn toward Gramsci, as he has a more fluid understanding of ideology (thru. hegemony)

   • better for conceptualizing i) struggle; and ii) a multiplicity of ‘ideologies’

Hall states clearly that ‘ideology’ needs to be understood as “a terrain of struggle”

**Weakness of structuralism for Hall**

1) unity thru. difference
   • related to the previous point is the fact that social formations achieve unity thru. difference, not identity
   • that is why there is absolute (not relative) autonomy of practices “via their necessary heterogeneity and necessary non-correspondence”

Hall feels this last point goes too far and that heterogeneity and non-correspondence is not an absolute process

What does this mean?
Hall is addressing the complex and unresolved question of determination (what characterizes the r/ns b/n structures and agency, or structures and experience)?

**What does Hall like about culturalism?**
1) insists on understanding the affirmative mvmt of the dvlpmt of conscious struggle (Gramsci is key here)
   - a necessary turn for the analysis of history, ideology and consciousness
   - something too downgraded in the structuralist model
   - Gramsci’s ‘common sense’ as a counter to ‘unconscious’ structures

In this sense culturalism properly restores the dialectic b/n the unconscious of cultural categories and the moment of conscious organization: even if, in its characteristic movement, it has tended to match structuralism’s over-emphasis on ‘conditions’ with an altogether too-inclusive emphasis on ‘consciousness.

**Concluding remarks: other promising paradigms**

1) Signifying practices
   - Lacan—how subjects are constituted in language
   - Freud: the unconscious
   - discourse theory
   - problem: addresses the ‘subject-in-general’ as opposed to the historically-determinate subject

2) Political economy of culture
   - a return to base/superstructure
   - economic processes and structures of cultural production as more significant than the cultural-ideological aspect
   - ideology is merely ‘false consciousness’
   - problem: is the economic level a sufficient explanation for culture?

3) Foucault and radical heterogeneity
   - makes possible the concrete examination of particular ideological and discursive formations

Hall’s bottom line: Gramsci is the way forward
FINAL OVERVIEW/SUMMARY

1) Emphasizes the ‘determinate conditions’ not only of culture, but, in turn, the structures on which experience itself is framed

- moves beyond the humanist perspective (i.e. human experience at the centre of culture ad thus the key to its understanding)
- ‘decentres’ experience
- that is, experience is not the material source upon which we can draw to understand culture
- instead, experience itself is an effect of structures

What is at stake for theory in this debate?

How are social and cultural phenomena explained in r/n to their social, political, and economic contexts?

How are those different elements thought of together; what are the causal/determinate r/ns therein?

Thus there remains the question of totality

And thus the structuralist insistence that experience-in and of itself— is not sufficient explanatory grounds for understanding culture

Experience itself needs to be explained

The primacy of experience has been critiqued as the key inadequacy of the culturalist paradigm

Experience is the authenticating source for understanding culture. But experience is in the middle of a complex set of indeterminate relations b/n social conditions and social consciousness.

In short, how can experience itself be explained?

Hall, conversely, also sees a strength in this weakness:

It has insisted, correctly, on the affirmative moment of the development of conscious struggle and organization as a necessary element in the analysis of history, ideology and consciousness: against its persistent down-grading in the structuralist paradigm (69).
Is Hall’s ‘strengths and weaknesses’ approach fatally flawed? Does such a combinatory approach not mean remaining trapped within the inadequate theoretical ground of culturalism? Does that limit the ability to understand culture (and our experience of it) as an effect of more abstract structural determinations?

Hall turns to Gramsci (and the concept of hegemony) in order to get out of this potential trap.

Hall highlights two ways in which Gramsci takes us further down the road:

i) conjunctural analysis
   - a specific combination of various levels and types of determination

ii) hegemony
   - beyond ‘economic reductionism’
   - no simple or mechanical determination of cultural and ideological expression by the mode of production
   - instead, a sit of complex and variegated struggle—which is always uncertain and in process

2) Frankfurt School and the Culture Industry

What is The Frankfurt School?
- group of German intellectuals who broadly analyzed the nature and consequences of capitalism on cultural, political, and social levels
this was in the context of the rise of Fascism and decline of revolutionary movements
they were Jews who fled Nazi Germany and were surprised at some of the similarities they saw in the US
viewed mass media as central to the success of capitalist regimes (as it did under Fascism)
the culture industry analyzed or its key normative role in socialization

Remember that in Marxist analysis, the ruling elite not only own the ‘mode of production’ but also control the production of society’s dominant ideas and values.

They emphasized the role of mass media (what they called the ‘culture industry’)

they came from an environment of propaganda and the effective use of mass media by the Nazis
in the US, they saw mass media playing a key role for capitalist society
namely, to obscure, undermine, and contain oppositional or critical consciousness on behalf of the dominant capitalist class
this left them deeply pessimistic—no immediate hope for revolution or radical change

Contextualizing the Frankfurt School and culture industry

The work of the Frankfurt School (including Adorno) is categorized under the umbrella term ‘Critical Theory’

These are some key characteristics of critical theory:
no singular approach or methodology
emphasizes the power of critique to help create awareness of structures of domination (political, social, economic and cultural) and the possibility of changing them
regarded the culture of everyday life as always being political
regarded fascism as a strategic response by capital to crisis (i.e. worker-led revolutions)
capital targeted the working class for containment thru. the ‘culture industry’
the effect of the culture industry on the consciousness of the working class is conformity
the mass production of commodified culture soothed workers and made them ready to go to work the next day
in turn, it left little space for productive political action and revolutionary movements
Historical context

• the Institute of Social Research (a.k.a. Frankfurt School) est. in 1923, just after the Russian Revolution (1917)
• the Spartacus League Uprising in Germany (1919) had the country teetering on the edge of revolution
• then the German Social Democratic Party purged itself of revolutionaries, just as the Nazi Party began its rise to power
• remember the Nazi’s began as ‘national socialists’
• suddenly, worker-led revolution, which had recently been regarded as immanent no longer seemed so ‘inevitable’
• Spain, Italy and Germany—all with very powerful political left wing—became fascist states
• they wondered what had happened to the revolutionary subjectivity of the working class?

The Frankfurt School were among the first to consider the role of mass media in sapping the working class of its revolutionary enemy (as well as facilitating the rise of fascism)

Adorno and Horkheimer (in The Dialectic of Enlightenment, 1947) used the term ‘culture industry’ instead of ‘mass media’

Culture Industry (a.k.a. Mass media)

• mass production techniques were being used in film and radio
• culture is produced like cars—‘assembly line’ (to maximize profits)
• culture becomes a commodity
• mass production techniques impacted both how culture was being produced and consumed
• culture produced is standardized and repetitive
• cultural consumption as undemanding and passive