Style, Space, and Resistance (through Rituals)

Class Outline
- Housekeeping and Reflections from last week
- Our Lecture
- Break (split tutorial groups)
- Discussion
- Student-Led Tutorial

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Reflections from Lecture Two
(Cultural Studies meets Sports Studies: Power, Sport, and Popular Culture)

i) Doing cultural studies means asking about how power operates in everyday life: There is something important at stake in studying popular culture.

ii) Our theories of power are conceptual tools and toolkits (not master equations).

iii) We are interested in anthropological, as opposed to a literary, definition of culture (a process of the so-called ‘democratization’ of culture).

iv) Questions about hegemony...
Reflections from Lecture Two
(Cultural Studies meets Sports Studies: Power, Sport, and Popular Culture)

Hegemony

Hegemony denotes the **indirect power** of the ruling class to sustain dominance over a majority.

Hegemonic power is sustained **not** by direct force, or coercion, nor simply because a population are dupes being manipulated into subordination (as if experiencing 'false consciousness').

Instead, hegemonic power is sustained through the imposition of a worldview and the **moralization and internalization of this worldview** by people, so as it seems 'natural' and common sense.

For example, voting is a hegemonic - dominant, widely accepted, and yet also contestable - mode of engagement with politics.

Today we will ask, what is hegemonic about sport?
To understand these readings as being somehow related, we have to explore changing ideas about 'resistance,' and especially about youth (sporting) subcultures, in post-war Europe and North America.
Why Resist or Oppose Dominant Sports?

What can we say about space and style in dominant sports?
How to explain the composition of a (physical) culture?

Dominant

Beliefs, values, and practices, that endure from the past within a dominant (sporting) cultural form (e.g. weekend fixtures, religious affiliations, amateur values such as ‘fair play’)

Residual

Hegemonic beliefs, values, practices, such as those found in dominant commercial sports and/or those advanced by dominant groups (e.g. win at all costs, capitalist imperative)

Emergent

Elements, perspectives and practices which pose alternatives and challenges to the dominant (sporting) culture (e.g. ‘Alternative’ sports, such as those associated with subcultures)

PC = Physical Culture
Any activity in which the moving body is the central focus and material core

Raymond Williams

Kinesiology 381: Sport, Leisure and Popular Culture
University of British Columbia
In 1964, the Contemporary Centre for Cultural Studies (CCCS) was founded in Birmingham, UK.

They were mostly British Marxists who were becoming dissatisfied with (certain elements of) Marxism.

...they were living through, and responding to, stark political, social, and economic change.
Amid these changes arose various ‘groups’ of young people - dubbed subcultures - who appeared to be responding somehow to their circumstances.

What are Subcultures?

In studying these groups, became dissatisfied with prevailing interpretations of how youth are socialized through (popular) culture (such as music, cinema, and sport).

*The research they developed was hugely influential for the study of youth, style, and resistance...*
What are Subcultures?
On Methodology

The methodology of the CCCS was to understand
"subcultures in terms of their relation to the wider class-cultural
networks of which they form a distinctive part" (1993, 6)

They therefore asked: "What is the connection between the political and
social change of our times, and the rise of these youth subcultures?"
Dick Hebdige studied the meaning of style in the emerging fashions of 1970s Britain.

“Style in subculture is pregnant with significance. Its transformations ‘go against nature’, interrupting the process of ‘normalization.’ As such they are gestures, movements, towards a speech that offends the silent majority, which challenges the principles of unity and cohesion, which contradicts the myth of consensus”

(Hebdige, 1979, 18)
1) The critique:
"Bowie has in effect colluded in consumer capitalism's attempt to re-create a dependent adolescent class, involved as passive teenage consumers in the purchase of leisure prior to the assumption of 'adulthood' rather than being a youth culture of persons who question (from whatever class or cultural perspective) the value and meaning of adolescence and the transition to the adult world of work."

(Taylor and Wall, Beyond the Skinheads in an edited collection called Working Class Youth Culture, 1976)
2) Hebdige's findings:

* That, through style, these young people were in fact challenging class and gender stereotypes
* They refused masculinity and femininity in their conventional and commodity forms
* Symbolically, they resisted, in ways that their parents and other authorities could not comprehend as meaningful or consequential
* BUT they did not do this in a cultural vacuum. As we have seen, these processes are inextricably connected to the dominant (hegemonic) culture.
* ...so how are they connected?
Safety Pins and the Circuit of Style: Resistance <-> Incorporation

1) Youth reject and reinterpret a cultural value, practice or, commodity
2) This reinterpretation is given new meaning
3) A larger style and associated identities and values form
4) These styles and identities begin to be mimicked more widely in the dominant culture
5) Sensationalist responses and media coverage
6) Commercialization of the style waters down its oppositional significance

Dominant (hegemonic) culture
Appropriation
Bricolage
Group Homology
Subculture
Incorporation
Diffusion
Moral Panic
What are Subcultures?

CCCS Definition

“Subcultures are social groups whose members consciously, and often flamboyantly, violate class, gender, race, ethnic, sexuality, or religious norms, and often intend, in their process of disrupting culturally taken-for-granted ways of seeing the world, to challenge the power base of a society that creates social stratification”

(Atkinson and Young, 2008, 52-53)
Sporting Subcultures: Skateboarding

How, and in what ways, did skateboarders resist the dominant sports culture
Sporting Subcultures: Skateboarding

From Resistant to Dominant Sports

Atkinson and Young, 2008, 53)
1) Talk about how the subculture concept was originally similar to the ideas of subatomic particles
2) Cultural studies researchers have suggested that identities in the late twentieth and early twenty first century are so fluid and constantly shifting that the idea of static class positions has less resonance. Mention the World Economic forum and rising inequality.
3) xxxxxxx
4) Some people who were part of these movements have gone onto write about how they never meant anything quite so spectacular or consequential; that the truth was, as is so often the case, more prosaic
5) Segue to whiteness
Parkour, Anarcho-Environmentalism, and Poiesis

Michael Atkinson

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As remarked by French "free runner" David Brel and Scottish runner, Tom in the 1990s, Parkour is a sartorial lifestyle of athletic performance focusing on overcoming obstacles in an everyday environment. It is not a technical sport, but rather a personal practice of using the body in a creative and clever way. The practice is often performed in urban settings. Through the public practice of Parkour across built outdoor sites, advocates demonstrate that people can move through the environment without fear or hesitation, often expressing a form of liberation and transcendence. This article takes ethnographic data collected in Parkour practice. A "free runner" can be anyone who is free to move and explore within a public space. It argues, Parkour is an emerging, urban, "anarcho-environmental" movement, showing the potential to challenge traditional norms of sport and leisure. The practice of Parkour is an act of empowerment, the expression of will to move and explore through the environment.

Keywords: Parkour, poiesis, environmental sport, youth, aesthetics

...Our Readings
Atkinson believes that in Parkour, he has found “a (globally) burgeoning sport counter-culture” (2009, 170).

Parkour is, for Atkinson, a kind of spatial resistance against dominant sports and technocapitalist urban spaces; an intrinsic, spiritual union between self, body, and space.

He claims, in doing so, to have unearthed “the essence of Parkour” (169). What do we make of this claim to ‘authenticity’?

What can we learn from his method of immersion in the practice?
(Physical) Cultural Expressions of the ‘White Male Backlash’

*Whiteness as socially constructed, not biological:
Kusz suggests that the style and representation of BMX is part of that construction

*The white male backlash is the self-victimization of those who lament the perceived losses of white (male) privilege since the 1960s (articulated throughout popular culture...)

*Kusz contends that BMX, and extreme sports more broadly, have been implicated in a "reactionary project" to "resecure the hegemonic position of white males" (163). What do we think of his method; the way he analysed the 'texts?'

*Whiteness and kinesiology...