

What Is Popular Culture? Definition and Analysis

Introduction

John Storey captures the definition of popular culture from several perspectives. Generally, popular culture incorporates itself in many walks of life or conceptual categories, for example, in 'common', 'folk', and 'mass' cultures. It has spread across many centuries in terms of history, commerce, media, art, drama, and the movie industry. In this detailed critical approach, Storey incorporates different definitions of terms like culture and ideology to clearly define popular culture. In his definition and approach makes me accept his definition of popular culture in different ways that are discussed in this paper.

To critically analyze the basic definition of popular culture, let's examine Storey's definitions in detail. Popular culture is constantly defined in contrast to the conceptual categories named above like folk culture (Storey 1). He argues that the term 'popular' is faced with certain difficulties in terms of theoretical and analytical definitions. Storey (1) therefore notes that popular culture can effectively be represented as an empty conceptual category that can be satisfactory about a variety of contextual references. These contextual references can be associated with great philosophers, artists, poets, and aesthetic factors. Also, the second noun 'culture' is used to denote; a way of life, works and practices of great artists, and the skill of producing 'signifying practices' like poetry and pop music. Therefore, Storey observes that the incorporation of the true meaning of the word culture as a way of life and culture should be in the form of 'signifying practices' named above.

Critical Analysis of Popular Culture

Definition of ideology

To clearly understand the true meaning of popular culture, Storey was indebted to incorporate the term Ideology in his approach to defining popular culture. He notable uses five ways in defining ideology. In his first approach he defines ideology as an organized structure of ideas expressed by various identities of people. This refers to different collections like political affiliation manifestos, professional groups' terms and conditions, e.g., marketing industries, and social ideas of a political party. Secondly, ideology is a certain distortion of texts and images that show the reality that evokes wrong awareness. These distortions perform well when the powerful oppress the powerless. This brings dominance where the powerful do not see the magnitude of their exploitation, thus concealing reality, e.g., capitalist ideology. A third explanation of ideology is defined in relation to Marx's approach to ideological forms. This focus on pop songs, films, and novels, from the society's point of view rather than a consensual approach. Thus, he defines popular culture as a site where well-understood and combined social concepts are formed. These concepts are meant to win the hearts of people in their perception of the world (Storey 4).

The fourth description of ideology according to Roland Barthes is based on the meaning of various texts and different practices they carry based on the level of connotation. Lastly, ideology is

defined as a material practice that entails everyday errands in a social order and not as a body of ideas, as observed by Louis Althusser. Therefore, we found the similarity and differences between the two words. Both culture and ideology focus on the conceptual arena of ideas. While the difference is, ideology offers a broad perspective of political dimension and culture generalizes. Hence, the definition of the terms culture and ideology clearly becomes the paramount stepping stone for approaching the correct definition of popular culture in different dimensions as discussed below (Storey 4).

What is popular culture?

First, popular culture is simply a custom that is widely preferred by many people. Thus, it implies that the magnitude of interested people determines the social concepts present. Such quantitative index of the majority of people can be traced in different lucrative fields. For example, a study on the rate of sold books and other electrical gadgets and find the statistic of net income. Also a close study on attendance reports at movie and sporting events could give the most approved movie or sporting event. An analysis of market research findings on the most preferred programs. Such details could give at a glance the most preferred item in the social lives of people. Although it might be difficult to agree on a certain figure that may qualify to be widely favored and qualify to be liked by the majority. However, a quantitative approach should be essential in defining popular culture.

Another way of defining popular culture is 'to suggest that it is the culture that is left over after we have decided what high culture is ... a residual category, there to accommodate texts and practices that fail to meet the required standards to qualify as high culture ... it is a definition of popular culture as inferior culture' (Storey 6). Thus, popular culture must include the audience and avoid complexity of 'high culture. This would be done when it includes a range of judgments in a respective item. This approach can be supported by the assumption that popular culture is commercial while high culture is individually forged. Thus high culture requires moral and aesthetic response and popular culture deserves a social conceptual inspection.

Third, popular culture can be defined as 'mass' culture (Storey 8). This implies that popular culture produces mass items that are consumed largely. The audience renders the mass-produced items hopeless because they will be wholly consumed, hence a non-discriminating audience. The culture is manipulative and in a designated formula that is passive. For example during the 20th century many films failed to benefit from the promotion cost incurred. Mass culture has been characterized to be influenced by American culture. However, this culture is hardly consumed wholly. The items of popular culture are seen as fantasy and have no structure or moral approach hence 'sees popular culture as a sort of ideological machine which more or less effortlessly reproduces the prevailing structures of power' (Storey 9).

'A fourth definition of popular culture is a custom that originates from 'the people'... according to this definition; the term should only be used to indicate an 'authentic' culture of 'the people'. This is popular culture as folk culture: a culture of the people for the people' (Storey 9). This definition is sometimes referred to as the working-class culture and acts as the main foundation of capitalism. However, like in the first definition, who are 'the people' and who qualifies to be 'the people. In addition, the definition does not touch on commercial approach of items from

popular culture. This definition evokes various questions. For example, what would be the implications of popular culture producing commercial raw materials?

Another attempt to define popular culture by Storey is that it is popular culture is one that focuses on political analysis and the concept of hegemony. Hegemony means the way powerful people try to win the hearts of the powerless using intellectual and moral forms of leadership (Storey 10). The political concept here explains the tension between the weaker individuals called 'subordinate' and the stronger class of people called 'dominant group'. Thus this culture is far from the mass culture or oppositional popular cultures discussed above. It mainly centers on the idea of hegemony. The various arguments on this theory apply to the struggle of the dominant group and the subordinate or the weaker group. Therefore, there are various aspects of this theory that need to be discussed in depth. For example, hegemony allows interaction between the dominant and subordinate groups to attain equilibrium, thus 'the compromise equilibrium of hegemony can also be employed to analyze different types of conflicts within and across popular culture ... but hegemony theory can also be used to explore and explain conflicts involving ethnicity, 'race', gender, generation, sexuality, disability, etc., all are at different moments engaged in forms of cultural struggle against the homogenizing forces of incorporation of the official or dominant culture' (Storey 11). In addition, popular culture has another feature that is attributed to hegemony theory, that it is a site for evaluating social groups and their response to political power.

Lastly, popular culture may be defined in relation to postmodernism. This is where there is no distinction between 'high culture' and 'popular culture'. No difference between 'authentic' and 'commercial'. There is full integration of the above-discussed definitions.

Conclusion

In conclusion, 'what all these definitions have in common is the insistence that whatever else popular culture is, it is a culture that only emerged following industrialization and urbanization (Storey 12).

References

John Storey, Cultural theory and popular culture: an introduction (fifth edition).