

History 474A
Spring 2022

ROBERT HOLTON NOTES

Modernization = Homogenization

Everything “new” seems to be the same

For some Americans prosperity was the problem –

“The range of cultural and personal possibilities had been unacceptably reduced.”

The Beats sought to establish “collective heterogeneous spaces” based on the examples of marginalized groups.

Those “excluded” were immune from the privileges and perils of mainstream modernity.

Homogenizing tendencies included:

Narrowing of political views → hostility to dissent

Highway system standardizes the experience of exploring the nation

Suburbanization → little boxes

The climate-controlled mall

Muzak

Conformity → diminution of individuality and difference

WHERE can the non-homogeneous continue to exist?

In the “folds of heterogeneity” – off limits to conventional citizens

1950s – little room for political rebellion, no leftist politics; even “modernism” (formerly daring and radical) was mainstream now

Alienation, but not in the Marxist sense of alienation from labor;

Capitalism doesn’t cause alienation, the homogeneity of modernity does

The war effort had co-opted all dissent and dampened cultural debate, but provided no solutions to the troubles of a bland, homogeneous culture

Lack of any organized political movement directs alienation to positive social goals

ALIENATION is personal, not economic or political

WALK AWAY FROM “IT” → **What is IT? Where can one walk to?**

NOWHERE – You can’t escape the “closed room” of American culture; you can’t imagine alternatives

Hide in the folds? Hide in the trash can?

Poetry can rename the world – verse can help people find a voice and begin the process of renewal → the means of BREAKING OUT of the cultural enclosure

Beats – a subcultural “walking away”

Allen Ginsburg’s HOWL – hearing it is a moment of recognition to those who are alienated – there must be more of us!

We can try to find a “heterogeneous space.”

Some look to the “marginalized” for a model of rebellion – latent racism creeps into such efforts, though → Mailer’s “The White Negro”

But such portraits gave a SENSE OF POSSIBILITY (reality of conditions is less important)

People seek an AUTHENTIC CONNECTION WITH LIFE

Bebop culture gives a sense of belonging to alienated whites

ANOMIC – those maladjusted individuals existing beyond the reach of conformity

Blacks are excluded

Anomics cannot be assimilated

Anomic spaces – sites of reconstructed community – community of social dregs, but still a specific fold in the cultural fabric

“JUNK is not a kick; it is a way of life” – a community away from homogenous America

LANGUAGE is important for these communities – not just self-expression but self-fashioning

A willingness to investigate the folds of heterogeneity derives from the Beat movement.