

Researching Europe : Unity, Diversity and Identity

Module 2960

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Week 1

Thursday, 22 April 2004. Our first lecture in this module was given by Shirley Jordan. We were introduced to the topics of popular culture and researching Europe. Before we had this lecture we were sent an email telling students to collect two articles from outside Shirley Jordan’s office. Although these two articles were not discussed in depth during this first session we were reminded that we should have read them which proved very useful for the following weeks lecture.

The lecture content was explained to us during this initial introductory lecture, the lectures were to be two weeks on the topic of popular culture, two weeks on defining Europe and one week to practice and rehearse our presentations.

The planning dossier was also explained, that it should show our response to process of thinking, a preliminary mapping out of our paper and that it should have three entries. It should also include the primary and secondary materials that we had found for our presentation.

The group was split into two halves for the conference and a volunteer was requested from each group to introduce the conference. Initially there was a great silence at this point, I offered myself to do this introduction for Group B, after this there followed quite rapidly a volunteer for the first Group of Presenters, group A.

During this lecture Thematic approaches were introduced to us. This demonstrated a higher level of working out what exactly and how you arrive at the topic that you would wish to develop for use as a paper to give at a seminar/conference.

Firstly, we had to list all the different kinds of ways that we had been thinking about European issues. We were told to make sure that they were coherent and well worded.

Next we had to break this down into what would be good for a conference and of interest to others as a potential conference project. The next stage we had to carry out was to select three topics and to break them down into subheadings; issues that could be discussed

The final stage of this thematic approach was to arrive at a single topic to make a preliminary framework and settle upon points that would be raised. In addition we were told to think about how to present this.

This first week left me with many things to write, think and address for this planning dossier. Initially we were three students who planned to make a combined presentation. My first thoughts were to speak about Spain, and its role within Europe. I was going to look at it as belonging to a collection of countries which have a common goal as a trading block against the North American and Asian markets. The areas I was going to look at were currency, trade, governance, Defence, media and Identity.

Then whilst trying to break the topics down I came to these topics, a lack of a common language, issues of culture, the euro currency, a European army and trade embargoes.

Other issues that I thought about were the lack of a common language in Europe, how the English language is dominant as it is the language of science and research. From thinking about these issues in the lecture amongst my peers we put together an initial outline for a paper. This was then discussed amongst the lecture group who gave feedback on what were good and bad features of the proposal and where it should be changed or reconsidered.

Having thought about our first thought of doing a combined presentation we realised that if the three of us were to do this then we would be repeating the explanations of what is a stereo type for example for the three countries, as well as the other points that we were going to address. On reflection we realised that this would not only bore the listener but it would be a monotonous exercise. This left me with going back to the drawing board to reconsider another idea. The seeds had been sown for how to go about carrying out a proposal at this stage.

Part 2

29 April 2004,

In this lecture the development of thematic approaches was continued. We discussed what the meaning of Popular Culture was.

We looked at its essential characteristics and decided that they were omnipresent, reflective of a given society, repetitive; manipulative; commercial (product of consumer capitalism). We made an attempt at defining popular culture. We thought about why we study popular culture, how to study it the different cultures and we applied a culture theory which was called the 'House of Popular Culture'. Repetitive Culture is linked to psychoanalysis theories according to Barthes/Freud. We discussed how popular culture feeds people something that they like. This repetition theory can be applied to advertising. This is because it reassures and destabilises the consumer with a goal that they cannot reach. We learnt that popular culture shapes our identities and our desires. It is conspicuous consumption. This means that often what we buy is for the benefit of others to view. Eg. Logos, brands ie the car you drive or the boat you have moored etc.

We also looked at if culture is in everything that surrounds us or if we would consider there to be a high and a low culture, critics are said to only be concerned with issues of high culture whereas a camera is said to record everything. During this lecture I also learnt that culture tracks history – it refers to a mind set of society according to geographical and historical factors. Hence in popular culture there is a time continuum.

During this lecture we had some cartoon sketches of asterix to analyse. Floriane Place – Verhnes our lecturer for this week explained how she reduced the topic of asterix to one topic to speak about for a presentation. Her topic was explained to us and how to reduce it to just one linguistic aspect. The topic was introduced the methodology was explained and why it was limited to just one aspect which was because of the time given for speaking only allowed her to cover this one aspect.

This was of interest for me because now I had a theoretical model which I could use to apply to my topic to underpin why I have used the topic. At this stage I had decided to study the mini skirt. I made a spider gram with fashion as the central bubble which off shoot bubbles for the following, models; trends; style; colour; brands; icons; and status. These were to be reduced down to the two or three topics for my presentation. In the lecture we also tried this out as a group with the cartoon strips. In the central bubble we had the title of Popular culture, the branches extending from this included, fashion; music; film; icons; advertising; sport; food and habits; comic strips and newspapers/magazines.

Week 3

6 May 2004

This lecture further developed the theory of Popular Culture. We watched a video of a cartoon of Blitz Wolf. Using the theory that we learnt in the second lecture we then worked in groups and applied this theory to this cartoon. In order to analyse the cartoon in depth we watched it twice. As a group we used the spider gram method to break the animation down into topics. We found that it covered the following topics :- Hitler in Hell; The Versaille Treaty; God Save the Queen; Brick pig represented the USA; Bombs; humour. We then did a more substantial spider gram whose branches were : Non aggression pact; recruitment; Bonds Stamps; Propaganda; Bombing of Japan; History; Rascism: Inuendoes; mocking derision; caricature of Hitler as the wolf; parody; fable; Disney.

This was not as simple as it appears on paper. We had to brainstorm as a group to get these ideas organised into what we saw as categories that fitted the 'house of Popular culture' model. As a group we created an overhead A4 sheet which was to be presented to the class but as there was not enough time Floriane used the overhead that my group had produced to show the class.

We had narrowed all the topics down and concentrated on the theory behind Propaganda. We had deduced that it implies human derision as the enemy was presented in a negative caricature format, that it distances the enemy from us through comedy. That it portrayed Hitler as being beneath us. We also said that it

demonstrated American Superiority. It illustrated their power. We noted that films work as they make light hearted humour of what are really very serious/bad situations.

From this I learnt that I needed to take the following steps to write my presentation.

- 1 Brain storm
- 2 Adapt one Theory
- 3 Adapt from several Theories
- 4 Limit the scope
- 5 Write up presentation

My topic now chosen, how the Beckhams have become the 'new royals'.

This is the spider gram that I used and its branches in order to prepare my presentation.

Beckhams : Paparazzi; Excellent Footballer; Death of Diana, need for a new face; Hair; Victoria Adams, Brooklyn; Romeo; Religion; Pepsi Cola; Style; Fans; Icon

The main theory that I have used to underpin my presentation is the House of popular culture as it best fits my chosen topic. I have used all the rooms in the house to explain the many facets of this Beckhamology.

The primary sources that I used were my lecture notes, the secondary sources were magazine web sites, Hello magazine.com and BBC.com also I watched a documentary on the Bravo Channel on Sky before choosing this topic so I am uncertain of the date but I have written about some of the things that I saw in this documentary.

This is the first time that I have undertaken a research project so freely so I am not able to record every aspect in as much detail as I would wish but I hope that the main issues have been recorded here.