
POST-COLONIALISM

(1) What is postcolonial media studies?

Thinking about media postcolonially requires us to rethink how we can study and produce media. In his manifesto 'For an imperfect cinema', Cuban filmmaker Julio García Espinosa called for a public cinema – made by the people for the people in which established technical and aesthetic rules can be broken; a cinema that celebrates the taste of the individual rather than dictating a 'taste' from above (1979).

Robyn Wiegman and, Robert Stam and Louise Spence suggest that to do postcolonial film studies, we need to look at moving image texts differently. Rather than focus on the traditional idea of positive / negative stereotypes, we should think about how texts structure a particular point-of-view (Stam and Spence 1999).

"What would it mean to think of race and ethnicity in ways that both critique and exceed the 'minority' rubric? What aspects of formal cinematic analysis might be affected by considering race and ethnicity as critical categories irreducible to bodies?" (Wiegman 1998: 159)

Look at clips from *Battle of Algiers* and Espinosa's films – how do they offer something different to the conventions of US and European moving image texts?

How does the TV series *Game of Thrones* establish a Euro-centric perspective through Daenerys? <http://bit.ly/2rMH6U8>

(2) The roots of postcolonial studies

In Edward Saïd's *Orientalism*, the Palestinian scholar claims that the Orient and the Occident (the West) are not simply inert facts of nature, but man-made by the West through a structure of Othering (2003: 4-5).

bell hooks is sensitive to the inherent racism of attempting to get close to the Other:

"One dares – acts – on the assumption that the exploration into the world of difference, into the body of the Other, will provide a greater, more intense pleasure than any that exists in the ordinary world of one's familiar racial group [...] the hope is that they will reenter that world no longer the same" (2013: 310).

hooks argues, following Renato Rosaldo, that this is a form of "imperialist nostalgia", which reiterates fantasies of "colonial power and desire, of seduction by the Other" (*Ibid.*)

How is the notion of Othering constructed in charity campaign videos of celebrities visiting impoverished communities or in adverts encouraging young people to volunteer abroad?

(3) The traditional representation approach

Eugene Franklin Wong's *On Visual Media Racism* (1978) was one of the earliest studies of onscreen racism. He argued that:

"The stereotype is a form of representation in film [and other media] that produces non-white cultures and characters as static and one-dimensional. [...] A group's stereotyped image tends to oscillate between two simple poles: good and bad, noble and savage, loyal and traitorous, kind-hearted and villainous. It is by virtue of this condensation that an image becomes a stereotype; a racialization is achieved by an implicit or explicit moral assessment concerning the group's inherent 'essence'" (Wiegman 1998: 161).

How might *Ugly Betty*, *Orange is the New Black* and *My Family* present different racial stereotypes? Could these be categorised as positive or negative?

(4) Criticism of the representational approach

Steve Neale, in *The Same Old Story: Stereotypes and Difference* (1979),

criticises the representational approach because (a) it is tied too heavily to character and characterization, downplaying the significance of form, (b) points to racism but does not recognise it as a representational and societal practice, (c) is based too heavily on a sense of 'the real' that is concerned with the authenticity of the image, (d) celebrates positive images as progressive, without considering their reductive potential

Look at clips from US TV shows that focus on Black families, such as *Roots*, *The Cosby Show*, *Fresh Prince of Bel-Air*, *Black-ish*. To what extent do they use stereotypes or counter-types that might seem 'positive' therefore 'progressive'? To what extent do these types universalise or normalise Blackness within conventions of White culture?

(5) The formalist approach

Stam and Spence argue that by looking at the ways texts establish point-of-view through cinematic [and we could extend this to think about televisual] techniques we can understand how racial fantasy is linked to visual pleasure (1999: 165).

"The racism of a text is [...] an effect of its aesthetic language and formal features of production and not simply a matter of narrative or characterization" (*Ibid.*).

How might a series like *The Man in the High Castle*, which arguably offers a colonial fantasy of victimhood in which America is colonised by the other (here German and Japanese), structure point-of-view in such a way that it still establishes the non-White as subaltern Other?

Useful Terms

Othering – Constructing a sense of difference between oneself and another.

Racism – Assigning of real or imaginary values which define the victim as other to the accuser's benefit, establishing privilege and /or aggression (Albert Memmi).

Race/ Ethnicity – "Where ethnicity provides the means for differentiations based on

culture, language, and national origins, race renders the reduction of human differences to innate, biological phenomena, phenomena that circulate culturally as the visible ledger for defining and justifying economic and political hierarchies between white and non-white groups" (Wiegman 1998: 160).

Subaltern – Those socially, politically and geographically outside of the hegemonic power of the Western coloniser. Those given little space to have their own voice represented by themselves.

Normalisation – often mistaken for so-called 'positive' representations, when non-White performers play roles typically played by White characters with little cultural adjustment, i.e. Black policemen in US cop dramas.

Universalisation – When, for example, a particular subject plays a character which symbolises the idea of being a minority devoid of cultural specificity.

For Further Reading:

Espinosa, Julio García (1979) 'For an Imperfect Cinema', *Jump Cut* 20, pp. 24-26.

hooks, bell (2012) 'Eating the Other: Desire and Resistance', *Media and Cultural Studies: Keywords* ed. by Gigi Meenakshi Durham and Douglas Kellner (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell), pp. 208-18.

Saïd, Edward (2003) *Orientalism* (London: Penguin).

Stam, Robert and Louise Spence (1999) 'Colonialism, racism and representation: An Introduction', *Film Theory and Criticism* ed. by Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen (Oxford: Oxford University Press), pp. 235-50.

Wiegman, Robyn (1998) 'Race, Ethnicity, and Film', *The Oxford Guide to Film Studies* ed. by John Hill and Pamela Church Gibson (Oxford: Oxford University Press), pp. 158-68.

For two stories related to the problems of voluntourism see <http://bit.ly/1JsicvL> and <http://bit.ly/1hqbjsg>

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