ARTS1090 : MEDIA, CULTURE & EVERYDAY LIFE

1. MEDIA RITUALS

Media: Key Concepts

- **Medium**: Socially instituted technology involving physical means for establishing or transforming (cultural) relationships between individuals and groups
    - Public communication and infrastructure with news channels e.g. BBC informing you of current events, broadcast media
- **Mediation**: 'middle' - not a neutral conduit, but rather an active space - a space of organisation and transformation according to particular social values.
- **Socially instituted technology**: how we experience community through its involvement
    - Structures society and regulates behaviour
    - E.g. advertising brings out emotional association
- **Media Studies** – 1970s, focus on how media are implicated in the dynamics of public and private life, how media provides us with resources and frameworks that shape everyday meanings and practices
    - Challenging monolithic notions of 'the media'
    - Influences: phenomenology, social studies of technology and cultural studies

Media Rituals – Couldry

- "The term media rituals refers to the whole range of situations where media themselves 'stand in', for something wider, something linked to the fundamental organisational level on which we are, or imagine ourselves to be connected as members of a society." - Couldry p.4 (something essential to social lives)
- Media becomes part of the everyday –> rituals connect us socially; orders our lives and organises space
- There is an assumption that media is the centre of society (symbolic power) → assumed legitimacy of media institutions (almost like confirmation) through media rituals
    - E.g. ritualised forms of TV viewing, conversation about appearing in the media, 'automatic' heightened attention towards media celebrities
- Three broad anthropological approaches to the term 'ritual':

- o *Habitual action* (any habit or repeated pattern, meaningful or otherwise) | *Formal action* (e.g. setting the table before dinner)|*Action involving transcendent values* (e.g. receiving the Eucharist)
- The media's influence on the forms of contemporary social life help identify the wider transcendent patterns within which the details of social life make sense
- Strength of media rituals: how they make natural the idea that society is centred and that some media-related categories are of overriding importance

Bloch and Bourdieu: connected ritual with management of conflict and masking of social inequality
Durkheim - rituals associated with claims that it produces or maintains social integration
- o Saw religion as main manifestation of social life which transcends everyday → shared social world focused upon shared objects/rituals which confirmed its sacredness → the obscure yet intimate relations individuals have with society --- Broken down into 3 stages:
  - o At certain times, we experience ourselves as explicitly social beings (members of shared social whole)
  - o What we do in this instance is focused on things we valued as 'sacred' and how we defend them from the 'profane'
  - o Distinctions between what is 'sacred' and 'profane' generate categorisations in which social life is organised
- Categories in Durkheim sense – principles that elude examination because they are the principles without which judgements are not believed possible
- In a spectacle → one part of the world is represented (dominated) → ritual structured performance in which not all participants are equal → rituals produced social cohesion by confirming superiority of some categories over others

Neo-Durkheim (Couldry against this) – Certain central categories through which we perceive the modern social world, and what is their origin?
- Through witnessing media events → more ritualised concentration of coming together physically and being aware of each other as social whole → sense of togetherness (collective emotions)
- Look at media's (esp. TV and internet) role in organisation of social life, rather than exceptional events
- Much more is at stake with our relationship w/ media than simply image consumption --> social construction media creates
- Need to acknowledge the consequent large-scale centralisation of power and social organisation

Functionalism –
- - Relationships aren't accidental -> rather, necessary result of 'functioning' of the social whole
- - There is such thing as 'the social whole' --> exists at level of national territories
- - Social integration is the primary sociological feature of societies
- ^Couldry's reading (based on evidence by Bourdieu and Foucault) contradicts these ideas
- Thus, looking at whether mediated society actually do hold together (with help of media or otherwise)
- Cognitive processes and categorisations (Couldry's views connected more with this) – that our simple knowledge of the social world, and the thought processes that underlie our media rituals have resonances in our everyday thinking beyond the context of the ritual themselves i.e. watching the news to keep up to date
- Positive: address how media penetrate the daily texture of private & public life, but fail to consider the social impacts of media power