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Pastiche

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Abstract

This entry briefly explores the development of pastiche as an idea within post-modern cultural studies before examining its usage within sociological research. In redeploying pastiche to help understand social identities and hegemonic power, sociologists have departed in important ways from its original usage. In this way, they have developed a useful and nuanced account of social power which focuses on reflexive micro-sociological interactions as the basis from which social structures are recast, recreated and potentially subverted.

Pastiche

The notion of pastiche has been employed within social scientific writing in a limited but interesting fashion to capture various dimensions of late- or post-modern Western social life. The most well known of its first exponents within post-modern cultural studies is Jameson (1991) who employed the idea to capture the increasing unavailability of a genuinely personal style within a social world of stylistic and discursive heterogeneity. Jameson built on Adorno's work examining musical experimentation to develop his exploration of the cultural logic of post-modern Western society via detailed discussions of art, architecture and various other cultural artefacts.

Jameson's writing and, more recently, that of Dyer (2006) provide detailed cultural explorations of the manner in which artists, social actors, institutions and organisations draw on previous works and ideas to (re)produce aesthetics. In this way the notion of pastiche has been used to articulate the mimicry of a particular style or character. Its root in the Italian word *pasticcio*, which denotes a mixing of various and diverse ingredients, adds a composite dimension to this stylised incorporation and, as such, moves the terms analytical capacity beyond that of 'reproduction' or 'copy'.

Unlike the related concept of parody, which has an inherent evaluative dimension, pastiche is drained of such a critique and, as such, is referred to by Jameson (1991, 17) as "blank parody". Absence of the satiric element of parody means that pastiche is a recreation of practice in a neutral form of systematic mimicry. In contemporary Western

social worlds, which Jameson suggests are constituted by a proliferation of social codes, the lack of more stable norms means that parody comes to be replaced by pastiche. Pastiche is then a depthless, superficiality enhanced by the fragmentation of social life and, in this way, it can effectively efface that which was once historically referent. For Jameson this omnivorous cultural appropriation and cannibalism results in an incapacity to capture and represent contemporary experiences, as imagined histories and diverse cultural signifiers are combined to produce a social hologram or simulacra.

In works that are more sociological in nature the use of this idea has shifted in important ways from its roots within post-modern cultural studies. Atkinson (2011) and Matthews (2014, 2016) have drawn on central features of Jameson's work and rearticulated it using Goffman (1959) to help explore the manner in which social identities and performances are crafted. Atkinson (2011) first employed the term as a means of reconsidering how social power might be undermined, gained and maintained in contemporary Western society.

Based on data collected from Canadian men, Atkinson argues that personal identifications can now be understood as a pastiche arrangement of cultural narratives, whereby renditions of social scripts are pieced together to suit increasingly numerous, contextual, flexible and fluid cultural norms. He argues that power in late-modernity is based on one's ability to reorder and incorporate cultural signifiers and identifications in a 'chameleonlike' way. In crafting performance in this way, such men are able to appear "culturally progressive, cool, sensitive, moral, genuine, correct, or liberal in one context or another; each of these becomes techniques for achieving power in a liquid modern, reflexive identity-based society" (Atkinson, 2011, 41). This theorisation draws on, and aligns with, conceptual and empirical turns within the social sciences towards the need to account for and explore intersectionality.

Atkinson combines pastiche with Gramsci's understanding of hegemony to develop a theoretical framework to understand how social influence and power can be produced in an aggregate form across and within social settings. For if there is an acceptance that late-modern Western societies are characterised by increasingly levels of contextual discontinuity, and that traditional social routines are of decreasing relevance as guides to direct social interactions, the need to reflexively consider one's performances of self becomes imperative.

Atkinson (2011) and Matthews (2014, 2016) employ this logic, to unpack how certain men's continued domination of localised social interactions can be carved out through their ability to read and effectively perform appropriate scripts, rather than as determined via patriarchal social structures alone. In so doing, they use pastiche identity and pastiche hegemony to help navigate a path between narratives that focus on the 'crisis of masculinity' and overly static theorisations of patriarchy and men's power.

These works feed micro-sociological behaviour patterns and symbolic interactions, which often lie at the foundation of the reproduction of structural inequalities, into an understanding of the power chances of certain men. For Atkinson (2011), it is those men who can read and respond to the under cutting of discourses which had traditionally enabled them to claim power by simply being men, that can recreate their social identities in a contextually appropriate manner to enable them to carve out a localised, contingent pastiche hegemony. Matthews (2016) details similar findings in a study that focuses specifically on the manner in which British men considered this process in relation to their performances of self in the work place.

Alongside those who are able to recast themselves through reflexive pastiche performances of contextually appropriate social scripts are those who have a seeming inability to do so. It is within this process that Atkinson locates the origin of narratives about the 'crisis of masculinity'. Such men find themselves unable to recreate social power by drawing on models of manhood they learn during childhood and they are also unable to reshape their social identities and performances in more appropriate ways. Here Atkinson (2011) draws on the notion of pastiche to help understand the rapidly changing and proliferating nature of what masculinity can mean and highlights how this results in the symbolic foundations upon which certain men build their lives being shaken and often destroyed. This form of 'narrative wreckage' undermines their personal power chances and can explain how some might feel in crisis despite others being able to recast and maintain the legacy of patriarchy by developing a reflexive approach to crafting patterns of behaviour.

Matthew (2016) employs Archer's (2003, 2007) exploration of how reflexivity mediates social structure to bolster Atkinson's thesis. Archer does not focus specifically on sex inequality in her analysis of social advancement and mobility, instead her focus details the inner conversations that are formative of social agents reflexive engagement in social

interactions. Archer (2003, 2007) demonstrates how social structures are reproduced or subverted through reflexive deliberation and subsequent agentic behaviours. When considering this in relation to men's power, the contextual discontinuity of late-modern society might well have loosened the structural and discursive grip of patriarchy, yet it is only via social agents actions that this undermining of the traditional status quo is continued or subverted (Matthews, 2016).

So while Atkinson (2011) details rich empirical narratives about the winners and losers of late-modernity, Matthews (2016) claims it is possible to broaden this theoretical analysis by exploring the structural constraints and enablements which are fundamental to understanding the pastiche recreation of men's power. That, for example, despite the breakdown of patriarchy as a more-or-less given pattern for the organisation of society it is still possible to see how the legacy of this arrangement privileges white, educated, physically able, middle-class men through 1) their access to powerful social scripts and 2) the opportunity to develop the reflexive skills required to deploy them correctly.

While pastiche has been deployed in a sociological sense in most detail by Atkinson (2011) and Matthews (2014, 2016) to unpack men's power this theoretical framework is certainly not limited to such empirical worlds. Further work might attempt to apply an understanding of pastiche identity and hegemony to different social enclaves, cultures and research samples. This is of increasing importance as Western societies navigate potential and actual decreases in social cohesion associated with political processes such as 'Brexit' and the rise of populism in America. Exploring pastiche identity during such developments would assist in refining Atkinson and Matthews theoretical developments while also holding the potential to help scholars ask different and nuanced questions as they seek to explore social power, (im)mobility and influence. Future research might also develop a focus on the manner that pastiche and parody intertwine both in terms of producing an understanding of the shape of social interactions and as useful theoretical tools.

See Also

Identity, hegemony, power, reflexivity, performances of self, intersectionality, masculinity, patriarchy, cultural studies, late-modernity, post-modernity, narrative wreckage

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