CULTURE & IDENTITY

CLASSES 9—10
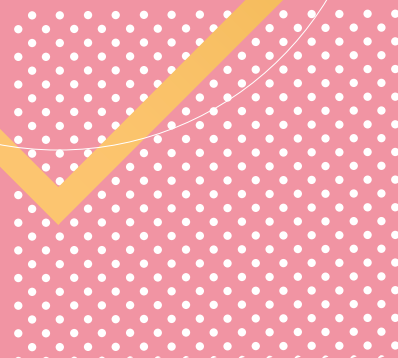
CULTURE & IDENTITY

IN THE AGE OF THE INTERNET

INSIDE THIS PROJECT

PROJECT OVERVIEW

CULTURE AND IDENTITY IN THE AGE OF THE INTERNET

In recent years there has been an exponential growth in different kinds of virtual spaces; each with its unique rules and regulations and particular qualities of presence, connectivity and boundaries. The majority of the world participates in these online spaces in one form or the other; through emails, phone calls, social media and/or video-sharing platforms. In social sciences these spaces are referred to as "Heterotopias"; spaces that are separate from everyday spaces and have their own distinct membership requirements and feelings of artificiality. The prefix, *hetero* comes from ancient Greek and means 'another, other

and different', and suffix *-topia* means 'place or region'. The concept was first introduced by French philosopher Michel Foucault to explain incompatible yet coexisting individuals, feelings of strangeness and detachment within certain tangible spaces i.e. libraries, cemeteries, ships, hospitals; and even intangible spaces i.e. phone calls, mirrors and theatrical plays.

Similarly, today global online communities coexist. This Culture and Identity project provides an opportunity to students to collaboratively analyse these online spaces as they become representations of their respective culture and identity. Through this project students share their opinions on heterotopic spaces, become ambassadors of their culture and identity and collaborate to create a new heterotopic space in the form of an online museum which allows authentic cultural exchange.

AIMS

Beaconhouse envisions its students to proactively identify solutions and explanations to immediate questions and concerns that surround them. The aims of the Culture and Identity projects are to:

- Investigate the challenges and opportunities, as well as isolation and dependence on online, social and virtual spaces through the concept of 'Heterotopia' developed by Michel Foucault
- Analyse the form, transmission and communication of culture and identity narratives in contemporary times through the medium of the internet and social media
- Identify important historical, cultural and social objects or subjects that can be shared and discussed
- Collaboratively work on, and create an online heterotopic museum to display their cultural exchange activities
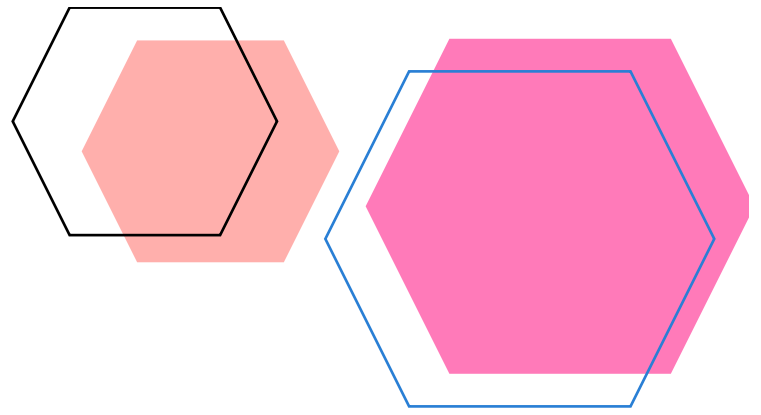
OBJECTIVES

- Students will be able explore Michel Foucault's concept of "Heterotopia" as a space defined by a 'world within a world', that exists outside normalcy and has particular functions that are either sacred or temporal
- Students will be able to identify virtual online spaces as a kind of heterotopic space and discuss its features of other-worldliness, transience and synchronised inclusive collaborations
- Students will be able to choose and research on four culture and identity topics and co-create displays or presentations for each topic
- They will be able to design a *Heterotopic Museum of Culture and Identity* online to showcase all their presentations and celebrate their authentic cultural and identity exchange experiences

SCOPE

- Students will work in groups and each group from a school will work with a group in a partner schools
- Participation: All Beaconhouse Schools, National & International
- Class/year level: The project is designed for students of class 9—10 between the ages of 14—15
- Duration: One month (4th May—4th June 2020)
- Language: English

IMPORTANT NOTES

- Prior to the Projects commencement, the Project Coordinators in each School will create an online project group on either the Padlet or Trello online board, with all the names of the participants from the two collaborating schools
- Similarly the two Project Coordinators, one from each School will schedule all online meetings on Google Meets for all introductory meetings, video watching, combined readings, discussions and project undertakings
- All collaboration will take place under the supervision of the Project Coordinators
- All document, images and video exchanges will be through School Management who will then forward or upload on to the chosen medium online
- Please note that any group that collaborates in absence of a school personnel will be disqualified and their project will not be accepted. Students and schools are strictly advised to follow Beaconhouse E-Safety policy

PROJECT

STAGE 1 WEEK 1

Watching Videos and Discussions

Through an online meeting the group will introduce themselves and exchange and translate traditional salutations. They will briefly discuss their interests and the reasons why they are interested in the project. They will then collectively watch an introductory video on the relation of the individual to the society, and how culture and identity are created:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=32KG_ba_NJc

They will then appoint a scribe, in real-time to write down key words, notes and observations on the Padlet or Trello board that they found interesting.

Collective Readings and Discussions

Students will read the three attached supplemental materials on their own times. They will make notes about things they found relatable and things they would like to research further upon.

They will then hold a discussion on the readings through the online Google Meet platforms moderated by their School Management at agreed upon time slots. They will exchange and upload their notes and observations on their project boards e.g. Padlet, Popplet or Trello Boards:

Reading 1: Introduction to Heterotopias | Excerpts from "Trains, Planes, and Automobiles: The End of the Postmodern Moment" By Walter Russell Mead 1995

Reading 2: Original Text on Heterotopia | Excerpt from "Of Other Spaces, Heterotopias" by Michel Foucault 1967

Reading 2: What makes a Heterotopia? | Six Principles of Heterotopia

After the readings discuss and compare the features of online social media spaces such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and Snapchat with the features discussed in the six principle of heterotopias. Ask within your group the following checklist questions to ascertain whether online spaces are truly heterotopic spaces:

- Does social media exist in all cultures of society?
- Do social media sites show constant change i.e. keep changing their formats and keep adding or subtracting features?
- Does social media allow contrasting and opposing views to exist within the same space?
- Do social media sites allow various activities done during various time periods collect on their platforms i.e. are all activities time-stamped and archived?
- Are there any preconditions for being on these online social platforms i.e. login, membership, hardware and software requirements?

- Does the structures, rules and information of society reflect on social media websites? For example do people who have influence and power display and act on creating a fan-following? Similarly is the information that people choose to publicise on their platforms influenced by their cultural, economic and social backgrounds?

STAGE 2 WEEK 2

Case Study

Students will read the articles below on their own time. They will make notes to understand the phenomena of Facebook, as a case study for online heterotopic spaces. They will then hold a discussion on the readings through the online Google Meet platforms moderated by their School Management at agreed upon time slots. They will exchange and upload their notes and observations on their project boards e.g. Padlet, Popplet or Trello Boards:

https://philosophynow.org/issues/107/The_Heterotopia_of_Facebook

https://firstmonday.org/article/view/5006/4091

STAGE 3 WEEK 3

Culture and Identity Conversations in Virtual Space

Students will collaborate to develop an online their *Heterotopic Museum of Culture and Identity* based on their previous readings and understanding of online spaces. They will select four topics the **Suggested Ideas and Themes** lists to create four presentations.

Before starting to work on your chosen topic, consider what objects or artefacts you already have in your home that may be considered as true representation of your culture and identity. Choose an object or a theme that is historically important to you and your family. Share the story behind your object or subject and discuss with the group if they have something similar in their homes. Think about how this object or subject may be displayed in a real museum. Similarly consider how your online website will connect the viewer, the artefact and the information.

Once the group decides on the four topics, they will decide on the presentation format for each topic i.e. whether they want to create paintings, digital illustrations, photographs, videos or interview recordings. Based on interest, equipment available and competencies, students can decide and divide workload.

SUGGESTED IDEAS AND THEMES

Visual Curation

    Traditional Etiquettes and Customs

    Traditional Recipes Exchange

    Flag Iconography

    Currency Investigation

    National Dresses and Festivals

Text-based Exhibits

    Introduction to Etymology and Cognates

    Sanskrit, Greek, Latin, Arabic and the Proto-languages

    Word Transitions through History

    Investigating Important Words

    Typography in Space: Experimenting with ***Weird Type App*** https://apps.apple.com/us/app/weird-type/id1352785248

    Augmented Reality Word Transformations

Video Assemblages:

    Identifying Local Heterotopias

    Capturing, Transporting and Merging Heterotopias: Experimenting with ***Weird Cuts App*** https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=cc.openframeworks.arcoreexample&hl=en

    Augmented Reality Dictionary of Heterotopias

Sound Curation:

    National Anthem Appreciation

    Favourite Folktales

    Famous Poetry Translations

    Interviews of Veterans of Important Historical Events

STAGE 4 WEEK 4

Morphing a New Heterotopia: Designing the Inter-School *Heterotopic Museum of Culture and Identity*

The virtual exhibition will include all of the four topics and may be made on the following websites:

https://www.classtools.net/3D/
You may download and use the Full Virtual Museum Templates from the website below

http://christykeeler.com/EducationalVirtualMuseums.html

To create a more dynamic exhibition on Culture and Identity students are suggested to consider including the four elements in their museum.

Four elements on the online Museum:

1. Visual: Research and exchange of cultural icons
2. Text-based: Research on languages and translations
3. Videos: Virtual Reality tours and Augmented Reality creations
4. Sound/Musical: Verbal histories and narratives

The group through an online meeting with the Project Coordinators, will decide the roles and responsibility of each student in making the virtual exhibition. Students may login into the same online platform/PowerPoint chosen and decide on the following roles:

- Architect or designer of the online museums
- Editor of video/photographs/images
- Writer and editor of the texts
- Illustrator for graphic designs

Group members will design their final outcome in the form they have selected. This final outcome will be uploaded by the schools on the online platform by 1st of June. Instructions to upload will be sent to the schools. Students will also share their reflections on their experience working as a group on the online collaborative project.

READING 1: INTRODUCTION TO THE IDEA OF HETEROTOPIAS

EXCERPTS FROM "TRAINS, PLANES, AND AUTOMOBILES: THE END OF THE POSTMODERN MOMENT"

BY WALTER RUSSELL MEAD

The airport is a kind of bubble of discontinuity in the social and geographical landscape of the modern city. Travelers from every corner of the earth stream in and out, travellers with cultural assumptions and purposes that bear no necessary relation to those of their fellow passengers. The Japanese businessman stands next to the Nigerian immigrant at the bar; the German tourist brushes past a bewildered family of what flight attendants call "Clampetts," first-time flyers from the boondocks attracted by low-cost fares.

The airport, like the world we live in, is a confusing place. The tens of thousands of passengers and crew passing through its corridors seem to have nothing in common, but for airports to work, workers and passengers alike must understand and adhere to a complicated combination of regulations and etiquette. Cutthroat competition between airlines coexists with common adherence to traffic and safety regulations without which airport operations would not be possible. The international airport is both an agent and a symbol of the new global economy that is eclipsing the nation-state, but from passport and customs control to air traffic control and international aviation agreements, the airport is one of the places in our society where the nation-state's power is most keenly felt. The airport is also a symbol of man's triumph over the forces of nature, but as most travellers can attest, not even farmers are as painfully exposed to the vagaries of weather as those who seek to travel by air.

The best one-word description of an airport is a term used by French philosopher Michel Foucault: heterotopia. Utopia is a place where everything is good; dystopia is a place where everything is bad; heterotopia is where things are different - that is, a collection whose members have few or no intelligible connections with one another. This, increasingly, is what contemporary observers perceive our world to have become; to feel this perception is to enter the post-modern world…

Heterotopias are essentially static. The differences between the passengers in an airport do not rub off: the devout Muslim woman visiting relatives is not much affected by the fashion model next to her, who is flying off to Tokyo for a shoot. As a heterotopia, an airport is a place where difference does not really make much difference; thesis and antithesis sit side by side, and there are no syntheses to be seen or had.

This is how postmodernists—those who believe that our world has become a static heterotopia—describe contemporary reality. The worlds' many cultures and ideas are all jumbled together, but the differences between them will not lead to conflicts that resolve those differences.

Bibliography

Mead, W. (1995). Trains, Planes, and Automobiles: The End of the Postmodern Moment. *World Policy Journal, 12*(4), 13-31. Retrieved April 16, 2020, from www.jstor.org/stable/40209444

READING 2: EXCERPT FROM "OF OTHER SPACES, HETEROTOPIAS"

HETEROTOPIAS

First there are the utopias. Utopias are sites with no real place. They are sites that have a general relation of direct or inverted analogy with the real space of Society. They present society itself in a perfected form, or else society turned upside down, but in any case these utopias are fundamentally unreal spaces.

There are also, probably in every culture, in every civilization, real places — places that do exist and that are formed in the very founding of society — which are something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted. Places of this kind are outside of all places, even though it may be possible to indicate their location in reality. Because these places are absolutely different from all the sites that they reflect and speak about, I shall call them, by way of contrast to utopias, heterotopias. I believe that between utopias and these quite other sites, these heterotopias, there might be a sort of mixed, joint experience, which would be the mirror. The mirror is, after all, a utopia, since it is a placeless place. In the mirror, I see myself there where I am not, in an unreal, virtual space that opens up behind the surface; I am over there, there where I am not, a sort of shadow that gives my own visibility to myself, that enables me to see myself there where I am absent: such is the utopia of the mirror. But it is also a heterotopia in so far as the mirror does exist in reality, where it exerts a sort of counteraction on the position that I occupy. From the standpoint of the mirror I discover my absence from the place where I am since I see myself over there. Starting from this gaze that is, as it were, directed toward me, from the ground of this virtual space that is on the other side of the glass, I come back toward myself; I begin again to direct my eyes toward myself and to reconstitute myself there where I am. The mirror functions as a heterotopia in this respect: it makes this place that I occupy at the moment when I look at myself in the glass at once absolutely real, connected with all the space that surrounds it, and absolutely unreal, since in order to be perceived it has to pass through this virtual point which is over there.

As for the heterotopias as such, how can they be described? What meaning do they have? We might imagine a sort of systematic description — I do not say a science because the term is too galvanized now —that would, in a given society, take as its object the study, analysis, description, and "reading" (as some like to say nowadays) of these different spaces, of these other places. As a sort of simultaneously mythic and real contestation of the space in which we live, this description could be called heterotopology.

Foucault, Michel. Translated from *Architecture, Mouvement, Continuité* no. 5 (1984): 46-49.

READING 3: SIX PRINCIPLES OF HETEROTOPIAS

Heterotopic spaces are essentially experiential spaces. They may exist in the form of physical or mental spaces. In his essay, Foucault describes six principles that differentiate heterotopic spaces from all other spaces. We can explore these heterotopic principles in order to gauge and ascertain if virtual spaces fall under the category of heterotopic spaces:

1. **Universality:** The first mark of a heterotopic space is that in exists in all cultures around the world. Any physical or non-physical space that recurs and can be found in all culture and communities in the world can be considered a heterotopic space. For example isolated experiential spaces that exist as complete and independent domains like graveyards, hospitals, schools, museums, ships, films and libraries, appear in all cultures.
2. **Constant Flux:** All heterotopias have a precise and determined purpose but keep gradually keeps changing their appearances and acquiring more purposes. All heterotopic spaces keep alive by updating, upgrading or increasing their capacities.
3. **Coexistence of contrasting things:** Heterotopias are capable of "contrasting in a single real place several spaces, several sites/objects/subjects that are themselves incompatible." For this he provides the examples of libraries and Oriental gardens again where opposing views in different books and different plants from different parts of the world can be placed together.
4. **Archives of time**: All Heterotopias contain information from different times and eras. They all contain "slices of time" that can be studied as cross-sectional views of the chronological sequence of events. For example libraries, graveyards, gardens and schools have a time-based system to archive the happenings in them.
5. **Standards for participation:** Most heterotopias require the user to follow protocols and rules for participation. For example you must have a library card to access books. Similarly for you to enjoy the intangible heterotopic space of a film or book you must have the literacy of language to understand the film and book narrative and have money to buy the technology of the book medium itself.
6. **Mirroring**: Finally, heterotopias reflect the social structure and order outside of them. They act as microcosms, reflecting the larger cultural patterns or social orders around them. For example the social hierarchy and privileges enjoyed by different people from different economic backgrounds are followed within a heterotopic space. For example, during flights, different people enjoy different experiences according to the class of ticket they purchase; similar to the kind of social discrimination based on economic background in the outside world.

Galin, Jeffrey R, and Joan Latchaw. "Defining Heterotopia." *Definition of Heterotopia*, 1998, kairos.technorhetoric.net/3.1/coverweb/galin/heterotopiadef.htm.