1 Culture and Communication

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Until the 1800s, the word culture usually connoted "growing," the way we might speak about growing a mold culture in a biology experiment. But as the use of the word was extended to social processes, it took on a fascinating, even bewildering, array of definitions, until today we have to be very careful when we hear the word culture to be sure that we know what meaning we and others are taking for granted. Not only are there many definitions of the term, but these definitions, like cultures themselves, change over time.

Most definitions of culture share a tendency to focus our attention on (a) activities and (b) their products—for example, journalism and news programs, or architecture and temples. Culture, then, is seen both as a product and as the social process that brings that product into being.

From the perspective of the anthropologist, culture is everything we do in our lives—brushing our teeth, erecting buildings, watching television coverage of the Olympics, participating in marriage ceremonies. Others use the word in the sense of "high culture": opera, ballet, theater, classical music, sculpture, painting. Still others use culture to mean the essence of a people's way of life, as in American culture,

Irish culture, Native American culture, or Gypsy culture: cultural identity. These national and ethnic definitions emphasize the contrasting ways that varying peoples define life. In other words, a culture in this sense is the way we interpret and understand the world in certain ways and exclude other ways of doing so.

Some Australian Aborigines, for instance, may see themselves living in sacred union with nature, whereas European cultural perspectives tend to see nature as something neutral or even hostile, to be exploited and profited from. So culture in this sense acts to cement a sense of priorities, to hold steady our understanding of who we are and where we are headed. Thus culture reinforces a particular social order—but also often the political power of an elite as well.

The intimate connection between culture and power is never far beneath the surface. Take, for instance, the question of personal appearance and dress. During centuries of the Chinese Ming dynasty, the Manchu conquerors who created the dynasty forced all Chinese men to wear their hair in a pigtail as a cultural symbol of their conquered status. Or consider the demand of Muslim fundamentalists in some countries that women should wear veils, although the veil is found nowhere in the Koran, the holy book of Islam, and is not worn by Muslim women in a number of other countries. This seems a case of traditional masculine power over everyday culture and communication, controlling women and signifying their subordinate status.

Depending on what we understand culture to be, we perceive different, even contradictory, roles for the media. From some critical perspectives, the media are viewed as conservative and primarily supportive of existing political and economic power. Others, especially those with a "high culture" perspective, see the mass media as a corrosive force on traditional culture, as producing trash culture instead. Still others would argue that the media are a great eye-opening and leveling force that enables people to see and communicate beyond the boundaries of their own in-groups and cultures.

Whatever meaning we give the word culture, concepts of communication and culture are important because, in the end, we always communicate with each other inside cultural codes. Indeed, the very self-understandings of individuals are tenuous outside of the societies and cultures in which they are embedded. Because cultures give life

shape and meaning, understanding culture is central to understanding human communication.

This chapter explores the history and evolution of the term culture, looks at some of the fascinating technical meanings of the word, and asks us to consider culture and communications in relation to the related terms hegemony, ideology, class, semiotics, cultural capital, popular culture, and mass culture. Because this book is dedicated to opening up questions that are never or rarely thought about, considering the multiple interconnections among power, culture, and communication is not only central to questioning the media, it has much to do with our becoming aware of the hidden assumptions that drive our lives.

Culture is one of the most complex words in the English language. Often people think that culture means the arts, sometimes termed *high culture:* opera, ballet, theater, sculpture. A "cultured" person, by this definition, is a highly educated person who is closely aware of these arts, who goes out to enjoy them often, who reads poetry, and perhaps buys paintings. For anthropologists and others, the concept of culture is much broader. Culture is everything we do in our lives, from brushing our teeth with toothpaste to putting up a building, and from watching the Olympics on TV to taking part in a marriage ceremony. Others may think of culture as encompassing characteristic qualities of a nation or people (as in American culture, Canadian culture, or Irish culture) or of an ethnic group (such as Native American culture, French-Canadian culture, or Gypsy culture).

Although the "high culture" and anthropological definitions of the term are narrow and broad, respectively, they share two features. They focus our attention on both products, such as paintings or pieces of music, and creative activities, such as using paint or making music. In the national and ethnic definitions, by contrast, *culture* refers to ways of understanding the world, perspectives on the meaning of life. For example, Native Americans and First Nation Canadians have generally held "Mother Earth" in great reverence. That is their cultural perspective (though it is not universal among them). By contrast, most Europeans, whether in Europe or settlers in the Americas, have tended to see nature as something to be exploited for economic gain, from logging to strip mining to oil-based or nuclear energy sources. Theirs is a different cultural perspective.

However, even these three different ways of using the term *culture*—to indicate a product, the activity that generates the product, and a perspective on the meanings of life—do not exhaust its meanings. At this point you may feel irritated and wonder why academics cannot simply get together, agree on a set meaning, and stick to it. Apart from the fact that no agreement would ever emerge from such a meeting, that a disagreement exists can be taken as a sign that there may be more going on than simple confusion about the sense of a particular word. We need to probe further to find out what is at stake in the divergent meanings of culture, what underlies the clash of definitions. At the very least, we need to be aware that when we meet the term, we must ask ourselves at once, In what way is this writer or speaker using the word *culture*?

In this chapter we will discuss the following uses of *culture* (new technical terms will be explained when we get to them): the history of the use of the term, culture as an interactive process humans engage in and change, the different meanings of "popular" culture and "mass" culture, culture and hegemony, culture and ideology, semiology (semiotics), and cultural "capital." Before setting out on this mapping exercise, however, let us just note in principle why the study of communication and the concepts of culture are important to each other. There is one sense in which the terms *communication* and *information* are both used, namely, to denote the "on/off" digital code to which all computers reduce communication, whether the information is text, image, sound, color, or moving pictures. Yet in and of themselves, these on/off signals communicate nothing at all, absolutely nothing. Unless they themselves are recoded through a computer program within language (itself a central aspect of culture) and within images and sounds that are recognizable in our culture, their elementary communication is null and void for us. We signal to each other, we inform each other, we communicate with each other, in cultural codes, not in electronic impulses or any equivalent of them—although we do communicate through such electronic means if we use computers. Thus culture is central to understanding communication.

Sources of the Word Culture

Some modern meanings of the word *culture* first emerged in Britain a little before 1800. Up until then, the word had been used mainly to

describe agricultural processes, such as the culture of wheat or corn (rather as the expression *growing a culture* is used in medicine or biology today). But then the word came to be extended to social processes (see R. Williams, 1977, on whose account much of this section is based).

As some conservative-minded observers reflected on the rapid spread of industrialization that was pushing and pulling farmers off the land into factories in bigger and bigger cities, and in the process uprooting many traditional ways of life, they began to worry deeply. They feared that the old order was in terminal decay, an order they often viewed through very rosy spectacles, where (as they saw it) the "well-bred" aristocrats ran everything for everyone else's benefit and the poorest pig herdsman was humbly grateful, along with his wife and children, for this enlightened oversight. In its place they saw the rise of a new class of factory worker, disconnected from the land and these traditional ties, surly and aggressive, a "dangerous class." They lamented and feared the disappearance of the old "culture," under threat of being trodden under foot by the new, truculent working class. They believed the arts would be destroyed by the extension of democracy to these lower orders—and thus was developed the notion of "high" culture as the arts. English writer Matthew Arnold's use of *culture* more or less reflects these concerns.

The word *civilization* was closely connected with *culture* in these debates. There were others who welcomed the new industrial developments, seeing them as part of a continual evolutionary advance in civilization, and in that sense as changing culture for the better, not leaving it stagnant and stuck in the past. These observers were as optimistic as the conservatives were pessimistic.

Still other, more radical, observers of these changes took yet a third view. They focused on the appalling conditions that the new class of factory worker was experiencing, with 12-hour workdays and 6-day workweeks, with children slaving away as well as adults, living in unsanitary and disease-ridden slum housing, with low life expectancy, and all for a pittance of a wage. Yet at the same time this set of observers envisioned a future in which the members of this class would become more educated, both in the sense of learning to read, write, and do mathematics and in the sense of becoming much more aware of their own importance to the economy and their potential power in society. For these observers, the growth of power from below, a truly democratic civilization and culture, was a goal to be struggled for despite the harsh circumstances.

We have referred to Britain, but similar developments can be traced in the United States. In the period up to the beginning of the 1900s, culture was something the dominant social classes considered that they alone possessed. The term signified intelligence and idealism, and those classes took this to prove their own consequent natural right to exercise leadership in U.S. society (DiMaggio & Useem, 1978). They believed that such idealism and intelligence were not qualities to be found among factory workers, farmers, domestic servants, or slaves. Thus culture replaced the former religious doctrine of many European societies, of the monarch's "divine right" to rule, with a this-worldly claim that sought to justify the superior authority and wealth of the upper classes. As Lewis Perry (1984) writes, "The term culture indicated continuing faith in a hierarchy of merit that distinguished the truly 'noble' person from the herd" (p. 264). Despite the supposedly powerful democratic traditions of the United States, the "herd" was how those in dominant circles saw the general American public, Joe (and Josephine) Six-Pack. Putting this together, we can see how the term *culture* has been used on both sides of the Atlantic to justify politically the rule of the dominant social classes, rather than as a detached, analytic concept.

At the same time, other contradictory definitions of *culture* were beginning to come to the fore. The influential eighteenth-century German writer Johann Gottfried Herder identified culture with nation, in the sense that each nation possesses its own unique national spirit, or culture; eventually this basic notion found its way into the emergent discipline of anthropology in the late nineteenth century. Over time, anthropologists took this notion a step further and identified all artifacts (such as clothing, buildings, and music) as well as beliefs and rituals as culture. In one sense, this was a little more democratic in spirit. Anthropologists at least identified culture with something belonging to everyone, not just to the elite. In principle, they created the possibility that one culture could be considered superior to other cultures in certain respects and not in others.

However, in practice, cultures were identified with civilizations, which in turn were ranked, with white Europeans at the pinnacle and people of color at the bottom. In turn, this definition of culture served to justify invasion for colonial powers—whether the United States in the war against Mexico in 1847-1848 or against the Philippines in 1898 or the British against India in 1857, or white Canadians and Americans against Indian nations throughout the period of settlement. The British spoke of their "civilizing mission" to excuse the plunder of their colonies, the white Americans of their "Manifest Destiny" to impose their culture all the way to the Pacific and the Rio Grande and on to Hawaii and the Philippines.

A very challenging Brazilian film titled *My Frenchman Was Really Delicious*[1] (Nelson Pereira dos Santos, 1971) addresses the issue of cultural superiority. The film, which begins and ends with shots of the Brazilian shoreline, is set in the sixteenth century, when France and Portugal were vying for control of the riches of South America. At the end of the film, a voice-over tells us that the bodies of the Indians massacred by the Europeans were piled high for three miles along this shore, but before that, the film has shown us the fate of a captured Frenchman at the hands of one of the tribes. They give him eight months to live, after which they will kill and eat him, each piece of his body being assigned to a particular tribe member by the chief. In the meantime, however, they treat him well, even giving him as temporary wife the widow of a slain warrior, so he can have normal sexual relations. They also teach him to hunt, though he seems more skilled at hunting humans than at hunting animals. In turn, he teaches them certain agricultural and building techniques. But at the end of the eight months, his time is up, and we last see his assigned wife as she eats his cooked neck (her promised piece) with evident enjoyment.

Strange, indeed; but the film forces us to face the question of which culture was the more barbaric, the cannibalistic culture that allowed one man to be devoured even after he had become personally known to the tribe or the European culture that heaped myriad slaughtered corpses for three miles along the beach, and wiped out the entire tribe. Thus, once more, we find culture being used in situations of power and conflict to support the claims of one side. The term is clearly not just an "academic" one, but one that can be used to gloss over social struggles. Let us move now to other senses of the term, where again we will see issues of power and conflict inextricably interwoven with it.

Culture as an Interactive, Changing Process

Let us begin by criticizing another common way of thinking about culture. We sometimes think of culture as a thing, such as an oil painting, or as a quality, such as a great oil painting. But we would

argue that it is better to think of culture principally as an active process or processes. Who paints? What do they paint? For whom do they paint? Culture is simultaneously an ongoing process and an active process of communication and understanding. The study of culture involves the study of activities and interactions, not just the study of cultural products such as paintings.

Let us look at painting as an example of cultural production and ask some important questions. Are painters defined, do they usually define themselves, as "artists"? If so, we usually expect them to have studios and to exhibit their paintings from time to time. We expect them to sell their paintings to try to make a living, which is an important reason for exhibiting their work. Are they mired in poverty, as so many fine painters appear to have been throughout history? Do they have to wait tables to get by? Do they know the people who will buy their paintings, as artists once used to do, or do they sell them mostly to buyers they have never met before and will never meet again? Do they paint how they wish or—to make a living—what they know people will buy? Does their need to earn a living take energy away from their more imaginative, innovative work? How dependent are they on being "in" with the "right" people in the art world's cliques, on positive reviews by influential art critics? If they have all those pieces in place, does that mean their artistic work is important? And last of all, but truly significant in the process, how much impact does interaction with other artists, learning from them, have on their work? We see at once from these questions that "culture" is only in part the painting itself, the piece of music, the T-shirt, the cultural product. Even the painter, the prototype "high-culture" artist, is engaged with economic reality, with the opinions of wealthy collectors, with the judgments of key art critics. Even such an artist, then, is not the solitary genius of popular portrayals, but learns from the work of other artists. Culture is an interactive process, saturated in everyday realities, not just the abstract, spiritual product of the lonely, lofty artist.

If we consider the many art school graduates who work in the advertising industry, we can see even more easily how economics, power, and cultural activity interact. The incomes and creative activities of such artists are guaranteed—so long as their work continues to please their employers. Admittedly, "high-culture" enthusiasts will likely scoff at this example and deny that people who work for ad agencies can be creative artists. In so doing, however, such individuals reduce cultural activity to their own artistic judgments.

How, in turn, should we define modern mural painters, who have set out to create cultural products to be seen at no charge by passersby and that often contain direct attacks on the powers that be, such as property developers or the police? How should we define schoolchildren's paintings, or the work of psychiatric patients in art therapy classes? Or graffiti? Or the act of painting the walls of the room you live in? In fact, the distinctions between grades of cultural producer become less interesting with each example, and it becomes more and more intriguing to explore the process, the context, and the reception of artistic cultural production, for these artists are producing culture for very different audiences, under very different conditions, from those of the supposedly "true" artists. Thus the cultural process is not only ongoing and active, it takes multiple forms even within the seemingly straightforward activity of painting.

We have taken painting as an example because it is so frequently thought of as a cultural activity that brings forth cultural products. Let us change focus a moment and look at some other cultural producers, namely, the people who wear clothes in order to create particular messages. Throughout history, humans have worn particular styles of dress to communicate particular signals. A three-piece suit is a cultural communication of respectability, affluence, status, career. Vividly colored hair, specially shaven scalps, and baseball caps worn backward signify the opposite. Doctors and nurses wear white coats to signify their knowledge about and authority over the human body or mind. Police officers wear uniforms to communicate their rights of arrest and public control.

The power of ongoing cultural activities to communicate can also be seen in an example—a frightening and extreme one—of what can happen when they are canceled or absent. In a horrific period in Argentina between 1976 and 1983, upward of 25,000 political dissidents vanished forever—imprisoned, tortured, killed, and their bodies disposed of without trace. The police who seized them on the streets or in their homes in the middle of the night came without uniforms, in unmarked cars without license plates. When their relatives sought information, from the police or from members of the military government, all knowledge of them was denied. In this case, the absence of uniforms, of cultural signals, communicated that the rule of law had been hijacked by a government whose officials acted like gangsters, that there was no protection in law anymore. It generated what some writers have described as a "culture of fear" in which many people were

afraid even to admit that a family member had disappeared. A similar case arose in the tiny Central American country of El Salvador during the 1980s, where more than 50,000 political dissidents or suspects "were disappeared"[2] or ended up as corpses left on the street with their eyes gouged out, their throats cut, and their genitals mutilated, as a terrible warning to instill terror in the public.

The instances recounted above may seem not only grisly, but also a sharp departure from our discussion of the meaning of *culture*. In fact, they are not. They illustrate from the experience of a culture of fear the reality that culture changes, is produced, and is an interactive process—in the cases cited, interactive between a military government and the general public. If the word *culture* normally sounds harmless, perhaps it is because we have not thought about it deeply enough. How deeply racist and sexist, for example, are the historical cultures of Europe and North America? As we have noted, the question of culture and communication cannot be separated from the dilemmas of conflict and power in society and made remote and sanitized, as in "Let's communicate better!" or "What an exotic culture!" The other lesson to be learned from the topics raised in this section concerns the continuous movement and change of culture. Raymond Williams (1977), in a section of his book *Marxism and Literature* titled "Structures of Feeling" (pp. 128-135), provides a finely written account of the ways in which cultural developments contain numerous, almost daily eddies and crosscurrents, tensions between what we have taken for granted so far and what may be on the verge of altering it. Thus it is a gross error to see culture as something static, frozen in time. It is in the very process of social communication that cultures change and mutate.

Popular Culture and Mass Culture

Another debate about culture centers on definitions of *popular culture* and *mass culture*. At first sight, these two terms look as though they should mean the same thing, and, depending on who uses them, they indeed can. In communication research, however, different meanings have been attached to the two terms; the distinction between them may be a useful one. Both terms are often used in opposition to *high culture*, to signify the cultural preferences of the general public, who, as we have seen, are often disdainfully presumed by the elite on

both sides of the Atlantic to be not only less formally educated than the elite but also less intelligent, less "cultured." But in the view of leading members of the Frankfurt school—a school of thought devoted to critical cultural research that began at Frankfurt University in Germany in the early 1920s—there is a sharp difference between mass and popular culture, even though both are enjoyed by ordinary citizens.

Examples of popular culture in the United States include several musical forms: jazz, soul, gospel, and blues. These are the products of several centuries of African musical cultures forged anew through the crucibles of Black Americans' experiences of slavery, legalized segregation after the Civil War, existence on the very margins of survival as migrant workers in northern U.S. cities, and sustained resistance to institutionalized racism. Jazz and the blues are among the most distinctive and vibrant features of popular music in the United States. Much rock music has its origins in them, although in practice it sometimes offers a much blander, less focused version than the original. Whether directly or in watered-down versions, this music has had an immense international impact.

Other examples of popular culture include Irish reels and jigs, many of them used at one time as part of preparation for battle, and the intense blend of Canadian and Black Louisianian music known as zydeco, developed by Canadian refugees from the British who relocated in the then French colony of Louisiana. Nonmusical expressions of popular culture include Texan boots, Yorkshire pudding, Mexican Day of the Dead ceremonies and artifacts, Russian fairy tales, Balinese puppet theater, and West African kente cloth.

In contrast, in the view of Frankfurt school critics such as Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer (1947/1972), *mass* culture consists of cultural expressions generated by big business simply and solely to advance the bottom line. Such cultural products are generated to fit consumer surveys that chop up the audience into segments according to differential purchasing power (see Gandy, Chapter 13) and are as synthetic as a tube of toothpaste. Examples of mass culture include formula dramas, on U.S. television in particular; for instance, the plot where a giggling psychopath traps a defenseless woman, or the hero, or a child, in a place where no one can find that person, and the suspense comes from waiting to see whether by some new miracle the good guys can find the place in time and blow the monstrous sadist away before the victim is killed. Or the kill-or-be-killed animated video game, or the cop-buddies movie, or easy-listening radio, or any other

series of repetitive formulas. Fashion provides many examples; clothing and accessories that are supposed to make us feel as though we are expressing our individuality or that we are ahead of the game actually put us in temporary mass uniforms until the next trend emerges (see Kellner, Chapter 19, for further commentary on this theme).

In other words, from the Frankfurt school perspective mass culture does not emerge from the needs and wishes and hopes of the general public, but is fed to them on the basis of what will sell. There are, of course, questions raised by this analysis. One issue is whether popular culture is being romanticized as a positive force simply because it is an authentic product of "the people." Another is whether mass culture really is the hollow, mindless product these critics claim it to be. A number of audience studies, for example, have found that Harlequin Romances and television soap operas may stimulate women viewers to visualize more satisfying, mutually respectful, and affectionate relationships between men and women (see Ang, Chapter 12). This does not fit with the charge that such mass cultural products are empty and superficial.

Even if the distinction between mass culture and popular culture has problems, we may still see some merit in it for certain purposes. For instance, our comments above about how mainstream rock music has at times taken Black American popular musical forms and made them bland illustrates a distinction that can fairly be drawn between popular culture and mass culture. The question still remains as to how absolutely we can separate the two.

Culture and Hegemony

Interestingly and surprisingly, earlier in the twentieth century some conservative and some radical scholars developed a very similar analysis of mass communication. In the 1940s and 1950s, the left-wing Frankfurt school and conservative Spanish commentator José Ortega y Gasset both took the view that modern societies were being submerged under an ocean of commercially driven, soulless mass culture that met none of the deep needs of human beings. Newspapers, radio, and popular film—and eventually television, when it began to spread—were assumed to act in mechanical ways on the public, destroying meaningful culture and replacing it with mass culture, a pseudoculture. This view was almost a revival of the conservative nineteenth-century attitude described earlier, which lamented the passing of old truths and sniffed suspiciously and disdainfully at new cultural developments. However, when researchers armed with these concepts began to investigate the media, it soon became clear that mass communication did not work in this mechanical way. The mechanical model of mass media as a metaphorical hypodermic syringe capable of injecting beliefs into the public had to be replaced by a much more careful and complex model of how media actually work.

To begin with, a number of U.S. studies in the late 1940s and the 1950s went almost to the opposite extreme, suggesting that mass media had practically no impact at all (see Klapper, 1960, for a summary of this research). However, at a later point, in the early 1970s, with the translation into English of the work of Italian writer Antonio Gramsci, a new term used rather intensively by Gramsci came to be used quite widely: *hegemony* (see, e.g., Forgacs, 1989; Gramsci, 1971; R. Williams, 1977). Derived originally from a Greek word meaning "rule," in Gramsci's writings it took on a fuller meaning: the combined dominance over and leadership of a society by its ruling classes. By definition, we would expect dominance of governing classes, for otherwise they would not rule. Gramsci, however, was intrigued not so much by the fact that dominant classes existed, but by the mechanisms of how they ruled. In particular, he was interested in the extent to which large sections of the public seemed to accept their rule willingly, without any kind of active forced compliance.

Gramsci essentially saw the formula for rule by these classes as an amalgam of force and consent. Force is socially organized, in his view, in the shape of police, courts, prisons, and, in a major crisis, the military and related bodies such as the U.S. National Guard or the British S.A.S. But sheer force by itself does not, and quite possibly cannot, keep people stably in line over long periods. It is effective only in short periods of unrest or organized challenge to the status quo. Over the longer term, the public needs to feel, either gladly or at least passively, that the country is being run by the most competent, farsighted, experienced sectors of the society. By "run" we do not mean only the actions of presidents, prime ministers, and their cabinets, but also the actions of major business executives, leading bankers, top civil servants and military leaders, the scientific and engineering establishment, and, in some countries, even religious leaders—the whole constellation of power at the top, in other words.

The question then arises, How is it that the general public comes to this degree of confidence in the leadership of the society? Why are people not more suspicious, more skeptical, more feisty? For Gramsci, the process of cultural hegemony is at the heart of the answer. In the present context, this process is important for four reasons. First, it suggests we should study mass media, education, the arts, religion, and everyday culture not as spontaneous public expression, but as processes of persuasion in which we are invited to understand the world in certain ways but not in others. Second, it argues that customarily accepted ways of understanding and experiencing the everyday world have important political consequences; they are not simply neutral, charming, or obvious. Third, it suggests that to be successful, cultural hegemony must be flexible, responsive to changing conditions, adaptive—that the same old ideas and procedures, in a situation of change, will fail to wield the same hegemony. Fourth, it implies the possibility of counterhegemonic cultural activity, disruption of the existing hegemony.

The first point proposes that there is normally an intimate connection between culture and power. Communication and cultural processes do not take place on a level playing field where everyone gets to contribute as he or she will and each contribution carries the same value and weight. On the contrary, in the hegemonic view the media are dominated by those sectors of society that also wield considerable economic and political power. Thus what normally gets communicated through mainstream media will rarely challenge the foundations of that economic and political power, even though the media may voice criticism of some particular policies or issues (for further examples, see Herman, Chapter 5; Robinson, Chapter 6; Rodríguez, Chapter 8).

The second point challenges some of our most basic, taken-for-granted assumptions, notions that are sometimes so buried in ourselves that we have never even noticed they are there, let alone examined or questioned them. A quick example can be drawn from our school experience. Along with the subjects we learn, we also—without being especially conscious of it—learn that we are supposed to be on time for things, such as classes; that some people (instructors) have authority over us, which means that others set the pace and content and subject order of the class, and not us; that human knowledge is chopped up into different subjects (e.g., sociology, history, communication, psychology, anthropology, economics, government), even though all have to do with human society; and, not least, that our fellow students in different tracks (in the United States) or streams (in the United Kingdom) are "less" or "more" than us, that humans supposedly have marked differences in "intelligence." Most of us take these things for granted; they are obvious not because they are explicitly taught, but because they are continuously expressed by the daily rituals and organization of schooling. But they do have consequences, not least because we usually do not think about them. This book is dedicated to opening up questions you have never or rarely thought about.

The third and fourth points above concerning hegemony directly challenge the Frankfurt school's and Ortega y Gasset's implied pessimism and dismissal of the public's capacity to have alternative visions of life to those it is fed by mass media. If we acknowledge, as Gramsci does, that cultural hegemony exercised through mass media, education, and other channels is not automatically going to be valid in the same versions for long periods, then we are also acknowledging that the public changes as times change. Especially in periods of social and economic crisis, people's settled ways of thinking and ingrained acceptance of things as they are tend to crumble. At such times, thoughts and visions of life as it might be can arise to challenge convention. People open up in ways they used to think of as pointless or a waste of time. If all this is true, then definitions of mass culture as a lead weight that squashes creative thinking are arguably defective.

Furthermore, if groups of people become substantially detached from the reigning cultural hegemony and begin not only to question the assumptions of their media, their schooling, their religious authorities, but to communicate with each other about such issues, then they are creating counterhegemonic processes and institutions. In other words, the cultural situation is not locked in, as at least some of the founders of the Frankfurt school seem to argue—there are spaces for dissonant communication (for further discussion, see Downing, Chapter 14).

However, all these considerations combine to emphasize the reality that the concept of hegemony directly addresses (or argues for, if you disagree with the proposition) the multiple interconnections among power, culture, and communication in all societies, whether the power is that of dominant social groups or dissident social groups. The concept of cultural hegemony is directly at odds, therefore, with the assumptions that mass communication takes place on a level playing field or that we are victims of a mass culture imposed from above.

Ideology

Another chapter could be written on competing definitions of the word *ideology*, but here we will summarize some of them. *Ideology* is a term the use of which sometimes overlaps *culture* in the sense of a worldview. One common use of *ideology* is to describe a systematic set of ideas, but quite often one that the person doing the labeling does not like and considers dangerous to human well-being. For most of the twentieth century the word was hurled back and forth between the United States and the Soviet Union, with U.S. commentators describing Marxism as an ideology and Soviet commentators describing American celebration of free enterprise as an ideology. Americans would describe Marxism as underpinning the power of the Kremlin; the Soviets would describe the discipline of economics as underpinning the power of Wall Street. Much heat, less light. Sometimes the word *ideology* is used to suggest a strong emotional or psychological attachment to biased ideas, such as the fierce passion of religious fundamentalists, that are generally beyond reach of any reasoned challenge.

One assumption written into these definitions is that ideology needs to be unmasked, stripped away, cleared like a fog, so that its victims can see the truth, "the facts" as they really are. In other words, the term implies that there is reality and there is ideology, truth versus lies, persuasion versus propaganda, honesty versus deception, freedom fighters versus terrorists, devout Christians versus Muslim fanatics, a free press versus government-sponsored TV. But once you pin down some of these seemingly obvious simple oppositions to specifics, especially as in the last three examples, "reality" becomes a whole lot fuzzier.

So far, we have seen how the word *ideology* can be used to denote a stupid set of ideas, a wrong set of ideas, and/or a ferociously believed-in set of ideas. Its first use, by French writer Condorcet in the late eighteenth century, was quite neutral; the word was coined to denote the systematic study of ideas among human beings, as part of the larger project of zoology.

A different meaning of *ideology* is similar to the "wrong set of ideas" definition. Classical Marxist analysis argues that the ruling social class transmits its preferred ideas and views of reality to the general public and that, through this successful communication of its own ideas, the general public learns to think and act in ways that do not challenge—

indeed, that support—the continued rule of that class. There are at least two problems with this argument. One is that it assumes there is a single and homogeneous set of ideas swimming around in the skulls of the members of a ruling class. The other is that it presupposes some surefire way of projecting these ideas into everyone else's skulls and getting them accepted, as in Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World.*

This was a crude and clumsy early form, as you may recognize, of Gramsci's concept of hegemony and of the Frankfurt school's notion of mass culture. Gramsci, however, developed a far more supple and complex analysis of power, culture, and communication than this A + B = C formula, and so did the Frankfurt school researchers. All of them, whatever their other merits or shortcomings, were able to build the shifting and contradictory flows of culture and communication into their analyses, which are quite missing from the crude version.

Our purpose in presenting this analysis, and that of all the terms discussed in this chapter, is to help you recognize the need to ask yourself at once, when you see these words in something you are reading, how the writer is using them. We also hope to encourage you to be precise in the way you use these terms and to hone your ability to analyze culture and communication.

Semiology

Semiology, also known as semiotics, is the study of signs. There are different national traditions of semiology/semiotics—American, Russian, French and Italian—some of which have influenced each other, some of which have not. "Signs" in this context means a whole range of things, from film to architecture, from clothes to gestures, all of which have particular meanings in particular cultures. Originally, semiology examined underlying patterns in culture and communication rather than specific content or messages, much in the same way a specialist in linguistics might study the grammar and structure of languages without focusing on the meaning of a given sentence or word (see Desjardins, Chapter 23).

For example, one very influential early writer in this tradition of cultural analysis is the Russian Vladimir Propp (1928/1968), who argues that all folktales and fairy tales, which number in the thousands, can be reduced to a few basic story lines. Apart from being intriguing, Propp's work is important because it suggests that what is

communicated in a folktale—and thus, evidently, in a soap opera or a sports report—is not just the contents, the specific details. If he and other semioticians are correct, then the form, the underlying structure of the tale, is also attractive and important to the audience. This is the basis of the classical semiological technique of analyzing culture, the detection of the underlying structure (sometimes called the "deep" structure). The basic technique can be used in many different situations. For example, one could try to show that Hollywood's countless western movies all had a deep structure of bad:good = Indians:cowboys.

Semiology set out to become an exact science. Its founders thought they were mapping nothing less than the underlying structure of the human mind. It soon became obvious, however, that semiology could not avoid dealing with the specifics of human values and history. It may be true, for example, that all cultures have a fundamental structure of bad:good, but the identification of cowboys with the good and the Indians with the bad rests upon a particular value system, namely, White racism. Most analysts would agree that the deep structure in western movies tells us more about a particular history and culture—racial subjugation in the United States—than about the fundamental structure of the human mind.

As a result of this kind of criticism, semiology began to revise its goals. It is now often seen as only one tool of analysis that must be supplemented by the study of historical and political issues. Many semioticians have come to acknowledge the importance of placing signs in their cultural contexts (see, e.g., Barthes, 1973; Berger, 1991).

Cultural Capital

Cultural capital is a term coined by French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1984) that picks up on the notion of "high" culture and takes it in a different direction. It is designed to capture a certain reality of professional middle-class life, namely, the way families in that social class use certain kinds of cultural awareness and information both to maintain their own socioeconomic status and to pass it on to their children. Extra time spent by parents with their children, reading them stories or dragging them around museums and cathedrals; the development of interest in music and the arts; simply being surrounded by "high" culture in the forms of books and CD-lined shelves; exposure to adult discussions of art and politics; the use of home computers as active instruments rather than

as relatively passive video games—all these represent the endowment of cultural capital in children. This investment is one that parents hope will pay off for their children in the ability to capture and keep professional or executive careers—and hence to acquire economic capital. Bourdieu argues that this cultural communication is more important for some purposes than is formal education in schools. Because such valued skills take a long time to develop, the chances are great that children from the dominated classes will never catch up.

This manipulation of "high" culture legitimates the high social status and income of the middle and professional classes (DiMaggio, 1982). Possession of this culture pays off in everything from job interviews to professional contacts and "networking." Members of the lower-middle and working classes may aspire to acquire cultural capital, but they find it hard to achieve. They have not imbibed the background. They do not have the time it takes. The tickets are too expensive, whether to the opera or to the "right" university. The working classes are left with what Bourdieu calls "the choice of the necessary." They tend to feel uneducated, lacking in confidence in "those" circles, and know they are left out. Some individuals may even blame themselves, though others may criticize what counts as "high" culture, its pretentiousness, its jargon, and its long-windedness.

Conclusions

We have examined many different definitions of *culture* and related terms (*hegemony, ideology, cultural capital, semiology,* and *mass, high,* and *popular culture*). We have argued that culture should be seen as an interactive and ongoing process, not simply as the products that process brings into being. We have stressed the close interactions among culture, communication, and power, whether economic or political. We have emphasized the conflicts that express themselves in cultural terms as well as in economic or social terms, and the way the very term *culture* has been interpreted differently depending on people's positions in relation to those conflicts. We have looked at culture in the sense of outlook on life or understanding of the world—in other words, as the source from which we begin to make sense of an otherwise bewildering social reality.

The chapters in Part V of this volume deal with what are termed *cultural studies* issues. We have no space to map out here the multiple

ways in which cultural studies approaches are used. There are British (e.g., Hall, 1980; R. Williams, 1977), North American (Grossberg, Nelson, & Treichler, 1992), South American (O'Connor, 1991; Rêgo, 1993), and Australian (Bennett, 1992) variants. Nonetheless, you should be aware that this is a rich and significant contemporary movement within communication research; the chapters in Part V will introduce you to some of its insights.

Further Questions

1. How would you describe and identify the main characteristics of your country's culture? Is it very difficult to do so?
2. How would you apply notions of culture, hegemony, interactive process, and the rest to ethnic majority/minority situations in your country?
3. What do you see as the cultural functions of a library or a museum? How important is the memory of past culture to present-day culture?

Notes

1. The film's title in Portuguese is *Como Era Gostoso O Meu Frances*. It is available in the United States, in subtitled format for classroom use, under the title *How Tasty Was My Little Frenchman* (New Yorker Films, Manhattan).
2. The verb came to be used in this form as a way of saying that the government's claim that all these people had simply "disappeared" had to be a lie. The military governments in both Argentina and El Salvador, it should be noted, received extensive aid from the U.S. government.