4 Marxisms

Classical Marxism

Marxism is a difficult and contentious body of work. But it is also *more* than this: it is a body of revolutionary theory with the purpose of changing the world. As Marx (1976b) famously said: 'The philosophers have only *interpreted* the world, in various ways; the point is to change it' (65). This makes Marxist analysis political in a quite specific way. But this is not to suggest that other methods and approaches are apolitical; on the contrary, Marxism insists that all are ultimately political. As the American Marxist cultural critic Fredric Jameson (1981) puts it, 'the political perspective [is] the absolute horizon of all reading and all interpretation' (17).

The Marxist approach to culture insists that texts and practices must be analysed in relation to their historical conditions of production (and in some versions, the changing conditions of their consumption and reception). What makes the Marxist methodology different from other 'historical' approaches to culture is the Marxist conception of history. The fullest statement of the Marxist approach to history is contained in the Preface and Introduction to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*. Here Marx outlines the now famous 'base/superstructure' account of social and historical development. In Chapter 1, I discussed this formulation briefly in relation to different concepts of ideology. I shall now explain the formulation in more detail and demonstrate how it might be used to understand the 'determinations' that influence the production and consumption of popular culture.

Marx argues that each significant period in history is constructed around a particular 'mode of production': that is, the way in which a society is organized (i.e. slave, feudal, capitalist) to produce the material necessaries of life – food, shelter, etc. In general terms, each mode of production produces: (i) specific ways of obtaining the necessaries of life; (ii) specific social relationships between workers and those who control the mode of production, and (iii) specific social institutions (including cultural ones). At the heart of this analysis is the claim that how a society produces its means of existence (its particular 'mode of production') ultimately determines the political, social and cultural shape of that society and its possible future development. As Marx explains, 'The mode of production of material life conditions the social, political and intellectual life process in general' (1976a: 3). This claim is based on certain assumptions about

the relationship between 'base' and 'superstructure'. It is on this relationship – between 'base' and 'superstructure' – that the classical Marxist account of culture rests.

The 'base' consists of a combination of the 'forces of production' and the 'relations of production'. The forces of production refer to the raw materials, the tools, the technology, the workers and their skills, etc. The relations of production refer to the class relations of those engaged in production. That is, each mode of production, besides being different, say, in terms of its basis in agrarian or industrial production, is also different in that it produces particular relations of production: the slave mode produces master/slave relations; the feudal mode produces lord/peasant relations; the capitalist mode produces bourgeois/proletariat relations. It is in this sense that one's class position is determined by one's relationship to the mode of production.

The 'superstructure' (which develops in conjunction with a specific mode of production) consists of institutions (political, legal, educational, cultural, etc.), and 'definite forms of social consciousness' (political, religious, ethical, philosophical, aesthetic, cultural, etc.) generated by these institutions. The relationship between base and superstructure is twofold. On the one hand, the superstructure both legitimates and challenges the base. On the other, the base is said to 'condition' or 'determine' the limits of the content and form of the superstructure. This relationship can be understood in a range of different ways. It can be seen as a mechanical relationship ('economic determinism') of cause and effect: what happens in the superstructure is a passive reflection of what is happening in the base. This often results in a vulgar Marxist 'reflection theory' of culture, in which the politics of a text or practice are read off from, or reduced to, the material conditions of its production. The relationship can also be seen as the setting of limits, the providing of a specific framework in which some developments are probable and others unlikely. However we view the relationship, we will not fully understand it if we reduce the base to an economic monolith (a static economic institution) and forget that for Marx the base also include social relations and class antagonisms.

After Marx's death in 1883, Frederick Engels, friend and collaborator, found himself having to explain, through a series of letters, many of the subtleties of Marxism to younger Marxists who, in their revolutionary enthusiasm, threatened to reduce it to a form of economic determinism. Here is part of his famous letter to Joseph Bloch:

> According to the materialist conception of history [Marxism], the ultimately determining element in history is the production and reproduction of real life. Neither Marx nor I have ever asserted more than this. Therefore if somebody twists this into saying that the economic factor is the only determining one, he is transforming that proposition into a meaningless, abstract, absurd phrase. The economic situation is the basis, but the various components of the superstructure . . . also exercise their influence upon the course of the historical struggles and in many cases determine their form. . . . We make our own history, but, first of all, under very definite assumptions and conditions. Among these the economic ones are ultimately decisive. But the political ones, etc., and indeed even the traditions which haunt human minds also play a part, although not the decisive one (2009: 61).

What Engels claims is that the base produces the superstructural terrain (this terrain and not that), but that the form of activity that takes place there is determined not just by the fact that the terrain was produced and is reproduced by the base (although this clearly sets limits and influences outcomes), but by the interaction of the institutions and the participants as they occupy the terrain. Therefore, although texts and practices are never the 'primary force' in history, they can be active agents in historical change or the servants of social stability.

A brief discussion of ideology should make the relationship between base and superstructure a little clearer. Marx and Engels (2009) claim that, 'The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas, i.e. the class which is the ruling *material* force in society, is at the same time its ruling *intellectual* force' (58). What they mean by this is that the dominant class, on the basis of its ownership of, and control over, the means of material production (the mode of production), is virtually guaranteed to have control over the means of intellectual production. However, this does not mean that the ideas of the ruling class are simply imposed on subordinate classes. A ruling class is 'compelled . . . to represent its interest as the common interest of all the members of society . . . to give its ideas the form of universality, and represent them as the only rational, universally valid ones' (59). Unless we include both formulations (ruling ideas and compulsion, and especially the way the second qualifies the first), we arrive at a very simplified notion of power: one in which class struggle is replaced by social control; where power is simply something imposed rather than something for which men and women have to struggle. During periods of social transformation ideological struggle becomes chronic: as Marx (1976a) points out, it is in the 'ideological forms' of the superstructure (which include the texts and practices of popular culture) that men and women 'become conscious of . . . conflict and fight it out' (4).

A classical Marxist approach to popular culture would above all else insist that to understand and explain a text or practice it must always be situated in its historical moment of production, analysed in terms of the historical conditions that produced it. There are dangers here: historical conditions are reduced to the mode of production and the superstructural becomes a passive reflection of the base. It is crucial, as Engels and Marx warn, and, as Thompson demonstrates (see Chapter 3), to keep in play a subtle dialectic between 'agency' and 'structure'. For example, a full analysis of nineteenth-century stage melodrama (one of the first culture industries) would have to weave together into focus both the changes in the mode of production that made stage melodrama's audience a possibility and the theatrical traditions that generated its form. The same also holds true for a full analysis of music hall (another early culture industry). Although in neither instance should performance be reduced to changes in the material forces of production, what would be insisted on is that a full analysis of stage melodrama or music hall would not be possible without reference to the changes in theatre attendance brought about by changes in the mode of production. It is these changes, a Marxist analysis would argue, that ultimately produced the conditions of possibility for the performance of a play like *My Poll* and *My Partner Joe*[1] and for the emergence and success of a music hall performer like Marie Lloyd. In this way, then, a Marxist analysis would insist that ultimately, however indirectly, there is nevertheless

a real and fundamental relationship between the emergence of stage melodrama and music hall and changes that took place in the capitalist mode of production. I have made a similar argument about the invention of the 'traditional' English Christmas in the nineteenth century (Storey, 2008, 2010a, 2016).

The English Marxism of William Morris

William Morris, according to E.P. Thompson (1976), is the first English Marxist. Although best known as a designer and poet, Morris was, in his later life, also a revolutionary socialist. He joined the first British Marxist party, the Democratic Federation, in 1883. The following year he formed the Socialist League (other founding members included Eleanor Marx, the youngest daughter of Karl Marx). His commitment to the cause was total, and he involved himself in all aspects of its work, from political campaigns to editing and selling its newspaper, *The Commonweal*. Morris's contribution to Marxist thought is extensive. Here I shall discuss only one aspect, his critique of capitalist society in terms of art and alienation and how this provides an implicit commentary on what is popular culture.

Like Marx and Engels, Morris argued that creative labour is not just an activity to be enjoyed or avoided: it is an essential part of what makes us human. Industrial capitalism, with its repetition, its long hours and its denial of creativity, engenders what Marx called the alienation of labour. As Marx explained, the worker 'does not fulfil himself in his work . . . does not develop freely a physical and mental energy, but is physically exhausted and mentally debased' (1963: 177). This situation is compounded by the fact that work 'is not the satisfaction of a need, but only a *means* for satisfying other needs' (177; original emphasis). Lacking the ability to find herself (i.e. express her natural creativity) in her work, she is forced to seek it outside her work. 'The worker therefore feels himself at home only during his leisure, whereas at work he feels homeless' (177). In other words, she works to earn money in order to express her natural creativity (denied to her in industrial work) in patterns of consumption (see Storey 2017).

On the basis of this analysis, making art is seen as an ideal model of how work should be experienced. Accordingly, Morris's definition of art is not the narrow definition as, for example, used in traditional forms of art history; for Morris it includes all creative human production. 'I use the word *art* in a wider sense than is commonly used. . . . To a Socialist a house, a knife, a cup, a steam engine, or . . . anything . . . that is made by man and has form, must either be a work of art or destructive to art' (1979: 84). Ultimately, for Morris, art is 'the expression of pleasure in the labour of production' (84). Under the conditions of industrial capitalism, 'founded on the art-lacking or unhappy labour of the greater part of men' (85), only the artist can achieve such pleasure. A fundamental part of the promise of socialism is that it will extend this pleasure to all humankind. Rejecting assembly line methods of production ('Fordism'), labour under socialism will use 'the whole of a man for the production of a piece of goods, and not small portions

of many men' (87). Art, therefore, is not for Morris an ornamental addition to everyday life; it is the very substance of what makes us truly human.

In a non-alienated world of communist social relations, the worker is returned to herself (i.e. to an ability to express his natural creativity in his labour). Like Morris, Marx and Engels understand this in terms of popular art: 'The exclusive concentration of artistic talent in particular individuals, and its suppression in the broad mass which is bound up with this, is a consequence of division of labour. . . . In a communist society there are no painters but at most people who engage in painting among other activities' (1974: 109). The end of capitalism means the end of the division of labour. 'In communist society . . . nobody has an exclusive area of activity and each can train himself in any branch he wishes . . . making it possible for me to do one thing today and another tomorrow, to hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, breed cattle in the evening, criticise after dinner, just as I like without ever becoming a hunter, a fisherman, a herdsman, or a critic' (quoted in McLellan, 1982: 36).

In other words, in a non-alienated, communist society all men and women will work like artists: all work will in effect produce popular art, because all work will be creative. As Morris insisted, 'What business have we with art at all unless all can share it? (1986: 139). Moreover, 'The absence of popular art from modern times is more disquieting and grievous to bear for this reason than for any other, that it betokens that fatal division of men into the cultivated and the degraded classes which competitive commerce [capitalism] has bred and fosters' (139). The end of alienation will mean the end of the distinction between culture and popular culture.

Morris's (2003) [1890] novel *News From Nowhere* describes a twenty-first-century, post-revolutionary England. Guest, the novel's main character, falls asleep in the 1880s and wakes up in the twenty-first century to discover that England has undergone a revolution in 1952–54 and is now a non-alienated, communist society. Goods made to sell for profit have been replaced by goods produced to the satisfaction of the worker and to meet the needs of the community. In similar fashion, private ownership has been replaced by common use. Moreover, art as a separate category has disappeared, as art and creativity are now fully integrated into the routines of everyday life.

The novel should not be read as a literal picture of a future society. Rather, it should be read as a political incitement to make the society Guest finds in twenty-first-century England. The aim of the novel is 'the education of desire' (Thompson, 1976): that is, to make men and women aware of the possibility of a non-alienated society and to educate their desire to make such a society. As Morris observed, capitalism 'has reduced the workman to such a skinny and pitiful existence, that he scarcely knows how to frame a desire for any life much better than that which he now endures' (1986: 37). Morris wishes to educate the desire for a 'life much better', hoping that to allow men and women to think of such a life is to create the desire for them to make such a life (see Storey 2018).

News From Nowhere provides a beautiful example of what Morris, Marx and Engels had in mind when they envisaged a non-alienated, communist society. The novel depicts a world a million miles away from the authoritarian horrors of the Stalinism of the Soviet Union; moreover, it is a society in which the distinction between culture and popular culture, and the corresponding divisions of social class, no longer exist.

The Frankfurt School

The Frankfurt School is the name given to a group of German intellectuals associated with the Institute for Social Research at the University of Frankfurt. The Institute was established in 1923. Following the coming to power of Adolf Hitler and the Nazi Party in 1933, it moved to New York, attaching itself to the University of Columbia. In 1949 it moved back to Germany. 'Critical Theory' is the name given to the Institute's critical mix of Marxism and psychoanalysis. The Institute's work on popular culture is mostly associated with the writings of Theodor Adorno, Walter Benjamin, Max Horkheimer, Leo Lowenthal and Herbert Marcuse.

In 1944 Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer (1979) coined the term 'culture industry' to designate the products and processes of mass culture. The products of the culture industry, they claim, are marked by two features: homogeneity, 'film, radio and magazines make up a system which is uniform as a whole and in every part . . . all mass culture is identical' (120–1); and predictability:

> As soon as the film begins, it is quite clear how it will end, and who will be rewarded, punished, or forgotten. In light music [popular music], once the trained ear has heard the first notes of the hit song, it can guess what is coming and feel flattered when it does come. . . . The result is a constant reproduction of the same thing (125, 134).

While Arnold and Leavisism had worried that popular culture represented a threat to cultural and social authority, the Frankfurt School argue that it actually produces the opposite effect: it maintains cultural and social authority. Where Arnold and Leavis saw 'anarchy', the Frankfurt School see only 'conformity': a situation in which 'the deceived masses' (133) are caught in a 'circle of manipulation and retroactive need in which the unity of the system grows ever stronger' (121). Here is Adorno reading an American situation comedy about a young schoolteacher who is both underpaid (some things do not change), and continually fined by her school principal. As a result, she is without money and therefore without food. The humour of the storyline consists in her various attempts to secure a meal at the expense of friends and acquaintances. In his reading of this situation comedy, Adorno is guided by the assumption that while it is always difficult, if not impossible, to establish the unmistakable 'message' of a work of 'authentic' culture, the 'hidden message' of a piece of mass culture is not at all difficult to discern. According to Adorno (1991a), 'the script implies' that:

> If you are humorous, good natured, quick witted, and charming as she is, do not worry about being paid a starvation wage. . . . In other words, the script is a shrewd method of promoting adjustment to humiliating conditions by presenting them as objectively comical and by giving a picture of a person who experiences even her own inadequate position as an object of fun apparently free of any resentment (143–4).

This is one way of reading this TV comedy. But it is by no means the only way. The German Marxist playwright Bertolt Brecht might have offered another way of reading, one that implies a less passive audience. Discussing his own play, *Mother Courage and Her Children*, Brecht (1978) suggests, 'Even if Courage learns nothing else at least the audience can, in my view, learn something by observing her' (229). The same point can be made against Adorno with reference to the schoolteacher's behaviour. It is only by starting with the assumption that the text dictates its meaning to a passive audience that he can be so certain about the meaning of the TV comedy.

Leo Lowenthal (1961) contends that the culture industry, by producing a culture marked by 'standardisation, stereotype, conservatism, mendacity, manipulated consumer goods' (11), has worked to depoliticize the working class – limiting its horizon to political and economic goals that could be realized within the oppressive and exploitative framework of capitalist society. He maintains that, 'Whenever revolutionary tendencies show a timid head, they are mitigated and cut short by a false fulfilment of wish-dreams, like wealth, adventure, passionate love, power and sensationalism in general' (ibid.). In short, the culture industry discourages the 'masses' from thinking beyond the confines of the present. As Herbert Marcuse (1968a) claims in *One Dimensional Man*:

> the irresistible output of the entertainment and information industry [the culture industry] carry with them prescribed attitudes and habits, certain intellectual and emotional reactions which bind the consumers more or less pleasantly to the producers and, through the latter, to the whole. The products indoctrinate and manipulate; they promote a false consciousness which is immune against its falsehood . . . it becomes a way of life. It is a good way of life – much better than before – and as a good way of life, it militates against qualitative change. Thus emerges a pattern of one-dimensional thought and behaviour in which ideas, aspirations, and objectives that, by their content, transcend the established universe of discourse and action are either repelled or reduced to terms of this universe (26–7).

In other words, by supplying the means to the satisfaction of certain needs, capitalism is able to prevent the formation of more fundamental desires. The culture industry thus stunts the political imagination.

As with Arnold and Leavisism, art or high culture is seen to be working differently. It embodies ideals denied by capitalism. As such it offers an implicit critique of capitalist society, an alternative, utopian vision. 'Authentic' culture, according to Horkheimer (1978), has taken over the utopian function of religion: to keep alive the human desire for a better world beyond the confines of the present. It carries the key to unlock the prison-house established by the development of mass culture by the capitalist culture industry (5). But increasingly the processes of the culture industry threaten the radical potential of 'authentic' culture. The culture industry increasingly flattens out what remains of

> the antagonism between culture and social reality through the obliteration of the oppositional, alien, and transcendent elements in the higher culture by virtue of

> which it constituted another dimension of reality. This liquidation of two-dimensional culture takes place not through the denial and rejection of the 'cultural values', but through their wholesale incorporation into the established order, through their reproduction and display on a massive scale (Marcuse, 1968a: 58).

Therefore, the better future promised by 'authentic' culture is no longer in contradiction with the unhappy present – a spur to make the better future; culture now confirms that this is the better future – here and now – the only better future. It offers 'fulfilment' instead of the promotion of 'desire'. Marcuse holds to the hope that the 'most advanced images and positions' of 'authentic' culture may still resist 'absorption' and 'continue to haunt the consciousness with the possibility of their rebirth' in a better tomorrow (60). He also hopes that one day those on the margins of society, 'the outcasts and outsiders' (61), who are out of reach of the full grasp of the culture industry, will undo the defeats, fulfil the hopes, and make capitalism keep all its promises in a world beyond capitalism. Or, as Horkheimer (1978) observes,

> One day we may learn that in the depths of their hearts, the masses . . . secretly knew the truth and disbelieved the lie, like catatonic patients who make known only at the end of their trance that nothing had escaped them. Therefore it may not be entirely senseless to continue speaking a language that is not easily understood (17).

But, as Adorno (1991b) points out, mass culture is a difficult system to challenge:

> Today anyone who is incapable of talking in the prescribed fashion, that is of effortlessly reproducing the formulas, conventions and judgments of mass culture as if they were his own, is threatened in his very existence, suspected of being an idiot or an intellectual (79).

The culture industry, in its search for profits and cultural homogeneity, deprives 'authentic' culture of its critical function, its mode of negation – '[its] Great Refusal' (Marcuse, 1968a: 63). Commodification (sometimes understood by other critics as 'commercialization') devalues 'authentic' culture, making it too accessible by turning it into yet another saleable commodity.

> The neo-conservative critics of leftist critics of mass culture ridicule the protest against Bach as background music in the kitchen, against Plato and Hegel, Shelley and Baudelaire, Marx and Freud in the drugstore. Instead, they insist on recognition of the fact that the classics have left the mausoleum and come to life again, that people are just so much more educated. True, but coming to life as classics, they come to life as other than themselves; they are deprived of their antagonistic force, of the estrangement which was the very dimension of their truth. The intent and function of these works have thus fundamentally changed. If they once stood in contradiction to the status quo, this contradiction is now flattened out (63–4).

It is not difficult to think of examples of this process (whether or not we read them in quite the same way, leftist or neo-conservative). In the 1960s, a bedsit without a poster of Che Guevara was hardly furnished at all. Was the poster a sign of a commitment to revolutionary politics or a commitment to the latest fashion (or was it a complicated mixture of both)? Bennett (1977) provides a telling example of an advertisement inserted in *The Times* in 1974:

> an advertisement which consisted of a full page colour reproduction of Matisse's Le Pont, below which there appeared the legend: 'Business is our life, but life isn't all business.' Profoundly contradictory, what was ostensibly opposed to economic life was made to become a part of it, what was separate became assimilated since any critical dimension which might have pertained to Matisse's painting was eclipsed by its new and unsolicited function as an advertisement for the wares of finance capital (45).

We might also think of the way opera and classical music are used to sell anything from bread to expensive motorcars (for examples see Table 4.1). Is it possible, for instance, to hear the second movement from Antonin Leopold Dvořák's *New World Symphony* without conjuring up an image of Hovis bread?

It is not that Marcuse or the other members of the Frankfurt School object to the 'democratization' of culture, only that they believe that the culture industry's 'assimilation is historically premature; it establishes cultural equality while preserving domination' (Marcuse, 1968a: 64). In short, the democratization of culture results in the blocking of the demand for full democracy; it stabilizes the prevailing social order.

According to the Frankfurt School, work and leisure under capitalism form a compelling relationship: the effects of the culture industry are guaranteed by the nature of work; the work process secures the effects of the culture industry. The function of the culture industry is therefore, ultimately, to organize leisure time in the same way as industrialization has organized work time. Work under capitalism stunts the senses; the culture industry continues the process: 'The escape from everyday drudgery which the whole culture industry promises . . . [is a] paradise . . . [of] the same old drudgery . . . escape . . . [is] predesigned to lead back to the starting point. Pleasure promotes the resignation which it ought to help to forget' (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1979: 142). In short, work leads to mass culture; mass culture leads back to work. Similarly, art or 'authentic' culture circulated by the culture industry operates in the same way. Only 'authentic' culture operating outside the confines of the culture industry could ever hope to break the cycle.

To make more concrete these general points, I shall now examine a specific example of the Frankfurt School's approach to popular culture – Adorno's (2009) essay, 'On popular music'. In the essay he makes three specific claims about popular music. First, he claims that it is 'standardized'. 'Standardization', according to Adorno, 'extends from the most general features to the most specific ones' (64). Once a musical and/or lyrical pattern has proved successful it is exploited to commercial exhaustion, culminating in 'the crystallisation of standards' (ibid.). Moreover, details from one popular song can

Table 4.1 Depriving 'authentic' culture of its critical function.

The use of opera and classical music in advertisements
Bach: Suite No. 3 in D – Hamlet cigars
Bach: Sleepers Awake! – Lloyds Bank
Bach: Harpsichord Concerto in F minor – NASDAQ
Beethoven: Symphony No. 6 in F – Blueband margarine
Beethoven: Für Elise – Heinz spaghetti/Uncle Ben's rice
Bellini: Norma – Ford Mondeo
Boccherini: Minuet – Save and Prosper building society
Britten: Simple Symphony Opus 4 – Royal Bank of Scotland
Debussy: Suite Bergamasque – Boursin cheese
Delibes: Lakmé – British Airways/basmati rice/Ryvita/IBM computers/Kleenex tissues
Delibes: Coppelia – Jus-Rol pastry
Dukas: The Sorcerer's Apprentice – Fiesta kitchen towels/Sun Liquid/Royal Bank of Scotland/Philips DCC
Dvořák: New World Symphony – Hovis bread
Fauré: Requiem Opus 48 – Lurpak butter
Gluck: Orfeo ed Euridice – Comfort fabric softener
Grieg: Peer Gynt – Nescafé/AEG/Alton Towers
Handel: Serse – Rover cars
Handel: Solomon – Woolworths
Holst: The Planet Suite – Dulux Weathershield
Khachaturian: Spartacus – Nescafé
Mascagni: Cavalleria rusticana – Kleenex tissues/Stella Artois/Baci chocolates
Mozart: Piano Concerto No. 21 – Aer Lingus
Mozart: The Marriage of Figaro – Citroën ZX
Mozart: Cosí Fan Tutte – Mercedes-Benz
Mozart: Horn Concerto No. 4 – Vauxhall Carlton
Mussorgsky: Night on a Bare Mountain – Maxell tapes
Offenbach: Tales of Hoffmann – Bailey's Irish Cream
Offenbach: Orpheus in the Underworld – Bio Speed Weed
Orff: Carmina Burana – Old Spice/Carling Black Label/Fiat Marea
Pachelbel: Canon in D – Thresher wines
Prokofiev: Peter and the Wolf – Vauxhall Astra
Prokofiev: Romeo and Juliet – Chanel L'Egoiste
Puccini: Madama Butterfly – Twinings tea/Del Monte orange juice
Puccini: Gianni Schicchi – Philips DCC
Puccini: La Bohème – Sony Walkman
Puccini: Tosca – FreeServe
Ravel: Boléro – Ryvita
Rimsky-Korsakov: Tsar Saltan – Black and Decker
Rossini: The Barber of Seville – Ragu pasta sauce/Fiat Strada/Braun cordless shavers
Saint-Saëns: Carnival of the Animals – Tesco
Satie: Gymnopédie No. 3 – Bournville chocolate/Strepsils lozenges
Schumann: Scenes from Childhood – Chocolate Break
Smetana: Má Vlast – Peugeot 605
J. Strauss: Morning Papers Waltz – TSB
Tchaikovsky: The Nutcracker Suite – Reactolite sunglasses/Cadbury's Fruit and Nut/Hellmann's mayonnaise
Verdi: Aida – Diet Pepsi/Michelob/Egypt
Verdi: Il Trovatore – Ragu pasta sauce
Verdi: La Forza del Destino – Stella Artois
Verdi: Nabucco – British Airways
Verdi: Rigoletto – Ragu pasta sauce/Little Caesar's pizza
Vivaldi: The Four Seasons – Chanel No. 19 perfume/Kingsmill bread/Citroën BX/Braun

be interchanged with details from another. Unlike the organic structure of 'serious music', where each detail expresses the whole, popular music is mechanical in the sense that a given detail can be shifted from one song to another without any real effect on the structure as a whole. In order to conceal standardization, the music industry engages in what Adorno calls 'pseudo-individualization': 'Standardisation of song hits

keeps the customers in line by doing their listening for them, as it were. Pseudo-individualization, for its part, keeps them in line by making them forget that what they listen to is already listened to for them, or "pre-digested" ' (69).

Adorno's second claim is that popular music promotes passive listening. As already noted, work under capitalism is dull and therefore promotes the search for escape, but, because it is also dulling, it leaves little energy for real escape – the demands of 'authentic' culture. Instead refuge is sought in forms such as popular music – the consumption of which is always passive, and endlessly repetitive, confirming *the world as it is*. While 'serious' music (Beethoven, for example) plays to the pleasure of the imagination, offering an engagement with *the world as it could be*, popular music is the 'non-productive correlate' (70) to life in the office or on the factory floor. The 'strain and boredom' of work lead men and women to the 'avoidance of effort' in their leisure time (ibid.). Adorno makes it all sound like the hopeless ritual of a heroin addict (as taken from the detective genre he detested so much). Denied 'novelty' in their work time, and too exhausted for it in their leisure time, 'they crave a stimulant' – popular music satisfies the craving.

> Its stimulations are met with the inability to vest effort in the ever-identical. This means boredom again. It is a circle which makes escape impossible. The impossibility of escape causes the widespread attitude of inattention toward popular music. The moment of recognition is that of effortless sensation. The sudden attention attached to this moment burns itself out instanter and relegates the listener to a realm of inattention and distraction (71).

Popular music operates in a kind of blurred dialectic: to consume it demands inattention and distraction, while its consumption produces in the consumer inattention and distraction.

Adorno's third point is the claim that popular music operates as 'social cement' (72). Its 'socio-psychological function' is to achieve in the consumers of popular music 'psychical adjustment' to the needs of the prevailing structure of power (ibid.). This 'adjustment' manifests itself in 'two major socio-psychological types of mass behaviour . . . the "rhythmically" obedient type and the "emotional" type' (ibid.). The first type of listener dances in distraction to the rhythm of his or her own exploitation and oppression. The second type wallows in sentimental misery, oblivious to the real conditions of existence.

There are a number of points to be made about Adorno's analysis. First, we must acknowledge that he is writing in 1941. Popular music has changed a great deal since then. However, having said that, Adorno never thought to change his analysis following the changes that occurred in popular music up until his death in 1969. Is popular music as monolithic as he would have us believe? For example, does pseudo-individualization really explain the advent of rock'n'roll in 1956, the emergence of the Beatles in 1962, the music of the counterculture in 1965? Does it explain punk rock and Rock Against Racism in the 1970s, acid house and indie pop in the 1980s, rave and hip hop in the 1990s?

Moreover, is the consumption of popular music as passive as Adorno claims? Simon Frith (1983) provides sales figures that suggest not: 'despite the difficulties of the calculations . . . most business commentators agree that about 10 per cent of all records released (a little less for singles, a little more for LPs) make money' (147). In addition to this, only about another 10 per cent cover their costs (ibid.). This means that about 80 per cent of records actually lose money. Moreover, Paul Hirsch has calculated that at least 60 per cent of singles released are never played by anyone (cited in Frith, 1983: 147). This does not suggest the workings of an all-powerful culture industry, easily able to manipulate its consumers. It sounds more like a culture industry trying desperately to sell records to a critical and discriminating public. Such figures certainly imply that consumption is rather more active than Adorno's argument suggests. Subcultural use of music is clearly at the leading edge of such active discrimination, but is by no means the only example.

Finally, does popular music really function as social cement? Subcultures or music taste cultures, for instance, would appear to consume popular music in a way not too dissimilar to Adorno's ideal mode for the consumption of 'serious music'. Richard Dyer (1990) argues that this is certainly the case with regard to the gay consumption of disco. He detects a certain romanticism in disco that keeps alive a way of being that is always in conflict with the mundane and the everyday. As he explains, 'Romanticism asserts that the limits of work and domesticity are not the limits of experience' (417).

The analysis offered by the majority of the Frankfurt School works with a series of binary oppositions held in place by the supposed fundamental difference between culture and mass culture (Table 4.2).

Walter Benjamin's (1973) essay 'The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction' is much more optimistic about the possibility of a revolutionary transformation of capitalism. He claims that capitalism will 'ultimately . . . create conditions which would make it possible to abolish capitalism itself' (219). Benjamin believes that changes in the technological reproduction of culture are changing the function of culture in society: 'technical reproduction can put the copy of the original into situations which would be out of reach for the original itself' (222). Reproduction thus challenges what Benjamin calls the 'aura' of texts and practices.

Table 4.2 'Culture' and 'mass culture' according to the Frankfurt School.

Culture	Mass culture
Real	False
European	American
Multi-dimensional	One-dimensional
Active consumption	Passive consumption
Individual creation	Mass production
Imagination	Distraction
Negation	Social cement

> One might generalise by saying: the technique of reproduction detaches the reproduced object from the domain of tradition. By making many reproductions it substitutes a plurality of copies for a unique existence. And in permitting the reproduction to meet the beholder or listener in his own particular situation, it reactivates the object reproduced. These two processes lead to a tremendous shattering of tradition . . . Their most powerful agent is film. Its social significance, particularly in its most positive form, is inconceivable without its destructive, cathartic aspect, that is, the liquidation of the traditional value of the cultural heritage (223).

The 'aura' of a text or practice is its sense of 'authenticity', 'authority', 'autonomy' and 'distance'. The decay of the aura detaches the text or practice from the authority and rituals of tradition. It opens them to a plurality of reinterpretation, freeing them to be used in other contexts, for other purposes. No longer embedded in tradition, significance is now open to dispute; meaning becomes a question of consumption, an active (political), rather than a passive (for Adorno: psychological) event. Technological reproduction changes production: 'To an ever greater degree the work of art reproduced becomes the work of art designed for reproducibility' (226). Consumption is also changed: from its location in religious ritual to its location in the rituals of aesthetics, consumption is now based on the practice of politics. Culture may have become mass culture, but consumption has not become mass consumption.

> Mechanical reproduction of art changes the reaction of the masses toward art. The reactionary attitude toward a Picasso painting changes into the progressive reaction toward a Chaplin movie. The progressive reaction is characterised by the direct, intimate fusion of visual and emotional enjoyment with the orientation of the expert (236).

Questions of meaning and consumption shift from passive contemplation to active political struggle. Benjamin's celebration of the positive potential of 'mechanical reproduction', his view that it begins the process of a move from an 'auratic' culture to a 'democratic' culture in which meaning is seen no longer as unique, but as open to question, open to use and mobilization, has had a profound (if often unacknowledged) influence on cultural theory and popular culture. Susan Willis (1991) describes Benjamin's essay thus: 'This may well be the single most important essay in the development of Marxist popular culture criticism' (10). While Adorno locates meaning in the mode of production (how a cultural text is produced determines its consumption and significance), Benjamin suggests that meaning is produced at the moment of consumption; significance is determined by the process of consumption, regardless of the mode of production. As Frith points out, the 'debate'[2] between Adorno and Benjamin – between a socio-psychological account of consumption combined with an insistence on the determining power of production, against the argument that consumption is a matter of politics – continues to be argued in contemporary accounts of popular music: 'Out of Adorno have come analyses of the economics of entertainment . . . [and the] ideological effects of commercial music making. . . . From Benjamin have come

subcultural theories, descriptions of the struggle . . . to make their own meanings in their acts of consumption' (57).

Despite its Marxist sophistication and admirable political intent, the approach of the Frankfurt School to popular culture (with the exception of Benjamin) would in some respects fit easily into the 'culture and civilization' tradition discussed in Chapter 2. Like the perspective developed by Arnold, Leavisism and some of the American mass culture theorists, the Frankfurt School perspective on popular culture is essentially a discourse from above on the culture of other people (a discourse of 'us' and 'them'). It is true that the Frankfurt School are very critical of conservative cultural critics who bemoaned the passing of, or threat to, a 'pure' autonomous culture for its own sake. Adorno, as J.M. Bernstein (1978) points out, 'regards the conservative defence of high culture as reflecting an unreflective hypostatization of culture that protects the economic status quo' (15). Nevertheless, it remains the case that there are certain similarities between the focus of the 'culture and civilization' tradition and that of the Frankfurt School. They condemn the same things, but for different reasons. The 'culture and civilization' tradition attack mass culture because it threatens cultural standards and social authority, the Frankfurt School attack mass culture because it threatens cultural standards and depoliticizes the working class, and thus maintains the iron grip of social authority: 'obedience to the rhythm of the iron system . . . the *absolute* power of capitalism' (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1979: 120; my italics). It is very difficult to imagine the possibility of political agency in a situation of absolute power.

Althusserianism

The ideas of Louis Althusser have had an enormous influence on cultural theory and popular culture. As Hall (1978) suggests, 'Althusser's interventions and their consequent development are enormously formative for the field of cultural studies' (21). Althusser's most significant contribution to the field is his different attempts to theorize the concept of ideology. I shall therefore restrict discussion to this aspect of his work.

Althusser begins by rejecting mechanistic interpretation of the base/superstructure formulation, insisting instead on the concept of the social formation. According to Althusser (1969), a social formation consists of three practices: the economic, the political and the ideological. The relationship between the base and the superstructure is not one of expression, i.e. the superstructure being an expression or passive reflection of the base, but rather the superstructure is seen as necessary to the existence of the base. The model allows for the relative autonomy of the superstructure. Determination remains, but it is determination in 'the last instance'. This operates through what he calls the 'structure in dominance'; that is, although the economic is always ultimately 'determinant', this does not mean that in a particular historical conjuncture it will necessarily be dominant. Under feudalism, for example, the political was the dominant level. Nevertheless, the practice that is dominant in a particular social formation will

depend on the specific form of economic production. What he means by this is that the economic contradictions of capitalism never take a pure form: 'the lonely hour of the last instance never comes' (113). The economic is determinant in the last instance, not because the other instances are its epiphenomena, but because it determines which practice is dominant. In volume one of *Capital*, Marx (1976c) makes a similar point in response to criticisms suggesting definite limits to the critical reach of Marxist analysis:

> [Marxism, so its critics say,] is all very true for our own time, in which material interests are preponderant, but not for the Middle Ages, dominated by Catholicism, nor for Athens and Rome, dominated by politics. . . . One thing is clear: the Middle Ages could not live on Catholicism, nor could the ancient world on politics. On the contrary, it is the manner in which they gained their livelihood which explains why in one case politics, in the other case Catholicism, played the chief part. . . . And then there is Don Quixote, who long ago paid the penalty for wrongly imagining that knight errantry was compatible with all economic forms of society (176).

Althusser produced three definitions of ideology, two of which have proved particularly fruitful for the student of popular culture. The first definition, which overlaps in some ways with the second, is the claim that ideology – 'a system (with its own logic and rigour) of representations (images, myths, ideas or concepts)' (1969: 231) – is a 'practice' through which men and women live their relations to the real conditions of existence. 'By practice . . . I . . . mean any process of transformation of a determinate given raw material into a determinate product, a transformation effected by a determinate human labour, using determinate means (of "production")' (166). Therefore, as the economic, the historically specific mode of production, transforms certain raw materials into products by determinate means of production, involving determinate relations of production, so ideological practice shapes an individual's lived relations to the social formation. In this way, ideology dispels contradictions in lived experience. It accomplishes this by offering false, but seemingly true, resolutions to real problems. This is not a 'conscious' process; ideology 'is profoundly unconscious' (233) in its mode of operation.

> In ideology men . . . express, not the relation between them and their conditions of existence, but the way they live the relation between them and their conditions of existence: this presupposes both a real relation and an 'imaginary', 'lived' relation. Ideology . . . is the expression of the relation between men and their 'world', that is, the (overdetermined) unity of the real relation and the imaginary relation between them and their real conditions of existence (233–4).

The relationship is both real and imaginary in the sense that ideology is the way we live our relationship to the real conditions of existence at the level of representations (myths, concepts, ideas, images, discourses): there are real conditions and there are the

ways in which we represent these conditions to ourselves and to others. This applies to both dominant and subordinate classes; ideologies do not just convince oppressed groups that all is well with the world, they also convince ruling groups that exploitation and oppression are really something quite different: acts of universal necessity. Only a 'scientific' discourse (Althusser's Marxism) can see through ideology to the real conditions of existence.

Because ideology is for Althusser a closed system, it can only ever set itself such problems as it can answer; that is, to remain within its boundaries (a mythic realm without contradictions), it must stay silent on questions that threaten to take it beyond these boundaries. This formulation leads Althusser to the concept of the 'problematic'. He first uses the concept to explain the 'epistemological break' that he claims occurs in Marx's work in 1845. Marx's problematic, 'the objective internal reference system . . . the system of questions commanding the answers given' (67), determines not only the questions and answers he is able to bring into play, but also the absence of problems and concepts in his work.

According to Althusser a problematic consists of the assumptions, motivations, underlying ideas, etc., from which a text (say, an advert) is made. In this way, it is argued, a text is structured as much by what is absent (what is not said) as by what is present (what is said). Althusser argues that if we are to fully understand the meaning of a text, we have to be aware of not only what is in a text but also the assumptions that inform it (which may not appear in the text itself in any straightforward way but exist only in the text's problematic). One way in which a text's problematic is supposedly revealed is in the way a text may appear to answer questions it has not formally posed. Such questions, it is argued, have been posed in the text's problematic. The task of an Althusserian critical practice is to deconstruct the text to reveal the problematic. To do this is to perform what Althusser calls a 'symptomatic reading'.

In *Reading Capital*, Althusser characterizes Marx's method of reading the work of Adam Smith as 'symptomatic' in that

> it divulges the undivulged event in the text it reads, and in the same movement relates it to a different text, present as a necessary absence in the first. Like his first reading, Marx's second reading presupposes the existence of two texts, and the measurement of the first against the second. But what distinguishes this new reading from the old is the fact that in the new one the second text is articulated with the lapses in the first text (Althusser and Balibar, 1979: 67).

Through a symptomatic reading of Smith, Marx is able to construct for analysis 'the problematic initially visible in his writings against the invisible problematic contained in the paradox of *an answer which does not correspond to any question posed*' (28). Marx (1951) himself says this of Smith, 'Adam Smith's contradictions are of significance because they contain problems which it is true he does not solve, but which he reveals by contradicting himself' (146).

To read a text symptomatically, therefore, is to perform a double reading: reading first the manifest text, and then, through the lapses, distortions, silences and absences

(the 'symptoms' of a problem struggling to be posed) in the manifest text, to produce and read the latent text. For example, a symptomatic reading of the film *Taxi Driver* would reveal a problematic in which answers are posed to questions it can hardly name: 'How does the veteran return home to America after the imperial horrors of Vietnam?' At the heart of the film's problematic are questions relating to real historical problems, albeit deformed and transformed into a fantasy quest and a bloody resolution. A symptomatic reading of *Taxi Driver*, reading the 'symptoms' for evidence of an underlying *disease*, would construct from the film's contradictions, its evasions, its silences, its inexplicable violence, its fairy-tale ending, the central and structuring absence – America's war in Vietnam.

Another example can be seen in the number of recent car advertisements that situate vehicles isolated in nature (for example, see Photo 4.1). This mode of advertising, I would argue, is a response to the growing body of negative publicity that car ownership has attracted (especially in terms of pollution and road congestion). To prevent this publicity having an adverse effect on car sales these criticisms have to be countered. To confront them in a direct way would always run the risk of allowing the criticisms to come between the car being advertised and any potential buyer. Therefore, showing cars in both nature (unpolluted) and space (uncongested) confronts the claims without the risk of giving them a dangerous and unnecessary visibility. In this way, the criticisms are answered without the questions themselves having been formally posed. The emphasis placed on nature and space is, therefore, a response to the twin questions (which remain unasked in the advertisements themselves but exist in the assumptions that organize the adverts – in the text's 'problematic'): does buying a car increase both pollution and road congestion? The answer given, without the question being asked, is that these cars, as if by magic, neither pollute nor contribute to, or experience, road congestion.

Pierre Macherey's (1978) *A Theory of Literary Production* is undoubtedly the most sustained attempt to apply the technique of the Althusserian symptomatic reading to cultural texts. Although, as the book's title implies, Macherey's main focus is on literary production, the approach developed in the book is of great interest to the student of popular culture.

In his elaboration of Althusser's method of symptomatic reading, he rejects what he calls 'the interpretative fallacy': the view that a text has a single meaning, which it is the task of criticism to uncover. For him the text is not a puzzle that conceals a meaning; it is a construction with a multiplicity of meanings. To 'explain' a text is to recognize this. To do so it is necessary to break with the idea that a text is a harmonious unity, spiralling forth from a moment of overwhelming intentionality. Against this, he claims that the literary text is 'decentred'; it is incomplete in itself. To say this does not mean that something needs to be added in order to make it whole. His point is that all literary texts are 'decentred' (not centred on an authorial intention) in the specific sense that they consist of a confrontation between several discourses: explicit, implicit, present and absent. The task of critical practice is not, therefore, the attempt to measure and evaluate a text's coherence, its harmonious totality, its aesthetic unity, but instead to explain the disparities in the text that point to a conflict of meanings.

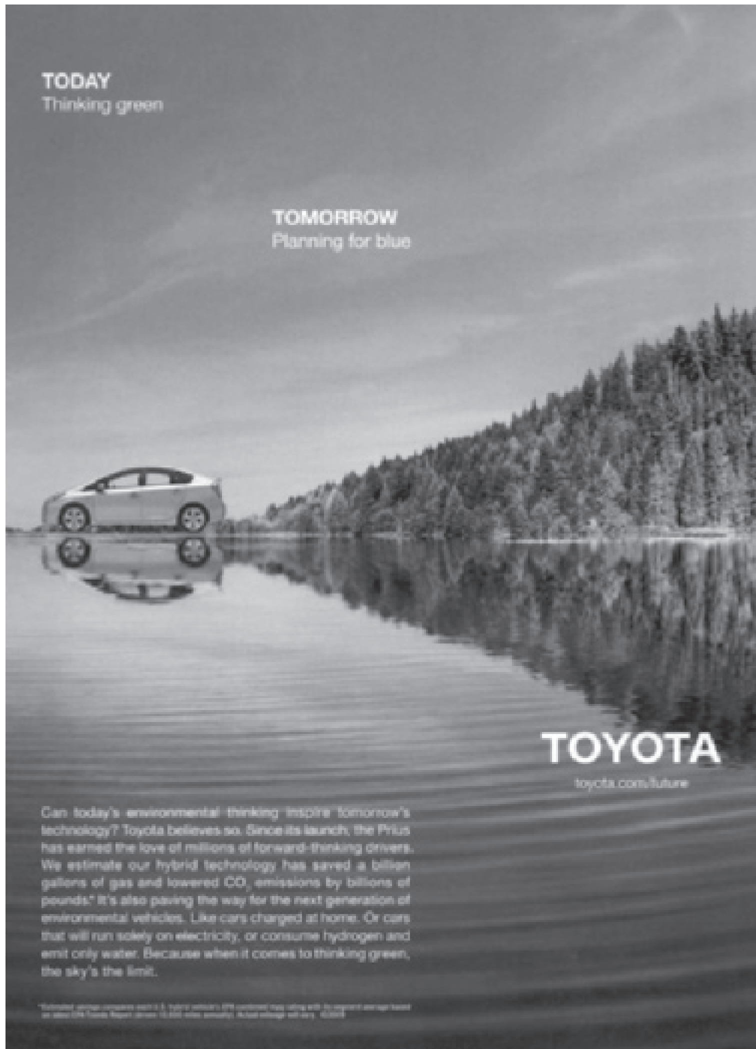

Photo 4.1 Advertising as an example of the 'problematic'.

Source: Image courtesy of The Advertising Archives

This conflict is not the sign of an imperfection; it reveals the inscription of an otherness in the work, through which it maintains a relationship with that which it is not, that which happens at its margins. To explain the work is to show that, contrary to appearances, it is not independent, but bears in its material substance the imprint of *a determinate absence* which is also the principle of its identity. The book is furrowed by the allusive presence of those other books against which it is elaborated; it circles about the absence of that which it cannot say, haunted by the absence of certain repressed words which make their return. The book is not

> the extension of a meaning; it is generated from the incompatibility of several meanings, the strongest bond by which it is attached to reality, in a tense and ever renewed confrontation (79–80; my italics).

A text may seek to control the production of meaning, but there is always a surplus of signification; that is, other meanings threatening to dislodge the authority of the primary meaning. It is this conflict of several meanings that structures a text: it displays this conflict but cannot speak it – its determinate absence. Traditionally, criticism has seen its role as making explicit what is implicit in the text, to make audible that which is merely a whisper (i.e. a single meaning). For Macherey, it is not a question of making what is there speak with more clarity so as to be finally sure of the text's meaning. Because a text's meanings are 'both interior and absent' (78), to simply repeat the text's self-knowledge is to fail to really explain the text. The task of a fully competent critical practice is not to make a whisper audible, nor to complete what the text leaves unsaid, but to produce a new knowledge of the text: one that explains the ideological necessity of its silences, its absences, its structuring incompleteness – the *staging* of that which it cannot speak.

> The act of knowing is not like listening to a discourse already constituted, a mere fiction which we have simply to translate. It is rather the elaboration of a new discourse, the articulation of a silence. Knowledge is not the discovery or reconstruction of a latent meaning, forgotten or concealed. It is something newly raised up, an addition to the reality from which it begins (6).

Borrowing from Sigmund Freud's work on dreams (see Chapter 5), Macherey contends that in order for something to be said, other things must be left unsaid. It is the reason(s) for these absences, these silences, within a text that must be interrogated. 'What is important in the work is what it does not say' (87). Again, as with Freud, who believed that the meanings of his patients' problems were not hidden in their conscious discourse, but repressed in the turbulent discourse of the unconscious, necessitating a subtle form of analysis acute to the difference between what is said and what is shown, Macherey's approach dances between the different nuances of *telling* and *showing*. This leads him to the claim that there is a 'gap', an 'internal distanciation', between what a text wants to say and what a text actually says. To explain a text it is necessary to go beyond it, to understand what it 'is compelled to say in order to say what it wants to say' (94). It is here that the text's 'unconscious' (Macherey's term for Althusser's problematic) is constituted. And it is in a text's unconscious that its relationship to the ideological and historical conditions of its existence is revealed. It is in the absent centre, hollowed out by conflicting discourses, that the text is related to history – to a particular moment in history and to the specific ideological discourses that circulate in that moment. The text's unconscious does not reflect historical contradictions; rather, it evokes, stages and displays them, allowing us not a 'scientific' knowledge of ideology, but an awareness of 'ideology in contradiction with itself'; breaking down before questions it cannot answer, failing to do what ideology is supposed to do: 'ideology exists precisely in order to efface all trace of contradiction' (130).

In a formal sense, a text always begins by posing a problem that is to be solved. The text then exists as a process of unfolding: the narrative movement to the final resolution of the problem. Macherey contends that between the problem posed and the resolution offered, rather than continuity, there is always a rupture. It is by examining this rupture that we discover the text's relationship with ideology and history: 'We always eventually find, at the edge of the text, the language of ideology, momentarily hidden, but eloquent by its very absence' (60).

All narratives contain an ideological project: that is, they promise to tell the 'truth' about something. Information is initially withheld on the promise that it will be revealed. Narrative constitutes a movement towards disclosure. It begins with a truth promised and ends with a truth revealed. To be rather schematic, Macherey divides the text into three instances: the ideological project (the 'truth' promised), the realization (the 'truth' revealed), and the unconscious of the text (produced by an act of symptomatic reading): the return of the repressed historical 'truth'. 'Science', he claims, 'does away with ideology, obliterates it; literature challenges ideology by using it. If ideology is thought of as a non-systematic ensemble of significations, the work proposes a *reading* of these significations, by combining them as signs. Criticism teaches us to read these signs' (133). In this way, Machereyan critical practice seeks to explain the way in which, by giving ideology form, the text displays ideology in contradiction with itself.

In a discussion of the work of the French science fiction writer Jules Verne, he demonstrates how Verne's work stages the contradictions of late nineteenth-century French imperialism. He argues that the ideological project of Verne's work is the *fantastic* staging of the adventures of French imperialism: its colonizing conquest of the earth. Each adventure concerns the hero's conquest of nature (a mysterious island, the moon, the bottom of the sea, the centre of the earth). In telling these stories, Verne is 'compelled' to tell another: each voyage of conquest becomes a voyage of rediscovery, as Verne's heroes discover that either others have been there before or are there already. The significance of this, for Macherey, lies in the disparity he perceives between 'representation' (what is intended: the subject of the narrative) and 'figuration' (how it is realized: its inscription in narrative): Verne 'represents' the ideology of French imperialism, while at the same time, through the act of 'figuration' (making material in *the form* of a fiction), undermines one of its central *myths* in the continual staging of the fact that the lands are always already occupied (similarly, the first edition of this book was written in the middle of a discursive avalanche of media – and other – claims that America was *discovered* in 1492, ignoring the fact that people had lived there for more than 15,000 years.). 'In the passage from the level of representation to that of figuration, ideology undergoes a complete *modification* . . . perhaps because no ideology is sufficiently consistent to survive the test of figuration' (194–5). Thus by giving fictional form to the ideology of imperialism, Verne's work – 'to read it against the grain of its intended meaning' (230) – stages the contradictions between the myth and the reality of imperialism. The stories do not provide us with a 'scientific' denunciation ('a knowledge in the strict sense') of imperialism, but by an act of symptomatic reading 'which dislodges the work internally', they 'make us see', 'make us perceive', 'make us feel', the terrible contradictions of the ideological discourses from which each text is constituted: 'from which it is born, in which it bathes, from

which it detaches itself . . . and to which it alludes' (Althusser, 1971: 222). Verne's science fiction, then, can be made to reveal to us – though not in the ways intended – the ideological and historical conditions of its emergence.

In the nineteenth century there were a great number of books written to advise young women on appropriate conduct. Here, for example, is an extract from Thomas Broadhurst's *Advice to Young Ladies on the Improvement of the Mind and Conduct of Life* (1810):

> She who is faithfully employed in discharging the various duties of a wife and daughter, a mother and a friend, is far more usefully occupied than one who, to the culpable neglect of the most important obligations, is daily absorbed by philosophic and literary speculations, or soaring aloft amidst the enchanted regions of fiction and romance (quoted in Mills, 2004: 80).

Rather than see this as a straightforward sign of women's oppression, a Machereyan analysis would interrogate the extent to which this text is also an indication of the refusal of women to occupy positions traditionally demanded of them. In other words, if women were not engaging in philosophic and literary speculation, there would be no need to advise them against it. Women actually engaging in literary and philosophic speculation (and probably so much more) is, therefore, the determinate absence of the text. Similarly, Sara Mills (2004) points out how women's travel writing in the nineteenth century had to continually address a discourse of femininity that suggested that travel was something beyond a woman's strength and commitment. For example, in Alexandra David-Neel's account of her travels in Tibet we read, 'For nineteen hours we had been walking. Strangely enough, I did not feel tired' (quoted in Mills, 2004: 90). It is the phrase 'strangely enough' that points to a determinate absence: a masculine discourse of disbelief that haunts the unconscious of the text.

Finally, Photo 4.2 shows two figures on an otherwise empty beach; they look cold and uncomfortable. When trying to decide what this photograph signifies, it is very likely that our understanding may well be organized and shaped by a historically specific determinate absence: a normative expectation of a beach as a place of holiday-makers, relaxed and enjoying themselves. It is this determinate absence that locates the 'meaning' of the photograph in a specific historical moment: before the rise of the seaside holiday in the 1840s, this normative expectation would have been unavailable as an interpretative framework. In other words, the meaning we make is both historical and structured by absence.

In Althusser's second formulation, ideology is still a representation of the imaginary relationship of individuals to the real conditions of existence, only now ideology is seen no longer as only a body of ideas, but as a lived, material practice – rituals, customs, patterns of behaviour, ways of thinking taking practical form – reproduced through the practices and productions of the Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs): education, organized religion, the family, organized politics, the media, the culture industries, etc. According to this second definition, 'all ideology has the function (which defines it) of "constructing" concrete individuals as subjects' (2009: 309). Ideological subjects are produced by acts of 'hailing' or 'interpellation'. Althusser uses the analogy of a police

Photo 4.2 Two figures on a beach.

officer hailing an individual: 'Hey, you there!' When the individual hailed turns in response, he or she has been interpellated; has become a subject of the police officer's discourse. In this way, ideology is a material practice that creates subjects who are in turn subjected to its specific patterns of thought and modes of behaviour.

This definition of ideology has had a significant effect on the field of cultural studies and the study of popular culture. Judith Williamson (1978), for example, deploys Althusser's second definition of ideology in her influential study of advertising, *Decoding Advertisements*. She argues that advertising is ideological in the sense that it represents an imaginary relationship to our real conditions of existence. Instead of class distinctions based on our role in the process of production, advertising continually suggests that what really matters are distinctions based on the consumption of particular goods. Thus social identity becomes a question of what we consume rather than what we produce. Like all ideology, advertising functions by interpellation: it creates subjects who in turn are subjected to its meanings and its patterns of consumption. The consumer is interpellated to make meaning and ultimately to purchase and consume and purchase and consume again. For example, when I am addressed in terms such as 'people like you' are turning to this or that product, I am interpellated as one of a group, but more importantly as an individual 'you' of that group. I am addressed as an individual who can recognize myself in the imaginary space opened up by the pronoun

'you'. Thus I am invited to become the imaginary 'you' spoken to in the advertisement. But such a process is for Althusser an act of ideological 'misrecognition': first, in the sense that in order for the advert to work it must attract many others who also recognize themselves in the 'you' (each one thinking they are the real 'you' of its discourse). Second, it is misrecognition in another sense: the 'you' I recognize in the advert is in fact a 'you' created by the advertisement. As Slavoj Žižek (1992) points out, interpellation works like this: 'I don't recognise myself in it because I'm its addressee, I become its addressee the moment I recognise myself in it' (12). Advertising, then, according to this perspective, flatters us into thinking we are the special 'you' of its discourse and in so doing we become subjects of and subjected to its material practices: acts of consumption. Advertising is thus ideological both in the way it functions and in the effects it produces.

One of the problems with Althusser's second model of ideology, and its application in cultural theory, is that it seems to work too well. Men and women are always successfully reproduced with all the necessary ideological habits required by the capitalist mode of production; there is no sense of failure, let alone any notion of conflict, struggle or resistance. In terms of popular culture, do advertisements, for example, always successfully interpellate us as consuming subjects? Moreover, even if interpellation works, previous interpellations may get in the way of current interpellations (contradict and prevent from working). Put simply, if I know that racism is wrong, a racist joke will fail to interpellate me. It was against this background of concerns that many working within the field of cultural studies turned to the work of the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci.

Hegemony

Central to the cultural studies appropriation of Gramsci is the concept of hegemony. Hegemony is for Gramsci a political concept developed to explain (given the exploitative and oppressive nature of capitalism) the absence of socialist revolutions in the Western capitalist democracies. The concept of hegemony is used by Gramsci (2009) to refer to a *condition in process* in which a dominant class (in alliance with other classes or class fractions) does not merely *rule* a society but *leads* it through the exercise of 'intellectual and moral leadership' (75). Hegemony involves a specific kind of consensus: a social group seeks to present its own particular interests as the general interests of the society as a whole. In this sense, the concept is used to suggest a society in which, despite oppression and exploitation, there is a high degree of consensus, a large measure of social stability; a society in which subordinate groups and classes appear to actively support and subscribe to values, ideals, objectives, cultural and political meanings, which bind them to, and 'incorporate' them into, the prevailing structures of power. For example, throughout most of the course of the twentieth century, general elections in Britain were contested by what are now the two main political parties, Labour and

Conservative. On each occasion the contest circled around the question, who best can administer capitalism (usually referred to by the less politically charged term 'the economy') – less public ownership, more public ownership, less taxation, more taxation, etc. And on each occasion, the mainstream media concurred. In this sense, the parameters of the election debate are ultimately dictated by the particular needs and interests of capitalism, presented as the interests and needs of society as a whole. Once the election is won the new prime minister will be accompanied on all official overseas visits by a large group of capitalists, each hoping that new business opportunities will be forthcoming. Similarly, new government policies will be justified and scrutinized in terms of how 'the markets' (i.e. capitalism in general) will respond. This is clearly an example of a situation in which the interests of one powerful section of society have been 'universalized' as the interests of the society as a whole. The situation seems perfectly 'natural', virtually beyond serious contention. But it was not always like this. Capitalism's hegemony is the result of profound political, social, cultural and economic changes that have taken place over a period of around 500 years. Until as late as the second part of the nineteenth century, capitalism's position was still uncertain.[3] It is only in the twenty-first century that the system seems to have won, or at least to be winning, especially with the political and economic collapse of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, and the introduction of the 'Open Door' policy and 'market socialism' in China. Capitalism is now, more or less, internationally hegemonic.

Although hegemony implies a society with a high degree of consensus, it should not be understood to refer to a society in which all conflict has been removed. What the concept is meant to suggest is a society in which conflict is contained and channelled into ideologically safe harbours; that is, hegemony is maintained (and must be continually maintained: it is an ongoing process) by dominant groups and classes 'negotiating' with, and making concessions to, subordinate groups and classes. For example, consider the historical case of British hegemony in the Caribbean. One of the ways in which Britain attempted to secure its control over the indigenous population, and the African men, women and children it had transported there as slaves, was by means of the imposition of a version of British culture (a standard practice for colonial regimes everywhere): part of the process was to institute English as the official language. In linguistic terms, the result was not the imposition of English, but, for the majority of the population, the creation of a new language. The dominant element of this new language is English, but the language itself is not simply English. What emerged was a transformed English, with new stresses and new rhythms, with some words dropped and new words introduced (from African languages and elsewhere). The new language is the result of a 'negotiation' between dominant and subordinate cultures, a language marked by both 'resistance' and 'incorporation': that is, not a language imposed from above, nor a language that had spontaneously arisen from below, but a language that is the result of a hegemonic struggle between two language cultures – a dominant language culture and a mix of subordinate language cultures, involving both 'resistance' and 'incorporation'.

Hegemony is never simply power imposed from above: it is always the result of 'negotiations' between dominant and subordinate groups, a process marked by both

'resistance' and 'incorporation'. There are of course limits to such negotiations and concessions. As Gramsci makes clear, they can never be allowed to challenge the economic fundamentals of class power. Moreover, in times of crisis, when moral and intellectual leadership is not enough to secure continued authority, the processes of hegemony are replaced, temporarily, by the coercive power of the 'repressive state apparatus': the army, the police, the prison system, etc.

Hegemony is 'organized' by those whom Gramsci designates 'organic intellectuals'. According to Gramsci, intellectuals are distinguished by their social function. That is to say, all men and women have the capacity for intellectual endeavour, but only certain men and women have in society the function of intellectuals. Each class, as Gramsci explains, creates 'organically' its own intellectuals:

> one or more strata of intellectuals which give it homogeneity and an awareness of its own function not only in the economic sphere but also in the social and political fields. The capitalist entrepreneur [for example] creates alongside himself the industrial technician, the specialist in political economy, the organisers of a new culture, of a new legal system, etc. (2009: 77).

Organic intellectuals function as class organizers (in the broadest sense of the term). It is their task to shape and to organize the reform of moral and intellectual life. I have argued elsewhere[4] that Matthew Arnold is best understood as an organic intellectual, what Gramsci identifies as one of 'an elite of men of culture, who have the function of providing leadership of a cultural and general ideological nature' (Storey, 1985: 217; Storey, 2010a). Gramsci tends to speak of organic intellectuals as individuals, but the way the concept has been mobilized in cultural studies, following Althusser's barely acknowledged borrowings from Gramsci, is in terms of *collective* organic intellectuals – the so-called 'ideological state apparatuses' of the family, television, the press, education, organized religion, the culture industries, etc.

Using hegemony theory, popular culture is what men and women make from their active consumption of the texts and practices of the culture industries. Youth subcultures are perhaps the most spectacular example of this process. Dick Hebdige (1979) offers a clear and convincing explanation of the process ('bricolage') by which youth subcultures appropriate for their own purposes and meanings the commodities commercially provided. Products are combined or transformed in ways not intended by their producers; commodities are re-articulated to produce 'oppositional' meanings. In this way, and through patterns of behaviour, ways of speaking, taste in music, etc., youth subcultures engage in symbolic forms of resistance to both dominant and parent cultures. Youth cultures, according to this model, always move from originality and opposition to commercial incorporation and ideological diffusion as the culture industries eventually succeed in marketing subcultural resistance for general consumption and profit. As Hebdige explains: 'Youth cultural styles may begin by issuing symbolic challenges, but they must end by establishing new sets of conventions; by creating new commodities, new industries or rejuvenating old ones' (96).

The concept of hegemony allows students of popular culture to free themselves from the disabling analysis of many of the previous approaches to the subject. Popular culture is no longer a history-stopping, imposed culture of political manipulation (the Frankfurt School); nor is it the sign of social decline and decay (the 'culture and civilization' tradition); nor is it something emerging spontaneously from below (some versions of culturalism); nor is it a meaning-machine imposing subjectivities on passive subjects (some versions of structuralism). Instead of these and other approaches, hegemony theory allows us to think of popular culture as a 'negotiated' mix of what is made both from 'above' and from 'below', both 'commercial' and 'authentic'; a shifting balance of forces between resistance and incorporation. This can be analysed in many different configurations: class, gender, generation, ethnicity, 'race', region, religion, disability, sexuality, etc. From this perspective, popular culture is a contradictory mix of competing interests and values: neither middle nor working class, neither racist nor non-racist, neither sexist nor non-sexist, neither homophobic nor homophilic . . . but always a shifting balance between the two – what Gramsci calls 'a compromise equilibrium' (2009: 76). The commercially provided culture of the culture industries is redefined, reshaped and redirected in tactical acts of selective consumption and productive acts of reading and articulation, often in ways not intended or even foreseen by its producers.

Post-Marxism and cultural studies

As Angela McRobbie (1992) observes, Marxism is no longer as influential in cultural studies as it has been in the past:

> Marxism, a major point of reference for the whole cultural studies project in the UK, has been undermined not just from the viewpoint of the postmodern critics who attack its teleological propositions, its meta-narrative status, its essentialism, economism, Eurocentrism, and its place within the whole Enlightenment project, but also, of course, as a result of the events in Eastern Europe, with the discrediting of much of the socialist project (719).

What is certain, as she explains, is that 'the return to a pre-postmodern Marxism as marked out by critics like Fredric Jameson (1984) and David Harvey (1989) is untenable because the terms of that return are predicated on prioritizing economic relations and economic determinations over cultural and political relations by positioning these latter in a mechanical and reflectionist role' (ibid.). But more than this, there is a real sense in which cultural studies was always-already post-Marxist. As Hall (1992) points out,

> There was never a prior moment when cultural studies and Marxism represented a perfect theoretical fit. From the beginning . . . there was always-already the

> question of the great inadequacies, theoretically and politically, the resounding silences, the great evasions of Marxism – the things that Marx did not talk about or seem to understand which were our privileged object of study: culture, ideology, language, the symbolic. These were always-already, instead, the things which had imprisoned Marxism as a mode of thought, as an activity of critical practice – its orthodoxy, its doctrinal character, its determinism, its reductionism, its immutable law of history, its status as a metanarrative. That is to say, the encounter between British cultural studies and Marxism has first to be understood as the engagement with a problem – not a theory, not even a problematic (279).

Post-Marxism can mean at least two things. As Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (2001) point out in their deeply influential contribution to post-Marxism, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*, 'if our intellectual project in this book is *post*-Marxist, it is evidently also post-*Marxist*' (4). To be *post*-Marxist is to leave behind Marxism for something better, whereas to be post-*Marxist* is to seek to transform Marxism, by adding to it recent theoretical developments from, especially, feminism, postmodernism, post-structuralism and Lacanian psychoanalysis. Laclau and Mouffe are more post-*Marxist* than they are *post*-Marxist. They envisage a partnership between Marxism and the 'new feminism, the protest movements of ethnic, national and sexual minorities, the anti-institutional ecology struggles waged by marginalized layers of the population, the anti-nuclear movement, the atypical forms of social struggle in countries on the capitalist periphery' (1). In my view, cultural studies is post-Marxist in the positive sense advocated by Laclau and Mouffe.

The concept of discourse is central to the development of post-Marxism. As Laclau (1993) explains, 'The basic hypothesis of a discursive approach is that the very possibility of perception, thought and action depends on the structuration of a certain meaningful field which pre-exists any factual immediacy' (431). To explain what they mean by discourse Laclau and Mouffe (2009) give an example of two people building a wall. The first person asks the second to pass him/her a brick. On receiving the brick, the second person adds it to the wall. The totality of this operation consists in a linguistic moment (the request for a brick) and a non-linguistic moment (adding the brick to the wall). Discourse, according to Laclau and Mouffe, consists in the totality of the linguistic and non-linguistic. In other words, they use the term discourse 'to emphasize the fact that every social configuration is *meaningful*. If I kick a spherical object in the street or if I kick a ball in a football match, the *physical* fact is the same, but its *meaning* is different. The object is a football only to the extent that it establishes a system of relations with other objects, and these relations are not given by the mere referential materiality of the objects, but are, rather, socially constructed. This systematic set of relations is what we call discourse' (159).

Moreover,

> the discursive character of an object does not, by any means, imply putting its existence into question. The fact that a football is only a football as long as it is integrated within a system of socially constructed rules does not mean that it ceases

> to be a physical object. . . . For the same reason it is the discourse which constitutes the subject position of the social agent, and not, therefore, the social agent which is the origin of discourse – the same system of rules that makes that spherical object into a football, makes me a player (159).

To understand this we have to differentiate between objectivity (the supposed ability to judge without context or interest) and the objective world, which exists independent of our experiences of it or our thoughts about it. In other words, objects exist independently of their discursive articulation, but it is only within discourse that they can exist as meaningful objects. For example, earthquakes exist in the real world, but whether they are

> constructed in terms of 'natural phenomena' or 'expressions of the wrath of God', depends upon the structuring of a discursive field. What is denied is not that such objects exist externally to thought, but the rather different assertion that they could constitute themselves as objects outside any discursive condition of emergence (Laclau and Mouffe, 2001: 108).

As Gramsci (2007) points out, 'East and West . . . never cease to be "objectively real" even though when analysed they turn out to be nothing more than a "historical" or "conventional construct"' (175).

> It is obvious that East and West are arbitrary and conventional (historical) constructions, since every spot on the earth is simultaneously East and West. Japan is probably the Far East not only for the European but also for the American from California and even for the Japanese himself, who, through English political culture might call Egypt the Near East. . . . Yet these references are real, they correspond to real facts, they allow one to travel by land and by sea and to arrive at the predetermined destination (176).

In other words, East and West are historical constructions, directly connected to the imperial power of the West. However, they are forms of signification that have been realized and embedded in social practice: cultural constructs they may be, but they do designate real geographic locations and guide real human movement.

As Gramsci's example makes clear, meanings produced in discourse inform and organize social action. It is only in discourse, for example, that 'a relation of subordination' can become 'a relation of oppression', and thereby constitute itself as a site of struggle (Laclau and Mouffe 153). Someone may be 'objectively' oppressed but unless they recognize their subordination as oppression, it is unlikely that this relation will ever become antagonistic and therefore open to the possibility of change. Hegemony works, as Laclau (1993) explains, by the transformation of antagonism into simple difference.

> A class is hegemonic not so much to the extent that it is able to impose a uniform conception of the world on the rest of society, but to the extent that it can articulate different visions of the world in such a way that their potential antagonism is neutralised. The English bourgeoisie of the 19th century was transformed into a

> hegemonic class not through the imposition of a uniform ideology upon other classes, but to the extent that it succeeded in articulating different ideologies to its hegemonic project by an elimination of their antagonistic character (161–2).

'Articulation' is a key term in post-Marxist cultural studies. 'The practice of articulation', as Laclau and Mouffe (2001) explain, 'consists in the . . . partial fix[ing] of meaning' (113). Hall (1996b) has developed the concept to explain the ways in which culture is a terrain of ideological struggle. Like Laclau and Mouffe, he argues that texts and practices are not inscribed with meaning; meaning is always the result of an act of articulation. As he points out, 'Meaning is a social production, a practice. The world has to be *made to mean*' (2009a: 121). He also draws on the work of the Russian theorist Valentin Volosinov (1973). Volosinov argues that texts and practices are 'multi-accentual': that is, they can be 'spoken' with different 'accents' by different people in different discourses and different social contexts for different politics. When, for example, a black performer uses the word 'nigger' to attack institutional racism, it is 'spoken' with an 'accent' very different from the 'accent' given the word in, say, the racist discourse of a neo-Nazi. This is, of course, not simply a question of linguistic struggle – a conflict over semantics – but a sign of political struggle about who can claim the power and the authority to (partially) fix the meaning of social reality.

An interesting example of the processes of articulation is the reggae music of Rastafarian culture. Bob Marley, for example, had international success with songs articulating the values and beliefs of Rastafari. This success can be viewed in two ways. On the one hand, it signals the circulation of the 'message' of his religious convictions to an enormous audience worldwide; undoubtedly for many of his audience the music had the effect of enlightenment, understanding and perhaps even conversion to, and bonding for those already convinced of, the principles of the faith. On the other hand, the music has made and continues to make enormous profits for the music industry (promoters, Island Records, etc.). What we have is a paradox in which the anti-capitalist politics of Rastafari are being articulated in the economic interests of capitalism: the music is helping to reproduce the very system it seeks to condemn; that is, the politics of Rastafari are being expressed in a form that is ultimately of financial benefit to the dominant culture (i.e. as a commodity that circulates for profit). Nevertheless, the music *is* an expression of an oppositional (religious) politics, and it may circulate as such, and it may produce certain political and cultural effects. Therefore, Rastafarian reggae is a force for change that paradoxically stabilizes (at least economically) the very forces of power it seeks to overthrow.

Another example, in some ways more compelling than that of reggae, is the music of the American counterculture. It inspired people to resist the draft and to organize against *Amerika*'s (spelling used by political sections of the counterculture, intended to imply, by use of the Germanic 'k', that the USA was fascist) war in Vietnam; yet, at the same time, its music made profits (over which it had no control) that could then be used to support the war effort in Vietnam. The more Jefferson Airplane sang 'All your private property/Is target for your enemy/And your enemy/Is *We*',[5] the more money RCA Records made. The proliferation of Jefferson Airplane's anti-capitalist politics

increased the profits of their capitalist record company. Again, this is an example of the process of articulation: the way in which dominant groups in society attempt to 'negotiate' oppositional voices on to a terrain which secures for the dominant groups a continued position of leadership. The music of the counterculture was not denied expression (and there can be little doubt that this music produced particular cultural and political effects), but what is also true is that this music was also articulated in the economic interests of the war-supporting capitalist music industry.[6] As Keith Richards of the Rolling Stones discovered,

> We found out, and it wasn't for years that we did, that all the bread we made for Decca was going into making black boxes that go into American Air Force bombers to bomb fucking North Vietnam. They took the bread we made for them and put it into the radar section of their business. When we found that out, it blew our minds. That was it. Goddam, you find out you've helped kill God knows how many thousands of people without really knowing it (quoted in Storey, 2010a: 28–9).

In Chapter 3 we examined Williams's (2009) social definition of culture. We discussed it in terms of how it broadens the definition of culture: instead of culture being defined as only the 'elite' texts and practices (ballet, opera, the novel, poetry), Williams redefined culture to include *as* culture, for example, pop music, television, cinema, advertising, going on holiday, etc. However, another aspect of Williams's social definition of culture has proved even more important for cultural studies, especially post-Marxist cultural studies – the connection he makes between meaning and culture.

> There is the 'social' definition of culture, in which culture is a description of a particular way of life, *which expresses certain meanings and values* not only in art and learning but also in institutions and ordinary behaviour. The analysis of culture, from such a definition, is *the clarification of the meanings and value*s implicit in a particular way of life (32; my italics).

The importance of a particular way of life is that it 'expresses certain meanings and values'. Cultural analysis from the perspective of this definition of culture 'is the clarification of the meanings and values implicit in a particular way of life'. Moreover, culture as a signifying system is not reducible to 'a particular way of life'; rather, it is fundamental to the shaping and holding together of a particular way of life. This is not to reduce everything 'upwards' to culture as a signifying system, but it is to insist that culture, defined in this way, should be understood 'as essentially involved in all forms of social activity' (Williams, 1981: 13). While there is more to life than signifying systems, it is nevertheless the case that 'it would . . . be wrong to suppose that we can ever usefully discuss a social system without including, as a central part of its practice, its signifying systems, on which, as a system, it fundamentally depends' (207).

Following this definition, and the discourse theory of Laclau and Mouffe, post-Marxist cultural studies defines culture as the production, circulation and consumption of meanings. As Hall (1997a), for example, explains, 'Culture . . . is not so much a set of things – novels and paintings or TV programmes and comics – as a process, a set of practices. Primarily, culture is concerned with the production and exchange of meanings – the giving and taking of meaning' (2). According to this definition, cultures do not so much consist of, say, books; cultures are the shifting networks of signification in which, say, books are *made* to signify as meaningful objects. For example, if I pass a business card to someone in China, the polite way to do it is with two hands. If I pass it with one hand I may cause offence. This is clearly a matter of culture. However, the 'culture' is not simply in the social act, nor is it just in the materiality of the card; it is in the 'realized' meaning of both act and card. In other words, there is nothing essentially polite about using two hands; using two hands has been made to signify politeness. Nevertheless, signification has become embodied in a material practice, which may, in turn, produce material effects (I shall say more about this in Chapter 11). Similarly, as Marx (1976c) observed, 'one man is king only because other men stand in the relation of subjects to him. They, on the contrary, imagine that they are subjects because he is king' (149). This relationship works because they share a culture in which such relations are meaningful. Outside such a culture this relationship would seem meaningless. Being a king, therefore, is not a gift of nature but something constructed in culture. It is culture and not nature that gives the relation meaning.

To share a culture, therefore, is to interpret the world – make it meaningful and experience it as meaningful – in recognizably similar ways. So-called 'culture shock' happens when we encounter radically different networks of meaning: when our 'natural' or our 'common sense' is confronted by someone else's 'natural' or 'common sense'. However, cultures are never simply shifting networks of shared meanings. On the contrary, cultures are always both shared and contested networks of meanings: culture is where we share and contest meanings of ourselves, of each other and of the social worlds in which we live.

Post-Marxist cultural studies draws two conclusions from this way of thinking about culture. First, although the world exists in all its enabling and constraining materiality outside culture, it is only in culture that the world *can be made to mean*. In other words, culture constructs the realities it appears only to describe. Second, because different meanings can be ascribed to the same 'text' (anything that can be made to signify), meaning making (i.e. the making of culture) is always a potential site of struggle and/or negotiation. For example, masculinity has real material conditions of existence, which we think of as 'biological', but there are different ways of representing masculinity in culture, different ways of 'being masculine'. Moreover, these different ways do not all carry the same claims to 'authenticity' and 'normality'. Masculinity, therefore, may depend on biological conditions of existence, but what it *means*, and the struggle over what it *means*, always takes place *in* culture. This is not a question of semantic difference – a simple question of interpreting the world differently – it is about relations of culture and power; about who can claim the power and authority to define social reality; to *make the world (and the things in it) mean* in particular ways.

Culture and power is the primary object of study in post-Marxist cultural studies. As Hall (1997a: 4) explains, 'Meanings [i.e. cultures] . . . regulate and organize our conduct and practices – they help to set the rules, norms and conventions by which social life is ordered and governed. They are . . . , therefore, what those who wish to govern and regulate the conduct and ideas of others seek to structure and shape.' Meanings have a 'material' existence, in that they help organize practice; they establish norms of behaviour, as we recognized in the examples of different masculinities and the passing of a business card in China.

In other words, then, dominant ways of making the world meaningful, produced by those with the power to make their meanings circulate in the world, can generate the 'hegemonic discourses', which may come to assume an authority over the ways in which we see, think, communicate and act in the world and become the 'common sense' which directs our actions or become that against which our actions are directed. However, although post-Marxist cultural studies recognizes that the culture industries are a major site of ideological production, constructing powerful images, descriptions, definitions, frames of reference for understanding the world, it rejects the view that 'the people' who consume these productions are 'cultural dupes', victims of 'an up-dated form of the opium of the people'. As Hall (2009b) insists,

> That judgment may make us feel right, decent and self-satisfied about our denunciations of the agents of mass manipulation and deception – the capitalist cultural industries: but I don't know that it is a view which can survive for long as an adequate account of cultural relationships; and even less as a socialist perspective on the culture and nature of the working class. Ultimately, the notion of the people as a purely passive, outline force is a deeply unsocialist perspective (512).

Post-Marxist cultural studies is informed by the proposition that people *make* popular culture from the repertoire of commodities supplied by the culture industries. *Making* popular culture ('production in use') can be empowering to subordinate and resistant to dominant understandings of the world. But this is not to say that popular culture is always empowering and resistant. To deny the passivity of consumption is not to deny that sometimes consumption is passive; to deny that consumers are cultural dupes is not to deny that the culture industries seek to manipulate. But it is to deny that popular culture is little more than a degraded landscape of commercial and ideological manipulation, imposed from above in order to make profit and secure social control. Post-Marxist cultural studies insists that to decide these matters requires vigilance and attention to the details of the production, distribution and consumption of the commodities from which people may or may not make popular culture. These are not matters that can be decided once and for all (outside the contingencies of history and politics) with an elitist glance and a condescending sneer. Nor can they be read off from the moment of production (locating meaning, pleasure, ideological effect, the probability of incorporation, the possibility of resistance, in, variously, the intention, the means of production or the production itself): these are only aspects of the contexts for 'production in use';

and it is, ultimately, in 'production in use' that questions of meaning, pleasure, ideological effect, incorporation or resistance can be (contingently) decided.

Notes

1. See Storey 1992 and 2010a.
2. See *New Left Review* (1977).
3. See Stedman Jones (1998).
4. See Storey (1985 and 2010a).
5. 'We Can Be Together', from the album *Volunteers* (1969).
6. See Storey (2010a and 2009).

Further reading

Storey, John (ed.), *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: A Reader*, 4th edn, Harlow: Pearson Education, 2009. This is the companion volume to the previous edition of this book. A fully updated 5th edition containing further readings is due for publication in 2018. An interactive website is also available (www.routledge.com/cw/storey), which contains helpful student resources and a glossary of terms for each chapter.

Barrett, Michele, *The Politics of Truth: From Marx to Foucault*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991. An interesting introduction to 'post-Marxism'.

Bennett, Tony, *Formalism and Marxism*, London: Methuen, 1979. Contains helpful chapters on Althusser and Macherey.

Bennett, Tony, Colin Mercer and Janet Woollacott (eds), *Culture, Ideology and Social Process*, London: Batsford, 1981. Section 4 consists of extracts from Gramsci and three essays informed by hegemony theory. The book also contains similar sections on culturalism and structuralism.

Hebdige, Dick, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*, London: Methuen, 1979. The seminal account of youth subcultures: an excellent introduction to hegemony theory and popular culture.

Laing, Dave, *The Marxist Theory of Art: An Introductory Survey*, Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1978. A very readable introduction to Marxist theories of culture. Contains an interesting section on popular culture.

Marx, Karl and Frederick Engels, *On Literature and Art*, St Louis: Telos, 1973. A useful selection of the writings by Marx and Engels on matters cultural.

Nelson, Cary and Lawrence Grossberg (eds), *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, London: Macmillan, 1988. An interesting collection of essays on Marxism and culture.

Showstack Sassoon, Anne (ed.), *Approaches to Gramsci*, London: Writers and Readers, 1982. A collection of essays on Gramsci. Contains a useful glossary of key terms.

Sim, Stuart (ed.), *Post-Marxism: A Reader*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998. Interesting collection of essays on the question of post-Marxism.

Simon, Roger, *Gramsci's Political Thought: An Introduction*, London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1982. A very readable introduction to Gramsci.

Slater, Phil, *Origin and Significance of the Frankfurt School: A Marxist Perspective*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977. The book provides a critical overview of the work of the Frankfurt School. Chapter 4, on the culture industry, is of particular interest to the student of popular culture.

Storey, John, *Culture and Power in Cultural Studies: The Politics of Signification*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010. A collection of essays examining culture from the perspective of Gramscian cultural studies.

Storey, John, *Utopian Desire*, London: Routledge, forthcoming. The book explores radical utopianism from the perspective of a Gramscian cultural studies.

Wayne, Mike, *Marxism and Media Studies*, London: Verso. An excellent overview of what should be the focus of Marxist media studies.