Introduction to Cultural Studies

مقرر: مدخل إلى الثقافة العامة

الفرقة: الثالثة برنامج اللغة الإنجليزية والترجمة

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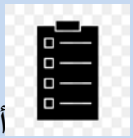
 **فيديو للمشاهدة.**

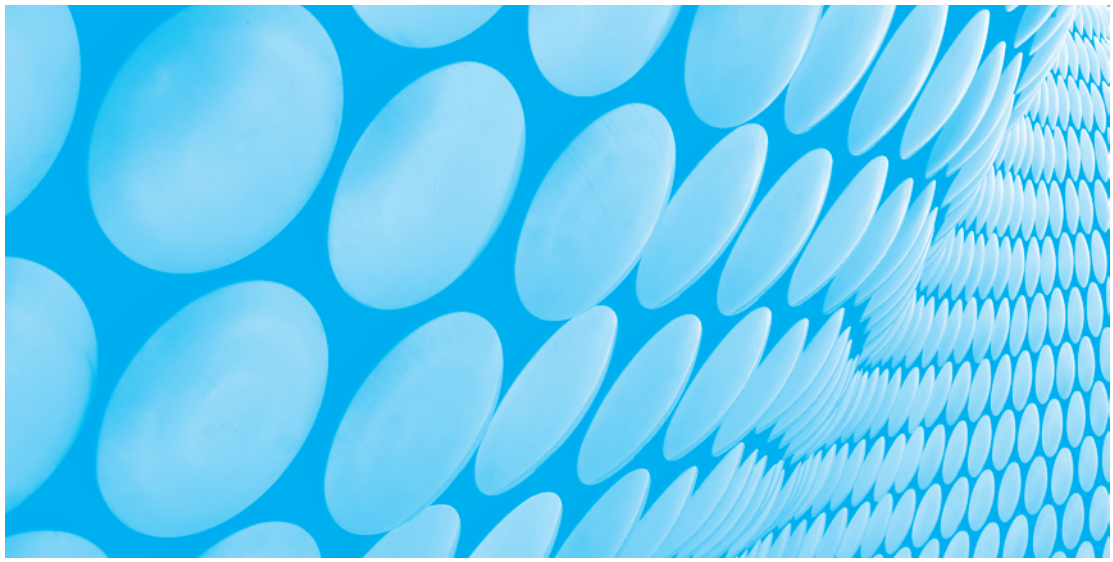
 نص للقراءة والدراسة.

 **رابط خارجي.**

 **أسئلة للتفكير والتقييم الذاتي.**

 **أنشطة ومهام.**

Part 1 Cultural theory



Chapter 1

Culture and cultural studies

1.0 Introduction

Cultural studies is a new way of engaging in the study of culture. In the past many academic subjects – including anthropology, history, literary studies, human geography and sociology – have brought their own disciplinary concerns to the study of culture. However, in recent decades there has been a renewed interest in the study of culture that has crossed disciplinary boundaries. The resulting activity, cultural studies, has emerged as an intriguing and exciting area of intellectual inquiry that has already shed important new light on the character of human cultures and which promises to continue so to do. While there is little doubt that cultural studies is coming to be widely recognised as an important and distinctive field of study, it does seem to encompass a potentially enormous area. This is because the term 'culture' has a complex history and range of usages, which have provided a legitimate focus of inquiry for several academic disciplines. In order to begin to delimit the field that this textbook considers, we have divided this chapter into four main sections:

1.1 A discussion of some principal *definitions* of culture.

1.2 An introduction to the *core issues* raised by the definitions and study of culture.

1.3 A review of some leading *theoretical accounts* that address these core issues.

1.4 An outline of *our view* of the developing field of cultural studies.

In introducing our book in this way, we hope to show the complexity of the central notion of culture and thereby to define some important issues in the field of cultural studies.

Learning objectives

- To understand different definitions of the concept of culture.
- To identify the principal issues in the study of culture.
- To learn about some of the leading theoretical perspectives in cultural studies.

1.1 What is culture?

The term 'culture' has a complex history and diverse range of meanings in contemporary discourse. Culture can refer to Shakespeare or Superman comics, opera or football, who does the washing-up at home or how the office of the President of the United States of America is organised. Culture is found in your local street, in your own city and country, as well as on the other side of the world. Small children, teenagers, adults and older people all have their own cultures; but they may also share a wider culture with others.

Given the evident breadth of the term, it is essential to begin by trying to define what culture is. Culture is a word that has grown over the centuries to reach its present broad meaning. One of the founders of cultural studies in Britain, **Raymond Williams** (p. 3), has traced the development of the concept and provided an influential ordering of its modern uses. Outside the natural sciences, the term 'culture' is chiefly used in three relatively distinct senses to refer to: the arts and artistic activity; the learned, primarily symbolic features of a particular way of life; and a process of development.

Culture with a big 'C'

In everyday talk, culture is believed to consist of the 'works and practices of intellectual and especially artistic activity', thus culture is the word that describes 'music, literature, painting and sculpture, theatre and film' (Williams, 1983b: 90). Culture in this sense is widely believed to concern 'refined' pursuits in which the 'cultured' person engages.

Culture as a 'way of life'

In the human sciences the word 'culture' has achieved wide currency to refer to the creation and use of **symbols** (p. 214) which distinguish 'a particular way of life, whether of a people, a period or a group, or humanity in general' (Williams, 1983b: 90). Only humans, it is often argued, are capable of creating and transmitting culture and we are able to do this because we create and use symbols. Humans possess a symbolising capacity which is the basis of our cultural being.

What, then, is a symbol? It is when people agree that some word or drawing or gesture will stand for either an idea (for example, a person, like a pilot), or an object (a box, for example), or a feeling (like contempt). When this has been done, then a symbol conveying a shared idea has been created. These shared ideas are symbolically mediated or expressed: for example, by a word in the case of 'pilot', by a drawing to convey the idea of a box or by a gesture to convey contempt. It is these meanings that make up a culture. A symbol defines what something means, although a single symbol may have many meanings. For example, a flag may stand for a material entity like a country and an abstract value such as patriotism. To study culture is thus to ask what is the meaning of a style of dress, a code of manners, a place, a language, a norm of conduct, a system of belief, an architectural style, and so on. Language, both spoken and written, is obviously a vast repository of symbols. But symbols can take numerous forms: flags, hairstyles, road signs, smiles, BMWs, business suits – the list is endless.

Given the way that we have discussed culture so far, it might be thought that culture is everything and everywhere. Indeed, some approaches to the study of culture take such a position, especially, for instance, those coming at the topic from a more anthropological point of view. Thus, the nineteenth-century anthropologist Edward Tylor (1871: 1) famously defined culture as 'that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man [sic] as a member of society'. This definition underlines the pervasiveness of culture in social life. It also emphasises that culture is a product of humans living together and that it is learned. A similar idea informs the definition offered by the American poet and critic T.S. Eliot:

Key influence 1.1

Raymond Williams (1921–88)

Raymond Williams was a Welsh cultural analyst and literary critic. His 'serious' attention to 'ordinary culture' was a key influence on the development of the idea of cultural studies, of which he is normally seen as a founding figure.

Born into a Welsh working-class family, Williams studied at Cambridge before serving as a tank commander in the Second World War. He returned to Cambridge after the war to complete his degree. He taught for the Workers' Educational Association during the 1950s, before returning to Cambridge to take up a lectureship in 1961. He was appointed Professor of Drama in 1974.

Williams's earliest work addressed questions of textual analysis and drama and can be seen as reasonably conventional in approach, if not emphasis. His influence was enhanced and reputation made by two key books: *Culture and Society* (1958) and *The Long Revolution* (1961). The former re-examined a range of authors to chart the nature of the formation of culture as a response to the development of industrialism. The latter pointed to the democratic potential of the 'long revolution' in culture. Williams distanced himself from the elitist and conservative perspectives of F.R. Leavis and T.S. Eliot in arguing for both socialist transformation and cultural democracy. Williams emphasised these themes in *Communications* (1962) which also contained some proto-typical media analysis. Television was the subject of the later *Television: Technology and Cultural Form* (1974) which introduced the concept of 'flow'. From the 1960s on, Williams's work became more influenced by Marxism, resulting in *Marxism and Literature* (1977) and *Culture* (1981). His *The Country and the City* (1973a) greatly influenced subsequent interdisciplinary work on space and place. His vast corpus of work (including over 30 books) also addressed drama, cultural theory, the environment, the English novel, the development of language, leftist politics and, in the period before his death, Welshness. He was also a prolific novelist.

The impact of Williams's rather dense and 'difficult' writings was often in terms of his overall approach, cultural materialism, and emphasis rather than in the detail of his analyses. His lifelong commitment to socialism, combined with the desire for cultural communication and democracy, was greatly attractive to a generation of leftists. His current status is enhanced by the use of his concept of structure of feeling to study various phenomena from literary texts to urban ways of life.

Further reading

Williams wrote a vast amount, so much so that his identity has been seen as that of 'writer'. The first reference is a revealing set of interviews, which combine the life and work.

Williams, R. (1979) *Politics and Letters: Interviews with New Left Review*, London: New Left Books.

Eldridge, J. and Eldridge, L. (1994) *Raymond Williams: Making Connections*, London: Routledge.

Inglis, F. (1995) *Raymond Williams*, London: Routledge.

Milner, A. (2002) *Re-imagining Cultural Studies: The Promise of Cultural Materialism*, London: Sage.

> Culture . . . includes all the characteristic activities and interests of a people. Derby Day, Henley Regatta, Cowes, the 12th of August, a cup final, the dog races, the pin table, the dart board, Wensleydale cheese, boiled cabbage cut into sections, beetroot in vinegar, nineteenth century Gothic churches, and the music of Elgar.
>
> (Eliot, 1948, quoted in Williams 1963[1958]: 230)

Other approaches have tended to argue that some areas of social life are more properly thought of as political or economic than cultural and thus can in some fashion be separated from culture. Thus, those who would define culture in the sense of 'arts and artistic activity' would tend to exclude some institutions and phenomena that others who accept the definition of 'way of life' would see as part of culture. There is little consensus on this matter but it is clear that it will be an issue in this book.

Culture in the sense of way of life, however, must be distinguished from the neighbouring concept of society. In speaking of society we refer to the pattern of social interactions and relationships between individuals and groups. Often a society will occupy a territory,

be capable of reproducing itself and share a culture. But for many large-scale, modern societies it may make more sense to say that several cultures coexist (not always harmoniously) within the society.

Process and development

The earliest uses of the word 'culture' in the late Middle Ages refer to the tending or cultivation of crops and animals (hence agriculture); a little later the same sense was transferred to describe the cultivation of people's minds. This dimension of the word 'culture' draws attention to its subsequent use to describe the development of the individual's capacities and it has been extended to embrace the idea that cultivation is itself a general, social and historical process (Williams, 1983b: 90–1).

The different senses in which the concept of culture can be used are illustrated in the following examples. A play by Shakespeare might be said to be a distinct piece of cultural work (sense: culture with a big 'C'), to be a product of a particular (English) way of life (sense: culture as a way of life) and to represent a certain stage of cultural development (sense: culture as process and development). Rock 'n' roll may be analysed by the skills of its performers (culture with a big C); by its association with youth culture in the late 1950s and early 1960s (culture as a way of life); and as a musical form, looking for its origins in other styles of music and also seeing its influence on later musical forms (culture as a process and development).

In this book we shall consider all three of these different senses of culture. However, it is important to note that these definitions and their use raise a number of complex issues and problems for the analysis of culture which we introduce in the next part of the chapter.

1.2 Issues and problems in the study of culture

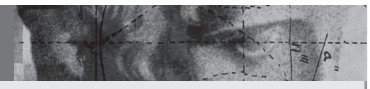
The three senses of culture identified in the previous part of this chapter have tended to be studied from different points of view. Hence, artistic or intellectual activity has commonly been the province of the humanities scholar. Ways of life have been examined by the anthropologist or the sociologist, while the development of culture might seem to be the province of the historian using historical documents and methods. These disciplines have tended to approach culture in different ways and from different perspectives. However, as we shall demonstrate in this chapter, the special merit of a distinct cultural studies approach is that it facilitates the identification of a set of core issues and problems that no one discipline or approach can solve on its own. Let us explain what we mean through the identification and exemplification of these core questions. As you will see, they both start and finish with the issue of the relationship between the personal and the cultural.

How do people become part of a culture?

Culture is not something that we simply absorb – it is learned. In anthropology this process is referred to as acculturation or enculturation. In psychology it is described as conditioning. Sociologists have tended to use the term 'socialisation' to describe the process by which we become social and cultural beings. The sociologist Anthony Giddens (2006:163) describes socialisation as the process whereby, through contact with other human beings, 'the helpless infant gradually becomes a self-aware, knowledgeable human being, skilled in the ways of the culture in which he or she was born'. Sociologists have distinguished two stages of socialisation. Primary socialisation usually takes place within a family, or family-like grouping, and lasts from birth until the child participates in larger and more diverse groupings beyond the family, usually beginning with school in Western societies. Primary socialisation involves such elements as the acquisition of language and a gendered **identity** (p. 142). Secondary socialisation refers to all the subsequent influences that an individual experiences in a lifetime. Psychology and its subdisciplines like **psychoanalysis** (p. 5) pay particular attention to childhood and the conditioning that relates to the acquisition of a gender and a sexuality. Gender refers to the social roles that different societies define as masculine or feminine. Sexuality refers to the desires and sexual orientation of a particular indi-

vidual. The founder of psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud, argued that masculinity and femininity and the choice of a sexual object are not directly related to biology, but are a result of conditioning. Feminists have used Freud's theories to oppose the idea that men are naturally superior, even though Freud himself was not

Defining concept 1.1



Psychoanalysis

Psychoanalysis is the name given to the method developed by Sigmund Freud (1856–1939). Freud himself used his interpretative technique to analyse literature and art. Psychoanalytic theory has subsequently developed into a number of different schools, some of which have influenced **feminist** (p. 82), **postcolonial** (p. 143), **Marxist** (p. 65) and **postmodernist** (p. 295) cultural criticism. Critics who have used psychoanalytic ideas include members of the **Frankfurt School** (p. 75), **Julia Kristeva** (p. 149) and **Judith Butler** (p. 148).

Freud's method of interpretation is first developed in *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900). He describes how symbols in dreams represent condensed or displaced meanings that, when interpreted, reveal the dreamer's unconscious fears and desires. In *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life* (1901), he showed how slips of the tongue and the inability to remember words are also symptoms of unconscious mental processes. Condensation, displacement and 'symptomatic' methods of interpretation have been deployed by critics to decode cultural texts. Psychoanalysis has been particularly influential in film criticism. Freud developed a tripartite theory of the mind: the id or unconscious; the ego, which adjusts the mind to external reality; and the super-ego, which incorporates a moral sense of society's expectations. Perhaps his most important work was on a theory of sexuality. The psychoanalytic concept of sexuality posits a complex understanding of desire. The fixed binarism of masculine/feminine given by earlier biologistic theories of sexual difference tended to assume an equally fixed desire by men for women and by women for men. In psychoanalysis, there is no presupposition that sexual desire is limited to heterosexual relations. Rather, the adaptable nature of desire is stressed and an important role is given to fantasy in the choice of sexual object. Freud's work was still partially attached to a theory of biological development.

The influential psychoanalytic critic, Jacques Lacan, argued that the unconscious is structured like language. In other words, culture rather than biology is the important factor. Lacan's work has been important for feminist critics, who have developed an analysis of gender difference using Freud's Oedipus complex. According to feminist psychoanalytic criticism, the context in which feminine sexuality develops is different to that of masculine sexuality. Men and women enter into different relationships with the symbolic order through the Oedipus complex. The Oedipus complex arises through the primary identification of both boys and girls with their mother. Paradoxically, it is the mother who first occupies the 'phallic' position of authority. The discovery that the mother does not hold as powerful a position in society as the father (it is the father who symbolises the phallus) creates the crisis through which the boy and the girl receive a gendered identity. The boy accepts his 'inferior phallic powers', sometimes known as 'the castration complex', but with the promise that he will later occupy as powerful a position in relation to women as his father does. The girl learns of her subordinate position in relation to the symbolic order, her castration complex, but for her, there is no promise of full entry to the symbolic order; consequently her feeling of lack persists as a sense of exclusion (Mitchell, 1984: 230).

In cultural studies the theory of the unconscious has allowed a more subtle understanding of the relationship between **power** (p. 64) and the formation of subjectivity. While psychoanalysis has been found wanting in that it suggests but does not actually show how the social relates to the psychic, that suggestion has been the starting point for some of the most fascinating investigations in cultural studies.

Further reading

Mitchell, J. (1984) *Women: The Longest Revolution, Essays in Feminism, Literature and Psychoanalysis*, London: Virago.

Thwaites, T. (2007) *Reading Freud: Psychoanalysis and Cultural Theory*, London: Sage.

Weedon, C., Tolson, A. and Mort, F. (1980) 'Theories of language and subjectivity', in *Culture, Media, Language*, London: Unwin Hyman.

particularly sympathetic to **feminism** (p. 82). The concepts of acculturation and enculturation, conditioning and socialisation draw attention to the many and various social arrangements that play a part in the ways in which humans learn about meaning.

How does cultural studies interpret what things mean?

Anthropology and some forms of sociology see meaningful action, the understandings that persons attribute to their behaviour and to their thoughts and feelings, as cultural. This approach to culture refers to the shared understandings of individuals and groupings in society (or to the way of life sense of culture – see above). Some sociologists, for example Berger and Luckmann (1966), stress that human knowledge of the world is socially constructed, that is, we apprehend our world through our social locations and our interactions with other people. If it is the case that our understanding is structured by our social locations, then our views of the world may be partial. This view suggests that there is a real world but we can only view it from certain angles. Thus, our knowledge of the world is inevitably perspectival. The perspectival view of the world complements the issue of cultural relativism (see section 3.4). It emphasises the way that social roles and relationships shape the way we see and give meaning to the world, whereas cultural relativism stresses the way that habitual, taken-for-granted ways of thought, as expressed in speech and language, direct our understandings. An example of perspectival knowledge is the differing accounts of the dissolution of a marriage given by those involved and affected by it. The explanation given for the break-up of a marriage by one partner will rarely coincide with the explanation given by the other (Hart, 1976).

The sociology of knowledge, as this approach to understanding is known, suggests that the sense that we make of the world can be made intelligible through the examination of our social location. For example, it is sometimes proposed that one's view of the world is linked to class position, so that working-class people will have a different view of the world from upper-class people. Sociologists of knowledge do not propose that our beliefs can always be reduced to, or simply read off from, our social location, but they do suggest that these world-views are cultural, and that culture has to be studied in relation to society. Moreover, the interpretation of culture in relation to social location introduces further issues of evidence and relativism. If knowledge is socially constructed, can there be such a thing as 'true' knowledge? If perceptions and beliefs are always relative to social location, then why should we believe any particular view, even the view of the person asserting this statement, since it too will be influenced by the person's location? In seeking to interpret a way of life of a different society or a different group in our own society, why should we believe one interpretation rather than any other? If we are to begin to adjudicate or evaluate different interpretations then we will need to consider the types of evidence offered for the particular interpretation. Interpretation of meaning is therefore a core issue in cultural studies, and it relates to how we understand the relationship between the past and the present.

How does cultural studies understand the past?

One hears much talk in England of the traditional nature of culture (see Box 1.1); England is seen by some to have a culture that stretches back over a thousand years. Within this context, culture in English studies has often been conceived in terms of influence and tradition. For T.S. Eliot (1932: 15), for example, 'no poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone. His significance, his appreciation is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists'. More recently, English studies has begun to question the values of the canon, that is, those written texts selected as of literary value and as required reading in schools and universities. Texts that have been previously neglected have been introduced into school and university syllabuses. More women's writing, writing by minority groups in British society, non-British writing and popular fiction have been included in the canon. For example, the poems of Derek Walcott (St Kitts, Caribbean), the novels of Chinua Achebe (Nigeria) and those of Alice Walker (USA) are now regarded as deserving literary consideration. English studies has widened its outlook beyond the influence of other poets and writers to look

Box 1.1

Tradition and traditional

Derived from the Latin verb *tradere* meaning to pass on or to give down. Commonly used in cultural studies to refer to elements of culture that are transmitted (e.g. language) or to a body of collective wisdom (e.g. folk tales). As an adjective (traditional) it implies continuity and consistency. Traditions and traditional practices may be seen positively or negatively. Where the past is venerated, traditions may be seen as a source of legitimacy and value; in revolutionary situations the past may be viewed with contempt and seen as a brake upon progress.

The term 'tradition' has a number of different meanings, all of which are central to how culture is understood. It can mean knowledge or customs handed down from generation to generation. In this sense the idea, for example, of a national tradition can have a positive sense as a marker of the age and deep-rooted nature of a national culture. On the other hand, the adjective 'traditional' is often used in a negative or pejorative sense from within cultures like those of North America or Western Europe which describe themselves as modern. Here 'traditional', when used to describe non-European cultures and societies, can mean 'backward' or 'underdeveloped', terms that assume that all societies must modernise in the same way and in the same direction. Cultural studies is always critical of this kind of imposition of the standards of one culture upon another to define it as in some way inferior. 'Traditional' can also refer to social roles in society which are often taken for granted, but which might be questioned in cultural studies: for example, what it is to be a mother or a father.

at social and historical factors affecting the production of texts. It is now common for critics to look at, for example, the position of women in the nineteenth century when considering the novels of the period. Critics like **Edward Said** (p. 115) and Gayatri Spivak have also looked at the history of European imperialism and asked how that history manifests itself in literature.

This particular example from the discipline of English shows that traditions are not neutral and objective, somehow waiting to be discovered, but are culturally constructed. In being constructed and reconstructed some things are included and others excluded. This reflects, according to many writers, patterns of the distribution of **power** (p. 64) in society. Let us attempt to clarify some of these points through another example.

The kilt and Highland dress are presented, both in Scotland and outside, as Scottish traditional costume. This garb is one of the most recognisable and visible components of Scottish culture and is worn by Scottish people at a variety of special occasions. It is thus presented to the non-Scots world as a component of Scottishness – the attributes of a particular place. It also functions in this manner for many Scots who consider the wearing of the tartan to be a method of identification with their cultural heritage. However, it appears that the kilt as a traditional cultural form has been constructed and repackaged to meet some historically specific needs. David McCrone (1992: 184) has suggested that 'a form of dress and design which had some real but haphazard significance in the Highlands of Scotland was taken over by a lowland population anxious to claim some distinctive aspect of culture at a time – the late nineteenth century – when its economic, social and cultural identity was ebbing away'. Thus a widely accepted and representative cultural form is shown to have been far from universal but rather associated with a particular group at a specific moment in time. Furthermore, this means that the meaning of the kilt is constantly changing within Scottish society. For example, in the 1950s wearing a kilt was thought effeminate by certain sections of the younger generation; however, since the recent increase in Scottish nationalism the kilt has come back into fashion, and is often worn at occasions such as weddings.

Can other cultures be understood?

An issue of reliability of evidence is also raised through this example as it may be difficult to know precisely who wore the kilt and when. Further, it raises the problem of what has been termed 'historical relativism'. What this draws attention to is the extent to which we, as contemporaries of the first decade of the twentieth-first century, dwell in a world that is sufficiently different from the worlds in which our predecessors lived that it may be very difficult for us to understand those worlds in the same way that they did. How well can we understand what was in the middle-class, lowland Scots person's mind when he or she adapted and adopted Highland dress? There are some similarities between the issues raised under this heading and others thought more often to be associated with cultural relativism, which we discuss next.

Further to the difficulty of studying culture across history, there is the parallel problem of interpretation of cultures from different parts of the world or in different sections of our own society. To what extent is it possible for us to understand the cultures of other peoples in the way they do themselves? Will our understanding inevitably be mediated via the distorting prism of our own cultural understandings? These problems have always confronted anthropologists in their attempts to interpret the other worlds of non-European societies. Is it possible to convey adequately the evident seriousness that the Azande accord to the consultation of oracles (see Box 1.2) or the conceptions of time held by Trobriand Islanders (see Box 1.3), in texts designed for consumption by Western audiences who hold very different temporal conceptions and ideas about magic and witchcraft? Novelists, sociologists and journalists also face this problem in describing the ways of life of different groups in their own society. Many quite serious

Box 1.2

Azande

The Azande, an African people, live around the Nile–Congo divide. The classic work on their belief systems is *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande* by E.E. Evans-Pritchard, published in 1937. The Azande believe that many of the misfortunes that befall them are caused by witchcraft (*mangu*). *Mangu* is inherited; the Azande believe that it has the form of a blackish swelling in the intestines, and it is this substance that, when activated, causes harm to others. Even though individuals may have inherited *mangu* they do not necessarily cause harm to others because it is only bad, anti-social feelings that set off witchcraft. As long as a person remains good tempered they will not cause witchcraft. Since witchcraft is the product of bad feelings, then a person who suffers a misfortune suspects those who do not like her or him and who have reason to wish harm. The first suspects are therefore one's enemies. There are five oracles that a Zande (singular of Azande) may consult in order to have the witch named. After an oracle has named the witch, the person identified is told that the oracle has named them and she or he is asked to withdraw the witchcraft. Usually named people protest their innocence and state that they meant no harm; if they did cause witchcraft it was unintentional. Evans-Pritchard states that Azande do not believe that witchcraft causes all misfortunes and individuals cannot blame their own moral failings upon it. Azande say that witchcraft never caused anyone to commit adultery. Witchcraft is not the only system of explanation among the Azande; they do recognise technical explanations for events: for example, a man is injured because a house collapses, but witchcraft attempts to answer the question of why *this* house collapsed. All systems of explanation involve the 'how' of events and the 'why' of events; the house collapses because the wooden supports are rotten – this is the technical 'how' of explanation – but why did it collapse at a particular time and on a particular man?

The 'why' of explanation deals with what Evans-Pritchard calls the singularity of events: 'why me?', 'why now?' Religious explanations offer the answer that it was the will of God; scientific explanations speak of coincidences in time and space; agnostics may see the answer in chance; the Azande know that it is witchcraft. Evans-Pritchard comments that while he lived among the Azande he found witchcraft as satisfactory a form of explanation for events in his own life as any other.

Box 1.3

Trobriand Islanders

The Trobriand Islands are politically part of Papua New Guinea. The best-known works on the Trobriand Islands are by Malinowski but E.R. Leach has written on Trobriand ideas of time in 'Primitive calendars' (*Oceania* 20 (1950)), and this, along with other work, is discussed in *Empires of Time: Calendars, Clocks and Cultures* by Anthony Aveni, 1990.

The Trobriand calendar is guided by the moon: there are twelve or thirteen lunar cycles but only ten cycles are in the calendar; the remaining cycles are 'free time' outside the calendar. The primary event of the Trobriand calendar is the appearance of a worm which appears for three or four nights once a year to spawn on the surface of the water. There is a festival (*Milamak*) in this month which inaugurates the planting season. The worm does not appear at exactly the same time every year and planting does not take place at exactly the same time every year so there is sometimes a mismatch between worm and planting. This situation is exacerbated because the Trobriand Islands are a chain and the worm appears at the southern extremity of the chain, so news of its appearance takes time to communicate. The consequence is that the festivals, and so the calendar, vary greatly in the time of their celebration from island to island. When the discrepancies are felt to be too great to be manageable there is a realignment and the calendar is altered to achieve consistency.

Trobriand reckoning of time is cyclical, associated with the agricultural year. Lunar cycles that are not connected to this activity are not recognised so there is time out of the calendar; a difficult notion to grasp in modern industrial societies where time is believed to be a natural and inevitable constraint upon activity. The Trobriand language has no tenses; time is not a linear progression that, once passed, cannot be regained; in the Trobriand system, time returns. Trobriand ideas of the nature of existence are not set in time but in patterns; it is order and patterned regularity that locates events and things, not time.

practical difficulties can arise from this problem. For example, one influential study of conversation (Tannen, 1990) suggests that the many misunderstandings that occur between men and women arise because what we are dealing with is an everyday version of the difficulties of cross-cultural communication. In the USA 'women speak and hear a language of connection and intimacy while men speak and hear a language of status and independence' (Tannen, 1990: 42). Differing conversational practices are employed by men and women. Tannen observes that in discussing a problem, women will offer reassurance whereas men will seek a solution. Women tend to engage in 'rapport-talk' while men are more at home lecturing and explaining. Men tend to be poorer listeners than women. According to Tannen, women engage in more eye contact and less interruption than men in conversation. Her argument is that men and women employ distinct conversational styles that she labels 'genderlects'. These styles are sufficiently different from each other that the talk between men and women might be appropriately regarded as a form of cross-cultural communication (see Chapter 2).

Hollis and Lukes (1982) include both historical and cultural relativism under the broad heading of 'perceptual relativism' and argue that there are two different dimensions to be examined. First, there is the degree to which seeing or perception is relative; that is, when we look at something or seek to understand it, do we actually see the same thing as another person looking at it? Second, there is the extent to which perception and understanding rely on language. These questions about perception remind us that, as students of culture, we must constantly think about who we are – where we come from and what our 'position' is – in order to understand who and what we are studying.

How can we understand the relationships between cultures?

This question of position raises another problem in terms of how we understand the relationships between cultures. One conventional way of understanding this is to see cultures as mutually exclusive blocs that may

interface, intersect, and interact along a boundary or 'zone of contact'. For example, it would be possible to consider the interactions between the Trobriand Islanders or the Azande and the Europeans who arrived as part of the process of **colonialism** (p. 143) (including, of course, the anthropologists who studied them and wrote about them). This way of thinking about culture often describes these relationships in terms of 'destruction' of cultures or their 'disappearance' as one culture 'replaces' or 'corrupts' another. A good example would be the fears of Americanisation as McDonald's hamburgers, Coca-Cola and Levis' jeans spread to Europe, Asia and Africa through processes of **globalisation** (p. 125).

However, this point of view is limited in certain ways. First, it is impossible to divide the world up into these exclusive cultural territories. As we have pointed out, culture is also a matter of age, gender, class, status – so that any such cultural bloc, defined in terms of nation, tribe or society, will be made up of many cultures. This means that we will also be positioned in relation to not just one culture but to many. Second, culture does not operate simply in terms of more powerful cultures destroying weaker ones. Since culture is a never-ending process of socially made meaning, cultures adapt, change and mutate into new forms. For example, the Trobriand Islanders took up the English game of cricket, but they did so in terms of their own war-making practices. So cricket did not simply replace other Trobriand games, it was made into a new **hybrid** (p. 126) cultural form that was neither English cricket nor Trobriand warfare. Finally, it might be useful to think about the relationships between cultures in terms of a series of overlapping webs or networks rather than as a patchwork of cultural 'territories' (see, for example, Chapter 9). This would mean that understanding the meaning of any cultural form would not simply locate it within a culture but would look at it in terms of how it fitted into the intersection between different cultural networks. For example, Coca-Cola has taken on different meanings in different parts of the world: signifying **neo-colonial** (p. 143) oppression in India (and being banned for some time), while it suggests freedom and personal autonomy to British–Asian young people in London. Its meanings cannot be controlled by the Coca-Cola company, although they try through their advertising campaigns. Neither do their meanings simply involve the extension of an 'American' culture. Instead these meanings depend upon the location of the product in a complex network of relationships that shape its significance and value to differently positioned consumers.

Why are some cultures and cultural forms valued more highly than others?

In English studies, literature has traditionally been seen as part of high culture (sense: arts and artistic activity). Certain literary texts have been selected as worthy of study, for example the novels of Charles Dickens or the plays of Shakespeare. This process of selection has meant the simultaneous exclusion of other texts, defined as non-literary. It has also led to an emphasis on writing, to the detriment of other, more modern forms of cultural activity, for example film and television. In a further step such forms of literature or high culture are regarded by some to be culture itself. Other excluded forms of writing or texts are defined as simply rubbish, trash or, in another often derogatory phrase, as mass culture. This entails a judgement of value, which is often assumed to be self-evident. Thus some forms of culture are to be valued and protected and others written off as worthless and indeed positively dangerous. However, as we have already seen, such canons or traditions are themselves constructed. Furthermore, as Hawkins (1990) has maintained, things that are thought to be high culture and those defined as mass culture often share similar themes and a particular text can be seen as high culture at one point in time and popular or mass culture at another. The example of opera may be used to illustrate this point. In Italy opera is a popular and widely recognised cultural form, singers are well known and performances draw big audiences who are knowledgeable and critical. In contrast, opera in Britain is regarded as an elite taste and research shows that typically audiences for opera are older and are drawn from higher social classes than other forms of entertainment. Yet in 1990, following the use of *Nessun Dorma* from the opera *Turandot*, sung by Pavarotti, to introduce the BBC television coverage of the 1990 World Cup Finals, opera rocketed in public

popularity in Britain. In addition to increased audiences at live performances in opera houses, there were large-scale commercial promotions of concerts of music from opera in public parks and arenas. Television, video and compact disc sales of opera increased enormously and an album, *In Concert*, sung by Carreras, Domingo and Pavarotti, was top of the music charts in 1990. The example illustrates the point that it is often empirically difficult to assign cultural practices to neat conceptual divisions.

The question of boundaries between levels of culture and the justification for them is an area of central concern for cultural studies. Pierre Bourdieu (1984) (see Defining Concept 9.1, p. 259) has maintained that the boundaries between popular and high art are actually in the process of dissolving. Whether or not one accepts this view, it is clear that the study of boundaries and margins may be very revealing about cherished values which are maintained within boundaries. The relationships between cultural systems are a fruitful area for the study of the processes of boundary maintenance and boundary change, linked as these topics are to issues of cultural change and cultural continuity (sense: culture as a process of development).

Within social anthropology there is an established practice of demonstrating the value and viability of cultures that are often regarded by the relevant authorities as poor and impoverished or as anachronisms and, as such, ripe for planned intervention to bring about change. Studies by Baxter (1991) and Rigby (1985) have argued that nomadic pastoralism, that is a way of life in which people move with animals and in which animal products are the staple diet, is a wholly rational and efficient use of resources. Such peoples are able to live in inhospitable areas where cultivation is not possible and enjoy a rich cultural, social and political life. Despite this evidence there is pressure from development planners to enforce change through land policies that compel pastoralists to give up their traditional way of life and become settled cultivators or wage labourers. Similarly, Judith Okely in her study of gypsies (1983) has shown the complex richness of gypsy cultural beliefs and practices, identifying a set of core principles around which gypsy life is articulated and which gives meaning to all activities. Gypsies, like pastoralists, are under pressure to settle down and to conform to prevailing ideas about a proper and fitting way of life. Both these examples draw attention to the issues of power and inequality in cultural and social life to which we turn in the next section of the chapter.

What is the relationship between culture and power?

Implicit in our discussions so far has been the issue of **power** (p. 64). Since it is a product of interaction, culture is also a part of the social world and, as such, is shaped by the significant lines of force that operate in a social world. All societies are organised politically and economically. Power and authority are distributed within them, and all societies have means for allocating scarce resources. These arrangements produce particular social formations. The interests of dominant groups in societies, which seek to explain and validate their positions in particular structures, affect cultures.

One of the ways in which groups do this is through the construction of traditions and their promulgation through the population. Thus it might be argued that the idea of a tradition of British Parliamentary democracy excludes other ideas of democracy and social organisation that are against the interests of the powerful. Likewise, tradition in English literature excludes and marginalises other voices. The definition of trash or mass culture might be seen to negate forms of culture that are actually enjoyed by oppressed groups.

However, another way of looking at this suggests that such mass or popular forms are actually used by those in power to drug or indoctrinate subordinate groups. Forms of popular culture can in this view be seen to be like propaganda. For example, one commentary on modern culture, that of the **Frankfurt School** (p. 75) of critical theory, argues that the culture industries engender passivity and conformity among their mass audiences. For example, in this type of analysis the relationship between a big band leader and his fans could be seen to mirror the relationship between the totalitarian leader and his followers. Both fans and followers release their tensions by taking part in **ritual** (p. 214) acts of submission and conformity (Adorno, 1967: 119–32).

Whatever view is adopted, it is clear that power and culture are inextricably linked and that the analysis of culture cannot be divorced from politics and power relations. Indeed, we would argue that this is a very important reason for studying culture and for taking culture seriously. However, the precise way in which forms of culture connect to power remains a complex issue requiring careful investigation.

How is 'culture as power' negotiated and resisted?

Given the interests of different groups in society, it is inevitable that cultural attitudes will always be in conflict. Thus, the process of negotiation is endemic to societies and cultural **resistances** (p. 170) occur in many areas of life. Four key areas of struggle and negotiation that have concerned cultural studies are around gender, 'race', class and age (for more on these categories see pp. 18–19 and Chapter 3). These concepts define social relationships which are often fraught. To take one area as an example, the concept of gender encompasses both how masculinity and femininity are defined (see pp. 4–6) and how men and women relate to one another. Gender definitions are points of struggle in many societies since what it is to be a man and what it is to be a woman are never fixed. Indeed, these definitions themselves are, in part, the product of a power struggle between men and women.

Feminist writers have been most influential in gender studies. Feminist discussion of gender might be divided broadly into three arguments: for equality, for commonality or universality, and for difference. The argument for *equality* emphasises the political idea of rights. Equality between men and women is defined by abstract rights, to which both sexes are entitled. Inequality can be defined by women's lack of rights, for example to vote or to equal pay. Negotiation here is around the concept of women's rights. The argument for *commonality or universality* stresses that although women may belong to very different social, geographical and cultural groups they share common or universal interests because of their gender. Negotiation here is around the fundamental inequality of women because of their subordination in all societies. The argument for *difference* is more complicated; it rejects both ideas of simple equality and universality. Instead, it maintains that differences between men and women and between different groups of women mean that a concept of gender can never be abstracted out of a particular situation. Negotiation, therefore, while not denying inequality, will be around the specificity of differences. Critics of gender divisions struggle to redefine cultural constructions of gender. Women's movements, but also campaigns for lesbian and gay rights, seek to redraw the cultural boundaries of men's and women's experience. Such political movements are often drawn into conflict with the law and social and political institutions like religious organisations and political parties that do not wish the cultural support for their dominance to be eroded or destroyed. In these examples it can be seen that the wider frameworks of society (power and authority structures) influence and impose themselves on cultural belief and practice to affect outcomes. We have already introduced a number of other areas where culture can in some sort of way be held to be connected to relationships and patterns of power.

How does culture shape who we are?

The above examples demonstrate that struggle and negotiation are often around questions of cultural **identity** (p. 142). An example that gives the question of identity more prominence is the way in which the origins of English studies in the nineteenth century were closely linked to the growth of universal education. As a discipline English was, in the view of many commentators, designed to give schoolchildren a sense of a national culture (Batsleer *et al.*, 1985, as discussed in Ashcroft *et al.*, 1989). Literary texts were used to instil this sense. Consequently, although English literature was often presented as a proper study in itself, the way it was taught was often designed, consciously or unconsciously, to encourage a particular national identity, a sense of what it meant to be British. In teaching this sense of British identity, other national cultures or identities within Britain were either treated uncritically as part of English culture, or were left out of the canon.

Another effect of this process, which some writers have detected, was to infuse a pride in the British

Box 1.4

Conrad on Africa

> The prehistoric man was cursing us, praying to us, welcoming us – who could tell? We were cut off from the comprehension of our surroundings; we glided past like phantoms, wondering and secretly appalled, as sane men would be before an enthusiastic outbreak in a madhouse. We could not understand because we were too far and could not remember because we were travelling in the night of first ages, of those ages that are gone, leaving hardly a sign – and no memories.
>
> The earth seemed unearthly. We are accustomed to look upon the shackled form of a conquered monster, but there – there you could look at a thing monstrous and free. It was unearthly, and the men were – No, they were not inhuman. Well, you know, that was the worst of it – this suspicion of their not being inhuman. It would come slowly to one. They howled and leaped, and spun, and made horrid faces; but what thrilled you was the thought of their humanity – like yours – the thought of your remote kinship with this wild and passionate uproar. Ugly. Yes, it was ugly enough; but if you were man enough you would admit to yourself that there was in you just the faintest trace of a response to the terrible frankness of that noise, a dim suspicion of there being a meaning in it which you – you so remote from the night of first ages – could comprehend.
>
> Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* (1898); quoted in Chinua Achebe (1988: 6)

Empire. For example, the Nigerian writer and critic Chinua Achebe has criticised the way that the novel *Heart of Darkness* by Joseph Conrad is still often presented as a great example of English culture. The novel describes a nightmarish encounter with Africa from the European point of view (see Box 1.4). However, Achebe has demonstrated that the representation of African culture that it contains is partial, based on little knowledge and is thus grossly distorted. Consequently, to read the novel as an English or even a European (Conrad was Polish in origin) work of art is to receive a very one-sided view of European imperialism in Africa. Through such processes an English national identity was constructed which involved constructing African identities in particular ways: as irrational and savage 'others'.

Identities are very often connected to place both locally and more widely. We may feel that we identify with a particular local area, a city, a region and a country and that the extent to which we place emphasis on one of these may depend on a context, for example, who we are talking to at any particular time. However, it is clearly the case that these identities can cause conflict and disagreement and that important issues in the study of culture concern the way in which such identities are constructed and how they reflect and inflect particular distributions of power.

Summary examples

In order to examine some of the ideas contained in section 1.2, two short examples are given below: the family and Shakespeare.

Example 1: The family

An examination of family life reveals some of the issues that we have identified in the study of culture. For instance, within a family adults have great power over the lives of children because human infants are dependent on adults for their survival for relatively long periods of time. One way of understanding family life is to examine relationships and processes in terms of dominant and subordinate cultures. This approach has been used extensively by many feminist writers who have used the concept of patriarchy to refer to the assemblage of cultural and material power that men enjoy *vis-à-vis* women and children (Campbell, 1988; Pateman, 1989). The period of dependence of children varies from culture to culture, both historically and contemporaneously, and a number of writers have

commented that the Western notion of childhood is a relatively recent concept (Aries, 1962; Walvin, 1982). Further, in many parts of the contemporary world it is a mistake to think of the lives of children in terms of childhood as it is understood in the West; this period of growth and learning is seen quite differently from that in Western societies. Caldwell (1982), writing of India, remarks that in Indian rural society there is the cultural belief and practice that wealth flows from children to parents as well as from parents to children. He comments that, typically in Western society, resources flow in a one-way direction from parents to children and parents do not expect young children to contribute to the material wellbeing of the family of origin. However, in many parts of the world children are valued, at least in part, for the contributions that they make to the domestic economies of family and household; there is what Caldwell calls a 'reciprocal flow' of goods and services between parents and even quite young children. For example, toddlers can join in gathering firewood and this is a valuable contribution in economies where this is the only fuel available for cooking and boiling water. This cultural view of children is significant in understanding responses to family planning projects. Caldwell argues that all too often Western cultural assumptions about family life and desirable family size direct the policy and goals of these projects. Looking beyond the English family to families in other parts of the world reminds us of the heterogeneity and diversity of culture and alerts us to the dangers for understanding in assuming that cultures and cultural meanings are the same the world over.

Indeed, even in Western societies there is much cultural diversity. Novels and academic studies point to the effects of class and power on family life. In the recent past criticisms have been levelled against some traditional reading for children because it portrays a middle-class view of family structures and relationships which is far removed from the experiences of many children. Accusations of sexism and racism in literature for children have also been made. These criticisms again draw our attention to the relationships between general, diffuse cultures and local, particular cultures. Although we may identify an English culture as distinct from, say, a French culture, it cannot be assumed that all English families have identical cultures. This opens up the challenging issue of how particular local cultures relate to the broader, more general ones of which they may be thought to be a constituent part.

It is also clear that family structures and organisation change over time, not just chronological, historical time, but also structural time, that is as relationships between family members change as a consequence of age and maturation. In all societies, as children grow to adulthood the power of other adults over them diminishes. This occurs both as a result of physiological change (children no longer depend on their parents for food) and also as a result of cultural expectations about the roles of parents and children. These cultural expectations may be gendered; for example, the English idiom that describes adult children as 'being tied to their mother's apron strings' can be read as a general disapproval of adults who do not leave the immediate sphere of their mother. Yet this idiom is overwhelmingly applied to adult male children and thus expresses a view about the proper, expected relationships between adult males and their mothers. Men are expected to be free from the close influence of their mothers, whereas there is often felt to be an identity between adult women and their mothers. Variables such as the sex of children, the number of children and the age of the parents when children are born, all affect the course of family life. In Victorian England, when family size was bigger and life expectancy less than now, some parents had dependent children for all their lives – there was no time in which all their children had grown up and left home. These demographic and social factors greatly influence the course of family life and demonstrate not only the heterogeneity of culture but also the malleability of culture. All cultures are reproduced in specific circumstances; ideas and values are interpreted and understood in the light of local conditions. This last point brings us back to the issues of judgement and relativism in the understanding of cultural practice that we raised earlier in this section. A cultural approach to a common institution, in this case the family, demonstrates the power of cultural studies to generate a wide range and number of potential areas of investigation. Some of these have been alluded to in this example but you will be able to identify more.

Example 2: Shakespeare

The study of Shakespeare has always been central to English studies and to some constructions of English **identity** (p. 142). Traditionally, in English studies, Shakespeare's plays and Shakespeare's language have been presented as the essence of Englishness. They have been made to serve as the defining features of a homogenous and unchanging culture. Subsequent authors have often been judged in terms of how they fit into that tradition. Because of this connection between Shakespeare and national identity the position of these plays in schools has become an important issue. The argument is sometimes put forward that children must read Shakespeare in order to learn English and Englishness. Shakespeare's plays become valued over and above other forms of cultural production. As a result the teaching of Shakespeare, and English history, was also a part of **colonialism**'s cultural project (p. 143).

However, cultural studies asks rather different questions about Shakespeare. Instead of taking Shakespeare's position for granted, it asks what the social position of the theatre was in Elizabethan times. Further, it asks how plays were written and produced in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Evidence that shows a high degree of collaboration between playwrights and adaptation of plays on the stage changes the conception of Shakespeare as individual genius. He appears as part of a wider culture. Shakespeare is then placed historically rather than his plays being seen as 'timeless' or 'eternal'. The question of the audience is addressed both in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and now. This gives a sense of who the plays were intended for and how they have been received, further challenging the conception that his work is universal: that is, for everyone, all of the time. We might ask what groups of schoolchildren make of Shakespeare's plays depending on class, race and gender, or whether they have seen the plays in the theatre or in versions made for the cinema.

The timeless nature of Shakespeare can also be challenged by studies that show that the texts have been altered considerably over the years and that he was not always considered as important as he is now. Cultural studies looks at the changing conceptions of Englishness – and its relationships to the rest of the world – that caused Shakespeare to be rediscovered in the eighteenth century as the national poet. This extends from studying different versions of the plays to

Box 1.5

Troilus and Cressida

But when the planets
In evil mixture to disorder wander,
What plagues and what portents, what mutiny!
What raging of the sea, shaking of earth!
Commotion in the winds! frights, changes, horrors
Divert and crack, rend and deracinate
The unity and married calm of states
Quite from their fixure! Oh when degree is shak'd,
Which is the ladder of all high designs,
The enterprise is sick. How could communities,
Degrees in schools, and brotherhoods in cities,
Peaceful commerce from dividable shores,
The primogenity and due of birth,
Prerogative of age, crowns, sceptres, laurels,
But that degree stand in authentic place?
Take but degree away, untune that string,
And hark what discord follows. Each thing meets
In mere oppugnacy: the bounded waters
Should lift their bosoms higher than the shores,
And make a sop of all this solid globe;
Strength should be lord of imbecility,
And the rude son should strike his father dead

Troilus and Cressida I.iii.94–115

looking at the tourist industry in Stratford-upon-Avon. It can also involve studying the versions of Shakespeare that are produced in other parts of the world. These do not simply show the imposition of English cultural meanings, but the complex processes of negotiation within networks of cultural interaction which mean that Shakespearean history plays were vehicles for discussing political authority in the Soviet Union, and which recently brought a Zulu version of *Macbeth* from post-apartheid South Africa to the reconstruction of Shakespeare's Globe Theatre in London.

All of these processes of questioning and negotiation are of course political. They show that the interpretation of Shakespeare is a matter of power. This argument is developed by Margot Heinemann (1985) in her essay 'How Brecht read Shakespeare'. She gave the example of Nigel Lawson, Chancellor of the Exchequer in the late 1980s, who quoted from Shakespeare's play *Troilus and Cressida* (1601–2). Lawson used the quotation 'Take but degree away, untune that string/And hark what discord follows' to argue that Shakespeare was a Tory. However, as Heinemann pointed out, the character who makes the speech, Ulysses, is in fact a wily, cunning politician, who is using the threat of social disorder to attain his own ends (see Box 1.5).

All of these questions and issues derive from adopting a rather different approach to the study of culture to that represented by English studies in its more conventional guises. They are the sorts of questions posed by those adopting a cultural studies perspective and are shaped by the core issues that we have identified. However, they also involve asking questions which lead us on to examining the theoretical perspectives used within cultural studies: what is the relationship between the social position of the audience (for example, race, class and gender) and the interpretation of the text? How can we understand the ways in which the meanings of Englishness (and their link to Shakespeare) and the meanings of Frenchness become defined as opposites? What ideas and methods can we use to interpret plays in their historical context or the

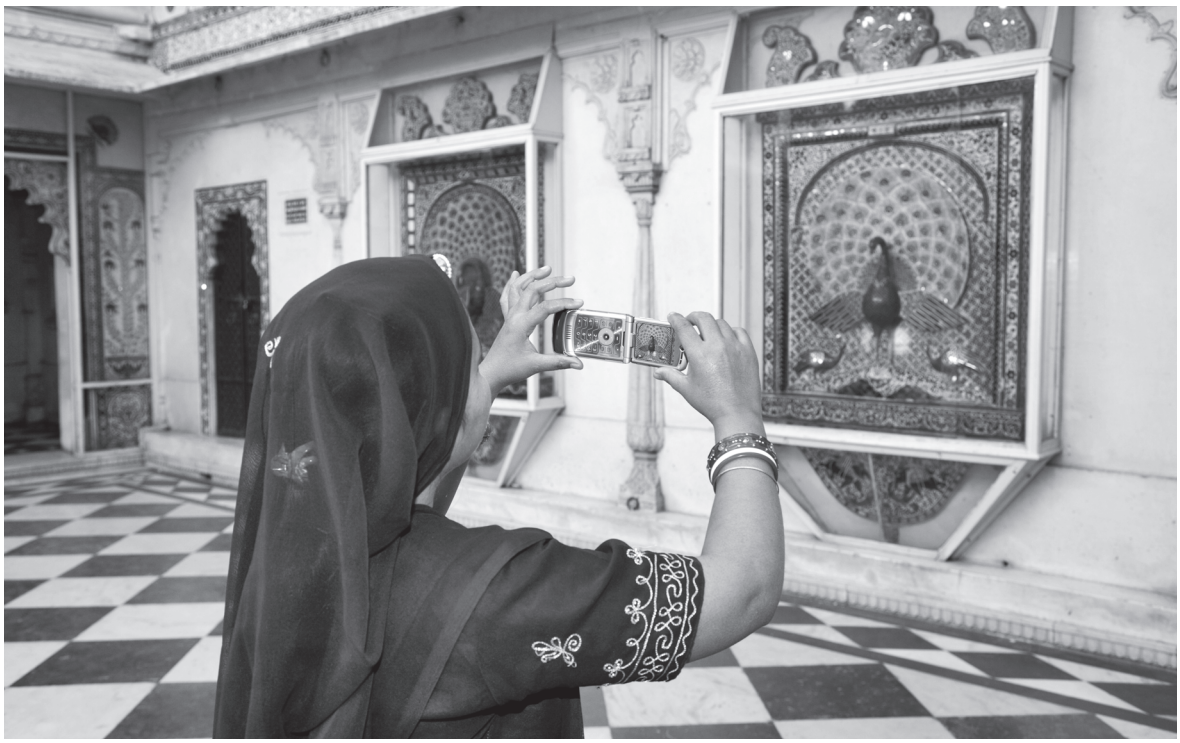


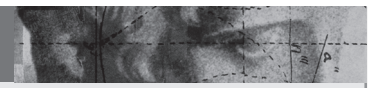
Figure 1.1 The rapid pace of social change raises issues of difference, identity and the impacts of technology and globalisation. These provide leading questions for contemporary cultural studies. (Indian woman taking photograph in Peacock Court.) (Source: ©Martin Harvey/Corbis.)

contemporary meanings of Shakespeare within schools? In the next section we examine some of the most influential ways of theorising culture.

1.3 Theorising culture

This section introduces theories of culture which attempt to address the issues and problems set out above and to unite them within frameworks of explanation. The bringing together of diverse issues and problems into a single form necessarily involves a process of abstraction. Theorists move away from the detail of particular instances and look for connections in terms of general principles or concepts. For the student, this means that theories are often difficult to grasp at first sight, couched as they are in abstract language. It may help you to think of issues and problems we have just introduced as the building blocks of theories. But there is no escaping the fact that the

Defining concept 1.2



Structuralism and poststructuralism

Structuralism was an intellectual approach and movement which was very influential in the social sciences and the arts in the 1960s and 1970s. The basic idea of structuralism is that a phenomenon under study should be seen as consisting of a system of structures. This system and the relationship between the different elements are more important than the individual elements that make up the system.

The Swiss linguist de Saussure is regarded as the founder of structuralism. In his study of language, he drew attention to the structures (langue) that underpin the variation of everyday speech and writing (parole) and analysed the sign as consisting of a signified (concept) and signifier (word or sound), founding **semiotics** (p. 29) as the science of the study of signs. The emphasis on the structure to be found below or behind everyday interaction, or the variety of literary texts, was taken up by a number of (mainly French) writers working in different areas of the social sciences and humanities. Examples include: Lévi-Strauss (anthropology) in studies of kinship, myth and totemism; Lacan (psychoanalysis) who re-worked Freud, arguing that the unconsciousness is structured like a language; **Barthes** (p. 96) (literary studies), who examined the myths of bourgeois societies and texts; **Foucault** (p. 20) (history and philosophy) who pointed to the way that underlying epistemes determine what can be thought in his archaeological method; and Althusser (philosophy), who drew on Lacan's reworking of Freud in a re-reading of **Marx** (p. 66) which emphasised the role of underlying modes of production in the determination of the course of history. Debate around Lacan was influential on the work in feminism of writers like **Kristeva** (p. 149) and Irigaray.

Poststructualism developed partly out of critique of the binary divisions so often characteristic of structuralism. So, for example, it criticised the idea that there is actually a distinct structure underlying texts or speech, blurring such distinctions. Moreover, it is critical of some of the scientific pretensions of structuralism. Structuralism tended to work on the premise that the truth or the real structure could be found. Poststructuralism is more concerned with the way in which versions of truth are produced in texts and through interpretation, which is always in dispute and can never be resolved. Poststructuralism therefore tends to be more playful in practice if not outcome. The work of Derrida and Baudrillard exhibits some of these poststructuralist ideas. Derrida shows how texts subvert themselves from within and Baudrillard explodes the neat oppositions of sign and signifier, use and exchange value.

Examples of structuralist and poststructuralist analyses can be found in cultural studies. More formal structuralist analyses have sought to find the hidden meanings of folk tales (Propp), James Bond (Eco), the Western film (Wright) and romantic fiction (Radway). Poststructuralist influence is more diffuse, but can be found especially in more literary forms of cultural studies, where the complexities of texts and their multiple meanings are interpreted.

Further reading

Hawkes, T. (1991) *Structuralism and Semiotics*, London: Routledge.

Wright, W. (1975) *Sixguns and Society*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

language of theory is abstract, and you may well find it difficult on first reading.

In this section we wish to outline the main features of some leading theoretical approaches in cultural studies. Broadly – and this is a caricature that can be filled out by looking at examples in the rest of the book – we start with functionalist and **structuralist** (p. 17) forms of understanding which suggest clearly defined, and often rather rigid, relationships between culture and social structure. From these we move on to theoretical approaches, which sometimes might still be called structuralist and are often influenced by **Karl Marx** (p. 66), that place emphasis on the understanding of culture and meaning through thinking about their relationships to political economy (for example, class structures, modes of production, etc.) and their importance within conflicts between differently positioned social groups. Finally we stress what are often called **poststructuralist** (p. 17) or **postmodern** (p. 295) theoretical approaches which retain a concern with politics (and some concern for economics) in explaining culture (see Chapter 6), but use a much more flexible sense of how cultures and meanings are made.

Culture and social structure

Sociologists often use the term 'social structure' to describe 'the enduring, orderly and patterned relationships between elements of a society' (Abercrombie *et al.*, 1984: 198). Society is often considered to be ordered, patterned and enduring because of the structures that underlie it. Just as a tall building is held together by the girders underneath the stone and glass exterior, so too society is held together by its distinct configuration of institutions (political, economic, kinship and so forth)

One influential version of this way of thinking can be seen in the work of the American sociologist Talcott Parsons. Parsons treats culture as necessary for the proper functioning of society. In general terms culture – that is, values, norms and symbols – provide the linchpin of Parsons's solution to the problem of social order. This problem is an analytical issue concerning the sources of the enduring quality of social life – how is the regularity, persistence, relative stability and predictability of social life achieved? Parsons maintains that culture is the central element of an adequate solution to this problem because it provides values, the shared ideas about what is desirable in society (perhaps values like material prosperity, individual freedom and social justice), and norms, the acceptable means of obtaining these things (for example, the idea that honest endeavour is the way to success). Culture also provides language and other symbolic systems essential to social life. Parsons further maintains that culture is internalised by personalities and that individual motivation thus has cultural origins. Moreover two of society's basic features, its economy and its political system, are maintained by culture. Hence there is an important sense in which culture 'oils the wheels' of society. In the functionalist view of Parsons, society, culture and the individual are separate but interrelated, each interpenetrating the other. Culture occupies a central place because on the one hand it is internalised by individuals and on the other it is institutionalised in the stable patterns of action that make up major economic, political and kinship structures of the society.

Social structure and social conflict: class, gender and 'race'

The separation of culture and social structure is not limited to functionalist theorists. It appears also in the work of theorists who argued that conflict is at the core of society and who understand culture in terms of the structured relationships of politics and economics (or political economy). **Karl Marx** (p. 66), the nineteenth-century philosopher and revolutionary, and the social theorist **Max Weber** (p. 158) treated beliefs, values and behaviour as products of social and economic inequalities and power relationships. Although Marx's ideas are very complex, some of his followers have argued that those who hold the means of production in society will control its ideas and values. The ruling ideas of a society (its forms of law, politics, religion, etc.) will be those of the dominant class. These ideas will be used to manage and perpetuate an unequal and unjust system. In this scheme, culture serves as a prop to the social structure, legitimising the existing order of things.

Box 1.6

Subordination and patriarchy

Subordination of women: a phrase used to describe the generalised situation whereby men as a group have more social and economic power than women, including power over women (Pearson, 1992). Men are dominant in society and masculinity signifies dominance over femininity in terms of ideas.

Patriarchy: originally an anthropological term that describes a social system in which authority is invested in the male head of the household (the patriarch) and other male elders in the kinship group. Older men are entitled to exercise socially sanctioned authority over other members of the household or kinship group, both women and younger men (Pearson, 1992).

Patriarchy has been criticised by some feminists as too all-embracing a term to describe the different forms of male dominance in different societies.

Feminist (p. 82) theorists have also seen culture as a product of social conflict; but whereas Marxists see social conflict as between classes, feminists see gender relations as just as important. Two key terms in feminist theory are 'subordination' and 'patriarchy' (see Box 1.6). Both these terms describe how men have more social and economic power than women. Feminist theory focuses on the political and economic inequalities between men and women. However, because women have often been excluded from the mainstream of political and economic life, feminists have also emphasised the importance of studying culture as the place in which inequality is reproduced. Because it is within culture that gender is formed, feminists have studied culture in order to examine the ways in which cultural expectations and assumptions about sex have fed the idea that gender inequality is natural.

Culture and conflict are also linked in the study of 'race' and racism. The concept of 'race' is often put in inverted commas because 'race', like gender, is also a social rather than a biological category. Although people are often differently defined by 'racial' characteristics, there are always as many differences within a defined 'racial' group as between 'racial' groups (Fields, 1990: 97). Fryer (1984) has argued that racial prejudice is cultural in the sense that it is the articulation of popular beliefs held by a people about others who are felt to be different from themselves. Racism, however, articulates cultural difference with structured inequality, using perceptions of these differences to validate oppression. The argument is that cultural domination is an essential element of economic and political control. Just as feminists contend that the cultural roles assigned to women (gendered roles) serve to account for their separate and unequal relationship with men, so critics of racism argue that prejudicial values and attitudes towards colonised peoples developed as European imperialists slaughtered them, took their lands and destroyed their cultures (Richards, 1990).

Culture in its own right and as a force for change

However, culture need not be seen as dependent upon and derivative of the economic or any other dimension of social structure. The celebrated case here is **Max Weber**'s (p. 158) account of the part played by the Protestant ethic in explaining the origins of modern capitalism. Weber argues that the beliefs of the early Protestant sects played a key causal role in the establishment of the 'spirit' or culture of capitalism, and thereby contributed to development of the capitalist economic system. Many of the early Protestant groups subscribed to the teachings of Calvin's doctrine of predestination that maintained that the believer's eternal salvation was determined at birth and that no amount of good works could alter God's decision. This placed a tremendous psychological burden on believers who had no way of knowing whether they numbered among the Elect (those who achieve eternal salvation in the life hereafter). The practical solution offered by the Protestant

religion to the anxiety thus generated lay in the notion of vocation: the believer was instructed to work long and hard in an occupation in order to attest his/her confidence and conviction that Elect status was assured. Later, the doctrine was relaxed so that systematic labour within a vocation and the material prosperity that accompanied it came to be seen as a sign of Election. The consequences of these beliefs and related restrictions on consumption and indulgence was (a) to introduce a new goal-orientated attitude towards economic activity to replace the diffuse attitudes that had persisted through the Middle Ages, and (b) to facilitate the process of capital accumulation. Weber of course was well aware that a number of factors other than the cultural contributed to a phenomenon as complex as capitalism (Collins, 1980).

Key influence 1.2

Michel Foucault (1926–84)

Michel Foucault was a French philosopher and historian – indeed these two categories or identities become blurred together in his writing and thought – who has had a dramatic and far-reaching impact on cultural studies through his work on the connections between **power** (p. 64), knowledge and subjectivity.

Foucault's varied career took him through several disciplines – including philosophy and psychology – and various countries – he worked in France, Sweden, Poland, Tunisia and Germany before taking up a position at France's premier academic institution, the Collège de France, in 1970. Significantly, his job in Paris was, at his suggestion, a professorship in History of Systems of Thought and in this we can trace the themes of much of the work that he undertook from the 1950s through into the 1980s.

Foucault's early work traced changing modes of thought in relation to 'psychological' knowledges. His book *Madness and Civilisation* (1961) traced the relationship between madness and reason; reading the changing reactions to madness, and the incarceration of the mad, in terms of thinking about rationality as they changed from the medieval period, through the Enlightenment's Age of Reason, and into the nineteenth century. The issues that it raised were explored in varied and changing ways in his subsequent work. Careful attention to the changing patterns of knowledge produced *The Birth of the Clinic* (originally published in French in 1963), *The Order of Things* (French original 1966) and *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (French original 1969). Indeed, he used the term 'archaeologies' to describe all these projects. The connections between knowledge and power which the treatment of the insane had revealed were further explored in relation to other marginalised groups in his *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (originally published in French in 1975), his edited editions of the lives of the murderer Pierre Rivière (1975) and the hermaphrodite Herculine Barbin (1978), and his three books on *The History of Sexuality* (originally published in French: Volume I 1976, Volumes II and III 1984). In all of these studies – which he called genealogies – he used theories of **discourse** (p. 21) to trace the changing ways in which power and knowledge are connected in the production of subjectivities and **identities** (p. 142).

Foucault's impact has been academic. He has changed the ways in which we think about power, knowledge and subjectivity, encouraging us to look at the ways in which they are connected and the ways in which they change from context to context. In emphasising that 'Nothing is fundamental. That is what is interesting in the analysis of society', he has encouraged us to think about the ways in which things – power relations, ways of thinking, and ways of understanding ourselves and others – could be different. This means that his influence has also been political. His attention to the forms of power which shape institutions and subjectivities has been influential in, for example, campaigns over prisoners' rights and gay rights.

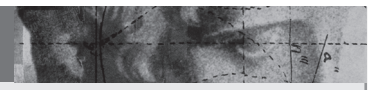
Further reading

Foucault, M. (1980) *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972–1977*, ed. Colin Gordon, Brighton: Harvester Press.

Kritzman, L.D. (ed.) (1988) *Michel Foucault: Politics, Philosophy, Culture. Interviews and Other Writings 1977–1984*, London: Routledge.

Rabinow, P. (ed.) (1984) *The Foucault Reader*, Harmondsworth: Penguin.

Defining concept 1.3



Discourse

Discourse is a way of thinking about the relationship between **power** (p. 64), knowledge and language. In part it is an attempt to avoid some of the difficulties involved in using the concept of **ideology** (p. 35). It is a way of understanding most associated with the work of the French philosopher and historian **Michel Foucault** (p. 20).

For Foucault a 'discourse' is what we might call 'a system that defines the possibilities for knowledge' or 'a framework for understanding the world' or 'a field of knowledge'. A discourse exists as a set of 'rules' (formal or informal, acknowledged or unacknowledged) which determine the sorts of statements that can be made (i.e. the 'moon is made of blue cheese' is not a statement that can be made within a scientific discourse, but it can within a poetic one). These 'rules' determine what the criteria for truth are, what sorts of things can be talked about, and what sorts of things can be said about them. One example that Foucault uses which can help us here is the imaginary Chinese encyclopaedia about which the Argentinian writer Jorge Luis Borges has written a short story. Foucault uses this to challenge our ideas about the inherent truthfulness and rationality of our own classification systems and scientific discourses. In the encyclopaedia:

> [A]nimals are divided into: (a) belonging to the Emperor, (b) embalmed, (c) tame, (d) sucking pigs, (e) sirens, (f) fabulous, (g) stray dogs, (h) included in the present classification, (i) frenzied, (j) innumerable, (k) drawn with a very fine camelhair brush, (l) *et cetera*, (m) having just broken the water pitcher, (n) that from a long way off look like flies.
>
> (Foucault, 1970: xv)

Foucault's aim is to problematise the relationship between words and things. He suggests that there are lots of ways in which the world can be described and defined and that we have no sure grounds to choose one over the others. In turn this also means that he is dedicated to recovering those ways of knowing that have been displaced and forgotten.

Discourse is also about the relationship between power and knowledge. Foucault (1980) argues that we have to understand power as something productive. For example, it is not in catching a criminal that power lies but in producing the notion of 'the criminal' in the first place. As he says: 'There is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations' (Foucault, 1977: 27). To continue the example, it is the body of knowledge – the discourse – that we call 'criminology' that produces 'the criminal' (and, in the past, now forgotten figures like 'the homicidal monomaniac') as an object of knowledge, and suggests ways of dealing with him or her. The criminal, the criminologist, the policeman and the prison are all created together 'in discourse'.

This does not mean that the world is just words and images. Foucault is keen to talk about the institutions and practices that are vital to the working of discourse. If we think about medical discourse we soon realise that the forms of knowledge and language that make it up are inseparable from the actual places where these discourses are produced (the clinic, the hospital, the surgery) and all the trappings of the medical environment (white coats, stethoscopes, nurses' uniforms) (see Prior, 1988).

Further reading

Foucault, M. (1980) *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972–1977*, ed. Colin Gordon, Brighton: Harvester.

Purvis, T. and Hunt, A. (1993) 'Discourse, ideology, discourse, ideology, discourse, ideology . . .', *British Journal of Sociology*, 44, 473–99.

His intention was to show how ideas can be 'effective forces' (Weber, 1930: 183) in the historical development of societies. Culture (here in the form of religious ideas) can shape as well as be shaped by social structure.

A more interwoven view of the relationship between culture and society is shown in the work of Mary Douglas and **Michel Foucault** (p. 20). They both stress in their writings that our understanding of particular objects relates as much to the way we think about those

objects as to any qualities those objects may have in themselves. There is a reciprocal relationship between thought and the object(s) of thought: a two-way process where objects have qualities that make an impression upon us, but that impression is influenced by the ways in which we have been conditioned to think about that object. Thought and object are, then, inseparably linked but this does not mean that we always think in the same way about things and that ideas never change. It does mean that change is the outcome of reciprocal relationships, not a uni-directional causality from structure to culture. This means that culture may influence structure, as well as structure influencing culture. The recognition that culture is a force for change (not simply the object of change) leads to the belief that culture can be examined as a system in its own right. For example, in *Purity and Danger* Mary Douglas (1966) argues that ideas about dirt and hygiene in society have a force and a compulsion, not simply because they can be related to the material world through ideas about contamination, germs and illness, but because they are part of a wider cosmology or world-view. Dirt and hygiene are understood within a culture not just in terms of their relation to disease, but also in terms of ideas of morality, for example moral purity versus immoral filth. Thus, a cultural understanding of dirt will have to take into account the meaning of dirt in more than just a medical sense. It will have to understand dirt's place historically, within a specific culture. The ordering and classifying of events which result from ideas about the world gives meaning to behaviour. The state of being dirty is thus as much the product of ideas as it is of the material world.

In turn, Foucault argues that social groups, identities and positions – like classes, genders, races and sexualities – do not pre-exist and somehow determine their own and other cultural meanings. They are produced within **discourses** (p. 21) which define what they are and how they operate. So, for Foucault, even though there have always been men who have sex with men, there was no 'homosexual' identity, and no 'homosexual sex' before that identity and the figure of the 'homosexual' were defined in medical, psychological and literary texts at the end of the nineteenth century. That those discourses about homosexuality both produced moves to regulate male sexuality – and therefore defined more clearly a group of homosexual men – and provided the basis for positive identification with that term on the part of some of those men, meant that 'homosexuality' came to have a significant place within the social structure. In Foucault's version of things there is no determinate relationship between social structure and culture. Instead there is a flexible set of relationships between **power** (p. 64), discourse and what exists in the world.

In considering theoretical accounts of the relation of culture and social structure we have demonstrated the rigid determinism of the functionalists; the strong connections between cultural struggles and the social relations of class, race and gender made by Marxists and feminists; and the importance of culture in reciprocally shaping social structures and social positions and identities argued by Foucault. These introductory remarks will be taken further in subsequent chapters that examine the issue they raise in more detail

1.4 Conclusion

What, then, is cultural studies? Throughout this chapter we have stressed the linkages between something that we have called cultural studies and the disciplines of sociology, history, geography, English and anthropology. We have discussed a set of central concerns for these disciplines, arguing that, given their common interests in culture, there are issues and problems that they all must address. These central concerns we call the core issues and problems in the study of culture. The shared interest in the topic of culture and the recognition of common themes brought practitioners from different disciplines together in the belief that it is through cooperation and collaboration that understanding and explanation will develop most powerfully. This clustering of different disciplinary perspectives around a common object of study offers the possibility of the development of a distinctive area of study characterised by new methods of analysis. It is this configuration of collaborating disciplines around the topic of culture that we see constituting both the substance and the methods of cultural studies. The arena in which this takes place can be labelled an 'inter-

discursive space', capturing the fluidity and focus that characterise cultural studies and contrasting the emergent, innovatory themes in substance and method that arise out of collaboration with the traditional themes of single disciplines. The metaphor of space also draws attention to the permeable nature of cultural studies: there are no fixed boundaries and no fortress walls; theories and themes are drawn in from disciplines and may flow back in a transformed state to influence thinking there.

Richard Johnson (1986) has pointed out the dangers of academic codification in regard to cultural studies, suggesting that its strength lies in its openness and hence its capacity for transformation and growth. He argues that cultural studies mirrors the complexity and polysemic qualities of the object of its study, culture. The power of culture arises from its diffuseness: the term is used where imprecision matters, where rigidity would destroy what it seeks to understand. Consciousness and subjectivity are key terms in Johnson's portrayal of cultural studies. Consciousness is used in the Marxist sense of knowledge and also in a reflexive sense to give the idea of productive activity. Subjectivity is used to refer to the construction of individuals by culture. Combining these two concepts leads Johnson (1986) to describe the project of cultural studies as being to 'abstract, describe and reconstitute in concrete studies the social forms through which human beings 'live', become conscious, sustain themselves subjectively'.

This project has been interpreted in cultural studies in terms of three main models of research: (a) production-based studies; (b) text-based studies; (c) studies of lived cultures. As you can see, there is a close correspondence here with the three senses of culture that we elaborated earlier in this chapter. Each one of these areas has a different focus; the first draws attention to processes involved in and struggles over the production of cultural items; the second investigates the forms of cultural product; the third is concerned with how experience is represented. Johnson points to the necessarily incompleteness of these ventures; like the wider arena in which they operate, they are fed by interactive communication. Each one gives to and takes from the others.

In summary, we suggest approaching cultural studies as an area of activity that grows from interaction and collaboration to produce issues and themes that are new and challenging. Cultural studies is not an island in a sea of disciplines but a current that washes the shores of other disciplines to create new and changing formations.

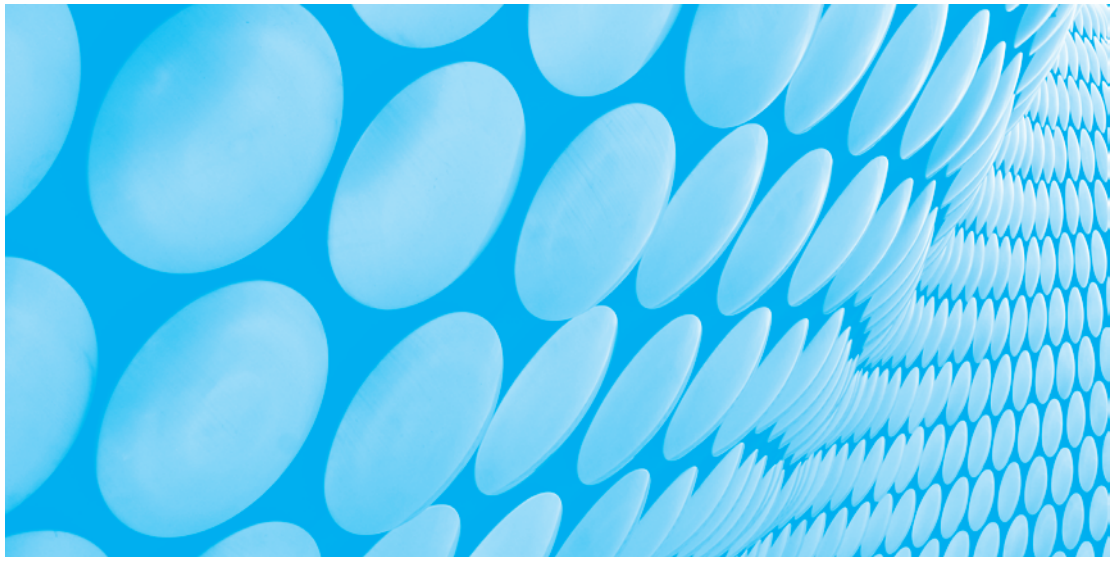
Recap

- In cultural studies the concept of culture has a range of meanings which includes both high art and everyday life.
- Cultural studies advocates an interdisciplinary approach to the study of culture.
- While cultural studies is eclectic in its use of theory, using both structuralist and more flexible approaches, it advocates those that stress the overlapping, hybrid nature of cultures, seeing cultures as networks rather than patchworks.

Further reading

Although they are not always easy reading, the best place to begin exploring the issues raised in this chapter is to look at the acknowledged early 'classics' of cultural studies: Richard Hoggart's *The Uses of Literacy* (1958), Raymond Williams' *Culture and Society 1780–1950* (1963) and E.P. Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class* (1968). Each of these works has had a profound influence over the subsequent development of cultural studies. Important stocktakings of the field's development are Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg's *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (1988) and the substantial collection edited by Grossberg, Cary Nelson and Paula Treicher, *Cultural Studies* (1992). John Storey's *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: An Introduction* (2006) connects debates about popular culture to the concerns of cultural studies. Richard Johnson's 'What is cultural studies anyway?' (1986) critically charts the possibilities of three models of cultural studies (production-based studies, text-based studies and studies of lived cultures). Some of these ideas feed into a recent collaborative work by Johnson, Deborah Chambers, Parvati Raghuram and Estella Tincknell (2004) *The Practice of Cultural Studies*. Distinctive takes on the topic matter of cultural studies are provided in David Inglis and John Hughson *Confronting Culture* (2003) and by

Angela McRobbie in *The Uses of Cultural Studies* (2005). A good guide to key concepts in cultural studies is provided by Tony Bennett, Lawrence Grossberg and Meaghan Morris (2005). For original recent work in cultural studies, the reader may wish to consult the following journals: *Cultural Studies*, *New Formations* and *Social Text*. You will probably need access to a university library to read these periodicals.



Chapter 2

Culture, communication and representation

2.0 Introduction

Chapter 1 presented an introduction to the ideas of culture and structure. Here in Chapter 2, we develop these discussions in relation to key debates and theories on communication and representation.

Communication is the process of making meaning. It is how one individual (or a word, object, sign, gesture or similar) conveys meaning to another individual – be that meaning intentional or not. Significantly, this process of communication also involves **representation** (p. 43), in that meaning is *represented* through objects or actions. For example, certain letters written on a page may spell the word 'cat' and those three small shapes (letters) placed together convey the meaning, and therefore represent, the idea of a cat. However, what is significant about the study of communication and representation for cultural studies, is the suggestion that it is through language and communication that we define and shape our social and cultural world. It is through language and communication that we make sense of our world, and convey these meanings to others, through which we develop shared meanings and shared cultures, which shape our understanding and interpretation of our whole social world.

This idea of 'making meanings' is considered in the first of three main sections within this chapter. This first main section (*the organisation of meaning*) begins by considering how meanings can be defined by the nature or form of communication, and in particular, considers *spoken, written and visual texts*. Within this section we present an introduction to the ideas of semiotics and the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis (the former discussed in more detail later in Chapter 4), which suggest that language is a structured system that shapes our cultures. This idea is developed further in the discussion that follows of *structuralism and the order of meaning*. The ideas that meanings are 'rigid' is challenged in the following discussion of *hermeneutics and interpretation*. Next, this section considers the role of the *political economy, ideology and meaning*, which suggests that meanings are defined through (dominant)

ideologies. This section concludes with discussions of *poststructuralism and the patterns of meaning* and *postmodernism and semiotics*, which both question the idea of meanings as structured and as shaped along social 'group' lines.

In the second main section of this chapter we move on to consider *language, representation, power and inequality* in more detail. This begins with a consideration of *language and power*, before considering the way language has been used in relation to *class*, *race and ethnicity* and *gender*.

The third and final main section of this chapter focuses more specifically on forms of *mass communication and representation*, and more specifically the *mass media and representation*. In this, we consider three examples of mass media representations – of *race and ethnicity*, *gender* and *celebrity*. This section, and chapter, then concludes with a consideration of *audiences and reception*. Within this discussion we focus on the important and influential work of **Stuart Hall** (p. 55) on encoding/decoding, before finally finishing off with a consideration of how this work is located with Abercrombie and Longhurst's (1998) theorisation of paradigms of audience research.

Learning objectives

- To understand the complexity of processes of communication and representation.
- To understand how language, communication and representation shape our social world and cultures.
- To reflect on the powerful role language plays in shaping our understanding of social factors such as class, gender and ethnicity.
- And also to understand how social and cultural 'groupings' such as ethnicity, gender and celebrity are presented and understood through and via the mass media.

2.1 The organisation of meaning

Raymond Williams (p. 3) argues that the patterning of meaning is a crucial starting point for cultural analysis:

> [I]t is with the discovery of patterns of a characteristic kind that any useful cultural analysis begins, and it is with the relationships between these patterns, which sometimes reveal unexpected identities and correspondences in hitherto separately considered activities, sometimes again reveal discontinuities of an unexpected kind, that general cultural analysis is concerned.
>
> (Williams, 1965: 47)

However, there are many different ways in which this search for patterns of meaning can proceed. In particular, this section begins by considering how meaning can be shaped by the form of communication used, this is then followed by discussions of communication and meaning, structuralism and meaning, hermeneutics and interpretation, the political economy and ideology, poststructuralism, and postmodernism.

Spoken, written and visual texts

A 'text', quite simply, is any cultural item that can be 'read' or interpreted. These can be (semi)permanent, such as books, letters or television shows, or can be more temporal such as someone speaking or watching a live football match. In particular, the 'openness' and degree of meaning that can be read into a text is a crucial consideration of poststructuralism (and this is considered further, later in this chapter). However, here we wish to highlight how the nature or form of a text can significantly contribute to the meaning derived from it. In particular, this can be summed by Marshall McLuhan's famous dictum that 'the medium is the message'. By this McLuhan (1964) is suggesting that too often we focus on the content of a message, but overlook its context, form or the medium through which it is delivered – and it is these which are crucial in determining what the content (message) is.

A significant contributor to the meaning of a text is the form that this takes; such as spoken, written or visual texts. Of course, to some degree this is a false distinction, as forms of communication often blur with each other. For instance a person talking (speech), will often use their hands, face and body to gesture (visual) and might also be wearing a t-shirt with writing on, which will also convey (written) meaning. However, it is important to realise that meaning is conveyed differently depending on the form of the medium or message carrier.

Spoken language first developed as sounds made to accompany gestures, which through use, developed into more elaborate codes (Newsom, 2007: 57). However, the development of spoken language should not be seen as a natural uncontested process of evolution. The history of any language is a history of contest, conflict and struggle. For instance, the 'English' language is in origin an Anglo-Frisian (i.e. Germanic) language first brought to Great Britain probably in the fifth century. This 'imported' language combined with Celtic dialectics to form 'old English', which over the centuries was adapted and changed, primarily due to successive invasion, such as from (Norse) Vikings and (Franco) Normans – each bringing, and at times imposing, their own languages.

What we have come to view as 'Standard British English' developed primarily as a merchant dialect in England in the Middle Ages. With the continued growth in importance of merchants, trade and business this dialect was increasingly used in the development of institutions, such as the law, government and financial institutions, facilitating the spread of this dialect and its common acceptance (Schirato and Yell 2000). This then becomes accepted as the 'correct' way to speak, with all other dialects being rejected, and viewed as 'incorrect' if not 'vulgar' (Schirato and Yell 2000). Then (just as invaders had done in Britain) the rise of the British Empire from the fifteenth century onwards sees the imposition of this language on many nations around the world; who in turn have added to the use and development of this.

Still today *how* we speak is very important. For instance, in the UK there continues to be an emphasis of speaking 'correctly' (what is sometimes referred to as 'The Queen's English'), and Shnukal (1983, cited in Schirato and Yell, 2000) suggests that this prioritisation of one form of dialect, and seeing all other as 'bastardised' or 'ungrammatical', is a form of linguistic racism – a point developed further, later in this chapter (p. 46).

Spoken language also has complexities in meanings beyond the actual words spoken themselves. For instance, the meaning of spoken words can be greatly influenced by tone, pitch, speed and volume – and this is sometimes referred as 'paralanguage' (Schirato and Yell, 2000). Speech will also often be punctuated by the use of noises or what Goffman (1981) referred to as 'response cries' such as 'ouch' (to being hit) or 'oops' (to a minor accident). Speech, and the meanings associated with it, are also frequently accompanied by non-verbal forms of communication, such as facial expression or gestures, and these have a very important role in communication and can significantly alter the meaning of what is being spoken. Also, for many, such as some who are hearing impaired, non-verbal gestures constitute the main form of communication, but even here, non-verbal communication (such as sign language) can be manipulated in subtle ways to convey different meanings and emotions.

Goffman (1959) also highlights how social interaction between people is shaped by their social status; such as people's behaviour and speech patterns may alter if the are talking to someone perceived to be more or less powerful than themselves. For Goffman social interaction was a social performance similar to acting on a stage, where people will also carefully consider how they are perceived by others and alter their behaviour and what they say accordingly – and Goffman refers to this as 'impression management'.

Turning to written language, it is evident that this first developed as symbolic, usually artistic, representations (such as cave paintings and later hieroglyphics) of aspects of the world, but did not relate directly to spoken words. The earliest written language that was also spoken was probably Sanskrit, which was first used in India in the fourth and fifth centuries BC (Newsom, 2007). Writing can be understood as a technology, which allows communication at distance. However, written language often lacks the same ability to convey the subtle meanings and variations that can be conveyed through paralanguage. To convey subtle

meanings, written language must rely on emphasis and punctuation, such as exclamation or question marks, or even emoticons (also known as 'smileys'), which are particularly common in Internet chat-rooms/messaging and emails, and use punctuations to represent faces and emotions such as :-) (smile) :-((sad/sulk) ;-) (wink) :-o (shock) :-P (tongue poking).

Written language is a form of communication that negates some of the unequal power relations associated with speech. For instance, it is often easier to tell a powerful person something in a letter than face-to-face. However, written words still involve some of the social conventions and role taking associated with speech. For instance, a letter writer will write in a very different style if they were writing to their mother, lover or boss. Written language styles also differ in various forms of document. For instance, legal, academic or scientific documents, comic books, novels, love letters and newspapers, may all be written in the same language, but will often use very different writing styles and techniques – and these will often be shaped by the **ideologies** (p. 35) or **discourses** (p. 21) of both the writer and the conventions associated with that type of document/publication. Though all texts (including written words) are open to multiple readings/interpretations by their audiences, it is evident that most texts will have a 'preferred reading' – in other words a 'dominant' meaning, which was intended by the author.

Communication can also take the form of visual communication. A full discussion of visual culture is provided later (in Chapter 10), but it is important to acknowledge here the powerful role of visual representations (such as painting, photographs and television) as a form of communication. Visual representations, often give the impression of being neutral (after all, many would argue that 'seeing is believing') and lacking in the ideology or discourses associated with spoken or written language. However, visual imagery is just as prone to, and shaped by, ideologies and discourses as written or spoken texts. For instance, paintings will be painted to portray particular meanings or sentiments, and will focus on particular subjects (and not others). Similarly, photographs only show particular angles or perspectives, they are frequently 'posed', if not 'set-up', they can then be edited, re-shot, touched up, and certain shots excluded in preference to others. And this is particularly the case in the mass media, which is in the business of image 'creation' (rather than presentation). Hence, it is important that visual images are seen as a **representation** (p. 43), and not *presentation*, of the world – and this point is taken up later in this chapter.

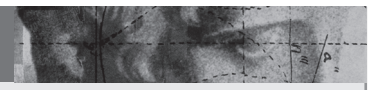
Communication and meaning

As already suggested the term communication refers to the process of making meaning. For instance, at its simplest, an individual speaks a word, which is heard and interpreted by a second person and this conveys a meaning to the listener. Similarly, an individual may wear a t-shirt or a hat, which conveys meaning to an observer – for example, that the wearer is the supporter of a particular sport team – or the meaning conveyed may be unintentional, such as the receiver of the message may think that the person in the hat or t-shirt looks silly or unfashionable.

However, this was not the original use of the term 'communication'. Gunther Kress (1988) in *Communication and Culture* suggests that the term communication came into popular usage first in the nineteenth century to refer to physical means of connection, such as railroads, roads and shipping. However, it was with the development of new technologies, such as the telegram, and later the radio and telephone, that the term 'communication' became more commonly used to refer to the delivery of information, rather than physical objects.

The origins of the term communication (as a simple process of passing on an object) strongly influenced early considerations of the communications process. In particular, one of the earliest studies of telecommunications was conducted by Claude Elwood Shannon who worked for the Bell telephone corporation in America in the 1940s. Shannon developed a mathematical model of communication that was concerned with the most effective way of transmitting information, which attempted to eliminate any disruption of the original message. This disruption in the transfer of a message Shannon referred to as 'noise'. Therefore, this early study of communication processes was primarily concerned with the transmission and reception of a

Defining concept 2.1



Semiology and semiotics

The study (or science) of 'signs' is known in Europe as 'semiology' (a term coined by Ferdinand de Saussure (1857–1913), a Swiss linguist) and in North America as 'semiotics' (a name devised by C.S. Peirce (1839–1914) for his independently developed philosophical system that shared many common premises with de Saussure's).

The simplest way to define what a sign is, is to consider the components or parts that make it up. At its simplest a *sign* consists of two components. First, there is a spoken, written, or visual symbol (such as a word, a road sign or an advertisement) – this is known as the *signifier*. Second, associated with this symbol will be a certain concept or idea – this is the *signified*. For example, the word 'cat' (the signifier) along with our understanding of what a cat is (a small furry domestic animal – this is the signified) together provides us with an understanding or meaning of a 'cat'. This then is the sign – the sum of both the word and the meaning we attach to it.

One of the key suggestions of de Saussure is that the relationship between a sign and its meaning is *arbitrary*. That is to say, that meaning is not straightforward. For example there is no reason why the three letters that make up the word 'cat' should mean a small furry domestic animal. These three letters could just as easily have been used to refer to what we call a 'dog' or a 'fish' or a 'banana'.

De Saussure's most influential ideas were set out in lectures given between 1907 and 1911 and published posthumously in 1916 as *Cours de Linguistique General*, edited from de Saussure's papers and his students' notes. De Saussure emphasised that what a sign stands for is simply a matter of cultural convention, of how things are done in a given culture. This can clearly be seen in the way different people attach different meanings to a word or the way people use different words to refer to the same object/thing. For instance, the word 'pig' could refer to a farmyard animal. However, in a different context, or to a different person, a 'pig' could refer to a greedy person or even a police officer. Likewise to a French speaking person the farmyard animal in question is not called a 'pig' at all, but rather a 'porc'. This is also the case for all signs and symbols. For instance, many Western cultures see black as a colour for mourning and funerals; however, in many Asian nations it is white (and not black) that is associated with death (Newsom, 2007).

If the sign is arbitrary, then its meaning can only be established by considering its relation to other signs. It is thus necessary to look for the connections and differences between signs. These are classified in two broad ways:

- Syntagmatically – the linear or sequential relations between signs (thus traditional English meals consist of a starter, followed by a main course and a dessert).
- Paradigmatically – the 'vertical' relations, the particular combination of signs (thus soup or melon but not apple pie for starters).

Semiologists also speak of different levels of signification. The skilled semiologist can proceed from the level of denotation, the obvious meaning of the sign (e.g. a photograph of a cowboy smoking a Marlboro cigarette), to the connotation of the sign, its taken-for-granted meaning (e.g. that smoking Marlboro is something that tough 'real' men do.)

In this way the ideological functions of signs can be exposed. Certain cultural forms can be seen as myths which serve to render specific (often bourgeois) values as natural, universal and eternal.

A further influential distinction suggested by de Saussure is between language as a patterned system (langue) and language as embodied in actual speech (parole) – and in particular, de Saussure himself concentrated most of his studies on language systems (langue), which are relatively stable, unlike spoken language (parole) that are much more fluid and dynamic. This is because de Saussure located the study of language as part of a larger science devoted to 'the study of the life of signs within society'. In particular, semiologists maintain that it is possible to discern certain logics or structures or codes, which underpin the multiplicity of cultural life as we experience it – and in particular semiology is associated with **structuralism** (p. 17).

De Saussure's ideas have been developed effectively in the broader sphere of culture by **Roland Barthes** (p. 96). His writings explicate the latent meanings (the myths and codes) that inform such diverse cultural phenomena as guide books, steak and chips, electoral photography, all-in wrestling, margarine, and the Eiffel Tower. A good example of Barthes use of semiology is his analysis of a cover photograph on the French magazine, *Paris Match* (p. 31).

Defining concept 2.1 (continued)

Further reading

Barthes, R. (1973) *Mythologies*, St Albans: Paladin.

Gottdeiner, M. (1995) *Postmodern Semiotics*, Oxford: Blackwell.

message or information. This model therefore presents a very straightforward and simplistic understanding of communication, which at its simplest involves a three-stage process of 'sender – message – receiver'. First, there is an individual (the sender) who composes a message (such as a letter or a spoken sentence or phrase), this is then delivered to and received by another individual (the receiver).

What this model fails to recognise or consider, is the social context of message creation, conveyance and reception. For instance, the process of communication does not simply involve a message, which is clearly intended by the sender and likewise clearly understood in the same way by the receiver. The meaning of a message will be determined by many different social factors, such as the contexts of the message, the form it takes, the power relations between the 'sender' and 'receiver' and the process of interpretation and re-interpretation undertaken by the receiver. All of these (and more) are what helps create the meaning of a message and also form important constituent parts of the communication process, and cannot therefore be simply dismissed as 'noise' that needs to be overcome. In particular, **semiotics** (or semiology as it is also known), which is the study (or science) of 'signs', shows us that 'meaning' is not straightforward or 'natural'; but rather that there is an arbitrary relationship between a signifier (word, symbol or similar) and the meaning that this carries (the signified).

Therefore, there is no natural commonsensical reason why we attach certain meaning to words or symbols. Furthermore, de Saussure suggests that the semiotic systems (such as language) we use are not made *by* 'the world', but rather it is semiotic systems that *make* the world (Schirato and Yell, 2000). That is to say, it is not simply the existence of pigs or cats that makes us form words to describe these, but rather the words and signs we develop, and the meaning we attach to these, that shape our understanding of the world.

This can be clearly illustrated by Benjamin Lee Whorf's work on the language system of the Hopi, a Native American people. Unlike mainstream American culture which expresses the understanding of time in spatial metaphors, for example, one may say 'it is a *long time* since . . .' or 'it will happen in a *short time*', the Hopi expressed events as happenings taking place in a state of *being*, a condition that does not lend itself to being categorised in the same way as mainstream American notions of time. Similarly the tenses of the Hopi language did not correspond with American customary notions of past, present and future.

Whorf's work is built upon the earlier work on linguistics of Edward Sapir who suggested that there develops in all languages specialised and elaborated lexicons dedicated to the description and understanding of important features of social and cultural life. Whorf's work on the Hopi, together with Sapir's earlier analysis, contributed to the formulation of the Sapir–Whorf hypothesis that states that language creates mental categories through which humans make sense of the world. The proposition is that the world is filtered through the conceptual grids produced by language and the routine and regular use of particular languages produces habitual thought patterns, which are culturally specific. It is these culturally specific thought patterns that Sapir and Whorf refer to as *thought worlds*. Whorf expresses the idea in the following way:

> We dissect nature along lines laid down by our native languages. The categories and types that we

Box 2.1

Semiotics of colonialism

Figure 2.1 Cover of *Paris Match*.

One of the best-known examples of semiotic analysis can be found in Roland Barthes' (1915–80) analysis of a photograph from the magazine *Paris Match* (1976). This photograph was published at the time when France was embroiled in the conflict over the decolonisation of Algeria. As will be seen, this context of conflict over empire is very significant to the meaning and analysis of the photograph. Barthes says: 'I am at the barber's, and a copy of *Paris-Match* is offered to me' (1976: 116). He continues, 'On the cover, a young Negro in a French uniform is saluting, with his eyes uplifted, probably fixed on the fold of the tricolour. All this is the *meaning* of the picture.' Barthes has identified the denotative meaning of the photograph. Having done this, Barthes develops his analysis. He says:

> But, whether naively or not, I see very well what it signifies to me: that France is a great Empire, that all her sons, without any colour discrimination, faithfully serve under her flag, and that there is no better answer to the detractors of an alleged colonialism than the zeal shown by this Negro in serving his so-called oppressors.
>
> (1976: 116)

After identifying these connotations of the photograph, Barthes locates his discussion within the language of semiotics:

> I am therefore again faced with a greater semiological system: there is a signifier, itself already formed within a previous system (a black soldier is giving the French salute); there is a signified (it is here a purposeful mixture of Frenchness and militariness); and finally a presence of the signified through the signifier.

The discussion of these photographs has introduced several important points about semiotics which can be summarised as follows:

1. Any image or text can be said to contain different layers or levels of meaning. In particular there is a distinction between *denotative* and *connotative* levels.
2. The nature of such meanings will depend on the context in which they are contained, or the surrounding circumstances. Meaning is *relational*.
3. Some of the levels of meaning or *codes* are relatively neutral, or objective, whereas others will be saturated with social meanings or discourses.
4. The recognition and elucidation of these different meanings involves analysis or *decoding* which often depends on the nature of the knowledge and experience brought to the analysis.

Using the language of semiotics, the photographs considered here are acting as signs. The sign consists of two elements: the signifier and the signified. The signifier is a sound,

Box 2.1 (continued)

printed word or image, and the signified is a mental concept.

The semiotic approach, which was developed from the study of language by de Saussure, has been applied widely. Thus, **Barthes** (p. 96) argues (1976: 113):

> take a black pebble: I can make it signify in several ways, it is a mere signifier; but if I weigh it with a definite signified (a death sentence, for instance, in an anonymous vote), it will become a sign.

Barthes shows how different levels of meaning are associated. This is shown in Figure 2.2.

This demonstrates the relationship between the denotative or connotative levels of meaning. Barthes also writes here about the distinction between language and myth. For Barthes, myths shore up existing structures of power, which favour the bourgeois class. Myths make what is historical or changeable appear to be natural and static and are thus ideological. Thus, the myth constructed in part by the photograph of the young black man in uniform would seek to represent the Algerian conflict in such a way as to prevent change and decolonialisation.

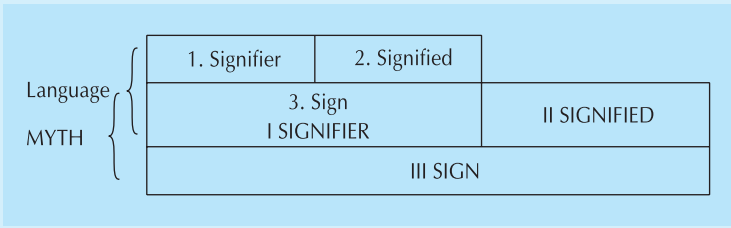


Figure 2.2 Language and myth. (Source: Barthes, 1976.)

Further reading

Barthes, R. (1973) *Mythologies*, St Albans: Paladin.

isolate from the world of phenomena we do not find there because they stare every observer in the face; on the contrary, the world is presented in a kaleidoscopic flux of impressions which has to be organized by our minds and this means largely by the linguistic systems in our minds. We cut nature up, organize it into concepts, and ascribe significances as we do, largely because we are parties to an agreement to organize it in this way – an agreement that holds through our speech community and is codified in the patterns of our language. The agreement is, of course, an implicit and unstated one. *But its terms are absolutely obligatory*; we cannot talk at all except by subscribing to the organization and classification of data which the agreement decrees.

(Carroll, 1956: 212–14, in Black, 1972: 97)

Therefore, for linguistic theories, such as semiotics and the Sapir–Whorf hypothesis, language is seen as a structural system, which is both stable and provides a useful tool for understanding the social world in which these are used. Therefore linguists such as Saussure provides the basis of **structuralism** (p. 17) – the idea that there are structures to be found below or behind everyday interaction.

Structuralism and the order of meaning

Structuralists see culture as an ordered system or structure. Culture is presented as a system of coded meanings that are produced and reproduced through social interaction. Their interest is in how participants through interaction learn and use the codes of communication. A number of perspectives have been brought to this issue.

Certain theories of linguistics, for example those of Ferdinand de Saussure and Noam Chomsky, state that there is a universal structuring principle in all human language: that of binary oppositions. Binary opposi-

tions consist of two opposing terms; for example, black and white, man and woman, high and low. Lévi-Strauss (1966) argues that these oppositions are not amenable to direct observation or analysis. Instead, they operate at a level that is not conscious, a level sometimes described as that of deep structure. The study of culture, according to structuralists, consists of an examination of cultural forms. These cultural forms are the result of the human mind being brought to bear on particular environments. Lévi-Strauss argues that the resultant cultural forms all exhibit the same pattern, that of binary oppositions. The content of particular cultures may be different but this is the result of different environments. What is significant is not the different contents, but the identical patterning of cultural forms. Working from the assumption that cultural forms consist of identical patterns, Lévi-Strauss says that individuals have an innate biological capacity, what he calls a 'bio-grammar', which they use to 'decode' or interpret codes of cultural information. Codes are cultural in the sense that they are the expression of a people's shared conventions at a particular time. Acculturated members of a society know the codes for their society. Codes are culturally specific, but the ability to decode is universal and innate.

This means that everyone makes sense of the world at two distinct levels, which take place simultaneously. The first is at the level of deep structure where the binary oppositions operate. The second is at the surface level of contemporaneous activity where knowledge of a cultural code allows sorting and classifying to operate and meaning to emerge. Lévi-Strauss likens this thinking to what we engage in when we listen to music. We hear both the melody and the harmony, but in order to achieve an understanding of the music we have to integrate them. It is the whole that gives us the message, and so it is both surface and deep structure that gives us our understanding of cultural messages. Lévi-Strauss worked out these ideas through the analysis of myth, which he argues is one of the clearest forms of cultural expression of a society's view of itself.

Mary Douglas (1966) and Edmund Leach (1970) adopt a similar stance to that of Lévi-Strauss towards cultural understanding and the reception of cultural messages. They both agree that meaning arises out of patterning and order, but they differ from Lévi-Strauss in locating the source of order in the social world and not in physiology. It is the social and cultural contexts and the agreed meanings of shared experience through interaction that allocate and set meanings. Leach, for example, illustrates his case with colour classifications. In English culture there are customary associations made between colours and fact and feeling – thus red is the colour of danger, red is also associated with pomp, it is the colour of the British Labour Party and it is a term used to describe members of the Communist Party. A native user of English is aware of some if not all of the repertoire of available meanings and on hearing the word 'red' will decide, according to context, which meaning is appropriate. This will be the meaning that makes sense to the hearer and gives a message. This sociocultural explanation of culture and communication also pays attention to other features of conventional cultural systems, such as gesture, dress, physical appearance, volume and tone of communication. The standardised meanings that cluster around each cultural item provide support and evidence for situationally preferred readings.

Hermeneutics and interpretation

Another significant tradition in the social sciences concerned with meaning and interpretation is hermeneutics. Derived initially from debates in German-speaking countries over the interpretation of the Bible, this approach has become increasingly concerned with wider issues of interpretation and with philosophical debates over the connections between meaning and existence. Hermeneutics argues that it is impossible to divorce the meaning of a text from the cultural context of its interpreter. In order to interpret any text the interpreter necessarily and unavoidably brings to the text certain prior understandings or fore-understandings from their own culture. The interpreter's fore-understandings facilitate the process of interpretation and are themselves worked upon (i.e. confirmed, modified, refuted, amended, etc.) in the course of interpretation. This conversation-like process is sometimes described by the term 'the hermeneutic circle' (Gadamer, 1975: 235–45). Advocates of the hermeneutic circle maintain that

interpretation is not a simple one-way transmission of ideas from text to reader but it is rather an interactive process in which the reader's fore-understandings are required for any further understanding of the text to be possible. Thus, when we read Shakespeare's *Hamlet* (1600–1), or watch a performance of it, we bring to bear our present-day cultural understandings about familial relations, jealousy and revenge, sexual propriety, etc., and these understandings are elaborated and modified in consequence of our reading of this play. The notion of the hermeneutic circle has fed into many theories of culture in the social sciences and humanities. One of its central implications is to underscore the absence of any privileged or objective position for the interpretation of cultural phenomena – knowledge of a culture, to paraphrase the American sociologist Harold Garfinkel, is always knowledge 'from within' a culture.

One example of the development of a sociological approach to interpretation influenced by the hermeneutic tradition can be found in the work of the Hungarian sociologist of knowledge Karl Mannheim. Mannheim argues that a cultural act or text contains three levels of meaning: objective, expressive and documentary. Mannheim uses the hypothetical example of a friend giving alms to a beggar to bring out the differences between these three layers of meaning. The first level is the objective meaning of the act or product inheres in the act itself, and in this example it is assistance. The second level, expressive meaning, involves the consideration of what an actor intended or wishes to express by any particular act. Mannheim's friend may have been wishing to convey sympathy to the beggar through his act. The third layer of meaning is the most important for Mannheim as it links the act to wider contexts. The act can function as a document of the friend's personality and could be seen to document hypocrisy if, for example, the friend was a multi-millionaire who made his money by making the beggar redundant from a job in the first place. However, to formulate this interpretation we have to know the wider context of the act, for example, that its author was exceptionally wealthy. This connection to wider contexts establishes, in this case, links between the act and the political economy within which it takes place. In the next section we discuss political economy and the importance of **ideology** (p. 35) as a way of understanding patterns of meaning.

The importance of social context in determining meaning is also illustrated by several other sociologists, including, most notably the work of **Erving Goffman** and **Pierre Bourdieu** (see below). Goffman (1974) highlights how our social experiences are interpreted and understood through 'frames' of reference. Frames are basically cognitive tools that we subconsciously construct to help us make sense of a social situation. For instance, if we see an individual standing on a street corner playing a guitar, with an open guitar case in front of them full of money, we apply our existing frame to this to make sense of this. This allows us to understand that the individual is 'busking' and therefore (if we feel so inclined) we could put money in their case, rather than that this person is giving away free money, and we should reach down and take some. However, as with the hermeneutic circle, these frames are formed on the basis of interaction, and hence have both structure and flexibility.

Goffman also discusses at length the use of frame narratives. Narratives refer to the structured meanings within a story, which have a sense of sequence and causality. For instance, take our busker. By playing a guitar on the street corner, they want (and often get) people to place money in their guitar case. This then tells a structured mini-story (a narrative) where events progress and cause others to occur. Though not considered by Goffman, it is also important to recognise that narratives are also strongly influenced by **ideologies** (p. 35). For instance, narratives will have an 'expected' sequence of events based upon commonsensical ideas of what 'should' happen. For instance, most romance novels or film narratives prescribe to a heterosexual ideology, where the viewer expects the story to follow an excepted 'boy-meets-girl' story and structure (Schirato and Yell, 2000).

The nature of narratives is also shaped by genre. Genres are types or forms of communication practice (Schirato and Yell, 2000). For instance, a face-to-face argument between two people, or a romance novel, or a newspaper article on poverty – these different genres all have different types (and expected) narrative structures and frames.

Pierre Bourdieu (1984) also contributes to our

understanding of social interactions and the meanings of communication through his discussion of 'fields' and 'habitus'. Fields for Bourdieu are the constituent parts of a society or 'social space' – and some examples discussed by Bourdieu include the contemporary fields of art, politics, sport and economics. Society, for Bourdieu, consists of multiple interrelated fields, where each of these will have its own habitus.

Habitus is similar to what other authors have described as the 'culture' of a particular group or society. However, key to Bourdieu's understanding of habitus is that this is embodied. Jenkins (1992: 74) writes that *habitus* is Latin to mean 'a habitual or typical condition, state or appearance, particularly of the body'. Bourdieu maintains much of the original meaning of this word, and particular emphasis is placed upon the embodiment of habitus. This Jenkins (1992: 74) argues is manifested in three ways: First, habitus only exists 'inside the heads of actors' – for instance, ways of behaving and modes of practice are learnt and internalised by social actors. Second, habitus only exists through the practice and actions of social actors – their ways of talking, moving, acting and behaviour. Third, the 'practical taxonomies' actors use to make sense of the world are all rooted in the body – such as male/female, hot/cold, up/down are all linked to our senses and physically located in relationship to our bodies.

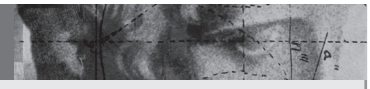
This Bourdieu links to the term 'hexis', which refers to individuals' deportment, their stance, grace and gestures. Though habitus is located within the body it is not a form of innate human behaviour but rather a way of behaving and understanding the world that is taught to us through social interaction. Unlike theories of socialisation, for Bourdieu habitus is achieved primarily through instruction, rather than experience.

For instance, in respect to art, the 'sophisticated' observer has been taught the mechanisms and language for decoding the symbolic meaning of the art form through their social network, education and interaction with others. This therefore, is crucial in our understanding of why certain social groups (such as social classes) possess the skills to 'understand' and interpret art, and others do not. However, it is also important to recognise that habitus is not a set inflexible frame, which people simply learn and remains static throughout their lives. As Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992: 133) suggest in relation to the concept of habitus:

> Habitus is not the fate that some people read into it. Being the product of history, it is an open system of dispositions that is constantly subjected to experiences, and therefore constantly affected by them in a way that either reinforces or modifies its structure.

Hence, for both Bourdieu and Goffman meanings are shaped by existing frames of reference that social actors possess. However, these frames do not simply 'appear' ready-formed within individual heads, but rather it is important to recognise the role of **ideology** (see below) and the political economy in shaping these.

Defining concept 2.2



Ideology

Theories of ideology are an attempt to understand ideas in terms of **power** (p. 64). This has been most fully developed within **Marxist** (p. 65) theory (see Williams, 1977) and what follows is a consideration of that tradition and critiques of it. **Raymond Williams** (p. 3) (1977) stresses the various meanings that the term 'ideology' can have from explicitly acknowledged political ideologies to more subconscious 'common-sensical meanings' or 'taken-for-granted beliefs'. He identifies two components to Marxist understandings of ideology:

- Ideology as the ideas of a particular social group.
- Ideology as a system of illusory beliefs.

Ideologies as the ideas of a social group

This is the argument that social groups (and within Marxism the debate has revolved mainly around social classes) have particular beliefs associated with them. One source of this is **Karl Marx** (p. 66) and Fredrich Engels's *The German Ideology*. In this critique of idealism (a way of thinking

Defining concept 2.2 (continued)

that identifies ideas as the main properties of a society) they asserted that ideas were not independent. Instead ideologies come from social classes in their social relations with each other. Or, as Janet Wolff says, 'the ideas and beliefs people have are systematically related to their actual and material conditions of existence' (Wolff, 1981: 50).

Ideas, or ideologies, are seen to be rooted in the material conditions of the everyday life of classes (including their relations with other classes). Yet these classes are not equal; some ideas dominate because of the unequal material social relations of a class-based society. Marx sums this up in a famous phrase: 'The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas, i.e. the class which is the ruling *material* force of society, is at the same time its ruling *intellectual* force' (Marx and Engels, 1968: 64). Indeed, these ideas are part of their rule. They serve to legitimate their domination (for example, the Swedish ruling classes legitimating capitalist modernisation with ideologies of both progress and tradition – see p. 112) and to reproduce the unequal social relations from which they benefit (there are a whole series of arguments about how education is part of the reproduction of class relations, for example, Althusser, 1971; and Willis, 1977).

Generally, then, ideology (the realm of ideas) is seen to be shaped by something 'deeper' – the social (or class) relations within which people live their lives or even the economic organisation of society (or 'mode of production') which shapes those class relations. There is, however, a recognition that ideologies have real consequences. They operate as 'maps of meaning', used to interpret and define what is going on. That they work better for some groups than others is the second component of Marxist theories that Williams identifies.

Ideology as a system of illusory beliefs

This is the suggestion that, because of their origins as part of unequal social relations, ideologies are a distorted representation of the truth. This relies on the points set out above to argue that there are sets of ideas appropriate to each class, generated by their position within exploitative social relations, but that people may have adopted other ideas via education, the media, entertainment and so on. Since a true class consciousness with an objective material basis is being claimed here, then people who do not think that way are said to have 'false consciousness'. There is a sense that they have been hoodwinked. Their real interests are concealed from them and the real interests of the exploitative classes are also concealed (for example, nationalism which serves the political, military and economic interests of ruling classes might be said to be false consciousness for a working class that 'should' think of itself not as divided but as internationally united).

There are a series of problems with these ways of thinking. First, 'false consciousness' is always something that someone else has, not oneself. It has a tendency to define people as 'cultural dupes' who can be led out of their ignorance by a right-thinking vanguard or the visionary theorist who knows the 'Truth'. Second, can classes and ideas be matched as neatly as this way of thinking suggests? Can we allocate ideologies to social groups in this way? Third, can the world be understood in terms of class alone? If not, do the forms of analysis (often rooted in understanding economic relationships) set out above work for social groups defined in terms of gender, race, sexuality or age?

In response to these problems the 1970s and 1980s saw the development of more and more elaborate and difficult theoretical work on the relationships between ideas and power (see Althusser, 1971; Thompson, 1984). The main path that this took was through understanding language, thinking about ideas not as something 'free-floating' but as existing as words spoken or written. It also meant a move away from only studying class.

This work has stressed that ideology is about the relationship between language and power. Instead of thinking about ideas being fixed to particular social groups or about them being untrue there is a sense that meanings are not fixed, that they arise in language, in communication and representation. This means thinking about many competing ideologies, not one dominant one, and about a whole range of social groups. The connection to power lies in the ways in which meanings present the world to the advantage or disadvantage of particular social groups, and the ways in which those groups can attempt to fix or challenge those meanings. For example, a set of widespread ideas about nature, motherhood and domesticity which served to legitimate women's dependence within the home benefited and were reproduced by men, but have in many ways been effectively challenged by women. As Thompson says: 'To study ideology, I propose, is to study the ways in which meaning (or signification) serves to

Defining concept 2.2 (continued)

sustain relations of domination' (Thompson, 1984: 4).

This way of thinking is very close to other theoretical concepts that look at the relations between meaning and power (for example, **discourse** – p. 21) and has raised the question of whether we still need the concept of ideology. Those arguing against using it suggest that it still brings with it the problems of believing in something called 'the truth', and of being too rooted in economic class relations (Foucault, 1980). Those who want to retain it claim that it brings a necessary critical edge to making judgements about the power relations involved in statements (Eagleton, 1991; Purvis and Hunt, 1993).

Further reading

Eagleton, T. (1991) *Ideology: An Introduction*, London: Verso.

Thompson, J. (1984) *Studies in the Theory of Ideology*, Cambridge: Polity.

Williams, R. (1977) *Marxism and Literature*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Political economy, ideology and meaning

An interest in political economy means an interest in issues of power and inequality that are associated with the allocation of resources and the formation of wealth. The ideas of political economy have had a widespread value and application in social science and in disciplines such as history and English studies because they have proved fruitful in the investigation of patterns of meaning. To relate political economy to culture is to prompt some of the following questions. What are the connections between ownership and control of the media and cultural transmission? What is the role of the economic infrastructure in the dissemination of ideas? What are the links between technology transfer and the transfer of knowledge? In all these areas of investigation a relationship is sought between politics, economics and culture.

An example of this approach would be an analysis of newspaper content to see if a connection can be established between the ownership and control of the newspaper and the type and nature of news printed. In simple terms, it suggests considering the extent to which the owner's views and interests are reflected in the content of the newspaper. Newspaper coverage of the news has been found to be overwhelmingly pro-capitalist, pro-*status quo* in character. The question then becomes: how is this coincidence with owner's interests to be explained? One explanation points to the concentration of ownership and control of British newspapers (for instance, the Australian businessman Rupert Murdoch owns and controls *The Sun*, *News of the World* and *The Times* newspapers in the UK). Newspaper proprietors have mutual interests in other financial and industrial undertakings (for instance, Murdoch also owns numerous other businesses and media networks the world over, including *BSkyB* television and the *Fox* network), and also have an upbringing and lifestyle in common; in short, they have shared economic interests and a shared culture. Thus it is hardly surprising that the press's coverage is biased in favour of the interests and values of private enterprise.

An alternative explanation draws attention to some different features of the political economy of newspaper production. Here emphasis is placed on the prevailing logic of the market in which newspapers are presently produced. The commercial survival of newspapers depends upon advertising revenue which in turn generates a pressure to maintain a newspaper's circulation. To retain a large readership, newspapers give people what they are believed to want – human interest stories, crime, sex, sport and scandal. Entertaining the readership comes to take precedence over providing information about significant world events and educating the public in the ways of responsible citizenship. Material documenting cultural difference and ideological diversity tends to get squeezed out of newspapers, leaving only a relatively narrow middle ground.

A more sophisticated way of connecting the concerns of political economy and questions of cultural

meaning are through the concept of **ideology** (p. 35). Ideologies can be of various sorts. **Antonio Gramsci** (see below) divided up ideologies into three categories. The first is that of common sense. Common-sense ideas are those we all take for granted. Common-sense ideas and values are part of everyday life. They form the bedrock of our understanding of the world; but when examined closely they may appear to be either contradictory or very superficial. An example of a common-sense ideology is given in the phrase 'Boys are better at football than girls'. This expresses a widely held idea, commonly held to be true. A closer examination of this 'truth', however, might question its validity by asking 'Are boys encouraged to be more physically active than girls?' or 'Are girls allowed to participate in football or are they excluded at home, at school, or at club level?' If the answer to these questions is yes, then the common-sense idea that boys are better at football than girls is shown to be true only because of particular circumstances.

Gramsci's second category of ideology is that of a particular philosophy. This means not so much the thought of a particular philosopher but of a particular group of people in society who put forward a reasonably coherent set of ideas. These people Gramsci calls intellectuals; and he includes both traditional intellectuals such as priests, and intellectuals who emerge from social movements, like trade unionists or political

Key influence 2.1

Antonio Gramsci (1891–1937)

Antonio Gramsci was an Italian political activist and writer who was influential in the development of **Marxist** (p. 65) cultural theory. He aimed to develop concepts that would enable the understanding and transformation of twentieth-century political and economic structures and social and cultural relations. He is best known for his work on the idea of **hegemony** (p. 73).

Gramsci was born in Sardinia and was educated in Turin where he joined the Italian Socialist Party, and worked as a journalist. In 1921 he was a founder member of the Italian Communist Party (PCI) and, after a visit to Moscow, was elected to the Italian Parliament. He later became leader of the PCI and, in 1926, was sentenced to 20 years' imprisonment by Mussolini's Fascist government. At his trial the official prosecutor demanded of the judge that 'We must stop this brain working for 20 years!' However, during his imprisonment Gramsci wrote his most famous works, published as *Selections from Prison Notebooks* (1971), which combined studies of politics, philosophy, history, literature and culture. He died shortly after being released from prison.

Gramsci is important to cultural studies because of his attempts to develop the connections between class relations, culture and **power** (p. 64) without reducing issues of culture and meaning to a superstructure determined by an 'economic base'. His concept of hegemony aimed at understanding how dominant classes could organise their rule through consent when their political and economic power was not in the interest of those they subordinated. However, this was not a static situation within which the ideas of the powerful went unchallenged. Gramsci used the metaphor of a 'war of manoeuvre' to suggest that political struggles were continually being fought in a whole variety of arenas: political, economic and cultural. In turn this meant conceptualising the role of the intellectuals who were part of fighting these 'wars'. Through his notion of the 'organic intellectual' he argued that everyone who used ideas was an intellectual (it was not just a label for a small professional group) and that these 'thinkers' and their ideas were organically tied to particular class interests. It can be argued that it is Gramsci's ideas that form the basis of the notion of 'cultural politics', due to the ways in which they were taken up and reworked by those working in the Birmingham **Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies** (p. 241) in the 1970s.

Further reading

Gramsci, A. (1971) *Selections from Prison Notebooks*, London: Lawrence and Wishart.

Gramsci, A. (1985) *Selections from Cultural Writings*, London: Lawrence and Wishart.

Joll, J. (1977) *Gramsci*, London: Fontana.

activists. Thus, examples of ideologies that are philosophies are Roman Catholic teachings or the ecological ideas of Greenpeace or the beliefs of Right to Life anti-abortionist groups. Gramsci's third category is that of a dominant or **hegemonic** (p. 73) ideology, that is one that has a leading role in society. An example of a hegemonic ideology in a particular society might be the dominance of one person's ideas, for example in a dictatorship. Or it might be the description of a society as capitalist or individualistic, whereby ideas (or ideologies) like 'the primacy of monetary profit' or 'the survival of the fittest' are the dominant ideas.

An understanding of how these three different categories of ideology may interrelate can be gained by thinking about the ideology of racism. In the first category, 'common-sense' racism might consist of phrases like 'The English are cold', or 'Black people are natural athletes'. These phrases express everyday prejudices as common sense. They do not, on their own, express anything more than the individual prejudice of the speaker. If, however, these common-sense ideas become part of a coherent system, then they enter Gramsci's second category of a philosophy. Nineteenth-century anthropologists classified the 'races' of humanity, placing Europeans at the top of a purportedly evolutionary ladder with Orientals and Africans coming further down; this is plainly an example of a racist philosophy. The Nazi and Fascist beliefs about Aryan racial superiority are of the same type. Racism becomes a dominant or hegemonic ideology when it is used within a particular society to legitimate the social divisions and organisation of that society. So, for example, the use of racist ideas to justify the European colonisation of India and Africa or to exclude black people from housing or particular jobs is an example of a hegemonic ideology. In practice, these three categories are often combined. Thus, a common-sense racist remark is often made in the context of an accepted knowledge of available racist philosophies and of racism as a hegemonic ideology – and the relationship between power and language is considered in more detail later in the chapter (p. 44).

Poststructuralism and the patterns of meaning

Thinking through the concept of ideology means considering a whole range of social groups and their relationship to ideas and cultural meanings. In the structuralist version these meanings are strictly patterned according to specific structures and systems such as binary opposition. In the political economy view there are more or less strong links between the different groups and the ideas and meanings that they hold. Poststructuralism has questioned the nature of the connections that are made in both of these other theoretical approaches.

First, it questions what are seen as the rigidities of structuralist systems of thought. Instead of binary oppositions it suggests that there are much more complicated and ever-changing systems of meaning that need to be understood in their particular contexts. Thus, the meanings that things have are not fixed – they are fluid and changing. As in our Shakespeare example, the meanings of the plays are not defined by fixed systems of signs – for example, thinking about the relationships between harmony and disharmony or order and disorder in the comedies – but are dependent on the contexts in which they are written, enacted, consumed and interpreted. Thus Shakespeare's understandings of race and money (such as in a play like *The Merchant of Venice*) can be interpreted in terms of contemporary **discourses** (p. 21) of economics and morality. This need not be based upon direct knowledge that Shakespeare had, but a set of interlocking cultural codes. As Stephen Greenblatt argues, dealing with the correspondences between medical texts and Shakespeare's texts:

> [T]he state of Shakespeare's knowledge of medical science is not the important issue here. The relation I wish to establish between medical and theatrical practice is not one of cause and effect or source and literary realization. We are dealing rather with a shared code, a set of interlocking tropes and similitudes that function not only as the objects but as the conditions of representation.
>
> (Greenblatt, 1988: 86)

It is not, therefore, the systems and structures of meaning that are important but the ways in which

more diffuse patterns of meanings intersect in particular situations.

Second, poststructuralists question the solidity of the relationships that the political economy approach argues exist between economic relationships and cultural meanings. Instead of asserting that there are ideologies appropriate to classes, they argue that the relationships are both contingent and contextual. Again, classes, genders and races are, in part, formed through the ideas, ideologies and discourses that are used about them and that they use in their struggles; and these will differ depending on the time, the place, the nature of the struggle, and the history of that struggle. Thus the patterns of meaning cannot be traced back to underlying political and economic structures; they are related to them but in ways that are ever-changing and which must be explored and interpreted by the cultural analyst. Thus, Shakespeare does not always define Englishness for a certain class, but is taken up in that way in particular battles over education, status and **cultural capital** (p. 259). All of this puts much more of a burden on our own interpretations of culture.

A central element of poststructuralist thought is the idea that culture – in all its forms – is a 'text' which can be 'read'. This theoretical move towards 'textuality' shifts the focus of the study of culture. What is studied is not so much cultural forms or representation as the text itself. Whereas before it has been assumed that it might be possible to gain knowledge by the study of cultural form, poststructuralist theorists (**Barthes** (p. 96), **Foucault** (p. 20) and Jacques Derrida) have questioned the search for meaning and coherence.

Semiology suggests that all cultural products should be seen as 'texts'. However, unlike de Saussure and other structuralists would have us believe, the meaning of these texts is not set. For instance, for de Saussure meaning was seen as intentional. De Saussure saw signs as consisting of specific (and to some degree independent) components that were 'put together' by someone. Therefore, de Saussure prioritises the importance of the sender of a message, and the act of sending as a conscious decision. However, not all meanings are intended. Poststructuralism highlights how meanings are not always intended, and that texts are *polysemic* (open to multiple readings).

Jacques Derrida has argued that the texts that make up culture can never be pinned down. Instead of yielding meaning and knowledge to the student of culture, they defer it. The task of students of culture is not, therefore, to look for explanations, but to 'deconstruct' meaning in culture. Students of culture should not look for systems, structures and ideologies but should look at the gaps, discontinuities and inconsistencies in texts. Followers of this approach contend that there is always partiality and subjectivity in understanding; culture consists of multiple realities that are never understood in their entirety either by the sender or the receiver of information. Texts are always subject to interpretation, doubt and dispute, whatever the attempts of authors to exercise control. As Schirato and Yell write:

> texts circulate widely within a variety of contexts and situation types. They last of a time and then disappear from circulation, perhaps to reappear later in a different form. Riddles, jokes, fashions, limericks, songs, advertising, slogans and jingles, memorable lines from movies, characteristic sayings of public figures, whole texts and fragment of texts of all kinds are used and re-used within cultures.
>
> (Schirato and Yell, 2000: 52)

Though texts circulate, and may have a life beyond their original context, all texts carry with them elements of their previous context(s). This means that texts do not exist in isolation, but always refer or relate to other texts. Hence, it is argued by Bakhtin that all texts are simply a composite of 'where they have been' and other texts that they relate, so therefore no text can claim 'originality'.

The 'Bakhtin School', and particularly V.N. Volosinov, argues that the sign (see **semiology** – p. 29) is a site of social contestation. This means that different groups within society struggle, argue and dispute over the meanings of different signs. Volosinov argues, that unlike de Saussure suggests there can never be perfect autonomous semiotic system, as semiotic systems are constantly in use, and therefore constantly being contested and therefore changing.

In *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* (1973) Volosinov argues that it is class conflict that conditions the struggle over signs. Bakhtin's idea that any text con-

tains 'multiple voices' within it has been developed by **Julia Kristeva**'s (p. 149) influential concept of 'intertextuality'. This idea concerns the relation of a given text to other texts. Any text, it is argued, can be analysed in terms of the other texts that it has absorbed and transformed. Thus intertextuality embraces various forms of textual borrowing and echoing, such as allusion, parody, pastiche and quotation. The concept allows us to appreciate how a science fiction movie like *Blade Runner* draws on 1940s 'hard-boiled' detective stories and *film noir* as intertexts (*The Maltese Falcon*, *The Big Sleep*, etc.). What we see in *Blade Runner* is the incorporation and transformation of these intertexts in a futuristic setting (the movie is set in 2019). Most of the action takes place in shadowy rooms or after dark in poorly lit public places; the film's hero makes a living out of a technologically advanced parody of the classic gumshoe role; the heroine dresses in 1940s retro style; like many *film noir* movies, the development of the plot is at times opaque and, also like many movies of this genre, in the original version of *Blade Runner* the hero provides 'voice-over' to link scenes. By deconstructing *Blade Runner* in terms of its intertexts it becomes possible to realise one poststructuralist premise, 'the death of the author'. What this means is that the author's intentions are adjudged irrelevant to the interpretations of the text; the text is a separate and autonomous entity. Thus, instead of studying the influences on the author and the sources s/he drew upon in authoring the text (a notoriously contentious interpretive strategy), the interpreter is left instead to consider the intertexts figuring in a given text.

Postmodernism and semiotics

The philosophic origins of **postmodern** (p. 295) thought can be traced back to the philosophy of Nietzsche and Heidegger. These philosophers, and in particular Nietzsche, question the ideas of the Enlightenment that there exists one 'true' reality, which is delivered to us by science and rationality. Nietzsche suggested that all social reality was a product of language and thought, and not objective truths or realities.

These ideas were then developed further by postmodern writers such as Jean-Francois Lyotard and **Jean Baudrillard** (p. 299). Lyotard is often viewed as one of the 'founding fathers' of postmodern social theory. Like many postmodernists, Lyotard's philosophical origins can be seen in his disillusionment with traditional **Marxist** (p. 65) theory. Lyotard rejects the idea that Marxism offers the only objective knowledge of society, and rejects the idea that society is based around technologies of production (as Marx would have us believe). Instead Lyotard suggests that social life revolves around language and **discourse** (p. 21). In particular, he highlights the changing nature of narrative in social life.

Lyotard suggests that in pre-industrial times, myths and stories had a religious quality and assisted in the reproduction of the social order. With the Enlightenment came a new set of narratives, which emphasised progress and reason, knowledge and technology. These provided social life with an order and regularity. However, he suggests we have now moved into a postmodern era, where science, technology and computers have developed to such as point that the principle force within our society has become knowledge. Knowledge becomes more widespread and accessible, hence, there is a decline in belief of one truth or one knowledge.

Lyotard refers to this as the decline in grand narratives or metanarratives. He suggests that knowledge has always been made up of different, and at times incompatible perspectives or views, but these were often hidden within modernism and scientific positivism, which claimed to provide one absolute truth. However, most people no longer believe that there is one truth that is delivered to us by science and rationality. Nor do they believe that there is one theory, which can explain all aspects of our social lives. As a result, knowledge and societies fragment. As Lyotard writes:

> The social bond is linguistics, but it is not woven with a single thread . . . nobody speaks all those languages, they have no universal metalanguage . . . the goal of emancipation has nothing to do with science . . .
>
> (Lyotard, 1984: 40–41)

Hence, what defines our postmodern social lives is language and linguistic, but there exists no one true

meaning, no one true reality. There is no truth, but only truths.

Postmodern knowledge comes by 'putting into question existing paradigms, by inventing new ones, rather than assenting to universal truth or in agreeing to a consensus' (Best and Kellner, 1991: 166), and draws on the work of poststructuralist such as Derrida. Derrida (1978) suggest that the relationship between the signifier and the sign (see **semiology** – p. 29) is now *completely arbitrary* and lacks any connection at all. The signifier (the concept or idea) has no link to the real world or to an object (the signified), but exists on its own. Signs therefore become free floating, without any link or relationship to an underlying reality. All that exists is a concept, or 'image', without any basis or link to reality.

In particular, these are ideas developed further by Jean Baudrillard (p. 299). Baudrillard, following Derrida, also sees signs as becoming free-floating, disconnected from reality. In particular, Baudrillard suggests that society has become overrun by simulacra. This is an 'image' or representation of a person or thing, which lacks the substance or qualities of the original. Baudrillard argues that these *simulacra* 'are so omnipresent that it is henceforth impossible to distinguish the real from simulacra' (Best and Kellner, 1991: 101).

Baudrillard links this to ideas of *hyperreality*. Hyperreality is 'the blurring of distinctions between the real in the unreal and which the prefix 'hyper' signifies more real than real whereby the real is produced according to a model' (Best and Kellner, 1991: 119). For postmodernists there is no longer an underlying reality, which has an existence apart from the simulations and simulacra. The only reality is a reality created by signs (which have no depth or relation to real objects). What we consider to be social reality is indefinitely reproducible and extendable, with the copy indistinguishable from the original, or perhaps seeming more real than the original.

For instance, Baudrillard suggests that Disneyland is presented to America (and the rest of the world) as an 'unreal' fantasy land – but this conceals that fact that all of America *is* Disneyland, it is all a hyperreal theme park. However, Disneyland does not hide social reality, in the sense that Marx argues that social reality is hidden from people, but rather Disneyland conceals that fact that there is nothing to conceal, nothing to hide, because America is a superficial hyperreal nation, where there is no depth. Everything appears on the surface (Inglis and Hughson, 2003).

Baudrillard also uses the term *implosion* to refer to the process whereby simulation and reality collapse in on each other and become the same, so that there is no longer any distinction between the two. This is:

> A process of social entropy leading to a collapse of boundaries, including the implosion of meaning in the media and the implosion of media messages and the social in the masses. . . . The dissemination of media messages and semiurgy saturates the social field, and meaning and messages flatten each other out in a neutralized flow of information, entertainment, advertising, and politics.
>
> (Best and Kellner, 1991: 121).

All the different parts of the social world implode, leaving no separation between formerly distinctive parts of society – politics and sports become entertainment, or the latter become the former. For instance, with the O. J. Simpson or Michael Jackson trials it becomes difficult to separate entertainment, legal issues, private, public and the social reality – all imploded together and all that is left is a depthless spectacle. The public become mesmerised by the spectacular. Reality and meaning no longer matter or even exist – just the spectacle. Therefore for postmodernists (like Baudrillard) there is no social world, or individuals, just an all consuming mass wrapped up in the consumption of signs and spectacles.

2.2 Language, representation, power and inequality

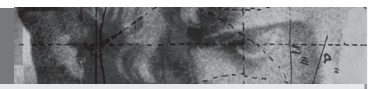
Representation and communication of cultural meaning takes place through language because of two sets of standardisations: the customary meanings attached to words and the customary ways of speaking in given social and cultural settings. In both instances membership of the language community may be tested or decided according to the familiarity of a language

user with the conventions of use. Language is seen as *problematic*, and this approach owes much to the development of social and cultural theorising which stresses the partial and contested nature of social life; such theorising is often labelled as **postmodern** (p. 295) but it also characterises much feminist analysis, as well as race, ethnic and class analyses.

A key source for them is the work of the Russian Marxist analyst of language V.N. Volosinov (1973). Volosinov argues that language has to be understood in social context and in social activity. It is this stress on social activity that is perhaps of central importance to subsequent developments. As **Raymond Williams** (p. 3) argues:

> We then find not a reified 'language' and 'society' but an active *social language*. Nor (to glance back at positivist and orthodox materialist theory) is this language a simple 'reflection' or 'expression' of

Defining concept 2.3



Representation and realism

Raymond Williams (1983b: 296) points to two meanings of 'represent' that have developed through history. A representation, he suggests, can mean either 'a symbol or image, or the process of presenting to the eye or the mind'. The meaning of symbol or image is particularly important. A representation re-presents or stands for something else. As Williams explains, this meaning is complicated by the development of the idea of an 'accurate reproduction'. Hence, a photograph represents that which was arranged before the camera, but is also often thought to be an accurate reproduction of it. We are familiar with the common phrase 'the camera never lies'. However, we should also be aware that photographs may be cropped or doctored to produce a particular meaning.

Realism in art or culture seems to be simply captured in the idea that it attempts 'to show things as they really are' (Lovell, 1980). However, such simplicity is illusory and realism has been hotly debated. Berger (1972) points to the way in which realism in art develops at a particular historical moment. Likewise Watt (1963) illuminates the beginnings of the realist novel, which used real names for characters and was set in recognisable places and so on. Some versions of realism attempt to capture the details of everyday life in all its aspects. This approach was labelled naturalism in the nineteenth century. The novels of Zola are held to be an important example. Other forms of realism have worked through the practice of typicality. It does not matter, it may be suggested, that all life is not shown (indeed, how could it be?) as long as recognisable types are used for characters and events. However, some **Marxist** (p. 65) approaches to realism often criticise these ideas, as they suggest that there is some deeper truth or reality to be known, which will not be captured by conventional realist depiction. Somewhat paradoxically, the attempt to capture this reality is often through avant-garde methods. Debates between the Marxist critics Lukács and Brecht pointed up some of these issues, as did the later work of MacCabe. The latter used a very wide definition of realism, which he then criticised as being unable to capture the real.

Despite the difficulties involved in defining realism, the term is much used in everyday discussions about fiction. Being authentic or real is often seen as praiseworthy and being melodramatic a criticism. However, such simplifications evade the difficulties surrounding the terms. For example, soap operas are often criticised for their inadequate representation of the real: too much happens, they do not contain enough ethnic minorities, whole rich families share one house and so on. They are not empirically or objectively real. However, as Ang (1985) in her discussion of viewers' reactions to the American soap Dallas shows, these representations may convey ideas and feelings that viewers feel to be subjectively real or important. They may be emotionally realist. Criticising or praising realism is not to be done lightly without a clear definition of the meaning of the term.

Further reading

Lovell, T. (1980) *Pictures of Reality: Aesthetics, Politics and Pleasure*, London: BFI.

Hill, J. (1986) *Sex, Class and Realism: British Cinema 1956–1963*, London: BFI.

Williams, R. (1983b) *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, London: Fontana.

> 'material reality'. What we have, rather, is a grasping of this reality through language, which as practical consciousness is saturated by and saturates all social activity, including productive activity. And, since this grasping is social and continuous (as distinct from the abstract encounters of 'man' and 'his world', or 'consciousness' and 'reality', or 'language' and 'material existence'), it occurs within an active and changing society.
>
> (Williams, 1977: 37)

Williams took these ideas very seriously in his own work – so much so that he devoted extensive sections of many of his own books to the consideration of the history and development in social context of important concepts. The zenith of this work came in his book *Keywords* (Williams, 1983b), which appears to be a dictionary, but is actually an investigation of the contested meaning and social import of some terms and concepts that Williams takes to be central in contemporary social and political struggles. As Eagleton (1983: 117) argues, concerning Volosinov but which could equally be applied to Williams, 'It was not simply a matter of asking "what the sign meant", but of investigating its varied history, as conflicting social groups, classes, individuals and discourses sought to appropriate it and imbue it with their own meanings'.

Language and power

Cultural politics (see Chapter 6, p. 141) introduces the dimension of inequalities in **power** (p. 64) and authority in cultural forms and the *contested* nature of cultural practice; it is these concerns that drive the analysis of language when it is linked with the domains of class, race or gender. Thus, as will be suggested below, language has become increasingly politicised and implicated in social struggles. Consequently, argument has moved from seeing language as a neutral instrument for objectively representing and communicating the views of a uniform grouping to seeing language as a politically and culturally charged medium over which groups wrestle for control.

Benedict Anderson (1991) drew attention to the role of print languages in enabling the rise and spread of nationalism. At present, it is sufficient to single out that thread of Anderson's argument that says that the invention of print language gave a 'new fixity' to language and created languages of power; particular forms of language became dominant. Spoken languages that were close in form and vocabulary to printed language were the most prestigious (Anderson, 1991: 44–5). In this way written language came to be viewed as more 'correct' than spoken language and oral communication was, and often still is, evaluated socially according to its degree of resemblance to written language (Street, 1993; Leech *et al.*, 1982). In this process of evaluation, ways of speaking such as dialect (local language), accent, choice of words and use of grammar were all assessed and ranked against the social conventions of language as typified in written language (Street, 1993; Labov, 1973). These rankings were extended to other areas of social experience and, through the overlaying of social action by cultural ways of speaking, became a symbolic representation of ways of life – a situation summed up by Pulgram in the following way:

> We can recognise a person by his speech quite apart from the intelligence or intelligibility of his utterance. The mere physical features of his speech, conditioned automatically and by habits, suffice for identification. If, in addition, what he says and how he says it, in other words his style, provide further clues all the better. The what and how are socially conditioned, however, by the speaker's education, surroundings, profession, etc. Directors and actors of radio plays who cannot convey any part of the contents of the performance visually are very skilful in the art of voice characterisation. Even the psyche; the temperament of a person finds expression in his speech, to say nothing of his temporary moods and every hearer makes a certain value judgement of a speaker simply on the basis of 'what he talks like'.
>
> (Pulgram, 1954, in Street, 1993)

A cultural studies approach reminds us that what is being described is not simply **difference** (p. 121) but hierarchies of prestige which are often also hierarchies of **power** (p. 64). Street (1993) alerts us to the resonances of words: he argues that the use of the word 'one' as in 'one knows' implies status; the use of the word 'we' can express solidarity but when used by a

doctor, as in 'and how are we feeling today?', it can imply power and status (Street, 1993: 71).

The specialised lexicons and forms of speech that characterise certain social groupings serve to facilitate communication among those who belong to the group but exclude those who are outside and cannot speak the language. It is debatable whether specialised lexicons (semantic domains) can be ranked in terms of functional use – some being more useful than others; but what is certain is that it is possible to rank the social groupings who use particular semantic domains, so, for example, the professional language of doctors and lawyers is more prestigious than that of youth groups (see below). Language as a communicative form which represents, constructs and reproduces social and cultural inequality is the focus of the next sections.

Language and class

The work of the sociologist Basil Bernstein (1924–2000) is an influential example of research linking social class, language and speech. Educational policies and practices in Britain and the USA in the 1960s were much affected in their design and implementation by his explanations of the educational failure of young people. In essence, Bernstein argued that his researches showed that lower-class members of English society spoke a language that was *restricted* in comparison with the *elaborated* code of the middle classes. This restricted code handicapped them in their quest for social and economic betterment because schools, which were seen by Bernstein as the chief agency for social mobility, required the use of elaborated codes. Elaborated codes were necessary for the intellectual activity of learning and for the social and political purposes of receiving favourable recognition from teachers. See Box 2.2.

Bernstein revised the characteristics of restricted and elaborated codes a number of times in the light of empirical and theoretical work and eventually abandoned them. It is important to note that the changing configurations reveal the difficulties of identifying a set of inherent characteristics of cultural forms, especially when, as in this case, they are linked in opposition to each other.

Bernstein's depiction of the relationship between language and class is reminiscent of the Sapir–Whorf hypothesis; indeed it is possible to recast Bernstein's analysis in terms of lower- and middle-class groups occupying different 'thought worlds'. Both hypotheses give weight to the effects of socialisation in establishing taken-for-granted ways of seeing the world that form the texture of thought for group members. And in both cases ways of thinking are a response to socioeconomic environments. Bernstein's work is distinctive in that it is looking at language use within an apparently homogeneous language group, whereas Sapir's and Whorf's studies relate to quite different and distinct language groups; the most startling difference for our purposes is Bernstein's linking of speech and language with the structured inequalities of the English class system. For Bernstein, class-based language is not simple variation but reflects the hierarchies of the English class system with the consequence that some languages are socially and culturally dominant. Success comes to those who speak the dominant language and use its skills. Bernstein argues that formal or elaborated language is better than public or restricted language because it is constituted through the operation of logic and abstract thought – qualities that are functionally necessary for learning. Lower-class language is more context bound and encourages the assertion of uniformity, not the appreciation of difference. In this sense lower-class language is a less competent form than middle-class language and its speakers and users are not able to benefit from education which requires discrimination and logic. Bernstein's analysis suggests that the class base of English society is perpetuated and made visible through language; language both **represents** (p. 43) and *constitutes* the class system.

New emphases in cultural and social theory, more empirical studies and changes in policy making and implementation have called into question many of the conclusions of Bernstein's work. Compensatory education was recommended for children who had allegedly suffered linguistic deprivation, a condition said to be rooted in the home life of the child and in particular in the mother–child relationship. Such policies have now been switched to working with schools to enable them to be more accommodating to all children, not just those with favoured cultural characteristics.

Box 2.2

Speech codes

Restricted or public speech codes are characterised by the following:

1. Short, grammatically simple, often unfinished sentences with a poor syntactical form (stressing the active voice).
2. Simple and repetitive use of conjunctions (so, because, then).
3. Little use of subordinate clauses to break down the initial categories of the dominant subject.
4. Inability to hold a formal subject through a speech sequence: thus a dislocated informational content is facilitated.
5. Rigid and limited use of adjectives and adverbs.
6. Infrequent use of impersonal pronouns as subjects of conditional clauses.
7. Frequent use of statements where the reason and conclusion are confounded to produce a categoric statement.
8. Using a large number of statements/phrases that signal a requirement for the previous speech sequence to be reinforced: Wouldn't it? You see? You know? etc. This process is termed sympathetic circularity.
9. Individual selection from a group of idiomatic phrases or sequence will frequently occur.
10. The individual qualification is implicit in the sentence organisation: it is a language of implicit meaning.

Elaborated or formal speech codes are characterised by the following:

1. Accurate grammatical order and syntax regulate what is said.
2. Logical modifications and stress are mediated through a grammatically complex sentence construction, especially through the use of a range of conjunctions and subordinate clauses.
3. Frequent use of prepositions that indicate logical relationships as well as prepositions that indicate temporal and spatial contiguity.
4. Frequent use of the personal pronoun 'I'.
5. A discriminative selection from a range of adjectives and adverbs.
6. Individual qualification which is verbally mediated through the structure and relationships within and between sentences.
7. Expressive symbolism which discriminates between meanings within speech sequences rather than reinforcing dominant words or phrases, or accompanying the sequence in a diffuse, generalised manner.
8. Language use which points to the possibilities inherent in a conceptual hierarchy for the organising of experience.

(Bernstein, 1961: 169f., in Dittmar, 1976).

This switch has been prompted by empirical and theoretical work that has shown that all languages are characterised by the capacity for logical argument and abstract thought; the privileging of one form of language against others is a *political* and not a linguistic act. Consequently the reasons that children fail must be sought in the realms of social and political economy. It is in these areas that the work of Bernstein remains influential, as his linking of social structure with language opened up a wider investigation into ideas of dominant cultures and their formation, transmission and maintenance. By drawing attention to the social and political dimensions of cultural forms Bernstein rebutted the contention that language is simply a technical device for the representation and communication of culture.

Language, race and ethnicity

In 1966 Bereiter and Engelmann applied Bernstein's theories to the language of black children in the USA and concluded that 'the poor intellectual ability of Black lower class children is reflected in their inadequate speech' (Dittmar, 1976: 80) and the children showed 'a total lack of ability to use language as a device for acquiring and processing information. Language for them is unwieldy and not very useful' (Bereiter and Engelmann, 1966: 39, in Dittmar, 1976: 81). These conclusions were challenged by Labov (1972b) from the findings of a number of studies that he conducted on the use of non-standard English by black youths. His work demonstrated that the language

of black youth (Black English Vernacular or BEV) was different from that of middle-class speech forms; however, to describe BEV as a poor language was simply middle-class ideology. Labov criticised the data collection methods of Bereiter and Engelmann's study on two counts: (a) the data did not describe natural black language use despite purporting to do so – in fact the material gathered was a set of responses to issues set by the researchers; (b) the interviewer in the study was a white adult – Labov contends that such a person would be seen by black youth as an authority figure, a representative of a dominant other culture, to whom they would not speak freely and openly. Although the criticism is a methodological one, it is another reminder that language and language use are political and that it is important to treat critically any claims that language speaks for everyone, everywhere, at all times.

The fabrication of language as a natural, politically neutral device which 'tells things as they are' is one of the means by which language and truth are associated. There is in English culture a widespread belief that nature and the natural are truthful and reliable since they are apparently outside the realm of human manipulation; language is, as we have seen, felt to be part of nature as it is so instinctive and taken for granted. It is a short step from these assumptions to see language as truth. This discourse about language offers the opportunity to know truth through language. In this reasoning language is extremely powerful for it both constitutes truth and guarantees truth. In this formulation, questions about language use and 'who speaks for whom?' are matters of great significance for whoever gives the account is able to pronounce the truth of things. Speakers and writers of non-standard language may suffer the fate of others claiming to speak for them or of their own accounts of their situation being declared untrue or unworthy of attention. Such practices have marked the discipline of literary criticism where, for example, writings from former colonial countries written in the metropolitan language have been declared not to be literature – due to two reasons: (a) local variants of the metropolitan language are not legitimate for the writing of literature; (b) writing about colonial or postcolonial society from the experiences of native peoples is not a legitimate subject for literature. This example serves as another illustration of language as 'the medium through which a hierarchical structure of power is perpetuated and the medium through which conceptions of 'truth', 'order', and 'reality' become established' (Ashcroft *et al.*, 1989).

In the face of the imperialising cultural power of metropolitan language the writers and speakers of local variations of the language are encouraged by their compatriots to treat the language as if it was their own. They are urged to shrug off the metropolitan meanings and associations of the language and to appropriate it for their own use and by these actions 'make language "bear the burden" of one's own cultural experience' (Ashcroft *et al.*, 1989: 38) in order to 'convey in a language that is not one's own the spirit that is one's own' (Rao, 1938: vii, in Ashcroft *et al.*, 1989: 39). An example of this can be seen in the extract from the poem 'Inglan is a Bitch' by the black British poet Linton Kwesi Johnson (see Box 2.13).

Box 2.3

Inglan is a bitch

w'en mi jus' come to Landan toun
mi use to work pan di andahgroun
but workin' pan di andahgroun
y'u don't get fi know your way aroun'
Inglan is a bitch
dere's no escapin' it
Inglan is a bitch
dere's no runnin' whey fram it

Linton Kwesi Johnson

The work of Edward Said (1993) covers the same territory of cultural imperialism as cited above albeit with a perspective that illuminates how writers from metropolitan countries have, through their language, created an image of 'other societies' that is a product of language. His argument is that, alongside the devaluing of local culture and cultural products of 'other

societies', a parallel process has taken place in which metropolitan versions of these societies have been configured. These versions are in accord with the imaginings of metropolitan society, not with the experienced realities of native social actors. The example serves as a further illustration of the power of language to constitute the object of regard and simultaneously affirm the truth of that regard.

The force of the comments about the political use of language moves the discussion away from language as a technical instrument communicating politically neutral information to one that stresses that language takes its meaning from the social settings in which it operates. When it is used by the powerful it may be a subtle instrument of oppression, the more so because of its apparently neutral and natural attributes. In these circumstances it is no surprise that aspirant national groups seek to recreate or revivify local languages to symbolise their identity and carry the weight of their political ambition. The revival of Hebrew in the creation of the nation-state of Israel is one example; language as a political issue in Canada, Spain, France and Wales are other examples. In all these cases the intent is to rid themselves of **identities** (p. 142) imposed by the language of others. Such processes have also been central to the debates about 'political correctness' and language recently. So there has been a concern to change language use to eliminate oppressive uses and implications.

Language and gender

Elsewhere in this volume (Chapter 1) there is discussion of language as an expression of patriarchy. Just as postcolonial writers and speakers of non-standard language have protested that their voices are made inaudible or declared illegitimate by the power of dominant language, so women also assert that they are voiceless in language. As in the case of language and class discussed earlier in this chapter, the consideration of language and gender serves as a reminder that a language is not necessarily one's own even if one is a native speaker. The meaning and the power of language is determined by social practice; even a native speaker may be mute or dumb in certain settings. The suggestion is that this is the fate of women language users.

In this respect, Edwin Ardener (1974) suggested that 'women are often more "inarticulate" than men' by which he meant that the arenas of public discourse are typically dominated by men and the language of public discourse is 'encoded' with male meanings (Ardener, 1974: viii). The implication of this for women is that they must struggle to be heard and that they must learn male language.

Robin Lakoff (1975) is an influential early writer in the discussion of women and language; her book *Language and Women's Place*, which was based on the observation of her own and her friends' language use, set an agenda for the discussion of the topic, arguing that women's language is characteristically weak in form (not in content) and that this fits well with women's subordinate position *vis-à-vis* men. The characterisation of women's language as weak rests on Lakoff's assertion that women's speech has more 'tag' forms than men's speech. A typical example of a tag form is the statement 'It's a nice day, isn't it?'; in this example 'isn't it?' is the tag. The speaker is not seeking information but confirmation; there is the desire to achieve consensus with the hearer and the hearer is invited to participate in the statement and share the belief. Lakoff's contention is that women's speech is weaker than men's, less decisive and functionally less useful. Labov (1966), in his research on language and class, noted a gendered difference in language use which suggested that women were more deferential and less assertive than men. He found that lower middle-class women used fewer stigmatised forms than men of the same social class. The picture that emerges from this writing is one of highly gendered speech: men are said to use competitive, aggressive speech while women's speech is cooperative. Deborah Tannen (1990) argues that characteristics of the two forms of speech are so distinct that talk between men and women really represents a form of cross-cultural communication. In the language of the Sapir–Whorf hypothesis men and women inhabit different thought worlds. The characteristics of male and female talk (Tannen 1990) are as follows:

Male Talk	*Female Talk*
Hierarchies	Network
Independence	Intimacy

Information	Sharing
Attention	Symmetry
Big talk	Small talk
Superiority	Inferiority
Powerful	Powerless

The issue of cross-cultural communication between men and women is addressed in the cartoon by Jacky Fleming in Figure 2.3.

Deborah Tannen's work introduces the consideration of an important issue in the study of language, communication and representation. The discussion of language using a sociolinguistic model has alerted us to how language is embedded in social practice and has drawn attention to the ways in which language is suffused with the significant structuring principles of society.

Although Tannen's findings are broadly consistent with those of Ardener and Lakoff, her interpretation stresses cultural difference (p. 121) rather than super- and subordination. She does not see women's language as inferior to men's as, for her, the two languages are directed towards the creation of different **discourses** (p. 21) about the world. This difference does not imply that women's talk is trivial or less functionally useful than men's; indeed she would argue that women's talk has many positive virtues, stressing, as it does, inclusion rather than exclusion and cooperation rather than competition.

The possibility of interpreting gendered speech as difference rather than hierarchy reminds us that language is expressive and hence open to interpretation. Any discussion of language as a meaningful system must take account of the intentions of those who utter language and those who hear the utterances.

2.3 Mass communication and representation

Up to this point, this chapter has been primarily (though not exclusively) concerned with interpersonal communication and representation. This section relates more specifically to forms of mass communication – though obviously many issues already discussed, for example representation and ideology, relate to both interpersonal and mass communication.

The term 'mass communication' is generally used in academic studies to refer to the study of the mass media. The advent of mass media, and mass communication, is tied in with the history of printing. Block printing probably dates back to as early as the seventh century AD in China, but did not become commonplace in Europe until the fourteenth century. The advent of

Figure 2.3 Communication between men and women. (Source: Fleming, 1992.)

'mass media' is usually attributed to what are referred to as 'popular prints', which became popular in Europe from the fifteenth century onwards. These were commonly produced by woodcut printing, which were then crudely coloured by hand.

The mechanical printing press, invented by German goldsmith Johannes Gutenberg in 1447, greatly increased printing capabilities, speed and reduced costs, and would subsequently lead to the production of the first newspaper in Strasbourg, Germany, in the early seventeenth century. Throughout the seventeenth century there were many types of publications featuring 'news' stories, but across Europe in this period there starts to develop more regular and periodical publications, which we associate with contemporary newspapers.

The development of the mass media is then greatly enhanced by several key inventions in the nineteenth century, such as photography, the telephone, phonograph, cinematography, the wireless telegram and loudspeakers. Shortly after, the early twentieth century brings radio and talking film and television, and the importance of the mass media in our society begins to increase to the levels of saturation (seeping into every corner of our lives) that it has reached today.

This section, continuing the chapter's overall theme, deals specifically with the issue of mass media representations, and specifically those of ethnicity, gender and celebrity. It then concludes with a discussion of audiences and reception and in particular highlights the important work of Stuart Hall on encoding and decoding.

The mass media and representation

As suggested earlier, it is important that we do not see visual imagery and the mass media as simply a window on the world, showing us 'truth' and 'reality'. What the mass media gives us is a selected view of the world, which is always given to us from a certain perspective and angle. Hence, the mass media does not present the world, but rather gives a **representation** (p. 43) of it. Furthermore, there can never be an unbiased, objective representation of the world, as all representations come from humans and hence come from a particular position or viewpoint (O'Shaughnessy and Sadler 1999). In particular, here we now turn to the issues of media representation of race/ethnicity, gender and celebrity as illustrations of this (though equally we could have considered other representations such as of age, disability, religion, nationality, sexuality, politics, sport, crime, plus numerous other social 'groups' or phenomenon).

Mass media representations of race and ethnicity

It is often assumed by the mass media that ethnic or 'racial' groups are fundamentally different, with 'black' and 'white' frequently set up as binary opposites. For example, films such as the *Indiana Jones* series portray a white male hero adventuring in 'uncivilised' lands populated by non-white dangerous and animal-like savages. Frequently films that cover Britain's colonial history (such as *Zulu* or even *Carry On up the Khyber*) or any number of 'cowboy' films represent these as stories of native (non-white) 'savages' attacking the civilised (white) 'settlers'. This association of 'colour' with good and evil even continues over to the dress of characters in many 'cowboy' films, where the hero would frequently wear a white hat, compared with the black hat of the villain. Hence, many film narratives perpetuate these ideas of fundamental white and non-white difference:

White	**Non-White**
Civilised	Primitive
Sophisticated	Savage
Rational	Irrational
Scientific	Magical
Good	Evil

(O'Shaughnessy 1999: 237)

Stereotyped ways of portraying black and minority ethnic people in the mass media today may be less obvious, but are still apparent. For instance, non-white people continue to be stereotyped as 'deviant' and threatening by the mass media (Cole and Denny, 1994: 129). For instance, television shows, films, and popular music frequently portray black men as 'gangsters' or thugs, and black women as sexualised and permissive,

or generate **moral panics** (p. 238) around issues such as 'immigration' or 'multiculturalism' in Britain.

Van Dijk (1991) carried out an investigation into racism in the printed press and examined 2700 news articles on ethnic issues. Unsurprisingly his study suggested that the mass media is primarily run and produced by white people, who convey through this, dominant (often racist) ideological attitudes. However he suggests that racist views, such as not allowing immigrants into the country are constructed as 'not being prejudiced', but rather just 'common sense' (see **ideology** p. 35).

Though certain black celebrities (such as film or sport stars) are sometimes elevated and promoted by the mass media, these individuals can lose their 'privileged status' and be 're-raced' when associated with deviance. For instance, O.J. Simpson's 'race' was not an issue while he was a successful American football player and film star, but became important in the way the national and international press treated him after he was accused of murder – such as accusing him of trying to 'play the race card' to gain sympathy during his trial. Furthermore, it is significant how the Olympic sprinter Ben Johnson was hailed as a Canadian hero when he won the gold medal in the 1988 Olympic Games until he tested positive for 'performance enhancing' drug use and was re-raced by the Canadian press as a 'Jamaican immigrant' (Davis and Harris, 1998).

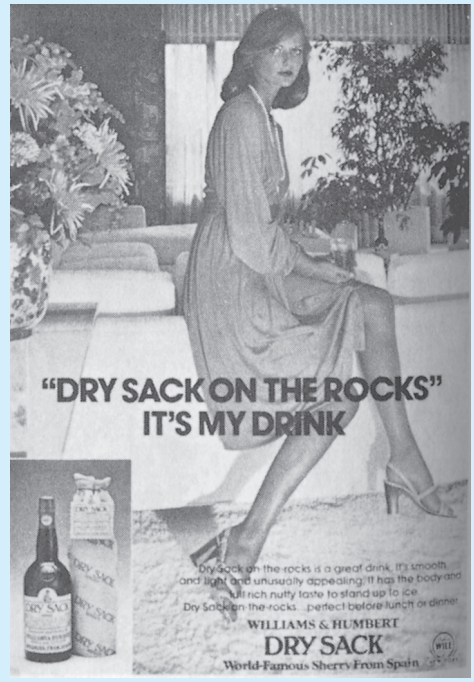
Today, images of black people are often used in advertising, film and music to represent something as 'cool', or part of 'street' or 'urban' culture. Though some could argue that through this, black culture is being portrayed in a more positive light, this is still a very

Box 2.4

The invisible man

This woman is looking at a man (who may coincide with the reader: he is drawn in): her words are in reply to his 'what will you drink?' Her dress is unbuttoned provocatively, indicating beyond doubt that the invisible character is male; the final factor is the chess set visible behind her, implying a second person, an intimacy, yet defining her intellectual quality in relation to the man, as does her decided preference for a certain drink. The message is that she is at home in a man's world, yet is sexy; and not in a passive way, as is shown by her unbuttoning of her dress. Women (in media) are 'entirely constituted by the gaze of man'. This woman is alone, is decisive and intellectual: 'Femininity is pure, free, powerful; but man is everywhere around, he presses on all sides, he makes everything exist; he is in all eternity the creative absence. . . .' The man in this picture is nowhere and everywhere, a pervasive presence defining and determining everything, and in whose terms the woman must define herself. She is doomed to see herself through his eyes, describe herself in his language.

(Williamson 1978: 80)



stereotypical and one-dimensional view of black people, and one that still carries many negative connotations and connections.

Mass media representations of gender

Tuchman (1981) referred to the 'symbolic annihilation of women' in popular culture – that is to say, either an absence, marginalisation or stereotyping of women in many aspects of popular culture, such as the mass media. Though, of course, there is some evidence of women taking more active and prominent roles within the mass media – for example, journalists, television presenters and movie or digital game action heroes, such as *Lara Croft* (in both games and films) – women continue to be largely portrayed in the mass media as sexual objects, and/or fulfilling their traditional roles as wives, mothers and partners. This is clearly visible in the way women are objectified in men's magazines and advertising, but also in other aspects of popular culture, such as in song lyrics. A good illustration of this is the song 'Wives and Lovers', written by Burt Bacharach in the 1960s, which suggests a wife's primary role is to remain 'pretty' and take care of her man to ensure his fidelity. Of course, it could be argued that this song is now quite dated, but very similar sentiments are expressed in the Destiny's Child song 'Cater 2 U', from their 2004 album *Destiny Fulfilled*, which similarly suggests a woman's role is to 'keep her self up' and 'keep it tight', and 'cater to' their man by providing him with his dinner, a foot rub, a manicure, fetching his slippers, and much more, all on demand.

Tuchman (1981) suggests that the mass media reflects society, not as it really is, but rather how it would like to see itself. For instance, today two-parent headed households with two or three children are in the minority in Britain, but still, this is how the mass media tends to represent 'typical' British family life. Likewise, women are frequently portrayed in very traditional, or trivialised, roles.

This is even evident in the ways in which women are represented in the media in traditional 'male' domains, such as sport. For example, van Zoonen (1994) argues that in sport photography male athletes are always portrayed in active roles, their bodies hard and tough, never passive and never yielding to the viewer. Though the rise in popularity of exercise and sport for women in recent years has increased the portrayal of women in the mass media in more active performing roles, Leath and Lumpkin (1992) suggests that women are still most likely to be depicted in the mass media in 'posed' rather than 'athletic' shots.

Hargreaves (1994) even goes as far to suggest that the portrayal of women in active sporting poses only further extends the male objectification of the female body – as these are still sexualised images. For example, how *The Sun* newspaper in 2003 printed a picture of tennis player Anna Kournikova every day (in its 'Kourni-corner') throughout that year's Wimbledon tennis tournament – irrespective of whether she played that day or not.

Even though we are now seeing situations where men, and in particular male athletes, are portrayed in the mass media in sexualised ways, Whelehan (2000: 131) argues that men remain represented in dominant strong roles, and more importantly, this does 'nothing to affect our perceptions of these men as people, or prompt us to question their fitness for work, their sexual propriety or anything else' – unlike women, men never become truly *objectified*.

Mass media representation of celebrity

Rojek (2001: 10) defines celebrity as 'the attraction of glamorous or notorious status to an individual within the public sphere'. By this he means that people gain celebrity status for either 'glamorous' reasons, such as super-models, footballers and pop stars, or for more 'notorious' reasons, such as serial killers or people who have committed 'lewd acts'.

Rojek suggest that although the idea of 'fame' may be historic (having existed for maybe thousands of years, in the form of monarchy and ancient 'heroes') 'celebrity' is very much a contemporary phenomenon. Rojek (2001) suggests that the rise in social importance of celebrities has occurred due to three main and interrelated historical processes:

1 The democratisation of society – which has increased our freedom of choice and allowed 'ordinary' people to rise to the status of celebrity.
2 The decline in organised religion – where in a

secular society celebrity culture replaces religious icons and role models.

3 The commodification of everyday life – where almost everything in life becomes commodified and purchasable, such as magazines which sell us insights into how to dress like celebrities, or celebrities themselves who sell us clothing ranges, perfumes or underwear bearing their names; such as *Glow* perfume by J-Lo or *Lovely* underwear by Kylie.

In particular, it is suggested that where 'fame' was once based upon success or achievement, contemporary celebrity is primarily a media creation or a 'cultural fabrication' (Rojek, 2001). As Schickel (1985: 47) argues, from the 1920s onwards:

> reward began to detach itself from effort and from intrinsic merit, when the old reasonable correlation between what (and how) one did and what one received for doing it became tenuous (and, in the upper reaches of show biz, invisible).

Furthermore, Boorstin (1992: 57–61) draws a distinction between the historical 'hero' and contemporary 'celebrity':

> The celebrity is a person who is known for his well-knownness . . . The hero was distinguished by his achievement; the celebrity by his image or trademark. The hero created himself; the celebrity is created by the media. The hero is a big man [sic]; the celebrity is a big name.

Echoing the sentiments of Schickel (1985) and Boorstin (1992), as well as Monaco (1978) and numerous others, Rojek (2001) therefore distinguishes between three 'types' of celebrity:

1 Ascribed celebrity – which is celebrity status that typically follows bloodline and biological dissent. The foundation of this celebrity is predetermined and something born into; for example, monarchy.

2 Achieved celebrity – derives from the (perceived) accomplishments of an individual in open competition. In the public realm these celebrities are recognised as individuals with rare talent. For example, early sporting stars such as Jesse Owen.

3 Attributed celebrity – result of the representation of an individual as noteworthy or exceptional by cultural producers (such as the mass media), regardless of an individual's actual talent or skill.

Achieved celebrity pre-dates the rise of the mass-media, and whilst those who were marked out for their significant achievements were widely known and talked about, key elements of their private self were secret from public view. By contrast the contemporary 'achieved' celebrity is ever present and open to digestion through various arms of the mass media, and as such, become much dependent upon their 'public' face.

The contemporary celebrity is therefore closely associated with the mass media and a **postmodern** (p. 295) era, where depth or meaning are no longer important, and increasingly what is important is surface and image. It does not really matter what David Beckham or Brad Pitt are *really* like – all that matters is their media and celebrity images, which become disconnected from any sense of reality. For instance, in his book on David Beckman, Ellis Cashmore (2002) utilises the work of Andy Warhol, and in particular his repetition of images of stars such as Marilyn Monroe and Elvis Presley, to highlight the way in which contemporary celebrities are produced and reproduced like any other consumer commodity by the mass media. And as Cashmore (2002: 192) writes, David Beckham is 'as much a [media] construction as Bob the Builder or Tony Soprano – a product of imagination and industry, rather than exploits'.

However, the mass media created 'celebrity' can be very short-lived. Rojek (2001) suggests that the term celebrity is linked to the Latin word *celere*, which means 'swift', and therefore in doing so highlights the precarious nature of celebrities. In particular, he identifies what he refers to as 'celetoids', who are individuals who command media attention for only a very short period of time. Examples include lottery winners, stalkers, streakers or kiss-and-tellers. In particular, celetoids are often constructed around sexual scandal, such as Monica Lewinsky, who had an affair with the (then) US president Bill Clinton. The celetoid receives their moment of fame and then disappears from public consciousness rapidly, although they can achieve a degree of longevity – such as Monica Lewinsky who in the period after her affair, launched her own brand of

handbags and appeared on several chat and 'reality' television shows, and gave numerous interviews to newspapers and magazines.

Similarly, just as celebrity fades, so too can media and public adulation be transformed into revulsion. Many celebrities have seen their celebrity 'glamorous' status pulled from under them, and replaced with one of shame and 'notoriety'. This is particularly common in sport, where very easily, failures, or off-field behaviour can turn stars into villains overnight. A good example being the life and changing (media) fortunes of the one time professional footballer Paul 'Gazza' Gascoigne. Gascoigne's career and life has continuously been the focus of British tabloid journalism for well over a decade.

His life has been recounted like that of a soap character, featuring the highs of his success (and England's *almost* success) at the 1990 football World Cup finals, which ended (literally) in tears for Gascoigne, to the lows of his struggles with his weight and depression and admission of abuse toward his wife (see Giulianotti and Gerrad 2001). Though undoubtedly Paul Gascoigne was a footballer of great talent, it was his tears in 1990, not his talent, which made him a celebrity, and this is a celebrity that was maintained by continued media interest in his private life, long after his professional career had ended.

Audiences and reception

This chapter has highlighted the processes of communications and representation as involving complex patterns of interaction and interpretation between the sender and receiver of a 'message'. The relationship between message or textual production and its reception should be understood as a complex cycle, rather than a unidirectional process. However, it is still frequently the case that the production (or 'encoding' processes) of a text or message are given precedence in many studies of communication and the mass media, at the expense of reception (or 'decoding' processes). However, an important contribution to our understanding of both these encoding and decoding processes is the work of Stuart Hall (p. 55).

Stuart Hall: encoding, decoding and ideology

Work on the media developed and operationalised some of the key debates on **ideology**. In particular the research carried out at the Birmingham **Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies** (p. 241) was hugely influential. The cornerstone of this was the work of Stuart Hall.

In 'Encoding/decoding', Hall (1980) argues that television programmes, and by implication all other forms of text, should be understood as 'meaningful **discourse**' (p. 21). In the language of **structuralism** (p. 17) and

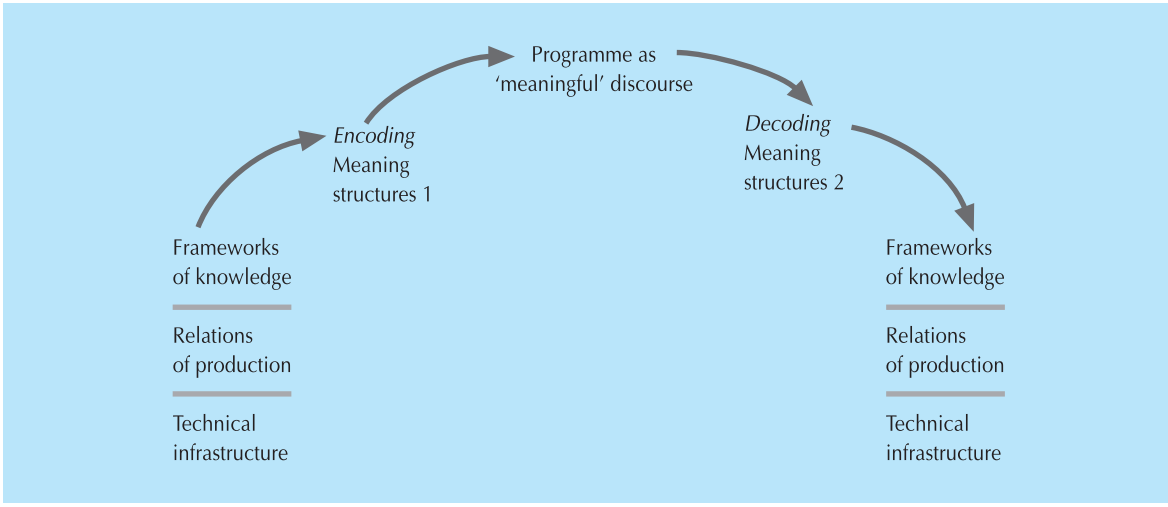


Figure 2.4 Encoding and decoding. (Source: Hall, 1980: 130.)

Key influence 2.2

Stuart Hall (1932–)

Stuart Hall is a Jamaican-born intellectual and political activist who can in many senses be seen as the crucial figure in the development of contemporary cultural studies through his own work, his stimulation of others and his continued attention to the interconnections between politics and the pursuit of knowledge.

Born into a middle-class family, Hall left Jamaica in 1951 to study at Oxford. He was active in left politics and became the first editor of New Left Review in 1960. In 1964 he was appointed as deputy director (to Richard Hoggart) of the newly created **Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies** (p. 241). He subsequently became director, before taking the Chair of Sociology at the Open University in 1979.

Hall's early engagement with the New Left stimulated his interest in popular culture and he published an important text with Paddy Whannel, The Popular Arts (1964). This interest continued in a number of papers on diverse topics in the area of media and communication, including news photographs, the magazine *Picture Post*, and news and current affairs television. His ongoing concern with issues of race was combined with this emphasis in the influential (collectively authored) *Policing the Crisis* (1978). He wrote on subcultures specifically on hippies, but most importantly in the key collective text *Resistance through Rituals* (1976). His theoretical interests were developed in papers on ideology, which were influenced by both Althusser and **Gramsci** (p. 38). He was one of the first leftist analysts to confront Thatcherism and from 1979 on developed an analysis and critique based in a Gramscian approach. This resulted in the concept of 'authoritarian populism', *The Politics of Thatcherism* (1983) and *New Times* (1989), both edited with Martin Jacques. Confronting **postmodernism** (p. 295) led Hall to increased concern with issues around 'race' and '**identity**' (p. 142) in the 1990s, when he also continued to reflect on the development of 'cultural studies'.

The impact of Hall's own work, centred on the interconnections between **ideology** (p. 35), identity, culture and politics, on cultural studies cannot be overestimated. He remains at the cutting edge of developments, continuing to argue for the relevance of a sophisticated Marxism to the understanding of contemporary social formations, as well as a force for social change. Moreover, especially during his time at the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies in Birmingham, he influenced a generation of researchers who were themselves to become some of the leading writers in the field. His commitment to collective work is reflected in his joint authorship and editorship of many volumes.

Further reading

Morley, D. and Chen, K.-H. (eds) (1996) *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*, London: Routledge.

Hall, S. and Jefferson, T. (eds) (1976) *Resistance through Rituals: Youth Subcultures in Post-war Britain*, London: Hutchinson.

Hall, S., Critcher, C., Jefferson, T., Clarke, J. and Roberts, B. (1978) *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State and Law and Order*, London: Macmillan.

semiotics (p. 29) introduced earlier in this chapter, they consist of codes. To achieve this status they must be encoded by those involved in their production, and be capable of being decoded by the audiences who watch them. They are social phenomena subject to struggle and change. These relationships are summarised by Hall in the diagram reproduced in Figure 2.4.

Hall argues that the television text, or sign, is very complex; furthermore that it can be decoded in different ways by the audience. Hall identifies three positions 'from which decodings of a televisual discourse may be constructed' (1980: 136). These he calls the 'dominant-hegemonic', the 'negotiated' and the 'oppositional' (1980: 136–8). In the dominant-**hegemonic** position (p. 73) the logic of the television programme is gone along with.

> When the viewer takes the connoted meaning from, say, a television newscast or current affairs programme full and straight, and decodes the message in terms of the references code in which it has been encoded, we might say that the viewer is *operating inside the dominant code.*
>
> (Hall, 1980: 136)

The negotiated code may also operate within this framework, but will allow for disagreements within it. Thus, on the basis of experience, for example, there may be specific challenges to aspects of the dominant frame.

> Decoding within the *negotiated version* contains a mixture of adaptive and oppositional elements: it acknowledges the legitimacy of the hegemonic definitions to make grand significations (abstract), while, at a more restricted, situational (situated) level, it makes its own ground rules – it operates with exceptions to the rule.
>
> (Hall, 1980: 137)

In the oppositional position the dominant framework is directly resisted, in a 'globally contrary way' (Hall, 1980: 137–8).

These potential positions were empirically considered by Morley (1980). Reiterating the influence of the sociologist Frank Parkin (1973) on his and Hall's position, Morley found evidence for the existence of the different positions among social groups to which he showed examples of the British current affairs magazine programme *Nationwide* (see further Abercrombie, 1996; Abercrombie and Longhurst, 1998).

Audiences

The work of Stuart Hall on encoding/decoding was (and continues to be) significant for the study of audiences. Prior to the work of Hall and his colleagues at the University of Birmingham, audience members were frequently cast as 'passive dopes' (Garfinkel 1967) who passively absorbed messages communicated to them by the mass media. This is the attitude towards audiences that appears to be conveyed by **Frankfurt School** writers such as Theodor Adorno (p. 75), and it is also the attitude of many (even contemporary) psychological studies of audiences, such as the perceived 'effect' of media violence on individuals (p. 193).

This perspective of audience members as passive recipients of mass media 'messages' (Abercrombie and Longhurst (1998)) refers to as the *Behavioural Paradigm* of audience research. However, they suggest that the influential work of authors such as Stuart Hall led to a recognition that audiences are not passive, but can actively 'decode' and engage with texts. This then leads to the development of a new paradigm in audience research, which they call the *Incorporation/Resistance Paradigm*.

In this model audiences are seen as more active in their consumption, where the messages conveyed by the mass media are reinterpreted or even rejected (resisted) by audience members (see **resistance** p. 170). Put simply, they suggest that the focus of this paradigm is on 'whether audience members were incorporated into dominant ideology by their participation in media activity, or whether to the contrary, they are resistant to that incorporation' (1998: 15).

However, Abercrombie and Longhurst (1998) argue that there are a number of weaknesses with this paradigm. These include, most notably, that the power an audience has to resist or reinterpret the messages the mass media conveys to them is often overstated within this paradigm, and second, that there exists little empirical evident to support this paradigmal framework – on the contrary, as audiences becoming more skilled in their media use, their responses and actions are less likely to conform to this simple model.

In particular, Abercrombie and Longhurst (1998) argue there is now occurring a shift towards a new paradigm, and this they refer to as the *Spectacle/Performance Paradigm*. They suggest that within an increasingly spectacular and performative (**postmodern** – p. 295) society individuals become part of a 'diffused audience'. That is to say, we draw on the mass media as a resource and use this in our everyday social performances, rendering us (and others) both performances, and audiences to others' performances, in our everyday lives.

The Incorporation/Resistance Paradigm therefore recognises audiences as not the passive product of production/text process, while more contemporary debates (within a Spectacle/Performance Paradigm) allow us to break down the boundaries between production/text/consumption, and see audiences as both consumers and producers of texts and performances.

2.4 Conclusion

In this chapter we have considered the social and cultural importance of communication and representation. In particular, we have highlighted that unlike early theorisations of communication, such as that offered by Claude Elwood Shannon, communication is not a simple straightforward process of a sender constructing a message and sending it to a receiver, who understands the message in exactly the way it was intended. Communication is rather, an extremely complex process. In particular, we have illustrated how the form of a message (or 'text'), such as being spoken, written or visual, can shape its meaning. Through a discussion of meanings and semiotics, we have also shown how the meanings attached to signs (such as words) are arbitrary, and hence language and meaning is not a straightforward and simple association. However, it is argued that the association between a sign and its meaning is a structured one, and this is illustrated with the work authors such as de Saussure, Chomsky and Lévi-Strauss, and also the ideological nature of meaning. This, however, is challenged by hermeneutics, poststructuralism and postmodernism, which emphasise the more subjective and/or fluid nature of meanings in contemporary society.

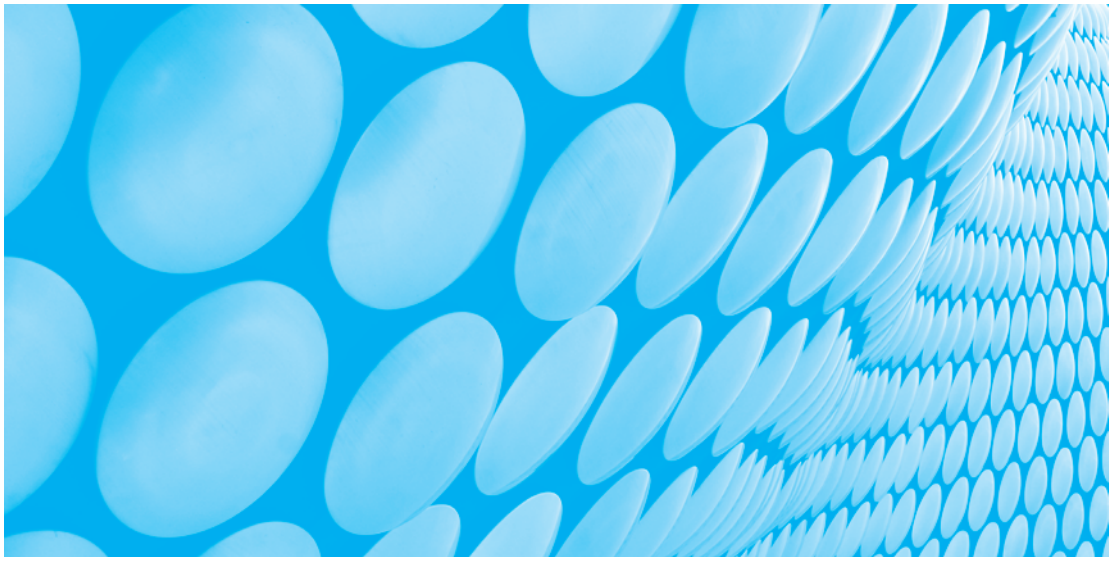
This chapter also highlights the importance of recognising the complexities involved in processes of representation, and also the power relations intrinsic to this. In particular, it considers the role language plays in structuring gender, race and ethnicity and social class. Finally, in this chapter we have consider mass media representations of gender, race and ethnicity, and celebrity, and again highlighted the important role that meanings represented through the mass media can have in shaping our understanding of cultural forms and 'groupings'. But here we also highlight the important work of Stuart Hall, which makes us aware that mass media 'messages' need not always be accepted or encountered in the way they were intended, and that audiences have the ability to 'decode' and reinterpret 'texts'.

Recap

- Communication and representation are a complex process and cycle of making meanings, interpretation and re-interpretation.
- Communication and representation are not neutral, but rather can be value-laden.
- That it is through language and communication that we make sense of our world, and through this, help shape our world.

Further reading

An excellent short introduction to issues of language and representation, especially as discussed in the structuralist and semiotic viewpoints, can be found in Terence Hawkes, *Structuralism and Semiotics* (1977). The classic study which applies these to advertising is Judith Williamson *Decoding Advertisements: Ideology and Meaning in Advertising* (1978), which might be used to prompt analyses of your own. Connections between representation and power (especially of class and gender) are economically and influentially dealt with by John Berger in *Ways of Seeing* (1972). John Fiske and John Hartley, *Reading Television* (1978) apply semiotics to television; Fiske's *Television Culture* (1987) develops the argument and approach. And a good introduction to the Mass Media is O'Shaughnessy and Sadler's *Media and Society: An Introduction* (1999).



Chapter 3

Culture, power, globalisation and inequality

3.0 Introduction

Globalisation, is the buzzword that has been coined to describe the spread of economies, cultures and power across national borders. It is a highly contested term that is both used and misused. Indeed as Dicken (2007) suggests it has become a convenient term used to collect together all the 'goods' and 'bads' facing contemporary societies. However, it is true to say that there is an increasingly global scale to the complex geography of production, distribution and consumption of the things that we use in our daily lives (Dicken, 2007). We shall suggest that the globalisation of capitalist economies and a westernised consumer culture has had a significant impact on contemporary societies. We will see that in many ways culture is the most visible manifestation of this globalisation. However, we also want to suggest that the globalisation of capitalism leads to an unequal distribution of income and wealth between and within societies.

The development and global expansion of a world capitalist system of production has generated increasing disparities of wealth, income and life chances within and between the populations of the world's nation-states. The pursuit of capitalist goals is contrary to social, economic and political egalitarianism; capitalism produces inequality. It is also becoming more and more apparent that the sources and manifestations of this inequality are not simply produced by the globalisation of market logics and mechanisms. The cultural dimension is increasingly significant.

This chapter begins with a discussion of globalisation and the cultural and economic effects it produces. We examine a range of approaches to the study of globalisation taken by writers in and around cultural studies. We shall suggest that the pessimism that often frames the debate around the globalisation of culture is not always well founded. However, we shall see that inequalities are inherent to a global capitalist system of economic production. Second, we develop this idea and examine the relationship between culture, power and

inequality, looking at explanations of the origins of inequality in capitalist societies. Third, the chapter considers how and why inequality is maintained in capitalist societies with particular reference to the role of culture. Fourth, it looks at systems of inequality that are commonly seen to be rooted and expressed in non-economic values, namely race, ethnicity, age and gender. This will allow us to examine the principal sources and characteristics of inequality (class, status and caste), the ways that inequality is made acceptable to people, that is how it comes to be seen as legitimate, and some of the leading cultural consequences of inequality. In the concluding section we shall examine the idea that different kinds of inequality interact to produce multiple disadvantages.

Learning objectives

- To understand the social, economic and cultural significance of globalisation.
- To recognize the main structural sources of social inequality.
- To appreciate the various conceptions of the part played by culture in legitimating inequality.
- To learn about the leading cultural manifestations of inequality.
- To grasp some of the ways in which cultural power is displayed.

3.1 Understanding globalisation

Globalisation is a term that tries to capture the rapid social change that is occurring simultaneously across a number of dimensions, including the economy, politics, communications and culture (Tomlinson, 1999, 2006). Theorists of globalisation emphasise that we inhabit a world where there are global economies, a global media, a world characterised by virtual communication, institutional deregulation, and the movement of capital, information and people at great speed across large distances (Savage *et al.*, 2005). Where social and cultural life can no longer be seen as firmly located in particular places with clear boundaries (Abercrombie *et al.*, 2000).

Globalisation: cultural and economic change

We can think of globalisation in two senses as a process and as an outcome, in both these senses globalisation leads to cultural and economic change. Firstly, it is a process over time that is compressing the distances between people and places and which increases the sense that we live in a single world. Secondly, it is suggested that the outcome of globalisation is that we live in a world criss-crossed by global processes, where individual places, groups of people and societies have lost their significance and power and where there is interdependency, culturally, politically, economically and militarily (Abercrombie *et al.*, 2000).

New forms of global communications, such as the development of international travel via mass jet transportation, or high-speed trains, and the increased prevalence of mobile phones, the internet, fax and satellite communications play a key role in the development of globalisation. It is suggested that such developments reduce the distance between places and people, as they reduce the time taken to move people, images or information. They lead to a re-drawing of the categories of time and space, and a compressing of distance: we are seen to inhabit a 'small world' where there is an increasing sense of global interdependence (Abercrombie *et a*l., 2000). These technological developments are seen to be sweeping away cultural boundaries and creating the possibility, even the likelihood of a global culture (GPF, 2007).

Another key aspect of globalisation is that there are huge flows of money between different foreign exchange markets, leading to an internationalisation of economies, and a sense of economic interdependence. Companies, such as Microsoft, Nike, McDonalds, Virgin, or Sony adopt global strategies, and have an annual turnover greater than whole national economies. An extensive range of products are available worldwide, such as the *iPod* or *Coca Cola*. There is growth in scale of the import and export of goods and services as the barriers to international trade are

reduced and the capitalist system expands on a worldwide scale.

Large corporations also control the world's mass media, leading to a uniformity of programmes based on a large international market, and reducing the impact of local programmes and identities. We begin to inhabit a world of media sameness and again there is the suggestion that this leads to a homogenised global culture. The proliferation of 'reality television' across the globe is symptomatic of this. International companies such as Endemol N.V, market themselves as 'global leaders' aiming to promote their 'premium entertainment concepts' or brands such as 'Big Brother' across the globe (**www.endemoluk.com**). Global entertainment companies have the capacity to shape people's perceptions and dreams wherever they may live. The culture, norms and values promoted tend to support Western ideals of capitalism and consumer culture.

The extent and effects of globalisation are difficult to measure, but the World Bank suggests that the scope and pace of change can be monitored along four key channels: trade in goods and services; financial flows; the movement of people; and the diffusion of technology and knowledge. The following data from the 2007 edition of the World Bank's annual publication, *World Development Indicators* go some way to illustrating the scale and the growth of globalisation over the past 20–30 years.

- Exports and imports of goods and services exceeded $26 trillion in 2005, or 58 per cent of total global output, up from 44 per cent in 1980.
- Gross private capital flows across national borders exceeded 32 per cent of global output in 2005, up from 9 per cent in 1980.
- People have become more mobile. More than 800 million people travelled to foreign destinations in 2005, nearly triple the number in 1980. Some 190 million people are estimated to reside outside their land of birth, nearly double the 1980 level.
- Technology and knowledge are diffusing at unprecedented speed across countries. International phone traffic, measured in minutes, increased more than fourfold between 1995 and 2005 (World Bank, 2007).

Theorising about globalisation

Globalisation theory emerged from the late 1980s onwards as commentators tried to make sense of the rapid social change they were observing. Early globalisation theory was a response to the new forms of capitalist power and dominance that were being identified (Robertson, 1992). The collapse of most state socialist regimes, as well as the weakening power of labour movements and socialist politics within many capitalist nations removed the main political alternative to capitalism (Bauman 1987). Economic restructuring, state deregulation, the power of large transnational corporations, and the proliferation of new technologies facilitating the mobility of goods, capital, people and symbols, led to a new sense of global connectivity (Savage *et al.*, 2005). As Tomlinson (1999) has outlined, at the heart of globalisation is a process of accelerating 'connectivity', a rapidly developing and increasingly dense network of interconnections and interdependencies that characterise modern social life (Tomlinson, 2006).

Commentators have tried to connect this process to historical and social change indicating that we have entered a 'global age', one that marks the end of modernity (Albrow, 1996). Consequently, a new kind of consumerist post-modern aesthetic and intensified forms of individualised identities were heralded as indications of new social relations generated by global flows (see Harvey, 1990; Jameson 1991; Lash and Urry, 1987; Bauman, 1987). By the early 1990s it was possible to conceive of one world organised around common capitalist parameters, for the first time since the First World War (Fukuyama, 1992). Roland Robertson (1992) developed the first major account of globalisation as the rise of a 'global awareness'. He argued that globalisation was making the world a 'single place' which was leading to 'the compression of the world and the intensification of consciousness of the world as a whole' (1992: 8).

The move towards the characterisation of the world as a single place went alongside a fear of the decline in importance of the local. As communication was no longer confined to the boundaries of particular places, practices became increasingly detached from their local

settings. An important impetus here was the way that new media technologies could be seen to play a crucial role in time–space distanciation. Early globalisation theorists' response to this was rather pessimistic. Giddens (1991) argued that new forms of media generated 'no sense of place', with people defining their salient relationships not in terms of face-to-face contacts but in terms of media characters and celebrities. Concern was expressed over the spread of a global culture that would homogenise cultural experience, destroy local identities and localities, and lead to a loss of community and 'face-to-face' interaction (Savage *et al.*, 2005). There was anxiety that local cultures would be taken over by a global consumer culture, and that consumer values would overwhelm people's sense of community and social solidarity. However, for some there was also the hope that a common culture would lead to greater shared values and political unity. This early period of classic globalisation theory was, however, short-lived.

By the early 1990s any simple hopes for a new world order were dissipated behind growing national and cultural conflicts (Savage *et al.*, 2005). It became clear that major global tensions, between religious blocs and between national and ethnic groups, only served to highlight the significance of boundaries. It was clear that the world was not a single unified place, politically, economically or culturally. Globalisation was and is an uneven process: it does not spread to all corners of the globe. For example, the developing world is not able to participate in global communications or the global economy to the same extent as the developed world (Massey, 1994).

A different approach to globalisation and spatial change emerged by the mid 1990s, and can be found in the later work of Robertson (1995), in the writings of Lash and Urry (1994), Massey (1994), Appadurai (1996) and Castells (1996, 1997). These writers did not emphasise the erosion of place but rather focused on new forms of connection and mobility, of global flows between places, and their potential to rework social relationships and to reconstruct localism. As Beck says (2002: 23), 'you cannot even think about globalisation without referring to specific locations and places'. A key point made by these writers was that the local is not transcended by globalisation, but rather that the local is to be understood through the lens of global relationships (Savage *et al.*, 2005). Globalisation, therefore, produces new forms of localisation in a dialectical relationship that Robertson (1995) popularised as 'glocalisation', where 'globalisation' has involved the reconstruction of 'home', 'community' and 'locality'. As Urry states 'the global and local are inextricably and irreversibly bound together through a dynamic

Figure 3.1 The McTurco.

relationship' (2003: 84) so that people dwell 'in and through being at home and away, through the dialectic of roots and routes' (Urry 2000: 132–3). Hence, whilst, there is evidence of the spread of a westernised or Americanised consumer culture, this does not necessarily translate into a uniform global culture, rather it can lead to the appearance of new cultural forms, for example Disneyland Paris, or the transformation of traditional cultural expressions such as Turkish McDonald's restaurants serving their customers a 'McTurco' (see Figure 3.1) a type of Turkish kebab. However, this does not mean that globalisation is unproblematic. As we shall see in the next section inequalities are an inherent part of the global capitalist system.

Globalisation and inequality

Globalisation leads to an unequal distribution of income and wealth. The development and global expansion of a world capitalist system of production has generated increasing disparities of wealth, income and life chances within and between the populations of the world's nation-states. In 1996 the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) complimented the British government on its economic success in controlling inflation and reducing unemployment in the British economy but warned that there might be a high price to pay in terms of social disharmony and civil unrest because the policies of sound economics had produced a big gap in incomes and wealth in British society. By 2006 the OECD was warning that exceptionally strong labour force growth, driven by high immigration and rising workforce participation was outstripping employment growth, pushing the UK unemployment rate up and contributing to a high rate of child poverty and joblessness. Similar warnings have been given about the relationships between the industrially developed and economically advanced nations of the world and areas of the former communist world and countries of the so-called developing or Third World. This is a political term which is used to describe poor countries in Africa, Latin America and parts of Asia, many of which were former colonies of European states. In all cases the warning is that there are dangers to social cohesion and political stability as a result of the operation and continuing expansion of the capitalist system.

If we consider the global economic differences between societies, it is evident that the contrasts are very marked in scale and continuing to grow. Economists speak of these increasing differences in the wealth of the developed and developing world societies as the 'development gap'. One way of measuring the development gap is to compare the gross national income per head of the population (GNI per capita). This is the total value of goods and services produced annually in a nation divided by its population. In 2005 the World Bank's 'high income' nations – mainly in North America, Europe, Australasia and parts of the Middle and Far East – made up 16 per cent of the world's population yet had an average GNI per capita well over 20 times higher than the average for the rest of the world (World Bank, 2007).

A key area of concern is Third World debt, which has long been recognised as a major obstacle to human development, education, health and economic recovery and growth. Many other problems arise because of the enormous debt that Third World countries owe to rich countries: it is estimated that about 11 million children die each year around the world, due to conditions of poverty and debt. The developing world now spends $13 on debt repayment for every $1 it receives in grants. In 1970, the world's poorest countries (roughly 60 countries classified as low-income by the World Bank) owed $25 billion in debt: by 2002, this was $523 billion. For Africa, in 1970, it was just under $11 billion and by 2002 it was $295 billion. These countries have paid back $550 billion in principal and interest over the last three decades, on $540 billion of loans and they still continue to pay (**http://news.bbc.co.uk**). The G8 Summit (the periodic meeting of the eight most industrialised nations in the world to discuss and draw up global economic policies) in July 2005 promised debt relief and a doubling of aid for some poor countries in Africa. However, to date, whilst there has been some reduction in debt, the World Bank (2007) notes that 'donor nations are falling behind in fulfilling their promises' (see the satirical cartoon in Figure 3.2).

Debt has impeded sustainable human development, security and political or economic stability in the developing world. It leads to an unequal distribution of

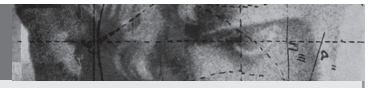
Figure 3.2 World debt. (Source: the *Observer*, 17 May 1998, © Chris Riddell.)

power and wealth throughout the globe. It is partly in response to such inequalities that we have seen the development of the anti-globalisation movement which is both a political and cultural response to the effects of globalisation. This is a diverse new social movement (NSM) or collection of social movements (see also Chapter 6 for discussion of NSMs) who oppose certain aspects of globalisation, such as the political and economic power of large corporations and industrial nations, or the environmental impacts. They campaign for human rights and the dissolution or reform of the capitalist system. The movement is made up of different groups and organisations, with different viewpoints, strategies and tactics but who come together to demonstrate at international events. This has led to anti-globalisation demonstrations and mobilisations against organisations such as the World Trade Organization, International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. The anti-globalisation movement is against neo-liberalism, United States imperialism and domination by US-based transnational corporations (Epstein, 2001). They have been involved in a variety of peaceful and violent marches, demonstrations and street protests. They have employed civil disobedience and used a strategy of confrontation against, amongst others, the WTO in Seattle in 1999, and the G8 summit meetings in Genoa in 2001 and Germany in 2007.

Of course what these data about inequalities between societies overlook are the very considerable differences in income, wealth and associated life chances that individuals may experience *within* any given society. Even in a rich society such as the USA, the poor encounter real deprivation. Nevertheless, the differences between rich and poor societies in a global perspective are striking, for example, in 2005 life expectancy at birth varied from

Figure 3.3 Anti-globalisation civil disobedience.

Defining concept 3.1



Power

Power has come to be one of the crucial concepts in cultural studies. Interpretations of culture that draw upon ideas of 'cultural politics' argue that everything is political and, as a result that power is everywhere (see Chapter 6). For example, it is used in this book to understand relations of class, race, gender and age; to interpret the body and representations of people and places; and to make sense of our understandings of time and space. As **Michel Foucault** (p. 20), one of the theorists responsible for extending the use of ideas of power, put it: 'Power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere.' To understand what he meant by this, and its implications, we need to look more closely at how power has been understood.

In a classic essay originally written in 1974, and updated and reissued in 2004, Steven Lukes argued that there are three views of power. The 'one-dimensional view' is that it means that person A can get person B to do something that they would not otherwise do. The 'two-dimensional view' is that group A has power to the extent that they can define not just the outcomes but the 'rules of the game' to their advantage. The 'three-dimensional view' is where the powerful have power to the extent that they can prevent people, to whatever degree, from having grievances by shaping their perceptions, cognitions and preferences in such a way that they accept their role in the existing order of things either because they can see or imagine no alternative to it, or because they see it as natural and unchangeable, or because they value it as divinely ordained and beneficial (Lukes, 1974, 2004). This third view has many similarities to that which is put forward in the notions of **ideology** (p. 35) and **hegemony** (p. 73), and it helps us to understand the importance of the ways in which the unequal distribution of power is made to seem appropriate – the way it is given legitimation.

The challenge that is offered to these views of power is that they are essentially negative. They all involve trying to understand how people are prevented from doing what they want, defining the 'rules of the game' as they want, or thinking their own thoughts. Instead of this Foucault suggests that power is productive. Power lies in the creation of **discourses** (p. 21), institutions, objects and **identities** (p. 142); power is all about making and remaking the world in a particular way. Thus, in his analysis, power produces classifications of knowledge which define our understanding of the relationship between people and nature; power produces bodies that can be made even more productive in factories and prisons; and power produces sexuality as the site that tells us most about ourselves. Power is not about saying 'no'; it is about producing things, identities and ideas.

Taking these views together, what we have are multiple forms of power. In each case, rather than trying to track down who finally holds 'power' and what that power is in the sort of abstract language that Lukes uses, we can try to understand how the relations of power work. There are plenty of examples in this book – such as analyses of orientalism, monuments or the body – where we have tried to offer this sort of interpretation. What we find is that power works in many different ways because, as Foucault says, 'power comes from everywhere'; it is part of all relationships. Yet this is not a matter of reducing the world to a grey arena in which we are all totally dominated and controlled by capitalism or patriarchy or 'the system'. There are always **resistances** (p. 170) (which we need to think about not as qualitatively different from power but as forms of 'counter-power') which – together with the fact that the forces they oppose are often in conflict – produce a vibrant world of many contending people, institutions and discourses engaged in never-ending contests over resources, meanings, spaces, identities, positions and representations.

Further reading

Clegg, S.R. (1989) *Frameworks of Power*, London: Sage.

Lukes, S. (ed.) (1986) *Power*, Oxford: Blackwell.

Lukes, S (2004) *Power: A Radical View*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan

75 years in 'high income' nations to 59 years in 'low income' nations (World Bank, 2007). These differences remain an underlying source of tension and instability in the contemporary world.

3.2 Theorising about culture, power and inequality

We have suggested that globalisation and the expansion of the global capitalist system leads to an unequal distribution of power, income and wealth within and between societies. In this section we shall look at how theorists have tried to explain this and we show how culture contributes to the production and maintenance of inequalities and power relations in the contemporary world. We begin with the work of Karl Marx.

Marx and Marxism

Much contemporary theorising about culture, power and inequality derives from **Marx's** theories (Marx and Engels, 1967; McLellan, 2000) and Marxian analyses and models of the social and economic processes of class formation in capitalist society. As Raymond Williams (1983a: 16) has noted, Marxism has made an influential contribution to modern cultural thought, even though Marx himself never developed a fully systematic theory of culture. Marx outlines a historical progression from societies that he saw as exhibiting primitive communism through feudal society and into various forms of capitalist society, leading eventually to a revolution in which the agencies of the state would be overthrown and a socialist society emerge. There are a number of features of Marxian analyses that are significant for consideration of the connections between culture and inequality: the underlying economic structure of class inequality; Marx's emphasis on the opposed and antagonistic relationship between the classes; and the connection between power and culture.

It is economic relationships that underpin inequality for Marx; in all known societies (save the early state of primitive communism) there has always been the basic and fundamental contradiction that some members of society have owned and controlled the means of production, a characteristic that has given them power over the remaining members of society who, in order to make a livelihood, participate in production on terms and conditions set by these owners. For Marx, inequality in capitalist society hinges on whether one is an owner of the means of production or an owner of one's labour. As capitalism develops, the class structure simplifies around two main classes, proletariat and bourgeoisie. The relationship between these classes is asymmetrical: there is an unequal distribution of power between them. In the context of the underlying economic relationship this asymmetrical relationship is an antagonistic one as the owners of the means of production increasingly seek to exploit the providers of labour. It is this antagonism and contradiction at the heart of society that acts as the dynamic that propels society on to new forms of exploitation. As it is inherent in capitalism to expand and to destroy all other forms of production, the relationship between the principal classes, the bourgeoisie (the owners of the means of production, those with power and money) and the proletariat (the owners only of their labour, and so lacking in power and money), becomes ever sharper and more antagonistic until eventually the proletariat rises up in revolution and overthrows the bourgeoisie.

For Marx, inequality in society is grounded in antagonistically related social classes. Marx addresses the question of how and why it is possible for the bourgeoisie to maintain its position of dominance for protracted periods, given the fact that it is a minority in society and given the level of oppression and hardship experienced by the masses, the proletariat. Part of the answer is that the bourgeoisie, through its economic power, also exercises political power and so shapes and controls the agencies of the state. Effective control of the state apparatus also gives it a monopoly on the use of force. Another aspect of its power to shape and control the state is the cultural control exercised by the bourgeoisie. Marx sees the bourgeoisie spreading and implementing beliefs and values that sustain the unequal system of relationships by legitimising it through reference to non-economic domains of social experience. An example of this is the realm of spirituality and religious belief. Marx sees the particular beliefs of organised religion as buttresses for an unequal, unjust society. Religion, in his celebrated

Key influence 3.1

E.P. Thompson (1924–93)

Edward Palmer (E.P.) Thompson was a very influential English Marxist historian and political activist. His education at Cambridge was interrupted by war service in Italy, but he returned to finish his degree and then took up a position as extra-mural lecturer at Leeds University (1948–65). He was also a Reader at the Centre for the Study of Social History at the University of Warwick, where he influenced a whole generation of social historians. As well as writing on history and theory, he was an active campaigner for nuclear disarmament and a novelist.

E.P. Thompson's most influential work is probably *The Making of the English Working Class* (1968). This social and political history of the working class in the English industrial revolution attempted to present a 'history from below', one written from the perspective of an increasingly proletarianised and politicised working class. It sought, as he put it, 'to rescue the poor stockinger from the enormous condescension of posterity' and to present a history in which the working class were active in their own 'making'. In doing so he offered a challenge to Marxist interpretations of history which saw the history of capitalism as foretold by the inevitable movements of modes of production and social formations. This attention to agency – the power of people to shape history – was stated in opposition to the structuralist theories of Louis Althusser in Thompson's caustic attack entitled *The Poverty of Theory* (1978). It also offered an understanding of class and power which saw them not only as economic relationships but also as social and cultural ones. This led to studies of law and custom that considered class relations in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Britain in terms of the ways in which classes defined themselves and were brought into conflict over questions of criminality and customary rights (see *Whigs and Hunters* (1975); *Albion's Fatal Tree (1975) and Customs in Common* (1991)).

Thompson has been criticised for failing to pay sufficient attention to issues of gender and race in the 'making of the English working class', and the role of agency and culture in the history of capitalism is still a matter of ongoing debate. However, his impact on cultural studies has been to stress the importance of theoretically informed histories, especially 'histories from below', and his attention to the active role of culture in the making of class relations is important.

Further reading

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Key influence 3.2

Karl Marx (1818–83)

Marx's work has been widely influential in the social sciences, arts and humanities. He did not write much about culture itself, but Marxist cultural critics have developed his ideas and those of his collaborator, Friedrich Engels, on alienation, ideology, history and value.

Marx was born in Trier, Prussia, in 1818 to a Jewish family which later converted to Christianity. He studied law at Bonn and Berlin. In 1842 he became editor of the *Rheinische Zeitung*, and in this year he also met his lifelong collaborator Friedrich Engels. In the 1840s Marx began to study French utopian socialism. Combining socialist ideas and an interpretation of Hegel's philosophy, he developed a theory of consciousness as a product of human labour. In the writings later collected as the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, he argued that capitalism is the last in a series of modes of production that alienate workers from their labour. Earlier modes of production include primitive communism, the slave mode of production (employed in ancient Greece and

►

Key influence 3.2 (continued)

Rome), and feudalism. In 1846 he published *The German Ideology* with Engels, in which they argued that: 'The ideas of the ruling class are, in every epoch, the ruling ideas.' *The Communist Manifesto* (1848) proposed that all history is the history of class struggle, and predicted the victory of the new industrial working class, the proletariat, over capitalist society. The demise of capitalism would lead to socialism and ultimately a higher form of communism, where alienation would be at an end. Marx's radical political views meant that he ran into trouble with first the Prussian, then the French and then the Belgian authorities. He and his family were eventually exiled to England. Here Marx worked on his most ambitious project, *Capital*, a detailed analysis of the development and workings of capitalist political economy. At the centre of the three volumes of *Capital* (only one of which was published before Marx's death) lies his account of the commodity. He noted a contradiction within capitalism between the market value (exchange value) of a particular product and its value as an item that somebody might actually use (use value). Capitalism holds the market value of goods and people to be worth more than the people themselves. In effect, both goods and people are commodified: they become no more than their exchange value. The capitalist allocation of goods by their market value leads to inequalities of wealth between rich and poor and large-scale wastage of resources.

In cultural studies it has been Western Marxism, and especially the work of Georg Lukács, the **Frankfurt School** (p. 75) and **Gramsci** (p. 38) that has had most influence. Marx's theory of alienation has had a profound impact. Marxist cultural theorists view culture in relation to the mode of production, as a historical product of human labour rather than representing timeless human values. Marxist critics have understood art both as an expression of human alienation and as having the utopian potential to imagine an unalienated world. Marxist-informed theories of ideology have allowed critics to interpret cultural artifacts in relation to social structure. An understanding of cultural production in relation to political economy has been a vital part of studies of the culture industry and mass media.

Further reading

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phrase, is the opiate of the masses. Thus Marx presents culture as ideology, as a partial, biased prop for the bourgeoisie, which is fashioned by it in its own interests. Culture as ideology blunts the understanding of the proletariat: it is the instrument of its deception, occluding its true interests. Culture in this sense stands as somehow opposed to the truth of things.

This is an important aspect of Marx's and Marxist thought and one that reverberates in wider discussions of culture, many of which are discussed in this book. The proposal is that culture is partial, often promoting a 'false consciousness' of the world and thereby acting as an instrument of oppression. Marx sees all the agencies of the state operating within cultural values that serve the interests of the bourgeoisie. The bourgeoisie has power, through its power it has knowledge and through its power and knowledge it creates the dominant culture. Marxist thought draws attention to the connections between power, knowledge and culture and proposes a systematic relationship in which cultural beliefs and practices are a cultural code for relationships of power.

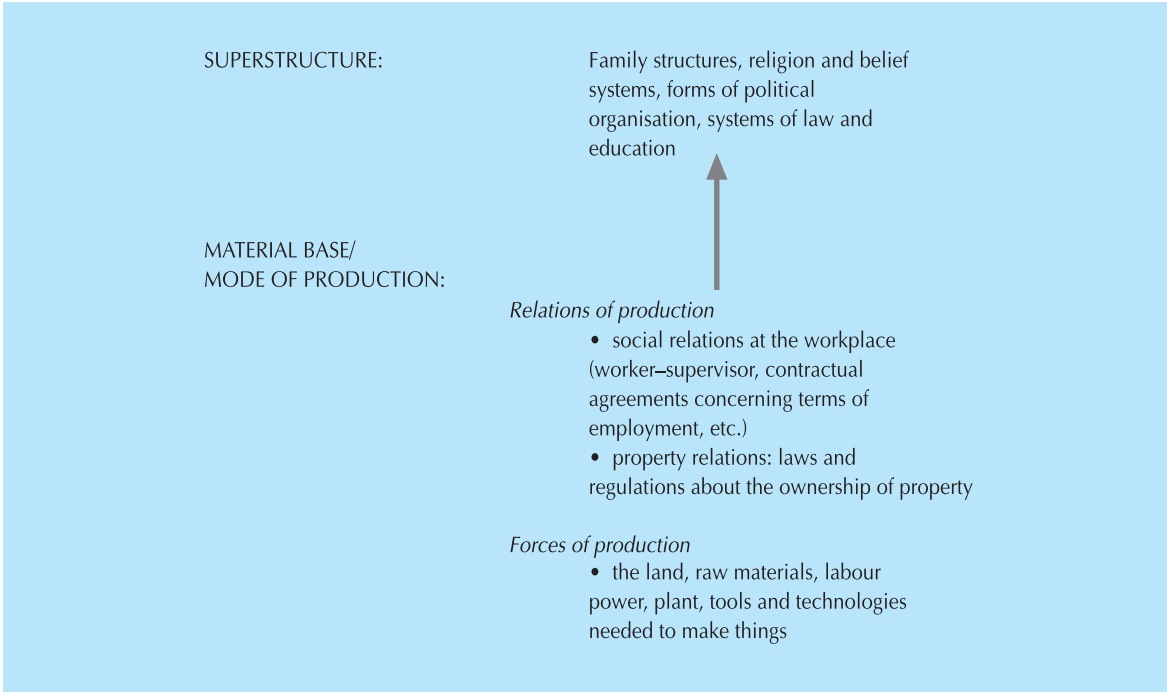


Figure 3.4 Marx's base–superstructure model.

Marx's favoured method for conceptualising these connections is the base-superstructure metaphor (see Figure 3.4). The formula that Marx proposes is that the economic (or material) base of a society determines the broad character of its superstructure. In other words, if we wish to understand the principal features of the superstructure (i.e. culture – including the legal institutions, political organisations and belief systems) of a society then we must carefully analyse the forces of production (productive technologies, institutionalised

Box 3.1

Marx and Engels on 'ruling ideas'

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. The class which has the means of material production at its disposal, has control at the same time over the means of mental production, so that thereby, generally speaking, the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are subject to it. The ruling ideas are nothing more than the ideal expression of the dominant material relationships, the dominant material relationships grasped as ideas; hence of the relationships which make the one class the ruling one, therefore, the ideas of its dominance. The individuals composing the ruling class possess among other things consciousness, and therefore think. In so far, therefore, as they rule as a class and determine the extent and compass of an epoch, it is self-evident that they do this in its whole range, hence among other things rule also as thinkers, as producers of ideas, and regulate the production and distribution of the ideas of their age: thus their ideas are the ruling ideas of the epoch. For instance, in an age and in a country where royal power, aristocracy, and bourgeoisie are contending for mastery and where, therefore, mastery is shared, the doctrine of separation of powers proves to be the dominant idea and is expressed as an 'eternal law'.

(Marx and Engels, 1968)

property relations) and the social relations of production consequent upon these productive forces. In a famous passage Marx and Engels (1968: 61) contend that 'the ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas' (see Box 3.1).

When nineteenth-century capitalist England is analysed in these terms, it is no surprise to find that the state is the 'executive committee of the bourgeoisie' (Marx and Engels, 1967), that the laws and courts consistently favour the interests of capital (those with power and money) as against those of organised labour, and that Christian doctrine as institutionalised in the established Church endorses the existing ordering of society and preaches the virtues of humility to the poor. Although Marx is sometimes equivocal about how strict a relation of determination obtains between base and superstructure, the broad thesis that he advances is that forms of consciousness crystallise into cultural forms and practices which are to be understood as originating socially. The social relationships that provide the touchstone for understanding cultural forms and practices are those predicated on the mode of production.

At first sight this formulation seems to allocate a secondary role to culture as a mere reflection of the material base of a society. Indeed, even Engels, whom many regard as a simplifier of Marx's ideas, baulks at the implications of this position. It is a view that gives culture no significant role in social change; for example, it denies the potentially revolutionary effects of art forms such as theatre and novels in transforming people's perception of the world and thus their action within it. The debate focuses around the determining power of the material base and the degree of autonomy to be given to the superstructure. Williams (1973b: 4) suggests that Marx 'uses the notion of determination and conditioning not in the narrow sense but in a much looser sense of setting limits, exerting pressure and closing off options'. He goes on to argue that Marx did not see either base or superstructure as fixed entities but as dynamic and shifting relationships, and this therefore precludes any simple formulaic conception of the relationship between the two. If determination is to be understood as setting limits, exerting pressure and closing off options, then what we have instead is an agenda for empirical inquiry. This is precisely the view taken by versions of cultural Marxism (e.g. Jameson, 1991), where the base-superstructure metaphor becomes simply a problem to guide inquiry, not a solution. Historically, the significant challenge to Marxian conceptions originates in the thought of **Max Weber** (1864–1920).

Weber, status and inequality

Max Weber (1978) proposed a complex approach to inequality which expressly takes account of non-economic dimensions of ranking and inequality. Against Marx, Weber maintains that the operation of **power** (p. 64) in societies is yet more fundamental than their economic basis. Power is defined as the capacity of individuals or groups to realise their will, even in the face of the opposition of others. This yields three categories fundamental to the analysis of inequality: *class*, *status* and *party*. Inequality may be located in economically defined classes (here Weber emphasises market capacity in contrast to Marx's stress on property) but could also be founded in status groups (organised around notions of prestige and honour) and political parties and groupings. In this elaboration he sought to refine the measurement of inequality and to show the potential singularity of his criteria as well as their connectedness. For example, power is often linked to class-based wealth but it can be separated in situations where power is linked to knowledge. Status refers to style of life. It also refers to social esteem, the respect and admiration accorded a person according to their social position (see Box 3.2), and this can be local rather than structural and take account of interpersonal subjectivities. Marx's stress on structural relationships and on the duplicitous nature of culture tends to be replaced by a view of classes as ranked hierarchies of fixed groupings through which individuals may be mobile. While the categories are fixed and classes are bounded, individuals may, nonetheless, change their class position. Furthermore, Weber's discussion emphasises how both class and status distinctions can affect people's *life chances*, that is, the chances that an individual has to share in the economic and cultural goods of a society. Material and cultural goods are often asymmetrically distributed and class and status rankings will ensure that people will have

Box 3.2

Weber on status

In modern 'democratic' society . . . all explicitly regulated status privileges for individuals are done away with. [In some of the smaller Swiss cities] only families belonging to broadly similar taxation groups dance with each other... But status is not necessarily connected with a 'class situation': normally it stands rather in glaring contradiction to the pretensions of naked property ownership . . . The 'equality' of status of the American 'gentleman' finds expression in the fact that . . . it would be considered the height of bad taste – wherever the old tradition prevails – for even the richest 'chief' to treat his 'clerk' as in any way at all of unequal rank, even in the evening in the club, over billiards or at the card table. It would be unacceptable to treat him with that kind of condescending affability which marks a difference in position, and which the German chief can never avoid entirely – one of the most important reasons why German club-life has never managed to seem so attractive there as the American club.

In content, social status is normally expressed above all in the imputation of a specifically regulated style of life to everyone who wishes to belong to the circle. This goes together with a restriction of 'social' intercourse – that is, intercourse that does not serve any economic, commercial or other 'practical' purposes – including especially normal intermarriage, to the circle of status equals . . . [In the USA] one example of this is that only those who reside in a certain street ('The Street') are regarded as belonging to 'society' and as fit for social intercourse, and are accordingly visited and invited... For the rest, social 'status' is usurped by certain families who have resided in a certain area for a long time (and who are, naturally, correspondingly well-to-do), such as the 'FFV' or 'first families of Virginia', or the descendants, real or alleged, of the 'Indian princess' Pocahontas or the Pilgrim Fathers, or the Knickerbockers, or the members of some extremely exclusive sect, or all kinds of circles of associates who mark themselves off by some criterion or other. In this case it is a matter of a purely conventional social differentiation based essentially on usurpation (although this is admittedly the normal origin of almost all social 'status'). But it is a short step from this to the legal validation of privilege (and lack of privilege), and this step is usually easy to take as soon as a certain arrangement of the social order has become effectively 'settled' and has acquired stability as a result of the stabilisation of economic power. Where the consequences are followed through to the limit, the status group develops into a closed *caste*. That is, distinction of status is guaranteed not only by convention and law, but also by ritual sanction to such an extent that all physical contact with a member of a caste regarded as 'inferior' is held to be ritually polluting for members of the superior caste, a stain which must be religiously expiated. The individual castes, indeed, in part develop quite separate cults and gods.

(Weber, 1978: 49–50)

differential access to these goods. These features of Weber's thought are important to bear in mind when considering non-class based systems of inequality.

This approach allows for the consideration of systems of inequality other than class. There are ranked societies where there is unequal access to positions of status and prestige and these are not necessarily linked to economic wealth. An example is found in those traditional African societies where the chiefs did not live at a higher standard of living than their subjects and where economies were redistributive, that is the chief received tribute which he then gave back to his followers as a mark of his status and largesse. The position of many European noble families is a contemporary example of ranked society: access to claim a title is limited, usually to family members, and many of these titled families are no longer wealthy and have no power by virtue of their nobility in their societies. Within families there are usually ranked orders, sometimes of generations, sometimes of generation and gender. Once one starts to look and notice, it is clear that notions of rank and inequality are pervasive in English society. In England accent still serves as a telling sign of status. Other features of speech patterns also express status rankings. Studies of who interrupts whom have found that parents interrupt children, men interrupt women,

doctors are not to be interrupted by patients. All these are illustrations of the pervasive nature of hierarchy and status-based inequality in day-to-day living in which a socially adept member of society must be well versed.

Caste societies

Comparisons are often drawn between caste and class societies. These comparisons sometimes draw attention to the apparent similarities of the structured system of groups and the fixed relationships between constituent groups. However, it is misleading to link the two systems in this way since to do so is to focus upon structure at the cost of overlooking culture. Class inequality is based on economic criteria and culturally it is open to an individual to achieve their own class position. Individual class mobility is possible in class systems, and indeed this is the ethos of most industrial class systems in the contemporary world. Caste systems are based on religious and ritual criteria. Castes cannot be understood in secular terms of inferiority and superiority for the principle that ranks the parts in the whole is religious (Dumont, 1970). In Hindu India there are four categories (varnas) which are distinguished from one another by degrees of **ritual** purity (p. 214) as established in the Sanskrit texts. These varnas are: Brahmins, who are the priests and scholars; Kshatriyas, who are the rulers, the warriors and the landowners; Vaisyas, who are the entrepreneurial middle classes; Sudras, who are the cultivators, workers and traders. The Harijans, or untouchables, perform the most menial tasks. In theory they lie outside the caste system because they are ritually impure. Although these broad varnas are associated with occupation, in practice within a village there will be a number of occupations associated with a particular varna, so although the system is clear and unambiguous in principle, empirically there may be variety and complexity.

A person's caste membership is ascribed; this ascription is given religiously and is dependent upon the individual's conduct in their past life. Reincarnation is a central doctrine of Hindu belief, so to be given a favourable caste position one must lead a good life according to caste values and conventions, and fulfill caste expectations. If one fails to meet caste expectations then in reincarnation one will come back as a member of a lower caste or even in non-human form. The insistence upon living according to caste expectations places great value on maintaining caste boundaries, since contact with lower castes may be polluting and one may only carry out those tasks that are fit for one's own caste. The consequence of this is that there is a high degree of social segregation between castes but, of necessity, there is a high degree of economic interdependence as castes rely on others to perform tasks for them which they themselves are forbidden to carry out.

An important aspect of the maintenance of group boundaries is that marriage is endogamous, that is, individuals must marry within their own caste. This is an important difference from class societies where marriage is not formally circumscribed between classes, and can be an acceptable means of achieving social mobility.

The variety of occupational ranking and the diversity within villages means that in practice the significant groupings of caste in day-to-day relationships are the *jati*, endogamous groups of kin who are associated with certain occupations. These local subgroups of caste often compete with one another for ranking in the caste system and it is not unusual for a local *jati* to seek to improve their caste ranking by adopting the manner and practices of a higher-ranking group. It may take time for these aspirations to be met and their claims to be realised but movement is possible within the caste system and boundaries are more permeable than might at first seem possible. However it would be a mistake to assume that the possibility of mobility raises again the possibility of comparison with class systems. The mobility issue in the caste system is that the claim of the *jati*, the whole group, must be recognised, not just the claim of a single individual. Adrian Meyer (1960) observed that in one village in South India which he studied there were 23 castes which grouped themselves according to the use of the same smoking pipe, the provision of ordinary food for common meals and the provision of food for feasts. The higher castes in the village would share the pipe with almost all castes except four; between 12 and 16 castes would smoke together, although in some cases a different cloth must be placed between the pipe and the

lips of the smoker. Meyer writes that castes that enjoyed power in the village were not fussy about what they ate and with whom they ate. It was the middle range of castes who were very fussy so that if, for example, they were invited to a feast by a more powerful group, they would insist on having their food served raw and carrying it home to cook. The untouchables – the outcasts – are literally outside the caste system altogether. Caste discrimination is not allowed in modern India, but in practice the diversity of groupings and the complexity of relationships make such a ruling difficult to enforce. There are other examples of religious ranking and hierarchies that you may wish to explore, for example Drid Williams' (1975) study of Christian nuns where she found that for nuns what mattered and what came first was the issue of nearness or distance from God. The hierarchies of the convent were hierarchies of spirituality, not power.

3.3 Legitimating inequality

Whenever the topic of inequality is addressed, the question that sooner or later must be asked is: why do people allow such manifest inequalities, disadvantages and injustices to remain as an acceptable part of their lives? Weber's answer is that people believe in certain legitimate forms of authority – an ordering of the world which they accept as 'right', as justifiable and reasonable. Three bases of legitimate authority are identified: *traditional* ('accept this, because it is what our people have always done'), *charismatic* ('accept this, because of the leader or prophet's exceptional powers which can transform your life'), or *legal-rational* ('accept this, because this is what is specified in the laws and rules governing our society'). These forms of legitimacy show how cultural power is institutionalised and given moral grounding. They provide the bases on which people may tolerate inequality and subordination, if not actually embrace it. A somewhat different range of solutions to this problem gives more explicit attention to the cultural dimension. We consider next: Gramsci on hegemony; the Frankfurt School's development of the theory of ideology; and Bourdieu's theory of the habitus.

Ideology as common sense: hegemony

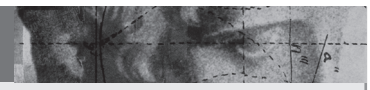
One development of Marx's thinking about ideology which has proved influential and productive in cultural studies is the concept of **hegemony** (p. 73), advanced by the Italian Marxist Antonio **Gramsci** (1891–1937) (p. 38). He wanted to explain how, despite manifest evidence of inequality, capitalist ruling classes continue to rule. Only part of the explanation, Gramsci believed, was due to ruling-class control of the means of coercion in society (the military and police). Underlying repressive state power lay hegemony, 'a special kind of power – the power to frame alternatives and contain opportunities, *to win and shape consent*, so that the granting of legitimacy to the dominant classes appears not only ' "spontaneous" but natural and normal' (Clarke *et al.*, 1976: 38). Hegemony is about what passes as the common-sensical, unquestioned backdrop of reflection on the workings of society. Consequently, the terrain on which hegemony 'is won or lost is the terrain of superstructures'. The central institutions of capitalist society – its courts and schools, its churches and mass media – are framed by ideas and beliefs that promote ruling-class interests. The pervasiveness of hegemony is described by writers from the Birmingham School thus:

> A hegemonic cultural order tries to *frame* all competing definitions of the world within its *range*. It provides the horizon of thought and action within which conflicts are fought through, appropriated (i.e. experienced), obscured (i.e. concealed as 'national interest' which should unite all conflicting parties) or contained (i.e. settled to the profit of the ruling class). A hegemonic order prescribes, not the specific content of ideas, but the *limits* within which ideas and conflicts move and are resolved.
>
> (Clarke *et al.*, 1976: 39)

The notion of hegemony is related to the concept of ideology but can be distinguished from it:

> Hegemony works through ideology, but it does not consist of false ideas, perceptions, definitions. It works *primarily* by inserting the subordinate class into the key institutions and structures which

Defining concept 3.2



Hegemony

The concept of hegemony is used as a way of thinking through the relationships between culture and **power** (p. 64). It was developed within the work of the Italian activist and Marxist theorist **Antonio Gramsci** (p. 38). His concern was to understand how social groups organise their rule and, more pressingly for him, why there had been no proletarian revolution. His conclusion was that rule involves both domination (the coercive use or threat of force via the military and the police) and hegemony (the organisation of consent based upon establishing the legitimacy of leadership and developing shared ideas, values, beliefs and meanings – a shared culture). Rule for Gramsci was hegemony armoured with coercion (Gramsci, 1971; see also Williams, 1977, Bennett *et al.*, 1981, and Jones, 2006).

In his theoretical and political work Gramsci's aim was to show how this consent (hegemony) had two characteristics. First, that it was class based and class biased. He wanted to show that culture is saturated with class power. As 'hegemony', shared values, shared meanings and shared beliefs are seen to act in the interests of the dominant (or hegemonic) class. The examples that Gramsci uses are ideas like religion in Italy and Fordism in America which promote certain values and forms of conduct over others, e.g. the work ethic. He connects both with the economic and political development of class-divided societies. Second, hegemony does not just happen; it is something that has to be organised. This also carries the positive political message that the situation can be altered. In many way this goes beyond **Marxist** (p. 65) theories of **ideology** (p. 35). It rejects the notion that ideas are firmly rooted in class positions and sees them as 'material forces' which can organise groups, shape terrains of encounter and debate, and define positions to be attacked or defended. It also has a rather deeper notion of culture and meaning which sees them as basic to the formation of all social relations rather than as something 'added on', the icing on the economic cake. Here classes are defined as much culturally as economically.

There are several problems that must be noted. First, just as for ideology, Gramsci's concentration on class makes the concept of hegemony problematic. Any suggestion that people have singular **identities** (p. 142) and interests and that there is a singular political project is not useful when trying to deal with the multiplicity of interrelated identities and power relations within which we all live. These singular class identities also carry with them the unhelpful notion of 'false consciousness'. The question is whether we can extend the term to use it to talk about race, gender and sexuality. Second, the tendency to use the notion of 'hegemony' to imply the existence of one dominant, totalising culture of power must be avoided. Gramsci certainly did not mean the concept to be a rigid, static, uniform and abstract one. Partly, this means talking about counter-hegemonies and a whole series of competing alternative hegemonies. It also means recognising that hegemonies are constructed: they are forms of rule that social groups try to put together. We might think of them as ongoing 'projects' of legitimating leadership and negotiating consent through a whole series of channels. Here is Gramsci on American Fordism:

> Recall here the experiments conducted by Ford and the economies made by his firm through direct management of transport and distribution of the product. These economies affected production costs and permitted higher wages and lower selling prices. Since these preliminary conditions existed, already rendered rational by historical evolution, it was relatively easy to rationalise production and labour by a skilful combination of force (destruction of working-class trade unionism on a territorial basis) and persuasion (high wages, various social benefits, extremely subtle ideological and political propaganda) and thus succeed in making the whole life of the nation revolve around production. Hegemony here is born in the factory and requires for its exercise only a minute quantity of professional political and ideological intermediaries.
>
> (Gramsci, 1971: 285)

These 'projects' are about the organisation of ruling groups, the creation of alliances ('hegemonic blocs') and the forging of collective identities (perhaps via religion, politics or culture). They are also about the organisation of power-laden relations with others in order to create a managed consent. This is all to be understood as a continual process with a whole variety of different social groups involved. In order to understand this we can use another, related Gramscian term: 'war of manoeuvre'. This means seeing society as both a real and an ideological battlefield

Defining concept 3.2 (continued)

where everyone is trying to establish what side they are on, who are enemies, who are allies, what position they are in, what the terrain looks like, how the battle is progressing, and what weapons they should use. It is a constant ongoing struggle within which ideas, beliefs, values and meanings are among the weapons. However, what is important is not any innate characteristics of these weapons but whether they are effectively deployed. This sense of hegemony as a process of active organisation is a useful one which is not restricted to understanding class relations.

Further reading

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> support the power and social authority of the dominant order. It is, above all, in these structures and relations that a subordinate class *lives its subordination*.
>
> (Clarke *et al.*, 1976: 39)

Gramsci believed that capitalism could not be overcome until the working class developed its own counter-hegemony which successfully challenged the existing ruling-class cultural hegemony.

Existing power relations and inequalities are thus stabilised through cultural hegemony. The concept has been influential in cultural studies since the 1970s because it offered a more complex analysis of ruling-class domination than older models of ideological domination. The Birmingham School linked the concept of hegemony to Althusser's notion of ISAs (ideological state apparatuses – schools, churches, media, etc., which support state ideology) to present a more complex analysis of how class domination worked. Hegemony emphasises that the ruling class was itself composed of different fractions, that class rule also required the winning of the consent of the subordinate class, and that it facilitated the empirical exploration of the institutions through which cultural hegemony works such as youth subcultures (Hall and Jefferson, 1976), schools (Willis, 1978) and broadcast news (Glasgow University Media Group, 1976). Importantly, the notion of hegemony is amenable to historical analysis since it is not a 'given' of any particular class or organisation but is something that has to be worked for and sustained. So it can be argued, for example, that hegemonic cultural domination was a more significant source of working-class subordination in Britain in the 1950s than in the 1930s. That stabilisation was obtained in the 1930s by market effects (unemployment as an instrument of labour discipline), whereas in the prosperous 1950s working-class consent was obtained through the hegemonic domination of an ideology of affluence.

Ideology as incorporation: the Frankfurt School

Members of the **Frankfurt School** (p. 75), in particular Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer (in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 1972) developed an analysis of the part played by the superstructure in accounting for the failure of the revolutionary social change that Marx had predicted. They focused on the role played by mass culture, or what they preferred to call the 'culture industry' (to distance themselves from the – erroneous – idea that mass culture is a spontaneously erupting popular culture) in securing the incorporation of the working class into capitalist society.

Through radio, TV, movies and forms of popular music like jazz, the expanding culture industries were disseminating ruling-class ideologies with greater effectiveness than Marx could have envisaged. The further development of consumer society in the twentieth century powerfully aided the process of working-class incorporation by promoting new myths of classlessness, and wedded the working class even more tightly

to acquisitive and property-owning beliefs. Even oppositional and critical forms of culture can be marketed (consider Andy Warhol, the Sex Pistols, Damian Hirst). The development of the culture industries, one part of the superstructure, seemed destined to subvert the social changes that Marx saw as originating in society's material base. Other Frankfurt School theorists, notably Marcuse, condemned the 'one-dimensionality' of the society that the culture industries were shaping with increasing success. Unfortunately, the force of the Frankfurt School's critique was weakened by their apparently elitist dismissal of forms of popular culture.

The celebrated – some might say notorious – example of the Frankfurt School's dismissive approach to popular culture is Theodor Adorno's (1903–69) analysis of popular music. Writing in the late 1930s and early 1940s Adorno proposed that the industrialisation of musical production and the commercialisation of musical consumption had a baleful influence on musical form. Popular music had become standardised: 'all aspects of musical form – Adorno instances overall structure (the thirty-two-bar chorus), melodic range, song-types and harmonic progressions – depend upon pre-existing formulae and norms, which have the status

Key influence 3.3

The Frankfurt School

The Frankfurt School describes the social and cultural theorists who worked for, or were connected with, the Frankfurt Institute for Social Research. Their method, known as 'critical theory', has influenced the study of mass culture and elements of feminist, postmodernist and post-colonial theory.

The Institute was founded in 1923. At its inception, it was very much a product of the cultural freedom and political struggles of the German Weimar Republic (1918–33). Key members of the Institute were Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno and Herbert Marcuse. **Walter Benjamin** (p. 274) was an important associate. Along with **Gramsci**'s (p. 38) writings, critical theory forms the main body of Western (as opposed to Soviet-influenced) **Marxism** (p. 65). Influenced by the ideas of **Marx** (p. 66) and Freud, it resists systematic, universal explanations of cultural and social phenomena. In 1933 the Nazis' rise to power forced the Institute into exile in Germany. Many of the members were Jewish and faced death if they stayed. Horkheimer, Adorno and Ernst Bloch all went to the USA. Post-Weimar, the School began its critiques of the Fascist system from which they fled and the new experience of North American mass culture: for example, Adorno's well-known critique of popular music. This culminated in Adorno and Horkheimer's best-known work, *The Dialectic of the Enlightenment* (1972, orig. 1944) which contains seminal chapters on the origins of **modernity** (p. 295), mass culture and anti-Semitism. After the war, the Institute returned to Germany. Adorno contributed works of philosophy, *Negative Dialectics* (1973) and *Aesthetic Theory* (1984). Hannah Arendt continued the critique of authoritarian regimes in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1958). Ernst Bloch and Herbert Marcuse explored the utopian dimension of critical theory in *The Principle of Hope* (1986, orig. 1959) and *Eros and Civilization* (1955). The political events of the 1960s led to a revival of interest in the School's work. Its recognised heir is Jürgen Habermas. True to its impulse, in his *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* (1987), he criticises both members of the School and poststructuralist thought.

The key to understanding critical theory is the recognition that it is not a unified body of thought. Rather, it defines itself 'negatively' against other theoretical systems. Each strand criticises and debates in a polemical style. Each thinker is best understood in his or her relation to other thinkers. For example, Adorno's apparent resistance to utopian solutions is best understood in relation to the more overt utopianism of Bloch and Benjamin. It is this tradition of critique and debate that is the School's most important legacy.

Further reading

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Held, D. (1980) *Introduction to Critical Theory*, London: Hutchinson.

virtually of rules, are familiar to listeners and hence are entirely predictable' (Middleton, 1990: 45). Popular music has become standardised into particular types (country & western, heavy metal, pop, etc.) and within each type particular formulas develop. Adorno contrasted popular with 'serious' music which was not standardised but distinctive and original. Beethoven's work was Adorno's exemplar of serious music. Not only were popular and serious music different in form, they encouraged different responses from listeners. Serious music made challenging demands on the listener while popular music made little – popular music had become just another stultifying element of mass culture. Adorno maintained that:

> Music for entertainment . . . seems to complement the reduction of people to silence, the dying out of speech as expression, the inability to communicate at all. It inhabits the pockets of silence that develop between people moulded by anxiety, work and undemanding docility. . . . It is perceived purely as background. If nobody can any longer speak, then certainly nobody can any longer listen. . . . Today . . . [the] power of the banal extends over the whole society.
>
> (Adorno, quoted in Middleton, 1990: 34)

Adorno's searing critique of popular music places it alongside film, cheap holidays and comic books as a method of incorporating the working class. But it is an analysis that has a number of flaws (see Longhurst, 2007a: 6–11) The popular/serious distinction introduces a value judgement before the analysis has begun. The scope of Adorno's theory (all popular music under capitalism) seems far too broad and Adorno does not appear to appreciate how that scope might be constrained by his own social and historical location. Some types of music (jazz, blues, rap) might have non-standard structures or might express resistance to dominant ideologies. The development of new musical technologies might also work against the tendencies that Adorno noted in popular music. Thus critics suggest that the claims of the theory exceed what can be reasonably sustained. As a critique of Tin Pan Alley in the 1930s and 1940s Adorno made some sense, but the application of his ideas to the proliferation of popular musical styles since then tells only a small part of the story.

The contribution of the Frankfurt School was to indicate the enormous expansion of the culture industries and their increasing influence in modern capitalism. Leo Lowenthal (1961) captured this change well in his study of the biographical articles appearing in popular US magazines between 1890 and 1940. He found that in the earlier period it was predominantly 'captains of industry and finance' who were profiled. This gave way in the later period to a preponderance of interviews with movie stars and singers. There had been a shift from the 'idols of production' to the 'idols of consumption' – the culture's heroes were now firmly located in superstructural occupations, not the material base. Unlike the economism of earlier Marxian traditions, the Frankfurt School attributes a significant role to the domain of culture in analysing relations of culture and power.

Habitus

The work of Pierre Bourdieu (Robbins, 1991, 1999) stresses the learned, unquestioned, taken-for-granted aspect of cultural behaviour. He puts forward the notion of **habitus**, the cultural framework wherein and whereby the habitual aspects of everyday social thought and action operate. People's perceptions, thoughts, tastes and so forth are shaped by their habitus. These principles are symbolically mediated in action and are learned through experience. However, the power of the dominant classes ensures that their cultural habitus is preferred over others. Schooling is a process in which dominant class power works symbolically to legitimate the kinds of accomplishment that will count as knowledgeable and worthy and to relegate features of the habitus of working-class pupils as evidence of failure. In effect, one cultural system of **symbolism** (p. 214) and meaning is imposed on that of another social group – a process termed 'symbolic violence' (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990).

Bourdieu is especially interested in the ways in which particular groups (classes) in society mark their identity, the symbolic ways in which they express values and seek to maintain boundaries between themselves and other groups. He describes this as the process of 'distinction' (Bourdieu, 1984). Again there is a stress that culture is deceptive. While novelty and creativity is

acknowledged, the emphasis lies on the ways in which what is learned and practised is an affirmation of an existing set of hierarchically organised systems of relations. Bourdieu's position has been described thus:

> To a very large extent we do not choose our identity. We receive the cultural identity which has been handed down to us from previous generations. . . . We adhere to groups, whether clubs or political or religious organisations, and we adopt the identifying images of social groups, whether in hair-style or clothing, so as to confirm our social identity. For the same reason, we take steps to distinguish ourselves from those who belong to different groups. Our tastes and our lifestyles have no intrinsic value but serve to maintain the coherence of the group to which we belong.
>
> (Robbins, 1991: 174)

Bourdieu's focus on distinctions between groups rather than on the whole system of which they are a constitutive part contrasts with the Marxian and the dominant ideology approach. Bourdieu sees cultural striving for individual expression as a sham but in many ways he has a more organic approach to the issue of inequality than Marx, Gramsci or the Frankfurt School.

These debates around hegemony, incorporation and habitus show how misleading it is to think of culture as a mere superstructural 'effect' determined by the material base. In the views of the theorists reviewed in this section, culture plays a part in legitimising and naturalising many forms of inequality. The extent to which dominant ideologies are themselves guarantors of social order has been questioned by some sociologists. Abercrombie *et al.* (1980) propose that the dominant ideology only brings coherence to the dominant class, not to the society as a whole. Subordinate classes are incorporated by political and economic control, not ideological dominance. A different approach is taken by other theorists who argue that the cultural dimension is a significant source of inequality. We next consider a selection of studies that examine this idea.

3.4 Culture and the production and reproduction of inequality

In this section we explore the relevance of the explanations of inequality discussed above by means of a review of some cultural manifestations of inequality. We shall look at studies that focus on the key variables of class, ethnicity, gender and age as sources of cultural inequality.

Class

The notion that cultural differences follow class lines has a long history. Weber's concept of status includes the notion of style of life and opens the way for considering overlaps and disparities between class and status. The early classics of cultural studies, notably Hoggart (1958) and Thompson (1968) were very much concerned with the shaping, characteristics and development of working-class culture. In more recent work on youth subcultures the notion of class cultures is also prominent (see Chapter 9). Cultural commentary has long addressed the lifestyles of the rich as well as the poor. Those living at the extremes of society, it is sometimes felt, are perhaps very different in their ways of life from the broad mass in the middle. In this section the issue of class, culture and inequality is approached by means of a survey of explanations of the lifestyles of the poor: we shall consider in turn the culture of poverty thesis, the cycle of deprivation theory and the putative emergence of an underclass.

The culture of poverty thesis was popularised in the 1950s and 1960s by the American anthropologist Oscar Lewis's studies of the poor in Mexico, Puerto Rica and the USA. He sought to understand how it was that poverty seemed to reproduce itself across generations: how poor people appeared to produce more poor people. His explanation concentrated on the distinctive cultural features shared by the so-called undeserving or disreputable poor. Lewis (1961, 1966) proposes that the poor have a distinctive subcultural lifestyle which, like any culture, is a design for living that provides a structure and rationale enabling the poor to go on with their

lives. Controversially, he suggests that this way of life is passed down across the generations through the medium of the family. At the centre of this theory is the identification of about seventy traits said to characterise the culture of poverty. They include the following:

- The poor are not integrated into the major institutions of the society and remain fearful of them.
- There is a low level of community organisation or identification with place in slum neighbourhoods.
- Families display the following features:
  - absence of a lengthy childhood phase of the life-cycle
  - early initiation into sex
  - free unions or consensual marriages
  - high incidence of abandoned wives and children
  - female-centred households
  - predisposition to authoritarianism and frequent use of violence as a way of resolving conflict
  - competition for household maternal affection
  - sibling rivalry.

Key influence 3.4

Richard Hoggart (1918–)

Best known for his singular 1957 study of working-class culture, *The Uses of Literacy* was written when he worked in adult education at the University of Hull. Subtitled 'aspects of working-class life with special reference to publications and entertainments', the book focuses on how working-class culture has been affected by mass publications in the decades leading up to the mid-century. The impact of *Uses* stems from its literary critic's dissection of popular publications by an author who imaginatively draws upon his experiences of being brought up as an orphan in the Chapeltown and Hunslet working-class districts of Leeds. '*Uses*' portrays northern working-class life with a striking evocativeness, particularity and vividness. It also marks a significant intervention into debates about the cultural value of the mass media and emergent forms of popular culture.

The Uses of Literacy contains two parts. The first examines the remains of an 'older order' of working-class life, a collection of cultural attitudes and beliefs. Hoggart describes the binding influences of home, parents and neighbourhood; the organisation of the world into 'us' and 'them'; the focus on the personal and the concrete rather than the general and the abstract; the attractions of the immediate, the present and the cheerful. The second part of *Uses* considers some of the ways in which the old order is 'yielding place to the new'. Hoggart critiques the personalisation, oversimplification and pandering to base motives of much popular journalism and questions the real worth of 'spicy' magazines and sex-and-violence novels. (In places Hoggart's critique seems dated, as in his denunciation of the 'juke-box boys who while away their evenings in milk-bars'.) His general argument is that the older culture 'of the people' is under siege from a 'new mass culture' that 'is in some important ways less healthy than the often crude culture it is replacing' (*Uses*, 1958: 24). While *The Uses of Literacy* heralds a new sensitivity to the nuances of working-class culture in literary and ethnographic terms, it also participates in an older tradition of judging its worth. In *Uses*, as in much of his writing, Hoggart displays a sharp appreciation of the subtleties of everyday language as a finely culturally differentiated communicative medium.

Hoggart's other principal contribution to cultural studies was to found the **Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies** (p. 241) in 1964 shortly after he became Professor of English at the University of Birmingham (**Stuart Hall** (p. 55) was the Centre's first research fellow). He became an assistant director-general of UNESCO in 1970, gave the Reith Lectures in 1971 (published as *Only Connect*, 1972) and later played a leading role in the British Arts Council. His long career as a writer, teacher and public servant is reviewed in three absorbing volumes of autobiography.

Further reading

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Hoggart, R. (1990) *A Sort of Clowning*, London: Chatto & Windus.

Hoggart, R. (1992) *An Imagined Life*, London: Chatto & Windus.

Hoggart, R (2006) *Mass Media in a Mass Society: Myth and Reality*, London: Continuum International Publishing Group Ltd.

Lewis argues that the culture of poverty only emerges in specific historical and social contexts, namely the early free enterprise phase of class-stratified individualistic capitalist society. Excluded are pre-literate societies where poverty is no bar to social integration and the lower castes of India (because caste membership is a source of integration). The culture of poverty is regarded as a creative, adaptive response on the part of the poor to their material deprivation. An implication of the culture of poverty thesis is that the poor will always be with us as long as their culture is.

The theory has been roundly criticised (see Valentine, 1968). Although Lewis recognises the fundamentally material origins of poverty, he does not attempt to assess the relative importance of social and economic compared to cultural factors. He assumes that the culture of poverty will override other cultural traditions, such as those that new immigrants bring with them. He agrees that not all the poor participate in the culture of poverty but he fails to specify fully the criteria of inclusion. It seems plausible that chronically poor people will lead distinctive styles of life, but these cannot be explained in purely cultural terms.

This was also the conclusion arrived at by social scientists in the 1970s charged with investigating the 'cycle of deprivation'. The idea came to public attention in a speech made by Sir Keith Joseph, the Secretary of State for Social Services, in 1972. He asked, 'Why is it that, in spite of long periods of full employment and relative prosperity and the improvement in community services since the Second World War, deprivation and problems of maladjustment so conspicuously persist?' His reply was to posit a 'cycle of deprivation' (see Figure 3.5).

In Sir Keith's view, parents who were themselves deprived in one or more ways in childhood went on to become the parents of another generation of deprived children. This political initiative was recast in social scientific terms as an investigation of the intergenerational continuities in 'disadvantage', a more inclusive term than deprivation. It also conceded that factors other than family and culture might cause disadvantage, such as social group membership, ethnic discrimination or residence in a particular locality. The outcome of this research was to build a more comprehensive picture of the multiple disadvantages faced especially by members of the lowest social classes (see Rutter and Madge, 1976).

Blaming the poor for their circumstances is still a popular activity for cultural commentators. It some-

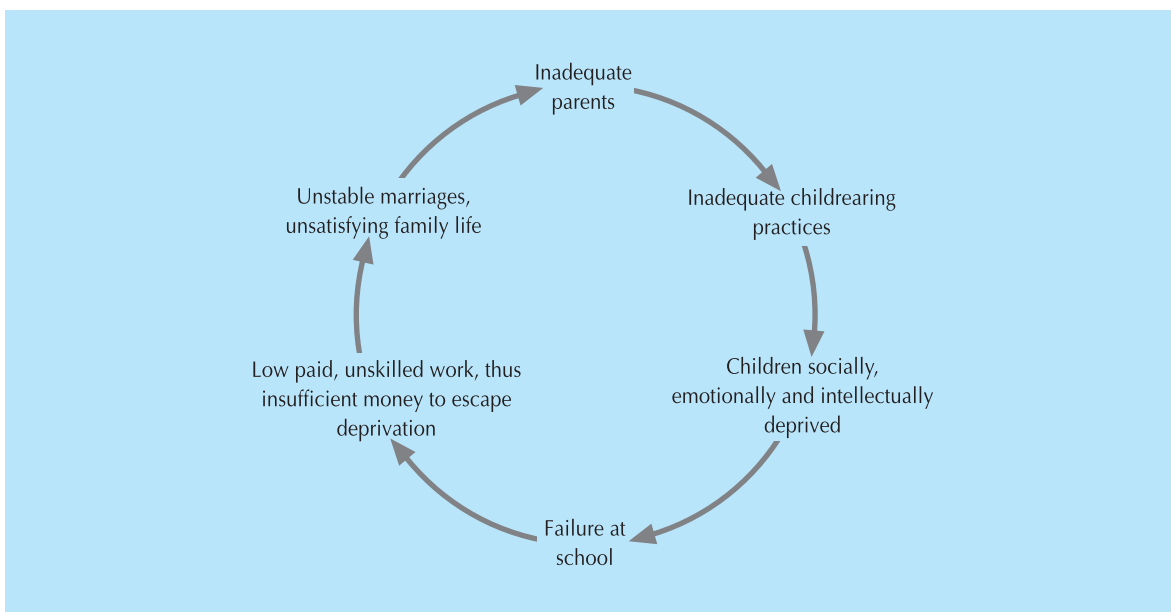


Figure 3.5 The cycle of deprivation.

times surfaces in debates about the 'underclass'. Beginning with Marx's comments about the lumpen proletariat, class analysts have long recognised the existence of a class beneath the established working class. Attempts have been made to identify this class in structural terms, that is, in terms of the conditions of life encountered by people in particular circumstances. For example, in the UK the underclass is often felt to comprise groups such as the long-term unemployed, single-parent families and elderly pensioners. In the USA it is often associated with poor black residents of inner-city ghettos. Structural explanations of the underclass are usually advanced by academic sociologists who emphasise that these groups of people have most to lose from processes of continuous industrial restructuring and its impact on the patterning of work. But other commentators, notably the influential New Right theorist Charles Murray, have seen this phenomenon in primarily cultural (and by extension highly moralistic) terms. Murray focuses on the significance of illegitimacy, marital breakdown, inadequate patterns of childrearing and criminality among the poor (for a review of the debates about the underclass in the USA see Wilson, 1993; for the UK, see Lister, 1996). Correspondingly, the solutions advanced for the problems of the underclass differ. Structural explanations emphasise that underclass problems are rooted in the social and economic structures of societies. Culturalist accounts of the underclass seek changes to the moral fabric of individuals and their family circumstances. The debate between these two understandings of the underclass reruns elements of a much older cultural distinction between the 'deserving' and 'undeserving poor'. An assertion of cultural difference is a response that is apparently only acceptable in the first case. (See Skeggs, 1997 for a discussion of the relationship between gender, class and 'respectability'.)

'Race' and ethnicity

The term 'race' is often placed in inverted commas in cultural studies to signal its historical dubiousness and its questionable status as an analytic concept. In the nineteenth century there were numerous attempts by European investigators to classify people according to racial groups ('white', 'yellow', 'black') and ascribe unchanging characteristics to them. These attempts to legitimate sets of stable racial differences scientifically are now widely regarded as spurious (Miles, 1989). However, race is an everyday concept that people routinely employ to categorise themselves and others.

Irrespective of the scientific utility of the term, race is widely believed to serve as a potent marker of cultural difference. These differences, whether they are believed to be grounded in culture or biology, are often manifest in expressions of racism, the discrimination against others on the basis of their membership of a perceived 'racial' group. Racism, when it is practised by an individual towards another person, is often termed 'racial prejudice'. However, racism can also take institutional form, as when a political policy takes it for granted that immigration is a problem, or when schools systematically understate the contribution of ethnic minorities to the development of art and science and teach history that fosters a negative perception of Africa or Asia. Institutional racism may be more deeply taken for granted and thus harder to dislodge than a prejudicial attitude.

Sometimes the terms 'ethnicity' and 'ethnic groups' are employed in an attempt to put some distance between the historically racist implications of 'race' and to emphasise that it is cultural and not biological difference that is the key distinction. Writers within cultural studies have tended to avoid the anodyne terminology of 'ethnicity' and headed straight for the freighted term 'race' in an attempt to grasp the real-world significances of this dimension of cultural difference and inequality. One early study in this tradition, by Hall *et al.* (1978), examined the moral panic surrounding the emergence of 'mugging' as a social problem. 'Mugging' was not a legal term ('robbery' and 'larceny from the person' being the English legal terms) but it quickly came into popular and media discourse from 1972. The category was imported from the USA and, translated into British society, it came to stand for a particular kind of perpetrator – a young, black male, usually acting with one or more accomplices. Hall *et al.* trace the development of a moral panic that bears some resemblances in form to the earlier moral panics surrounding 1960s youth subcultures (see the discussion of mods and rockers in Chapter 9). The myth of the black mugger condensed many exaggerated fears about youth, crime and per-

sonal safety, race and immigration. Hall *et al.* see mugging as an 'ideological conductor' of the 'crisis of hegemony of early 1970s Britain'. They show how the moral panic over mugging, a social constructed deviant behaviour, nevertheless articulated deeper concerns about British society. The exaggerated response to the 'problem' of mugging is indicative of a drift towards more authoritarian state interventions.

The theme of racial issues sparking a hegemonic crisis in Britain where established understandings about the ordering of ethnic groups come to be challenged is taken up in *The Empire Strikes Back* (Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, 1982). This is the work of seven members of the Birmingham centre who set out to analyse race and racism during the 1970s from a vantage committed to black resistance. They emphasise the need to locate racism not in individual psyches but in large-scale social processes. They draw particular attention to the change in Britain's international position since the end of the Second World War. They suggest that the prominence of 'race' as an issue in the 1970s is connected to the decline of Britain's position as a major trading nation. It is in the context of these changes that immigration policies, ethnic bases of competition in housing and labour markets, etc., must be set. In the crisis of hegemony facing British capitalism, the **Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies** (CCCS) (p. 241) collective maintains, the British state is moving in authoritarian directions (which were shortly to become even more pronounced as Thatcherism became established). At the level of lived experience this issues forth in forms of popular authoritarianism of which racism is the most conspicuous example. Racism, then, cannot be understood as a simple ideological phenomenon. To appreciate its force requires a detailed and specific analysis of changes in the British state and Britain's dominant and working classes.

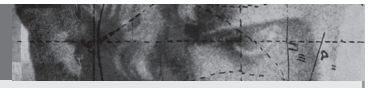
The Empire Strikes Back sparked a good deal of controversy when it appeared, not least because of its criticisms of the 'race relations industry' which they saw as just one more instrument of control over black working-class communities. They are especially critical of those studies that account for black disadvantage in terms of fractured nuclear families that fail to provide adequate material and emotional support to children. Such studies 'pathologise' black subcultures. The CCCS collective are hesistant about offering recommendations beyond a general endorsement of black **resistance** (p. 170). In the analysis of cultural forms, this emphasis on a complex Marxism in which close historical analysis of political and economic circumstances is combined with a commitment to black struggles has been taken forward most notably in the work of **Paul Gilroy** (p. 131).

Another part of the larger picture in which 'race' and racism is located is the history and consequences of **colonialism** (p. 143). Many influential conceptions of racial difference have their origin in the colonial encounters of European powers with the societies that they sought to dominate. Cultural analysts such as **Edward Said** (p. 115) Gayatri Spivak, and Frantz Fanon have focused on colonial texts to consider what they tell us about oppressor and oppressed. Said's (1978) monumental study, *Orientalism* (p. 115) shows how European writing, from the nineteenth century onward, constructed a conception of the 'Orient' (the Middle East in particular) as exotic, glamorous and dangerous. This fictional, simplified framework nevertheless served to act as a potent cultural grid through which the cultures of the East were apprehended. Gayatri Spivak (1987) is more concerned with issues of power and representation. In a world dominated by Western discourses, how can the 'subaltern' status of Third World voices achieve parity in dialogue with those of the West? The work of Frantz Fanon (1968) is concerned with language as an index of power, and the objectification of the black body through literary and other representations. Said, Spivak and Fanon deepen our understanding of racial difference by using the tools of literary and cultural analysis to problematise the representations of the 'other' contained in Western texts

Gender

Discussions about relationships between men and women mirror many of the arguments that have been discussed above. It is often remarked that, whatever the nature and type of relationships between men and women in whatever part of the world, there is inequality, men are the dominant sex and are regarded as superior to women. It is suggested that there is a

Defining concept 3.3



Feminism

Feminism describes both the broad movement that has campaigned against the political and social inequalities between men and women and the school of academic criticism that takes gender inequality as its object of study. Feminists all critique the subordination of women to men, but they differ widely in their strategies for empowering women. Feminist accounts of the role of culture in gender inequality have been central to the development of cultural studies.

A crude periodisation of feminism might identify three phases: first-wave, second-wave and postmodern feminism. First-wave feminism describes the women's movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. While it contained many different political strands, first-wave feminists generally accepted a fundamental, natural difference between men and women, but argued for their political equality. The best-known campaign of first-wave feminism was for women's suffrage. Second-wave feminism describes the women's movement from the 1960s on. This period has seen an enormous growth in feminist scholarship, which has employed various forms of understanding inequality. An early concept used was patriarchy. This was originally an anthropological term which describes a social system in which older men are entitled to exercise socially sanctioned authority over other members of the household or kinship group, both women and younger men. However, this term has been criticised subsequently, because it does not discriminate between the different forms of inequality manifested in different cultures. An alternative concept, proposed by Gayle Rubin, was the sex/gender system. This makes use of an important distinction between sex and gender where sex describes biological or natural differences, while gender describes the social roles of masculinity and femininity. Rubin argued that different societies assign different kinds of roles based on biological differences. The object of feminist inquiry should then be the kinds of cultural expectations that these roles presume.

Research into gender identity has taken many different paths in the investigation of how gender is socially constructed. One influential strand has been poststructuralist, psychoanalytic feminism. This argues that gender identity is constructed through language. In Western culture, language is phallocentric, or male centred. Because they are excluded from full access to language, women are refused entrance to a masculine symbolic order. However, psychoanalytic accounts have been criticised for universalising male dominance. More recently, postmodernist feminism has queried the sex/gender distinction. Judith Butler has suggested that it is a mistake to assume that there is a foundational, natural sex upon which gender identity is constructed. Instead, she argues that sex itself is socially constructed. A useful metaphor is employed by Linda Nicholson, we use the body as a coat rack to hang our cultural assumptions about sexual differences. For example, women's bodies are soft, passive and yielding, men's are hard, active and forceful. Butler's argument usefully problematises the idea that sex comes first and that gender is somehow created from it. While no one argues that there are not physical differences between men and women, Butler directs the spotlight back onto the question of how culture interprets those differences. As white academic feminism has been challenged by the diverse strands of the women's movement worldwide, the question of cultural difference and the relationships between gender, 'race', sexuality and class have moved to centre-stage in feminist theory. However, there is a continuing and productive tension between this emphasis on difference and feminists' desire to assert a collective identity to combat the abiding social inequalities between men and women.

Further reading

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Haraway, D. (2003) *The Haraway Reader*, London: Routledge

Nicholson, L. (1995) 'Interpreting gender', in L. Nicholson and S. Seidman (eds) *Social Postmodernism*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

natural hierarchy between men and women, a natural inequality. Support for this inequality is often drawn from historical evidence and from comparison with the animal world (the science of ethology, popularised by the works of Desmond Morris). It seems that it is impossible to think about gender without thinking about hierarchy (Moore, 1993). One suggestion about the seemingly inevitable connection between male superiority and female inferiority is that this thinking is congruent with other patterns of thought in Western society, namely the hierarchical relation between nature and culture. Moore (1993), Ortner (1974) and Strathern (1981) have all drawn attention to the association of female with nature and male with culture; female with the private and the domestic and male with the public and the collectivity. They argue that, in societies where culture is seen as preferable and superior to nature and where the public always encompasses the private, then it is inevitable that gender relations will be apprehended in hierarchical terms.

The argument is similar to the discussion of caste and class above. It is necessary to understand that cultures may be organised differently and experienced differently from those in the West and that it is important not to fall into the trap of thinking 'that all societies struggle with the same givens of nature, so that all social formations appear equivalently and thus holistically organized to the same ends' (Strathern, 1988: 342–3). A general theme of women anthropologists writing about issues of gender and inequality (and some men, notably Ardener, 1974, and Errington and Gewertz, 1987) is that much of the writing on non-Western societies is formulated in terms of Western assumptions about persons and relationships; there is a Western folk model which sees social life in dichotomous terms and this is imposed onto the substance of other lives and other arrangements. In making this line of argument – namely that the dichotomies are a feature of anthropological discourse, not the social and symbolic systems of the societies studied by the anthropologist – the reasoning is similar to that made in discussions about writing culture. Errington and Gewertz (1987), who studied the Chambri people of Papua New Guinea (a people made famous by Margaret Mead and Reo Fortune as the Tchambuli), write that in her wish to explore variations in culture and personality, Mead, paradoxically, underestimated the extent to which cultures differ from one another. In a complex argument they contrast Western views of persons as distinct and competent individuals with private subjective selves and unique dispositions with the Chambri view that persons are constituted by social relationships. Individuals are not bounded entities who possess certain characteristics as they are said to be in the West (and note the value-laden term 'possess' – denoting a materialist view of persons) but persons who share and who are part of others through their relationships and are multiply constituted (see also Strathern, 1988). Errington and Gewertz (1987) argue that women among the Chambri are very different from women in the Western world and gender concepts have a different meaning.

The caution against assuming universal patterns of superiority and inferiority has a validity beyond that of the discussion of gender and has particular importance for discussions about the ways in which people are multiply constituted in Western society through race, ethnicity, class, age and gender. All these are attributes of personhood and the task for the analyst is to see how these different attributes constitute the person rather than assuming that these categories of difference simply attach to the person (Strathern, 1988). The reflexive process with regard to Western ideas of personhood and gender has been taken further by some to question the distinction between sex and gender (Collier and Yanagisako, 1987; see also Chapter 8). Collier and Yanagisako take from Foucault (1984b) the idea that sex is an effect rather than an origin; just as it has been argued above that gender is the product of discursive practices, so also is sex.

> The notion of 'sex' made it possible to group together, in an artificial unity, anatomical elements, biological functions, conducts, sensations, and pleasures and it enabled one to make use of this fictitious unity as a causal principle, an omnipresent meaning: sex was thus able to function as a unique signifier and as a universal signifier.
>
> (Foucault, 1984b: 154)

This does not mean that anatomical differences are not noted but these are not necessarily the basis of a

binary sex classification (Moore, 1993). Notwithstanding the suggestion that perhaps sexual differences are culturally constructed, there seems to be general agreement among commentators about the cultural constructs of gender in Western society (Strathern, 1988; Moore, 1993; Butler, 1990; Tcherkezoff, 1993).

Taking up the issues of knowledge and the power to impose particular knowledge constructs on society as a whole, which were considered earlier in this chapter, feminists have developed the idea of patriarchy. This is a male-dominated social system in which society is seen as male-dominated, identified or centred. The argument is that society is based on convention, a convention in which men are prominent – men have certain interests in the framing of cultural conventions which give them power and exclude women from power. Strathern (1988) states that women experience a double arbitrariness: the Western dichotomous model creates opposed categories so women are what men are not, and since it is men who decide who men are, then women are doubly excluded. These feminist arguments rest on the cultural conventions about the nature of persons in Western society, the idea of duality and dichotomy and the connectedness of these ideas to the domains of the individual and society and to men and women/male and female in Western society. Strathern argues that there is in Western society a social contract view of society – culture is collective – held in common and so individuals willingly subordinate themselves to it (Strathern, 1988). This masks the reality that culture is 'authored' – 'it is patriarchy that produces cultures' (Strathern, 1988: 323).

These views have also been given voice in discussions about women's participation in science (Harding, 1991), where it is said that the idea of woman the 'knower' is a contradiction in terms. Harding points to the male domination in scientific fields. The production of scientific knowledge tends to be the province of those who have male characteristics and since it is predominantly men who have male characteristics so women are excluded (Harding, 1991: 48). Dale Spender (1982), writing about women in education, makes a similar cultural argument: that women cannot have a voice as producers of art and knowledge because they are not men. Spender cites the marginalisation of many women in the field of literature and women's rights, for example, Aphra Benn, Mary Wollstonecroft, Catherine Macauley (see also Chapter 6).

While feminism has served to refocus attention on the nature and sources of women's subordination it has also, obliquely, stimulated interest in the characteristics of masculinity and the sources of male domination. There is what is sometimes termed 'hegemonic masculinity' (Connell, 1987) (see also p. 218), the ideal form of being a man: a configuration of courage, physical strength and toughness that is endlessly paraded in the mass media (see also Chapter 8). One codification of the US version is offered by Brannon (1976):

- 'no sissy stuff' – the avoidance of all feminine behaviours and traits
- 'the big wheel' – the acquisition of success, status and breadwinning competence
- 'the sturdy oak' – strength, confidence and independence
- 'give 'em hell' – aggression, violence and daring

In recent times masculinity itself has, in some quarters at least, become another contested terrain. The pervasiveness of hegemonic masculinity has been empirically questioned and it is suggested that there are in fact multiple discourses of masculinity rather than a single ideal (Edley and Wetherall, 1996), a situation that has led some commentators to speak in the plural of 'masculinities' (Hearn, 1996). Masculinity or masculinities are undoubtedly real but whether the concept on its own has much efficacy in explaining the gendered basis of domination seems open to question.

Age

Age and the ageing process are, like gender and the body (see Chapter 8), apparently natural processes. Yet it will come as no surprise that within this chapter, as in the book as a whole, the argument will be made that what seems straightforwardly natural is highly cultural and culturally specific, with the added twist that the cultural ordering locates age in the biological world. Culture naturalises age, as it also naturalises gender, race, ethnicity – all those aspects of human experience that seem to be rooted in biology. Age is a cultural con-

struct symbolically located in a biological metaphor (Spencer, 1990). The apparently natural process of the person's passage from birth to death in chronological time is ordered, sometimes controlled, but always shaped by cultural ideas of what is appropriate and conventional behaviour at certain ages.

Age has different meanings among different peoples not only for the individual but for all those with whom the individual is associated; a change of status for an individual involves others in new roles and relationships. Also as with gender (see above), theorising about the significance of age must give regard to, and account for, the ways in which age is mediated by class, gender, race, ethnicity and all other culturally significant variables at particular moments and contexts. A small example to make the point is that most people who live in British society treat age as if it was a linear process in which one is born and one passes through measured time until one's death. However, there are those in British society who believe in reincarnation and so the ageing process is for them a circular and not a linear journey, and they look forward to a rebirth – equally for those who believe in the resurrection of the spirit and/or operate with a different sense of time than those who believe that death is the end of being.

In fact something that seems so taken for granted and unremarkable empirically turns out to be an important principle of social organisation and marker of social differentiation. It is arguable that age and gender are the most important shapers of social experience for individuals. For example, if we look at how people spend their leisure time we see that the type of leisure people engage in is related to their age. Research has shown that the range and frequency of participation in out-of-home leisure declines with age, so that 42 per cent of 16–24 year olds spend their free time mainly at home compared to 67 per cent of over 60 year olds (Martin and Mason, 1998: Roberts, 1999). It seems that in all societies people are treated differently on the basis of age. It is possible to speak of age roles, the clusters of expectations that accrue to certain chronological and structural age bands. Most societies have conventions about the age at which it is suitable for individuals to marry (this may be gendered), to engage in sexual relations, and in British society there are a set of age-determined laws regarding employment and retirement.

The significance of age is not just a matter for the individual; it is a relational matter touching on how one behaves to others. The ideas about the relationship are incorporated into social expectations, often into scientific, 'natural' ideas about how children should develop and how they should behave to others. The disciplines of child psychology and developmental psychology and the psychology of ageing rest on models of 'normal' (cultural) expectations. In the individual life course the experience and practice of age roles is common within the domestic life-cycle. Most people grow up in the company of others and learn the age-appropriate behaviour for their sex, class, race or ethnic group and according to scientific and medical knowledge.

Historical evidence shows that our ideas of age-appropriate behaviour have changed considerably in the recent past in Western society. Aries (1962) has written that the idea of childhood is a recent one, and Mayhew's (1968) survey of the London labouring classes in the middle of the nineteenth century showed clearly the class-based experience of childhood. Mayhew declared himself appalled by the lack of childhood for these children, noting how they looked older than their years and finding that children as young as six or seven years old were making a living for themselves independently on the streets of London. Reports in the contemporary world often speak of the high incidence of child labour in developing world countries where children are seen as a resource to make a contribution to household economies. Caldwell (1982) points out that the flow of resources from parents to children in affluent Western societies is unidirectional, whereas in developing world countries resources flow both ways when children start to make a contribution to the household.

In some societies the transition to new status roles based upon age is highly ritualised. Such highly ritualised movements are named rites of passage. The seminal work on rites of passage was carried out by van Gennep (1960) who established a common threefold pattern in such rites: the phase of separation (when the initiate leaves old associations and relationships); the liminal (limbo) phase; and the phase of incorporation into the new status. It is possible to identify several rites of passage in modern society. Weddings and funerals are both loosely associated with age but not necessarily

so. There are a few rites of passage that are tightly linked to age and to major shifts in life courses. The commonest example in Western society is that of the bar mitzvah for young Jewish boys (and bat mitzvah for girls) which takes place around the age of thirteen when boys become ritually full adult members of the religious community. The best-known ceremonies of status change are to be found in African societies, for example among the Masai and the Hazda people. Young men, when they are initiated into the status of warriors, become the herders of cattle and serve in this role for several years until a new cohort of young men are initiated. Rites of passage often involve scarification or other forms of bodily mutilation so that there is a permanent, visible sign of changed status. Sociologists have taken these ideas further, advancing the idea that 'status passage' (Glaser and Strauss, 1971) is a very common feature of modern societies. For example, occupational life is increasingly frequently thought of in 'career' terms and the status passages associated with promotion, retirement and so forth are important ceremonial occasions in organisational cultures.

All this may yield the misleading impression that status passages are pre-programmed by the culture and unproblematically experienced by the passagee. Often there is considerable individual diversity of experience in negotiating status passages, even among persons in broadly similar situations. Consider the transition from school to work. Although it is becoming increasingly less common for this transition to be made at the age of sixteen, until the mid–1970s this was a standard trajectory for very many British schoolchildren (as late as 1976 only 25 per cent of pupils stayed on beyond their sixteenth year). Almost a quarter of school-leavers entered the labour market with no educational qualifications. Many ended up in poorly paid occupations. Of course, the process is not random: this is an important moment of social and cultural reproduction. As Paul Willis pointedly puts it:

> The difficult thing to explain about how middle class kids get middle class jobs is why others let them. The difficult thing to explain about how working class kids get working class jobs is why they let themselves.
>
> (Willis, 1977: 1)

The conventional sociological wisdom invokes a description of class culture that suggests that working-class children are enmeshed in cultural notions such as a lack of deferred gratification, weak or absent future orientations and the like. For Willis such explanations are doubly inadequate, for they fail to suggest where these attitudes originate (1977: 141) and they work with a notion of culture as something passively absorbed by the children rather than as at least in part actively constructed, a 'product of collective human praxis' (Willis, 1977: 4).

The core of Willis's explanation turns on his interpretation of the 'lads' counter-school culture. His ethnography of school-leavers in their final year at school distinguishes the 'lads' from the more conventional pupils (the 'ear 'oles'). The lad's culture is sexist and racist, as well as anti-school and anti-conventional morality. Most of the lads will end up with unskilled, heavy labouring jobs that pay reasonably well early on but which will soon take their toll on their health. Ironically, this is a future that the lads choose and willingly embrace.

Willis documents the features of the lads counter-school culture – drinking and smoking, sticking up for their mates, 'dossing, blagging and wagging', 'having a laff' and so on. He goes on to argue that the counter-school culture is both ideological in character and a rational response to the realities of their situation. The lads culture is ideological because it facilitates their smooth transition into dead-end work. As an ideology the culture masks the reality of the lads' situation and effectively dupes them into accepting the worst jobs going. But the counter-school culture is also a considered, rational response. The lads positively value manual work which they regard as masculine, an activity infused with machismo. Moreover they do not much care what work they do providing that it is a manual job (white-collar work they define as effeminate). In their indifference to occupational choice the lads effectively reaffirm their conviction that all jobs are essentially the same. And this, for Willis, represents a penetration of the real conditions of their existence as a class – it is a profound expression of the reality of their situation. As capitalism advances, labour becomes more abstract and thus it matters less and less what occupation you work in so long as you work. In this

sense the lads counter-school culture is a rational assessment of the reality of their situation in the labour markets of advanced capitalism.

There has been criticism of the emphasis on age as an indicator of a person's social role or influence upon their social experience. It is suggested that in a post-industrial society that is characterised by de-standardisation and flexibility. There is a less secure work life, families are more diverse and less stable, and major life events are no longer so closely linked to age. There is a greater variety within all age groups and it is difficult to generalise about the circumstances and behaviour of people at any life stage. For example, women aged 25–40 may still be traditional housewives, in full-time employment, or single and childless. Young adults by the age of 25 may have established themselves in careers and good jobs, may have poor jobs, may be unemployed or on various schemes, or may be full-time students (Roberts, 1999). This is not to suggest that age has become socially meaningless, it is still a basis for social discrimination, and people's behaviour early in life still has important implications for their future.

Structural and local conceptions of power

To conclude this section we can make two general observations about the workings of culture, power and inequality. These concern power as a local phenomenon and the interrelations of systems of domination and disadvantage.

All the theories reviewed above tend to take an objectivist, structural view of power and inequality. They decode the cultural to reveal the true nature of the relationships involved and, as has been argued, much of that revelation has turned on power and its manifestations. Often that power seems to be encompassing in form, lodged in the class structure or ethnic hierarchy or institutionalised arrangements between men and women. But, as Foucault reminded us, power is also something diffused throughout the working of a society. So power is also local and can be understood contextually rather than structurally – a recommendation for a hermeneutic approach to understanding culture, power and inequality.

This can be illustrated by two studies of power and control in work organisations: Malcolm Young's study of the police (1991) and Sallie Westwood's study of Asian women garment workers (1984). In both cases control was in the hands of men, and in the case of the factory the control was experienced through the discipline of the operation of a capitalistic enterprise. The firm was, Westwood says, a reputable and paternalistic firm, which stressed good time-keeping and maximising output. There were separate canteens for management (all men) and workers (mainly women) and there were considerable differences in pay and conditions, with the management receiving company cars and allowances. Westwood describes how the women developed a 'shopfloor culture of resistance and celebration'. Elaborate rituals were engaged in to celebrate the events of the women's lives (weddings, engagements) and the women used company time and resources for their own affairs. The shopfloor culture was one that emphasised friendship and solidarity. The playful antics of the women can be regarded as rituals of resistance which served to emphasise 'sisterhood and strength against the patriarchy and gender inequalities of the company' (Westwood,1984: 2).

The women police officers described by Young had scant opportunity to develop a counter-culture to the heavily masculine ethos of the police force. There were fewer women and they tended to be more isolated. Additionally they were not seen as legitimate members of the force by the policemen. Young describes (1991: 219, 242, 233) the ways in which the women were marginalised and denigrated by the men, given abusive and humiliating names, and repeatedly subject to sexual innuendo in an organisation that was dedicated to a traditional masculine ethos and imagery. Young remarks that the state of the institutional mind kept women in narrowly defined roles and subject to the formal and informal domination of men.

In this last illustration the power exercised was in terms of gender hierarchies, a reminder that modern societies are subject to many systems of domination, not simply that of class, which nevertheless tends to be the predominant typifying feature of modern industrialised society. Power also worked in a capillary fashion, in that it was evident in everyday acts and their implications and consequences. If there are different

hierarchies through which power is 'exercised', or different forms of power through which domination works, how are these systems of domination interrelated?

This is sometimes formulated as: how do race, gender, age and class disadvantages relate to each other? Note that the very way that the question is formulated disposes us towards a structural rather than Foucauldian conception of power. Within the frame set by a structural approach there is, as we saw in considering the cycle of deprivation, substantial evidence that economic and cultural factors can overlap or interact to produce multiple disadvantage. Being a black woman can increase the likelihood of the person being found in an underclass location. A poor black woman is likely to face disadvantages that those situated higher up class, racial and gender hierarchies will not. These are well-supported facts. There is a risk, however, of running away with such geometrical metaphors of overlapping disadvantageous categories of class, race, gender and age. These factors certainly describe the broad patterning of disadvantage and the oppressions (racism, sexism, class oppression, etc.) that result. Whether they illuminate the particularities of people's ordinary cultural experience is more open to question, as in everyday life we are all gendered, raced, classed and aged and these categories may have variable relevance to how we are treated in particular instances in everyday life (see West and Fenstermaker, 1995). For instance, we may sometimes feel ourselves to be badly treated by a shop assistant. Is this because of our race or class or gender or age? In actual instances the answer can be very variable for any given person, so it can be very difficult to pin down which particular source of disadvantage is operating. This difficulty does not deny the reality and force of these disadvantages. But it does serve to further underline Foucault's fundamental point about the omnipresence of power and resistance: dominations of class or race or gender are never complete or total and can be challenged in the conduct of our everyday lives.

3.5 Conclusion

News broadcasts daily provide us with information about the effects of globalisation and the cultural differences between people. The inequalities premised on these differences are the basis of many social conflicts. Witness, for example, the long-running conflicts in the Basque region, central Africa, and the Middle East, or the violent anti-globalisation demonstrations that have accompanied the annual summit meetings of the G8.

In this chapter we have reviewed explanations of the origin of inequality in capitalist societies and considered some of the leading theoretical ideas. Concepts such as hegemony, incorporation and habitus have been used to explain how inequality is justified and rendered acceptable. The chapter has also focused on the ways that these inequalities are made manifest through characteristic cultures of class, ethnicity, gender and age. The concepts, theories and studies reviewed above show some of the many ways in which all cultures are 'structured in dominance'. This work might also help to suggest ways in which strategies of resistance to systems of dominance might be organised.

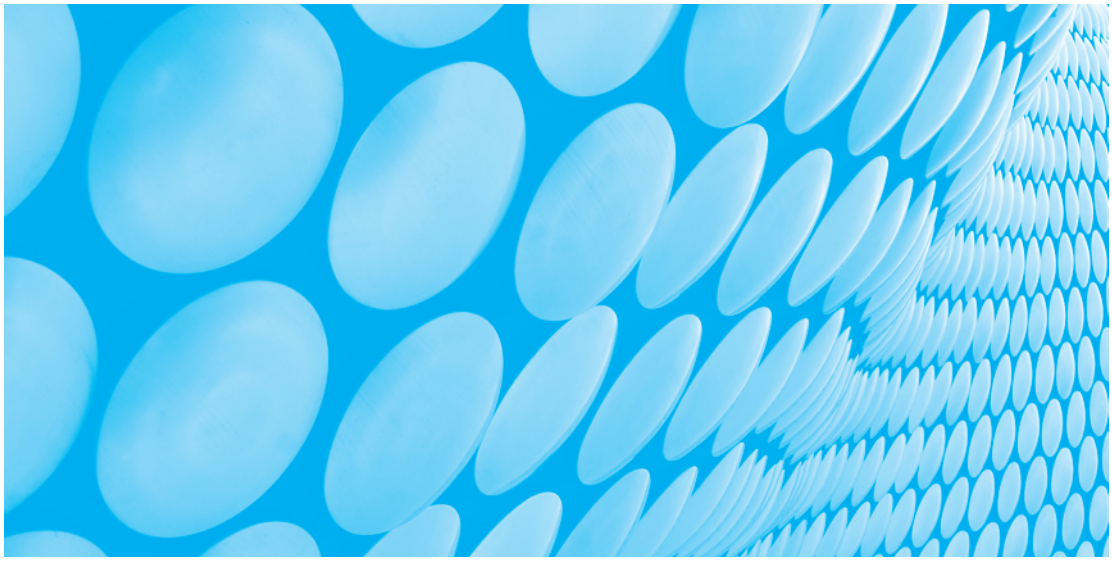
Recap

This chapter has:

- considered the cultural and economic effects of globalisation;
- reviewed the principal structural sources of inequality;
- surveyed explanations of the role of culture in legitimating forms of inequality;
- examined how class, race, gender and age inequalities are culturally produced and reproduced.

Further reading

A helpful survey of the base-superstructure debate and beyond can be found in Jorge Larrain's *The Concept of Ideology* (1979). Some of the ramifications of the dominant ideology debate are explored in Nicholas Abercrombie, Stephen Hill and Bryan S. Turner (eds) *Dominant Ideologies* (1990). Ruth Lister's collection *Charles Murray and the Underclass: The Developing Debate* (1996) contains short, lively contributions about the concept and reality of the underclass. On race and ethnicity, *The Empire Strikes Back* (1982), collectively authored by members of the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, is still an engaging read. There is a video of an illustrated lecture by Stuart Hall (1997) entitled 'Race as a floating signifier' available from Media Education Foundation, **www.mediaed.org/**, or you can view an extract from the Lecture on You Tube **www.youtube.com/ watch?v=bMo2uiRAf30**. Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (2006) has been influential in shaping recent debates on gender. A good resource for exploring the complex issues involved in the globalisation process is *The globalisation Reader* (2003), edited by Frank J. Lechner and John Boli. See also the Globalisation Website: **www.sociology.emory.edu/globalization/**



Chapter 4

Researching culture

4.0 Introduction

This chapter concentrates not on theories or analytic standpoints but on methods of research, that is how knowledge is produced in cultural studies. The term research originates from the French 'rechercher', meaning to search for the facts, to investigate something thoroughly. Researchers in cultural studies have used a wide array of methods drawn from the humanities and social sciences, and especially those methods that prize interpretation. Whether cultural studies has any distinctive methods of its own is a moot point. For example, Jim McGuigan (1997: 1) observes that 'still it remains difficult to see quite what cultural studies amounts to methodologically'. Often, the metaphor of bricolage is employed to describe the eclectic, topic and problem-driven approach of cultural studies. What seems to matter most is the selection of methods that treat culture seriously as a topic in its own right, not as a mere 'effect' (Alasuutari, 1995).

In many quarters of cultural studies what is known as methodological pluralism prevails. This is the idea that different methods of investigation can illuminate different aspects of culture, and that methods have to be appropriate to the research question posed. For example, questions about just how common are particular kinds of images in 'lad's mags' can be best addressed by using a method like content analysis, which allows the researcher to carefully measure the incidence and prevalence of specific features of texts. But if the research question seeks to discover say, the ways in which male–female relationships are portrayed in a magazine's editorial column, then a semiotic approach may be more helpful. Pluralism means that we cannot speak of any single method as *the* method of cultural studies. There are 'cultural methodologies' (McGuigan, 1997) but no one cultural methodology.

All research involves an initial stage of planning. This is often called the research design stage. It involves making key decisions about what you want to find out (your research question or problem), how you will obtain facts or evidence that will provide an answer to

your research question (methods of data collection), and how that evidence will be analysed (methods of data analysis).

In this chapter we will provide a brief overview of some of the leading methods of data collection and analysis used in cultural studies. Much work in cultural studies focuses on the analysis of texts and lived experience. A good deal of culture is textually mediated through advertisements, magazines, films, computer games, music and the like. We will begin by considering first content and thematic analysis, and then semiotics. Each of these methods facilitates the analysis of cultural texts. But culture is not merely textual. It is also lived through our day-to-day experiences. Accordingly, the chapter will then look at the use by cultural studies of ethnographic methods to study culture as a lived, ordinary experience, beginning with a famed study of the lived experience of school leavers (Willis 1977), before coming full circle to a consideration of the methods used to study how audiences experience cultural texts (Radway, 1987).

Learning objectives

- To, understand the differing objectives of the leading methods for producing knowledge in cultural studies.
- To, appreciate the range of theoretical and practical issues generated by the use of these methods.
- To, acquire a knowledge of the processes through which investigations of texts and lived experience in cultural studies are accomplished.

4.1 Content and thematic analysis

'Content analysis' is a term which covers a range of ways of analysing the written and visual elements of texts. It can be quantitative or qualitative in character. The quantitative version emerged in the early twentieth century. One of its best known exponents was Bernard Berelson, who in 1952 published *Content Analysis in Communication Research*. Or it can be used in a more qualitative manner to refer to any attempt to identify recurrent ideas or themes in a document or collection of documents.

For Berelson, content analysis is 'a research technique for the objective, systematic and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication' (1952: 18). The definition is worth unpacking. Communication is considered to consist of a flow of messages from a transmitter to a receiver; thus, from an author to a readership, from a television programme to its audience, or from a photograph to its viewer. It is the 'manifest' – that is, the obvious, palpable, self-evident-features of the message – that are of relevance to content analysis, not its latent or hidden dimensions. Thus content analysis is primarily limited to what is expressly communicated by some document rather than the motives animating the construction of the document or the responses that persons make to it (Berelson, 1952: 16).

The method claims to offer an 'objective,' 'systematic,' and 'quantitative' (Berelson, 1952: 16–17) analysis of documentary content. The objectivity of content analysis resides in the devising of precisely and clearly defined categories to apply to the material analysed. The idea is that different analysts using the same categories and rules of application would obtain identical results from their analysis of any given body of data. This is the key to the reliability of the method. The rules of application serve to minimise the influence of the individual analyst's disposition and preconceptions. The requirement that content analysis is systematic means that *all* the material relevant to the investigation must be analysed, not just a selection designed to support a preferred hypothesis. Content analysis is often regarded as primarily a quantitative technique because it aims to establish the frequency with which certain categories or themes appear in the material investigated. This quantitative dimension is facilitated by assigning numerical values to category or theme and is a basic characteristic of the method. Of course, some kinds of content analysis have a qualitative orientation. These are also considered below.

Quantitative content analysis: gangsta rap lyrics

Use of the method of content analysis involves six basic steps: (1) selecting a topic and determining a research problem; (2) selecting a documentary source; (3) devising a set of analytic categories; (4) formulating an explicit set of instructions for using the categories to code the material; (5) establishing a principled basis for sampling the documents; and (6) counting the frequency of a given category or theme in the documents sampled (Ball and Smith 1992). We can understand how content analysis is done by looking at how these steps are applied in Edward Armstrong's (2001) study of gangsta rap lyrics.

Selecting a topic and determining a research problem

In cultural studies inquiry begins with the selection of a topic for investigation and the determination of a 'research problem'. Armstrong's research question is to describe the nature and extent of violent and misogynist messages in rap music. While it is possible to interpret rap music as part of an oppositional culture committed to social critique, such views overlook the presence of a lyrical content that portrays violence against women as a normal and acceptable fact of life. Armstrong's task is primarily descriptive: he seeks to ascertain the extent of such imagery in rap music.

Selecting a documentary source

The next step in content analysis involves the identification of a collection of documents relevant to the research problem. Armstrong (2001: 98) suggests that rap lyrics are well-suited to content analysis because they are in first-person accounts that avoid metaphor and word play and favour the direct communication of meaning. Rappers are committed to speaking straightforwardly: manifest content is what rap is about. Armstrong draws upon the lyrics of 490 songs made by 13 popular and well-regarded rap artists between the years 1987 and 1993.

Devising a set of categories

The categories into which the content is to be coded are plainly central parts of the analytical process. As Berelson observed, 'Content analysis stands or falls by its categories … since the categories contain the substance of the investigation, a content analysis can be no better than its system of categories' (1952: 147). The categories chosen must reflect and be sensitive to the research problem. Armstrong's categories concentrate on criminal offences directed against women: assault, forcible rape, murder, and a combined rape and murder category. Further requirements are that categories are mutually exclusive and exhaustive of the content under consideration. It is important that any element of the content is coded under one and only one category and that the category system is sufficiently comprehensive to provide space for every relevant aspect of content. Armstrong's four categories meet these requirements.

Formulating an explicit set of coding rules

Any given instance of content has to be coded, that is, allocated to one (and only one) category. Sometimes, however, a given item of content may be ambiguous and fall between two or more categories, and for that reason, it is essential that categories are sufficiently explicit to provide coders with clear instructions about how to deal with the problematic item. Armstrong does not report any difficulties in coding lyrics into his four categories.

Sampling the documents

Some selection of the material to be analysed is usually necessary in order to ensure that a properly representative sample is obtained. Armstrong chooses to analyse the work of rap's 'ruling class' in its foundational period, before it began to diversify and fragment. While there is an arbitrary element to selection of the 13 artists, the 490 songs represent to totality of their published output in the 1987–93 period.

Counting the frequencies of the categories

A count must be made of how often the categories appear in the content under investigation. The information thus obtained can be readily presented in tables or graphs. Armstrong (2001: 126) tabulates his findings, which are presented as whole numbers and percentages. Overall, 22 per cent of the 490 songs have violent and misogynist lyrics. Assault, followed by murder, are the commonest forms of violence and misogyny depicted. In strictly quantitative content analysis, the provision of examples of the data is deemed superfluous. What matters is the tabular and graphical representation of the research findings, which indicate the patterns relevant to the research question. Much large-scale content analysis readily lends itself to cross-tabulation and significance testing. Armstrong does not go this far in his study. Instead, he argues that once the categorisation process is complete, the interesting step is not statistical analysis but consideration of the meanings of the lyrics. Thus Armstrong (2001: 100–4) gives attention to exactly how his categories of assault, rape, murder and rape, and murder are depicted in the lyrics. This part of Armstrong's study moves towards a more qualitative thematic analysis.

Of course, gangsta rap has been and continues to be an enormously controversial cultural phenomenon. On the one hand, some see it as a cause of social problems, as providing a source of and legitimation for the growing violence in urban neighbourhoods. On the other, its supporters argue that its messages need to be decoded and are not as unambiguous as they seem to critics from the outside. The point of Armstrong's study is to establish the factual basis of claims about the violence and misogyny of gangsta rap lyrics. Statistics always have to be interpreted so it could be suggested that 'only' 22 per cent deal with violent and misogynist themes, therefore 78 per cent do not. Also, Armstrong's analysis gives lie to some common misconceptions that the more shocking a rapper is, the more successful he will be. Armstrong show that those artists who score highest on violence and misogyny are the least commercially successful. Or at least they were, in 1987–93. Armstrong ends with a quick comparison of this period with the lyrics of Eminem's successful albums. This suggests that in more recent years a 'hard' image is coming to be more commercially successful than was the case in the earlier period.

Certain shortcomings are associated with quantitative content analysis as a method of analysis. These centre on issues of manifest and latent content, data fragmentation and decontextualisation. For cultural studies, these issues set limits on the usefulness of the method. Berelson (1952) sought to restrict content analysis to what is manifestly apparent in the communicative message, excluding implicit or latent meanings from the coding operation. Content analysis also depends upon a communicative message – song lyrics, for example, being fragmented for purposes of coding. What can be lost is the latent meaning of a message that may only become apparent when the fuller context of the message is taken into account. So content analysis risks fragmenting and decontextualising its topic matter, losing the sense that is given it by the local circumstances in which it appears. Armstrong's study at least partially escapes these criticisms. He is able to maintain that many rap lyrics have a literalness that makes it unnecessary to seek for subtler decodings. He also focuses not simply on the presence or absence of certain words and images in the lyrics but places these terms in the bleak contexts in which they occur as representations of acts of violence.

Thematic analysis

Thematic analysis or qualitative content analysis stands closer to the traditional methods of the humanities. It involves close scrutiny of texts in order to ascertain key ideas or themes. Thematic analysis is broadly what Siegfried Kracauer meant when he defined qualitative content analysis as: 'the selection and rational organization of such categories as condense the substantive meanings of the given text, with a view to testing pertinent assumptions and hypotheses. These categories *may* or *may not* invite frequency counts' (1952: 638). Kracauer argued that the quantitative dependence upon pre-established categories applied to manifest elements of the content of communication can easily result in the inadequate treatment of the significance of key words or phrases. Qualitative analysis, in contrast, is appropriately equipped to pick up such nuances. Note how far Kracauer's recommendations depart from

Berelson's: there is no requirement to treat only manifest content, but equally there are no clear, replicable procedures presented whereby the substantive meanings of a given text can be condensed. Much, then, is left to the ingenuity of the individual analyst. Nor are frequency counts barred from qualitative content analysis, but this point simply sidesteps the problem: under what circumstances is a count to be preferred over a qualitative appraisal of communication content?

Erving Goffman's (1979) book *Gender Advertisements* offers a pictorial variation of thematic analysis. He takes a constructionist stance towards gender that anticipates the later and better known ideas of Judith Butler. His focus in this book is on 'gender displays', the nonverbal ways through which we exude 'femininity' or 'masculinity'. For Goffman how we sit, stand, hold hands, cuddle, tilt our heads, lower our bodies, etc. all speak of our gendered natures. There is a (culturally variable but socially sanctioned) feminine way to sit, just as there is a (culturally variable but socially sanctioned) masculine way to stand. His argument is that these gender displays are cultural practices that are socially learned. His book offers an analysis of some practices of gender display using a collection of more than 500 images, mostly drawn from newspaper and magazine adverts.

The pictures are grouped under six broad themes, with sub-themes developed as and when Goffman's analysis suggests it appropriate. The main features of gender displays are:

- *relative size*: men are typically depicted as bigger than women;
- *function ranking*: if men and women are depicted together engaged in a task, the man will likely be in charge;
- *the feminine touch*: men grasp objects, women gently touch or stroke them;
- *the family*: family photographs often depict the man at the head of the family in a protective and authoritative role;
- *the ritualisation of subordination*: the various forms of bending and lowering of the body through which people, and especially women, display their subordinate status;
- *licensed withdrawal*: the various ways in which people remove themselves from full involvement in the situation through forms of reserve, gazing vacantly into the distance, nuzzling and cuddling another, that are typically done by women.

Overall, Goffman suggests that the 'parent–child complex' serves as a model for the gender displays of adult men and women. His analysis of these themes is conducted in words and pictures. He presents a short written description of a theme or sub-theme then follows it with a series of pictures that illustrate it. For example, in the section of the ritualization of subordination, Goffman presents a series of advertising pictures where women are playfully being 'attacked' by men – being pulled down the beach into the sea, having water thrown over them, being lifted off the ground. He precedes the series of pictures with the comment:

> Adults play mock assault games with children, games such as chase-and-capture and grab-and-squeeze. The child is playfully treated like a prey under attack by a predator. Certain materials (pillows, sprays of water, light beach balls) provide missiles that can strike but not hurt. Other materials provide a medium into which the captured body can be thrown safely – beds, snow banks, pools, arms. Now it turns out that men play these games with women, the latter collaborating through a display of attempts to escape and through cries of alarm, fear, and appeasement. (Figure-dancing provides occasion for an institutionalized example, the partners who are swung off their feet never being men.) Of course, underneath this show a man may be engaged in a deeper one, the suggestion of what he could do if he got serious about it. In part because mock assault is 'fun' and more likely in holiday scenes than in work scenes, it is much represented in advertisements.
>
> (Goffman, 1979: text preceding pictures 235–43)

The juxtaposition of written text and pictorial display allows the reader to develop a subtle understanding of features of gender display through the interaction between the written text and pictorial sequence, each elaborating the other. Goffman's book

can be read as an example of a thematic analysis of gender displays. Goffman maintains that advertising photographs are not, of course, 'real life', but that they offer an exaggerated and stylised representation of what we do in ordinary everyday life. As such, advertisements provide a strategic research site for the student of gender display. In Goffman's hands they provide a magnifying glass for what we routinely undertake when performing gender.

4.2 Semiotics as a method of analysis

Semiotic approaches noticeably contrast with quantitative content analyses. Content analysis is based upon traditional social scientific preoccupations such as clearly defined concepts, testable hypotheses and representative samples. These ideas are not prominent in semiotics. It is much more interested in how cultural knowledge figures in the interpretation of cultural features. It is a method that has proved effective in the humanities as well as in cultural studies. From a semiotic point of view, content analysis seems to fragment the cultural phenomena it investigates when it categorises elements or features of texts. In seeking to quantitatively describe these features, it loses sight of the text as a unified package – of the overall meaning of a song or an image as it might be heard or viewed. Semiotic analyses offer an opposing approach centred on the close study of individual cases taken as a whole. The aim is to provide an analysis that attuned to what is communicated by the text in its entirety. In this respect semiotic analysis has a rigour of its own: but differences remain. As we shall see, semiotic analyses often concentrate on only one or two texts, or bigger collections of texts that have not been assembled by a systematic sampling procedure.

Much recent writing on the communication and representation of meaning, as other chapters in this book suggest, has been influenced by **structuralism** (p. 17) and **semiotics** (or **semiology** – p. 29). One important source of structuralism was the theories of the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure (1857–1913),

Figure 4.1 A sign is always a thing plus meaning.

whose ideas were developed in the 1960s by influential writers such as Althusser, **Barthes** (p. 96), Chomsky, **Foucault** (p. 20), Lacan and Lévi-Strauss. Keat and Urry (1975: 124–6) identify the main features of structuralism as follows:

1 Systems must be studied as a set of interrelated elements. Individual elements should not be seen in isolation. For example, in a set of traffic lights, green only means go because red means stop.
2 An attempt to discover the structure that lies behind or beneath what is directly knowable.
3 The suggestion that the structure behind the directly visible and the directly visible itself are both products of structural properties of the mind.
4 The proposal that the methods of linguistics can be applied to other social and human sciences.
5 Culture can be analysed in terms of binary oppositions: for example, between good and bad or hot and cold.
6 The adoption of a distinction between synchronic (static) and diachronic (changing) analyses.
7 The attempt to identify similar structures in different aspects of social life.

Key influence 4.1

Roland Barthes (1915–80)

Roland Barthes was a French literary critic and cultural analyst. His development of **structuralist** and **poststructuralist** (p. 17) ideas in the context of writing on aspects of everyday life was particularly influential in the early development of cultural studies.

Barthes' early life was dogged by tuberculosis. He taught in French lycées and abroad before being appointed to the Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes in 1962. He was appointed to a Chair at the Collège de France (Paris) in 1976. He died after being knocked over by a truck outside the Collège.

Barthes' early work concerned the nature of language and representation from a **structuralist** (p. 17) point of view. Examples of his general approach can be found in *Writing Degree Zero* (1953) and *Elements of Semiology* (1964). He worked on the formal properties of literary texts and carried out influential specific analyses such as *S/Z* (1970), which addresses the structure of a novella by Balzac. His identification of proairetic, hermeneutic, semic, symbolic and referential codes was innovative and consequential. Barthes was also concerned to apply the ideas of semiology to aspects of everyday life. He wrote a regular newspaper column in the 1950s that covered topics such as margarine, the brain of Einstein and wrestling from this point of view. These short analyses were collected in *Mythologies* (1957): a best selling text which encapsulates some of the key aspects of decodings based in a cultural studies approach. Barthes sought to dig below the surface of the everyday for deeper meanings and to show how those meanings were implicated in relations of **power** (p. 64) and structures of domination. He mounted an attack on the role of such seemingly innocent representations and activities in the **ideological** (p. 35) dominance of the bourgeois class. He also examined fashion in *The Fashion System* (1967). The sometimes playful nature of Barthes' analyses became more prominent in his later work which, under the influence of **poststructuralism** (p. 17), is less concerned with the methodical mapping of codes and meanings and more with the interrogation of pleasure and the self. Examples of this can be found in *The Pleasure of the Text* (1973), *Camera Lucida* (1980) and *Roland Barthes on Roland Barthes* (1975).

Barthes' attention to everyday life and popular texts from an academic point of view was groundbreaking. It is likely that his later work would have developed further in parallel with the **postmodernist** (p. 295) emphases on **identity** (p. 142) and pleasure. He remains, however, one of the seminal figures of postwar French thought, who influenced a variety of disciplines in the humanities and the social sciences.

Further reading

Mythologies is a great place to start reading Barthes.

Barthes, R. (1973) *Mythologies*, St Albans: Paladin.

Culler, J. (1983) *Barthes*, London: Fontana.

Sontag, S. (ed.) (1982) *A Barthes Reader*, London: Cape.

Roland Barthes adopted many of these features of structuralism in his influential analyses. Barthes followed de Saussure's preoccupation with the nature of signs. De Saussure was well-aware of the wide scope of semiology, which he defined as 'the science that studies the life of signs within society' (de Saussure,1966:16). However, his own work concentrated on language. Barthes' accomplishment was to provide a wide array of worked examples of how the whole of culture, not just language, could be analysed semiologically. In a sense, Barthes encashed de Saussure's promise, taking semiology out of linguistics and into cultural studies.

Chapter 2 (p. 32) has introduced some of the key components of Barthes' ideas about semiotics. (Barthes preferred the term semiology but for the sake of consistency in this chapter we will speak of semiotics.) The discussion here will concentrate on areas where Barthes has been particularly important, the semiotic analysis of photography and advertising. The aim is to show how semiotic concepts are mobilised to facilitate the analysis and understanding of images.

Photographs were a class of signs that long fascinated Barthes. In his 1961 essay, 'The photographic message' (Barthes, 1977) the press photograph is examined. The photograph in a newspaper when treated as a sign seems to occupy the realm of 'pure denotation'. It appears as a literal representation of a factual state of affairs, depicting the actuality of a flood victim's plight or a wounded soldier's suffering or a politician making a speech. The press photograph is denotative in that it directly indicates what there is in the world. In this sense, states Barthes, it seems to be a 'message without a code'. But the press photo is always surrounded by written text such as a caption and a news story and such written texts follow certain codes for reporting diplomatic manoeuvring, disasters, political conflicts and so on. The written text is widely acknowledged to be a source of connotation. So the two messages co-exist: one without a code and one with one. This is what Barthes calls 'the photographic paradox'.

But Barthes then goes on to suggest that this is not a true paradox. This is because a photograph is a message without a code only in respect of its referent, that is to *what* it points to in the world. *How* the photograph is taken is the source of the photograph's connotation. Photographs have to be taken in some way, in some style or other. Barthes resolves the photographic paradox by identifying six 'connotation procedures' that show how photographs are not simple denotative signs depicting brute, natural fact. Through connotation procedures photographers can alter reality or their images of reality. The three procedures that can modify the reality shown in a photograph are *trick effects* (for example, unlikely photos that put together people who have never actually met); decisions about *pose*; and the manipulation of *objects* in the scene photographed. Three connotation procedures concern what the photographer does with the image: *photogenia* is the selective use of lighting, exposure, cropping, etc. to produce a particular effect; *aestheticism* is the attempt to introduce artistic elements into the production of the photograph by, for example, modelling a photograph after a well-known painting; and *syntax*, which is the photograph's placement in a sequence of other photographs. The message conveyed by the photograph is no less connotative and therefore contestable as a representation of reality than is a written text.

Barthes turned his attention to advertising images in his 1964 paper, 'Rhetoric of the image'. Here he dissects a Panzani advertisement (see overleaf) depicting a string bag containing Panzani spaghetti, tomato sauce and grated cheese along with fresh vegetables.

In speaking of an image's 'rhetoric', Barthes is asking how this image works as an advertisement. Specifically, he wants to know how it works to provoke desire in the viewer and persuade them to buy Panzani products. Barthes locates the question in a broader concern with how an image signifies, i.e. how it is constructed in order to convey a range of meanings (wholesomeness, freshness, 'Italianicity').

Barthes suggests that to understand the advertisement it is important to recognise that both the verbal and visual elements operate at denotative and connotative levels. The verbal part – the labels bearing the name Panzani and the caption at the bottom of the image – are denotative in that they describe what the products are and who makes them. But there is also a connotational level: the name Panzani just sounds Italian. Likewise, the visual element has a denotational component. What we 'see' when we look at the image is a string shopping bag containing vegetables and Panzani products. It also carries a rich range of connotations.

Figure 4.2 Panzani.

The signifier of the string bag, for example, suggests 'return from the market' which in turn implies 'freshness of the products' destined for 'home preparation'. The varied collection of objects in the bag conveys the idea of a 'carefully balanced dish' in which an equivalence can be drawn between the natural produce (onions, tomatoes, etc.) and the Panzani products, even though the latter are manufactured (Barthes 1977: 34–35). The advertisement tells us that we are looking at the constituents of a complete and wholesome meal. By analyzing what is signified by the various signifiers in the advertisement Barthes is able to build up a convincing analysis of how this message is achieved.

Semiotics of advertising

A number of writers have drawn attention to the way in which advertisements deploy particular representations of gender relations. Feminist writers have suggested that they often contain grossly caricatured or stereotyped representations of women. Yet they also portray a glossy, attractive world that many readers find appealing. This is the contradiction that drives Judith Williamson's (1978) semiotically-inspired *Decoding Advertisements*. Williamson asks how advertisements work and analyses a large number of advertising images in semiotic terms. She breaks down advertisements into their constituent parts – their signifiers – and asks what they mean and how they are related. For example, she takes a famous 1970s Chanel No. 5 advertisement that features a portrait of Catherine Deneuve gazing straight out of the picture at the reader. Williamson suggests that this 'mirror-image technique' encourages the reader to momentarily identify with Ms Deneuve. At the same time, the presence of a bottle of Chanel No. 5 in the corner of this ad is key to how it works to sell the product. 'Correlative sign work' is involved. The sense of 'French chic' that Deneuve represents to us carries over to the bottle of perfume.

But it is not enough just to analyse the assembly of signifiers in the ad in order to fully understand how advertisements work. In addition, Williamson argues, attention to the knowledge that viewers bring to the reading the advertisement is required. Many readers will know that Ms Deneuve is an international film star. She has a particular image (chic, sophisticated, French) that is very different from other film stars who advertise perfume. Williamson contrasts the very different signifieds associated with the American actress, Margaux Hemingway who featured in a series of advertisements for Babe perfume. Hemingway strikes a contrasting figure – active, tomboyish, youthful, exuberant – through the signifiers used in Babe advertisements depicting her practising karate, etc. Film stars stand in a system of differences and contrasts with one another, which is how they each cultivate their distinctive image. Williamson goes on to show how much advertising depends upon the reader's mobilisation of three 'referent systems'. This is our general

cultural knowledge linked to our notions of 'nature', 'magic' and 'time'. Butter advertisements trade on the naturalness of the product; vodka advertisements on the impossibly exotic things that might happen to you once you start drinking the product; wholemeal bread ads draw upon nostalgic notions about how bread was once made. Williamson's book deserves close attention by students of cultural studies as a richly illustrated training manual for doing semiotic analysis.

Signs are organised into systems which convey meaning; these systems are often called codes in structuralist and semiotic approaches (Fiske and Hartley, 1978: 59). One of the areas where such codes have been most studied is advertising (see, most importantly, Williamson, 1978), which forms the topic of this section.

It is important to recognise the range of different types of advertising in contemporary societies. A useful categorisation of five different types has been suggested by Dyer (1982) who distinguishes between 'informational', 'simple', 'compound', 'complex' and 'sophisticated' advertisements.

Informational advertisements are like the classified advertisements found in newspapers. They are often brief and small, and may contain very little elaboration of the basic message. *Simple* advertisements are larger than informational advertisements, but they still contain relatively precise and clear information about a particular product or service. There is some degree of encouragement to buy the product. Many advertisements in the free local newpapers in Britain are of this type.

In *compound* advertisements there is more encouragement, which may be of a subtle kind. Pictures are more persuasive and facts may be contained in the copy that accompanies the advertisement. The picture is often 'glossy' and it is the intention of the advertiser that the reader will associate the product with the whole impression created by the picture. Advertisements in the magazines associated with newspapers are often of this kind. In *complex* advertisements the background takes over and the product merges into it. It is sometimes difficult to see precisely what is being sold. The whole image conveys a message of status, wealth and power. *Sophisticated* advertisements move beyond such complex advertisements and they often contain an attempt to draw upon hidden feelings through subtle associations. A deep-seated psychological appeal is often made.

A semiotic analysis of a sophisticated advertisement

A humorous semiotic analysis of a sophisticated advertisement (for the cigarette Silk Cut) is contained in the extract from David Lodge's (1989) novel *Nice Work*. In this novel a university lecturer in English, Robyn Penrose, has been detailed to 'shadow' an industrialist, Vic Wilcox, with the aim of encouraging greater mutual understanding between academia and business. Much of the humour in the novel revolves around the interaction between the two main characters who represent very different worlds. We conclude this section with this fictional but generally sound example of semiotic analysis in action.

4.3 Ethnography

Semiotics has been a very important method within cultural studies. However, like content and thematic analysis, it is very much a method for analysing cultural texts as relatively discrete entities. It is commonplace to contrast the study of culture as text with the study of lived experience. Here, cultural studies has drawn upon the classic anthropological technique of ethnography, but as we shall see, has adapted it to its own ends. In this section we consider the contributions of ethnographic method to cultural studies through a discussion of two influential studies: Paul Willis's (1977) *Learning to Labour* and Janice Radway's (1984) *Reading the Romance*.

A primary aim of ethnography since the days when Bronislaw Malinowki (1884–1942) first articulated the canons of modern fieldwork has been to articulate the 'native's point of view'. This has usually involved a period of prolonged immersion in a fieldwork setting. Malinowki spent several years on the Trobriand Islands (now part of Papua New Guinea) living among the islanders in order to understand and describe their activities, including such apparently odd ceremonies as

Box 4.1

Semiotic analysis of a Silk Cut ad

A typical instance of this was the furious argument they had about the Silk Cut advertisement. They were returning in his car from visiting a foundry in Derby that had been taken over by asset-strippers who were selling off an automatic core moulder Wilcox was interested in, though it had turned out to be too old-fashioned for his purpose. Every few miles, it seemed, they passed the same huge poster on roadside hoardings, a photographic depiction of a rippling expanse of purple silk in which there was a single slit, as if the material had been slashed with a razor. There were no words on the advertisement, except for the Government Health Warning about smoking. This ubiquitous image, flashing past at regular intervals, both irritated and intrigued Robyn, and she began to do her semiotic stuff on the deep structure hidden beneath its bland surface.

It was in the first instance a kind of riddle. That is to say, in order to decode it, you had to know that there was a brand of cigarettes called Silk Cut. The poster was the iconic representation of a missing name, like a rebus. But the icon was also a metaphor. The shimmering silk, with its voluptuous curves and sensuous texture, obviously symbolized the female body, and the elliptical slit, fore-grounded by a lighter colour showing through, was still more obviously a vagina. The advert thus appealed to both sensual and sadistic impulses, the desire to mutilate as well as penetrate the female body.

Vic Wilcox spluttered with outraged derision as she expounded this interpretation. He smoked a different brand, himself, but it was as if he felt his whole philosophy of life was threatened by Robyn's analysis of the advert. 'You must have a twisted mind to see all that in a perfectly harmless bit of cloth,' he said.

'What's the point of it, then?' Robyn challenged him. 'Why use cloth to advertise cigarettes?'

'Well, that's the name of 'em, isn't it? Silk Cut. It's a picture of the name. Nothing more or less.'

'Suppose they'd used a picture of a roll of silk cut in half – would that do just as well?'

'I suppose so. Yes, why not?'

'Because it would look like a penis cut in half, that's why.'

He forced a laugh to cover his embarrassment. 'Why can't you people take things at their face value?'

'What people are you referring to?'

'Highbrows. Intellectuals. You're always trying to find hidden meanings in things. Why? A cigarette is a cigarette. A piece of silk is a piece of silk. Why not leave it at that?'

'When they're represented they acquire additional meanings,' said Robyn. 'Signs are never innocent. Semiotics teaches us that.'

'Semi-what?'

'Semiotics. The study of signs.'

'It teaches us to have dirty minds, if you ask me.'

'Why d'you think the wretched cigarettes were called Silk Cut in the first place?'

'I dunno. It's just a name, as good as any other.'

' "Cut" has something to do with the tobacco, doesn't it? The way the tobacco leaf is cut. Like "Player's Navy Cut" – my uncle Walter used to smoke them.'

'Well, what if he does?' Vic said warily.

'But silk has nothing to do with tobacco. It's a metaphor, a metaphor that means something like, "smooth as silk". Somebody in an advertising agency dreamt up the name "Silk Cut" to suggest a cigarette that wouldn't give you a sore throat or a hacking cough or lung cancer. But after a while the public got used to the name, the word "Silk" ceased to signify, so they decided to have an advertising campaign to give the brand a high profile again. Some bright spark at the agency came up with the idea of rippling silk with a cut in it. The original metaphor is now represented literally. But new metaphorical connotations accrue – sexual ones. Whether they were consciously intended or not doesn't really matter. It's a good example of the perpetual sliding of the signified under the signifier, actually.'

Wilcox chewed on this for a while, then said, 'Why do women smoke them, then, eh?' His triumphant expression showed

Box 4.1 (continued)

that he thought this was a knock-down argument. 'If smoking Silk Cut is a form of aggravated rape, as you try to make out, how come women smoke 'em too?'

'Many women are masochistic by temperament,' said Robyn. 'They've learned what's expected of them in a patriarchial society.'

'Ha!' Wilcox exclaimed, tossing back his head. 'I might have known you'd have some daft answer.'

'I don't know why you're so worked up,' said Robyn. 'It's not as if you smoke Silk Cut yourself.'

'No, I smoke Marlboros. Funnily enough, I smoke them because I like the taste.'

'They are the ones that have the lone cowboy ads, aren't they?'

'I suppose that makes me a repressed homosexual, does it?'

'No, it's a very straightforword metonymic message.'

'Metowhat?'

'Metonymic. One of the fundamental tools of semiotics is the distinction between metaphor and metonymy. D'you want me to explain it to you?'

'It'll pass the time,' he said.

'Metaphor is a figure of speech based on similarity, whereas metonymy is based on contiguity. In metaphor you substitute something like the thing you mean for the thing itself, whereas in metonymy you substitute some attribute or cause or effect of the thing for the thing itself.'

'I don't understand a word you're saying.'

'Well, take one of your moulds. The bottom bit is called the drag because it's dragged across the floor and the top bit is called the cope because it covers the bottom bit.'

'I told you that.'

'Yes, I know. What you didn't tell me was that "drag" is a metonymy and "cope" is a metaphor.'

Vic grunted. 'What difference does it make?'

'It's just a question of understanding how language works. I thought you were interested in how things work.'

'I don't see what it's got to do with cigarettes.'

'In the case of the Silk Cut poster, the picture signifies the female body metaphorically: the slit in the silk is like a vagina – '

Vic flinched at the word. 'So you say.'

'All holes, hollow spaces, fissures and folds represent the female genitals.'

'Prove it.'

'Freud proved it, by his successful analysis of dreams,' said Robyn. 'But the Marlboro ads don't use any metaphors. That's probably why you smoke them, actually.'

'What do you mean?' he said suspiciously.

'You don't have any sympathy with the metaphorical way of looking at things. A cigarette is a cigarette as far as you are concerned.'

'Right.'

'The Marlboro ad doesn't disturb that naïve faith in the stability of the signified. It establishes a metonymic connection – completely spurious of course, but realistically plausible – between smoking that brand and the healthy, heroic, outdoor life of the cowboy. Buy the cigarette and you buy the life-style, or the fantasy of living it.'

'Rubbish!' said Wilcox. 'I hate the country and the open air. I'm scared to go in a field with a cow in it.'

'Well then, maybe it's the solitariness of the cowboy in the ads that appeals to you. Self-reliant, independent, very macho.'

'I've never heard such a lot of balls in all my life,' said Vic Wilcox, which was strong language coming from him.

'Balls – now that's an interesting expression . . .' Robyn mused.

'Oh no!' he groaned.

'When you say a man "has balls", approvingly, it's a metonymy, whereas if you say something is a "lot of balls", or "a balls-up", it's a sort of metaphor. The metonymy attributes value to the testicles whereas the metaphor uses them to degrade something else.'

'I can't take any more of this,' said Vic. 'D'you mind if I smoke? Just a plain, ordinary cigarette?'

'If I can have Radio Three on,' said Robyn.

(Lodge, 1989)

exchanging kula shells. Malinowski emphasised the importance of living among a group of people in order to come to appreciate the logic and rationale of their customs and practices, an element of ethnography now known as participant observation. Later, as the traditional topic matter for anthropology fast disappeared as part of a process now glossed as globalisation, anthropologists began to study their own societies. Sociologists had early taken their lead from anthropologists (for example, the Chicago School of the 1920s) and could also draw upon the model of the nineteenth century 'urban explorers' (Mayhew, Booth, Rowntree). Outside the university system the Mass Observation projects of the 1930s and 1940s produced a number of studies of aspects of everyday life in Britain using ordinary people as observers and informants. Ethnography enjoyed a major revival in the hands of the so-called Second Chicago School of Sociology in the immediate post-Second World War period. One of its most gifted exponents expressed the key features of the approach thus:

> Any group of persons – prisoners, primitives, pilots or patients – develop a life of their own that becomes meaningful, reasonable and normal once you get close to it . . . a good way to learn about any of these worlds is to submit oneself in the company of the members to the daily round of petty contingencies to which they are subject.
>
> (Goffman, 1961: ix-x)

So when the Birmingham School (**CCCS** – p. 241) first began to use ethnographic methods in cultural studies in the 1970s, there was a rich tradition to draw upon.

Learning to Labour by Paul Willis (1977) is a controversial early application of ethnographic methods by an investigator trained at CCCS in its early 1970s heyday. Willis is interested in the transition from school to work and specifically in the question of how it is that working-class kids come to choose the worst jobs in the labour market. As memorably expressed in the book's opening lines:

> The difficult thing to explain about how middle-class kids get middle-class jobs is why others let them. The difficult thing to explain about how working-class kids get working class jobs is how they let themselves.
>
> (Willis 1977: 1)

They are not forced or duped into taking low-paid work with poor long-term prospects. They make a choice. Willis's study attempts to understand and explain the choice they make. He uses the methods of participant observation, interviews, groups discussions and case study work. He concentrates on one group of 12 boys at a secondary modern he calls Hammertown Boys School. He has some smaller groups both from this school and neighbouring schools to serve as points of comparison. The school's intake is entirely working class and Hammertown has the reputation of being a 'good' school. The main focus of Willis's research was on the group of 12 boys. He spent a great deal of time with them as a participant observer, both in class (sitting with the pupils) and outside of it. This provided opportunities for individual interviews and group discussions, and allowed him the opportunity to become closely acquainted with the boys over their last two years at school. Willis was also interested in how they dealt with the world of work, and followed the boys into their first jobs after leaving school. In the workplace Willis spent short periods of time with each of the 12 boys and with some of the boys in the control groups. He also interviewed the boys and did some further interviews with their foremen, managers and shop stewards.

The boys develop an oppositional culture. They quite consciously reject the school's authority structures through many minor acts of defiance. They despise those conformist pupils who do their homework and play things by the school's rules. They – the 'lads' – feel superior to those pupils they call 'ear'oles'. The lads frequently come into conflict with teachers over how they dress (they prefer the style of the latest youth subculture, not school uniform). They drink. They smoke as soon as they are through the school gates. They brag about their sexual conquests. They do as little school work as they can. They show up while the register is taken then manage to 'wag off' their classes, often finding other places and activities within the school to occupy their time when they are not simply 'dossing'. 'Having a laff' and fighting are major

Box 4.2

'Having a laff'

'Even communists laff' (Joey)

The space won from the school and its rules by the informal group is used for the shaping and development of particular cultural skills principally devoted to 'having a laff'. The 'laff' is a multifaceted implement of extraordinary importance in the counter-school culture. As we saw before, the ability to produce it is one of the defining characteristics of being one of 'the lads' – 'We can make them laff, they can't make us laff'. But it is also used in many other contexts: to defeat boredom and fear, to overcome hardship and problems – as a way out of almost anything. In many respects the 'laff' is the privileged instrument of the informal, as the command is of the formal. Certainly 'the lads' understand the special importance of the 'laff':

[In an individual discussion]

Joey I think fuckin' laffing is the most important thing in fuckin' everything. Nothing ever stops me laffing (. . .) I remember once, there was me, John, and this other kid, right, and these two kids cum up and bashed me for some fuckin' reason or another. John and this other kid were away, off (. . .) I tried to give 'em one, but I kept fuckin' coppin' it . . . so I ran off, and as I ran off, I scooped a handful of fuckin' snow up, and put it right over me face, and I was laffing me bollocks off. They kept saying 'You can't fuckin' laff'. I should have been scared but I was fuckin' laffing (. . .)

PW What is it about having a laugh, (. . .) why is it so important?

Joey (. . .) I don't know why I want to laff, I dunno why it's so fuckin' important. It just is (. . .) I think it's just a good gift, that's all, because you can get out of any situation. If you can laff, if you can make yourself laff, I mean really convincingly, it can get you out of millions of things (. . .) You'd go fuckin' berserk if you didn't have a laff occasionally.

Key to transcript symbols:

. . . Pause

(. . .) Material edited out

(Willis, 1977: 29)

preoccupations. In addition there is a lot of sexism and racism evident in the lads' talk among themselves.

When it comes to seeking a job, the lads choose those forms of heavy manual labour that pay reasonably well in the short term but which do not offer 'prospects'. Willis's main point is that the oppositional culture of the school actually prepares them for this type of work and seals their fate. It provides a context in which these occupations are positively valued, undertaken with pride as a symbol of one's adult masculinity. This is one of the ways how the class structure reproduces itself.

Willis secures his interpretation of the lads' conduct by quoting extensively from individual and group interviews. He is able to depict the attitudes and points of view of the lads by presenting verbatim transcripts in the text. Consider the fragment shown in Box 4.2 in which Willis develops the theme of humour as an instrument to subvert the authority of the school.

This is a common device in ethnography but its use is not as unproblematic as first seems. Willis has been criticised for not paying sufficient attention to the intricacies of interpreting some of his data. For example, he seems to take the lads' dislike of the authority of teachers as evidence of a general opposition to authority in general. The issue here is how particular pieces of the lads' talk are interpreted as evidence of a broader analytic theme, a very common problem in any ethnographic analysis. More generally, Willis is said to develop 'over-rapport' with the lads so that much of the book reads as almost a celebration of what they think and do. Willis seems ready to find in

the lads' behaviour and attitudes traces of authentic working-class culture, yet the ear'oles, who are no less working class, are denied that voice (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983; Bessett and Gualtieri, 2002). Ethnography has been derided in some academic circles as 'merely descriptive'. But cultural description and analysis turns out to be a rather more complex process than is often thought.

Cultural studies uses ethnographic methods in order to access people's lived experience. That lived experience includes experience of texts traditionally considered the province of specialists in the humanities. Janice Radway's (1987) examination of how women read romance novels offers a novel ethnographic approach to the study of popular fiction. It also links to the new directions cultural studies took towards audiences in the 1970s and 1980s.

Studies of romance fiction prior to Radway adopted textualist methods. They undertook a thematic analysis of popular romantic fiction, concluding that they reinforced and perpetuated prevailing patriarchal attitudes, practices and institutions. Women's pleasure ultimately came down to pleasing men. Such approaches, in Stuart Hall's distinction, concentrated on the encoding of cultural texts in isolation from how these texts were decoded by their audiences. Radway seeks to remedy this inattention by addressing not only how readers interpret texts but also how they make use of them in their everyday lives.

To follow through this approach Radway carried out ethnographic interviews with a group of avid romantic novel readers in 'Smithton', a city in a Midwestern state of the USA. She was directed to 'Dot Evans', a 48-year-old bookshop worker who was regularly consulted by a large network of women who were heavy consumers of romances. Dot's knowledgeability about romance novels was well known. In fact she developed a newsletter to comment on the qualities of new romantic fiction. She became so successful that publishers began to ask her to read manuscripts for them. Radway's research activity consisted of:

- approximately 60 hours of interviews with Dot over an eight-month period and observation of Dot's interactions with bookshop customers;
- group and individual interviews with 16 regular customers;
- a lengthy questionnaire given to 42 customers.

Radway (1983: 57) reports that the demographic profile of her sample seemed to match what information she could glean from the market analysis obtained from somewhat secretive publishing houses. Around two-thirds of her sample were aged between 25 and 50. The Smithton group were particularly avid romance readers: half of them read between four to 16 romances a month while 40 per cent read more than 20. Asked why they read romances, the overwhelming response was 'escape' or 'relaxation' ('its an escape'; 'it offers me a small vacation from everyday life'). A big part of the attraction of the books was their fantasy element, how they contrasted with the humdrum concerns of the women's ordinary life. In particular, 'the heroine is frequently treated as they themselves would most like to be loved' (Radway 1983: 60). Dot spoke for many romance readers when she told Radway that romance reading amounts to a ' "declaration of independence" from the social roles of wife and mother' (Radway 1983: 60–1). In this time out from family obligations women are afforded an opportunity for emotional reconstitution.

Discovering that many of her sample knew each other and thus made up a loose social network, Radway deployed the literary critic Stanley Fish's notion of 'interpretive communities'. This is the idea that the meaning of a text is neither produced by its author nor by the reader acting on their own. Rather, readers from the same social grouping will make sense of a text in much the same way, in accordance with much the same standards. Radway found that the Smithton romance readers made up an interpretive community with shared standards about what constituted a 'good' and 'bad' romantic novel: for example, a good novel will have no obscenity or explicit sex; no serious abuse of the heroine; and is likely to correspond to a narrative structure in which misunderstandings and misrepresentations are finally cleared away as the hero's apparent indifference toward the heroine is revealed as only hesitancy on his part about declaring his love and need for her. Fish made the point that culture fills people's heads in finely detailed ways. By taking an eth-

Figure 4.3 A selection of popular romantic fiction.

nographic approach in her research Radway was able to discover an interpretive community of romance readers who 'join forces symbolically and in a mediated way in the privacy of their individual homes and in the culturally devalued sphere of leisure activity' (Radway 1987: 212).

4.4 Conclusion

This chapter has sketched some of the leading methods used by researchers in cultural studies. The aim has been not to provide a comprehensive and detailed guide but rather to give an indication of some of the popular and distinctive ways of working in this field. We hope that the discussion will encourage readers to undertake some research of their own. The good news is that neither huge resources nor expensive equipment are required. Some kinds of work in cultural studies require no more than a text (a magazine, a film, a CD, a book) and an analytical and critical inclination. For other kinds of work the reader may need to draw more extensively on established social science methods (interviews, ethnography, content analysis). The further reading below offers a good guide to concepts and methods.

A useful exercise is to take a text and to interrogate it with ideas drawn from a particular theory or theorist. This might then generate research questions like the following.

- What insight might semiotics offer into anti-globalisation demonstrations?
- How would Walter Benjamin respond to the Internet?
- In what respects could the latest Rolling Stones tour be regarded as a postmodern phenomenon?
- What light could Georg Simmel cast on the attractions of shopping malls?
- How might Richard Hoggart rewrite *The Uses of Literacy* at the beginning of the twenty-first century?

Attempting to apply the ideas of a theorist or perspective to a cultural phenomenon should give the reader a surer sense of its potential and shortcomings. What does the theory or theorist illuminate? What gets overlooked? It should also sensitise one to questions of method. Which research methods would provide the evidence to support or question a particular interpretation? Some careful thought needs to be given to the selection of the theory/theorist used to mobilise analysis of any given phenomenon (which theory or theorist would *you* choose to analyse the Lottery?).

Recap

- No single method is *the* method of cultural studies.
- Research in cultural studies coalesces around investigations of texts and investigations of lived experience.
- Textual methods seek to isolate the key components of the messages communicated by the text.
- Methods for investigating lived experience draw upon anthropological and sociological traditions of ethnography.

Further reading

Perrti Alasuutari's *Researching Culture: Qualitative Method and Cultural Studies* (1995) is a bold attempt to cover a range of methods of analysis relevant to the practice of cultural studies. Jim McGuigan's edited collection *Cultural Methodologies* (1997) contains some influential contributions. Several recent publications outline the current state of the art: Mimi White and James Schwoch's edited collection *Questions of Method in Cultural Studies* (2006); Paula Saukko's book *Doing Research in Cultural Studies* (2003); and *The Practice of Cultural Studies* (2004), co-written by Richard Johnson, Deborah Chambers, Parvati Raghuram and Estella Tincknell. A good guide for students beginning a project in cultural studies is Jane Stokes's *How to do Media and Cultural Studies* (2003).

REFERENCES

The contents of this textbook have been reproduced from other original sources for educational purposes only. The topics covered in this course have been selected carefully so that they address the varying needs of ESL students. The major sources for this textbook are the following:

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