CHAPTER ONE

Introduction: What is Culture, and How Does Culture Work?

"Culture" is one of sociology's most interesting and widely used concepts. "Culture" is central to the humanities, the social sciences, and the fine and performing arts, where it is understood in a variety of ways. "Culture" is also used colloquially in everyday life, where it takes on a myriad of meanings. But while the tremendous range of definitions and usage makes the concept interesting, this same multiplicity of meanings makes culture confusing and ambiguous. In this book, we seek to sort out the concept of culture. This project is at once theoretical, methodological, and empirical. In the ensuing chapters, we seek to explain: what is culture and how does culture work? How do we identify and "measure" the basic elements of culture? How and why does understanding culture enhance our view of the world? In other words, how and why does culture matter?

Three Usages of "Culture"

Despite the plethora of meanings of the term "culture," by and large, these definitions can be divided into three groups. "Culture" can be used to refer to (1) humanistic refinement and elite artistic activities (classical ballet, opera); (2) an entire way of life of a people or group (e.g., as seen in *National Geographic*); or (3) systems or patterns of shared symbols. These categories can be understood respectively, as aesthetic, ethnographic, and symbolic definitions of culture.

Aesthetic (or humanistic) definitions of culture – culture as "high culture"

One of the most common uses of the term "culture" comes from the same root as "cultivation," as in agriculture; it means the "cultivation of the human mind and sensibility" (Griswold 1994, p. 7; see also Eagleton 2000, p. 1). In this sense, "culture" can be used as a noun to refer to "the best and most important or glorious achievements of a people or civilization" (e.g,. classical ballet, opera, Shakespeare); or "culture" can be used as an adjective to refer to aesthetic sensibility, i.e., emotional or intellectual sensitivity to art and beauty (e.g., to become "cultured," a "cultured" person). The relationship between culture as a noun (the elite arts) and culture as an adjective (aesthetic sensibility) is that it is thought that through the experience and "appreciation" of classic aesthetic form (ballet, opera, literature, art) that aesthetic sensibility is acquired.

The importance of the humanistic definition of culture is that the arts and aesthetic sensibility are what makes human groups distinctive. Debates may rage as to whether or not and to what extent nonhuman animals have "emotions" and use "language"; but there is no question that only human activity is mired in such vibrant, complex, abstract, varied aesthetic forms. So far as we know, only humans seek to create "art" for the sole purpose of self-expression. So far as we know, only humans are moved to tears by *fictional* books and films.

Nevertheless, there are two conceptual problems with the aesthetic definition of culture. First, the problem with defining culture as aesthetic sensibility, sophistication, or refinement is that this is taken to refer to a quality in *individuals*, but, as we will see, culture is a *collective* phenomenon. Culture, by definition, is shared; there is no such thing as "individual" culture. Secondly, the problem with defining culture as "the best that has been thought and said in the world" is that this conceptualization is elitist. It is part and parcel of a "high culture"/"low culture" dichotomy in which only select cultural forms are seen as "genuine." Conversely, the opposite of "high culture" is deemed "low culture" (or "mass culture," "folk culture," or "popular culture"). Such cultural products are understood as less "sophisticated" or "refined" – or relatively superficial, or even base – forms of expression. This high culture/low culture dichotomy implies that there is a relatively "objective" degree of sensibility apparent in every cultural work, such that some cultural works are clearly distinguishable as "better" than others. But in fact, why one category or genre of art is "high" and another "low" is primarily a sociological rather than an aesthetic issue; the classification of art as "high" or "low," or "popular" or "folk," revolves around socioeconomic and sociocultural, far more than *aesthetic,* standards and conditions.

Consider, for instance, the example of jazz – often heralded as the United

States' most important native musical form. While there are obviously many styles and genres of jazz, technically, intellectually, and emotionally, jazz is "sophisticated." In terms of its complexity, sensibility, and historical role, surely jazz qualifies as (high) "culture."

But of course, jazz first developed in the United States around the turn of the century out of West African musical traditions and African American folk music. Though jazz also reflects the vocabulary and structures of European classical and popular music, it is most distinctive for its West African traits: vocal styles that include great freedom of vocal color, a tradition of improvisation, call-and-response patterns, and rhythmic complexity – both syncopation of individual melodic lines and counter-punctuated rhythms played by different members of an ensemble.[1]

The point is, jazz did not become (high) "culture" when the music itself became more sophisticated or complex; the exact same characteristics that make jazz "sophisticated" are also apparent in its earlier, more "popular" or "folk" forms. Rather, jazz became *recognized* as "high" culture only after it was legitimated in the early twentieth century by white cultural elites (although, significantly, even today some people think of *only* classical music – not jazz – as "high" culture).[2] Specifically, the first jazz band record was not recorded by American blacks; it was recorded in 1917 by a group of white New Orleans musicians called The Original Dixieland Jazz Band. This record created a sensation in Europe and the United States, and gradually – especially after classically trained white musicians (such as George Gershwin and Aaron Copland) turned their attention to jazz – jazz became respected as a "true," elite art form (Appelrouth 1999).[3]

In sum, the difference between the "field hollers" sung by unschooled African Americans as they picked cotton in the nineteenth century) and the "jazz" performed at the Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts today is not so much aesthetic, but socioeconomic and symbolic: each genre reflects distinct locations in hierarchical class and status systems. Indeed, the very idea that (high) culture is the "most important or glorious achievements of a people or civilization" should alert us to the fact that this is a *social and cultural* and not an aesthetic classification.

Yet this is not to say that "high culture" is simply a reflection of socioeconomic phenomena. As we will see, to say that culture or art simply *reflects* economics is not a very *cultural* argument or interpretation. Nor am I saying that all culture has the "same" artistic merit, creativity, etc. That the high culture/low culture dichotomy is false and elitist does not mean all artistic expression is of equal quality or value, nor that all people in society have equal access to "culture" (see Bourdieu 1984). There is good "popular" art, and bad "popular" art, and good classical music and bad classical music, etc. (though, obviously, in deeming art "good" or "bad" one must be clear as to the criteria one is using as a yardstick).

Ethnographic definitions of culture – culture as an entire way of life

In contrast to the narrow definition of culture as aesthetic (and generally elite) sensibility is the broad, anthropological definition of culture as "that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society" (Tylor 1958 [1871], p. 1; Griswold 1994, p. 8). This expansive definition of culture has been preponderant in the social sciences since first enunciated by the anthropologist E. B. Tylor in the late nineteenth century. The advantage of this definition of culture is, first, that it circumvents the ethnocentrism and elitism of the aesthetic definition of culture; and second, that it underscores that "culture" is not "above and beyond," but part and parcel of, the everyday world (Griswold 1994, p. 8). For cultural anthropologists (as well as others) who utilize this conceptualization of culture, culture is all-encompassing and all-pervasive. Culture is at the heart of human existence.[4]

Yet, as E. P. Thompson has pointed out, the problem with the ethnographic definition of culture is that "any theory of culture must include the concept of the dialectical interaction between culture and something that is *not* culture" (Hall 1980 [1973], p. 62). The broad, ethnographic definition inflates "culture" to mean all that is produced by human groups, to include all elements of social life – anything that is not biological or evolutionary. In other words, while the definition of culture as aesthetic sensibility is too narrow and does not link "culture" and "society" enough, the ethnographic definition of culture as "an entire way of life" is too broad; it links "culture" and "society" too much. There is no way to distinguish the cultural realm from *other* dimensions of society. There is a complete *fusion* of the *social* and the *cultural* realms.

One of the most unfortunate consequences of the ethnographic overinflation of "culture" (or the fusion of the culture and social structure) is that it has periodically spurred anthropologists and sociologists to abandon the concept of culture altogether. This trend began in the 1930s, when the eminent anthropologist Alfred Radcliffe-Brown set his sights on explaining "social structures" (such as kinship) rather than "culture," because while "culture" denotes only a "vague abstraction," "social structure" denotes "networks of actually existing social relations," which can be revealed by "direct observation."[5] For Radcliffe-Brown, anthropology was a *scientific* discipline parallel to the physical and biological sciences; thus, anthropology had no place for abstract concepts that were hard to measure. As he states (in Applebaum 1987, p. 122): "I conceive of social anthropology as the theoretical natural science of human society, that is, the investigation of social phenomena by methods essentially similar to

those used in the physical and biological sciences. I am quite willing to call the subject 'comparative sociology' if anyone so wishes." Interestingly, this focus on the *social* rather than the *cultural* realm diminishes the distinctions between human and nonhuman groups. There is only an empirical – and not a theoretical – difference between social anthropology and zoology, etc. Thus, Radcliffe-Brown maintains:

> In a hive of bees there are the relations of association of the queen, the workers and the drones. There is the association of animals in a herd, of a mother-cat and her kittens. These are social phenomena; I do not suppose that anyone will call them cultural phenomena. In anthropology, of course, we are only concerned with human beings, and in social anthropology, as I define it, what we have to investigate are the forms of association to be found amongst human beings. (p. 122)

Elsewhere he states (1957, p. 58, as cited by Kuper 1996, p. 52): "You cannot have a science of culture. You can study culture only as a characteristic of a social system . . . if you study culture, you are always studying the acts of behavior of a specific set of persons who are linked together in a social structure."

Interestingly, forty years later, structural sociologists in the United States abandoned cultural variables for much the same reason. Whereas Radcliffe-Brown and his associates replaced "culture" with social structural variables such as kinship, sociologists such as Charles Tilly (1978) and Theda Skocpol (1979) replaced subjective variables such as "solidarity" (the feeling of "oneness" with a group) with "objective" variables such as "organizational resources" and "social networks" in order to explain the rise and success of specific social movements. They argued that extant forms of social change, such as revolution, can be fully explained by focusing on *economic* and *political* factors and ignoring *cultural* conditions (see Edles 1995, 1998). Structural sociologists of the 1970s did not *deny* the existence of culture; but they considered culture *epiphenomenal* (a *consequence*, and not a *cause* of social change).[6]

Indeed, even today sociologists and cultural analysts continue to spar around the theoretical and methodological problems caused by the *subjectivity* of cultural phenomena. Yet, as we will see in this book, theoretically and methodologically, contemporary cultural analysts *are* creating new ways to get a handle on *meaning*. Even more importantly, today cultural sociologists are demonstrating *how* culture informs and thereby *shapes* very real social issues and concerns.

Symbolic notions of culture — culture as systems of shared meaning

Since the 1960s, increasing numbers of social scientists have turned away from defining culture as an "entire way of life" and moved toward defining culture as systems or patterns of *shared symbols and/or meaning* (Geertz, 1973, p. 89). This is the definition of culture adopted in this book. Cultural systems (or symbolic systems, or systems of meaning) include highly organized and formalized systems of meaning, such as religion, as well as relatively mundane, taken-for-granted webs of signification integral to daily life (e.g., knowing whether or not to bring a gift to the home of a friend, or whether or not to take off one's shoes when entering the house), as well as highly organized but also open symbolic systems, such as language and fashion.

Thus, significantly, the symbolic definition of culture coincides with the humanistic/aesthetic definition of culture discussed previously in that art *is* a type of symbolic phenomenon. The relationship between "art" and symbolic phenomena in general is that art is simply a particularly *effective* symbol; "art" combines "economy of statement with richness of expression" (Jaeger and Selznick 1964, p. 664, as cited by Gilmore 1992, pp. 408–9). However, in contrast to the aesthetic definition of "culture" (which limits culture to *only* the "arts"), the symbolic definition of culture includes *all* symbolic phenomena (not just art), i.e., language, religion, fashion, etc.

Yet, in contrast to the aesthetic definition of culture, the symbolic definition of culture underscores that culture is collective and *shared*. Like the ethnographic definition of culture, the symbolic definition of culture emphasizes that cultural systems are historically linked to specific social groups at specific moments, and intertwined in complex ways with other societal dimensions. The *collective* nature of culture is most evident in *language*, which is, as indicated previously, one of the most fundamental systems of meaning. (*Webster's Dictionary* defines language as "the words, pronunciation, and methods of combining them used and understood by a considerable community . . . a systematic means of signs, gestures, marks, or especially articulate vocal sound.")[7]

In my view, the symbolic definition of culture is most useful in conjunction with the more general notion that societies are composed of three analytically (but not empirically) distinct parts: the (1) economic, (2) political, and (3) cultural realms.[8] Specifically, all societies have some sort of *economic* system/s, or means through which goods and services are produced and distributed. Common economic systems include "capitalism" (in which land and labor are bought and sold by private individuals), "bartering" (the exchange of goods/services without the intermediary of money), and "reciprocation" ("turn-taking" systems, such as barn-raisings and gift exchanges, e.g., I give you a gift on your birthday, and you give

me one on mine). Secondly, every society has some sort of *political* system/s (e.g., dictatorship, theocracy, monarchy, democracy), or ways in which *power* is distributed (or not distributed) and decisions are made. For instance, since the 1990s, we have seen a rapid decline in socialist regimes, and a rise in more formally *democratic* political systems (see Edles 1995, 1998).[9] Finally, every society has *cultural* (or *symbolic)* systems through which people "make sense" of the world. These "webs of signification" (Geertz 1973, p. 5) provide a nonmaterial or metaphysical structure; they represent a level of organization that patterns action as surely as structures of a more visible kind (Alexander and Smith 1993, p. 156).

As we will see further in the next chapter, one of the central ways that cultural systems are *structured* is into the "sacred" and the "profane." In this basic symbolic dichotomy the "sacred" is that which is "holy" and "good"; the sacred is *set apart* from everyday life, it is respected and revered. While the symbolic opposite of the "sacred" is the "profane," that which is evil, or bad. The "profane" is typically the violation of the sacred. The sacred and the profane are most readily apparent in the religious realm (e.g., God and Satan; the Ten Commandments, etc.), however, this basic symbolic dichotomy underlies all kinds of cultural systems as well.

Thus, for instance, the "high culture"/"low culture" dichotomy at the heart of the aesthetic definition of culture discussed previously imbues "high culture" with the qualities of the sacred (the good and revered); and "low culture" (including "popular culture" or "mass culture") with the qualities of its symbolic opposite, the profane (the bad or common). According to this symbolization, "high culture" is *pure, precious,* and *good*; thus, "high culture" must be set apart and away from both "low culture" and the everyday world. The sacrality of "high culture" is reflected and reaffirmed in the great cultural institutions of the world (museums, libraries, theatres) through such architectural features as grand entrances and high ceilings, and through norms and rituals that inspire awe and silence (Griswold 1994, p. 7). It is precisely this *sacrality* that gives "high culture" the imposing mantle of religious authority (Eagleton 2000, p. 2). "High culture" must be carefully guarded and preserved – because it is in "danger" of being "lost," debilitated, wiped out, or *overrun* by (profane) popular or mass cultural forms.[10]

The problem with the symbolic definition of culture is that it erroneously implies that culture is *only* symbolic. This is why, as we will see in chapters 6 and 7, contemporary theorists such as Pierre Bourdieu and the late Michel Foucault introduce provocative new concepts – e.g., "habitus" and "discourse" – that pointedly *integrate* social/cultural and political/economic realms. These analysts demonstrate that culture is continuously embodied, *practiced*, and reproduced, i.e., that it does not simply "exist" in abstract forms. However, whether one uses new terms and concepts (e.g., *habitus*, discourse), or the symbolic definition of culture (as I do in this

book), the point is that "culture" and "social structure" are only analytically, and never empirically, distinct. There are intricate systems of meaning about production and distribution (e.g., consumerism, reciprocation), and there are complex notions of authority and power (e.g., ideology). Thus, while certain areas of social practice (e.g., the arts, religion) are more overtly symbolic than others (e.g., the economy), there is nothing inherently noncultural about utilitarian activities. All collective social practices are potentially symbolic and therefore potentially cultural (Gilmore 1992, p. 409). In sum, as Alexander (1998) states:

> Every action, no matter how instrumental and reflexive vis-à-vis its external environments, is imbedded in a horizon of meaning (an internal environment) in relationship to which it can be neither instrumental nor reflexive. Every institution, no matter how technical, coercive, or seemingly impersonal, can only be effective if related to patterned sets of symbols that instruct it to become so and to an audience that "reads" it in a technical, coercive, and impersonal way. For this reason, every specialized subfield of sociology must have a cultural dimension; if not, the very workings of action arenas and institutional fields will never be fully understood.

The Example of Colonialism

Consider, for instance, the issue of colonialism/imperialism.[11] Colonialism is typically considered an *economic* phenomenon. Historically, whether it was procuring new spices in the Orient, or land or gold and silver in the Americas, the explicit goal of the European and American expansionist movements of the last several centuries was (and is) often economic or material gain.This is precisely the type of motivation that Marx and Engels so eloquently discussed in *The Communist Manifesto:* "the need of a constantly expanding market for its products chases the bourgeoisie over the whole surface of the globe. It must nestle everywhere, settle everywhere, establish connections everywhere" (Marx and Engels 1970 [1848], p. 474; see also Lenin 1917).

But as Marx and Engels also realized, imperialism/colonialism is, and has always been, an overtly *political* issue – the goal is/was not simply the extraction/production/distribution of resources/goods, but also the quest for new territory, more power and greater strategic advantage. This is what is represented by placing the flag of the "old" world on the "new" one (whether it be in Latin America or on the moon).[12] It is a *political* statement that *this* territory belongs to *this* nation. In terms of strategic advantage, the case of the Hawaiian islands is a relatively recent example in this regard. Hawai'i was particularly attractive to the United States not only because of the islands' natural resources, but because of its location in the middle of the Pacific Ocean, literally halfway to Asia.

There is no question that colonialism/imperialism *is* a politico-economic issue. Nevertheless, important cultural questions remain. For instance, what if we find out that colonialism is *not* politically or economically advantageous for the colonizing country? Fieldhouse (1973) points out that especially after the 1880s, colonies often became a tremendous economic and political burden. The point here is not the empirical one as to why a particular country "keeps" or relinquishes its colonies, or why it overlooks "short-term" losses, in anticipation of "long-term" gains. The point is that colonialism "makes sense" *only* in relation to specific economic, political, or ideological goals; and these goals are rooted in specific systems of meaning.

Put in another way, colonialism came about in a specific *cultural* as well as *political* and *economic* context; in order to understand colonialism, we must also understand these systems of meaning. Obviously, the systems of meaning in fifteenth-century Europe or twentieth-century America are varied and complex. Nevertheless, historically, there have been two central cultural lynchpins of colonization. The first is what is generally called "manifest destiny," i.e., the very idea that it was good, and morally right – indeed, inevitable – for Europeans to go out and "tame" or exploit the globe. The racialized version of "manifest destiny" is a type of white supremacy in which whites have the right, destiny, or "burden" of bringing order and "civilization" to, and ruling, the world. Thus, for instance, a colonial planter in Hawai'i in the 1880s proclaims:

> Europe was given to the white man, America to the red man, Asia to the yellow man and Africa to the black man. And with the slight exceptions the white man is the only one that has ventured beyond the "bounds of his habitations". He has over run Europe, and crossing the Atlantic westward has taken possession of America, and is "monarch of all he surveys" from Cape Horn to Behring's [sic] Strait. He has stepped across the Pacific Ocean, leaving the imprint of his enterprising foot upon the various islands of the sea; he has taken possession of Australia and India, with their countless thousands; he has gone to Africa, and this time to stay . . . . The coming of the white man to Africa means government, enterprise, agriculture, commerce, churches, schools, law and order. It will be better for the colored man of India and Australia that the white man rules, and it is better here that the white man should rule. (Daws 1968, p. 213)[13]

The second cultural linchpin of colonization was Christianity, specifically Christian evangelism, the very idea that Christians had not only the right – but the duty – to propagate and disseminate their religion. Thus for instance, the Philippines became predominantly Catholic instead of Muslim in the sixteenth century because after the Spaniards' early, disappointing search for spices and gold, Spanish colonizers turned single-mindedly to evangelism (Wurfel 1988, p. 4).

That is not to say that "missionaries" were guided by "Christianity" and "politicians" by strategic advantage; historically, political, economic, and cultural motivations were complex and intertwined.[14] Rather, the point is that Christian evangelism and manifest destiny helped define and affirm the very notion of colonialism from the beginning.[15] Christian evangelism and manifest destiny/white supremacy were vital systems of shared meaning that were part and parcel of geographical expansion. The purpose of cultural analysis is to systematically sort out and explain precisely these types of symbolic systems, i.e., the exact nature and impact of systems of symbols/ meaning.

In sum, while Radcliffe-Brown set his sights on *ignoring* cultural (and only exploring *social structural*) phenomena, here I follow Geertz (1973, p. 30), who first maintained that we cannot expect to understand human societies without exploring the symbolic (or cultural) realm. As Geertz (1973, p. 30) states, "To look at the symbolic dimensions of social action – art, religion, ideology, science, law, morality, common sense – is not to turn away from the existential dilemmas of life for some empyrean realm of de-emotionalized forms; it is to plunge into the midst of them."

Cultural Sociology vs. Cultural Studies

But of course, there is not *one* "cultural sociology" either. Cultural sociologists are inspired by a wide variety of theoretical and methodological traditions and orientations, both "classical" (e.g., Weber, Durkheim, Gramsci, Mead, Du Bois), and contemporary (e.g., Bourdieu, Foucault, Baudrillard).

To step back a bit: sociology first emerged as a discipline in the late 1800s as a "*science* of society." As we have seen, the anthropologist Radcliffe-Brown sought to explain human societies scientifically. In a parallel way, the founding scholars of sociology, most importantly Max Weber and Emile Durkheim, sought to replace utopian visions with objective, value-neutral, and empirically controlled social explanations (Seidman 1994, p. 11).[16] As Rabinow and Sullivan (1979, p. 1) state:

> As long as there has been a social science, the expectation has been that it would turn from its humanistic infancy to the maturity of hard science, thereby leaving behind its dependence on value, judgement, and individual insight. The dream of modern Western man to be freed from his passions, his unconscious, his history, and his traditions through the liberating use of reason has been the deepest theme of contemporary social science thought.

However, since the 1980s, "interpretive" social scientists, such as Rabinow and Sullivan (1979) and Seidman (1994), have pointed out that replacing the contextual understandings of everyday life with context-free categories is neither possible nor desirable. These analysts emphatically refute the

claim that one can somehow reduce the complex world of signification to the products of a self-consciousness in the traditional philosophical sense. Rather, they maintain that "interpretation begins from the postulate that the web of meaning constitutes human existence to such an extent that it cannot ever be meaningfully reduced to constitutively prior speech acts, dyadic relations, or any predefined elements" (Rabinow and Sullivan 1979, p. 5). In short, in accordance with Geertz (1973) and Alexander (1998), these analysts concur that sociology *must* have a cultural dimension.

At the same time that new "interpretive" social scientific perspectives have come to the fore, a new interdisciplinary field called "cultural studies" has emerged. In its most strict sense, cultural studies refers to a tradition that emerged in Britain during the 1960s and 1970s. Often called "British cultural studies," this type of cultural studies can be traced to the founding of the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies in 1964 as a research grouping within the English Department at the University of Birmingham in the UK. The first director of the center (now called the Birmingham Department of Cultural Studies) was a professor of English, Richard Hoggart, but the second director was Stuart Hall, who though trained as a literature scholar, later took up a Chair in Sociology at the Open University in England. British cultural studies blends seminal work by European structuralists, such as Lévi-Strauss and Barthes, with the work of certain European Marxists, most importantly Antonio Gramsci and Louis Althusser (Turner 1996 [1990], p. 3) (although cultural studies tends to draw on theory informally and "unsystematically," and/or implicitly, rather than explicitly).

In a broader sense, cultural studies refers to any type of work on the relationship between *culture* and *society*. In this sense, cultural studies includes both literary "essays" about culture and society that fall well within the traditional boundaries of the humanities (e.g., Toni Morrison); and more theoretically and methodological grounded works on culture that fall well within the traditional boundaries of sociology (e.g., Joshua Gamson, Stuart Hall). In this broader sense, "cultural studies" is practiced by linguists, geographers, essayists, historians, sociologists, anthropologists, and political scientists, among others.

Nevertheless, as indicated previously, I am not at all arguing that we should *abandon* sociology in favor of "cultural studies." On the contrary, the point is that the subject of culture falls well *within* traditional sociological boundaries; sociology must, in a sense, get *back* to its roots – for sociology was founded as a discipline with an emphasis on locating and identifying systems of shared meaning. In other words, the founding scholars of sociology sought *methodical*, *empirical* ways of uncovering "social facts" – but they never lost sight of the *existence* and *significance* of human subjectivity. The European classical social theorists "aimed to furnish a sociohistorical account of the making-of-the subject and to expose a social

and political unconsciousness in the movement of individuals, societies, and histories" (Seidman 1997, p. 47). In this book, I seek to bring this focus into the present. The idea is to use a methodical, albeit *interpretive*, approach to uncover what the philosopher Wilhelm Dilthey called "human-social-historical-reality" (see chapter 7). Put in another way, Seidman (1997, p. 55) challenges sociologists to dare to see what social knowledge would look like "if we abandon or seriously rethink a modern Enlightenment framework, if we no longer fetishize the Real." The purpose of this book is to help actualize Seidman's challenge.

Cultural Sociology vs. Sociology of Culture

Yet there is another important theoretical and empirical split in the sociological study of culture. This is the split between those who focus on the organizational, bureaucratic, economic, political, and social processes behind the *production* of cultural objects; and those who focus on the *content* and *meaning* of cultural objects themselves. For Berezin (1994, p. 15), cultural sociology is a "fissured terrain," characterized by an uncomfortable split between explanatory methods whose goal it is to explain social processes [sociology of culture], and interpretive methods where the objective is to interpret a wide range of materials in order to identify what might be described as an underlying *Gestalt* [cultural sociology]).

Specifically, since the 1970s, sociologists working within what is now known as the "production of culture" perspective – most importantly, Peterson (1976; 1978), Powell (1978), Becker (1982), and Fine (1992) – have been exploring the *social organization* of "culture" (in the more "artistic" sense of the term). These analysts focus on the "complex apparatus" between cultural creators and consumers (Peterson, 1978, p. 295). This apparatus includes:

> facilities for production and distribution; marketing techniques such as advertising, coopting mass media, or targeting; and the creation of situations that bring potential cultural consumers in contact with cultural objects. Placing racks of paperbacks in a supermarket, signing a new singer with a record company, legwork done before and after a Billy Graham rally, organizing a blockbuster museum exhibit, getting publicity for a new trend in fashion – all of these activities are grist for the production-of-culture mill. (Griswold 1994, p. 71)

Production of culture analysts set their sights on exploring the often *mundane* dimensions of cultural production, including focus on the *reward structure* in artistic production; *gatekeeping* and *decision chains*; and the *careers* of artworkers.

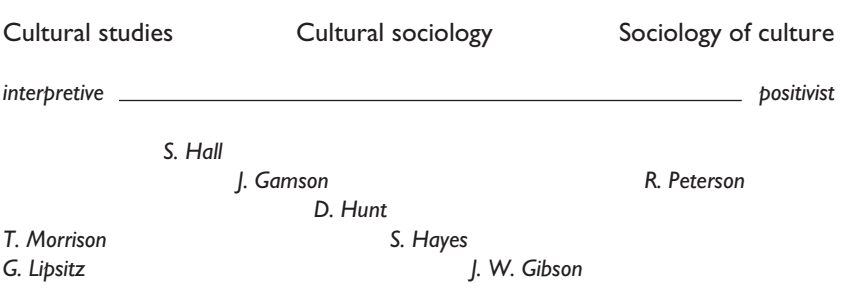
For instance, in his seminal work which helped define the "production of culture" approach, Richard Peterson (1976, 1978) showed the impact of market changes on country music. Peterson showed that after the emergence and dominance of Elvis Presley in the 1950s, country singers banded together to form the Country Music Association (CMA) in order to preserve "country" music. The CMA was in large part responsible for a proliferation of "country" music radio stations in the 1960s. However, ironically, country stations sought to broaden their market by reaching beyond traditional country music fans. Thus, the country stations turned from "country radio" to "modern country radio," i.e., they began to resemble the "top 40" stations, featuring the country songs that sounded most like rock. The result was not simply that country music became less and less distinguishable from other popular music; but, most importantly, that certain genres of country music (e.g., old singing styles such as "cowboy music") dropped out of the marketplace altogether. Traditionalists formed a new organization, called the Association of Country Entertainers, to fight the "dilution" of the country sound; but the problem was that record companies and radio stations preferred "crossover" music. Musicians and singers felt compelled to develop a "crossover" strategy in order to "make it" as musicians. There was little incentive for individual musicians and singers to develop and/or maintain a traditional "country" style. Thus, Peterson explains the emergence of a new genre of music – country rock – by focusing not on *meaning* at all, but by focusing on *organizational* and *market* concerns.

Theoretically and methodologically, the production of culture perspective falls well within the rubric of mainstream sociology. As Peterson (1994, p. 165) points out, "many of the early researchers in the [culture of production] perspective had been trained in the sociology of organizations, industry, and occupations and brought their skills in the analysis of material production to the field of symbol production." The culture of production perspective simply applies organizational sociology to a new arena. It provocatively demonstrates exactly how political, economic, and social elements – most importantly, market structure and bureaucratic structure – impact the "cultural" realm.

Of course, from an *interpretive* point of view, this is precisely the "problem" with the production of culture approach. It focuses on the *production* of culture, rather than cultural objects themselves. It does not purport to explain the "statement" itself, to uncover *what* cultural objects/ statements *mean*. Thus, for instance, Peterson is not interested in why consumers, especially urban consumers, *liked* "country-rock" music; he does not discuss the fact that Elvis imitated urban "black" styles, thereby creating a new "white," working-class, macho sexuality, and that this *fusion* of "white" and "black," and "urban" and "country," was exciting and aesthetically pleasing.[17]

However, the point here is that while, clearly, market forces must not be ignored, at the same time, symbolic forces should not be dismissed either. In other words, "sociology of culture" and "cultural sociology" are *distinct* ways to approach cultural objects, but there is no reason why these two approaches cannot be brought together. Indeed, the central premise of this book is that cultural sociologists can and must uncover the underlying *Gestalt* of culture, without ignoring the critical organizational parameters of cultural production. This point is illustrated in figure 1.1, which presents a *continuum* of types of cultural analysis. At the "interpretive," humanities end of the spectrum are Toni Morrison and George Lipsitz, who, as we will see in chapter 4, provide insightful self-reflective essays and provocative, intuitive analyses of such phenomena as the O. J. Simpson trial. At the "positivistic" "social scientific" end of the continuum is Richard Peterson, whose work on the *production* of culture fits well within the sociology of organizations.[18] At the heart of cultural sociology are analysts like James W. Gibson (1994), Joshua Gamson (1998), Sharon Hayes (1996), and Darnell Hunt (1999) – all of whom readily acknowledge the organizational and bureaucratic parameters behind the *production* of culture, but at the same time, also use systematic discourse analysis, ethnography, interviews, and/or social history to sort out the complexities of the cultural realm. It is this *comprehensive* type of cultural sociology that I emphasize in this book (see chapter 7).

Table 1.1 summarizes the fundamental theoretical and methodological differences between cultural studies and cultural sociology (and the sociology of culture). Cultural studies relies primarily on self-reflective essays and unsystematic (or ad hoc) literary or discursive analysis; while cultural sociology relies on the *systematic* analysis of data, albeit within an interpretive tradition. The very term "cultural sociology" reflects that we're



Note: Approximate position of exemplary cultural analysts featured in this book.

Figure 1.1 A continuum of cultural studies, cultural sociology, and the sociology of culture

Table 1.1 Distinguishing characteristics of cultural studies, the sociology of culture, and cultural sociology

Subdiscipline	*Disciplinary home*	*Theoretical stance*	*Methodological stance*	*Empirical focus*	*Exemplary authors (featured in this book)*
Cultural studies	Interdisciplinary (but primarily humanities, especially English)	Atheoretical or implicit/ad hoc theory (especially critical/cultural Marxist, structural, or postmodern)	Unsystematic (ad hoc) (e.g., self-reflective essays, unmethodical discourse analysis)	Meaning of cultural objects	G. Lipsitz T. Morrison S. Hall*
Sociology of culture	Sociology	Explicitly theoretical (especially organizational/ Weberian or critical/ cultural Marxist)	Systematic	Production of cultural objects	R. Peterson
Cultural sociology	Sociology	Explicitly theoretical (neo-Durkheimian, neo-Weberian, critical/cultural Marxist, or postmodern)	Systematic	Meaning of cultural objects	S. Hayes D. Hunt J. Gamson J. W. Gibson S. Hall*

* Stuart Hall is a cultural sociologist who helped found (British) cultural studies. His work is explicitly theoretical, but methodologically unsystematic (or amethodological).

talking about a particular *type* of *sociological* analysis – one that blends the basic premises of sociology with the insights of the recent "cultural turn."

Outline of the Book

We begin our systematic exploration of the theoretical, empirical, and methodological quagmires and nuances of culture in the next chapter by focusing on one of the fundamental culture structures in all societies: religion. As Durkheim and Weber first pointed out (and Gramsci also underscored), understanding *religion* is important because it illuminates how *systems of meaning* (or culture in the symbolic sense) work in general. The basic elements of religion – values, rituals, doctrine, symbols, and the binary opposition between the *sacred* and the *profane*– are fundamental *cultural* categories that move far beyond the world of the "Church."

In chapter 3, we focus on one of the most important arenas for the creation and dissemination of meaning in modern societies: *the media*. Today we take for granted the extent to which our world is *mediated*, i.e., the extent to which we conceive of and act in the world via television, movies, radio, newspapers, computers, etc. We explore "the media" and "popular culture" in chapter 3 because so much of "popular culture" is *mediated* (most obviously, television). Indeed, this is one of the fundamental characteristics of modern (as well as postmodern) culture – that it is mediated.

In chapter 4, we explore one of the most pivotal and volatile categories of meaning within American society today: *race*. We will see that race is an independent criterion for vertical hierarchy in the United States (Bonilla-Silva 1997, p. 475). Race is a core *symbolic code*, or system of meaning. We will analyze racial categories (as well as class and gender categories) historically and semiotically, in order to shed light on how race in the United States *came* to take on a "life of its own." In addition, we will also see how racial and other symbolic codes were central in one of our most effervescent recent media events: the O. J. Simpson spectacle.

In the second part of this book, we explore qualitative *methods* for studying culture and society. We focus especially on naturalist ethnography and ethnomethodology in chapter 5; textual/discourse analysis and audience/reception research in chapter 6; and "comprehensive" cultural sociology in chapter 7. We will see that traditional field research (ethnography) focuses on "culture" in the ethnographic sense (i.e., the "entire way of life" of a specific social group); while discourse/textual analysis focuses on"culture" in the *symbolic* sense of the term. We conclude the book by calling for a *comprehensive* cultural sociology – one that illuminates the complex workings of culture and social structures without ignoring individual agency and interpretation.

Important Concepts Introduced in This Chapter

- Culture
- Cultural studies
- Cultural sociology
- Production of culture perspective
- Colonialism
- Imperialism

Study Questions

1 Discuss the relationship between being "cultured" (i.e., "sophisticated" or "refined," as in a "cultured person"), and the "high culture"/"low culture" dichotomy. Do, for instance, classical music and opera *do* something for the individual that "popular" cultural forms (such as heavy metal music and hip hop) do *not?* Discuss three different ways that you have experienced "high culture" and "low culture."

2 Have you ever heard of "culture shock"? Have you ever experienced it? If so, describe it. What is "shocking" about culture shock? Is it just "extreme difference"? Why should finding out "differences" (no matter how extreme) or finding out "things you didn't know" be so *shocking*? Is there something else involved? If so, what is it?

3 There are many excellent movies on the relationship between "art" and "culture." One of my favorites is *Basquiat*, about the New York "graffiti artist" of the same name. View this film (preferably twice), and discuss: (a) the relationship between Basquiat's life and work and the "high culture"/"low culture" (or "pop culture") dichotomy; and (b) the relationship between art and "high society" (as portrayed in the film).

Suggested Further Reading

Berezin, Mabel. 1994. "Fissured Terrain: Methodological Approaches and Research Styles in Culture and Politics," in Crane, ed., *The Sociology of Culture*.

Crane, Diana, ed. 1994. *The Sociology of Culture*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Gray, Herman. 1997. "Jazz Tradition, Institutional Formation, and Cultural Practice: The Canon and the Street as Frameworks for Oppositional Black Cultural Politics," in Long, ed., *From Sociology to Cultural Studies*.

Griswold, Wendy. 1994. *Cultures and Societies in a Changing World*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge.

Long, Elizabeth, ed. 1997. *From Sociology to Cultural Studies*. Cambridge, MA: Blackwell.

Peterson, Richard. 1994. "Culture Studies Through the Production Perspective: Progress and Prospects," in Crane, ed., *The Sociology of Culture*.
Seidman, Steve. 1997. "Relativizing Sociology: The Challenge of Cultural Studies," in Long, ed., *From Sociology to Cultural Studies*.
Smith, Philip, ed. 1998. *The New American Cultural Sociology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Williams, Raymond. 1977. *Marxism and Literature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Notes

1 "Jazz," *Microsoft® Encarta® 98 Encyclopedia*. © 1993–7 Microsoft Corporation; Appelrouth 1999.

2 Analysts such as Gray (1997) might argue that the legitimation of jazz has been far more recent – i.e., the inauguration of the Jazz Program at the Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts in 1991. Appelrouth (1999) points out two other defining moments in the historical legitimation of jazz: (1) Dizzy Gillespie's tour of the Middle East and Latin America under the auspices of the State Department in 1956; and (2) the adoption of Congressional Resolution 57, which suggested, among other things, that "jazz is hereby designated as a rare and valuable national American treasure to which we devote our attention, support, and resources to make certain it is preserved, understood, and promulgated" (Berliner 1994, p. 759).

3 The opposite is true as well: some of our most celebrated types of "high" culture – e.g., eighteenth-century European opera – were "popular culture" in their day. Shakespeare was popular melodrama in 1850, but classical high culture by 1920. See Levine (1988).

4 Sadly, there are a few cases of children raised in extreme isolation that demonstrate this point. In a now classic article, Kingsley Davis (1947) discusses the case of "Anna," a girl raised in extreme isolation. Anna apparently received only enough care to keep her alive; she had no instruction or friendly attention. When Anna was discovered at six years of age (she died at ten), she had "no glimmering of speech, absolutely no ability to walk, no sense of gesture, not the least capacity to feed herself even when the food was put in front of her," and she "failed to grasp nearly the whole world of cultural meanings." Indeed, Anna was so apathetic that "it was hard to tell whether or not she could hear," although later tests found her hearing to be perfectly normal.

5 A. R. Radcliffe-Brown, Presidential Address to the Royal Anthropological Institute, reprinted in Applebaum 1987, pp. 121–35.

6 Significantly, the structuralist approaches dominant in sociology in the 1970s (e.g., Skocpol 1979; Tilly 1978) were themselves a reaction to the functionalist "value analysis" popular in the 1950s and 1960s, which grossly ignored or underemphasized structural concerns. Value analysts (not only sociologists, but political scientists, and social psychologists as well) used surveys and questionnaires to identify and measure "values" and "root beliefs" – which they

assumed stood for "culture." They conducted extensive empirical research, much of it comparative (e.g., cross-national surveys of "religiosity," "political attitudes," etc.) in order to explain the role of "culture" in a wide variety of social phenomena, e.g., differences in national development and stability (see, for instance, Pye and Verba 1965; Lipset 1963). See Edles (1998) for a brief critique of functionalist political cultural analysis. See also Ragin and Becker (1992), who point out that value analysts erroneously assumed that objects of investigation were similar enough and separate enough to permit treating them as comparable instances of the same general phenomena.

7 *Webster's Seventh New Collegiate Dictionary* (Springfield, MA: G. & C. Merriam), 1967, p. 474.

8 The notion of the "relative autonomy" of political, economic and cultural realms comes from Poulantzas (1982), who borrowed from Parsons (1951). Poulantzas first argued that the ideological and political levels in a society are partially autonomous to (i.e, are not mere expressions of) the economic level. (As will be discussed shortly, while the Marxist term "ideology" contains specific connotations of power, it is essentially comparable to the more general term "culture.") By "analytically" and not "empirically" distinct I mean that, in the "real" world the social, cultural, economic, and political realms are inevitably entwined. There are cultural dimensions to "economic" phenomena, and vice versa, etc.

9 By "democratic" system, I mean systems in which there is (1) a real possibility of partisan alternation in office, and (2) a real possibility of reversible policy changes resulting from alternation in office, and (3) effective civilian control over the military (see Przeworski 1991; Edles 1995).

10 Of course, language also reflects the basic symbolic dichotomy of the "sacred" and "profane." "Bad" words (profanity) are precisely those that violate core religious or moral codes (taking the "Lord's name in vain"; the "f-word") or what we consider bodily filth.

11 "Colonialism" and "imperialism" are often used synonymously, but generally colonialism refers specifically to the Western expansionist movements which began in the 1400s, while "imperialism" is commonly used to refer to various types of capitalist domination of the periphery, e.g., multinational corporations (Borgatta and Borgatta 1992, p. 881). To be sure, analysts such as Said (1993) distinguish "imperialism" from "colonialism" in a different way. For Said (1993, p. 9), "The term 'imperialism' means the practice, the theory, and the attitudes of a dominating metropolitan center ruling a distant territory; 'colonialism' which is almost always a consequence of imperialism is the implanting of settlements on distant territory."

12 Interestingly, the actual planting of an American flag on the moon on July 20, 1969 did not technically "do" anything – for according to the 1967 "Treaty on Principles Governing the Activities of the States in the Exploration and Use of Outer Space including the Moon and Other Celestial Bodies," territory in outer space is not subject to national acquisition. Nevertheless, this act was extremely provocative and important: the image of staking an American flag on the moon symbolized and reaffirmed – it meant (and for many still means) – American supremacy, "manifest destiny," etc. In short,

this extraordinary symbolic act did not "do" anything "politically" in a technical, material sense; but it did do quite a lot "politically" in the ideological sense of the term.

13 As Bonilla-Silva (1997, p. 473) points out, the major problem with orthodox Marxist analyses of colonialism is that they have not been able to accept the fact that after the expansion of European capitalism into the New World, racism "acquired a life of its own"; "the subjects who were racialized as belonging to the superior race, whether or not they were members of the dominant class, became zealous defenders of the racial order." This is why, as postcolonial cultural Marxists such as Fanon (1968 [1963], p. 210) and Trask (1999 [1993]) point out, a pivotal part of decolonization is to "remake the image" and "rewrite the history," i.e., to reconstruct the discourse, of formerly colonized people.

14 For instance, in the Philippines, the (Spanish) governor general had appointive powers over the church, while the archbishop had the status of lieutenant governor and sat on numerous boards and council duties (Wurfel 1988, p. 4). While in Hawai'i, as Daws (1968) points out, the Christian missionaries said they came in peace, but they were quite prepared for war. And one generation later, the missionaries' children became powerful capitalist elites.

15 Of course, colonizers used Christian evangelism and manifest destiny to rationalize, justify and/or carry out political and economic goals. My point here is simply that – contrary to the mainstream position – there was more to it than this. In theoretical terms, most analysts implicitly or explicitly suggest that culture is "epiphenomenal," i.e., that culture does not explain the "causes" of colonialism. Thus, for instance, the entry on "imperialism/colonialism" in the *Encyclopedia of Sociology* (Borgatta and Borgatta 1992, pp. 881–4) makes no mention of Christian evangelism or manifest destiny or racism or any other cultural elements at all. Colonialism is explained as a function of the rise of new markets and luxury goods, the need to invest outside the domestic economy, or international economic relations – i.e., the classic economic explanations of Lenin (1917), Baran and Sweezy (1966), Frank (1967), and Wallerstein (1974); and Schumpter's (1951) classic political (rather than economic) explanation.

16 However, as Seidman (1994, p. 11) points out, despite their emphasis on sociological methods, "social facts" and "value-free" sociology, Weber and Durkheim were "no less inspired and informed by moral and political commitments" than were their predecessors, though they did tend to bury their moral commitments in the language of empirical science.

17 As will be discussed in chapter 4, I use quotation maarks for "race words" such as "black" and "white" to signify that these are *social* categories of perception and experience, but not biologically or physiologically tenable ones.

18 "Positivism" refers to a tradition in which objective "truths" are held to be attainable strictly through "scientific" methods and observations. Positivists believe that, like natural scientists, social scientists can infer general laws from observed regularities, the goal being not only to explain, but to predict (Baert 1998, p. 5).