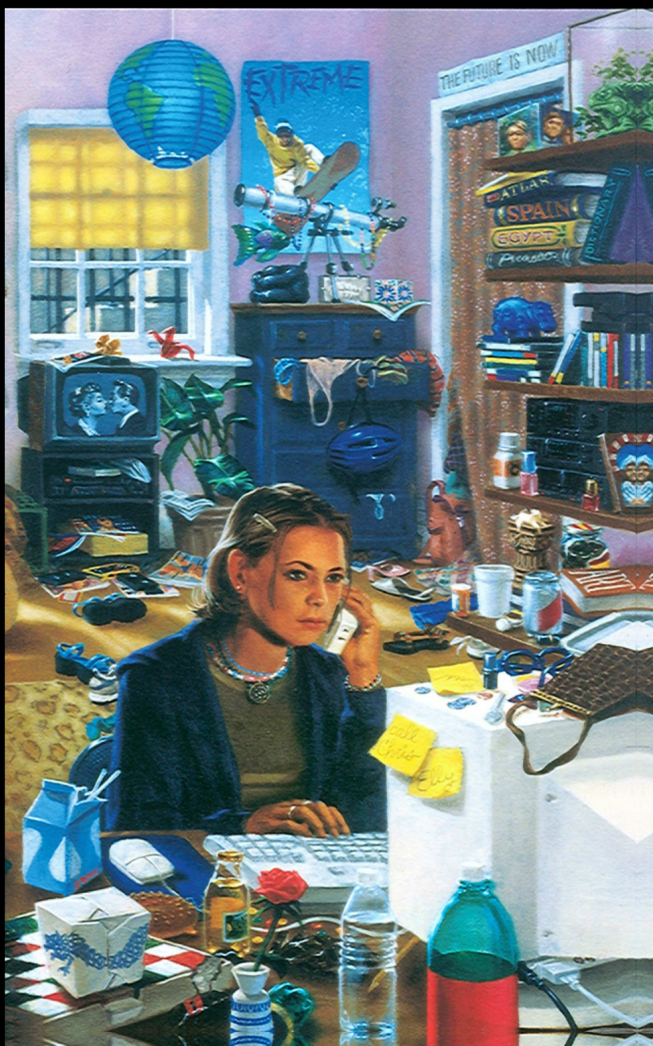
Second edition, fully revised and updated

MEDIA, COMMUNICATION, CULTURE

A Global Approach



James Lull

Media, Communication, Culture

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A Global Approach

Second edition

James Lull

Polity Press

First edition published 1995

Reprinted in 1995, 1996, 1999

This edition published 2000 by Polity Press in association with Blackwell Publishers Ltd.

Editorial office:
Polity Press
65 Bridge Street
Cambridge CB2 1UR, UK

Marketing and production:
Blackwell Publishers Ltd
108 Cowley Road
Oxford OX4 1JF, UK

ISBN 0-7456-2190-2
ISBN 0-7456-2191-0 (pbk)

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Typeset in 10.5 on 12 pt Sabon by Best-set Typesetter Ltd, Hong Kong
Printed in Great Britain by T.J. International Ltd, Padstow, Cornwall.

Contents

Acknowledgements *ix*

1 Introduction **1**

The global gaps 5
Social class 5
The technology gap 7
Structure and agency 8
Structuration theory 9
Communication and connectivity 10
About this book 12

2 Ideology and Consciousness **13**

Ideology 13
Ideology and the mass media 16
Image systems 16
Ideational image systems 17
Mediational image systems 24
Consciousness 28
The subconscious 32
Temporal and spatial consciousness 34
Domestic time, space, and place 41
The role of culture 44

3 Hegemony **48**

The role of media and popular culture 52
Global capitalist hegemony 58

Communist hegemony 62
Counter-hegemony: do we *really* do what we're told? 63
Conclusion 73

4 Social Rules and Power 75

Rule 75
Rules in society 77
Exceptions to rules 81
Rules and culture 86
Power 89
Lines of authority 91
The special authority of electronic media 93
Public images and private practices: media, rules, and the macro/micro question 94
Rules in perspective 95

5 Media Audiences 97

Direct effects 98
Limited effects 100
Uses and gratifications 101
A uses and gratifications approach 102
The functionalist tradition 111
The mass audience 112
The mass society 114
Rethinking the mass audience 116
The audience and technological change 120
Fragmentation and segmentation 122
Polarization 124
Conclusion 127

6 Culture 129

Ideology and culture 135
Emotion and culture 137
Language and culture 138
Race and culture 144
Internal cultural patterns 152
Social class and culture 155
Habitus 157
Conclusion 159

7 Symbolic Power and Popular Culture 160

Popular culture 165
Popular reception 167
Popular emotions 169
Emotional "branding" 170
Mediated feelings 171
Story, genre, discourse 172
Cultural uses of symbolic power 173
Culture and the material world 180
Popular cultural capital: black gold 182
Carnival culture 186
Conclusion 188

8 Meaning in Motion 189

Media and cultural imperialism: a brief review 189
The zones of indeterminacy 196
Communication sources: institutional diversity 197
Communication channels: unmanageable technology 206
Communication messages: shades of significance 217
Conclusion 222

9 Globalization and Cultural Territory 224

Communication receivers: the making of global cultures 229
The global cultural mix 232
Image nations 234
The dynamics of global culture 237
Deterritorialization and migration 239
Cultural melding and mediation 241
"Glocalization" 249
Reterritorialization and diasporas 253
Circular migration 256
Ramp-up to postmodernity 261

10 Culture, Superculture, Sensation 264

Surviving the culture crash 264
New communication skills and the personalization of culture 266
The superculture 267
The cultural spheres 268

Cultural actualization 271
Sensations 272
Experience without culture 274
Conclusion 275

Notes *277*
Glossary *282*
References *293*
Index *304*

Acknowledgements

My work is made possible by contributions from wonderful people in many parts of the world. It seems impossible to acknowledge everyone who has influenced the work because this book reflects an accumulation of professional and personal experiences that date back to long before I began to write the first edition.

Among those who certainly should be mentioned are Agnes da Silva, Janet Breit, Joe Verballis, Eduardo Neiva, Heloisa Aguiar, Pertti Tiihonen, Mirja Liikkanen, Katarina Eskola, Terhi Rantanen, Juha Kytömäki, Dalmer Pacheco, Tomas Pereira, Guillermo Orozco Gómez, Klaus Bruhn Jensen, Toshie Takahashi Sato, Debbie Johnson, Michael Marx, Steve Hinerman, Maria Immacolata Vassalo Lopes, Dave Morley, Leoncio Barrios, Bo Reimer, Karl Erik Rosengren, Renata Veloso, Stephanie Coopman, Ted Coopman, Dave Elliott, Dennis Jaehne, Tim Hegstrom, Serena Stanford, Mike Real, Paul Messaris, Ien Ang, Thomas Tufte, Federico Varona, Laura Nguyen, Walter Neira, Zhang Li-fen, Lucia Castellon Aguayo, Marcia Terlaje-Salas, Stefanie Izumi, Miguel de Aguilera, Romaldo Lopez, Sam Koplowicz, Marsha Siefert, Brian Sparks, Brett Garland, Patricia Martinez Iguínez, Héctor Gómez, Ricardo "Oso" Morales, Andrew Goodwin, Teresa Velázquez, Juan José Perona Páez, Amparo Huertas Bailén, Juan Luis Manfredi, Nilza Waldeck, Marisa Leal, Rita Monteiro, Robert Avery, Brian Moeran, Claudio Avendaño, and Eleonora Pires.

Very insightful comments on an earlier draft of the manuscript were made by John Tomlinson and Charlotta Kratz.

The staff at Polity Press has been extremely helpful, as always. Once again I wish to thank John B. Thompson for his constant intel-

lectual stimulation, professional advice, and personal friendship. Julia Harsant, Lynn Dunlop, Fiona Sewell, and Sandra Byatt were very encouraging and helpful editors, and Sue Leigh carefully supervised production. Thanks as well to the North American co-publisher of this volume, Columbia University Press, especially Ann Miller and Alexander Thorp, for their enthusiastic editorial guidance and support.

The considerable time I have spent in Brazil and Mexico in recent years has taught me much about media, communication, and culture. In particular, I wish to thank Jorge González, Director of the Culture Program at the University of Colima, Mexico, for sharing with me his great fascination with and knowledge of contemporary Mexican and Latin American culture, as well as his limitless energy and personal kindness. The staff of the Culture Program in Colima, especially Irma Alcaraz, Ana Uribe, Ana Isabel Zermeño, Angelica Rocha, and Genaro Zenteno, have all greatly expanded my knowledge and made life ever so much more enjoyable.

James Lull
San José, California

(JamesLull@aol.com; home page: http://members.aol.com/JamesLull)

The cover painting, 'AD 2000: New York City,' is by the Canadian artist René Milot. Commissioned by the National Geographic Society (of the United States), the painting displays a young woman sitting in her New York apartment, windows barred against urban threats. When not out with friends, she is connected to the world via computer, cell phone, television, and radio – living life remotely, in a barrage of information. A caged iguana, dusty telescope, and potted plant hint at the nature world she has little time to enjoy. Cultural trinkets litter her room, disposable as a pizza box. Craving stimulation, she wouldn't live anywhere else. (By permission of the National Geographic Society, Washington, DC.)

Introduction

> I grew up here when California was full of, you know, California type people. Now it's international.
>
> *My plumber, San José, California, 1999*

> The global is the true state of affairs.
>
> *Friedman 1994: 3*

As the middle-aged, middle-class professors from the Philippines droned on sadly about how their traditional island musics were being replaced by Anglo-American sounds and modern popular music from Manila, my mind drifted back to my childhood. I recalled my days as a teenager when I so desperately wanted out of the little "island" where I was born and raised – a small farm town of Nordic immigrants in southern Minnesota. I depended so much then on top forty radio stations from Minneapolis and Chicago to feel free, sexy, and connected to other places. I wanted to explore the unknown, break the chains, feel alive. I loved the cool music, the smooth, fast-talking deejays, the dances, the clothes, the city girls – especially Marianne Fitzgerald, who was by far the cutest ninth grader in all of Minnesota, and one of the regular dancers on Minneapolis's version of *American Bandstand*.

The big sounds of the metropolis connected so powerfully with my body, my senses, my dreams. Listening and moving to the big city beat, I imagined just how much more complex, interesting, and exciting life could be. And I was right! I knew then that I wanted to be more than just another midwestern American kid who never left home.

Wake up! Back to reality – an academic conference on popular music. Filipinos lamenting their imagined lost utopias at the hands of the corrupting international music industry and the modern sounds from Manila. I understand where they're coming from, but . . .

This book begins where the wistful Filipino professors' argument leaves off, and concludes much more optimistically. We begin this complex journey into twenty-first-century media, communication,

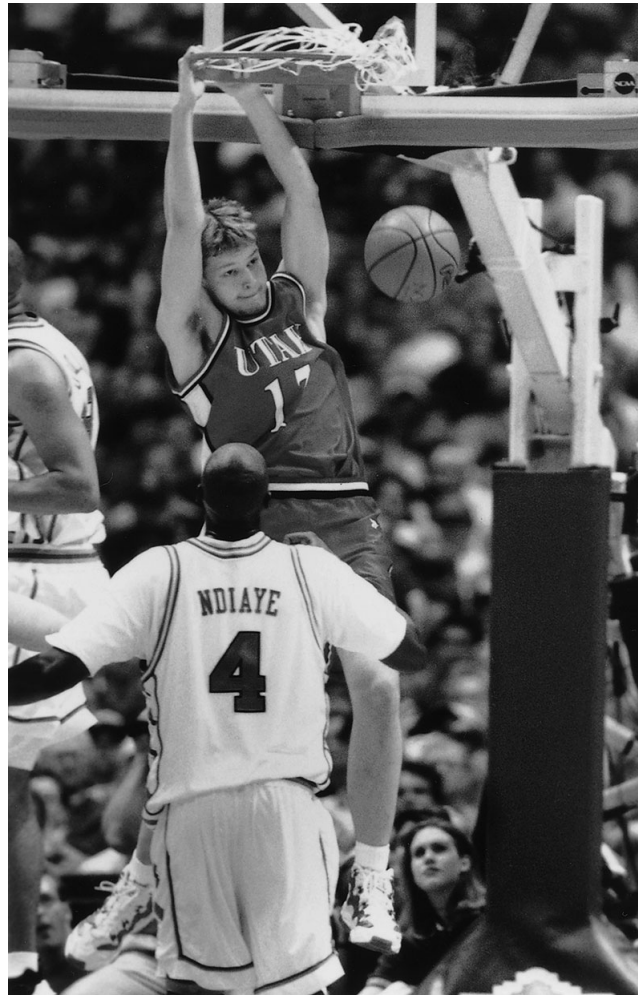

Photo 1.1 Hanno Möttölä – the globalized Finn (photo by University of Utah Athletic Department)

and culture with an example of a truly globalized man – a young professional basketball player from Finland who lives in America. We will then summarize how the gaps in comparative socioeconomic status, technology use, information, and knowledge between and among peoples of the world have reached very disturbing levels. We then briefly introduce *structuration theory* as it can be applied to media, communication, and culture. Structuration theory is a useful framework for analyzing how people's lives are structured by, but not limited to, the powerful ideological and cultural forces that surround them.

Box 1.1 International Sport and the Globalized Finn

(The following is based on personal communications with National Basketball Association player, Hanno Möttölä. . . .)

Got his first pair of Air Jordans when he was ten years old. Grew up watching the National Basketball Association (NBA) on TV. Loved the Lakers, hated the Celtics. Really liked Michael Jordan and Hakeem Olajuwon, but Magic Johnson was by far his favorite player. Played hoops with his older brother and friends at the local YMCA. Into U2, Springsteen, and the Rolling Stones.

Some kid from Kansas City?

Try Helsinki.

Head down, fists clenched, arms pulling front to back, a look of great determination on his face, Hanno Möttölä runs down the court to assume a defensive position. He has just scored another two points inside with a fluid duck-under move, a lethal complement to his excellent outside shooting. The big blond is the first man ever from remote, sparsely populated Finland to play in the NBA.

Basketball has become a truly international sport, rivaled only by soccer and hockey. The NBA features famous players from Nigeria, Venezuela, Australia, Germany, France, Serbia, Croatia, Mexico, New Zealand, Canada, Lithuania, Holland, Russia, and several Caribbean islands, among many other global locales.

The rich diversity of players in the NBA today is one spectacular indication of how international sport in particular, and popular culture in general, have been globalized at the outset of the twenty-first century. Hanno Möttölä's story reveals just how connected we have become across the boundaries of time and space.

Not only did Hanno lace up his Air Jordans, watch the NBA on TV, and crank up Bono and U2 on his stereo in Helsinki as a kid, he learned to speak English and Swedish, traveled the world playing for the Finnish national basketball team, and spent a year in San Antonio, Texas, as a foreign exchange student. His father serves as an advisor for Finland's foreign ministry in international relations, and his mother edits the culture section of Helsinki's major daily newspaper.

The globalized Finn maintains constant contact with friends and family via email and telephone, and checks the hockey and soccer scores on-line every day. His family watches him play basketball on America's NBC satellite Superchannel in Finland, and on the Internet.

And what about the game of basketball itself? To watch Hanno play in the NBA is to observe a striking contrast in style. Basketball is the "black man's game" in America, with more than 80 percent of the professional players claiming African-American heritage. For Hanno, "that makes the game much more interesting . . . faster, tougher, more athletic." Still Hanno values and exhibits tremendous discipline, toughness, maturity, and team play – qualities brought from Finland that were refined under coach Rick Majerus where Hanno played college ball – the University of Utah.

In sharp contrast to subdued and modest Finnish culture, the Big American Pop Culture Show has caught up a reluctant Hanno in its midst – lots of money, screaming fans, cheerleaders, pressure to win at all costs. And nationalism: "In the United States you hear the national anthem at every sports game and you see lots of American flags everywhere. Back home these things are not so obvious . . . they're sacred."

Can glitz, glamour, and big money seduce the soul forever? Certainly. But Finland's first NBA player so far resists the temptation. He says he'll go back to Helsinki when his basketball career is over. He loves the history and tradition there. The beautiful old buildings. The people. The culture. The silences. A true cosmopolitan child of globalization who has benefited tremendously from all the advantages the ultra-modern world can bring, Hanno Möttölä still believes one thing:

"You'll always be the person from the place you come from . . ."

That place is the most wired nation in the world. Finland has the highest percentage of its population connected to the Internet – way over half. Finns are also among the world's most active users of cellular phones, and the country is home to Nokia, the famous mobile

phone maker.[1] Finland's appetite for the latest personal communications devices is more than remarkable given that its people are famous for their quiet, some would say "uncommunicative," social style. Finland is also among the world's leaders in quality education, and despite some rough times in recent years, the country has developed a very high standard of living for the vast majority of its people.

The global gaps

> Globalization divides as much as it unites; it divides as it unites.
>
> *Bauman 1998: 2*

Finland is one of the world's "have" nations. Finns have money and high technology. They have a high literacy rate and an excellent educational system. They have professional opportunities and social guarantees. Finland has the world's most equal social distribution of wealth.[2]

But when we survey all the world's nations and peoples, we find that Finland is truly exceptional in all these respects and is, after all, a small nation with fewer than six million inhabitants. A very troubling trend confronts us as global citizens as we proceed through these early years of the twenty-first century.[3] To put it simply, the world's rich are getting richer, and the poor are getting poorer. Real differences between social and cultural groups in the world are increasing by the minute, and the differences become more striking with every technological advance.

Europe and North America accounted for more than half the world's wealth at the turn of the century, while the developing countries of Africa, Asia, and Latin America (with exceptions like Brazil, Chile, China, and Taiwan) account for a only small percentage. But this is changing. The gaps between and among many of the world's nations are actually getting smaller rather than larger. As a proportion of the world's wealth, European and North American economies are losing ground.

Social class

> I am against the kind of globalization that allows one US gentleman to have $90 billion, while another sleeps under a bridge.
>
> *Fidel Castro, accepting a medal as an honorary citizen of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 1999*

The real gap in socioeconomic status around the world exists *between members of the middle class and the truly poor populations in all countries*. The size of the international middle class is increasing, but the world's underclass population is expanding simultaneously at an even greater rate, and the poor keep getting relatively poorer.

Socioeconomic disparities inside Third World (or "newly industrializing countries," NICs) are particularly extreme. In Asia and Latin America, for example, a tiny number of super-rich people benefit tremendously from international trade and modern information technology while the poor – who procreate at rates much higher than the rich, and therefore increase their numbers faster in absolute and relative terms – fall farther and farther behind.

China, India, Indonesia, Brazil, and Russia have been identified by the World Bank as the largest newly emerging world economies. Their likely future success as nations, however, does not mean that most people or families living in these countries will benefit. National economic development in countries where the differences in socioeconomic standing are great creates explosive social conditions. The World Bank predicts that while China, India, Indonesia, Brazil, and Russia will double their economic output from about 8 to 16 percent of the world's total by the year 2020, serious "social turbulence" will accompany the growth. Indeed, clear symptoms of widespread unrest are manifest in all those countries already. So, while economic development in the coming years will gradually reduce the gap between many nations of the world and expand the size of the middle class in all the emerging world economies, poverty will also grow at a frightening rate. This is not a determined consequence, of course, because nations could direct revenues and resources in ways that would reduce the suffering. But of the five large economies mentioned above, China's socialist system may be the only one able to provide an effective social safety net for its poorest people.

Americans, Brits, Japanese, and Australians are by no means exempt from these global trends. The same internal gaps are developing. Of all the world's large, industrialized countries, the United States has become the most divided by income and wealth. The "gentleman" that Fidel Castro referred to in Brazil is Bill Gates, the world's wealthiest man. The disparity between rich and poor in the United States is systemic. Statistics indicate that roughly the richest 20 percent of the American public now controls more than 80 percent of the nation's wealth, a trend that keeps growing.

The technology gap

Technology never functions in an undifferentiated field of social relations. In our own individual countries, and in the global context too, some people have much greater access to communications technology than others. Socioeconomic class is the most obvious predictor of this difference.

While cellular phones, fax machines, digital video disc players, and all other modern communications technologies are concentrated disproportionately in the hands of the relatively well-to-do, the personal computer really separates rich from poor. While more than 50 percent of North American families had a computer in the home at the turn of the century, information technology remains largely a white-collar phenomenon. Well-paid, highly-educated, young male professionals are most likely to own and use a computer, especially for Internet access.

A US Department of Commerce report explains how the differences between rich and poor in the United States are related to race and technology. Poor people of all races in the United States have few computers in their homes. Blacks and Hispanics make up a disproportionately higher percentage of the American poor, so they are far less likely than whites or Asians to have computers. That clearly limits their opportunities.

This trend is not just related to social class, however. The rate of computer ownership among blacks and Hispanics of all social classes is comparatively low in the United States. More than a third of North Americans who did not own a personal computer in 1998 said they have absolutely no interest in ever having one. Exclusion from and resistance to high technology (and to higher education) thus is related to disadvantages imposed by low social class, but also by cultural values and ways of life.

Higher education, computers, and all forms of high technology are keys to economic success for individuals, families, and nations. Those who do not use computers in today's globalized environment are left behind in many ways. This is what is meant by terms such as the technology gap, the information gap, and the knowledge gap. This worldwide social crisis could not be solved easily even if technological resources were abundant and accessible to everyone, which they most assuredly are not. Technological development cannot simply be mandated in situations where people's basic needs are unfulfilled, where their opportunities are greatly limited, or where their cultural values do not match up well with the razor-sharp

rationality of high technology and the competitive demands of global capitalism.

And in global terms, how can we talk about the empowering potential of computers, the Internet, and information technology for India, China, and most countries in Africa and Southeast Asia when the vast majority of families there don't yet have a telephone? With the exception of the relatively small middle-class populations of nations like South Africa and Zimbabwe, sub-Saharan African peoples don't have access to computers at all. The unwired countries of Africa and elsewhere simply function outside the Global Information Infrastructure. In Africa, the technology gap interacts with political turmoil, corruption, the AIDS crisis, and poverty to greatly limit opportunities for economic growth – a goal which requires access to the information superhighway to be realized.

At the same time, the upper classes in developing countries are very sophisticated users of high technology. Many of them have satellite receivers, computers with Internet access, cell phones, DVD machines, fax machines, and every other communications gadget in their homes and offices. They operate in Bombay, Lagos, Sao Paulo, Mexico City, and Kuala Lumpur at a First World standard, safely tucked away in guarded fortresses which isolate them from the threatening, anonymous poor who occupy the streets nearby. The few computers and other information technologies which do exist in developing countries are used mainly to make money rather than improve health, education, family planning, and economic opportunities for the general population.

We have cast our discussion of the global gaps so far mainly in terms of economics and technology. This is a necessary critical orientation, and the world scene in these respects obviously is troubling. But life is not limited to money and computers, and gaps between social groups should not be addressed solely in these terms. Love, beauty, passion, pleasure, and romance, for example, are not taken into account when we focus on the differences between people strictly in terms of economics, technology, and information. By expanding the analysis into *culture*, which includes the emotional dimensions of life as well as the rational sides, we open up lots of interesting possibilities. These will be explored in the chapters which follow.

Structure and agency

We will wrestle mightily with one central theoretical problem throughout this book. The critical issue is by no means unique to the

analysis presented here. In one way or another, theorists and writers from all the social sciences have long tried to understand the dynamic relationship between two basic, powerful, and seemingly opposing forces. These forces reflect tensions that have already been raised in this brief introduction.

On one side of the issue, we have *structure*. There are many kinds of structure, but generally we can say that *structure is any force that systemically limits or contains people*. Structures can be quite abstract, and are in some ways even invisible because they can be huge and are therefore taken for granted. The fields of politics, economics, ideology, and culture, for example, all structure social interaction in ways that favor the interests of some people over others. The comments of Zygmunt Bauman and Fidel Castro quoted earlier, for instance, call attention to what these men consider to be structural inequalities in globalization and socioeconomic relations.

On the other side of the issue is human *agency*. This positive force refers to the energy, creativity, purposefulness, and transcendent abilities that individual persons and subgroups set in motion, even unconsciously, to make their lives meaningful and enjoyable. *Agency is the force of liberation and growth*. Agency is exercised at personal and collective social levels.

Apparently we've got a classic "bad guy, good guy" pairing of opposing forces here. In simplified terms, human beings can overcome the confining structures that surround and limit them by exercising their human potential – their agency. This contrasting, dynamic tension provides a productive platform from which we can now begin our explorations and commentaries about global media, communication, and culture.

Structuration theory

The most far-reaching and comprehensive approach for analyzing the controversies of social power that takes structure and agency as its point of departure is the famed British sociologist Anthony Giddens's theory of *structuration* (see especially Giddens 1984; Lull 1992b). A detailed explanation of this very complex social theory goes beyond our purposes here and will not be attempted. But the spirit of the theory can help us find our way round the mosaic that makes up this text. Essentially, Giddens's theory integrates "macrosocial" conditions (reflecting the constraints of structure) with "microsocial" processes (where agency takes form). *Structuration theory is particularly valuable because it explains how structure and agency need*

not be thought of as entirely opposing forces. This is a crucial advance in thinking because while structuration theory recognizes the constraints structure clearly imposes on individuals and societies, it does not programmatically blame external forces for everything wrong in the world, an overly simplified conclusion that crops up all too often in "critical" academic theorizing.

We must strike a balance in our thinking about structure and agency in order to fairly evaluate what's really going on in media, communication, and culture at the global level. We want to keep the issue of social power in the forefront of the analysis, of course, but we do not want to simply assume an *a priori* point of view that is overloaded on one side of the social power equation or the other. Too much emphasis on structure exaggerates constraint, making it appear that established social institutions and rules somehow *determine* our realities in an airtight fashion. But by the same token giving too much attention to agency naively grants unwarranted power to individuals and underestimates how dominant forces and guidelines do in fact influence individuals and societies, often even against their best interests.

Communication and connectivity

Communication is necessary for cultural innovation, and cultural innovation is necessary for human survival. This was true more than 40,000 years ago when the first cave art and other symbolic artifacts appeared in Europe and Africa, and it was also true some 400,000 years ago when *Homo sapiens* first developed the physical ability to utter sounds and interact through speech (Kay, Cartmill, and Barlow 1998).

Through communication we create culture, and when we communicate, we communicate culturally: "Culture can be understood as the order of life in which human beings construct meaning through practices of symbolic representation . . . [that is] by communicating with each other" (Tomlinson 1999: 18). In today's complex world communication is the social nexus where interpersonal relations and technological innovations, political-economic incentives and socio-cultural ambitions, light entertainment and serious information, local environments and global influences, form and content, substance and style all intersect, interact, and influence each other.

Human communication is just as necessary today as it was hundreds of centuries ago, but social exchange and the cultural domains that human interactions help create assume radically different forms

Photo 1.2 Do you speak MTV? Globalized media and popular culture like MTV Asia challenge traditional values in every corner of the world, including China (printed with permission of MTV)

and formats in the era of globalization. As British sociologist David Chaney points out, "traditionally, social institutions such as family and religion have been seen as the primary media of [cultural] continuity. More recently . . . the role of ensuring continuity has increasingly been taken over by . . . forms of communication and entertainment" (Chaney 1994: 58).

We live today in an ever-increasingly hyper-interconnected world, a "global ecumene" of communicative interactions and exchanges that stimulates profound cultural transformations and realignments (Hannerz 1996: 7). Any study of culture in the globalized, mass-mediated, Internet-influenced world we live in, therefore, must seriously take into account the most sweeping dimension of communication – *connectivity*. With the Internet and information technology come incredible social opportunities. This is because communication is ultimately an open, undetermined space where the unlimited creativity of people can take form.

Even the most basic, non-mediated, minimally connected communication codes and processes assure tremendous latitude in symbolic exchange. The Canadian anthropologist Grant McCracken offers the analogy of linguistic structure and the way people use language

to demonstrate the limits of structure and the vitality of agency in routine social interaction:

> Each speaker of a language is both constrained and empowered by the code that informs his language use. He or she has no choice but to accept the way in which distinctive features have been defined and combined to form phonemes. He or she has no choice but to accept the way in which the phonemes have been defined and combined to form morphemes. The creation of sentences out of morphemes is also constrained, but here the speaker enjoys a limited discretionary power and combinatorial freedom. This discretionary power increases when the speaker combines sentences into utterances. By this stage the action of compulsory rules of combination has ceased altogether. (1990: 63)

About this book

Moving forward then with an overarching philosophy that life's vital trajectories are not predestined, we shall now explore the dynamic interaction of three themes that will make up the core of this book: mass media and information technology, patterns and processes of human communication, and the social construction of diverse cultures.

The book is international, multicultural, and multidisciplinary. Many of the examples refer to cultures outside North America, the United Kingdom, and continental Europe. We study capitalist and communist systems, the First World and the Third, the rich and the poor, the mainstream and the margins. We evaluate media, communication, and culture stretching from California to China, by way of England, Brazil, Mexico, New Zealand, and scores of other places. Theorists from outside the northern loop are prominent contributors to the points of view that evolve in the following pages. We will travel theoretical terrain that encompasses key concepts and issues from communication studies, sociology, cultural studies, political economy, psychology, and anthropology. We visit the premodern, modern, high modern, and postmodern eras.

No facile, easy answers to complex, tough questions will be found in these pages as we strive to explain the forces of structure and agency in contemporary media, communication, and culture. Given the choice of privileging structure over agency, or agency over structure, however, I choose the latter. I prefer to stand in the sunshine, not in the shadows, and I hope that by the end of our journey together readers of this volume will be inspired to do the same.

2

Ideology and Consciousness

We move forward with this critical analysis of media, communication, and culture now by exploring concepts that should be part of any college student's working vocabulary. Ideology and consciousness are the subjects of this chapter, and a related idea, hegemony, will be the focus of the next. We will refer to ideology, consciousness, and hegemony throughout this book. The concepts are complex and overlapping, though each has a unique emphasis and role in social theory. To introduce the first two, we can say that *ideology* is a system of ideas expressed in communication and *consciousness* is the essence or totality of attitudes, opinions, and sensitivities held by individuals or groups.

Ideology

In the most general sense, ideology is organized thought – sets of values, orientations, and predispositions that are expressed through technologically mediated and interpersonal communication. Ideologies are internally coherent *ways of thinking*. They are *points of view* that may or may not be "true;" that is, ideologies are not necessarily grounded in historically or empirically verifiable fact. Ideologies may be tightly or loosely organized. Some are complex and well integrated; others are fragmented. Some ideological lessons are temporary; others endure. Some meet strong resistance; others have immediate and phenomenal impact. But the varying character of ideology should not obscure its importance. Organized thought is never innocent; it always serves a purpose. Ideologies are implicated

by their origins, their institutional associations, and the purposes to which they are put, though these histories and relationships may never be entirely clear. In fact society's power holders often prefer that people don't understand or question where ideas come from, or whose interests are served by ideologies, and whose are not.

Ideology is a term we can use to describe the values and public agenda of nations, religious groups, political parties, candidates and movements, business organizations, schools, labor unions, even professional sporting teams, urban gangs, rock bands, and rap groups. But most often the term refers to the relationship between organized thought and social power in large-scale, political-economic contexts. Ideology, therefore, is fundamentally a large-scale, "macro"-level concept. *Selected ways of thinking are advocated through a variety of channels by those in society who have widespread political and economic power.* The ongoing manipulation of public information and imagery by society's power holders constructs a particular kind of ideology – a *dominant ideology* which helps sustain the material and cultural interests of its creators.

Ideology as a system of ideas has persuasive force only when such ideas can be represented and communicated. Naturally, then, the mass media and all other large-scale social institutions play a vital role in the dissemination of ideologies. Fabricators of dominant ideologies become an "information elite." Their power, or dominance, stems directly from their ability to publicly articulate their preferred systems of ideas. Ironically, in today's world many of society's "elites" must depend on non-elite cultural forms – the mass media and popular culture – to circulate their ideologies in order to maintain their elevated social status.

The origins of ideology as a critical concept in social theory can be traced to late eighteenth-century France (Thompson 1990). Since then, by one definition or another, ideology has been a central concern of historians, literary critics, sociologists, philosophers, semioticians, political scientists, rhetoricians – theorists representing virtually every niche in the humanities and social sciences. European intellectuals in particular have given ideology a sharp critical edge. British social theorists, for example – living in a blatantly class-divided society famous for its kings and queens, princes and princesses, lords and ladies – often define ideology in terms of how information is used by one socioeconomic group (the elite or "ruling class") to dominate the rest – especially the poor and the working class. Raymond Williams, one of the most respected communication theorists of years past, called ideology "the set of ideas which arises from a given set of *material* interests or, more broadly, from a definite class or group" (1976: 156; italics mine). He was saying that ideology is closely connected to eco-

nomic interests. Persons and institutions with political or economic power will try to use ideology to maintain their privileged position at all costs. To give a particularly consequential example, during the Vietnam War of the 1960s and early 1970s the corporate manufacturers of military weapons, equipment, and supplies vigorously supported the ideological assertion, "My Country Right or Wrong!" in order to keep the profitable war going as long as possible.

Because "systems of ideas" are used in ways that favor the interests of some people over others, we must never trivialize the meaning of ideology. For this reason, the British sociologist John B. Thompson insists that ideology is best understood in the aforementioned, more narrow sense of "dominant ideology," wherein "symbolic forms" including language, media content, political platforms, institutional messages from governments, schools, organized religion, and so on are used by those with power to "establish and sustain relations of domination" (1990: 58). However, Thompson argues, "specific symbolic forms are not ideological *as such*: they are ideological only in so far as they serve, in particular circumstances, to establish and sustain systematically asymmetrical relations of power" (Thompson 1995: 213). The socioeconomic elites can saturate society with their preferred ideological agenda partly because they have great influence, often ownership, over the institutions that author and dispense symbolic forms of communication, including the culture industries and the mass media.

Ideology, then, is a very good place to begin a critique of media, communication, and culture. Our reflection begins with the term itself. Simply to refer to any system of ideas as "ideology" calls attention to the nature of that system of ideas, and opens the door for meaningful analysis. The expressions "capitalist ideology" and "socialist ideology," for example, call attention to the fundamental principles that make up the two contrasting, often competing, political-economic-cultural systems. Using the term "ideology" directs attention to the values and practices of capitalism and socialism as political-economic-cultural schemas that are constructed and represented rather than natural and self-evident. It problematizes capitalism and socialism as sets of values, perspectives, and conforming social practices. A seemingly minor shift of language – from "capitalism" to "capitalist ideology," for example – thus facilitates analysis and debate. That is a main reason why ideology is a favorite term of critical observers and theorists. However, the term can also be used in a way that discourages critical reflection. Some American politicians, citizens, and media complain of the "communist ideology" of "Castro's Cuba" or of "red China," for example. When used in this pejorative manner, the term "ideology" nearly becomes a synonym for

"communism." It is the communists who suffer from ideology, according to this interpretation, as if Americans and others in the "free world" don't have to worry about any such political manipulations.

Ideology and the mass media

Some ideologies are elevated and amplified by the mass media, given great legitimacy by them, and distributed persuasively, often glamorously, to large audiences. In the process, ideas assume ever-increasing importance, reinforcing their original meanings and extending their social impact. Television has the unparalleled ability to expose, dramatize, and popularize cultural bits and fragments of information. It does so in the routine transmission of entertainment programs, news, and commercials. The bits and fragments then become ideological currency in social exchange. People talk a lot about what they read, see, and hear on the mass media and the Internet. Media fragments don't stand alone – not in the media, and not in our conversations. Various bits of information often congeal to form ideological sets that overrepresent the interests of the powerful and underrepresent the interests of the less rich or simply less visible people. Although television may be the most obvious conveyer of such dominant ideologies, all mass media, including seldom recognized forms such as postage stamps, store windows, breakfast cereal boxes, automobile bumper stickers, tee-shirts, grocery receipts, golf tees, matchbook covers, restaurant menus, even the bottom of urinals carry messages that serve the interests of some groups and not others. Consider, for instance, the (dominant) ideological lessons given in these familiar American bumper stickers:

- He Who Dies with the Most Toys Wins.
- I Owe, I Owe, So Off to Work I Go.
- My Other Car is a Porsche.
- My Boss Was a Jewish Carpenter.

Image systems

Image . . . is everything.

Tennis professional Andre Agassi in a TV commercial for a Japanese camera manufacturer

Image . . . is nothing.

Professional basketball star Grant Hill in a TV commercial for an American soft drink company

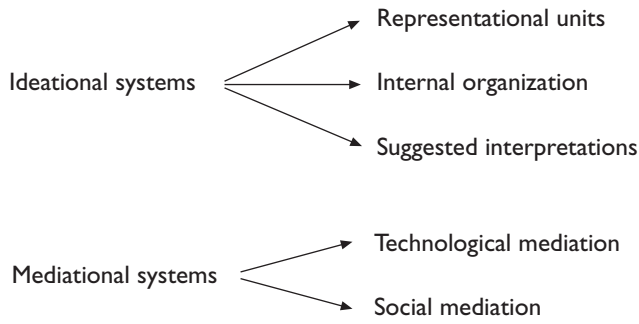

Figure 2.1 Image systems

The Sprite commercial, of course, is meant to be heavily ironic. The soft drink company *depends* on Grant Hill's image to claim that "image is nothing!" Appearances are extremely important in a mass-mediated world. The effective spread of dominant ideologies – those mainstream sets of ideas that reinforce the status quo – depends on the strategic use of *image systems*, of which there are two basic types: *ideational* and *mediational* (figure 2.1). *Ideational image systems refer to how ideas take form. Mediational image systems refer to how ideas circulate in society.* The key word in both cases is "system." Ideologies make sense because their internal elements hang together in systematic patterns. Those patterns then become familiar and accepted because they are delivered to us systematically via the mass media, and are further circulated in the personal conversations we have with our families, friends, co-workers, teachers, fellow students, neighbors, email correspondents, chat-room partners, and others. Image systems, therefore, refer to the articulation of layers of ideological representation and the tactical use of modern communications technology to distribute the representations, which, when successful, encourage audience acceptance and reproduction of the dominant themes, thus reinforcing relationships of power that are already in place. We use the term "image systems" to emphasize that *ideology depends on the patterned construction, representation, and transmission of ways of thinking in order to be influential.*

Ideational image systems

Let's concentrate first on ideas. As we are learning, ideas are never neutral and they rarely stand alone. They are grouped together for

strategic purposes, refer to each other, and reinforce each other. A comparison with language may help clarify how systems of ideas work. When people speak a language, they utter sounds that are organized into words, phrases, sentences, and so forth. Language as a system encourages certain responses and understandings, and not others. It is not a closed system – there is room for misunderstanding, disagreement, and invention – but it is a system that is structured sufficiently well so that people who share the code can communicate and coordinate their actions according to mutually intelligible assumptions and rules. The same basic process characterizes how systems of ideas take shape and move about.

Let's consider an extended example of an ideational image system – commercial advertising – a $200-billion industry in the USA alone. What commercial advertisers sell are not just products, services, or isolated ideas. Advertisers sell multilayered, integrated ideational systems that embrace, interpret, and project interdependent images of products, cheerful consumers benefiting from the products, corporations that profit from sale of the products, and, most important, the overarching political-economic-cultural structure – and the values and social activity it embraces – that presumably makes all the consumer activity possible. Advertisers want people not only to like the brands and product groups they put up for sale, but to believe in the economic system that underlies the very idea that "to consume is good." Some ideas thus are acceptable to the economic elite who sponsor the advertising, while other idea are not. One idea that does *not* fit well with the ideational image system of advertising, for example, is the well-documented scientific claim that current patterns of natural resource consumption on a global scale – especially at rates evident in the more developed countries of the northern hemisphere – are destroying the earth's ecological balance and threatening the planet's very survival.

Without much regard for environmental or social consequences, advertisers try to turn media audience members into consumers. Through advertising people are encouraged to become personally involved with commercial products by imagining contexts – the physical scenes, emotional circumstances, and actual social situations in which they would be able to use various products. These projected *imagined situations* are grounded in an overarching *value structure* with which the consumer is already familiar. Advertising's success thus depends largely on the interpretative chemistry of plausible imagined consumptive situations interacting with familiar and accepted value structures. So, for example, a Nissan automobile commercial encourages viewers to buy one of their sleek-looking but competitively priced cars "Because rich guys shouldn't have all the