

MASS CULTURE AND WORLD  
CULTURE: ON  
“AMERICANISATION” AND THE  
POLITICS OF CULTURAL  
PROTECTIONISM

The debate over the influence of American culture upon Europe and the rest of the world is hardly new. Discussions about the cultural effects of video recorders, satellite broadcasting, cable television and their likely content are only the latest episode in a long-running drama in which the young and aggressive culture of America bludgeons the elderly culture of old Europe (or correspondingly overruns and wipes out the quaint but ill-armed ethnic cultures of the less-developed world, dragging the natives from coconuts to Coca-Cola in a generation of identity crisis). But though there has been much written about some aspects of this issue, and most non-Americans who have come into contact with American culture have some awareness of its dimensions, there is also much which remains unclear, and ill- or misunderstood. In this essay two aspects of this large and complex problem will be examined. Firstly, the problem of how the “Americanisation of world culture” has been understood until now will be outlined, by

looking at its background in the mass culture critique of the 19th and 20th centuries, with some current notions of what American culture is, and some accounts of how it has been internationalized. My aim in this first section is in particular to try to isolate “American culture” from commercial and industrial culture more generally, for a conflation of these phenomena is widespread and very misleading. Secondly, a normative argument will be outlined from the premises that a “superculture” is indeed developing and that, though it is less threatening than many suspect, it requires a vital measure of resistance if many valuable elements of human experience are not to be relegated to anthropology museums. The central value which will be defended here, however, is not “Europeanism” or “Americanism”, but rather the central liberal virtue of diversity, of which cultural expression is an extremely important form. My attempt to develop a politics of cultural protectionism, then, represents a wish to surpass simplistic rejections of American culture and to come to terms with the confrontation of culture with industrial society itself. This involves going beyond the traditional discussion of culture in one country, however, and trying to extend the mass culture debate to the international arena, where the present debate on this problem is far more complex but often less sophisticated.<sup>1</sup>

## I. MASS CULTURE AND THE DEBATE OVER AMERICAN CULTURE

Most of the discussion today about the relative merits of “high”, “elite” culture versus “low”, “mass” or popular culture can be traced back to late 18th and early 19th century debates, though the roots of such a dichotomy can be found in ancient Athens.<sup>2</sup> The period from the early 18th century onwards saw a remarkable increase in popular European literacy, which produced a new

<sup>1</sup> This paper was first presented to the conference on European-American Relations and New Technology at the Sonnenberg International Institute, St. Andreasberg, July 1986. Thanks to all participants of the conference and especially to Ms. Ursula Truman for research assistance.

<sup>2</sup> On the classical roots of the distinction see Patrick Brantlinger, *Bread and Circuses. Theories of Mass Culture as Social Decay*, Ithaca, N.Y., Cornell University Press, 1983, pp. 53-81.

demand for literature which would satisfy the curiosity and intellectual standards of broader publics than the narrow, highly educated elite. This soon gave rise to the complaint that the new genres were inducing a corruption of popular taste.<sup>3</sup> The novel had no sooner been invented, it seemed, than it had begun to give way to cheap imitations, while newspapers and magazines sprang up to cater to popular taste as never before. For every popular edition of Shakespeare printed, critics lamented, a thousand penny-dreadfuls glorifying the lives of pirates and highwaymen appeared, while for every Dickens novel serialised five hundred vulgar imitations appeared. The coming of modern culture, then, was pre-eminently the result both of increasing wealth and leisure time and of mechanical production. Though the rise of the novel pre-dates the industrial revolution, it was steam-driven mechanical reproduction and a cluster of new scientific techniques which helped to diffuse the reproduction of the printed image so widely.

Though the term “mass society” is today usually only applied to the United States among 19th-century societies, the critique of the culture of industrialisation began in early 19th-century Britain with the identification of the process of “Americanisation” as the onslaught of vulgarity, loss of distinction and coming of that crude egalitarianism which resulted when each felt himself or herself to be as good as all others. The first powerful expression of this fear emerged in the two volumes of the French aristocrat Alexis de Tocqueville’s *Democracy in America* (1835 and 1840) which described the culture of the new democracy principally in terms of its shallowness and mediocrity and found the origins of these in the cultural predominance of the majority.<sup>4</sup> This perspective provoked the greatest British thinker of the century, John Stuart Mill, to rethink his attitudes towards democracy in terms of the need to safeguard the social position of the educated elite.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> A useful account of the 18th-century British debate is Leo Lowenthal and Marjorie Fisk, “The Debate over Art and Popular Culture in Eighteenth Century England”, in Mirra Komarovsky, ed. *Common Frontiers of the Social Sciences*, New York, Free Press, 1957, pp. 33-112.

<sup>4</sup> See Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, ed. Henry Reeve, Oxford University Press, 1953, pp. 328-61.

<sup>5</sup> The change is particularly evident in the essay, “Civilization” (1836) (see *The Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, vol. 18, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977, pp. 119-47).

“Americanisation”, however, was the term particularly chosen by Matthew Arnold, whose *Culture and Anarchy* (1869) set the tone for a great deal of the subsequent debate over the merits of popular and elite culture. For Arnold it was the task of the state and of culture to counteract the effects of democracy, the integration of the majority into the social and political system, which he thought tended to produce widespread social fragmentation through being allowed to do what one wanted, as well as banality, which resulted from a disinterest in standards of excellence.<sup>6</sup> Nonetheless it was not the aristocracy which was to preserve “culture”, for it had lost interest in such a task. Instead Arnold hoped that the middle class, freed from their puritanical obsessions with work and success, might become educated to the values of “largeness of soul and personal dignity”, to a love of intelligence and beauty. “Culture” meant the development of all sides of the personality, the pursuit and study of perfection in a harmonious and active manner which also bore the need for the general perfection of mankind in mind. In its broadest sense “education” was to be the source of culture, which required state organisation of secondary schools and the extension of the universities.

These themes were adapted and reworked in a variety of ways during the rest of the 19th century by such writers as Mill, Ruskin, Burckhardt and Marx. The last-named can be introduced here because it is quite clear that the reaction to the rise of industrial society did not only involve the conservative condemnation of the social power of the majority which had emerged with Burke’s critique of the French revolution, but also included the radical condemnation of the material results, lifestyle and productive techniques of industrial society. Thus in Cobbett, Owen, Morris and others (to take only British examples) we also find an emphasis upon the need for “culture”, but coupled here with the utopian vision of the transformation of the social system in order to bring the material benefits of modern productive techniques to the

<sup>6</sup> Matthew Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1971, pp. 19-22. For a useful review of the British side of this debate see Leslie Johnson, *The Culture Critics. From Matthew Arnold to Raymond Williams*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979. The current state of cultural studies in Britain in particular is examined in David Punter, ed., *Introduction to Contemporary Cultural Studies*, London, Longmans, 1986.

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majority.<sup>7</sup> As we will see, the radical and conservative critiques of modern culture in fact often overlap and to some degree share a similar outlook insofar as each condemns what it sees as the sedative, anti-progressive and even brutalising effects of modern culture.

From these 19th-century roots criticism of the culture of modern industrial society has seen much development in the 20th century, especially because after 1918 and then to a far greater degree after 1945 American influences upon Europe—and then from the 1960s onwards upon increasingly remote areas of the world—have accentuated the impact of modern culture upon social development generally until they have at last resulted in the image, or spectre, of a homogeneous world culture. With the increasing demise of the European aristocracies and the quickening pace of industrialization have come the anguished cries of those for whom modernity only entails a sentence of death by gradual strangulation for culture, now seen (as for the English critic F.R. Leavis) less in terms of self-cultivation than in the educated appreciation of art and literature. But as a well-conceived and carefully argued theory, it must be stressed, this debate has so far focussed primarily upon America, and secondarily upon the impact of America upon Europe. Its weakness lies in its inattention to the other sections of the world and to new forms of technology as well as more traditional modes of cultural transmission. These weaknesses will be therefore partly addressed in section three below.

The chief development in 20th-century cultural criticism has been the articulation of the idea of “mass culture” as the artefacts and forms of lived experience (including styles of design and modes of consumption) of industrial societies in which the majority is actually incorporated into and to a significant extent controls social life. Though there had always been a variety of forms of popular culture, these were generally conceded to vary from the new mass culture in several important respects. Popular culture tended to deal with the concrete world immediately familiar to its audience, relevant to its concerns, and closely tied to the traditions of those who consumed it, and tended to be more an authentic

<sup>7</sup> On radicalism and culture see in particular Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society 1780-1950*, Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 1963.

emotional experience demanding participation than more passive forms of consumption and observation.<sup>8</sup> Mass culture, however, tends to separate the manufacturers of culture from its consumers until culture becomes essentially a spectator sport. No longer geared to the tastes of a narrow elite, mass culture aims to satisfy the average taste, which requires a high degree of standardisation. This standard of taste, however, is dictated *by* the mass rather than for them, and the initiative for cultural change shifts from elite to mass. Mass culture centres upon distraction and entertainment since the majority dislike learning and "high" art. The moral and aesthetic standard for judging cultural products becomes popular approval and financial success, which in turn diverts potential talent from other forms of artistic expression. The proliferation of communication weakens bonds between individuals even as it multiplies them, leading to greater indifference as well as to the trivialisation of meaning. To counter lives in which boredom is a central problem, escapism becomes an essential cultural motif.<sup>9</sup>

Even more than 19th- and early 20th-century discussions of high and low culture, the critique of mass culture which developed in the 1930s and blossomed in the English-speaking world after 1945 focussed upon America. The United States was the first nation whose institutions and identity were essentially formed in a technological era, where massive urbanisation (after 1945 in particular) became a central facet of cultural identity, and where the affluence of the white majority created a lifestyle based upon the consumption of commodities and a hedonistic rather than an educative approach to culture generally. A central point, therefore, in any discussion of "Americanisation" and the creation of a homogeneous world culture is the extent to which the culture created in 20th-century and especially post-war America is in fact peculiarly American, and the degree to which it is merely the logical outgrowth of a particular stage of industrial society. For if, in fact, much of what Europeans often castigate as "American"

<sup>8</sup> Oscar Handlin, "Comments on Mass Culture and Popular Culture", *Daedalus*, 89 (1960), 328-9.

<sup>9</sup> See Ernest van den Haag, "A Dissent from the Consensual Society", *Daedalus*, 89 (1960), 315-24, for a discussion of these points. A good review of the modern American cultural debate is Christopher Brookeman, *American Culture and Society since the 1930s*, London, Macmillan, 1984.

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when they despise the modern and vulgar displacing the traditional and aesthetic is not “American” but merely *modern*, our whole attitude towards culture will be very different indeed. This is a large problem which cannot be solved or fully investigated here. But we can begin to approach it by considering what special circumstances underlay American culture.

The unique sources which account for the specific character of American culture are rooted in five phenomena. Firstly, America was a new country in which the sense of tradition was and has been weaker than any other nation. Largely unburdened by the past, wearing only very lightly even those elements of Anglo-Saxon experience which have predominated in American culture to the present, Americans have characteristically looked forward to the future in their articulation of culture rather than back to the roots of older customs. As a result of its immigrant influx, America unlike many countries had to create a common national tradition at the same time as it underwent that process of urbanisation and the creation of urban culture which it shared with other countries in the 19th and 20th centuries. To fashion a national culture out of so many diverse ethnic, racial, religious, linguistic and cultural contributions (even given Anglo-Saxon predominance) has meant that it has been necessary to teach what has been termed a “thin, uniform, ‘homogeneous’ culture, a highest common denominator culture, and the common denominator naturally cannot be very high”.<sup>10</sup> While the limited New England literary culture of the early 19th century set a high standard, thus, the national standard in literature has been demonstrably lower, for its appeal had necessarily to be to those whose roots lay in Poland, Italy, Germany and Sweden (and later Mexico, Vietnam, Cuba) as well as England, Scotland and Ireland.

Secondly, American culture began from a specially weak point of departure because it was merely a branch of a tremendously rich and powerful Anglo-Saxon tradition of literature, painting, theatre, architecture, design and so on. Already disadvantaged by a metropolis-province relationship with Britain, American high culture thenceforth had to compete with the high standards of both

<sup>10</sup> D.W. Brogan, “The Problem of High Culture and Mass Culture”, *Diogenes*, 5 (1954), 8.

British and generally European high culture without having an aristocratic basis of support in the first instance. Thirdly, though England was the first industrialised country, America in the 20th century has created a more wholly industrialised culture shaped and then finally dominated by new technologies than any other country. This is particularly true of the last thirty years, but in the case of film as well, it has been new cultural media which have in the 20th century played an essential role both in creating an American national culture and in exporting that culture to other countries, for this today is the side of America which most of the world sees.

Fourthly, and for many critics most importantly, America was the first modern society in which mass participation in political and social life, coupled with widespread affluence, converted the standards of popular taste into not merely widely accessible but legitimately desired modes of cultural expression. In a society which highly values commercial success, the wants of the multitude can be easily satisfied while enriching the producers of culture. More importantly, the egalitarian ideal of democracy legitimates popular taste even more than the drive towards conformity exhibited in modern society does. Personal cultural preference, be it for high culture or the debased or bizarre, is simply the cultural expression of political democracy. This is a source both of strength (for when diversity overpowers conformity it is a source of creative inspiration) and weakness, for the taste of the majority takes on a sacrosanct quality not easily attacked without arousing that recurrent anti-intellectualism which has played no small role in American cultural as well as political history.

Finally, the predominance of private enterprise in America has meant that the means of cultural production—radio, TV, museums, theatres, etc.—are largely in private hands and more directly susceptible, therefore, to pressures from the consumers of culture. Those who displease popular taste may pay the price of bankruptcy, for here more than for any other reason it is popularity which is the criterion of success. This also has both negative and positive aspects. Beyond the role played by private foundations, it has meant—and the grave deficiencies of this will be underscored later—that no institution like the state has been empowered to attempt to raise the general level of culture or diffuse different (e.g.



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minority) forms of culture. On the other hand, political manipulation of the cultural media is minimal, which for those who have been subjected to an officially-imposed culture is no doubt a much clearer blessing than is readily apparent to most of us.

These are some of the reasons for the special quality of American culture. There are also of course specific values which recur in the content of American culture as a result of its historical development, such as individualism, self-reliance, utilitarianism, puritanism and the like. These are less important for our topic here. But before we turn to the question of the diffusion of American culture throughout the world, we should first ascertain whether, as we have so far largely assumed, there really is a single "American culture" which at least dominates over other forms of culture in the US. Most critics in fact agree that there are a plethora of cultures in America. These can be divided into four main groups. Firstly, there are variations within the Anglo-Saxon culture according to region (south, northeast, midwest, west, and the localities within these) and religion (Protestant, Catholic, Jewish).<sup>11</sup> Secondly, ethnicity is a vital factor in American cultural differentiation, for there are substantial differences between the cultural life of Chicanos, Chinese- and Japanese-Americans, Hawaiians, Puerto Ricans, Blacks as well as Italians, Poles, Germans or other white ethnic groups.<sup>12</sup> Thirdly, age is an increasingly important factor in cultural expression, and though there is no single "youth culture" which can be isolated, the process of cultural homogenisation generally is more marked among younger people of all backgrounds.<sup>13</sup> Superimposed upon all of these distinctions, further, are a set of what have been termed "taste cultures", which are essentially but not exclusively a function of class. At least five of these have been isolated: high, upper-middle,

<sup>11</sup> On regional cultures see Anne Rowe, "Regionalism and Popular Culture", in M. Thomas Inge, ed., *Handbook of American Popular Culture*, vol. 3, Westport, Greenwood Press, 1981, pp. 413-27.

<sup>12</sup> On American ethnic culture generally see Faye Vowell, "Minorities in Popular Culture", in *ibid.*, pp. 205-29.

<sup>13</sup> Useful here are Philip Slater, *The Pursuit of Loneliness. American Culture at the Breaking Point* (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1970), pp. 109-34, and more generally, Morris Dickstein, *Gates of Eden. American Culture in the Sixties*, New York, Basic Books, 1977.

lower-middle, quasi-folk, and low. These are not rigidly exclusive categories and some “straddling” of cultures often takes place (perhaps in America more than in most other countries). But it is generally argued that the main US taste culture today belongs to that of the lower-middle class public, which replaced the low taste culture as the dominant type during the 1950s.<sup>14</sup>

What then is “American culture” as seen from the perspective of the present? In music alone one can find classical, country, rock, folk, jazz and many other styles, of which the most popular variety is probably that melange of tunes drawn from many of these styles and often known as “easy listening”, and commonly heard as “muzak” in airports, elevators and restaurants. This is closely followed by country and mainstream rock in popularity. In any other cultural form a similar range of expression is confined to music, films, television, certain eating habits, and the occasional fad (drugs, breakdancing, jogging) which ventures abroad.

Of these the most important representation of American culture to the world is clearly television programming, and it might be useful to say a few words about this, as it will be paradigmatic for my later discussion of cultural diffusion. Television is of course the newest and most profound popular medium of our time, and for many epitomises, beyond even detective novels, comic books and low radio comedy, the ugly side of mass culture. Some of the effects of television some forty years after its introduction are relatively clear. By 1955 radio listening in America had been cut by some 50%, and reading by about 20% (though lower forms of recreational reading were most affected). Viewing TV an average of eight hours daily, most high school graduates have spent 50% more time in front of their sets than they have in the classroom. 64% of Americans have television as their main source of news. At any one time popular TV programming appeals to some 40 million people (and the various forms of high culture, some half a million). Though efforts to portray minorities in a more progressive fashion have expanded in the last few decades, television largely remains a mirror of white, middle- and lower-middle class life and values. It is this life and these values, then, which have not only become

<sup>14</sup> Herbert Gans, *Popular Culture and High Culture. An Analysis and Evaluation of Taste*, New York, Basic Books, 1974, pp. 69-81.

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the most predominant cultural form in modern America, but which is also the face America usually shows to the world.<sup>15</sup>

### II. COCA-COLONISATION: ON THE “AMERICANISATION” OF WORLD CULTURE

Having now briefly outlined and described the mass culture debate and some of the special elements in American culture, let us now turn to the question of what effects this set of cultures has had and could have upon the rest of the world. This section will trace briefly over some of the elements of American culture which have been most successfully exported during the post-war period, and attempt to touch upon some of the points of conflict between the emerging “superculture” and traditional cultures. My central argument here will be that these effects have often been exaggerated and over-rated, and that much of what is termed “Americanisation” is in fact the proliferation of modern industrial rather than American culture *per se*. Once this is then clarified, however, we can see that both modern industrial culture and its specific American form do present very significant threats to the progress of human culture generally. What these threats are will be outlined briefly here. How we might deal with them will be addressed in the final section. For lack of space any consideration of the media imperialism of other nations will have to be omitted here, though it is worth acknowledging, at least, the highly successful export efforts of Britain, France, Italy, Egypt, India, the USSR and other countries.

The export of the American way of life is essentially a post-war phenomenon. After about 1900 the first evidence of American cultural influence was felt, however. Hollywood began to export films as soon as it had started to make them and by the mid-1920s already had a profound influence. Jazz took a section of European

<sup>15</sup> Raymond Bauer and Alice Bauer, “America”, “Mass Society”, and “Mass Media”, *Journal of Social Issues*, 16 (1960), 34-5; L.J. Martin and A.G. Chaudhuri, eds., *Comparative Mass Media Systems*, London, Longmans, 1983, p. 140; H. Gans, *Popular Culture and Mass Culture*, p. 21. A useful overview of the age of television in Robert Alley’s “Television”, in M. Thomas Inge, ed., *Handbook of American Popular Culture*, vol. 1 (1978), pp. 323-53.

youth by storm between the wars, while in the 1930s some of the first material artefacts of the high American standard of living began to be more widely disseminated, such as frozen food and soft drinks. But these were as nothing compared to the explosive impact of American culture, productive techniques and habits of consumption upon a world weary with war, anxious to share in the material elements of the American dream, and widely attracted by the American political system as well. One of the first and most powerful symbols of this new conquest was Coca-Cola, supplied to all US soldiers abroad for five cents, no matter what the cost to the corporation. In 1950 a coalition of wine-growers and communists in France attempted to stem the tide with an anti-soft drinks bill, but to no avail.<sup>16</sup> The following year the French political thinker Raymond Aron noted that European intellectuals foresaw “the tin can replacing home cooking, Coca-Cola substituted for the noblest product of the soil (I mean, of course, wine), the taste-destroying refrigerator threatening the extinction of the earthen cellar” (and he was right on the last count at least).<sup>17</sup> Throughout the 1950s the intellectuals’ warnings rose in volume as the population at large began a binge of consumption unknown in its history. In the late 1950s, according to one correspondent, the French characteristically continued to worry about food, and to decry the spread of milk bars, ham and eggs and hamburgers.<sup>18</sup> But they gladly acquired central heating, freezers, washing machines and larger cars, all of which, we tend today to forget, had at the time a distinctively American aura they have since lost, having been first seen on the silver screen and only later in reality.<sup>19</sup>

By the end of the 1950s and early 1960s, in fact, much anti-American sentiment had subsided, giving way to a new

<sup>16</sup> “Culture from America?”, *Time*, 15 May 1950, 16, 20. On the German case see Wolfgang Kreute and Joachim Oltmann, “Coca Cola statt Apfelmilch. Kalter Krieg und Amerikanisierung westdeutscher Lebensweise”, *English-American Studies*, 6 (1984), 22-35. A good early postwar account is Albert Norman, *Our German Policy: Propaganda and Culture*, New York, Vantage Press, 1951.

<sup>17</sup> “Does Europe Welcome American Leadership?”, *Saturday Review of Literature*, 13 January 1951, 15.

<sup>18</sup> “Europe’s Americanization is Skin-Deep”, *New York Times Magazine*, 6 April 1958, 17, 19.

<sup>19</sup> For evidence of this, see “Europe Goes American—on the Surface”, *New York Times Magazine*, 18 October 1959, 15.

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curiosity about American culture and a renewed enthusiasm for fast food, bowling alleys, vending machines, larger cars, credit cards, supermarkets, doughnuts, motels, drive-in banks, cake mixes, breakfast cereals, drive-in movies and much else.<sup>20</sup> While it was widely conceded that Americans had succeeded in particular in making the leisure time of ordinary people more varied and attractive, much of the appeal of American culture also lay in its association with the energy and excitement of American life, which to the “angry young men” rebelling in Britain in the 1950s exercised an attraction which would not be felt by their counterparts a generation later.<sup>21</sup> Yet it was no longer necessary to emigrate to America to achieve this. The American Dream, long ago a European dream, was by the 1960s again reinstated, and fast becoming a European reality.

Particularly for the young, then, things American came in the post-war period to denote freshness, novelty, modernity, progress, technological mastery and a preference for hedonism over discipline. With the new forms of democracy the middle and working classes were more wealthy and powerful than ever. Yet it was increasingly evident by the early 1960s, and is widely recognised now, that the post-war transformation of Europe (we will consider the rest of the world in a moment) had in reality far less to do with “Americanisation” than it did with the spread of a consumer lifestyle and patterns of production appropriate to a particular stage in the evolution of industrial society. Critics might bemoan the “spiritual emptiness” of American literature, but what was affecting Europeans far more was the diffusion of technology and consumerism rather than the more narrowly cultural effects of American society.<sup>22</sup> There was a tendency to blame young people’s staying up late, dancing to loud music, drinking too much and experimenting sexually upon American influence, but it was increasingly realised that these were effects of the greater autonomy, individuality and freedom which this stage of industrial society tended to encourage. Traditional restraints diminished in

<sup>20</sup> See “New Chapter in ‘Americanization’ of Europe”, *US News and World Report*, 7 August 1961, 62-4.

<sup>21</sup> “The Image of America”, *Fortune*, August 1958, 63.

<sup>22</sup> “Culture from America?”, *Time*, 23 January 1950, 18.

importance in the face of so much novelty, while affluence and the emergence of the superpower system diminished political involvement (at least until the end of the 1960s) and traditional social alignments. There was a recognisable decline of tradition, an increasing materialism and hedonism, and emphasis upon the acquisition of wealth and technology. But while the modern was often equated with the American in the 1950s, this was rarely true ten years later.<sup>23</sup> Far-sighted observers like the philosopher Hannah Arendt were already writing in the mid-1950s that “in reality, the process which Europeans dread as “Americanisation” is the emergence of the modern world with all its perplexities and implications”.<sup>24</sup> By the middle of the 1960s it was clear that “Americanisation” meant only that America had evolved the first consumer society, and that once mass consumption had become well-developed in Europe it was clear that despite the easy adaptation of many American products and the tremendous American capital investment in Europe, Europeans had come to design, produce, distribute and organise their own commodities and styles of using them. America had changed greatly after 1945, and Europe had grown closer to it, but the two were far from identical and were not even necessarily heading towards a single identity.<sup>25</sup> In fact even semi-deliberate attempts to “Americanise” particular populations, such as occurred in the American zone of occupied Western Germany after the war, were twenty years later widely regarded as failures, although some recent polls have suggested that West Germany remains the least anti-American country in Europe.<sup>26</sup>

So far we have mostly considered post-war Europe. What about the rest of the world? Here it is fair to say that at least the superficial penetration of American culture has been in direct

<sup>23</sup> For example, Erik von Kuehnelt-Leddihn, “The Mythology of Anti-Americanism”, *Commonweal*, 15 January 1954, 374.

<sup>24</sup> “Dream and Nightmare”, *Commonweal*, 10 September 1954, 610.

<sup>25</sup> See Edward McCreary, *The Americanization of Europe*, New York, Doubleday, 1964, pp. 252-64, H. Stuart Hughes, “Mass Culture and Social Criticism”, *Daedalus*, 89 (1960), 392.

<sup>26</sup> “Europe’s Americanization is ‘Skin-Deep’”, 19; “How the World Views America”, *US News and World Report*, 15 July 1985, 30. The German case is detailed in Jeremy Tunstall, *The Media are American. Anglo-American Media in the World*, London, Constable, 1977, pp. 156-60.

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proportion to the degree of industrialisation of the country concerned, as well as the affluence of its middle and working classes and affinity to the American political system. Of the 1926 Macdonalds hamburger restaurants in 41 countries outside the US, for example, there were more in Japan than any other single country (it is in fact Japan's largest food chain).<sup>27</sup> Of the 1\$ billion annually which America enjoys as a trade surplus in film and television series to the 100,800 film theatres and 417 million television sets throughout the world, the most substantial impact is probably upon countries which share a similar set of values (about 20% of European television time is made up of American programming, while approximately 60% of films shown world-wide are American-made).<sup>28</sup> But the actual diffusion of American programming is of course far more widespread than highly industrialised societies, and often represents the first substantial contact with the mores of such societies which inhabitants of the less-developed world encounter. With tourism, that other harbinger of western values, the film and television media are thus the great purveyors of industrial culture generally and its American form in particular to the rest of the world.

These values, however, are accepted reluctantly as well as willingly, and there is no inconsiderable tension between the superculture and traditional cultures throughout the world. Once again, though such values are present in many forms of culture, all of these forms are best known through the communications media. The ways in which these tensions are perceived are fairly clear. Most traditional societies are organised around the family (usually patriarchally) tribe, village, religion, and ethnic grouping. The diffusion of a particular form of culture, as we have already seen in the case of America, may and usually does play a central role in creating a national identity out of these lesser forms of identity. But the tendency of industrial superculture is towards modernity and away from tradition, towards cosmopolitanism rather than nationalism, sexual equality rather than domination, democracy

<sup>27</sup> "How the World Views America", *Newsweek*, 11 July 1983, 9.

<sup>28</sup> Jack Valenti, "And the Winner is... American Movies, Television and Videos", *Public Opinion*, 9 (1986), 13; C. Bigsby, "Europe, America and the Cultural Debate", in Bigsby, ed., *Superculture: American Popular Culture and Europe*, London, Elek Books, 1975, pp. 4, 26.

rather than authoritarianism, formal education rather than assigned status, secularity rather than religion and uniformity rather than distinctiveness.<sup>29</sup>

The mass media in particular thus have the ability to interfere both with the nation-building process and in the task of the formation of the identity of new nations within the international system. Briefly put, western or northern media influence may favour some groups in third-world countries (particularly modernising elites) just as they may and do favour the ideology of western economic, social and political development within the world generally, and portray world history and contemporary affairs in terms of their conformity to this standard of values. In terms of the whole world, then, the growth of the international media system has been the most important extension of western and especially American values in this century (which is why the term “cultural imperialism” is so appropriate to our own era). As is well-known, most of the world’s news is today collected and distributed by four agencies (AP, UPI, Reuters, Agence France-Presse) although there are a wide variety of national and regional news services.<sup>30</sup> The developed west also operates a large proportion of telephone, cable and satellite communications, and through foreign extensions of government broadcasting systems (the BBC World Service, Voice of America and allied American services) reaches a large proportion of the world’s population by radio. We have already noted some facts about television.<sup>31</sup> The US (but also China) imports less than 2% of its programming, but exports some 80% of all exported programs. By contrast France imports 9% and Japan 10%, while Mexico, Italy, Australia and

<sup>29</sup> See the discussion in Kenneth Boulding, “The Emerging Superculture”, in K. Baier and N. Rescher, eds., *Values and the Future*, London, Macmillan, 1969, pp. 336-50.

<sup>30</sup> The world news distribution system is detailed in Warren Agee, Phillip Ault, Edwin Emory, eds., *Introduction to Mass Communication*, 7th ed, New York, Harper and Row, 1982, pp. 412-16. An excellent introduction to the whole subject is Jeremy Tunstall, *The Media are American*.

<sup>31</sup> On the view others get of the US via television see Don Browne, “The American Image as Presented Abroad by U.S. Television”, *Journalism Quarterly*, 45 (1968), 307-18. The development of the medium globally is detailed in Timothy Green, *The Universal Eye. World Television in the Seventies*, London, Bodley Head, 1972. A useful regional study is Allan Wells, *Picture-Tube Imperialism? The Impact of U.S. Television on Latin America*, Maryknoll, Orbis Books, 1972.



many other countries take some 50% of their telecasts from foreign sources (and Saudi Arabia, 100%). The amount of cinema films viewed throughout the world is in direct proportion to the amount of television available in any one country. Though India, followed by Japan, are the world's largest film producers, American films are seen most widely. If one looks at the statistics on print media, too, the predominance of the west is everywhere evident. Though there are perhaps 500 written languages and dialects, two-thirds of the world's printed materials are published in only five languages (English, Russian, Spanish, German and French). In some cases single titles or periodicals have a tremendous impact; *Readers' Digest*, for example, sells over 11 million copies abroad in 25 national editions printed in 13 languages.<sup>32</sup>

This western domination of the communications media has in recent years led to demands on the part of third world nations in particular for greater decentralisation of control over such media. In the next section we will consider some of these proposals in greater detail. These demands focus upon the purported right of all nations (justified by the United Nations Charter) to have their news and values fully and fairly reported, and include the plea for substantial help from the west to set up communications systems in the third world, lend assistance to the news agencies of the non-aligned countries, legitimise the right of governments to restrict certain news sources and the flow of news across national borders, and the establishment of a supra-national UNESCO tribunal to monitor news media behaviour worldwide.<sup>33</sup>

Much of the debate in the last twenty years over the impact of the mass media upon non-western cultures has presumed that the predominance of western and especially American influence has had a harmful effect upon the rest of the world. This as we have seen has also been a traditional premise with respect to debates

<sup>32</sup> Warren Agee, Phillip Ault, Edwin Emory, eds., *Introduction to Mass Communications*, pp. 416-37. For a national study of two magazines see Isaiah Litvak and Christopher Maule, *Cultural Sovereignty. The Time and Reader's Digest Case in Canada*, New York, Praeger, 1974. See also James Wood, *Of Lasting Interest. The Story of Reader's Digest*, New York, Doubleday, 1958.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 428-31. See also "The International Dimension", *Many Voices, One World*, Paris, UNESCO, 1980, pp. 34-43. K. Ramphal, "In the Third World", L.J. Martin and A.G. Chaudhury, eds., *Comparative Mass Media Systems*, pp. 147-63.

upon the effects of mass cultures within particular national cultures, and especially in the US. But by no means all contributors to the mass culture debate accept such pessimistic prognoses. Some argue, for example, that the values purveyed in American culture are no more coarsely materialistic than those of the aristocratic culture of old Europe which built Venice, Versailles and St. Paul's.<sup>34</sup> They remind us that the life of the majority prior to the 20th century was far more degraded and unpleasant than it is in industrialised countries today, and that much of even the high culture of previous centuries has been over-rated and over-romanticised.<sup>35</sup> They draw attention to the very low degree of literacy before the 20th century, and to the fact that more high culture is now available to the majority than ever before, especially in the form of knowledge of other cultures.<sup>36</sup> These factors indicate that no definite conclusion can yet be drawn about the degradation of taste through mass media in modern societies. That a consciousness of such decline among intellectuals exists and is widespread is clear, but that it has any solid foundation in fact, either within America, or with respect to American influence upon Europe, has not yet been established (which is not to argue that it cannot be). How then should we see this question in relation to the superculture and the rest of the world?

We have noted that one of the principal effects of a national media system with semi-homogeneous programming such as exists in the US is to enforce an important degree of cultural standardisation. That the cultural product emanating from film and television is of *lower* quality than that which it displaces or joins is not often provable, but that it is *different*, and that media programming tends towards similarity, is widely acknowledged. What suffers here, as we have briefly indicated earlier, is minority ethnic programming, regional and sectarian programming, second-language and dialect programming. The curse of such media is conformity rather than mediocrity.

Here, then, we have the appropriate parallel required to

<sup>34</sup> Stephen Spender, "Americanization", *Partisan Review*, 39 (1972), 160.

<sup>35</sup> Edward Shils, "Daydreams and Nightmares: Reflections on the Criticism of Mass Culture", *Sewanee Review*, 62 (1957), 604.

<sup>36</sup> Raymond Bauer and Alice Bauer, "America, 'Mass Society' and Mass Media", 39-47.

construct a model of international cultural influence upon the basis of the mass culture debate, for the central problem in the impact of media outside of the industrialised West is also their effect upon national, local, ethnic, tribal, religious and linguistic culture whose weaknesses may not be evident until it is too late to save them for anything but ethnological dissection and other forms of academic study. In any country, as we have indicated earlier, there will always be some groups for whom some types of western programming will have a special appeal, and others for whom it is to be held in passionate contempt (the Iranian revolution is a good example of recent conflict between such groups).<sup>37</sup> Economic change creates new classes, and the emergence of a modern, westernised educational, technical and governmental elite not unusually creates a demand for the further influx of such western values as this elite was educated with. On occasion the very existence of a nation otherwise hopelessly divided by tribal, linguistic, religious and ethnic differences may appear dependent upon precisely such foreign influences (think of the role played by the English language in India).<sup>38</sup>

Yet from the point of view of the desirability of a maximum of diversity in world culture (which principle we will defend in the following section) the impact of mass media upon non-western societies must be harmful no matter what stage of national development has been reached, no matter whether programming suits the apparent aims of a party in or out of power, of a majority or minority ethnic group, even when the cause of national integration is furthered by the encouragement of a foreign culture. For the superculture, as we have seen, tends towards uniformity, conformity, and the erosion of most forms of traditional loyalty. It reinforces the values of cosmopolitanism, urbanism, technological growth and economic expansion, and the maximisation of commodity consumption.<sup>39</sup> Economic growth is

<sup>37</sup> See generally Brian Taylor, "Culture; Whence, Whither, and Why?", in A. Alcock, B. Taylor, J. Welton, eds., *The Future of Cultural Minorities*, New York, St. Martins, 1979, pp. 9-29.

<sup>38</sup> On this case see R.R. Mehrotra, "Dimensions of a Language Policy - The Case for English", in Satish Saberwal, ed., *Towards a Cultural Policy*, New Delhi, Vikas, 1975, pp. 112-25.

<sup>39</sup> See especially F.Y. St. Leger, "The Mass Media and Minority Cultures", in A.

clearly not endless, and one could quarrel with the dissemination of these values to a world not yet aware of many of the pitfalls of advanced industrialisation. To remain closer to the topic of culture, however, the great danger of the mass media throughout the world is uniformity, the destruction of cultural diversity and the enormous variety of human cultural expression. Let us now consider why this is so important and what can be done to hinder it.

### III. CULTURAL PLURALISM, INTERNATIONALISM AND RELATIVISM

We have seen so far that while the diffusion of an industrial culture (particularly in its American form) may represent far less of a threat to “high culture” than is often conceded, nonetheless in an international context a danger of a rather different kind, cultural homogeneity, is present. There is no reason to suspect that new technologies will inevitably render the world entirely Americanised. The use of satellites (e.g. Arabsat) and new cable systems will allow regions and nations to cater to their own cultural needs in a way previously unthought of. Increasing wealth will probably permit the widespread imitation of the highly successful film industries of nations like India, Hong Kong, Egypt and Mexico. Nonetheless the extension of the superculture may well keep pace with these balancing factors, and will overcome them in the degree to which cultural pluralism is not sought as a goal of national and international policy. This section will briefly consider first, what cultural pluralism is, and secondly, how to defend and restore it. Before this, however, it would be useful to reiterate why cultural pluralism is an ideal worthy of defence, and what the value is of the philosophical principle, social and individual diversity, which underlies it.

Though it is only rarely given an adequate defence within the liberal tradition, and lamentably even more rarely outside of it, the value of diversity is in fact one of the leading principles of an open,

Alcock, B. Taylor, J. Welton, eds., *The Future of Cultural Minorities*, pp. 63-81. On the problem of the “authenticity” of local cultures see Jeremy Tunstall, *The Media are American*, pp. 57-9.

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pluralistic society, and one which has with respect at least to ethnicity been given increasing recognition in many western countries during the last twenty years. The classic liberal defence of diversity (its best statement is still Mill's *On Liberty*, 1859) connects the desirability of diversity to the need for social progress generally.<sup>40</sup> The intellectual progress of any nation and of the world generally requires not only freedom of thought and discussion, but the freedom of personal experimentation in lifestyle and activity which allows the fullest possible development of all aspects of the personality, for only with this rich development do selected individuals discover and nurture their special talents and capacities which produce the inventions and cultural productions emulated by the majority. The value of diversity, then, is not alone in the greater richness of experience which it provides for all, but in the differing models of activity which present a greater variety of choices for individual life-plans. The strength of individual character, moreover, and the ultimate freedom of the individual, lie in his or her capacity to transcend customary modes of thought and action and to break spontaneously as well as deliberately into new realms of thought and action. Sheeplike conformity to custom is the greatest enemy of individuality, while those who are most able to plan and direct their own lives have not only achieved the greatest degree of freedom, but the highest and most harmonious development of their faculties, for these are used most fully where self-determination is strongest and imitation weakest.

The great enemy of diversity, then, is conformity and homogeneity. The cultural expression of diversity is usually termed cultural pluralism, and as a value worth defending was early on in this century already juxtaposed to the "Americanism" usually quickly imposed upon new immigrants to the United States (though the modern practice of cultural pluralism is better identified with Canada than the US).<sup>41</sup> In the US cultural pluralism began to emerge seriously only in the 1960s and 1970s, and particularly with respect to black and *chicano* sub-cultures it has

<sup>40</sup> J.S. Mill, *On Liberty*, London, Dent, 1948, pp. 114-31.

<sup>41</sup> On one segment of the rise of cultural pluralism see F.H. Mathews, "The Revolt against Americanism: Cultural Pluralism and Cultural Relativism as an Ideology of Liberation", *Canadian Review of American Studies*, 1 (1970), 4-31.

made considerable gains since then.<sup>42</sup> Since then much interesting work has begun to emerge on the problem of diversity and uniformity, and it is fair to say that at least the foundations (if no more) of public acceptance of the value of cultural pluralism have been laid.<sup>43</sup>

Cultural pluralism can be defined as the recognition that where different cultures meet within a single nation (these cultures are usually conceived in ethnic terms, though they may take many other forms) their values and form should be preserved to the greatest possible extent compatible with national unity. Cultures which become dominant because of the economic, social, political, or military power of the classes, tribes or other groups backing them should not attempt to eradicate all competitors, though where no single group is obviously dominant or where its hold is precarious the temptation to do so as a means of consolidating power is obvious (as in virtually any colonial society and many modern African, Asian and South American states). Even where some short-term disadvantage for some groups can be implied, the long-term and wider value of the preservation of virtually all available cultural forms should be recognised. Cultural *pluralism* as a policy to describe attitudes within a single country should be understood as cultural *internationalism* when discussing relations between countries. Instead of a cosmopolitan attitude which seeks to break down the barriers of cultural and national distinction as a mode of ensuring social peace and harmony, cultural internationalism respects the individuality, unique assets and right of survival of different nations, tribes, religious, ethnic groups, castes and classes. The meaning of “internationalism” here implies that cultures which do not meet as equals because of the different power or amount of population supporting them should nonetheless meet in mutual respect, with the larger and more powerful protecting the weaker and culturally more fragile.

<sup>42</sup> See Kevin Fong, “Cultural Pluralism”, *Harvard Civil Rights-Civil Liberties Law Review*, 13 (1968), 133-73, on the legal defence of the idea. A good review of the question of ethnic pluralism is George De Vos, “Ethnic Pluralism: Conflict and Accommodation”, in G. De Vos and L. Romanucci-Ross, eds., *Ethnic Identity. Cultural Continuities and Change*, Palo Alto, Mayfield, 1975, pp. 5-41.

<sup>43</sup> For recent work on this question see especially Marshall McLuhan, “The Implications of Cultural Uniformity”, in Bigsby, ed., *Superculture*, pp. 43-57.

This conception immediately runs up against several seemingly insurmountable problems. Perhaps the most obvious is the reality of social and political power. It is one thing to speak of a semi-anthropological and somewhat paternalist concern for the protection of harmless minority cultures in a fully-formed nation state in which a predominant culture is well-established and under no threat from such other cultures. It is quite another to ask a new nation in which cultural hegemony is an important element of social and political power to sacrifice some potential advantage for the long-term utility of human progress. Even in a mature and very stable nation such programming could have highly subversive results, as might a strengthened emphasis upon Muslim culture in Soviet Central Asia. The only even partially plausible means of countering this tendency, it will be suggested below, is by giving greater power to a central cultural organisation like UNESCO, for human experience militates against trusting individual nations often engaged in a desperate struggle against starvation, debt and internal turmoil to engage seriously in the task of cultural preservation.

In some respects an even more serious problem with the extension of the idea of cultural pluralism is that associated with the idea of cultural relativism, or the view that no culture can seriously claim to be morally superior to another.<sup>44</sup> For lack of space we will have to pass over some of the individually interesting cases raised by this objection, such as head-hunting, clitorrectomy, and satee. Most individual cases revert to a central conflict between established custom and some statement about the "higher" values of western culture, such as democracy and equality. It is fine to concede to every nation the principle of cultural pluralism, but what does this imply when we consider the painfully inferior and subordinate position in which women are kept in many countries, or the hostility of patriarchalism to most forms of democracy? In fact, put bluntly, the three central values of western society, democracy, liberty and equality, are not widely shared in most other societies, or at least not in forms which would be acceptable

<sup>44</sup> A useful introduction to this problem is David Bidney, "The Philosophical Presuppositions of Cultural Relativism and Cultural Absolutism", in Leo Ward, ed., *Ethics and the Social Sciences*, New York, University of Notre Dame Press, 1959, pp. 51-76.

to the inhabitants of most western industrial societies. Here, then, we must either defer to the higher value of these goals, and sacrifice something (perhaps a great deal) of our commitment to cultural pluralism in the process, or we must swallow our own western ethnocentrism and affirm the higher value of cultural pluralism.

This problem is compounded by the fact that the superculture which we have been discussing here in terms of the diffusion of western and especially American culture does specifically uphold (often uncritically) the values of western science, technology, industrialisation, urbanisation, and modernisation. The superculture is an essentially cosmopolitan culture which imposes a particular type of uniformity. As the well-known critic Kenneth Boulding has expressed it, "the superculture is the culture of airports, or throughways, skyscrapers, hybrid corn and artificial fertilizers, birth control and universities. It is worldwide in its scope; in a very real sense all airports are the same airport, all universities the same university. It even has a world language, technical English, and a common ideology, science".<sup>45</sup> How then can we reconcile the values of the superculture with those of all other cultures?

The answer to this, one of the most extraordinarily difficult questions of our times, is "carefully". Without engaging in any lengthy reflection upon western values, we must affirm that most human beings benefit by greater liberty, equality and democracy when these are accompanied by sufficient affluence. What we need to be able to do is to transform these values into other cultures, such that it is not necessary to take the entire package of western development, warts and all, in order to gain the best of western social and political development. Most non-western countries today accept this perspective and wish to choose delicately from among all of the products of western life in order to take what will be of benefit and reject the more obviously harmful. Such a choice is a long and exceedingly complex process. But in this balancing of western and other cultural values, national and international cultural and especially media policy is of central importance. In the final section, then, some of the practical, policy means by which this can be carried out will be considered.

<sup>45</sup> K. Boulding, "The Emerging Superculture", p. 347.



IV. IMPLEMENTING THE POLICY OF CULTURAL PROTECTIONISM

Unless the entire world is to be gradually remoulded in the image of the superculture more advanced and carefully thought-out counter-measures will have to be taken. Just as the assimilationist, melting-pot model of American ethnicity has now largely given way (at least in the universities) to a more pluralist conception of cultural co-existence, so too must the foundations of a pluralist world cultural policy be extended as firmly and quickly as possible, for new technologies are daily rendering the influence of the superculture ever greater. Some nations—Nigeria and India are often cited—have relatively successfully organised the politics of cultural pluralism, while others (Quebec, Belgium, Ulster, the USSR) have been less successful in this regard.<sup>46</sup> Media policy is clearly an excellent point of departure and model for other forms of cultural protectionism, too, for the communications media are not only fairly easily manipulable, but have the capacity to do an enormous amount of good as well as harm.<sup>47</sup> Particularly as the newest communications media become diffused, the opportunity exists to exact maximum social benefit from their innovatory trends. The slow decline of a variety of minority cultures (working class as well as ethnic, regional as well as racial) and their conversion into mass culture at the point of industrialisation can certainly be hindered to a significant degree by sound and sensible programming policy; even if it is clear that we cannot break from industrial society, we can certainly put the brakes on some of its effects.

The single most important policy proposal of this type does not relate specifically to the communications media but to all education generally. Just as in each nation citizens should be sufficiently educated to be able to appreciate the higher cultures of their countries without despising the more recent, or regional, minority, ethnic, etc., cultures, so too throughout the world educational systems should aim at the highest possible level of cultural attainment without inducing a contempt for other forms

<sup>46</sup> A good introduction to the problem is Crawford Young, *The Problem of Cultural Pluralism*, Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, 1976.

<sup>47</sup> Still helpful here is Wilbur Schramm, *Mass Media and National Development*, Paris, UNESCO, 1964. See also *World Communications: A 200-Country Survey of Press, Radio, Television and Film*, Paris, UNESCO, 1975.

of culture. This type of policy both recognises that higher cultures generally may often be more comprehensive, informative and emotionally enriching, but that all taste cultures deserve a degree of recognition and public support in relation to their taste publics.<sup>48</sup> Within some countries, such as the US, one obvious step in this direction would be a dramatic increase in publicly-founded media expenditure (perhaps modelled more closely on the highly-successful German system), aimed not only at the greater diffusion of Anglo-Saxon higher culture, but equally at ethnic, racial, regional and religious subcultures as well as local programming.

More specifically within the field of communications media policy, a variety of proposals have been put forward which might here be included under the label of “cultural protectionism”, with the clear implication that complete free trade in cultural products—in a monopolistic cultural market—is by no means always beneficial to all parties any more than it is in the economy generally. First and foremost, an increased role for UNESCO, at the moment suffering a severe crisis in confidence, has often been called for during the last twenty years.<sup>49</sup> This role need not and indeed could not be the same as in the past, since it would have to take into account the effects of new media, for example. But there is little negative to be said, for example, against the prospect of a world-wide radio and television network attached to UNESCO, whose goal would be the creation of cultural pluralism in any possible form. Such an enterprise would of course be fraught with political pitfalls of all kinds from the outset and would no doubt remain highly controversial, but this hardly speaks against the effort.

Secondly, national efforts need to be begun to institutionalise minority access to the media. More features should be devoted to minorities, broadcasts should be in minority languages, perhaps through the introduction of a new channel (as the British have recently done with respect to the Welsh language). Higher standards at all levels can be maintained if it is ensured that

<sup>48</sup> See the useful comments on this strategy in Herbert Gans, *Popular Culture and High Culture*, pp. 125-30.

<sup>49</sup> A review of UNESCO’s activities in this field is in Robert Knight, “UNESCO’s International Communications Activities”, in H-D Fischer and J. Merrill, eds., *International Communications*, New York, Hastings House, 1970.

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advertisers (where they are admitted) and sponsors of programmes in private broadcasting systems have minimal or no control over the content of programmes.<sup>50</sup> A widely-respected model for minority media access generally is the Dutch, which allows most organised minority groups radio and television time in proportion to their size.<sup>51</sup> But there is no doubt that all forms of subcultural programming must aim at going beyond the mere representation of minorities in proportion to their numerical size, for this is probably insufficient to resist the natural process of assimilation into a larger and dominant culture.

There are some objections to this ideal of subcultural programming. It can be interpreted as giving people inferior culture rather than raising them to a higher level of culture, as giving people what they want rather than what is good for them, as encouraging socially-undesirable goals by comparison to those sought by the majority, as further developing an attitude of consumption of culture rather than creation of it, as reinforcing rigid distinctions between taste publics, as reducing the generally cohesive function of the mass media in any nation, and as providing news and information geared only to a particular taste public rather than the wider world.<sup>52</sup> Since so many of the proposals put forward so far in this area involve public programming, a further danger of great importance is that of political censorship and control. This is probably best met by the imposition of strict controls for fairness and impartiality as well as the provision for mixed public and private media systems (the emulation of the American commercial system is rarely recommended), with each type of control helping to balance the other.

These are only a few of the more important ideas put forward in recent years to deal with the problem of the emerging superculture and to ensure greater protection for minority cultures everywhere. From our examination of the mass culture debate with particular reference to the United States, we have seen that there are

<sup>50</sup> For this proposal see Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., "Notes on a National Cultural Policy", *Daedalus*, 89 (1960), 394-400.

<sup>51</sup> See F.Y. St. Leger, "The Mass Media and Minority Cultures", pp. 68-74.

<sup>52</sup> These objections are summarised in Herbert Gans, *Popular Culture and High Culture*, pp. 136-42.

important parallels as well as disjunctures between the problem of culture in one country and that within the international world system. Between nations, in particular, there can be no real question of one "high culture" and other "low cultures" in aesthetic terms, though we have seen that there is some parallel to this problem in the question of the relative value of liberty, equality and democracy in relation to the possibly conflicting values of traditional societies. The clearest parallel between the national and international models, however, comes with the problem of conformity and homogeneity, for here the superculture has the same gradual effect upon the large variety of minority cultures in the world as a dominant culture does to minority cultures in any one nation. Other countries have often looked to America and conceived that they found there the face of their own future. But if the gradual process of world industrialisation cannot be forestalled by any large measure there is no reason to think that every industrial culture must be uniform any more than that the industrialisation process itself must be. It would be utopian to expect that some reduction of intranational diversity will not take place as a result of this process, but as a concomitant effect we can welcome the measure of expanded knowledge of other cultures which does accompany the extension of the world's communications network. It would be equally utopian to refuse to recognise that for many the mass superculture represents a stage of liberation from some of the constraints of traditional society, and to accept that just as mass culture in any one country is part of the price paid for democracy, so too a mass superculture may be a partly inevitable result of the greater affluence which accompanies the industrialisation process. But the superculture need not represent a vast monolith towering over its surroundings and choking the growth of all around it. The culture of industrialism can also be increasingly diverse, and shaped to national and other tastes, and sharing with rather than eradicating the pre-industrial cultures too often seemingly doomed by its introduction. In such a policy of peaceful cultural co-existence, then, there are grounds for optimism.

Gregory Claeys  
(*University of Hannover,  
West Germany*)