

On the Anatomy of Culture

The problem of home blindness

„We do not see the lens through which we look“, wrote Ruth Benedict once about the dilemma of the anthropologist.¹ For European ethnologists whose main task is the study of their own Western culture this problem is even more evident. Whether we are analysing the beliefs of a 19th century peasant, the world view of the Victorian bourgeoisie or are trying to find general patterns in contemporary everyday culture, we face the problem of creating enough analytical distance to be able to step outside our own society and look at it from without.

There are two traps to fall into when studying one's own culture and society. First of all we often take too much for granted. Things are seen but not noticed. We simply fail to problematize life around us and to realize that much of what we view as 'normal' or parts of human nature, are in fact cultural products which must be anchored in history rather than in biology and psychology.

Secondly, we may underrate the otherness of other subcultures within our own society. We may try to analyse teenage culture, religious world views, or working class life through our own middle class academic lenses, using categories and cognitive frameworks which are alien to them. In this case we underestimate the need for *cultural translation*.

To counteract these tendencies we need to develop research strategies which can de-trivialize everyday life and make the familiar a bit more unfamiliar.

We also need to devote more time to introspection and critical self-reflection in order to find out what our own cultural lenses really look like and what kind of silent assumptions we make about human nature and normality.

In order to do this we must study not only the symbolic messages hidden in everyday culture, but also the way culture is organized. How is our social consciousness, our conception of the world structured? In short, this means examining what is *thinkable* in our own culture.

Such were the problems facing my colleagues and myself at the Department of European Ethnology in the University of Lund when we started a research project on cultural change in modern Sweden.

1 Benedict, Ruth: *The Science of Custom*, *Century Magazine*, 117 (1929), pp. 641-649.

In this paper I will explore some of the difficulties of studying one's own culture and discuss some possible strategies for overcoming them, drawing from the findings of our ongoing study. As empirical illustration I will use the emergence of a Victorian bourgeois culture in 19th century Sweden and look at some of the ways in which this culture was confronted with other life styles and gradually became the dominant culture.

The research project is called „Culture and Class: a study of social and cultural change in Sweden c. 1880-1980“. Our aim is to analyse dominant cultural themes in Swedish life in their persistence and change over time. We seek to examine to what extent one may speak of a common Swedish culture and how this culture relates to class-based subcultures; finally to discuss the levels and the areas in which one may talk of a development towards greater cultural homogeneity or heterogeneity in 20th century Sweden.

These are broad questions to which no easy answers are available. We view our work as explorative: we may produce some answers but even more new questions.

When we started it was not the problem of studying the present which worried us, as there exists a rather long tradition of studying contemporary culture in Swedish ethnology, it was rather the task of making our analysis sufficiently deep. There is always the risk that a study of cultural change in contemporary society becomes too superficial, that we mistake new attitudes, styles or cultural forms for more radical changes in values and cognitive patterns. We may consume new commodities and fashions as well as new attitudes, but behind this façade of change, the basic cultural structures often prevail.

Our ambition is to analyse culture at a deeper level and discuss how basic values and models of thought are structured into systems and thus often embedded in the unconscious level of culture. But as ethnologists, we also see it as our task not only to make hidden cultural systems or ideologies visible, but also to relate them to another cultural level, that of the observable everyday life. We want to analyse how cultural values, ideas and aspirations are anchored in everyday experience and knowledge: how seemingly trivial routines and rituals have an important role in maintaining or enforcing a certain world view, and how everyday experiences in turn influence a people's cultural perception of the world. Such a dialectical approach calls for a cultural analysis which moves between different levels, linking observable empirical manifestations to the invisible and non-conscious layers of culture.

New theoretical directions

For many years this type of cultural depth-analysis was not very common in Swedish ethnology. In the 1960's functionalism and later interactionist social theory dominated research, with an emphasis on community studies. Attempts to study world views, basic values or belief systems were often frowned upon. They led, it was argued, to thoughts of earlier speculations about national character, folk psychology or *Weltanschauungen* and the smell of *Blut- und -Boden* — research traditions one tried to get away from.

During the 1970's, the situation changed as new perspectives and theories were introduced into the ethnological debate. There was a growing awareness of the need for synthesis in cultural studies and for attempts to generalize about cultural patterns or profiles. Although an enormous amount of energy had been invested in, for example, the classical field of peasant studies, there was surprisingly little which could be said about peasant culture *in general*. There were still very few attempts to discuss peasant belief, values, and knowledge in terms of cultural systems. The cultural grammar behind the manifold expressions of peasant life remained to be studied.

Inspiration for such a reorientation came from several international research traditions in culture theory. First of all from the new work in symbolic anthropology, which was carried out by structuralists and cognitive anthropologists, but also from semiotics and current directions in the sociology of knowledge.²

Common to these rather different approaches is an interest in how human thought and knowledge is organized, how we learn to think and act through a largely unconscious cultural grammar. In this grammar there are patterns and structures to be uncovered; basic concepts are often defined through oppositions: masculinity through femininity, normality through deviance and vice versa.

Such basic oppositions may be organized into paradigmatic structures, which means that they will be manifested on different cultural levels, as structuralist analysis has shown.

Furthermore, there has been an interest in how cultural messages are synthesized and transmitted through symbol, metaphor and image, and how

² For an overview of the somewhat different French and British structuralist traditions as well as the type of cognitive studies developed among American anthropologists see Hastrup, Kirsten et. al.: *Den ny antropologi*. Copenhagen 1975. 275 pp. Peter L. Berger & Thomas Luckman: *The Social Construction of Reality*. New York 1966, opened an interest in the phenomenological tradition. For a critical appraisal of this influential approach on the sociology of knowledge, see Nicholas Abercrombie: *Class, Structure and Knowledge*. Oxford 1980.

oppositions and inconsistencies in cultural systems can be mediated or repressed. Through such types of cultural theory we have been given new tools for the analysis of the hidden messages embedded in a fairy tale, the lay-out of a house or a rite de passage. In this manner cultural forms can be interpreted as texts and analysed on several levels.

There are, however, some serious shortcomings in these research traditions. Their approach is often ahistorical and thus fails to give us an understanding of how value systems and cognitive patterns are produced and reproduced in society. Here the approach of historical materialism seems more helpful and especially some of the new and more unorthodox attempts to create a marxist theory of culture, which does not reduce culture to a mere ideological reflection of socio-economic conditions. Typical of these new perspectives is an interest both in the relation between macrostructure and individual life and in the ways social actors handle their material experiences through cultural frames. Such an analysis calls for a truly dialectical study of the relation between objective social forces and subjective experiences.³

To me, the attempt to combine the study of cultural organization in symbolic anthropology and the new culturalist perspectives in historical materialism, seems a fruitful task. Similar attempts at bridge-building are found in both the new social history of popular mentality and in studies of the civilizing process.⁴

The cultural perspective

Discussions of cultural analysis often get trapped in rather meaningless fights about how to define the concept of culture. Should the term be used as a label for common ideas and knowledge as well as human activities and artefacts? Should it be synonymous with the way of life of a certain group or should it be reserved for the values and knowledge shared by a group of people, whose activities and artefacts are then seen as manifestations or expressions of their culture? Definitions like these do not exclude each other,

³ I am thinking here of the humanist marxist tradition and the 'culturalist' approach developed among British scholars like E.P. Thompson, Raymond Williams, and the group at the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies in Birmingham. See the discussion in Raymond Williams: *Marxism and Literature*. Oxford 1977, and John Clarke et al.: *Working Class Culture. Studies in History and Theory*. London 1979, p. 41 and p. 201 ff.

⁴ These are tendencies found in some of the recent work in the *Annales* tradition as well in the attempts to carry on the perspective developed by Norbert Elias in his classic: *Über den Prozess der Zivilisation*. Bern and München 1969, 2nd edition. See Peter Burke's discussion of these approaches in his book *Sociology and History*. London 1980 as well as the presentations by Burke and Le Roy Ladurie in *The New Cambridge Modern History*, XIII. Cambridge 1979. Another important tradition is found in the work of Roland Barthes, see for example his *Mythologies*. Paris 1969.

rather they should be seen as different analytical perspectives, in the same way as we can talk of culture on very different social levels, from the culture of a nation down to the micro-cultures of a work place or a family.

In this paper I will mainly talk of culture in terms of collective consciousness, i.e. the common world of experiences, values, and knowledge that a certain social group constitutes and reproduces in their daily life.

Such a definition makes it different to reduce culture to an argument of base and superstructure. This is so because culture is the medium through which people express their world and organize their lives. Culture has a tendency to continually creep down into the material base, as the British social historian E.P. Thompson has aptly put it.⁵

In cultural analysis it becomes important to grasp this dialectic between culture and society. Culture is manifested in the socio-economic structures as frames for the organization of social relationship, it is embedded both in the material setting and the social institutions of society. Through culture material experiences are organized and group relations structured, but culture is also the medium through which the social world is experienced, interpreted and understood. Culture in this sense is something more basic than an ideological superstructure.⁶

Culture is produced in a given society within the framework set by the socio-economic structure of the particular social formation. The cultural process that perpetually occurs among the different groups and classes in a society, however, also affects this social structure. Such cultural creation is much more than social reproduction; within it new and alternative views of society are constructed: utopian or visionary programs for action.

We can illustrate this dynamic in another way. Culture can be looked at from either of two aspects, as passive or active process. Culture can be analysed in terms of a superordinate form of cognitive system into which an individual is more or less unconsciously programmed. Such a perspective may stress 'how culture thinks for us' or how a person learns to manage his world from the categories and conceptions the culture offers. Against this perspective, which sees man as a *bearer of culture*, we can put forward a perspective of man as a *builder of culture*, whose activity not only reproduces but also transforms culture. These two perspectives do not exclude on another. We ought to examine those processes through which culture is transmitted in a relatively unreflected and, therefore, invisible way. We ought also, however,

⁵ See the discussion in E.P. Thompson: *The Poverty of Theory*. London 1978 and Clarke op. cit.

⁶ Cf. the discussion in Stuart Hall & Tony Jefferson (eds.): *Resistance through Rituals: Youth Subcultures in Postwar Britain*. London 1975, pp. 10-11.

analyse how individuals, groups and classes actively produce and reproduce culture. We are all born into a culture, but we also, in cooperation with others, transform and change that culture throughout our lives, although this is seldom experienced as conscious culture building.

Another fruitful 'double perspective' is to analyse, firstly what culture *does in society*, how it is used as a tool in social relations or as a weapon in social conflicts. How, for example, cultural expressions are used to strengthen group cohesiveness, weed out deviants, mark a status change or resolve a conflict. Secondly, to examine what culture *says about society*, i.e., interpreting the messages embedded in the cultural manifestations around us, from artefacts to activities.

Finally, there exists a third double-perspective, namely the importance of analysing both the *form* and *content* of culture. Through an analysis of cultural phenomena on these two levels we can avoid drawing false conclusions about either continuity or cultural change. The same cultural form can have a totally different content or meaning in different social settings or epochs, making an apparent continuity only superficial. In the same way, what the Swedish ethnologist Börje Hanssen has so rightly called 'the stubborn structures' in a culture may be dressed up in new, superficial forms, which do not reflect more fundamental changes.⁷

With these examples of how culture can be studied, I have stressed the importance of seeing the concept of culture as a strategic term, as a research perspective. In looking at social life through the lenses of a cultural perspective, we can see other connections, or perhaps other sides, of a society than if we looked from the perspective of social structure, eco-system, or mode of production. Here the question is not either/or, but one of both/and. The idealistic and often ahistorical tradition that some ethnological and anthropological work has been carried out in has clearly shown the dangers of viewing culture as a free-floating system without ties to an historically conditioned social and economic reality.

I find it necessary to stress the strategic importance of using certain concepts as analytical tools or perspectives. 'Culture' is one of them, but there are many other such concepts, 'which are good to think with', just because they are not rigidly defined but rather have a *framing* function. They turn our attention in new directions and enable us to see things in a different light. Such play with word is often an important help in the first attempts to come to grips with a cultural phenomenon: to see a house façade as a message, an ordinary meal as a ritual, a social group in terms of counter-culture, a chair

7 Hanssen, Börje: Kulturens permanens och förändring. *Nord-Nytt*, 1973:3/4, pp. 34-44.

as an instrument for socialization or a rite de passage as a form of social control.

Basic cultural structures

In the same way a loosely defined concept like world-view can be a good one to think with, as it directs our attention toward the supporting beams in a given culture.

Through culture reality becomes manageable. As a cultural being, man not only is a creator of symbols but also a builder of systems. We learn to filter, to label, to classify, to repress and to interpret the flow of disparate impressions we meet everyday. The skeleton in this ordering apparatus is the cognitive structures around which our world-view is built up. The importance of this world-view lies precisely in its 'natural' and taken-for-granted character. It is this 'givenness' that makes it such an effective instrument of social control; at the same time, it makes it difficult for the researcher to discover and to clarify.

The basic elements in this conceptual structure are accepted without question, they describe not how things ought to be, but how they are. A world-view speaks not only about what is correct, but also what is natural and self-explanatory. A world-view often gets its legitimizing and stabilizing power through reference to supernatural forces outside human control, in the forms of divinity, natural law or scientific logic, that is, presuppositions that are above all discussion or beyond question. Perhaps the most important mechanism of social control in a society lies precisely in these internalized cultural premises.

'World-view' is a good concept to reflect on, but hardly a sharp analytic term. Just as with the concept of ideology, world-view permits various interpretations and definitions. I intend to use the term here to direct attention to that way in which our conceptions of reality are organized in the form of classification systems, such as categories and oppositions, as well as thought forms and value systems. It is this *basic cultural structure* that I aim at.

In attempting to concretize the discussion about which themes one ought to investigate and problematize in order to grasp this cultural structure, let me propose the following list of some of the most important elements in a world-view. A world-view can give a picture of *human nature*, the apprehension of mind and body; it can define the picture of the 'I' and the individual in relation to the collective or draw the borders between the human and non-human, 'culture' or 'nature'. A world-view comprises the underlying accept-

ance of the *social landscape*, the classification of fellow creatures or the use of gender as a way of organizing social relations. It can underpin the acceptance and legitimation of power and hierarchy. Another important area of a world-view comprises basic *cosmological* and *moralistic* principles, thus defining which forces affect our lives, how we draw the line between sacred and profane, between right and wrong, good and bad, pure and impure. This basic structure conditions, also, our way of determining time and space, our outlook on past and future or the cultural organization of the life cycle. It also gives the territorial landscape cultural meaning and defines social space, in expressions of distance and nearness, for example.⁸

The culture building of the Victorian bourgeoisie

These are some of the theoretical and methodological considerations behind our research project, but what about the actual analysis?

At an early stage we realised that a study of contemporary Swedish life was not a very good starting point, because we lacked the distance necessary to examine the culture surrounding us. Both cultural boundaries and class boundaries seemed blurred, diffuse and hard to grasp.

Taking a historical perspective became for us an important tool for problematizing the present. We decided to start our analysis with the cultural world of the Victorian bourgeoisie, as it was manifested in the period around the turn of the century (c. 1880-1910), and to work our way up to the 1980's from this point of departure. In order not to take too much for granted even in this historical setting, we decided to use our ethnological knowledge of 19th century peasant culture as an analytical contrast to the life and views of the Victorians.

In our first study, „Den kultiverade människan“,⁹ we discussed the culture building of the Victorian bourgeoisie in contrast to some main themes in peasant culture. We started by comparing the very different attitudes towards time, discussing the development of a new linear and much more disciplined concept of timekeeping, as well as the strongly evolutionary notion of time and life-career typical of the rising bourgeoisie. We looked at the different uses of, and attitudes toward, nature in the two cultures and the gradual development of a romantic and nostalgic conception of the rural landscape, mainly experienced in terms of recreation by the urban bourgeoisie. The new polarisation of work and leisure, as well as the dichotomy between home and

⁸ Cf. Löfgren, Orvar: On the Study of World-Views. *Ethnologia Scandinavica*, 1981. In Press.

⁹ Frykman, Jonas & Löfgren, Orvar: *Den kultiverade människan*. Lund 1979. 240 pp. (Engl. title: *The Civilised Man*.).

public life was another theme we discussed, especially with references to the totally new attitudes toward family, marriage, and childhood which emerged among the Victorians. In connection with this we took a closer look at the different conceptions of sexuality found among the peasantry and the bourgeoisie, as well as the views of the body and the notions of health, cleanliness and purity.

We found this type of comparative analysis helpful in bringing hidden cultural premises out into the open. Victorian attitudes towards the life of peasants, their manners and morals, also told us much about the self-conception and the world-view of the bourgeoisie itself.

In Sweden the period around the turn of the last century can be called the classic era of bourgeois culture, but it is a culture with a long prehistory. Many researchers have traced the genesis of this culture and its gradual transformation over the centuries. In this, it is important to remember that bourgeois culture started as an antagonistic subculture, attacking the hegemony of the traditional aristocracy, only to become the victorious and dominant culture in the 19th century.

In viewing this process we can study the dynamics between class formation and culture building, as the rising bourgeoisie developed its own values and lifestyle in opposition to the old, feudal elite culture. For the ambitious new class culture became an important weapon in the struggle for social and economic leadership.

This is illustrated in the notion of individuality, a key concept in the new bourgeois world-view. It would be wrong to see this concept primarily as a reflection of the need to redefine social relations and to create an individual freedom of action in the market place. As a part of a new ideology, 'individualism' was also a liberating and revolutionary idea directed against the oppressive and petrified structure of feudal society.¹⁰

A historical perspective can thus illustrate how basic patterns of thought and values were constructed into the bourgeois world-view; how central notions of individuality, productivity, and the need for accumulation and investment in all spheres of life took shape. Through this one can trace how new definitions of morality, intimacy and emotion are developed and internalised.

¹⁰ Cf. the discussion in Abercrombie, *op. cit.* pp. 53 ff. and two Swedish studies of this development: Arne Melberg: *Realitet och utopi*. Stockholm 1978, and Ronny Ambjörnsson: *Familjeporträtt*. Stockholm 1978.

Of great importance is also the analysis of how a new definition of the individual is anchored in everyday social life in the works of Norbert Elias, *op. cit.* and Michel Foucault's study of social control: *Surveiller et punir*. Paris 1975.

In our study we have concentrated not on the genesis of this world-view, but mainly on how it was anchored in daily life and routines. Our aim is not to write the cultural history of a class or an epoch but rather to carry out an analysis of cultural processes. Let me illustrate this perspective by a few examples.

One does not have to work for long with the Victorian era in order to discover the central role played here by the notions of *self-control* and *self-discipline*.

These basic values permeated daily life and were transmitted through a number of cultural registers: the perception of the body and the suppression of sensuality, the strict drill of children's table manners, the struggle against the horrors of masturbation, the economy around time, money and emotions, the stress on moderation, correctness, and restraint in all areas from clothing to facial expressions, the fear and anxiety of the 'vulgar', the animalistic and the uncontrollable. In order to understand how effectively these cultural themes were internalized, one must look at all the everyday situations and the numerous means through which such codes were communicated.

Often such codes are hidden in trivialities, such as the sharing of a meal. The obsession with proper table manners and the etiquette of eating can become understandable when seen as an important discipline drill. 'Elbows in, chew slowly, converse politely, always be on time for meals', all this harping on how children should behave at the table is then not a lesson in eating but in mastering self-control.

Behind the bewildering multitude of rules of etiquette there exists a pattern. There is consistency in the ways one ought to dress, move the body, choose a topic of conversation, handle a fork or execute a pearly but controlled laughter.

Intimately connected with the importance of self-control was the need for Victorians to cover or hide themselves, their body, their thoughts and their inner self. Play acting thus became a necessary skill in everyday life. The art of self presentation and dissembling were taught to children from an early age: emotions had to be controlled and hidden behind a proper façade.

Control was also important in the management of sexuality, and just because open sexuality was so strongly censored and tabooed, the whole Victorian culture became oversexualized. Sexual hints and messages were read everywhere and the Victorians constantly had to watch their speech and looks and to bridle their fantasy. Sexuality was nowhere and yet everywhere.

Looking for basic structures as these in a culture makes for sound research economy, because the manifold expressions of a culture become manageable and understandable only when they are seen as parts of a system.

There are other ways of analysing the structure of the Victorian world-view. A fruitful approach is found in the study of phenomena with a strong symbolic meaning, which can be shown to contain condensed messages about a number of basic values. One such phenomenon is the notion of home, which came to symbolise many things. The Victorians found the word 'home' a good word to think with. To a large extent their lives were defined in terms of home and its opposite: all that which was non-home. Images of home and all subconcepts like homeliness, homesickness, and home-coming thus become an important field of study. We can talk of the notion of home as a *key symbol* in Victorian culture.¹¹ It is used as a metaphor in many situations.

Culture as a social weapon

At first glance, the conception of the world that existed within the Victorian bourgeoisie appears as a confusing mixture of rituals, taboos and rules, a culture full of oppositions. Behind this façade, however, there exists an inner logic and connection that forms a basic cultural structure. The boundaries that are drawn here between work and free time, between production and reproduction, reason and emotion, between masculinity and femininity or body and mind, are to a great extent consistent and logical when considered from the point of view of bourgeois assumptions and ambitions in turn-of-the-century Sweden.

At this stage the main enemy was no longer the old aristocracy. Now the cultural battle came to be waged mainly on another front, against the grey masses of peasants and workers. For the bourgeoisie and perhaps even more so for the petty bourgeoisie it was important to maintain cultural boundaries from the lower classes; at the same time, however, to be filled with an ambition to educate, civilize and cultivate these masses.

In order to understand precisely how one perceived this problem of boundary maintenance and cultural reformation, we have to look at another basic structure in bourgeois culture.

It has been pointed out that the dichotomy between 'Nature' and 'Culture' held a far more central position in the 19th century Victorian world-view than in most other cultures.¹² In our analysis of the Swedish bourgeoisie we found this polarity important in many contexts, for example, in the new

11 Cf. Sherry Orther: On Key Symbols. *American Anthropologist*, 1973:1338-1346.

12 See the discussion in Carol MacCormack & Marilyn Strathern (eds.): *Nature, Culture and Gender*. Cambridge 1980.

attitudes toward rural life and the recreational landscape, and in the definition of masculinity and femininity.¹³

Even more striking, however, is the use of this opposition in organizing the social landscape of class difference. Linked to the dichotomy of nature/culture is a marked evolutionary cognitive orientation. Victorians saw themselves on the top of the ladder of cultural development, looking down on other classes, peoples or eras that had not 'advanced' as far. Culture stood for civilization, for orderliness and refinement, while nature was associated with chaos, primitiveness, and lack of discipline.

The obsession with order was not only manifested in a need for self-discipline, cleanliness and moral purity, it was also expressed in the ways in which the Victorians organized their physical environment. In the home, boundaries were drawn between different activities and functions, between the world of children and adults, between family and servants, between male and female and between visitors and family. Doors, passages, and separate entrances guarded the different territories and functions of the house.

Eating, sleeping, playing, working or entertaining: all these activities had their own proper place and territories, and it was important that they should not be mixed.

In the organization of public life we see the same preoccupation with boundaries and orderliness. It is evident in the love for straight angles, in the geometrical arrangement of school desks, gardens, hospital beds, and factory machines. In all these seemingly trivial details we witness a constant battle against a lurking chaos, which often is represented by the outside world or the life of 'the others', the primitives, the undisciplined workers and the uncouth peasants. There is system to this line of thought in which other oppositions are linked to the basic polarities of nature/culture and chaos/order. A tentative presentation of this pattern could be as follows:

Nature	Culture
chaos	order
primitive	civilized
savage, animalistic	cultivated
wild	disciplined
uncontrolled	controlled
vulgar	refined
irrational	rational
feeling	intellect
physical	mental
body	mind
polluting, unclean	pure, clean
immoral	moral
mass-instinct	individualism
the lower classes	the higher classes

¹³ See Frykman & Löfgren, op. cit. pp. 53 ff, 83 ff and 145 ff.

This mental structure is to be found primarily on an unconscious level in Victorian culture. Yet it is expressed in many forms. It is evident in stereotypes about workers and working-class life, for example. We find it in school books, in cartoons and jokes, in memoirs and moral reform programs. There is also an element of fear or anxiety in some of these stereotypes, where workers are described as brutish, coarse, and loudtalking, as hedonistic creatures living for the day, seldom described as individuals but rather as an undisciplined mass.

In the social images of Victorian children the typical worker is often represented by the chimneysweep or the coal man: swarthy, swaggering, blackish figures. Such stereotypes can be viewed as an example of *symbolic inversion*, in which the bourgeoisie defined itself indirectly through a description of its opposite, its 'social other'. In this light stereotypes like these tell us more about the self-image of the bourgeoisie than about the realities of working-class culture.

The manner in which questions of class were linked to ideas about cultural development had consequences for the ways in which the Victorian bourgeoisie tried to bring programs of cultural reformation to other people.

Working-class life came to be defined by the bourgeoisie not as an *alternative* culture, but rather as a *lack of culture*. Working-class life was thus a defective way of life which had to be improved. Behind many reform programs of this era we find, often on a nonconscious level, the idea that the working class should be domesticated and disciplined. Here was a raw material that needed refining in order to be raised to a higher level of cultural development.

Cultural dominance and the problem of embourgeoisement

The concept of embourgeoisement has been a central one in ethnological discussions about the cultural confrontation between elite and folk culture, or between the life-styles of the bourgeoisie and the working class in 19th and 20th century settings. Yet this concept is problematic, to say the least. Accepting it uncritically can very easily lead to a one-sided and mechanical analysis, and to a simplistic view of how the bourgeoisie implanted its ideology and world-view into a defenseless or submissive working-class. Active cultural transmitters are then set against passive cultural receivers.

It seems more fruitful to study such cultural processes in terms of cultural confrontation and patterns of dominance and resistance. Above all it is im-

portant not to view it as a case of a static cultural *hegemony*, another much mistreated concept.

For Antonio Gramsci the idea of cultural hegemony was primarily a perspective on the strategies and tactics found in the battle between antagonistic cultures in the fight for cultural dominance. The attempt by one class to impose its own definition of normality and reality on another can be seen as a way in which one social group tries to transform a competing culture into a subordinate one.¹⁴

Such an attempt to create a new cultural order or hierarchy means not so much a policy of direct enforcement but rather a strategy for establishing a cultural and moral leadership: getting other classes to accept the new definitions of reality as inevitable and natural. In this way ideological expressions are transformed into an all-encompassing world-view, in which previous oppositions have become invisible or less articulated.

The concept of hegemony has, however, often been used in the oversimplified way that Gramsci warned against. Hegemony is not a condition under which ruling groups define or control a society's way of life or thought. It is not a question of a static monopoly over beliefs, but rather of a process, a cultural struggle with shifting battlegrounds. Those striving for hegemony are continually under attack and put to question. Raymond Williams has pointed out that it is better to talk about *hegemonic* rather than hegemony. The latter, i.e., a form of total cultural dominance, has never existed. Alternative groups and cultures are always present, just as there are always tensions within a dominant culture itself:

The dominant culture of a complex society is never a homegeneous structure. It is layered, reflecting different interests within the dominant class (e.g. religious ideas within a largely secular culture), as well as emergent elements in the present. Subordinate cultures will not always be in open conflict with it. They may, for long periods, coexist with it, negotiate the spaces and the gaps in it, make inroads into it, warrenning it from within . . .¹⁵

Personally, I find the concept of hegemony too burdened with notions of one-way control, and prefer to use the term cultural dominance.

¹⁴ For a recent discussion of Gramsci's ideas see Chantal Mouffe (ed.): *Gramsci and Marxist Theory*. London 1979, and Raymond Williams' analysis of the concept of hegemony in his book *Marxism and Literature*. Oxford 1977.

¹⁵ Williams, *op. cit.* p. 113.

The fact that attempts at cultural dominance are always met with resistance in the form of more or less articulated counter-cultures is important to remember. The relation between bourgeois culture and working-class culture as it appears at the beginning of the 20th century is thus less a question of cultural indoctrination than of cultural confrontation.

In our study of this process as it evolved during the period up to the Second World War, we have tried to use a twofold perspective. Firstly looking at the confrontation as it was seen from the standpoint of the bourgeoisie, and secondly from the view-point of the working class. It is this approach that I shall sketch in the following pages.

My discussion of class and cultures as a polarization of workers and bourgeoisie of course represents a rather grand simplification. This can perhaps be defended as a heuristic device rather than as reflecting an historical reality. Typical for the development of Swedish society during this century has been the emergence of a much more complex class structure and a less distinct relationship between class and culture when compared with the Victorian era.¹⁶

Culture transformed into human nature

In our discussion of how bourgeois culture became the dominant culture in late 19th century Sweden, we found that internalization of the new world-view occurred most rapidly in just those areas where it was unchallenged, areas which immediately were defined as unproblematic, apolitical and value-neutral. It was much more difficult for the bourgeoisie to transform the sexual and work morality of the working-class, for instance, for in these areas the competing value-systems stood face-to-face in a much more visible way.

In such areas, as Jonas Frykman has shown, the bourgeoisie succeeded more readily when it linked its new world-view to ideas about hygiene and health.¹⁷ In other words, by tying its world-view to a campaign for bettering the general 'quality of life', the bourgeoisie found its resistance lighter. In the same way, the new ideology around family life found easier going when it was linked to an idea of 'a good home' than when spread in direct morality campaigns.

¹⁶ Cf. Jonas Frykman's discussion of 'middle class culture' during the period c. 1920-1950 in a forthcoming report from our project: 'Clean and Rational', in *Ethnologia Scandinavica*, 1981 (in press).

¹⁷ See Frykman & Löfgren, op. cit. pp. 185 ff and Frykman, op. cit.

At this point one should reiterate that much of this type of cultural indoctrination was invisible, even for those who were the messengers and propagators. Many of the turn-of-the-century reformers saw themselves as carriers of progressive developments. They wanted to spread enlightenment, health, and knowledge, and were often unconscious of the moral overtones in the messages they addressed to the people through a variety of means: from child care instructions and philanthropic housing programs to idyllic oleographs and children's stories. To talk of a well-planned bourgeois conspiracy to pacify the working-class would mean to simplify the issue.

During this era the bourgeoisie did not weed out alternative cultures and the world-views but managed to make their own culture *the* culture, with an official standing in public life. In the next stages of the hegemonic process it is possible to observe how large segments of this culture were transformed into attributes of 'human nature': the dominant culture gradually was made invisible as the standard and normal way of life and thinking.

A central aspect in this process took the form of a *scientific ordering of daily life*. The Victorian world-view was to a great extent supported by notions of its *moral* superiority. It was presented as the 'good and proper life', and to act 'wrongly' was sinful or immoral. During the first decades of the 20th century, this type of argument was gradually replaced by an appeal to *science*: it became unsound, unhealthy, abnormal, or perhaps, impractical to act wrongly. The black-coated hegemony of pastors and jurists was replaced by the white-coated world of doctors, councillors, and scientists, as Christopher Lasch has noted.¹⁸

The change is very evident in the period between the two world wars. During that period the foundations of the Swedish Welfare State were laid as the Social Democrats came to power. It would be wrong to regard the dominant culture of the 1930's simply as a reflection of the old Victorian culture. New groups and new interests were active in building not only a new society but also a new culture. In this process we can see, however, that many of the stubborn structures continued to prevail.

In the changing class structure of the inter-war period the emerging new 'middle class' is a striking phenomenon. The growing numbers of academics, administrators, and technicians saw themselves as a new force in society, partly in opposition to the traditional bourgeoisie. They wanted to build a modern and rational society without the ballast of tradition.

A closer look at their self-image and world-view shows, however, that it contains much of the basic structures found in Victorian thought and ideals, albeit in a reworked form.

18 See Christopher Lasch: *Haven in a Heartless World. The Family Besieged*. New York 1977.

This is evident in their attitude towards the working-class. The building of a Welfare State meant securing a more egalitarian distribution of resources, but also a stronger state interest in the lives of individuals. The latter interest often carried a marked, but rarely conscious note of paternalism. The new intellectuals felt they knew best and saw themselves as representing *normality*, rather than a certain cultural viewpoint. This new normality was defined by science, rather than by religion or moral.

We can observe how, step by step, science pushed its way in as an organising and disciplinary force in everyday life of the 1930's. It is a time when society's grip on the individual is greatly strengthened by visions of a classless society populated by rational and responsible citizens. Government authorities penetrated the homes with surveys and pamphlets, warnings and good advice to a much greater extent than before. In studying this process it is important to pay closer attention to what the French social philosopher Michel Foucault has called the 'little powers' of everyday life: the relations between doctor and patient, teacher and student, between parent and child, social worker and client.

These new scientifically based arguments permeated the workers' lives from the shop-floor to their children's school instruction, child-birth, household work, sex-life, leisure activity, and so on. Much of the previous forms of cultural competence were now lifted from the common individual and placed into the waiting arms of specialists and experts, with the consequence that social knowledge was re-distributed and fragmented. Through this attempt at the 'scientific' reorganization of daily-life activities a new phase in the cultural dominance was reached. What had earlier been moral preaching now became an appeal to unquestionable fact and self-evidence. As a consequence, we no longer have a situation where one class wants to force its definition of reality onto another, but a situation where a particular world-view is raised above class-conflict and passed off as unproblematic and based upon human nature.

One can find this type of message very clearly in advertisements and articles in the weekly press, in the new ideal of the home and in propaganda for health and sport. It is a message that carries with it an enormous optimism about the future and an absence of a sense of history; in the coming rational world based on science and technology the best look is forward and not behind.

There is a tendency then to define some traits in working-class culture not as alternative life-styles, but as deviances from normality, behind which the dominant culture is hidden.

Cultural resistance and working-class life

In such an analysis of how new forms of cultural dominance evolve and are made invisible there are several pit-falls. There exist types of invisibility which may trap us into overestimating the hegemonic order of the dominant culture. The fact that this official culture dominates both the media and public life tends to make the subordinate and alternative cultures less visible. They lack the formal and institutionalised means of expression that the dominant culture has. They become muted and less articulated.

It is not so simple as that the bourgeois cultural dominance led to the uprooting of other cultural patterns, for example those of the working class. What we see as embourgeoisement in working-class copying of the new cultural patterns and life-styles can be epiphenomenal.¹⁹ We must be careful not to pursue our cultural analysis on the premises or through the lenses of bourgeois culture. This may happen if we only observe the visible and the easily documented flood of influences from the mass-media and other channels and, at the same time, interpret the lack of cultural resistance within the working-class as a sign of cultural poverty.

If we change perspectives and look at the culture-building of the working-class from within and through its own cultural categories the whole picture of embourgeoisement tends to change.

First of all, it is important to remember that the Swedish working class of the early 20th century was not a homogeneous class. There existed important socio-economic and cultural differences. Compared with bourgeois culture, working-class culture was much more locally based. There were marked regional as well as occupational variations. The typical worker of this period (c. 1900-1930) was not a factory hand or a skilled artisan. The great majority was still to be found in rural settings, as agricultural hands, navvies, lumber-jacks, and casual labourers. In the urban settings perhaps the largest group of workers was made up by the thousands of girls in domestic service.

Not only did these groups have varying cultural backgrounds, their structural position in productive life and their material experiences were very different.

In the culture building of the working class we can thus see a number of dividing factors, which tended to produce subcultural variations. There were also uniting forces, however.

19 Cf. the discussion in Hermann Bausinger: *Verbürgerlichung*, in: G. Wiegmann (ed.): *Kultureller Wandel im 19. Jahrhundert*. Göttingen 1973.

The emerging working class of the late 19th century had to develop its own social institutions and safe-guards, as they often were denied access to the official life. This development of a counter-culture included not only labour unions and voluntary associations but also a whole undergrowth of everyday cooperation. In the working class neighbourhood and at the work place, a network of mutual aid and informal social groups emerged.

In this culture building many elements were borrowed from bourgeois culture, but they were usually integrated into new patterns, given new meanings and functions. It is very important not to mistake this similarity in form for a similarity in content. What we find here is a selective borrowing and transformation, not a simple process of embourgeoisement.

On the other hand we must be careful not to create a myth of a self-sufficient, 'pure' working-class culture in this pioneer era of the early 20th century. We must not view changes in working-class culture simply as the transformation of a strong, self-sufficient life-style into a disintegrated and commercialized mass-culture. If we do this we run the risk of repeating the type of devolutionary premise found in the laments for the 'real' traditional peasant culture of a golden past, in which change is seen only as disintegration and deformation.²⁰

At no stage can we talk of a 'pure' working-class culture. Such a counter-culture, then, must be discussed both in terms of dependance and resistance to the dominant culture.

Conclusions

I have argued in favour of a cultural analysis in which the focus is on the processes which produce, reproduce, and change culture in society. I have used the term culture-building as a label for this study of the dynamics of culture. Culture-building is an ongoing process found in all social groups, or as the American sociologist Everett Hughes has put it:

„Wherever some group of people have a bit of common life with a modicum of isolation from other people, a common corner in society, common problems and perhaps a couple of common enemies, there culture grows.“²¹

²⁰ See Alan Dundes' discussion of the devolutionary premise in folklore analysis in Dundes (ed.): *The Study of Folklore*. Englewood Cliffs, 1965, and the search for a golden past in earlier studies of Scandinavian peasant culture, cf. Orvar Löfgren: *Historical perspectives on Scandinavian peasants*. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 1980: 187-314.

²¹ E. Hughes: *Students' Culture and Perspectives*. Lawrence 1961, p. 28. Quoted after Ulf Hannerz: *Exploring the City. Inquiries Toward an Urban Anthropology*. New York 1980.

Groups and classes create their own culture both in dependence on and in opposition to the others. Any discussion of hegemony or emporgeoisement must therefore include an analysis of both working class and bourgeois culture, and of the complicated dialectic between them.

In the process of culture-building we can observe several stages. First, an initial one of innovation and the borrowing of cultural forms, followed by a stage of institutionalization in which more disparate elements are homogenized and integrated. After this may follow a development towards further elaboration and stylization of cultural forms, with the condensation of messages in the form of key symbols. Sometimes this formalisation and ritualisation can lead to petrification: cultural forms survive but are slowly drained of their original meaning.

By using the term culture-building I have stressed the creative element in the way people handle their culture. The concept must not, however, lead to images of a conscious process in which blue-prints are drawn up and construction platforms nailed together. Culture-building is usually a non-conscious affair. People seldom view themselves as culture-builders in their everyday task of integrating new experiences or giving new meaning to old experiences. The structure and direction of this task is easier to see in retrospect by the outsider, the researcher, than by the participants themselves.

By using the concept of cultural dominance I have focused on the continuous cultural struggle which always exists in pluralistic societies, where different social groups or classes try to launch their cultural definition of reality as the superior or desirable one. .

In this process it is important not to adopt a oneway perspective in which confrontation is studied in terms of an active dominant culture and passive, subordinate ones. My examples from the 20th century Sweden have underlined this. Resistance to messages from the ,official' culture and commercial mass-culture is often more effective than one might think. Such cultural opposition is, however, often found in places which may be overlooked or among groups where one would not expect to find it. Again, superficial similarities in life-styles may hide more basic differences in values and outlook. This is at least our experience from the study of cultural change in modern Sweden.

A dialectic approach also means that such change cannot be reduced to a simple ,bourgeois conspiracy'. The dominant culture is always under attack and has to develop through compromises and adaptation to changed social and economic circumstances. In Sweden the rapid transformation of society has produced changes affecting all classes. An anatomy of culture must then

include a constant search for both hidden messages and muted meanings. We must study the invisibility both of the dominant, 'normal' culture and of the alternative cultures which have been pushed aside out of the public spotlight. The ethnological perspective with its emphasis on everyday culture and the use of interviews as well as unorthodox historical sources is well suited for this search, both by making the familiar unfamiliar and the invisible visible. Such can be seen, for example, in the study of women's culture and working-class life.

There are several research strategies for such studies. We must continually develop new perspectives that can surprise or problematize the trivialities of everyday life. In my discussion I have shown the necessity of finding breaking points in which cultural patterns can be elucidated. These can be found in the confrontation between different life-styles and ideals, and in deviance from accepted norms. In this way the study of the untypical may throw better light on the typical. A sudden conflict, a social drama, the experience of an outsider in a group may be of great analytical importance in catching the hidden premises of normality. In the same manner the analysis of symbolic inversion may help us use stereotypes about others as reflections of self-images.

Another useful theme to problematize is the internalization of culture. The process of how culture is learned and anchored in the unconscious is one that continues throughout the entire life of an individual.

Such studies must also focus on the silent communication which occurs between the individual and his or her surroundings. Our milieu is filled with cultural messages which perhaps influence us even more effectively than the spoken word, because the messages are always there and seldom become the object of conscious reflection. The scenery surrounding us becomes an important lesson in how life is organized. The walls speak to the factory worker, to the school child, and to the patient in hospital.

As ethnologists we must devote a lot of attention to this dialogue between our surroundings and ourselves: how we use the material objects around us and what they do to us. The ways in which a table is laid, a tool constructed or a room furnished hold important cultural meanings that need to be unearthed and articulated.

Finally, perhaps the most important task in an anatomy of culture is the analytical switching between different levels of culture. How is the conscious, everyday culture related to the unconscious cognitive patterns and values? How are material experiences related to world-views and outlooks? How can individuals be seen as both bearers and creators of culture?