

KEYWORDS

*A Vocabulary of Culture
and Society*

Raymond Williams

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to authority it has of course been repeatedly challenged, and **critic** in the most common form of this specialized sense – as a reviewer of plays, films, books and so on – has acquired an understandable derogatory sense. But this cannot be resolved by distinctions of status between **critic** and *reviewer*. What is at issue is not only the association between **criticism** and fault-finding but the more basic association between **criticism** and judgment as apparently general and natural processes. As a term for the social or professional generalization of the processes of reception of any but especially the more formal kinds of COMMUNICATION (q.v.), **criticism** is ideological not only in the sense that it assumes the position of the *consumer* but also in the sense that it masks this position by a succession of abstractions of its real terms of response (as *judgment, taste, cultivation, discrimination, sensibility; disinterested, qualified, rigorous* and so on). This then actively prevents that understanding of response which does not assume the habit (or right or duty) of judgment. The continuing sense of **criticism** as fault-finding is the most useful linguistic influence against the confidence of this habit, but there are also signs, in the occasional rejection of **criticism** as a definition of conscious response, of a more significant rejection of the habit itself. The point would then be, not to find some other term to replace it, while continuing the same kind of activity, but to get rid of the habit, which depends, fundamentally, on the abstraction of response from its real situation and circumstances: the elevation to judgment, and to an apparently general process, when what always needs to be understood is the specificity of the response, which is not a judgment but a practice, in active and complex relations with the situation and conditions of the practice, and, necessarily, with all other practices.

See AESTHETIC, CONSUMER, SENSIBILITY, TASTE

CULTURE

Culture is one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language. This is so partly because of its intricate historical development, in several European languages, but mainly because it has now come to be used for important concepts in

several distinct intellectual disciplines and in several distinct and incompatible systems of thought.

The fw is *cultura*, L, from rw *colere*, L. *Colere* had a range of meanings: inhabit, cultivate, protect, honour with worship. Some of these meanings eventually separated, though still with occasional overlapping, in the derived nouns. Thus 'inhabit' developed through *colonus*, L to *colony*. 'Honour with worship' developed through *cultus*, L to *cult*. *Cultura* took on the main meaning of cultivation or tending, though with subsidiary medieval meanings of honour and worship (cf. in English **culture** as 'worship' in Caxton (1483)). The French forms of *cultura* were *couture*, oF, which has since developed its own specialized meaning, and later *culture*, which by eC15 had passed into English. The primary meaning was then in husbandry, the tending of natural growth.

Culture in all its early uses was a noun of process: the tending of something, basically crops or animals. The subsidiary *coulter* – ploughshare, had travelled by a different linguistic route, from *culter*, L – ploughshare, *culter*, oE, to the variant English spellings *culter, colter, coulter* and as late as eC17 **culture** (Webster, *Duchess of Malfi*, III, ii: 'hot burning cultures'). This provided a further basis for the important next stage of meaning, by metaphor. From eC16 the tending of natural growth was extended to a process of human development, and this, alongside the original meaning in husbandry, was the main sense until lC18 and eC19. Thus More: 'to the culture and profit of their minds'; Bacon: 'the culture and manurance of minds' (1605); Hobbes: 'a culture of their minds' (1651); Johnson: 'she neglected the culture of her understanding' (1759). At various points in this development two crucial changes occurred: first, a degree of habituation to the metaphor, which made the sense of human tending direct; second, an extension of particular processes to a general process, which the word could abstractly carry. It is of course from the latter development that the independent noun **culture** began its complicated modern history, but the process of change is so intricate, and the latencies of meaning are at times so close, that it is not possible to give any definite date. **Culture** as an independent noun, an abstract process or the product of such a process, is not important before lC18 and is not common before mC19. But the early stages of this development were not sudden. There is an interesting use in Milton, in the second (revised) edition of *The Readie and Easie Way to Establish a Free Common-*

wealth (1660): 'spread much more Knowledge and Civility, yea, Religion, through all parts of the Land, by communicating the natural heat of Government and Culture more distributively to all extreme parts, which now lie num and neglected.' Here the metaphorical sense ('natural heat') still appears to be present, and *civility* (cf. CIVILIZATION) is still written where in C19 we would normally expect *culture*. Yet we can also read 'government and culture' in a quite modern sense. Milton, from the tenor of his whole argument, is writing about a general social process, and this is a definite stage of development. In C18 England this general process acquired definite class associations though *cultivation* and *cultivated* were more commonly used for this. But there is a letter of 1730 (Bishop of Killala, to Mrs Clayton; cit Plumb, *England in the Eighteenth Century*) which has this clear sense: 'it has not been customary for persons of either birth or culture to breed up their children to the Church'. Akenside (*Pleasures of Imagination*, 1744) wrote: '. . . nor purple state nor culture can bestow'. Wordsworth wrote 'where grace of culture hath been utterly unknown' (1805), and Jane Austen (*Emma*, 1816) 'every advantage of discipline and culture'.

It is thus clear that *culture* was developing in English towards some of its modern senses before the decisive effects of a new social and intellectual movement. But to follow the development through this movement, in IC18 and eC19, we have to look also at developments in other languages and especially in German.

In French, until C18, *culture* was always accompanied by a grammatical form indicating the matter being cultivated, as in the English usage already noted. Its occasional use as an independent noun dates from mC18, rather later than similar occasional uses in English. The independent noun *civilization* also emerged in mC18; its relationship to *culture* has since been very complicated (cf. CIVILIZATION and discussion below). There was at this point an important development in German: the word was borrowed from French, spelled first (IC18) *Cultur* and from IC19 *Kultur*. Its main use was still as a synonym for *civilization*: first in the abstract sense of a general process of becoming 'civilized' or 'cultivated'; second, in the sense which had already been established for *civilization* by the historians of the Enlightenment, in the popular C18 form of the universal histories, as a description of the secular process of human development. There was then a decisive change of use in Herder.

In his unfinished *Ideas on the Philosophy of the History of Mankind* (1784–91) he wrote of *Cultur*: 'nothing is more indeterminate than this word, and nothing more deceptive than its application to all nations and periods'. He attacked the assumption of the universal histories that 'civilization' or 'culture' – the historical self-development of humanity – was what we would now call a unilinear process, leading to the high and dominant point of C18 European culture. Indeed he attacked what he called European subjugation and domination of the four quarters of the globe, and wrote:

Men of all the quarters of the globe, who have perished over the ages, you have not lived solely to manure the earth with your ashes, so that at the end of time your posterity should be made happy by European culture. The very thought of a superior European culture is a blatant insult to the majesty of Nature.

It is then necessary, he argued, in a decisive innovation, to speak of 'cultures' in the plural: the specific and variable cultures of different nations and periods, but also the specific and variable cultures of social and economic groups within a nation. This sense, which has become common in C20 anthropology and sociology, and by extension in general use, remained comparatively isolated, however, in all European languages until at earliest mC19 and was not fully established until eC20.

What mainly happened in eC19, under the influence of Herder and many other writers of the Romantic movement, in Germany, England and France, was a social and historical application of an alternative idea of human development: alternative, that is, to the ideas now centred on 'civilization' and 'progress'. This application was exceptionally complicated. It was used to emphasize national and traditional cultures, including the new concept of *folk-culture*. It was used to attack what was seen as the 'MECHANICAL' (q.v.) character of the new civilization then emerging: both for its abstract rationalism and for the 'inhumanity' of current industrial development. It was used to distinguish between 'human' and 'material' development. Politically, as so often in this period, it veered between radicalism and reaction and very often, in the confusion of major social change, fused elements of both. (It should also be noted, though it adds to the real complication, that the same kind of distinction, especially between 'material' and 'spiritual' development, was

made by von Humboldt and others, until as late as 1900, with a reversal of the terms, **culture** being material and *civilization* spiritual. In general, however, the opposite distinction was dominant.)

The complexity of the modern development of the word, and of its modern usage, can then be appreciated. We can easily distinguish the sense which depends on a literal continuity of physical process as now in 'sugar-beet culture' or, in the specialized physical application in bacteriology since the 1880s, 'germ culture'. But once we go beyond the physical reference, we have to recognize three broad active categories of usage. The sources of two of these we have already discussed: (i) the independent and abstract noun which describes a general process of intellectual, spiritual and aesthetic development, from C18; (ii) the independent noun, whether used generally or specifically, which indicates a particular way of life, whether of a people, a period or a group, from Herder and C19. But we have also to recognize (iii) the independent and abstract noun which describes the works and practices of intellectual and especially artistic activity. This seems often now the most widespread use: **culture** is music, literature, painting and sculpture, theatre and film. A **Ministry of Culture** refers to these specific activities, sometimes with the addition of philosophy, scholarship, history. This use, (iii), is in fact relatively late. It is difficult to date precisely because it is in origin an applied form of sense (i): the idea of a general process of intellectual, spiritual and aesthetic development was applied and effectively transferred to the works and practices which represent and sustain it. In English (i) and (iii) are still close; at times, for internal reasons, they are indistinguishable as in Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy* (1867); while sense (ii) was decisively introduced into English by Tylor, *Primitive Culture* (1870). The decisive development of sense (iii) in English was in IC19 and eC20.

Faced by this complex and still active history of the word, it is easy to react by selecting one 'true' or 'proper' or 'scientific' sense and dismissing other senses as loose or confused. There is evidence of this reaction even in the excellent study by Kroeber and Kluckhohn, *Culture: A Critical Review of Concepts and Definitions*, where usage in North American anthropology is in effect taken as a norm. It is clear that, within a discipline, conceptual usage has to be clarified. But in general it is the range and overlap of meanings that is significant. The complex of senses indicates a complex argument about the relations between general human

development and a particular way of life, and between both and the works and practices of art and intelligence. Within this complex argument there are fundamentally opposed as well as effectively overlapping positions; there are also, understandably, many unresolved questions and confused answers. But these arguments and questions cannot be resolved by reducing the complexity of actual usage. This point is relevant also to uses of forms of the word in languages other than English, where there is considerable variation. Even within English, 'social anthropology' is normally used in Britain where 'cultural anthropology' would be used in North America. The anthropological use is common in the German, Scandinavian and Slavonic language groups, but it is distinctly subordinate to the senses of art and learning, or of a general process of human development, in Italian and French. Between languages as within a language, the range and complexity of sense and reference indicate both difference of intellectual position and some blurring or overlapping. These variations, of whatever kind, necessarily involve alternative views of the activities, relationships and processes which this complex word indicates. The complexity, that is to say, is not finally in the word but in the problems which its variations of use significantly indicate.

It is necessary to look also at some associated and derived words. **Cultivation** and **cultivated** went through the same metaphorical extension from a physical to a social or educational sense in C17, and were especially significant words in C18. Coleridge, making a classical eC19 distinction between civilization and culture, wrote (1830): 'the permanent distinction, and occasional contrast, between cultivation and civilization'. The noun in this sense has effectively disappeared but the adjective is still quite common, especially in relation to manners and tastes. The important adjective **cultural** appears to date from the 1870s; it became common by the 1890s. The word is only available, in its modern sense, when the independent noun, in the artistic and intellectual or anthropological senses, has become familiar. Hostility to the word **culture** in English appears to date from the controversy around Arnold's views. It gathered force in IC19 and eC20, in association with a comparable hostility to *aesthete* and **AESTHETIC** (q.v.). Its association with class distinction produced the mime-word *culchah*. There was also an area of hostility associated with anti-German feeling, during and after the 1914-18 War, in relation to propaganda about *Kultur*. The central area of hostility

has lasted, and one element of it has been emphasized by the recent American phrase **culture-vulture**. It is significant that virtually all the hostility (with the sole exception of the temporary anti-German association) has been connected with uses involving claims to superior knowledge (cf. the noun **INTELLECTUAL**), refinement (*culchah*) and distinctions between 'high' art (**culture**) and popular art and entertainment. It thus records a real social history and a very difficult and confused phase of social and cultural development. It is interesting that the steadily extending social and anthropological use of **culture** and **cultural** and such formations as **sub-culture** (the culture of a distinguishable smaller group) has, except in certain areas (notably popular entertainment), either by-passed or effectively diminished the hostility and its associated unease and embarrassment.

See AESTHETIC, ART, CIVILIZATION, HUMANITY, SCIENCE

D

DEMOCRACY

Democracy is a very old word but its meanings have always been complex. It came into English in C16, from fw *démocratie*, F, *democratia*, mL – a translation of *demokratia*, Gk, from rw *demos* – people, *kratos* – rule. It was defined by Elyot, with specific reference to the Greek instance, in 1531: 'an other publique weal was amonge the Atheniensis, where equalitie was of astate among the people . . . This maner of gouernaunce was called in greke *Democratia*, in latine, *Popularis potentia*, in englissh the rule of the comminaltie.' It is at once evident from Greek uses that everything depends on the senses given to *people* and to *rule*. Ascribed and doubtful early examples range from obeying 'no master but the law' (? Solon) to 'of the people, by the people, for the people' (? Cleon). More certain examples

compare 'the insolence of a despot' with 'the insolence of the unbridled commonalty' (cit. Herodotus) or define a government as democracy 'because its administration is in the hands, not of the few, but of the many'; also, 'all that is opposed to despotic power, has the name of democracy' (cit. Thucydides). Aristotle (*Politics*, IV, 4) wrote: 'a democracy is a state where the freemen and the poor, being in the majority, are invested with the power of the state'. Yet much depends here on what is meant by 'invested with power': whether it is ultimate sovereignty or, at the other extreme, practical and unshared rule. Plato made Socrates say (in *Republic*, VIII, 10) that 'democracy comes into being after the poor have conquered their opponents, slaughtering some and banishing some, while to the remainder they give an equal share of freedom and power'.

This range of uses, near the roots of the term, makes any simple derivation impossible. It can, however, be said at once that several of these uses – and especially those which indicate a form of popular class rule – are at some distance from any orthodox modern 'Western' definition of **democracy**. Indeed the emergence of that orthodox definition, which has its own uncertainties, is what needs to be traced. 'Democracy' is now often traced back to medieval precedents and given a Greek authority. But the fact is that, with only occasional exceptions, **democracy**, in the records that we have, was until C19 a strongly unfavourable term, and it is only since IC19 and eC20 that a majority of political parties and tendencies have united in declaring their belief in it. This is the most striking historical fact.

Aquinas defined **democracy** as popular power, where the ordinary people, by force of numbers, governed – oppressed – the rich; the whole people acting like a tyrant. This strong class sense remained the predominant meaning until IC18 and eC19, and was still active in mC19 argument. Thus: 'Democracie, when the multitude have government', Fleming (1576) (for the class sense of *multitude* see **MASSES**); 'democratie, where free and poore men being the greater number, are lords of the estate' (1586); 'democracy . . . nothing else than the power of the multitude', Filmer, *Patriarcha* (1680). To this definition of the *people* as the *multitude* there was added a common sense of the consequent type of *rule*: a **democracy** was a state in which all had the right to rule and did actually rule; it was even contrasted (e.g. by Spinoza) with a state in which there was rule by repre-