

What pop culture does for society

By JESSE FITTS
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In this article, I shall try to define what "popular culture" is, show some of its functions in our society, and point to some of the factors that influence its capacity to fulfill these functions.

These factors I shall call "the Ceremonial Valence" and "the Organizational Authority."

The great French sociologist Durkheim had a theory according to which the strength of an idea, as an influence upon our behavior, was proportional to the number of people whom we knew shared that idea.

And the way people shared that idea was through a special type of symbol—an emblem, a flag—which stood for both the idea and the fact that it was widely shared.

When we saw that flag, we knew that other people shared the idea the flag stood for, and this very experience would reinforce our commitment to the idea, especially if the flag was the occasion for common action, i.e., a ceremony, like saluting the flag. This phenomenon is the "Ceremonial Valence" of communication.

OUR DEFINITION of popular culture follows from this theory: It is the sum of the information and entertainment that is aimed either at the whole population or to large blocks of it—social class groups, ethnic groups, occupational groups, political groups. This definition encompasses the overt function of popular culture, which is the information and the relaxation of the citizenry. The more invisible function is to maintain a prideful identification to our sub-groups (class, ethnicity, education, etc.), but also to reintegrate us in our devotion to the total society, the country.

This integrative function is all the more necessary that our society has become more diverse and its division of labor more complicated.

Popular culture recreates consensus where the division of labor and increasing specialization might separate us, and make the sharing of our life experience more difficult.

For many couples, separated by sex roles and job experience, the sharing of popular culture is the major opportunity—besides the raising of children—for pleasant interaction and agreement.

THE DIVISION of popular culture

between information and entertainment is somewhat arbitrary, because in popular culture, news is largely a form of entertainment, and entertainment is a form of news.

In the first place, the tales of woe happening to others draw attention to our comparative luck and safety. They often degrade those who are our social superiors.

They draw attention to the stupidities and sins of our enemies.

In the second place, entertainment tells us what styles are "in," even what politics and morals are "in."

And this capacity to guide us is derived from the Ceremonial Valence mentioned above: The fact that we know that millions of people are watching what we are watching.

ANOTHER FACTOR in the persuasiveness of popular culture is "Organizational Authority." There are two basic sources of organizational authority.

The first is to speak in the name of a particular group or, even better, to speak in the name of the whole nation. The other is to be able to assert a connection to the sacred.

Sometimes the claim to represent the nation, or its glorious past, is

equivalent to the claim of a connection to the sacred.

When we are children, an example of organizational authority is the peer group. Examples of the sacred are first and foremost our parents, our teachers.

For adults, sources of the sacred are (were?) the president of the United States, the Supreme Court, the Great Academies speaking from their knowledge of Advanced Science, the High Clergy, the Famous Artists.

ORGANIZATIONS will claim to represent us because they are devoted to our welfare. Such are the agencies of government, the churches, the medical profession, the mass media.

The national media will claim higher representativeness than the local media. To tell us what we think, they will use national surveys.

Critics will tell us what shows are compatible with good taste and our cultural traditions.

I question to students: Between the "Ceremonial Valence" and the "Organizational Authority" of popular culture, how do we make up our own mind? For that matter, is our own mind still left to us?

Hunting time near; train the kids

By LEM MESESE
Outdoors writer

Suddenly it's almost fall and hunting season.

The Oakland County Sportsmen's Club will hold its annual young hunter safety clinic this Sunday, Sept. 10.

President Ron Soncraine said registration will begin at 8 a.m. and training will run from 8:15 a.m. to 4 p.m.

The course is required for all forms of hunting within Michigan. Every youngster aged 12-16 who wishes to purchase a license for the first time must complete successfully a hunter safety course.

Clinic co-chairmen Soncraine and John Pritchett said most sessions will be held outdoors, rain or shine. So dress of the day should be geared to the weather.

Sandwiches, soft drinks and snacks will be available for those who wish to purchase them. Picnic tables are available for those who pack their lunches.

The clinic is on the sportsmen's club grounds at 4770 Waterford Road, just



Outdoors

north of US-10, in Waterford Township. Registration fee is \$1.

HUNTERS WHO wish to participate in put-take pheasant hunting may obtain the special permits from local Michigan license agents and DNR field offices.

In addition to the special permit, hunters will need a current small game license (or all-encompassing sportsman's license) and a \$1 public access stamp.

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