Adversarialism as a Cultural Hegemony
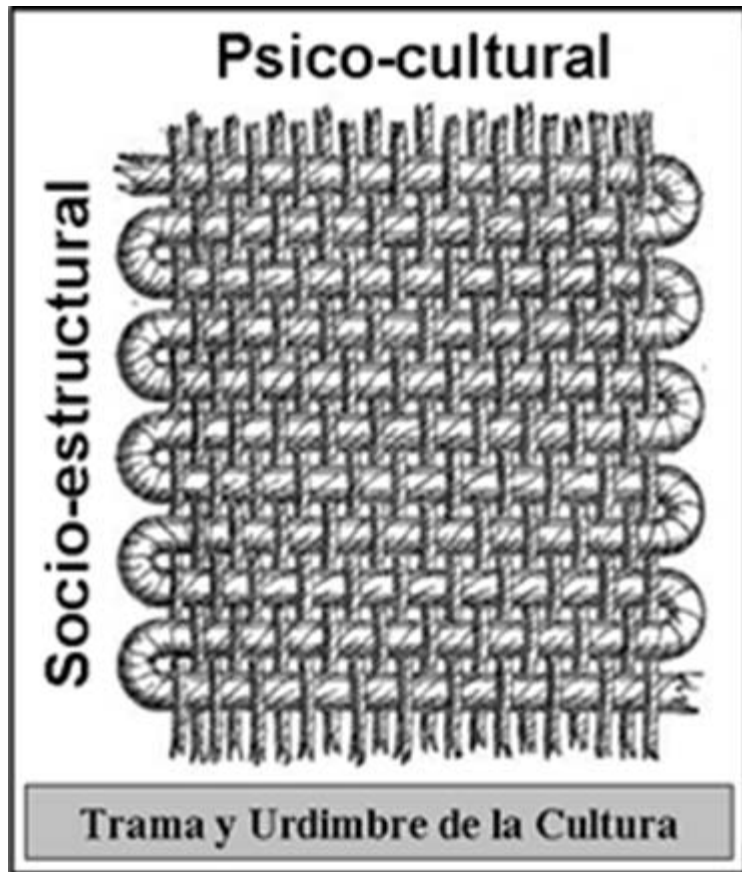
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Naturalization of Culture

- Must the world be the way it is? ('ser' versus 'estar')

- Why does my culture seem natural to me?

- Historical amnesia & boiled frogs

- A self-fulfilling prophesy

- The pathology of normalcy

- Denaturalizing our culture.

The two Dimensions

Psico-cultural

Socio-estructural

Trama y Urdimbre de la Cultura

□ <u>Psycho-cultural</u>: The structure of human conscious: mental models, assumptions, theories, beliefs, values, attitudes, symbolism, representation, worldviews, neurosis, psychopathologies, etc.

□ <u>Socio-structural</u>: Normative practices that regulate individual behavior, institutions that structure collective life, economic, political and judicial systems, hierarchies of power and authority, production and distribution of resources, division of labor.
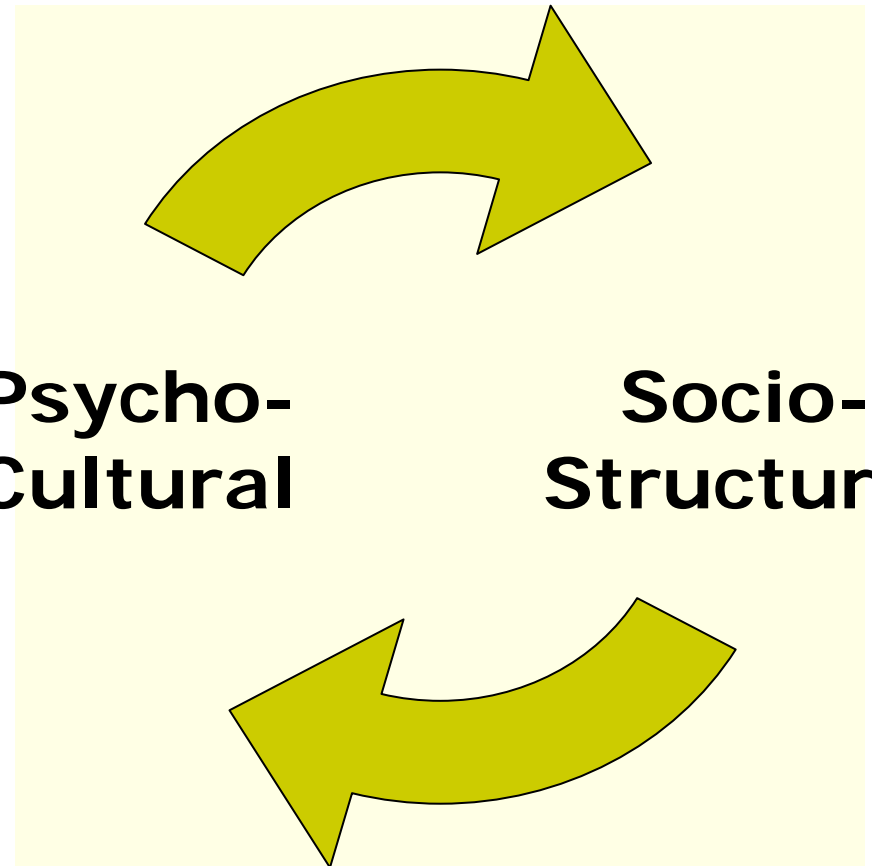
The two Dimensions (cont.)

- Reinforce each other in a continual feedback loop;

- Constitute 'the world', but as a cultural construct that must be reproduced in order to continue;

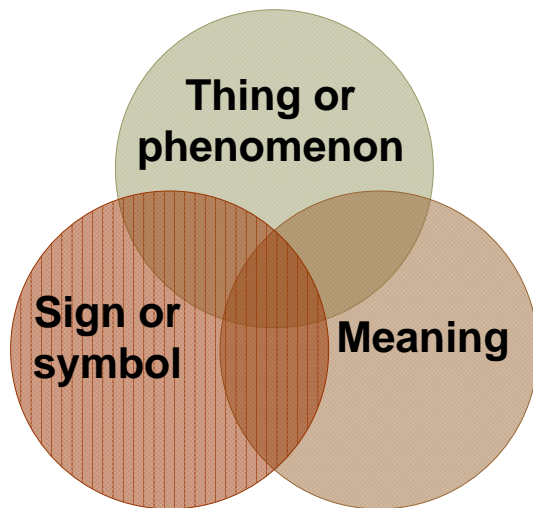- Permeable and moldable, can be changed, and actually do change continually.

Psycho-Cultural

Socio-Structural

Giving the world meaning

Thing or phenomenon

Sign or symbol

Meaning

- ☐ Meaning: a basic human need
- ☐ 'Representation' assigns and conveys meaning
- ☐ The representational triad:
  - ■ <u>Referents</u>: objects, phenomena, events, facts;
  - ■ <u>Signifiers</u>: signs or symbols to refer to events and facts;
  - ■ <u>Meanings</u>: interpretations and feelings relating to the other two.

"He controls the world who controls the representation of the world."

For example…

1) <u>Referent</u>: A man enters his neighbor's house and takes away his radio.

2) <u>Signifier</u>: Culture A – 'stealing', Culture B – 'borrowing', Culture C – 'sharing'.

3) <u>Meaning</u>: Culture A – conflict and resentments, Culture B – debt and reciprocity, Culture C – mutual appreciation and friendship.

Q: Are these differences due to genetic diversity, or to cultural diversity?

Defining 'discourse'

"Discourses are widely shared systems of representation which provide culturally and historically specific ways of thinking about, talking about and acting in relation to an entire class of phenomena."

(Michael Karlberg –

Beyond the Culture of Contest)

In other words, discourse…

- ☐ Does not just refer to speeches and words.

- ☐ Also includes actions: normative practices or institutions, *and their meanings*.

- ☐ Also includes how people think, *especially in contrast to what they say and do*.

- ☐ Example: the 'discourse on development' includes how we *think about, talk about and practice* development.

Discursive Hierarchy

Level: **Example:**

Discursive formations ⟹ Culture of adversarialism

Whole discourses ⟹ Social science, dystopian art

Discursive constructs ⟹ "A war of all against all"

Cultural codes ⟹ "Human nature"

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Whole discourses

- Dictate cannons of knowledge: what can/cannot be said and thought; accepted 'truths'

- Grant authority to produce this knowledge: 'experts' vs. 'fools'

- Define the 'subjects': who can/cannot be actors or receivers of the discourse.

- Make certain subjects the personifications of the discourse (for example: dominant / dominated)

- Generate social structures that organize and regulate group practices in keeping with their inner logic.

Incarnation of Adversarialism

Capitalist system ⇒ Greed

Party politics ⇒ Power struggle

Electoral system ⇒ Ambition

Political movements ⇒ Conflict

Legal system ⇒ Litigation

Defense system ⇒ Fear

Mass media ⇒ Fighting

Educational system ⇒ Competition

Games and sports ⇒ Contests

Religious sectarianism ⇒ Rivalry

Medicine & agriculture ⇒ Invasion

Social relations ⇒ Disputes


Adversarialism is a cancer to the body politic.

Today's social science

How the myth developed

- Brutality, inhumanity of conquest ⟹ Justify genocide of non-Europeans

- Inequitable exploitation by colonization ⟹ Legitimize European domination / institutions

- Slave trade and employment ⟹ Legitimize slavery as a practice and institution

- Rise of capitalism as the economic system ⟹ Naturalize capitalism as an inevitable system

- Two world wars centered around Europe ⟹ Explain how European 'superiority' led to this

- USA (1945–): Worldwide economic imperialism ⟹ Legitimize excesses of deregulated free market

What is hegemony?

Antonio Gramsci
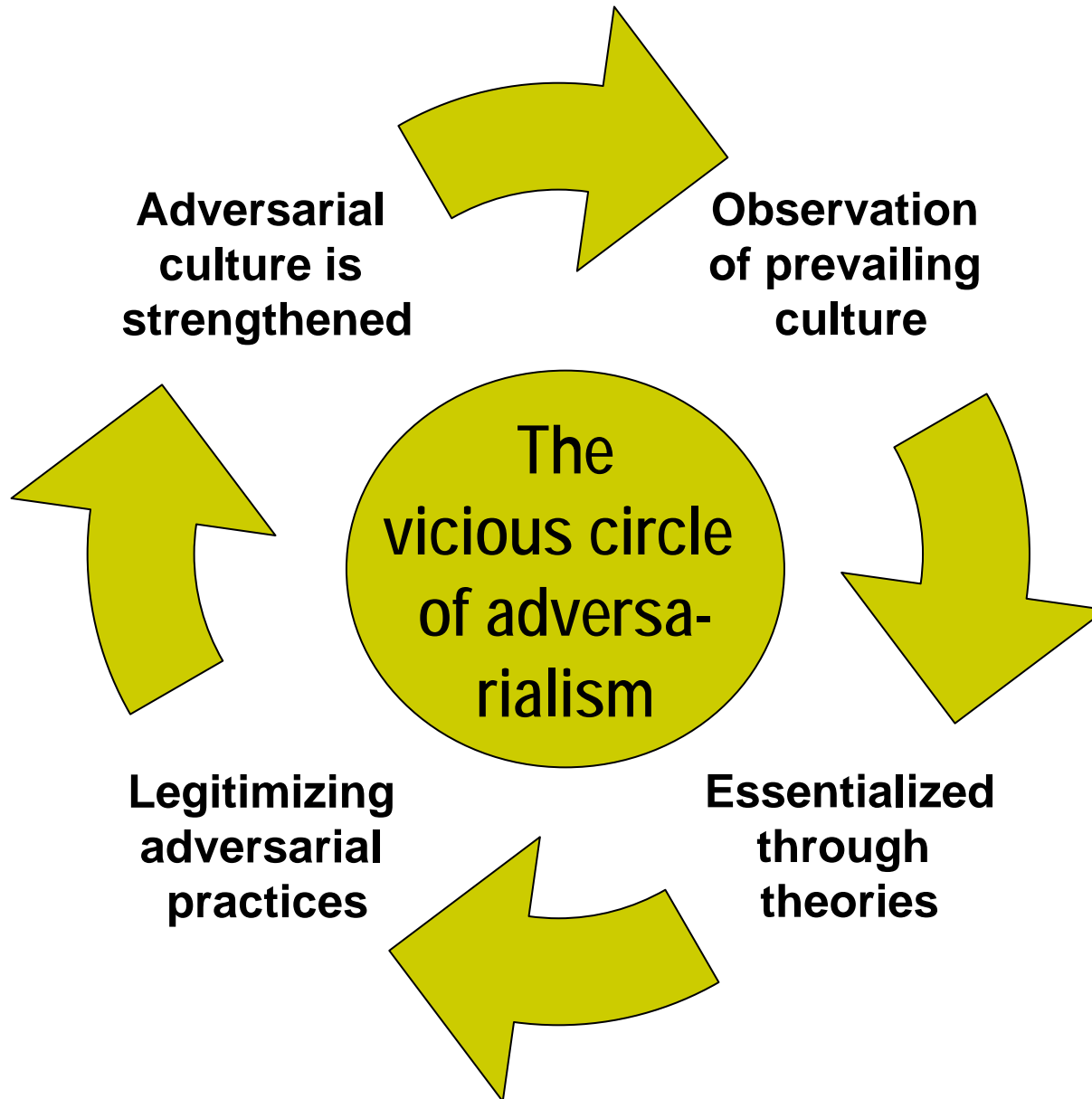
☐ Political Hegemony: The spatial or geographical extension of dominance by one political entity over others, largely through force.

☐ Cultural Hegemony: The ability of dominant social classes to cultivate, through non-coercive means, a popular world view that naturalizes their dominant social positions and makes these structures appear to serve the interests of other social classes.
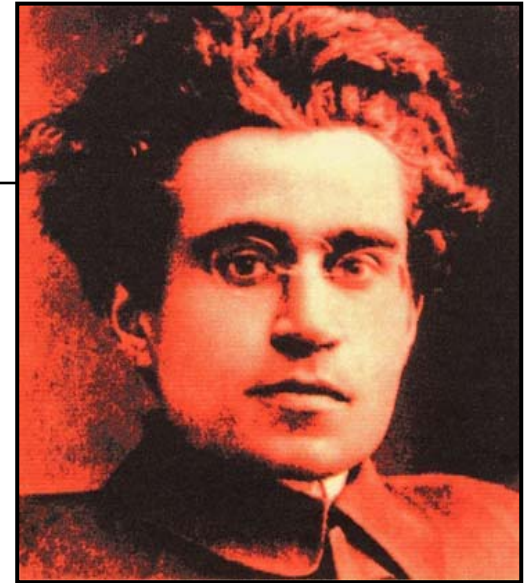
How to prevent change

1. Limit the vision to the individual, not the social structures.

2. Enable adaptation and conformity ("boil the frog").

3. Promote egocentrism, individualism and consumerism ("you deserve it").

4. Prescribe the 'realism' of superficial reform ("don't be a utopian").

5. Favor excuses: "I will change the system from within"; "it is only for a while"; "If I don't, I will lose my job".

(Source: Alfie Kohn)
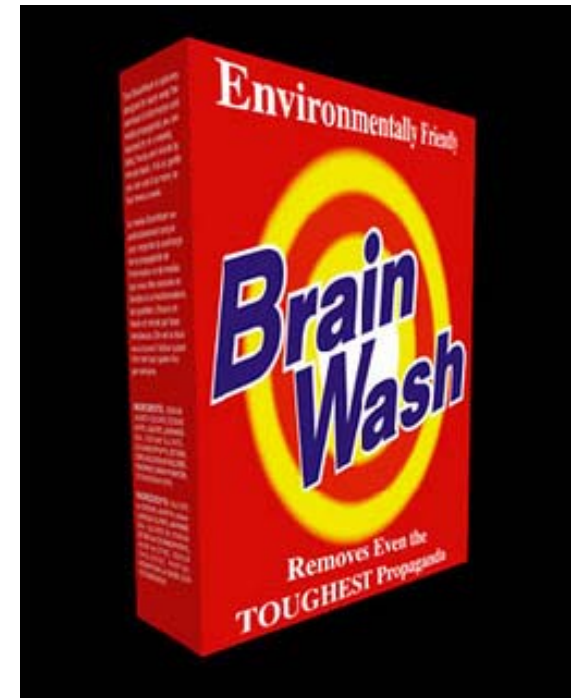
Means for Social Control

1. <u>Hide the truth</u>: give the illusion of freedom of speech

2. <u>Censure any opposition</u>: no important voice, self-censure

3. <u>False consensus</u>: manufacture consent, propagandistic media, intellectuals serve their masters

4. <u>Distractions</u>: absorbing occupations, consumer wishes, deadening entertainment, facile reporting, focus on minor issues, representative democracy

5. <u>Spread fear</u>: psychosis of insecurity ("*Close to Home*"), convince them how much they need their leaders

6. <u>Impose game rules</u>: ensure competition, winners keep winning, 'old-boy' privileges, adversarial change strategies

7. <u>Despair</u>: disillusionment, pessimism, cynicism, and feeling of powerlessness are effective paralyzers.

(Source: Noam Chomsky)

cui bono? **Who Benefits?**

□ <u>The powers that be</u>:

- Military-industrial complex, govern-ments, mega-corporations, financial institutions, legal system, mass media, novel and film, social sciences

□ <u>Ideologies</u>:

- Elites, oligarchies, aristocracies; conservatives, political parties, Marxists, racists, white men

□ <u>The Masses</u>:

- Gives the world meaning, frees from blame and responsibility, skepticism is 'cool', parents & teachers, chauvinists & misogynists, the neighborhood bully.

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Who is Harmed?

<u>Everybody</u>!

- <u>Game theory</u>: zero and negative sum

- <u>Military expense</u>: change the world in one year

- <u>Party politics</u>: you push and I pull

- <u>Academic contest</u>: the loudest voice

- <u>Competition</u>: performance, interest, character

- <u>Psychological</u>: emotional and relational cost.

Is it a Conspiracy?

- Reasons to believe: # promoters and beneficiaries
- It is not suggested in this case because:
    - Difficult and unlikely for beneficiaries to agree
    - Would not have had such powerful, lasting effect
    - Would be denounced by "*whistle-blowers*"
    - Means putting the blame on an 'other'
    - Would put culture of peace movement in ridicule
    - Adversarial culture is legacy and liability of all
- A conspiracy would not even be necessary
- The massifying role of the mass media
- The true culprit: conformity and complicity
- The need: systematic questioning and change.

Is a post-hegemonic world possible?

- ☐ Hegemonies are as fluid as their discursive constructs

- ☐ Directing their change requires joint effort

- ☐ Not replace one hegemony with another, but achieve unity in diversity of world discursiveness

- ☐ Agents of socio-cultural change are needed with an optimistic outlook of 'historic agency'.

Our Options

A. If adversarial theories are true, the obstacle is human nature:

    1. Give up:

        a. Retire from society

        b. Join the 'war of all against all'

        c. Attack the evils we perceive

    2. Structure society to take advantage of the inherent adversarialism

B. If they are not true, the obstacle is our belief in them:

    1. Sigh with relief and continue with life as usual

    2. Criticize those who try to make a change

    3. Help to build a new culture of peace.

Thank you

www.cultureofpeace.peternewton.biz