

## Culture: Definitions

### Culture is ordinary

by Raymond Williams

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“Culture is ordinary: that is the first fact. Every human society has its own shape, its own purposes, its own meanings. Every human society expresses these, in institutions, and in arts and learning. The making of a society is the finding of common meanings and directions, and its growth is an active debate and amendment under the pressures of experience, contact, and discovery, writing themselves into the land. The growing society is there, yet it is also made and remade in every individual mind. The making of a mind is, first, the slow learning of shapes, purposes, and meanings, so that work, observation and communication are possible. Then, second, but equal in importance, is the testing of these in experience, the making of new observations, comparisons, and meanings. A culture has two aspects: the known meanings and directions, which its members are trained to; the new observations and meanings, which are offered and tested. These are the ordinary processes of human societies and human minds, and we see through them the nature of a culture: that it is always both traditional and creative; that it is both the most ordinary common meanings and the finest individual meanings. We use the word culture in these two senses: to mean a whole way of life--the common meanings; to mean the arts and learning--the special processes of discovery and creative effort. Some writers reserve the word for one or other of these senses; I insist on both, and on the significance of their conjunction. The questions I ask about our culture are questions about deep personal meanings. Culture is ordinary, in every society and in every mind.”

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### *For this course we define culture as:*

- ❑ Culture is the complex and broad set of relationships, values, attitudes and behaviors that bind a specific community consciously and unconsciously.
- ❑ We are born into specific cultures with prevailing values and opportunities.
- ❑ Culture, like history, *allows for change*. Culture is dynamic, *shaping and being shaped by those who occupy it*.
- ❑ Micro-cultures: cultures at localized level which may exhibit some features which are quite distinct from the broader culture e.g. CS department.

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