

# Introduction

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I grew up here when California was full of, you know, California type people. Now it's international.

*My plumber, San José, California, 1999*

The global is the true state of affairs.

*Friedman 1994: 3*

As the middle-aged, middle-class professors from the Philippines droned on sadly about how their traditional island musics were being replaced by Anglo-American sounds and modern popular music from Manila, my mind drifted back to my childhood. I recalled my days as a teenager when I so desperately wanted out of the little “island” where I was born and raised – a small farm town of Nordic immigrants in southern Minnesota. I depended so much then on top forty radio stations from Minneapolis and Chicago to feel free, sexy, and connected to other places. I wanted to explore the unknown, break the chains, feel alive. I loved the cool music, the smooth, fast-talking deejays, the dances, the clothes, the city girls – especially Marianne Fitzgerald, who was by far the cutest ninth grader in all of Minnesota, and one of the regular dancers on Minneapolis’s version of *American Bandstand*.

The big sounds of the metropolis connected so powerfully with my body, my senses, my dreams. Listening and moving to the big city beat, I imagined just how much more complex, interesting, and exciting life could be. And I was right! I knew then that I wanted to be more than just another midwestern American kid who never left home.

Wake up! Back to reality – an academic conference on popular music. Filipinos lamenting their imagined lost utopias at the hands of the corrupting international music industry and the modern sounds from Manila. I understand where they're coming from, but . . .

This book begins where the wistful Filipino professors' argument leaves off, and concludes much more optimistically. We begin this complex journey into twenty-first-century media, communication,



**Photo I.1** Hanno Möttölä – the globalized Finn (photo by University of Utah Athletic Department)

and culture with an example of a truly globalized man – a young professional basketball player from Finland who lives in America. We will then summarize how the gaps in comparative socioeconomic status, technology use, information, and knowledge between and among peoples of the world have reached very disturbing levels. We then briefly introduce *structuration theory* as it can be applied to media, communication, and culture. Structuration theory is a useful framework for analyzing how people's lives are structured by, but not limited to, the powerful ideological and cultural forces that surround them.

### **Box 1.1 International Sport and the Globalized Finn**

(The following is based on personal communications with National Basketball Association player, Hanno Möttölä. . . .)

Got his first pair of Air Jordans when he was ten years old. Grew up watching the National Basketball Association (NBA) on TV. Loved the Lakers, hated the Celtics. Really liked Michael Jordan and Hakeem Olajuwon, but Magic Johnson was by far his favorite player. Played hoops with his older brother and friends at the local YMCA. Into U2, Springsteen, and the Rolling Stones.

Some kid from Kansas City?

Try Helsinki.

Head down, fists clenched, arms pulling front to back, a look of great determination on his face, Hanno Möttölä runs down the court to assume a defensive position. He has just scored another two points inside with a fluid duck-under move, a lethal complement to his excellent outside shooting. The big blond is the first man ever from remote, sparsely populated Finland to play in the NBA.

Basketball has become a truly international sport, rivaled only by soccer and hockey. The NBA features famous players from Nigeria, Venezuela, Australia, Germany, France, Serbia, Croatia, Mexico, New Zealand, Canada, Lithuania, Holland, Russia, China, and several Caribbean islands, among many other global locales.

The rich diversity of players in the NBA today is one spectacular indication of how international sport in particular, and popular culture in general, have been globalized at the outset of the twenty-first century. Hanno Möttölä's story reveals just how connected we have become across the boundaries of time and space.

Not only did Hanno lace up his Air Jordans, watch the NBA on TV, and crank up Bono and U2 on his stereo in Helsinki as a kid, he learned to speak English and Swedish, traveled the world playing for the Finnish national basketball team, and spent a year in San Antonio, Texas, as a foreign exchange student. His father serves as an advisor for Finland's foreign ministry in international relations, and his mother edits the culture section of Helsinki's major daily newspaper.

The globalized Finn maintains constant contact with friends and family via email and telephone, and checks the hockey and soccer scores on-line every day. His family watches him play basketball on America's NBC satellite Superchannel in Finland, and on the Internet.

And what about the game of basketball itself? To watch Hanno play in the NBA is to observe a striking contrast in style. Basketball is the "black man's game" in America, with more than 80 percent of the professional players claiming African-American heritage. For Hanno, "that makes the game much more interesting . . . faster, tougher, more athletic." Still Hanno values and exhibits tremendous discipline, toughness, maturity, and team play – qualities brought from Finland that were refined under coach Rick Majerus where Hanno played college ball – the University of Utah.

In sharp contrast to subdued and modest Finnish culture, the Big American Pop Culture Show has caught up a reluctant Hanno in its midst – lots of money, screaming fans, cheerleaders, pressure to win at all costs. And nationalism: "In the United States you hear the national anthem at every sports game and you see lots of American flags everywhere. Back home these things are not so obvious . . . they're sacred."

Can glitz, glamour, and big money seduce the soul forever? Certainly. But Finland's first NBA player so far resists the temptation. He says he'll go back to Helsinki when his basketball career is over. He loves the history and tradition there. The beautiful old buildings. The people. The culture. The silences. A true cosmopolitan child of globalization who has benefited tremendously from all the advantages the ultra-modern world can bring, Hanno Möttölä still believes one thing: "You'll always be the person from the place you come from . . ."

That place is the most wired nation in the world. Finland has the highest percentage of its population connected to the Internet – way over half. Finns are also among the world's most active users of cellular phones, and the country is home to Nokia, the famous mobile

phone maker.<sup>1</sup> Finland's appetite for the latest personal communications devices is more than remarkable given that its people are famous for their quiet, some would say "uncommunicative," social style. Finland is also among the world's leaders in quality education, and despite some rough times in recent years, the country has developed a very high standard of living for the vast majority of its people.

## The global gaps

Globalization divides as much as it unites; it divides as it unites.

*Bauman 1998: 2*

Finland is one of the world's "have" nations. Finns have money and high technology. They have a high literacy rate and an excellent educational system. They have professional opportunities and social guarantees. Finland has the world's most equal social distribution of wealth.<sup>2</sup>

But when we survey all the world's nations and peoples, we find that Finland is truly exceptional in all these respects and is, after all, a small nation with fewer than six million inhabitants. A very troubling trend confronts us as global citizens as we proceed through these early years of the twenty-first century.<sup>3</sup> To put it simply, the world's rich are getting richer, and the poor are getting poorer. Real differences between social and cultural groups in the world are increasing by the minute, and the differences become more striking with every technological advance.

Europe and North America accounted for more than half the world's wealth at the turn of the century, while the developing countries of Africa, Asia, and Latin America (with exceptions like Brazil, Chile, China, and Taiwan) account for a only small percentage. But this is changing. The gaps between and among many of the world's nations are actually getting smaller rather than larger. As a proportion of the world's wealth, European and North American economies are losing ground.

## Social class

I am against the kind of globalization that allows one US gentleman to have \$90 billion, while another sleeps under a bridge.

*Fidel Castro, accepting a medal as an honorary citizen of  
Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 1999*

The real gap in socioeconomic status around the world exists *between members of the middle class and the truly poor populations in all countries*. The size of the international middle class is increasing, but the world's underclass population is expanding simultaneously at an even greater rate, and the poor keep getting relatively poorer.

Socioeconomic disparities inside Third World (or “newly industrializing countries,” NICs) are particularly extreme. In Asia and Latin America, for example, a tiny number of super-rich people benefit tremendously from international trade and modern information technology while the poor – who procreate at rates much higher than the rich, and therefore increase their numbers faster in absolute and relative terms – fall farther and farther behind.

China, India, Indonesia, Brazil, and Russia have been identified by the World Bank as the largest newly emerging world economies. Their likely future success as nations, however, does not mean that most people or families living in these countries will benefit. National economic development in countries where the differences in socioeconomic standing are great creates explosive social conditions. The World Bank predicts that while China, India, Indonesia, Brazil, and Russia will double their economic output from about 8 to 16 percent of the world's total by the year 2020, serious “social turbulence” will accompany the growth. Indeed, clear symptoms of widespread unrest are manifest in all those countries already. So, while economic development in the coming years will gradually reduce the gap between many nations of the world and expand the size of the middle class in all the emerging world economies, poverty will also grow at a frightening rate. This is not a determined consequence, of course, because nations could direct revenues and resources in ways that would reduce the suffering. But of the five large economies mentioned above, China's socialist system may be the only one able to provide an effective social safety net for its poorest people.

Americans, Brits, Japanese, and Australians are by no means exempt from these global trends. The same internal gaps are developing. Of all the world's large, industrialized countries, the United States has become the most divided by income and wealth. The “gentleman” that Fidel Castro referred to in Brazil is Bill Gates, the world's wealthiest man. The disparity between rich and poor in the United States is systemic. Statistics indicate that roughly the richest 20 percent of the American public now controls more than 80 percent of the nation's wealth, a trend that keeps growing.

## The technology gap

Technology never functions in an undifferentiated field of social relations. In our own individual countries, and in the global context too, some people have much greater access to communications technology than others. Socioeconomic class is the most obvious predictor of this difference.

While cellular phones, fax machines, digital video disc players, and all other modern communications technologies are concentrated disproportionately in the hands of the relatively well-to-do, the personal computer really separates rich from poor. While more than 50 percent of North American families had a computer in the home at the turn of the century, information technology remains largely a white-collar phenomenon. Well-paid, highly-educated, young male professionals are most likely to own and use a computer, especially for Internet access.

A US Department of Commerce report explains how the differences between rich and poor in the United States are related to race and technology. Poor people of all races in the United States have few computers in their homes. Blacks and Hispanics make up a disproportionately higher percentage of the American poor, so they are far less likely than whites or Asians to have computers. That clearly limits their opportunities.

This trend is not just related to social class, however. The rate of computer ownership among blacks and Hispanics of all social classes is comparatively low in the United States. More than a third of North Americans who did not own a personal computer in 1998 said they have absolutely no interest in ever having one. Exclusion from and resistance to high technology (and to higher education) thus is related to disadvantages imposed by low social class, but also by cultural values and ways of life.

Higher education, computers, and all forms of high technology are keys to economic success for individuals, families, and nations. Those who do not use computers in today's globalized environment are left behind in many ways. This is what is meant by terms such as the technology gap, the information gap, and the knowledge gap. This worldwide social crisis could not be solved easily even if technological resources were abundant and accessible to everyone, which they most assuredly are not. Technological development cannot simply be mandated in situations where people's basic needs are unfulfilled, where their opportunities are greatly limited, or where their cultural values do not match up well with the razor-sharp

rationality of high technology and the competitive demands of global capitalism.

And in global terms, how can we talk about the empowering potential of computers, the Internet, and information technology for India, China, and most countries in Africa and Southeast Asia when the vast majority of families there don't yet have a telephone? With the exception of the relatively small middle-class populations of nations like South Africa and Zimbabwe, sub-Saharan African peoples don't have access to computers at all. The unwired countries of Africa and elsewhere simply function outside the Global Information Infrastructure. In Africa, the technology gap interacts with political turmoil, corruption, the AIDS crisis, and poverty to greatly limit opportunities for economic growth – a goal which requires access to the information superhighway to be realized.

At the same time, the upper classes in developing countries are very sophisticated users of high technology. Many of them have satellite receivers, computers with Internet access, cell phones, DVD machines, fax machines, and every other communications gadget in their homes and offices. They operate in Bombay, Lagos, Sao Paulo, Mexico City, and Kuala Lumpur at a First World standard, safely tucked away in guarded fortresses which isolate them from the threatening, anonymous poor who occupy the streets nearby. The few computers and other information technologies which do exist in developing countries are used mainly to make money rather than improve health, education, family planning, and economic opportunities for the general population.

We have cast our discussion of the global gaps so far mainly in terms of economics and technology. This is a necessary critical orientation, and the world scene in these respects obviously is troubling. But life is not limited to money and computers, and gaps between social groups should not be addressed solely in these terms. Love, beauty, passion, pleasure, and romance, for example, are not taken into account when we focus on the differences between people strictly in terms of economics, technology, and information. By expanding the analysis into *culture*, which includes the emotional dimensions of life as well as the rational sides, we open up lots of interesting possibilities. These will be explored in the chapters which follow.

### **Structure and agency**

We will wrestle mightily with one central theoretical problem throughout this book. The critical issue is by no means unique to the

analysis presented here. In one way or another, theorists and writers from all the social sciences have long tried to understand the dynamic relationship between two basic, powerful, and seemingly opposing forces. These forces reflect tensions that have already been raised in this brief introduction.

On one side of the issue, we have *structure*. There are many kinds of structure, but generally we can say that *structure is any force that systemically limits or contains people*. Structures can be quite abstract, and are in some ways even invisible because they can be huge and are therefore taken for granted. The fields of politics, economics, ideology, and culture, for example, all structure social interaction in ways that favor the interests of some people over others. The comments of Zygmunt Bauman and Fidel Castro quoted earlier, for instance, call attention to what these men consider to be structural inequalities in globalization and socioeconomic relations.

On the other side of the issue is human *agency*. This positive force refers to the energy, creativity, purposefulness, and transcendent abilities that individual persons and subgroups set in motion, even unconsciously, to make their lives meaningful and enjoyable. *Agency is the force of liberation and growth*. Agency is exercised at personal and collective social levels.

Apparently we've got a classic "bad guy, good guy" pairing of opposing forces here. In simplified terms, human beings can overcome the confining structures that surround and limit them by exercising their human potential – their agency. This contrasting, dynamic tension provides a productive platform from which we can now begin our explorations and commentaries about global media, communication, and culture.

## Structuration theory

The most far-reaching and comprehensive approach for analyzing the controversies of social power that takes structure and agency as its point of departure is the famed British sociologist Anthony Giddens's theory of *structuration* (see especially Giddens 1984; Lull 1992b). A detailed explanation of this very complex social theory goes beyond our purposes here and will not be attempted. But the spirit of the theory can help us find our way round the mosaic that makes up this text. Essentially, Giddens's theory integrates "macrosocial" conditions (reflecting the constraints of structure) with "microsocial" processes (where agency takes form). *Structuration theory is particularly valuable because it explains how structure and agency need*

*not be thought of as entirely opposing forces.* This is a crucial advance in thinking because while structuration theory recognizes the constraints structure clearly imposes on individuals and societies, it does not programmatically blame external forces for everything wrong in the world, an overly simplified conclusion that crops up all too often in “critical” academic theorizing.

We must strike a balance in our thinking about structure and agency in order to fairly evaluate what’s really going on in media, communication, and culture at the global level. We want to keep the issue of social power in the forefront of the analysis, of course, but we do not want to simply assume an *a priori* point of view that is overloaded on one side of the social power equation or the other. Too much emphasis on structure exaggerates constraint, making it appear that established social institutions and rules somehow *determine* our realities in an airtight fashion. But by the same token giving too much attention to agency naively grants unwarranted power to individuals and underestimates how dominant forces and guidelines do in fact influence individuals and societies, often even against their best interests.

### **Communication and connectivity**

Communication is necessary for cultural innovation, and cultural innovation is necessary for human survival. This was true more than 40,000 years ago when the first cave art and other symbolic artifacts appeared in Europe and Africa, and it was also true some 400,000 years ago when *Homo sapiens* first developed the physical ability to utter sounds and interact through speech (Kay, Cartmill, and Barlow 1998).

Through communication we create culture, and when we communicate, we communicate culturally: “Culture can be understood as the order of life in which human beings construct meaning through practices of symbolic representation . . . [that is] by communicating with each other” (Tomlinson 1999: 18). In today’s complex world communication is the social nexus where interpersonal relations and technological innovations, political-economic incentives and socio-cultural ambitions, light entertainment and serious information, local environments and global influences, form and content, substance and style all intersect, interact, and influence each other.

Human communication is just as necessary today as it was hundreds of centuries ago, but social exchange and the cultural domains that human interactions help create assume radically different forms



**Photo 1.2** Do you speak MTV? Globalized media and popular culture like MTV Asia challenge traditional values in every corner of the world, including China (printed with permission of MTV)

and formats in the era of globalization. As British sociologist David Chaney points out, “traditionally, social institutions such as family and religion have been seen as the primary media of [cultural] continuity. More recently . . . the role of ensuring continuity has increasingly been taken over by . . . forms of communication and entertainment” (Chaney 1994: 58).

We live today in an ever-increasingly hyper-interconnected world, a “global ecumene” of communicative interactions and exchanges that stimulates profound cultural transformations and realignments (Hannerz 1996: 7). Any study of culture in the globalized, mass-mediated, Internet-influenced world we live in, therefore, must seriously take into account the most sweeping dimension of communication – *connectivity*. With the Internet and information technology come incredible social opportunities. This is because communication is ultimately an open, undetermined space where the unlimited creativity of people can take form.

Even the most basic, non-mediated, minimally connected communication codes and processes assure tremendous latitude in symbolic exchange. The Canadian anthropologist Grant McCracken offers the analogy of linguistic structure and the way people use language

to demonstrate the limits of structure and the vitality of agency in routine social interaction:

Each speaker of a language is both constrained and empowered by the code that informs his language use. He or she has no choice but to accept the way in which distinctive features have been defined and combined to form phonemes. He or she has no choice but to accept the way in which the phonemes have been defined and combined to form morphemes. The creation of sentences out of morphemes is also constrained, but here the speaker enjoys a limited discretionary power and combinatorial freedom. This discretionary power increases when the speaker combines sentences into utterances. By this stage the action of compulsory rules of combination has ceased altogether. (1990: 63)

### **About this book**

Moving forward then with an overarching philosophy that life's vital trajectories are not predestined, we shall now explore the dynamic interaction of three themes that will make up the core of this book: mass media and information technology, patterns and processes of human communication, and the social construction of diverse cultures.

The book is international, multicultural, and multidisciplinary. Many of the examples refer to cultures outside North America, the United Kingdom, and continental Europe. We study capitalist and communist systems, the First World and the Third, the rich and the poor, the mainstream and the margins. We evaluate media, communication, and culture stretching from California to China, by way of England, Brazil, Mexico, New Zealand, and scores of other places. Theorists from outside the northern loop are prominent contributors to the points of view that evolve in the following pages. We will travel theoretical terrain that encompasses key concepts and issues from communication studies, sociology, cultural studies, political economy, psychology, and anthropology. We visit the premodern, modern, high modern, and postmodern eras.

No facile, easy answers to complex, tough questions will be found in these pages as we strive to explain the forces of structure and agency in contemporary media, communication, and culture. Given the choice of privileging structure over agency, or agency over structure, however, I choose the latter. I prefer to stand in the sunshine, not in the shadows, and I hope that by the end of our journey together readers of this volume will be inspired to do the same.