

Lecture Notes:

- ① **culture** provides at least two things for us: (1) meaning and (2) rules for conduct and can be divided into two kinds:
- **material** (artifacts) includes objects made through application of human arts, crafts, and sciences to raw goods
 - **nonmaterial** (symbolic) includes knowledge, beliefs, attitudes, norms, values, and ideologies
 - **semiotics** (C S Peirce from John Locke): “the study of signs,” a branch of linguistic philosophy concerned with the way cultural elements convey meaning:
 - **object** (significate): the thing or idea that a sign stands for, and
 - **sign** (signifier): thing, word, or picture that stands for or represents something else (the **signified**)
 - **iconic**: directly represent the object they refer to; for example, a picture of a ferocious dog for “beware of dog” or the “dangerous curve” or “slippery when wet” road signs
 - **indexical**: can only be interpreted by reference to what is being indicated in that instance and given context; the word “me,” for example, means something quite different when I use it than when you use it
 - **symbolic**: independent of any object to which they refer and their meaning is established by convention; nothing in the nature of the sign directly resembles or refers to any specific object (numerals, most words)
 - **signified**: mental picture or meaning triggered by the signifier
 - **Sapir-Whorf** hypothesis: linguistic categories structure perceptual and cognitive ones
 - strong version largely disproven
 - weak version still viable and controversial
 - how symbols (names or labels) are important:
 - 1 identity formation
 - 2 impression management
 - 3 boundary construction
 - 4 Thomas’ theorem: if we define something as real, it is real in its consequences
 - 5 collective identity
 - 6 setting the nature and limits of debate
- **Symbols** are categories that refer to classes of objects and are used for representation and for communication; meaning is not intrinsic in most objects, but changes depending on how the object is used; words, gestures, artifacts, actions, etc. are symbolic; they are social, meaningful, significant, and their use is purposeful or intentional
- “human” vs. “infrahuman” (presymbolic infants and nonhuman animals)
 - socially agreed-upon symbols form the basis for our unique, individual interpretations
 - though there is an external, objective reality, our understanding and experience of it is **mediated** through the symbols we use to **interpret** it
 - we notice, ignore, or redefine objects and their meanings based on changes in their uses and our goals
 - perspectives are sets or frameworks of symbols
 - symbolic meaning depends on perspective
 - symbols are essential to **society** because:
 - they are the repository of culture, history, and accumulated knowledge
 - it is maintained through their communication
 - they form the medium to socialize individuals
 - symbols are essential to **individuals** because they:
 - shape our perceptions and sense experiences
 - allow us to categorize, file, recall, and manipulate perceptions and ideas
 - enable us to think
 - allow us to transcend location in space, time, society, and culture
 - permit us to abstract and create
 - permit us to formulate goal-directed actions

- ③ **cultural diffusion** (of innovation, ideology, or other cultural form): the spread of cultural traits, social practices, knowledge systems, or information from one individual or group to others, generally works as follows:
- new ideas are communicated directly via **networks** or indirectly via **media**
 - **S-curve** pattern of adoption (“early adopters” or “opinion leaders,” most others, stragglers — not all)
 - methods of cultural diffusion:
 - **acculturation**: a process in which contacts between different cultural groups lead to the acquisition of new cultural patterns by one or both groups
 - **enculturation**: both the informal and formal acquisition of cultural norms and practices by group members
 - **socialization**: the process through which the culture of a society is transmitted to group members, *especially children*; provides for the integration into society and the differentiation among individuals
 - institutional socialization (primarily family and school)
 - deliberate socialization (curricular content, pledge of allegiance)
 - incidental socialization (implicitly competitive surroundings, etc.)
 - informal socialization (primarily social networks and the media)
 - access to and control of the media by political and economic power elites
 - content of the media: media act as **gatekeepers** of our understanding of current and historical events
 - seeing the media as channels for manipulation, not conduits of information

Key Ideas:

Material culture, symbolic culture, cultural diffusion, norms, symbols, acculturation, enculturation, socialization.

