UNDER CONSTRUCTION
LINKS FOR THE SITE OF LITERARY THEORY
ESSAYS IN HONOUR OF
HENDRIK VAN GORP

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Culture Repertoire and the Wealth of Collective Entities[1]

Itamar EVEN-ZOHAR

The two major concepts of "culture"

Two major concepts of 'culture' are widely used, in everyday and official parlance, and in academic traditions: (1) culture as-goods, and (2) culture-as-tools. The 'culture-as-goods' concept characterizes mostly official and everyday use, as well as various sections of the 'humanistic traditions'. The 'culture-as-tools' concept, on the other hand, has characterized all academic disciplines which have worked with the idea of 'culture' from at least the end of the 19th century. I am referring here to anthropology and sociology on the one hand, and to cultural semiotics on the other.

It is my view that the 'culture-as-tools' conception is more useful and allows greater analytical and research versatility for developing research and understanding – and eventually also practical tools for policy-making – in the field of culture.

Culture-as-goods

In the 'culture-as-goods' conception, culture is considered as a set and stock of evaluable goods, the possession of which signifies wealth, high status, and prestige. The possessor of such a set of goods can use it for a variety of purposes, which all perhaps obey the simple principle of *gaining power by displaying riches*. This is therefore a procedure (a strategy) which can be adopted by an individual as well as by an organized collective of individuals, namely a social entity.

Clearly, for those who practice this conception, these goods are viewed, and sensed, as 'values'. A whole stock of words has been invented to distinguish these valuable items: objects, ideas, activities, and artifacts, from less valuable ones. They are labeled 'original', 'artistic', 'aesthetic', 'spir-

itual', and more. They are treated as givens, and a whole set of institutions have emerged along the ages with the purpose of cherishing them, enhancing their value, and securing it. The possibility to view these valued and valuable items as cultural goods and analyze the way they function and are used has been developed in a wide range of disciplines, from anthropology to archaeology, history, and sociology. A considerable impetus to this method has been Bourdieu's contribution to the understanding of the nature and mechanism of the exchange of these goods. (Bourdieu 1971, 1979a, 1979b, 1984, and more.)

The term 'evaluable' stands for a bundle of procedures involved with the transformation of any goods to desirable, successfully marketable ones. It also comprises the complex set of comparisons arising from intersystemic competition, that is, from the aspiration of different bodies, or individuals who dominate them, to acquire status on a larger-than-the-domestic scene. This aspiration is not an abstract pursuit of some vague sense of respectability, but a concrete sentiment which has always worked in endeavours for survival and achieving deterring power.

The nature of cultural goods

Cultural 'goods', often discussed as 'properties' (cf. Bourdieu's 'biens symboliques'), may be both material and semiotic (problematically called 'symbolic' in some traditions) – that is, both 'palpable' and 'unpalpable'. It really matters little, from the point of view of their respective function, whether the goods in discussion are lapis lazuli, a high palace, running water, a car, a computer, or a set of texts, a group of text producers ('poets', 'writers'), a collection of pieces of music, a collection of paintings, sculptures, a theater, etc. Once a defined set of such goods acquires the condition of evaluability by mutual recognition, it is assigned a specific value. Goods which cannot be evaluated by an established market (or Stock Exchange) cannot have value, and therefore are not marked as 'culture'. Therefore, social entities may be labeled as 'having no culture' by other social entities, if diagnosed as not being in possession of the required and acknowledged set of goods.

Shifts of value

The relevant set of goods is of shifting nature. What may have had a high value in one period may have acquired a low value in some other period, or even become obsolete. The mechanisms regulating such shifts

are (in addition to domestic dynamics which characterizes any social entity, large or small) the contacts one social entity maintains with others entities. However, these contacts are basically constrained by the domestic dynamics. (For further discussion and bibliography see Even-Zohar 1990a, 1990b, 1997.)

The possessors of goods

The possession of cultural goods has never been equally distributed among social groups. Clearly, it is the privileged who not only have access to such goods, but also act with authorization to define their value in the first place. These restricted dominating circles thus have the double capacity of both possessing the goods and preventing others from having them. For a ruler, or the ruling strata at large, such goods could be part of what I elsewhere (Even-Zohar 1996b) suggested to term the *indispensabilia of power*. Along history, rulers propagated the idea of their superiority, distinguishing themselves from 'the rest of society, or from 'lesser' rulers, as it were.

As Gentili (1984: 153) puts it – discussing Greece in the sixth and fourth centuries B.C. – through the work of the artist, the rich lord or the aristocrat of town, and above all the tyrant, aimed at ennobling themselves and consolidating their political power (translating I. Even-Zohar).

It is only in later periods, sporadically in ancient Greece, but overwhelmingly only since the Modern Era (the late 18th century, to be more precise), that a growing portion of society is allowed to some extent to have a growing share of the goods that previously were restricted to a more limited group. Thus, ordinary people may have some access to books, paintings (perhaps in the form of cheap reproductions), sports, the theater, cloths, foods, music, or perfumes (now in mass production). When not accessible as private possessions, these can be declared to be in the public domain through state schools, museums, and other displays (for example, the Paris metro stations). Such goods, and in particular those now labeled 'works of art' begin, since the 19th century, to be propagated as the common property of 'nations', to become a common 'heritage'. In other words, they are converted to assets that distinguish social groups from other which are alleged to have no equivalent assets.

The producers of goods

For the potential producers of cultural goods, to have their products recognized as valuable clearly has meant gaining benefits and privileges in

accessing the desirable resources normally known as 'success'. To have one's products (and consequently one's total activity) admitted into the canonized set of valued goods therefore has meant, throughout human history, an achievement one would not easily give up. What is usually described in the various sciences of man as canon formation and canon struggles represent, more often than not, contests and conflicts about shares and access to social privileges and benefits.

Culture-as-tools

In the 'culture-as-tools' conception, culture is considered as a set of operating tools for the organization of life, both on the collective and individual levels. These 'tools' are basically of two types:

Passive tools

'Passive' tools are procedures with the help of which 'reality' is analyzed, explained, and made sense of for and by humans.

This perspective is in fact based on the hermeneutic tradition: it views 'the world' as a set of signs which need to be interpreted in order to make some sense of life. The idea of a modelling system, developed by Ivanov, Lotman, and other Soviet semioticians, is above everything else a coherent set of procedures with the help of which 'the world makes sense'.

Perhaps this is best formulated by Lotman and Uspenskij (1971: 146-147; 1978) as follows:

> The main 'work' of culture [...] is the structural organization of the surrounding world. Culture is a generator of 'structuredness' and it creates social sphere around man which, like biosphere, makes life possible (in this case social and not organic). (translation by Segal 1974: 94-95).

Active tools

'Active' tools are procedures with the help of which both an individual and a collective entity may handle any situation encountered, as well as produce any such situation. As Swidler puts it, culture is "a repertoire or 'tool kit' of habits, skills, and styles from which people construct 'strategies of action'" (Swidler 1986: 273). This aspect, unlike that of the passive tools, is therefore mostly linked with notions of 'acting' rather than

with 'understanding'. Evidently, 'understanding' is indispensable for 'acting', but the main point here is the making of active decisions and performing, rather than 'make sense' of given situations.

Tools vs. goods as socio-semiotic organizers

While tools, either 'passive' or 'active', function as organizers of 'life', 'goods' may be considered as 'organizers' only indirectly, when converted (or transformed) into tools. That is, when they may help those who possess them to convert the signified value into a workable tool. This conversion entails the making of models, for either understanding or acting, from symbolical values. This conversion is basically analogous to what Renfrew (1986), for example, has suggested as the (diachronic) transformation of materials from symbols to usage. In our case, however, the goods do not necessarily lose their function as signifying values even when converted to tools for practical actions.

Repertoire and other parameters in culture

Tools, whether 'passive' or 'active' are not a random pile of options, but a complex set, an array of interrelated components. The term 'repertoire' has been suggested for this array in various traditions of culture analysis, both semiotic (e.g., Jakobson) and anthropological (e.g., Swidler).

Two key concepts in the theory of repertoire need be underlined: (a) 'relations', a concept that expresses the view that none of the hypothesized components in a set is an ontological unit working per se (this is basically the systemic thinking); and (b) 'clusters', a concept that expresses the view that the 'units' always work, are acquired, understood, and used in ready-made bundles ('combinations', 'models').

These, and other concepts of system and theories of repertoire in relation to culture, are discussed in more detail in Even-Zohar (1990, 1997, and 1997a).

Conversion and transfer

Procedures of conversion seem to be most consequential when they take place in the framework of *transfer*. Through the competition between people and societies, items may indeed more likely be transferred as

goods before these goods are converted to work as models for generating situations in the life of people. Usually, it takes more time to change a repertoire of a culture than to absorb a definite quantity of goods. For example, to acquire a number of paintings from some external source does not necessarily nor immediately engender domestic production of painting, nor does it put the activity of painting as such as an accessible option to people. Moreover, it does not make painting a tool for 'modelling the world'. However, it may be a preamble to such a development. The very act of seeking, and acquiring such goods may engender repertoire change.

Cultural 'heritage'

The term 'heritage' is normally used in the sphere of prestigious possessions. It commonly refers to the *accepted canon of precious goods*, thus designating distinction and a useful benchmark for competition. It thus normally works as a tool for validating the effectiveness of an established repertoire (i.e., historically accumulated), and for securing its perpetuation.

The making and distribution of culture repertoire

Repertoires, or components for prevailing repertoires, are constantly created by people, then thrown on the market, with any relevant institution either promoting or disallowing them.

The producers of such repertoires may be anonymous individuals whose labor is accidental. On the other hand, deliberate labor may be involved in the making, either by individuals or by more or less organized groups whose explicit purpose may be to create shifts and exercise control.

In the making of repertoires, various procedures are needed. Independently of the circumstances, the major procedures seem to be 'invention' and 'import'. These are not opposed procedures, because inventing may be carried out via import. However, it relates to the labor involved in the making, within the confines of the home system, without any link to some other system. For example, 'invention' may have to be based more on analogies and oppositions, while import may necessitate organization skills and marketing. Even in cases of seemingly conspicuous 'originality', i.e., inventiveness which cannot be traced back to a simple source,

import may be present. In short, import has played a much more crucial role in the making of cultural repertoires, and hence in the organization of groups, and the interaction between them, than is normally admitted.

Repertoires and identities

It is a common procedure in human groups to signal out certain conspicuous items from a prevailing repertoire for demarcating the group as a distinct entity. This is described as creating a 'sense of self', or 'collective identity'. This aspect of culture was already highlighted by Sapir who claimed that

> Emphasis [in this aspect] is put not so much on what is done and believed by a people as on how what is done and believed functions in the whole life of that people, on what significance it has for them. (Sapir 1968 [1924]: 311)

The selected items may be drawn from any area. The size of the item may be as minute as some linguistic details, or certain foods, cloths, scents, bodily features (like beards or whiskers or wigs) and gestures, or general preferences for environmental settings, often known under such concepts as 'cosiness', 'cleanliness', or 'order'.

Culture and the making of collective entities

Through this adoption of a shared repertoire, groups, large and small, are both created and survive. Thus, culture works as a mechanism that generates collective entities, by enabling both cohesion and differentiation.

Culture and cohesion

Culture provides cohesion to both a factual or a potential collective entity. This is achieved by creating a disposition of allegiance among those who adhere to the repertoire. At the same time, this acquired cohesion generates a validated disposition of distinction, i.e., a state of separateness from other entities.

What is generally meant by a 'cohesion' is a state where a widely spread sense of solidarity, or togetherness, exists among a group of people, which consequently does not require acts enforced by sheer physical power. The basic, key concept to such cohesion is readiness, or proneness. Readiness (proneness) is a mental disposition which propels people

to act in many ways which otherwise may be contrary to their 'natural inclinations'. For example, going to war ready to be killed in fighting against some other group would be the ultimate case, amply repeated throughout human history. To create a large network of readiness (proneness) on a fair number of issues is something that, although vital for any society, cannot be taken for granted by that society. For example, no government can take for granted that people will obey 'laws', whether written or not, unless they are successfully motivated to do so. Obedience achieved by physical force, applied by the military or the police, can be effective for a certain span of time. But sooner or later such a form of obedience will collapse, partly because few societies can afford to keep a large enough corps of law-enforcement agents.

Classical sociological thinking has recognized the powerful role of what they called 'persuasion' for the 'successful control' of a dominated population. As most succinctly put by Bartoli (1981: 4) these mechanisms consist

> di persuasione alla conformità e di interiorizzazione di modelli culturali che la classe o i gruppi al potere ritengono necessari per i mantenimento dell'equilibrio del sistema sociale e che, in particolare nelle società forte-mente stratificate, determinati altri gruppi o classi sociali pongono al centro di una strategia di organizzazione del consenso attorno ai propri obiettivi e attorno alle proprie definizioni della realtà.
>
> [of persuasion to conformity and of internalization of the cultural models (patterns) the dominating classes or groups deem necessary for maintaining the equilibrium of the social system and which, especially in highly stratified societies, certain other groups or social classes put in the center of a strategy of organizing the consensus about the appropriate objectives and the appropriate definitions of reality.]

Cohesion as a necessary condition for the creation or survival of large entities

Cohesion may become a necessary condition for creating a new entity, and/or for the survival of an existing entity.

The large entities discussed here, i.e., such social units as 'community', 'tribe', 'people', or 'nation', are – we all seem to agree – not 'natural' objects. They are formed by the acts of individuals, or small groups of people, who take *initiative* and are successful in mobilizing the resources needed for the task. The most vital element among those resources is a cultural repertoire that makes it possible for the enterprising group to provide justification, contents and *raison d'être* to the separate and distinct existence of the entity.

Without going into a detailed discussion of the available options for the making of entities (see Even-Zohar 1994 and 1995), there is ample evidence that a permanent labor for the making and maintenance of cohesion is required for their survival. For example, Schama, discussing the making of culture in Holland claims that,

> The most extraordinary invention of a country that was to become famous for its ingenuity was its own culture. From ingredients drawn from earlier incarnations, the Dutch created a fresh identity. On a more pragmatic level, it was imperative that popular allegiance be mobilized exclusively in favor of the new Fatherland. (Schama 1987: 67)

And further:

> Dutch patriotism was not the cause, but the consequence, of the revolt against Spain. Irrespective of its invention after the fact, however, it rapidly became a powerful focus of allegiance to people who considered themselves fighting for heart and home. (Schama 1987: 69)

In all of the varieties of the emergence and crystallization of entities, whatever the pace, the endeavors to make it possible for an entity to maintain itself over time is certainly a primary concern for those who are interested in its existence. The more consent is achieved through cultural cohesion, the more this interest will become a concern of larger and larger numbers of individuals. If not achieved, or not even attempted, it naturally will remain an interest of the very privileged few who may draw benefits from the existence of the entity. This may nevertheless endanger the survival of the entity in the long run and put in peril the vested interests of the privileged group as well. (For more about consent see Dodd 1986, especially p. 2.)

Cultural labor as a source of energy

I contend that where a planning activity takes place, *regardless of the consequences*, the relevant entity – or the agglomerate of people – may have achieved better access to resources, which may become an improvement of their standard of life. Moreover, I am more and more convinced that for the maintenance of any collective human entity, the labor involved with the making of repertoires eventually creates motion of some scale. This may make it possible for the entity involved to attain access to options from which it has been previously deprived or barred.

The term *energy* seems to be most viable to cover this bundle of factors. It has been in use for quite some time in historical analysis as well as in business management and economic theories (see Barker 1992). In

spite of the theoretical vagueness of the term, and at the risk of over-interpreting a simple metaphor, I believe that Braudel (1976) fundamentally adheres to the same view when he links high volume of activity in some society with prosperity.

It can, of course, be argued that the engagement with cultural labor is a *result* of energy rather than the other way around. Where there is social action, people also write texts and develop ideas, and contribute very lively to creating new repertoires. However, in all of the cases which served as input for my work on culture planning, preoccupation with planning began at a very low state in the welfare of a population. This does not mean that they were all equally humiliated or underprivileged, but that they all had less access to resources than did others, or at least so it seemed from their own point of view.

For example, in comparison with France and England, both 18th and 19th century German provinces had inferior possibilities. Provinces such as 19th century Spanish Galicia had not become out-of-the-way localities because of their geographical position on the Iberian peninsula. On the contrary, Galicia was the first developed province on the peninsula in Roman times, and it kept its primary position almost until the unification of the Spanish realm under Castile and Aragon in the 15th century. Its decline was a consequence of a deliberate policy of ostracism by the central government. The slow and noncoordinated steps towards a reinvention of Galicia, carried out through the 19th century, became the only chance for the province to establish itself as an entity with a proper repertoire that would allow it not to be confined only to options available and permissible in the center.

Energy and wealth

Capitalizing on Adam Smith's *œuvre célèbre* I would like to suggest the use of the term 'wealth' for this relation between energy and the accessibility of resources, first and foremost on the level of the collective, but in a more detailed analysis also on the level of individuals. Clearly, wealth in economic theories must eventually be manifest in such parameters as GNP. While the concept of wealth suggested here may well be compatible with this approach, access to resources is, on a more encompassing level, the decisive concept. Bourdieu's notion of cultural capital may be enlarged to apply to entities as wholes, in addition to its validity for the life of individuals. That such capitals may eventually surface in terms of GNP, as well as in material wealth of individuals and defined

groups, goes without saying. The point is here, however, to get relatively liberated from this restrictive view in order to accept the taking into account of other parameters of wealth, expressed in acquired positions, levels of organizedness, mutual aid between members of the collective, abilities to act, sense of selfconfidence, access to enterprising options, and more.

Results of repertoire making

It is not a simple question to determine when the results of repertoire making is to be considered a success or failure. One of the reasons for this is that for the entrepreneurs, the content of a repertoire may become more important than the function of that repertoire for what was described as its ultimate goal. For example, if reintroducing a language becomes a sine qua non for the making, or re-making, of an entity, then the potential failure of that language at a time when the ultimate goals of the entity may have been achieved may be a disappointment for those who attached their worldview and self-identity to the language.

The reason for such – perhaps pathetic – occurrences lies in the very nature of the cultural enterprise. Success of a cultural entreprise may be achieved in a short time once culture entrepreneurs and holders of power begin to collaborate. However, if repertoire makers must create a power base and persevere for making their labor attractive enough to entice power holders, then the span of time between labor and its outcomes may be long, sometimes over a century. In such cases, the alternative repertoire, designed under the initial conditions and thus fitted with solutions relevant to those conditions, by the time of implementation may already be cruelly dated.

The Spanish Galician case may serve here an example. Three decades ago it might still seem possible to pull the Galician population out from its misery by legitimizing 'its own language'. However, it has since dawned upon modern Galicians that if they now confine themselves to this, by now fully legalized official Galician language, they are more likely to make losses than gains. Consequently, while Galician has won a respective and official position, school children, and their Galician-speaking parents, are more and more inclined to prefer the Castilian language, a language described in the Galician patrimony as the source of all evil. Obviously, without the language as a central ingredient in the new Galician repertoire, one undoubtedly could not have achieved the current socio-political success of Galicia. However, with the language as

a major vehicle of socio-cultural interaction, Galicia may be doomed to backwardness. Perhaps an adequate explanation of this outcome may be given in terms of the failure of the Galician language to convert itself from a necessary good to a useful tool. Nevertheless, without the conflicts about this and other repertoire items, Galicia would not have created, nor will create, the energy needed for its prosperous survival.

Center, periphery, and wealth

As a rule, a 'periphery' is allowed to follow only what is available in the 'center', while the center is free to offer new options daily. In plain words, if you are in a periphery, anything you do, i.e., your whole repertoire is, by definition, inferior to that of the center, because those in the center always master it better than you do, and also take the liberty of augmenting and changing it more freely than you. If you speak the 'same language', as it were, the language of the center will still sound a bit different, and your brand may put some obstacles in your way when you wish to get a job in prestigious places.

Of course, deficiency in the center, or increased energy in a periphery, may turn the course of relations. As we know, peripheries may be the alternative source for innovation and power positions. (For a more detailed discussion see Even-Zohar 1990.) What I have come to label 'energy' allows a certain agglomerate of people, or an entity already established to some extent, to take on the privileges of a center. By doing so, local welfare may increase remarkably. If nothing is done, however, then the place is doomed to a peripheral state.

A summary of the chief hypotheses proposed

1. Two major prevailing notions of 'culture' are circulated: (a) culture as a set of desirable and legitimized goods, consequently evaluable on a comparative scale; and (b) culture as a repertoire of tools with the help of which people and groups organize their life on all possible levels.
2. It is proposed to adopt the culture-as-tools approach, incorporating into it the analysis of goods.
3. Accordingly, culture is viewed as a tool-kit, a repertoire of options for organizing life.
This occurs via (a) a modelling of the world ('passive repertoire'), (b) an active set of instructions how to proceed ('active repertoire').

4. The capacity of this repertoire to function is interrelated with social factors which may promote or repudiate it, most conspicuously the market and the institutions.

5. Both as 'passive' and 'active', the culture repertoire enables access to resources.

5.1. The access to resources, whether 'symbolic' or 'material', is the ultimate target of individual and collective survival.

6. The culture repertoire is the most viable way to create and maintain collective entities, large or small. Culture creates cohesion by imparting a sense of togetherness and distinct identity.

7. The volume of the tool-kit projects on the abilities to organize life with either lesser or greater versatility.

7.1. The more prolific the repertoire, subject to availability, the better is the access to resources.

7.2. While components for repertoires may be continuously and permanently generated by any member of an entity, it is more often than not a deliberate engagement of 'intellectuals.'

7.2.1. These 'intellectuals', engaged in cultural labor, may be (a) dependent on power, or its direct agents, or (b) free, self-nominated agents.

7.2.1.1. When of the latter category, the results of their work will not be implemented unless (a) they transform themselves into holders of power; and/or (b) create a conjuncture with prevailing power holders.

7.3. The more prolific the activity involved with the permanent making of potential repertoires, the greater the energy produced by and inside a collective entity.

7.4. The greater the energy, the greater the wealth possessed by the collective entity.

7.5. The more distributed the activities, the greater are the chances for a more shared wealth.

8. At any given time, more than one repertoire prevails for any intersection of social and spacial groups. The totality of operators for the assumed parameters is therefore suggested to be heterogeneous and open.

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