
ONE Introduction: From the Beginning

In the south east of Brazil, in the state of Minas Gerais, in the small town of Ponte Nova beneath the mountains, a boy grows up in an Arab community, listening to the sound of Lebanese voices, singing the mass in an old, local Catholic church. In his youth he gets interested in jazz and bossa nova. In 1970, at the age of 24, João Bosco meets the carioca poet Aldir Blanc and they start playing samba, boleros, a mix of Latin, Caribbean and African. One of the songs they create is a beautiful tune called 'O Mestre Sala dos Mares' (The Master of Ceremonies of the Seas) (1975). The song talks of a 'black navigator' visiting various ports. His audience – a fusion of cultures, 'races' and ethnicities – come alive in the music and dance of the carnival.

The song was originally written as a homage to the black sailor, João Candido, who led the Chibata rebellion (or the revolt against 'the whip') of 1910. Many of the sailors in the Brazilian navy were black, in contrast to the whiteness of the officer class. Candido led a mutiny against the maltreatment of the sailors and in particular against the severe beating of a friend on his ship, *Minas Gerais* (named after the state in which Bosco was to be born). The rebellion spread and Candido called on the Brazilian president and the naval establishment to cease using the chibata as a means of discipline. Fearing an attack on the republic, an amnesty was negotiated, but many of the sailors, once having given up their arms, were slaughtered and João Candido was exiled to the Amazon. He finally went crazy and died selling fish in Rio De Janeiro.

'O Mestre Sala dos Mares' was written by Bosco and Blanc during the dictatorship in Brazil. The original lyrics talked of the whip and the revolt and it was initially titled the 'Black Admiral'. But the Brazilian naval establishment were still smarting and the lyrics and title were censored. Words that easily signified the original event – such as 'revolt' and 'blood' – were replaced by the songwriters with ones that give the song a surreal tone: 'Glory to the

CULTURE AND SOCIETY

pirates, the mulattos, the sereias, Glory to farofa, cachaça, the whales'. The song now talked of the orchestration of a carnival dance and the navigation of the sea. The black admiral, now referred to elliptically as the 'black navigator', directs the dancing at the carnival. The song – formed as it is through the overlapping genealogies of 'race', colonisation, enslavement, gender and sexuality – emerged at a politically turbulent time in contemporary Brazil and reminds us not to forget 'our history', a history that is hybrid, vibrant and formed in resistance. Culture matters.

One hundred and thirty-five years before, Frederick Douglass (who the cultural theorist Paul Gilroy states as having been known for talking 'sailor like an old salt' (1993a)) had been sailing with Irish crew on Baltimore Clippers and had given his first public abolitionist speech to a white audience in the late 1830s in the Athenaeum library in Nantucket, a largely Quaker dominated island, 24 miles off the coast of New England. From Nantucket, a fleet of more than 70 whaling ships sailed the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans, hunting the great mammals for blubber to process into oils for industry, cooking and lighting. In the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries it was a major economy, not just for the island, but also for the north American and other outposts of an emerging network of industry and trade. In the late eighteenth century, the white colonisers drew on the native Wampanoag Indians as oarsmen for the boats, but by the nineteenth century the crew was more mixed with sailors from further afield, from Boston and other towns on the mainland. Nearly ten years before Douglass gave his speech, an almost all-black crew had returned in 1830 from a voyage of over 14 months with 2,280 barrels of oil and the local newspaper declared that it was the 'GREATEST VOYAGE EVER MADE' (Philbrick, 2001). Such a journey was to be compared with the earlier and more fateful one for which the island is now better known – the voyage of the *Essex*. The journey that took a mixed-race crew from the north American coast to the tip of the south Americas, to be rammed, west of the Galapagos and north of the Marquesas islands, by a sperm whale of biblical proportions. The largely white survivors, who made it back to safety, three months after the *Essex* had been sunk and after much hardship and cannibalism of their fellow crewmates, had some of their story told in various reports, newspaper articles and in Herman Melville's great US novel, *Moby Dick*. What is striking for us about this event is not only the horror and violence, but also the faith and hope that is encoded in such stories of different 'peoples', communities, species, materials, technologies, and journeys. Culture matters.

As I write the opening words to this book on culture, I'm listening to Bosco on my CD player, with a book about the history of the Nantucket whalers to one side and a copy of Gilroy's fabulous text, *The Black Atlantic*

on the other. In the long history of the Atlantic and beyond, these peoples, arts and work are set in the context of slavery, the movement and settlement of Europeans and the colonisation of native American Indian lands, and the diaspora of peoples of African descent across a huge geography. A movement of women, men and children, ideas, arts and influences. A movement of cultures. And, although a numbers of threads link these stories together (empire, sailing, and the sea), their particular genealogies, in many ways, have little in common. Across the different peoples of Ponte Nova and Nantucket, across the different forms of expression from literature to song, and across the different religions, politics, daily struggles and imagined futures, we happily refer to particular styles of music, to the lived experiences of workers, and to the conflict between people as 'cultural'. Moreover, we use the term *culture* not only to refer to things different in form or distant in place, but also to events and happenings across large stretches of time. Thus, we quite happily refer to a song from the 1970s and a book from 1851 with the same term, 'culture'. I say this not in order to dismiss the term 'culture' as too broad and general to take account properly of all the detail and distinction across these different cases, but to stand back in amazement at how well the category 'culture' allows us to hold these differences up for inspection, without ever making the assumption that the differences are reducible to one and the same thing; the deaths of a boatload of black sailors is not the same as a story of a whale. Having said this though, we should be wary of assuming that the meaning of the term culture has itself remained constant over those 100 or so years. Just as the world changes over time and place, so too does the meaning of a word and the use to which it is put.

This said, we might also wonder whether 'culture' is not only a category or an idea, but also something substantive, something material. If we are to talk about the pleasures of listening to a song or the hardship of living in a whaling community as 'cultural', then do we mean that a culture is tangible, malleable and affective? In a very real sense, songs and stories only travel and find their way across space and time because they are carried alongside other materials. In the satchel of a solitary traveller or in the minds and bodies of masses of people forced to take flight, in the ordinary conversation across a telephone line or through the global distribution of a Bollywood blockbuster, across land, sea and air, in different forms and through different means, across a multiplicity of bodies, culture finds its way into different places over different times. Culture in all its flexibility allows us to think not just of the stuff that is carried but also all that goes on in the carrying.

This book is a book about *cultural matters*. It is a book about cultural matters in two senses: first, in the sense that it is concerned with questions about the materiality of culture, about its material practices, about the

CULTURE AND SOCIETY

technologies that support it and shape it, about the forms and affects that any culture might have; and, secondly, it looks at why culture might be important in the shaping of our and other people's lives and at how culture has been valued in the academic study of culture, in particular in the discipline of cultural studies. But what, then, is culture? What is the matter of culture? And what kind of matter is the matter of culture? The English cultural critic, Raymond Williams, states boldly in his *Culture and Society* (1958) that 'the idea of culture, and the word itself in its general modern uses, came into English thinking in the period which we commonly describe as that of the Industrial Revolution'. A particular idea of culture emerges in relation to a series of related ideas about industry, democracy, class, and art. But to what does this idea refer? Williams argues that in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the word 'culture' changes its meaning:

Before this period, it had meant, primarily, the 'tending of natural growth', and then, by analogy, a process of human training. But this latter use, which had usually been a culture *of* something, was changed, in the nineteenth century, to *culture* as such, a thing in itself. It came to mean, first, 'a general state or habit of mind', having close relations with the idea of human perfection. Second, it came to mean 'the general state of intellectual development, in a society as a whole'. Third, it came to mean 'the general body of the arts'. Fourth, later in the century, it came to mean 'a whole way of life, material, intellectual and spiritual'. (1958: xvi)

A song by João Bosco or the abolitionist philosophy of Frederick Douglass might be understood through the first three types of culture to which Williams refers. These forms of culture refer to the arts and high cultural disciplines that are seen to cultivate the mind and the spirit, to lift ones self and society more generally above the quagmire of dereliction and depravity. Equally though, the peoples of Nantucket or Ponte Nova might be understood in the sense of culture as a 'whole way of life'. Thus we would understand a whaling community not simply according to the work that these people carried out, but according to how they lived more generally, including their forms of artistic expression as well as the ceremonies of marriage and kinship relations.

For Williams 'culture' in the nineteenth century takes up a privileged position of being able to document and bear witness to the changes in those other fields of industry, democracy, class and art. In that sense, culture takes on the capacity of being that which allows being to reflect and to be conscious of itself. Whether a television news programme or an advert on the subway or the statue of a political figure, culture is able to witness events and circumstances, changes and developments, lives and deaths in domains outside of itself. It makes possible a kind of reflection on the world. But in Williams' account, culture comes into being only inasmuch as it grows and

changes from being a *being in process* to *being as a state*, as if the process of being, that we might ordinarily associate with the notion of growth, is not sufficiently indicative of solidity and materiality. It is as if culture as a process is not seen to sufficiently matter. Of concern, then, is that in foregrounding a culture of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century as the matter of culture, we lose sight of culture in its more natural, organic, but also more technical and technological sense: namely, we lose sight of culture as growth and training. Culture could refer to the environment in which bees, oysters, fish, silk or bacteria might emerge and grow, but also to the growing itself, to the tending of the organisms, plants and animals, to their training and to their development. Culture refers to the close correlation between growth and government, in the sense that a parent governs the upbringing of their child. Such an idea of culture brings its meaning close to that of cultivation, to the cultivation of plants and animals and, by analogy, to the cultivation of manners and dress in humans. Just as the care and training of a field of wheat helps to produce a good yield, so it was thought, from the Romans onward, that humans could be equally cultivated.

Of course, by the end of *Culture and Society*, Williams has come full circle and suggests in response to the wound that is made upon society by industrial modernity that any sense of solidarity, of community and common culture must pay attention to its husbandry:

Against this the idea of culture is necessary, as an idea of the tending of *natural* growth. To know, even in part, any group of living process, is to see and wonder at their extraordinary variety and complexity. To know, even in part, the life of man, is to see and wonder at its extraordinary multiplicity, its great fertility of value... The tending is a common process, based on common decision, which then, within itself, comprehends the actual variations of life and growth. The natural growth and the tending are parts of a mutual process, guaranteed by the fundamental principle of equality of being. (1958: 337-8)

But instead of proposing culture as growth and government as a solution to the problem of division and inequality in modern society, we will, in this book, take it as our starting point. In that sense, when the literary critic, Terry Eagleton, reminds us that to talk of 'cultural materialism' is to present a tautology, we should not read either term as providing limits on the other (Eagleton, 2000). This book intends to avoid the Scylla of presuming that culture is reducible to, or determined by, matter and the Charybdis of taking matter as that fixed stuff of the world that can only be divided and shaped by an active culture.

That said, we should not then presume that the matter of culture – its being or its ontology, to put it more philosophically – is reducible to economic matter, to human bodily matter, or to lived experiential matter. If

CULTURE AND SOCIETY

anything, the history of culture from the late eighteenth century onward tells us that, importantly, matters of culture are also spiritual. Most notably the English critic, poet, and schools administrator, Matthew Arnold says in his influential volume *Culture and Anarchy* (originally published in 1869) '*The kingdom of God is within you; and culture, like manner, places human perfection in an internal condition, in the growth and predominance of our humanity proper, as distinguished from our animality*' (1960: 47). For Arnold, culture is what is best, the ability to know what is best, the mental and spiritual application of what is best, and the pursuit of what is best. Such an understanding of culture as spiritual matter, read through the doctrine of Christian Anglican theology, reads the traits of industrial capitalism, whether in terms of the bourgeois striving for wealth or the harsh realities of poverty, as matter to be purged:

Now, the use of culture is that it helps us, by means of its spiritual standard of perfection, to regard wealth as but machinery, and not only to say as a matter of words that we regard wealth as but machinery, but really to perceive and feel it is so. If it were not for this purging effect wrought upon our minds by culture, the whole world, the future as well as the present, would inevitably belong to the Philistines. (1960: 51-2)

For Arnold the spiritual matters of culture are posed against industry, machinery, and materialism:

The idea of perfection as an *inward* condition of the mind and spirit is at variance with the mechanical and material civilisation... Faith in machinery is... our besetting danger... as if it had a value in and for itself. What freedom but machinery? what is population but machinery? what is coal but machinery? what are railroads but machinery? what is wealth but machinery? what are, even, religious organisations but machinery? (1960: 49-50)

A theological division between soul and matter, between indivisible spirit and divisible matter, is presented, such that when life is reduced to mechanics it is only ever seen as instrumental. But for Arnold, culture as the inward perfection of the soul is matched by its more '*general expansion of the human family*', in terms of the capacity of culture to be constitutive of a humanity that is more than the individual, and by its '*harmonious expansion of human nature*', in terms of its ability '*for seeing more than one side of a thing*' (1960: 49).

For some, such as the poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge, this spiritual aspect of culture is closely tied to a sensibility for the nation and for the tradition and progress of civilisation. Thus against the backdrop of a still-recent memory of the French Revolution of 1789, he says:

the objects and final intention of the whole order being these - preserve the stores, and to guard the treasures, of past civilisation, and thus to bind the present to the past; to perfect and add to the

same, and thus to connect the present with the future; but especially to diffuse through the whole community, and to every native entitled to its laws and rights, that quantity and quality of knowledge which was indispensable both for understanding of those rights, and for the performance of the duties correspondent. (1972: 34)

Only if wisely guided and cultivated can a nation and civilisation grow. For Coleridge, writing before Arnold, an ecclesiastical language is used to describe the cultivation of a nation, but it is one that was intended to be stripped of its religion, such that any governing class cultivating the spirit of the nation was not of a religious, but a cultural, nature.

It is in the context of the French revolution that a range of philosophers and poets, writing before Arnold, help to give birth to a sense of culture as embodying the spirit of the people, namely a notion that the people are the primary site of cultural expression, a people of spirit and nation. This seemingly more modern definition can be seen clearly, nearly 100 years later, in its more solidified form in Edward Burnett Tylor's 1871 text *Primitive Culture: 'Culture or Civilisation, taken in its wide ethnographic sense, is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society'* (Tylor, 1874: 1, quoted in Bennett, 1998: 93, Kuper, 2000: 56). The anthropologist, Adam Kuper, refers to Tylor's work as nothing less than 'an intellectual revolution' (2000: 56), but although there is much agreement that Tylor's definition of culture leaves little that is not included under its wing, there is some dispute as to the role that Tylor plays in the long genealogy of modern culture. For example, the historian of anthropology, George Stocking had argued that Tylor's definition, in fact rested on Arnold's understanding of culture and civilisation: namely, far from putting into play a relativist understanding of different cultures (in the plural), Tylor had reduced culture to a single evolutionary and hierarchical model (i.e. to Culture in the singular) (Stocking, 1968). Thus we can clearly see this when Tylor states, with regard to the question of hierarchically organising different cultures across the globe, that: '[t]he educated world of Europe and America practically settles a standard by simply placing its own nations at one end of the social series and savage tribes at the other, arranging the rest of mankind between these limits according as they correspond more closely to savage or to cultured life' (Tylor, 1874:26).

Tylor's relation, not just to Arnold, but to the Romantic tradition, is significant in terms of how we understand the notion that culture is a whole way of life. Williams, in 1958, clearly locates the emergence of this idea in the tradition of Coleridge and Carlyle:

The sense of 'culture' as a 'whole way of life' has been most marked in twentieth-century anthropology and sociology ... The sense depends, in fact, on the literary tradition. The development of social

CULTURE AND SOCIETY

anthropology has tended to inherit and substantiate the ways of looking at society and a common life which had earlier been wrought out from general experience of industrialism. The emphasis on a 'whole way of life' is continuous from Coleridge and Carlyle, but what was a personal assertion of value has become a general intellectual method. (1958: 232-3)

By and large though, most modern commentators, and Williams himself in his later works, refer to Tylor as the originator of culture in its anthropological sense. Thus, for example, even the poet and critic T.S. Eliott, in his *Notes Toward the Definition of Culture*, states that: 'the culture of the individual cannot be isolated from that of the group, and... the culture of the group cannot be abstracted from that of the whole society;... our notion of "perfection" must take all three sense of "culture" into account at once' (1948: 24). Moreover, he states that:

I mean first of all what the anthropologists mean: the way of life of a particular people living together in one place. That culture is made visible in their arts, in their social system, in their habits and customs; in their religion. But these things added together do not constitute the culture... a culture is more than the assemblage of its arts, customs, and religious beliefs. These things all act upon each other, and fully to understand one you have to understand all. (1948: 120)

As the cultural theorist Tony Bennett argues, the definition of culture proposed by Tylor is 'inescapably normative' (1998: 88). But a notion of the 'anthropological concept of culture' is normative, not only because of the way that Tylor provides a model of uneven comparison between different cultures, but also because of the way that a certain version of late nineteenth century anthropology is used to represent the whole of a discipline from then to now. In part, it is due to the uneasy history of the relation between anthropology, colonialism and a sense of culture as residing in the locale of a particular place (the 'tribe', the 'society', the 'nation', the 'people') that contemporary anthropology has become so reflexive and critical about itself as a discipline and about its understanding of culture (cf. Appadurai, 1996; Geertz, 1973; Hannerz, 1992; Rosaldo, 1993; Strathern, 1991, 1995).

Nevertheless, despite the sophistication of many contemporary anthropologists and cultural theorists as to the place and nature of culture, there is a residual normativity that runs throughout some debates about culture in the field of cultural studies and elsewhere. At too many times, the positive ascription of 'the anthropological concept' or the application of an 'ethnographic study' of culture brings with it the baggage of whole series of connotations about place, society and nation. Thus, if in this book I refer to 'the anthropological definition' it is not to reduce anthropology further to a normative understanding, but to foreground the problem of the often unwitting deployment of this late nineteenth century discourse. This is an issue for me

because to a large extent this book concerns the attempt to deconstruct that understanding, to make connections from language and belief to physical materiality, but also to lift culture from the space of an enclosure and stretch it, warp it and twist it. The roots that ground oneself in culture and the routes that traverse that cultural identity mean that we can think about culture as more than simply bound within a single place. I, for example, live in London. If I think about the culture of London, I am forced to do more than look at what happens or has happened within a single geographical place and to do more than look at the people that occupy that particular territory. In order to understand the culture of those people who live in London, I have to look also to the connections that are made to peoples, communities, places, media and cultures across and outside of that particular geographical locale. Moreover, in doing so, we would be forced to rethink the idea that there was any single culture within London, that there was 'a whole way of life' that could be seen and studied. To study a culture, then, means not to analyse the habits, customs, beliefs, ideas and arts in an enclosed and isolated place, but to investigate the connections and disconnections, the circulations and movements, the ups and downs that make a culture a living culture above and beyond its singular location.

The study of culture over the last two centuries has been shaped by the disciplines of anthropology, literary studies and sociology, but also philosophy, art history, linguistics, media studies, psychoanalysis, politics and history to name but a few. Cultural studies – as that discipline that has 'culture' as its primary object of analysis – has been informed by these surrounding disciplines. Cultural studies is a field that is disciplined through its relatively short history by a focus on certain kinds of cultural theory, certain objects of study and certain kinds of method and methodology. To say this is not to claim that cultural studies is not thus interdisciplinary or is not formed by its surrounding and supportive disciplines, but that of necessity any knowledge and any field of knowledge is situated within particular contexts and forms of understanding. It is not that cultural studies is clearly distinguished from these other disciplines that consider the cultural, but that cultural studies is perhaps a favoured home for doing so. In many ways, cultural studies has taken a lead and has become a favoured site for thinking across these disciplinary spaces about historical and contemporary culture. Moreover, cultural studies is a frame within which one can consider the translations and cross-overs across objects of study, such as the relation between a novel and a television programme, or a film and genetic biology, or an airport and professional fashions, or a Latin text on military campaigns and nineteenth-century painting.

By and large, the cross-overs that have contributed to the formation of cultural studies have been within the arts, humanities and human sciences.

CULTURE AND SOCIETY

But more recent innovation in the discipline has led, in the context of the cultural, to translation between the humanities, social sciences and the physical and medical sciences. For example, recent research might consider the relations between a medical text, masculine practices of medicine and the emergence of medical diagnostics, or it might consider our understanding of the novelistic form and the impact of early twentieth century physics. Cultural studies has become a space for thinking about the economics of globalisation and the cultural fact of empire, for grappling with the relation between genetic technoscience and film culture, for mapping the physical connections between different identities in geographical space, and for imagining how objects might have something to say about the nature of culture. In this sense, cultural studies is one of the places in which it is possible to analyse the relations across the human and non-human, the technological and the organic, and the natural and artificial. Such work clearly questions any conventional understanding of the divisions between culture and nature, culture and technology, or culture and materiality.

In this book I try to give a sense of some of the main theoretical models for understanding recent developments in the field concerning culture and materiality, but I do so in the context of what many would see as the founding and longstanding debates and problems of cultural studies. In the opening three chapters I consider three areas of debate that have dominated the field, concerning the production of cultural meanings, the shaping of cultural meanings and identities within structures and institutions of power, and the valorisation of popular culture as a central stage in the organisation of modern societies. In chapter two, on semiotics, I look at the articulation of cultural signs: how cultures take on meaning and are thought to be structured like languages, how cultural expression is always in the context of social interaction and always in relation to an audience and how cultural signs are like machines that do things and that make connections not just to other cultural signs, or in the context of a single cultural system, but to other materialities in sometimes quite complex forms. Then in chapter three the question of power in the context of culture is considered how culture is structured and formed in the context of relations of power and how culture assists in the exercise of power and control over others. Is culture a means of deceiving people, an ideology that helps to keep people in their place? Or is the relation between culture and power more ambivalent, and more open, oriented as much to the possibility of democracy and freedom as it is to control and domination? In chapter four, I look at the notion of popular culture in the history of cultural studies. I look at why it is important to study popular culture (in the sense that ordinary cultural forms and practices are as important to investigate as elite or high cultural forms and practices), but I also ask

what we might mean by that category and whether it has any relevance for contemporary understandings of culture and cultural formations. My discussion in these opening chapters is intended to give the reader a good sense of some of the core debates in the field, but also to suggest the movement that debate might be taking: namely, in terms of a shift toward understanding cultural semiosis as both symbolic and material, understanding power as not only ideological but also more governmental and technical and understanding a sense of common culture as predicated less on a national people, than on a more dispersed multitude.

In the next four chapters, I look at four contemporary and central problem-spaces, or fields of questioning and investigation, in cultural studies: the problem of identity, the problem of body, the problem of economy and the problem of globalisation. The list is certainly not exhaustive, but it is suggestive of what may be seen as significant debates for us to consider now. These chapters build on the earlier chapters; they attempt to give the reader a strong grounding in what are the important aspects of these areas of debate; and they are intended to push you into thinking about these areas innovatively. Chapter five, on identity, then looks at questions of cultural identity in the writings of Homi Bhabha, Judith Butler and Stuart Hall concerning questions of cultural authority, performance, and diasporisation. But the chapter also discusses the problem of the subject in relation to an object world that is lived and organised through complex foldings and interaction. In chapter six, on the body, I consider culture, not in opposition to, but alongside nature and technology. Donna Haraway's understanding of the cyborg or Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's thoughts on desiring-machines or Bruno Latour and Michel Callon's work on actor-networks all help us to rethink more classical conceptions of the body and natural organism. Moreover, it is through the work of Michel Foucault that we begin to understand how not only the body, but life itself has since the eighteenth century increasingly become a central focus of power and knowledge. Suffice it to say, this has major implications for how we think about culture. In the following chapter seven, on the economic, I look at how Marxist approaches to the relation between culture and economy were pursued in cultural studies in the 1970s and 1980s. But I also look to more recent work on how the economic is itself seen as a cultural phenomenon. To suggest that something seemingly so material as the economic can be thought as cultural has profound consequences for how we understand the economic but also culture itself. And in the last chapter of this section, chapter eight, I look at the problem of globalisation. In the contemporary world it is hard not to see how cultural spaces are connected to other cultural spaces and infused by cultures from other places. Culture is increasingly circulated, stretched and warped. I look at this problem in terms

CULTURE AND SOCIETY

of contemporary debate about changing economic, social, political and cultural conditions, in the context of the brute historical fact of empire, but we also urge a note of caution with regard to how to account for the scale of such a global problem. In the final chapter of the book, I conclude not only by attempting to bring together the various debates and arguments and schools of thought discussed in the book, but also by raising the question of how we might think about an ethics of cultural study. In doing so, we return to some of the core literature within the field, but read from a different angle. Across all of these chapters the relation between culture and matter and the question of the materiality of culture is a constant provocation: what is the matter of culture? How is culture material?

This book is one for students who are initially coming to the field, as much as it is one for those thinking about some key issues at more advanced stages in their thought. It is a book that is clearly theoretical. It is not a book about method or about how to research culture. It is a book of ideas about the nature of culture. This is an introductory book, but it is not meant to be an easy book to read – as if interesting ideas should be easily digested and consumed. But nor is it a difficult book as if good ideas were only ones that were incomprehensible or made incomprehensible through lack, rather than acquisition, of knowledge. The understanding of culture – no less than the mending of a car, working in a stock exchange, or caring for the plants in a garden – implies the need for a technical (i.e. theoretical) language. Any technical language, of necessity, marks a difference between the one who knows and the one who doesn't, between the professional and the lay person. Such ideas lay at the heart of cultural studies thinking, about popular culture and about democracy. But the point is not to make analysis accessible to the point of meaninglessness. Nor is the point to make this book a popular book, if by that I mean one read or capable of being read by all and anyone. Rather this book is intended as a point of translation between a discipline and field of study and those who are interested in these ideas and those who want to learn more. In many ways it is not intended to drag everyone in off the streets; it could not, nor should it try. It is a book in a sea of other books and writings about culture. It is hoped that anyone reading it will understand that to sail across the waves requires some training of how to handle a boat in the water; how one achieves that training is another matter, but for me this book in front of you is one form of that discipline.