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**DIRKS
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A READER IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIAL THEORY

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Editors

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• I N T R O D U C T I O N •

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THIS READER is part of a more general effort to explore the varieties of relations among the phenomena of "culture," "power," and "history." Perhaps the best way to explain our objectives is to elaborate on the current thinking concerning these three terms and the contexts of their interpenetration.

Culture. The notion of culture has recently been undergoing some of the most radical rethinking since the early 1960s. Within anthropology, where culture was in effect the key symbol of the field, the concept has come under challenge precisely because of new understandings regarding power and history. Thus, for example, one of the core dimensions of the concept of culture has been the notion that culture is "shared" by all members of a given society. But as anthropologists have begun to study more complex societies, in which divisions of class, race, and ethnicity are fundamentally constitutive, it has become clear that if we speak of culture as shared, we must now always ask "By whom?" and "In what ways?" and "Under what conditions?"

This shift has been manifested in several very visible ways. At the level of theory, the concept of culture is being expanded by Foucauldian notions of discourse, and Gramscian notions of hegemony (on the latter point, the works of Raymond Williams have been particularly influential). Both concepts emphasize the degree to which culture is grounded in unequal relations and is differentially related to people and groups in different social positions. Connected to this point, at the level of empirical work, there has been an explosion of studies, both contemporary and historical, on the cultural worlds of different classes, ethnic groups, racial groups, and so on and the ways in which these cultural worlds interact.

Another core aspect of the concept of culture has been the notion of culture's extraordinary durability. The cultures of "traditional societies" were thought to have changed extraordinarily slowly, if at all. The virtual absence of historical investigation in anthropology, until recently, has meant that cultural systems have, indeed, appeared timeless, at least until ruptured by "culture contact." But as anthropologists have begun to adopt, at least partially, a historical perspective, the durability of culture has dissolved. In many cases, timeless traditions turn out to have been "invented," and not very long ago at that (see Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983). In other cases, long-term cultural configurations have, indeed, been very stable (e.g., Bloch 1986; Geertz 1980; Ortner 1989), but we now realize that this is a peculiar state of affairs, requiring very sharp questioning and investigation.

Finally, a central aspect of the concept of culture has been the claim of relative coherence and internal consistency—a "system of symbols," a "struc-

ture of relations." But an intriguing line of discussion in contemporary critical theory has now posed a major alternative view: culture as multiple discourses, occasionally coming together in large systemic configuration, but more often coexisting within dynamic fields of interaction and conflict.

Perhaps the main point about the current situation is that the anthropologists no longer "own" culture. At least some of the critique and transformation of the culture concept derives from its use in creative, and not simply derivative, ways in other fields—in history, philosophy, sociology, and literary criticism, to name only the most obvious cases. The field of "cultural studies," which established itself with astonishing effectiveness in the last decade, draws on literary criticism, social history, sociology, and anthropology to fashion what has become a distinct perspective on the culture of power, the culture of resistance, and the politics of cultural production and manipulation. (See Johnson 1987; Brantlinger 1990; Grossberg, Nelson, and Treichler 1992.) Which brings us to the second term for discussion:

Power. Just as the concept of culture is undergoing fragmentation, expansion, and reconstruction, so are issues of power, domination, and authority. And here, too, the questioning extends across a wide variety of fields.

One of the lasting goods of the intellectual radicalism of the 1960s—which was also the founding moment of contemporary social history—has been an expanded and more sophisticated understanding of the role and nature of "the political" in social life. This involves a radically deinstitutionalized understanding of the political process, in which questions of conformity and opposition, of the potentials for stability and cohesion in the social order, and of the strength or fragility of the dominant value system, are all displaced from the conventional institutional arena for studying them (that is, the state and public organizations in the narrower sense) onto a variety of settings previously regarded as "nonpolitical," including the workplace, the street, the deviant or criminal subculture, the recreational domain, and, above all, the family and the home. If "the personal is political" (the specifically feminist contribution to this shift of understanding), then so, too, is the wider sphere of everyday transactions.

Thus if one direction of social history, perhaps the predominant one, has been to depoliticize the social into a discrete and manageable object for study, another has been to invest it precisely with political meanings. Politics was inscribed in the texture of the everyday. The effects of these shifts on the concept of power have been multiple.

There is first of all the sense that all the relations of everyday life bear a certain stamp of power. As Foucault in particular has made us see (see esp. Foucault 1978, 1980), people acting as men and women, parents and children, teachers and students, doctors and patients, priests and penitents, can no longer be regarded simply as performing functionally defined "roles." Rather, these terms define relations in which the parties, whatever else they may do, are constantly negotiating questions of power, authority, and the control of the definitions of reality.

Second, there is the sense that everyday life and culture, in which people implicitly "conform to" or "accept" their situation, should not always be contrasted with dramatic "social movements," in which people question and challenge the status quo. Instead, while organized social movements remain enormously important in understanding large-scale transformations, much can be learned by attending to "everyday forms of resistance" as well (see Scott 1985, 1990; Lüdtke 1993).

But this, in turn, opens the question of the relationship between popular culture—in which people strive to define their identities, their boundaries, their self-respect, their "space" against the established order—and more well-defined social movements that claim to represent "the people." Such movements often themselves become removed from everyday experience, their members coming to see popular behavior as something to be educated, improved, disciplined. At the same time, the people on whose behalf such movements claim to speak often find the language and the mechanics of these movements remote and alienating. The complex and problematic relations between social movements and disorderly popular culture, involving distinctions of class and gender, ethnicity and race, roughness and respectability, are becoming central to the contemporary problematic.

Finally, the move in social history away from state politics, and toward a focus on the "small people," has often gone too far by dropping the state out of the picture. The redefinition of politics in another domain of discussion has also applied to concepts of the state; this, too, needs to be recaptured. At present much creative effort is needed to synthesize an understanding of local movements and class culture, on the one hand, and large-scale state dynamics, on the other.

Thus "power" is moving around the social space. No longer an exclusive property of "repressive apparatuses," it has invaded our sense of the smallest and most intimate of human relations as well as of the largest; it belongs to the weak as well as to the strong; and it is constituted precisely within the relations between official and unofficial agents of social control and cultural production. At the same time, there is a major recognition of the degree to which power itself is a cultural construct. The modes of expression of physical force and violence are culturally shaped, while force and violence in turn become cultural symbols, as powerful in their nonexecution as in their doing. And, of course, force in turn is only a tiny part of power, so that much of the problematic of power today is a problematic of knowledge making, universe construction, and the social production of feeling and of "reality."

History. One of the most obvious changes in the field of anthropology in recent years is the extent to which the field has been moving in a historical direction. Only slightly less obviously, history has become increasingly anthropological. On both sides, some extremely interesting and important work has come out of these shifts, yet we may now recognize that the love affair between the two fields has been relatively uncritical. On the side of anthropology, the category of "history" was for a long time captured by the so-

strategic character of his analysis. Indeed, Foucault's reading of power, and of discourses more generally, is always strategic, tactical, polemical, situated. Thus Foucault has examined hospitals, prisons, asylums, the truth regimes of philology and humanism, the discourses of sexuality, and what he calls "government" in a broad sense: "the government of children, of souls, of communities, of families, of the sick" (1982, 221). In subjecting to his critical scrutiny the institutions of the modern era otherwise regarded as rational and liberating, Foucault has both perfected his analytic of power and demonstrated its historicity: the success of modern forms of domination has resided in the dispersal of power from the state to a wide variety of agencies with "reasonable" claims to autonomy. This is not to say that Foucault ignores the state, only perhaps that he appreciates how misleading its obviousness can be. Indeed, Foucault reads the sinuous and subtle operations of power back into the state, which since the eighteenth century has attained an unprecedented capacity, "both an individualizing and a totalizing form of power" (1982, 213).

The triumph of modern power, however, provides us with only a partial sense of the problems of understanding its workings and is never to be construed as sufficient reason for total despair. Power exists for Foucault not as some essential thing or elementary force, but, rather, as a relation. If power is therefore everywhere, this is "not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere" (Foucault 1978, 93). Foucault continues, "[W]here there is power, there is resistance." But even as his discussion of the necessary relation of power to resistance makes clear the immanent cracks in all forms of discursive domination, we also discover that resistance itself cannot be placed outside of power, that there is "no single locus of great Refusal, no soul of revolt, source of all rebellions, or pure law of the revolutionary" (ibid., 95), no place in which the spirit of resistance may be kept wholly pure and safe. Instead, Foucault sees a plurality of resistances, which play the multiple roles of "adversary, target, support, or handle in power relations" (ibid.).

Foucault's complex understanding of power therefore invites analyses of the multiple ways in which power is deployed, engaging the myriad "points of resistance present everywhere in the power network" (ibid.). For Foucault, power is not simply juridical. Rather than exercising the negative function of limitation or repression, of just saying no, power is productive and inciting. Power cannot somehow be stripped away from social relations or discursive forms to expose the essence at the core, and the utopian prospect of eliding the relations of power in the politics of resistance can only be illusory. But far from thereby neutralizing the importance of power, Foucault instead demonstrates the complexity of its ubiquity, and compels us to assert that without it, neither history nor culture can be understood.

For the purposes of this reader, we echo Foucault's advocacy of a "new economy of power relations" (1982, 210) and see it as leading in a number of different, contestatory directions. For example, Foucault's writings on how

this economy works in asylums, clinics, and prisons are taken up explicitly in Tony Bennett's paper, "The Exhibitionary Complex" (this volume), this time in terms of the institutional history of museums and exhibitions. Although Bennett begins his article with explicit acknowledgement of Foucault's method, he also seeks to qualify the terms Foucault proposes for investigating the development of power/knowledge relations during the formation of the modern period. Whereas Foucault's classic institutional mechanisms of subjection involve confinement, Bennett's examples are of exhibition, display, and spectacle. Surely the carceral system is only one aspect of the individualizing and normalizing technologies of power. Museums and exhibitions, Bennett argues, "sought to allow the people, and *en masse* rather than individually, to know rather than be known, to become the subjects rather than the objects of knowledge" to be impressed by the capacity of the state to arrange things and bodies, not least society itself, for public display.

Foucault argued in *Discipline and Punish* (1977a) that the modern prison was part of the development of a society based not on spectacle but on surveillance. The panopticon was seen from the outside simply as a sign of disciplinary power, but on the inside was a labyrinth for the disciplinary gaze, where subjects are always seen by invisible but all-invasive eyes. The great exhibitions of the nineteenth century, on the other hand, were designed so that everyone could see. One of the major objects that could be seen, of course, was society itself, an abstraction made material, an object less of discipline than of regulation. Bourgeois national culture was both celebrated and constituted by the civic instruction involved in assembling large crowds for peaceful and uplifting purposes. The rowdiness of the public fair and carnival gave way to the moral and cultural regulation of the museum.

It is interesting to compare this approach to nineteenth-century bourgeois culture with existing historical literatures, most of which have yet to register the impact of Foucauldian perspectives and are generally formed around sets of particularized national-historiographical preoccupations. In British social history, for instance, one such focus has been on religion, philanthropy, moral improvement, and the bases of associational life; in Germany attention has focused on the supposed difficulties of grounding liberal ideals of citizenship in the emergent structures of bourgeois economic power. In the massive outpouring of publications revisiting the social and cultural history of the nineteenth-century German bourgeoisie since the mid-1980s, there is no evidence of the possibilities suggested by Bennett's appropriation of Foucault or the more general literature on museums and exhibitions on which he draws (see Kocka and Mitchell 1992; Blackburn 1991; on Britain, see Wolff and Seed [1988]). A different, but cognate, line of enquiry also stems from Jürgen Habermas's concept of the public sphere, although the persisting nervousness of Habermas before the kind of cultural analysis represented in this reader tends to position such inquiry in a somewhat different intellectual space, as, indeed, does the more vehement resistance of Habermas to a Foucauldian notion of power (see Habermas [1962] 1989; Calhoun 1992; Eley, this vol-

mately to understand the bases of "social action," somehow the examination of any actual instances of social action was never quite reached, being endlessly deferred as the theory of systems was refined. Lévi-Strauss on the other hand had no interest in even nodding to the actor. As the debates with Sartre made clear, the whole point of his framework was quite intentionally to get away from a philosophical tradition in which the actor (or consciousness, or will, or intention, or subject) had been endowed with far too much ontological and historical force and freedom (Lévi-Strauss 1966).

Most poststructuralists in France, including Foucault, sustained and indeed expanded the structuralist bias against theorizing the subject, particularly in the form of an agent with will and intentionality. While dropping certain aspects of Lévi-Strauss's hyperrationality, they did not drop this core tenet of the structuralist agenda, and thus should be considered late- or ultra-structuralist, rather than post-, as more or less any French thinker who became popular after Lévi-Strauss tends to be. Insofar as a subject was recognized or postulated within this framework at all, it was a radically decentered subject, often drawing from the psychoanalytic theories of Lacan. The subject had no internal coherence, and was granted neither the originary grounds of autonomous existence nor the epistemic means for self-knowledge; instead, the subject was seen as dispersed in (multiple) texts, discursive formations, fragmentary readings, and signifying practices, endless constructing and dislodging the conceit of the self.

The papers in the present collection have been selected in part to constitute a response to this position. They do so in two rather different ways. On the one hand, there is general agreement that the bourgeois agent and psyche are not the eternal subject; on the other hand, there is a clear refusal to argue that the acting subject has no ontological reality whatsoever. Thus we try to highlight efforts to understand the ways in which the subject is culturally and historically constructed in different times and places, as a being with a particular kind of affective organization, particular kinds of knowing and understanding, particular modes of gender and sexual ordering, and so forth. At the same time we seek to highlight efforts to understand the ways in which culturally and historically constituted subjects become agents in the active sense—how their actions and modes of being in the world always sustain and sometimes transform the very structures that made them.

Constituting the Subject

We must begin by confronting the ambiguity in almost all the available terms for the actor, that is, we must confront the fact that all these terms have both an active and a passive implication. Both the notion of the agent and the notion of the subject imply a person who is an active initiator of action. According to *The Concise Oxford Dictionary*, all of the primary meanings of "agent" are highly active: "One who exerts power or produces an effect; [of things] efficient cause; a natural force acting on matter . . . ; one who does the actual work." The active implications of "subject" are less prominent, but are

thrown into relief when the term is contrasted with "object." In these contexts, both agents and subjects are "authors" of their actions and their projects. But "agent," of course, also means "representative"; travel agents or shipping agents act on behalf of their clients, not on their own initiative. Similarly, as Foucault in particular has emphasized, one of the meanings of "subject" is precisely a person under the dominion of an authority of some sort: a king's subjects are in a relationship of obedience to him, and laboratory subjects may do only what they are told to do by the researcher. And there are further terms, all of which carry their own nuances of activity and passivity: "person," "self," "actor," "individual," "consciousness." Given that there is no perfectly unambiguous vocabulary for the phenomenon in question, we will simply shift about between the terms undogmatically and clarify our intentions as we go.

Perhaps the most extreme position on the constitution of the subject is staked out by Foucault, who fully equates the constitution of subjects with subjection in the dominative sense. As he says at the beginning of his essay "The Subject and Power," "My objective . . . has been to create a history of the different modes by which, in our culture, human beings are made subjects . . . three modes of objectification which transform human beings into subjects" (1982, 208). He goes on to say that he is interested in exploring not so much institutions of power, but forms of power, and specifically that form of power that "categorizes the individual, marks him [*sic*] by his own individuality, attaches him to his own identity, imposes a law of truth on him which he must recognize and which others must recognize in him. It is a form of power which makes individuals subjects" (1982, 212).

Most of the authors in this volume do not take as uncompromising a position on the subjection of the subject as did Foucault. Nonetheless, even for authors committed to recognizing much greater scope for transformative practice, there is now a strong Foucauldian tendency to recognize that the identities culturally made available to us are often deforming and debilitating, at once constituting and limiting, providing people with a narrow sense of possibility, keeping them in their places. Through his concept of "habitus," Pierre Bourdieu develops this point extensively, arguing that the parameters of personal identity—especially of one's "place" within a system of social differences and inequalities—are structured into the objective environment (Bourdieu 1977; see esp. ch. 4, reprinted in this volume). The organization of space (in houses, in villages and cities) and time (the rhythms of work, leisure, holidays) embody the assumptions of gender, age, and social hierarchy upon which a particular way of life is built. As the actor grows up, and lives everyday life within these spatial and temporal forms, s/he comes to embody those assumptions, literally and figuratively. The effect is one of near-total naturalization of the social order, the forging of homologies between personal identity and social classification.

Bourdieu's discussion of the inculcation of doxa, of the sense that the limits of one's subjective desires are more or less isomorphic with the limits of objective possibility, is a discussion of the formation not of any particular

From this vantage point, Bourdieu had two principal objectives: to show how these real divisions become masked through the process of naturalization, and to chart this process as it seeped into people's heads, bodies, selves. The realization of both objectives is to be found in practice. Thus the enterprise of practice theory, in Bourdieu's hands, is largely a matter of decoding the public cultural forms within which people live their lives—the patterns and rhythms of work, eating, sleeping, leisure, sociability, patterns and rhythms that already encode the divisions, distinctions, and inequalities of the society as a whole. And the aim is to get as close as possible (both ethnographically and imaginatively) to the practical ways in which, in enacting these forms, the subject/agent comes to embody them, assume them, take them so utterly for granted that "it goes without saying because it comes without saying."

In *Marxism and Literature* (1977, excerpted in this volume) Raymond Williams works within the context of British literary studies and Marxist politics, and seems at one level to be concerned with very different kinds of issues. However, like Bourdieu, Williams is concerned with the degree to which the social and cultural process as a whole, which he interprets with his classic reading of Gramsci's theory of hegemony, shapes identities and, in his famous phrase "structures of feeling," so as to produce the naturalization of the arbitrary to which Bourdieu attends so centrally. But Williams is more directly concerned than Bourdieu with the question of resistance and social transformation, and thus attends more directly to the question of how hegemony (similar to but critically different from doxas and discourses) can be at once so powerfully defining and shaping of identities and worldviews, and at the same time limited or "open" enough that the actor is never wholly "subjected." Williams comes up with a variety of solutions, sometimes emphasizing the historical complexity of social formations, such that there are always "residual" and "emergent" arenas of practice that do not articulate fully with the current regimes of the ordinary; sometimes emphasizing the synchronic social complexity of a given social entity, such that (say) different classes will necessarily have at least partially different sets of practices and views of the world; and sometimes emphasizing the openness and inexhaustibility of creative cultural forms, which demand interpretive flexibility and imaginativeness on the part of the actor. Recognizing the "finite but significant openness of many works of art, as signifying forms making possible but also requiring persistent and variable signifying responses" helps us see the ways in which, and the degrees to which, "the cultural process must not be assumed to be merely adaptive, extensive, and incorporative."

Calls to practice have taken diverse forms in different national contexts as well as in different disciplinary formats. Another important variant is the so-called *Alltagsgeschichte* ("everyday life") school of social history developed among German social historians. Exponents of this view, such as Hans Medick and Alf Lüdtke, examine the resources and resourcefulness of ordinary people in the conduct of their everyday lives, and find their values and

experiences not easily assimilable to the conventional narratives of political history and social development (Lüdtke 1993, Eley 1989). At one level, this represents the now-familiar social historian's move, which carries analysis beneath or behind the actions of formal institutions, such as government or parties, to the structuring context of society itself. But in fact, such work is far more than this, and registers precisely the influences expounded in this introduction—above all, a turning to anthropology and a sophisticated conception of culture and power relations—so that the microcontexts of everyday analysis are less the superior realities that some populist social histories would like them to be, than the necessary ground to which the big and abstract questions of domination and subordination, power and resistance have to be chased. In other words, it is in daily experience, in the settings of ordinary desire and the trials of making it through, that the given power relations are contested or secured, in an always-incomplete process of negotiation, which is rarely unambiguously "lost" or "won."

If "power" is the term that transforms both "culture" and "history" in ways that move beyond their midcentury forms, "practice"—in the extended sense suggested here—in turn grounds both culture and power in history. In its strongest claims, practice theory is nothing less than a theory of history (thick history?), a theory "of how social beings, with their diverse motives and their diverse intentions, make and transform the world in which they live" (Ortner 1989, 193). Practice takes many forms, from the little routines of everyday life, which continually establish and naturalize the boundaries of the subject's aspirations; to the "micropractices" of relations of power and knowledge, as for example between therapist and patient, which reestablish the normalcy or deviancy and very forms of certain desires; to the practices of resistance, both daily and in large-scale social movements, which denaturalize and transform the boundaries of exploitation, oppression, and prejudice in custom and law.

RESISTANCE

If the call to practice is an attempt at one level to repeal the normative character of social scientific assumption, it carries its own freight of problems. Practice may contest the overdeterminations of theories of power, but Bourdieu and Foucault often appear as two giants chipping away at two sides of the same theoretical coin; while Foucault uncovers the operation of power in institutional discourses and disciplinary practices, Bourdieu shows us how power inscribes its logics and scripts into the everyday lives and categories of subjects, who carry the full weight of their etymological ambivalence. It is perhaps small wonder that resistance to some of the implications of these theoretical projects, even when this resistance takes these analyses of power and practice as the point of departure, has taken the form of seeking out resistance itself.

code (semiotically and politically) the Santal insurrection of 1855; he argues that the Santals used the resources of their own cultural religiosity to engage in a decidedly political contest against British domination.

Guha, an Indian historian responsible for organizing a collective of younger Indian historians under the banner of "Subaltern Studies," takes many of his terms and cues from Gramsci. However, he begins his essay with the challenge that the texts of historical analysis are always the texts of the dominant or, in the case of modern Indian history, the colonial power, and that the voices of the subaltern are either silent or muted and transformed by the grammar of official discourse in these texts. Thus peasants are texted only in the colonial prose that contains, controls, and dismisses their subjectivity. This textualization is more than simply an abstract report: it is an expression of the colonial codes that provide the dominant structures for peasant life as well. As Guha notes, the peasant's "subalternity was materialized by the structure of property, institutionalized by law, sanctified by religion, and made tolerable—and even desirable—by tradition." So far, Guha's reasoning seems consistent with a Foucauldian understanding of the power of discourse, in this case, the truth regime that was institutionalized in the invasive colonial presence in India.

However, Guha demonstrates his departure from Foucault and his specific debt to Gramsci in taking as his primary subject the recovery and interpretation of peasant resistance. In other words, power is acknowledged and analyzed, but less because of its totalizing importance than because it has become the foil for uncovering the suppressed subject position of the subaltern. Official texts are read to show the extraordinary complexity and resilience of peasant rebellion, the expression of rebellion through the systematic (if sometimes displaced) upending of colonial codes. Guha rescues the peasant in part by reading silences, in part by explaining the necessarily "religious" character of protest in an overdetermined, "prepolitical" colonial context. The terms of analysis are structuralist and oppositional; there is a clear implication, in spite of the subsequent alignment of the Subaltern school with Foucault by some of its authors, that radical history must champion resistance rather than power, even in contexts where power seems not only triumphant, but able to trivialize the gestures and idioms of any revolt from below.

The return of the repressed, however, raises a host of theoretical and empirical problems. In particular, when Guha attempts to restore the subject position of the subaltern in history, he must resort to characterizations of peasant tradition, culture, and religion that reverberate problematically with the views of colonial anthropology itself. "Peasants" are often homogenized (not least by all being gendered as "he"), reified, and romanticized. When questioning the European constitution of the universal subject, whether for any history celebrating resistance, or for non-Western histories where European subjects are imposed, it is clear that we constantly run the risk of reinventing all-too-familiar categories, the genealogical foundations that take us right back to the

heart of modern darkness: colonial history and the patriarchal anthropologies of domination. Nonetheless, Guha and the Subaltern Studies collective stake out an important pole of the resistance problematic forcefully and eloquently, insisting on the necessity for recovering not only instances of resistance but also some of the irrepressible cultural forms from which resistance can grow.

In "Ritual and Resistance: Subversion as a Social Fact" (this volume), Nicholas Dirks reviews a range of arguments about the character of resistance and its relationship to both periodic and quotidian forms of cultural practice. The essay confronts us with ethnographic examples of disorder, disruption, and dissention in a set of key village rituals in southern India, and suggests that resistance as a conceptual preoccupation may be most useful as a way of undermining the assumptions of order that undergird most of our social science. It prompts us to look not just for hidden transcripts but for systematic and pervasive disorder. In arguing that order is, at least in part, an effect of power, he proposes that the search for disorder through resistance may provide access to more critical understandings of both order and power. The recognition of disorder also opens ways to confront the ambivalent relationship of discourse and event, in terms of cultures of power where the center never holds, in which the twin processes of containment and dispersal are always in conflict (though in culturally specific contexts and ways). Thus the road to resistance might take us further than we expected, into critical forms of reflection about the foundational assumptions underlying social scientific theories about social order, in this particular instance, anthropological concepts of ritual and culture (and resistance).

Nevertheless, even anthropological approaches to the study of cultural order/orders can demonstrate, as in Marshall Sahlins's paper, "Cosmologies of Capitalism" (this volume), that the culture concept need not be on the side of power. It may even provide the basis for articulating powerful resistance, in this case to the hegemonic spread of Western capitalism. Sahlins projects his insights about the cultural character of resistance onto the largest possible screen: the interactions of Europeans with Chinese, Hawaiians, and Kwakiutl in the course of European commercial expansion from the mid-eighteenth to the mid-nineteenth century. Here, the "subjects" in question are societies, peoples with their own traditions and their own histories, who accepted (though always selectively) the material goods the Europeans had to offer, but who resisted the frames of interpretation (which of course cast the Europeans as superior) that seemed to go with them. "Resistance" here was not so much a matter of articulating opposition as of reasserting existing cultural forms and of subordinating European goods to the fulfillment of traditional ends: "[D]estiny is not history. Nor is it always tragedy. Anthropologists tell of some spectacular forms of indigenous cultural change turning into modes of political resistance—in the name of cultural persistence." Thus culture can provide instances of dramatic resistance to Western hegemony and power, at

The politics of culture are explored in a number of essays in this volume, most directly in those by Susan McClary, Judith Williamson, Elizabeth Traube, and Susan Harding. Like Greenblatt, McClary (1990, 1992) extends the reach of critical cultural theory to "high" art. But in the paper reprinted here, "Living to Tell: Madonna's Resurrection of the Fleshly," she writes about one of the most remarkable phenomena of contemporary popular music, namely, Madonna, whose determined assault on the representational codes of both conventional morality and established left-wing and feminist critique, on the rules of sexual difference, and on public decorum and good taste, constantly inflames expectations of how public women should behave. McClary shows how Madonna "operates within a persistently repressive discourse to create liberatory musical images."

In "Family, Education, Photography" (this volume), Judith Williamson pursues what is perhaps the most populist of popular culture, photography. Williamson shows how the rise of the family photograph—both photographs of (the) family and the situating of photography within the family—is not merely an innocent pleasure, but part of the incredibly powerful (if strangely invisible) production and reproduction of the bourgeois family form. In "Secrets of Success in Postmodern Society" (this volume), Elizabeth Traube analyzes a series of popular U.S. movies produced in the 1980s. Traube traces the way the more successful ones "address the hopes and anxieties of middle-class youth regarding the corporate work world that they have joined or are about to join" in the context of the specific social and economic conjunctures of the Reagan era. The U.S. corporate ethic of entrepreneurial conformity is thus tested and reworked for a new generation in the darkened and displaced arenas of celluloid desire.

Finally, Susan Harding's paper, "The Born-Again Telescandals" (this volume), shows how television has become the principal medium not only of the sexual but of the sacred as well. In a postmodern world, ethnography has not only come home (in Williamson's case, quite literally), it makes us watch films, television, and advertisements with eyes that are constantly dazzled not only by astonishing production values, but by the ever more dizzying movement between reality and its now-receding referents.

Whether the worlds we study are postmodern or not, we are likely aware that the age of cultural innocence has escaped for good. And if the politics of culture have recently preoccupied academic concerns of the kind represented in this reader, it is also the case that we confront the politics of culture everywhere else we turn. Identity politics builds on the notion that cultural (read racial, gender, ethnic, religious) categories provide both a source of oppression and a means for empowering groups and communities to contest that oppression. Cultural politics are actively championed even by those who claim that culture should be depoliticized, for example, in the "family values" campaign of the Republican Party in 1992. While we recognize an extraordinary convergence between academic debates regarding culture and the political career of culture outside the academy, we also note the contradictions that result when recent theoretical attempts to deessentialize the categories of dif-

ference become reessentialized through the very political process that is mobilized to contest previous essences. We are learning that if all culture is political, it is accordingly impossible to establish a neutral ground for culture that would itself be exempt from the struggles, claims, contests, and chaos of the political world.

ALL THE WORLD'S A TEXT

So far we have provided only a partial description of the intellectual background to which this reader is a critical response. To understand why we have chosen these particular contents, some further history of our present concerns has to be offered. If we survey the intellectual landscape of the social sciences at the end of the twentieth century, it is hard not to be impressed by the power and popularity of literary theory, linguistic analysis, and related forms of theoretical address. Whether we look to the revival of intellectual history and the influence of Dominick LaCapra (1985), to the somewhat different convergence of intellectual historians with literary critics in a "new historicist" mold (Veese 1989), to the enormous impact of Edward Said (1979, 1983) on intellectuals writing in and about the third world, to the interest of Joan Scott (1988) and other feminists in theories of gender and language, to the pull of reflexive anthropology toward the narrative ordering of the experienced world (Clifford and Marcus 1986; Clifford 1988), to formal analysis of the rhetoric of economics and other apparently nonliterary disciplines (McClosky 1985), or simply to the common currency of such terms as "discourse" and "deconstruction"—in all of these places, there seems to be no escape.

The transformation of literary studies by the impact of Derrida among others has played a key part in this challenge. The complexities of reading (and writing) have brought the category of the text and the work of interpretation into question. From focusing on authorial intention and the text's single attainable meaning (a chimera, which obscures the necessary openness of the text and its multiplicity of meanings), literary theory has increasingly stressed the importance of two other kinds of move—*back*, to the contexts of the text's production; and *out*, to the ways in which its meanings become constructed. In fact, rather than determining what a text "means," it may be more important to understand how the text "works," indeed, how the text itself is a "work," implicated, like all other products, in modes of production. Furthermore, this mode of analysis has been extended from written texts in the more conventional sense to all manner of documents—indeed to experience, behavior, and events as well. From assailing the transparency of the text in the discourse of literary criticism, textuality has become a metaphor for reality in general (see esp. Bennett 1982, 1990).

How have we reached this point? One key to the answer, we would argue, lies in a set of specific intellectual biographies that began somewhere in the Marxist tradition. For behind the theoretical discussions is a specific political

recognition that society has been fundamentally transformed by postmodernism. Indeed, if we follow the suggestions of Jean Baudrillard (1988), apocalyptic theorist of the postmodern, there is no longer any social referent at all. The social is produced as a simulacrum of itself, a mere chimera that the masses consult to find out what they believe and whether they exist. But Baudrillard's flight from any form of political or social determination is not shared by many who nevertheless find him correctly identifying many of the features of the postmodern age (Harvey 1989; Huyssen 1986; Lash and Urry 1987; Lash 1990; Soja 1989; Wilson 1988; Jameson 1984). It may be that the social has been transformed, but the structure of transformation seems too closely linked with the interests of late industrial capitalism and postimperial nationalism to allow the older notions of social context to be argued out of existence altogether.

One way of specifying the parameters of postmodern politics and society is provided by Susan Harding in her discussion of contemporary religious fundamentalism ("The Born-Again Telescandals," this volume). Harding uses the "born again" telescandals of 1987–1988 to delineate a rupture in what she calls the myth of modernity. Whereas fundamentalist Christians had for years been complicit in a narrative in which they accepted their position as premodern, the use of modern media, principally television, and the entry of fundamentalists into modern politics, signaled a major shift. In spite of the telescandals which brought down such religious leaders as Jim and Tammy Faye Bakker and Jimmy Swaggart, fundamentalist religion did not slide back into its earlier relationship with liberal secularists. Instead, the scandals revealed the fundamental similarities among the competing religious groups, and between them and the media establishment now clearly using the myth of the modern to service the economics of the postmodern. Here the politics of truth—the nightly docudrama of Ted Koppel—gives way to the truth of the spectacle. The most spectacular example of postmodernism as a cultural form comes in Harding's descriptions of the fundamentalist theme park Heritage U.S.A., with its depthlessness of infinite forgiveness, gratification, and incitement to consume. Thus, after modernity had appeared to install secularism as a moral value for the religious and the nonreligious alike, we have witnessed another collapse of boundaries, the merger not only of television and evangelism but of religion and politics. The dangers of postmodernism appear ironically like those we used to ascribe to the premodern, only now with a technological vengeance.

For social historians who might still claim that postmodernism is either irrelevant to their historical quest or an ideological distraction from the foundational realities of class and social determination, there are no ready-made solutions to the current conundrum. However, one extremely fruitful response has been to historicize the category of "the social" itself, by looking at the terms under which it first became abstracted into an object of theoretical knowledge, a target of policy, and a site of practice. In this context, "the social" refers not to the global analytical category of "society" in some un-

problematic social science sense but to the historically located "methods, techniques, and practices" that allowed such a category to be constructed in the first place. Circling back once again to Foucault, we see that his concept of the disciplinary society is concerned directly with this process: on the one hand, as noted above, he carries the analysis of power away from the core institutions in the sense of the centralized national state toward the emergence of new individualizing strategies "that function outside, below and alongside the State apparatuses, on a much more minute and everyday level" (1980, 60); on the other hand, it is precisely through such individualizing strategies that "the social" or the "social body" became recognized, constituted, and elaborated as the main object of science, surveillance, policy, and power.

Population (fertility, age, mobility, health), economics, poverty, crime, education, and welfare became not only the main objects of governmental activity but also the measure and modalities of cohesion and solidarity in the emerging nineteenth-century social order. If we are to understand the latter, it is to the new social science and medicoadministrative discourses, their technologies, and their effects that we must look—to the new knowledges "concerning society, its health and sickness, its conditions of life, housing and habits, which served as the basic core for the 'social economy' and sociology of the nineteenth century" (Foucault 1980, 176). In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the repertoire of power-producing knowledges further expanded—psychiatry and psychology, social work and the welfare state, youth policy, industrial relations, public health, social hygiene, eugenics, and so on. As Donzelot (1979) and others have argued, the family became a particular object of such interventions and expertise. Moreover, as feminist scholars and Foucault's own final works have shown, sexuality provides a particularly rich field for showing such power relations under construction.

This "discursive" move—from the assumption of an objective "society" to the study of how the category of "the social" was formed—can be repeated for other areas too. Class may be similarly deconstructed as a category. Under the antireductionist logic described above, the process of working-class formation in the nineteenth century can no longer be presented as the logical unfolding of an economic process and its necessary effects at the levels of social organization, consciousness, and culture. At the same time, we cannot conduct the alternative analysis simply as a process of empirical disaggregation, so that a fuller grasp of the working class's compositional complexities (its sectional variety across industries, its internal differentiation according to hierarchies of seniority, status, and skill, and its cultural segmentation along lines of gender, religion, ethnicity, and race) and the time scale of its coalescence can emerge. To understand class as a political factor, in fact, we have to go further and accept the methodological and theoretical difficulties of still trying to analyze working-class politics—the rise of labor movements and socialist parties—as the expressive outcome of an economically located class interest and social-structural position.

Overcoming such exclusions means recognizing the indeterminate multiplicity of identity, and it is here that the basic poststructuralist claims about language and identity become useful. How we see ourselves as a basis for action and how we are addressed in the public arena are not fixed. Sometimes we recognize ourselves as citizens, sometimes as workers, sometimes as parents, sometimes as consumers, sometimes as enthusiasts for particular sports or hobbies, sometimes as believers in religious and other creeds, and so on; those recognitions are usually structured by power relations of different kinds: and they are usually gendered by assumptions placing us as women or men. At one level, the observation that identity or subject positions are complex and nonfixed is banal. But the important thing is that politics is usually conducted *as if* identity were fixed. The question then becomes, On what basis, at different times and in different places, does the nonfixity become temporarily fixed in such a way that individuals and groups can behave as a particular kind of agency, political or otherwise? How do people become shaped into acting subjects, understanding themselves in particular ways?

In effect, politics consists of the effort to domesticate the infinitude of identity. It is the attempt to hegemonize identity, to order it into a strong programmatic statement. If identity is decentered, politics is about the attempt to create a center. Thus the power of the socialist tradition between the late nineteenth century and the 1930s was its ability to harness and harmonize popular identities into a strong conception of the working class—that is, to construct popular political agency around the discourse of class in all the classic materialist ways. But concentrating identity in that way also has its costs. It involves a reduction to class. It involves exclusions and neglects. The positivity of the working class presumed the negativity of others—and not just other classes, but also other kinds of workers (for example, the unorganized, the rough and unrespectable, the criminal, the frivolous, the religiously devout, the ethnically different, and of course the female), and of other elements of subjectivity—in effect all those aspects of identity that could not be disciplined into a highly centered notion of class-political agency.

FEMINIST DISRUPTIONS

Throughout this essay we have pointed repeatedly to the ways in which feminist thought has challenged and undermined established categories and practices of scholarship. It is time now to pull together the various elements of contemporary feminist theory represented in this volume. “Feminist theory” is, of course, no single unitary object. It has gone through significant transformations since its emergence in the early seventies, partly in response to theoretical shifts in other fields, and partly in response to its own internal dialectics. What has unified it since the beginning, across its disparate strands, is its focus on power, on the asymmetry of the gender dichotomy and of gendered relationships.

Thus, probably the most fundamental assumption of contemporary feminist theory and practice, in all its forms, is that gender is not simply a form of difference but a form of power. This simple shift from an earlier perspective, in which gender, if it was attended to at all, was treated as a set of power-innocent “roles” (the “role of women” among tribe x, or in the xth century), not only radically reoriented the study of women and gender, but also realigned the political/intellectual matrix in which the gender problematic was situated—it became apparent that gender must be viewed as an axis of major social inequality along with race and class. The alignment of gender with race and class, in turn, has played a major role in furthering the process discussed earlier: dislodging class from its sovereign status as both the analytic key to social inequality and the primary vehicle for radical political transformation. The most prominent new forms of theorizing about social transformation argue for the necessity of recognizing diverse and multiple political initiatives (including those based not only on class, race, and gender, but on other concatenations of interests) that engage or disengage with one another in shifting and complex ways (Laclau and Mouffe 1985; Andersen and Collins 1992; Collins 1990; Sacks 1989).

Sally Alexander's piece, “Women, Class and Sexual Differences in the 1830s and 1840s” (this volume), beautifully illustrates the ways in which gender and class in particular link up with and repel each other in actual historical practice, shaping each other conceptually and practically. Alexander distinguishes between the recognition of “sexual difference” and the actual subordination of one sex by the other, a distinction that might be contested in some feminist quarters, given the point made above that gender difference is never merely difference. Drawing on Freudian and Lacanian theory, however, Alexander goes on to argue that sexual difference is always at least latently antagonistic because of its involvement with identity formation, that is, with the shaping of the self that inevitably entails the differentiation from the nonself, the Other. It is this latent antagonism, intrinsic to the formation of gendered identities, that intersects with other forms of inequality, sometimes merging with them and sometimes disrupting them. Beatrix Campbell's *Wigan Pier Revisited* (1984), and Carolyn Steedman's *Landscape for a Good Woman* (1987) exemplify more of the surprising turns class and gender take when they are conjoined nondogmatically, that is, when neither term is allowed to dominate.

If, following our earlier arguments from Foucault, all social relations are infused with power, the same must also be said of gender: everything is gendered. This second fundamental insight of contemporary feminism has opened up another interpretive perspective, wherein seemingly gender-neutral categories, such as “class” or “the family,” or the distinction between public and private spheres, are shown to encode gendered assumptions and tacitly to embody gendered images. For example, as discussed in the previous section, it is now generally accepted that the image behind the category “the working class” is basically male; insofar as the working class is primarily

this regard, showing the ways in which, in colonial regimes, race, class, gender, and generational (adult/child) categories are simultaneously, interactively—and often contradictorily—constructed.

Feminist theory, in other words, has both provoked and mirrored the interactions of culture, power, and history with which we are concerned. For it is in feminist and other forms of “minority” theory that issues of power and of cultural constructionism have a peculiar vividness and urgency. In these contexts, neither the pervasiveness of power nor the constructedness of identity is an abstract “academic” question. In these contexts, all have more than a passing stake in understanding both the invasiveness and the limits of hegemony. And in these contexts, all have more than a passing stake in understanding both the limits and the possibilities of resistance.

DISCOURSES OF CULTURE

We cannot end this discussion without confronting the fact that one of our key terms, “culture,” has been subjected in recent years to very probing critique within its own field of origin, anthropology. Anthropology is a field in which the interpretive point of view has been well established, and in which the battle with some forms of reductive thinking (including various vulgar materialisms) is no longer the primary problem. For a discipline that has historically had a tentative relation to texts—focussing instead on oral cultures and primitive peoples—anthropology was much quicker to textualize culture than history has been to textualize the past. Although anthropologists for years had to confront the linguistic turn through the considerable impact of structural linguistics and symbolic analysis, the original textual turn was taken by Clifford Geertz, on the basis of a very different ensemble of theoretical influences, including Kenneth Burke, Northrup Frye, and Paul Ricoeur. Geertz wrote, in his well-known essay on the Balinese cockfight, that “[t]he culture of a people is an ensemble of texts, themselves ensembles, which the anthropologist strains to read over the shoulders of those to whom they properly belong” (1973, 452). Moreover, Geertz extended the metaphor of the text over the whole range of cultural products. As he wrote in *Negara*, “Arguments, melodies, formulas, maps, and pictures are not idealities to be stared at but texts to be read; so are rituals, palaces, technologies, and social formations” (1980, 135). All of culture is a text, not so much because it looks like one but because it can be read as one.

But then, of course, the ethnographer creates yet another text, with its own problematic character. This has generated the most recent phase of theoretical reflection in anthropology, including Geertz’s own *Works and Lives* (1988), as well as the highly influential volume, *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* (Clifford and Marcus 1986). *Writing Culture* proclaimed a crisis of representation in anthropology. The book consists almost entirely of the discussion and dissection of anthropological texts—“ethnogra-

phies” in one form or another—showing the ways in which these texts make use of various tropes, literary conventions, and narrative devices to establish ethnographic authority and/or certain kinds of unstated visions of the world. The editors and authors situate themselves firmly within the interpretive tradition established by Geertz and others over the past twenty years or so, but they argue that there is a kind of smugness to standard interpretive work. While interpretivists are happy to argue that “native” categories are culturally and historically constructed, the *Writing Culture* argument goes, they grant themselves a privileged position, in which their own categories are not subjected to this argument. But, of course, their categories are as much products of their culture, their historical moment, and their forms of power as everyone else’s. Not only is this not faced and examined, it is actively obscured by the various forms of discourse construction (generally “writing”) hegemonic in the academic world.

But the *Writing Culture* critique is already the focus of criticism (e.g., Sangren 1988). One cluster of questions that has been raised concerns the degree to which the *Writing Culture* argument raises self-consciousness about the writing of ethnography to the point of paralysis. If this was the case, it was only briefly so. After catching its breath, the field has collectively gone on writing, though in general with a self-awareness that has been entirely salutary.

A more serious set of questions has been raised concerning *Writing Culture*’s lack of interest in historical questions at a time when many anthropologists and others are taking “the historic turn” (McDonald, forthcoming), its virtual blindness toward feminist issues when these are so prominent in most forms of contemporary theorizing, and its narrowly disciplinary orientation at a time when interdisciplinary work is exploding all over the landscape. Of course no book can do everything. But we would suggest that the book’s relative silence on issues of “power” and total silence on “history” seriously weaken the radicalness of its critique of “culture.” The exclusively disciplinary focus has a similar effect, since for the most part it excludes consideration of novel—and radical—uses of the culture concept outside the field of anthropology, most notably in cultural studies.

This is not to say, however, that the question of representation raised by *Writing Culture* is trivial. The increasing attention to reflexivity of a more Saidian sort in current anthropological writing, and in particular to the way that anthropological forms of knowledge are shaped by relations of power and interest, and predetermined by tropic beginnings and procedures, has indeed led to widespread questioning of the epistemological validity of the traditional ethnographic object. Anthropologists are now rightly suspicious of the categories of “otherness” and “difference” that have historically been caught in logics of domination and denigration, whether “orientalist,” “primitivist,” or “colonialist.” But in addressing the powerful epistemological and historical questions that compromise the objectivism of anthropological accounts, there is a danger of losing what has always been most salutary about

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