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The Concept(s) of Culture

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The aim of this chapter is to reflect upon the concept—or more properly the concepts—of culture in contemporary academic discourse. Trying to clarify what we mean by culture seems both imperative and impossible at a moment like the present, when the study of culture is burgeoning in virtually all fields of the human sciences. Although I glance at the varying uses of "culture" in a number of disciplines, my reflection is based above all on the extensive debates that have occurred in anthropology over the past two decades—debates in which some have questioned the very utility of the concept.[1] I feel strongly that it remains as useful, indeed essential, as ever. But given the cacophony of contemporary discourse about culture, I also believe that the concept needs some reworking and clarification.

The current volatility of the concept of culture sharply contrasts with the situation in the early 1970s, when I first got interested in a cultural approach to social history. At that time it was clear that if you wanted to learn about culture, you turned to the anthropologists. And while they by no means spoke in a single voice, they shared a widespread consensus both about the meaning of culture and about its centrality to the anthropological enterprise. I began borrowing the methods and insights of cultural anthropology as a means of learning more about nineteenth-century French workers. Cultural analysis, I hoped, would enable me to understand the meaning of workers' practices that I had been unable to get at by using quantitative and positivist methods—my standard tool kit as a practitioner of what was then called "the new social history."[2] I experienced the encounter with cultural anthropology as a turn from a hardheaded, utilitarian, and empiricist materialism—which had both liberal and *marxisant* faces—to a wider appreciation of the

range of human possibilities, both in the past and in the present. Convinced that there was more to life than the relentless pursuit of wealth, status, and power, I felt that cultural anthropology could show us how to get at that "more."[3]

Anthropology at the time had a virtual monopoly on the concept of culture. In political science and sociology, culture was associated with the by then utterly sclerotic Parsonian theoretical synthesis. The embryonic "cultural studies" movement was still confined to a single research center in Birmingham. And literary studies were still fixated on canonical literary texts—although the methods of studying them were being revolutionized by the importation of "French" structuralist and poststructuralist theory. Moreover, the mid-1960s to the mid-1970s marked the glory years of American cultural anthropology, which may be said to have reached its apotheosis with the publication of Clifford Geertz's phenomenally influential *Interpretation of Cultures* in 1973.[4] Not only did anthropology have no serious rivals in the study of culture, but the creativity and prestige of cultural anthropology were at a very high point.

During the 1980s and 1990s, the intellectual ecology of the study of culture has been transformed by a vast expansion of work on culture—indeed, a kind of academic culture mania has set in. The new interest in culture has swept over a wide range of academic disciplines and specialties. The history of this advance differs in timing and content in each field, but the cumulative effects are undeniable. In literary studies, which were already being transformed by French theory in the 1970s, the 1980s marked a turn to a vastly wider range of texts, quasi-texts, paratexts, and text analogs. If, as Derrida declared, nothing is extratextual ("il n'y a pas de hors-texte"), literary critics could direct their theory-driven gaze upon semiotic products of all kinds—legal documents, political tracts, soap operas, histories, talk shows, popular romances—and seek out their intertextualities.[5] Consequently, as such "new historicist" critics as Stephen Greenblatt and Louis Montrose recognize, literary study is increasingly becoming the study of cultures.[6] In history the early and rather self-conscious borrowing from anthropology has been followed by a theoretically heterogeneous rush to the study of culture, one modeled as much on literary studies or the work of Michel Foucault as on anthropology. As a consequence, the self-confident "new social history" of the 1960s and 1970s was succeeded by an equally self-confident "new cultural history" in the 1980s.[7]

In the late 1970s, an emerging "sociology of culture" began by applying standard sociological methods to studies of the production and marketing of cultural artifacts—music, art, drama, and literature. By the late 1980s, the work of cultural sociologists had broken out of the study of culture-producing institutions and moved toward studying the place of meaning in social life more generally. Feminism, which in the 1970s was concerned above all to document women's experiences, has increasingly turned to analyzing the discursive production of gender difference. Since the mid-1980s the new quasi-discipline of cultural studies has grown explosively in a variety of different academic niches—for example, in programs or departments of film studies, literature, performance studies, or communications. In political science, which is well known for its propensity to chase headlines, interest in cultural questions has been revived by the recent prominence of religious fundamentalism, nationalism, and ethnicity, which look like the most potent sources of political conflict in the contemporary world. This frenetic rush to the study of culture has everywhere been bathed, to a greater or lesser extent, in the pervasive transdisciplinary influence of the French poststructuralist trinity of Lacan, Derrida, and Foucault.

It is paradoxical that as discourse about culture becomes ever more pervasive and multifarious, anthropology, the discipline that invented the concept—or at least shaped it into something like its present form—is somewhat ambivalently backing away from its long-standing identification with culture as its keyword and central symbol. For the past decade and a half, anthropology has been rent by a particularly severe identity crisis, which has been manifested in anxiety about the discipline's epistemology, rhetoric, methodological procedures, and political implications.[8] The reasons for the crisis are many—liberal and radical guilt about anthropology's association with Euro-American colonialism, the disappearance of the supposedly "untouched" or "primitive" peoples who were the favored subjects for classic ethnographies, the rise of "native" ethnographers who contest the right of European and American scholars to tell the "truth" about their people, and the general loss of confidence in the possibility of objectivity that has attended poststructuralism and

postmodernism. As anthropology's most central and distinctive concept, "culture" has become a suspect term among critical anthropologists—who claim that both in academia and in public discourse, talk about culture tends to essentialize, exoticize, and stereotype those whose ways of life are being described and to naturalize their differences from white middle-class Euro-Americans. If Geertz's phrase "The Interpretation of Cultures" was the watchword of anthropology in the 1970s, Lila Abu-Lughod's "Writing against Culture" more nearly sums up the mood of the late 1980s and the 1990s.[9]

As John Brightman points out in his superb commentary on the recent disputes about culture in anthropology, the anthropological critics of the 1980s and 1990s have exhibited widespread "lexical avoidance behavior," either placing the term "culture" in quotation marks when it is used, refusing to use "culture" as a noun while continuing to use it as an adjective (as in "cultural anthropology"), or replacing it with alternative lexemes such as "habitus," "hegemony," or "discourse."[10] This emerging anthropological tabu seems to me mistaken on two counts. First, it is based on the implicit assumption that anthropology "owns" the lexeme and that it is therefore responsible for any abuses that might be perpetrated by others employing the term. Second, it assumes that anthropological abstention from the use of the lexeme will magically abolish such abuses. The truth is that the term has escaped all possibility of control by anthropologists: whatever lexical practices the anthropologists may adopt, talk about culture will continue to thrive—in both abusive and acceptable ways—in a wide range of other academic disciplines and in ordinary language as well. Moreover, as Brightman again points out, even the critical anthropologists find it impossible to give up the *concept* of culture, as opposed to the lexeme. James Clifford's lament that "culture is a deeply compromised concept that I cannot yet do without" seems emblematic of the unresolved ambivalence: the concept is compromised and he hopes in the future to do without it, but because it continues to perform valuable intellectual work the fateful act of renunciation is indefinitely deferred.[11] If, as I believe, Clifford is right that we cannot do without a concept of culture, I think we should try to shape it into one we can work with. We need to modify, rearticulate, and revivify the concept, retaining and reshaping what is useful and discarding what is not.

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY CULTURE?

Writing in 1983, Raymond Williams declared that "culture is one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language."[12] Its complexity has surely not decreased since then. I have neither the competence nor the inclination to trace out the full range of meanings of "culture" in contemporary academic discourse. But some attempt to sort out the different usages of the word seems essential, and it must begin by distinguishing two fundamentally different meanings of the term.

In one meaning, culture is a theoretically defined category or aspect of social life that must be abstracted out from the complex reality of human existence. Culture in this sense is always contrasted to some other equally abstract aspect or category of social life that is not culture, such as economy, politics, or biology. To designate something as culture or as cultural is to claim it for a particular academic discipline or subdiscipline—for example, anthropology or cultural sociology—or for a particular style or styles of analysis—for example, structuralism, ethno-science, componential analysis, deconstruction, or hermeneutics. Culture in this sense—as an abstract analytical category—only takes the singular. Whenever we speak of "cultures," we have moved to the second fundamental meaning.

In that second meaning, culture stands for a concrete and bounded world of beliefs and practices. Culture in this sense is commonly assumed to belong to or to be isomorphic with a "society" or with some clearly identifiable subsocietal group. We may speak of "American culture" or "Samoan culture," or of "middle-class culture" or "ghetto culture."[13] The contrast in this usage is not between culture and not-culture but between one culture and another—between American, Samoan, French, and Bororo cultures, or between middle-class and upper-class cultures, or between ghetto and mainstream cultures.

This distinction between culture as theoretical category and culture as concrete and bounded body of beliefs and practices is, as far as I can discern, seldom made. Yet it seems to me crucial for thinking clearly about cultural theory. It should be clear, for example, that Ruth Benedict's concept of cultures as sharply distinct and highly integrated refers to culture in the second sense, while Claude Lévi-

Strauss's notion that cultural meaning is structured by systems of oppositions is a claim about culture in the first sense. Hence their theories of "culture" are, strictly speaking, incommensurate: they refer to different conceptual universes. Failure to recognize this distinction between two fundamentally different meanings of the term has real consequences for contemporary cultural theory; some of the impasses of theoretical discourse in contemporary anthropology are attributable precisely to an unrecognized elision of the two. Thus, a dissatisfaction with "Benedictine" ethnographies that present cultures as uniformly well-bounded and coherent has led to what seem to me rather confused attacks on "the culture concept" in general—attacks that fail to distinguish Benedictine claims about the tight integration of cultures from Lévi-Straussian claims about the semiotic coherence of culture as a system of meanings.[14] Conversely, anthropologists who defend the culture concept also tend to conflate the two meanings, regarding claims that cultures are rent with fissures or that their boundaries are porous as implying an abandonment of the concept of culture altogether.

Here, I will be concerned primarily with culture in the first sense—culture as a category of social life. One must have a clear conception of culture at this abstract level in order to deal with the more concrete theoretical question of how cultural differences are patterned and bounded in space and time. Once I have sketched out my own ideas about what an adequate abstract theory of culture might look like, I will return to the question of culture as a bounded universe of beliefs and practices—to the question of cultures in the Benedictine sense.

CULTURE AS A CATEGORY OF SOCIAL LIFE

Culture as a category of social life has itself been conceptualized in a number of different ways. Let me begin by specifying some of these different conceptualizations, moving from those I do not find especially useful to those I find more adequate.

Culture as learned behavior. Culture in this sense is the whole body of practices, beliefs, institutions, customs, habits, myths, and so on built up by humans and passed on from generation to generation. In this usage, culture is contrasted to nature: its possession is what distinguishes us from other animals. When anthropologists were struggling to establish that differences between societies were not based on biological differences between their populations—that is, on race—a definition of culture as learned behavior made sense. But now that racial arguments have virtually disappeared from anthropological discourse, a concept of culture so broad as this seems impossibly vague; it provides no particular angle or analytical purchase on the study of social life.

A narrower and consequently more useful conceptualization of culture emerged in anthropology during the second quarter of the twentieth century and has been dominant in the social sciences generally since World War II. It defines culture not as all learned behavior but as that category or aspect of learned behavior that is concerned with meaning. But the concept of culture-as-meaning is in fact a family of related concepts; *meaning* may be used to specify a cultural realm or sphere in at least four distinct ways, each of which is defined in contrast to somewhat differently conceptualized noncultural realms or spheres.

Culture as an institutional sphere devoted to the making of meaning. This conception of culture is based on the assumption that social formations are composed of clusters of institutions devoted to specialized activities. These clusters can be assigned to variously defined institutional spheres—most conventionally, spheres of politics, economy, society, and culture. Culture is the sphere devoted specifically to the production, circulation, and use of meanings. The cultural sphere may in turn be broken down into the subspheres of which it is composed: say, of art, music, theater, fashion, literature, religion, media, and education. The study of culture, if culture is defined in this way, is the study of the activities that take place within these institutionally defined spheres and of the meanings produced in them.

This conception of culture is particularly prominent in the discourses of sociology and cultural studies, but it is rarely used in anthropology. Its roots probably reach back to the strongly evaluative conception of culture as a sphere of "high" or "uplifting" artistic and intellectual activity, a meaning that Raymond Williams tells us came into prominence in the nineteenth century.[15] But in contemporary academic discourse, this usage normally lacks such evaluative and hierarchizing implications. The dominant style of work in American sociology of culture has been demystifying: its typical approach has

been to uncover the largely self-aggrandizing, class-interested, manipulative, or professionalizing institutional dynamics that undergird prestigious museums, artistic styles, symphony orchestras, or philosophical schools. And cultural studies, which has taken as its particular mission the appreciation of cultural forms disdained by the spokesmen of high culture—rock music, street fashion, cross-dressing, shopping malls, Disneyland, soap operas—employs this same basic definition of culture. It merely trains its analytical attention on spheres of meaning production ignored by previous analysts and regarded as debased by elite tastemakers.

The problem with such a concept of culture is that it focuses only on a certain range of meanings, produced in a certain range of institutional locations—on self-consciously "cultural" institutions and on expressive, artistic, and literary systems of meanings. This use of the concept is to some extent complicit with the widespread notion that meanings are of minimal importance in the other "noncultural" institutional spheres: that in political or economic spheres, meanings are merely superstructural excrescences. And since institutions in political and economic spheres control the great bulk of society's resources, viewing culture as a distinct sphere of activity may in the end simply confirm the widespread presupposition in the "harder" social sciences that culture is merely froth on the tides of society. The rise of a cultural sociology that limited itself to studying "cultural" institutions effected a partition of subject matter that was very unfavorable to the cultural sociologists. Indeed, only the supercession of this restrictive concept of culture has made possible the explosive growth of the subfield of cultural sociology in the past decade.

Culture as creativity or agency. This usage of culture has grown up particularly in traditions that posit a powerful "material" determinism—most notably Marxism and American sociology. Over the past three decades or so, scholars working within these traditions have carved out a conception of culture as a realm of creativity that escapes from the otherwise pervasive determination of social action by economic or social structures. In the Marxist tradition, it was probably E. P. Thompson's *Making of the English Working Class* that first conceptualized culture as a realm of agency, and it is particularly English Marxists—for example, Paul Willis in *Learning to Labor*—who have elaborated this conception.[16] But the defining opposition on which this concept of culture rests— culture versus structure—has

also become pervasive in the vernacular of American sociology. One clear sign that American anthropologists and sociologists have different conceptions of culture is that the opposition between culture and structure—an unquestioned commonplace in contemporary sociological discourse—is nonsensical in anthropology.

In my opinion, identifying culture with agency and contrasting it with structure merely perpetuates the same determinist materialism that "culturalist" Marxists were reacting against in the first place. It exaggerates both the implacability of socioeconomic determinations and the free play of symbolic action. Both socioeconomic and cultural processes are blends of structure and agency. Cultural action—say, performing practical jokes or writing poems—is necessarily constrained by cultural structures, such as existing linguistic, visual, or ludic conventions. And economic action—such as the manufacture or repair of automobiles—is impossible without the exercise of creativity and agency. The particulars of the relationship between structure and agency may differ in cultural and economic processes, but assigning either the economic or the cultural exclusively to structure or to agency is a serious category error.

This brings us to the two concepts of culture that I regard as most fruitful and that I see as currently struggling for dominance: the concept of culture as a system of symbols and meanings, which was hegemonic in the 1960s and 1970s, and the concept of culture as practice, which has become increasingly prominent in the 1980s and 1990s.

Culture as a system of symbols and meanings. This has been the dominant concept of culture in American anthropology since the 1960s. It was made famous above all by Clifford Geertz, who used the term "cultural system" in the titles of some of his most notable essays.[17] The notion was also elaborated by David Schneider, whose writings had a considerable influence within anthropology but lacked Geertz's interdisciplinary appeal.[18] Geertz and Schneider derived the term from Talcott Parsons's usage, according to which the cultural system, a system of symbols and meanings, was a particular "level of abstraction" of social relations. It was contrasted to the "social system," which was a system of norms and institutions, and to the "personality system," which was a system of motivations.[19] Geertz and Schneider especially wished to distinguish the cultural system from the social system. To engage in cultural analysis, for them, was to

abstract the meaningful aspect of human action out from the flow of concrete interactions. The point of conceptualizing culture as a system of symbols and meanings is to disentangle, for the purpose of analysis, the semiotic influences on action from the other sorts of influences—demographic, geographical, biological, technological, economic, and so on—that they are necessarily mixed with in any concrete sequence of behavior.

Geertz's and Schneider's post-Parsonian theorizations of cultural systems were by no means the only available models for symbolic anthropology in the 1960s and 1970s. The works of Victor Turner, whose theoretical origins were in the largely Durkheimian British school of social anthropology, were also immensely influential.[20] Claude Lévi-Strauss and his many followers provided an entire alternative model of culture as a system of symbols and meanings—conceptualized, following Saussure, as signifiers and signifieds. Moreover, all these anthropological schools were in a sense manifestations of a much broader "linguistic turn" in the human sciences—a diverse but sweeping attempt to specify the structures of human symbol systems and to indicate their profound influence on human behavior. One thinks above all of such French "structuralist" thinkers as Roland Barthes, Jacques Lacan, or the early Michel Foucault. What all of these approaches had in common was an insistence on the systematic nature of cultural meaning and the autonomy of symbol systems—their distinctness from and irreducibility to other features of social life. They all abstracted a realm of pure signification out from the complex messiness of social life and specified its internal coherence and deep logic. Their practice of cultural analysis consequently tended to be more or less synchronic and formalist.

Culture as practice. The past decade and a half has witnessed a pervasive reaction against the concept of culture as a system of symbols and meanings, which has taken place in various disciplinary locations and intellectual traditions and under many different slogans—for example, "practice," "resistance," "history," "politics," or "culture as tool kit." Analysts working under all these banners object to a portrayal of culture as logical, coherent, shared, uniform, and static. Instead they insist that culture is a sphere of practical activity shot through by willful action, power relations, struggle, contradiction, and change.

In anthropology, Sherry Ortner in 1984 remarked on the turn to politics, history, and agency, suggesting Pierre Bourdieu's key term "practice" as an appropriate label for this emerging sensibility. Two years later the publication of James Clifford and George Marcus's collection *Writing Culture* announced to the public the crisis of anthropology's culture concept.[21] Since then, criticisms of the concept of culture as a system of symbols and meanings have flowed thick and fast. The most notable work in anthropology has argued for the contradictory, politically charged, changeable, and fragmented character of meanings—both meanings produced in the societies being studied and meanings rendered in anthropological texts. Recent work in anthropology has in effect recast culture as a performative term.

Not surprisingly, this emphasis on the performative aspect of culture is compatible with the work of most cultural historians. Historians are generally uncomfortable with synchronic concepts. As they took up the study of culture, they subtly—but usually without comment—altered the concept by stressing the contradictoriness and malleability of cultural meanings and by seeking out the mechanisms by which meanings were transformed. The battles in history have been over a different issue, pitting those who claim that historical change should be understood as a purely cultural or discursive process against those who argue for the significance of economic and social determinations or for the centrality of concrete "experience" in understanding it.[22]

Sociologists, for rather different reasons, have also favored a more performative conception of culture. Given the hegemony of a strongly causalist methodology and philosophy of science in contemporary sociology, cultural sociologists have felt a need to demonstrate that culture has causal efficacy in order to gain recognition for their fledgling subfield. This has led many of them to construct culture as a collection of variables whose influence on behavior can be rigorously compared to that of such standard sociological variables as class, ethnicity, gender, level of education, economic interest, and the like. As a result, they have moved away from earlier Weberian, Durkheimian, or Parsonian conceptions of culture as rather vague and global value orientations to what Ann Swidler has termed a "tool kit" composed of a "repertoire" of "strategies of action."[23] For

many cultural sociologists, then, culture is not a coherent system of symbols and meanings but a diverse collection of "tools" that, as the metaphor indicates, are to be understood as means for the performance of action. Because these tools are discrete, local, and intended for specific purposes, they can be deployed as explanatory variables in a way that culture conceived as a translocal, generalized system of meanings cannot.

CULTURE AS SYSTEM AND PRACTICE

Much of the theoretical writing on culture during the past ten years has assumed that a concept of culture as a system of symbols and meanings is at odds with a concept of culture as practice. System and practice approaches have seemed incompatible, I think, because the most prominent practitioners of the culture-as-system-of-meanings approach effectively marginalized consideration of culture-as-practice—if they didn't preclude it altogether.

This can be seen in the work of both Clifford Geertz and David Schneider. Geertz's analyses usually begin auspiciously enough, in that he frequently explicates cultural systems in order to resolve a puzzle arising from concrete practices—a state funeral, trances, a royal procession, cockfights. But it usually turns out that the issues of practice are principally a means of moving the essay to the goal of specifying in a synchronic form the coherence that underlies the exotic cultural practices in question. And while Geertz marginalized questions of practice, Schneider, in a kind of *reductio ad absurdum*, explicitly excluded them, arguing that the particular task of anthropology in the academic division of labor was to study "culture as a system of symbols and meanings in its own right and with reference to its own structure" and leaving to others—sociologists, historians, political scientists, or economists—the question of how social action was structured.[24] A "cultural account," for Schneider, should be limited to specifying the relations among symbols in a given domain of meaning—which he tended to render unproblematically as known and accepted by all members of the society and as possessing a highly determinate formal logic.[25]

Nor is the work of Geertz and Schneider unusual in its marginalization of practice. As critics such as James Clifford have argued, conventional modes of writing in cultural anthropology typically smuggle highly debatable assumptions into ethnographic accounts—for example, that cultural meanings are normally shared, fixed, bounded, and deeply felt. To Clifford's critique of ethnographic rhetoric, I would add a critique of ethnographic method. Anthropologists working with a conception of culture-as-system have tended to focus on clusters of symbols and meanings that can be shown to have a high degree of coherence or systematicity—those of American kinship or Balinese cockfighting, for instance—and to present their accounts of these clusters as examples of what the interpretation of culture in general entails. This practice results in what sociologists would call sampling on the dependent variable. That is, anthropologists who belong to this school tend to select symbols and meanings that cluster neatly into coherent systems and pass over those that are relatively fragmented or incoherent, thus confirming the hypothesis that symbols and meanings indeed form tightly coherent systems.

Given some of these problems in the work of the culture-as-system school, the recent turn to a concept of culture-as-practice has been both understandable and fruitful—it has effectively highlighted many of the earlier school's shortcomings and made up some of its most glaring analytic deficits. Yet the presumption that a concept of culture as a system of symbols and meanings is at odds with a concept of culture as practice seems to me perverse. System and practice are complementary concepts: each presupposes the other. To engage in cultural practice means to utilize existing cultural symbols to accomplish some end. The employment of a symbol can be expected to accomplish a particular goal only because the symbols have more or less determinate meanings—meanings specified by their systematically structured relations to other symbols. Hence practice implies system. But it is equally true that the system has no existence apart from the succession of practices that instantiate, reproduce, or—most interestingly—transform it. Hence system implies practice.[26] System and practice constitute an indissoluble duality or dialectic: the important theoretical question is thus not whether culture should be conceptualized as practice or as a system of symbols and meanings, but how to conceptualize the articulation of system and practice.

THE AUTONOMY OF CULTURE

Let me begin this task by stating some assumptions about practice. I assume that human practice, in all social contexts or institutional spheres, is structured simultaneously both by meanings and by other aspects of the environment in which they occur—by, for example, power relations or spatiality or resource distributions. Culture is neither a particular kind of practice nor practice that takes place in a particular social location. It is, rather, the semiotic dimension of human social practice in general. I further assume that these dimensions of practice mutually shape and constrain each other but also that they are relatively autonomous from each other.[27]

The autonomy of the cultural dimension of practice can also be understood by thinking about culture as a system. The cultural dimension of practice is autonomous from other dimensions of practice in two senses. First, culture has a semiotic structuring principle that is different from the political, economic, or geographical structuring principles that also inform practice. Hence, even if an action were almost entirely determined by, say, overwhelming disparities in economic resources, those disparities would still have to be rendered meaningful in action according to a semiotic logic—that is, in language or in some other form of symbols. For example, an impoverished worker facing the only manufacturer seeking laborers in that district will have no choice but to accept the offer. Yet in accepting the offer she or he is not simply submitting to the employer but entering into a culturally defined relation as a wageworker. Second, the cultural dimension is also autonomous in the sense that the meanings that make it up—although influenced by the context in which they are employed—are shaped and reshaped by a multitude of other contexts. The meaning of a symbol always transcends any particular context, because the symbol is freighted with its usages in a multitude of other instances of social practice. Thus, our worker enters into a relationship of "wageworker" that carries certain recognized meanings—of deference, but also of independence from the employer and perhaps of solidarity with other wageworkers. These meanings are carried over from the other contexts in which the meaning of wage work is determined—not only from other instances of hirings but from statutes, legal arguments, strikes, socialist tracts, and economic treatises. They enter importantly into

defining the local possibilities of action, in this case perhaps granting the worker greater power to resist the employer than the local circumstances alone would have dictated.

To understand fully the significance of this second sort of autonomy, it is important to note that the network of semiotic relations that make up culture is not isomorphic with the network of economic, political, geographical, social, or demographic relations that make up what we usually call a "society." A given symbol—mother, red, polyester, liberty, wage labor, or dirt—is likely to show up not only in many different locations in a particular institutional domain (motherhood in millions of families) but in a variety of different institutional domains as well (welfare mothers as a potent political symbol, the mother tongue in linguistic quarrels, the Mother of God in the Catholic Church). Culture may be thought of as a network of semiotic relations cast across society, a network with a different shape and different spatiality than institutional, or economic, or political networks.[28] The meaning of a symbol in a given context may therefore be subject to redefinition by dynamics entirely foreign to that institutional domain or spatial location: thus, for example, in the 1950s a particular political meaning of the symbol "red" became so overpowering that the Cincinnati Reds baseball team felt the need to change its name to "the Redlegs." This fact is what makes it possible—indeed virtually guarantees—that the cultural dimension of practice will have a certain autonomy from its other dimensions.

If culture has a distinct semiotic logic, then by implication it must in some sense be coherent. But it is important not to exaggerate or misspecify the coherence of symbol systems. I assume the coherence of a cultural system to be semiotic in a roughly Saussurian sense: that is, that the meaning of a sign or symbol is a function of its network of oppositions to or distinctions from other signs in the system. This implies that users of culture will form a semiotic community—in the sense that they will recognize the same set of oppositions and therefore be capable of engaging in mutually meaningful symbolic action. To use the ubiquitous linguistic analogy, they will be capable of using the "grammar" of the semiotic system to make understandable "utterances."

It should be noted, however, that this conception actually implies only a quite minimal cultural coherence—one might call it a thin coherence. The fact that members of a semiotic community recognize a

given set of symbolic oppositions does not determine what sort of statements or actions they will construct on the basis of their semiotic competence. Nor does it mean that they form a community in any fuller sense. They need not agree in their moral or emotional evaluations of given symbols. The semiotic field they share may be recognized and used by groups and individuals locked in fierce enmity rather than bound by solidarity, or by people who feel relative indifference toward each other. The posited existence of cultural coherence says nothing about whether semiotic fields are big or small, shallow or deep, encompassing or specialized. It simply requires that if meaning is to exist at all, there must be systematic relations among signs and a group of people who recognize those relations.

That this Saussurian conception implies only a thin cultural coherence seems consonant with certain deconstructionist arguments. The entire thrust of deconstruction has been to reveal the instability of linguistic meaning. It has located this instability in the signifying mechanism of language itself—claiming that because the meaning of a linguistic sign always depends on a contrast with what the sign is opposed to or different from, language is inevitably haunted by the traces of the very terms it excludes. Consequently, the meaning of a text or an utterance can never be fixed; attempts to secure meaning can only defer, never exclude, a plethora of alternative or opposed interpretations.

Cultural analysts who—like me—wish to argue that cultural systems are powerfully constraining have often drawn back from deconstructionist arguments in horror. I think this is a major mistake; indeed, I would maintain that a broadly deconstructionist understanding of meaning is essential for anyone attempting to theorize cultural change. Deconstruction does not deny the possibility of coherence. Rather, it assumes that the coherence inherent in a system of symbols is thin in the sense I have described: it demonstrates over and over that what are taken as the certainties or truths of texts or discourses are in fact disputable and unstable. This seems entirely compatible with a practice perspective on culture. It assumes that symbol systems have a (Saussurian) logic but that this logic is open-ended, not closed. And it strongly implies that when a given symbol system is taken by its users to be unambiguous and highly constraining, these qualities cannot be accounted for by their semiotic qualities alone but must result from the way their semiotic structures

are interlocked in practice with other structures—economic, political, social, spatial, and so on.[29]

Thus far in this section I have mainly been considering culture as system. But what I have said has implications for how we might conceptualize culture as practice. First, the conception of culture as semiotic implies a particular notion of cultural practice. To engage in cultural practice is to make use of a semiotic code to do something in the world. People who are members of a semiotic community are capable not only of recognizing statements made in a semiotic code (as I have pointed out above) but of using the code as well, of putting it into practice. To use a code means to attach abstractly available symbols to concrete things or circumstances and thereby to posit something about them. I would also argue that to be able to use a code means more than being able to apply it mechanically in stereotyped situations—it also means having the ability to elaborate it, to modify or adapt its rules to novel circumstances.

What things in the world *are* is never fully determined by the symbolic net we throw over them—this also depends on their preexisting physical characteristics, the spatial relations in which they occur, the relations of power with which they are invested, their economic value, and, of course, the different symbolic meanings that may have been attributed to them by other actors. The world is recalcitrant to our predications of meaning. Hence, as Marshall Sahlins has pointed out, every act of symbolic attribution puts the symbols at risk, makes it possible that the meanings of the symbols will be inflected or transformed by the uncertain consequences of practice. Usually, such attributions result in only tiny inflections of the meaning of symbols. But on some occasions—for example, when Hawaiian chiefs used the category of tabu to enforce their monopoly on trade with Western merchants—novel attributions can have the result of transforming the meaning of a symbol in historically crucial ways.[30]

Part of what gives cultural practice its potency is the ability of actors to play on the multiple meanings of symbols—thereby redefining situations in ways that they believe will favor their purposes. Creative cultural action commonly entails the purposeful or spontaneous importation of meanings from one social location or context to another. I have recently worked on a telling example of the importation of meaning. The men and women who captured the Bastille in July of 1789 were unquestionably characterizable as "the

people" in the common sense of "the mob" or the "urban poor." But Parisian radicals and members of the French National Assembly played on the ambiguity of the term to cast those who took the Bastille also as a concrete instance of the abstract category of "the people" who were said to be sovereign in radical political theory. Importing the association between the people and sovereignty from the context of political theory into that of urban crowd violence had the not inconsequential effect of ushering the modern concept of revolution into the world.[31]

CULTURES AS DISTINCT WORLDS OF MEANING

Up to now, I have been considering culture only in its singular and abstract sense—as a realm of social life defined in contrast to some other noncultural realm or realms. My main points may be summarized as follows: culture, I have argued, should be understood as a dialectic of system and practice, as a dimension of social life autonomous from other such dimensions both in its logic and in its spatial configuration, and as a system of symbols possessing a real but thin coherence that is continually put at risk in practice and therefore subject to transformation. Such a theorization, I maintain, makes it possible to accept the cogency of recent critiques yet retain a workable and powerful concept of culture that incorporates the achievements of the cultural anthropology of the 1960s and 1970s.

But it is probably fair to say that most recent theoretical work on culture, particularly in anthropology, is actually concerned primarily with culture in its pluralizable and more concrete sense—that is, with cultures as distinct worlds of meaning. Contemporary anthropological critics' objections to the concept of culture as system and their insistence on the primacy of practice are not, in my opinion, really aimed at the concept of system as outlined above—the notion that the meaning of symbols is determined by their network of relations with other symbols. Rather, the critics' true target is the idea that cultures (in the second, pluralizable sense) form neatly coherent wholes: that they are logically consistent, highly integrated, consensual, extremely resistant to change, and clearly bounded. This is how cultures tended to be represented in the classic ethnographies—Mead on Samoa, Benedict on the Zuni, Malinowski on the Trobriands, Evans-Prichard on the Nuer, or, for that matter, Geertz on the Balinese. But recent research and thinking about cultural practices, even in relatively "simple" societies, has turned this classic model on its head. It now appears that we should think of worlds of meaning as normally being contradictory, loosely integrated, contested, mutable, and highly permeable. Consequently the very concept of cultures as coherent and distinct entities is widely disputed.

Cultures are contradictory. Some authors of classic ethnographies were quite aware of the presence of contradictions in the cultures they studied. Victor Turner, for example, demonstrated that red symbolism in certain Ndembu rituals simultaneously signified the contradictory principles of matrilineal fertility and male bloodletting. But he emphasized how these potentially contradictory meanings were brought together and harmonized in ritual performances.[32] A current anthropological sensibility would probably emphasize the fundamental character of the contradictions rather than their situational resolution in the ritual. It is common for potent cultural symbols to express contradictions as much as they express coherence. One need look no farther than the central Christian symbol of the Trinity, which attempts to unify in one symbolic figure three sharply distinct and largely incompatible possibilities of Christian religious experience: authoritative and hierarchical orthodoxy (the Father), loving egalitarianism and grace (the Son), and ecstatic spontaneity (the Holy Ghost). Cultural worlds are commonly beset with internal contradictions.

Cultures are loosely integrated. Classic ethnographies recognized that societies were composed of different spheres of activity—for example, kinship, agriculture, hunting, warfare, and religion—and that each of these component parts had its own specific cultural forms. But the classic ethnographers typically saw it as their task to show how these culturally varied components fit into a well-integrated cultural whole. Most contemporary students of culture would question this emphasis. They are more inclined to stress the centrifugal cultural tendencies that arise from these disparate spheres of activity, to stress the inequalities between those relegated to different activities, and to see whatever "integration" occurs as based on power or domination rather than on a common ethos. That most anthropologists now work on complex, stratified, and highly

differentiated societies, rather than on the "simple" societies that were the focus of most classic ethnographies, probably enhances this tendency.

Cultures are contested. Classic ethnographies commonly assumed, at least implicitly, that a culture's most important beliefs were consensual, agreed on by virtually all of a society's members. Contemporary scholars, with their enhanced awareness of race, class, and gender, would insist that people who occupy different positions in a given social order will typically have quite different cultural beliefs or will have quite different understandings of what might seem on the surface to be identical beliefs. Consequently, current scholarship is replete with depictions of "resistance" by subordinated groups and individuals. Thus James Scott detects "hidden transcripts" that form the underside of peasants' deference in contemporary Malaysia and Marshall Sahlins points out that it was Hawaiian women who most readily violated tabus when Captain Cook's ships arrived—because the tabu system, which classified them as profane (*noa*) as against the sacred (*tabu*) men, "did not sit upon Hawaiian women with the force it had for men."[33] Cultural consensus, far from being the normal state of things, is a difficult achievement; and when it does occur it is bound to hide suppressed conflicts and disagreements.

Cultures are subject to constant change. Cultural historians, who work on complex and dynamic societies, have generally assumed that cultures are quite changeable. But recent anthropological work on relatively "simple" societies also finds them to be remarkably mutable. For example, Renato Rosaldo's study of remote Ilongot headhunters in the highlands of Northern Luzon demonstrates that each generation of Ilongots constructed its own logic of settlement patterns, kinship alliance, and feuding—logics that gave successive generations of Ilongots experiences that were probably as varied as those of successive generations of Americans or Europeans between the late nineteenth and late twentieth centuries.[34]

Cultures are weakly bounded. It is extremely unusual for societies or their cultural systems to be anything like isolated or sharply bounded. Even the supposedly simplest societies have had relations of trade, warfare, conquest, and borrowing of all sorts of cultural items—technology, religious ideas, political and artistic forms, and so on. But in addition to mutual influences of these sorts, there

have long been important social and cultural processes that transcend societal boundaries—colonialism, missionary religions, interregional trading associations and economic interdependencies, migratory diasporas, and, in the current era, multinational corporations and transnational nongovernmental organizations. Although these transsocietal processes are certainly more prominent in more recent history than previously, they are hardly entirely new. Think of the spread of such "world religions" as Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, or Buddhism across entire regions of the globe or the development of extensive territorial empires in the ancient world. I would argue that social science's once virtually unquestioned model of societies as clearly bounded entities undergoing endogenous development is as perverse for the study of culture as for the study of economic history or political sociology. Systems of meaning do not correspond in any neat way with national or societal boundaries—which themselves are not nearly as neat as we sometimes imagine. Anything we might designate as a "society" or a "nation" will contain, or fail to contain, a multitude of overlapping and interpenetrating cultural systems, most of them subsocietal, transsocietal, or both.[35]

Thus all of the assumptions of the classic ethnographic model of cultures—that cultures are logically consistent, highly integrated, consensual, resistant to change, and clearly bounded—seem to be untenable. This could lead to the conclusion that the notion of coherent cultures is purely illusory; that cultural practice in a given society is diffuse and decentered; that the local systems of meaning found in a given population do not themselves form a higher-level, societywide system of meanings. But such a conclusion would, in my opinion, be hasty. Although I think it is an error simply to assume that cultures possess an overall coherence or integration, neither can such coherences be ruled out a priori.

HOW COHERENCE IS POSSIBLE

Recent work on cultural practice has tended to focus on acts of cultural resistance, particularly on resistance of a decentered sort—those dispersed everyday acts that thwart conventions, reverse valuations, or express the dominated's resentment of their domination.[36] But it is important to remember that much cultural practice is concentrated in and around powerful institutional nodes—including

religions, communications media, business corporations, and, most spectacularly, states. These institutions, which tend to be relatively large in scale, centralized, and wealthy, are all cultural actors; their agents make continuous use of their considerable resources in efforts to order meanings. Studies of culture need to pay at least as much attention to such sites of concentrated cultural practice as to the dispersed sites of resistance that currently predominate in the literature.[37]

Even in powerful and would-be totalitarian states, centrally placed actors are never able to establish anything approaching cultural uniformity. In fact, they rarely attempt to do so. The typical cultural strategy of dominant actors and institutions is not so much to establish uniformity as it is to organize difference. They are constantly engaged in efforts not only to normalize or homogenize but also to hierarchize, encapsulate, exclude, criminalize, hegemonize, or marginalize practices and populations that diverge from the sanctioned ideal. By such means, authoritative actors attempt, with varying degrees of success, to impose a certain coherence onto the field of cultural practice.[38] Indeed, one of the major reasons for dissident anthropologists' discomfort with the concept of culture is that it is so often employed in all of these ways by various powerful institutional actors—sometimes, alas, with the help of anthropologists.

The kind of coherence produced by this process of organizing difference may be far from the tight cultural integration depicted in classic ethnographies. But when authoritative actors distinguish between high and low cultural practices or between those of the majority ethnicity and minorities or between the legal and the criminal or between the normal and the abnormal, they bring widely varying practices into semiotic relationship—that is, into definition in terms of contrasts with one another. Authoritative cultural action, launched from the centers of power, has the effect of turning what otherwise might be a babble of cultural voices into a semiotically and politically ordered field of differences. Such action creates a map of the "culture" and its variants, one that tells people where they and their practices fit in the official scheme of things.

The official cultural map may, of course, be criticized and resisted by those relegated to its margins. But subordinated groups must to some degree orient their local systems of meaning to those recognized as dominant; the act of contesting dominant meanings itself

implies a recognition of their centrality. Dominant and oppositional groups interact constantly, each undertaking its initiatives with the other in mind. Even when they attempt to overcome or undermine each other, they are mutually shaped by their dialectical dance. Struggle and resistance, far from demonstrating that cultures lack coherence, may paradoxically have the effect of simplifying and clarifying the cultural field.

Moreover, dissenting or oppositional groups work to create and sustain cultural coherence among their own adherents, and they do so by many of the same strategies—hierarchization, encapsulation, exclusion, and the like—that the authorities use. Once again, it is notable that the concept of culture is as likely to be deployed politically by dissident groups as by dominant institutions, and with many of the same exclusionary, normalizing, and marginalizing effects as when it is deployed by the state. To take an obvious example, dissident nationalist and ethnic movements nearly always attempt to impose standards of cultural purity on those deemed members of the group and to use such standards to distinguish between those who are and are not group members.

None of this, of course, implies that cultures are always, everywhere, or unproblematically coherent. It suggests instead that coherence is variable, contested, ever-changing, and incomplete. Cultural coherence, to the extent that it exists, is as much the product of power and struggles for power as it is of semiotic logic. But it is common for the operation of power, both the efforts of central institutions and the acts of organized resistance to such institutions, to subject potential semiotic sprawl to a certain order: to prescribe (contested) core values, to impose discipline on dissenters, to describe boundaries and norms—in short, to give a certain focus to the production and consumption of meaning. As cultural analysts we must acknowledge such coherences where they exist and set ourselves the task of explaining how they are achieved, sustained, and dissolved.

It is no longer possible to assume that the world is divided up into discrete "societies," each with its corresponding and well-integrated "culture." I would argue forcefully for the value of the concept of culture in its nonpluralizable sense, while the utility of the term as pluralizable appears to me more open to legitimate question. Yet I think that the latter concept of culture also gets at something we need to retain: a sense of the particular shapes and consistencies of

worlds of meaning in different places and times and a sense that in spite of conflicts and resistance, these worlds of meaning somehow hang together. Whether we call these partially coherent landscapes of meaning "cultures" or something else—worlds of meaning, or ethnoscapes, or hegemonies—seems to me relatively unimportant so long as we know that their boundedness is only relative and constantly shifting. Our job as cultural analysts is to discern what the shapes and consistencies of local meanings actually are and to determine how, why, and to what extent they hang together.

NOTES

I have received valuable comments on this chapter from a number of friends and colleagues. Even though I heeded their good advice only intermittently, I would like to thank Anne Kane, David Laitin, Claudio Lomnitz, Sherry Ortner, William Reddy, Marshall Sahlins, Paul Seeley, Ann Swidler, Lisa Wedeen, members of the Social Theory Workshop at the University of Chicago, the audience at a Sociology Department Brown Bag at the University of Arizona, and my fellow authors in this volume, who gave me critical comments at our conference at the University of California at Berkeley in April 1996.

1. For a discerning analysis of this debate, see Robert Brightman, "Forget Culture: Replacement, Transcendence, Relexification," *Cultural Anthropology* 10 (1995): 509–46.

2. One outcome of these efforts was William H. Sewell, Jr., *Work and Revolution in France: The Language of Labor from the Old Regime to 1848* (Cambridge, 1980).

3. This turn of historians to anthropology was quite widespread in the 1970s, not only in America, where it informed the work of such scholars as Natalie Davis and Robert Darnton, but also in France, England, and Australia, where anthropology influenced such scholars as Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, Jacques Le Goff, Keith Thomas, Peter Laslett, and Rhys Isaac.

4. Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York, 1973).

5. Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore, 1976).

6. A good introduction to this current of scholarship is H. Aram Veeser, ed., *The New Historicism* (New York, 1989).

7. Lynn Hunt, ed., *The New Cultural History* (Berkeley, 1989).

8. The most celebrated expression of this angst is the collective volume edited by James Clifford and George E. Marcus, *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* (Berkeley, 1986).

9. Geertz, *Interpretation of Cultures*, and Lila Abu-Lughod, "Writing against Culture," in *Recapturing Anthropology: Working in the Present*, ed. Richard G. Fox (Santa Fe, 1991), pp. 137–62.

10. Brightman, "Forget Culture," p. 510.

11. James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Cambridge, Mass., 1988), p. 10.

12. Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, rev. ed. (London, 1983), p. 87. See also Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society: 1780–1950* (New York, 1958).

13. The two types of meanings I have distinguished here can be overlaid, so that the cultural aspects of the life of a people or a social group are distinguished from the noncultural aspects of its life. Hence, "Balinese culture" may be contrasted to "Balinese society" or "the Balinese economy." In anthropological usage, however, "culture" also is commonly used to designate the whole of the social life of a given people, so that "Balinese culture" becomes a synonym for "Balinese society" rather than a contrastive term.

14. Ruth Benedict's views are expressed most systematically in *Patterns of Culture* (Boston, 1934). Lévi-Strauss's views are expressed in many of his works, including *Structural Anthropology*, trans. Clair Jacobson and Brooke Grundfest Schoefp, 2 vols. (New York, 1963), and *The Savage Mind* (Chicago, 1966).

15. Williams, *Keywords*, pp. 90–91.

16. E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London, 1963); Paul Willis, *Learning to Labor: How Working Class Kids Get Working Class Jobs* (New York, 1981).

17. Clifford Geertz, "Religion as a Cultural System" and "Ideology as a Cultural System," in *Interpretation of Cultures*, pp. 87–125, 193–233; "Common Sense as a Cultural System" and "Art as a Cultural System," in *Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretive Anthropology* (New York, 1983), pp. 73–93, 94–120.

18. David M. Schneider's most influential book is *American Kinship: A Cultural Account* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1968). The most systematic statement of his conception of a cultural system is David M. Schneider, "Notes toward a Theory of Culture," in *Meaning in Anthropology*, ed. Keith H. Basso and Henry A. Selby (Albuquerque, 1976), pp. 197–220.

19. Talcott Parsons, *The Social System* (Glencoe, Ill., 1959). Geertz and Schneider were both students of Talcott Parsons and Clyde Kluckhohn in the Harvard Department of Social Relations and they taught together during the 1960s at the University of Chicago, then the epicenter of cultural anthropology.

20. Victor W. Turner, *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1967), *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Chicago, 1969), and *Revelation and Divination in Ndembu Ritual* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1975).

21. Sherry Ortner, "Theory in Anthropology Since the Sixties," *Comparative Studies in History and Society* 26 (1984): 126–66; Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge, 1977); Clifford and Marcus, *Writing Culture*.

22. Joan W. Scott has been at the center of much of this polemic. "On Language, Gender, and Working-Class History," *International Labor and Working Class History*, no. 31 (spring 1987): 1–13, was a response to Gareth Stedman Jones, *Languages of Class: Studies in English Working Class History, 1832–1982* (Cambridge, 1984). This essay was published with responses in the same issue by Bryan D. Palmer (14–23), Christine Stansell (24–29), and Anson Rabinbach (30–36); Scott then responded to their critiques in no. 32 ([fall 1987]: 39–45). Scott criticizes John Toews, "Intellectual History after the Linguistic Turn: The Autonomy of Meaning and the Irreducibility of Experience," *American Historical Review* 92 (1987): 879–907, in "Experience," in *Feminists Theorize the Political*, ed. Joan W. Scott and Judith Butler (New York, 1992), pp. 22–40. Laura Lee Downs criticizes Scott in "If 'Woman' Is Just an Empty Category, Then Why Am I Afraid to Walk Alone at Night? Identity Politics Meets the Postmodern Subject," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 35 (1993): 414–37; Scott's response, "The Tip of the Volcano" (438–43), and Downs's reply (444–51) are published in the same volume. Perhaps the most blistering denunciation of discursive history is Brian D. Palmer, *Descent into Discourse: The Reification of Language and the Writing of Social History* (Philadelphia, 1990). For a discussion of many of these issues, see Joyce Appleby, Lynn Hunt, and Margaret Jacob, *Telling the Truth about History* (New York, 1994), pp. 198–237.

23. Ann Swidler, "Culture in Action: Symbols and Strategies," *American Sociological Review* 51 (1984): 273–86.

24. Schneider, "Notes toward a Theory of Culture," 214.

25. See, e.g., Schneider, *American Kinship*.

26. Readers of Marshall Sahlins should find this formulation familiar. See especially *Islands of History* (Chicago, 1985), pp. 136–56.

27. For a fuller exposition of this perspective, see William H. Sewell, Jr., "Toward a Post-Materialist Rhetoric for Labor History," in *Rethinking Labor History: Essays on Discourse and Class Analysis*, ed. Lenard R. Berlanstein (Urbana, Ill., 1993), 15–38.

28. On the spatial aspect of culture, see Claudio Lomnitz-Adler, "Concepts for the Study of Regional Culture," *American Ethnologist* 18 (1991): 195–214.

29. This is not, of course, the usual conclusion arrived at by deconstructionists, who would insist that these "other structures" are no less textual than semiotic structures and that making sense of them is purely a matter of intertextuality. This epistemological and perhaps ontological difference between my position and that of deconstruction should make it clear that I am appropriating from deconstruction specific ideas that I find useful rather than adopting a full-scale deconstructionist position.

30. Marshall Sahlins, *Historical Metaphors and Mythical Realities* (Ann Arbor, 1981), esp. pp. 67–72, and *Islands of History*, pp. 136–56.

31. William H. Sewell, Jr., "Political Events as Transformations of Structures: Inventing Revolution at the Bastille," *Theory and Society* 26 (1996): 841–81.

32. Turner, *Forest of Symbols*, pp. 41–43.

33. Sahlins, *Historical Metaphors*, p. 46. See also James Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven, 1985).

34. Renato I. Rosaldo, *Ilongot Headhunting, 1883–1974: A Study in Society and History* (Stanford, 1980).

35. Arjun Appadurai's work on recent forms of transnational cultural forms has been particularly influential. See, e.g., "Global Ethnoscapes: Notes and Queries for a Transnational Anthropology," in Fox, ed., *Recapturing Anthropology*, pp. 191–210, and *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis, 1996).

36. For a critical discussion of such work, see Sherry B. Ortner, "Resistance and the Problem of Ethnographic Refusal," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 37 (1995): 173–93.

37. For a fascinating study of state cultural practices, see Lisa Wedeen, *Ambiguities of Domination: Politics, Rhetoric, and Symbols in Contemporary Syria* (Chicago, forthcoming, 1999).

38. This characterization seems to me to be roughly consonant with a Gramscian idea of hegemony; see Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, ed. and trans. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (New York, 1971). For two quite different Gramscian cultural analyses of politics, see Stuart Hall, *The Hard Road to Renewal: Thatcherism and the Crisis of the Left* (London, 1988), and David D. Laitin, *Hegemony and Culture: Politics and Religious Change among the Yoruba* (Chicago, 1986).