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# Introduction

## Rethinking Popular Culture

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Popular culture studies have undergone a dramatic change during the last generation—from an academic backwater to a swift intellectual river where expansive currents from different disciplines meet. Anthropologists, historians, sociologists, and literary scholars have mounted impressive intellectual challenges to basic assumptions in their own fields, which had previously barred close attention to popular forms.

These intellectual developments, shaped by the general cultural upheaval of the 1960s, helped change the outlooks of conventional disciplines and helped define a number of hybrid fields, including communication and cultural studies, in the past twenty years. The rigid conceptual barrier between "high," or estimable, culture and popular, or representative, culture has broken down. Literary and art critics have come to recognize how much high culture and popular culture have in common as human social practices. The distanced and intentionally nonevaluative approach of the social sciences has come to influence thinking about culture in the humanities. Scholars have also come to see, as several of the articles in this volume make clear, how much the traditional division of high and popular culture has been a political division rather than a defensible intellectual or aesthetic distinction. They have begun to trace the mutual influence of high and popular culture. They have come to take popular culture more seriously as a terrain of political and social conflict and a weapon of political mobilization. In historical writing, in particular, attention to the beliefs and practices of ordinary people has very nearly displaced studies of political, diplomatic, and military elites. (The pendulum has not yet swung the other way, but several recent critical appraisals of "the eclipse of politics" in historical writing signal a change.)[1]

The redefinition of popular culture studies has made problematic earlier views of mass culture as degraded and elite culture as elevating. Instead, the new studies recognize the power of the ordinary, accept the commonplace as a legitimate object of inquiry, hammer away at the often arbitrary and ideological distinctions between popular, mass, and elite culture, and ask serious questions about the role of popular culture in political and social life.

We intend this volume to mark the emergence of this rethinking of popular culture by collecting some leading examples of both theoretical and empirical work, demonstrating to students and scholars in a range of disciplines the rich resources and significant problems for inquiry that have opened up. This is a limited selection of recent work; we do not pretend to have covered all the territory. We have tried to represent a range of key figures and key ideas, to include pieces that draw attention to a variety of popular culture forms, and to provide examples of different theoretical and disciplinary perspectives. We have also tried to choose, where possible, works of special clarity to make this book valuable in the classroom.

The new study of popular culture is institutionally as well as intellectually distinctive. Historically, colleges and universities have taken as part of their responsibility and as central to their identity the transmission of the greatest cultural achievements of human beings. In practice, of course, this mission has tended to be parochial, a parochialism in which many still take pride. But parochialism it is, or "educational fundamentalism," as Gerald Graff has called it.[2] Universities in the West have particularly emphasized the achievements of Western civilization; especially since the decline of classical studies, universities in a given country have emphasized the achievements of their own national elite culture.

Nowhere in the conventional university curriculum of fifty or a hundred years ago was there a place for the study of popular culture, but seeds of change had already been planted. In the eighteenth century, "culture" was a synonym for "civilization," the general process of becoming civilized or cultivated—an evolutionary process leading up, presumably, to eighteenth-century European culture as the pinnacle. The German philosopher Johann Gottfried von Herder attacked this view: "Men of all the quarters of the globe, who have perished over the ages, you have not lived solely to manure the earth with your ashes, so that at the end of time your posterity should be made happy by European culture. The very thought of a superior European culture is a blatant insult to the majesty of Nature."[3] Herder was the first to speak of "cultures" rather than "culture" in the singular. He began to use the term in a way that would become standard in anthropology and sociology a century later. Herder and others encouraged studies of "folk culture" in the early nineteenth century, and under the influence of a new democratic romanticism, folkloric studies began in Europe. Still, substantial institutional recognition came only with the formal organization of the social sciences in the late nineteenth century. If the popular arts of a primitive tribe were still not included for study in a department of art or literature, they at least could be examined in anthropology. If they were not to be studied as great human achievements, they could nonetheless be examined as evidence of the kind of creatures human beings are.



At first, anthropological and other social scientific approaches to the study of culture had little impact on central understandings of culture in the humanities. Even within anthropology, the potential that existed for reshaping the mission of the university itself was rarely exploited. The anthropological focus on exotic and *traditional* cultures typically blinded anthropology to the contemporary popular culture of the primitive groups they studied as these groups encountered "modernizing" influences. Anthropologists did not see mass cultural forms such as Indian films or tourist art as worthy of scholarly attention. If they were recognized at all, they were seen as symptoms of the breakdown of noble traditions, impurities in the cultural soup rather than the soup itself. In this way, even the relatively egalitarian discipline of anthropology carved out its own academic niche while joining art and literary criticism in condemning modern popular culture. Even anthropology tended to praise folk culture for its authenticity and decry mass culture for its commercial origins and purposes, its ideological aims, or its aesthetic blandness.

The legitimation of contemporary popular culture as a subject for study in universities and a subject of inquiry for serious scholars, although far from complete today, has grown enormously in a generation. In both the social sciences and humanities, the study of popular culture has been transformed and has, to some extent, transformed the definitions of the disciplines themselves. As evidence grows that "authentic" folk traditions often have metropolitan or elite roots and that mass culture often is "authentically" incorporated into ordinary people's everyday lives, it has become hazardous to make an invidious distinction between popular culture and high culture or a rigid separation of authentic, people-generated "folk" culture from unauthentic and degraded, commercially borne "mass" culture.

In this period of rethinking, "popular culture" is a difficult term to define. We will sidestep a great many terminological disputes with the inclusive claim that popular culture refers to the beliefs and practices, and the objects through which they are organized, that are widely shared among a population. This includes folk beliefs, practices and objects rooted in local traditions, and mass beliefs, practices and objects generated in political and commercial centers. It includes elite cultural forms that have

been popularized as well as popular forms that have been elevated to the museum tradition. In this way, we capture some of the subtleties of new cultural theories and can help convey the array of studies that have made traditional conceptions of popular culture untenable.

While studies of popular culture today are creating a truly interdisciplinary literature, scholars continue to speak to others of their own disciplinary backgrounds and come upon the scene of popular culture not entirely fresh but shaped by particular bents, traditions, and theories of their own fields. No single discipline has or will ever have a monopoly on the study of popular culture; no discipline represents the "best" approach. Each sees a different part of the elephant.

Moreover, each has used popular culture as a weapon in its own disciplinary wars. The process of legitimating popular culture studies in recent years has (in all the fields) been associated with major theoretical challenges to basic assumptions of the disciplines. Students of popular culture in each field have seen themselves as innovative, marginal, and as challenging traditional modes and objects of research, missionaries within their own disciplines who employ new subject matter and ideas imported from other disciplines to call into question the standards of their own.

For example, historians from the French *Annales* school (the name comes from the journal in which they have published) sought to move their discipline away from its traditional focus on the activities of elites and the political histories of nations based on documents written by the literate. Instead, they advocated studying the common people (who left few or no written records), using aggregate data (from birth, marriage, and death records or tax figures) or descriptions of collective, ritual life made by literate neighbors. This research agenda required historians to learn some social science. They learned statistics like sociologists or economists in order to analyze public records. They learned anthropology to better interpret the cultural lives of the nonliterate. Their new tools did not make a new generation of historians into social scientists, however. *Annales* historians wanted to understand a lost past, not unchanging cultural patterns or contemporary ones; they wanted to use data about the past to describe the passage of time and its human significance. Moreover, the methodological problems and principles of this type of research were meant to differ from those of statistical sociology or interpretive anthropology because historical records must be understood in their historical contexts before they can be used statistically *or* symbolically, and neither anthropologists nor sociologists have typically cultivated the appropriate skills for doing this. So although historians have been liberally borrowing theories and methods from social scientists, historical studies of popular culture remain surprisingly remote from those made by sociologists and anthropologists.



Similarly, Marxist historians devoted to understanding the role of culture in the political mobilization of disadvantaged groups have borrowed numerous sociological concepts and organized their research to answer theoretical questions posed in the social sciences, but they have also concentrated on unearthing new kinds of historical records in order to give voice to groups that have been absent from historical literature. Digging in the archives has become a self-conscious form of contemporary politics within the discipline of history, not a way to supply sociology with the answers to long-standing questions.

Students of popular culture, then, have simultaneously worked in the tradition of their disciplines and fought with their premises. The most successful of them have transformed their disciplines and made their style of research a new (and still somewhat threatening) model of good work. This is why we have organized the readings in this volume by discipline. Most of the works here are deeply interdisciplinary, if that is not an oxymoron (and we do not think it is). But most of them do emerge from specific disciplinary perspectives and can best be understood in light of related developments in their disciplines.

There is an irony in this. We think that unearthing the disciplinary underpinnings of popular culture studies is important now precisely because popular culture has become an interdisciplinary subject of research. Popular culture studies have embraced such a range of issues with such an array of methods that they have become bafflingly diffuse to many students. Many of the researchers exulting in the intellectual freedom of the field have had no interest in establishing clear boundaries around it. After all, they rebelled against the traditional territorial arrangement of disciplines and have in many cases been loath to draw a new set of territorial lines. The resulting freedom for researchers has had its costs for students. The field is not easily characterized by either its perimeter or its center. The boundaries are not clear, and there are multiple centers emerging from the parent disciplines. So students approaching the field have no coherent way to understand why analysts of popular culture care so much about, for example, the role of the working class, the meaning and development of literacy, the extent to which popular forms mirror reality or express dreams and wishes, or how reversals of meaning appear in popular culture objects or performances. By looking at how popular culture analysis has developed in history, anthropology, sociology, and literary studies, novices to the field can see more clearly how the intellectual traditions and politics of diverse fields have helped shape the issues within popular culture studies.

We confess here a preference, if not an elitism, of our own—not about what human phenomena merit study but about the theoretical sophistication of the approach to their study. Some may ask if baseball cards are as valuable for study as *The Scarlet Letter*. Is the baseball game as significant a cultural tradition in the United States as the novel? Or is the passion for statistics and for collecting among preadolescent males as much a part of American culture as a Puritan heritage and sense of sin? Or is the ritual of Little League or the World Series as vital to everyday life as the close study of a semisacred text in a high school classroom? And which students are to be judged more culturally literate—those who can identify Hester Prynne but not Babe Ruth or those who can identify Jackie Robinson but not Arthur Dimmesdale?

These are not our questions. What matters, it seems to us, is that a student of popular culture, as opposed to an enthusiastic fan of it or a hands-over-the-ears critic of it, should have good questions to ask. To date, the most sophisticated and fruitful questions have come from scholars using theoretical positions developed in anthropology, sociology, history, and literary studies. Because popular culture studies have developed in conjunction with major theoretical restructuring in these fields, researchers from them have generally been especially sensitive to theoretical issues.

The new theoretical approaches to the study of culture that we highlight no longer exclude topics like popular ceremonies or consumer goods from the range of possible research subjects. A historiography that can treat vital statistics as seriously as diplomatic correspondence necessarily accepts and calls for the expansion of appropriate subjects for study. Literary theory that focuses on relations between texts, their producers, and their audiences—and can conclude that a text is definable only by these relationships—necessarily reconsiders romance novels and science fiction and television soap operas and other denigrated literary forms as acceptable subjects for study.

This is not, of course, a matter of purely intellectual development detached from its social setting. Not only have the theoretical views in the different fields influenced one another, but all have been shaped by the changing politics of academic life since the 1960s. The antielitist tendencies of the intellectual movements that have promoted the study of popular culture are products of the radical questioning of higher education that marked the cultural revolution of the 1960s and since. In part, this led to a more receptive audience for Marxism in the academic world and therefore more sympathetic attention to the beliefs and practices of the working class and others lower in the social order. In part, it meant that less overtly political theories, and even theoretical views like structuralism, which could easily be politically conservative, were turned



to the antielitist cause (which is not to say that, once established, these same movements have not created invidious distinctions of their own).

The disciplines we consider here all held elitist attitudes toward popular culture. There was a preciousness in anthropologists' tendency to deny the forces of change that were affecting the societies they studied. They wanted social groups to be ideal types, unaffected by changing conditions of ordinary life, but this stance was not necessarily helpful to the groups that they studied. Politically active anthropologists made this point well, helping to underscore anthropological elitism and to spark efforts to change the discipline. There was also an elitism among the sociologists who found religion or art (meaning conventionally understood "high" art) more fittingly academic than popular culture as a subject of study. There was an elitism among traditional historians connected in part to their reliance on written records to uncover the past but, more important, tied to a vision of history as a chronicle of "major" sociopolitical and cultural changes. With this conventional focus, one needed to uncover the actions, values, and motives only of elites, not of ordinary people.

But the new efforts of social historians to examine the everyday lives of slaves, women, children, and other groups, whom professional historians had almost entirely neglected, so richly changed the sense of the past in leading university history departments and so quickly were tied to demands of women and minorities for greater representation in the profession that the elitism of conventional historiography came to seem increasingly silly and stuffy. (In the end, opening up historical analysis to include the lives of ordinary people had practical benefits for the discipline: it gave history new subject matter and reason for continued scholarship. It has also given history departments a leading role in thinking about new curricula for new or nontraditional college students from ethnic minorities.)

Literary scholars, art and music historians, and cultural critics in general were the most committed of all academics to elitist concepts of culture. Indeed, defining taste and value was in many ways their raison d'être. Thus, they seemed the most stodgy of all when threatened by those who would study popular culture. And this may help explain why the changes in literary theory have been the most far-reaching of any we consider here. The traditional tools of literary scholarship seemed shockingly at odds with the antielitist tone of so much contemporary art and writing—the very subject of scholarship seemed to be escaping, or rejecting, its institutionalized study. The revolution in theories of interpretation could not help addressing new questions about the purpose of cultural criticism itself.

The result is a vastly restructured intellectual environment for the

study of culture and society, one that not only allows room for the study of popular culture but requires it. We have tried to represent this new world of popular cultural studies here. In the pages that follow, we provide an overview of substantive issues in popular culture studies and an introduction to the specific works we have included in this anthology.

## HISTORICAL STUDIES OF POPULAR CULTURE

Historians in general have given more sustained scholarly attention to popular culture than members of any other discipline, but their reasons for doing so have not been of a piece. Scholars specializing in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries have most frequently looked to popular culture to try to understand the consequences of the industrial revolution, especially the role of culture in the development of the working class, the significance of the new commercial culture developing in the period, and the new uses of culture as a means of social control. In contrast, historians of the early modern period have more often engaged in a kind of archaeological exploration, turning to the unnoticed marks of cultural activity left by illiterate people. If a main task of the nineteenth-century historian is to preserve nineteenth-century popular culture from denigration and to explore its relationship to politics, the task of the early modernist is to save popular culture for history altogether. There is in this a strong egalitarian impulse, a reaction against a tradition of historiography that privileges literary evidence, but the resulting scholarship is often much less closely tied to contemporary political concerns than the work of the nineteenth-century historians who struggle with the web of politics, industrial capitalism, and culture.

Medievalists and early modernists look beyond the well-known characteristics of the elaborate court culture of their periods (reaching its height or depth, as the case may be, at Versailles) to the forgotten activities practiced by "the people" in other, less powerful social worlds.[4] In a kind of gesture of affirmative action, they turn to reading practices, carnival activities, songs, jokes, pictures, and dances to reinstate ordinary people in history, using new methods of research adapted from anthropology and sociology. Because popular practices could not be successfully understood by either extrapolating from the behavior of elites or reading elite accounts of them, methodology has been an abiding preoccupation of many of these scholars.

Some historians, for instance, began to use statistics. If there are few personal records (like diaries) of the thoughts and aspirations of individual peasants or poor urban dwellers, one can still get a sense of everyday life from various forms of aggregate data. Tax rolls can suggest general levels of wealth, prices and measures of household wealth taken for tax



or other purposes can say something about consumption patterns, school enrollments or whether wills are signed or marked can speak to literacy rates, legal documents from the Inquisition can say something about the theological leanings of the population, and guild records can reveal the occupational structure of towns. These sources used in conjunction with the accounts of public events written down by the literate are providing historians with surprisingly detailed views of past ways of life. French historian Fernand Braudel argued that historians who use such materials could begin to "read" in Europe another kind of history running beneath the world of high-stakes politics and wealth, a history of slow changes transforming the lives of ordinary people in significant but undramatic fashion (the *"longue durée"*).[5]

Braudel is a central figure in the *Annales* school of historiography.[6] The *Annales* historians have sought to move their discipline away from elites and political history to studies of the common people and social history. They have advocated attention to bureaucratically gathered data and the use of statistics to analyze them, all in an effort to chart the *longue durée*. Because of the low literacy rates of the late middle ages and the early modern period, there was no other choice. It is perhaps no coincidence, then, that an early member of the *Annales* school, Lucien Febvre, turned to the question of literacy itself as a subject for research focusing on Europe from the twelfth to the sixteenth century. He and Henri-Jean Martin wrote a book on the subject that (true to form) depends crucially on statistical evidence about printing and literacy.[7] They tried to construct a model of literate culture and its changes after the introduction of print by examining the records of publishing houses. This effort was later supplemented by the work of Natalie Davis on patterns of literacy and reading among nonelites in early modern France (some of which is reprinted here), work on the cognitive effects of literacy developed by the anthropologist Jack Goody but taken up by historians, and the work done by Elizabeth Eisenstein on printing's crucial role in the Renaissance, Reformation, and the scientific revolution.[8]

One central problem for these researchers has been defining literacy. Natalie Davis discusses that issue carefully in her essay in this volume. She asks what people from different social ranks could read and what kinds of effects reading was likely to have had on them. She does not take the ability to read to be the same as having access to a literate culture. She does not even assume uniformity in the literate cultures people could find around them. She makes it clear that literate culture was something that spread beyond the bounds of the literate in the sixteenth century—the period covered in the article included here—because readers would read out loud to those who could not read themselves. She also notes that marginally literate people living in the highly literate cul-

ture of the cities could be affected more by literacy then the highly literate few in the countryside. Like Febvre and Martin, she is conservative in her assessment of literacy's effects, but because she pays more attention to reading than printing, she is much more precise in detailing patterns of literacy and the bounds of literate culture.

It is notable that Davis takes reading to be an active kind of behavior. Very often, she observes, readers "translated" as they read along from French to a local language or dialect and "edited" as they adapted small portions of long works for their particular purposes. And they had plenty of room to interpret as they chose—so much so, Davis observes, that the church began to include illustrations and notes in the Bible to guide readers toward the proper interpretation. All this demonstrates the theoretical point Davis makes in the beginning: A printed book is not so much a source of ideas as "a carrier of relationships." This is a point that has appeared, in an entirely different context and with extraordinary force, in contemporary literary theory, as we shall see.

What Davis does not do in this essay is indicate how people were thinking when they were reading. Carlo Ginzberg in *The Cheese and the Worms* suggests that not all readers extracted the same meaning from a text.[9] He seems to share Goody's idea that having literacy skills allows people to think in new ways, but that just being able to read and write does not automatically make people think in a "literate" fashion. People can be nonliterate members of a literate culture and show "literate" thought patterns, or readers coming out of a primarily oral culture can retain "oral" modes of thinking. Ginzberg studied a sixteenth-century miller who developed an idiosyncratic heretical theology based on his "readings" of a variety of religious and "historical" books. This man could "read," but he used the interpretive skills and liberties of someone in an oral culture. He gave just as much credence to books of myths as he did to theological and scientific texts; moreover, he saw them all as materials he could use for his own storytelling. With them, he developed an idiosyncratic creation myth that was so elaborate and about which he spoke so freely that the Catholic church thought he must be part of a heretical sect. Like the singer of tales or storyteller in an oral culture, Ginzberg's oral literate seemed to feel uninhibited in remaking texts to his own design.

Using this case as evidence, Ginzberg (much like Michel Foucault and Janice Radway in the selections here) argues that the meaning of a text comes from its mobilization in reading. He joins with those who contend that if we want to understand the effects of literacy, we need to know *how* people read as well as *what* they read.

It is hard to overestimate the importance of research on literacy for



popular culture studies. Today it is common to use "reading" as a metaphor for the interpretation of any cultural object, a piece of art as much as a book, a social ritual as much as a pamphlet. It is also common to think of cultural objects as existing in and deriving from a "code" or "language." The whole field of communication grows out of a set of categories about how a "sender" "encodes" a "message" in a given "medium" that a "receiver" or "audience" then "decodes." That is a familiar model in communication of the central cultural or communicational act. So in communication studies, as elsewhere, when new light is shed on the uses and meaning of literacy in its most conventional sense—the reading and writing of texts in script or print—the whole field of cultural studies is illuminated.

The accessibility of "literacy" as a concept and "reading" as a metaphor creates some problems, too. Students of literacy patterns in Europe before the eighteenth century describe how low literacy rates have built barriers between us and the people we read about in the past. The lack of diaries and other firsthand accounts has certainly obscured our access to past voices, but the problem goes deeper. We read of the nonliterate past from the point of view of a deeply literate culture, using sensibilities nonliterates could not share. So part of the project for historians of popular culture from this period is the infinitely difficult one of finding ways to unearth the cultural assumptions of those times, which are unlike the ones we know today.

For this project, historians from the *Annales* school prescribed the use of anthropological theories and methods. After all, anthropologists developed their research tools for studying (primarily) nonliterate groups. Moreover, early modern and late medieval popular culture was often a performance culture, filled with rites and ceremonies, saints' days and other religious festivals, whose study appropriately fits into the intellectual domain of anthropology. (If "reading" is one master concept in the new study of popular culture, "performance" is another.) This original impulse was then expanded into more recent interest in material culture studies as a basis for historical thinking. The work of folklorists as well as anthropologists was applied to the problems of historiography.[10]

The most ambitious historians tried diligently to combine statistical and anthropological methods, sometimes with great success. Le Roy Ladurie's magisterial *Carnival in Romans* contains tax data and anthropological readings of popular rituals to excavate a political upheaval that reached its bloody apex in carnival.[11] He reconstructs the course of the events from the diaries of two wealthy men, trying to take into account and comment on their differing perspectives on the events, but he goes beyond this. He describes the major actors in the events in terms of social

characteristics he derived from tax rolls and residency patterns, and using anthropological methods, he dissects the symbolism in carnival that aggravated the political tensions of the event.

To give a taste of the symbolic reading of political protest in this period and to suggest the influence of anthropology in history, we have included here a celebrated study by historian Robert Darnton, "The Great Cat Massacre." Darnton shows how the discontent of apprentices in a sixteenth-century print shop (note the attention to printing again) led them to express their hostility in violence. But they did not make their master (the source of their oppression) or his wife (the source of many of their frustrations) the object of their violence. They called on their symbolic resources to transform their master's cat into a symbol of their dissatisfaction and focused their violence on that animal. They were not in any position to engage in overtly political acts to redress their grievances—as many did in peasant rebellions—but they could lash out safely through symbolic action. The result was still effective. The meaning of their massacre was visible enough to their employers to constitute a threat. Here cultural performance was a piece of cultural politics.

However much the carnival in Romans and the massacre of cats were instances in which culture was mobilized for political protest, these were not acts of political resistance of the sort to be found in the nineteenth century. The low-level artisans in both cases used the symbols from the common culture of their period to represent their subordination and to vent their distress, but they did not resist the culture itself or protest fundamentally the social hierarchy in which they lived. Darnton and Ladurie do not tell us these stories to show the political power of culture, but rather to give us access to the political intelligence expressed in these acts. These symbolic protests were not the actions of dumb, rude peasants (if such a thing existed); these were the acts of shrewd readers of political relations and cultural symbols.[12]

The archaeological work by historians of the early modern period has given forgotten voices a place in historical accounts and has helped build new images of and ideas about history. The work on peasant and artisanal culture was only a start. Its success helped legitimate research on women and children. Family history and women's history have become active areas of early modern studies as women and children have been recognized as important populations historians had ignored in the past. They, too, were found to be more interesting and lively than historians had previously realized, and their lives were reconstructed to become part of the record of popular forms.[13]

It is instructive to contrast the spirit in which historians have presented popular activities of peasants and families from the early modern period to the tone of the research on the cultures of nineteenth-century



working-class groups and families. One can see immediately that historians of nineteenth-century popular culture look not so much for forgotten or lost cultural forms to give us something approaching an ethnographic record of earlier nonelites, but rather search out and describe the *political* meanings and uses of culture during industrialization (i.e., the way popular culture in the nineteenth century either helped outline an emerging system of social control by elites over nonelites, particularly workers and women, or articulated new bases for social integration and differentiation).

The focus on subordinate groups—slaves, laborers, immigrants, women—became central to historical research. History is now often written, as advocates began to say in the 1960s, "from the bottom up."[14] The landmark work published in 1963 by the independent British scholar E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class,* was central in shaping scholarship on the working class.[15] This extraordinarily powerful, rich, and probing work argued that a working class in early industrial England became an organized and self-conscious entity not as an automatic and passive result of industrial change but as a willed force responding to economic transformation. Moreover, the English working class was not only working class but English, built on workers' sense of their political entitlement as citizens of England. Thompson stressed how much the political ambitions of these workers were shaped by their belief in a traditional moral order, their sense not of a new or revolutionary political vision but of their rights as "free-born Englishmen," in other words, their understanding of their cultural heritage. This understanding was passed down in songs and stories, in fraternal organizations, and in recalled history and myth. It crucially shaped the character of new working-class organizations and politics. Members of the working class saw a past on which to construct (and fight for) a future.

Thompson and other historians of the working class have become preoccupied with the relationship between culture and politics for the working class. They examine the imposition of work discipline (for example) that developed with the factory system and ask who was served by the growing cultural emphasis on punctuality and the abhorrence of drinking on the job. They also have asked questions about the political potential of working-class institutions: whether they have facilitated political mobilization or simply directed workers' attention away from political problems.[16] Historians of the working class often differ in their interests in working-class culture and its relationship to power. Some, like Thompson and Gareth Stedman Jones, are interested in the extent to which workers' culture led to the creation of a class consciousness that fed political action.[17] Others, like Kathy Peiss and Roy Rosenzweig, are more concerned with the preservation of cultural autonomy and main-

tenance of cultural traditions by workers in the nineteenth century.[18] They see a kind of class struggle written in the codes of cultural objects and practices cultivated by workers who did not bow to elite tastes. Not accidentally, Thompson and Stedman Jones look at England, where a strong working-class consciousness developed and a strong labor party emerged; Rosenzweig and Peiss examine the United States, where nineteenth-century politics is more often characterized as "ethnocultural" than as strictly class based, with sectional, ethnic, and religious divisions often more sharply drawn than class antagonisms.[19]

The chapter from Rosenzweig's book reprinted in this volume illustrates patterns of working-class cultural recalcitrance and change visible in drinking habits. Rosenzweig describes drinking habits in working-class ethnic groups blatantly at odds with the perceived economic interests and hegemonic beliefs of the social elites. The drinking culture of workers who had traditionally drunk on the job, for example, threatened the efficiency of the factory and challenged employers' capacity to control their employees' work time as well as after-hours activities. Traditional drinking habits not only insulted the Protestant ethic by interfering with sober attention to work itself; they ran counter to American individualism because they stressed the fundamentally *social* nature of drinking. They also (in early stages) reduced the separation of the workplace and the home by supporting the growth of drinking establishments in working-class houses near factory sites. This drinking was not so much to resist elite control but to contest elite culture. Thus, it had political meanings even if it was not inspired by, or was not fated to inspire, political action.[20] (Although this selection emphasizes commonalities in the working class, other parts of Rosenzweig's work stress important variations. For instance, French-Canadian and Irish workers supported the saloons, but native Protestant workers and Swedish immigrants frequently supported efforts to control or close them. Religious differences were important, too: Protestant temperance groups rejected the saloon totally; Catholic temperance societies offered alternative recreational facilities that accepted the fellowship of the saloon—its spirit without its spirits.)[21]

As Rosenzweig hints, the issue of cultural resistance to elite control was important to women as well as to working-class men in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Kathy Peiss and Dolores Hayden, among others, examine women's culture from this perspective.[22] They too want to understand the limits and effects of cultural domination by elites (elite men); and, in a parallel fashion, they illustrate how both women workers and elite women tried, in their different ways, to use their degrees of cultural freedom to articulate a gender culture that would serve their social and political interests. Sometimes the women drew on tradition (like the culture of the domestic economy), and other times they reappropriated hegemonic cultural forms to suit their purposes. Thus, elite women used the machines of industrialization to reorganize domestic life in collectives and other utopian housing schemes, trying to free themselves from the physical burden and social isolation of housework without becoming victims of the new division of labor by gender that accompanied industrialization. In a similar vein, working-class women, using their new independent wealth gained from factory work, bought clothing that copied reigning fashions but also used the bright colors and exaggerated designs associated with prostitutes. They reproduced the fashion consciousness of their gender role but reappropriated it to resist dominant tastes. These women responded to elite domination not by trying to change their political status but by demonstrating their ability to retain some control over their own actions.



The term "hegemony" has come into widespread use fairly recently in all the disciplines covered here (and Raymond Williams discusses it directly in his essay).[23] The term is now used—sometimes with great abandon—to describe any aspect of a culture, ideology, or set of practices through which elites impose their views and establish the legitimacy of their power and privilege over nonelites. In some uses, "hegemony" becomes a synonym for "domination." However, its original intent, in the works of the Italian communist political writer Antonio Gramsci, was to explain how dominant classes could rule *without* employing force.[24] The question to which "hegemony" is an answer is, "Why do dominated or oppressed groups accept their position in the social hierarchy?" Gramsci held that, in fact, oppressed groups accept the definition of the world of elites as common sense; their understanding of how the world works, then, leads them to collaborate in their own oppression. Gramsci's work, available in English translations and popularized in the academic community in Britain and the United States in the 1970s, helped lead Marxist historians and social scientists to a new interest in ideology and culture.

Historical studies of nineteenth-century popular culture, for all they hold in common, have *not* all focused on the issue of resistance to cultural hegemony. Many studies examine the social origins and cultural organization of hegemonic culture itself. Scholars like Rosalind Williams, represented here, as well as others like Gunther Barth and Alan Trachtenberg, have sought to understand why professional sports, commercial expositions, or department stores became shared objects of delight among people of different social positions.[25] They document the development of hegemonic cultural systems for a growing mass society. Other studies trace the emergence of work discipline in the new factories, moral indoctrination in the Sunday schools, uses of literacy to tame

rather than liberate workers, and other new systems of social control of behavior "society" judges deviant.[26] Much of this work is less a tale of elite control than a saga of the breakdown of traditional class cultures that accompanied the rise of a more commercial, urban, mass-distributed culture. The new culture was an improvisation as much as an imposition, articulating a new set of relationships among members of diverse social classes.

Lawrence Levine's work (reprinted here) presents a striking picture of some changes in nineteenth-century definitions of popular and high culture.[27] Examining the reception of Shakespeare's plays in the United States, Levine shows that the dividing line between popular culture and high culture was shaped by complex cultural politics. He indicates that early in the century, these plays were treated as part of a distinctively "American" culture, integrating rather than differentiating diverse groups of Americans. Shakespeare was presented on makeshift stages in rural areas as well as in established urban theaters. Audiences were heterogeneous, more like the audience at an athletic event today than one attending contemporary theater. Only at the end of the century did Shakespeare become appropriated as high culture, deemed intellectually beyond the reach of the masses. This story is very much like the one Paul DiMaggio tells (in the sociology section of this book) about two "high culture" institutions established late in the nineteenth century: the Boston Symphony Orchestra and Boston Museum of Fine Arts. He shows that both were self-consciously and painstakingly created by elites to make visible their high status in an uncomfortably fluid and class-crossing culture. Both Levine and DiMaggio show that "high culture" emerged by the end of the century not so much from aesthetic decisions as from cultural politics—a restratification of culture through the establishment of a distinct set of elite cultural organizations and standards of taste.

Levine is less explicit than DiMaggio in describing the specific institutional and organizational ways in which this transformation took place, but he writes suggestively about the values embodied in Shakespeare that helped make his plays so congenial to nineteenth-century Americans. He sees some of the interest in Shakespeare stemming from the form of the plays, their oratorical style (like political speeches in the nineteenth century), and their melodrama. But he also points to their individualism and emphasis on morality. These were deep American values in the early nineteenth century, and Shakespeare's plays were a vehicle for celebrating and reinforcing them. The reappropriation of Shakespeare as literature rather than performed moral lesson left the value of individualism and moral reasoning to other forms of writing (like the sentimental novel that Ann Douglas describes).[28] Shakespeare became a carrier of American values for elites, part of a newly claimed



territory (like museums and symphonies), but not before helping give body to an American culture that spoke to all about individual opportunity and responsibility.

Whereas Levine examines a part of popular culture that became exclusive culture, Rosalind Williams looks at the late nineteenth-century growth of a mass commercial culture, a culture of consumption and conspicuous display, that some elites originated and others almost instantly attacked. Williams's work may at first seem in the tradition of the *Annales* school in that it draws attention to a number of locales that are themselves relatively new to serious historical study—fairs and expositions (themselves a product, on the modern scale, of the rising industrial forces of the mid-nineteenth century), the department store and other modern arenas of shopping, movie theaters, and the nightlife made possible by electrical lighting.[29] But Williams does this work to consider more fundamental theoretical and political questions about the effects of mass culture on the general population. Indeed, she is writing something closer to intellectual history than to social history, but her work illustrates how precarious a distinction this can be. Consumer enjoyments once limited to elites were now spreading to a mass public. Was this good or bad for people? How did it affect the self-definition of elites? How did elite culture change in response? How was the aesthetic of mass consumption affected by the world economy that supported it?

As Williams shows, these questions are not only the recurrent questions of twentieth-century cultural critics when they address the subjects of advertising, popular amusements, or consumer culture in general; they were equally the questions of intellectuals present at the explosion of mass culture in the late nineteenth century. Williams resuscitates the nineteenth-century voices that first came to define mass culture as vulgar and unauthentically commercial, appealing to the lowest common denominator of taste. She argues that this kind of talk was part of an effort to redefine elite culture after its traditional forms had been put in the service of mass culture. Earlier in the century, taste leaders like Beau Brummel had abandoned the aesthetics of French court culture, turning to simplicity and perfection as markers of elite status. In this way, they had dissociated themselves from the models for mass culture design, dismissing them as "gaudy." Their efforts to set new tastes were later paralleled by the work of intellectuals who began to show concern about the depravity of fashion and conspicuous consumption now that the masses were driven by them.

Although Williams does not describe late nineteenth-century consumer culture as a precursor of the "postmodern," her description of it comes very close to what people in recent years have meant by that term. The fair, the department store, and the newspaper may have con-

tributed to a modernist urban culture, but they also helped create a style Williams calls syncretistic, illogical, and flamboyant, a "chaotic-exotic" style. What her work demonstrates (and this may be a useful insight for understanding the "postmodern" today) is that "modern" forms of popular culture already had seeds of postmodernism in them because the institutional and technological sources of a vast consumer culture and cacophonous forms within it already existed in the nineteenth century.[30]

The study of popular culture in history has had a range of uses and benefits for historians as well as a diversity of analytic forms. The study of neglected groups, championed by early modernists but visible among other specialists, has corrected historical misconceptions and brought to the forefront of historical research areas (like social and cultural history) that have broadened the charge of historians. And the studies of cultural politics initiated mostly by specialists in nineteenth-century working-class or women's history have made it decisively clear that one should never again think that ordinary people have been unimportant to political history; they have been visibly engaged in the cultural realm in shaping and resisting the exercise of power.

## ANTHROPOLOGICAL APPROACHES TO POPULAR CULTURE

Anthropology's catholic approach to the study of human societies has been essential to the revival (in many disciplines) of popular culture studies. Interest in understanding contemporary popular and mass cultural forms has hardly been universal in anthropology, and its tradition of cultural relativism has not until recently tempered a disciplinary disdain for modern mass culture. Documenting *traditional* cultural forms has remained the primary charge of most research. But two movements have encouraged anthropologists to apply their long-standing cultural relativism to the analysis of modern forms of popular culture. We label these, loosely, the structuralist and interpretivist wings in anthropology.

The former, inspired by the conceptual tools of linguistics and the work of French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss, has affected anthropological research on a wide range of subjects from kinship structures to mythology. Lévi-Strauss and his followers work from the assumption that language is a fundamentally structured and structuring part of culture. Language systems give order to the experience of individuals as well as provide them with the means for generating complex cultural forms. On this basis, Lévi-Strauss has argued that even "simple" societies have complex cultures because all societies have relatively complex language systems. By extension, one could argue (and many have) that all cultural expressions have complex deep structures, and to the extent that all language systems have structural similarities, all cultural systems



may be analyzed in comparable ways. Ironically, structuralism has *not* been used widely in anthropology to legitimate new attention to popular culture, but it has still had a great impact on popular culture studies, particularly in the French intellectual world where Lévi-Strauss works. There it has been picked up by literary and other cultural critics as a basis for reform of their critical enterprise.

The structuralists begin with the premise that the human mind universally orders the flux of experience into binary oppositions: male/female, sacred/profane, pure/impure, in/out, kin/other, and, most of all, nature/culture. People make sense of the world through these binary categories and make use of the sense data of the world—plants, animals, colors, human bodies, weather, geography—to arrive at cognitive order. Things that seem to bridge categories are "anomalous" and take on special powers of danger, magic, or heightened meaning. Religious systems and myths are cultural constructions that elaborate a society's cognitive categories. The cognitive categories hold social, moral, and intellectual significance.

Lévi-Strauss's essay on totemism, for instance, reconsidered an anthropological chestnut: How do we explain the origins, purposes, and meaning of totemic religions? Can any sense be made of the apparently arbitrary connections between social units (say, the "bear" clan and the "eagle" clan) and the totemic objects (an image of a bear and an image of an eagle) they worship? Lévi-Strauss gave a celebrated, aphoristic response to this old problem. Totems, he concluded, "are good to think with."[31] In other words, the object of analysis could not be the individual totemic animal but the *system* of totemic symbols as a whole, and the point of totemism could be seen as the differentiation of social groups around differentiable symbols. Through the readily distinguished symbols, the more abstractly experienced social groups could take on stronger form.

This structuralist explanation grants great importance to the cognitive experience of social groups. Religion is not about the spirit for Lévi-Strauss, but the mind. Similarly, for anthropologist Mary Douglas, consumer goods are not in the first instance about producing cheap goods for a mass market, but about providing a common culture for a population with few other meanings or presuppositions to hold it together. Consumer goods offer a readily recognizable and cognizable basis for social relations.[32] This is not simply a brand of functionalism. At any given moment in the history of society, neither religious symbols nor consumer goods are invented self-consciously to serve the intellectual or communicative functions they do; instead, communication and intellection become possible at all only within limits imposed by these symbolic or material categorizations of the world. As Lévi-Strauss wrote in his study of South American mythology, his work shows "not how men think

in myths but how myths operate in men's minds without their being aware of the fact."[33]

These views have had enormous influence in the study of primitive myth, religion, and ritual. They have been applied to modern industrial societies, too. Will Wright applied a Lévi-Straussian framework to a study of Western movies. Judith Williamson did something similar for advertisements, E. A. Lawrence for rodeo, and Paul Bouissac for circuses.[34] Most notably, Roland Barthes developed structuralism as a tool for analyzing modern fashion, advertising, architecture, literature, and popular culture in general. In each case, structuralism has directed attention away from the anthropologists' omnibus definition of culture as a people's "way of life" and toward a view of culture as a people's shared mental categories and contents, the governing "rules" that order perception, thought, and action.

The second or interpretivist stream of anthropological theory has been much more strongly connected to popular culture studies within anthropology itself as well as in a number of the social sciences. It differs from structuralism in emphasizing structures or patterns of *feeling* or *sentiment* where structuralism typically emphasizes *cognitive organization*. It differs even more strikingly in stressing methodologically that the scholar should seek to understand human experience from the subject's point of view. Its products, then, are more often tapestries of native experience than, as in the structuralist case, recoding and categorizations of native beliefs or practices taken out of their local context.

The interpretivist tradition can be traced most of all to Clifford Geertz, an American anthropologist. Geertz's celebrity is today probably as pronounced in history, sociology, communication, and even literature departments as in anthropology (where he has come under attack for having been insufficiently self-conscious and reflexive a field-worker).[35] Geertz elaborates a notion of a "cultural system" that strictly distinguishes it from the social system (a term he borrows from the sociologist Talcott Parsons). Geertz takes the capacity for and reliance on the symbolic as the defining feature of the human species. Symbols, he says, exercise a cybernetic control over human behavior, expressing the social and the personality systems of a culture without being merely expressive. Like the structuralists, Geertz accords significance to symbols (and relationships within the symbol system). Unlike them, he does not adopt a formalist method of analysis that would divorce the symbolic from the social. Although in theory he separates "culture" (a system of symbols) from "society" (a system of social relations), in practice he seeks always to understand their mutuality.

This turns out to be both the strength and weakness of Geertz, as distinguished from the structuralists. Structuralist accounts of culture, it



seems to us, often provide insights that seem absolutely right—side by side with observations that seem utterly arbitrary or demonstrably wrong.[36] The structuralist matrix offers a general method and approach that can be applied rather mechanically, but the results, even where they seem insightful, feel arbitrary or ungrounded. Suppose it is true, as Lévi-Strauss has argued, that the Oedipus myth is in some respect about the overvaluing versus the undervaluing of kin or that the "trickster" figure in American Indian mythology is important because it has an anomalous or mediating quality—so what? Just what does that explain? And what do the interpretive niceties have to do with the general role and meaning of culture in society?

Geertz's work never raises such a question. He is deeply concerned not only with the relations of symbols to one another but the relations of symbols to social order, the efficacy of culture, if you will. In the essay included here, Geertz's most celebrated piece of writing, he shows how the Balinese cockfight represents and heightens the importance of social solidarities and social divisions in Balinese society. He also shows how the cockfight represents and heightens important psychological tendencies in the Balinese personality, especially those surrounding the relationship between the Balinese man and his "cock." Geertz treads familiar ground here in connecting a cultural object to its social and psychological moorings. But he then confronts a recurrent question in cultural analysis: If the culture just "expresses" the social order, why bother? If it "reinforces" the social order, to what end? Why does the social order need expression or reinforcement? Doesn't a reinforcement theory of culture suggest culture is redundant, a restatement without apparent issue of what already exists?

Geertz offers an intriguing answer: Culture is not only a reflection of a social setting or a psychological predisposition, but also a production of meaning. And that is its point: to offer the Balinese a text that represents Balinese society to itself and so provides the opportunity and the occasion for the Balinese to think and rethink, feel and feel again what being Balinese means. Not all representations of a society to itself are the same. Each may feature or caricature the society in somewhat different ways—a point Geertz makes but does not himself explicitly emphasize. The cockfight does not precisely express what Balinese society is but what, in a kind of collective thought experiment, it might be if one important set of emotional tendencies were taken to a logical extreme. The cockfight is a safe way, culturally framed, to test what happens when certain tendencies in the social order go unchecked, just as, Geertz argues, *King Lear* is a collective thought experiment about what happens when fathers and daughters do not show love and respect for one another. Geertz holds that an observer can read the cockfight as a text just

as a critic can read *King Lear* as a text. The cockfight provides "sentimental education" for the Balinese. Not incidentally, Geertz's analysis of "high" art is just the same: Works of art, he writes—meaning all works of art, high, commercial, or popular—are important most of all because they "materialize a way of experiencing, bring a particular cast of mind into the world of objects, where men can look at it."[37]

Whatever the worth of this analysis for Bali—and critics in anthropology have complained that Geertz never really gives very much evidence of what the Balinese themselves imagine the cockfight to be about, nor does he offer even a ghost of an idea about how different segments of Balinese society might think of the cockfight differently (for instance, the view of women, excluded from cockfighting, versus the view of men, for whom cockfighting may be a central passion)—this view of the cockfight does articulate a general theory of culture. The influence of this essay—and other work of Geertz—on neighboring fields and on the study of popular culture generally has been twofold.

First, it has offered a democratization of the objects deemed appropriate for study. Geertz's influence has by no means been alone here, but it has been significant. The study of the cockfight especially, and not incidentally because of Geertz's intentionally provocative comparisons to Shakespeare and Dickens, has been seen to open up the range of things taken to be textual and accessible to interpretation. (In a review of four books on American boxing, Garry Wills sardonically comments that sportswriters now have become social historians, and so remarks, "Clifford Geertz has a lot to answer for.")[38]

Second, it has offered methodological guidance—at least a code phrase, "thick description." Unlike structuralists, interpretivists never make it very clear how you are to go about your work. How do you do thick describing? Geertz does not say how a thick description is to get one very far along the way toward explanation, but that seems to be its mission. Geertz rejects the notion that anthropology is a science like the natural sciences, but just what kind of a science he has in mind is not very clear. Is he restating the late nineteenth-century German distinction between hypothetico-deductive sciences and hermeneutic sciences, that is, between studies capable of arriving at empirical generalizations and laws open to disconfirmation, and studies primarily interpretive that can be judged only on the basis of internal consistency, thoroughness, and aesthetic criteria of elegance? Perhaps, but he seems to be wary of sequestering anthropology as "merely" interpretive. Although he is skeptical about scientific "explanation" in social studies, the idea of a thick description seems to be a claim that what social science can aspire to is not "mere" description but description at a certain high level of intensity and reliability, yielding a high concentration of insight into social relations



that, say, a journalist popping into Bali for a few days or a week would not be able to provide.

Geertz's theoretical and methodological precepts offer no particular guidance about what one should be most interested to observe. It is not easy to predict, say, what Geertz himself will write on next. He has written on ideology, law, common sense, kingship, religion, and other topics, as well as versions of "cultural systems." What next? There is no telling.

In contrast, anthropologists we would label neo-Durkheimians, especially Victor Turner and his students, have concentrated attention on aspects of human activity that step self-consciously out of social life to negate and counterpoise daily existence with moments of high contrast in "antistructure," "hyperstructure," or what Elihu Katz and colleagues have called the "high holidays" of culture.[39] They have concentrated attention on ceremony, ritual, celebration, and spectacle. Victor Turner himself focused on "social dramas," "sustained public actions" in which social conflicts are dramatized, be it in a court of law, an assembly of elders, or some other ritual mode of redress. These dramas do not simply restate or mirror underlying social structure and social divisions. They are performances that belong to what Turner calls society's "subjunctive" mood. Ritual, carnival, festival, theater, and other cultural performances express "supposition, desire, hypothesis, possibility," rather than fact.[40] For anthropologists in the Turnerian as well as the Geertzian line, cultural forms can be read as a culture thinking out loud about itself. Barbara Babcock discusses Southwest Indian clown performances, for instance, as a kind of acted-out philosophizing, a metalanguage and commentary on social life that "disrupts and interrupts customary frames and expected logic and syntax and creates a reflexive and ironic dialogue, an open space of questioning."[41]

Geertz remarks that the virtue of Turner's work—the capacity of his concepts of ritual action to apply to a wide variety of social activities, from Mexican insurrections to Icelandic sagas to Caribbean carnivals to tribal rites of passage—is also its defect, for it makes "vividly disparate matters look drably homogeneous." All rituals, in the Turnerian formula, have an initial phase that separates the rite from daily life, a second "liminal" or "betwixt and between" phase that suspends normal psychological and social roles and rules, and a final phase of reintegration into everyday life. These social processes have formal similarities (and even emotional similarities), but, Geertz cautions, they "say . . . rather different things, and thus have rather different implications for social life."[42] It might be added that the Turnerian or neo-Durkheimian tradition is typically invoked not only to analyze but to celebrate performative genres. The anthropologists here, like the folklorists and historians elsewhere, are not only pointing out the performative elements in

social life but (unlike Erving Goffman, for example) are "commending them" to our attention.

This is an inevitable potential in academic studies of popular culture. There is a chip on the shoulder of anyone in the academic world who dares take popular culture seriously because he or she does so always in the face of a tradition of high culture and is invariably reckoned by many colleagues alternately shallow or subversive.

Subversive, indeed, is the selection here by Marshall Sahlins, part of a chapter from his difficult and brilliant *Culture and Practical Reason.* It is an intriguing statement not because it argues for the priority of culture over economic or material forces as an explanation of human action—that, after all, is a kind of anthropological commonplace, in some quarters taken as the very rationale for anthropology as a discipline. But Sahlins has himself been a leading practitioner of economic anthropology, an exponent of a materialist orientation to anthropological studies, drawing the discipline's attention to economic and ecological underpinnings and causes of the arrangements of kinship and social organization anthropologists so regularly studied. *Culture and Practical Reason* turns this around. In Sahlins's own summary of his book, he writes, "This book amounts to an anthropological critique of the idea that human cultures are formulated out of practical activity and, behind that, utilitarian interest."[43] He thus attacks both economics as a discipline and Marxist thought, which incorporates economistic assumptions. Sahlins's task began with a question about Marx's analysis of society: Why is it so difficult to apply Marx to tribal societies? And his conclusion is the ironic one that Marx was a bourgeois ideologue, a creature of his class and times and presuppositions, someone who imbibed the spirit and preconscious cultural assumptions of a world that gave priority to motives of self-interest. Marx's theories provide an acutely perceptive description of the bourgeois world but unconsciously incorporate bourgeois presuppositions into the analysis.

So Sahlins, reanalyzing anthropological studies of Tallensi farmers, concludes, "Tallensi farmers are not related as father and son by the way they enter into production; they enter thus into production because they are related as father and son," thereby siding with a traditional British social anthropologist (Meyer Fortes) against his Marxist reviser (Peter Worsley).[44] Social and cultural relations organize practical activity rather than the other way around. And so, too, when he turns to some instances of American popular culture in the selection printed here, his stress is on the ways in which "culture" sets the bounds within which, even in this most bourgeois and utilitarian of societies, utilitarian and economically self-interested motives are defined. Sahlins's work is implicitly critical not only of the imperial tendencies of neoclassical economics to define as universal human motives what is the historically constituted motivational structure of the Western bourgeoisie, but equally of the Marxist spirit that instructs a significant amount of the new study of popular culture.



Indeed, in *Culture and Practical Reason,* "culture" comes to have a kind of priority and autonomy that sounds suspiciously Lévi-Straussian; the French structuralists have clearly influenced Sahlins in this work. In works published since, Sahlins has been seeking some way of articulating the relationship between culture and history, structure and action, the constraining presuppositions of social life and social thought, and the permeability of these presuppositions to the erosions of time and the upheavals of historical change.[45]

The final anthropological selection is also influenced by structuralism. In "Jokes," Mary Douglas makes a persuasive effort to combine a little Freud, a little structuralism, and a little old-fashioned sociological understanding of social groups and their conflicts. It is the kind of piece that has, we could say, the conventional virtue of anthropology, making us see something more than we did about ourselves by showing us how the *X* or *Y* or *Z* tribe does it. But it goes beyond this. Indeed, we include it in part because it is such a nice companion to the Robert Darnton essay on the cat massacre. Both are about jokes; both claim that jokes are commentary on social structure.

Douglas is reacting against conventional British social anthropology, which has treated "ritual joking" as a form of tension release for social relations that are structurally full of conflict—as, for instance, the relationship between a mother-in-law and a daughter-in-law in certain cultures. This tends to reduce the joke to a shout, an emotional outburst that appears at a particularly sore point in the social structure. Douglas, in contrast, sees the joke as providing cognitive as well as expressive satisfaction to those who tell it and hear it. Indeed, she suggests that a joke makes social sense—as commentary on social structure—because it provides cognitive satisfaction. Like Freud, she believes "the pleasure of the joke lies in a kind of economy," and she defines the joke as "a play upon form."

The joke, Douglas argues, as a play upon form, is necessarily subversive. But it is also what people have always popularly taken it to be: frivolous. It is not always acceptable to tell a joke, of course; some subjects or occasions are too sacred or too precarious for the challenge of a joke. So Douglas shifts her attention not only to what makes a joke but to what permits its telling. For her, the relationship of social and symbolic is very close. A joke is not a mirror of social structure; it is an experience called forth by social structure. As she puts it, "the experience of a joke form in the social structure calls imperatively for an explicit joke to express

it." She closes her essay with a sympathetic commentary on Victor Turner's argument that ritual joking in Africa, far from being a mere ejaculation of social structural conflict, is a serious form of philosophy, that even though these jokes are not treated in their societies as "philosophy," they nonetheless are reflective commentaries on the relation of thought to experience. They may comment not only on social organization but also on the conditions of human knowledge.

Does this go too far? Does this give a seriousness to the joke that it cannot sustain? It is, from a different angle, the same kind of irreverent leveling we find in Geertz's comparison of Balinese cockfights and Shakespeare's tragedies. Here again, popular culture is held up as serious self-reflection. (All this is screwed up one more notch in Geertz's most recent essays on anthropologists as writers and in the essays by James Clifford and George Marcus and colleagues that, in a sense, hold up serious self-reflection in anthropology as popular culture.)[46] Here popular culture is taken to be a society thinking out loud about itself. The democratization, the leveling of cultural forms, and the societies that have produced them are brazen challenges anthropologists have flung at conventional Western thinking about culture. Once the cultic elements of structuralist thinking have been laid aside, once the hypnotic elegance of Clifford Geertz's writing has been bracketed, a defiant message remains.

## PRODUCING CULTURE: THE SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

In the early twentieth century, when American sociology was primarily a native discipline, linked to Protestant social reform and to a strong emphasis on "social problems," popular culture entered unobtrusively into sociological studies. In sociology, more than in any other discipline, it was taken for granted that popular culture could be a legitimate subject of study. Early figures in and around American sociology manifested strong and unembarrassed interest in popular culture. Robert Park, an ex-journalist and a student of Georg Simmel, studied the newspaper; John Dewey, an influence on sociology, social psychology, and education, also wrote about the press. Thorstein Veblen, an economist and social critic, wrote about the "leisure class" and took an interest in everything from the wealthy classes' passion for sports to the livery of their servants.[47]

When sociology emerged as a discipline at the University of Chicago, students were encouraged to examine the everyday life of the ordinary and not so ordinary citizen. William I. Thomas and Florian Znaniecki in *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America* (1918–1920), a defining work for the Chicago school, used life histories, diaries, and letters of Polish



immigrants to investigate social life and social organization in all of its variety. They looked at family, schools, the immigrant press, prostitution, the dance hall, and the nostalgia of the immigrants for a homeland left behind.[48] Out of a separate tradition of Christian social reform, Robert and Helen Lynd published *Middletown* in 1929 and so helped cement community studies as a central element in American sociology, and one deeply concerned with the whole range of human social activity. The Lynds approached "middle American" Muncie, Indiana, like anthropologists examining an exotic tribe. They were as attentive to dating patterns and the role of movies in the socialization of the young as they were to occupational stratification and other topics one might assume to be of greater sociological dignity.[49]

Despite this parentage, sociology developed its own ambivalence toward the study of popular culture. The Lynds saw mass culture as an integral—but unsettling—part of a whole way of life. The Payne Fund studies of mass entertainment in the 1930s saw the movies as a social problem, a cause of juvenile delinquency. When European social thought came to America in the 1930s and after, the sociological attitude toward popular culture darkened. Mass culture was seen increasingly as a central feature of the decay of civilization in a capitalist society. By the 1950s, the most influential work on popular culture in sociology was the work of or work influenced by the Frankfurt school (see the next section on literary criticism)—and, within a short time, its critics. David Manning White and Bernard Rosenberg's standard anthology, *Mass Culture* (1957), is centrally oriented to the "mass culture" debate, as it came to be known.[50] That debate weighed the dangers and prospects of mass-produced cultural forms for the political enlightenment and cultural enrichment of the citizens.

The debate (outlined in an early French version in Rosalind Williams's essay) persists today. It is regularly renewed by critics of new media (television, video games, and MTV in recent years), advertising, and consumer culture generally. Its contours were comprehensively restated and reconsidered by Herbert Gans in 1974.[51] Gans comes out a sharp critic of the critics of mass culture. He finds their arguments inconsistent, their evidence of the pernicious consequences of mass culture thin or nonexistent, and their tenor of argument less related to the political radicalism many critics profess than to the particular "taste culture" of upper-middle-class intellectuals they share. He sees the case against mass culture as more often parochial than political.

While the mass culture debate moved sociology away from empirical studies of cultural phenomena, attention to culture survived in sociology, notably in *The Lonely Crowd* (1950), by David Riesman, Nathan Glazer, and Reuel Denney, followed up by Riesman in other essays.[52] The com-

plexity of sociological attitudes to popular culture is discussed in some of Riesman's work, where he defends mass culture from its highbrow critics (recommending, for instance, that a new supermarket might be a better arena for community leisure than a new park and arguing that it is by no means clear that books are more liberating than radio and television). But he is equally prepared to defend high culture minorities from "inverse snobbery and class romanticism."[53]

The mass culture debate continues in a variety of polemics that, in our view, too often only recycle the old (and still very readable) essays on the subject by Edward Shils, Dwight MacDonald, Hannah Arendt, C. Wright Mills, and others and rarely achieve the complex confrontation with the valuation of popular culture forms one finds in Riesman.[54] But recent sociological concern with popular culture has moved sharply from heated debate over the aesthetic and moral worth of popular culture to an acceptance that popular culture is legitimate to study as a symbolic object and, even more, as a manufactured thing produced in and by social organizations. As in literary studies, this newer sociological work has eschewed attention to the valuation of popular culture as good or bad, high or low. Much recent work on popular culture in the United States comes from the "production-of-culture" school, which uses analytical systems from the sociology of occupations and of organizations to see how social resources are mobilized by artists, filmmakers, and the like to make culture production possible. There has also been renewed interest among sociologists (including a large number in Europe) in the stratifying functions of cultural systems, the way social groups are identified by their cultural tastes or their abilities to create cultural institutions suited to members of their social strata. Both approaches provide new perspectives for analyzing cultural objects or systems without finding any reason to sharply distinguish elite culture from popular culture.

The production-of-culture route begins from the assumption that the production of cultural objects, be they "art" *or* "mass culture," involves social cooperation and group problem solving that can be approached with conventional tools of sociological analysis. Social commonalities across aesthetic categories make the study of popular culture no more and no less important than the study of fine art. In the hands of some production-of-culture writers, this assimilates the study of art to the sociology of organizations and markets; in the hands of others, it assimilates the study of art to the sociology of occupations.[55] In either case, the artist is dethroned as a genius whose creativity can only be appreciated rather than analyzed and replaced with a worker whose habits can be systematically investigated. Similarly, the cultural stratification school, if we may call it that (represented here by Pierre Bourdieu), begins from the assumption that cultural differences and social attention to cultural difference are important sociologically because they are linked to fundamental patterns of social stratification. Social stratification is buttressed by differences in the cultural attributes of people from different strata. Because understanding cultural stratification requires attention to the range of cultural forms, popular culture has a central (but not dominating) role.



Some American sociologists who study popular culture invoke the heritage of European social theory rather than of early American sociology. Emile Durkheim and Max Weber, they observe, both studied the sociology of popular religion. Durkheim is an important intellectual forebear of structuralism; Weber encouraged sociology to focus on how people make meanings in their world, and he is thereby a legitimating presence for any sociological study that centers on symbols and signification. (Geertz, in an oft-quoted line, cites Weber as having taught us that human beings are creatures who live suspended in webs of meaning they themselves have spun.)[56] But neither Weber nor Durkheim directly influenced new sociological work on popular culture. Weber offers warrant, but not precedent or example, for attention to popular cultural forms, the study of religion itself excepted.[57] The sociological studies of culture that most often acknowledge an American heritage grow out of symbolic interactionism. Here, in a direct line that goes back to Robert Park and George Herbert Mead at the University of Chicago (and can be traced back further to American pragmatism generally in John Dewey and William James and others), a distinctive emphasis on how people make meaning and make society through the experience of everyday social interaction emerged. This approach is tailor-made for the quietly leveling or more openly pedestal-blasting tendencies in popular culture studies.

The production-of-culture approach notes that, in spite of the Western emphasis on the role of creative *individuals*, social *groups* produce art, music, literature, television news, and so forth. What pop music and particle physics have in common is that both are symbolic structures produced by human beings who work in and are shaped by social organizations. This apparently unexceptional observation contrasts sharply with assumptions common in both lay and professional writing on culture. The organizational perspective denies that there is a close relationship between the intentions of an individual, even a powerful individual, in a corporate culture-producing organization, and the kind of product that gets created. The product is more the unplanned consequence of a large number of small choices than the intended result of a small number of critical decisions. Choices are shaped in large part by the internal needs of an organization and not the long-range goals of its executives or owners.

In this way, the production-of-culture approach to popular culture has in many instances been a self-conscious reaction against mass culture studies. Paul DiMaggio argues that left-wing critics of mass culture implicitly assume a "monopoly" situation: that there is a single producer of culture (the ruling class) and that the public will necessarily absorb whatever it offers. Right-wing critics, in contrast, implicitly assume a situation of "perfect competition" where there is a multitude of culture producers that create a practically unlimited assortment of cultural objects so that the public can choose whatever it desires. In DiMaggio's view, the central features of mass culture do not fit either right-wing or left-wing models because the key characteristics of mass culture vary by industry, not by society. Some mass culture industries are monopolistic—like the television industry (before cable) or school textbook publishing in the United States. But other mass culture industries—trade books, records, movies, magazines—create objects for specialized audiences; their situation more closely resembles one of free competition. The degree of diversity and innovation in the cultural goods available to the public depends, then, primarily on the market structures and organizational environments of specific industries, not on the preferences of either the masses or their masters.[58]

This approach also denies any simply stated relationships between cultural products and underlying social structure or cultural values. On the one hand, it is precisely the point of organizational studies to demonstrate that cultural products are more or less determined by social structure—the social structure of the producing organizations. On the other hand, the attention to the producing organization has grown out of dissatisfaction with studies that suggested a connection between culture and broad, underlying social and economic structures based on the axiomatic belief that culture mirrors the social order. In this regard, sociology squares off against anthropology or, at least, against reading very much from studies of simple societies for the understanding of complex societies. Perhaps there is a snug "fit" between culture and social organization in the societies anthropologists typically study, but it does not follow that in highly complex, differentiated, plural societies today we will find so neat a correspondence.

The sociological approach here breaks sharply from the anthropological tradition in a second way: It moves away from the study of meaning altogether to the study of culture as a manufactured product. Using a perspective honed earlier in his career in the sociology of occupations, Howard Becker, for example, examines material, social, and symbolic resources for the creation of meaningful cultural objects. He is not interested so much in what the final objects mean. He wants to understand what is *social* about them. He focuses on the wide array of cooperative



links between "creators" and "support personnel" necessary for the production of cultural objects. Most work in both the sociology of art and cultural criticism looks for some "creator" or "artist" who is responsible for the final object. Becker, in contrast, opens his *Art Worlds* discussing the relationship of Anthony Trollope to his valet as essential to the production of the books we attribute to Trollope, and he goes on to reproduce a long list of the "credits" of a recent commercial film to illustrate the collectiveness of artistic production in another medium. The conventions of Western individualism and resulting aesthetic theory have made the support personnel behind culture production invisible servants. Those who develop film in laboratories, make paints, or print books are central to the production of culture, but rarely cited for their contribution. Studying these links, Becker contends, generates a fundamentally *social* vision of the creative process and its creations. Interestingly, Becker takes for granted that a sociology of art and popular culture need not be organized around understanding how some culture becomes "respected" and other kinds are critically lambasted. Critics, dealers, and museum personnel are, like everyone else in Becker's art worlds, simply doing their jobs. Their special power in the world of art and the relationship of aesthetic stratification of culture to social hierarchy are not things Becker singles out for central attention. Less to his credit, he does not emphasize how such hierarchical considerations (both social and aesthetic) enter into the production process. But others working in the production-of-culture school do.[59]

If production-of-culture studies are linked on one side to symbolic interactionism and the sociology of occupations, they are connected on the other side to the sociology of organizations. Take, for example, Paul Hirsch's essay on fads and fashions. Hirsch, like Becker, is not interested in interpreting culture (i.e., providing accounts of what cultural objects "mean"). There is no obeisance here to Weber and *Verstehen*, Geertz and thick description, or other heroes of the interpretive persuasion. Hirsch wants to know about the characteristics of industries that produce cultural products (typically nonmaterial goods that serve for their consumers an aesthetic or expressive rather than utilitarian function). The main problem for the industries he has in mind—trade books, movies, and records—is the uncertainty of popular demand for the products. The main economic feature that structures the way these industries operate is their cheap technology: It costs very little to produce a book, record, or low-budget film. The result is overproduction and differential promotion of cultural items: These industries produce far more cultural objects than they need or expect to make money for them. They count on the "gatekeeper" institutions of media critics and radio stations and so forth to identify to the public the best or most attractive cultural ob-

jects. They then put more marketing muscle behind those products so identified than the other objects they have produced (with the hopeful writers and artists wondering vainly why their books, records, or movies are not being promoted). Hierarchical ratings of cultural products are central to Hirsch's approach, but not as a means for distinguishing good from bad culture. They are central to the way participants in culture industries organize the production and distribution process.

Hirsch's essay has the virtues and defects of the general approach of production-of-culture studies. The virtue is that it really tells us something about how popular culture gets created. There are no vague references here to a relationship between something called "culture" and something called "society" that it somehow reflects. Instead, Hirsch describes a concrete set of organizations and individuals and entrepreneurial motives and organizational routines that concretely produces items of culture, some of which become popular and influential, most of which do not. This locates culture in concrete social and economic institutions.

As for defects, there are three. First, as practitioners of this viewpoint themselves recognize, the organizational approach is much better at explaining the normal mechanisms for creating "normal" culture than it is at explaining what happens when culture changes. It is not that the latter is impossible. Todd Gitlin makes an impressive effort in his study of prime-time television at explaining why "Hill Street Blues," a decidedly unusual and norm-breaking TV program, managed to get on the air and stay there in the 1980s. In the excerpt from his book on television included here, he also tries to get a grasp of typical routines by examining an exception. In this case, the exception very much proves the rule. Indeed, what Gitlin finds is that what began as an exception—a break from network television blandness, an effort to make a strong political statement—wound up bowdlerized, just another object on the cultural assembly line. Hegemony worked its wonders even though the "authors" had hoped to make a critical statement. Gitlin's is a particularly vivid description of this process.

Second, there is a tendency in production-of-culture work to assume that sociological factors are more determining than, in fact, they are. The danger is that organizational studies may come to assume that organizations are more limited by the need to respond to constraints in their environments than is actually true. Organizations (or rather, key decision makers within them) have some freedom to act within broad environmental constraints. Moreover, there are frequently alternative decisions that could lead to an equally acceptable outcome. Perhaps still more important, organizations may help create the environments they must then respond to—this is especially so in industries that are government regulated or oligopolistic. Finally, organizations respond not to their



"real" environments but to their perception of the environment.[60] Even in the most pragmatic organizations, culture—in the form of traditions, ideologies, and presuppositions—enters into the formulation of problems. The "bottom line" is no less a "cultural" product than other humanly constructed lines (national borders, time zone demarcations, or newspaper deadlines).

Third, there is a tendency in production-of-culture studies to assume that they study the production of "culture." They do not. They study the production of cultural objects, and these objects become a part of and contribute to culture. But they are not culture as such. Production-of-culture studies examine *parole,* not *langue;* performance, not competence; or speech, not language, to borrow distinctions from linguistics. The whole production process and certainly the gatekeeping process Hirsch and Gitlin describe so nicely are not only socioeconomic but are also cultural processes, created and existing against a network of background assumptions, symbolic taken-for-granteds. And *that* is culture.[61] (Gitlin understands this. His work is as rooted in cultural criticism as in organizational sociology; if he is less systematic than some of the others who look at culture-producing organizations, he is more theoretically encompassing.)

The distinctive contribution of the sociological tradition is not limited to a focus on the organizations, structures, and processes that produce cultural objects. Sociologists, particularly those influenced by a Marxist tradition (which means nearly all European sociologists whether they are Marxists or not), have drawn attention to the connections between culture and social class. They have, more than anthropologists or literary scholars, centered work on the sociocultural dimensions of social differentiation and social stratification. In the Marxist-influenced tradition, this means primarily an emphasis on the relations between culture and class; in the American tradition, it is just as likely to examine the relations between culture and other social forms of differentiated power, notably ethnicity and gender.

A particular form of this kind of work examines especially the subjective experience of class or other relations of hierarchy and subordination. At one level, this becomes a study of expressive style in nations, classes, and subcultures of various sorts. Culture can be viewed as an expression of instrumental desires, as in Dick Hebdige's work on subculture.[62] Or it can be viewed as metonymically related to other matters of social difference and social cohesion, a shadow of social relations.

Bourdieu's essay gives a good sense of a highly developed articulation of the sociological vision of culture as an expression and instrument of social class divisions. (Bourdieu's work is most fully elaborated in *Distinction.*)[63] It is explicitly concerned with the "production" of culture, but it

sets this interest in tandem with a concern about the consumption of culture. Ultimately, Bourdieu's interest in examining both the "supply" of a cultural entity (sports, in this essay) and the "demand" for it becomes a task of mapping the distribution of a given cultural object or cultural taste among the different subgroups (especially classes, but Bourdieu also attends in this essay to the distribution of sports activity across age groups) of a population. In this work, Bourdieu shows that modern sports have emerged under specific historical conditions and in specific class locations. He argues that, despite the presence of popular sport, the dominant sports tradition is a schooled one, associated with elite educational institutions where "the propensity towards activity for no purpose" is cherished and promoted in both the taste for art and the taste for sports. The popularization of sport offers no essential problem for this view; in fact, popularization goes hand in hand with the elaboration of a cultural division between professionals and the lay public reduced to the role of consumers. Here, indeed, Bourdieu suggests, is the area where sport produces "its most decisive political effects," condemning the greater public to "an imaginary participation which is only an illusory compensation for the dispossession they suffer to the advantage of the experts."

In this argument, Bourdieu connects leisure activities to the stratification systems traditionally tied in sociology exclusively to the work process. He argues that class, not status, is reproduced in sport. This is a major claim to be made for the role of culture in social life, and Bourdieu brings much evidence to bear on it. Unfortunately, his theoretical net does not capture all the richness of the empirical, historical knowledge he brings to the analysis. By dint of the focus on the hierarchical structuring of culture, Bourdieu's model is awkward to use for studying the kinds of cultural processes rendered so well by researchers in the production-of-culture school. The attribution of popular tastes and activities to class, for example, tends to obscure the complex ways people make sense of and use their tastes. Still, Bourdieu integrates the constellation of culture into a broader analysis of society as a whole, which the production-of-culture approach rarely even attempts. Not surprisingly, the elegant power of his model is a major factor leading new generations of students to the study of popular culture in sociology.

Paul DiMaggio's essay, certainly influenced by Bourdieu, nicely combines both the class-related vision of European sociology and the organization-related perspective of the production-of-culture school. DiMaggio examines the development of "elite culture" in late nineteenth-century Boston. The reason we include a work specifically concerned with "high" culture in a volume devoted to popular culture quickly becomes clear in this essay: Creating the Boston Symphony Orchestra and the Boston



Museum of Fine Arts was not a matter of finding an organizational basis for an already defined realm of "high culture" but a task of *inventing* a category of high culture *through* the creation of organizations that would mobilize elites around it. DiMaggio argues that the distinction between high culture and popular culture in the United States emerged in the late nineteenth century as urban elites created organizations that isolated a separate sphere of "high culture" and differentiated it from "popular culture." In Boston, a new organizational form—the nonprofit corporation governed by a self-perpetuating board of trustees—emerged to secure a separate sphere for high culture and its elite patrons. What DiMaggio documents is how a "status group"—the Boston "Brahmins"—sought to define an exclusive and prestigious culture that they could control. At the same time, as a dominant social class, the Brahmins sought to impose on the general public a respect for and deference to the culture they were claiming as exclusively their own.

DiMaggio's emphasis on the organizational basis of culture is a crucial contribution of the sociological perspective. However, it should not obscure the importance of the differentiation of high from popular culture on a symbolic as well as organizational basis. We just briefly note here an essay by William Weber on how a pantheon of musical "masters" developed in mid-nineteenth-century Europe. Because no Greek and Roman music had survived, European music could not draw on a classical tradition, as did literature, architecture, painting, and sculpture. With the rise of a mass public for music in the early nineteenth century, thanks in part to the growth of the printing industry and the availability of sheet music, elite professional orchestras began to establish a "classical" repertoire. In the 1820s, the works played by the Philharmonic Society of London were primarily works by living composers; by the 1850s, less than a third were by living composers; the Société des Concerts in Paris devoted only 11 percent of its repertoire to living composers by the 1860s. Weber's view, like DiMaggio's, is ultimately sociological and skeptical; it gives no quarter to those who would insist that the classical repertoire is "better" than more popular musical forms but argues that the creation of a classical repertoire is itself a social phenomenon dominated by struggles for power and standing among class and status groups.[64]

Clearly, then, a central lesson of the new studies of popular culture is that a radical distinction between high culture and popular culture cannot be maintained. Aspects of popular culture become high culture over time (Charles Dickens, folk art, early manufactured furniture, jazz). Aspects of high culture become popular culture (Pachelbel's "Canon in D," Handel's *Messiah*). Common people have sophisticated and refined craft knowledge and artistic capabilities; elites have their own folk beliefs (including the persistent belief in the nineteenth-century romanticist view

of the individual genius as cultural creator). The borderline of elite and popular culture is patrolled, and the fences maintained, for identifiably social and political, rather than purely aesthetic, purposes. Now, in contrast to the "mass culture" debates in sociology in the 1950s, sociologists are a bit more inclined to sit on the sidelines and observe the very debates they once engaged in (and sometimes still do) as part of a social process by which valuation is attached to the particular tastes of particular social groups.

These considerations link up with new studies in literature and the arts on "canonization." Literary scholars are increasingly reflective about the extent to which their own activity is not abstractly critical but concretely political—that what counts as a piece of "literature" depends very much on what individuals and institutions connected with the dominant gender and dominant social classes declare literature to be. What counts as a masterpiece is a social and political process, not an exercise of pure reason.[65]

The legitimation of popular culture should not be taken—though it sometimes is—as an uncritical welcome to all that popular culture contains. The study of popular culture is too often its celebration. Although this celebration helps legitimate the aesthetic and political expressions of common people, the democratic aspiration of popular culture studies is sometimes undiscriminating. We can happily celebrate discoveries in popular culture of sociability, fellowship, and creative resistance to exclusionary cultural forms; but that should scarcely blind us to popular traditions of racism, sexism, and nativism that are just as deeply rooted. This is popular culture, too.

This raises a key issue, usually ignored in popular culture studies, about the relation of the popular to the public. There is, in the concept of "the public sphere," public spaces where people come together on equal terms and work out problems together through rational and critical discussion, a normative dimension and a political program that are not part of the general concept of the popular. A modern sense of the public is itself a historically specific notion, as the German philosopher and social theorist Jürgen Habermas makes plain in the short article we include in this volume. The work from which this paper is drawn was originally written in 1962 but translated into English only in 1989. Its influence on academic thought in the Anglo-American context, then, has yet to be fully felt. However, the emphasis on a "public sphere" that Habermas more than anyone else has insisted upon has drawn the attention of various scholars in several disciplines to the institutions that define and constitute a public realm in modern societies, especially the news media, private associations, and leisure activities in which political discussion is free to take place (as in the coffeehouses of the eighteenth



century). As politics descended in the eighteenth century and after from the halls of aristocratic power restricted to the few to parties that recruit from the masses, newspapers that seek a broad readership, and streets where groups of people from different classes and backgrounds congregate to express their views, the study of democratic politics necessarily became a consideration of various institutions of popular culture.

This, clearly, adds a different kind of normative dimension to the analysis of popular culture. With a sense of the "public sphere" in mind, aspects of popular culture may be worth examining not simply because they are popular but because they may contribute to, or impede, rational and critical participation in the political world. The concept of the "public sphere" as a normative standard is a vital addition to the study of popular culture.

## LITERARY AND OTHER FORMS OF CRITICISM

Perhaps the most dramatic rethinking of popular culture has been initiated by literary critics, many of whom have left behind altogether traditional allegiances to high culture as the privileged subject matter of serious criticism. They have led a series of critical revolutions with a proliferating set of theoretical schools (structuralism, semiology, post-structuralism, deconstruction, discourse theory) and a startling opacity of terminology that intimidates outsiders and makes not a few insiders shake their heads. But within this brave new world of literary theory are new tools of critical analysis and new outlooks on the nature of culture, broadly understood, that reach far beyond the confines of literature departments.

To begin a few steps back: Attention to popular culture in literary or, broadly, cultural criticism can be traced to both right-wing and left-wing dissatisfaction with the cultural inclinations of the general population. On the right, anxiety about democratic and egalitarian movements and about increasing working-class participation in politics was accompanied by disapproval of the mass culture that the general population seemed to take such pleasure in. Whether it was novels in the eighteenth century that attracted women readers, mass circulation newspapers in the late nineteenth century that attracted the working class, nickelodeons at the turn of the century that drew an audience of immigrants in the United States, or comic books in the 1940s and 1950s that attracted the young, guardians of elite culture saw in these works serious threats to the maintenance of high culture as the central standard for education and socialization. New mass cultural forms seemed debased in a variety of ways: they appealed to the senses and not to reason; they represented and thereby encouraged violence and sexual activity; they were easily acces-

sible to the uneducated or ill-educated and demanded little of their audiences.

If all this could be said from the side of elitists intent on defending high culture, much the same critique could come from left-wing critics intent on locating authentic and liberatory cultural elements in oppressed social groups. The Left as well as the Right deplored the influence of mass-produced commercial culture. Where the Right blamed the low level of mass culture on the tastes of the masses, the Left blamed it on elite efforts to domesticate a potentially unruly population. On the Right, this brand of criticism did not develop in any systematic way, but on the Left, it became a sophisticated set of critical perspectives in the hands of the Frankfurt school. The Frankfurt school refers to the work of scholars associated with or influenced by the Frankfurt Institute of Social Research (Institut für Sozialforschung), founded in 1923 as an independent research institute designed to pursue Marxist studies while reexamining the philosophical underpinnings of Marxism itself from the ground up. When Hitler came to power in 1933, the prospects of a Marxist research institute, most of whose leading figures were Jewish, were obviously dim, and the institute moved to Geneva. Before long, many of the key figures in the institute emigrated to the United States. The term "Frankfurt school" did not arise until after the group left Frankfurt, indeed, not until the institute returned to Frankfurt in 1950.[66]

Not surprisingly, much of the work of this group of scholars tried to understand the success of Nazism, in part by considering the psychological and political effects of mass culture and its role in shaping popular political consciousness. They perceived mass culture as aesthetically and politically debilitating, reducing the capacities of audiences to think critically and functioning as an ideological tool to manipulate the political sentiments of the mass public. They developed a new kind of Marxist perspective, one still devoted to understanding how the power of the capitalist class was sustained under industrial capitalism, but now grappling with the role of mass media in creating something unanticipated by Marxist theory: conservatism and—a new term—"authoritarianism" among workers.

As on the Right, so on the Left there was hostility to new cultural forms and new technologies that reached the masses. One of the key Frankfurt school critics, Theodor Adorno, criticized both popular music (including jazz) and the radio technology that distributed it. He found that the "commodity form" of capitalist culture, standardizing culture and reducing it to a lowest common denominator, led toward a music that emphasized recognition of the familiar rather than more active and intelligent appreciation. Popular music encouraged passivity. As for radio itself, it isolated individuals and kept people apart from the sense of



community that a live performance can create; it encouraged "atomized listening."[67]

With the revival of Marxism in the American student movement and its European counterparts during the 1960s, critical theory, as the work of the Frankfurt school came to be known, gained a new constituency and was given new direction. Walter Benjamin's famous essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" became a touchstone for new critical discourse.[68] Benjamin was an uneasy ally of the Frankfurt school, connected with Frankfurt school scholars but always at arm's length from them. Benjamin was deeply influenced by Jewish theology and mysticism, on the one hand, and a cruder brand of materialism, on the other. Under the influence of Bertolt Brecht, he was optimistic about the revolutionary potential of popular art and new technologies in a way that other Frankfurt scholars were not. This is readily apparent in "The Work of Art," where he suggests that the mass production of imagery makes image makers seek constituencies rather than personal presence through their work. Thus, mass production necessarily and fundamentally politicizes communication. It removes the "other" (the author) from immediate view by audiences, and it can be used only where large numbers can be enticed into becoming an audience.

What made Benjamin's analysis so appealing to critical analysts in the 1960s is in part simply that his work is allusive, aphoristic, more poetic than analytic, and therefore interpretable in a wide variety of ways. In his emphasis on mass production, Benjamin's ideas seemed compatible with then-popular ideas espoused by Marshall McLuhan, claiming the medium as the message.[69] But unlike McLuhan and the earlier critical theorists, Benjamin did not believe that mass media necessarily had a particular character (good or bad, hot or cold). As a partisan of some still photography and an enthusiast of film, he believed these media could be used for aesthetically important purposes and could have politically progressive effects. In this way, Benjamin's work no doubt helped assuage the guilt of rock music fans or film aficionados who wanted to be critical thinkers; more important, it stimulated new debate about how to structure a liberatory communication system and gave it a distinguished pedigree. In the latter project, he was followed by several illustrious thinkers with Frankfurt ties, including Herbert Marcuse and Jürgen Habermas.

Interest in creating new communicative possibilities was very closely tied to the interests of the student radicals of the period. If political conservatism was taught through the dominant media, then how could other political positions be articulated and realized? Another way to answer the question was to turn to labor history and see how culture and oppositional politics had functioned together in the past. Particularly in

England, students of labor history and literary critics both began to ask themselves about the role of culture in mobilizing the working class. E. P. Thompson's *Making of the English Working Class,* already discussed, had extraordinary significance in this regard.

Other scholars tried to articulate formally the theories of cultural control and resistance Thompson raised for discussion, like the late Raymond Williams in the essay we have included here. Williams, a literary critic and historian, had a vital role in reinvigorating critical studies in England (and the rest of the English-speaking world). In his studies of mass media, from drama to the press and television, he describes how the messages conveyed by the media have been constructed according to the politicoeconomic as well as technological environment in which they have been mobilized. He sees their forms as an expression simultaneously of the social position of their "authors" (which he understands primarily in terms of Marxist categories of class analysis) and the social relations developed around the media.

In this article, Williams outlines a program for a Marxist theory of culture. Here he offers a kind of primer of key terms for a reconstituted Marxist theory, one that would abandon superficial notions of a "base" "determining" a "superstructure." In attacking all three terms and sketching in a history of other critical revisions of them, he presents a lexicon of concepts he believes improve a Marxist approach to culture: hegemony; dominant, alternative, and oppositional cultures; dominant, residual, and emergent cultures. Williams tackles head-on the conventional Marxist metaphor that the "base" of economic structure determines the "superstructure" of politics, law, religion, and—of central interest here—culture. He finds, as others have, that culture is more variable in its meaning and significance than Marxist theory has usually allowed. More than that, he essentially denies that culture is properly understood as superstructure at all. He argues that this view wrongly gives the impression that culture is a set of symbols or set of objects when it is more properly understood as a set of practices. That is, base and superstructure coexist within the world of culture itself. Even more important, he holds, the notion of the base as a fixed technological and economic system misrepresents what Marxist scholars should be attending to: the specific activities of people in real social and economic relationships, a process of productive activity and not a machine of determined proportion. If base and superstructure are misunderstood, so too is "determine" in the old Marxist formula. For Williams, "determine" should not mean "totally predicts or prefigures" but "sets limits."

Williams does not sit easily in any disciplinary category. He, like the other key figures in establishing the "cultural studies" movement in Britain (Stuart Hall and Richard Hoggart), is equally identifiable as a literary



scholar, communication scholar, and even sociologist.[70] In Britain, the field of communication has become a center for the kind of popular culture studies we discuss here. In the United States, this is also increasingly true, as students of communication are influenced by various literary theorists (notably Mikhail Bakhtin), British cultural studies (especially Stuart Hall and Raymond Williams), and bits of a "hegemony theory" from sociology.[71]

Cultural studies in Britain, as John Fiske has defined it, is "concerned with the generation and circulation of meanings in industrial societies."[72] Most of this work speaks on the Marxist assumption (although this is an assumption shared by sociologists generally) that culture—the meanings by which people live—derives from social structure. Culture is important (and this is in part Williams's point) because it acts back on social structure to hold it in place. But none of this happens in an easily apprehensible way. That is, the ideology inscribed in popular culture—notably in television, which has been an important subject for British cultural studies—may be "decoded" by actual audiences in a variety of ways. In Stuart Hall's terms, there may be a "preferred reading," but audiences may also arrive at alternative or even oppositional readings of the same text.[73] When empirical studies examine how actual audiences read actual texts, even this formulation seems too simple; and works in cultural studies emphasize the "multivocality" or "polysemy" of texts, indeed arguing, as Fiske does, that the more popular a text, the more likely it is to be "open," allowing "the various subcultures to generate meanings from it that meet the needs of their own subcultural identities."[74] Once cultural studies have shifted this far from a view of popular culture as a medium for the transmission of a simple, dominant ideology, it is not easy to retain clearly any sense of domination or hegemonic authority, although even Fiske in the formulation cited here tries to. The dialogue between text and audience, he argues, must be understood not as anarchic or pluralistic, but in terms of dominant power relations in society. The television text, for instance, he holds is not anarchic. One cannot read any meaning out of it: "The diverse subcultures in a society are defined only by their relations (possibly oppositional) to the centers of domination, so, too, the multiple meanings of a text that is popular in that society can be defined only by their relationships (possibly oppositional) to the dominant ideology as it is structured into that text."[75]

Marxist theory today is itself full of contradictory and competing views. Williams represents, as do British cultural studies in general, a minimally deterministic, process-oriented, and activity-oriented version of neo-Marxist thought. This has led to an increasing need for essays, like Williams's here, that try to spell out what a Marxist cultural theory sensitive to empirical complexity will look like.

As Williams became more precise in articulating theory, he correspondingly moved farther away from the kind of work that established his reputation: interpreting cultural works in their sociohistorical context. Theory or no theory, "reading" culture as an expression of hierarchical and historical social relations is no easy task. John Berger takes a stab at it in his brief but telling analysis of a famous 1913 photograph by Auguste Sander of three peasants in dress suits on their way to a dance. He suggests from the photographs that the suit is not the same object on the body of a laborer as it is on the body of a businessman. It is made for the latter, reinforcing class relations while seemingly providing an egalitarian link among men. This is a graphic example of "hegemony" at work. The peasants look so awkward and ungainly in their suits because *they are*. The suit as we know it developed, Berger writes, as "a professional ruling class costume." Yet the workers and peasants come to accept this clothing as their own, thereby consigning themselves to clumsy appearance in an intrinsically foreign garment. In a nutshell, this is the story of cultural hegemony everywhere: The working class "accepts" and takes for granted not only the dress but the art, the language, the values of the bourgeoisie. Similarly, cultural hegemony is at work when women accept the standards of taste and value set by men, the Third World accepts the standards of behavior and worth defined by colonial powers, blacks accept the norms of whites, homosexuals accept the values of heterosexuals, and so forth. In each case, what is so powerful is not that a foreign system is viciously imposed on subordinates (though this is sometimes exactly what happens), but that the force of domination has succeeded in "naturalizing" the values of the dominant class so that their superiority is taken by everyone as obvious, as common sense.

In his writings. Berger takes images (like these photographs) to have clear and recognizable politicoeconomic significance. He assumes that configurations of social power and social interests are the essential forces behind the look and meanings of pictures, not the personal motives or gifts of an author. It is interesting to compare Berger's actual practice of reading culture in this little essay to Williams's prescriptions in his theoretical work. In one respect, Berger's study of the suit beautifully illustrates what it means to see culture as a practice rather than a symbol or object. But in other respects, Berger falls short. For someone as careful as Berger ordinarily is to see the artifactualness of images, it is odd to find him here taking Sander's photograph as transparent. He talks about the three men in their suits as if we (the viewers of the photograph) had through the photo direct access to empirical reality. He never asks if the social act of photographing three men in their suits is not itself part of the process of making the men appear awkward. He sees Sander as a



scientist, not as a man among men, a middle-class and urban man at that, whose attitude and style and social position must surely have had something to do with making his rural subjects ill at ease. Yet Berger here talks only of suits, not of photographs of suits. His greatest strength, ordinarily, showing the ways in which a photograph or painting has been constructed, is here abandoned.

There is another matter curiously overlooked in this essay. Berger never asks how the observer's sense of beauty, the observer's sense of what is gainly or ungainly, comes to be formed. Not only does he see the photographer Sander as directly registering with his camera empirical reality, but he also takes himself (and his readers) to be objective observers, scientists with no social position or social background themselves. Would peasants also see the three men as ungainly? Would peasants of 1913 have seen them as ungainly?

All these problems acknowledged, there remains something compelling in this little gem of "reading" culture. Berger, other British Marxists, and Frankfurt school critics have persuasively urged attention to the relations between texts or pictures, the social power they exercise, and the aesthetic systems that govern judgment. The power of an individual image to define reality may emanate in part from its compelling use of a powerful aesthetic, but that too emanates from a social reality it helps to reproduce.

This point of view provides a set of tools for critical analysis that helps forge ties between social history and cultural exegesis, but it does not provide critics with a very refined set of techniques for approaching the content of some cultural objects. After the social relations are identified in the objects, what can you say about their other aesthetic characteristics? The ties between aesthetic and social movements are not always easy to identify, nor is there always a clear correspondence between the social origins of a cultural object and the social content of its message or, even more, its style. The antipathy of the founders of the Frankfurt school to mass culture of the twentieth century made attempts to analyze contemporary culture using this critical perspective more difficult for Marxists, so scholars interested in doing more than condemning contemporary literature and art tended to look to other schools of thought for theoretical guidance.

What some have identified as the most original Anglo-American contribution to literary theory, "New Criticism," arose in the 1930s as a specifically antihistoricist, anticontextual reading of texts.[76] New Criticism asserted that knowing the author's intentions or, indeed, anything at all about the author and the world in which he or she wrote, was irrelevant to deciphering the meaning of texts. The message was in the text itself, and the good reader could discover it without reference to external clues.

New Criticism seemed to have little to offer students of popular culture. After all, its practitioners were concerned with developing the techniques for distinguishing good from bad literature and did not generally deign to touch mass culture because it was by definition less closely tied to a distinctive authorial style. But still, their approach to reading had its counterpart in film studies—in the guise of "auteur theory." Critics working within this tradition tried to explain individual films by reference to the corpus of the director. They redefined film as an expressive more than commercial medium, and they redefined the hierarchy of control within filmmaking units. Before the 1950s (at least in the United States), films were often thought to belong to their producers. (Why not? They were industrial products, and the producers controlled the money.) In contrast, auteur theory attributed film content to the decisions of film directors, who were treated as authors. They were the aesthetic arbiters in film units, so they were easy to anoint as the God figures who "created" films. With the director as artist, film could become art.[77]

Auteur theory was successful in elevating film this way in part because it was a French import, designed for analyzing works following the art film tradition in Europe. It also worked because auteur theorists were able to apply models of literary analysis that assumed that the meaning of a work resided in the techniques of expression chosen by a single author. Finally, it worked because it did not question the importance of distinguishing art from mass culture. It taught viewers how to distinguish art films (with a signature) from commercial works (expressing collective commercial values, not a personal vision). In this way, auteur theory reinforced the critical hierarchy in literary studies, simply taking some films and placing them alongside "real" literature. The study of film did not open up the academy to popular culture; it simply allowed a new medium, or certain exemplars of a new medium, to enter into an academy whose principles of operation could remain largely intact.[78]

Serious study of forms of popular culture *as popular culture,* using techniques of literary criticism, had to wait for the semiotics of Roland Barthes. Barthes was among the early structuralists to use Saussurian linguistics as a means for cultural analysis. He went one step beyond most structuralists, however. He did not simply use linguistic techniques for analyzing patterns of literary writing; he proposed to use them for studying nonelite imagery (film, photography, clothing) and other popular forms (like food and boxing).

The logic of this move was simple. Indeed, as Robert Alter has argued, the premise of semiotics and structuralism that the world is a set of signs to be deciphered and not a set of objects to be known, led inescapably to "a global expansion of the concept of *text.*" "Structuralist man," writes the not very sympathetic Alter, "encounters nothing but texts wherever he looks."[79] Like other followers of Saussure, Barthes took oral speech as the model language form. Even to study written texts, one had to "translate" from one medium to another. This might be particularly easy with writing because alphabetic writing systems attempted to reproduce speech, but writing was still a medium separate from speech. It was less flexible and interactive than the spoken word; equating it with speech was an imperfect equation. If applying linguistic techniques to the written word was useful, then why not also apply these techniques to other systems of signification? All systems of signification could be treated as imperfect attempts to communicate with the mental equipment of speakers.



But what could this mean practically for the study of cultural forms? For one thing, it meant paying attention to how differences between types of objects are conceived, how a weed is distinguished from a flower in a garden, how a fashionable dress is distinguished from any old garment, or how a boxing match is distinguished from a brawl. If culture is a web of signs, and if Saussure is to be heeded in his argument that the meaning of a sign is its difference from other signs rather than some absolute meaning, then the analysis of culture must focus on classificatory schemes and must take *difference* as a central concept.

Structuralism in general and Barthes's semiology in particular share with Marxist structuralism the inclination to treat communication as an expression of a *system* more than an expression of an author. The fundamental structuring system in Marxist theory is class difference in the political economy; in linguistic structuralism, it is elementary phonemic differences in spoken language. For the latter, culture is an elaborate system of signification. Cultural analysis at its best would attempt to differentiate the subsystems of signification and the means for translating from one to the next. It would not be concerned as much with the social world as with the signs used to represent human actions and make them meaningful. All these themes are evident in "Written Clothing," a selection from *The Fashion System,* probably Barthes's most ambitious effort (not necessarily his most successful) to apply formal semiotic analysis to an apparently nonlinguistic aspect of culture.

In this piece, Barthes argues that fashion is produced not by designing and then producing exquisite clothing, but rather by a coincidence of three language systems. One language is the language of clothing construction. Clothes are made from a limited "vocabulary" of fabrics, shapes, and colors and the techniques used to produce them. This vocabulary limits how clothes are technically put together, which in turn limits what they could possibly mean, but it does not define fashion.

Fashion is also partially defined by an image-making system, fashion photography, which differentially emphasizes some aspects of clothing

rather than others. Using camera angles and lighting effects, fashion photographs select certain aspects of clothing, reducing once again the vocabulary of fashion statements.[80] (Barthes adds that dress patterns are part of a visual system of signification with more or less the same role as photographs. Here he is on shakier ground. Paper patterns for dresses do not identify what is fashion; they describe techniques for constructing clothes. They do not evaluate the salience of technique to fashion as fashion photographs do implicitly and fashion writing does explicitly.)

Writing about clothes is (to Barthes) the third and most important language of clothes. It tells readers how to interpret clothing styles, what techniques to pay attention to, and how they function as meaningful parts of some fashion. Aspects of a dress design (like the location of the waistline) may in some periods be crucial to fashion (empire dresses or 1920s flapper dresses) but in other periods may not be so important. Fashion writings articulate a hierarchy of salience of the features of clothing as well as evaluative comments on the choices made by a particular designer.

Barthes flies in the face of convention in this analysis. Fashion designers are usually thought of as "authors" who express a certain sensibility that is personally their own. They are thought to express this in the techniques and materials they use for their clothing. Their role is completely ignored by Barthes, who sees their manipulation of cloth as only the most rudimentary part of fashion. The complex cultural system that Barthes is accounting for exists as a collective process; Barthes does not give pride of place to an "author." It is a social system; in particular, it is a capitalist system that Barthes not so subtly criticizes. But his techniques are far from those used by Raymond Williams and John Berger. The signs he studies are not (to Barthes) outcomes of *behaviors* that can be studied (as they are for Williams and Berger); they are part of the language systems that structure the life-world of the people who use them. (Note in this selection that he explicitly distinguishes sociological from semiological analysis.)

Marxist structuralists and Saussurian structuralists agree that human agency is less autonomous than we imagine in our daily life (and in the tradition of individualism in Western culture). But although Williams and Berger see human culture as organized and animated primarily by politicoeconomic structures and interests, linguistic structuralists see human culture as a set of language systems. Whether they agree with the idea that the human mind is structured for language, and therefore the structuring of language has a biological base, or whether they see language as socially developed (interactive, interpersonally shaped) does not so much matter as the belief in the primacy of this cultural-linguistic



structuration. The market or the mind, history or culture—the impersonality of the outcomes is similar.

For literary or art theory, this means a reversal of the Renaissance-rooted inclination to identify works as the manifestation of an individual sensibility. For theorists trying to understand artworks of any sort, it means that authors are to be set aside as objects of study, and new objects are to be given center stage. Cultural forms are impersonally developed. They must be accounted for with an analysis of the *systems* by which languages are mobilized. Human agency is minimized, as is human feeling, as Robert Alter observes.[81] With the exception of the British school of Marxists, who have been particularly interested in working-class resistance to structural systems of control, little room is left in structuralist theories for concerted action, expressive or political. This is one of the problems of structuralism that helped spur the development of post-structuralist theories.

If no one is the author, perhaps everyone is the author. Probably the central tenet of poststructuralist analyses is that texts are multivocal. Texts are seen as having a variety of potential meanings, none of which is the real meaning to be derived by some superior reader. The Frankfurt school, New Criticism, and structuralism all have taken it for granted that the purpose of criticism is to discover "the" meaning of a text. They generated totalizing systems or theories meant to explain reality (or texts) in an exhaustive way. Members of the different schools have held distinct opinions about what "the" reading should be and have seen these differences as more than inherent difficulties of interpretation. They have taken them as expressions of the weaknesses of others' theories.

Poststructuralists have generally been more interested in the variability of readings than in the perfectibility of the reading process. They claim not only that different interpretations are a necessary part of reading because different readers approach texts with different assumptions about writing and reading, but also that texts themselves are multivocal or riddled with contradictions. A feminist piece might use language that is deeply patriarchal, negating part of its message; a collectivist piece might advocate ideas about personal freedom essential to Western individualism. In less blatant ways as well, writers present their readers with mixed messages, leaving them to construct a coherent meaning from a less than coherent text through the act of reading. All texts, the post-structuralists effectively teach, are "intertextual"; and just as they subtly or openly, intentionally or unconsciously, allude to or incorporate other texts, so they make themselves inevitably open to multiple readings.

From this viewpoint, the critic loses his or her special expertise. The act of criticism is an act of reading, like any other one. On the one hand,

this gives the critic greater power than the writer in assigning meaning to a text simply because the critic is a reader. But the critic is no longer privileged vis-à-vis the general public. This means that popular readings of popular culture are just as interesting a subject matter for poststructuralist analysis as readings by critics within elite culture. At the same time, poststructuralists tend to think that what kinds of objects audiences are "reading" make a difference because the relationships between object and reader differ across media.[82]

Jacques Derrida argues, for instance, that writing cannot be studied as a derivative translation of spoken language.[83] The world of writing has its own life, and its textuality is part of how it communicates. It is spatial and visual, not simply aural. So language use on paper has its own meanings, problems, and possibilities. One of its special features is that it allows repeated study and careful comparisons of different passages within a text. This enables analysts (like Derrida and his followers) to seek out the conceptual contradictions in writing, contradictions so severe that written work is its own criticism, or, as one school of poststructuralism says, writing "deconstructs" itself.

A number of poststructuralists have also asked questions about the psychological factors that pervade the reading process. Michel Foucault, Roland Barthes, and Christian Metz, among others, have drawn attention to the sensual nature of the reading process.[84] They have asked what makes reading a book or watching a film pleasurable. With the revival of Freudian thinking in France based on the work of Jacques Lacan, critics have asked more about how human needs are addressed through culture.[85] They have picked up threads of Freudian critical discourse that had (in an earlier form) been central to the Frankfurt school, but dropped out in most later Marxist cultural analysis (Louis Althusser being a notable exception).[86]

Sex and power, then, have been reestablished as motivating forces, affecting the ways in which culture can be made and used. Sex and power have been particularly important categories in feminist theory, a critical movement that has developed in interaction with other streams of poststructuralist thinking. Feminists have contended that language is by its nature political as well as sensual and reveals or establishes systems of power in its every use. The class system is clearly imprinted on the tradition of "great writers and writing" and so is the system of gender stratification. Genres typically used by women, types of narratives employed by women, and ways of using language comfortable for women are disrespected, and the types of literature advocated and used by men are hailed as superior. These patterns, among others, are evidence that it is inappropriate to talk about the structuring nature of language without paying attention to the way language helps structure social relations while



it structures thought. Interpreters of feminist drama, for instance, argue that contemporary feminist theater may seem unsatisfying to viewers raised on classical theater because it offers no "act of recognition" as its climactic moment. Macbeth or Lear or Oedipus come face to face with their own identities in self-recognition, but feminist drama questions the very notion of self these plays take for granted. Where traditional heroism lay in "this process of recognition and unveiling," in feminist drama, the self is not seen as stable and true, if hidden, but as "shifting, alterable, admirably and problematically varied."[87]

Foucault raises many of these issues in his essay on the author. He has been an extremely controversial thinker whose influence has touched literary criticism, sociology (especially the study of deviance and social control), and intellectual and cultural history. The essay here is one of his most important pieces of poststructuralist thinking because it focuses so precisely on the nature of language and power and so clearly draws a line between structuralism and poststructuralism. Like many structuralists, he sees the author as a cultural invention, embedded in the system of Western individualism, masking the extent to which all writers draw their ideas and language from a common culture. But unlike structuralists, Foucault does not think we should ignore authorship altogether. On the contrary, he thinks the author should be studied as a vital instrument of power that has been used in literary criticism to restrict access to print and its power. Authors are "given" (through attribution) both bodies of writing and distinctive ways of using language. When they are said to have invented new writing styles, it seems sensible enough because they have indeed written their books. But to the extent that they use characters from their culture and use language they have heard in others' mouths, they are inappropriately isolated as the sole source of their work. They should be more precisely seen as recipients of territories of language that are not distributed to ordinary people and keepers of language skills that help keep them esoteric. Assigning authorship is not merely a tool for criticism, then, but a means for allocating power.

Once this is understood, it raises new questions about what constitutes authorship. Is all "Freudian" writing authored by Freud because he developed its language and the style still bears his name? What would happen if we began thinking of it this way? What would happen if we attributed authorship to the ordinary people whose voices writers mimic in their fiction or their ethnographies? Would we want to say a book was written by Brooklyn? And if we wanted to redistribute power in society, how might we redistribute authorship? Foucault opens the concept of authorship like Pandora's box and lets the possibilities fly out. To distribute the power of authorship and its attribution more widely, he argues for a common poststructuralist vision of decentralized meaning. He con-

tends that all readers should assert their own views of authorship, recognizing the act of reading for what it is: a political act shaping and using the power of language.[88]

Foucault's analysis suggests that we have so long kept standard ideas about authorship in large part because without them the cultural critic could no longer identify great work by its great author. That would be dangerous because it would upset the system of power in language, including the stratified relationship of elite to popular culture. Popular culture is often "authorless," unless, like film, it is elevated by the identification of its "real" author (the director). It is precisely because Foucault's analysis of literary authorship unravels so revealingly the politics of cultural stratification that it is so important to students of popular culture.

Foucault calls into question what it means to be an author, but Janice Radway pointedly raises the issue of what it means to be a reader. Her essay is that of a feminist engaged in a form of reader response analysis. Reader response theory developed before poststructuralism and without the concern for the multivocal quality of texts themselves. But Radway is very much aware of and concerned about the mixed messages conveyed in texts. She is also aware of the sensual/sexual power of reading and the ways language embodies power relations.

Radway's essay concerns her ethnographic study (more fully reported in her book, *Reading the Romance*) of a group of women readers of romance novels.[89] She was curious about romance novel reading because of critics' disdain for these books as mass cultural garbage and the more recent feminist criticism of the politics of their messages. Both these "readings" of romances were clearly political and had to do with gender politics, but what was their relationship to romance readers' readings? She identifies the attraction of these books to their readers with psychological satisfactions—on the one hand, turning away from the demands of their families to read something for themselves and, on the other hand, providing a fantasy world in which to certify repetitiously the value of their choice to live as wives and mothers rather than as career women. In their favorite novels, strong and attractive women make the same choice over and over again, significantly, just as they convince some virile man of the value of love and tenderness. The woman gives up her autonomy, but she scores a victory for feminine culture, civilizing an otherwise unruly male. The books temporarily make the cultural world of housewives dominant, and this (Radway asserts) is part of their pleasure for these readers. Still, it is also the basis for the criticism of romances by some feminists. Radway concludes that these texts are multivocal and allow contradictory political readings. How can this be with such stereotyped, formula fiction?



Radway fully recognizes that these texts are highly commercial and formulaic. But the reading of them, she argues, although patterned, is not formulaic. It is both patterned *and* personal. The psychopolitical situation that these books address (women at home who are asked to spend so much of their lives tending to the needs of others) is standard enough as a social form to make the formula "work" for many readers, but the readings are still made by individual women and *tailored* by them to their needs and dreams as domestic women. It is in this sense that romance readers act individually but still constitute an "interpretive community." In an interpretive community, common literary analysis or interpretation depends on a consensus of experience and attitudes of a particular group of readers.

Radway's essay begins by commenting on André Kertesz's photographs of people reading.[90] Again, reading itself is found problematic, and Radway calls, much as Natalie Davis has in her work, for "specific studies of what people do with printed texts." Although other advocates of an audience- or reader-oriented criticism have raised the same questions, no one else has so determinedly left the classroom to find readers to examine. In a sense, Radway takes seriously the theoretical conviction that reading is a social process and so turns to sociological investigation to study literature. She takes recent literary criticism that would view reading and writing as activities to a logical end: the study of the activities themselves.

But she sets herself a particularly daunting task: How is a feminist to evaluate romance reading for women? If she can set aside the bias of high culture looking at popular culture, she has no desire to set aside her political values. So if, on the one hand, she recognizes that the multivocality of these texts, like any texts, gives readers power to use them to serve their own needs, she also comes to her project suspecting that the language of romances and their formulaic character offer a dominant message that urges women to accept as natural the oppressive gender relations to which they are accustomed.

Radway finds that the women she studies use the act of reading itself to carve out for themselves private time in the face of demanding husbands and children. Even if the books are "escape" literature, they are an actual escape from the oppressive demands of everyday life; even if they make room for "fantasy" rather than rebellion, the value of fantasy deserves some reconsideration (as the British feminist, Angela McRobbie, has made explicit in recent work).[91]

Still, from her reading of the texts, the lessons romance novels seem to preach are not attractive to Radway. But what about the readings the romance readers themselves offer? Are their readings as "good" as her own feminist reading of the books? It is not a question Radway resolves,

remaining on the whole, it seems, a relativist on this matter. But in her book, she makes some critical observations of the romance readers: that they read addictively (she compares their habit to liquor and drugs); that they claim to value diversity but will not finish a romance that strays from a basic plot line; that they identify so closely with the heroine that they will not read romances where something unpleasant happens to her and certainly will not approve a romance with a sad ending; that they are very literal readers with little sense of the possibilities of irony in an author or psychological complexity or self-deception in a character; and that they read therapeutically, rereading old romances when they are depressed or under stress (psychoanalysis can be understood as suggesting that all narrative is therapeutic).[92]

Still, Radway champions the power of reading over the power of writing, and she has more contempt for those who disdain these readers than she has for the messages they derive from the books. Her work is self-consciously multivocal, providing a critical analysis of the society that has put many women into a position to like formula romances but leaving room for both a critical and an appreciative view of the romance novel readers themselves.

In a sense, Radway shows that the global expansion of "the text" has also been its global evaporation. If more and more objects are taken to be textual, that is, capable of being interpreted, more and more the interpretation of the texts denies their objectness. The text decomposes into the readers who read it and the interpretive communities, more generally, whose norms and values sustain it and make its interpretation possible in the first place. Oddly enough, rather than thereby reducing the authority of the interpreter, this view gives the act of interpretation a new importance. Now, it seems, interpretation is the very act whereby a text is sustained; the practice of literary criticism, as Stanley Fish has written, "is absolutely essential not only to the maintenance of, but to the very production of, the objects of its attention." Interpretive communities, not the text or even the reader, in Fish's view, "produce meanings" and do so prior to the act of reading itself.[93]

The implications of this position are probably most evident in the studies of canonization and canonicity that are now popular in literary studies. In one elegant example, Jane Tompkins has written of the social, economic, and political underpinnings of the rise of Nathaniel Hawthorne's writings to "masterpiece" status. She challenges the commonplace notion of a "classic" as a text that retains its value even though times change. She argues that a "classic" is in constant change: "Rather than being the repository of eternal truths, they embody the changing interests and beliefs of those people whose place in the cultural hierarchy empowers them to decide which works deserve the name of classic



and which do not. For the idea of 'the classic' itself is no more universal or interest-free than the situation of those whose business it is to interpret literary works for the general public."[94] If, in Radway, we find a literary scholar who has taken to sociological studies of actual readers, quite in accord with new literary theory, in Tompkins and others, we find a literary scholar who has taken on literary scholarship as an object of sociohistorical scholarship. Interpretation becomes the object of study of the interpreters in a way that cannot help leaving the student of popular culture wondering if the elite culture/popular culture distinction, and all the elaborate barricades and buildings and temples erected to sustain it, has finally been revealed as a house of cards.

## CONCLUSION

The readings collected here reflect the disciplinary origins of the new research in popular culture, resulting from the broad reassessments of the nature of culture within these fields. The traditional "great man" history and "genius" approaches to literary analysis and art history have lost their special charm. Western individualism and the achievement ethic as conceptual systems (although certainly not as general normative systems) have been systematically and self-consciously undermined or turned on their heads as a kind of intellectual (and sometimes, ironically, a heroic) exercise. Many scholars have had to suspend belief in fundamental normative prescriptions of Western culture, a difficult move in its requirements of careful theoretical reasoning but a rewarding one in opening up for study a vast range of human activities. This work is inevitably "reflexive," asking us to rethink not only popular culture but the category of popular culture, not only the category of popular culture but the cultural institutions and interpretive communities that have created and preserved that category—including, of course, the university. The whole educational apparatus of departments and disciplines, professional associations and prestigious chairs and prizes, curricula reform and the assembling of a reader on popular culture are all elements in the social elaboration of culture. There is no Archimedean point outside culture from which to observe it objectively and no protection within the university for those wishing to be ignorant of the popular cultural environment.

As definitions of what objects are important for cultural analysis have changed, popular culture has found legitimacy for the very reasons it was previously derided: the scale of its social impact and its attractiveness to unschooled audiences. This has made it central to any understanding of Western societies and thought. The irony of this situation is that popular culture, the fluffy stuff so often described by academics as vacuous

and insignificant (and alien to the Great Tradition that previously defined Western culture) has arrived in the present intellectual environment as a fascinating and revolutionary object for academic thought. That is why, although the rethinking of popular culture we document here may be embedded in analyses of jokes, romance novels, and the treatment of pets, it is not just about these subjects. It is also a commentary on broad intellectual changes initiated by scholars who, in struggling to "see" Western culture without being totally blinded by its assumptions, began to think about and reject the taboos that had kept thinkers away from everyday culture. They bravely redefined the role and value of popular amusements and, in so doing, allowed their thinking and ours to be transformed.

## NOTES

1. Theodore S. Hamerow, *Reflections on History and Historians* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987); Gertrude Himmelfarb, *The New History and the Old* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1987).

2. Gerald Graff, "Conflicts Over the Curriculum Are Here to Stay: They Should Be Made Educationally Productive," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, February 17, 1988, p. A48.

3. Cited in Raymond Williams, *Keywords* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), p. 79.

4. Interestingly, these "people" were resuscitated by nineteenth-century Romantics who saw them as carriers of an authentic European tradition of vital interest to elites. Contemporary historians want to know about them less to celebrate their authenticity than to determine more accurately their historical importance to their own periods. For a discussion of the history of historical attention to popular culture, see Peter Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe* (New York: Harper & Row, 1978). Burke has also written useful reviews of the study of popular culture in "Revolution in Popular Culture," in Mikulas Teich and Roy Porter, eds., *Revolution in History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp. 206–225, and "Popular Culture Between History and Ethnology," *Ethnologia Europaea* 14 (1984), pp. 5–13. For a provocative discussion of the origins of the whole metaphor of "high" and "low" to indicate rank, see Barry Schwartz, *Vertical Classification* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981).

5. See Fernand Braudel, *On History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980).

6. For a discussion of the influence of the *Annales* school, see S. Clark, "French Historians and Early Modern Popular Culture," *Past and Present* 100 (1983), pp. 62–99; Lynn Hunt, "French History in the Last Twenty Years: The Rise and Fall of the *Annales* Paradigm," *Journal of Contemporary History* 21 (1986), pp. 209–224; Lynn Hunt, "Introduction: History, Culture, and Text," in Lynn Hunt, ed., *The New Cultural History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), pp. 1–22.



7. Lucien Febvre and Henri-Jean Martin, *The Coming of the Book*, trans. David Gerard (London: NLB, 1958, 1976).

8. Natalie Davis, *Society and Culture in Early Modern France* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1975). The essay reprinted here is from pp. 189–226. See also the interview with Natalie Davis in MARHO, the Radical Historians Organization, *Visions of History* (New York: Pantheon, 1983), pp. 97–122. Jack Goody, *The Domestication of the Savage Mind* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977). See also Michael Cole and Sylvia Scribner, *The Psychology of Literacy* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1981). Elizabeth Eisenstein, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979).

9. Carlo Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms* (New York: Penguin, 1980).

10. For contemporary discussions of material culture and how to look at it, see T. J. Schlereth, *Material Culture Studies in America* (Nashville: American Association of State and Local History, 1982); Chandra Mukerji, *From Graven Images: Patterns of Modern Materialism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983); Neil McKendrick, John Brewer, and J. H. Plumb, *The Birth of a Consumer Society: The Commercialization of Eighteenth-Century England* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982); Arjun Appadurai, ed., *The Social Life of Things* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986). For works that take a folkloristic or anthropological approach to social history, centering on aspects of ritual and performance in social life, see Susan Davis, *Parades and Power: Street Theater in Nineteenth-Century Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986); Rhys Isaac, *The Transformation of Virginia: 1740–1790* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982).

11. Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, *Carnival in Romans* (New York: Braziller, 1980).

12. Darnton's "Great Cat Massacre" was criticized by French historian Roger Chartier in "Text, Symbols, and Frenchness," *Journal of Modern History* 57 (1986), pp. 682–695, and Darnton responded in "The Symbolic Element in History," *Journal of Modern History* 58 (1986), pp. 218–234.

13. This is now a vast area of research. A key work is Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500–1800* (New York: Harper & Row, 1977). The seminal work on children is P. Ariès, *Centuries of Childhood* (New York: Vintage, 1969). See also J. H. Plumb, "The New World of Children in 18th-Century England," in McKendrick, Brewer, and Plumb, *Birth of a Consumer Society*. Natalie Davis describes women's lives in *Society and Culture in Early Modern France* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1975). See also Jean-Louis Flandrir, *Families in Former Times* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979); Merry Weisner, *Working Women in Renaissance Germany* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1986).

14. Peter Novick traces the phrase to the 1920s but dates its general usage to the influence of American historian Jesse Lemisch in the 1960s. See Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 442.

15. E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York: Vintage, 1963). See Novick, *That Noble Dream*, pp. 440, 461, and 484, for observations on E. P. Thompson's influence on the rise of social history.

16. See E. P. Thompson, "Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism," *Past and Present*, no. 38 (1967), pp. 56–97.

17. Gareth Stedman Jones, *Languages of Class: Studies in English Working Class History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

18. Kathy Peiss, *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in New York City, 1880 to 1920* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1985); Roy Rosenzweig, *Eight Hours for What We Will* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

19. Sean Wilentz criticizes the notion of American "exceptionalism" in studies of working-class culture, arguing that the American case is startlingly different from European working classes only if one rather rigidly identifies working-class consciousness with organized working-class socialism. See his "Against Exceptionalism: Class Consciousness and the American Labor Movement," *International Labor and Working Class History* 26 (Fall 1984), pp. 1–24.

20. Drinking has been the subject of a number of important studies of politics and popular culture, including Joseph Gusfield, *Symbolic Crusade* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1963); Brian Harrison, *Drink and the Victorians* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1971).

21. Rosenzweig, *Eight Hours for What We Will,* pp. 98, 100, 106.

22. Dolores Hayden, *The Grand Domestic Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1981).

23. For a valuable essay on the use of the term in historiography, see T. J. Jackson Lears, "The Concept of Cultural Hegemony: Problems and Possibilities," *American Historical Review* 85 (1985), pp. 567–593. In American studies of the media, the concept has been most notably employed in the work of Todd Gitlin. See his *The Whole World Is Watching: Mass Media in the Making and Unmaking of the New Left* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980).

24. Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (New York: International Publishers, 1971).

25. Gunther Barth, *City People: The Rise of Modern City Culture in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980); Alan Trachtenberg, *The Incorporation of America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982).

26. On work discipline in the factories, see Thompson, *Making of the English Working Class.* On Sunday schools, see Tom Laqueur, *Religion and Respectability: Sunday Schools and Working Class Culture* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1976). On literacy as social control, see Harvey J. Graff. *The Literacy Myth: Literacy and Social Structure in the Nineteenth-Century City* (New York: Academic Press, 1979). On new forms of controlling deviance, see Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization* (New York: Pantheon, 1965); David Rothman, *The Discovery of the Asylum* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1971); Andrew Scull, ed., *Madhouses, Mad-Doctors and Madmen* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981).

27. Levine's essay on Shakespeare, included here, is now part of a book, *Highbrow/Lowbrow* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988), which includes a parallel study of opera.

28. Ann Douglas, *The Feminization of American Culture* (New York: Knopf, 1977).

29. In this, she crosses paths with the historian Neil Harris, "Museums, Merchandising, and Popular Taste: The Struggle for Influence," in I. M. G. Quimby, ed., *Material Culture and the Study of American Life* (New York: Norton, 1978), pp. 140–174.



30. This may have been especially true for women. See Sharon Zukin, "The Post-Modern Landscape: Mapping Culture and Power," in Scott Lash and Jonathan Friedmann, eds., *Modernity and Identity* (London: Basil Blackwell, 1990).

31. Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Totemism* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1963).

32. Mary Douglas and Baron Isherwood, *The World of Goods* (New York: Basic Books, 1979).

33. Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Raw and the Cooked* (New York: Harper & Row, 1969), p. 12.

34. Will Wright, *Sixguns and Society: A Structural Study of the Western* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975); Judith Williamson, *Decoding Advertisements* (London: Boyars, 1978); E. A. Lawrence, *Rodeo: An Anthropologist Looks at the Wild and the Tame* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1982); Paul Bouissac, *Circus and Culture: A Semiotic Approach* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1976).

35. For some criticism of Geertz, see Vincent Crapanzano, "Hermes' Dilemma: The Masking of Subversion in Ethnographic Description," in George Marcus and James Clifford, eds., *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), and Aletta Biersack, "Local Knowledge, Local History: Geertz and Beyond," in Lynn Hunt, ed., *The New Cultural History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), pp. 72–96.

36. This is well illustrated in a critique of Lévi-Strauss. See Michael Carroll, "Lévi-Strauss, Freud, and Trickster," *American Ethnologist* 8 (1981), pp. 301–313.

37. Clifford Geertz, "Art as a Cultural System," *MLN* 91 (1976), p. 1478.

38. Garry Wills, "Blood Sport," *New York Review of Books,* February 18, 1988, p. 5.

39. See Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Chicago: Aldine, 1969), for a discussion of antistructure; John J. MacAloon, "Olympic Games and the Theory of Spectacle in Modern Societies," in John J. MacAloon, ed., *Rite, Drama, Festival, Spectacle: Rehearsals Toward a Theory of Cultural Performance* (Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues, 1984), pp. 241–280, for a discussion of hyperstructure. See also Elihu Katz, "Media Events: The Sense of Occasion," *Studies in Visual Communication* 6 (1984), pp. 84–89.

40. Victor W. Turner, "Liminality and the Performative Genres," in MacAloon, *Rite, Drama, Festival, Spectacle,* pp. 19–41.

41. Barbara Babcock, "Arrange Me in Disorder: Fragments and Reflections on Ritual Clowning," in MacAloon, *Rite, Drama, Festival, Spectacle,* p. 107.

42. Clifford Geertz, *Local Knowledge* (New York: Basic Books, 1983), p. 28.

43. Marshall Sahlins, *Culture and Practical Reason* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), p. vii.

44. Ibid., p. 9.

45. Marshall Sahlins, *Islands of History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985).

46. Clifford Geertz, *Works and Lives* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988); Clifford and Marcus, *Writing Culture.*

47. Robert Park, "The Natural History of the Newspaper," *American Journal of Sociology* 29 (November 1923), pp. 273–289; Robert Park, *The Immigrant Press and Its Control* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1970; Harper, 1922); John Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems* (New York: Henry Holt, 1927); Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (New York: New American Library, 1953; Macmillan, 1899).

48. William I. Thomas and Florian Znaniecki, *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America* (Boston: Richard G. Badger, 1918).

49. Robert and Helen Lynd, *Middletown* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1929).

50. David Manning White and Bernard Rosenberg, eds., *Mass Culture* (Glencoe, Il.: Free Press, 1957).

51. Herbert J. Gans, *Popular Culture and High Culture* (New York: Basic Books, 1974).

52. David Riesman, with Nathan Glazer and Reuel Denney, *The Lonely Crowd* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1950).

53. David Riesman. *Individualism Reconsidered* (New York: Free Press, 1954), pp. 264–265.

54. Several key essays in this debate appear in White and Rosenberg, *Mass Culture*, including Dwight MacDonald, "A Theory of Mass Culture," pp. 53–59; Irving Howe, "Notes on Mass Culture," pp. 496–503; Ernest Van Den Haag, "Of Happiness and of Despair We Have No Measure," pp. 504–536. Edward Shils's contributions are "Mass Society and Its Culture," *Daedalus* 89 (1960), pp. 288–314, and "Daydreams and Nightmares: Reflections on the Criticism of Mass Culture," *Sewanee Review* 65 (1957), pp. 587–608. A number of relevant essays, including one by Hannah Arendt, appear in Norman Jacobs, ed., *Culture for the Millions* (Princeton, N.J.: Van Nostrand, 1961). C. Wright Mills comments on popular culture in *The Power Elite* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1956). For a fine intellectual history of the mass culture debate, see Leon Bramson, *The Political Context of Sociology* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1961).

55. "It might be reasonable to say that what I have done here is not the sociology of art at all, but rather the sociology of occupations applied to artistic work. I would not quarrel with that way of putting it." Howard Becker, *Art Worlds* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), p. xi.

56. Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), p. 5.

57. We have not included studies of religion in this volume. The reasons for this have (we think) disciplinary origins. Literary scholars rarely look at religious writing, except students of early American literature, who necessarily read much religious writing. Cultural critics like Barthes rarely dare or want to tackle religious practices; they may study the worship of Garbo's face, but not sacred worship. Anthropologists and sociologists have tended to see religion as the most powerful form of culture, organizing and regulating other areas of social life, and thus clearly different from the everyday rites and fashions of popular culture. Only historians of the early modern period have routinely studied religious festivals as part of popular life. The burgeoning of popular culture studies has attracted the attention of more sociologists, anthropologists, and historians of the modern period to religious beliefs and practices, but religion still remains a small part of the field of popular culture studies. Our volume simply reflects the limits of the field.



58. Paul DiMaggio, "Market Structure, the Creative Process, and Popular Culture: Toward an Organizational Reinterpretation of Mass-Culture Theory," *Journal of Popular Culture* 3 (1977), pp. 436–452.

59. Becker, *Art Worlds*.

60. Howard Aldrich and Richard Pfeffer, "Environments of Organizations," *Annual Review of Sociology* 2 (1976), pp. 79–105.

61. For other production-of-culture studies, see Richard A. Peterson, "Revitalizing the Culture Concept," *Annual Review of Sociology* 5 (1979), pp. 137–166; Richard Peterson, ed., *The Production of Culture* (Beverly Hills: Sage, 1976).

62. Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (New York: Methuen, 1979).

63. Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1984).

64. William Weber, "Mass Culture and the Reshaping of European Musical Taste, 1770–1870," *International Review of the Aesthetics and Sociology of Music* 8 (1977) pp. 18–19.

65. There is now a small but impressive literature that treats politics itself as a form of popular culture and sees political debate and discourse as an instance of wider cultural forces. See, for instance, Jean Baker, *Affairs of Party* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1983), for a Victor Turner–inspired examination of mid-nineteenth-century American presidential elections as collective rituals and "social dramas." See also Michael McGerr, *The Decline of Popular Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), for a provocative study of "styles" of political campaigning as forms of popular culture with a significant impact on how Americans learn to conceive of politics and how they learn to care, or not care, about it. See also a discussion of politics as an expressive form of ethnic and social group conflict in Jonathan Rieder, *Canarsie: The Jews and Italians of Brooklyn Against Liberalism* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1985).

66. Martin Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination: A History of the Frankfurt School and the Institute of Social Research 1923–1950* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1973).

67. Ibid.

68. Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations* (New York: Schocken, 1968), pp. 219–253.

69. Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1965).

70. Richard Hoggart was founder and first director of the Center for Contemporary Cultural Studies at the University of Birmingham in 1964. He is best known for his book *The Uses of Literacy* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1957). Stuart Hall succeeded Hoggart as director of the "Birmingham school" and is widely known for lucid reviews, evaluations, and explorations of cultural theory. See, for instance, his "Cultural Studies: Two Paradigms," *Media, Culture and Society* 2 (1980), pp. 57–72; "The Rediscovery of 'Ideology': The Return of the Repressed in Media Studies," in Michael Gurevitch, Tony Bennett, James Curran, and Janet Woollacott, eds., *Culture, Society and the Media* (London: Methuen, 1982), pp. 56–90; "Signification, Representation, Ideology: Althusser and the

Post-Structuralist Debates," *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 2 (1985), pp. 91–114.

71. M. M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981).

72. John Fiske, "British Cultural Studies and Television," in Robert C. Allen, ed., *Channels of Discourse* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987), p. 254.

73. Stuart Hall, "Encoding and Decoding," in Stuart Hall et al., eds., *Culture, Media, Language* (London: Hutchinson, 1980).

74. John Fiske, "Television: Polysemy and Popularity," *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 3 (1986), p. 392.

75. Ibid.

76. For a history that discusses New Criticism and its influence, see Gerald Graff, *Professing Literature: An Institutional History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987). See also Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), pp. 46–53.

77. For the early period in American film, see Benjamin Hampton, *The History of the American Film Industry from Its Beginnings to 1931* (New York: Dover [1931], 1970). Dudley Andrews speaks of "auteur theory" as not a theory but a critical method. In contrast, see the rethinking of film and film history in the late 1950s and early 1960s in Arthur Knight, *The Liveliest Art* (New York: Mentor 1957); Ralph Stephenson and Jean R. Debrix, *The Cinema as Art* (Baltimore: Penguin, 1965). See also J. Dudley Andrew, *The Major Film Theories: An Introduction* (London: Oxford University Press, 1976), p. 4.

78. Knight, *The Liveliest Art;* Stephenson and Debrix, *Cinema as Art* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1966); Gerald Mast and Marshal Cohen, *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974); and Peter Wollen, *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1969).

79. Robert Alter, "Mimesis and the Motive for Fiction," *TriQuarterly* 42 (1978), p. 233. For more sympathetic treatments of structuralism, see Edith Kurzweil, *The Age of Structuralism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980); Richard T. DeGeorge, *The Structuralists from Marx to Lévi-Strauss* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1972).

80. For a sociological analysis of fashion photography that compares its style, ideology, and work organization with other forms of photography, see Barbara Rosenblum, "Style as Social Process," *American Sociological Review* 43 (1978), pp. 422–438, and *Photographers at Work* (New York: Holmes & Meiers, 1978).

81. Alter, "Mimesis and the Motive for Fiction," pp. 228–249.

82. Eagleton, *Literary Theory;* Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980); and Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978).

83. Ibid.

84. Roland Barthes, *The Pleasures of the Text;* Michel Foucault, "What Is an Author?" *Partisan Review* 4 (1975), pp. 603–614; Christian Metz, *The Imaginary Signifiers* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982). See also Kristeva, *Desire in Language.*



85. See Sherry Turkle, *Psychoanalytic Politics* (New York: Basic Books, 1978).

86. Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," in Louis Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971) pp. 127–186.

87. Helene Keyssar, *Feminist Theatre* (New York: Grove Press, 1985), p. xiv. See also Kristeva, *Desire in Language.*

88. Foucault's ideas look on the level of academic practice at a politics of language that goes well beyond the university. Julia Kristeva has described ways that world politics shapes language use. She contends the peace treaty in Yalta that divided Europe into East and West, starting the cold war, made her give up her homeland, marry a Frenchman, and write in French. She claims this denied her the authorship of her own texts because politicohistorical forces shaped what she could and could not write and in what language. She connects this dissolving of the "I" to a passion for language on one hand and, on the other, the female experience.

89. Janice Radway, *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984).

90. André Kertesz, *On Reading* (New York: Grossman, 1971).

91. Angela McRobbie, "Dance and Social Fantasy," in Angela McRobbie and Mica Nava, eds., *Gender and Generation* (London: Macmillan, 1984), pp. 130–161.

92. Eagleton, *Literary Theory.*

93. Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class?* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1980), pp. 368, 14.

94. Jane Tompkins, *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction 1790–1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 37. See also the essays in Robert von Hallberg, ed., *Canons* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984).