

# OCTOBER

# 53

Stuart Hall

Catharine Stimpson  
Barbara Harlow

Mark Poster

Paul A. Bové

Cornel West

The Humanities as Social Technology  
A Special Issue

*The Emergence of Cultural  
Studies and the Crisis of the  
Humanities*

*Federal Papers*

*Political Detention: Countering  
the University*

*Words without Things: The  
Mode of Information*

*Power and Freedom: Opposition  
and the Humanities*

*The New Cultural Politics of  
Difference*

\$8.00/Summer 1990

*Published by the MIT Press*

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OCTOBER (ISSN 0162-2870) (ISBN 0-262-75203-4) is published quarterly (Summer, Fall, Winter, Spring) by the MIT Press, 55 Hayward Street, Cambridge, Massachusetts 02142, and London, England.

Subscriptions: individuals \$25.00; institutions \$60.00; students and retired \$20.00. Foreign subscriptions outside USA and Canada add \$12.00 for surface mail or \$18.00 for air mail. Prices subject to change without notice.

Address subscriptions to OCTOBER, MIT Press Journals, 55 Hayward Street, Cambridge, Massachusetts 02142. Manuscripts, in duplicate and accompanied by stamped, self-addressed envelope, should be sent to OCTOBER, 19 Union Square West, New York, NY 10003. No responsibility is assumed for loss or injury.

Second class postage paid at Boston, MA, and at additional mailing offices. To be honored free of charge, claims for missing copies must be made immediately upon receipt of the next published issue.

POSTMASTER: send address changes to OCTOBER, MIT Press Journals, 55 Hayward Street, Cambridge, Massachusetts 02142.

OCTOBER is distributed in the USA by B. Deboer, Inc., 113 East Centre Street, Nutley, New Jersey 07110.

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EUGENE W. HOLLAND and  
VASSILIS LAMBROPOULOS

From a theoretical viewpoint, it seems redundant to talk about the humanities in crisis, because the humanities has always faced crisis, indeed emerged as the managing of a particular crisis: the demise of the stratified theocentric feudal order. The task of the humanities, since the Battle of the Books at the turn of the eighteenth century at least, has been to manage the affairs of the individual man as Human—as an independent self endowed with the universal quality of autonomous reason. And universal Man lives in a permanent crisis of identity, caught between the luminous promise of insight and *Bildung*, on the one hand, and the threat of ignorance and self-forgetfulness, on the other. This pursuit of secular illumination, the relentless individual critique of (self-)knowledge, constitutes the humanities as the guardian and judge of enlightened reason. Philosophy from Kant to Derrida, art from Goya to Holtzer, literature from Cervantes to Pynchon have all proceeded in full cognizance of this fundamental critical task.

Yet, from a historical perspective, the present crisis of the humanities represents a special case, and belongs to the apocalyptic moment of late capitalism. The very market forces that dissolved theocratic society and may at one time have fostered autonomous reason in free individuals now pulverize individuality and obliterate independent rationality. Scientific reason appears inseparable from the technological domination of nature worldwide and is deployed in all-pervasive technologies of social domination serving the nation-state; critical reason seems finally unable to counteract the subordination of rationality to the market calculations of the “cash nexus” and the power calculus of state reason. Even outside the natural and social sciences, the realm of aesthetics is increasingly recuperated and refunctionalized by institutions ranging from campaign-management and museum sponsorship to advertising. The institutions and modes of thought that once sustained the humanities—empirical science, rational social thought, autonomous art—have deserted, leaving it to face crisis without apparent intellectual resources or sacrosanct cultural domains: this time, the crisis is not for, but of, the humanities.

The breadth of its impact in this country alone (the American case being specific, not to say "unique") is impressive: it takes shape in countless intellectual, scholarly, pedagogical, artistic, political, and business concerns. Discussions focus on such diverse topics as moral standards for federally supported art, cultural or literal illiteracy, competitiveness in the international marketplace, biases in school curricula, the training of scientists, the demographics of higher education, challenges to the canon, the politicization of research (especially in terms of race, class, and gender), accuracy in the media, and the need for a national language. Public and administrative interest has rarely been so intense: business magazines devote special issues to education; George Bush, having promised to be the "education President," convenes an extraordinary governors' education summit; books by Allan Bloom and E. D. Hirsch on the closing and refilling of the American mind become best-sellers; radio and TV devote entire programs to school problems; curriculum-revision movements sweep the academy; statements and initiatives of the directors of the National Endowments for the Humanities and the Arts make headlines. This unprecedented attention indicates a special crisis, and at the same time suggests the centrality acquired by the arts and humanities in the larger American intellectual and educational landscape. For it is mainly in the area of the so-called liberal arts that the stakes have been raised regarding concerns as broad as industrial productivity, definitions of high and low culture (particularly in the arts), sexual conduct, national literacy, medical ethics, and others. Yet however urgent the crisis, however high the stakes, prognosis remains uncertain: overall, the arts and humanities can be seen either as suffering a paralyzing onslaught or as enjoying well-deserved and invigorating attention.

Perhaps the most interesting feature of this crisis, which radically differentiates it from previous ones, is the focus on the institutional dimension—the challenge not just to prevailing views and traditions themselves, but to their organizational basis of legitimacy, as well. All cultural institutions—from the university to the museum, from the anthology to the textbook, from research centers to federal agencies—have come under severe attack for their authoritarian practices and ideological biases. The struggle of ideas alone has now expanded to contestation of the sites in and from which dominant discourses operate. This discovery of the institutional operations of hegemony, in what is often perceived as a state of siege or war, has in turn broadened our perspective on power, which is now seen as a condition, a dimension, a parameter, even a resource in the domain of culture and society whose potential is not determined *a priori* but is always negotiated. Power no longer means just tyranny and oppression; it can be an enabling as well as a disabling condition. Since power is now understood as the inevitable horizon rather than a distinctive characteristic of action, the time has come to explore its productive potential: its associations with creativity, knowledge, critique, and freedom. This new understanding of power as both managing and enabling technology, of knowledge as both regime and

resistance, has played a major role in the current reorientation of the humanities away from the position of guardian of reason and servant of tradition, toward a more activist stance within society.

It was with these ideas in mind that we organized the Tenth Annual Humanities Symposium at the Ohio State University in October 1989. The title of the symposium was the same as that of this issue, and the papers included here were presented on that occasion. Our purpose was to provide a forum for an examination of the politics of the truth of Man and for a critical assessment of the ways in which the knowledge produced in the humanities affects culture and society. We believe that the essays we have collected—with their interdisciplinary approaches to vastly different topics—represent some of the most challenging positions in the field (while contributing to the collapse of traditional distinctions among its disciplines): they look closely at the truth the humanities speaks, the stories it tells, the territory it claims, the understanding it dictates, the authority it exercises, the jurisdictions it polices, the mechanisms it controls, the interests it serves, the techniques it employs. In addition, while criticizing its foundationalist assumptions, they propose a reorientation in terms of subject matter, methodology, and political commitment which demands a new, interventionist scholarship and pedagogy for the humanities. In what follows, we sketch a composite view of the field that emerges out of this collective inquiry into its historical constitution and social role.

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The humanities is the principal social technology that has supported and (re-)produced the individual as autonomous self in modernity. It emerged around the turn of the seventeenth century as an explanatory scheme and scholarly paradigm proposing, and offering to account for, a new social position: (the universal) Man. The individual (man or woman) was constituted as a self when s/he acquired depth—a private and unique interior where personal identity was to be defined and defended. The journey into depth, the search for essence and origin, is exemplified in the act of interpretation. The new person, the individual of modernity, the Man of the Humanities, practices and finds her/his self above all in interpretation, in a movement from the depth of the soul toward the (bottomless) depth of a text or artwork possessing comparable qualities (like self-regulating autonomy).

The interpretive act, which takes place in the interior of one's (re-)collection (of books, artifacts, manuscripts, and the like), removes understanding from the public realm of ritual or politics to the private sphere of cultural appreciation. It is the basic exercise of freedom and *Bildung*. As an exercise of personal freedom, interpretation is the ultimate civil right: the right to one's own understanding, unrestrained by outside coercion (especially church dogma). As an exercise in *Bildung*, it promotes the highest goal in life, the cultivation of a truly

enlightened and independent self. Thus, interpretation is both askesis and fulfillment. Although it first arose, as a type of conduct and attitude, in the Protestant North, it became the model of humanity per se, which European colonialism and imperialism have exported to the rest of the world well into this century. Thus, as an assemblage of disciplines centering on the constitution and continual (re-)elaboration of autonomous subjectivity, the humanities has contributed to human knowledge, identity, truth, presence, ethics, and legitimacy, becoming an integral part of the subject's reality through its diagnostic, advisory, therapeutic, and gnosiological functions.

It is a commonplace among scholars and intellectuals—if not always among the government agencies, politicians, and bureaucrats that sometimes support scholarship and art—that high culture in the West, at least since the Enlightenment, has often been critical of the prevailing social order. After all, the public face of the interpreter is the citizen: equality as an interpretive right soon becomes a civil one. For three centuries, often at great personal risk, the high culture of intellectuals turned against authoritarian establishments and questioned their legitimacy. Even today, one rationale often given for liberal education is that it affords a critical perspective on the status quo. It is therefore puzzling to many intellectuals that the projects of liberal humanist critique—even the supposedly radical avant-garde—have lost their critical edge and end up serving the very social order they were meant to contest: Russian-formalist “defamiliarization,” for example, has become a fashionable advertising gimmick for reprogramming consumer society. In his essay propounding the heuristic concept of “the mode of information,” Mark Poster examines some of the ways in which electronic mediation of communication has transformed postmodern subjectivity, showing how the deep self of interpretation gives way to the disseminated self of information as the privileged locus of intellectual activity which was the library gets reformatted by computer networking, data bases, and CompuServe.

With the demise of virulent colonialism abroad and benign Fordism at home, capitalism turns inward, subsuming absolutely all activity under the laws of the market and the regime of productivity. Noncommodifiable thought—preeminently critical thought, of course—thus has no place in the neoliberal economy, or is at most relegated to the purely private sphere of enjoyment (or despair). Meaning that the end of colonialism, however desirable and necessary in and for itself, signals the instauration of neo-colonialism at home as well as abroad, and thus—neoliberal ambitions notwithstanding—the expansion of antihegemonic struggle into social institutions everywhere. In the period of anticolonial national liberation movements directly after World War II, imperialist wars were clearly fought elsewhere, around the globe; now, generalized neocolonialism brings the war home—as the growing number of homeless, the battle against unions, the attacks on women's and minority rights, chronic unemployment, and the disappearance of the middle class into the gaping rift between

rich and poor all clearly attest. The importance of Barbara Harlow's essay, in this context, is to show that not all space is completely flattened and homogenized under these postmodern conditions. The high-technology security state—and not just in the Third World—cannot do without two crucially similar institutions: prisons and universities; through them pass increasingly large numbers of social subjects to be processed and formatted. The parallel between the two, both construed as humanities institutions, suggests that the immediacy of canny resistance to brutal oppression in the one should inform the more flaccid versions of the same in the other, since the power relations of neocolonialism pervade them both.

The period since World War II has seen the end of empire and of attendant notions of European superiority; and then, more recently, the decline of American super-dominance and of notions of the superiority of the West over the East and of North over South, as well as the end of the Cold War and the beginning of a new era in Eastern Europe. It has also seen the instauration of neocolonialism abroad and—in the form of enforced reaccumulation at the heart of the beast—at home as well (under the name of Reaganomics in the United States and Thatcherism in the United Kingdom). If in such a context, confidence in traditional humanities programs for building national character has been shaken by their failure to impose coherence and assure global hegemony, it has not been shattered, and such programs have not simply disappeared. On the contrary, a number of high-visibility “return to . . .” educational proposals have followed the recently proclaimed “crisis in higher education” in this country, and a similar assault on progressive trends in higher education has taken place in Great Britain. Hence the urgent importance of examining how national cultures (as well as geo-regional traditions such as “western civilization”) have been and are being (re-)constructed, as well as the importance of exploring how they could be adapted to new geo-political realities. In his essay tracing the emergence of cultural studies in England, Stuart Hall undertakes such an examination of the attempt to reinforce British national tradition under Thatcherism, and of the political, intellectual, and pedagogical strategies of attack and resistance essayed by cultural studies from its position on the margins of the English academy. Catharine Stimpson documents the parallel attempt of the Reagan Administration to use federal endowment policy as a directly political weapon to roll back the advances made by women and ethnic and racial minorities in the domain of cultural expression during the '60s and '70s.

Over the past forty years, then, the globalization of economics and politics, the social integration of populations via consumption, the accelerating commodification of knowledge, the dislocation of use-value by sign-value and of basic production by rapid circulation, the paradigm shifts from visions of liberation to narratives of resistance, have radically altered the place of culture in the post-modern world and the role of the humanities within it. This is the context in which Stanford University's curricular revisions deemphasizing the Western tra-

dition in favor of global cultural multiversity generated such furor and nationwide media attention, as a challenge to Euro-American ethnocentrism. In concert with struggles for national liberation abroad, marginalized groups within national boundaries have also vigorously challenged oppression and discrimination. A renewed women's movement, for example, has taken up the struggle, targeting, as the civil rights movement did, the inequities of cultural disenfranchisement along with the more blatant mechanisms of economic exploitation and political exclusion. These developments have had especially visible repercussions for traditional high culture and higher education, since the period of economic expansion and demand for an expanded high-tech work force during the 1950s and '60s opened the academy to women and to minorities in unprecedented numbers. This influx generated sharp challenges to an alien, or downright alienating, canon effectively monopolized by white, usually Anglo-Saxon males.

Variouly experienced as disturbing or exhilarating within the academy itself, in the subsequent period of economic retrenchment since 1974, challenges to canon, norm, rule, and dogma have increasingly appeared to many outside as dangerously subversive or simply unacceptable, and politicians and bureaucrats have tried to close ranks around traditional values and heritage. The battle lines are now drawn—unfortunately, not usually from our own initiative.\*

Before taking sides on issues relating canons to tradition, modernity, and the postmodern condition—precisely in order to be able to do so more effectively—we would do well to inquire into the aims the hallowed canon is supposed to further, as well as its actual effects: Whom does it serve or privilege? Whom does it exclude or disadvantage? What should the function of humanities canons in postmodern culture be, and how are they (to be) formed and/or re-formed? How can research and teaching reinforce, alter, or subvert their function? With respect to which specific groups and in what contexts can a canon be enabling or disabling? What practices and modes of cognition or types of social interaction are enabled or disabled by canons and by the various humanities programs that shape their formation, transmission, and reception? The relevance of questions like these is by no means limited to the academy, for they—or more often, presumed answers to them—shape debates raging everywhere from local school boards and state legislatures to Congress and the White House.

Important scholarly work already under way examines the effects of institutionalization and professionalization on disciplinary research and teaching in

\* In symposium papers not included here, Barbara Hernstein Smith pronounced a scathing critique of the "cultural literacy" movement, which has in some circles set the terms of the debate over the public role of the humanities; and George Marcus sketched the outlines of a critical ethnography of the J. Paul Getty art empire and its attempt to restore and maintain (from Los Angeles, of all places!) the canon of the European, high art tradition in the face of global, economic, and cultural restructuring.

the humanities. Meanwhile, highly visible discussions of the relations among the humanities, higher education, morality, language, and society take place which largely ignore important issues raised by the operationalization of culture in late capitalism, the increasing interdependence of states and cultures around the globe, and the accelerating specialization of research. While recent, related investigations have emphasized difference, otherness, and heterology (reiterating critiques of exploitation and indictments of oppression), this issue of *October*, by also investigating the conditions of the production of knowledge of identity (self, same, essence, foundation, origin), explores the truth and the power, the limitations and the possibilities, of the Man of Humanities.

After the apocalyptic critique and subsequent death of such cherished humanistic notions as man, the author, literature, art, and so on, some disciplines have moved rapidly from their traditional roles of interpretation and criticism to theory and intervention. Paul Bové's essay traces the shift in focus of Foucault's work from the technologies of domination that engulfed and subverted Humanist Man by subjecting him to power, to the potential for and necessity of exercising freedom within the horizon of power. Against the historical background—and failures—of programs of liberal criticism, Cornel West proposes a demystifying and "prophetic cultural criticism" linked specifically to the aspirations and active struggles of Third World and minority artists and intellectuals. These essays (along with those of Hall and Harlow, especially) assert the need not only to explore the socio-political implications of various humanities research paradigms—particularly their constructions of gender, race, religion, sexual preference, ethnicity, class, national culture, subjectivity, agency, language, and history—but also to raise questions that move beyond the ethics of opposition into the interests and tactics of intervention. By what means should the knowledge produced in the humanities affect society at large? If we accept that technology mediates between hard science research and society, and that public policy, public relations, and mass marketing mediate between social science research and society, what media should link humanities research with the public sphere, and how should those links be forged? What modes of expertise will engagement in the postmodern world require of intellectuals, and how will that expertise attain legitimacy and exercise power?

We are concerned, then, with the ways various conceptions of the humanities shape culture and influence social relations, economic developments, political action. Hence our title, "The Humanities as Social Technology," with its allusion to human engineering of some kind: through a wide variety of media and institutions—from federal endowments to private trusts, from university teaching to prison resistance, from scholarly research paradigms to electronic communications and mass culture productions—the discourses and practices comprising the subject matter of the humanities in effect construct social subjects and mold today's citizens. Our aim is threefold: to examine the ways in which various discourses and practices in the humanities reinforce or undermine ideol-

ogies of universal man, the economy of bourgeois experience, ethnocentric First World perspectives, and other essentialisms; to assess the means by which and the ends for which the discourses and practices of the humanities produce knowledge and exercise power in social context; and ultimately, to formulate agenda for more direct and active intervention by the humanities in the public sphere of culture and society.

## The Emergence of Cultural Studies and the Crisis of the Humanities

STUART HALL

If I address the crisis of the humanities in the face of the problem of social technology, I want to do so first of all from the point of view of the United Kingdom, and more particularly from the perspective of the growth and development of cultural studies such as it is in Britain. Specifically, this will be from my own experience at the Centre for Cultural Studies, where, if one believes in origins, the term *cultural studies* first appeared in its modern manifestation.

But this is neither a search for origins nor a suggestion that Birmingham was the only way to do cultural studies. Cultural studies was then, and has been ever since, an adaptation to its terrain; it has been a conjunctural practice. It has always developed from a different matrix of interdisciplinary studies and disciplines. Even in Britain, the three or four places bold enough to say they are offering courses in cultural studies have different disciplinary roots, both in the humanities and the social sciences. There should be no implication in my remarks that Birmingham did it the right way or even that there was any one Birmingham position; indeed, there is no such thing as the Birmingham School. (To hear "the Birmingham School" evoked is, for me, to confront a model of alienation in which something one took part in producing returns to greet one as thing, in all its inevitable facticity.)

My own memories of Birmingham are mainly of rows, debates, arguments, of people walking out of rooms. It was always in a critical relation to the very theoretical paradigms out of which it grew and to the concrete studies and practices it was attempting to transform. So, in that sense, cultural studies is not one thing; it has never been one thing.

In trying to sight the problem of the humanities and social technology from the standpoint of cultural studies a particular sense of irony takes over insofar as cultural studies in Britain emerged precisely from a *crisis* in the humanities. Many of us were formed in the humanities; my own degrees are in literature rather than in sociology. When I was offered a chair in sociology, I said, "Now that sociology does not exist as a discipline, I am happy to profess it." But the truth is that most of us had to leave the humanities in order to do serious work in

it. For, at the birth of cultural studies, the humanities were relentlessly hostile to its appearance, deeply suspicious of it, and anxious to strangle, as it were, the cuckoo that had appeared in its nest. So I want to begin by saying something about the project of cultural studies in the face of that hostility, to speculate on where I think that hostility came from, why I think it was present, and why I think it continues to make itself felt. In so doing, I want to question the self-presentation of the humanities as an ongoing, integral, integrated exercise. For those of us in cultural studies, the humanities have never been or can no longer be that integral formation. It is for this reason that in Britain cultural studies was not conceptualized as an academic discipline at all.

For me, cultural studies really begins with the debate about the nature of social and cultural change in postwar Britain. An attempt to address the manifest break-up of traditional culture, especially traditional class cultures, it set about registering the impact of the new forms of affluence and consumer society on the very hierarchical and pyramidal structure of British society. Trying to come to terms with the fluidity and the undermining impact of the mass media and of an emerging mass society on this old European class society, it registered the cultural impact of the long-delayed entry of the United Kingdom into the modern world.

The attempt to describe and understand how British society was changing was at the center of the political debate in the 1950s, and cultural studies was at this time identified with the first New Left. The first New Left, dated not 1968 but 1956, was founded around such books as *The Uses of Literacy* by Richard Hoggart (himself not a university professor of English at all, but a teacher of adult working-class students in what was called the extramural department of the university); *Culture and Society* by Raymond Williams (who was teaching as an extramural tutor in the south of England); and *The Making of the English Working Class* by Edward P. Thompson (who was an extramural teacher in Leeds). I myself was working as an extramural teacher, once I left the University of Oxford, in and around London. We thus came from a tradition entirely marginal to the centers of English academic life, and our engagement in the questions of cultural change—how to understand them, how to describe them, and how to theorize them, what their impact and consequences were to be, socially—were first reckoned within the dirty outside world. The Center for Cultural Studies was the locus to which we *retreated* when that conversation in the open world could no longer be continued: it was politics by other means. Some of us—me, especially—had always planned never to return to the university, indeed, never to darken its doors again. But, then, one always has to make pragmatic adjustments to where real work, important work, can be done.

The attempt to found the Center for Cultural Studies was originally Richard Hoggart's project. Once he was named a professor of English and brought inside the University at Birmingham, what he said, in effect, was that he would like to continue the work he was doing in *The Uses of Literacy*, in which he

had written about his own working-class background and the way in which working-class culture was being transformed by the new forces of mass culture. The department responded with disbelief and dismay. Having appointed him, they couldn't say he couldn't do it; but they certainly did say they weren't going to give him any money with which to do it. For that he would have to go outside the university. Having raised a very small amount of money, he was able to hire me as a Research Fellow to tend the cultural studies pasture, as it were, while the mainstream work of the department went on. I had to pay my dues by doing my lectures on Henry James to undergraduates, lecturing on the American novel, which was my own area of research, and running the gauntlet of the University.

Now, with the appearance of the Centre for Cultural Studies, this gauntlet was an *enfilade* fire from both sides. On the day of our opening, we received letters from members of the English department saying that they couldn't really welcome us; they knew we were there, but they hoped we'd keep out of their way while they got on with the work they had to do. We received another, rather sharper letter from the sociologists saying, in effect, "We have read *The Uses of Literacy* and we hope you don't think you're doing sociology, because that's not what you're doing at all."

Having entered this very tiny space we asked ourselves questions like: What shall we call ourselves? Shall it be an *institute*? On looking around, we clearly weren't institutionalized in any way, so that name wouldn't do. We thought we'd call ourselves a *center* because that might rally some troops and make us look a bit more impressive on the academic campus. But we were clearly far from any center. Throughout the 1960s, in fact, we were moved from one temporary residence to another, in and out of a series of Quonset huts, provisional structures built during the war and intended to last about six months—until the German bombers came. But they never hit the Quonset huts on the Birmingham campus, and we occupied them all in sequence. In case we had any doubts about our marginal status in the field, this physical displacement and the space in which we operated symbolized it for us daily.

To understand this dubious reception is to realize that in the English context the humanities, insofar as they were ever illuminated by a general statement about program or intentions, were conducted in the light, or in the wake, of the Arnoldian project. What they were handling in literary work and history were the histories and touchstones of the national culture, transmitted to a select number of people.

The archetypal figure who inherited that project and who lived it for us in my undergraduate years was, of course, F. R. Leavis. Leavis is ambiguously placed in relation to this project because the establishment at Cambridge did not receive him to its bosom; he too lived a marginal kind of existence there. Nevertheless, Leavis saw himself committed to the project of tending the health of the language and the national culture, of nurturing the refined sensibilities of that small company of scholars who alone could maintain the vigor of culture and

cultural life; it was in their keeping, the keeping of a particular literary elite. Leavis himself gives an account of what the conversation of those attending to the cultural life of a nation is like in pedagogic terms: "It is an exchange of conversation in which one speaker says to the other, 'This is so, it is not?'"

The question "This is so, is it not?" has to do with at what exact page in *The Portrait of a Lady* Henry James stops being part of the great tradition and begins to be part of something else. That is what the question means. And such a question appears to invite comment as to whether, in fact, the contention is so. Yet, to picture Leavis asking this question, imagine the archetypal Lawrencian, the nonconformist scholar, who, whenever he visited Oxford, always unbuttoned his shirt, baring his chest as it were to the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune from the Oxford establishment, and imagine Leavis turning his beady, parrot-like eyes on him and saying "This is so, is it not?" The idea of his having the temerity to say "No, it's not," is unthinkable. It was a very controlled conversation among a very controlled number of people. Only five or ten people at Downing College were admitted to the circle of those who were sufficiently attentive to what Leavis called "these words on the page; these words in this order on the page," and had the sensibility to care for and nurture it.

This is a caricature, of course; yet it is also a paradox, because nearly all of us who entered the cultural studies project were actually formed in the Leavisite ethos. Raymond Williams, for instance, does a chapter on Leavis in *Culture and Society*. Or, Hoggart, in his *Uses of Literacy*, writes about working-class culture as though he were reading a text in a Leavisite way. Having no other sociological method, he uses that of practical criticism, applied, as it were, to real life. What is more, there was an educational project deeply lodged in the Leavis project because Leavis and the *Scrutiny* group paid careful attention to winning over and transforming English teachers in the schools. In fact, some of the finest work of the *Scrutiny* group was accomplished by mobilizing secondary school teachers in relation to English teaching.

Indeed, Leavis himself, though he had a highly conservative definition of culture and of the manifest destiny of English studies in relation to the national culture, was nevertheless different from many other scholars in the humanities, and this is why he was hated at Oxford: because he actually took questions of culture seriously. He thought it mattered what happened to the culture, whereas they thought the culture would take care of itself. So, in fact, our relation to Leavis included admiration for the seriousness with which he understood that questions of culture and cultural change lay at the very heart of social life and could not be refused, that the issues of language were central to the understanding of the national culture, and that any serious scholar must be engaged in the question of the nature of language and what it is saying. The fact that Leavis adopted a conservative position on these questions and was driven to an elitist educational program—in which only about five scholars in each generation could really have a vocation for this attention to culture—was one side of the

coin; the depth of his engagement with cultural questions was the other. As his neophytes, albeit in a critical sense, we took our distance from his educational program and from his conservative cultural values. But our respect for the other aspect of his project came from the fact that no other place could be found within the humanities that took these questions seriously.

The Leavisite influence can be gauged by the fact that Raymond Williams's *Culture and Society* is really a rereading of the core "English Moralists" course at Cambridge. Required for all literary students, this course was the only point at which they engaged the broader cultural and philosophic traditions out of which works of literature arose. *Culture and Society* is Williams's attempt to read the tradition of the English moralists, including the moral element in English literature, from a different vantage: the vantage, as it were, of cultural studies. In turn, that project made possible *The Long Revolution*, which humanities departments in England received with total incomprehension. They said he wrote with incredible difficulty about simple questions; that he appeared to be a kind of Marxist but he couldn't actually name a single Marxist concept; that his work was written in code; that it had its own profound difficulties of comprehension; and, above all, that it seemed he thought he was theorizing. For a serious professor of English, who had paid his dues in the real world teaching adult students, and who had finally won his chair at Cambridge, to produce a book with the title *The Long Revolution* was a scandal, one which Williams, in his very seriously moderated way, never quite outlived.

When cultural studies began its work in the 1960s and '70s, it had, therefore, to undertake the task of unmasking what it considered to be the unstated presuppositions of the humanist tradition itself. It had to try to bring to light the ideological assumptions underpinning the practice, to expose the educational program (which was the unnamed part of its project), and to try to conduct an ideological critique of the way the humanities and the arts presented themselves as parts of disinterested knowledge. It had, that is, to undertake a work of demystification to bring into the open the regulative nature and role the humanities were playing in relation to the national culture. From within the context of that project, it becomes clear why people wrote us rude letters.

That represents the negative side of how we had to distance ourselves from some of the ongoing traditions in the humanities. The positive work one then went on to do in the Center had still to be invented. No place existed at that stage, whether in the social sciences or in the humanities, where one could find the concept of culture seriously theorized. Contemporary cultural forms did not constitute a serious object of contemplation in the academic world. And the political questions, the relationships, complex as they are, between culture and politics, were not a matter considered proper for study, especially by graduate students. The strategy of the Center for developing both practical work that would enable research to be done in the formations of contemporary culture and the theoretical models that would help to clarify what was going on was designed

as a series of raids on other disciplinary terrains. Fending off what sociologists regarded sociology to be, we raided sociology. Fending off the defenders of the humanities tradition, we raided the humanities. We appropriated bits of anthropology while insisting that we were not in the humanistic anthropological project, and so on. We did the rounds of the disciplines.

What we discovered was that serious interdisciplinary work does not mean that one puts up the interdisciplinary flag and then has a kind of coalition of colleagues from different departments, each of whom brings his or her own specialization to a kind of academic smorgasbord from which students can sample each of these riches in turn. Serious interdisciplinary work involves the intellectual risk of saying to professional sociologists that what they say sociology is, is not what it is. We had to teach what we thought a kind of sociology that would be of service to people studying culture would be, something we could not get from self-designated sociologists. It was never a question of which disciplines would contribute to the development of this field, but of how one could decenter or destabilize a series of interdisciplinary fields. We had to respect and engage with the paradigms and traditions of knowledge and of empirical and concrete work in each of these disciplinary areas in order to construct what we called cultural studies or cultural theory.

Not all the models and approaches we needed were to be found somewhere in the disciplinary mix of a standard English university, so, in part, the curriculum of cultural studies, or its literature, had to be made up from other sources. Increasingly, the books people read in cultural studies were not only salvaged from other people's bookshelves, but were taken from traditions that had had no real presence in English intellectual life. Cultural studies would not have occurred, and certainly would not have survived the 1970s, without the enormous program of translation of European work undertaken in the late '60s and '70s by *New Left Review*. The project of the second New Left was crucial, for, along with a few other publishers of that time, it translated books not yet available to us. For the first time it brought us, in English, the major works of the Frankfurt School, then of Benjamin, and then of Gramsci. Without those "Ur-texts," which no one was reading inside the academy, cultural studies could not have developed its project: it could not have survived; it could not have become a field of work in its own right.

At this particular period—and I'm talking now mainly about the 1970s, which is my own time at the Center for Cultural Studies in Birmingham—the development of cultural studies had two practical ramifications. First, a word about pedagogic practice, about how the work was actually done. It was obviously impossible for us to pretend that we represented anything like a discipline since there were so few of us hired as teachers and lecturers in cultural studies. During my time at Birmingham, the total complement of teachers of cultural studies was three, along with one Research Fellow; all the other names that are now known as the leading lights of cultural studies were graduate students. In

this context, it was impossible for us to maintain for very long the illusion that we were teaching our graduate students from some established body of knowledge, since it was perfectly clear to them that we were making it up as we went along: we were all in the game; we were apprentices to cultural studies trying desperately to keep just one step ahead of them. And so the normal pedagogic relations where the teacher is supposed as the keeper of wisdom and students respond to the question "This is so, is it not?" with that kind of compulsive drive that requires them to say, "Of course, of course," was simply impossible.

Consequently, and for a series of additional reasons I won't go into, we did not think that what had to be done was clear-cut from the first day we opened. Gradually it emerged that we had to have working seminars in which the theory itself was actually developed. We could not do graduate work as I think it is done both in England and the United States, where the first chapter of a dissertation is a review of the existing literature which implies that the candidate knows the books, has a complete bibliography, every item of which he or she has read, etc. What was the bibliography of a cultural studies thesis? Nobody knew.

Secondly, it was not possible to present the work of cultural studies as if it had no political consequences and no form of political engagement, because what we were inviting students to do was to do what we ourselves had done: to engage with some real problem out there in the dirty world, and to use the enormous advantage given to a tiny handful of us in the British educational system who had the opportunity to go into universities and reflect on those problems, to spend that time usefully to try to understand how the world worked. Therefore, if someone came to me asking me to suggest an interesting project that could be done in cultural studies, that person would not be a good candidate for us at the Center, because it was not someone who had already engaged with and become committed to a field of inquiry which seemed, to that person, to matter. (I myself still don't understand how people drive themselves through to the ends of their Ph.D.s on problems they don't think matter. I know how they start, because the lure of a proper career and a job at the end will always motivate one to begin, but how one manages to finish it three or four years later, I do not comprehend.) So, from the start we said: What are you interested in? What really bugs you about questions of culture and society now? What do you really think is a problem you don't understand out there in the terrible interconnection between culture and politics? What is it about the way in which British culture is now living through its kind of postcolonial, posthegemonic crisis that really bites into your experience? And then we will find a way of studying that seriously.

The question of studying seriously is important because, rightly or wrongly, the Center did not say: "All you have to do is to be a good activist and we will give you a degree for it." Rightly or wrongly, and especially in the 1970s, the Center developed, or tried to develop, what I would call a Gramscian project. That is to say, our intention was to address the problems of what Gramsci called "the national popular": how it was constituted; how it was being transformed;

why it mattered in the play and negotiation of hegemonic practices. And our intention was always to do that in the most serious way we could. In that sense we remained what people sometimes called "beetle-browed Leavisites." It was a serious project. We took to heart the Gramscian injunction that the practice of an organic intellectual would have to be to engage with the philosophical end of the enterprise, with knowledge at its most testing. Because it mattered, we had to know more than they knew about our subject at the same time as we took responsibility for translating that knowledge back into practice—the latter operation was what Gramsci calls "common sense." Neither the one nor the other alone would do. And that is because we tried, in our extremely marginal way up there on the eighth floor in the Arts Faculty Building, to think of ourselves as a tiny piece of a hegemonic struggle. Just one tiny bit of it. We didn't have the illusion we were where the game really was. But we knew that the questions we were asking were of central relevance to the questions through which hegemony is either established or contested.

I therefore think it is true to say of the Center's work that it always insisted that intellectuals themselves take responsibility for how the knowledge they produce is then transmitted to society; that they can't wash their hands of the game of translating knowledge into the practice of culture. We never flattered ourselves that because we were studying postwar youth cultures we were nothing but street boys. The remorseless march of the division of knowledge and the gap between theory and practice is not to be overcome by wishing to do so or by declaring that it has just happened. The gap between theory and practice is only overcome in developing a practice in its own right. It is a practice to bring together theory and practice. It had to be done. And the vocation of intellectuals is not simply to turn up at the right demonstrations at the right moment, but also to alienate that advantage which they have had out of the system, to take the whole system of knowledge itself and, in Benjamin's sense, attempt to put it at the service of some other project. What the movement needed from us as part of their struggles of resistance and of transformation, then, was what we had in our heads. The Center's project was thus never what I would call a populist intellectual project. It never suggested it would be easy. It never implied it could be done without engaging with theoretical paradigms.

Of course, the foregoing is not the whole story of the Center's work; nevertheless, I want to leave it at that for now in order to turn to the contemporary context. We are, in Britain, currently going through our crisis of the system of higher education. In the particular area of the humanities and social sciences, and of education more generally, this crisis began with what is now known as "the standards debate," in which two university English professors, Copt and Dyson, broke the silence that had been developing in the universities about what they called the high illiteracy out there in the world. The high illiteracy had to do with the inability of the students they were getting to read and write; and it had to do with that typical figure, a stereotype of the 1960s, called in England "the

polytechnic lecturer." These are people reared in the '60s who couldn't get jobs in the universities at the decade's end but who, with the expansion of the polytechnic system (the bottom end of our system of higher education), were then recruited into polytechnic humanities and social sciences departments, to be regarded by the arts and humanities establishment as not much more than '60s barbarians.

The attack on higher education is not restricted to these limited targets any longer. Under Thatcherism, in the Baker Education Bill, there is a major and frontal assault on the free public-education system itself, on the schooling system as well as on that of higher education. We are in the throes of a debate as to whether, for the first time, the English educational system should have a national curriculum. On the one hand, this question represents the attempt to computerize and business-manage the entire world; but, on the other, it has as its central focus the question of what is being taught in two areas: literature and history. Because, as I think Mr. Baker says—having himself produced a book of national English verse which might be the primary text of the national curriculum in the English department itself—the attention to literary language and its impact on the question of who can or cannot speak English effectively is a central matter for the future and survival of the United Kingdom as a civilized society. As for history, it was in one sense a matter of why it is students do not know which king followed which queen and, in a very different sense, why they now believe (under the influence of the '60s barbarians, of course) that it might be important for English students of history at the school, undergraduate or graduate level, to know something about the rest of the world, any part of the rest of the world. Such a dreadful misunderstanding as this had to be dispelled; one had to be returned to the proper understanding of the national destiny as it is recorded, embalmed, and enshrined in English history.

This project has ambiguous and curious allies, like the Prince of Wales. He is a very ambiguous figure; from day to day, in our attempt to develop a conjuncture of politics, we don't know whether we should be for the prince or against him. But when he says things like, "The people I meet these days can't speak English properly; they can't write English properly; they have no knowledge of the essential structure of an ordinary English sentence," we must have some doubts. Now, from the ancient universities, the cry is going up that the students can hardly be taught because, of course, the schools do not provide them with basic skills. "In all of my time," said Professor Norman Stone, a distinguished professor of history at the University of Oxford, "standards fell" (though he doesn't indicate whether he had any responsibility for the decline). Professor Hugh Ropold, who is also one of our most eminent professors, offers himself as a kind of flying doctor, battling single-handedly with what he calls the educational pandemic—an epidemic raised to universal proportions. Having assured himself of the truth of a colleague's diagnosis at Oxford of creeping, or galloping, illiteracy among university students, he suggests two remedies. He



*Hans Haacke. Taking Stock (Unfinished). 1983-84.  
(Photo: Zindman / Fremont.)*

himself has so far abjured the construction of a list in the manner of E. D. Hirsch, but has offered instead the ten commandments for graduate students. And for undergraduates he has one recommendation: a steady and unswerving reading of Churchill and Orwell. Correct spelling, punctuation, and an elementary grasp of syntax and sentence structure now seem to be luxuries, even among the so-called educated classes, with a dismaying number of university graduates unable to master these essentials of a bygone age.

All this is part of Thatcherism; it has to do with a profound crisis of national identity, of the national culture; it's about the erosion and decline of the United Kingdom as a nation-state, about the threats Britain now feels itself facing, first of all from its own regions, second of all from Europe, thirdly from America, fourthly from Japan, and fifthly—and especially—from its own population. It is under threat from the "others," and the "others" accumulate in the cities; they accumulate around the margins; they accumulate in Wales and in Scotland; they accumulate in the trade unions. It's the attempt of Thatcherism to discover who can really still be English; it's a tiny handful of almost the same size as the number of people who gathered in Downing College under F. R. Leavis—and they may indeed be exactly the same people. Because, as Thatcherism has made the round of British society, it has, one after another, excluded everybody. Thatcherism has a place for women, of course, if they respect the traditional family role; otherwise they don't belong. And, through the exercise of this logic, one after another, all of us have been excluded from belonging to the national community at all. It has to do with a sense of unease and uncertainty that can only be shored up by a national curriculum; with the enormous displacements of a deeply centered and hierarchical traditional culture which has been blown apart by world migration, by fragmentation, by the rise of the margins, by the struggles of the margins to come into representation, by the contestation of the margins for cultural power, by the pluralization of ethnicity itself in English society.

Within the context of these "threats," what we are seeing is not the triumphant march of the human sciences and the glorious destiny of the liberal humanities; rather, the humanities are invoked as the last bastion in a primarily defensive operation. Thatcherism itself is a defensive operation. It asks: Who now can be English? What is it like to be English? Can one be English and Black? English and Muslim? English and feminist? English and socialist? English and Welsh? This is the degree to which Thatcherism sees itself imprisoned in an increasingly tight and tiny island. This has nothing to do with the question of whether Thatcherites hold power; of course they do. The notion that, because they don't really have anywhere to stand, they're going to abdicate their position at the center of the culture and tell the rest of us to take over is a kind of illusion that intellectuals sometimes have. They aren't simply going to get out of it; they are engaged, instead, in an enormous struggle to define what Britain can mean in the twentieth century if it is not to be the center of a huge commercial, economic, and imperialist empire. Where is there for the English people to stand, and what

could be the identities they could claim in the twenty-first century that might enable them to have any kind of self-respect? In the search to find an answer to that question, we have taken off to the South Seas to defend the Falklands; we have to defend something in order to assure ourselves that this dark heroic destiny is still a possible future for us. And these might be regarded as mere fantasy excursions—except, of course, that real people die at either end of the process.

If cultural studies came into existence in order to understand cultural and social change in British society since the war, what I have just been describing is the current, contemporary form in which that cultural crisis continues to work itself out in the United Kingdom. The vocation of cultural studies has been to enable people to understand what is going on, and especially to provide ways of thinking, strategies for survival, and resources for resistance to all those who are now—in economic, political, and cultural terms—excluded from anything that could be called access to the national culture of the national community: in this sense, cultural studies still has as profound a historical vocation as it ever had in the 1960s and '70s. But on the other hand, in relation to the mass education of students, both in higher education and elsewhere, cultural studies is, as an institutional form, very minor. But the humanities and the arts are not. And indeed the contestation that cultural studies was partly responsible for putting on the agenda has been taken into the humanities themselves. The notion that the humanities disciplines are an integral field that has the option to decide whether or not to become social technologies is, in my view, hopelessly utopian. The cultural crisis now cuts into and through the humanities from beginning to end: the social technologies of the other side have already invaded the humanities, summoning them to the barricades to defend an old project. And the humanities have thus to decide on which side of this particular form of cultural politics they are going to engage in the future.

That crisis, it seems to me, runs through most arts and humanities departments in British universities and, looking on from a distance, it is my observation that they run through cultural studies, communications studies, and the humanities in the United States as well. The people who understand what the problem is for the humanities are not to be numbered in terms of their institutions, their programs, or what their departments call themselves. In the United States, for instance, "cultural studies" has become an umbrella for just about anything, and to ask whether someone is doing cultural studies or not is unlikely to evoke the answer you want. Similarly, those who are doing formal deconstruction of the most elegant, mannered kind are perfectly in touch with the advanced frontiers of theoretical work, yet their contribution to the resolution of the cultural crisis I have just named is nonexistent. The question is not whether one is a deconstructionist, but whether these new theoretical techniques and the new positions opened up by feminism and by Black struggles, as well as the new theoretical positions opened up by the postmodernist and the poststructuralist debates, can

be won over and drawn into an understanding of the larger historical/political project that now confronts the humanities. It is perfectly possible to write elegant treatises on the "other" without ever having encountered what "otherness" is really like for some people actually to live. It is perfectly possible to invoke the postmodernist paradigm and not understand how easily postmodernism can become a kind of lament for one's own departure from the center of the world.

These crises cut through existing new practices; they intersect the humanities; they bisect cultural studies; they interrupt people's careers; they destroy people's reading lists; they cut through the canon; they fire cannons at one another rather than establishing them. They are a series of interruptions in the peaceful life of the humanities. There may be some idea that, now, late in the day, the humanities could still ask questions like: Shall we respond vigorously to the assault on our economic and funding base? Shall we venture even a toe into these troublesome waters? Shall we take thought for the morrow? But the notion that such questions are open for us to ask and that we have the time to reflect extensively on a reply to them—that, it seems to me, is the last of the humanist illusions.



*President Reagan addressing the heads of independent research libraries during a meeting to announce a special urban initiative launched by the NEH. William Bennett in background. (Photo: Billie B. Shaddix.)*

CATHARINE R. STIMPSON

A brief comment on a set of government documents—some federal papers that are remote descendants of the *Federalist Papers*: the annual reports of the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) from Fiscal Year 1980 through Fiscal Year (FY) 1987<sup>1</sup>—this essay will focus on two discursive practices:

1) *The exchanges between a political ideology and overt cultural policies.* Clearly, the conservatism of the 1980s distinctly influenced national cultural policy. The conservatives whom Reagan brought to federal power wanted to grasp and wield power, and they were neither shy nor reticent about acting on these desires. Yet, the cultural rise of the right shows more of the smoke than of the fire of the apocalypse. Smoke can choke and kill, but its drift seems less drastic than conservatives desired, less drastic than their opponents feared.<sup>2</sup>

2) *The ways in which my federal papers evade and dilute an explicit recognition of these exchanges.* These papers paper over the struggle any political shift entails.

1. A historian of bureaucracy could trace the modern splitting of the concept of "the year" into "calendar," "academic," "fiscal," etc. I have previously written about NEH in "The Humanities and Everyday Life," *Where The Meanings Are: Feminism and Cultural Spaces*, New York and London, Methuen, 1988, pp. 165–178; and "Politics and Academic Research," in Betty Jean Craige, ed., *Literature, Language, and Politics*, Athens, Georgia, University of Georgia Press, 1988, pp. 84–98.

2. Let me stress that my essay stops with an NEH report for 1987, two years before the events in Congress in Summer, 1989, summarized as "The Helms Amendment," even though the Amendment itself was not adopted. Congress put controls, at least until 1990, on the activities of both the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) and the NEH. If the general object of these controls is "obscenity," a specific target is the homosexual body. The absence of the homosexual body from the NEH reports, its *unfundability*, shows what an easy target it is for social and cultural conservatives. The language of the Helms Amendment is both vague and brief. Its purpose is: "To prohibit the use of appropriated funds for the dissemination, promotion, or production of obscene or indecent materials or materials denigrating a particular religion." It then specifies: "None of the funds authorized to be appropriated pursuant to this Act may be used to promote, disseminate, or produce —(1) obscene or indecent materials, including but not limited to depictions of sadomasochism, homo-eroticism, the exploitation of children, or individuals engaged in sex acts; or (2) material which denigrates the objects or beliefs of a particular religion or non-religion; or (3) material which denigrates, debases, or reviles a person, group, or class of citizens on the basis of race, creed, sex, handicap, age, or national origin."

Simultaneously, they wall out glimpses into the details of funding decisions, into questions of staff influence or the selection of the peer review panelists who, once chosen, are scrupulously named.

Although its focus is tight, this essay emerges from a larger, looser concern with the institutions that support the humanities and the relationships among these institutions. In addition to the federal government, they include: schools, colleges, and universities; private foundations; some state agencies; museums and libraries; the media, especially public television; and a literate public. The shopper who buys a copy of Allan Bloom, E. D. Hirsch, Jr., James McPherson, or Linda Nochlin is underwriting humanistic inquiry. I am also curious about official papers as papers, about the genres that agencies and bureaucracies, be they public or private, have developed. The rhetorical features of a budget, memorandum, report, or telephone log have both their interest and their interests.

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In 1980, when Ronald Reagan was elected president, Joseph Duffey, a Democratic appointee, was chairman of NEH. On April 15, 1981, he transmitted the *15th Annual Report* for FY 1980. Although such documents are ostensibly addressed to the President, who is the federal government's chief executive officer, they are a major vehicle of accountability to the Congress, which oversees and funds the NEH, and to the public-at-large, which elects the Congress. As such, they are carefully planned narratives of self-presentation and self-justification. They tell of principles and policies faithfully executed, moral and bureaucratic obligations met, monies received and spent. In appearance, the *15th Report* is deliberately plain and sober, its typeface undistinguished. Six inches by nine inches, the size of an old-fashioned college catalogue, the report aligns itself with academic tradition. No flash here. Five hundred fifty-one pages long, it is thick, as if heft itself were a mark of responsibility. The typeface is also small. No flab here either.

If the *15th Report* is stylistically coherent, its ideological and cultural legacy to the Reagan Administration is contradictory. On the one hand, the text endorses a theory and practice of the humanities that the Reagan Administration was to disdain and spurn. Cheerfully, without any Carteresque malaise, Duffey denies that American culture is in decline and that humanists lack purpose and value. On the contrary, he finds energy, productivity, briskness, freshness, American creativity on the march. Supportively, the Jefferson Lecturer is Barbara Tuchman, her subject the upbeat "Mankind's Better Moments." In a black-and-white photo, she stands erect at a lectern, staring right, confidently, even defiantly. Surveying the fifteen years of NEH history since its founding in 1965, Duffey concludes:

America is complex . . . Its hierachies [sic] of wealth and taste are always subject to attack by newly emergent expressions of quality. . . . Let us beware . . . of oversimplification and of an ahistorical sense of ourselves. Nothing is so valuable an antidote to those errors as witnessing the complexity and diversity of the cultural creativity which, originating in the thousands of applications addressed to the Endowment, flows through its review processes. (p. 5)

Logically, then, Duffey praises new approaches to the humanities that keep American creativity on the march: the new social history, personal narratives, living museums, and theory. He singles out *Critical Inquiry* for applause. In a pragmatic and populist gesture, he also funds marginal groups doing self-studies that might empower them. For example, \$28,840 dollars go to Selma University to support a youth project “. . . to assess the emergence and course of the civil rights movement in Selma, Alabama, in 1965.” (p. 17) Such a grant is compatible with the *Report's* effort to engage the reader. Some narrative portions isolate unifying themes in NEH grants (teaching, documentation, an analysis of “continuity and change”). However, the text declares itself an unconventional story, its narrative materials “data, information, artifacts.” The “challenge” to the reader is “interpretation.” (p. 7) The reader is to become a humanist and join in the process of putting it all together.

On the other hand, the *Report* has two elements that later issues from ideologically different chairs will pick up and carry forward. First, it is patriotic, proudly conscious of America as a world leader. The particular obligation of NEH is to show that America is ahead in “. . . the realm of ideas and the spirit.” Despite the historical weight of this task, the NEH budget is small, less than 7 percent of the total that all sources have given to the arts and humanities. At the beginning of the Reagan/Bush decade an abyss opens up between the fulsome advocacy of a fetishized public ideal (other than defense or “national security”) and its funding. To throw a drawbridge over the abyss, the *Report* makes the small beautiful. This 7 percent will stimulate private funding. Moreover, it will show the reluctance of the federal government to dominate and control the humanities. The office of the NEH chair will not be a throne for kings. At best a bully pulpit, it will not pay for a bully in the pulpit. In the 1980s, when bullies strode towards the pulpit, this modesty was a weapon of resistance to them.

Second, the *Report* construes the humanities, even their jam sessions, as a preserving force. More particularly, the humanities bottle and conserve values. Linking America, a history of its origins, and humanistic zeal, the *Report* appeals to a Founding Father to legitimize its activities. Without exploring its use of a dynastic metaphor for cultural transmission or its teleological vision of history, the *Report* cites a famous statement of John Adams. He must study politics and

war so that his sons can study mathematics, philosophy, geography, natural history, and naval architecture; so that his grandchildren can study painting, music, and architecture.

The *Report's* tension between the support of innovation and of tradition appears in its illustrations. Some show diversity of class, race, and gender. A white woman in glasses stares at a book; a black woman, with earphones, at a pad, pencil in hand; a Native American man, holding a book, at some bookshelves. However, most of the photographs are static head shots. The first and last reinforce stereotypical images of the humanities. The cover photo is of a gray-haired gentleman in glasses and tweed jacket, absorbed in the contemplation of a manuscript page. The last photo is of three staff members processing and sorting the 1700 or so applications for summer stipends. Two of the clerks are black, one white, all female.

On December 21, 1981, Reagan nominated William J. Bennett as chairman of NEH. His confirmation in early 1982 began his tenacious adhesion to high public office. On April 15, 1982, Bennett transmitted the *16th Annual Report*, for FY 1981, to his President. Given the fact that Duffey stayed in office for much of 1981, the format and contents of the report must be largely his. Two



Photos on this and following page are from the NEH's 15th Annual Report for FY 1980. (Photos: Morton Broffman.)

prefatory photos signify this residual influence. The first is of the Jefferson Lecturer, Gerald Holton, a physicist and historian of science. He stands at a lectern before a much larger slide projection displaying a draft manuscript copy of the Declaration of Independence. It is written, rewritten, scratched out and over in ink, not engraved in stone. The second picture frames some students "engaged in a field study of their architectural heritage in Worcester, Massachusetts." Standing outside, they are holding papers, a camera. They look involved, engaged, earnest, together as a group. The caption says that they are "using the local community as a teaching tool."

The introductory prose of this *16th Report* is blunt, straightforward, an explanation of NEH's concept of the humanities and an outline of its administrative processes. It stresses how little money NEH has, but how it can fill special needs nonetheless. It praises the peer review system. Although the language of everyday logistics seems to detach the chairman from the *Report*, at one point, however, the prose anticipates Bennett's willful and belligerent style. A paragraph on "The Chairman" reminds us that he can act "contrary" to the recommendations of his advisory National Council on the Humanities and can make sixty-six grants, up to \$17,500 each, on his own.



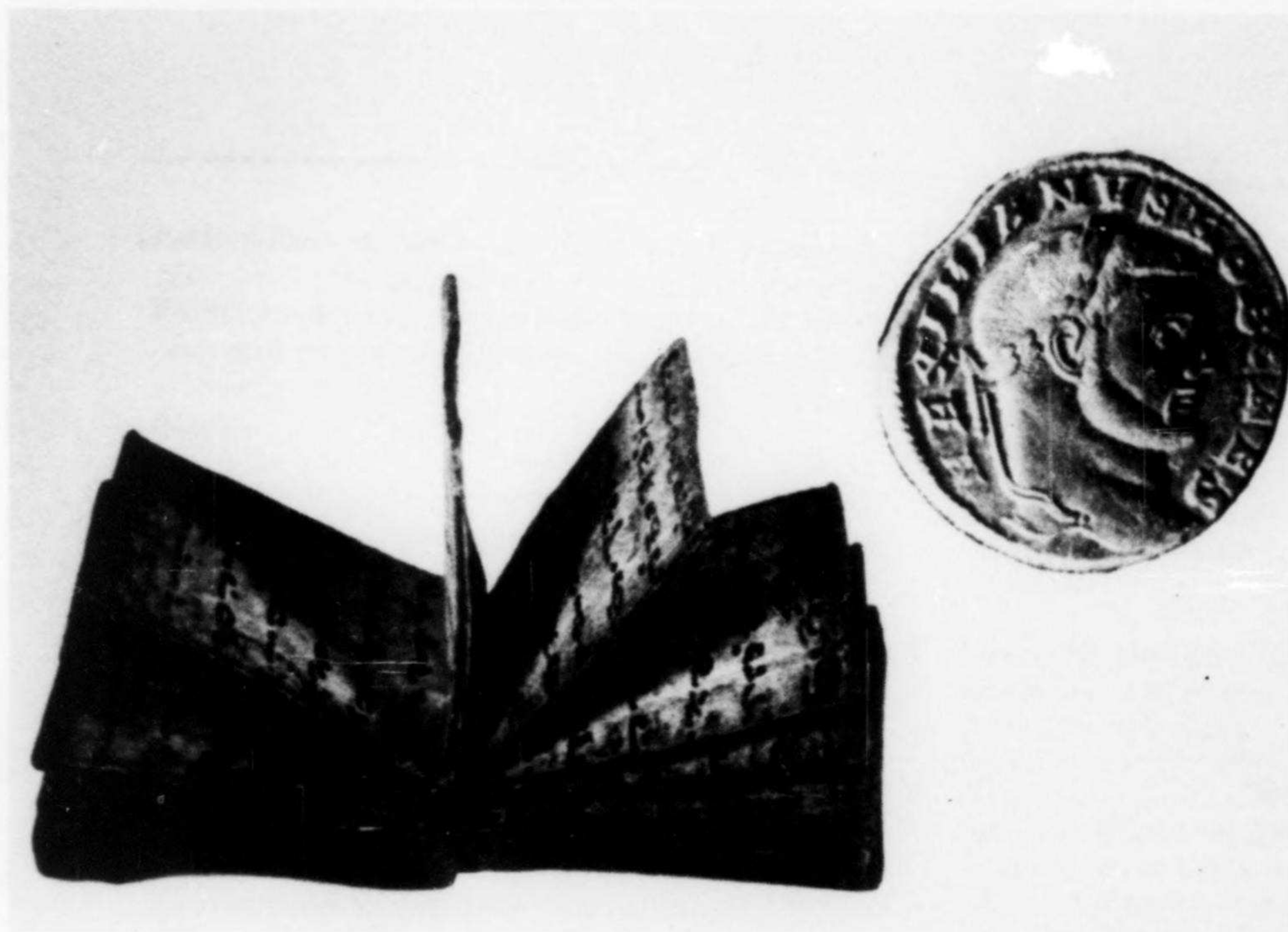


*Both photos from the NEH's 17th Annual Report for FY 1982.*

The *17th Annual Report*, for FY 1982, consolidates Bennett's governance. Some of the new projects might have occurred under Duffey: more travel money to collections; more for secondary school teachers; support for the celebration of the Bicentennial of the Constitution, one of the 1980s celebrations meant to cement the allegiance of the United States humanities. The 1983 *Report* will also announce grants that Duffey's NEH might have made, for example, to historically black colleges and universities. The final 1983 picture will be a full-page reproduction of a woman representing a woman, Gwen John's lovely portrait *Seated Woman* from the collection of a new museum to which NEH gave a grant, the National Museum of Women in the Arts.

However, not surprisingly, major changes have parachuted in. They appear in the reports as if they had always been there or, if not, as if they should have been. To present them, NEH has overhauled the report's format. James Madison has replaced John Adams as the Founding Father of choice. Portraits of Madison will become icons of the 1980 reports, his comments on connections between learned institutions and a free people, scriptural. These bows and bouquets to Madison are in a booklet now eight and one-half inches by eleven inches, the size of the yearly message from a corporation or affluent foundation. It has many more photos, is much more tastefully done. Some shots of human beings engaged in the humanities remain. Page 148 is given over to a perky white man in glasses

(Photo: Courtesy Milwaukee Public Library.)



working in a bioethics library, apparently with its information-retrieval system. A far greater proportion represent humanistic artifacts from projects NEH has funded. The photos change the visual emphasis of the report from doing — from activity — to being — to objects we must regard and respect. Opposite the title page is a reproduction of El Greco's *St. Martin and the Beggar*, in which St. Martin might well be the NEH and the beggar a needy humanist. In the next years, placing faith and colonization in their historic loop, reproductions of white men's renderings of Native American men, be they paintings or sculptures, will be a persistent visual theme.

The new format also assigns the yearly Jefferson Lecture, which NEH sponsors, its own section. In 1982, the lecturer, Emily Vermeule, an archaeologist, does not have a photograph. In subsequent years, the lecturers will have handsome portraits. They will also all be white males, mostly at the end of distinguished careers.<sup>3</sup> Excerpts from their speeches, often praising democratic

3. In 1983, Jaroslav Pelikan; in 1984, Sidney Hook; in 1985, Cleanth Brooks; in 1986, Leszek Kolakowski; in 1987, Forrest McDonald. Another change in format concerns the announcement of grants. In 1980 and 1981, they are organized by the state in which the awardee (person or institution) lives, which permits quick Congressional scrutiny. Now they are organized according to the program that awarded them. In effect, geography has given way to bureaucratic categories. Politics, however, creeps back in. The 1984 *Report* has an "Index of Grants," listed by state.

traditions that seem to be shimmering in the twilight's last gleaming, are a metonymy for a second change in post-Duffey reports. The humanities are no longer lively, but in dismaying decline and decay. An emergency medical crew of the word, NEH must revive, even resurrect them. The infinitives of revival are "to reinvigorate" and, even more compulsively, "to restore." Later reports will praise and announce grants to study two publications by NEH chairmen that lament the present and call for a better future: Bennett's bluntly entitled *To Reclaim a Legacy* (1984) and Lynne V. Cheney's *American Memory* (1987) mourn the loss of the study of history and literature. In 1986, NEH, symbolically but legitimately, creates an Office of Preservation to expand material efforts to save texts.<sup>4</sup>

Meeting the need for a revival of the humanities, NEH promises to seek out a particular kind of project, one with "quality." Although the 1983 *Report* promises to retain fair selection procedures, which peer review insures, it monotonously underscores an unexamined quest for "excellence," "the best," the "finest," the "great work," the "masterwork." Curricula, no longer sulking on the borders of the great traditions, will have a "core." NEH alters its categories to encourage projects that demonstrate this decorum. The *Report*, for example, happily discusses how well the Division of Education Program has encouraged educational reform. It has installed a "Central Disciplines in Undergraduate Education" program with categories that include:

- a. Improving Introductory Courses
- b. Promoting Excellence in a Field
- c. Fostering Coherence Throughout an Institution

Wary of seeming too elitist, the reports develop a strain of populism, that John Agresto, as deputy chairman, outlines most transparently in the 1986 *Report*. This NEH brings "the best" straight to the people. Giving people the best—the *great* books, *major* themes, *significant* historical events—liberates minds and imaginations. Aesthetic and intellectual hierarchies breed not more hierarchies but freedom. Agresto implies that his liberal predecessors were either rigid specialists or flaccid panderers who gave the people "the worst," two more signs of the decay that the Reagan Revolutionaries have had to drill out. These predecessors lurk between Agresto's lines:

We have resisted the belief that scholarship is for scholars and that the public will accept the humanities only in adulterated forms. We have held fast to the notion that exposure to the best the humanities have to

4. The 1986 *Report*, the 21st, lists thirty-two grants, totaling \$4,059,207 in outright and matching funds, for preservation. No matter what their ideological persuasion, humanists can agree on the need to preserve texts that are physically crumbling away. The disagreement is over *which* texts and for what purposes.

offer can be an educational experience that is neither narrow and boring nor simply entertaining. (p. 7)

One of the most irritating changes in the 1980s' reports is the number of self-righteous declarations that NEH grants will now be non-ideological, non-partisan, apolitical, without any social agenda or advocacy. In that false but common binary opposition between ideology and excellence, NEH will choose excellence, reason, and reflection. For FY 1983, in the *18th Annual Report*, then-Assistant Chairman Agresto's "Letter of Introduction" declares: "The administration's first objective through the Endowment was to ensure that federally funded scholarship and culture are free from political, partisan, or ideological influences." (p. 8) Yet, the reports are blatantly if blandly political. In the 1982 number, between the reproductions of *St. Martin and the Beggar* and a portrait of James Madison, is a photo that takes up nearly the entire page, bled on three sides. In the background is a row of flags. Standing before them, head cocked, looking respectful, is William J. Bennett. Dominating the foreground, holding a sheet of paper, wearing a plaid suit, looking to the left, is Ronald Reagan. The place is the White House, the occasion, on December 8, 1982, is the announcement of special awards to selected research libraries. Reagan's microphones cut across Bennett's chest, as if they were military sashes.

Opposite Reagan's photo is an excerpt from his remarks. Astonishingly, he cites Alfred North Whitehead's 1933 list of the qualities of a civilized society: truth, beauty, adventure, art, and peace. The humanities, the President vows, provide their "intellectual underpinnings." But the old privatizer has a warning: Don't expect the federal government to finance the humanities. It will support only ". . . the basic disciplines and essential activities." This will, however, stimulate giving from that old sugar daddy, the private sector. In effect, federal underpinnings are to be pin monies.

These presidential homilies accompanied the havoc Bennett wrecked on the NEH budgets. Tracking NEH monies can be tricky. Grants are either "outright" or "challenge," the latter requiring the recipient to raise other monies. Administrative categories and programs change, appear, and disappear. Nevertheless, between 1981 and 1982, the NEH budget dropped from \$144,366,330.48 to \$115,818,324.49; the total number of grants from 2,632 to 2,143. Big cuts came in public or general programming, special programs, education, and fellowships and seminars. State councils for the humanities survived because law mandated that they receive, at a minimum, a certain percentage of the NEH budget. By 1987, the total budget has increased by a little over \$8,588,000, but NEH is no starfish whose amputated limbs grow back.

In 1984, Bennett left NEH to become Secretary of Education. Agresto was to serve as Acting Chairman until the Senate approved the appointment of Lynne V. Cheney in 1986. Agresto's introductions get even more romantic about the reversal of the ostensible decline of the decades before Reagan. He

offers an alternative vision of the humanities that at once essentializes and nationalizes them. In an apostrophe to Mr. President, he vows:

The humanities are vitally important to the educational and cultural life of our nation, constituting as they do the soul of civilization, which has been formed over the course of the centuries. Preserving and transmitting this tradition serves to nurture and sustain our national character, helping to make the United States worthy of its leadership in the world. (*20th Annual Report* for FY 1985, p. 3)

Despite such militancies, the annual reports must strive for the serene, quiet, dignified tone that they assert the humanities sustain. These documents pitch the humanities in general and NEH in particular above the fray. So doing, they replicate that idealized, decontextualized picture of the humanities as a precious, separate domain that miraculously reaches into our life only to inspire and enhance us. The reports also suggest that the picture of the humanities they draw is the only plausible one for reasonable Americans. The description of awards, at best a sentence or two about their topics, reinforces this unseasonable tranquillity. One example: in 1984, Bennett gave a much-reported \$30,000, as a Chairman's Emergency Grant, to the right-wing organization Accuracy in Media (AIM). The *19th Annual Report* for FY 1984 lists this award alphabetically under "Humanities Projects in Media." Though it is identified as a Chairman's Grant, the entry reads as if the producer, Reed J. Irvine, had neither subject position nor scores to settle. The mild and skim-milky language reads: "To support the production of a two-hour television program in response to the previously aired series, 'Vietnam: A Television History.' The program will focus more generally on the role of the media in creating perceptions that influence the course of history." (p. 79)

So constructed, so construed, these NEH texts are even less candid than a corporate report, which must, somewhere, in some footnote, murmur some truth about the company's financial condition and prospects. Yet, during the Bennett/Agresto years, NEH provoked political controversy after controversy about the theory and practice of the humanities. Visible and publicized, the fights were with Congress, its funder; and with academics and intellectuals, its fundees and potential peer reviewers; and with National Committee members, its adjunct administrators. Among the texts that record the struggles are the *Congressional Record*, in which legislative manners can hone rather than deny disagreements; publications of professional organizations; the press; and the occasional scholarly work about NEH. The NEH reports ignore, sanitize, and evade the dirt and grit. Their apparent detachment from contests conveys the impression that any contest that might have gotten fired up is either unworthy of notice or over.

To note but four contests that became disappearing acts:

1. *Budgetary*. Bennett consistently sought to reduce the budget for the State Humanities Councils. In 1985, for example, NEH asked for 9.6 percent less than

it had received in 1984 and for a 21.45 percent cut in the Division of State Programs. This Division, a remarkable innovation, seeks to bring professional humanists and the public, academic humanities and public issues, together—a meeting that state-run organizations orchestrate. Congress insisted on giving NEH more than it wanted. Framing this debate was another, which the creation of NEH and NEA in 1965 ought to have put to rest but which continues with increasing virulence: whether the federal government ought to be funding the arts and humanities at all. Some radical conservatives oppose the mean, daft, crafty Helms Amendment, not because they dislike Helms, but because they would rather get rid of NEH than control it. Their rhetoric invokes “the taxpayers” as if they were deities to be placated, not through gifts and sacrifices, but through the resolute refusal to take their manna to feed philosophers and painters.

2. *Contemporary approaches to the humanities.* NEH reports insinuate that such new movements as women’s studies, which they encode as “advocacy” or “having an agenda,” traduce the humanities. Many in the field fought back, often implying or stating that NEH had tainted the peer review system in order to get projects from new fields rejected, usually with the summary judgment of “trendy.” On March 23, 1982, for example, Joan Hoff-Wilson, the Executive Secretary of the Organization of American Historians, wrote Bennett in a publicly distributed letter:

As a historian, I am especially concerned that some of the more recent and productive fields of specialization such as family history, women’s history, public history and quantitative methodology so often utilized by the “new social” historians in general will not be given equal consideration along with more traditional historical projects. (p. 1)

3. *Governance.* Filling the office of the chairman inspired two outcries. One, ironically among conservatives, was over Bennett’s appointment in 1981; the second, in 1985, between the Reagan Administration and a coalition of opponents, concerned the nomination of Edward J. Curran, an ex-headmaster then deputy director of the Peace Corps. A Senate committee ultimately voted eight to seven against the nomination. In addition, Reagan appointees to the National Council were often roundly accused of being unqualified, their appointment a cheap political reward for a Reagan loyalist. In 1984, for example, Helen Marie Taylor of Virginia was a candidate. In part, her resumé shows the starts and stops of a woman of her class and generation.<sup>5</sup> A graduate of Waco High School in 1940, she trained as an actress. Her career, however, seems to be less that of a professional than of a philanthropist and civic activist, who was even arrested and jailed in Richmond for “attempting to save the historic Benjamin Franklin Press

5. I am using a resumé attached to a “Memorandum” of the Senate Committee on Labor and Human Resources, June 28, 1984.

Building." Despite this flirtation with civil disobedience, her political credentials are sturdily party-line: a Republican activist, a Reagan/Bush supporter, the winner of a special recognition award from the American Security Council Foundation in 1978, and two Eagle Forum awards in 1973 and 1980 for "dedicated leadership for God, Home and America."

4. *Affirmative Action*. Bennett consistently refused to file an affirmative action plan for the Endowment. So did the Department of Justice, the Department of Education, and the Federal Trade Commission. Congressperson Cardiss Collins, a Democrat from Illinois, a black woman, held congressional hearings on his disregard of the law.

On April 15, 1988, Lynne V. Cheney, signing herself "Chairman," sent the *22nd Annual Report* for FY 1987 to the President. Facing her letter is a reproduction of *Mark the Evangelist Writing* from a Book of Hours displayed in an exhibit NEH supported. Though Mark is a noun, a saint's name, it can also be an imperative verb. We are to mark, to watch, evangelists writing. The *Report* is obviously a text from its decade. The "youth grants," already declining, are gone. Cheney invokes Madison's belief in the inseparability of "liberty and learning." However, her signature is clear. She stresses her commitment to humanities education in the primary and secondary schools, inseparable from her support of the public humanities. Far less confrontational than Bennett, she is far more the fair adjudicator, a judge, but admittedly with her own principles.

Agresto, now Deputy Chairman, has more of the old-time spirit and its by-now stock themes. A casual observer, he begins in his "Letter of Introduction," might be pessimistic about the humanities. The number of undergraduate majors remains depressed. Moreover, some stubborn "professional organizations . . . do not hesitate to defend narrowness and heightened specialization in the academic realm." He, however, is optimistic. For people, defying these interest groups, are buying books about "restoration." With the self-effacement power can publicly display, he offers criteria to measure the success of the Endowment that are at once naive in their rudimentary humanism, covertly aristocratic in their trickle-down theory of the distribution of humanistic virtues, and obedient to one version of the needs of "the taxpayers." Measuring performance by means of the following questions, the criteria are: how well has NEH succeeded in "helping to restore and transmit the tradition of humanities learning and teaching"? Has it presented the humanities to the general public in ways that have been "truly . . . enlightening and educational?" Has an elite tradition been conveyed to a democratic audience? Have the taxpayers had their money spent on significant projects and major issues? Have the "virtues and uses" of the humanities been made available to "new institutions, new scholars, new teachers, new students?" (pp. 6-7)

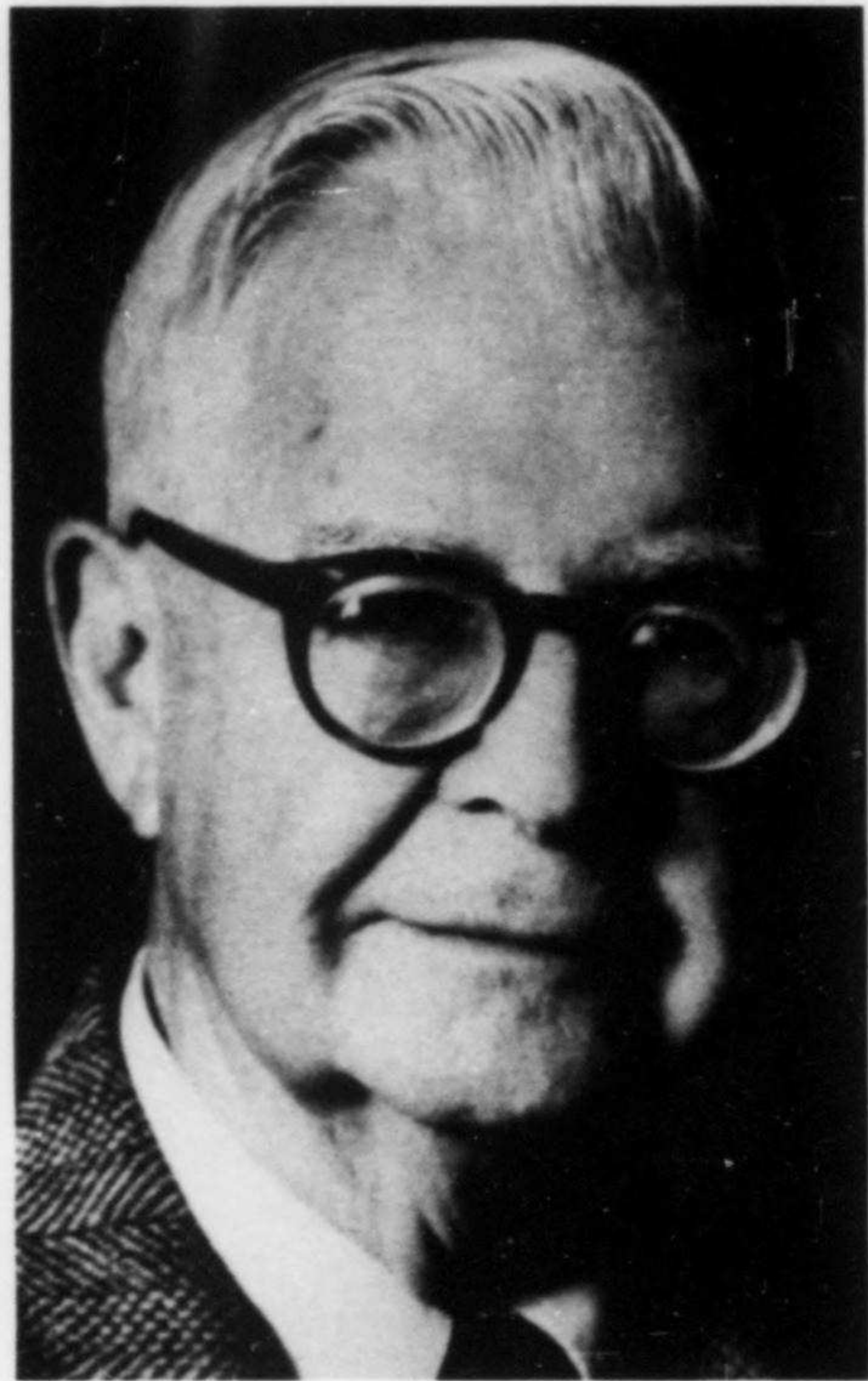


*Cover for the NEH's 22nd Annual Report for FY 1987.*

Despite the liturgical calls for submission to “cores” and “excellences,” cultural and social Fundamentalism has not taken command. Mark the Evangelist is still a gallery exhibit, not required reading in every school in America. Agresto’s 1987 text lacks the certainties of the Helms Amendment, which poisonously fused right-wing and certain radical feminist complaints. The 1987 *Report* has its gestures towards moderation. The cover is a bright red apple with its top cut and hinged at the back. Rising from the whole of the apple’s interior, not just from a core, are figures who blur canons of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and an emerging canon of the 1970s and 1980s: Hawthorne, Frost, Cather, Twain, King, Jr., Dickinson, and John Greenleaf Whittier. One half-page photo is of coal miners, a reference to a book an NEH Fellow wrote about black coal miners in America. A one-eighth page photo is of Anne Spencer, an African American poet, a reference to a grant to research a book on black American women poets from 1915 to 1930. Finally, Helen Taylor is no longer on the National Council, an erasure that first appears in the 1986 *Report*.



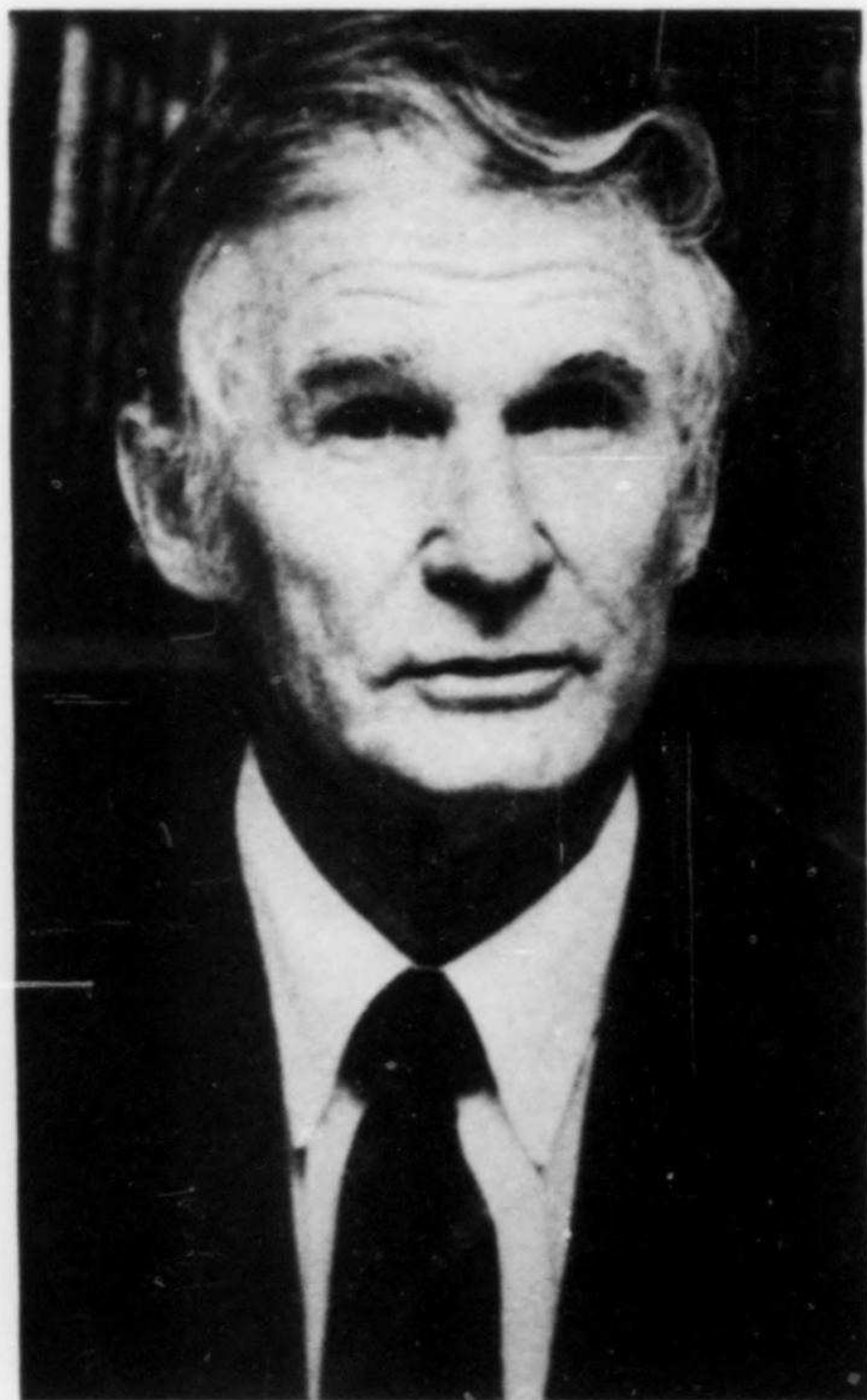
Sydney Hook. 1984 *Jefferson Lecturer*. (Photo: Morton Broffman.)



Cleanth Brooks. 1985 *Jefferson Lecturer*.



Leszek Kolakowski. 1986 *Jefferson Lecturer*. (Photo: Layle Silbert.)



Forrest McDonald. 1987 *Jefferson Lecturer*. (Photo: James Gleason.)

Let me tentatively suggest some reasons why the "Reagan Revolution," so effective in achieving popularity and in its defense and fiscal policies, did not drag NEH further to the right. The product of wise, even visionary, legislation in 1965, NEH had done a good job between 1965 and 1980 under four different presidential administrations (Johnson, Nixon, Ford, Carter). To many, to chart a steady-as-you-go course was prudent and plausible. They included such powerful congressmen as Representative Sidney Yates of Illinois and Senator Claiborne Pell of Rhode Island. These legislators could check and balance NEH's surge towards power, especially under Bennett's macho, tough-guy-of-"standards" regime. The fact that NEH does not provide all the financial support for the humanities put further limits on its influence. To be sure, NEH is a primary source of research monies and individual fellowships. It is not, however, the major support for publications or for academic curricula. NEH's poormouthing was, in part, a symptom of its lack of overwhelming dominance.

Finally, the style of the NEH reports is more than a set of rhetorical gestures that projects a picture of the humanities as smoothly transcendent, as airily universal and unifying, in order to repress conflict, dissent, and the struggle to define what the humanities are, who humanists might be. That style is also a synecdoche for the humanities in the United States, despite our ferocious quarrels. Humanists do speak a common language, which incorporates terms of disagreement. The tribe, for example, quickly lines up in formation on a battle site labeled "transcendent values," "canon," "Shakespeare," or "narrative." In brief, in simple, we share a professionalized discourse in which the humanities are a particular set of concepts, disciplines, and controversies. A confession: I could probably talk more easily with William Bennett than with an old woman who was poor, barely literate if at all, and a devout, self-humiliating believer in one monotheistic god or another. The quarrels among humanists in the 1980s, hard and volatile and ugly though they were, resembled those among political parties in a system in which all parties have some shared commitment to the rules of the game.

In 1990, however, Congress must reauthorize NEH. A number of conservative congressmen will fight to change the rules of the game, to do away with NEH and its parallel endowment, the National Endowment for the Arts, or to constrict what the endowments might do and fund. I dread the possibility of their success, of federal papers with a newly barren script and old fears of free tongues.



*Cartoon reads:— One eye on my homeland.  
— And the other eye on my son  
in Israeli prisons.*

*By the Palestinian cartoonist, Naji al-Ali. Assassinated  
in London. August 1987.*

## Political Detention: Countering the University

BARBARA HARLOW

*The most widespread error of method seems to me that of having looked for this criterion of distinction in the intrinsic nature of intellectual activities, rather than in the ensemble of the system of relations in which these activities (and therefore the intellectual groups who personify them) have their place within the general complex of social relations.*

— Antonio Gramsci,  
“The Formation of the Intellectuals”

*Aprender a luchar desde esta celda. Esta sera mi trinchera. (I will learn to struggle from this cell. This will be my trench.)*

— Nidia Diaz, *Nunca Estuve Sola*

*We must prevent this brain from functioning for 20 years.*

— Prosecutor at Antonio Gramsci's trial

Walid al-Fahum is a Palestinian lawyer in Israel and the Occupied Territories, an advocate for Palestinian political detainees, who began his legal work in the offices of the Israeli woman lawyer and activist Felicia Langer. *These Chains that Must be Broken*,<sup>1</sup> a collection of his writings on prison conditions, under Israeli occupation, includes the account of an exchange with one of his clients. During a discussion, from their respective positions, of the unsatisfactory prison conditions, the lawyer comments on the excessive crowding inside the cells. The crowding is so extreme, he says, it is as if the detainees were “packed in like

1. Walid al-Fahum, *Wa la budda li-l-qaid in yankasiru (These Chains That Must Be Broken)*, Acre, Maktabat al-Jalil, n.d. The texts in this volume were originally published in newspapers between 1974 and 1977.

sardines in a can." The prisoner, however, responds, "No, my friend," and when al-Fahum expresses surprise at his answer, the prisoner adds, "We are like matches in a book of matches." Asked to explain, he replies, "Sardines are arranged next to each other in the can with the head of one next to the tail of the other. With a book of matches, the heads of all the matches are facing in the same direction" (p. 163).

The prison writings of political detainees, of men and women, in Israel as elsewhere throughout the world, offer a critique not only of the ruling systems that have incarcerated dissidents, but of the very institution of literature as an autonomous arena of activity. That critique is generated no matter what the character of the regime—"liberal democrat," "socialist," or that of a "military dictatorship." Literature, when abstracted from the historical and institutional conditions that inform its production—and its distribution—serves in the end to underwrite the repressive bureaucratic structures designed to maintain national borders and to police dissent within those borders. The literature of political detention, composed in prison, is by contrast necessarily partisan, polemical, and collective. It is written against those very structures of dominance and of an historical tradition of literature that legislated the isolation and the political neutrality of both literature and literary critic. Prison writing demands a reading that runs counter to the passivity, aesthetic gratification, and the pleasures of consumption traditionally sanctioned by the academic disciplining of literature; it demands an activist approach.

Such is the imperative articulated in the exemplary first article in al-Fahum's volume "Pages from a Student's Notebook in the Occupied Land." The lawyer describes, in this anecdotal lesson, two models of counter-strategy in reading. They are determined not by traditions of literary distance or of poetic license, but rather by the material and political conditions of military occupation and of economic and political disenfranchisement. According to the first of these exempla, "in the long street, under the light of the street lamps, several Tulkarm students are escaping the [noise of the] song of Abd al-Halim [a popular Egyptian film star and recording artist]—'Lamplight.' . . . Their families have many children and the suffocating atmosphere is not conducive to study, either at night or in daytime. The children have developed a serious habit of studying while out walking by day and standing under the public street lights at night" (p. 7). In the second example, al-Fahum describes the innovative practice of reading "upside down" (*bi-l-maqlub*) necessitated by restricted economic circumstances. Because there is not enough money to provide books for each child, they must both learn from the same book. Facing each other when seated at the table, then, they read from opposite sides of the book (p. 7).

The economic and political conditions of occupation and dispossession that have disrupted the ideal of the splendid solitude of scholarly pursuits have made of learning a collective street activity. They have inspired as well, over decades of repression, the emergence of an organized Palestinian resistance movement

demanding liberation of the land and autonomy and self-determination for the people living under occupation. The Israeli military occupation has responded to this challenge by its opponents to its oppressive authority with consistent and massive detention, often without trial. In prison, however, and within the framework of the collective work of political opposition, those counter-strategies of reading and writing, developed of necessity outside, are further exercised and developed as critical weapons in the struggle itself. The theoretical and practical reconstruction of the site of political prison as a "university" for the resistance, a training ground for its cadres, is more than a literary topos or metaphoric embellishment in the writings of political detainees, whether from occupied Palestine, South Africa, El Salvador, Northern Ireland, or the United States.

\*

In his novel *Requiem for a Woman's Soul*, the Argentinian novelist-in-exile Omar Rivabella narrativizes the radical exigencies of a critical reading of the literature of political detention, incarceration, and torture. The story opens in a local church, at early morning mass, when Father Antonio sees amongst the congregation a woman "alone in the last row of pews, hugging a large cardboard box, that partially hid her face, on her lap."<sup>2</sup> That box, left with Father Antonio by the unknown woman after the mass is over, contains, underneath "an intense odor as of a mixture of urine and human excrement" (p. 5), a collection of "abundant wads of paper." At once repelled and intrigued by the box and its confused contents, the priest struggles with his political consciousness, his moral conscience, and his human curiosity. Eventually, however, his daily pastoral routine is transformed into the painful deciphering of the words on the many decomposed pieces of paper (matchbooks, toilet paper, newspaper margins, the foil from cigarette packages) into the chronological ordering of the story they tell. The reconstruction of the "diary of an unknown woman" (p. 7), is another story, that of the arrest, torture, and presumed death of "Susana."

*Requiem for a Woman's Soul*, a work of counterpoint; its components are the dated recomposed fragments of Susana's writings and Father Antonio's italicized account of his paradigmatic experience with textual editing, his encounter with the contents of the woman's box. He finds himself mentioned by name on a piece of paper, together with a reference to one Nestor, and realizes his own recondite implication in the history he is piecing back together: "I had been Susana's family priest in my previous parish" (p. 17), and, he recalls, Susana had once introduced him to her friend Nestor as "the priest who will marry us" (p. 17). His involvement with the reconstruction of the diary leads first to Father Antonio's neglect of his official priestly duties towards his parishioners and to chastening reminders from his bishop. There follow the denunciations in his

2. Omar Rivabella, *Requiem for a Woman's Soul*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1986, p. 3.

sermons of the growing corruption of the national bureaucracy, which bring him visits from the police commissioner and an army captain. The searing task of editing the tortured woman's diary, her daily notations challenging his daily routine, progressively leads Father Antonio back into the community to Rosa and the "mothers of the children lost to the forces of repression" (p. 56).

Written into the body of Susana's dismembered and dislocated story, as Father Antonio learns, is the further account of the text's own production: the way in which, together with two of the detainees, Alicia and Luisa, whom she meets in the prison yard, the woman prisoner agrees to the project of writing about her detention and commissioning it for "publication" by Father Antonio. The other women continue to provide Susana with the few scraps of paper they are able to retrieve here and there from the prison's refuse, and it is these, covered with Susana's writing, that are eventually delivered to Father Antonio at that fated morning mass. By the time he has completed his demanding editorial work upon the still truncated, still incomplete diary, Father Antonio has been voluntarily relieved of his pastoral responsibilities. Evading the supervision of his companions assigned to look after his health and mental stability, he seeks out Susana's parents. He finds them, old and decrepit, beset by anxiety, in a run-down house in a well-to-do neighborhood. Susana's father, once a physician, now sits mesmerized by the vision of a large jar in his small laboratory: "Inside were two hands, severed at the wrists. One of them bore a ring on the middle finger. Together they floated in the bloody liquid, in a macabre ballet. There was Susana's engagement ring" (p. 114). The clandestine strategies of prison writing here calls for a new political responsibility on the reader-critic outside, the responsibility to mobilize still larger popular and literary constituencies in the reworking of narratives not limited to the text but participating in a larger political project.

*Requiem for a Woman's Soul* ends with an epilogue, the copy of a letter sent by Rosa, one of the "mothers of the disappeared" in Father Antonio's local congregation, to the novelist Omar Rivabella in New York City, containing what might be the final words of the priest now hospitalized in the National Institute of Mental Health: "He took my hands, just as he used to when he comforted my sorrows, and pronounced some unintelligible words. Then he pulled from his shirt pocket a piece of paper he seemed to have prepared for this last interview. He gave it to me and said in an enthusiastic tone, 'To him, send it to him.' On the piece of paper was your name and address" (p. 116). This "piece of paper," no less than the carton with the "abundant wads of paper" that Susana had left to Father Antonio, calls for a response other than that offered to the literary legacy addressed to a posthumous readership or a university archive. That is no naturalized transmission to posterity of a lettered corpus. Rather, it demands a political critique of the institutionalized complicity, political and economic, that transcends national borders and geo-political divides such as that between First and Third Worlds. In Argentina, for example, prisons and detention camps, the

Catholic Church, even the family, and the metropolitan publishing industry are implicated. In *The Body in Pain*, Elaine Scarry has distinguished the combination of two languages of pain — Amnesty International letters and “poems and narratives of individual artists” — as breaking through the resistance of physical pain to “objectification” in language.<sup>3</sup> Father Antonio’s own slip of paper in Omar Rivabella’s novel proposes a rethinking by way of reading and writing of the contestatory possibilities that these several institutional sites contain.<sup>4</sup>

By virtue of its publication by Penguin Books, the traditional guardian of the classics in paperback and a major arbiter in the selection and dissemination to a mass but choice public of contemporary works and writers, Rivabella’s novel *Requiem for a Woman’s Soul* can be said to participate in the institutional network denounced by the screams of tortured political prisoners and challenged by their counter-strategies of writing. That participation is, however, a critical one, whereby complicity in the structures of institutional domination can be remade as an act of collaboration within a larger project of collective counter-resistance. While the novelist Rivabella radically recast the fragments of Susana’s makeshift prison diary within his contrapuntal narrative, another novelist, Hernan Valdes, has found his novel-in-progress subjected to a different kind of literary critique than that generally provided and therefore anticipated by members of the academic establishment.

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Valdes, a Chilean writer, was arrested on February 12, 1974, in the repression immediately following the CIA-assisted overthrow of Salvador Allende’s Popular Unity government. He was held for just over one month in Tejas Verdes, one of Chile’s concentration camps, or what Valdes refers to as a “political detergency apparatus,”<sup>5</sup> until his release on March 15, 1974. His prison memoir, *Diary of a Chilean Concentration Camp*, was, as he writes in the foreword, “reconstructed after the event (it would be inconceivable for anyone under such conditions to find the means of producing a written text, quite apart from the impossibility of achieving a state of mind that would allow one to attempt such a thing in the first place)” (p. 5). At the time of his arrest, Valdes, as author, was writing what he thought of as a political novel. That same novel, however, became at one point during his detention the focus of his interrogation, and the question as to its form and content abrasively posed to him by his

3. Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1985, p. 5.

4. John Bender’s *Imagining the Penitentiary: Fiction and Architecture of Mind in Eighteenth-Century England*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1988, argues the relation between narrative closure and the development of the modern penal institution. What I would like to propose here is narrative as a way of “re-imagining the penitentiary.”

5. Hernan Valdes, *Diary of a Chilean Concentration Camp*, trans. Jo Labanyi, London, Victor Gollancz, 1975, p. 6. See also Jean Franco, “Death Camp Confessions and Resistance to Violence in Latin America,” *Socialism and Democracy*, no. 2 (Spring/Summer, 1986).

interrogators-turned-literary critics forced a reexamination on his part of his own role and responsibility as author. It led, moreover, to a reconsideration of the generic criteria by which literary works such as his are constituted, appreciated, and judged. "What's your novel about?" the interrogators ask.

This question throws me more than anything else. My memory goes a complete blank. Whenever anyone's asked me that kind of question in the past I've always felt incapable of replying, but in previous instances it was different. This time I have to say something, I can feel their breath on my face, their fists are at the ready. There's no plot, it's a novel of situations. I reduce what I thought was an existential drama to a romance for shorthand typists. Maybe that's all it was. I feel wretched. (p. 38)

This author, brutally interrogated by the servants of the state, can no longer avoid critical pressure; he cannot hide behind his work nor claim judicial impunity on the "new critical grounds" that the work "speaks for itself." Indeed, the academically sanctioned question, "What's your novel about?" when asked in the context of torture, disappearance, and political detention, exposes the coercive machinery of political containment that is complicitously prescribed by certain established literary critical practices. The writer then chooses an alternative that is not free of compromise: "I reduce what I thought was an existential drama to a romance for shorthand typists." Such a "reduction" and the feeling of "wretchedness" that it would seem to produce for the writer's sense of professional excellence raises, however, still another question, that of the relation between "high art" and "mass culture." The critical inquiries posed by the state apparatus, "fists at the ready," force Valdes the writer-prisoner to replot his narrative and thereby to rearticulate, if only temporarily, and in the most provisional way, his social and political relation to his readership, even to rethink implicitly who that readership might be. Is he, that is, writing existential dramas for a lettered elite, or romances for shorthand typists? And what would be the difference between the two projects?

Prison writing is often prefaced by a critical apologia—such as Hernan Valdes's statement that his diary was not written *in situ* but was "reconstructed after the event." Excuses for limitations of style and literary technique are not to be taken for the disarming disclaimers of false modesty or for tacit acknowledgment of "literary standards." Rather, they bespeak both the coercive pressures of traditional abstract ideals of "art" and "culture" and the antisystemic possibilities for submitting those same ideals to the political and material demands of historical conditions and priorities. Thus, in the prologue to Ana Guadalupe Martinez's *Las Carceles Clandestinas de El Salvador*,<sup>6</sup> the narrative of incarceration

6. Ana Guadalupe Martinez, *Las Carceles Clandestinas de El Salvador*, Sinaloa, Mexico, Universidad Autonoma de Sinaloa, 1980.

tion and torture in 1976 as a guerrilla and member of the Ejercito Revolucionario del Pueblo (ERP) in El Salvador's secret prisons, René Cruz locates the woman commander's memoir as necessarily integral to the larger revolutionary struggle:

[The book] is an initial effort to write the history of our revolution from the trenches of combat themselves and not from the comfortable desks of inconsequential bystanders. In this sense we are not going to find here in the text any literary pretensions of a *recherche* style. It is time now that the revolutionaries transmit in an effective way their experience to our people in their own language, with a sensibility that the people understand and have lived. Much concrete experience has been lost for not having been processed and transmitted. Still another part has been essentially deformed for having been elaborated by leftizing (*izquierdantes*) intellectual intermediaries who adjust it not to the necessities of the revolution but to a bourgeois fictionalization and theorization of the revolution. (p. 12)

Nearly ten years later, in April 1985, Nidia Diaz, herself a *commandante* in the FMLN-FDR, the now-combined resistance organizations of El Salvador, was arrested in a helicopter raid on guerrilla bases in the mountains of San Vicente. The prison record of Ana Guadalupe Martinez now served her as an example of detainees' oppositional strategies. These strategies in turn become written into her own prison memoir, *Nunca Estuve Sola*, of which Diaz has said, with regard to the putative literary critics who would prefer Commandante Nidia as an autobiographer or diarist than as a revolutionary leader, "I am told that I have put more of my revolutionary ideology than my personal emotions into my book. But in prison, if you don't hold fast to your convictions, your ideology, you are lost. You can display nothing personal to your captors and interrogators. Nor did I want to. And afterwards this same thing came out as I sat down to write. I lived prison minute by minute, guarded and resistant."<sup>7</sup> For Maria Lopez Vigil, in her presentation of the volume, *Nunca Estuve Sola* stands as an example of "how books are and how they are made in times of war. With urgency and without much polish, in hatchet strokes (*a hachachos de esfuerzos*), keeping problems of style "in the schoolbag" (*a mochila*), and with the clear objective of assisting in the reconstruction and interpretation of an immediate history. With the dream of contributing something to the transformation of the history of war into a history of peace" (p. 8).

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Penal institutions, despite their function as part of the state's coercive apparatus of physical detention and ideological containment, provide the critical

7. Nidia Diaz, *Nunca Estuve Sola*, San Salvador, UCA Editores, 1988, p. 8.

training space for alternative social and political practices of counter-hegemonic resistance movements. Crucial to such practices, at once cultural and political, are the narrative means whereby prison is represented in literature, and the multiple contestatory roles played by literature in the prison itself. According to H. Bruce Franklin's *Prison Literature in America*, a study of the "victim as criminal and artist," prisons in the United States, where there is no recognition of the "political prisoner," have contradictorily served to reeducate their inmates in radical self-constructions through writing that ultimately challenges the state's authority to contain them within the parameters demarcated by the penitentiary walls. "My subject," writes Franklin,

is literature created by those members of the oppressed classes who have become artists with words through their experience of being defined by the state as criminals. . . . The authors' "crimes" are mostly those peculiar to the condition of poverty and forced labor: refusal to work; desertion and escape; mutiny and revolt; revolution. Their art expresses the experience of being legally kidnapped, plundered, raped, beaten, chained, and caged—and the understanding that results.<sup>8</sup>

Unlike the political detainee, however, Franklin's "criminal narrator is sharply marked off from the reader. He or she speaks as a lone 'I'—an outlaw, a desperado, a deviant, or a member of an alien underworld—to society in general, or, more usually, a respectable reading public, incarnate in the reader" (p. 126).

The intimate ideological relationship between criminal and political prisoner, differently articulated and managed by various governments and judicial systems, has critical consequences for the practical and theoretical organization of resistance movements, both inside and outside the prison. For criminals, whether convicted of petty theft, prostitution, murder, or simply social deviance, the experience of prison can, given particular times and circumstances, provide the historically necessary conjunctural premise for recasting the narrative of an individual "crime" as generated by a sociopolitical system of economic exploitation and political disenfranchisement. Political prisoners in turn, when confined together with "criminals," are often led to reformulate ideological constructs with regard to "the people" and interaction between a vanguard party and its supposed popular constituencies. Prison, then, as an always already immediate political fact for both paid and self-appointed guardians of the state as well as for its organized opposition, continues to insist on the ever-renewed necessity of rethinking critical strategy.

The "criminals" imprisoned over the last two centuries by the United

8. H. Bruce Franklin, *Prison Literature in America: The Victim as Criminal and Artist*, Westport, Connecticut, Lawrence Hill and Co., 1982.

States penal system whose writings inform Franklin's proposal for reconstructing the "victim as criminal and artist" insistently remind the critic that "Whereas the literary criteria dominant on campus exalt what is extraordinary or even unique, most current autobiographical writing from prison intends to show the readers that the author's individual experience is not unique or even extraordinary, but typical and representative" (p. 250). Franklin suggests that "In truth, it may not be going too far to say that the prison and the university provide the contradictory poles defining the field of aesthetics, as well as some other areas, for in our society the two main competing intellectual centers may be the universities and the prisons" (p. 235). This preliminary conclusion might be extended by considering the writings produced out of the experience of "political prison" in a way such that, while representing "contradictory poles," prison and the university are also seen to function as complicit parts of the same operational system of state control of dissent and the containment of anti-systemic challenge.

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The state and its apparatus of political detention have, as their clear goal, the isolation of the opposition leadership from its base of popular support in the larger community. However, that strategy is being disarticulated and turned to other ends through the differently reconstituted social and political relations across the prison walls between incarcerated militants and the population outside. Already in 1927, when Antonio Gramsci was sentenced to twenty years, four months, and five days imprisonment, the prosecutor at his trial had argued on behalf of the state that "We must prevent this brain from functioning for twenty years." Gramsci's self-proposed "adjustment" to an extended period of confinement and physical and worldly isolation that would claim the better part of his life, the middle years of his manhood and paternity—indeed, as it turned out, would confiscate all the rest of his life—involved the organization of a major plan of study. The mind that the prosecutor wanted to "prevent from functioning for twenty years" produced instead a written corpus of political theory, Gramsci's "prison notebooks."

That corpus also includes the letters written over a period of ten years. In an early letter (March 1927), from a Milan prison, to his sister-in-law Tania, Gramsci wrote, "You see, I'm haunted—and this, I think, is a phenomenon quite familiar among prisoners—by an idea, that it is necessary to do something *fur ewig*. . . . In short, I want, according to a prearranged plan, to occupy myself intensively and systematically with some subject which will absorb me and provide a central channel for my inner life."<sup>9</sup> Writing to Giuseppe Berti, a fellow

9. Antonio Gramsci, *Prison Letters*, trans. Hamish Henderson, London, Zwan Publications, 1988, p. 45.

communist, however, Gramsci reproached himself, a few months later: "I'm not doing any work; you can't call reading work when it's purely and simply reading for pleasure. I read a great deal, but unsystematically. I receive a few books from outside, and I read the books from the prison library week after week, taking whatever I get from the farthing dip" (p. 63). Two years later, again to Tania, the veteran political prisoner was giving informed advice on how a prisoner can use his time "to advantage." First of all, Gramsci insists, it is necessary "to rid oneself of the mental overcoat of academicism, and not cherish the vain illusion that one can pursue regular and intensive courses of study; that sort of course is out of the question, even for people in less difficult circumstances." Gramsci goes on to add that "Nevertheless it's my opinion that a political prisoner must find ways and means of squeezing blood from a stone. The main thing is to do one's reading with a certain end in view, and to take notes (if one is allowed to write)" (pp. 92-93).

One of Gramsci's main correspondents, an important visitor, and a provider to him of reading and study materials as well as news of world events and party comrades, was Tania, his wife Julia's sister. To Julia, however, or Julca as he often addressed her in his letters, Gramsci wrote from Turin prison in 1931: "You intend, you say, to study . . . wouldn't it be a good idea to study certain things which interest me too and so start a correspondence with me about material which is of interest to the two of us because it is a reflection of the present intellectual life of [their sons] Delio and Giuliano?" (p. 184). The student of political theory and imprisoned party militant was finding that in detention his own sons were inevitably estranged from him, living now in Russia where they had gone with their mother. Julia, furthermore, like Gramsci's own mother before her, was concealing from their children the fact of their father's detention (243n). The tormented need to rethink radically their affective bonds and marital loyalties haunts Gramsci's letters to his wife: "We must hurl all that's past into the flames and build new lives from the ground up. Why should we let ourselves be crushed by the lives we've led up to now? There's no sense in preserving anything at all but what was constructive and what was beautiful. We must get out of the ditch, and throw off that silly toad sitting on our hearts" (pp. 225-226). Political reconstructions of organized opposition and party structures are shown to reverberate on the most intimate level of personal relationships as well, and new modes of articulating those relationships demand passionate and painful new elaborations. As Rosa Luxemburg wrote two decades earlier from prison in Zwickau to her "comrade and lover" Leo Jogiches, addressing him in the feminine appellative of Leonie to avoid prison censorship, "When I left, you promised you'd read one book a day. Do you? You *must*, I beg you! Now I appreciate again the value of making serious books a part of daily life. It saves the mind and the *nervous* system. But Marx, you know, ends up by

making me angry. I still *can't get the better of him*. I keep getting swamped and can't catch my breath."<sup>10</sup>

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The experience of prison, from state apparatus to prison counterculture, and its impact on the larger society, proposes new priorities and agendas for political organizing and cultural mobilization with critical implications for altering the curricula of other public institutions as well. "Prison," for Molefe Pheto, "political prison, is a university."<sup>11</sup> Pheto, a South African writer, and organizer of MDALI (Music, Drama, Arts and Literature Institute) in Soweto, spent a year in South African prisons in 1975-76 just prior to the Soweto uprisings in June 1976. His prison memoir, *And Night Fell*, narrates his de-education, his reappraisal from inside the cement block walls of the prison compound of the ivy-covered walls of university quadrangles. His prison experience, which includes interrogation, the attempt to establish communication with fellow prisoners from other organizations, and the effort to enlist the aid of sympathetic guards, provides the foundation for his radical critique of his academic credentials, granted by western or western-sponsored institutions and for his reeducation as a partisan in the local struggle against apartheid. Pheto, at the time of his arrest, was a member of the PAC, or Pan Africanist Congress, which had broken away from the African National Congress (ANC) in the late 1950s on the basis of their program that emphasized black African resistance to the structures of apartheid, as distinguished from the multiracialism of the ANC. Pheto remained a PAC partisan, but his political reeducation in the prison was assisted by various groups represented there: the torturers and interrogators whose "language" he must learn if he is to succeed in not communicating any information to them; imprisoned members of the ANC whose political tactics and ideological analyses differ from his own; the children of the townships who understand as well as Pheto the meaning of the word "politics." On more than one occasion, Pheto is asked, across the barriers of enforced isolation, by supposed "criminals," why he is being held in solitary confinement. His efforts to define political detention usually reveal to him instead the heightened degree of political consciousness that characterizes these "criminals." Indeed, it is the most common criminals, the women, the prostitutes and shebeen queens, who, by making available to him the new rhythms and songs to which people are now dancing in Soweto, are most effective in reintegrating the party militant into the politics of popular resistance.

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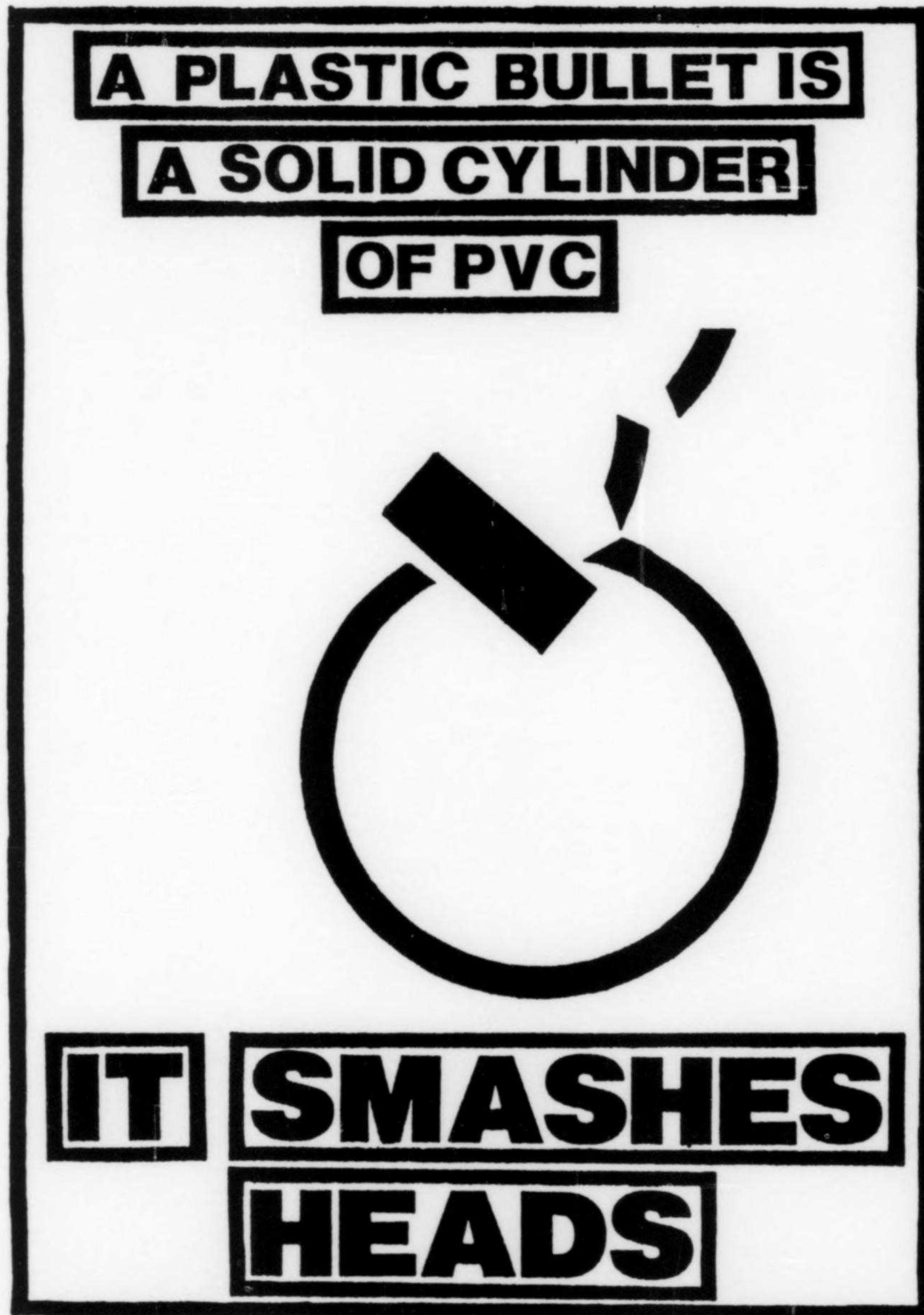
10. Rosa Luxemburg, *Comrade and Lover: Rosa Luxemburg's Letters to Leo Jogiches*, trans. and ed. Elzbieta Ettinger, Cambridge, Massachusetts, MIT Press, 1981, p. 137.

11. Molefe Pheto, *And Night Fell: Memoirs of a Political Prisoner in South Africa*, London, Allison and Busby, 1983, p. 195.

Carol Ackroyd and the three co-authors of *The Technology of Political Control* address "the Troubles" in Northern Ireland and the concerted British judicial and technological response to the organized Northern Irish resistance, especially that of the Provisional IRA, to British military occupation of the Six Counties. They raise more generally the current issue of a "new type of weaponry, produced by the application of science and technology to the problem of neutralization of the state's enemies."<sup>12</sup> The authors are all members of the British Society for Social Responsibility in Science (BSSRS), founded in May 1969, just a few months prior to the battle of Bogside fought in Derry between Northern Irish Catholic residents of the area and Protestant militia and constabulary with the eventual assistance of the British army. The battle of Bogside, which followed upon a series of civil rights marches in Northern Ireland in late 1968 and early 1969, marked the first and one of the most extensive uses by British troops of CS gas against a civilian population in the United Kingdom. It announced as well the arrival of the British army forces in Northern Ireland and the beginning of an occupation more than two decades long. This escalation of the "technology of political control" was followed two years later, in the summer of 1971, by the introduction of rubber bullets to be used, it was claimed, in the nonlethal dispersal of riotous crowds and, in August of that year, by the use of sensory-deprivation torture, known as "depth interrogation," in the questioning of interned IRA suspects.

Writing in 1977, the four British scientists indicated by way of introductory remarks that their "approach . . . may seem a curious amalgam of technological exposé and political analysis. It is not a particularly familiar or apparently natural one. But it is an approach which is being used more and more by scientists who are becoming aware of the political implications of their work" (p. 11). Defining "technology" as "any device or method which exploits knowledge from any of the sciences from physics to psychology" (19n), they argue throughout their study that the "motives behind the technology of political control are not humanitarian. These technologies are used by states to achieve specific political goals" (p. 21). Such motives are in particular associated with what are called "strong states," the liberal democracies in which power relationships are largely veiled. The ever increasing increments of political control of internal dissent are made in small, often imperceptible, steps such as greater funding of the security apparatus or expansion of the state bureaucracy. Equally significant for these governments, however, are the uses of legal innovations and sanctions to ratify, for public consumption and acquiescence, alterations in the government's modus operandi. Much of the "technology of political control," the authors indicate, used by Britain in Northern Ireland—computerized intelligence networks, etc., as well as gas and plastic bullets—was first developed in the

12. Carol Ackroyd, Karen Margolis, Jonathan Rosenhed, Tim Shallice, *The Technology of Political Control*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1977, p. 11.



*Postcard design by Stephen Dorley-Brown. 1984. Back reads: A plastic bullet is a solid cylinder of PVC measuring 4" x 1½" and weighing 4¾ oz. Plastic bullets are now available to many police forces throughout Britain. Plastic bullets have killed children and adults in Northern Ireland. Many more have been maimed. . . . Campaign against Plastic Bullets.*

United States and imported by Britain. As Ackroyd and her fellow scientists point out, these technologies are designed to "maximize repression, subject to the constraint that any political backlash must be kept to manageable proportions. Backlash depends not on how harmless the technologies are, but on how harmless they *seem*. 'Humanitarianism,' then, is not an objective, but a propaganda claim" (p. 41). After all, as they say, "It is easy enough to kill people. It is harder *not* to kill them, but to stop them all the same. 'Non-lethal' riot-control technology provides governments with sophisticated methods for controlling unruly populations. At the same time, it avoids the public outcry which results from outright massacres such as Bloody Sunday" (p. 197).

Torture in the twentieth century has its own material and ideological specificity. Despite its long history, dating back further even than ancient Greece, where it was designed to elicit a confession that would suffice as incriminating evidence to convict and condemn the accused, torture today has acquired new ends and a radical technologization of its means. The attack on the personal identity and the body of the victim is calculated now to undermine the social body as well. Nor is it information that the system of power is, for the most part, concerned to extract. Torture in political detention is calculated rather to produce propaganda and intimidate, if not destroy, the human and political constitution that continues to resist. The witnessing of torture by the tortured yields, however, another kind of information: the testimony, often clandestine, of the political prisoner who survives. The danger inherent in such testimony is precisely that represented by the political prisoners themselves, a danger responsible for their detention in the first place. The concluding section of *The Technology of Political Control* presents this as a threefold danger: "Firstly, there is the damaging effect of publicity surrounding their trial and imprisonment. Secondly, there is the danger of increasing the political commitment of both political prisoners and 'criminal' prisoners who are exposed to their influence, and of others not in gaol. . . . Thirdly, there is the danger that political prisoners will provide a focus for the organization of political movements within the prisons" (p. 255).

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While historically, in the Middle Ages, in Latin America, or even as recently as the 1960s in the United States, the university, or the academy, has served at times as a recognized site of sanctuary, a countenanced alternative or counter space marked off from the institutions of sovereign or state power, that formerly acknowledged space is being ever more systematically occupied by the various coercive, ideological mechanisms of state domination. In Chile, for example, in September 1973, with the overthrow of the Allende government, troops invaded the National University to arrest those Popular Unity supporters or even "neutral" observers who had taken refuge there. Between 1980 and 1984, the University of El Salvador was occupied by the Salvadoran army, and professors, staff,

administrators, and students continue to be regular victims of the paramilitary death squads. In the United States, university administrations of the 1980s had repeated recourse to city, rather than campus, police to disperse — and arrest — demonstrating students. Palestinian universities and schools in the Occupied Territories are militarily closed more often than they are open. Indeed, in order to accommodate the massive numbers of detained protesters since the beginning of the *intifada*, the Israeli authorities have for certain periods used the closed schools as makeshift prison centers.

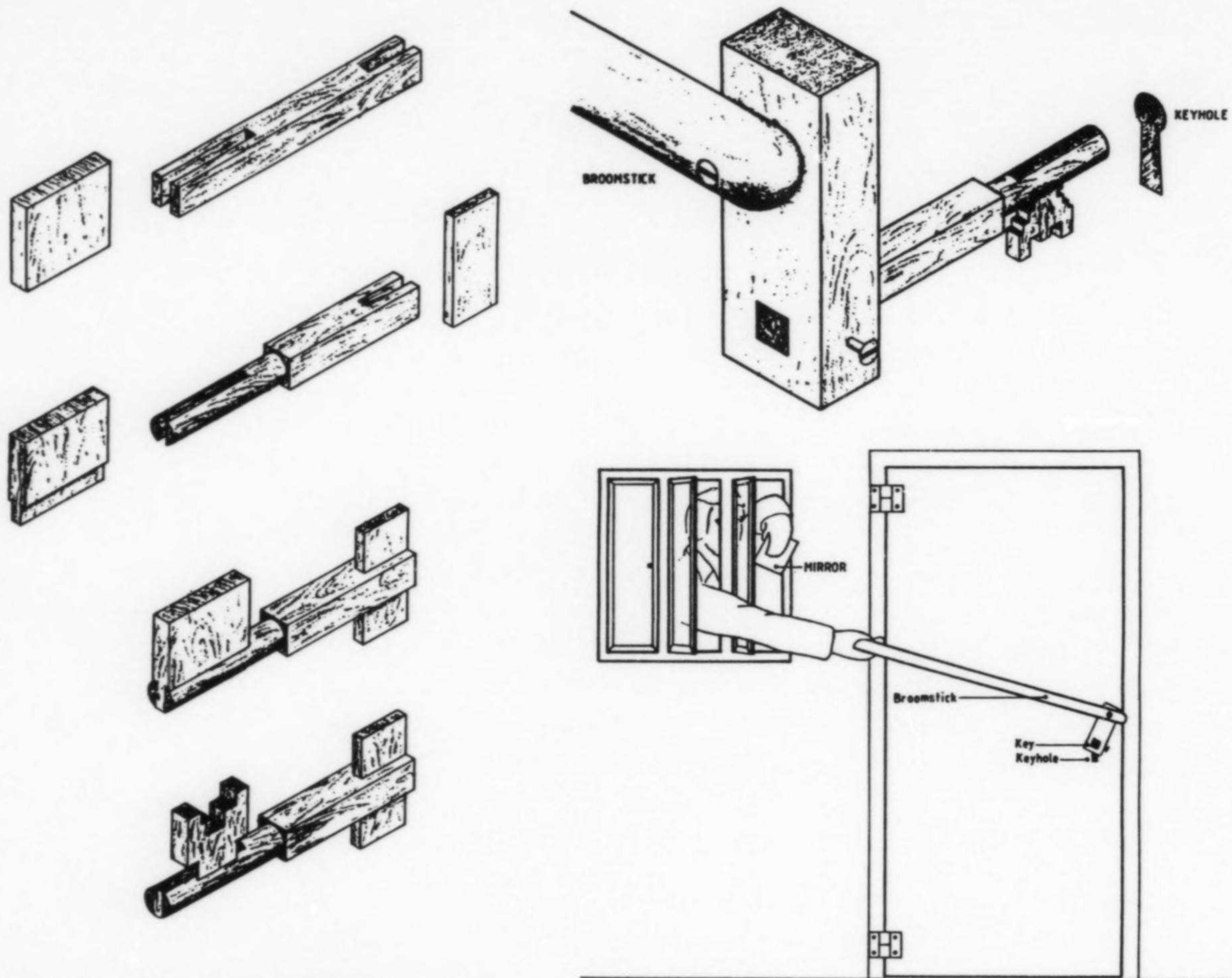
The threat that prisons and universities pose to the state if not properly policed or effectively disciplined is told in a short story, published in May 1989, by the Israeli writer Matt Nesvisky. "The Game's Up" relates an attack by Navy frogmen on a boat moored in international waters off the coast of Israel. None of the commandos involved in the operation knows what they will find there. "Military intelligence hasn't determined if it's drug-smuggling, gun-running, white-slavery or terrorism. But we do know the gambling is a front for something big, and our job is to find it. Any more questions? Okay, men, after me — and good luck." The attack is carried through successfully and the ship's gamblers are "herded into the central lounge." But there is still the locked door below-decks. When this final obstacle is opened with plastic explosives, the Israeli frogmen confront forty West Bank pupils and their teacher. "I suspected as much!" Bar-Barian snorted. 'A clandestine matriculation class! In the name of the Civil Administration, I hereby arrest you for illegal education!'"<sup>13</sup>

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"Illegal education," the kind practiced clandestinely offshore or in underground prison cells, proposes a counter to the university. Although it may not bring about its effective dismantling, it can at least facilitate individual or even collective escapes from prison. *Escape from Pretoria* is Tim Jenkin's account of how he, in the company of two other prisoners, Stephen Lee and Alex Moumbaris, accomplished their escape from Pretoria Prison's "New European Section" on December 11, 1978. Although, as Jenkin claims, "For us an escape was a political act, not an individual flight for freedom,"<sup>14</sup> the very escape plans themselves involved considerable controversy among the ten detainees held in their section of the facility. Arrested in 1978 and charged under Section Six of the Terrorism Act, Jenkin had been sentenced to twelve years imprisonment. Lee, his coworker in the distribution of "illegal pamphlets" for the ANC, received an eight-year sentence. Their fellow prisoners included Denis Goldberg, one of the Rivonia group from 1964 serving three life sentences. Other of the detainees were in various stages of sentences ranging from seven to

13. Matt Nesvisky, "The Game's Up," *The Jerusalem Post*, May 26, 1989.

14. Tim Jenkin, *Escape from Pretoria*, London, Kliptown Books, 1987, p. 95.



Stages of making a wooden key and crank mechanism for Door Two. (From *Tim Jenkin's Escape from Pretoria*. London, Kliptown Books. 1987.)

twelve years. Lee and Jenkin's trial had been one of extreme frustration for them, for despite their own political convictions, they had submitted to their lawyers' decision to appeal to the mercy of the court. Jenkin describes the two prisoners' reaction to the sentence when the proceedings were concluded: "In the cells below, the two of us felt sick. Not because of the sentences imposed on us, but because we'd failed to raise our fists and shout *Amandla!*— "Power!" as is fitting and proper for political prisoners to do when sentenced. Why had we succumbed to the appeals of our lawyers?" (p. 65). The decision to escape then was construed as a challenge, at once personal and political, to the South African court and its penal institutions.

The debate among their fellow prisoners, however, concerning the nature of that challenge was such as to engage still larger and more complex issues of political organization and strategies of resistance:

While our unity and comradeship was our greatest source of strength it was also the source of the controversies that arose over the planning of the escape. A failed attempt, everyone knew, would lead to severe disruption and threaten the unity which gave us our strength. The differences arose out of this: some felt that the preservation of unity was paramount; those bent on getting out found it difficult to accept that others did not display the same drive to get out. (p. 96)

For those who agreed, at various stages of the planning, to participate in the escape attempt, other more detailed questions were raised: Was it necessary to "theorize" the escape before attending to its practical exigencies? Should the resistance organization outside be involved? And if so, in what ways? And so on. In the end, and in part for circumstantial reasons, these questions were answered negatively. The key to the escape was to be in making keys, keys to the ten doors that stood between the prisoners and freedom. Jenkin became, during his months in prison, a master locksmith—and a skilled tailor, in order to remake used prisoner garb into unidentifiable streetwear. When the time came, only one door, the tenth and the last, refused the designated key, and it was necessary to force it open. The escape was successful—for the individuals involved—but it was not without its consequences for others, both inside and outside the prison walls.

The escape had profound consequences for many people: for our comrades who stayed behind it meant three years of unhappy confinement in the "condemned" section of Pretoria Central where prisoners awaiting execution are held; for political prisoners in other jails around South Africa it served as an inspiration and a boost to morale; for a prominent member of the ANC it meant an international kidnapping; for Sergeant Vermeulen it meant a five-month-long trial to prove his innocence; for several comrades in South Africa and my brother it meant detention, torture and jail; for our enemy, the apartheid rulers, it meant a terrible embarrassment and defeat; for Alex, Steve and me it meant freedom and the chance to throw ourselves back into the struggle against apartheid. (p. 231)

Many were the political lessons of theory and practice still to be learned.

Different lessons, then, would figure in the partially successful mass escape three years later in September 1983 of thirty-eight IRA prisoners from "The Maze, Her Majesty's Prison"—or the "H-blocks" as it is popularly known—in Northern Ireland. Recognized as the largest jail break in Europe since World War II, the escape, which followed upon the blanket protests, the no-wash

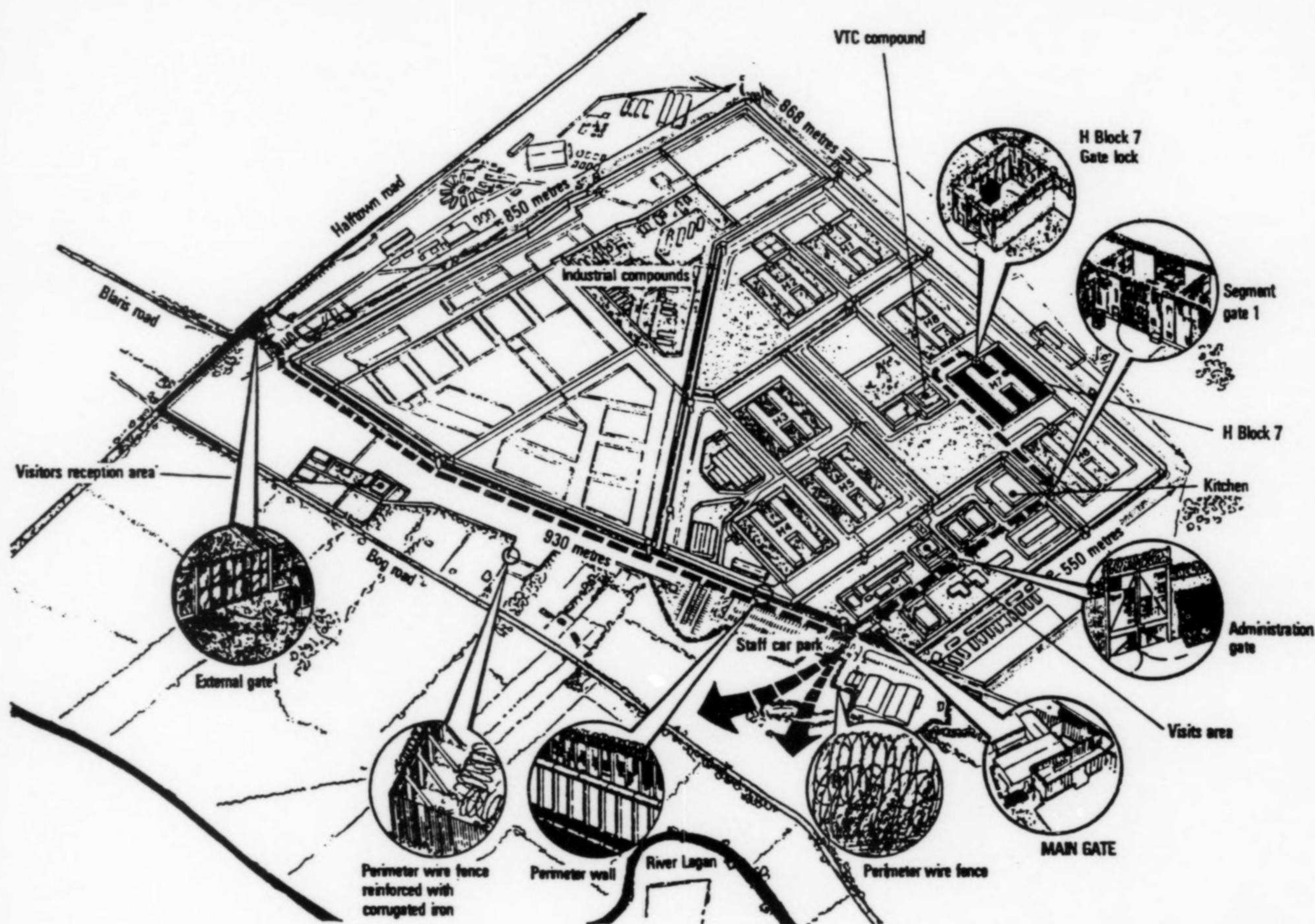
protests, the "dirty" protest (meaning here, the smearing of excrement on prison walls), and a series of hunger strikes during the preceding years, was constructed out of the strictly disciplined internal organization of the political prisoners within the prison itself. *Out of the Maze*, Derek Dunne's account of the escape based on interviews with escapees—some recaptured, others still on the run—and prison officials and police alike, narrates the development of that organization and the radical challenge it posed to Britain's "technology of political control." The escape plans involved such extensive strategies as "getting the blocks solid" and establishing connections with the IRA outside which was to see to the eventual transport and security of the escapees, as well as the details of smuggling in the needed weapons, setting up a communications network, and memorizing the minutiae of the layout of the entire prison. The preparations also involved the difficult decision of who would go and who would stay behind. On the day set for the escape,

the Provos would carry out the largest operation in their history. The escape would be a morale booster, a propaganda exercise and would put some of their most capable men back into circulation. And that was the last question that needed to be answered. Who was going out? The lorry couldn't take any more than forty men. In H7 there 125 men in the Block. There was going to be some bad feeling on the day when the takeover took place, when some men would realise that they had no part in the escape, that they were going to be left behind.<sup>15</sup>

In the end, an unanticipated delay in the rounds of the food truck to be used in the escape produced a confrontation at the prison's outer gate, and the truck was unable to go through. Only twenty-one of its thirty-eight passengers managed to get out on foot, and many of these too were sooner or later recaptured. For those who did elude prison, however, even escape did not necessarily mean untrammelled freedom: "The men from Belfast and Derry could not go home. They would be recognized immediately if they went back to visit their families and friends. They underwent a period of adjustment, which in some cases took years. There were, of course, furtive meetings with families and loved ones south of the border. But they had to break completely with their past" (p. 130).

Prison escapes, like Tim Jenkin's key, even as they materially and symbolically challenge the state's apparatus of control and containment, and for all their effectiveness in assisting the resistance and its political and military struggle outside, leave the state institution of detention intact. The escapes do serve, however, as blueprints, drafts, for the project of its dismantling. Like "statements from the dock" by political prisoners, the discursive contestations of the judicial

15. Derek Dunne, *Out of the Maze: The True Story of the Biggest Jail Break in Europe Since the Second World War*, Dublin, Gill and Macmillan, 1988, p. 59.



General view of HMP Maze showing escape route.  
 (From *Dever Dunne's Out of the Maze*. Dublin, Gill & Macmillan. 1988.)

system, the escapes enact an emergent alternative history lesson, a collective counter-strategy, against the history of dispossession, exploitation, and systemic injustices waged by the state's prisons and universities alike. In 1964, prior to his sentencing to life imprisonment, Nelson Mandela addressed the court assembled in Pretoria's Palace of Justice: "I am the First Accused,"<sup>16</sup> he said, and proceeded to instruct those present in the history of South African resistance, from the formation of the ANC in 1912 through the Defiance Campaign in the early

16. In Mary Benson, ed., *The Sun Will Rise*, London, International Defense and Aid Fund, 1976, p. 11.

1950s, the Sharpeville massacre in 1962, and including the establishment of Umkhonto wa Sizwe, the armed wing of the ANC, in 1961. Two years later, Bram Fischer, who had been a lawyer for the defense in the trial of Mandela and others detained at Rivonia, addressed the same court from the dock: "I cannot address any argument to this court. What I can do is to give the court certain facts regarding the manner in which the criminal law has come to be administered in political cases in this country. It presents a picture which is horrifying to those brought up with traditional ideas about justice."<sup>17</sup>

In 1975, four young people, three men from Northern Ireland and a young Englishwoman, now known as the "Guildford Four," were convicted of the 1974 pub bombings in the English towns of Guildford and Woolwich and sentenced to some of the longest prison sentences ever imposed in Britain. In *Time Bomb*, Grant McKee and Ros Franey tell the personal history of these four individuals, the crime and its investigation, the trial—and the subsequent confessions to the same crime, by four members of a Provisional IRA Active Service Unit in London who had themselves been arrested a year later. Tried and convicted for numerous other bombings, IRA member Joe O'Connell, acting against IRA policy, which refuses to recognize the legitimacy of the British system of justice, rose to address the court from the dock following the proceedings:

We have recognized this court to the extent that we have instructed our lawyers to draw the attention of the court to the fact that four totally innocent people—Carole Richardson, Gerard Conlon, Paul Hill and Patrick Armstrong—are serving massive sentences for three bombings, two in Guildford and one in Woolwich. . . . Time and again in Irish political trials in this country innocent people have been convicted on the flimsiest of evidence, often no more than statements and even "verbals" from the police. Despite the oft-repeated claim that there is no such thing as a political prisoner in England . . .<sup>18</sup>

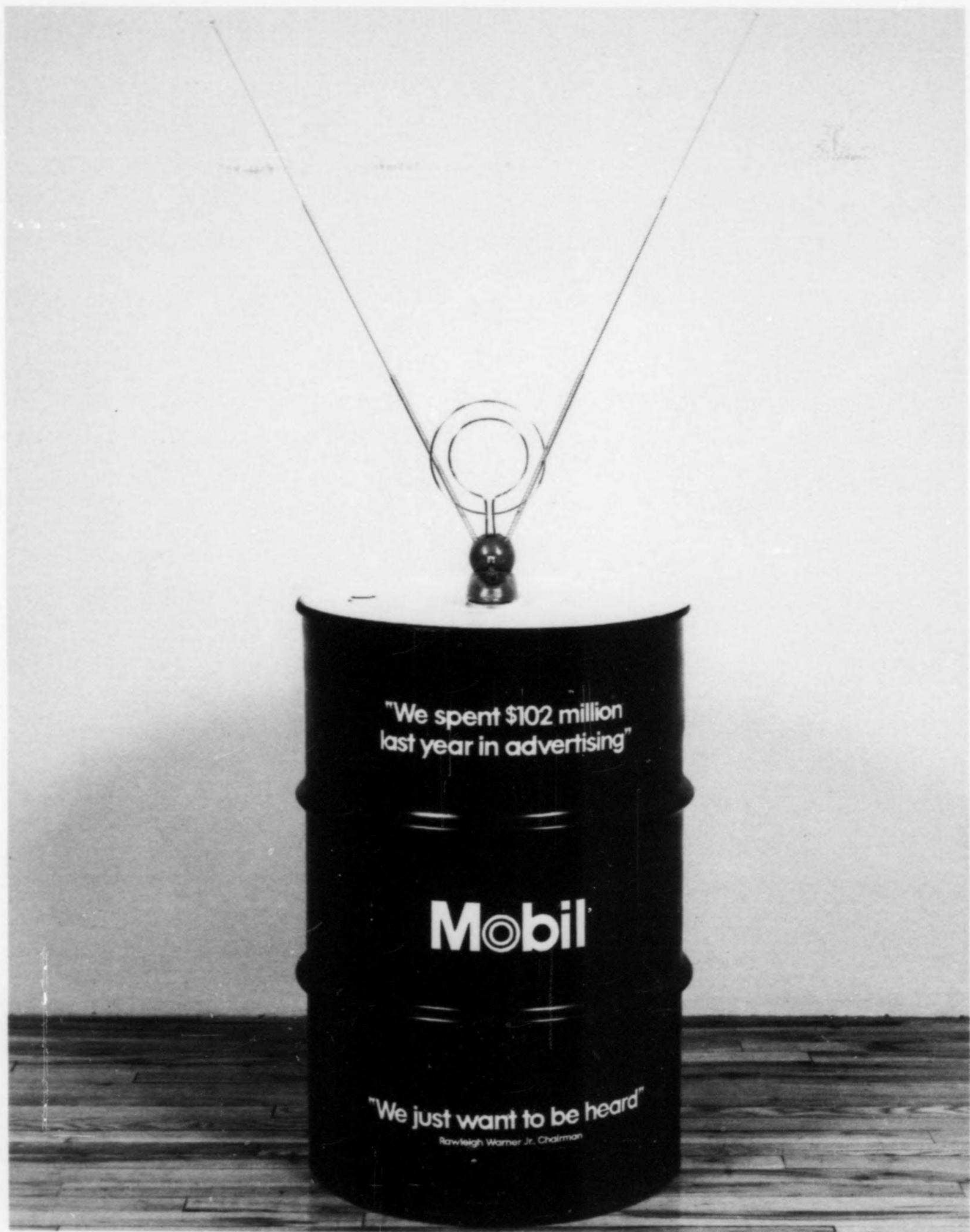
In October 1989, the conviction of the Guildford Four was finally reversed, and Richardson, Conlon, Hill, and Armstrong were released after fourteen years spent in British prisons. Hill issued a statement on his emergence into freedom in which he asked, "We hope that we have breached the wall. . . . At the moment, it's damage control—it's everybody's duty to insure that they don't shore up the hole in the wall, so we can ensure that the Birmingham Six [held on similar charges and on equally dubious evidence] will eventually emerge. Then, perhaps, we can finally smash the wall—once and for all."<sup>19</sup>

17. *Ibid.*, p. 46.

18. Grant McKee and Ros Franey, *Time Bomb: Irish Bombers, English Justice and the Guildford Four*, London, Bloomsbury, 1988, pp. 384–386.

19. *Guardian*, November 15, 1989, p. 15.

In the United States, in El Salvador, in Israel, in South Africa, and elsewhere throughout the world, the work of political prisoners, their "illegal education," is challenging the contemporary university structure and the institutions of state of which it is a part to rethink the social and cultural traditions that the university has inherited and is engaged in reproducing.



Hans Haacke. *Creating Consent*. 1981. (Photo: Jon Abbott.)

## Words without Things: The Mode of Information

MARK POSTER

An increasing segment of communications is mediated by electronic devices. People watch television; make phone calls; listen to the radio; go to the movies; use computers, fax machines, VCRs, and stereos. Such communications occur in every institution and in every social group. Politics, work, consumption, the family, the military, the church, education, leisure activities—in varying degrees all employ electronic mechanisms in their communications. In each instance, symbols are exchanged, messages are sent and received, information is retrieved just as they have been since human beings began using language. And yet something has changed as well. Electronic communications are new language experiences in part by virtue of electrification. But how are they different from ordinary speech and writing? And what is the significance of this difference? How is the distinction between the public and the private affected by these innovations? I believe that the humanities have an important role to play in making intelligible an emerging new culture. This paper outlines a theoretical perspective, “the mode of information,” that might be useful for opening new interpretive strategies for critical social theory in relation to these new developments.

Some observers argue that the introduction of electronic devices makes no substantial difference in the nature or consequence of a communication. The politician who speaks in a TV ad campaign still attempts to gain votes according to the rules of constitutional democracy. The worker who uses a computer to control an assembly process or type a letter is paid for his or her labor as in the past, according to the contract of employment. The consumer who merely watches TV gains information about products that might be bought in a store, much like reading a newspaper. The soldier who uses a computer to guide a projectile to its target, like the archer who visually aims his arrow, is practicing the art of destroying the enemy. The electronic device simply increases the efficiency of the communication in question. From this perspective language appears as a tool for the purposes of acting human subjects, clearly subordinate in importance to the positional intentions of individuals in determinate institutional frameworks.

Nor do electronic devices nullify the theories that explain the nature of communications. To a Marxist, new communications devices fall within the thesis of class struggle: increased access to information occurs differentially in relation to one's position in the class structure. To neo-Marxists, electronic media reinforces the culture industry, heightening the hegemonic force of ideology. To an economist, the laws of the market determine who shall use a computer, who shall advertise on television, who shall have their songs broadcast to radio receivers. To a Weberian, electronic communications increase the differentiation of society into subsystems and promote the power of bureaucracy; to a liberal they are subject to the contest for power among pluralist factions. Even for technological determinists, nothing is new: electronic media confirms the proliferation of machines that alleviate toil and subordinate nature to the wishes of mankind. Regardless of one's theoretical perspective, the conclusion appears incontrovertible that with the introduction of electronically mediated communication nothing basic has changed.

These perspectives all recognize and account for one sort of modification introduced by electronic communications: the exchange of symbols between human beings is now far less subject to constraints of space and time. In principle, information is now instantly available all over the globe and may be stored and retrieved as long as electricity is available. Time and space no longer restrict the exchange of information. Marshall McLuhan's "global village" is technically feasible and as such has important consequences that must be considered and studied by all positions that would comprehend the present conjuncture. The electronic reproduction of scenes from Vietnam into American homes in the late 1960s had a stunning impact on politics. The capture of a government television station by the Philippine rebels in 1985, and their subsequent broadcasts reassuring the population of their success, materially affected the fate of the Marcos regime. The recent introduction of direct retailing on television portends a revolution in the marketing practices of consumer goods. The apprehension of suspected criminals by clues provided through the computer analysis of fingerprints affords a new level of information to law enforcement agencies. The prospect of instant universal information, introduced by electronic media, clearly has profound effects on society, the extent of which are still to be determined. But the conquest of space and time by electronic media augurs more for institutions and for theory than a mere retuning of practices and ideas to new communicational frequencies.

The new level of interconnectivity afforded by electronic media, for instance, heightens the fragility of social networks. Take the example of computer networks at research facilities. Early in November 1988, newspapers reported that a network of military, corporate, and university computers (ARPAnet), some 6,000 across the country, were "infected by a virus" and consequently

rendered dysfunctional.<sup>1</sup> A "virus" is a small "program" or set of commands that attaches itself to other programs or files so that it reproduces itself while also executing its routines. The virus spreads both within a computer and from one computer to another as files or messages are transmitted between them. The virus also carries out commands that vary from the innocuous "Display 'Gotcha!' on the screen" to the disastrous "Delete all files on the hard disk." In November, the virus in question tied up the computers' memory by simply reproducing itself ad infinitum. The shut down of ARPAnet was costly and frustrating to users. Even though no files were damaged, no information lost, and no known crime committed, the FBI was called in to locate the perpetrator.

A virus is an agent that spreads disease among living organisms. The metaphorical application of the term to computers underscores the likeness of computer networks to living bodies: computers are so profoundly interconnected that they may behave like parts of a body. Machines that are mechanically interconnected normally are unable to transmit physical forces to other machines, thereby remaining unaffected by malfunctions at other points in a chain. Computers that are informationally connected are, like living bodies, able to pass complex instructions to one another, instructions that may disable the entire computer network. With more and more institutions increasingly connected by computer networks, and dependent upon them for their functioning, society has spawned electronic, informational "bodies" which, like human communities, are subject to "epidemics." At a time when the AIDS virus threatens the human community, other "viruses" threaten the society of computers. If one of the ways the AIDS virus is transmitted is by sexual contact, the computer virus, in the case of ARPAnet, was initiated in a psycho-sexual Oedipal context: the author of the virus is a graduate student at Cornell University whose father is a computer security consultant. Cybernoanalysis and psychoanalysis may apparently become related fields, however, computer viruses are quite common and are increasing in frequency. In January and February of 1989, a combined total of 3,000 viruses were reported.<sup>2</sup> Instead of enacting a Freudian Oedipal drama, viruses might be seen as generating a new form of resistance against those who control computerized information.

The speed at which computer viruses spread spotlights the new fragility of society in the age of the mode of information. Very little time elapsed between the initial transmission of the abovementioned virus and the shutdown of the entire network. Similarly, in the stock market collapse of October 1987, news from New York passed instantly to London and Tokyo, and their reactions passed back to New York just as quickly. Financial panic at one center spread to

1. See *Los Angeles Times* articles on November 9, 23, and 25, 1988.

2. John Markoff, "Computer Viruses Thwart the Experts," *International Herald Tribune* (June 9, 1989), p. 12.

other centers as quickly as a sense of danger spreads among a herd of animals. The *New York Times*' report of the event noticed the impact of computers on the slide in stock prices.<sup>3</sup> Distance provided no buffer between remote points that might otherwise allow time for reactions to be deliberated. The communications network that ties the world's financial hubs together for better access to information also threatens them with instant economic collapse. Thus the simple utilitarian advantage of efficient language transmission becomes, through increased speed alone, a new social phenomenon, as quantity "dialectically" transmutes into quality. And this social phenomenon urges, perhaps as never before, careful attention to and examination of the linguistic dimension of culture.

An adequate account of electronic communications requires a theory that is able to decode the linguistic dimension of the new forms of social interaction. As a step toward that end I am offering the concept of the mode of information. The term "the mode of information" plays upon Marx's theory of the mode of production. In *The German Ideology*, and elsewhere, Marx invokes the concept of the mode of production in two ways: (1) as a historical category which divides and periodizes the past according to variations in the mode of production (differing combinations of means and relations of production); (2) as a metaphor for the capitalist epoch which privileges economic activity as, in Althusser's phrase, "the determination in the last instance." By mode of information I similarly suggest that history may be periodized by variations in the structure in this case of symbolic exchange, but also that the current culture gives a certain fetishistic importance to "information."

Every age employs forms of symbolic exchange that contain internal and external structures, means and relations of signification. Stages in the mode of information may be tentatively designated as follows: face-to-face—orally mediated exchange; written exchanges mediated by print—and electronically mediated exchange. If the first stage is characterized by symbolic correspondences, and the second by the representation of signs, the third stage is characterized by informational simulations. In the first, oral stage, the self is constituted as a position of enunciation through its embeddedness in a totality of face-to-face relations. In the second, print stage, the self is constructed as an agent centered in rational/imaginary autonomy. In the third, electronic stage, the self is decentered, dispersed, and multiplied in continuous instability.

In each stage the relation of language and society, idea and action, self and other is different. Although in this paper I do not have space fully to develop this theme, I want to stress that the stages are not "real," not "found" in the documents of each epoch but imposed by the theory as a necessary step in the process of attaining knowledge. In this sense the stages are not sequential but coterminous in the present. They are also not consecutive, since elements of each

3. Paul Brodeur, "Annals of Radiation: The Hazards of Electromagnetic Fields, III—Video Display Terminals," *The New Yorker* (June 26, 1989), p. 39 ff.

are at least implicit in the others. The logical status of the concept of the mode of information is both historical and transcendental. In that sense the latest stage is not the privileged, dialectical resolution of previous developments. In one sense, however, a sense that Marx anticipated, the current configuration constitutes a necessary totalization of earlier developments: that is, one cannot but see earlier developments from the situation of the present. The anatomy of the mode of electronic information, to paraphrase Marx, necessarily sheds new light on the anatomy of oral and print modes of information. The danger that must be avoided in Marx's formulation is progressivism. I prefer to consider the present age as simply an unavoidable context of discursive totalization, not as an ontological realization of a process of development.

If the stages prove to have heuristic value they will become integrated into the repertoire of standpoints through which we understand our past, and in that sense, they are "historical." As Marx notes in *The German Ideology*, the test of any theory is determined in empirical studies informed by its concepts. In this spirit, my paper is to be taken above all as an attempt to suggest the value of poststructuralist theory to the history of communications, to promote a new direction of research in that field, and therefore to be considered one theme in what Foucault called the history of the present.

For now I want to mention some peculiarities of the term "information" and suggest that it takes on a special valence in the third stage. In a sense all signs are now considered information, as in cybernetics and often in popular parlance, where "information" is contrasted with "noise" or nonmeaning. Information has become a privileged term in our culture. TV ads for information services warn consumers and corporate executives alike that they or their children will fall behind in the race for success if they do not keep up with current information. Information is presented as the key to contemporary living, and society is divided between the information rich and the information poor. The "informed" individual is a new social ideal, particularly for the middle class, a group to which in the United States everyone but the homeless claims to belong. The term "information" in the title then evokes a certain feature of the new cultural conjuncture that must be treated with suspicion.

The issue of communicational *efficiency* does not raise the basic question of the configuration of information exchange, or what I call the wrapping of language. Unless traditional assumptions about the nature of society and the theory that would comprehend it are called into question, the study of communicational distancing remains only an addendum, however important, to established points of view. If communication only facilitates or impedes other activities, it has no independent consequences. In that case, there is little justification for a new theoretical initiative such as the mode of information. But I shall argue otherwise: that the configuration of communication in any given society is an analytically autonomous realm of experience, one that is worthy of study in its own right. Furthermore, in the twentieth century the rapid introduction of new

communicational modes constitutes a pressing field for theoretical development and empirical investigation. What is at stake are new language formations that alter significantly the network of social relations, that restructure those relations and the subjects they constitute.

The example of music reproduction illustrates the way electronic mediation changes the language situation. A coterie of audiophiles strives to produce in their homes an exact copy of original musical performances.<sup>4</sup> Audiophiles maintain that certain recordings contain in their grooves all the information needed to accomplish a miracle of sound technology: the illusion that the listener is there, at the live performance of the music. For this magic to occur, everything must be just right. Only a handful of recordings qualify for this purpose: a select few by RCA (those with shaded dogs on the label), some from Mercury issued during the late 1950s and early '60s, and a handful produced by EMI from the '60s through early '70s. The stereo components must be carefully selected and matched for a perfect balance of sound reproducing abilities. Even the cables connecting the components are critical. The room itself is also a component since its qualities of sound reflection and absorption affect what the listener hears. Under the right circumstances, audiophiles insist, the listener comes very close to hearing in the home what a person in the concert hall would have heard when the piece being played on the turntable was originally performed. In this case, audiophiles are regarding musical information or language as a neutral medium of artistic expression. In its electronically mediated form, they assume, musical information may be reproduced without alteration. Information as representation here achieves its apotheosis.

The case of recorded rock music presents a quite different configuration of language. Many studio recordings of rock are from the outset structured for reproduction in the home. Most often no original performance exists. Instead each musician is taped on a separate "track"; musicians in some cases actually play the music in different cities, and some of the tracks, especially the percussion, may be taped from a synthesizer, without any "performance." An engineer combines the discrete "tracks" into a master tape which constitutes the "original." In doing so, the engineer introduces acute changes: each track is adjusted

4. The leading purveyor of this point of view is *The Absolute Sound* with its intrepid editor, Harry Pearson. This "underground" audiophile journal has, since the late 1970s, pursued the quest for the perfect representation of music in the home. In an evaluation of an amplifier (which, by the way, costs \$5000.00), the reviewer praised the component as "mightily akin to the real thing. . . . You will find yourself playing and replaying familiar recordings [on the amplifier,] . . . basking in the true representation . . . One can [when using this amplifier] easily pinpoint the location of each musical source . . . on both the lateral and depth planes. In addition, the image size is correctly maintained, as are the separating spaces between the instruments. Remarkably, not only are there detectable spaces between the musical sources, but the size of these separating spaces . . . is also captured by this amplifier." John Nork, "A Tale of Three Amplifiers," *The Absolute Sound*, Vol. 13, no. 55 (September/October 1988), p. 56. For another sample of this point of view see William Semple, "The Absolute Sound Itself," *The Absolute Sound*, vol. 8, no. 30 (June 1983), pp. 26-32, in which the tonal qualities of concert halls are examined.

for amplitude and frequency response or tonal balance. In addition, instruments are "repositioned" in the recording within the stereo soundfield, assuming the speakers are properly placed about six feet apart squarely facing the listener. The drums, for example, are often balanced to appear to emerge alternately with each beat from the left and right speaker so that the drummer seems to be situated across the spread of the room. The performance that the consumer hears when the recording is played is not a copy of an original but is a simulacrum, a copy that has no original. These rock performances exist *only* in their reproduction. Electronic mediation, in this case, produces millions of copies of musical information that was never performed in the usual sense of the term. Many other examples could be given of information systems which produce simulacra.

Electronic mediation complicates the transmission of language and subverts the subject who would limit language to the role of a simple medium of expression. In the case of the audiophile, the effort to achieve an exact musical reproduction quickly goes beyond the listener's intention. Striving to extract more and more information from the grooves of the vinyl disk, the audiophile soon finds him- or herself hearing *more* than the listener at the original performance. The audiophile claims to discern the space around each instrument, the voices of each instrumental group in complex orchestral passages (such as the violas or second violins), individual singers in choruses, and so forth. While the aim of choruses, for example, is to blend voices into unified waves of sound, the audiophile, aided by expensive stereo gear that resolves complex sounds into their discrete parts, claims to discern individual voices within the ensemble, hearing, through electronic mediation, more "information" than was audible to a listener at the original performance. The obsession to recapture the musical language of the past slides into the production of a new manifold of information. To copy an original means, in the mode of information, to create simulacra.

For many audiophiles, what began as a simple quest for musical enjoyment in the home soon becomes an extensive, multifarious quest for a perfect stereo system. More and more time, care, and money are invested in the medium of sound reproduction; more and more effort is expended to control the listening environment. Even the electricity coming into the home is suspect as a possible source of distortion: a "line conditioner" must be installed to "decontaminate" the electric current and regulate the voltage more precisely than the company delivering that electricity thinks necessary. As much as is possible, the listening room is isolated from the exterior world, reducing the decibel level of ambient street noise. In some cases, the foundation of the room is reinforced and the walls are altered by the installation of a combination of reflective and damping materials to achieve perfect acoustic properties. The body of the audiophile, seated equidistant between two speakers, becomes part of an ideal microworld, an auditory utopia in which subject and object, listener and room, merge in an identity of blissful sound. Or so the audiophile dreams.

In actuality, desire continuously escapes fulfillment as improvements continuously suggest themselves, intrusions by friends and family members disrupt listening sessions, and imperfections in the system are recognized. The electronic mediation of musical information subverts the autonomous, rational subject for whom language is a direct translation of reality, instantiating instead an infinite play of mirror reflections, an abyss of indeterminate exchanges between subject and object in which the real and the fictional, the outside and the inside, the true and the false oscillate in an ambiguous shimmer of codes, languages, communications. In this world, the subject has no anchor, no fixed place, no point of perspective, no discrete center, no clear boundary. When Foucault wrote in *The Order of Things* that "man" is dead,<sup>5</sup> he registered the disorientation of the subject in the mode of information. In electronically mediated communications, subjects now float, suspended between points of objectivity, being constituted and reconstituted in different configurations in relation to the discursive arrangement of the occasion.

In this study I take from poststructuralists the theme that subjects are constituted in acts and structures of communication. I investigate the way changes in communication patterns involve changes in the subject. Changes in the configuration or wrapping of language alter the way the subject processes signs into meanings, that sensitive point of cultural production. The shift from oral- and print-wrapped language to electronically wrapped language thus reconfigures the subject's relation to the world. If I am successful in demonstrating the effects of electronically mediated communication on the subject, the further need will also be apparent to theorize the field of the social, to call into question basic, foundational assumptions of critical social theory and more generally those of the social sciences.

In this project I also hope to contribute to a reconstruction of critical social theory by bringing poststructuralist theory to bear on the phenomena of electronically mediated communication. I hope to demonstrate that new forms of language wrapping are imposing significant changes in the social field, and that poststructuralist theory offers a uniquely appropriate strategy of interpretation in relation to these new phenomena. Conversely, I hope also to show the ways in which electronically mediated communication becomes a social context for poststructuralist theory; that turning a poststructuralist gaze upon these social phenomena introduces a feedback effect on that theory, compelling a recalibration of its interpretive habits in important ways.

The first obstacle to the constitution of the field of the mode of information is theoretical. I refer to the tendency among social theorists to objectify mean-

5. His actual words are "man would be erased, like a face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea." Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, New York, Pantheon, 1970, p. 387.

ings, to limit words to single meanings, and to treat language as a transparent tool for action. As an intellectual historian I trace the problem back to its origins. Social theory arose in a Cartesian culture of distinct objects and subjects, in a dualist metaphysics of extended things and minds.<sup>6</sup> In this theoretical context, the social scientist is constituted as a knowing subject separate from his or her object of study, one who enunciates univocal words to define an objective social field distinct from him- or herself. The discourse of social theory is structured as a direct representation of the mind of the social theorist. Within the constituted social field, by contrast, language is presumed to exist at a different level from theory but one that remains univocal. The everyday world of language (opinions, attitudes, ideas, and ideology) is also distinct from the world of action, a separate register that may be out of phase with the register of action. Still, social scientists regard the social level of discourse, like the discourse of theory, as representing the mind of the individual. In this theoretical context, language is nothing more than a transparent mediation, a representation of consciousness in writing or speech. Within this theoretical economy, electronic communications simply increase the representational power of language by reducing the temporal and spatial distancing of meaning.

Today, however, the representational character of language is especially fragile and problematic. In sphere after sphere of daily life, the relation of word and thing is complicated by the loss of the referent. Consider for a moment the example of money as a representational sign. At one time it denoted rare, precious metals that were coined by the state and therefore functioned as legal tender. Gold, for example, both functioned as a medium of exchange and was considered valuable in itself. The referent was a stable ground of the word. A correspondence existed between the representational function of gold as a medium of exchange and its specific character as a scarce commodity. The sign "money" represented the thing "gold" with little ambiguity. Money then came to designate bank notes which represented coined precious metals stored in fortified government depositories, but were not precious in themselves since they could be printed in great quantities. The *correspondence* between word and thing was dropped in favor of a relation of *representation*. Later, checks, representing deposits of bank notes, came to serve as money and, being more easily printed than bank notes, were even less precious in themselves. At present bank cards are replacing checks, representing not deposits of bank notes, but electronic information in data bases, which in turn are representations of deposits of bank notes. The word "money" now refers to a configuration of oxides on a tape stored in the computer department of a bank. The connection between the oxides and the

6. For an excellent analysis of Cartesian culture as masculine see Susan Bordo, *The Flight into Objectivity: Essays on Cartesianism and Culture*, Albany, State University of New York Press, 1987.

function of exchange medium is arbitrary, revealing its socially constituted character, and the representational aspect of "money" is sustained through language, through configurations of language, its referent being remote and difficult to discern. The case of "money" illustrates the great elasticity of representational language, the way words can refer to things that are at a very great remove from them, but also to the limits of that elasticity. The next step in linguistic change is the formation of simulacra.

The function of representation comes to grief when words lose their connection with things and come to stand in the place of things—in short, when language represents itself. The complex linguistic worlds of the media, the computer and the databases it can access, the surveillance capabilities of the state and the corporation, and finally, the discourses of science, are each realms in which the representational function of language has been placed in question by different communicational patterns each of which shift to the forefront the self-referential aspect of language. In each case, the language in question is constituted as an intelligible field with a unique pattern of wrapping, whose power derives not so much from representing something else but from its internal, linguistic structure. While this feature of language is always present in its use, today meaning increasingly is sustained through mechanisms of self-referentiality, and the nonlinguistic thing, the referent, fades into obscurity, playing less and less of a role in the delicate process of sustaining cultural meanings. In such a cultural context the categories of objectivist social science force a premature closure of knowledge, reducing the ambivalent complexity of the mode of information to the "rationality" of language as a tool for action.

Some social critics complain that the increase in informational language by itself, in such areas as the media, science, the computer, and state and corporate surveillance, undermines the representational function. The crisis of representation derives, I suggest, not only from the information explosion but also from the new communicational structures in which that information circulates. Beyond a certain point, increased distance between addressor and addressee allows a reconfiguration of the relation between emitter and receiver, between the message and its context, between the receiver/subject and representations of him- or herself. These reconfigurations, which I call wrappings of language, in turn impose a new relation between science and power, between the state and the individual, between the individual and the community, between *authority* and law, between family members, between the consumer and the retailer. In sum, the solid institutional routines that have characterized modern society for some two hundred years are being shaken by the earthquake of electronically mediated communication and recomposed into new routines whose outlines are as yet by no means clear.

While to some extent language is a tool for intentional action, and as such must be accounted for within the theory of the mode of information, language has another, very different capacity: it is a figurative, structuring power that

constitutes the subject who speaks as well as the one that is spoken to. Electronically mediated communication has compelling effects at this level of language. By distancing the relation of speaking body to listening body, by abstracting from the connection between the reader or writer and the palpable materiality of the printed or handwritten text, electronically mediated communication upsets the relation of the subject to the symbols it emits or receives and reconstitutes this relation in drastically new shapes. For the subject in electronically mediated communication, the object tends to become not the material world as represented in language but the flow of signifiers itself. In the mode of information it becomes increasingly difficult, or even pointless, for the subject to distinguish a "real" existing "behind" the flow of signifiers, and as a consequence social life in part becomes a practice of positioning subjects to receive and interpret messages.

McLuhan's axiom that "the medium is the message" points in the direction of the mode of information but does not go far enough. By focusing on the "sensorium" of the receiving subject he preserves the subject as a perceiving, not an interpreting, being. He continues the tradition of Lockean epistemology by treating humans as sensing animals, except he stresses the changes introduced particularly by television, in the configuration of sensations confronting these animals. What the mode of information puts into question, however, is not simply the sensory apparatus but the very shape of subjectivity: its relation to the world of objects, its perspective on that world, its location in that world. We are confronted not so much by a change from a "hot" to a "cool" communications medium, or by a reshuffling of the sensoria, as McLuhan thought, but by a generalized destabilization of the subject. In the mode of information the subject is no longer located in a point in absolute time/space, enjoying a physical, fixed vantage point from which rationally to calculate its options. Instead it is multiplied by databases, dispersed by computer messaging and conferencing, decontextualized and reidentified by TV ads, dissolved and materialized continuously in the electronic transmission of symbols. In the perspective of Deleuze and Guattari, we are being changed from "arboreal" beings, rooted in time and space, to "rhizomic" nomads who daily wander at will (whose will remains a question) across the globe, and even beyond it through communications satellites, without necessarily moving our bodies at all.<sup>7</sup>

The body then is no longer an effective limit of the subject's position. Or perhaps it would be better to say that communications facilities extend the nervous system throughout the earth to the point that it enwraps the planet in a

7. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen Lane, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1983; and *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1987.

noosphere, to use Teilhard de Chardin's term, of language.<sup>8</sup> If I can speak directly or by electronic mail to a friend in Paris while sitting in California, if I can witness political and cultural events as they occur across the globe without leaving my home, if a database at a remote location contains my profile and informs government agencies which make decisions that affect my life without any knowledge on my part of these events, if I can shop in my home by using my TV or computer, then where I am and who am I? In these circumstances I cannot consider myself centered in my rational, autonomous subjectivity or bordered by a defined ego, but I am disrupted, subverted, and dispersed across social space.

The broad purpose of this project is to explore the theoretical conditions for understanding the new configurations of the subject. Important limits of the study must be explicitly stated. The term "the mode of information" is not intended as a totalizing or essentializing category to control or inscribe a figure of the present age. It must be understood in the first instance as multiple: there are many modes of information, each with its historical particularities, and there are continuities and breaks between modes of information. In this paper I do not attempt to generate a formal theory of the field of modes of information. I do not delineate concepts as Marx did with the mode of production and as Weber did with the theory of legitimate authority—in each case specifying and controlling areas of empirical investigation, or providing explanatory models to account for changes from one mode of information to another, or offering periodizing taxonomies. The reason for this theoretical modesty derives from cautions imposed by the theoretical strategies that seemed most appropriate and most suggestive to my study, theoretical strategies that are known as poststructuralist. This project then is a preliminary study that posits in a rudimentary fashion a mode of information in the current situation. It is an experiment that hopes to promote further theoretical development and empirical research.

A review of critical social theory led me to the conclusion that contemporary society ought not be approached through action-centered models. This is so for two reasons. First, groups that hold the initiative in recent protest movements, such as women and minorities, have been inscribed by the metanarratives of liberalism and Marxism as "other." These grand theories appeal to the discontents of a rational subject (individual or collective) that is thought to be capable of emancipating itself from domination. Women and minorities are excluded from this process, or at least are at the margins of the centered political drama. Thus, when women and minorities took the spotlight of political opposition in the 1970s, a certain dislocation was imposed upon earlier traditions of emancipatory theory, a dislocation which some feminist theories have addressed with particular force. In order to take into account the politics of the "other,"

8. Teilhard de Chardin, *The Phenomenon of Man*, trans. Bernard Wall, New York, Harper and Row, 1961.

critical social theory requires an epistemological overhaul in which the figure of the rational subject no longer serves as a ground or frame. We are thereby permitted to reconstruct the oppositions normal/deviant, majority/minority, masculine/feminine. In addition to feminist and subaltern theory, the poststructuralist positions of Foucault, Derrida, Lyotard, Deleuze, and Baudrillard move precisely in this direction.<sup>9</sup> They provide an antidote to a false return to those emancipatory metanarratives that can no longer function as critical. They also caution us about and institute theoretical mechanisms against positioning the theorist—especially the male theorist—as a rational subject, in a central, privileged position in the movement of liberation.

The second cause for skepticism about action-centered theory is that the social scene appears to me increasingly composed of electronically mediated communications that expand upon and magnify the self-referential aspect of language. Instead of envisioning language as a tool of a rational, autonomous subject intent upon controlling a world of objects for the purpose of enhanced freedom, the new language structures refer back upon themselves, subverting referentiality and thereby acting upon the subject and constituting it in new and disorienting ways. Again, the theoretical texts of the poststructuralists had already pioneered this forbidding, strange terrain. If poststructuralist positions appear doubly relevant to a reconstructed critical social theory, they also impose severe restrictions upon such a project. Oddly enough, poststructuralists call into question theory itself—if by theory one means a set of concepts that open a terrain for investigation by a strategy that produces discursive maps of the territory. My turn to poststructuralism thus precludes the development of a theory of the mode of information that displaces while mirroring the theory of the mode of production.

The strategy I adopt follows a double imperative: it locates sectors of electronically mediated communication and in each case invokes a poststructuralist position to highlight and examine the self-referential linguistic mechanism instantiated therein. The poststructuralist position illuminates the decentering effects of the electronically mediated communication on the subject, and reciprocally, the electronically mediated communication subverts the authority effects of the poststructuralist position by imposing the social context as a decentering ground for theory. Hence, I couple TV ads and Baudrillard, data bases and

9. Feminist theorists have also moved in this direction. See, for example, Julia Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, trans. Margaret Waller, New York, Columbia University Press, 1984; and *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, trans. Thomas Gora et al., New York, Columbia University Press, 1980; Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clement, *The Newly Born Woman*, trans. Betsy Wing, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1986; Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One*, trans. Catherine Porter, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1985. For an interesting argument on this score, see Leslie Rabine, "A Feminist Politics of Non-Identity," *Feminist Studies*, vol. 14, no. 1 (Spring 1988), pp. 11–31.

Foucault, electronic writing and Derrida, science and Lyotard. The intended result is to accomplish the intermediate task of drawing attention to some of the structurally new features of the contemporary social space and to promote interest in theories that brightly illuminate it. The topics I suggest are of course not the only possible ones: the telephone, photography, the cinema—to name only a few language wrappings I do not discuss—are fully appropriate and even necessary topics within the thematic of the mode of information.

In the case of data bases, Foucault's writing on the panopticon suggests that computerized accumulation of information and monitoring of individuals is not so much an invasion of privacy, a violation of the space of a centered self, but a constitution of new subjects which decenter and multiply the individual. In the case of computer writing, the electrification of the mark compels a rethinking of Derridean deconstruction. In word processing, computer conferencing, and computer messaging, the electric mark subverts and disperses the subject in ways that give new meanings to the term *différance*. In the case of TV ads, a monologic, self-referential communication with asynchronous speech contexts generates simulacra much as Baudrillard has written. In the TV ad, a language has been made which leaves/urges viewers to regard their own subjectivity as a constituted structure, to regard themselves as members of a community of self-constituters, an asynchronous community separated in space and time (with VCRs, satellites), a mute community, a community of individuals who participate in the self-referential conversation of the TV ad in one manner only: by constituting themselves as subject/object of the message. The full development of these topics requires a different format.

My effort is to focus on the point of intersection between new communication phenomena and poststructuralist theories, to explore the ramifications of that intersection as a step toward a more general discursive initiative that has variously been termed cultural studies, postmodern theory, subaltern discourse, local knowledges. I see these tendencies as part of a challenge to existing disciplines in the human sciences to ask new sorts of questions, ones that take as their point of departure a self-reflexive recontextualization, and that abandon "modern" positions in favor of exploring "postmodern" positions. I mean by this that the political metanarratives of emancipation from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that have served as frames and reference points for the disciplines of history, literature, philosophy, sociology, anthropology, and so forth now appear to be losing their powers of coherence, their ability to provide a groundwork of assumptions that make it appear natural to ask certain questions and to think that the answers to those questions define the limit and extent of the problem of truth. I refer to questions such as the following: What is/was the condition of the working class at a certain time and place? How do/did political mechanisms insure natural rights and overthrow arbitrary power? How does/did a given nation insure its glory and power? How does/did an economy industrialize and secure continued growth? These questions, along with many others like them,

have been some of the leading and animating issues of the human sciences. The time has come to question their hegemony over discourse, to propose new questions that the old ones subordinate, forget, or repress—new questions that open political initiatives that may not easily fit into the cultural frame of liberal and socialist images of freedom and that may move to the “margins,” to the new movements of the 1970s and '80s. At this stage, however, it is too early in the development of the problematic to provide firm linkages between the forms of domination and potentials for freedom that the theory of the mode of information reveals, on the one hand, with the advances of feminism, minority discourse, and ecological critiques, on the other. Only occasionally does the opportunity arise to correlate the mode of information with discussions of gender, race, and class.

I situate the theoretical and social origin of the mode of information within a field of contending discourses and imagine that it threatens the dominance of established positions. But I do not claim that the old questions are irrelevant or that they should be abandoned, only that they need to be relativized by new ones. To argue otherwise would amount to asserting not a contest of discourses but a pretense to exclusive reason, a claim that poststructuralist theory, to which I am indebted, denies from the outset. Yet I do assert the emergence of a certain “new,” I do affirm a break with the modern, a discontinuity with current paradigms. And I do so knowing full well that this “new” electronically mediated communication or mode of information is in many ways not new at all, but has been anticipated in social developments and theoretical initiatives for decades, even centuries. Electronically mediated information systems go back to the telegraph and photography of the nineteenth century.

The problem, however, is not to demonstrate the slow, continuous evolution of the past into the present, thereby creating a familiarity effect, an ideological haze of false recognition that celebrates and substantializes the phenomena in question; instead I see the issue as one of configuring in theory certain phenomena so that their disruptive potential can be recognized and, perhaps in time, acted upon. I choose discontinuity over continuity, the newness of the new over the oldness of the new for political, not epistemological, reasons. By doing so, as I believe Marx did with the concept of the mode of production, the prospects may be furthered for defining structures of domination and contributing to the process through which they may be disrupted. Industrial capitalism was, when Marx theorized it, both a minority phenomenon and the outcome of a long historical trajectory; the same emergent character may be attributed today to the mode of information.

## Power and Freedom: Opposition and the Humanities\*

PAUL A. BOVÉ

*On the critical side—I mean critical in a very broad sense—philosophy is precisely the challenging of all phenomena of domination at whatever level or under whatever form they present themselves.*

—Michel Foucault,  
“the ethic of the care for the self as a practice for freedom”

With the publication of *Discipline and Punish* and the first volume of *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault's critics begin to assert that his thinking about power, discipline, and the panopticon leaves no room for freedom or resistance to power. This line of criticism derives from the earlier charge that his “archaeological” method could not account for change. In “Criticism Between System and Culture,” for example, Edward Said argues that Foucault's work has been haunted by an “asymmetry in his work between the blindly anonymous and the intentional.” Foucault has been concerned “with . . . the subjugation of individuals in society to some suprapersonal disciplines or authority.” In effect, Said insists that what Foucault has done is to provide “a prodigiously detailed set of possible descriptions whose main aim is . . . to overwhelm the individual subject or will and replace it instead with minutely responsive rules of discursive formation, rules that no one individual can either alter or circumvent.”<sup>1</sup>

Of course, a number of key Foucauldian texts ground just such an interpretation. In a lecture of January 14, 1976, for example, Foucault speaks of the disciplines as displacing the order of sovereignty and producing a new code, a new “norm”: “The code they come to define,” Foucault writes, “is not that of law but of normalisation.” Foucault's lecture describes the relative displacement of juridical and sovereign organizations of power and right by a newer, modern

\* I want to thank Jonathan Arac, Daniel T. O'Hara, and Donald E. Pease for reading this essay and offering specific and encouraging response.

1. Edward Said, *The World, the Text, and the Critic*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1983, p. 186.

form of social organization based on the disciplines' powers to normalize life. In the process, he makes several remarks that help open up the discussion of the human sciences as a technology for forming a normalized or disciplinary society:

I believe that the process which has rendered the discourse of the human sciences possible is the juxtaposition, the encounter between two lines of approach, two mechanisms, two absolutely heterogeneous types of discourse: on the one hand there is the reorganisation of right that invests sovereignty, and on the other, the mechanics of the coercive forces whose exercise takes a disciplinary form. . . . the procedures of normalisation come to be ever more constantly engaged in the colonisation of those of law. I believe that all this can explain the global functioning of what I would call a *society of normalisation*.<sup>2</sup>

Foucault's comments have helped critics understand the importance of hegemonic elements of societal organization and have guided many oppositional critics' examinations of the determining roles played by the institutionalized practices and discourses of the human sciences in the constitution of relations of knowledge and power between individuals and institutions and among individuals. Also, they have helped make possible a number of genealogical investigations into how these seemingly determinant relations have come about, into just what their histories have been. By their emphasis on norms, they have also helped make us aware of the importance of difference; by their emphasis on truth and power, they have helped us see how the "regimes of truth" need to be changed. In addition, they have helped us understand the continuing if unsatisfactory importance of the older discourse of "rights" in the face of newer and older forms of power; women and minorities, in particular, have made much good use of this line of argument in order to defend the remaining value of a juridical code of "rights."

In the humanities, Foucault's ideas of the late '70s helped make possible what Jonathan Arac nicely calls "critical genealogies," that is, narratives of the various disciplines' histories as they need to be told if we are to understand both how the present has come to be and how it might be different. In this way, Foucault's work has been relevant to the humanities' disciplinary self-examination, to the professionalism debate, and to the end of theory movement. In a different way, as certain recent developments at Berkeley suggest, Foucault's work has been made one element underlying what has come to be called the New Historicism, a movement whose actual political function in the United States needs to be considered at greater length elsewhere.

2. Michel Foucault, "Two Lectures," in Colin Gordon, ed., *Power/Knowledge*, trans. Alessandro Fontana and Pasquale Pasquino, New York, Pantheon, 1980, p. 107.

Foucault's writings after the publication of volume one of *The History of Sexuality* seemingly raise a number of questions different from those raised before. A very large number of critics and commentators note that the late Foucault turns in the direction of ethics, of the self, of style, of agency, and away from matters of power, knowledge, discipline, and normalization. Foucault, himself constantly responds to questions about a turn in his work, often trying to assert a continuity from his earliest writings on psychiatry to his last work on "governmentality." It is not unusual to hear critics wonder at the facility and power of Foucault's own apparent self-revisions; indeed, an interesting essay could be made to trace Foucault's changing self-representations.

But on one matter that importantly concerns the "Humanities as a Social Technology," one must decide if there has been a change, an evolution, or self-correction in Foucault's thought, and that is the persistent question of the individual will's relation to the collective order, no matter whether the latter is conceived as discourse or discipline. Two points are at stake: first, Said's typical charge that Foucault is "Borgesian," that is, politically quietistic; second, the question of whether or not Foucault offers some way of conceiving the human sciences as technologies for freedom.

Critics have often noted that Said needed continually to differentiate himself from Foucault throughout the seventies. His immediate political work—to name and encourage the Palestinian resistance while exposing the workings of "orientalism"—required a critical, political discourse that made more of both the intellectual's engagement on the side of the oppressed and of the nature and availability of resistance than did Foucault's. Closely related to this project was Said's insistence that academic intellectuals not be caught up within the networks of "textuality" to the detriment of their political, critical responsibility to take up more worldly matters in a materialist way.

In a justly famous essay, "Traveling Theory," Said puts the case against Foucault in a powerfully theorized political conclusion:

The disturbing circularity of Foucault's theory of power is a form of theoretical overtotalization superficially more difficult to resist because . . . it is formulated, reformulated, and borrowed for use in what seem to be historically documented situations. But note that Foucault's history is ultimately textual, or rather textualized; its line is one for which Borges would have an affinity. Gramsci, on the other hand, would find it uncongenial. He would certainly appreciate the fineness of Foucault's archeologies, but would find it odd that they make not even a nominal allowance for emergent movements, and none for revolutions, counterhegemony, or historical blocks. In human history there is always something beyond the reach of dominating systems, no matter how deeply they saturate society, and this is

obviously what makes change possible, limits power in Foucault's sense, and hobbles that theory of power.<sup>3</sup>

Much could be said about Said's own critical practice and genealogy in this passage, but it must stand as a powerful instance of a charge against Foucault that, if true, would substantially diminish the value of Foucault's work.

There are times when Foucault seems to be responding directly to Said's charges, as when, in "the ethic of the care for the self as a practice for freedom"—from which I've taken my epigraph—he says: "One cannot impute to me the idea that power is a system of domination which controls everything and which leaves no room for freedom."<sup>4</sup> Readers find it hard to believe this comment from 1984 when they recall some others from 1976; Foucault seems to be practicing the art of self-revision. In articulating his notion of "bio-power" which puts "life" and its management at the center of political control and social organization, Foucault makes some comments about power that tellingly raise the issue of the state and suggest that he has forgotten some of his earlier comments on power:

If the development of the great institutions of the state, as *institutions* of power, ensured the maintenance of production relations, the rudiments of anatomo- and bio-politics, created in the eighteenth century as *techniques* of power present at every level of the social body and utilized by very diverse institutions . . . operated in the sphere of economic processes. . . . They also acted as factors of segregation and social hierarchization, exerting their influence on the respective forces of both these movements, guaranteeing relations of domination and effects of hegemony.<sup>5</sup>

Gramsci—perhaps through Althusser—is more present in this passage than at most other moments in Foucault's speculations on power. Nonetheless, Foucault revises Gramsci here by defining state institutions as institutions of power and by getting at—even though not fully clarifying—the existence of a network of relations between the state and population, between domination and hegemony—that in fact underlies them both—that anticipates his own later concerns with governmentality.

Before developing this connection, though, one should note that, as long ago as 1976, in the same lecture quoted above, Foucault himself saw the political and intellectual inadequacy of any theory of power that left individuals the

3. Said, *The World*, . . . , pp. 246–247.

4. Interview with Michel Foucault in James Bernauer and David Rasmussen, eds., *The Final Foucault*, trans. J. D. Gauthier, S.J., Cambridge, MIT Press, 1988, p. 13. (The interview was conducted on January 20, 1984.)

5. Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 1, trans. Robert Hurley, New York, Pantheon Books, 1978, p. 141.

victims of anonymous will. Having argued that disciplinary formations largely replaced the sovereign will and its juridical legal apparatus in modernity, Foucault cautioned that the disciplines' opponents should not invoke theories of "right" of the sort which "invest sovereignty." Precisely because the disciplinary and sovereignty "are two absolutely integral constituents of the general mechanism of power in our society,"<sup>6</sup> invoking the latter against the former is a "dead end" in a struggle for freedom.

Foucault's comments on people's desire to "object" to the operations of disciplinary power can be found throughout his work of the '70s. It is not only the case, as I have argued elsewhere, that he clearly thought of his own genealogies as acts of "opposition" to the established order; it is also the case that he often thematized the felt need to stand "against" the operations of discipline—even though he often formulated the question so that there seemed no way to effectively be "against" the disciplines. As we read Foucault's descriptions of the workings of the panopticon and other forms of disciplinary or bio-power, we often wonder about the concrete possibilities of resistance his work represents: we know his own work is a form of resistance, but other than the critical and stylistic power of his writing, what forms might "resistance" take in Foucault? What might it mean to "be against" in his work? For example, in Volume One of *The History of Sexuality*, having developed the notion of bio-power, he points out that historically all resistance to its regime circulates through it: "against this power that was still new in the nineteenth century, the forces that resisted relied for support on the very thing it invested, that is, on life and man as a living being."<sup>7</sup>

Nonetheless, Foucault often tried to articulate the need to find such a way of "being against." In the lecture of January 14, 1976, for example, having told us an appeal to "right" cannot be meaningful as a mode of opposition in modern disciplinary society, he writes the following:

If one wants to look for a non-disciplinary form of power, or rather, to struggle against disciplines and disciplinary power, it is not towards the ancient right of sovereignty that one should turn but towards the possibility of a new form of right, one which must indeed be anti-disciplinarian, but at the same time liberated from the principle of sovereignty.<sup>8</sup>

Juxtaposing these two quotations suggests two directions for thought. First, that Foucault was dissatisfied with the easily available means of "being against" that disciplinary society offered, precisely because they recycled the effects of power in that order. Second, that Foucault's genealogy of power specified the limited historical possibilities for resistance precisely in order to point out the

6. *Ibid.*, p. 108.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 144.

8. Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*, p. 108.

need to find new ways to resist and, indeed, the existence of the possibility of those new ways. Of course, these two lines of thought converge on one point: "being against." That the lines of resistance to bio-power took the form of defending life against that very power did not, in itself and in advance, as it were, make meaningless the struggle waged in that form, through that set of relays: "life as a political object," writes Foucault, "was in a sense taken at face value and turned back against the system that was bent on controlling it."<sup>9</sup> Were power capable of the all-absorbing control that eliminates struggle — as Said and others have claimed — then Foucault's very problematic would have ceased to exist. The issue for Foucault was different: given that the relations of struggle are as much implicated by and in the operations of power as these constitute relations between and among agents — whether conceived as institutions or individuals — and given that, as Said might say, something "irreducible" appears in the very act of struggle within, against, and by means of the dominant, how then can one avoid drawing the conclusion that, for Foucault, agents — who might be individuals or collectives — are capable of struggling for themselves, for "freedom" to limit the dominating effects of power-systems, no matter what the dominant structure might be at a given time?

This line of thought suggests that the so-called "turn" in Foucault's late work results from his taking certain issues up in finer resolution. Perhaps tracing some of the connections between two of these more finely construed issues will usefully lead to the question of "The Humanities as a Social Technology."

Foucault's concern with opponents of disciplinary power — expressed as early as January, 1976 — deepens with his continuing work on "governmentality" and his emerging work on "ethics." In January, 1984, for example, he explicitly returns to the problem of how to be against disciplines, but now he casts the discussion in terms of "freedom." By this time, Foucault has come to see "relationships of power as strategic games between liberties."<sup>10</sup> If you will, this is a form of power that defines relationships between and among individuals and is, as it were, at the other end of the spectrum from "states of domination" that involve the largest institutions and the greatest forms of power and force. These "games between liberties" occupy the space that concerns itself with "ethics" and the "aesthetics of the self" — that is, the topics of his last two books.

Foucault's new emphasis upon "freedom" and "liberty" makes clear that he now intends to study less the order of disciplines that regulates the range of choice and action delimiting agency and to examine more explicitly the possibilities of self-definition in relation to the dual operations of power as, first, strategic

9. Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 1, p. 145.

10. Bernauer and Rasmussen, eds., *The Final Foucault*, "the ethic of the care for the self as a practice for freedom," p. 19. One might want to make a distinction between Foucault and Lyotard on this point. Just let it be said that, in Foucault, there is none of the utopian facility that one sometimes associates with Lyotard.

games of liberty and, second, governmentality conceived as a "political technology of individuals." This set of concerns may come as a surprise to some, but it should not. One should see these concerns as consistent with his suspicion of all discourses of liberty: they neither depend upon nor enforce any narrative of liberation; they avoid any idealist notion of a "free" subject, taken either as a class or individual self, conceived as a metaphysical unity and substance. In "The Subject and Power," we recall, Foucault theorized power as relationship and the relationships of power as actions upon actions: "What defines a relationship of power is that it is a mode of action which does not act directly and immediately on others. Instead it acts upon their actions: an action upon an action, on existing actions or on those which may arise in the present or the future."<sup>11</sup> Foucault now stresses the idea of possibility in such phrases as "those which may arise." Even in formulating the two essential components of power relationships, he emphasizes that they always induce—even in the one over whom power is exercised—effects of openness: "a power relationship," he writes, "can only be articulated on the basis of two elements which are indispensable if it is really to be a power relationship: that 'the other' . . . be thoroughly recognized and maintained to the very end as a person who acts; and that, faced with a relationship of power, a whole field of responses, reactions, results, and possible inventions may open up."<sup>12</sup> Power does not, in other words, preclude resistance; rather, it depends upon "freedom." Were there no range of possible responses within power relations, there would be slavery or violence, but not power. In Foucault's writings, there is no narrative of repressed freedom that needs to be released or liberated; there is not even a Gramscian vision of hegemonic institutions inducing consent. Or better, there is hegemony, but only because relations of power open up fields of response that can eventuate in consensus and agreement. Since Foucault sees power as "a structure of actions brought to bear upon possible actions," it cannot be adequately described in any subject-centered narrative of liberation. In this, it reminds us of Nietzsche, whose critique of the metaphysical subject in *On the Genealogy of Morals* insists that language deludes us into positing the necessary existence of a substantial subject as the only adequate cause of actions taken to be effects.<sup>13</sup> But what is most important in Nietzsche's critique—namely the persistence of the will, of willing, despite the lack of a metaphysical subject—gets taken up and transmuted in Foucault's theory so that it reappears as "freedom," the capacity to act within an open field of induced effects, itself the "effect," as it

11. Hubert L. Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, "Afterword by Michel Foucault: The Subject and Power," 2nd edition, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1982, p. 220.

12. *Ibid.*

13. Frederic Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale, New York, Vintage, 1969, p. 45.

were, of a structure of actions upon a range of possible actions in the present and future. Only "violence," as in slavery, can eliminate this capacity.

"Violence" acts upon the body: "it forces, it bends, it breaks on the wheel, it destroys, or it closes the door on all possibilities. Its opposite pole can only be passivity."<sup>14</sup> And we should add, its political aim is to eliminate all possible action or reaction, all possible choice, precisely by closing down any field of possibilities. Freedom, for individuals or collectivities, only exists when they "are faced with a field of possibilities in which several ways of behaving, several reactions and diverse compartments may be realized."<sup>15</sup> In tyranny, in totalitarianism, in occupied territories, indeed, in strongly empowered hegemonies, the political aim of the ruler is to foreclose relations of power because these always and only exist as a result of complex interrelations with freedom and choice. The oppressors' aim is best understood as an effort to preclude power relations that open fields of choice, not as an effort to repress the freedom given man by nature or to bring about some form of social "order" by regulating the supposedly bestial and sinful animal, man, in some constitution.

Having abandoned the grand narratives of liberation and having given theoretical reasons for doing so, Foucault suggests we think power and freedom as each the condition for the possibility of the other's existence. We have then something like a theory for the possibility of freedom offered in something like a structural paradigm of necessary interrelations. No theory that thinks one as prior to the other, no theory that thinks one alone can begin to understand social existence. Echoing Nietzsche once more, Foucault suggests that we should think the relationship of power as a permanent agon that denies neither the free attempt to act on others' actions nor the desire to remain free of those actions—while acting oneself. "At the very heart of the power relationship," writes Foucault, "and constantly provoking it, are the recalcitrance of the will and the intransigence of freedom. Rather than speaking of an essential freedom, it would be better to speak of an 'agonism,' of a relationship which is at the same time reciprocal incitation and struggle."<sup>16</sup>

But this struggle exists socially and individually, or, in terms central to Foucault's last work, it exists as a problem of "government"—which is a problem of ethics—and as a problem of aesthetics—which is also a problem of ethics. In "The Subject and Power," Foucault saw "government" as an issue pertaining to the collective, concerning primarily "the way in which the conduct of individuals or of groups might be directed."<sup>17</sup> By 1984, however, following his research

14. Dreyfus and Rabinow, *Michel Foucault*, p. 220.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 221.

16. *Ibid.*, pp. 221–222.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 221.

into the ancients, he had come to conceive the notion more broadly: "I say that governmentality implies the relationship of self to self, which means exactly that, in the idea of governmentality, I am aiming at the totality of practices, by which one can constitute, define, organize, instrumentalize the strategies which individuals in their liberty can have in regard to each other."<sup>18</sup> Foucault's research led him to conclude that this "totality of practices" involved power structures existing on at least three levels: "states of domination," that is, the largest forms of power such as the state and its affiliated institutions; "games of power," which are struggles among people to control others' actions; and "governmental technologies," which extend from control of the self to forms of domestic control to control of the economy: "It did not only cover the legitimately constituted forms of political or economic subjection, but also modes of action, more or less considered and calculated, which were destined to act upon the possibilities of action of others."<sup>19</sup> "Governmentality," in other words, extends as a concept from the operation of the "police" in the extended sense Foucault recovers and Donzelot employs to the relations among family members to the individual's struggle for self-mastery in aesthetic style.

Foucault's theory of power has not only been misread by those who have wanted to condemn him for failing to take "resistance" seriously, but also by others who have tried to adapt it for their own research into and arguments against the professionalization of the humanities within the institutions of the university. Some harm has been done by the second group—among whom it is no doubt only fair to put myself, but I hope only in part. Too many facile calls for trans- or interdisciplinary work, for "cultural studies," for "new" kinds of "historicism"—too many rapid dismissals of the institutionalized forms of humanistic study have followed on the reading that would have Foucault saying that disciplines and the human sciences are "repressive"—a category which, as we know, Foucault spent much of his time trying to overthrow as too closely linked to the dominant forms of rationality.

Foucault's thoughts on "freedom/power"—I put that as we used to put "power/knowledge"—lead to ways to reconsider the social operations of the institutionalized human sciences in terms of an all-important question: do they promote domination? Since Nietzsche, we have been unable to say simply and moralistically that relations of power are somehow, in themselves, "bad" or "immoral." The question regarding relations of power—which are technologies—becomes how to practice them without destroying them. Foucault's objections to Habermas no doubt have to do with the latter's hope for an undistorted form of communication, absent power and force—a possibility Foucault thinks of as Utopian. Indeed, Habermas's line—we cannot treat it at

18. Bernauer and Rasmussen, eds., *The Final Foucault*, p. 19.

19. Dreyfus and Rabinow, *Michel Foucault*, p. 221.

length here—cannot produce a theory of the intersection of power, freedom, ethics, politics, rationality, and style. In criticizing Habermas, Foucault gives a general sense of his project's aim:

I don't believe there can be a society without relations of power, if you understand them as means by which individuals try to conduct, to determine the behavior of others. The problem is not of trying to dissolve them in the utopia of a perfectly transparent communication, but to give one's self the rules of law, the techniques of management, and also the ethics, the *ethos*, the practice of self, which would allow these games of power to be played with a minimum of domination.<sup>20</sup>

Foucault's critics should immediately object to this as a liberal formulation that puts too much authority in and value on the individual as an autonomous figure, and extends the notion of "micro-physics" to the point where it seems to dissolve all collectivities into something uncomfortably like a "million points of light," as certain United States politicians might have it. Foucault has stressed the individual's responsibility to acquire—"to give one's self," as he says—the means to minimize domination in the strategic games of liberty. Of course, this is typical of Foucault's revisions of Althusser.<sup>21</sup> Rather than theorize the individual's relation to the symbolic in terms of an interpellation into ideology, Foucault imagines individuals minimizing domination in the games of freedom by asceticism, self-knowledge, and self-mastery—all of which, presumably, allow for a maximized use of the field of possibilities presented by power, but without dire effects upon the other in the relationship. The objections to Foucault on this level might ramify through the examples he gives: "We know very well that power is not an evil. Take for example, sexual relationship or love relationships. To exercise power over another, in a sort of open strategic game, where things could be reversed, that is not evil. That is part of love, passion, of sexual pleasure."<sup>22</sup> The objections, presumably, would have to do with the private nature of this example and, to many, with its apparently naive formulation of reversibility in sex. Indeed, we might argue, the Foucault of the '60s and '70s would have helped us understand why this reversibility would itself be restricted by the discourses, disciplines, and institutions that constituted the sexuality of the partners: the relations would not allow for complete and free reversal.

But the late Foucault is not, I think, trying to displace the early Foucault whose work has, in part, been misread as either a theory of repression or, more cleverly, a theory of restricted production. Rather, Foucault tried to offer a sort

20. Bernauer and Rasmussen, eds., *The Final Foucault*, p. 18.

21. We might say simply that Foucault's work on the microphysics of power as a mode of subject formation is a direct challenge to Althusser's overemphasis on the importance of ideology. One should read both *Discipline and Punish* and *The History of Sexuality* in this light.

22. Bernauer and Rasmussen, eds., *The Final Foucault*, p. 18.

of general field theory of power relations extending from the self in conflict with itself and others in relatively private spaces, where liberty was least restricted by larger social forces and forms, through the very broad space where games of liberty and governmental technologies intersect and cohere, and come to underlie or underpin the levels of domination within the state and economy. The vast intent of this incomplete project is fairly clear in Foucault's late works—despite their focus on the ancients. Perhaps their most powerful effect is to show that other relations of power have been possible—the current ones are not “natural” despite their status as “self-evident”—and despite the imagined objections that this is mere liberalism to show that “care for the self” in the form of self-mastery in style, not code or norm, has been possible before and can be seen as an open possibility even in today's order of political rationality.

The question, of course, is how can one imagine the significance of these games of liberty as political? Foucault's example of reversibility in sex and love seems weak on this point, although one could draw attention to the fact that even the “private” games of love, as games, are still not entirely outside the realm of sexuality—*The Use of Pleasure* makes this fairly clear. But perhaps Foucault's second example will help us answer this question:

Let us also take something that has been the object of criticism, often justified: the pedagogical institution. I don't see where evil is in the practice of someone who, in a given game of truth, knowing more than another, tells him what he must do, teaches him, transmits knowledge to him, communicates skills to him. The problem is rather to know how you are to avoid in these practices—where power cannot not play and where it is not evil in itself—the effects of domination which will make a child subject to the arbitrary and useless authority of a teacher, or put a student under the power of an abusively authoritarian professor, and so forth. I think these problems should be posed in terms of rules of law, of relational techniques of government and *ethos*, of practice of self and of freedom.<sup>23</sup>

Most important in this passage is Foucault's assertion that what at first seems to be matters between individuals—teacher and student, for example—matters that have to do with the “strategic games of liberty”—must in fact be treated as matters of governmentality and ethics. “Governmentality” is a crucial concept in Foucault's *oeuvre* because it links the domains of the individual and large powerful institutions, such as those of the State; and because it opens a theoretical space in which Foucault can combine his critique of discursive and institutional forms of domination and hegemony with his concern to show that these often establish and maintain themselves through governmental tech-

23. *Ibid.*, pp. 18–19.

niques.<sup>24</sup> Critics have always known that Foucault was interested in objecting to the abuses of power as these appear in clinical medicine, psychiatric practices, prisons, and humanistic disciplines in general throughout the social security state. Foucault's problem has always been how to theorize the possibility of "being against" forms of domination—however and wherever they appear—without simply reintroducing the worst effects of the empowering practices, often themselves necessary to "object" to the forms of domination. The issue appears in his thoughts on how individuals and collectives have objected to governmental practices and the affiliated disciplinary apparatuses that developed to regulate "life," as population, precisely by intensely insisting on the value of "life" and the knowledge about "life" generated by those regulative disciplines. As we have seen, being "inscribed," as we like to say now, within the system does not create a hopeless double-bind; objecting to the governmental and disciplinary attempts at regulation and domination has indeed gone on; the problem is how to understand the possibility of these objections and how to theorize this as the ground for a politics that will force us to alter the order of political, social rationality that currently exists but is being challenged.

Foucault surely was committed to what we might call the "materiality of thought," even though some others might call it "mere idealism." In "Practicing Criticism," an interview given in 1981 and collected in Lawrence Kritzman's distinguished edition of Foucault's work, *Politics, Philosophy, Culture*, Foucault, discussing the value of critique, says: "We must free ourselves from the sacrilization of the social as the only reality and stop regarding as superfluous something so essential in human life and in human relations as thought. Thought exists independently of systems and structures of discourse. It is something that is often hidden, but which always animates everyday behavior. There is always a little thought even in the most stupid institutions."<sup>25</sup> Heidegger's influence on Foucault encouraged this formulation. "Thought" comes up in this context because it is Foucault's contention that critique must try to "unearth" and influence this thought, "by showing that things are not as self-evident as one believed." Foucault gives the intellectual a high place in the task of maintaining a state of "permanent criticism" that agitates and so changes thought, that denies the self-evident, and that keeps open fields of possibility. But the intellectual's role is neither privileged nor unique in a theory of freedom's agon with itself and power, with its own liberties and its desires to impose its will. If we keep in mind that Foucault accepts and broadens Gramsci's definition of the intellectual as anyone with special expert competences, then we understand that, in the following lines, he is not only denying leadership authority to the state but to its

24. *Ibid.*, p. 19.

25. Michel Foucault, "Practicing Criticism," in Lawrence Kritzman, ed., *Politics, Philosophy, Culture*, essay translated by Alan Sheridan, New York, Routledge, 1989, p. 155.

intellectuals and all intellectuals aspiring to regulate the games of freedom: "the answers will not come from those who administer [state institutional] authority: answers ought rather to come from those who are trying to counter-balance the prerogative of the state and who constitute counter-powers. What comes . . . may possibly . . . open up a space for intervention."<sup>26</sup> This is a familiar note in Foucault, especially in light of his ritual refusal to assume the magisterial intellectual's role of "proposing" futures for others. What perhaps strikes some as important is his once more singling out the state and its opponents as the site for exemplary struggle. In passages like these, the issue seems to be the very existence of the state itself as a form of domination that attempts to preclude possibility precisely by inducing dependency and, thereby, predictably, opening up the limited opportunity for individuals to learn to play in the field of actions its own governing field of actions helps bring into play.

Although Foucault's concerns with the state's ability to effect actions appears throughout his writings on psychiatry, sexuality, and social security, it is in his attempt to retrieve earlier understanding of "police" that he most extensively lays out his concerns by theorizing the relation between the state and governmentality.

The "police" function of the state—which leads it to develop its technologies of government—itsself results from the modern political order of rationality caught in the slogan "reason of state," which, as Foucault writes, "refers to the state, to its nature, and to its own rationality."<sup>27</sup> With "reason of state," a new relation emerges between politics and knowledge; politics comes to be practiced on the basis of a new sort of positive knowledge generated precisely to help the state maintain and extend itself and help politicians acquire the specific technical and intellectual practical competences to bring this about. The problem becomes how to govern populations in the interest of the state:

Since the state is its own finality and since the government must have for an exclusive aim not only the conservation but also the permanent reinforcement and development of the state's strengths, it is clear that the governments don't have to worry about individuals; or government has to worry about them only insofar as they are somehow relevant for the reinforcement of the state's strength. . . . From the state's point of view, the individual exists insofar as what he does is able to introduce even a minimal change in the direction of the state, either in a positive or negative direction.<sup>28</sup>

26. *Ibid.*, "Social Security," p. 167; originally published in 1983.

27. Michel Foucault, "The Political Technology of Individuals," in Luther H. Martin, Huck Gutman, and Patrick H. Hutton, eds., *Technologies of the Self*, Amherst, The University of Massachusetts Press, 1988, p. 150.

28. *Ibid.*, p. 152.

When the state's intellectuals begin to theorize how individuals and populations can be best disposed, they develop the notion of "police" from the emerging practices of administrators and politicians. Foucault's genealogy of the category recovers its breadth. In sum, there was nothing that was not in the realm of the police: "In short," he writes, "life is the object of the police." Or, as Turquet puts it, "The police's true object is man." When the techniques of governmentality become theorized and academicized in the university as "police," as schooling in the administration of individuals and populations, when administration itself is systematized, the new political problem becomes: how do we stand in relation to the state and its administrators, which is to say, how do we stand in relation to the technologies of governmentality? In Foucault's late theory, domination—not violence—rests on these governmental technologies; they extend to the desire of "freedom/power" to act upon the actions of others, and to do so, perhaps, to the point of denying others' freedom and, thereby, turning power into tyranny.

Foucault would have it—given the failures of actually existing socialism and his analysis of the political disasters that follow on leading intellectuals' ambitions—that revolution is not clearly desirable in relation to the state or any of its orders of governmentality. Perhaps one needs to add that in relation to tyranny—as in the case of the Shah of Iran—Foucault allows that revolution, even though it will settle down into its own order of governmentality, is necessary as a way of reestablishing power relationships, that is, freedom and the possibility of action, where nothing or very little can be said or is felt to exist.

But in the so-called "advanced societies" that have developed as "social security states," revolution is not self-evidently the desirable political aim of struggle. Insofar as governmentality is linked to and embodied in the "police," in technologies, "maximizing freedom" must always mean struggling to assure that the range of possible actions and reactions is always as large as possible. That clearly is the aim, as many groups and individuals struggle towards self-determination in a new set of relations to the state and its institutions. In his disagreements with Habermas and certain liberal political theorists, Foucault insists that posing the state in opposition to some notion of "civil society" not only routinely demonizes the state but forgets that, as a polemical concept, "civil society" originated with liberal economists trying to maintain a sphere of economic action free of state intervention. In other words, in this view, "civil society" must be recalled as a place where some capitalists worked hard to "maximize their own freedom" in order to "minimize the freedom" of most others. Furthermore, as the opposition appears in Habermasian kinds of discourse, "civil society," like the ideal of "undistorted communication," does not allow one to theorize the existence of power throughout society and so cannot take into account what Foucault calls the "danger," presumably to freedom, that exists in every relationship, practice, or technology of government. The "danger" to freedom is of its essence and therefore must be seen as in any and all power. Its omnipresence

means that eliminating the state (in the name of "civil society" or some other utopian alternative) would not preclude either the emergence of relations of power nor the problems of controlling their effects: in itself, such a line of thought is a "danger." To put it simply, eliminating the state—were that possible—still would leave open a fundamental problem: "whatever scenario one takes," writes Foucault, "a power relation would be established . . . this relation being . . . dangerous . . . one would have to reflect, at every level, on the way it should channel its efficacy in the best way."<sup>29</sup>

Foucault's late work leaves us with the obligation not only to understand the relations of power and freedom in the humanities, but also to maximize the freedom that exists in the human and collective relations that make up their institutions and disciplines. We can see now that Foucault is neither a quietist nor a theoretician of political defeat. He rather offers us a different set of problems that we must try to deal with carefully. We must hope that we can find means to build ethics, aesthetics, and politics that will minimize domination and maximize freedom—and teach us respect for others' freedom to act and to act on us.

29. Foucault, *Politics, Philosophy, Culture*, p. 168.

## The New Cultural Politics of Difference\*

CORNEL WEST

In the last few years of the twentieth century, there is emerging a significant shift in the sensibilities and outlooks of critics and artists. In fact, I would go so far as to claim that a new kind of cultural worker is in the making, associated with a new politics of difference. These new forms of intellectual consciousness advance new conceptions of the vocation of critic and artist, attempting to undermine the prevailing disciplinary divisions of labor in the academy, museum, mass media, and gallery networks while preserving modes of critique within the ubiquitous commodification of culture in the global village. Distinctive features of the new cultural politics of difference are to trash the monolithic and homogeneous in the name of diversity, multiplicity, and heterogeneity; to reject the abstract, general, and universal in light of the concrete, specific, and particular; and to historicize, contextualize, and pluralize by highlighting the contingent, provisional, variable, tentative, shifting, and changing. Needless to say, these gestures are not new in the history of criticism or art, yet what makes them novel—along with the cultural politics they produce—is how and what constitutes difference, the weight and gravity it is given in representation, and the way in which highlighting issues like exterminism, empire, class, race, gender, sexual orientation, age, nation, nature, and region at this historical moment acknowledges some discontinuity and disruption from previous forms of cultural critique. To put it bluntly, the new cultural politics of difference consists of creative responses to the precise circumstances of our present moment—especially those of marginalized First World agents who shun degraded self-representations, articulating instead their sense of the flow of history in light of the contemporary terrors, anxieties, and fears of highly commercialized North Atlantic capitalist cultures (with their escalating xenophobias against people of color, Jews, women, gays,

\* This is a version of an essay that appears in Russel Ferguson, Martha Gever, Trinh T. Minh-ha, and Cornel West, eds., *Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Cultures*, New York, The New Museum of Contemporary Art; and Cambridge, MIT Press, 1990.

lesbians, and the elderly). The thawing, yet still rigid Second World ex-communist cultures (with increasing nationalist revolts against the legacy of hegemonic party henchmen), and the diverse cultures of the majority of inhabitants on the globe smothered by international communication cartels and repressive postcolonial elites (sometimes in the name of communism, as in Ethiopia), or starved by austere World Bank and IMF policies that subordinate them to the North (as in free-market capitalism in Chile), also locate vital areas of analysis in this new cultural terrain.

The new cultural politics of difference are neither simply oppositional in contesting the mainstream (or *malestream*) for inclusion, nor transgressive in the avant-gardist sense of shocking conventional bourgeois audiences. Rather, they are distinct articulations of talented (and usually privileged) contributors to culture who desire to align themselves with demoralized, demobilized, depoliticized, and disorganized people in order to empower and enable social action and, if possible, to enlist collective insurgency for the expansion of freedom, democracy, and individuality. This perspective impels these cultural critics and artists to reveal, as an integral component of their production, the very operations of power within their immediate work contexts (i.e., academy, museum, gallery, mass media). This strategy, however, also puts them in an inescapable double bind—while linking their activities to the fundamental, structural overhaul of these institutions, they often remain financially dependent on them. (So much for “independent” creation.) For these critics of culture, theirs is a gesture that is simultaneously progressive *and* coopted. Yet, without social movement or political pressure from outside these institutions (extra-parliamentary and extra-curricular actions like the social movements of the recent past), transformation degenerates into mere accommodation or sheer stagnation, and the role of the “coopted progressive”—no matter how fervent one’s subversive rhetoric—is rendered more difficult. In this sense there can be no artistic breakthrough or social progress without some form of crisis in civilization—a crisis usually generated by organizations or collectivities that convince ordinary people to put their bodies and lives on the line. There is, of course, no guarantee that such pressure will yield the result one wants, but there is a guarantee that the status quo will remain or regress if no pressure is applied at all.

The new cultural politics of difference faces three basic challenges—intellectual, existential, and political. The intellectual challenge—usually cast as a methodological debate in these days in which academicist forms of expression have a monopoly on intellectual life—is how to think about representational practices in terms of history, culture, and society. How does one understand, analyze, and enact such practices today? An adequate answer to this question can be attempted only after one comes to terms with the insights and blindnesses of earlier attempts to grapple with the question in light of the evolving crisis in different histories, cultures, and societies. I shall sketch a brief genealogy—a

history that highlights the contingent origins and often ignoble outcomes—of exemplary critical responses to the question.

### The Intellectual Challenge

An appropriate starting point is the ambiguous legacy of the Age of Europe. Between 1492 and 1945, European breakthroughs in oceanic transportation, agricultural production, state consolidation, bureaucratization, industrialization, urbanization, and imperial dominion shaped the makings of the modern world. Precious ideals like the dignity of persons (individuality) or the popular accountability of institutions (democracy) were unleashed around the world. Powerful critiques of illegitimate authorities—of the Protestant Reformation against the Roman Catholic Church, the Enlightenment against state churches, liberal movements against absolutist states and feudal guild constraints, workers against managerial subordination, people of color and Jews against white and gentile supremacist decrees, gays and lesbians against homophobic sanctions—were fanned and fueled by these precious ideals refined within the crucible of the Age of Europe. Yet, the discrepancy between sterling rhetoric and lived reality, glowing principles and actual practices, loomed large.

By the last European century—the last epoch in which European domination of most of the globe was uncontested and unchallenged in a substantive way—a new world seemed to be stirring. At the height of England's reign as the major imperial European power, its exemplary cultural critic, Matthew Arnold, painfully observed in his "Stanzas from the Grand Chartreuse" that he felt some sense of "wandering between two worlds, one dead/the other powerless to be born." Following his Burkean sensibilities of cautious reform and fear of anarchy, Arnold acknowledged that the old glue—religion—that had tenuously and often unsuccessfully held together the ailing European regimes could not do so in the mid-nineteenth century. Like Alexis de Tocqueville in France, Arnold saw that the democratic temper was the wave of the future. So he proposed a new conception of culture—a secular, humanistic one—that could play an integrative role in cementing and stabilizing an emerging bourgeois civil society and imperial state. His famous castigation of the immobilizing materialism of the declining aristocracy, the vulgar philistinism of the emerging middle classes, and the latent explosiveness of the working-class majority was motivated by a desire to create new forms of cultural legitimacy, authority, and order in a rapidly changing moment in nineteenth-century Europe.

For Arnold (in *Culture and Anarchy*, 1869), this new conception of culture . . . seeks to do away with classes; to make the best that has been thought and known in the world current everywhere; to make all men live in an atmosphere of sweetness and light . . .

This is the *social idea* and the men of culture are the true apostles of equality. The great men of culture are those who have had a passion for diffusing, for making prevail, for carrying from one end of society to the other, the best knowledge, the best ideas of their time, who have laboured to divest knowledge of all that was harsh, uncouth, difficult, abstract, professional, yet still remaining the best knowledge and thought of the time, and a true source, therefore, of sweetness and light.

As an organic intellectual of an emergent middle class—as the inspector of schools in an expanding educational bureaucracy, Professor of Poetry at Oxford (the first noncleric and the first to lecture in English rather than Latin), and an active participant in a thriving magazine network—Arnold defined and defended a new secular culture of critical discourse. For him, this discursive strategy would be lodged in the educational and periodical apparatuses of modern societies as they contained and incorporated the frightening threats of an arrogant aristocracy and especially of an “anarchic” working-class majority. His ideals of disinterested, dispassionate, and objective inquiry would regulate this secular cultural production, and his justifications for the use of state power to quell any threats to the survival and security of this culture were widely accepted. He aptly noted, “Through culture seems to lie our way, not only to perfection, but even to safety.”

For Arnold, the best of the Age of Europe—modeled on a mythological melange of Periclean Athens, late republican/early imperial Rome, and Elizabethan England—could be promoted only if there was an interlocking affiliation among the emerging middle classes, a homogenizing of cultural discourse in the educational and university networks, and a state advanced enough in its policing techniques to safeguard it. The candidates for participation and legitimation in this grand endeavor of cultural renewal and revision would be detached intellectuals willing to shed their parochialism, provincialism, and class-bound identities for Arnold’s middle-class-skewed project: “Aliens, if we may so call them—persons who are mainly led, not by their class spirit, but by a general *humane* spirit, by the love of human perfection.” Needless to say, this Arnoldian perspective still informs much of academic practices and secular cultural attitudes today—dominant views about the canon, admission procedures, and collective self-definitions of intellectuals. Yet, Arnold’s project was disrupted by the collapse of nineteenth-century Europe—World War I. This unprecedented war—in George Steiner’s words, the first of the bloody civil wars within Europe—brought to the surface the crucial role and violent potential not of the masses Arnold feared, but of the state he heralded. Upon the ashes of this wasteland of human carnage—some of the civilian European population—T. S. Eliot emerged as the grand cultural spokesman.

Eliot’s project of reconstituting and reconceiving European highbrow

culture—and thereby regulating critical and artistic practices—after the internal collapse of imperial Europe can be viewed as a response to the probing question posed by Paul Valéry in “The Crisis of the Spirit” after World War I:

This Europe, will it become *what it is in reality*, i.e., a little cape of the Asiatic continent? or will this Europe remain rather *what it seems*, i.e., the priceless part of the whole earth, the pearl of the globe, the brain of a vast body?

Eliot’s image of Europe as a wasteland, a culture of fragments with no cementing center, predominated in postwar Europe. And though his early poetic practices were more radical, open, and international than his Eurocentric criticism, Eliot posed a return to and revision of tradition as the only way of regaining European cultural order and political stability. For Eliot, contemporary history had become, as James Joyce’s Stephen declared in *Ulysses* (1922), “a nightmare from which he was trying to awake”; “an immense panorama of futility and anarchy” as Eliot put it in his renowned review of Joyce’s modernist masterpiece. In his influential essay, “Tradition and the Individual Talent” (1919), Eliot stated that:

Yet if the only form of tradition, of handing down, consisted in following the ways of the immediate generation before us in a blind or timid adherence to its successes, “tradition” should positively be discouraged. We have seen many such simple currents soon lost in the sand; and novelty is better than repetition. Tradition is a matter of much wider significance. It cannot be inherited, and if you want it you must attain it by great labour.

Eliot found this tradition in the Church of England, to which he converted in 1927. Here was a tradition that left room for his Catholic cast of mind, Calvinist heritage, puritanical temperament, and ebullient patriotism for the old American South (the place of his upbringing). Like Arnold, Eliot was obsessed with the idea of civilization and the horror of barbarism (echoes of Joseph Conrad’s Kurtz in *Heart of Darkness*), or, more pointedly, the notion of the decline and decay of European civilization. With the advent of World War II, Eliot’s obsession became a reality. Again, unprecedented human carnage (fifty million died)—including an indescribable genocidal attack on Jewish people—throughout Europe as well as around the globe put the last nail in the coffin of the Age of Europe. After 1945, Europe consisted of a devastated and divided continent, crippled by a humiliating dependency on and deference to the United States and Russia.

The second historical coordinate of my genealogy is the emergence of the United States as *the* world power (in the words of André Malraux, the first nation to do so without trying to do so). The United States was unprepared for world power status. However, with the recovery of Stalin’s Russia (after losing twenty

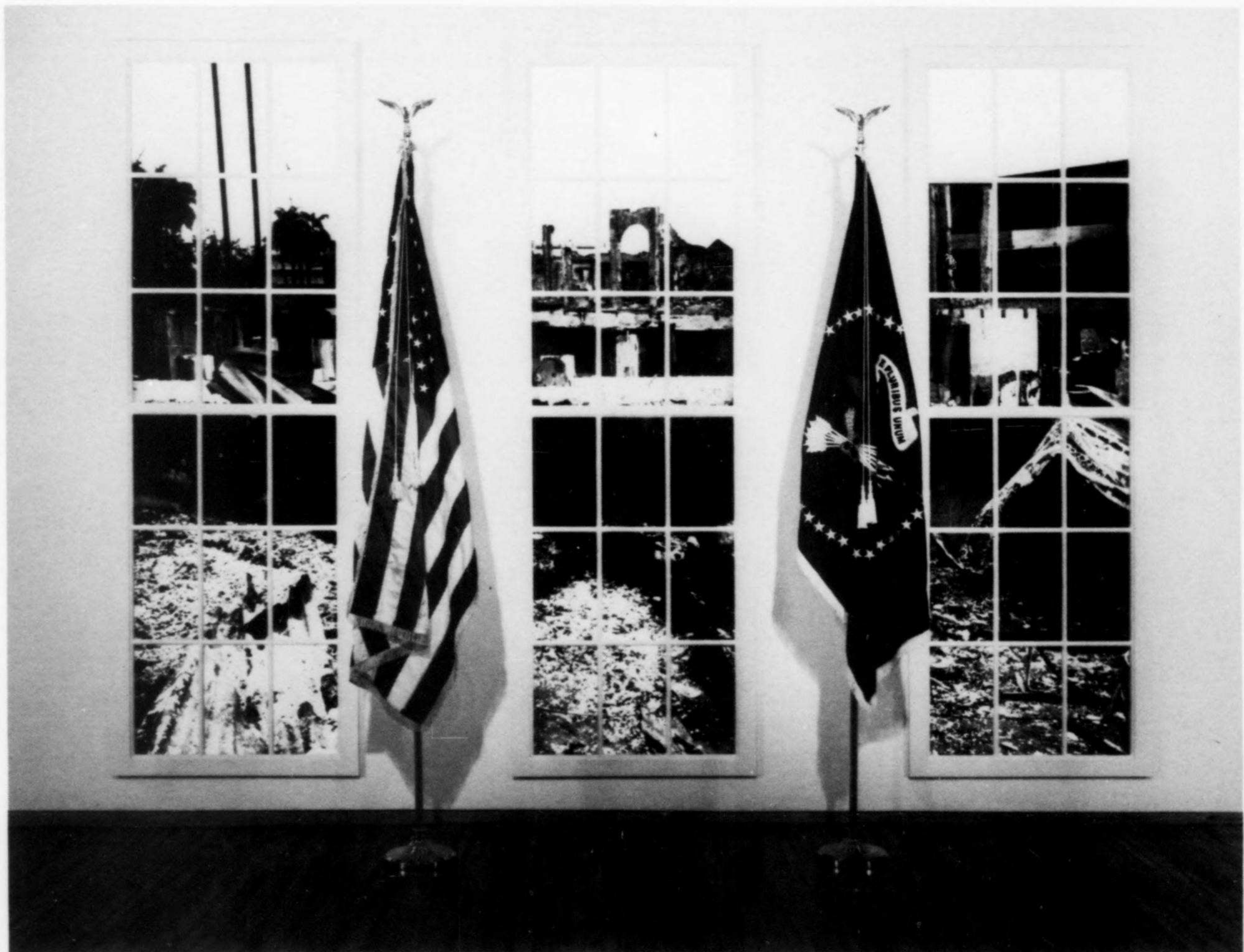
million lives), the United States felt compelled to make its presence felt around the globe. Then, with the Marshall Plan to strengthen Europe, it seemed clear that there was no escape from world power obligations.

The post-World War II era in the United States, or the first decades of what Henry Luce envisioned as "The American Century," was not only a period of incredible economic expansion, but of active cultural ferment. The creation of a mass middle class—a prosperous working class with a bourgeois identity—was countered by the first major emergence of subcultures of American non-WASP intellectuals; the so-called New York intellectuals in criticism, the Abstract Expressionists in painting, and the bebop artists in jazz music. This emergence signaled a vital challenge to an American male WASP elite loyal to an older and eroding European culture.

The first significant blow was dealt when assimilated Jewish Americans entered the higher echelons of the cultural apparatuses (academy, museums, galleries, mass media). Lionel Trilling is an emblematic figure. This Jewish entrée into the anti-Semitic and patriarchal critical discourse of the exclusivistic institutions of American culture initiated the slow but sure undoing of the male WASP cultural hegemony and homogeneity. Trilling's project was to appropriate Matthew Arnold's for his own political and cultural purposes—thereby unraveling the old male WASP consensus while erecting a new post-World War II liberal academic consensus around cold war, anticommunist renditions of the values of complexity, difficulty, variousness, and modulation. In addition, the postwar boom laid the basis for intense professionalization and specialization in expanding institutions of higher education—especially in the natural sciences that were compelled to somehow respond to Russia's successful ventures in space. Humanistic scholars found themselves searching for new methodologies that could buttress self-images of rigor and scientific seriousness. For example, the close reading techniques of New Criticism (severed from their conservative, organicist, anti-industrialist ideological roots), the logical precision of reasoning in analytic philosophy, and the jargon of Parsonian structural-functionalism in sociology helped create such self-images. Yet, towering cultural critics like C. Wright Mills, W. E. B. DuBois, Richard Hofstadter, Margaret Mead, and Dwight MacDonal bucked the tide. This suspicion of the academicization of knowledge is expressed in Trilling's well-known essay, "On the Teaching of Modern Literature":

. . . can we not say that, when modern literature is brought into the classroom, the subject being taught is betrayed by the pedagogy of the subject? We have to ask ourselves whether in our day too much does not come within the purview of the academy. More and more, as the universities liberalize themselves, turn their beneficent imperialistic gaze upon what is called life itself, the feeling grows among our educated classes that little can be experienced unless it is validated by some established intellectual discipline. . . .

Trilling laments the fact that university instruction often quiets and domesticates radical and subversive works of art, turning them into objects "of merely habitual regard." This process of "the socialization of the anti-social, or the acculturation of the anti-cultural, or the legitimization of the subversive" leads Trilling to "question whether in our culture the study of literature is any longer a suitable means for developing and refining the intelligence." He asks this question not in the spirit of denigrating and devaluing the academy, but rather in the spirit of highlighting the possible failure of an Arnoldian conception of culture to contain what he perceives as the philistine and anarchic alternatives becoming more and more available to students of the '60s—namely, mass culture and radical politics.



*Hans Haacke. View onto the Rose Garden (Operation Just Cause). 1990. (Photo: F. Scruton.)*

This threat is partly associated with the third historical coordinate of my genealogy—the decolonization of the Third World. It is crucial to recognize the importance of this world-historical process if one wants to grasp the significance of the end of the Age of Europe and the emergence of the United States as a world power. With the first defeat of a western nation by a nonwestern nation—in Japan's victory over Russia (1905); revolutions in Persia (1905), Turkey (1908), Mexico (1911–12), China (1912); and much later the independence of India (1947), China (1948); and the triumph of Ghana (1957)—the actuality of a decolonized globe loomed large. Born of violent struggle, consciousness-raising, and the reconstruction of identities, decolonization simultaneously brings with it new perspectives on that long festering underside of the Age of Europe (of which colonial domination represents the *costs* of “progress,” “order,” and “culture”), as well as requiring new readings of the economic boom in the United States (wherein the Black, Brown, Yellow, Red, White, female, gay, lesbian, and elderly working class live the same *costs* as cheap labor at home as well as in U.S.-dominated Latin American and Pacific rim markets).

The impetuous ferocity and moral outrage that motors the decolonization process is best captured by Frantz Fanon in *The Wretched of the Earth* (1906):

Decolonization, which sets out to change the order of the world, is obviously a program of complete disorder. . . . Decolonization is the meeting of two forces, opposed to each other by their very nature, which in fact owe their originality to that sort of substantification which results from and is nourished by the situation in the colonies. Their first encounter was marked by violence and their existence together—that is to say the exploitation of the native by the settler—was carried on by dint of a great array of bayonets and cannons. . . .

In decolonization, there is therefore the need of a complete calling in question of the colonial situation. If we wish to describe it precisely, we might find it in the well-known words: “The last shall be first and the first last.” Decolonization is the putting into practice of this sentence.

The naked truth of decolonization evokes for us the searing bullets and bloodstained knives which emanate from it. For if the last shall be first, this will only come to pass after a murderous and decisive struggle between the two protagonists.

Fanon's strong words describe the feelings and thoughts between the occupying British Army and the colonized Irish in Northern Ireland, the occupying Israeli Army and the subjugated Palestinians on the West Bank and Gaza Strip, the South African Army and the oppressed Black South Africans in the townships, the Japanese police and the Koreans living in Japan, the Russian Army and

subordinated Armenians, and others in southern and eastern Russia. His words also partly invoke the sense many Black Americans have toward police departments in urban centers. In other words, Fanon is articulating century-long, heartfelt, human responses to being degraded and despised, hated and hunted, oppressed and exploited, and marginalized and dehumanized at the hands of powerful, xenophobic European, American, Russian, and Japanese imperial countries.

During the late 1950s, '60s, and early '70s in the United States, these decolonized sensibilities fanned and fueled the Civil Rights and Black Power movements, as well as the student antiwar, feminist, gay, brown, gay, and lesbian movements. In this period we witnessed the shattering of male WASP cultural homogeneity and the collapse of the short-lived liberal consensus. The inclusion of African Americans, Latino/a Americans, Asian Americans, Native Americans, and American women in the culture of critical discourse yielded intense intellectual polemics and inescapable ideological polarization that focused principally on the exclusions, silences, and blindnesses of male WASP cultural homogeneity and its concomitant Arnoldian notions of the canon.

In addition, these critiques promoted three crucial processes that affected intellectual life in the country. First is the appropriation of the theories of postwar Europe—especially the work of the Frankfurt School (Marcuse, Adorno, Horkheimer), French/Italian Marxisms (Sartre, Althusser, Lefebvre, Gramsci), structuralisms (Lévi-Strauss, Todorov), and poststructuralisms (Deleuze, Derrida, Foucault). These diverse and disparate theories—all preoccupied with keeping alive radical projects after the end of the Age of Europe—tend to fuse versions of transgressive European modernisms with Marxist or post-Marxist left politics, and unanimously shun the term “postmodernism.” Second, there is the recovery and revisioning of American history in light of the struggles of White male workers, African Americans, Native Americans, Latino/a Americans, gays and lesbians. Third is the impact of forms of popular culture such as television, film, music videos, and even sports on highbrow, literate culture. The Black-based hip-hop culture of youth around the world is one grand example.

After 1973, with the crisis in the international world economy, America's slump in productivity, the challenge of OPEC nations to the North Atlantic monopoly of oil production, the increasing competition in hi-tech sectors of the economy from Japan and West Germany, and the growing fragility of the international debt structure, the United States entered a period of waning self-confidence (compounded by Watergate), and a nearly contracted economy. As the standards of living for the middle classes declined—owing to runaway inflation and escalating unemployment, underemployment, and crime—the quality of living fell for most everyone, and religious and secular neoconservatism emerged with power and potency. This fusion of fervent neonationalism, traditional cul-

tural values, and "free market" policies served as the groundwork for the Reagan-Bush era.

The ambiguous legacies of the European Age, American preeminence, and decolonization continue to haunt our postmodern moment as we come to terms with both the European, American, Japanese, Soviet, and Third World *crimes against* and *contributions to* humanity. The plight of Africans in the New World can be instructive in this regard.

By 1914, European maritime empires had dominion over more than half of the land and a third of the peoples in the world—almost 72 million square kilometers of territory and more than 560 million people under colonial rule. Needless to say, this European control included brutal enslavement, institutional terrorism, and cultural degradation of Black diaspora people. The death of roughly 75 million Africans during the centuries-long, transatlantic slave trade is but one reminder, among others, of the assault on Black humanity. The Black diaspora condition of New World servitude—in which they were viewed as mere commodities with production value, who had no proper legal status, social standing, or public worth—can be characterized as, following Orlando Patterson, natal alienation. This state of perpetual and inheritable domination that diaspora Africans had at birth produced the *modern Black diaspora problematic of invisibility and namelessness*. White supremacist practices—enacted under the auspices of the prestigious cultural authorities of the churches, print media, and scientific academics—promoted Black inferiority and constituted the European background against which Black diaspora struggles for identity, dignity (self-confidence, self-respect, self-esteem), and material resources took place.

An inescapable aspect of this struggle was that the Black diaspora peoples' quest for validation and recognition occurred on the ideological, social, and cultural terrains of other non-Black peoples. White supremacist assaults on Black intelligence, ability, beauty, and character required persistent Black efforts to hold self-doubt, self-contempt, and even self-hatred at bay. Selective appropriation, incorporation, and rearticulation of European ideologies, cultures, and institutions alongside an African heritage—a heritage more or less confined to linguistic innovation in rhetorical practices, stylizations of the body as forms of occupying an alien social space (i.e., hairstyles, ways of walking, standing, talking, and hand expressions), means of constituting and sustaining comradeship and community (i.e., antiphonal, call-and-response styles, rhythmic repetition, risk-ridden syncopation in spectacular modes in musical and rhetorical expressions)—were some of the strategies employed.

The modern Black diaspora problematic of invisibility and namelessness can be understood as the condition of *relative lack of Black power to present themselves to themselves and others as complex human beings, and thereby to contest the bombardment of negative, degrading stereotypes put forward by White supremacist ideologies*. The initial Black response to being caught in this whirlwind of Europeanization was to resist the misrepresentation and caricature of the terms set by

uncontested non-Black norms and models, and fight for self-recognition. Every modern Black person, especially cultural disseminators, encounters this problematic of invisibility and namelessness. The initial Black diaspora response was a mode of resistance that was *moralistic in content* and *communal in character*. That is, the fight for representation and recognition highlighted moral judgments regarding Black "positive" images over and against White supremacist stereotypes. These images "re-presented" monolithic and homogeneous Black communities in a way that could displace past misrepresentations of these communities. Stuart Hall has discussed these responses as attempts to change the "relations of representation."

These courageous yet limited Black efforts to combat racist cultural practices uncritically accepted non-Black conventions and standards in two ways. First, they proceeded in an *assimilationist manner* that set out to show that Black people were really like White people—thereby eliding differences (in history and culture) between Whites and Blacks. Black specificity and particularity was thus banished in order to gain White acceptance and approval. Second, these Black responses rested upon a *homogenizing impulse* that assumed that all Black people were really alike—hence obliterating differences (class, gender, region, sexual orientation) between Black peoples. I submit that there are elements of truth in both claims, yet the conclusions are unwarranted owing to the basic fact that non-Black paradigms set the terms of the replies.

The insight in the first claim is that Blacks and Whites are in some important sense alike—i.e., in their positive capacities for human sympathy, moral sacrifice, service to others, intelligence, and beauty; or negatively, in their capacity for cruelty. Yet, the common humanity they share is jettisoned when the claim is cast in an assimilationist manner that subordinates Black particularity to a false universalism, i.e., non-Black rubrics and prototypes. Similarly, the insight in the second claim is that all Blacks are in some significant sense "in the same boat"—that is, subject to White supremacist abuse. Yet, this common condition is stretched too far when viewed in a *homogenizing* way that overlooks how racist treatment vastly differs owing to class, gender, sexual orientation, nation, region, hue, and age.

The moralistic and communal aspects of the initial Black diaspora responses to social and psychic erasure were not simply cast into simplistic binary oppositions of positive/negative, good/bad images that privileged the first term in light of a White norm so that Black efforts remained inscribed within the very logic that dehumanized them. They were further complicated by the fact that these responses were also advanced principally by anxiety-ridden, middle-class Black intellectuals (predominantly male and heterosexual grappling with their sense of double-consciousness—namely their own crisis of identity, agency, audience—caught between a quest for White approval and acceptance and an endeavor to overcome the internalized association of Blackness with inferiority. And I suggest that these complex anxieties of modern Black diaspora intellectuals partly moti-

vate the two major arguments that ground the assimilationist moralism and homogeneous communalism just outlined.

Kobena Mercer has talked about these two arguments as the *reflectionist* and the *social engineering* arguments. The reflectionist argument holds that the fight for Black representation and recognition—against White racist stereotypes—must reflect or mirror the real Black community, not simply the negative and depressing representations of it. The social engineering argument claims that since any form of representation is constructed—i.e., selective in light of broader aims—Black representation (especially given the difficulty of Blacks gaining access to positions of power to produce any Black imagery) should offer positive images, thereby countering racist stereotypes. The hidden assumption of both arguments is that we have unmediated access to what the “real Black community” is and what “positive images” are. In short, these arguments presuppose the very phenomena to be interrogated, and thereby foreclose the very issues that should serve as the subject matter to be investigated.

Any notions of “the real Black community” and “positive images” are value-laden, socially loaded, and ideologically charged. To pursue this discussion is to call into question the possibility of such an uncontested consensus regarding them. Hall has rightly called this encounter “the end of innocence or the end of the innocent notions of the essential Black subject . . . the recognition that ‘Black’ is essentially a politically and culturally *constructed* category.” This recognition—more and more pervasive among the postmodern Black diaspora intelligentsia—is facilitated in part by the slow but sure dissolution of the European Age’s maritime empires, and the unleashing of new political possibilities and cultural articulations among ex-colonized peoples across the globe.

One crucial lesson of this decolonization process remains the manner in which most Third World authoritarian bureaucratic elites deploy essentialist rhetorics about “homogeneous national communities” and “positive images” in order to repress and regiment their diverse and heterogeneous populations. Yet in the diaspora, especially among First World countries, this critique has emerged not so much from the Black male component of the left, but rather from the Black women’s movement. The decisive push of postmodern Black intellectuals toward a new cultural politics of difference has been made by the powerful critiques and constructive explorations of Black diaspora women (i.e., Toni Morrison). The coffin used to bury the innocent notion of the essential Black subject was nailed shut with the termination of the Black male monopoly on the construction of the Black subject. In this regard, the Black diaspora womanist critique has had a greater impact than the critiques that highlight exclusively class, empire, age, sexual orientation, or nature.

This decisive push toward the end of Black innocence—though prefigured in various degrees in the best moments of James Baldwin, Amiri Baraka, Anna Cooper, W. E. B. DuBois, Frantz Fanon, C. L. R. James, Claudia Jones, the later Malcolm X, and others—forces Black diaspora cultural workers to encounter

what Hall has called the "politics of representation." The main aim now is not simply access to representation in order to produce positive images of homogeneous communities—though broader access remains a practical and political problem. Nor is the primary goal here that of contesting stereotypes—though contestation remains a significant though limited venture. Following the model of the Black diaspora traditions of music, athletics, and rhetoric, Black cultural workers must constitute and sustain discursive and institutional networks that deconstruct earlier modern Black strategies for identity formation, demystify power relations that incorporate class, patriarchal, and homophobic biases, and construct more multivalent and multidimensional responses that articulate the complexity and diversity of Black practices in the modern and postmodern world.

Furthermore, Black cultural workers must investigate and interrogate the other of Blackness/Whiteness. One cannot deconstruct the binary oppositional logic of images of Blackness without extending it to the contrary condition of Blackness/Whiteness itself. However, a mere dismantling will not do—for the very notion of a deconstructive social theory is oxymoronic. Yet, social theory is what is needed to examine and *explain* the historically specific ways in which "Whiteness" is a politically constructed category parasitic on "Blackness," and thereby to conceive of the profoundly hybrid character of what we mean by "race," "ethnicity," and "nationality." Needless to say, these inquiries must traverse those of "male/female," "colonizer/colonized," "heterosexual/homosexual," et al., as well.

Demystification is the most illuminating mode of theoretical inquiry for those who promote the new cultural politics of difference. Social structural analyses of empire, exterminism, class, race, gender, nature, age, sexual orientation, nation, and region are the springboards—though not landing grounds—for the most desirable forms of critical practice that take history (and herstory) seriously. Demystification tries to keep track of the complex dynamics of institutional and other related power structures in order to disclose options and alternatives for transformative praxis; it also attempts to grasp the way in which representational strategies are creative responses to novel circumstances and conditions. In this way, the central role of human agency (always enacted under circumstances not of one's choosing)—be it in the critic, artist, or constituency, and audience—is accented.

I call demystificatory criticism "prophetic criticism"—the approach appropriate for the new cultural politics of difference—because while it begins with social structural analyses it also makes explicit its moral and political aims. It is partisan, partial, engaged, and crisis-centered, yet always keeps open a skeptical eye to avoid dogmatic traps, premature closures, formulaic formulations, or rigid conclusions. In addition to social structural analyses, moral and political judgments, and sheer critical consciousness, there indeed is evaluation. Yet the aim of this evaluation is neither to pit art-objects against one another like racehorses

nor to create eternal canons that dull, discourage, or even dwarf contemporary achievements. We listen to Laurie Anderson, Kathleen Battle, Ludwig Beethoven, Charlie Parker, Luciano Pavarotti, Sarah Vaughan, or Stevie Wonder; read Anton Chekhov, Ralph Ellison, Gabriel García Márquez, Doris Lessing, Toni Morrison, Thomas Pynchon, William Shakespeare; or see the works of Ingmar Bergman, Le Corbusier, Frank Gehry, Barbara Kruger, Spike Lee, Martin Puryear, Pablo Picasso, or Howardena Pindell—not in order to undergird bureaucratic assents or enliven cocktail party conversations, but rather to be summoned by the styles they deploy for their profound insights, pleasures, and challenges. Yet, all evaluation—including a delight in Eliot's poetry despite his reactionary politics, or a love of Zora Neale Hurston's novels despite her Republican party affiliations—is inseparable, though not identical or reducible to social structural analyses, moral and political judgments, and the workings of a curious critical consciousness.

The deadly traps of demystification—and any form of prophetic criticism—are those of reductionism, be it of the sociological, psychological, or historical sort. By reductionism I mean either one-factor analyses (i.e., crude Marxisms, feminisms, racialisms, etc.) that yield a one-dimensional functionalism or a hyper-subtle analytical perspective that loses touch with the specificity of an art work's form and the context of its reception. Few cultural workers of whatever stripe can walk the tightrope between the Scylla of reductionism and the Charybdis of aestheticism—yet, demystificatory (or prophetic) critics must. Of course, since so many art practices these days also purport to be criticism, this also holds true for artists.

### The Existential Challenge

The existential challenge to the new cultural politics of difference can be stated simply: how does one acquire the resources to survive and the cultural capital to thrive as a critic or artist? By cultural capital (Pierre Bourdieu's term), I mean not only the high-quality skills required to engage in critical practices, but more important, the self-confidence, discipline, and perseverance necessary for success without an undue reliance on the mainstream for approval and acceptance. This challenge holds for all prophetic critics, yet it is especially difficult for those of color. The widespread modern European denial of the intelligence, ability, beauty, and character of people of color puts a tremendous burden on critics and artists of color to "prove" themselves in light of norms and models set by White elites whose own heritage devalued and dehumanized them. In short, in the court of criticism and art—or any matters regarding the life of the mind—people of color are guilty (i.e., not expected to meet standards of intellectual achievement) until "proven" innocent (i.e., acceptable to "us").

This is more a structural dilemma than a matter of personal attitudes. The profoundly racist and sexist heritage of the European Age has bequeathed to us a set of deeply ingrained perceptions about people of color including, of course, the self-perceptions that people of color bring. It is not surprising that most intellectuals of color in the past exerted much of their energies and efforts to gain acceptance and approval by "White normative gazes." The new cultural politics of difference advises critics and artists of color to put aside this mode of mental bondage, thereby freeing themselves both to interrogate the ways in which they are bound by certain conventions and to learn from and build on these very norms and models. One hallmark of wisdom in the context of any struggle is to avoid knee-jerk rejection and uncritical acceptance.

Self-confidence, discipline, and perseverance are not ends in themselves. Rather, they are the necessary stuff of which enabling criticism and self-criticism are made. Notwithstanding inescapable jealousies, insecurities, and anxieties, one telling characteristic of critics and artists of color linked to the new prophetic criticism should be their capacity for and promotion of relentless criticism and self-criticism—be it the normative paradigms of their White colleagues that tend to leave out considerations of empire, race, gender, and sexual orientation, or the damaging dogmas about the homogeneous character of communities of color.

There are four basic options for people of color interested in representation—if they are to survive and thrive as serious practitioners of their craft. First, there is the Booker T. Temptation, namely the individual preoccupation with the mainstream and its legitimizing power. Most critics and artists of color try to bite this bait. It is nearly unavoidable, yet few succeed in a substantive manner. It is no accident that the most creative and profound among them—especially those with staying power beyond mere flashes in the pan to satisfy faddish tokenism—are usually marginal to the mainstream. Even the pervasive professionalization of cultural practitioners of color in the past few decades has not produced towering figures who reside within the established White patronage system that bestows the rewards and prestige for chosen contributions to American society.

It certainly helps to have some trustworthy allies within this system, yet most of those who enter and remain tend to lose much of their creativity, diffuse their prophetic energy, and dilute their critiques. Still, it is unrealistic for creative people of color to think they can sidestep the White patronage system. And though there are indeed some White allies conscious of the tremendous need to rethink identity politics, it is naive to think that being comfortably nested within this very same system—even if one can be a patron to others—does not affect one's work, one's outlook, and, most important, one's soul.

The second option is the Talented Tenth Seduction, namely, a move toward arrogant group insularity. This alternative has a limited function—to preserve one's sanity and sense of self as one copes with the mainstream. Yet, it is,

at best, a transitional and transient activity. If it becomes a permanent option it is self-defeating in that it usually reinforces the very inferiority complexes promoted by the subtly racist mainstream. Hence it tends to revel in a parochialism and encourage a narrow racist and chauvinistic outlook.

The third strategy is the Go-It-Alone option. This is an extreme rejectionist perspective that shuns the mainstream and group insularity. Almost every critic and artist of color contemplates or enacts this option at some time in his or her pilgrimage. It is healthy in that it reflects the presence of independent, critical, and skeptical sensibilities toward perceived constraints on one's creativity. Yet, it is, in the end, difficult if not impossible to sustain if one is to grow, develop, and mature intellectually, as some semblance of dialogue with a community is necessary for almost any creative practice.

The most desirable option for people of color who promote the new cultural politics of difference is to be a Critical Organic Catalyst. By this I mean a person who stays attuned to the best of what the mainstream has to offer—its paradigms, viewpoints, and methods—yet maintains a grounding in affirming and enabling subcultures of criticism. Prophetic critics and artists of color should be exemplars of what it means to be intellectual freedom fighters, that is, cultural workers who simultaneously position themselves within (or alongside) the mainstream while clearly aligned with groups who vow to keep alive potent traditions of critique and resistance. In this regard, one can take clues from the great musicians or preachers of color who are open to the best of what other traditions offer, yet are rooted in nourishing subcultures that build on the grand achievements of a vital heritage. Openness to others—including the mainstream—does not entail wholesale cooptation, and group autonomy is not group insularity. Louis Armstrong, Ella Baker, W. E. B. DuBois, Martin Luther King, Jr., Jose Carlos Mariategui, Wynton Marsalis, M. M. Thomas, and Ronald Takaki have understood this well.

The new cultural politics of difference can thrive only if there are communities, groups, organizations, institutions, subcultures, and networks of people of color who cultivate critical sensibilities and personal accountability—without inhibiting individual expressions, curiosities, and idiosyncrasies. This is especially needed given the escalating racial hostility, violence, and polarization in the United States. Yet, this critical coming-together must not be a narrow closing of ranks. Rather, it is a strengthening and nurturing endeavor that can forge more solid alliances and coalitions. In this way, prophetic criticism—with its stress on historical specificity and artistic complexity—directly addresses the intellectual challenge. The cultural capital of people of color—with its emphasis on self-confidence, discipline, perseverance, and subcultures of criticism—also tries to meet the existential requirement. Both are mutually reinforcing. Both are motivated by a deep commitment to individuality and democracy—the moral and political ideals that guide the creative response to the political challenge.

### The Political Challenge

Adequate rejoinders to intellectual and existential challenges equip the practitioners of the new cultural politics of difference to meet the political ones. This challenge principally consists of forging solid and reliable alliances of people of color and White progressives guided by a moral and political vision of greater democracy and individual freedom in communities, states, and transnational enterprises—i.e., corporations, and information and communications conglomerates. Jesse Jackson's Rainbow coalition is a gallant, yet flawed effort in this regard—gallant due to the tremendous energy, vision, and courage of its leader and followers; flawed because of its failure to take seriously critical and democratic sensibilities within its own operations.

The time has come for critics and artists of the new cultural politics of difference to cast their nets widely, flex their muscles broadly, and thereby refuse to limit their visions, analyses, and praxis to their particular terrains. The aim is to dare to recast, redefine, and revise the very notions of "modernity," "mainstream," "margins," "difference," "otherness." We have now reached a new stage in the perennial struggle for freedom and dignity. And while much of the First World intelligentsia adopts retrospective and conservative outlooks that defend the crisis-ridden present, we promote a prospective and prophetic vision with a sense of possibility and potential, especially for those who bear the social costs of the present. We look to the past for strength, not solace; we look at the present and see people perishing, not profits mounting; we look toward the future and vow to make it different and better.

To put it boldly, the new kind of critic and artist associated with the new cultural politics of difference consists of an energetic breed of New World *bricoleurs* with improvisational and flexible sensibilities that sidestep mere opportunism and mindless eclecticism; persons from all countries, cultures, genders, sexual orientations, ages, and regions with protean identities who avoid ethnic chauvinism and faceless universalism; intellectual and political freedom fighters with partisan passion, international perspectives, and thank God, a sense of humor that combats the ever-present absurdity that forever threatens our democratic and libertarian projects and dampens the fire that fuels our will to struggle. Yet, we will struggle and stay, as those brothers and sisters on the block say, "out there"—with intellectual rigor, existential dignity, moral vision, political courage, and soulful style.

## TO OUR READERS

The proceedings of the *How Do I Look?* conference, which were scheduled for OCTOBER 52, will not be published here, and I have resigned my position as an editor of the journal. I want to emphasize, though, that my departure comes as a result of larger conflicts with OCTOBER's other three editors about editorial policy, conflicts which are not limited to, but which are nevertheless, I believe, adequately indicated by our differences over this issue. The *How Do I Look?* proceedings consist of six formal papers on lesbian and gay media representation, each followed by transcripts of discussions, with a final wrap-up discussion. With funding from the New York Council on the Humanities and the New York State Council on the Arts, the organizers of the conference—a lesbian and gay reading group called the Bad Object Choices, of which I am a member—were able to invite many prominent lesbian and gay media makers, critics, and theorists to participate in the discussions. Presented at Anthology Film Archives in New York last fall to an overflow crowd drawn mostly from the lesbian and gay communities, the conference was generally felt by those in attendance to be groundbreaking in a field of inquiry that is in its infancy.

My decision to withdraw the conference proceedings for publication elsewhere was a result of the refusal of two of the papers by my three coeditors, who insisted that the two papers in question did not meet OCTOBER's editorial standards. My reasons were the following: the integrity of the entire project would be destroyed by removing two of six papers; the interweaving of references in all follow-up discussions to the two papers would make no sense without them; the balances that we had tried to achieve in the conference—between lesbians and gay men, between theoreticians and practitioners, between people working inside and outside the academy—would be misrepresented. Many of the most significant, contentious, and ultimately productive issues that arose in the conference were a result of these differences, differences that also reflect and articulate uneven developments in lesbian and gay work as it struggles against very great odds to enter public discussion. It seemed to me that decisions based on certain notions of quality, or of theoretical correctness or sophistication, would distort the actual conditions of current lesbian and gay work.

My position in editorial discussions in this case was already one of conflict, since my obligations and loyalties were not merely to my coeditors, but also to my fellow organizers of and participants in *How Do I Look?* I felt sure that neither the

Bad Object Choices nor the conference participants would assent to publication of a truncated or significantly altered version of the conference proceedings, since those of us working in and for embattled communities are deeply committed to collectivity and solidarity, achieved not at the expense of, but rather through our recognition of differences. In that spirit, I also want to make very clear here my own sense of the importance of *all* contributions to *How Do I Look?* and of how they work together to advance discussion about lesbian and gay self-representation at this critical moment in our history. Happily, readers will be able to judge for themselves when the proceedings of *How Do I Look?* are published by Bay Press next spring.

— Douglas Crimp

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For a dozen of OCTOBER's fourteen years, Douglas Crimp has devoted his energy and skills to the production of the journal. He has also shared in the choices and decisions that have shaped its editorial policy. It is, therefore, with regret that we have accepted his resignation.

His departure was precipitated by a disagreement between us on one issue of policy. While OCTOBER has, like other journals, presented material generated by conferences, we have, in accordance with our collectively formed sense of the journal's project, done so selectively. We have always taken pains to inform conference organizers of this policy, expressing interest in but not uncritical nor unselective commitment to, publication of papers and proceedings.

We recognize the manner in which Douglas' position as both editor and conference organizer produced a conflict of interest; this undoubtedly complicated and intensified the predicament deriving from his unauthorized commitment to totality of publication. We therefore made every effort to publish as much as possible of the material as originally submitted, suggesting ways in which the authors of two texts about which there was serious disagreement might be editorially assisted in the presentation of their work to our readers. Our proposals were not, however, accepted and we were informed that the totality of the conference proceedings was being withdrawn from OCTOBER.

Douglas' decision and his subsequent resolve to resign were unilateral. We regret both decisions, for it is our view that our disagreement raised important issues for analysis and debate within the journal. These are issues we intend to address in the future.

Readers who have followed the course of OCTOBER's development know that the articulation of gay and lesbian issues was not at the center of this dispute. We have over the past several years willingly provided a forum for these issues.

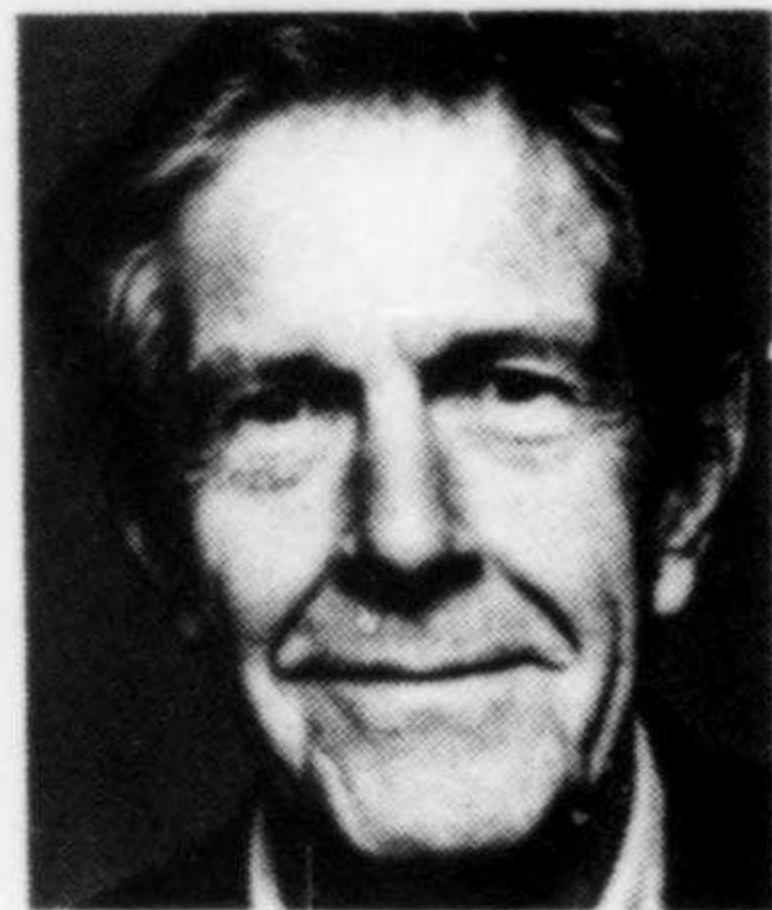
Although Douglas' reference to "larger conflicts . . . about editorial policy" remains unspecified and therefore wholly obscure to us, it does, of course, cast a rhetorical shadow over the journal and its editors. We take this to be

Douglas' intention and impute it to the sense of loss that he, too, must feel as he leaves the journal to which he has contributed much. With him go our confident hopes and our best wishes for his present and future work.

— The Editors

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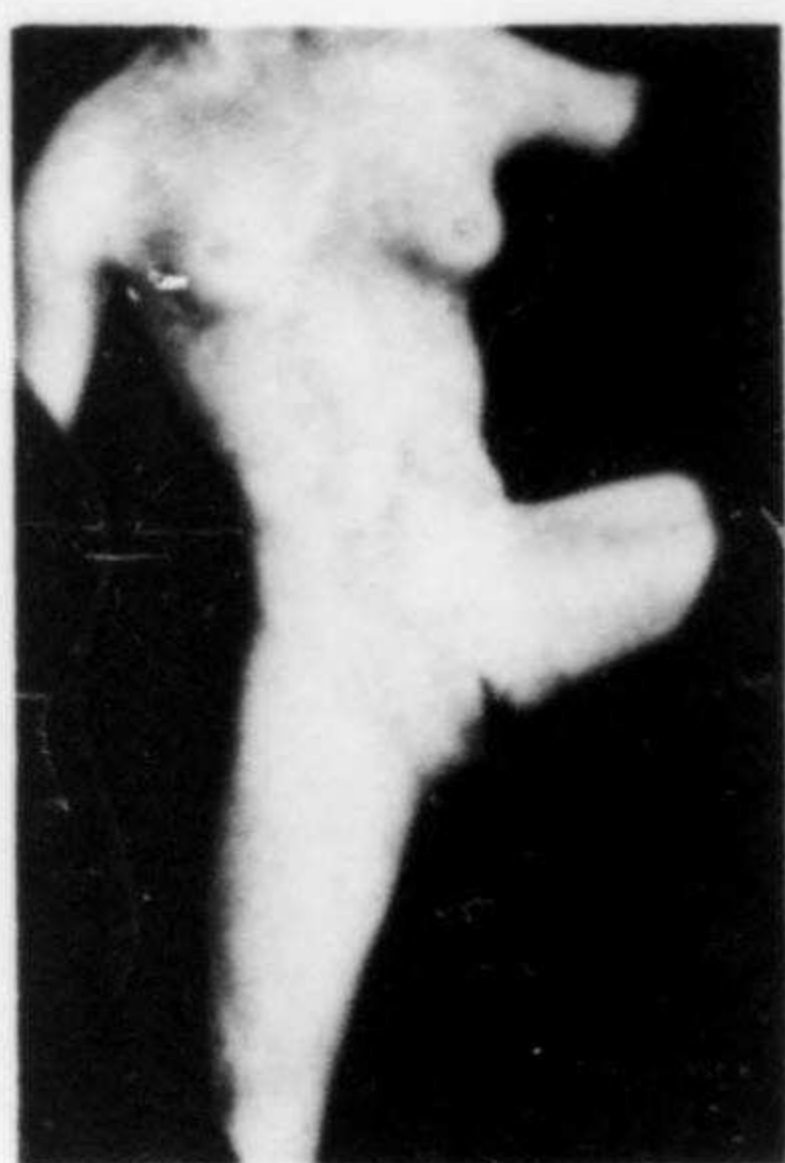
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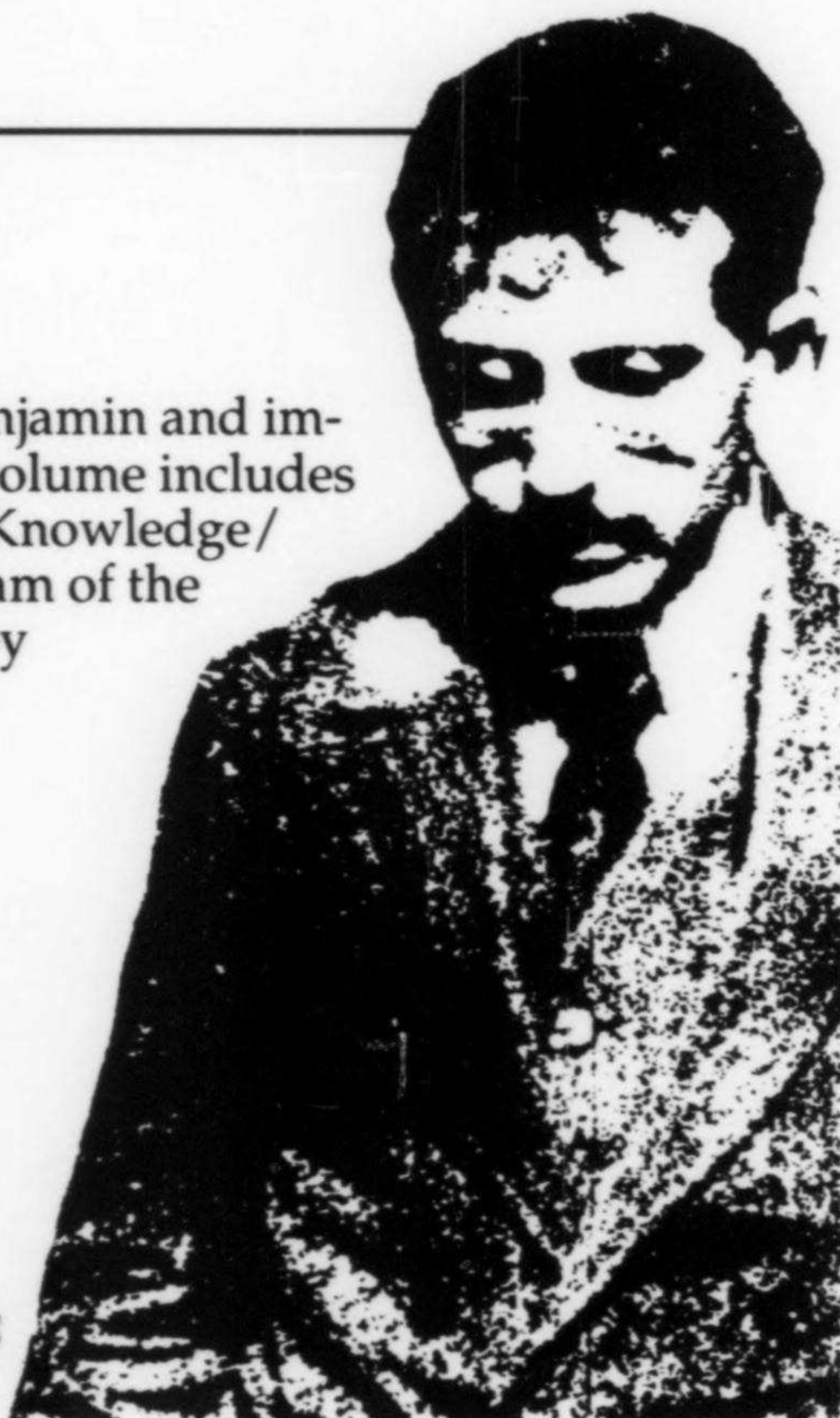
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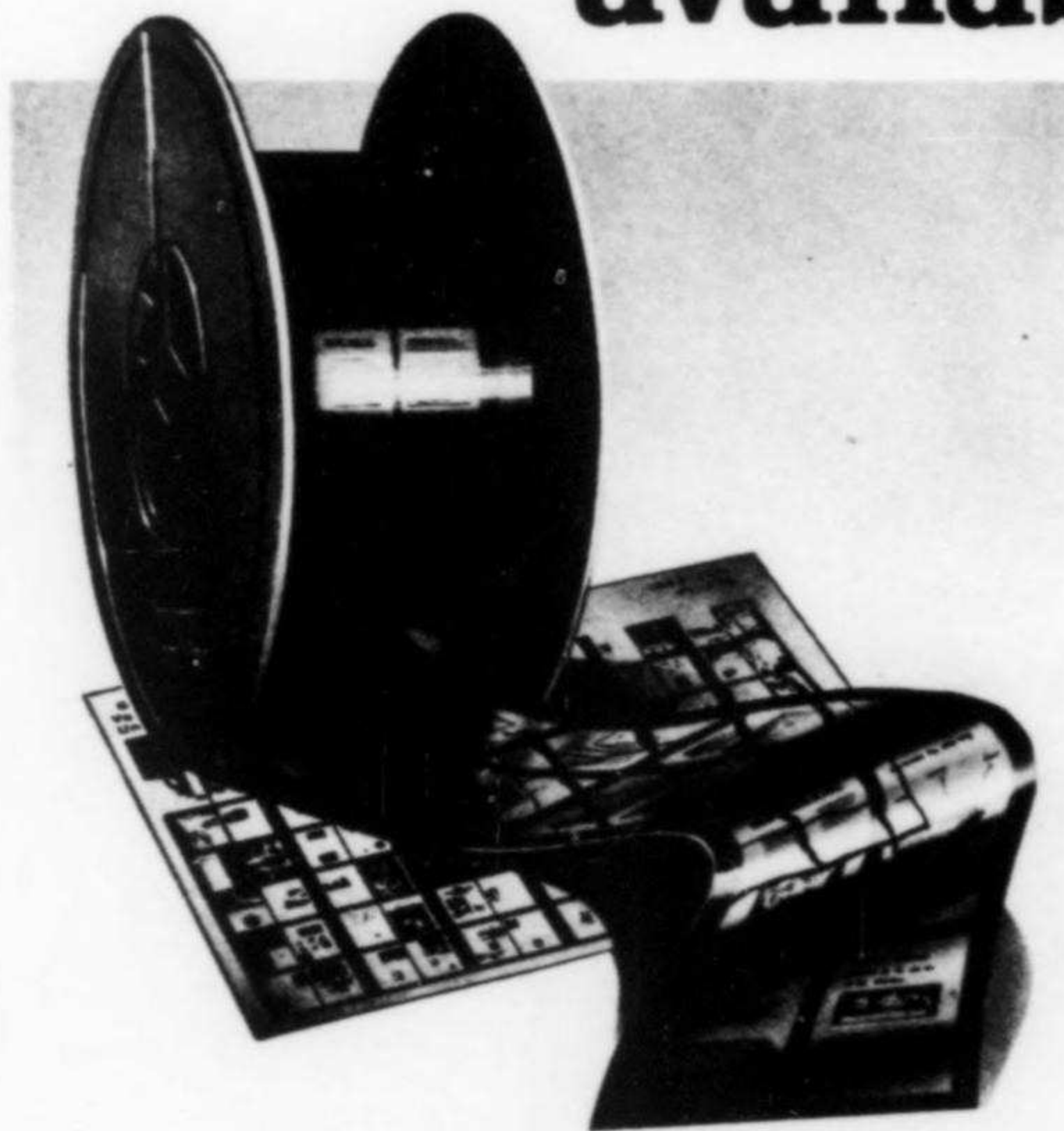
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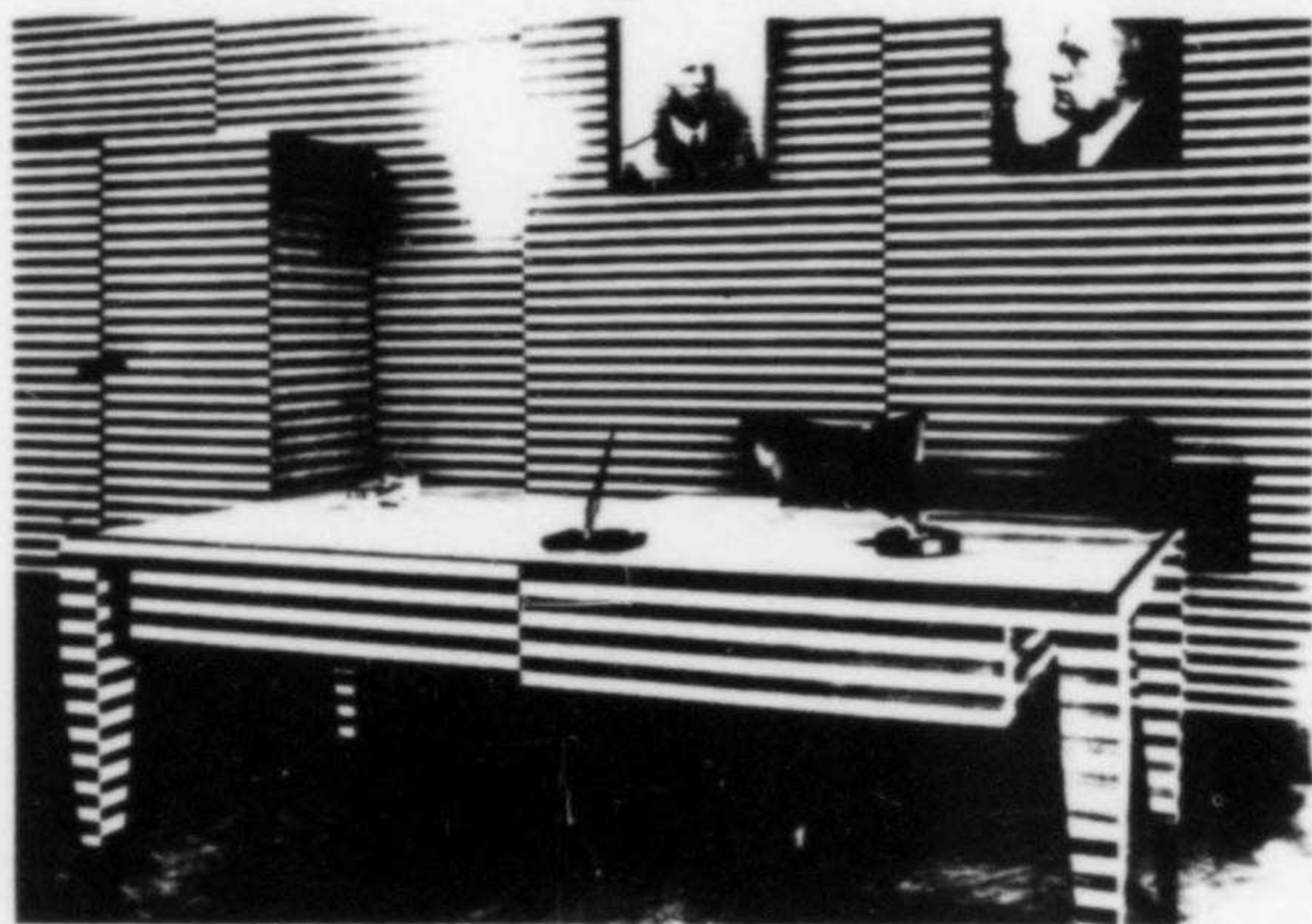
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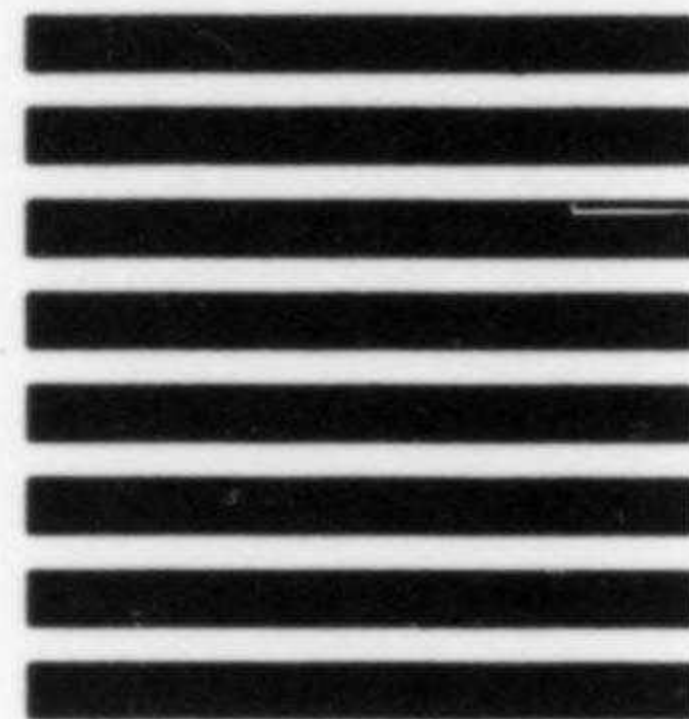


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