
Culture, geography, and the arts of government

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Abstract. In this paper I endeavor to prise open the theoretical closure of the conceptualization of culture in contemporary human geography. Foucault's later work on government provides the basis for a useable definition of culture as an object of analysis which avoids problems inherent in abstract, generalizing, and expansive notions of culture. The emergence of this Foucauldian approach in cultural studies is discussed, and the distinctive conceptualization of the relations between culture and power that it implies are elaborated. This reconceptualization informs a critical project of tracking the institutional formation of the cultural and the deployment of distinctively cultural forms of regulation into the fabric of modern social life. It is argued that the culture-and-government approach needs to be supplemented by a more sustained consideration of the spatiality and scale of power-relations. It is also suggested that this approach might throw into new perspective the dynamic behind geography's own cultural turn.

Using culture

Since the mid-1980s, culture seems to have become an organizing theme in an increasingly wide range of research in human geography. The cultural turn has even been championed as heralding the reinvention of geography (see *British Studies Now* 1996). However, 'culture' has been subjected to very little theoretical scrutiny. It tends to serve instead as a shorthand reference to a diverse set of concerns including identity, ideas, and representations, social constructionism, context, positionality, difference, and institutional embeddedness. In a sense, culture is a term that is *mentioned* a lot in a variety of strains of research, but on closer inspection it turns out that it is not really *used* as an organizing category of empirical inquiry or theoretical investigation. This perhaps helps to explain the absence, identified by Mitchell (1995), of a coherent and workable conceptualization of culture in human geography. He proposes that, rather than try to specify culture as a general ontological category, the main task of a critical human geography of culture should be to track the variable utilization of 'ideas of culture' in different contexts and by different interests. I want to develop this suggestion further, by elaborating upon a particular theoretical approach which can provide a useable definition of culture as an object of analysis. I shall consider the potential for thinking of culture along the lines suggested by Foucault's discussions of 'governmentality'. As a concept, governmentality cuts across a standard division between the history of ideas and a history of social institutions (Minson, 1993, page 60). It implies integrating a recognition of the institutional formation of culture's variable conceptualization and deployment into theoretical understandings. Acknowledging the "extent to which 'culture' itself constitutes an historically determined, discursive construction" (Young, 1996, page 15) might enable critical human geography to be better placed to address its own position in changing formations of culture, knowledge, and power.

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Culture imperious

The turn to culture in geography has in part been animated by an imputed weakness of positivist and political economy traditions, both of which are charged with doing violence to the essential wholeness and fecundity of everyday life which should be the proper concern of human geographers. In turn, there has been a strong attraction towards holistic conceptions of culture drawn from literary studies and anthropology. The work that culture does in a series of disciplinary reorientations is dependent upon a generalization of culture as both a whole way of life and the particular signifying or symbolizing practices through which social totalities are given meaning. This sort of definition tends to be *generalizing* insofar as it involves the seeming unimpeachable argument that all economic, political, and social process contain a 'cultural' or 'signifying' element. And it tends to be *totalizing* insofar as the methodological assumption that follows is that the work of cultural analysis can reveal the truth of the whole complex of social processes. The flexibility of expansionary definitions of culture is finally secured by the distinctively empty form of reference to differentiation, particularity, and specificity implied by this term. As a result, culture now seems at one and the same time to have no bounds or limits, insofar as it encompasses art, literature, pop music, social life in general; and yet to be inherently about differences, particularities, and specificities. The privileging of specificity, contingency, and differentiation in understandings of culture elevates concepts which, in their highly general denotation of particularity, actually resist further theorization or conceptual specification. Accordingly, the 'delimitation of culture' in human geography (Philo, 1991) has often led to the implicit embrace of the cultural as that which exceeds determination by abstract and universalizing forces and/or forms of understanding. When attached to an understanding of the geographical, the idea that processes of meaning and signification are simultaneously processes of differentiation privileges a research agenda which inquires into how general processes map themselves out differently in different places. And so a culturally inflected geography has succeeded in rehabilitating the idea that geography is essentially related to the study of areal differentiation (see Mitchell, 1999).

Much of the authority and sense of urgency associated with the cultural turn comes from a distinctive staging of interdisciplinarity, one which frames other disciplines as exciting and path-breaking fields. Geography's renewed interest in culture has been situated in relation to a more general resurgence of interest in culture across the social sciences and humanities. Calls for geographers to consider culture thus often take the form of injunctions that imply that geographers should not be left behind, while at the same time reassuring them that this shift has led to a heightened interest in and recognition of the importance of core geographical themes (for example, Gregory and Ley, 1988; Soja, 1996). As we start to do 'the cultural', so we find lots of new friends coming in the other direction who seem to be increasingly interested in 'the geographical', 'the spatial', and 'the local'. The theoretical influences shaping human geography's cultural turn are of course diverse, drawn from anthropology, literary studies, and sociology. In addition, there is an apparent convergence between human geography and cultural studies, evident in the emergence of a field of so-called "spatial-cultural discourse" (Rose, 1997, pages 1–3). Geographers have gravitated in particular towards a generalized textualism characteristic of certain strands of this field, one which equates culture with general models of signification or meaning, and presents this as the final word on the matter. As a consequence, geography's cultural turn has been underwritten by highly abstract conceptualizations of 'the specificity of the cultural' in terms of signifying practices, which are understood to work 'like a language', so that cultural processes are modeled on

a particular understanding of the production and articulation of meaning in language. This sort of understanding has become so widespread as to now almost constitute academic common sense in a diversity of fields. Such understandings are appropriations of the regulative notions of culture which have underwritten the internationalization of cultural studies (Kraniauskas, 1998). The unquestioned privileging of meaning, signification, or symbolization as the essence of the cultural also underwrites the political imaginary of a variety of approaches to cultural politics. Social relations of culture and power are constructed by analogy to a particular understanding of language, which holds language to be coextensive with meaning, and hinges the relationship between culture and power upon semiotic models of language which turn upon a binary opposition between (linguistic) system and (linguistic) use (Hirschkop, 1993). This model surreptitiously installs a series of philosophical oppositions in its wake, such as that between contingency and necessity, the intelligible and sensible, freedom and determinacy. And in turn, the relationship between culture and power is consistently figured around a set of antinomies that determine that the engagement with power can only ever be imagined in terms of opposition and resistance.

Of course, part of the appeal of cultural studies lies in its difficult relationship to disciplinarity. Cultural studies is distinguished in no small part by its theoretically sophisticated self-reflexive anxiety about its ever imminent and ever deferred capture by forces of disciplinization and institutionalization, which goes a long way to providing cultural studies with its political caché. The common representation of its political promise rests upon a routinely repeated description of cultural studies as an essentially postdisciplinary intellectual project: "cultural studies is imagined as a kind of polymorphously free zone for any intellectual commitments" (Nelson, 1996, page 277). Discussions of the institutional consolidation, professionalization, and internationalization of cultural studies are often accompanied by plaintive regrets or loud criticisms concerning co-optation or political neutralization. This sort of rhetoric reinstalls an idealized representation of cultural studies as a surrogate for broader social movements, and in the process any political significance it might acquire by virtue of its academic location is only ever constructed negatively. For many commentators, the political significance of cultural studies depends upon the maintenance of an apparent distance from the interests and structures that shape other academic disciplines.

Yet, as these sorts of complaints proliferate, other writers have expressed a concern for the need to acknowledge that cultural studies has always been an institutionally situated set of intellectual practices, and to adjust the terms for calculating its political potential accordingly (see Bennett, 1996; Striphas, 1998). 'Cultural studies' is more than a freely floating signifier which arbitrarily names any range of intellectual projects. It is the name attached to a quite specific set of intellectual fields of research and teaching with their own institutional histories (see Davies, 1995; Turner, 1996). Nor is it quite the porous and open field that is often supposed (Ferguson and Golding, 1997). Cultural studies has its own favored objects of research (popular culture, television, the everyday), its own favored methodologies (ethnography, thick description, reading), and it is marked by its own distinctive closures and exclusions (of quantitative methodologies, for example). Cultural studies thus remains subject to various forms of normalization, evaluation, and discipline as a condition of its existence (Bennett, 1993; 1998a). And work in cultural studies is disciplined not least through the reproduction of a certain idea of 'politics' which regulates research, teaching, and writing. The staging of 'politics' as a distinguishing feature is related to the ways in which, just as with well-established academic disciplines, cultural

studies is reproduced through narratives of origins, discourses of authority and celebrity, and processes of canon formation (Jones, 1994).⁽¹⁾

Making these observations is simply meant to suggest that one need not necessarily buy into the common representation of cultural studies as transcending the limitations of contemporary disciplinarity in order to find things of value therein. This is simply a quite conventional idea of culture as the means of overcoming division transposed into a model of 'postdisciplinary' practice. The main point I want to underscore is that cultural studies is not a homogenous field, making available uncontested conceptualizations for cross-disciplinary trafficking. It is shaped by its own internal divisions and debates. From the 'quantitative revolution' through to the 'cultural turn', the changing identity of human geography has been determined in no small part through the command of work from other disciplines. What I am suggesting is that, rather than thinking of interdisciplinarity in terms of import and export, borders and transgressions, perhaps it is better thought as a practice of affiliation, of knowing who your friends are (see Morris, 1992). And this requires a more careful consideration of the potential critical value of concepts and forms of cultural analysis which have their own distinctive political unconscious.

Disciplining culture

I now want to elaborate on some of the discursive, disciplinary, and institutional formations of modern academic understandings of culture in order to raise some questions which pertain to the position of human geography in relation to the wider set of processes currently reconfiguring cultural practices. As already suggested, geography's cultural turn has been largely dependent upon the recent internationalization of a particular version of the orthodoxy of cultural studies (see Barnett, 1998). However, the most recent phase of the development of cultural studies has also been accompanied by a sustained questioning of received understandings of culture, power, and theory worked up in the earlier period of the emergence of cultural studies. The "re-tooling" of cultural studies (Craik, 1995, page 201) has emerged most fully in certain 'postcolonial' contexts which have prompted more direct engagements with the relationships between culture, intellectual practice, the state, and the formation of 'the nation' (see Bennett et al, 1994; Chrisman, 1996; Washington, 1995). Driven by debates over the utility of theoretical work which privileges a fundamental vocabulary of opposition and resistance, culture has been reconceptualized in light of Foucault's work on governmentality, discipline, and technologies of the self (1988; 1991). This reconceptualization is particularly associated with debates over 'cultural-policy studies' in Australia in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Its significance is twofold: first, and theoretically, it is explicitly directed against the expansionary and generalized notions of culture otherwise characteristic of contemporary cultural studies (Hunter, 1988a);

⁽¹⁾ One feature of narratives of the development of cultural studies is a characteristic mapping of an institutional trajectory onto a highly normative account of its geographical adventures. These narratives of origin turn upon a center-periphery model which represents the growth of cultural studies as a process of spatial diffusion dogged by the constant danger of political dilution. So, one gets accounts of the recentering of cultural studies wherein 'Americanization' turns out to be the inevitable bogeyman (O'Connor, 1989; Pfister, 1991); or of the relocation of cultural studies 'from Birmingham to Milton Keynes' as indicative of a moment of institutional capture (Miller, 1994). Such narratives collapse a process of institutionalization into a process of diffusion in which the original potential of cultural leaks away. Suffice to say that these sorts of accounts have not gone uncontested (see Schwarz, 1994). One might suggest that a more fruitful approach to understanding the "cultural geography of cultural studies" (Schwarz, 1994, page 389) is provided by work which affirms the productivity of movement and translation in constructing new possibilities (Bhabha, 1994; Gilroy, 1993).

and second, this reconceptualization has been animated by a growing dissatisfaction with the widespread idea that cultural studies is, should be, or could be a form of “pure political practice” (Storey, 1997, page 99).⁽²⁾

The cultural-policy studies literature converges with a broader field of social and political theory which elaborates on Foucault's discussions of modern political reason in reconceptualizing liberal and neoliberal forms of governance (for example, Barry et al, 1996; Hindess, 1996). This work focuses on forms of government where the populations who are subjects of rule are presupposed to be free and autonomous citizens (Hindess, 1997). Liberal governance is understood as a set of rationalities and technologies for governing conduct through practices of subjectification as self-regulation (Miller and Rose, 1990). While the distinctively cultural forms of modern government are not the main focus of this range of work, this literature does suggest the close relationship between modern governmental rationalities and various technologies for the ethical self-regulation of the subject. This in turn indicates that various aesthetic and cultural practices might be productively rethought as normalizing apparatuses central to both the conceptualization and the operationalization of modern democratic processes (Miller, 1993). The historical development of a liberal problematic of political rule opens a gap between formal administration and the social field. Culture has been historically constructed as a medium for acting upon the social while maintaining this separation, as a means of governing the conduct of conduct (Bennett, 1998b). It is in this respect that it has been argued that culture is “inherently governmental” (Bennett, 1995, page 884). This should be understood by reference to the broad definition of ‘government’ as “techniques and procedures for directing human behavior” (Foucault, 1997, page 81).

This reconceptualization therefore depends upon a recognition of the historical imbrication of culture and aesthetics in formal and informal practices for producing self-formative ethical subjects capable of problematizing and regulating their own conduct. Accordingly, culture is understood in terms of varied practices for the inculcation of values, beliefs, routines of life, and forms of conduct. This is understood not in terms of psychological mechanisms of ideology or consent, but rather as involving the detailed regulation of social activity in particular institutional sites. “If Foucault has any lessons for cultural theory, it is that the politics of cultural institutions are not reducible to the politics of consciousness; that what goes on within such institutions is not only a struggle for ‘hearts and minds’ but also concerns ... the deployment of definite technologies of behaviour and forms of human management” (Bennett, 1990, page 270). This understanding implies that culture be understood as an historically variable range of practices that apply or deploy power to particular effects, and not as a realm that reflects, refracts, or represents other modes of power.

The culture-and-government literature is primarily an intervention within debates over the continuing evolution of cultural studies (see Bennett, 1997; Miller, 1998). As such, this work rests upon a distinctive interpretation of the conditions of emergence of cultural studies. Of course, the ‘origins’ of cultural studies are many and diverse.

⁽²⁾ For further discussions of the cultural-policy studies approach, see Bennett (1992a; 1992b), Craik (1994), Cunningham (1993). The reorientation indicated by this work has been subjected to various criticisms. McGuigan (1995) and O'Regan (1992) question the validity of starkly opposing critical analysis with policy-oriented work, pointing out the extent to which these two emphases have coexisted in previous traditions of cultural studies. Jameson (1993), on the other hand is somewhat more skeptical, even dismissive, preferring to reaffirm the image of cultural studies as a political project aligned with various social movements. His response indicates that what is at stake in the debates over cultural-policy studies is not just a new set of theoretical ideas, but rather a revision of the most favored self-representations of cultural studies as an intellectual project.

Furthermore, they are also heavily mythologized, whether in terms of great men and their foundational texts (Hoggart and *The Uses of Literacy*, Williams and *Culture and Society*), institutional locations ('Birmingham'), or a wider context of socialist, feminist, and antiracist movements ('The New Left'). But as Chrisman (1996, pages 184–187) has observed, while empirically the story of cultural studies is well-enough known, the *theoretical* significance of this story is less often given serious consideration. In this respect, the culture and government literature is premised upon an integration into theoretical understandings of culture of an acknowledgment of the roots of cultural studies in the destabilization of specific understandings of culture embedded in particular educational practices. The project of British cultural studies in the 1960s and 1970s aimed "to bring out the regulative nature and role the humanities were playing in relation to the national culture" (Hall, 1990, page 15). Rereading this history of cultural studies *theoretically* draws into focus the privileged relationship that institutionally embedded conceptions of culture have played "in the formation of citizens and the legitimation of the state" (Lloyd and Thomas, 1995, page 270). The institutionalized commitment to autonomy that shapes modern understandings of culture is given a central role in modern liberal conceptualizations of democratic practice, which is understood to depend in part on the internalized power of ethical self-reflection by individuals (Lloyd and Thomas, 1998). The historically intimate relation between conceptions of education, practices of cultural criticism, and the nation-state also draws attention to the constitutive role of modes of imperial and colonial administration in shaping modern conceptions of culture. This is one of the lessons of postcolonial studies: that the relation between aesthetics and utility, culture and instrumentality, is an internal rather than an external one, both practically and conceptually (see Bhattacharyya, 1991; Scott, 1995; Viswanathan, 1989; Young, 1995). The working up of humanistic educational and cultural practices in relation to the instrumental ends of governmental administration needs to be understood as something more than a fall from grace. Postcolonial studies thus underscores the more general point that particular instrumental interests are constitutive of conceptualizations of culture and aesthetics as properly disinterested and noninstrumental realms of meaning and value (Hunter, 1990).⁽³⁾

The critical governmentality literature also draws attention to the intricate connections between the liberal genealogy of notions of critique and understandings of liberalism as a distinctive mode of rule (Stenson, 1998). This is of interest given the coincidence of the recent emergence of the appellation 'critical' human geography with the 'cultural turn'. In *The Conflict of the Faculties* (1979), Kant delineated the legitimate place for critical intellectual reflection in relation to the authority of the modern state by redefining particular educational practices as forms of self-government. Kant's ideal individuals are taught through particular disciplines "to regulate their own behaviour in the manner of autonomous agents—they are, in other words, individuals who can only be governed only on the basis of their own implicit or

(3) The genealogy of the humanities that informs the culture-and-government literature should be distinguished from earlier critiques of the humanities which identified their historical imbrication in practices of domination. There is a widespread tendency to read Foucault's account of power as simply another version, akin to that of the Frankfurt School, of a narrative of the extension of instrumental rationality into all spheres of social life. However, Foucault's approach to the productivity of power, to be explicated in further detail below, "should not be reduced to a claim for the production of social control" (Lacombe, 1996, page 334). It follows that the genealogy of cultural practices is concerned with practices of liberation as much as practices of normalization, and that the cultural technologies, including the humanities, are understood as 'technologies of freedom', not merely as instruments for the reproduction of relations of domination (see Bové, 1990).

explicit consent” (Hindess, 1995, page 37). The hidden history of modern aesthetic theory lies secreted in its role in practices whereby disciplinary power ‘lays hold of the soul’ through myriad practices which work upon the body (Loesberg, 1998, pages 104–107). From Kant onwards, aesthetics is redefined so as to open onto the interior of the subject, so that the practical encounter between cultural artifacts and the subject can be reformulated as one of self-fashioning (see Lloyd, 1986). The task of modern notions of criticism has been to bring subjects into an ethically problematizing relationship with their own selves, in order that a process of ethical reshaping might be begun (Hunter, 1988b). During the course of the 19th century, these principles are institutionally realized in particular academic disciplines, along with other cultural institutions such as museums, galleries, libraries, and schools. Whereas for Kant, philosophy was the privileged discourse for the cultivation of practices of self-regulating critique, during the course of the 19th century this ethical practice of criticism became the special preserve of the new field of literary education. In the 20th century, this restriction has been raised, as the field of aesthetics has been expanded into a broader understanding of culture opened up to analysis through a generalized cultural criticism (Hunter, 1992). This reformulation of culture as aesthetics, and the subsequent populist delimitation of the aesthetic field beyond literature or art, underwrites the specific instrumentality of apparently noninstrumental conceptions of culture as a means of acting on the social. Modern discourses of culture are caught up with the normative construction of social fields to be acted upon through particular technologies aimed at transforming the relations of subjects to their own conduct and behavior.

It is important to emphasize that this instrumental deployment of culture is not a secondary, external process, but is constitutive of modern conceptions of culture that have now been extended across academic disciplines. The flexible utility of culture, as a concept associated with particular technologies of the self, is determined by the distinctively antithetical structure of modern definitions of the term (Young, 1995, page 29): culture is defined in opposition to nature, or civilization, or anarchy; and it can also always be divided hierarchically, into high and low, elite and mass. This internal and external division of culture is highly normative, insofar as one part is always defined as lacking some feature, while the other is defined as the medium for changing the former (Bennett, 1998b, page 91). The externality against which culture is defined is always likely to be consumed by culture, and the hierarchically subordinate element is thus always open to transformation by the superordinate term. This antithetical pattern is not merely a matter of definition, but an index of the inscription of culture in technologies for the transformation of social activity. The characteristically antithetical and self-divided modern conceptualization of culture is the key to its instrumental, utilitarian deployment in modern technologies of government. The discursive ‘splitting of culture’ defines, first, a range of resources for governing (a canon of cultural works and artifacts, as well as modes of interpretation, appreciation, and judgment); and, second, it defines a set of domains to which these technologies can be applied to change conduct (Bennett, 1998b, page 82). The simultaneous conceptual expansion of culture in the 19th century, to denote whole ways of life, and its institutional restriction to particular practices of conduct, judgment, taste, and evaluation was the means by which the transformation of the ‘culture’ of individuals and groups became the *object* of institutionalized practices in which ‘culture’ in the narrow sense was to be used as the *medium* of transformation (Hunter, 1988c). Cultures are constructed as a set of domains to be acted upon, using technologies designed for the cultivation of practices of transformative self-regulation.

The 'event' of cultural studies thus teaches us that the history of different notions of culture is more than just a tale of various theories of culture. It is, rather, the trace of the history of institutionalized aesthetic and ethical practices in which particular understandings of culture are worked up in relation to the application of particular modalities of power.⁽⁴⁾ Returning to Chrisman's point, the theoretical significance of reiterating the 'origins' of cultural studies lies in the acknowledgment that processes of governmental administration have played a central role in the historical formation and refinement of the conceptual understandings of culture still most favored by a rapidly expanding field of cultural theory. Contemporary cultural theory still disseminates the traces of notions of criticism and ethical problematization inherited from particular understandings of textuality, reading, and criticism (Mercer, 1991). The most innovative conceptions of culture now circulating in human geography (culture as a way of life, culture as signification) are determined by the same anti-thetical structure of normative described above. The reconceptualization of culture as a mode of government within the divided field of cultural studies might therefore be important for human geography not least for opening up the hidden investments underwriting the discipline's recent embrace of cultural methodologies. It raises serious doubts about the value of any reformulation of disciplinary agendas which does not carefully address the implications of the institutional genealogy of culture. And, as I want to discuss in the next section, it is a conceptualization that might require the rethinking of some cherished notions of culture as a privileged medium of critical engagement with power.

Culture, government, and freedom/power

I have identified an emergent reconceptualization of culture in cultural studies which draws upon the later work of Foucault and develops a self-consciously limited and situated notion of culture. Culture is understood as a set of practices or technologies for the transformation of individuals into subjects capable of governing themselves. The critical project suggested by this reconceptualization is to track specific formations of the cultural and the extension of distinctively cultural forms of government into the fabric of modern social life, as new fields are reconfigured as cultural in order to be subjected to particular forms of social management. The importance of this conceptualization lies not necessarily in the elaboration of new theoretical objects of analysis (after all, Foucault's ideas are already an important influence in cultural studies, human geography, and elsewhere), nor necessarily in its pragmatic orientation to policy-related issues (which is an old theme in cultural studies, and one which is also highly context dependent). Rather, this approach is significant for the particular understanding of the relation of culture and power that implies. It is therefore important to specify the precise notion of power underwriting the culture-and-government literature, if this approach is not to be immediately absorbed into the standard oppositional political imaginary of cultural studies and critical human geography alike. I want to specify two points about Foucault's approach that will help to clarify this argument. Foucault is widely associated with the idea that power is not a substance or possession,

⁽⁴⁾ I have chosen to reiterate the standard story of the emergence of cultural studies in relation to the literary humanities, but this is not the only narrative one could choose. However, I would contend that, even if one were to favor other stories, for example, the importance of anthropology as another departure point for cultural studies (Gregory, 1994, pages 134–135), the same emphases would emerge, namely the importance of governmental practices in shaping the formation of anthropological conceptualizations of culture (see Thomas, 1994). The same point holds also for the close relationships between cultural studies and earlier critiques of cultural imperialism (see Schiller, 1996, pages 88–105).

but is relational, capillary, and therefore diffused: ‘power is everywhere’. This is also routinely considered to be a politically disempowering idea, apparently leaving no room for the conceptualization of resistance.⁽⁵⁾ First, then, it will be necessary to distinguish this notion of the diffusion of power from other similar ideas. This will require, second, clarification of the specific, limited understanding of a particular form of power which, from a Foucauldian perspective, might be said to be dispersed across multiple sites and social relations.

On the first of these issues, Foucault’s discussions of modern governmentality reorients the analysis of political rule to a multitude of locations, decomposing power into the relationships between political rationalities, technologies, and practices. This understanding is rooted in the broader argument that modernity is characterized by the emergence of ‘disciplinary’ systems of power (Foucault, 1979; 1980). Disciplinary power refers behavior not a rule or a law, but to a norm or regularity, and it is conceived as being directed at positively governing conduct rather than constraining an essentially free individuality. And disciplinary forms of power are predicated on the myriad practices of experts administering truth and knowledge (Rose, 1994). From this perspective, government refers to an array of political rationalities and organizing practices that are concerned with indirectly regulating the conduct of individuals and groups, and in particular, concerned with inculcating those specific ethical competencies and styles which are considered to be basic attributes of modern citizenship. The point I want to emphasize here is that, compared with the modalities of power characteristic of sovereign, juridical systems of power, Foucault’s account describes heterogeneous practices for the management of individuals and groups which do not derive from a single center of power. Government refers to a range of “strategies and techniques for acting, through indirect means, on the conduct of others *in a range of different sites and under the aegis of a range of different authorities*” (Miller and Rose, 1995, page 429, emphasis added). This implies a conceptual reordering of the relations between state and civil society. In contemporary social and political theory, civil society is often constructed as the bulwark against the excessive encroachments of administrative power. After Foucault, state and civil society are no longer opposed as realms of domination and freedom, respectively (see Cohen and Arato, 1994, pages 255–298; Hardt, 1995). In a process referred to as the governmentalization of the state, ‘political society’ emerges as just a particular constellation of forms of rule, political rationalities, and technologies developed and embedded in the wider realm of ‘civil society’: “The state is superstructural in relation to a whole series of power networks that invest the body, sexuality, the family, kinship, knowledge, technology and so forth” (Foucault, 1986, page 64).

This reordering distinguishes the conceptualization of culture in relation to governmentality from notions of culture understood in relation to the concept of hegemony. The theme of the proliferation of power in Foucault breaks from the sovereign model of power that subsists in the analyses of work in cultural studies framed with reference to Gramscian hegemony. Gramsci’s notion of hegemony (1971) is pivotal both to the theoretical trajectory and to the political imaginary of contemporary cultural studies (see Johnson, 1991). Gramscian hegemony refers to a variety of practices of persuasion which, while extended beyond the realm of the economy and the state, continue to be understood as functioning primarily to secure the reproduction of capitalist social relations and which operate through consent to transform consciousness. The institutions of political society are understood to exercise coercion and control, while the institutions

(5) Such evaluations tend to take for granted that what counts as progressive or radical political action is already established and stable, and therefore disallow from the start alternative formulations.

of civil society are seen as establishing hegemony through the production of cultural and moral norms that secure the legitimacy of the social order (Bobbio, 1987). Thus, while hegemonic forms of rule diffuse power-relations throughout a social formation, multiplying the sites of the class struggle and allowing issues such as gender, ethnicity, and race to be conceptually incorporated into a Marxian schema, this dispersal remains unified by being a diffusion of a single set of relations which refer finally to the capital–labor relation. Foucault’s formulation of the problematics of modern discipline and government refers not just to multiple and diffuse sites of power, but to fundamentally heterogeneous forms of rule and contestation, and does not presume any necessary overarching dynamic, sovereign will, or single rationality which draws them into a unified relation.

This leads onto the second point noted above, which pertains to the quite specific type of diffuse and proliferating power conceptualized in Foucault’s formulations of discipline and government. Power here refers to a liberal form of rule which constitutes subjective agents as autonomous “and defines itself wholly in relation to them and to their freedom” (Halperin, 1995, page 18). Practices of government are understood as the mediums by which subjects come to govern themselves. Power is therefore predicated on the exercise of freedom: “Power relations are only possible in so far as the subject is free” (Foucault, 1997, page 292). Freedom is in turn refigured not as an innate capacity of an essential subjective consciousness, but as an array of competencies that are ascribed to different agents and can only be realized in relation to specific conditions of possibility.⁽⁶⁾ It has existence only through various technologies of the self, that array of “techniques which permit individuals to effect, by their own means, a certain number of operations on their own bodies, on their souls, on their own thoughts, on their own conduct, and this in a manner so as to transform themselves, modify themselves, and to attain a certain state of perfection, of happiness, of purity, of supernatural power, and so on” (Foucault, 1993, page 203). On this understanding, power is conceptually distinguished from domination, because disciplinary power-relations do not totally foreclose the field of action: “A man who is chained up and beaten is subject to force being exerted over him. Not power. But if he can be induced to speak, when his ultimate recourse could have been to hold his tongue, preferring death, then has has been caused to behave in a certain way. His freedom has been subjected to power. He has been submitted to government. If an individual can remain free, however little his freedom may be, power can subject him to government. There is no power without potential refusal or revolt” (Foucault, 1981, page 253). It is important to emphasize that formulations such as this do not claim to provide a theory of power in general, but rather define power as a quite specific form of action distinguished from other operations such as domination, slavery, or violence.

The definition which is critical for understanding the reconceptualization of culture in terms of governmentality is therefore the one which understands power as “a way of acting upon an acting subject or acting subjects by virtue of their acting or being capable of action. A set of actions upon other actions” (Foucault, 1983, page 220).⁽⁷⁾ This conceptualization of power is predicated upon agency, but agency is understood as an historically specific attribute of particular ensembles of subjectivity, knowledge, and power, rather than as an abstract predicate of an ahistorical human subject. The concept of governmentality thus rests on an understanding of power-relations not as relations of oppression of an otherwise free individuality, but of the positivity of power

⁽⁶⁾ For further discussions of conceptualizations of freedom and liberty from a Foucauldian perspective, see Ivison (1997) and Quinby (1991).

⁽⁷⁾ For further discussion of power as “actions on actions”, see Pottage (1998).

understood in two senses. First, power is understood as sets of relations that facilitate the production of willing and active agents of administration and management. And second, power is understood as a set of relations that can be refigured by those agents by virtue of their being forms of 'action at a distance' which depend upon the instantiation and reiteration of specific conditions of possibility (Gordon, 1991, page 48).

In drawing upon Foucault, then, the reconceptualization of culture as inherently governmental implies that the relation of culture to power needs to be rethought. If, after Foucault, power is not understood as externally opposed to freedom, then nor is freedom understood as emancipation from power. Power-relations are the necessary conditions for the free exercise of any agency, choice, judgment. These sorts of ideas are perhaps a little worn now, after extensive discussions of postmodernism, poststructuralism, and the like. But here I want to underscore the extent to which they should not be taken simply as a set of general theoretical postulates, but read as bearing upon the political imaginary which underwrites a great deal of contemporary cultural theory. The culture-and-government literature, drawing as it does upon Foucault, implies that a purely oppositional construction of the relation between culture and power needs to be reconsidered.

Reconfiguring culture

I have argued for the need to move understandings of culture beyond the totalizing horizon of meaning and signification that encloses current conceptualizations. I want to consider some ways in which recent work which conceptualizes culture in relation to notions of governmentality might offer fruitful directions for future work in human geography. I will discuss two related issues: the conceptual implications of the spatial dispersal of the subjects of government, compared with the spatial containment characteristic of discipline; and the implications of the contemporary reterritorialization of political power. Both issues suggest that a more sustained consideration of the complexity of scale for the exercise of power is required than currently exists in the culture-and-government literature.

First, the culture-and-government literature directs attention to the microgeographies of the formation and regulation of cultural attributes, following from the characteristic Foucauldian emphasis on the regulation of conduct through the detailed organization of the relations between persons, symbolic resources, and time-space routines. Human geographers have already addressed the importance ascribed by Foucault to the spatialities of different administrative systems (Philo, 1992). The distinctive spatiality of disciplinary power as it emerged in the 18th and 19th centuries was associated with a series of "spaces of enclosure" (Deleuze, 1992), the array of institutional sites including the school, the hospital, the factory, and the prison discussed by Foucault and further elaborated in work by human geographers (for example, Driver, 1985; 1992; Hannah, 1997). However, there are good reasons for supposing that the common emphasis on disciplinary subjectification as a process of spatial containment and surveillance needs to be supplanted to take account of significant contemporary reformulations of the spatialities of culture and its regulation.

Government is a crucial term in Foucault's work because it connects a concern for the detailed regulation of individual conduct with the regulation of whole populations, thus linking the microdomains of individual behavior to the macrodomains of large institutions. But this relationship should not be considered simply to involve the extension of disciplinary techniques over greater scales. Government implies a different spatiality of power compared with discipline, which in turn implies a revised understanding of the effectivity of governmental strategies (see Allen, 1997; 1998). If 'cultural' modes of regulation are now being displaced more fully beyond the realms of the state

(Elmer, 1996; Hall, 1997; Rose and Miller, 1992), then they have also been rescaled during the course of the 20th century beyond the confined spaces of schools, galleries, and museums. Consideration of the complex articulation of the multiple and dispersed spatialities of contemporary governmental technologies requires a reconsideration of understandings of the effectivity of strategies for the regulation of conduct and behavior (see Flew, 1996). Thinking through the distinctive spatialities of government as compared with those of disciplinary power calls into question the judgment that Foucault's analysis of power is 'hyperfunctionalist' (Brenner, 1994). This sort of negative account of Foucault's apparent failure adequately to conceptualize resistance is the flip side of the positive rendering of his work as a version of the social control thesis. Both depend upon privileging certain works on discipline and panopticism, eliding later work on governmentality, ethics, and technologies of the self which displace the power/resistance problematic with one centered upon 'strategic games between liberties'. Current technological and organizational changes in the modes of production, distribution, consumption, and regulation of culture are reconfiguring the spatialities of cultural practices. These processes impact in ways which remain to be specified upon the forms of effective 'action upon action' that can be exercised through these networks. In contrast to the seamless transmission of effects through policy implied by some of the governmentality literature, greater attention should be paid to "its failures and absurdities; with how people live with its operations and unforeseen consequences, and then with multiple mediations and refractions of their own responses; with how they formulate initiatives of their own; with how all this living 'exceeds' (to wheel in a useful term) the demands and the desires of the policy imaginary" (Morris, 1998, page 118). This move towards examining the active roles of the governed in strategies of government (see O'Malley, 1996; O'Mally et al, 1997) also requires, I would suggest, a reconsideration of the characteristic conceptual spatialization of power which one finds in much of the governmentality literature (see Barnett, 1999).

The second point of potential contact between the culture-and-government literature and geography concerns the extent to which the rescaling of cultural processes associated with the dispersal of sites of governmental regulation is connected to a reformulation of the territorial frameworks through which culture is deployed as a modality of government. Modern concepts of culture have historically been related to a particular territoriality of government, that of the nation-state. 'Cultural politics', insofar as this refers to a range of struggles which revolve around issues of equality, recognition, justice, and entitlement (Ross, 1998), often continues to be undertaken by social movements which aim to articulate their claims with the structures of the state. The contemporary reconfiguration of the government of culture beyond the state towards market mechanisms means that the articulation of culture with the territorial scales of institutionalized democratic politics is being eroded, as it becomes increasingly closely articulated with nonterritorialized networks of capital accumulation. The conditions for the academic celebration of the proliferation of cultural politics in everyday acts of meaning-making might therefore be related to a fundamental disarticulation of these practices from the sites and scales at which the 'political politics' of effective democracy largely continue to be organized. The consequence of this is that the practical purchase of the diffuse practices of the cultural politics of the everyday might be severely limited in the absence of a concomitant institutional restructuring of 'the political' as such (see Garnham, 1995). It remains an open question in the current conjuncture whether extranational, 'strong' public spheres can be developed in which a politics of cultural justice can be effectively pursued over the same scales at which processes of the commodification and the governmentalization of culture are now reproduced (Robbins, 1997).

The dual issues of the spatialities through which culture is regulated, and of the connections between the reterritorialization of democratic practices and the possibilities of effective postnational cultural politics, provide two thematic entry points through which the culture-and-government literature and human geography might be fruitfully connected. They illustrate the imbrication of culture in complex rearticulations of the scales of identity formation, accumulation, and administrative power. In turn, both issues indicate that the strategic utility of this approach for a critical human geography is rooted in maintaining a sense of the difference between culture and politics, enabling their relationship to be explored in a mundane, practical manner. Thinking of culture in terms of practices of government might be one means of better specifying the ways in which those activities recognizable as politics depend upon broader cultural conditions through which people are constituted as certain sorts of subjects, but to do so without collapsing the difference between political and other forms of practice (see Elshtain, 1997; Mulhern, 1995). In place of notions of cultural politics and radical democracy that finally evade the question of the actual sites of political participation, representation, and decisionmaking, the culture-and-government literature recenters critical attention upon the changing relationships between institutionalized cultural practices and the structures and practices of democratic politics.

Culture is everywhere

Rethinking culture in terms of its constitution in diverse practices of modern government raises the question of the relationship of the current expansion of academic cultural analysis to the current extension of distinctive political rationalities and governmental technologies beyond the realm of the state. In contemporary political discourses, everything from urban poverty and the management of firms to labor markets and the family are being reconfigured as cultural phenomena in order to be subjected to distinctive technologies of administration and transformation (for example, Greenhalgh, 1998; Miller and Rose, 1997). Neoliberal forms of governance are associated with the proliferation of new surfaces of person-formation, and with the development of new civic technologies for the regulation and transformation of the conduct of selected populations. Culture is just one amongst an array of related concepts which has been redeployed as part of a broader discursive shift in the terms for regulating the relations between state, practices of government, capital, and markets. Others would include community, citizenship, civil society, and the public sphere. As a discursive ensemble, all of these concepts are characteristically invoked in contemporary political discussions and policymaking circles to positively affirm the limits of state power (see Rose, 1999). At the same time, the state retains a commitment to cultivate and regulate these fields which remain outside its direct control. Culture, community, civil society, citizenship, and the public sphere all mark the constitutive relationship between formal political rationalities of the (neo)liberal state and their limits. Each names a realm that is both inside and outside the immediate and proper purview of administrative power. As such they are exemplary fields for the exercise of governmental strategies. In short, the current proliferation of these concepts across a host of academic debates might well be connected to broader trends in the development of neoliberal political rationalities towards the continued governmentalization of the relations between states, markets, and populations. Culture, in fact, can be considered the paradigm for the deployment of these other terms as part of new civic technologies of social regulation, insofar as it has been historically conceptualized as a realm both beyond state control (as whole ways of life), but simultaneously as a medium or means for acting upon and transforming that outside (as a set of artifacts, pedagogies, and dispositions). Governmentalization inscribes culture upon

a surface of potential social administration, as both an object of regulation, and, through a process of hierarchical splitting, as the means of governing social activity at a distance.

On this reading, we might hypothesize that more and more geography is now at least tangentially concerned with culture not so much because of some pivotal conceptual breakthrough in the intellectual progress of the discipline, but rather because a series of quite traditional concerns, such as urban management, industrial restructuring, and social policy, have all been reconfigured in the present conjuncture as open to modes of cultural regulation, where this implies certain ways of intervening to shape the conduct of individuals and populations through self-regulation. If this hypothesis carries any weight, then it suggests that we need different ways of imagining the engagement between culture and power than those offered by the domination–resistance couple. These should acknowledge the positive role of culture as a mode of rule, rather than constructing culture as standing opposed to power as a resource to be drawn upon to resist its operation. Culture articulates with power through the active (differential and selective) development of capacities, such that power-relations are reproduced by cultivating certain forms of agency. Education is a primary vector for this sort of exercise of power. Academic practices are always already deeply involved in programs for changing conduct and transforming behavior. As Castree rightly suggests (1999, page 259), acknowledging this is only the preliminary to assessing the potentials and limits of “specific modalities of subject administration and transformation”. The Foucauldian approach to the conceptualization of culture is significant because it indicates that it is not adequate to imagine academic practices as being capable either of unambiguously serving as instruments of liberation from coercion, nor as mere instruments for the reproduction of relations of domination or repression.⁽⁸⁾

In its insistent pragmatic calculation of practices and their effects, this approach suggests that a critical human geography of culture should be guided by questions which might help to keep it from overestimating the capacity of cultural practices to serve as mediums for transformative social action. These questions might include, for example, that of how the cultural turn in the social sciences and humanities is implicated in the current extension of modern political rationalities and governmental technologies beyond the realm of the state; and the related question of what the implications of these processes are for the position of academics in the social division of labor, located as they are in networks for the uneven social distribution of cultural resources and authority. These are large questions of course, and it is not my intention to address them further here. But I do want to suggest that they are the sorts of questions that should be at the center of the project of conceptualizing culture if it is to contribute to a critical human geography that amounts to more than a recitation of predictable critical attitudes and opinions.

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⁽⁸⁾ There are different models of political vocation derived from the governmentality approach: Bennett’s (1997) model of policy advocate, for example; or Rose’s (1999) vision of providing resources to the governed to enable challenges to the relations of authority underwriting governmental practices. Despite the differences between these models, and without the full implications of this being drawn by either position, together they suggest that professional cultural mediators are irredeemably caught within a politics of representation (see Robbins, 1993).

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