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# CULTURE, GEOGRAPHY, AND THE ARTS OF GOVERNMENT

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*Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*

**ABSTRACT**

This paper endeavors 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 re-conceptualization 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 through into new perspective the dynamics behind geography's own cultural turn.

## CULTURE, GEOGRAPHY, AND THE ARTS OF GOVERNMENT

### 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 re-invention 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, p. 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, p. 15) might enable critical human geography to be better placed to address its own position in changing formations of culture, knowledge, and power.

### **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* in so far as it involves the seemingly unimpeachable argument that all economic, political, and social process contain a 'cultural' or 'signifying' element. And it tends to be *totalizing* in so far 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, in so far 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 'de-limitation 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 inter-disciplinarity, 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 (e.g. 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, pp. 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 co-extensive 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 post-disciplinary intellectual project: “cultural studies is imagined as a kind of polymorphously free zone for any intellectual commitments” (Nelson 1996, p. 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 re-installs 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, Striplhas 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).<sup>1</sup>

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 'post-disciplinary' 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 inter-disciplinarity 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 cultural studies' orthodoxy (see Barnett 1998). However, the most recent phase of cultural studies' development has also been accompanied by a sustained questioning of received understandings of culture, power, and theory worked-up in the earlier period of cultural studies' emergence. The "re-tooling" of cultural studies (Craik 1995, p. 201) has emerged most fully in certain 'post-colonial' 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 re-conceptualized in light of Foucault's work on governmentality, discipline, and technologies of the self (1988, 1991). This re-conceptualization is particularly associated with debates over 'cultural-policy studies' in Australia in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Its significance is twofold: firstly, and

theoretically, it is explicitly directed against the expansionary and generalized notions of culture otherwise characteristic of contemporary cultural studies (Hunter 1988b); and secondly, this re-conceptualization 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, p. 99).<sup>2</sup>

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 neo-liberal 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 re-thought as normalizing apparatuses central to both the conceptualization and 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, 884). This should be understood by reference to the broad definition of ‘government’ as “techniques and procedures for directing human behavior” (Foucault 1997, p. 81).

This re-conceptualization 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, p. 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. 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 anti-racist movements ("The New Left"). But as Chrisman (1996, pp. 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 cultural studies' roots 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, p. 15). Re-reading 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, p. 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 dis-interested and non-instrumental realms of meaning and value (Hunter 1990).<sup>3</sup>

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* (1799), Kant delineated the legitimate place for critical intellectual reflection in relation to the authority of the modern state by re-defining 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 explicit consent” (Hindess 1995, p. 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, pp. 104-107). From Kant onwards, aesthetics is re-defined 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 re-shaping might be begun (Hunter 1988c). During the course of the nineteenth-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 nineteenth-century this ethical practice of criticism became the special preserve of the new field of literary education. In the twentieth-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 de-limitation of the aesthetic field beyond Literature or Art, underwrites the specific instrumentality of apparently non-instrumental 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, 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, in so far as one part is always defined as lacking some feature, while the other is defined as the source or medium for changing the former (Bennett 1998, p. 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, firstly, a range of resources for governing (a canon of cultural works and artifacts, as well as modes of interpretation, appreciation, and judgment); and, secondly, it defines a set of domains to which these technologies can be applied to change conduct (*ibid.*, 82). The simultaneous conceptual expansion of culture in the nineteenth 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 1988a). Cultures are constructed as a set of domains to be acted upon with the 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.<sup>4</sup> Returning to Chrisman's point, the theoretical significance of re-iterating 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 antithetical structure of splitting and normative hierarchical described above. The re-conceptualization 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 the cultural. And, as I want to discuss in the next section, it is a conceptualization that might require the re-thinking 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 re-conceptualization 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 re-conceptualization 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 it 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, 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.<sup>5</sup> Firstly, then, it will be necessary to distinguish this notion of the diffusion of power from other similar ideas. This will require, secondly, clarifying 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 to 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, p. 429; emphasis added). This implies a conceptual re-ordering 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 (see Cohen and Arato 1994, pp. 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, p. 64).

This re-ordering 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 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 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, p. 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, p. 292). Freedom is in turn re-figured 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.<sup>6</sup> 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, p. 203). On this understanding, power is conceptually distinguished from domination, since 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 he 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, p. 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 re-conceptualization 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, p. 220).<sup>7</sup> This conceptualization of power is predicated upon agency, but agency is understood as a 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 understood in two senses. Firstly, power is understood as sets of relations that facilitate the production of willing and active agents of administration and management. And secondly, 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, p. 48).

In drawing upon Foucault, then, the re-conceptualization of culture as inherently governmental implies that the relation of culture to power needs to be re-thought. 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, post-structuralism 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 to the spatial containment characteristic of discipline; and the implications of the contemporary re-territorialization 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.

Firstly, the culture-and-government literature directs attention to the micro-

geographies 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 eighteenth- and nineteenth-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 micro-domains of individual behaviour to the macro-domains of large institutions. But this relationship should not be considered to simply involve the extension of disciplinary techniques over greater scales. Government implies a different spatiality of power compared to 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 re-scaled during the course of the twentieth-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 to those of disciplinary power calls into question the judgement that Foucault's analysis of power is 'hyperfunctionalist' (Brenner 1994). This sort of negative account of Foucault's apparent failure to adequately 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 re-configuring 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, p. 118). This move towards examining the active roles of the governed in strategies of government (see O'Malley 1996; O'Malley *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 re-scaling 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', in so far as this refers to a range of

struggles which revolve around issues of equality, recognition, justice, and entitlement (Ross 1997), 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 culture's articulation with the territorial scales of institutionalized democratic politics is being eroded, as it becomes increasingly closely articulated with non-territorialized 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 extra-national, '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 re-territorialization of democratic practices and the possibilities of effective post-national 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 re-articulations 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 1994; 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 decision-making, 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 (e.g. Miller and Rose 1997; Greenhalgh 1998). Neo-liberal 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 re-deployed 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 policy-making 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 neo-liberal 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, in so far 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 discipline's intellectual progress, 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, p. 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.<sup>8</sup>

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 over-estimating 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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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> One feature of narratives of cultural studies' development is a characteristic mapping of an institutional trajectory onto a highly normative account of its geographical adventures. These narratives of origin turn upon a centre-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 re-centering of cultural studies wherein 'Americanization' turns out to be the inevitable bogey-man (O'Connor 1989; Pfister 1991); or of the re-location 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" (*ibid.*, p. 389) is provided by work which affirms the productivity of movement and translation in constructing new possibilities (Bhabha 1994, Gilroy 1993).

<sup>2</sup> For further discussions of the cultural-policy studies approach, see Bennett (1992a, 1992b), Craik (1994), Cunningham (1993). The re-orientation indicated by this work has been subjected to various criticisms. O'Regan (1992) and McGuigan (1995) question the validity of starkly opposing critical analysis with policy-oriented work, pointing out the extent to which these two emphases have co-existed in previous traditions of cultural studies. Jameson (1993), on the other hand is somewhat more skeptical, even dismissive, preferring to re-affirm 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.

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<sup>3</sup> 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 sphere 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). 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).

<sup>4</sup> I have chosen to re-iterate 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, pp. 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, pp. 88-105).

<sup>5</sup> 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.

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

<sup>7</sup> For further discussion of power as "actions on actions", see Pottage (1998).

<sup>8</sup> There are different models of political vocation derived from the governmentality

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approach: Bennett's (1998) 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 (Robbins 1993).