Taking Identity Politics Seriously:
'The Contradictory, Stony Ground . . .'

James Clifford

Gramsci said: 'Turn your face violently towards things as they exist
now.' Not as you'd like them to be, not as you think they were
ten years ago, not as they're written about in the sacred texts, but
as they really are: the contradictory, stony ground of the present
conjuncture.

Stuart Hall (1989: 151)

Pour moi, ce qui est authentique, c'est ce qui donne de la saveur
à ce que chacun vit. Ce que mon père, mon grand-père, mon
arrière-grand-père ont vécu, toutes leurs expériences des rites, de
la tradition, de l'environnement sont différentes. Ils en ont été
imprégnés sociologiquement et psychologiquement. Mais pas
moi, qui ait ma propre expérience du monde. Je serai peut-être
un jour authentique dans un musée de l'an 2000 ou de l'an 3000.
En attendant, c'est moi qui invente.

Jean-Marie Tjibaou (1996: 306)

We can build upon the contributions of cultural studies to dispose
of the idea that identity is an absolute and to find the courage
necessary to argue that identity formation – even body-coded
ethnic and gender identity – is a chaotic process that can have no
end. In this way, we may be able to make cultural identity a
premise of political action rather than a substitute for it.

Paul Gilroy (1996: 238)

'Identity politics' is under attack from all sides these days. The political
right sees only a divisive assault on civilizational (read national) tra-
ditions, while a chorus on the Left laments the twilight of common
dreams, the fragmentation of any cumulative politics of resistance.
Meanwhile intellectuals of a post-structuralist bent, when confronted
with movements based on tribal, ethnic, gender, racial or sexual
attachments, are quick on the anti-essentialism trigger. Now there is no

doubt that group identity narrowly defined and aggressively sustained
can be a serious obstacle to wider, more inclusive solidarities; and the
ideological work of clearly defining a sense of community or people-
hood often violently erases historical experiences of entangle-
ment, border crossing, and coexistence. The tragedy in the former Yugoslavia
stands as a brutal, inescapable warning. But however justified our
revulsion in particular instances of exclusivism or separatism, if the
criticism hardens into a general position against identity politics as
such, or leads to arguments for getting 'beyond' such claims, the effect
may be disabling. We risk being left with a narrowly foreshortened view
of contemporary social movements around culture and identity, miss-
ing their complex volatility, ambivalent potential, and historical
necessity.

In a recent collection, *Social Theory and the Politics of Identity*, Craig
Calhoun (1994a) challenges a widespread perception that the identity-
based politics of racial/ethnic groups, the women's movement, the gay
movement, and other self-assertions by excluded peoples represent
something new. Social theory, he argues, has tended to repress the
centrality of such mobilizations in heterogeneous, more-or-less demo-
cratic, public spheres. Identity has been seen as preceding political
participation, rather than as made and unmade, connected and discon-
nected, in the interactive arenas of democratic, national, and transna-
tional social life.

Identity formation on most models – including for example Habermas's
famous theory of the public sphere – prepares one for entrance into the
public arena. It gives one individual strength and individual opinions.
Conversely, the public sphere calls on one to put to the side the differences
of class, ethnicity, and gender in order to speak as equals. And it thereby
makes it all but impossible to thematize those very differences as the objects
of politics instead of as obstacles to be overcome before rational political
formation of the collective will. (Calhoun 1994b: 3)

Since the project of identity, whether individual or collective, is
rooted in desires and aspirations that cannot be fulfilled, identity
movements are open-ended, productive, and fraught with ambivalence.
Calhoun argues that this generative 'tension' is 'the source of identity
politics that aim not simply at the legitimation of falsely essential
categorical identities but at living up to deeper social and moral
values'(1994c: 29). Collective self-assertions may thus be traced simul-
taneously to the manipulations of leaders such as Slobodan Milošević
and to noble community aspirations and self-sacrificing moralities.
Indeed, modern national projects – identity politics writ large – have
always articulated noble goals of freedom, equality and solidarity with

chauvinistic projects of exclusion and sometimes genocide. Such inclusive 'communities' can never be finished or whole: to differing degrees they are unstable, complicated and undermined by other identifications. It follows that national and transnational orders are domains not of teleological progress, but of continual struggle and negotiation, formation and breakup.

One suspects that 'identity politics' needs to be contained, even scapegoated at times, because it is a figure for chaotic cultural and political articulations that exceed systemic, progressive determination. Collective agency, for better and worse, has long been exercised at discrepant scales: particular colonial and neo-colonial contact zones; regional, religious, ethnic mobilizations and resistances, specific transnational and diasporic circuits. It is on this uneven terrain, grasped with ethnographic complexity, that we can begin to track less heroic, more contradictory and multivalent processes of historical transformation. History without guarantees.

Stuart Hall has worked to keep this more complex field of identifications in view. From his crucial linkage of Gramscian politics with racial and ethnic formations (1986), to his recent attempts to reclaim 'ethnicity' from exclusivist nationalisms (1988), Hall recognizes the constitutive role of cultural, ethnic, and racial identifications in contemporary politics. Human beings become agents, capable of effective action, only when they are actively sustained 'in place' through social and historical connections and disconnections. For Hall, this relational positioning is the work of culture, ensuring that 'as subjects [social actors] function by taking up the discourses of the present and the past'.

> It is that taking up of positions that I call 'identities'. You see the consequence of turning the paradigm around that way, the political question (for there is always a political question, at any rate, in the way I pose the issue) is not 'How do we effectively mobilize those identities which are already formed?' so that we could put them on the train and get them onto the stage at the right moment, in the right spot – an act the left has historically been trying to do for about four hundred years – but something really quite different and much deeper. (Hall 1998: 291)

Throughout the world, people are caught up in, and excluded by, the powerful currents of capitalist markets, religious movements, and national projects. Embracing and resisting these forces they struggle to position themselves, to establish home bases, sites of collective support and action. Communities need to make 'room' for themselves (Turner 1992: 14) in a crowded world. If in the late twentieth century they have done this through cultural processes of ethnic, regional, tribal, class,

racial, gender, and sexual identification (in tactical combination) this is not something we have the luxury, or the privilege, to lament. As George Lipsitz (1998) trenchantly argues, opposition to the special claims of racial or ethnic minorities often masks another, unmarked, 'identity politics', an actively sustained historical positioning and possessive investment in Whiteness. This defensive response, most aggressively mobilized by the Right, in fact spans the political spectrum. It thus behoves those of us on the Left to be especially wary of any absolute, self-righteous opposition to identity claims. The lesson Gramsci learned from the devastating victory of national over class identifications in 1914 remains inescapable. Cultural politics is not secondary to more 'material' political/economic agencies. Effective democratic mobilizations begin where people are (not where they 'should be'): they work through the cultural discourses that situate groups, that provide them with roots (always spliced), with narrative connections between past and present (traditions), with distinctive social habits and bodies.

This hooking-up and unhooking, remembering and forgetting, gathering and excluding of cultural elements – processes crucial to the maintenance of an 'identity' – must be seen as both materially constrained and inventive. Of course it is difficult, analytically and politically, to sustain this double vision, just as it is hard to work with the ambivalence inherent in processes of identification: the practical inseparability of empowerment and chauvinism, of community and exclusion, of performance and commodification, of positioning and governmentality. And yet it is precisely in this uncomfortable site of cultural process and politics that we begin, and begin again. Moreover, it is here that we can cultivate a kind of historical 'negative capability', aware of our own partial access to other historical experiences, tracking interference patterns and sites of emergence, piecing together more-than-local patterns, big-enough stories of the 'global', of intersecting 'historical' trajectories.

In what follows I begin thinking in this comparative, historicizing spirit about contemporary claims for 'tradition', claims that are central to the deeper and more differentiated politics of identifications Stuart Hall helps us keep in view. For if, as he reminds us, a discursive linking of pasts and futures is integral to the positioning of collective actors, then some gathering up and performance of 'traditions' must inform all political subjecthood. To imagine a coherent future, people selectively mobilize past resources. Articulations of tradition, never simply backward-looking, are thus generative components of peoplehood, ways of belonging to some discrete social time and place in an interconnected world.

To take these complex, historically specific processes seriously we need to keep in view an uneven, broadly distributed, always unfinished range of phenomena. The task requires representational tact, a patient, self-reflexive 'listening' across cultures and histories. Towards the end of my remarks I will. urge the importance of a reconstituted cultural anthropology for this project. The anthropology I have in mind is no longer part of a unified 'science of man', a science which sorted out the world's cultures, synchronically and diachronically, from a privileged standpoint at the end, or cutting edge, of history. Rather I want to affirm another strand of anthropology which points towards more tentative, dialogical but still realist, ethnographic histories: a work of translation which focuses not so much on cultures as on conjunctures, on complex mediations of old and new, of local and global.

More explicitly than the term 'culture', the word 'tradition' (along with its many near-equivalents: *costumbre, coutume, kastom*, et cetera) high-lights a historical break, a relinking of past and future in a collective dynamism. Tradition becomes problematic, and thus politicized, in situations of rapid 'modernization'. Three canonical cultural-studies works, grappling with changes in Britain after World War Two, may be said to have introduced a contemporary, critical approach to the topic: Richard Hoggart's (1957) evocation of a threatened working-class way of life, Raymond Williams's (1958) critique of elitist appeals to 'cultural' value and continuity, and E.P. Thompson's (1963) history of artisanal traditions and the rights of 'freeborn Englishmen' in the popular politics of early industrialism.[1] These seminal works responded to a society struggling with industrial and imperial decline, with the emergence of mass politics and consumerism, and with a new international order increasingly dominated by US economic, military, and cultural power. Hoggart, Williams, and Thompson, in their different ways, were concerned to salvage and revitalize British, indeed rather narrowly English, currents of democratic community and contestation in a rapidly changing global context not yet fully visible when they wrote in the late 1950s (Gilroy 1996: 234–8). All three saw democratic politics as crucially a clash and negotiation of 'traditions'.

Twenty years later, two influential works would cast this critical approach to tradition in a wider frame: *The Invention of Tradition* (1983) by Hobsbawm and Ranger, and Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* (1983). Together they epitomized a paradigm in which the authenticity claimed for any tradition, culture, or identity would be interpreted as a historical and political process involving the selective and creative manipulation of symbols, stories, spaces and times. While the two books focused on national projects, their general approach

extended to a wider, more disorderly range of creations. Since the early eighties countless works have been written on the 'invention' of almost everything, from the Gaucho and George Washington, to Appalachia and the Shtetl. The 'invention paradigm' spilled out of the constraints Hobsbawm and Ranger placed on it. Their distinction between 'custom' which was (authentically) lived and 'tradition' which, under modernizing pressures, was (inauthentically) invented, quickly came under pressure. Indeed, Roy Wagner, in *The Invention of Culture* (1975), had already shown in a Melanesian context that cultural process is always invention, all the way down. He argued that the notion of 'culture' was a relatively new way of objectifying collective meanings – emerging from the distinct but connected modern projects of natives and anthropologists. But the basic symbolic production at work, the marking off of value and the social processing of novelty, was not qualitatively new in Melanesian inventions of tradition – cargo cults or a range of '*kastom*' movements.

In the 1980s the invention paradigm often fused with poststructuralist theories, underwriting a deeply sceptical stance toward all identity claims, and often a prescriptive anti-essentialism. In its more pragmatic forms, this disposition opened important new ways of imagining political agencies and alliances: the coming together of complex, multiply identified subjects in particular conjunctures around specific struggles (for example, Radhakrishnan 1989; Grossberg 1996). But given the well-established propensity of people to locate themselves in more enduring (if dynamic) traditions, this paradoxical 'politics of singularity' (Grossberg 1996: 102–5) retains a theoretical, utopian cast. Moreover, when post-structuralist critiques of identity have hardened into theoretical dogma they may dismiss historically adaptive forms of cultural *integrity* in the same breath as essentialist assumptions of *authenticity*. It is not surprising, then, that the invention paradigm itself quickly became a violently contested set of propositions wherever identity-based social movements need to make cultural claims against hegemonic systems. Seen from the standpoint of resistance movements, critiques of authenticity articulated from a dominant position appeared as disempowering, and sometimes, when matters ended up in court, as actively hostile. The resulting battles over cultural authority and colonial legacies, intellectual and material turf, have helped to focus attention on newly intractable, comparative questions.

How, in practice, is the gathering, locating, narrating power that the term 'tradition' implies mobilized and challenged? How do a range of peoples (nations, ethnicities, tribes, and other mobilized communities) distinguish relatively invariant, 'past'-oriented, dimensions of their collective life from changing, creative ('future'-oriented)

dimensions? And to what extent are the very temporal markers 'past' and 'future' skewed by a particular history of modernization? The culture wars of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Europe opposed ancients and moderns, religious orthodoxy and scientific enlightenment. This Western historical transition may be sedimented in the term 'tradition' whenever it is defined in implicit or explicit opposition to 'modernity'. But much is obscured by this prefiguration when we consider Melanesian invocations of '*kastom*', or other local, regional, and national claims integral to the process of patching together new nation-states. Is 'tradition' an adequate translation for pan-Mayan *costumbre* articulated in current struggles for a multi-ethnic Guatemalan polity? Indigenous traditionalisms, Marshall Sahlins (1994: 381) has proposed, might better be compared with a different European transition, one that returned to a classical past to innovate a dynamic future: 'the Renaissance'.

Tradition, in this view, is less about preservation than about transformative practice and the selective symbolization of continuity. But how much interaction and hybridity – mix and match – can a given set of conventions and filiations accommodate without losing the ability to assert the integrity of a discrete tradition? Apparently quite a lot. For the practical limits on 'invention' are primarily political (What does it take to *convince* ourselves and others?) rather than empirical (How *much*, exactly, is new?) or moral (Is this the *real* tradition?). Articulations of tradition can take many forms in a range of historical conjunctures, from early contact histories in the Pacific analysed by authors such as Greg Dening (1980) and Sahlins (1985), where more or less intact local cultures can still process novelty on indigenous terms, to the Caribbean of scholars such as Sidney Mintz (1966), Richard Price (1998), and Daniel Miller (1994), where cultural roots have long been radically cut and remixed. Differently hybrid versions of continuity and peoplehood need to be distinguished across a spectrum of post- and neo-colonial histories, a range of indigenous, local, national, and diasporic cultural projects.

As the twenty-first century begins, we confront a spectacular (I use the word advisedly) proliferation of claims to culture and identity. Can these be accounted for in a systematic way? An influential and important argument proposes that the prolific invention and reinvention of identities is integral to a late-capitalist, or 'postmodern', world system of cultures. In this view, globalization, at a cultural level at least, permits and even encourages ethnic, racial, gender and sexual differences – so long as they do not fundamentally threaten the dominant political-economic order. Traditions are thus constantly salvaged, created, and marketed in a productive game of identities. In the work of Fredric

Jameson (1984) and especially David Harvey (1990) the commodification of identities and traditions is linked to a historical moment, a global change that brings with it newly flexible and decisive restructurings of local worlds. While accounts vary as to where, when, and how unevenly the change occurs – the global economic crisis of the 1970s is often seen as a turning point – the outcome is a significantly new form of cultural production: postmodernity.

In the globalizing condition of postmodernity, local communities are reconstituted within a superficial shopping mall of identities. Where 'culture' and 'place' are reasserted politically in the new system, it is increasingly in nostalgic, commodified forms. Thus the before/after structure of 'authentic custom'/'invented tradition' assumed by Hobsbawm and Ranger is given a postmodern reworking. Traditional heritage persists as simulacrum, folklore as fakelore. We increasingly confront what Dean MacCannell (1992: 158) calls 'reconstructed ethnicity . . . new and more highly deterministic ethnic forms . . . ethnicity-for-tourism in which exotic cultures figure as key attractions'. I wish to argue, however, that this growing tendency to objectify, commodify, and perform identities is only part, albeit a crucial part, of the story.

In *The Condition of Postmodernity*, Harvey significantly identifies a crucial 'paradox' (1990: 295). Homogenization breeds difference. As geographic barriers and distances are erased by mobile commodity, labour and capital flows, as a global postmodern 'space' is created, simultaneously an increasingly explicit, performative differentiation of 'places' becomes apparent. What accounts for the contradiction? 'If capitalists', Harvey writes, 'become increasingly sensitive to the spatially differentiated qualities of which the world's geography is composed, then it is possible for the peoples and powers that command those spaces to alter them in such a way as to be more rather than less attractive to highly mobile capital.' Local elites 'package' their place so as to attract investment; and in a competitive environment, this leads to 'the active production of places with special qualities'. Cities, for example, need 'to forge a distinctive image and to create an atmosphere of place and tradition that will act as a lure to both capital and people "of the right sort"'. 'Heightened inter-place competition should lead to the production of more variegated spaces *within* [my emphasis] the increasing homogeneity of international exchange' (Harvey 1990: 295).

The paradox is thus functionally explained. Within the expanding 'space' of capital, 'places' exist as consumable commodities. Cultural differences produced by the postmodernist marketing of local aura and distinction tend, Harvey argues, towards the replication of nearly

(Harvey)

identical patterns from city to city. To clinch his argument, he cites New York's South Street Seaport, Boston's Quincey Market, Baltimore's Harbor Place (Harvey 1990: 295). This is, however, a very specific list of sites – all certifiably 'postmodern'. When we expand the range of performative sites for culture, locale, and tradition, the 'systematic' determination of heritage and identity is crosscut by other contributions. Indeed, an *unresolved* paradox is presented by the florescence of claims to difference (by people of both the right and the wrong sort) in contexts of political–economic globalization – a paradox Harvey clearly names but perhaps too quickly explains away. Ethnographic realism requires that we inhabit the paradox, if I may put it thus, more actively and attentively.[3]

Different versions of a global-systemic approach – for example, the work of Jonathan Friedman (1994), of Aiwah Ong and Donald Nonini (1997), or of Alan Pred and Michael Watts (1992) – leave more room for the transformative continuity of older elements in new situations, a politics of articulation rather than of functionalist containment. In these ethnographically based analyses, the old/new cultural claims and emergent identities cannot be ultimately determined by an expansive capitalism. Global-systemic forces do play a profound structuring role, but they do so *in relation to* local agency and prior traditions – structures negotiated in specific contact histories, which retain their own transformative momentum. A growing number of historically minded anthropologists have clearly shown the dynamism and transformative capacity of indigenous social structures and cosmologies. Overall, this work tends to shift the emphasis from inventions of tradition to traditions of invention. But *both* processes are at work in most contemporary conjunctures, and it is often hard to say definitively which plays the dominant role. The distinction between a transformed older structure and novel hybrid forms will necessarily be debatable.[4]

Ethnographic/historical research makes clear, in any case, that the relative dynamism and power of interacting local and global forces, and the ultimate question of determination – who consumes whom in a spectrum of culture-contact situations – cannot be read off in advance. While we can, and must, track the constitutive force of a world-system of cultures and identities, this cannot be the only, or the final, moment in our analysis. All global-systemic approaches run the risk of reductionism, where difference becomes merely derivative of, or contained by, structural power. But when a systemic approach is kept in serious tension with historical-ethnographic specificity, it can yield textured, realistic (which is not to say objective or uncontested) understandings of contemporary cultural processes. The challenge is to recognize overlapping but discrepant histories that struggle for

position, for room to manoeuvre, in a paradoxically systematic and chaotic modernity.

I have suggested that the perspective of a historically informed ethnography is indispensable to a comparative understanding of the politics of identities. In conclusion I would like to urge the point more strongly, particularly since cultural/historical anthropology does not appear to be required reading for a broad range of cultural studies scholars. Too often anthropology is stereotyped and misunderstood – seen as confined to 'pre-modern' societies, irreparably tainted by colonialism, or fatally hemmed in by its own forms of textual and institutional authority. The discipline has, of course, been going through an epistemological and political crisis, and it has been significantly transformed by the intense questioning (James *et al.* 1997). Indeed, one wonders how many academic fields could survive this kind of very public scrutiny, both of its methods and of its global positioning. The result in many departments today is a series of intense debates and turf battles – as a disarticulated anthropology debates its central heritage and essential methods. In this context (and as someone whose work is sometimes cited as having contributed to anthropology's disarray) I hasten to affirm some traditions worth reinventing.[5]

Cultural anthropology has characteristically made two irritating but crucial interventions, calling everyone up short: 'What else is there?' 'Not so fast!' The discipline pays serious attention to people at the margins: relatively powerless, non-literate or differently literate communities whose particular stories are left out of national or global histories. Of course this professional brief for diversity carries evident risks: nostalgia (the belief that distinctive traditions are vanishing, or must always be defended) and wishful thinking (an uncritical tendency to celebrate difference as 'resistance', either in traditional survivals or in a new world of hybrid forms). But a disposition to perceive and value difference can also be understood not as a reification of otherness but as an awareness of excess, of the unwoven and the discrepant in every dominant system, the 'constitutive outside' of even the most hegemonic social or ideological formations. In times of presumed globalization, 'brushing history against the grain', as Walter Benjamin (1969) put it, is more critical than ever. It is in the emergent sites, the things that don't quite fit, the remembered or revived alternatives, that we look for utopian, transformative visions and practices.

'What else is there?' Perhaps this question is all that can be reclaimed from anthropology's exoticist heritage, a systematic interest in what does not match familiar patterns. Ethnographic exoticism no longer presumes cultural isolates. It tracks, instead, 'out-of-the-way places'

intimately engaged with national and transnational powers (Tsing 1993) or populations that occupy, in Kathleen Stewart's (1996) title, 'a space on the side of the road'. Nor is this a matter of 'speaking for' the others – primitives or subalterns. What is at issue is more like listening than speaking. 'What else is there?' persistently reminds us not to skip over the marginal, the 'small', sites when thinking historically at global, national, or regional scales. In California, for example, one hears a great deal about the 'Asia-Pacific Region' or 'the Pacific Rim' – discussions in which the Island Pacific, Oceania, regularly drops from view. Yet places like Vanuatu or Papua New Guinea are extraordinary laboratories for 'postmodern' nation-making, and the latter is home to one-seventh of the world's languages. Melanesia is anything but small, in that register! Such places seem, always, to be left behind, playing historical catch-up. What changes of perspective, asks the Tongan anthropologist and novelist Epeli Hau'ofa (1993), would be needed to recast isolated dots scattered in a distant sea (as viewed from Europe) into a historically interconnected, culturally dynamic 'sea of islands'?

Or consider contemporary Mayans. I am often struck by the surprise many people evince when told that there are thirty living Mayan languages – not 'native dialects'. (The conversation reverts quickly to the ancient ruins.) Surviving Mayan societies are relatively small, to be sure; but their old/new traditions loom large in post-1992 reimaginings of the history of the Americas. One of several major pre-Columbian 'civilizations', Mayans are a past-becoming-future – active in a culturally complex present. Seen in global perspective, they shrink in importance; but within Guatemala, Mayans form a majority of the population. As they mobilize politically and culturally in the current conjuncture, they become a force to be reckoned with (Warren 1992, 1996, 1999; Fischer and Brown 1996). There are, of course, differences between the various local and pan-Mayan articulations of *costumbre*, tensions present, to varying degrees, in all contemporary indigenous movements: regional, linguistic, and class factions; urban and rural, traditionalist and modernizing agendas. The movement standardizes languages and customs, producing a newly objectified culture, and folklore. But its roots in local places and politics remain strong. Clearly the work of linguistic and cultural advocacy pursued by Mayan intellectuals and activists is a far cry from the state-sponsored nostalgia decried by First World critics of the 'heritage industry'. Nor is it very much like MacCannell's (1992) 'reconstructed ethnicity', a production for the White-dominated culture market – though tourism, these days, will always be somewhere in the picture.

Comparative ethnography – sensitive to historical patterns of dominance, accommodation and resistance, to gendered and regional for-

mations – helps us appreciate the uneven landscape, Hall's 'contradictory, stony ground', of contemporary identity claims. Are we concerned with colonial Williamsburg (Handler and Gable 1997), with English country houses (Hewison 1987), with newly 'traditional' Japanese sites of mourning (Ivy 1995), or with pan-Indian movements in North America – their powwows, art markets, and long histories of cultural performance across generations, for other Indians, and for tourists? Is our focus the mobilization by Melanesians of '*kastom*' in response to Christian missions, labour recruitment, and Western political institutions, a mobilization with different stakes for men and women (Jolly 1994)? Are we considering the cultural politics of Hawaiian sovereignty, including the quite recent and booming hula competitions (Buck 1993), or the extraordinary, transnational 'revival' of klezmer, described by its historian, Mark Slobin, as 'a reasonably rootless but deeply rooted music that has no geographic center, no living community it's attached to by continuous practice, a capricious and shifting audience, and no fixed body of music that defines its contours' (1998: 5)? Are we talking about Kayapo Indians from the Amazon, regaled in feather crowns and body paint to demonstrate in Brasília or at the World Bank against land encroachments, while recording these demonstrations on video for internal and external use (Turner 1991, 1992)? What is the ambivalent mix of local empowerment, self-stereotyping, alliance and chauvinism in such mobilizations of 'authentic' tradition (Conklin 1997)? How do differently positioned audiences (insiders, outsiders, border crossers) consume cultural performances for tourists – for example, mobilizations by the 'primitive' Ainu in Japan (Friedman 1990) or by the 'savage' Small Nambas of Malekula, Vanuatu (Tilley 1997)? What is the 'second life of heritage' (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998) in these experiences: the intricate mix of backward- and forward-looking agendas enacted in the myriad museums, villages, monuments and landscapes where 'tradition' is currently preserved and displayed?

'Not so fast.' The survival (and renaissance) of 'doomed' tribal peoples, or the variety of African Christianities and Islams, makes it clear that 'Westernization' has not been a linear progress. The local outcomes of 'acculturation' or religious 'conversion' can be surprising. It thus behoves us to hesitate when assessing the effects of cultural contact, staying alert for unexpected consequences and mixtures. Most histories of global development have had few second thoughts about people on the margins: 'pre-modern' societies are destined either to assimilate or to vanish in a relentless homogenizing process. As we have seen, visions of globalization tend to smooth over the constant (re)articulation of cultural identities and differences: in nationalist

visions, large- and small-scale (Gladney 1996); in supporting and sub-
verting established states (Comaroff 1996); in proliferating ethnic
claims, creative and virulent (Roosens 1989); in diverging local prac-
tices of consumption (Miller 1995c); in the politics of neo-tribal and
'Fourth World' movements (Sharp 1996).

It is all too obvious when identity turns ugly, when self-assertion
requires scapegoating, when people kill and expel their neighbours
(Ignatieff 1993; Ryan 1996). Rwanda, Sarajevo (now Kosovo), Belfast,
Cyprus, Indonesia . . . the list is depressingly long. Given the constitu-
tive tension of positive and negative impulses in claims to peoplehood,
all assertive identity movements, including those that empower the
dispossessed, can seem to be symptoms of a general disease. But only
when looked at abstractly. A more conjunctural understanding will
grapple with a shifting mix of political relations (hostility, tolerance,
indifference, alliance) and with the specific historical conditions of
social crisis and material insecurity that are conducive to chauvinism.
The range and outcome of identity politics can never be guaranteed.
In relatively secure times, movements of self-assertion by the less
powerful will include a combination of tactics, affirmations and nego-
tiations around separation *and* interaction. Effective group action in
complex civil societies means recognizing that there are times for
gathering in and times for reaching out, for the 'barred room' and for
'coalition politics' (Reagon 1983). Identity can be a basis for connec-
tion as well as disconnection. Let me end with two brief evocations,
offered in the spirit of ethnographic attention and historical open-
endedness I have been urging.

New Caledonia, a 'small' Oceanic place, has undergone a particularly
disruptive, at times deadly, colonization over the past century and a
half. Important white settler and diasporic Pacific populations are well
established there. The Kanak independence movement which emerged
in the 1960s has championed an island-wide politics of Melanesian
identity, organizing important heritage festivals and cultural centres
with the aim of repositioning dispersed 'tribal' groups as 'Kanaks'.
(The new name is a critical appropriation of the generic French
colonial label 'Canaque'.) This articulation (in Stuart Hall's terms, a
political cobbling-together) of a new ethnicity has been crucial for a
movement working, simultaneously, on cultural, economic, and politi-
cal fronts. And here, unlike the more diasporic experiences central to
much postcolonial and cultural studies work, a traditional attachment
to land, to particular sites and valleys, is a structuring element of the
old/new mix.

The Kanak movement's goal of rooted independence does not
presuppose, however, an absolute separation from France with its

ongoing cultural and economic contributions, or from the world system
of markets, media, and cultures. Rather, the movement works to
achieve a real measure of political autonomy and control over the
processes of import and export that inescapably connect places in the
world. Thus the struggle for sovereignty is not to opt out but to find
new – engaged and embattled – ways to be Kanak in a cosmopolitan
Pacific of the twenty-first century. The tactical politics of de-linking and
re-linking are inseparable. I derive this pragmatic vision from the
writings of the movement's late leader, Jean-Marie Tjibaou (1996). The
vision is not uncontested. Tjibaou was seen by some as too accommo-
dationist, and he was assassinated by a member of his movement's
radical fringe. His views have, however, generally prevailed. Given the
picture of local/global entanglement I have been sketching, Tjibaou's
understanding of independence as an interactive autonomy, and of *la
coutume* as a way of reaching back in order to be differently modern,
appears as something like realism.

What else is there? Not so fast! At the conclusion of a recently
published book, I quoted the long historical vision of Barbara Shangin,
an Alutiq (Koniag) elder from Alaska. I still can't quite assimilate her
statement. I don't think we should assimilate it too easily. 'Our people
have made it through lots of storms and disasters for thousands of
years. All the troubles since the Russians [arrived] are like one long
stretch of bad weather. Like everything else, this storm will pass over
some day' (Clifford 1997: 343). What will it take for this invocation
tradition – a temporality cast in the cyclical rhythms of weather – to be
widely accepted as realizable history, a differently modern past-becom-
ing-future?

Notes

1. In Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class* the centrality of
'cultural' politics to 'class' politics is inescapable. There is nothing universal
about the emerging consciousness Thompson traces: it is a historically contin-
gent articulation of local traditions. Indeed his most engaged critics have shown
the 'making' he traces to be strongly determined by populist movements of
local self-defence (Calhoun 1982) and by a gendered artisanal subjectivity
(Clark 1995) – the very limitations often laid at the door of 'identity politics' by
advocates of wider class mobilizations. Class that is 'for itself', that mobilizes
self-consciousness and agency, is always an articulated cultural formation. For a
recent example, see Ortner's (1998) ethnographic account of the fusion of
class with race and ethnicity in US social practices.

2. See Jolly (1992) and Briggs (1996) for sensitive accounts of the ongoing
disputes over 'invented' traditions and for the repositioning of anthropology

that follows from taking the challenges seriously. Indigenous perspectives are articulated by Jaimes and Noriega (1988), Trask (1991), and Hau'ofa (forthcoming).

3. See *Worlds Apart: Modernity through the Prism of the Local* (Miller 1995a) for a sampling of ethnographic work in a less determinist vein. The editor, Daniel Miller, argues for a bifocal historical attention to both 'apriori' and 'aposteriori' differences. The former are transformed, or syncretic versions of pre-modern cultures. The latter, 'rarely acknowledged or theorized', reflect the 'quite unprecedented diversity created by the differential consumption of what had once been thought to be global and homogenizing institutions' (Miller 1995b: 2–3). Miller's distinction, though no doubt heuristic, helps us keep a very wide range of local/global articulations in view. Another exemplary recent collection is Gupta and Ferguson (1997).

4. One might note, for example, the difference of *emphasis* underlying the disagreement between Nicholas Thomas (1992, 1993) and Marshall Sahlins (1993) over the Fijian custom of *kerekere*—dynamic local tradition and/or colonial invention. A sampling of recent work in historical ethnography/ethnographic history might include, along with the well-known scholarship of Sahlins, Thomas, and Greg Dening, the work of John and Jean Comaroff (1992), James Carrier (1992), Paul Sullivan (1989), and Carolyn Hamilton (1998), among many others. Sahlins (1994) provides a brilliantly argued manifesto for the general approach, diminished, however, by slapdash polemics and an unmotivated, almost Hegelian, vision of an emerging 'world culture of cultures'.

5. They are not, of course, the only ones. See also Clifford 1997, Chapter 3. Whilst I cite, for the most part, works by academic scholars based in the United States, Australia, and Europe, it is important to recognize that professional anthropology today includes Western, non-Western and in-between perspectives. Moreover, academic anthropology is not the only place one can go for a textured sense of local/global histories. As ongoing debates around the 'invention' of tradition show, no professional or geo-political standpoint enjoys a monopoly of authority, either scientific or indigenous. Indeed, many Western-based scholars now present their accounts in dialogue and tension with indigenous authorities. The work of Kay Warren, cited below, is exemplary.

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10

Representing 'Globalization':
Notes on the Discursive Orderings
of Economic Life

Paul du Gay

In the early days of her first government Margaret Thatcher spelled out the evangelical ambition of her political programme. 'Economics is the method,' she said. 'The aim is to change the soul.' In *The Hard Road to Renewal* (1988), Stuart Hall traced the imbrication of these economic and moral strands that produced the 'enterprise culture' as the symbol and goal of Thatcherism. In so doing, he indicated how the discursive, or meaning, dimension is one of the constitutive conditions for the operation of economic strategies. That the 'economic', so to speak, could not operate or have 'real' effects without 'culture' or outside of meaning or discourse.

Despite Stuart's (1996) insistence – and the example provided by his own work – that the (positive) rejection of 'economism' attendant on taking the 'cultural' or 'discursive' turn does not need to and, indeed, must not result in a flight from the 'economic' (or, by the same token, presage a return to a thoroughly acultural 'political economy'), something akin to such a flight does appear to have taken place in recent years. At one level, this is not too surprising. The move towards a greater engagement with 'the cultural turn' within the social and human sciences was obviously bound to possess its own logics of inclusion and exclusion, just as economism had. However, in an era in which economics has been heralded as offering an approach capable in principle of addressing the totality of human behaviour and in which more and more domains of existence have found themselves reimagined as forms of the economic, the costs of such marginalization seem increasingly difficult to bear.

And, what's more, there are no good reasons why they should be borne. As Stuart (1997a) has consistently argued, if the 'cultural turn'