Preface

THE IDEA BEHIND THIS BOOK developed as a result of my persistent and rather slow-witted efforts to make sense of class relations in a Malay village. I was hearing divergent accounts of land transactions, wage rates, social reputations, and technological change. By itself, this was not so surprising inasmuch as different villagers had conflicting interests. More troubling was the fact that the same villagers were occasionally contradicting themselves! It was some time before it dawned on me that the contradictions arose especially, but not uniquely, among the poorer and most economically dependent villagers. The dependency was as important as the poverty, since there were several fairly autonomous poor whose expressed opinions were both consistent and independent.

The contradictions, moreover, had a kind of situational logic to them. When I confined the issue to class relations alone—one of many issues—it seemed that the poor sang one tune when they were in the presence of the rich and another tune when they were among the poor. The rich too spoke one way to the poor and another among themselves. These were the grossest distinctions; many finer distinctions were discernible depending on the exact composition of the group talking and, of course, the issue in question. Soon I found myself using this social logic to seek out or create settings in which I could check one discourse against another and, so to speak, triangulate my way into unexplored territory. The method worked well enough for my limited purposes, and the results appeared in *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (Yale University Press, 1985), especially pp. 284–89.

Once attuned more closely to how power relations affected discourse *among Malays*, it was not long before I noticed how I measured my own words before those who had power over me in some significant way. And I observed

that when I had to choke back responses that would not have been prudent, I often found someone to whom I could *voice* my unspoken thoughts. There seemed to be a nearly physical pressure behind this repressed speech. On those rare occasions on which my anger or indignation had overcome my discretion, I experienced a sense of elation despite the danger of retaliation. Only then did I fully appreciate why I might not be able to take the public conduct of those over whom I had power at face value.

I can claim absolutely no originality for these observations about power relations and discourse. They are part and parcel of the daily folk wisdom of millions who spend most of their waking hours in power-laden situations in which a misplaced gesture or a misspoken word can have terrible consequences. What I have tried to do here is to pursue this idea more systematically, not to say doggedly, to see what it can teach us about power, hegemony, resistance, and subordination.

My working assumption in organizing the book was that the most severe conditions of powerlessness and dependency would be diagnostic. Much of the evidence here, then, is drawn from studies of slavery, serfdom, and caste subordination on the premise that the relationship of discourse to power would be most sharply etched where the divergence between what I call the public transcript and the hidden transcripts was greatest. Where it seemed suggestive I have also brought in evidence from patriarchal domination, colonialism, racism, and even from total institutions such as jails and prisoner of war camps.

This is not a close, textural, contingent, and historically grounded analysis in the way that my study of a small Malay village necessarily was. In its eclectic and schematic way it violates many of the canons of postmodernist work. What it shares with postmodernism is the conviction that there is no social location or analytical position from which the truth value of a text or discourse may be judged. While I do believe that close contextual work is the lifeblood of theory, I also believe there is something useful to be said across cultures and historical epochs when our focus is narrowed by structural similarities.

The analytical strategy pursued here thus begins with the premise that structurally similar forms of domination will bear a family resemblance to one another. These similarities in the cases of slavery, serfdom, and caste subordination are fairly straightforward. Each represents an institutionalized arrangement for appropriating labor, goods, and services from a subordinate population. As a formal matter, subordinate groups in these forms of domination have no political or civil rights, and their status is fixed by birth. Social mobility, in principle if not in practice, is precluded. The ideologies justifying domination of this kind include formal assumptions about inferiority and

superiority which, in turn, find expression in certain rituals or etiquette regulating public contact between strata. Despite a degree of institutionalization, relations between the master and slave, the landlord and the serf, the high-caste Hindu and untouchable are forms of personal rule providing great latitude for arbitrary and capricious behavior by the superior. An element of personal terror invariably infuses these relations—a terror that may take the form of arbitrary beatings, sexual brutality, insults, and public humiliations. A particular slave, for example, may be lucky enough to escape such treatment but the sure knowledge that it *could* happen to her pervades the entire relationship. Finally, subordinates in such large-scale structures of domination nevertheless have a fairly extensive social existence outside the immediate control of the dominant. It is in such sequestered settings where, in principle, a shared critique of domination may develop.

The structural kinship just described is analytically central to the kind of argument I hope to make. I most certainly do not want to claim that slaves, serfs, untouchables, the colonized, and subjugated races share immutable characteristics. Essentialist claims of that kind are untenable. What I do wish to assert, however, is that to the degree structures of domination can be demonstrated to operate in comparable ways, they will, other things equal, elicit reactions and patterns of resistance that are also broadly comparable. Thus, slaves and serfs ordinarily dare not contest the terms of their subordination openly. Behind the scenes, though, they are likely to create and defend a social space in which offstage dissent to the official transcript of power relations may be voiced. The specific forms (for example, linguistic disguises, ritual codes, taverns, fairs, the "hush-arbors" of slave religion) this social space takes or the specific content of its dissent (for example, hopes of a returning prophet, ritual aggression via witchcraft, celebration of bandit heroes and resistance martyrs) are as unique as the particular culture and history of the actors in question require. In the interest of delineating some broad patterns I deliberately overlook the great particularity of each and every form of subordination—the differences, say, between Caribbean and North American slavery, between French serfdom in the seventeenth century and in the mid–eighteenth century, between Russian serfdom and French serfdom, between regions and so on. The ultimate value of the broad patterns I sketch here could be established only by embedding them firmly in settings that are historically grounded and culturally specific.

Given the choice of structures explored here, it is apparent that I privilege the issues of dignity and autonomy, which have typically been seen as secondary to material exploitation. Slavery, serfdom, the caste system, colonialism, and racism routinely generate the practices and rituals of denigration, insult,

and assaults on the body that seem to occupy such a large part of the hidden transcripts of their victims. Such forms of oppression, as we shall see, deny subordinates the ordinary luxury of negative reciprocity: trading a slap for a slap, an insult for an insult. Even in the case of the contemporary working class it appears that slights to one's dignity and close control of one's work figure as prominently in accounts of exploitation as do narrower concerns of work and compensation.

My broad purpose is to suggest how we might more successfully read, interpret, and understand the often fugitive political conduct of subordinate groups. How do we study power relations when the powerless are often obliged to adopt a strategic pose in the presence of the powerful and when the powerful may have an interest in overdramatizing their reputation and mastery? If we take all of this at face value we risk mistaking what may be a tactic for the whole story. Instead, I try to make out a case for a different study of power that uncovers contradictions, tensions, and immanent possibilities. Every subordinate group creates, out of its ordeal, a "hidden transcript" that represents a critique of power spoken behind the back of the dominant. The powerful, for their part, also develop a hidden transcript representing the practices and claims of their rule that cannot be openly avowed. A comparison of the hidden transcript of the weak with that of the powerful and of *both* hidden transcripts to the public transcript of power relations offers a substantially new way of understanding resistance to domination.

After a rather literary beginning drawing on George Eliot and George Orwell, I try to show how the process of domination generates a hegemonic public conduct and a backstage discourse consisting of what cannot be spoken in the face of power. At the same time, I explore the hegemonic purpose behind displays of domination and consent, asking who the audience is for such performances. This investigation leads in turn to an appreciation of why it is that even close readings of historical and archival evidence tend to favor a hegemonic account of power relations. Short of actual rebellion, powerless groups have, I argue, a self-interest in conspiring to reinforce hegemonic appearances.

The meaning of these appearances can be known only by comparing it with subordinate discourse outside of power-laden situations. Since ideological resistance can grow best when it is shielded from direct surveillance, we are led to examine the social sites where this resistance can germinate.

If the decoding of power relations depended on full access to the more or less clandestine discourse of subordinate groups, students of power—both historical and contemporary—would face an impasse. We are saved from throwing up our hands in frustration by the fact that the hidden transcript is

typically expressed openly—albeit in disguised form. I suggest, along these lines, how we might interpret the rumors, gossip, folktales, songs, gestures, jokes, and theater of the powerless as vehicles by which, among other things, they insinuate a critique of power while hiding behind anonymity or behind innocuous understandings of their conduct. These patterns of disguising *ideological* insubordination are somewhat analogous to the patterns by which, in my experience, peasants and slaves have disguised their efforts to thwart material appropriation of their labor, their production, and their property: for example, poaching, foot-dragging, pilfering, dissimulation, flight. Together, these forms of insubordination might suitably be called the infrapolitics of the powerless.

Finally, I believe that the notion of a hidden transcript helps us understand those rare moments of political electricity when, often for the first time in memory, the hidden transcript is spoken directly and publicly in the teeth of power.

CHAPTER FIVE

Making Social Space for a Dissident Subculture

Man is a being that aspires to equilibrium: he balances the weight of the evil piled on his back with the weight of his hatred.

—MILAN KUNDERA, *The Joke*

Men may . . . discourse flippantly from arm chairs of the pleasures of slave life; but let them toil with him in the field . . . behold him scourged, hunted, trampled on, and they will come back with another story in their mouths. Let them know the heart of the poor slave—learn his secret thoughts—thoughts he dare not utter in the hearing of the white man; let them sit by him in the silent watches of the night—converse with him in trustful confidence.

—SOLOMAN NORTHRUP, ex-slave

IN THE COURSE OF THIS CHAPTER I want to sketch out the dynamics of the link between the hidden transcript and the experience of domination. This entails showing how more or less compelled performances engender a reaction and the basic form that reaction takes. This work of negation, as I call it, can take quite simple or quite elaborate forms. An example of an elaborate negation is the reworking by slaves of Christian doctrine to answer their own experiences and desires.

The balance of the discussion explores the process by which particular social sites and particular actors come to represent the location and carriers, respectively, of the hidden transcript. Their significance is best attested to, I argue, by the unremitting efforts of elites to abolish or penetrate such sites and the corresponding efforts by subordinate groups to defend them. Finally, I raise the question of how cohesive or coherent a particular group's hidden transcript is likely to be. Providing an answer requires us to specify both the homogeneity of the domination and the intensity of mutuality among those subject to it.

The Reaction to Saying "Uncle"

Our common sense tells us that those who must routinely knuckle under to insults or physical beatings they consider unjust pay a heavy psychological

price. Exactly what that price may be is another matter. There is, however, some tangential evidence from social psychology that attempts to specify the consequences of forced compliance.

The findings need to be treated carefully. Given the fact they are generated from a discipline that is largely experimental and that practices methodological individualism, I will be grossly slighting cultural and historical explanations. They may serve, nevertheless, to clarify the relationship between compliance and beliefs. Two general findings from a variety of experiments are of interest. First, they indicate that forced compliance not only fails to produce attitudes that would sustain that compliance in the absence of domination, *but produces a reaction against such attitudes.* Second, they show that individual beliefs and attitudes are likely to reinforce compliance with powerholders' wishes if, and only if, that compliance is perceived as freely chosen—as voluntary. Coercion, it would seem, can produce compliance but it virtually inoculates the complier against willing compliance.

A recent development in social psychology called reactance theory draws heavily on the findings of classical aggression theory. But instead of being rooted, as aggression theory was, in instinctual drives, reactance theory begins with the premise that there is a human desire for freedom and autonomy that, when threatened by the use of force, leads to a reaction of opposition.[1] Various experiments along these lines indicate that when threats are added to a persuasive communication they reduce the degree of attitude change that otherwise occurs. Providing the threat is sufficiently imposing, overt agreement and compliance may prevail but covert reactance will increase. Overt compliance in the presence of a threat was often secured only by close surveillance to detect and punish deviance. Once the surveillance was withdrawn, the compliance evaporated quickly, and it was found that the surveillance itself, as an emanation of compulsion, further increased the degree of reaction. As one summary of research concludes, "The literature on reactance theory attests to the fact that threatened choice alternatives tend to become more attractive, and threats to attitudes can produce boomerang attitude change."[2] The role of power relations in opening a gap between public and covert behavior is confirmed by other experimental evidence as well. In one case it was shown that dependent subordinates will agree more with an "irascible, malignant" supervisor than with a "benign and permissive one." Once the dependence—the domination—is eliminated, however, the results are reversed, implying that, covertly, the tyrannical supervisor was disliked all along and that this dislike

1. Sharon S. Brehm and Jack W. Brehm, *Psychological Reactance: A Theory of Freedom and Control.*
2. Ibid., 396.

was held back only through fear of punishment.[3] The greater the force majeure compelling the performance, the less the subordinate considers it representative of his "true self" and the more it seems merely a manipulative tactic having little or no bearing on his self-conception.

Unless the action appears to the subordinate as a more or less uncoerced choice, there is little chance that acting a mask will appreciably affect the face of the actor. And, if it does, there is a better chance that the face behind the mask will, in reaction, grow to look *less* like the mask rather than more like it. Put another way, the greater the extrinsic reasons compelling our action—here large threats and large rewards are comparable—the less we have to provide satisfactory reasons to ourselves for our conduct. Psychologists examining American prisoners after their release from camps in Korea, where they had been "broken" and had signed confessions and given propaganda talks, found that there were far fewer lasting consequences on their beliefs and attitudes than might have been supposed. The reasons for their collaboration were apparently so overwhelming that it could be seen instrumentally and have few consequences for beliefs.[4] To the degree such findings are germane to the more draconian and culturally elaborate forms of powerlessness we have examined, it helps us appreciate how compulsion and surveillance alone can generate a reaction that may lie in wait. It is little wonder, then, that those in involuntary service need close supervision, inasmuch as any lapse in surveillance is likely to result in a precipitous decline in the apparent enthusiasm of their performance.

3. Jones, *Ingratiation,* 47–51. For studies of aggression thwarted and released in much the same fashion, see Leonard Berkowitz, *Aggression: A Social Psychological Analysis.*

4. See Winn, *The Manipulated Mind.* Action that grows from what we see as a free choice works in the opposite way. When we commit ourselves voluntarily to actions that turn out to be at variance with our values, it is more likely that we will reassess our values to bring them more into line with our actions. This process was much in evidence in Stanley Milgram's famous experiment in which volunteers found themselves asked/commanded by experimental authorities to administer what they believed were severe electrical shocks to subjects apparently in pain. The rate of compliance was generally high, although it was clear that the volunteer subjects were reluctant; they showed obvious signs of tension like sweating and, when authority figures left the room, many only pretended to administer the shock. Evidently, the key to their compliance lay in their having volunteered in the first place. Those volunteers who were *less* well compensated for their participation produced *more* compelling reasons why the victims deserved to be shocked. They had more to justify to themselves. That there should be such sharp distinctions between the conscript and the volunteer is in line with our commonsense knowledge. The deprivations of the prison and of the austere monastery or convent may be roughly comparable. The inmates of the former, however, are alienated and hostile; they are there against their will. The inmates of the latter embrace their deprivations with dedication because it is a commitment freely chosen. See Philip G. Zimbardo, *The Cognitive Control of Motivation: The Consequences of Choice and Dissonance,* chap. 1.

The Work of Negation

In the contrived experimental world of reactance theory, the social facts being reacted to are comparatively trivial and thus the reaction itself is not elaborate. Slaves, serfs, untouchables, and peasants are, however, reacting to quite complex forms of historical domination, and thus their reaction is correspondingly elaborate as well.

By definition, we have made the public transcript of domination ontologically prior to the hidden, offstage transcript.[5] The result of proceeding in this fashion is to emphasize the reflexive quality of the hidden transcript as a labor of neutralization and negation. If we think, in schematic terms, of public transcript as comprising a domain of material appropriation (for example, of labor, grain, taxes), a domain of public mastery and subordination (for example, rituals of hierarchy, deference, speech, punishment, and humiliation), and, finally, a domain of ideological justification for inequalities (for example, the public religious and political world view of the dominant elite), then we may perhaps think of the hidden transcript as comprising the offstage responses and rejoinders to that public transcript. It is, if you will, the portion of an acrimonious dialogue that domination has driven off the immediate stage.

Just as traditional Marxist analysis might be said to privilege the appropriation of surplus value as the social site of exploitation and resistance, our analysis here privileges the social experience of indignities, control, submission, humiliation, forced deference, and punishment. The choice of emphasis is not to gainsay the importance of material appropriation in class relations. Appropriation is, after all, largely the purpose of domination. The very process of appropriation, however, unavoidably entails systematic social relations of subordination that impose indignities of one kind or another on the weak. These indignities are the seedbed of the anger, indignation, frustration, and swallowed bile that nurture the hidden transcript. They provided the energy, the passion, for Mrs. Poyser's year-long rehearsal of imaginary speeches to the squire (see chapter 1).

Resistance, then, originates not simply from material appropriation but

5. The point is also an important theme of Michel Foucault's work. "Where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power." *The History of Sexuality,* vol. 1, *An Introduction,* trans. R. Hurley, 95. This is a defensible way of proceeding, in my view, providing we keep two points in mind. The first is that the reverse of Foucault's statement is just as plausible: "Power is never in a position of exteriority in relation to resistance." Forms of domination are devised, elaborated, and justified *because* the effort to bend others to one's will always encounters resistance. The second point is that we ought not to assume that the real subjects of our analysis have absolutely nothing else to talk about except domination and resistance.

from the pattern of personal humiliations that characterize that exploitation. While the extraction of labor or grain from a subordinate population has something of a generic quality to it, the shape of personal domination is likely to be far more culturally specific and particular. The view urged here is not one that would ignore appropriation. Instead, it would enlarge the field of vision. In understanding the *experience* of slavery, for example, the coerced toil would be no more privileged than beatings, insults, sexual abuse, and forced self-abasement. In understanding serfdom, the grain and labor exacted from the peasantry would be no more privileged than the required gestures of homage and submission, forbidden terms of address, *ius primae noctis*, and public whippings.

My confidence in making this case for the kinds of domination we have examined is bolstered by studies of working-class values in liberal democracies. If the personal aspect of submission is crucial to relatively impersonal forms of wage labor performed by workers who enjoy political rights and who are formally free to quit their job, then it ought to be far more relevant to those forms of domination that are more direct and personal. Accounting for the way in which workers in the United States experience their working life, Richard Sennett emphasizes that having constantly to take commands arouses the greatest resentment. I offer two representative quotations from those to whom he spoke: "but then I went to work at the machine shop and like, it hit me. Life, people can order you around and you got to take it cause you need the job."[6] "All day, 'Yes, Sir,' 'Yes, Ma'am.' . . . I mean, I think work made me know how the little man has got to take it, you know?"[7] The other aspect of their jobs that breeds deep indignation is their belief that they are not accorded the minimal recognition they deserve as human beings on the job. As Sennett puts it, "At the same time, over and over again in our talks, people expressed a great resentment against 'being treated like nothing,' 'being treated like you was dirt,' 'like you are part of the woodwork.' How is man to make himself visible?"[8]

Public injury to one's dignity and standing as a person, Sennett argues, is at the very center of class experience for American workers. For while material appropriation may, in fact, be carried out quite impersonally (for example, work at a machine, piecework), domination is usually more individualized—one pays homage as a person, is punished as a person, is slighted as a person. It

6. Richard Sennett and Jonathan Cobb, *The Hidden Injuries of Class*, 97.

7. Ibid., 115. In each of these cases the men with whom Sennett is speaking recognize the logic or even the necessity of hierarchy in the plant, but it is still the most grating aspect of their work.

8. Ibid., 139.

is thus the domination, without which no appropriation takes place, that particularly leaves its mark on personal dignity—if not on the physical person.

Once we have named a condition of subordination such as *wage-laborer* or *slave*, it remains to specify the particular ways in which the subordination is experienced by those who occupy that status. We know relatively little about a Malay villager if we know only that he is poor and landless. We know far more about the cultural meaning of his poverty once we know that he is particularly in despair because he cannot afford to feed guests on the feast of Ramadan, that wealthy people pass him on the village path without uttering a greeting, that he cannot bury his parents properly, that his daughter will marry late if at all because he lacks a dowry, that his sons will leave the household early since he has no property to hold them, and that he must humble himself—often to no avail—to beg work and rice from wealthier neighbors. To know the cultural meaning of his poverty in this way is to learn the shape of his indignity and, hence, to gauge the content of his anger. To have said that he was poor and landless and to have stopped at that would merely have told us that he was short of income and the means of production. While the daily indignities we have listed all flow from his class position, they tell us far more about what it feels like to be a poor man in a particular culture with particular ritual decencies at a particular moment in history. It is these experienced indignities that form the bridge between his condition and his consciousness.

Dignity is at once a very private and a very public attribute. One can experience an indignity at the hands of another despite the fact that no one else sees or hears about it. What is reasonably clear, however, is that any indignity is compounded greatly when it is inflicted in public. An insult, a look of contempt, a physical humiliation, an assault on one's character and standing, a rudeness is nearly always far more injurious when it is inflicted before an audience. To gauge the added threat to personal dignity by a public injury, consider for a moment the difference between a dressing down (the term is itself suggestive) an employee may receive from his boss in the privacy of the boss's office and the same dressing down delivered before all of the employee's peers and subordinates. The latter, if I am not mistaken, will be viewed by the employee as a far more aggressive and humiliating act. In much the same fashion, it is a rare slave narrative that does not have a moving passage like the following: "Who can imagine what could be the feeling of a father and mother, when looking upon an infant child whipped and tortured with impunity, and then placed in a situation where they can afford it no protection?"[9] The direct harm in this case is inflicted upon the child; what the parents suffer is a

9. Osofsky, *Puttin' on Ole Massa*, 80–81.

devastating public display of their powerlessness to keep their child from harm. They lose, as Aggy did (see chapter 1), the public claim to be parents, above all in the eyes of their child and also in those of any onlookers. It is difficult to conceive a more damaging loss of standing as a person. The impact seems to be seared in the memory of those who suffer it.[10]

Who precisely, then, composes the audience before which an indignity is most damaging? It is, I believe, exactly that audience before whom one's dignity, one's standing as a person, is most important because it forms the social source for one's sense of self-esteem. In particular, this circle would include one's closest family, friends, neighbors, coworkers and peers, and, particularly, one's own subordinates toward whom one stands in a relationship of power.[11] Here it may be useful to distinguish between the standing enjoyed, say, by a slave with his master and the standing he enjoys with other slaves. Unless he is willing to court death, the slave can never effectively assert his personhood and dignity vis-à-vis his master. Correspondingly, he stands in little danger of losing much dignity in the master's eyes if for no other reason than that he has so little to begin with. The sphere within which a slave can, at least provisionally, more effectively establish his dignity and standing is that formed by his peers, among whom, correspondingly, he has most to lose by any public assault on that dignity.

Within this restricted social circle the subordinate is afforded a partial refuge from the humiliations of domination, and it is from this circle that the audience (one might say "the public") for the hidden transcript is drawn. Suffering from the same humiliations or, worse, subject to the same terms of subordination, they have a shared interest in jointly creating a discourse of dignity, of negation, and of justice. They have, in addition, a shared interest in concealing a social site apart from domination where such a hidden transcript can be elaborated in comparative safety.

The most elementary forms of negation found in the social sites of the hidden transcript represent nothing more than the safe articulation of the assertion, aggression, and hostility that is thwarted by the onstage power of the dominant. Discretion in the face of power requires that a part of the "self" that would reply or strike back must lie low. It is this self that finds expression in the safer realm of the hidden transcript. While the hidden transcript cannot be

10. See, for example, the account by untouchables of the humiliation of being insulted in front of one's own house and before one's family, children, and neighbors. Khare, *The Untouchable as Himself,* 124.

11. This last is clearly related to the exquisite pleasure derived by victimized subordinates in seeing their tormentor in turn publicly humiliated by his superior. Once a subordinate has seen his superior openly humbled, even if it does not essentially alter their power positions, something has, nonetheless, irretrievably changed.

described as the truth that contradicts the lies told to power, it is correct to say that the hidden transcript is a self-disclosure that power relations normally exclude from the official transcript.[12] No matter how elaborate the hidden transcript may become, it always remains a substitute for an act of assertion directly in the face of power. Perhaps for this reason the "many imaginary speeches" to the squire that Mrs. Poyser rehearsed backstage are unlikely to have yielded anything like the sense of satisfaction and release provided by her speech to the squire himself. A public insult, one suspects, is never fully laid to rest except by a public reply.

The negation found in the hidden transcript often takes back the speech or behavior that seemed unavoidable in power-laden encounters. A subordinate who has just received a public dressing down from his superior during which he behaved deferentially, and who now finds himself among his peers may curse his superior, make physical gestures of aggression, and talk about what he would like to say next time. ("Just wait until . . . .") But, in Mrs. Poyser's case and many others, it turns out to have been a dress rehearsal for a subsequent public negation. The collective hidden transcript of a subordinate group often bears the forms of negation that, if they were transposed to the context of domination, would represent an act of rebellion.

Ideological Negation

The work of negation, however, involves far more than the creation of a social realm in which the missing part of the subordinate's replies and assertions may be safely spoken. Inasmuch as the major historical forms of domination have presented themselves in the form of a metaphysics, a religion, a worldview, they have provoked the development of more or less equally elaborate replies in the hidden transcript.

How thoroughgoing this negation can be is evident from what we know about the difference between the public Christianity preached to the slaves by their masters in the antebellum U.S. South and the religion they practiced when they were not under surveillance.[13] In public religious services, con-

12. Jürgen Habermas bases his theory concerning the "ideal speech situation" on a similar assumption that any form of domination will prevent the free and equal discourse necessary for a just society. He claims, furthermore, that the ideal speech situation is nothing more than the practical assumptions that lie behind any effort to communicate and is therefore universal. My argument requires no such heroic assumptions, let alone Habermas's tendency to treat civil and political society as if it ought to be the perfect graduate student seminar. See Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action,* vol. 1, *Reason and the Rationalization of Society,* trans. Thomas McCarthy; see also Jürgen Habermas, chap. 4.

13. Unless otherwise noted, the material for this paragraph is drawn from Raboteau, *Slave Religion,* chaps. 4, 5.

ducted by the master or someone provided by him, the slaves were expected to control their gestures, facial expression, voice, and general comportment. Outside that surveillance and in the "hush arbors," where a whole series of devices were used to prevent the sound from carrying (for example, shouting into overturned pots), an entirely different atmosphere reigned—one of release from the constant guardedness of domination, permitting dancing, shouts, clapping, and participation. Autonomous slave religion was not merely a negation of the style of official services; it contradicted its content as well. Preachers with the interest of the masters at heart would emphasize New Testament passages about meekness, turning the other cheek, walking the extra mile, and texts like the following (from Ephesians 6 : 5–9), which, paraphrased, also appeared in a catechism for "Colored Persons": "Servant, be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ; not with eye service, as men pleasers; but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart." In contrast to this plea for a sincere official transcript from slaves, the offstage Christianity, as we know, stressed the themes of deliverance and redemption, Moses and the Promised Land, the Egyptian captivity, and emancipation. The Land of Canaan, as Frederick Douglass noted, was taken to mean the North and freedom. When they could safely boycott or leave sermons that condemned theft, flight, negligent work, and insolence, the slaves did just that, as Charles Jones, who preached in the South in 1833, discovered:

> I was preaching to a large congregation on the Epistle of Philemon and when I insisted upon fidelity and obedience as Christian virtues in servants and upon the authority of Paul, condemned the practice of running away, one half of my audience deliberately rose up and walked off with themselves, and those that remained looked anything but satisfied with the preacher or his doctrine. After dismission, there was no small stir among them; some solemnly declared that "there was no such an Epistle in the Bible," others "that they did not care" if they ever heard me preach again.[14]

Slaves were rarely fortunate enough to be able to openly display their disagreement in this way. There is little doubt, however, that their religious beliefs were often a negation of the humility and forbearance preached to them by whites. Ex-slave Charles Ball noted that heaven for blacks was a place

14. Ibid., 294.

where they would be avenged of their enemies, and that the "cornerstone" of black religion was the "idea of a revolution in the conditions of the whites and blacks."[15] This idea took, we may assume, a form bearing some resemblance to the oath spoken by Aggy the cook after her daughter was punished.[16]

Among untouchables in India there is persuasive evidence that the Hindu doctrines that would legitimize caste-domination are negated, reinterpreted, or ignored. Scheduled castes are much less likely than Brahmins to believe that the doctrine of karma explains their present condition; instead they attribute their status to their poverty and to an original, mythical act of injustice. As a group, they have seized on those traditions, saints, and narratives within the Hindu tradition that ignore castes or elevate the status of those least privileged. As a public matter, of course, there have also been defections from Hinduism in the form of conversions on a large scale to Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam, all of which emphasize the equality of believers. Such negation goes on, it is important to add, at the same time as millions of untouchables continue in daily practice to observe the ritual avoidances and gestures of homage that are part and parcel of a caste order. As one writer aptly puts it, one has "orthopraxy" without any necessary "orthodoxy" from the lower castes.[17]

Practices of resistance may mitigate the daily patterns of material appropriation, and the gestures of negation in the hidden transcript may answer daily insults to dignity. But at the level of systematic social doctrine, subordi-

15. Ibid., 291.

16. We recover this pattern of negation in bits and shards—glimpses of a world that was largely concealed from whites. The testimony we have from after the Civil War makes it clear that many slaves prayed fervently for a Northern victory; few whites, however, knew this during the war. As it became apparent that the South was, in fact, losing the war, the boldness of slaves grew: they ran away in greater numbers, they shirked work with more tenacity, they spoke back more frequently. Thus a Georgia slave reported that when urged by his master and mistress near the end of the war to pray for a Confederate success, he said he was obedient to his owners but that he would not pray against his conscience and wanted his freedom and that of "all the Negroes." Only the crumbling power of the Confederacy made his open declaration possible. For, as Raboteau realizes, "He was shouting in public what had been repeated in the dead of night in the private place of prayer which the slave claimed as his own." *Slave Religion,* 309. Our attention is thus directed not simply to the capacity to negate the religious rationale for domination, but to the social sites in the recesses of the social order in which such negations can be spoken and acted.

17. J. F. Taal, "Sanskrit and Sanskritization." See also Bernard Cohn, "Changing Traditions of a Low Caste" in *Traditional India: Structure and Change,* ed. Milton Singer, 207; Gerald D. Berreman, "Caste in Cross Cultural Perspective," in *Japan's Invisible Race: Caste in Culture and Personality,* ed. George DeVos and Hiroshi Wagatsuma, 311, and Mark Jürgensmeyer, "What if Untouchables Don't Believe in Untouchability?" One of the standard sources that argues against the case made here and for "ideological incorporation" is Michael Moffat, *An Untouchable Community in South India: Structure and Consensus.*

nate groups confront elaborate ideologies that justify inequality, bondage, monarchy, caste, and so on. Resistance at this level requires a more elaborate riposte, one that goes beyond fragmentary practices of resistance. Better put, perhaps, resistance to ideological domination requires a counterideology—a negation—that will effectively provide a general normative form to the host of resistant practices invented in self-defense by any subordinate group.

The Importance of Mutuality

The external power that deprives man of the freedom to communicate his thoughts publicly deprives him at the same time of his freedom to think.

—IMMANUEL KANT

Providing we take the term "publicly" to mean the social expression of thoughts in some context, however constrained, Kant's statement is an important truth about resistance to domination. The hidden transcript does require a public—even if that public necessarily excludes the dominant. None of the practices and discourses of resistance can exist without tacit or acknowledged coordination and communication within the subordinate group. For that to occur, the subordinate group must carve out for itself social spaces insulated from control and surveillance from above. If we are to understand the process by which resistance is developed and codified, the analysis of the creation of these offstage social spaces becomes a vital task. Only by specifying how such social spaces are made and defended is it possible to move from the individual resisting subject—an abstract fiction—to the socialization of resistant practices and discourses. It may seem reasonable to conjure up an individual subordinate who resents appropriation and resists it by pilfering, who is angered by an insult and dreams of striking back, who finds the rationale of his rulers unacceptable and dreams of a utopia where the last shall be first. The fact is, however, that even pilfering requires the complicity of fellow subordinates who will look the other way, that dreams of settling scores for an insult will necessarily take a social form satisfying to peers and appropriately provoking to superiors, and that the negation of a dominant religious ideology requires an offstage subculture in which the negation can be formed and articulated.

Social spaces of relative autonomy do not merely provide a neutral medium within which practical and discursive negations may grow. As domains of power relations in their own right, they serve to discipline as well as to

formulate patterns of resistance. The process of socialization is much the same as with any stylized sentiment. If we can imagine, hypothetically, an unarticulated feeling of anger, the expression in language of that anger will necessarily impose a disciplined form to it. If this now-articulated anger is to become the property of a small group, it will be further disciplined by the shared experiences and power relations within that small group. If, then, it is to become the social property of a whole category of subordinates it must carry effective meaning for them and reflect the cultural meanings and distribution of power among them. In this hypothetical progression from "raw" anger to what we might call "cooked" indignation, sentiments that are idiosyncratic, unrepresentative, or have only weak resonance within the group are likely to be selected against or censored. Looked at from the vantage point of any society and culture, of course, our hypothetical progression makes no sense. Anger, humiliation, and fantasies are always experienced within a cultural framework created in part by offstage communication among subordinates. In this respect there is probably no such thing as completely raw anger, humiliation, or fantasy, even if it is never communicated to another; it has already been shaped by the cultural history of one's experience. The essential point is that a resistant subculture or countermores among subordinates is necessarily a product of mutuality.

As we turn to an examination of the social sites where the hidden transcript grows, it will be helpful to keep several points in mind. First, the hidden transcript is a social product and hence a result of power relations among subordinates. Second, like folk culture, the hidden transcript has no reality as pure thought; it exists only to the extent it is practiced, articulated, enacted, and disseminated within these offstage social sites. Third, the social spaces where the hidden transcript grows are themselves an achievement of resistance; they are won and defended in the teeth of power.[18]

18. Indirect support for the importance of resistant mutuality comes from social psychology experiments demonstrating how difficult it is to sustain *any* judgment without some social support. The simplest of such experiments involves judgments about the relative length of two straight lines, in which confederates of the experimenter all purposely affirm that the shorter of two lines is, in fact, the longer. When this happens, most subjects are unable to swim alone against the tide of (mistaken) opinion and concur openly with the others. When, however, even a single confederate of the experimenter disagrees with the rest, the subject reverts to what we imagine was his original perception and joins the dissent. A single companion often seems sufficient to break the pressure to conform. Although these experiments hardly replicate the conditions of domination with which we are directly concerned, they do suggest how extraordinarily difficult solitary dissent is and how even the smallest social space for dissent may allow a resistant subculture to form. See Winn, *The Manipulated Mind,* 110–11.

Sites and Carriers of the Hidden Transcript: Degrees of Freedom

That's why the cabaret is the parliament of the people.

—BALZAC, *Les Paysans*

The social sites of the hidden transcript are those locations in which the unspoken riposte, stifled anger, and bitten tongues created by relations of domination find a vehement, full-throated expression. It follows that the hidden transcript will be least inhibited when two conditions are fulfilled: first, when it is voiced in a sequestered social site where the control, surveillance, and repression of the dominant are least able to reach, and second, when this sequestered social milieu is composed entirely of close confidants who share similar experiences of domination. The initial condition is what allows subordinates to talk freely at all, while the second ensures that they have, in their common subordination, something to talk about.

For any relation of domination it ought to be possible to specify a continuum of social sites ranged according to how heavily or lightly they are patrolled by dominant elites. The least patrolled, most autonomous sites would presumably be the most likely locations for recovering the hidden transcript. In antebellum U.S. slavery, for example, control was clearly most pronounced in the organization of work life—the site of the direct appropriation of labor—and in public displays of mastery and deference. Social autonomy for slaves was thus minimized before whites, in the big house, and when working. Outside this heavily patrolled sphere there were domains of greater autonomy in the slave quarters, in the circles of family and friends, which found expression in folktales, dress, language, song, and religious expression. Further still from the center of close surveillance were those social spaces most effectively sequestered from domination, those that might, on that account, be considered the privileged sites for the hidden transcript. These might include the hidden hush arbors where protected speech, singing, religious enthusiasm, dreams of deliverance, schemes for escape, plots of rebellion, tactics for pilfering, and so on could be discussed in relative safety. In the words of Henry Cheatam, an ex-slave, "dat overseer was a devil. He wouldn't allow no meetin' on de place. Sometimes us would slip down de hill and turn de wash pot bottom upwards so de sound of our voices would go under de pot, and us'd have a singin' and prayin' right dere."[19]

The term *social site* may convey the wrong impression if we take it to mean only a sequestered physical location. It might, of course, be just that; slaves

19. From interview with Cheatam, in Norman Yetman, ed., *Voices from Slavery,* 56.

made use of secluded woods, clearings, gullies, thickets, ravines to meet and talk in safety. They might also conspire to transform a site that was not so intrinsically safe by actively sealing it off from surveillance. In the quarters at night slaves might hang up quilts and rags to deaden the sound, circle on their knees and whisper, and post a watch to ensure their seclusion. The creation of a secure site for the hidden transcript might, however, not require any physical distance from the dominant so long as linguistic codes, dialects, and gestures—opaque to the masters and mistresses—were deployed.[20]

If the social location par excellence of the public transcript is to be found in the public assemblies of subordinates summoned by elites, it follows that the social location par excellence for the hidden transcript lies in the unauthorized and unmonitored secret assemblies of subordinates. Thus, as noted earlier, Christopher Hill explains that the "heresy" of Lollardy was most rife in the pastoral, forest, moorland, and fen areas, where the social control of the church and the squirearchy did not effectively penetrate.[21] Three centuries later, E. P. Thompson makes much the same point about religious heterodoxy in a vastly changed England: "The countryside was ruled by the gentry, the towns by corrupt corporations, the nation by the corruptest corporation of all; but the chapel, the tavern, and the home were their own. In the 'unsteepled' places of worship there was room for free intellectual life and democratic experiments."[22] The unpatrolled, social spaces nurturing dissent are, for Thompson's working class, no longer the unsettled wilds where Lollardy flourished. Rather they may be found within the privacy of the home or in those public places such as the tavern and chapel that the working class can call its own.

In European culture at any rate, the alehouse, the pub, the tavern, the inn, the cabaret, the beer cellar, the gin mill were seen by secular authorities and by the church as places of subversion. Here subordinate classes met offstage and off-duty in an atmosphere of freedom encouraged by alcohol. Here was also a privileged site for the transmission of popular culture—embodied in games, songs, gambling, blasphemy, and disorder—that was usually at odds with official culture. Peter Burke writes that the evidence for the importance of the

20. The development of such secret signs and codes probably requires an offstage context in which they can be generated and given common meaning before they can be used under the noses of the dominant.

21. "From Lollards to Levellers," 87.

22. *The Making of the English Working Class,* 51–52. Thompson's account of eighteenth-century poaching and the struggle over rural property rights notes that scattered and sequestered habitations were always seen as favoring lawlessness, and there was a great effort made to enclose land so as to force the population into villages. E. P. Thompson, *Whigs and Hunters: The Origin of the Black Act,* 246.

tavern as a center for the development of English popular culture from 1500 to 1800 is overwhelming. A historian of religion goes so far as to talk of the nineteenth-century rivalry between the church and the pub.[23]

The importance of the tavern or its equivalent as a site of antihegemonic discourse lay less in the drinking it fostered or in its relative insulation from surveillance than in the fact that it was the main point of unauthorized assembly for lower-class neighbors and workers. Along with the market, which was larger and more anonymous, the tavern was the closest thing to a neighborhood meeting of subordinates. The development of the coffeehouse and club-room during the eighteenth century created a similar social space for a growing middle class and in turn fostered the growth of a distinctive middle-class culture, leaving the alehouse more exclusively to the working classes. Each site, owing to the social position of its habitués, generated a distinctive culture and pattern of discourse. Surveying such developing class cultures, Peter Stallybrass and Allon White conclude,

> Patterns of discourse are regulated through the forms of corporate assembly in which they are produced. Alehouse, coffee-house, church, law court, library, drawing room of a country mansion: each place of assembly is a different site of intercourse requiring different manners and morals. Discursive space is never completely independent of social place and the formation of new kinds of speech can be traced through the emergence of new public sites of discourse and the transformation of old ones. . . . And so, in large part, the history of political struggle has been the history of the attempts to control significant sites of assembly and spaces of discourse.[24]

For medieval Europe, according to Bakhtin's now-celebrated argument, the marketplace was the privileged site of antihegemonic discourse, and carnival was its most striking expression. Only in the marketplace did the population gather more or less spontaneously without ceremony being imposed from above. The anonymity of the crowd together with the buying and selling that served to put people on an equal footing marked out the marketplace as a domain where the rituals and deference required before lords and clergy did not apply. Privilege was suspended. This atmosphere, Bakhtin argues, encouraged forms of discourse excluded from the world of hierarchy and etiquette: parody, ridicule, blasphemy, the grotesque, scatology, revelry, and so on. For Bakhtin, the uninhibited license of the marketplace—and especially of carnival—was a black mass of official values. Here the piety, humility, servility, seriousness, respect, and poses[25] of official onstage conduct were replaced by patterns of speech and conduct that were otherwise disapproved.

23. Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe,* 109, and Colin Campbell, *Toward a Sociology of Religion,* 44.

24. *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression,* 80. For a discerning discussion of the cultural meaning of the alehouse in Shakespeare's time and in his plays, see Susanne Wofford, "The Politics of Carnival in *Henry IV,*" in *Theatrical Power: The Politics of Representation on the Shakespearean Stage,* edited by Helen Tartar.

The reasons the more unmediated versions of the hidden transcript should be encountered in taverns, alehouses, at the marketplace, during carnival, and at night in secluded spots are instructive. A dissident subculture "invests the weak points in a chain of socialization."[26] For the working class in Poland just prior to the riots in Poznan in 1956, those weak points came to be virtually all those settings where confidences might be shared. As Lawrence Goodwyn explains, "The organizing conversations at Cegielski [Railway Works] were conducted in places beyond the gaze of foremen—in trains and buses to and from work, in remote sections of the plant, at lunch breaks, and in the grossly inadequate cold water locker rooms which in themselves constituted one of the continuing grievances. . . . This space was not a gift; it had to be created by people who fought to create it."[27] Thus, to think of antihegemonic discourse as occupying merely the social space left empty by domination would be to miss the struggle by which such sites are won, cleared, built, and defended.

The elaboration of hidden transcripts depends not only on the creation of relatively unmonitored physical locations and free time but also on active human agents who create and disseminate them. The carriers are likely to be as socially marginal as the places where they gather. Since what counts as socially marginal depends so heavily on cultural definitions, the carriers will vary greatly by culture and over time. In early modern Europe, for example, it seems that the carriers of folk culture played a key role in developing the subversive themes of the carnivalesque. Actors, acrobats, bards, jugglers, diviners, itinerant entertainers of all kinds might be said to have made their living in this fashion. Other itinerants—journeymen, craftsmen on tour, tin-

25. By *poses* I mean to call attention to the physical gestures and posture of the public transcript. As Bakhtin understands, an essential element of carnival is the *physical release* from the strain of an onstage performance. I am struck, in this context, with the boisterousness and physical exuberance often noted in slave celebrations and religious ceremonies when slaves were safe from surveillance. Here the analogy of schoolchildren at recess may be instructive insofar as their performance as subordinates in the classroom is also severely physically confining. The control of the body, voice, and facial expression may, when it is imposed, create something of a physical hidden transcript that is released in movement.

26. Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson, *Resistance Through Rituals: Youth Subcultures in Post-war Britain* (London: Hutchinson, 1976), 25–26.

27. "How to Make a Democratic Revolution: The Rise of *Solidarnosc in Poland,*" MS, chap. 5, pp. 29, 34.

kers, colporteurs, shoemakers, petty traders, vagrants, healers, "tooth artists"—while perhaps less active in elaborating a dissident subculture, might be important vectors for its propagation. Since much of the resistance to the dominant culture took the form of religious heterodoxy and heresy, the role of what Max Weber has termed the "pariah-intelligentsia" should not be overlooked. Here we would include some of the renegade lower clergy, would-be prophets, pilgrims, marginal sects and monastic orders, mendicants, and so forth. Their critical distance from dominant values arises, Weber notes, from their skills and their marginality: "Groups which are at the lower end or altogether outside of the social hierarchy stand to a certain extent on the point of Archimedes in relation to social conventions, both in respect to the external order and in respect to common opinions. Since these groups are not bound by social conventions they are capable of an original attitude towards the meaning of the cosmos."[28]

If we step back slightly from specific groups in a particular cultural milieu, something more general may be said about the principal carriers of the hidden transcript. It is not simply a question of their anomalous or low social standing. They are also likely to follow trades or vocations that encourage physical mobility. As travelers they often serve as cultural brokers and social links between subordinate communities while remaining, themselves, less socially anchored and hence more autonomous. In the cases of guilds or sects, they may also have a corporate existence that provides its own social insulation from direct domination. Finally, a good many of these groups depend directly on the patronage of a lower-class public to make their living. The clergyman who must rely on popular charity or the bard who expects his audience to feed him and give small contributions is likely to convey a cultural message that is not at odds with that of his public.[29]

Social Control and Surveillance from Above: Preventing the Hidden Transcript

The strongest evidence for the vital importance of autonomous social sites in generating a hidden transcript is the strenuous effort made by dominant groups to abolish or control such sites. In Europe from the fifteenth through the seventeenth centuries, both secular and religious authorities understood

28. *The Sociology of Religion,* 126.

29. He may, of course, have many reasons for masking or disguising his message to avoid retaliation from above. Chapter 6 is largely devoted to this issue. Nevertheless the point here is that the bard who sings for an audience of subordinates will have a repertoire more in keeping with the hidden transcript than a bard who is retained exclusively to sing praise-songs to the prince.

the danger that autonomous sites of dissident folk culture could pose. Nowhere is this clearer than in the cultural conflicts that preceded the German Peasants' War on the eve of the Reformation. Lionel Rothkrug's analysis of the struggle over a pilgrimage site associated with the "drummer of Niklashausen" is a striking case in point.[30] The young drummer's prophetic vision in 1476 incorporated themes that were already part and parcel of an underground tradition of religious dissent. This tradition held that Christ's sacrifice had redeemed all humankind—including serfs—from bondage and that access to salvation was democratically distributed. The church where Boheim, the drummer, denounced the venality of the clergy (particularly over the sale of indulgences) and called for the removal of the pope attracted large, threatening crowds. After an initial skirmish in which commoner Swiss archers defeated the cream of the Burgundian nobility, Boheim was captured and put to death as a heretic and rebel. Two features of these events and their aftermath are instructive for our purposes. First, the Niklashausen church, which had been of no particular significance earlier, became a social magnet for pilgrimages and subversive discourse only because of the popular *response* to the prophecy. This autonomous site of the hidden transcript was a social creation, not a social given. Second, once the threat was established, the authorities spared no effort in abolishing this node of dissent. The church was razed, Boheim's ashes were strewn in the Tauber river, offerings left at the shrine were destroyed, all relics and monuments to him were confiscated, and pilgrimages to the now-empty site were prohibited. Simultaneously the bishop of Würzburg launched a cultural offensive aimed at anticlerical sentiment, commissioning verses that would defame Boheim and demonize the "insurgents" who heeded his call. It is difficult to imagine a more ambitious effort both to eliminate a physical site of subversive discourse and to erase its traces in popular oral culture.

The persistence of subversive popular heresies and the hostility of secular and religious authorities to their carriers and the sites at which they thrived is captured in David Sabean's account of Hans Keil in Lutheran Germany less than two centuries later, just at the end of the Thirty Years War.[31] Against a background of marauding troops, the plague, and extortionate taxes, Hans Keil received a sign from God and a message from an angel. His grapevines bled as they were pruned. The angel descended to promise collective punish-

30. "Icon and Ideology in Religion and Rebellion, 1300–1600: Bayernfreiheit and Réligion Royale," in *Religion and Rural Revolt: Papers Presented to the Fourth Interdisciplinary Workshop on Peasant Studies,* ed. Janos M. Bak and Gerhard Benecke, 31–61.

31. For a more detailed account, see David Warren Sabean, *Power in the Blood: Popular Culture and Village Discourse in Early Modern Europe,* chap. 2.

ment for man's wickedness. The sins the angel promised to punish were, most particularly, the crushing exactions of grain and labor by the nobility, the tithes of the high clergy, and the failure of avaricious, licentious, and vain elites to observe God's commands. In religious terms it was clear that God held the authorities responsible for the suffering of the war and intended to bring them low. Once again, as with the drummer of Niklashausen, the content of the prophecy was not surprising or new; it was amply prefigured in the circulating broadsheets, accounts of miracles, and popular biblical traditions. The danger posed by Hans Keil's message from God was that the peasantry took it as a sign that authorized them to resist taxation. As stories of the miracle circulated throughout the region via newly printed broadsheets and popular verses about Hans Keil's deeds, the authorities sensed the danger of a generalized tax revolt. The steps they took to prevent the diffusion of popular accounts are instructive. Broadsheets depicting the miracle were seized, and the printers, singers, and itinerant workers who disseminated them were detained. Anyone caught discussing the subject, especially in markets and inns, was to be arrested and questioned. What we have here is a systematic attempt by the authorities to sever the autonomous circuits of folk discourse and to deny this heterodox story any social site where it could be safely retold and interpreted.

We would not have had either of these episodes at hand had they not attracted official attention—and repression. That is how they made it into the archives, so to speak. Each prophecy spilled beyond the sequestered confines of the hidden transcript to pose a direct threat to powerholders. It is, however, the pattern of repression that highlights for us the circulatory system of the hidden transcript. For seventeenth-century central Europe, that system is composed of nothing more nor less than the producers, carriers, and consumers of popular culture together with the routes they travel and the sites they occupy or pass through. The importance of popular culture and its social vectors is not, moreover, of merely antiquarian interest for the study of feudal and early modern Europe. More than one student of modern working-class history has suggested that many of the circuits of popular culture were destroyed by conscious design in the late nineteenth century with ominous consequences for the disciplining and cultural domestication of the proletariat.[32]

Slave owners in both the West Indies and North America took great pains

32. The most forceful exponent of this argument is Frank Hearn. *Domination, Legitimation, and Resistance: The Incorporation of the 19th-Century English Working Class;* see also his "Remembrance and Critique: The Uses of the Past for Discrediting the Present and Anticipating the Future," *Politics and Society* 5:2 (1975):201–27. Much of the argument of Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy,* though addressed to the twentieth century, may be read in the same sense.

to prevent the creation of sites where a hidden transcript could be created and shared. They were, of course, greatly aided by the fact that their subjects were a newly and traumatically assembled population torn from familiar contexts of social action.[33] To minimize communication plantation owners preferred to bring together a labor force of the greatest linguistic and ethnic diversity.[34] When a dialect of pidgin developed that was unintelligible to the planters, the slaves were required to converse at work only in a form of English their overseers could understand. Sunday and holiday gatherings, which planters understood as likely sites for sedition, were sharply restricted, and efforts were made to ensure that such assemblies rarely brought together slaves from several plantations. The standard use of slave informers served to further inhibit the establishment of safe sites for the hidden transcript. Finally, to break up secret nighttime gatherings of slaves, the owners organized mounted patrols—the dreaded patrollers—with dogs to apprehend and punish any slave found at large without authorization.

All these measures were part of a hopelessly utopian (a master's utopia, to be sure) project of eliminating any and all protected communication among slaves. Such aspirations were unrealizable in principle if for no other reason than the work itself required easy communication among the slaves. However hobbling the surveillance, it did not prevent the rapid development of linguistic codes impenetrable to outsiders, a popular slave culture of ridicule and satire, an autonomous religious vision emphasizing deliverance, actual patterns of arson and sabotage, not to mention free maroon communities in the hills.

Here, it is not the inevitable frustration of such plans that is most germane to our argument, but rather the effort, the aspiration, to atomize subordinates by removing or penetrating any autonomous domain of communication. The aspiration is encountered again and again, even in voluntary institutions that aim at commanding the undivided discipline and loyalty of their members. As Lewis Coser has argued, a close analysis of such "greedy" institutions as the jesuits, monastic orders, political sects, court bureaucracies using eunuchs or janissaries, or utopian communities brings to light social rules preventing the development of any subordinate loyalties or discourse that might compete with its hegemonic purpose.[35] To achieve their purpose, such rules would

33. In this respect they operated under handicaps similar in kind, but far more extreme in degree, to those of the new proletariat in the industrializing West shorn of their agrarian networks of social action.

34. This and subsequent points, unless otherwise noted, are drawn from Craton, *Testing the Chains,* chaps. 3–8.

35. *Greedy Institutions: Patterns of Undivided Commitment,* passim.

have to make subordinates entirely dependent upon their superiors, effectively isolated from one another, and more or less constantly under observation.

Imperial traditions of recruiting administrative staff from marginal, despised groups were designed precisely to create a trained cadre that was isolated from the populace and entirely dependent on the ruler for their status. In the case of celibacy or eunuchs, of course, the possibility of competing family loyalties was precluded in principle. In their training—which often began at a young age—and their service, they were frequently kept as isolated as possible from the civil population. Unlike that of serfs or slaves, the service of these elite staffs required a high degree of initiative, active loyalty, and cooperation, which in turn necessitated the horizontal links and training necessary to create a high esprit de corps. Even here, however, structured measures worked to minimize the generation of any purposes at odds with official aims. The more durable of the nineteenth-century utopian communities in the United States were those that insisted on either celibacy or free love within the community. Either option prevented the development of the dangerous dyadic and family ties that would create an alternative focus of loyalty. As Coser puts it, "The abolition of family life made it possible to assure that individuals always act in their public roles; that is, that they give up their right to privacy."[36] Transposed to the terminology we have been using, the abolition of family life was an effort to ensure that the onstage, public transcript exhausted the whole of social life. Accomplishing this also demanded a more or less complete pattern of surveillance to monitor any potentially subversive discourse. The Shakers, for example, had watchtowers, peepholes, and the social pressure of public confessions as part of their program of surveillance. Even voluntary, intentional communities, then, display an aspiration to total domination—an aspiration disclosed by their measures to eliminate all those small, autonomous social spaces and social ties in which some untoward, unauthorized hidden transcript might be born.

Social Control and Surveillance from Below: Defending the Hidden Transcript

If the logic of a pattern of domination is to bring about the complete atomization and surveillance of subordinates, this logic encounters a reciprocal resistance from below. Subordinates everywhere implicitly understand that if the logic of domination prevails, they will be reduced to a Hobbesian war of all

36. Ibid., 144. See also Rosabeth Moss Kanter, *Commitment and Community: Communes and Utopias in Sociological Perspective.*

against all. Individual strategies of preferment are a constant temptation to members of subordinate groups. It is, in part, to encourage normative and practical defection that elites call forth the public acts of compliance that represent their authority. Also by such means elites create the loyal retainers, "trustees," and informers on whom they can rely to patrol the sites of the hidden transcript. The mere presence of known or suspected trustees among subordinates is normally sufficient to disqualify the site as a safe place for the hidden transcript.

Members of a dissident subordinate subculture can act informally to foster a high degree of conformity to standards that violate dominant norms. A suggestive example drawn from sociolinguistic research on dialect use in England helps us to understand the process.[37]

Research into speech patterns of working-class men and women shows that women use a dialect significantly closer to Standard English (the dominant norm) than men. The difference is attributed to the fact that working-class men are more firmly embedded in an egalitarian workers' subculture than women, who are, by contrast, more anxious to avoid speech patterns (for example, double negatives) stigmatized by the dominant culture. More diagnostic for our purposes, however, is that women think they use more standard forms in their speech than they actually do, while men think they use more nonstandard forms than they actually do. The fact that men aspire, in a sense, to use working-class speech patterns even more frequently than is actually the case is testimony to the *covert prestige* of working-class usage among men. Against the pressures generated by the usage of their superiors, against the standardization fostered by the school system, by radio, and by television, the working-class culture has developed its own powerful sanctions that discourage a drift away from linguistic solidarity. Since both working-class English and Standard English are suitable for communicating most ideas, dialect here functions as a kind of moral discourse, expressing publicly a sense of identity and affiliation with one's working-class mates as against the middle and upper classes. Any sign of a linguistic betrayal of working-class dialect would be read as a telltale sign of a more general defection.

How does a subculture of subordinates with less social power, almost by definition, than the dominant culture achieve a high level of conformity? The answer surely lies in the social incentives and sanctions it can bring to bear to reward members who observe its norms and punish those who deviate. These sanctions must at least neutralize the pressures from above if the subordinate

37. Trudgill. *Sociolinguistics*, chap. 4. The central figure responsible for much of the research on issues of class, race, and dialect is William Labov.

subculture is to have any weight. Here, the vital social fact is that slaves, serfs, untouchables, and much of the working class historically have lived most of their lives in households and neighborhoods outside the direct gaze of elites. Even at work, providing they do not work individually, they are as much under observation from fellow workers as from the bosses. Subordinate groups do their own patrolling in this *kulturkampf,* singling out anyone who puts on airs, who denies his origins, who seems aloof, who attempts to hobnob with elites. These sanctions brought against them may run the gamut from small gestures of disapproval to a complete shunning and, of course, to physical intimidation and violence.

What is being policed by pressures for conformity within the subordinate group are not simply speech acts but a wide range of practices that damage the collective interest of subordinates as they see it. Among agricultural laborers in Franco's Spain, Juan Martinez-Alier reports that the concept of *union* expresses a shared ideal of solidarity.[38] Like the working-class dialect just discussed, it is not always religiously followed—given the temptations to break ranks—but nevertheless exerts a palpable influence on conduct. It dictates that those who agree to do piecework or to work for less than the minimum wage are held in open contempt, ostracized, and considered shameless. It dictates that workers will wait in their villages for work (rather than engaging in an unseemly scramble to beat one another to the estates), that they will not agree to sharecropping, and that they will not underbid a fellow laborer to gain work. Laborers who violate these injunctions fear not only the shame heaped upon them but physical retaliation as well.

As Alier points out in the case of Andalusian laborers, this conformity is created and maintained by shared linguistic practices. Landlords who are shown respect in public encounters are showered with abuse and given derisive nicknames behind their backs. The official, elite-imposed, public euphemism for sharecropping, *comparticipazione,* is privately mocked. Slanderous stories circulate about the local members of the *guardia civil* and priests. Class enmity is fanned not only by inequalities and domination but by the jokes, tales, and satirical verses that vividly convey injustice: "We eat the delicious thistle and tasty grass while they [the rich] eat the pestilent ham and the filthy sausage."[39] One can see in this linguistic practice and shared social outlook the unmistakable evidence of the *cultural work* performed by members of subordinate groups.

The military details of this skirmishing are not pretty. First, it must be

38. *Laborers and Landowners in Southern Spain,* chap. 4.
39. Ibid., 208.

remembered that in addition to engaging the enemy, one's own troops must be disciplined, particularly where the temptations of desertion are so large. While the dominant are likely to have more resort to open relations of force, intimidation, and economic power, the *mix* of incentives to conformity among subordinates is likely to include more peer pressure. Relations of force, however, are rarely absent, even among subordinates, when the costs of defection seem enormous. The assaulting of strikebreakers by workers on the picket line or the killing of suspected police agents in the black townships of South Africa are cases in point. For the most part, though, subordinates rarely have much in the way of coercive force to deploy among themselves, and what they do have depends typically on a modicum of popular assent—among subordinates—for it to be carried out. Conformity, instead, rests heavily on social pressure. Granting the *relatively* democratic aspect of social pressure among peers, these mechanisms of social control are painful and often ugly. Slander, character assassination, gossip, rumor, public gestures of contempt, shunning, curses, backbiting, outcasting are only a few of the sanctions that subordinates can bring to bear on each other. Reputation in any small, closely knit community has very practical consequences. A peasant household held in contempt by their fellow villagers will find it impossible to exchange harvest labor, to borrow a draft animal, to raise a small loan, to marry their children off, to prevent petty thefts of their grain or livestock, or even to bury their dead with any dignity. In aggregate, such sanctions have an obviously coercive weight, but they require, once again, a fair degree of popular assent to achieve their end of forcing the nonconformist back into line.

Solidarity among subordinates, if it is achieved at all, is thus achieved, paradoxically, only by means of a degree of conflict. Certain forms of social strife, far from constituting evidence of disunity and weakness, may well be the signs of an active, aggressive social surveillance that preserves unity. Nowhere has this principle been better illustrated than in Chandra Jayawardena's fine study of a Tamil plantation labor force in the Caribbean.[40] Their community was composed entirely of families employed by the plantation and therefore subject to the same structure of authority with few distinctions. They had developed a high degree of solidarity characterized by collective outbursts of violence involving tacit cooperation with no identifiable leadership or advance preparation. The solidarity was underwritten by an ideology of strictly egalitarian social relations termed *mati* (mate-ship). This ideology preserved a basic solidarity despite the desire of the management to cultivate collaborators and favorites from among the work force. The ideological work, in this case as

40. "Ideology and Conflict in Lower Class Communities."

in any other, was linked to a series of practices designed to prevent the growth of internal differentiation in status or income that might diminish the community's solidarity vis-à-vis the outside world.[41] These practices involved rumors, personal disputes, envy, and even court cases that had largely to do with violations of *mati.* As Jayawardena aptly puts it, "These disputes indicate the strength, not the weakness, of the bonds of community."[42] From our perspective the disputes do not simply indicate the bonds of community but are central in creating and reinforcing those bonds. It would thus be misleading to say that a form of domination creates social sites for a dissenting hidden transcript. It would be more accurate to claim that a form of domination creates certain possibilities for the production of a hidden transcript. Whether these possibilities are realized or not, and how they find expression, depends on the constant agency of subordinates in seizing, defending, and enlarging a normative power field.

The development of a thick and resilient hidden transcript is favored by the existence of social and cultural barriers between dominant elites and subordinates. It is one of the ironies of power relations that the performances required of subordinates can become, in the hands of subordinates, a nearly solid wall making the autonomous life of the powerless opaque to elites.

In its most striking form, an entire ersatz facade may be erected in order to shield another reality from detection. Hill villages in colonial Laos, for example, were required by the occasionally visiting French officials to have a village headman and elders with whom they could deal. The Laotians responded, it appears, by creating a set of bogus notables who had no local influence and who were presented to colonial functionaries as *the* local officials. Behind this ruse, the respected local figures continued to direct local affairs, including the performance of the bogus officials.[43] The Laotian case is but a dramatic instance of the age-old efforts of Southeast Asian villages to keep a threatening state at arm's length by keeping their land tenure, kinship, income, crop yields, livestock, and factions a closely guarded secret. This aim is often best accomplished by limiting contact with the state to the bare minimum, command performances.

More commonly, the use of a formulaic and seamless deference creates an impenetrable social barrier, which, because it employs the very observances

41. Social leveling, while it may contribute to solidarity, does involve a suppression of difference and hence of talent that is at odds with liberal ideology. This leveling often forces a worker to choose between excelling at work and keeping the friendship of his workmates, or the lower-class student to choose between good grades and the esteem of his classmates. See, for example, Sennett and Cobb, *The Hidden Injuries of Class,* 207–10.

42. "Ideology and Conflict," 441.

43. Jacques Dournes, "Sous couvert des maîtres."

insisted on by the dominant, is that much more durable. The willful use of submissiveness to this end can have a tone of aggression, as in this deathbed advice given by the grandfather in Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*: "Live with your head in the lion's mouth. I want you to overcome 'em with yesses, undermine 'em with grins, agree 'em to death and destruction, let 'em swoller you till they vomit or bust wide open. . . . Learn it to the young 'uns."[44] The wall of two-dimensional official performances by subordinate groups may often be supplemented by a feigned ignorance. As with performances, the dominant may grasp that the ignorance is a willful ignorance, intended to thwart demands or withhold information. An Afrikaner, speaking of the colored population in his district, understands the use value of such ignorance: "The coloureds have learned one thing: to play dumb. They can accomplish great things this way. I don't really know them myself. I don't think it is possible. They talk to me but there's always a wall between us—a point beyond which I have no understanding. I can know about them, but I can't know them."[45] In playing dumb, subordinates make creative use of the stereotypes intended to stigmatize them. If they are thought of as stupid and if a direct refusal is dangerous, then they can screen a refusal with ignorance. The systematic use of ignorance by the peasantry to thwart elites and the state prompted Eric Hobsbawm to claim, "The refusal to understand is a form of class struggle."[46]

It is tempting to generalize further about the ways in which the linguistic and social distance elites purposely put between themselves and their inferiors can be put to creative use by the latter. As an integral part of their claim to superiority, ruling castes are at pains to elaborate styles of speech, dress, consumption, gesture, carriage, and etiquette that distinguish them as sharply as possible from the lower orders. In racial, colonial, or status-based social orders, this cultural segregation also discourages unofficial contact between orders for fear of contamination. This combination of distinctiveness and apartheid creates, as Bourdieu has emphasized, an elite culture that is an illegible "hieroglyph," defying easy emulation by subordinates.[47] What he fails to note is that the same process that created an elite culture nearly impenetrable from below also encourages the elaboration of a subordinate culture that is opaque to those above it. In fact, it is precisely such a pattern of

44. Page 19.

45. Quoted by Vincent Crapanzano, *Waiting: The Whites of South Africa.* Compare with Balzac, *Les Paysans*—"'Lord, I do not know,' said Charles, with a stupid look a servant can assume to screen a refusal to his betters," 34.

46. "Peasants and Politics," *Journal of Peasant Studies* 1:1 (October 1973): 13.

47. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste,* 41.

dense social interaction among subordinates and very restricted, formal contact with superiors that fosters the growth of distinctive subcultures and the diverging dialects that accompany them.

A Sociology of Cohesion in the Hidden Transcript

How cohesive is the hidden transcript shared among members of a particular subordinate group? This question is not simply another way of asking how greatly at odds a given hidden transcript is from a subordinate group's onstage performance. The disparity between public action and offstage discourse depends heavily, as we have seen, on the severity of the domination. Other things equal, the more involuntary, demeaning, onerous, and extractive it is the more it will foster a counterdiscourse starkly at odds with its official claims.

Asking how unified a hidden transcript is amounts to asking about the resolving power of the social lens through which subordination passes. If subordinates are entirely atomized, of course, there is no lens through which a critical, collective account can be focused. Barring this limiting case, however, the cohesion of the hidden transcript would seem to rest on both the homogeneity of the domination and the social cohesion of the victims themselves.

In grasping the conditions that encourage the growth of a unified hidden transcript we may profit from a long tradition of research explaining differences in militancy and cohesion within the working class in the West. That research has demonstrated, to put it boldly, that workers who belong to "communities of fate" are most likely to share a clear, antagonistic view of their employers and to act with solidarity.[48] For example, an international comparison of workers' propensity to strike found that such occupational groups as miners, merchant seamen, lumberjacks, and longshoremen were far more militant than average in this respect. It is not difficult to see what distinguished such groups from the generality of the working class. Their labor was marked by an exceptionally high level of physical danger and required a commensurate degree of camaraderie and cooperation to minimize that danger. In a word, their very lives depended on their fellow workers. Second, miners, merchant seamen, and lumberjacks work and live in relative geographical isolation from other workers and other classes. In the case of lumberjacks and

48. Arthur Stinchcombe, "Organized Dependency Relations and Social Stratification," in *The Logic of Social Hierarchies,* ed. Edward O. Laumann et al., 95–99; Clark Kerr and Abraham Siegel, "The Inter-Industry Propensity to Strike: An International Comparison," in *Industrial Conflict,* ed. Arthur Kornhauser et al., 189–212; D. Lockwood, "Sources of Variation in Working-Class Images of Society"; Colin Bell and Howard Newby, "The Sources of Agricultural Workers' Images of Society."

merchant seamen, they are separated even from their families for much of the year. What marks these occupations, then, are the homogeneity and isolation of their community and work experience, their close mutual dependence, and, finally, a relative lack of differentiation within (and mobility out of) their trade. Such conditions are tailor-made to maximize the cohesion and unity of their subculture. They are nearly a race apart. They are all under the same authority, run the same risks, mix nearly exclusively with one another, and rely on a high degree of mutuality. We might say then, for them, all aspects of social life—work, community, authority, leisure—serve to amplify and sharpen a class focus. By contrast, a working class that lives in mixed neighborhoods, works at different jobs, is not highly interdependent, and takes its leisure in a variety of ways has a social life that serves powerfully to disperse their class interest and hence their social focus.

Little wonder, then, that communities of fate create a distinctive and unified subculture. They develop "their own codes, myths, heroes, and social standards."[49] The social site at which they develop a hidden transcript is itself uniform, cohesive, and bound by powerful mutual sanctions that hold competing discourses at arm's length. The process by which such high moral density develops is not unlike the way in which a distinctive dialect of a language develops. A dialect develops as a group of speakers mixes frequently with one another and rarely with others. Their speech patterns gradually diverge from those of the parent language and, indeed, if the process continues long enough, their dialect will become unintelligible to speakers of the parent language.[50]

In a similar fashion, isolation, homogeneity of conditions, and mutual dependence among subordinates favor the development of a distinctive subculture—often one with a strong "us vs. them" social imagery. Once this occurs, of course, the distinctive subculture itself becomes a powerful force for social unity as all subsequent experiences are mediated by a shared way of looking at the world. The hidden transcript, however, never becomes a language apart. The mere fact that it is in constant dialogue—more accurately, in argument—with dominant values ensures that the hidden and public transcripts remain mutually intelligible.

49. Kerr and Siegel, "The Inter-Industry Propensity to Strike," 191.

50. The process is akin to speciation among flora that, if sufficiently isolated from the genetic stock of the species as a whole, will gradually diverge to a point where the differences preclude cross-fertilization and a new species is created. It is thus the *relative* isolation of wildflowers, say, as compared with birds, that accounts for the greater local speciation among wildflowers.