

Introduction

CLIFFORD GEERTZ IS ONE OF THE FOREMOST figures in the reconfiguration of the boundary between the social sciences and the humanities for the second half of the twentieth century. Drawing on his own background in philosophy and literary studies, Geertz both revived and transformed the anthropological concept of culture in such a way as to make evident its relevance to a range of humanistic disciplines. At the same time, in insisting that human social life is a matter of meaningful activity only very imperfectly studied through the objectifying methods of (certain kinds of) science, he constructed an important alternative to the then-ascendant scientism of the social sciences, an alternative that continues to grow in influence in virtually every social science discipline to this day. As a result of all this—making visible the shared ways of thinking between anthropology and the humanities, on the one hand, and offering the social sciences a powerful alternative to the seemingly irresistible juggernaut of (a certain kind of) science on the other—Geertz's work in turn had the effect of radically repositioning the field of anthropology itself, moving it from a rather exotic and specialized corner of intellectual life to a much more central location.

At the same time, and unsurprisingly in the case of work as ambitious and important as Geertz's, his theoretical position has drawn a great deal of criticism almost from the outset. Attacked by the positivists for being too interpretive, by the critical studies scholars as being too politically and ethically neutral, and finally by the interpretivists (themselves products of the Geertzian revolution) as being too invested in a certain concept of culture, Geertz has frequently gotten it from all sides.

There were several motivations for producing this special issue of *Representations*, and for the particular form it has taken. I knew that Geertz was beginning to think about retirement from his professorship at the Institute for Advanced Study, and it seemed to me that the occasion could not be allowed to pass without some sort of celebration, something in the manner of the classic *Festschrift*. At the same time it seemed more interesting to bring together scholars whose work showed the range of impact (and transformation) of Geertz's work than to yield to the classic *Festschrift* impulse toward genealogical completeness (which often produces rather chaotic results in any event).¹ The inspiration for the particular form the project took came when I joined the editorial board of *Representations*, a journal founded by Stephen Greenblatt and colleagues who were developing the form of literary interpretation that came to be known as the New Historicism.² As

Greenblatt remarks in this volume, his work was influenced by Geertz's writings, not so much by the turn to "interpretation," which was after all not so radical in literary criticism, as by the ways in which Geertz's ("literary") approach to ethnography provided a way of opening up other cultural worlds that would work for a literary critic as well.

Representations thus seemed the perfect forum in which to reappraise Geertz's work across disciplines and across the work of a subset of anthropologists actively engaged, pro and con, with questions of "culture." The issue thus includes work by four anthropologists (myself, Lila Abu-Lughod, George E. Marcus, and Renato I. Rosaldo Jr.), as well as a literary critic (Stephen Greenblatt), a historian (Natalie Zemon Davis), and a historian-turned-sociologist-turned-political scientist (William H. Sewell Jr.).³

Before going on, a few words are in order about the absence from the volume of work from the interdisciplinary arena of "cultural studies." Cultural studies is notoriously difficult to define, in part because it is so broad in intellectual scope, and in part because it underwent fairly radical transformation as it crossed the Atlantic from Great Britain to the United States. My own interest would have been in the early (1970s) British form, where cultural work was embedded in both social history—for example, the work of E. P. Thompson and Raymond Williams—and a concern for social and political developments in the contemporary world—for example, Paul Willis's already classic *Learning to Labor*, or the work of Stuart Hall.⁴ More recent, and mostly American, versions of cultural studies have been largely focused on media or "public culture" analysis and, despite some partially answered calls for ethnographic work on "reception," have tended to maintain a primarily textual focus. Moreover, almost none of this work sees itself as engaging with the Geertzian revolution or with cultural anthropology, which also tended to disqualify it for present purposes. At the same time, Lila Abu-Lughod, in her paper on women and television in Egypt, provides a valuable critical overview of some of this literature and, more important, offers a model of how to do work on public culture in an ethnographically deep and complex way.⁵

Cultural studies aside, however, the papers collected here present quite a powerful array of commentary on the significance of Geertz as a cultural theorist, an ethnographer, and a moral philosopher, and at the same time they construct a set of openings toward the future. In this brief introduction I will address a few of what seem to me the most significant issues as these appear in variously clustering subgroups of the papers. First, I consider how one or another of the papers speaks to two broad sets of criticism of Geertz's work: the positivist critique and the political critique. Second, I consider how they address the question posed by the title of this book: The Fate of "Culture." Although all of these are live issues, the sequence of discussion in this introduction also roughly represents the chronological sequence of criticism over the past thirty-five or so years.⁶

Geertz as Realist and Scientist

Geertz argued that “culture” must be seen as the “webs of meaning” within which people live, meaning encoded in symbolic forms (language, artifacts, etiquette, rituals, calendars, and so on) that must be understood through acts of interpretation analogous to the work of literary critics.⁷ He explicitly posed this interpretive, humanistic approach against a variety of kinds of reductionist and objectivist work that had become dominant in the 1940s and especially the 1950s in anthropology and the other social sciences. Not surprisingly, then, the first (and still continuing in many quarters) attack on Geertz came from positivists of various stripes, who viewed him as carrying anthropology into some abyss of uncontrolled subjectivism, nominalism, and constructionism.

Without reviewing these discussions here (see the essay by William Sewell in this volume for a valuable overview of these and other critiques), what is worth remarking in the present collection is the surprising degree to which Geertz comes across as committed to some form of recognizably “scientific” endeavor. Of course, “science” means many things, but here are a few examples. Against the claim that Geertz’s cultural constructionism represents a repudiation of a commitment to the materiality of the world, Sewell calls attention to Geertz’s careful laying out of an objective, materialist, evolutionary grounding of his entire theory of culture in the little-read paper “The Growth of Culture and the Evolution of Mind.”⁸ Coming from a very different direction, George Marcus argues that Geertz’s commitment to a certain kind of ethnographic objectivism, despite his interpretive methods that may seem so counterscientific to some, played a major role in limiting the effect of certain insights in his work. Marcus demonstrates that Geertz had all the ingredients for making the reflexive critique that came together (and in which Marcus himself was a major player) in the 1980s but pulled back from this critique because of his commitment to the “historic anthropological project . . . in the line, for example, of Johann Gottfried von Herder, Franz Boas, Margaret Mead, and Ruth Benedict.” Although Marcus, perhaps intentionally, never specifies this project, it is clear that objectivism—the externality of the anthropologist vis-à-vis the culture studied and the claims of objectivity of the ethnographic account—is central to it.

Stephen Greenblatt also addresses the issue of objectivity, discussing at length the importance of the ethnographically “real” in Geertz’s work. As Greenblatt puts it, Geertz’s “insistence on narrative and on textuality helps to justify the appeal to techniques of literary analysis, but it is not quite the same as an insistence that ‘there is nothing outside the text.’” The fact that Geertz as ethnographer made truth claims about the real world was for Greenblatt central to the attraction of his work: “It is a tribute to Geertz that it was not his method that seemed powerful to me . . . but rather the lived life that he managed so well to narrate,

describe, and clarify. That lived life, at once raw and subtle, coarse and complex, was the thing that had been progressively refined out of the most sophisticated literary studies.”

Whether or not Geertz appears relatively objectivist, even scientific in a certain sense, is no doubt related to the larger intellectual context. Against the growing scientism of the fifties, Geertz, with his literary style, references, and method, looked terribly “soft.” But against certain trends in contemporary intellectual life (one thinks particularly of the work of Jean Baudrillard) that have gone much further in, as Greenblatt says, refining the real out of theory, Geertz begins to appear very much committed to the reality of the world, however much he insists—correctly, of course—on its symbolic mediation.

The Ethics and Politics of and in Geertz’s Work

Starting in the 1970s, questions of power have become central to contemporary scholarship. Geertz seems to have stood apart from that trend. For the most part, as I discuss in my paper, one will not find issues of gender asymmetry, racial discrimination, colonial domination, ethnic violence, and so on in Geertz’s work. Going further, Geertz has been accused of maintaining a relatively detached and “disengaged” stance vis-à-vis the problems of power and violence in the contemporary world.⁹

It is certainly the case that Geertz does not put issues of power and domination at the center of his interpretations and that this puts him sometimes startlingly out of phase with work based in feminist, or minority, or postcolonial theory.¹⁰ If one looks back at the fieldnote about Cohen and the sheep that Geertz uses as the basis for his discussion of “thick description,” for example, one may feel that it cries out for a more hard-edged interpretation than Geertz gives it.¹¹ The note describes a series of encounters between a Jewish trader named Cohen, some Berber tribesmen, and a French colonial official. Several people are killed, and in the end Cohen is unjustly jailed by the French, who also confiscate his sheep. Yet Geertz’s discussion of the episode is in terms of a “confusion of tongues” and a “clash of cultures” that never significantly engages with the power differentials in play.

Yet to say that Geertz does not engage in nineties-style feminist or Foucauldian or postcolonial analysis (and in all fairness, the discussion of Cohen and the sheep was written at a much more innocent moment of anthropology more generally) is not to say either that he is “disengaged” or that his work does not contain some important implications for the politics of and in anthropology (and beyond). A few words on each point.

Concerning the issue of engagement, first, I think I myself rather casually

shared the view, based perhaps on his frequently ironic style of writing, that Geertz's stance toward what he studied was relatively cool and disengaged. I was thus fascinated as the editor of this volume to see paper after paper describing Geertz as a passionate thinker and writer with a range of strong moral and ethical purposes. William Sewell makes the useful distinction between addressing "current social problems" à la Margaret Mead, which Geertz does not do, and addressing "issues of social and moral philosophy," à la Ruth Benedict, which he does do. George Marcus specifically notes the combination of playfulness and deep commitment in Geertz's writing and provides some extraordinary quotes on the wrenching disorientation of personal relationships in fieldwork from Geertz's little-read article "Thinking as a Moral Act."¹²

Renato Rosaldo makes the most extended case for understanding Geertz as a committed moral thinker. Rosaldo accepts Geertz's classic anthropological sense of real difference between cultures (an issue to which I will return) and explores the moral intensity that Geertz brings to articulating the need for, and the importance of anthropology in, the achievement of genuine cross-cultural understanding. Describing Geertz at one point as writing with "concentrated passion," Rosaldo goes on to say that "Geertz renders ethnographically and humanly vivid the force of his ethical vision about mutual engagement accountable to the depth and specific nature of human differences." It will be difficult in light of these discussions to sustain a view of Geertz as intellectually or ethically disengaged.

In addition, I would suggest that although Geertz's work does not address the kinds of issues that for the most part constitute "politics" in the present moment, it nonetheless offers the intellectual grounding for a position of considerable political importance. I refer here to the question of the cultural construction of "agency," of human intentionality and forms of empowerment to act.¹³ I take such a notion to be central to any understanding of the dynamics of power, yet there has been in social theory a tendency toward a relatively thin (and often ethnocentric) sense of the cultural and historical specificity of agency in given contexts of "power" and "resistance."¹⁴ What is important in Geertz's work, in turn, is that the makings are there for a culturally and philosophically rich theory of agency. From his insistence that culture must be understood "from the actor's point of view"; to his emphasis on the cultural construction of the needs, desires, and emotions that form the core of personhood in given times and places; to the central role he gives to understanding actors' intentions in the practice of "thick description"—each of these points make Geertz's work particularly productive for theorizing, or simply analytically deploying, "agency" in nonreductive ways.

Some of the possibilities of Geertzian theory for opening up issues of agency may be seen in Natalie Zemon Davis's paper, and in my own. In Davis's paper, we get rich, culturally informed portraits of a seventeenth-century Jewish trader and a rabbi. We see the ways in which they pursue their lives with great consciousness and self-awareness with respect to money, prestige, moral decisions, relation-

ships with relatives and enemies, and the intertwining of all these. Davis argues that these complex ideas cannot be reduced to some simple “ethic” in some simple causal relationship to the emergence of capitalism. Rather, they must be understood as very specific, culturally grounded forms of agency (though Davis doesn’t use the term) and intentionality.

My own paper concerns the relationship between Sherpas and international mountaineers on Himalayan climbing expeditions in the context of the ever-present possibility of sudden death on the mountains. The mountaineers control the terms of the expeditions, but the Sherpas mobilize a variety of cultural forms to manipulate the mountaineers and gain some measure of both real and supernatural protection. The analysis is grounded in several Geertzian interpretive strategies adapted for understanding the cultural construction of “agency,” which in turn is placed in the service of reaching a more complex understanding of “power” and “resistance.”

It may be suggested that the visibility of Geertz’s ethical passion and the relevance of his work for a more overtly political agenda are, like his “objectivism” and commitment to some sort of recognizable scientific project, very much matters of figure and ground. In an earlier cultural and political context, the ethical significance of Geertz’s (and anthropology’s) commitment to cross-cultural understanding and translation was both more visible and more appreciated than it is now, a point to which I will return below.

The Fate of “Culture”

Clifford Geertz’s major contribution to anthropology, and through that to the wider reconfiguration of social theory, was centered on his retheorization of the concept of “culture.” This retheorization had two very closely interlocked dimensions—an ontological one (what culture *is*) and an epistemological one (how we can know it). To define culture as a system of meanings embodied in symbols is to say not only that it is, as anthropology had long claimed, a system of world-views, values, and so forth (“meanings”), but also that one gains access to it not through some act of mystical empathy with informants, but through the (recording and) interpretation of the publicly available forms in which it is encoded (the “symbols”). One way to think about the “fate of culture” in the present moment is to consider the possibility that these two dimensions, the ontological and the epistemological, are coming apart.

As Geertz himself has recently noted, the epistemological revolution has been enormously successful: what has been called among other things “the interpretive turn” has “proved a proper revolution: sweeping, durable, turbulent, and consequential.”¹⁵ The ontological claims are suffering quite a different fate. As Geertz

notes at another point in the same essay, the concept of culture, up to and including his redefinition of it, has come under enormous attack. He is worth quoting at length on this:

Questions rained down, and continue to rain down, on the very idea of a cultural scheme. Questions about the coherence of life-ways, the degree to which they form connected wholes. Questions about their homogeneity, the degree to which everyone in a tribe, a community, or even a family (to say nothing of a nation or a civilization) shares similar beliefs, practices, habits, feelings. Questions about the discreteness, the possibility of specifying where one culture . . . leaves off and the next . . . begins. Questions about continuity and change, objectivity and proof, determinism and relativism, uniqueness and generalization, description and explanation, consensus and conflict, otherness and commensurability—and about the sheer possibility of anyone, insider or outsider, grasping so vast a thing as an entire way of life and finding the words to describe it. Anthropology, or anyway the sort that studies cultures, proceeds amid charges of irrelevance, bias, illusion, and impracticability.¹⁶

Geertz also goes on to make clear that he stands by that idea of culture:

Everyone, everywhere and at all times, seems to live in a sense-suffused world, to be the product of what the Indonesian scholar Taufik Abdullah has nicely called a history of notion-formation. . . . one can ignore such facts, obscure them, or pronounce them forceless. But they do not thereby go away. Whatever the infirmities of the concept of “culture” (“cultures,” “cultural forms” . . .) there is nothing for it but to persist in spite of them.¹⁷

In the present collection, both Lila Abu-Lughod and George Marcus question and depart significantly from the Geertzian or by now “classic” concept of culture. Both go after the idea of culture as “contained” in a location, and/or attached to a particular group. Marcus, arguing for radically new epistemological bases and practical forms of anthropological fieldwork, criticizes the position held by Geertz and others that “the symbolic and literal domain of fieldwork takes place inside another form of life, entailing crossing a boundary into it, exploring a cultural logic of enclosed difference.” Abu-Lughod, discussing her current project on the subject of popular television in Egypt, makes much the same point: “Television is most interesting because of the way it provides material inserted into, interpreted with, and mixing up with local but themselves socially differentiated knowledges, discourses, and meaning systems. Television . . . renders more and more problematic a concept of cultures as localized communities of people suspended in shared webs of meaning.”

Several different things are going on in these critiques, and more generally in anthropological self-questioning. Perhaps the most important is precisely the attempt to reconfigure the anthropological project in relation to the study of very complex social formations—nations, transnational networks, discontinuous discourses, global “flows,” increasingly hybridized identities, and so forth. How can anthropology hold on to ethnographic work in the deepest sense—long term,

intense, linguistically competent, whole-self, participant observation—in a world of these kinds of forms and processes? What kinds of relationship(s) can/may/should obtain between the resolute localness and face-to-faceness of ethnographic work and the vastness, complexity, and especially non- or a-localness of such formations?¹⁸ The suggestion here is that “culture” in the traditional anthropological and upgraded Geertzian sense is simply less and less relevant to the contemporary world.

A different source of skittishness about the idea of “culture” as a deeply sedimented essence attaching to or inhering in particular groups of people emerges from a variety of issues surrounding colonialism and postcolonialism. While, as Abu-Lughod discusses, “the notion of having a culture, or being a culture, has become politically crucial to many communities previously labeled ‘cultures’ by anthropologists,” at the same time many ethnic groups, and many contemporary postcolonial intellectuals, react very strongly against being studied as specimens of cultural difference and otherness. It is in relation to this concern, among others, that both Marcus and Abu-Lughod seek to construct projects in which informants are not understood as representatives of “other cultures” (even when, in some conventional sense, they are), and in which the anthropologist is instead, as Marcus puts it, “complicit” with his or her informants in a variety of ways.

Without denying the profound and far-reaching importance of this critique, I would suggest nonetheless that the issue is not so much one of either banishing the concept of culture, or insisting (even if one agrees with Geertz, as I do, that culture is real and will not go away) on an unreconstructed “classic” ethnographic project. Rather the issue is, once again, one of reconfiguring this enormously productive concept for a changing world, a changing relationship between politics and academic life, and a changing landscape of theoretical possibilities. Specifically, at least the following imperatives for rethinking and reconfiguring “culture” in the contemporary moment are suggested by work inside and outside this volume:

(1) To the move to reduce difference and create complicity, add the move to exoticize and objectify the culture of the ethnographer, placing it in the same analytic frame. An example in this collection would be my own piece, examining the history of encounters in Himalayan mountaineering between Western mountaineers (who appear rather “savage” in this account, insisting, for example, on slaughtering animals for meat on expeditions) and Buddhist Sherpas (not exactly nonviolent themselves, but who have a profound aversion to killing). More generally, and as Renato Rosaldo has argued elsewhere, welcome the ethnographies and histories of “borderlands,” of zones of friction (or worse) between “cultures,” in which the clash of power and meaning and identities is the stuff of change and transformation.¹⁹ In other words, maintain a strong presumption of cultural difference, but make it do new kinds of work.

(2) Emphasize the issue of meaning-making in Geertz (and others), as against the notion of cultural “systems.” The question of meaning-making is central to

questions of power and its effects. The idea that symbolic constructions of meaning are actively made by real historical actors was always visible in Geertz's work with respect to issues of political ideology.²⁰ Abu-Lughod's paper, in which she examines the ways in which Egyptian television programs, made by self-consciously "feminist" urban women, are received and reinterpreted by women in rural village settings, discusses several important complexities in the issue of the relatively self-conscious construction and transformation of meaning.

But there is another side to the question of meaning-making, signaled particularly by Geertz's discussions in "Religion as a Cultural System." There Geertz presents a portrait of human beings as vulnerable creatures who need "meaning," in the sense of order and purpose and reason, in order to survive, that is, in order to grapple with the threat (and sometimes the reality) of chaos and evil. One can push the implications of this point to get beyond the foregrounded discussion of religions as ready-made systems of meaning awaiting interpretation to the more backgrounded point that people are spinning what Geertz called "webs of meaning" all the time, with whatever cultural resources happen to be at hand. Thus, even if culture(s) were never as whole and consistent and static as anthropologists portrayed them in the past, and even if, as many thinkers now claim, there are fewer and fewer in the way of distinct and recognizable "cultures" in the contemporary world (though I am less sure about that), the fundamental assumption that people are always trying to make sense of their lives, always weaving fabrics of meaning, however fragile and fragmentary, still holds. The works of anthropologists who study very poor people or victims of overwhelming violence make it clear that the meaning-making process is of the most profound importance in these circumstances—without it there is rage, dissociation, madness.²¹

(3) As a general rule, situate cultural analysis within and, as it were, beneath larger analyses of social and political events and processes. Cultural analysis can no longer, for the most part, be an end in itself. The production of portraits of other cultures, no matter how well drawn, is in a sense no longer a major option, for the myriad reasons that Geertz summarizes so trenchantly in the passages quoted earlier. The point is not that there is no longer anything we would call "culture" or even "cultures," but that we want cultural interpretation to do different kinds of work. This is where the question of embedding cultural analysis within other kinds of questions and projects comes in.

This embedding is fundamental to a certain kind of cultural history, which William Sewall discusses theoretically, and which Natalie Zemon Davis and Stephen Greenblatt illustrate in practice. It is worth spending a little time on it here, as I take the historians' move(s) with culture to be paradigmatic of a more generalizable enterprise, beyond the fields of history and New Historicist literary criticism. The point is that there is always a story to be told, a story of struggle and change, a story in which actors are differentially situated with respect to power and have differential intentions. "Culture" is the means of understanding the "imaginative

worlds” (as Greenblatt calls them) within which these actors operate, the forms of power and agency they are able to construct, the kinds of desires they are able to form, and so forth. The point, as noted earlier in the discussion of agency, is already implicit in Geertz’s work, but it becomes explicit in the hands of the historians and New Historicist literary critics like Greenblatt: Culture is not an aesthetic object but the grounds of action and the stakes of action, with real outcomes in the real world and with powerful representations in literature, drama, and art.

The studies of cultural history may be organized in a variety of ways. We may think of them as having, in Sewell’s phrase, a “synchronic moment,” a space in which the cultural underpinnings of the drama are teased out, before they are put into motion. Yet this need not be the case. A cultural historian’s work can be fully synchronic (as Sewell also illustrates), can appear deceptively like a static ethnography of a “culture,” yet there is always a difference because historians collectively understand the narrative surrounding the text, the before-and-after that produces and is produced by the lines of force and conceptual structures in the text.

Consider the two examples of this interpretive strategy that appear in this collection. Stephen Greenblatt, first, examines two texts of ghostly apparitions in seventeenth-century England, the first from a deposition to a Yorkshire magistrate by an ordinary man who saw a ghost and fainted, the second from the first act of Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, when the King’s ghost appears to Horatio and others on the battlements of Elsinore Castle. Greenblatt’s main intention is to illustrate the ways in which the ethnographic-like text and the literary text may be used to illuminate one another, to bring out the shapes of the events within which—given a certain “imaginative universe”—such apparitions tended to appear, the kinds of terror and wonder they produced, the kinds of language in which people talked about them, and so forth. This then is the synchronic moment of the paper. But the cultural analysis is embedded in a larger narrative, which Greenblatt introduces at several points along the way, in this case a narrative of both official state interest in (claims of) ghostly happenings throughout the seventeenth century (which explains why such depositions were being taken down in the first place) and the “continuing, passionate debate . . . about the reality of spectral visitation” that went on in other quarters as well, and that wove in and out of larger political events. The analysis thus moves beyond its immediate contexts to open up the cultural underpinnings of intense and violent social and political conflict in that era.

Natalie Zemon Davis, similarly, addresses several seventeenth century texts: the autobiography of a Jewish woman trader and the biography of a rabbi. She too seeks to illuminate the conceptual and affective underpinnings of a particular local world, in the manner of a classic cultural interpretation. But once again the move has different effects because it is embedded within a narrative (in fact several) of power, difference, and change. Like Greenblatt, Davis appreciates the insight gained through Geertzian interpretation, the ways in which (for example) his dis-

cussion of the Moroccan *souq* (market) takes one into the richness and specificity of economic behavior in some real place and time. Like Greenblatt, too, Davis does not spell out all the narratives within which her characters and their thinking are embedded, narratives that give the cultural interpretation a larger political and historical import. Yet various parts of her discussion point precisely toward those larger narratives: the early emergence of capitalism (to be understood in a more complex—“ethnographic and comparative”—way than in the theories of Werner Sombart and Max Weber); and the precarious situation of even wealthy and successful Jews in the seventeenth century and beyond.

“The historic turn” need not, of course, be set in the past.²² My point here is that the historians’ move of embedding cultural interpretation within larger (represented or implied) narratives of social and political existence—of people both gripped by circumstances and transforming them—is another way of making culture do the kinds of work it does best: illuminating the complex motives and complex debates that are the stuff of real lives and struggles. We can see the same moves in various recent works in anthropology and other social sciences, some of which are set in the past, but others of which simply narrativize the present through a frame of struggle and conflict with outcomes that matter.²³

What I am trying to say is that the fate of “culture” will depend on its uses. The classic ethnography (which Geertz did, along with theory, so brilliantly) no longer carries the kind of epistemological/ethical import—the opening of difference to sympathetic cross-cultural understanding—it once did. “Culture,” if it is to continue to be understood as a vital part of the social process, must be located and examined in very different ways: as the clash of meanings in borderlands; as public culture that has its own textual coherence but is always locally interpreted; as fragile webs of story and meaning woven by vulnerable actors in nightmarish situations; as the grounds of agency and intentionality in ongoing social practice. All of these issues continue to assume, however, a fundamentally Geertzian view of human social life: meaning-laden, meaning-making, intense, and real.

Notes

Deepest thanks to Tim Taylor and Bill Sewell for speedy and thoughtful readings of this introduction, including both valuable editorial comments and general positive support.

1. As Clifford Geertz explains in *After the Fact: Two Countries, Four Decades, One Anthropologist* (Cambridge, Mass., 1995), chap. 5, he spent relatively little of his career in graduate departments of anthropology. He thus did not produce a large number of students, though most of the students he did train have gone on to distinguished careers: Karen Blu, James Boon, Dale Eickelman, Paul Rabinow, Lawrence Rosen, James Siegel. There are no doubt others as well; sincere apologies to anyone inadvertently omitted.

Sincere apologies also to Robert Darnton. Darnton should certainly be repre-

sented in this collection but, due to various compounding errors on my part, intersecting with his own impossible schedule, this turned out to be impossible. Darnton's is among the very important works in historical studies that have been influenced by Geertz and that was instrumental in launching a new genre of cultural history in the seventies and eighties; see, for example, his prizewinning *The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History* (New York, 1984).

2. I have since moved to Columbia University and am no longer on the Board.
3. Of the group, only I was Geertz's student in a formal sense. A few personal notes may be in order here. Geertz was already legendary by the time I came to the University of Chicago Department of Anthropology in the early sixties. The dittoed manuscript version of what became one of the founding essays of Geertzian anthropology, "Religion as a Cultural System," was circulating hotly among the graduate students during my first year. Yet Geertz did not actually become my advisor until my third year at Chicago, when he agreed by mail from Morocco to take me on. We had very little face-to-face contact as advisor/advisee; he was in Morocco when I was finishing course work, then I was in the field in Nepal, then he was in Princeton deciding whether to take the offer at the Institute for Advanced Study when I came back from the field. It took me a while to realize just how deeply imprinted I was with his perspective(s), in part through his own direct influence, but even more through the impact his thinking had had on the graduate program at Chicago, and how heavily the Chicago graduate program in turn imposed itself (and still does, I think, though of course with other influences) on its students.
 He was an ideal advisor, certainly for me. He was generous (in the double sense of kind and copious) with his comments on my dissertation but never—as far as I can recall—insisted on any particular changes. He has maintained this combination, throughout my career, of being fundamentally supportive without demanding great shows of intellectual loyalty, for which I am deeply appreciative.
4. See E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London, 1963); Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford, 1977); Paul Willis, *Learning to Labor: How Working Class Kids Get Working Class Jobs* (New York, 1981); and Stuart Hall, "Cultural Studies: Two Paradigms," in Nicholas B. Dirks, Geoff Eley, and Sherry B. Ortner, eds., *Culture/Power/History: A Reader in Contemporary Social Theory* (Princeton, 1995).
5. One further absence. One of the UC Press readers noted that there is very little discussion of Geertz as an ethnographer, both in the essays and (therefore) in this introduction. This is true, and raises many interesting questions, but these must be saved for some other occasion.
6. See Sherry B. Ortner, "Theory in Anthropology Since the Sixties," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 26, no. 1 (1984): 126–66, for an overview of anthropological theory that begins with the Geertzian revolution in the sixties.
7. His position is first laid out in various essays that began coming out in the sixties, later collected in Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York, 1973).
8. Clifford Geertz, "The Growth of Culture and the Evolution of Mind," in *ibid*.
9. Nancy Scheper-Hughes, review of *After the Fact*, by Clifford Geertz, *New York Times Book Review*, 7 May 1995.
10. It is worth noting, however, that Geertz has always seemed to me astonishingly nonsexist as a teacher and adviser. On this matter he reverses the more usual relationship between the talk and the walk.

11. Clifford Geertz, "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture," in *Interpretation of Cultures*.
12. Clifford Geertz, "Thinking as a Moral Act," *Antioch Review* 28, no. 2 (1968):139–58.
13. See Sherry B. Ortner, "Making Gender: Toward a Feminist, Minority, Postcolonial, Subaltern, etc., Theory of Practice," in *Making Gender: The Politics and Erotics of Culture* (Boston, 1996).
14. Sherry B. Ortner, "Resistance and the Problem of Ethnographic Refusal," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 37, no. 1 (1995):173–93.
15. Geertz, *After the Fact*, 115.
16. *Ibid.*, 43. 17. *Ibid.*; ellipses in original.
18. See especially George E. Marcus, "Ethnography in/of the World System: The Emergence of Multi-Sited Ethnography," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 24 (1995):95–117; Arjun Appadurai, "Global Ethnoscapes: Notes and Queries for a Transnational Anthropology," in *Recapturing Anthropology: Working in the Present*, ed. Richard G. Fox (Santa Fe, N. Mex., 1991).
19. See, e.g., Renato I. Rosaldo Jr., "Border Crossings," in his *Culture and Truth: The Remaking of Social Analysis* (Boston, 1989).
20. Clifford Geertz, "Ideology as a Cultural System," in *The Interpretation of Cultures*.
21. E.g., José Limón, *Dancing with the Devil: Society and Cultural Poetics in Mexican-American South Texas* (Madison, Wis., 1994); and E. Valentine Daniel, *Charred Lullabies: Chapters in an Anthropography of Violence* (Princeton, 1996).
22. Terrence McDonald, *The Historic Turn in the Human Sciences* (Ann Arbor, Mich., 1996); see also Dirks, Eley, and Ortner, *Culture/Power/History*.
23. Examples of such work set in the past include Marshall Sahlins, *Islands of History* (Chicago, 1985); Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff, *Ethnography and the Historical Imagination* (Boulder, Colo., 1992); Sherry B. Ortner, *High Religion: A Cultural and Political History of Sherpa Buddhism* (Princeton, 1989). Examples of works that narrativize the present include, e.g., Faye D. Ginsburg, *Contested Lives: The Abortion Debate in an American Community* (Berkeley, 1989); Jonathan Rieder, *Carnarsie: The Jews and Italians of Brooklyn Against Liberalism* (Cambridge, Mass., 1985); Stephen Gregory, *Black Corona: Race, Class, and the Politics of Place* (Princeton, 1998).