

Editorial Foreword

The Powers of the Written Word. Words sometimes seem to have a life of their own, but like fungi their vitality depends less on the object to which they are attached than on the atmosphere surrounding them. Recognizing that, much of modern cultural analysis is preoccupied with meanings not explicit and with the nearly invisible spores carried on cultural winds. Words and language are probed to reveal the controlling effects of the discourse (no word is more frequently, or elastically, employed in current discourse on culture) that contains them, with scholarly innovation and excitement stimulated by a fruitful concept burdened with few guidelines as to how or where to look for it. The articles in this section search in distinctive ways. Patrick Wolfe, pondering the power of language in nationalism and the dominance of colonial culture, follows the reflexive curve of discourse back to anthropological writing on Australian aborigines. The intellectual history of a memorable phrase reveals the threads of European thought from which it was composed and then the functions of dominance which it served and which nourished its appeal (compare Prakash, in *CSSH*, 32:2; Linke, in 32:1; Sider, 29:1, Clifford, 23:4, and Barnes, 2:2). The dreaming thought to describe the myth of one indigenous people blossomed with mistranslation and metaphor into another, European myth about the land and people of the entire continent before the white man came. R. W. Niezen tests theories about the impact of literacy (see Goody and Watt, 5:3) by comparing English Lollards and Islamic reformers in West Africa (note Goldberg's comparison of Calvinists and Islamic reformers, 33:1). In these two cultures of the book, the defense of orthodoxy depended not on the extent of literacy but on institutional constraints as to how writing was used. Niezen's subtle dissection of communication includes education, commerce, state, religious authority, and formal and popular culture to explain the reach of potentially heretical words (see Eickelman, 20:4; Ewald, 30:2; Fuller, 30:2).

Civil Wrongs. Modern accounts of bludgeoning authorities face a double challenge: If they can overcome the numbness that familiarity has bred, they must override an outrage that eschews analysis. The articles here, which discuss governments that are scarcely the worst the century has known, meet that challenge by exploring the tools of repression. Christopher Merrett and Roger Gravil use the legal categories of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, concepts that recently demonstrated a political weight east of the Berlin Wall which was not expected by hard-headed students of power. Merrett and Gavil's list of abuses in South Africa and in Argentina is appalling not just for the range, systematic quality, and intrusive pettiness it reveals but for the legal formalisms on which repression rested. Yet their comparison of two countries on two continents contains a note of hope. In its drive for control, the coercive state exceeds the rules it has just contrived, is itself destabilizing and subversive (compare Mouzelis, 28:1; Katz, 24:3). Meanwhile, the for-

malities violated and traditions hypocritically invoked propose an alternative standard and a basis for rebuilding. Fernando Coronil and Julie Skurski concentrate on state violence in itself, not so much as a measure of inhumanity or a revealing expression of the human psyche as a cultural form (compare Wickham-Crowley, 32:2; Taussig, 26:3). An imposed culture with its own emplotment and symbolic vocabulary, it absorbs and uses the myths and symbols around it (see Levine, 32:4; Diacon, Foley, and Martin, all in 32:3; Edwards and Seligmann, both in 31:4). Its achievement is fatal alienation embedded in ordinary experience. Violence in Venezuela provided a stage for reenacting history; yet the creation of a threatening Other can amplify voices that were supposed to be stilled. The importance of symbols, even manipulated ones, extends beyond the reach of power.

State Economic Policy and Social Division. England and France in the old regime provide one of the classics of comparison, central to arguments about the making of the modern state and the establishment of representative government, to interpretations of the French Revolution, and to explanations for industrialization (Markoff, 32:3; Goldstone, 30:1; Appleby, 20:2; Skocpol, 18:2). On this well-explored topic, Hilton Root has something fresh to say. In both nations, he argues, the relationship between new wealth and old aristocracy was crucial (compare Forster and Litchfield, 7:4); in both, state policy largely set the terms of that relationship, which in turn shaped contrasting political cultures—an English one dominated by a homogenous, compromising elite that articulated national goals and a French one in which clan-like factions competed in terms of abstract rights. Java has similarly held a privileged place in the literature on traditional cultures, economic development, and colonial practice (Mackie and O'Malley, 30:4; Evers, 29:4; Palmier, 2:2). Jennifer Alexander and Paul Alexander, however, suggest a radical reassessment of that literature by looking first at its assumptions and then some economic evidence. The ethnic stratification, communal values, and passive resistance to change that have stimulated so much cultural analysis may have been more new than changeless, the effect less of tradition than the policies of a colonial state that allocated land, controlled trade, and regulated commerce (compare Stoler, 33:1, and Lawson, 32:4). Such effects are not limited to modern history. Ricardo Godoy uses Andean archaeology to reconsider common-field agriculture. Instead of the usual discussion, evocative of communal living and precapitalist society, he emphasizes ecology and a more global perspective (note Biddick and Melville, both in 32:1). Applying familiar institutions in a new environment, the Spanish colonial state moved in directions similar to those of its Andean predecessors; the common-field system apparently required a certain technology, the right demographic density, and a state. While attending to other purposes, it was the state—that institutional collection of interests with interests of its own—that shaped the relations between landless and landlord; Dutch, Chinese, and Javanese; financiers and aristocrats.