CHAPTER FOUR

False Consciousness or Laying It on Thick?

On the one hand, a socio-economic space organized by an immemorial struggle between “the powerful” and “the poor,” presented itself as the field of constant victories by the rich and the police, but also as the reign of mendacity (there, no truth is said, except in whispers and among the peasants: “Agora a gente sabe, mas nao pode dizer alto”). In this space the strong always win and words always deceive.

—MICHEL DE CERTEAU, *La Pratique du Quotidien*

The powerful, as we have seen, have a vital interest in keeping up the appearances appropriate to their form of domination. Subordinates, for their part, ordinarily have good reasons to help sustain those appearances or, at least, not openly to contradict them. Taken together, these two social facts have, I believe, important consequences for the analysis of power relations. In what follows, I examine how the concepts of the public and hidden transcript can help us to a more critical view of the various debates swirling around the troubled terms, false consciousness and hegemony. A combination of adaptive strategic behavior and the dialogue implicit in most power relations ensures that public action will provide a constant stream of evidence that appears to support an interpretation of ideological hegemony. This interpretation may not be mistaken, but I will argue that it cannot be sustained on the basis of the evidence usually presented and that, in the cases I am examining, there are other good reasons for doubting this interpretation. I conclude with a brief analysis of how forms of domination generate certain rituals of affirmation, certain forms of public conflict, and, finally, certain patterns of profanation and defiance. Throughout, my aim is to clarify the analysis of domination in a way that avoids “naturalizing” existing power relations and that is attentive to what may lie beneath the surface.

The Interpretation of Quiescence

Much of the debate about power and ideology for three decades or more has centered on how to interpret conforming behavior by the less powerful (for
example, ordinary citizens, the working class, peasants) when there is no apparent use of coercion (for example, violence, threats) to explain that conformity. Why, in other words, do people seem to knuckle under when they appear to have other options? In North America, the arguments about the reasons for quiescence are to be found in what is known as the community power literature based on local studies demonstrating relatively low levels of political participation despite marked inequalities and a relatively open political system. In continental Europe and England the arguments have been conducted on a larger social terrain and in largely neo-Marxist terms employing Gramsci's concept of hegemony. Here, the attempt is to explain the relative political quiescence of the Western working class despite the continuing provocation of inequities under capitalism and access to the political remedies that might be provided by parliamentary democracy. Why, in other words, does a subordinate class seem to accept or at least to consent to an economic system that is manifestly against its interests when it is not obliged to by the direct application of coercion or the fear of its application? Each of these debates, I should add, begins with several assumptions, any one of which might plausibly be contested. Each assumes that the subordinate group is, in fact, relatively quiescent, that it is relatively disadvantaged, and that it is not directly coerced. We will, for the sake of argument, accept all three assumptions.

With the exception of the pluralist position in the community power debate, virtually all other positions explain the anomaly by reference to a dominant or hegemonic ideology. Precisely what this ideology is, how it is created, how it is propagated, and what consequences it has is hotly contested. Most of the disputants, however, agree that while the dominant ideology does not entirely exclude the interests of subordinate groups, it operates to conceal or misrepresent aspects of social relations that, if apprehended directly, would


be damaging to the interests of dominant elites.\(^3\) Since any theory that purports to demonstrate a misrepresentation of social reality must, by definition, claim some superior knowledge of what that social reality is, it must be, in this sense, a theory of false consciousness. Simplifying things greatly, I believe we can discern a thick and a thin version of false consciousness. The thick version claims that a dominant ideology works its magic by persuading subordinate groups to believe actively in the values that explain and justify their own subordination. Evidence against this thick theory of mystification is pervasive enough to convince me that it is generally untenable\(^4\)—particularly so for systems of domination such as serfdom, slavery, and untouchability, in which consent and civil rights hardly figure even at the rhetorical level. The thin theory of false consciousness, on the other hand, maintains only that the dominant ideology achieves compliance by convincing subordinate groups that the social order in which they live is natural and inevitable. The thick theory claims consent; the thin theory settles for resignation. In its most subtle form, the thin theory is eminently plausible and, some would claim, true by definition. I believe, nevertheless, that it is fundamentally wrong and hope to show why in some detail after putting it in as persuasive a form as possible, so that it is no straw man I am criticizing.

Within the community power literature, the debate is essentially between pluralists and antipluralists. For the pluralists, the absence of significant protest or radical opposition in relatively open political systems must be taken as a sign of satisfaction or, at least, insufficient dissatisfaction to warrant the time and trouble of political mobilization. Antipluralists reply that the political arena is less completely open than pluralists believe and that the vulnerability of subordinate groups allows elites to control the political agenda and create effective obstacles to participation. The difficulty with the antipluralist position, as their opponents lost no time pointing out, is that it creates a kind of political Heisenberg principle. That is, if the antipluralists cannot uncover hidden grievances—grievances that the elite is presumed to have effectively banished—then how are we to know whether apparent acquiescence is genuine or repressive? An elite that did its “anti-pluralist work” effectively would thereby have eliminated any trace of the issues they had suppressed.

\(^3\) The sort of misrepresentation referred to might, for a liberal democracy, include the effects of official beliefs in equality of economic opportunity, an open, accessible political system, and what Marx called “commodity fetishism.” The effect of each belief in turn might be to stigmatize the poor as entirely responsible for their poverty, to mask the inequalities in political influence underwritten by economic power, and to misrepresent low wages or unemployment to workers as an entirely impersonal, natural (i.e., not social) occurrence.

In an attempt to sustain the antipluralist position and to clarify how issues are, in fact, banished, John Gaventa proposes a third level of power relations. The first level is the familiar and open exercise of coercion and influence. The second is intimidation and what Gaventa calls "the rule of anticipated reactions." This second effect typically arises from experience of subordination and defeat in that the relatively powerless elect not to challenge elites because they anticipate the sanctions that will be brought against them to ensure their failure. Here there is no change in values or grievances presumably, but rather an estimate of hopeless odds that discourage a challenge. The third level of power relations is more subtle and amounts to a theory of false consciousness that is both thick and thin. Gaventa claims that the power afforded to a dominant elite in the first two dimensions of power "may allow [them] further power to invest in the development of dominant images, legitimations, or beliefs about [their] power through control, for instance, of the media or other socialization institutions." The result, he claims, may well be a culture of defeat and nonparticipation such as he found in the Appalachian coal valley he studied. What is not clear is how much of the "mystification" Gaventa points to is presumed to actually change values and preferences (for example, as his term "legitimations" implies) and how much is a reinforcement of the belief in the power of dominant elites to prevail in any encounter. Nor is it apparent why such ideological investments should be convincing to subordinate groups beyond the inferences they draw from their direct experience. Gaventa, at any rate, supports both a thick theory of false consciousness and a thin theory of naturalization.

When it comes to understanding why the Western working class has apparently made an accommodation with capitalism and unequal property relations despite its political rights to mobilize, one finds, again, both thick and thin accounts of ideological hegemony. The thick version emphasizes the operation of what have been called "ideological state apparatuses," such as schools, the church, the media, and even the institutions of parliamentary democracy, which, it is claimed, exercise a near monopoly over the symbolic means of production just as factory owners might monopolize the material means of production. Their ideological work secures the active consent of subordinate groups to the social arrangements that reproduce their subordination. Put very briefly, this thick version faces two daunting criticisms.

6. This is essentially the point of the electric fence analogy in chap. 3.
7. Power and Powerlessness, 22. For a "thicker" version of this argument, see Frank Parkin, Class, Inequality and the Political Order, 79–91.
8. Not, however, without real concessions as the price of hegemony on the Gramscian view.
First, there is some rather compelling evidence that subordinate classes under feudalism, early capitalism, and late capitalism have not been ideologically incorporated to anything like the extent claimed by the theory.\(^9\) Second, and far more damaging, there is no warrant for supposing that the acceptance of a broad, idealized version of the reigning ideology prevents conflict—even violent conflict—and some evidence that such acceptance may in fact provoke conflict.\(^{10}\)

The thin theory of hegemony makes far less grandiose claims for the ideological grip of ruling elites. What ideological domination does accomplish, however, according to this version, is to define for subordinate groups what is realistic and what is not realistic and to drive certain aspirations and grievances into the realm of the impossible, of idle dreams. By persuading underclasses that their position, their life-chances, their tribulations are unalterable and inevitable, such a limited hegemony can produce the behavioral results of consent without necessarily changing people's values. Convinced that nothing can possibly be done to improve their situation and that it will always remain so, it is even conceivable that idle criticisms and hopeless aspirations would be eventually extinguished. One sympathetic and penetrating account of English working-class culture by Richard Hoggart captures the essence of this thin theory of mystification:

When people feel that they cannot do much about the main elements of their situation, feel it not necessarily with despair or disappointment or resentment but simply as a fact of life, they adopt attitudes toward that situation which allow them to have a liveable life without a constant and pressing sense of the larger situation. The attitudes move the main elements in the situation to the realm of natural laws, the given and now, the almost implacable material from which a living has to be carved. Such attitudes, at their least adorned a fatalism or plain accepting, are generally below the tragic level, they have too much of the conscript's lack of choice about them.\(^{11}\)

At one level it is simply undeniable that this account is entirely convincing. No one will doubt that the actual situation of subordinate groups throughout their

9. This criticism is best summarized in Abercrombie et al., *The Dominant Ideology Thesis*, passim.
10. Some of this evidence is summarized in my *Weapons of the Weak*, chap. 8, where I rely heavily on Barrington Moore, Jr., *Injustice: The Social Bases of Obedience and Revolt*, and Willis, *Learning to Labour*.
11. *The Uses of Literacy*, 77-78.
history has seemed an unmovable “given,” and realistically so.\textsuperscript{12} If such a claim is plausible for the contemporary working class with its political rights and its acquaintance with would-be revolutionary movements, not to mention actual revolutions, historically it should be true in a far more overwhelming way for slaves, serfs, peasants, and untouchables. As an illustration, imagine the situation of an untouchable in eighteenth-century rural India. In the collective historical experience of his or her group, there have always been castes; his caste has always been most looked down upon and exploited, and no one has ever escaped his caste—in his lifetime. Small wonder that in such circumstances the caste system and one’s status within it should take on the force of natural law. There is also no standard of comparison that can be used to find the caste system wanting, no alternative experience or knowledge to make one’s fate less than inevitable.\textsuperscript{13}

This apparently compelling, thin version of the false consciousness argument is not incompatible with a degree of distaste for, or even hatred of, the domination experienced. The claim is not that one’s fated condition is loved, only that it is here to stay whether one likes it or not. On my reading, this minimal notion of ideological domination has become almost an orthodoxy, one encountered again and again in the literature on such issues. As Pierre Bourdieu puts it, “Every established order tends to produce (to very different degrees and with very different means) the naturalization of its own arbitrariness.”\textsuperscript{14} Other formulations vary only in particulars. Thus, Anthony Giddens writes of “the naturalization of the present” in which capitalist economic structures come to be taken for granted.\textsuperscript{15} Paul Willis echoes both in claiming that “one of the most important general functions of ideology is the way in which it turns uncertain and fragile cultural resolutions and outcomes into a pervasive naturalism.”\textsuperscript{16} Quite often, however, there is an attempt to take this

\textsuperscript{12} Hoggart also implicitly asks us to agree that people do not dream much about what they are convinced they cannot have nor do they waste time railing about what they believe they cannot change. These claims are far more contestable, as we shall see later.

\textsuperscript{13} The doctrine of karma and reincarnation, the ultimate in ideologies of hegemony, promises that a conforming and humble untouchable will be rewarded by rebirth in a higher status. Justice is promised, and in an entirely mechanical fashion; it is just that the justice operates only between lifetimes, not within them.

\textsuperscript{14} \textit{Outline of a Theory of Practice}, 164.

\textsuperscript{15} \textit{Central Problems in Social Theory: Action, Structure, and Contradiction in Social Analysis}, 195.

\textsuperscript{16} \textit{Learning to Labour}, 162. Zygmunt Bauman sees hegemony as a process by which alternatives to the current structure of power and status are excluded: “The dominant culture consists of transforming everything which is not inevitable into the improbable. . . . An overrepressive society is one which effectively eliminates alternatives to itself and thereby relinquishes spectacular, dramatized displays of its power.” \textit{Socialism, the Active Utopia}, 123.
more defensible notion of hegemony and, as it were, to fatten it back up to the thick theory of false consciousness. This transmutation is accomplished by arguing—and occasionally simply asserting—that what is conceived as inevitable becomes, by that fact, just. Necessity becomes virtue. As Bourdieu puts it epigrammatically, subordinate groups manage "to refuse what is anyway refused and to love the inevitable." 17

Barrington Moore raises this same equation into something like a psychological universal, claiming that "what is or appears to human beings unavoidable must also somehow be just." 18 The logic behind this position is not unlike the logic underlying some of the earlier studies of the personality structure of American blacks. 19 It is of the "face-grows-to-fit-the-mask" variety, beginning with the need for the black in a racist society to act a role and to continuously monitor his or her behavior by the standards imposed by the dominant, that is, white, world. It is difficult if not impossible, the logic goes, for an individual constantly to act a role and to hold a view of the self apart from that role. Since, presumably, the individual has no control over the roles imposed by powerful others, whatever personality integration takes place must bring the self into line with the imposed role. 20

17. Outline of a Theory of Practice, 77. In a later work the same point is put somewhat more obscurely and it is difficult to discern whether "consent" means resignation to the inevitable or the embracing of the inevitable. He writes, "Dominated agents ... tend to attribute to themselves what the distribution attributes to them, refusing what they are refused ('That's not for the likes of us'), adjusting their expectations to their chances, defining themselves as the established order defines them, reproducing in their verdict on themselves the verdict the economy pronounces on them, condemning themselves to what is in any case their lot ... consenting to be what they have to be, 'modest,' 'humble,' and 'obscure.'" Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste, trans. Richard Nice, 471.

18. Injustice, 64.

19. For a discussion of such theories, see John D. McCarthy and William L. Yancey, "Uncle Tom and Mr. Charlie: Metaphysical Pathos in the Study of Racism and Personality Disorganization."

20. If we substitute "servility" for "friendliness" in the following quote from Nietzsche, the process being imagined is apparent: "He who always wears the mask of a friendly [servile] man must at last gain power over friendliness [servility] of disposition, without which the expression itself of friendliness [servility] is not to be gained—and finally friendliness [servility] of disposition gains the ascendency over him—he is benevolent [servile]." We will have ample reason, later, to reject this logic, but it is important to recognize the nature of the argument being made. Nietzsche implies that the mask must never be removed and that the transmutation occurs after a long, but unspecified, period. Notice also that the substitution of "servility" for "friendliness" may fundamentally change the logic. We assume that the man who "wears the mask of a friendly man" actually wishes to become genuinely friendly, whereas there is every reason to assume that the man who "wears the mask of servility" wears it because he has no choice and wishes he could discard it. In the case of servility, the principal motive that might remake a face to fit a mask may well be lacking. Quoted in Hochschild, The Managed Heart, 35, emphasis added.
A Critique of Hegemony and False Consciousness

A great many objections can be made to the case for hegemony and false consciousness. Taken singly, many of them are crippling; taken together, I believe they are fatal. Our interest, however, lies for the most part in understanding how the process of domination generates the social evidence that apparently confirms notions of hegemony. For this reason, and because lengthy critiques are available elsewhere, this critique will be brief and even schematic.  

Perhaps the greatest problem with the concept of hegemony is the implicit assumption that the ideological incorporation of subordinate groups will necessarily diminish social conflict. And yet, we know that any ideology which makes a claim to hegemony must, in effect, make promises to subordinate groups by way of explaining why a particular social order is also in their best interests. Once such promises are extended, the way is open to social conflict. How are these promises to be understood, have they been carried out, were they made in good faith, who is to enforce them? Without elaborating, it is reasonably clear that some of the most striking episodes of violent conflict have occurred between a dominant elite and a rank-and-file mass of subordinates seeking objectives that could, in principle, be accommodated within the prevailing social order. The myriad complaints voiced from all over France in the cahiers de doléances prior to the Revolution give little evidence of a desire to abolish serfdom or the monarchy. Virtually all the demands envisioned a reformed feudalism with many “abuses” rectified. But the relative modesty of the demands did not prevent—one might even say they helped stimulate—the violent actions of peasants and sansculottes that provided the social basis for the actual revolution. Similarly, what we know of the demands from the factory committees formed spontaneously throughout European Russia in 1917 leaves no doubt that what these workers sought “was to improve working conditions, not to change them” and certainly not to socialize the means of production. And yet, their revolutionary actions on behalf of reformist goals, such as an eight-hour day, an end to piecework, a minimum wage, politeness from management, cooking and toilet facilities, were the driving force behind the Bolshevik revolution. Further examples abound.  

21. See, for example, Scott, Weapons of the Weak, chap. 8, and Abercrombie, et al., The Dominant Ideology Thesis, passim.
22. We shall later have reason to ask whether these objectives are not, themselves, partly an artifact of power relations that preclude voicing more ambitious objectives.
23. Moore, Injustice, 369–70.
24. Some that come to mind are those of the German working class in the “near-revolution” after World War I and the peasantry of Morelos under Zapata in the Mexican Revolution. To put it
that the subordinate classes to be found at the base of what we historically call revolutionary movements are typically seeking goals well within their understanding of the ruling ideology. "False consciousness" subjects are quite capable, it seems, of taking revolutionary action.

Even if we were, for the sake of argument, to grant that ideological hegemony, once achieved, should contribute to the quiescence of subordinate classes, it then becomes highly questionable whether such hegemony has often prevailed. The problem with the hegemonic thesis, at least in its strong forms as proposed by some of Gramsci's successors, is that it is difficult to explain how social change could ever originate from below. If elites control the material basis of production, allowing them to extract practical conformity, and also control the means of symbolic production, thereby ensuring that their power and control are legitimized, one has achieved a self-perpetuating equilibrium that can be disturbed only by an external shock. As Willis observes, "Structuralist theories of reproduction present the dominant ideology (under which culture is subsumed) as impenetrable. Everything fits too neatly. Ideology always pre-exists and preempts any authentic criticism. There are no cracks in the billiard ball smoothness of process." Even in the relatively stable industrial democracies to which theories of hegemony were meant to apply, their strongest formulation simply does not allow for the degree of social conflict and protest that actually occurs.

If social conflict is an inconvenience for theories of hegemony as applied to contemporary societies, it is a massive, intractable contradiction when applied to the histories of peasant societies, of slavery, and of serfdom. Considering only agrarian Europe in the three centuries before the French Revolution, the proponents of hegemony or naturalization are confronted with a host of anomalous facts. What is remarkable about that period, surely, is the frequency with which peasants were seized with a sense of historical possibilities on which they acted and which, it turned out tragically, were not objectively justified. The thousands of rebellions and violent protests from Wat Tyler's Rebellion in the late fourteenth century, through the great Peasants' War in Germany, to the French Revolution are something of a monument to the tenacity of peasant aspirations in the face of what seem, in retrospect, to have been hopeless odds. As Marc Bloch put it, "A social system is characterized not only by its internal structure but also by the reactions it produces. . . . To the historian, whose task is merely to observe and explain the connections another way, what Lenin saw as "trade-union consciousness"—modest objectives pursued in this case with ferocious intensity—is very common in revolutionary situations.

25. Learning to Labour, 175.
between phenomena, agrarian revolt is as natural to the seigneurial regime as strikes, let us say, are to large scale capitalism." For slavery in North America, where the odds were even longer against rebels, surely the remarkable thing is that they occurred at all and that for every actual rebellion there were scores of plots that never came to fruition. Given the dispersion of slaves among farms with relatively few hands, the fact that they were less than one-quarter of the population, and an active surveillance, the observer does not have to assume that slaves came to believe the "unavoidable" was just in order to account for the paucity of rebellion.

If there is a social phenomenon to be explained here, it is the reverse of what theories of hegemony and false consciousness purport to account for. How is it that subordinate groups such as these have so often believed and acted as if their situations were not inevitable when a more judicious historical reading would have concluded that it was? It is not the miasma of power and thralldom that requires explanation. We require instead an understanding of a misreading by subordinate groups that seems to exaggerate their own power, the possibilities for emancipation, and to underestimate the power arrayed against them. If the elite-dominated public transcript tends to naturalize domination, it would seem that some countervailing influence manages often to denaturalize domination.

With this historical perspective in mind, we may begin to question the logic of the case made for hegemony and naturalization. The attempt to turn a thin theory of naturalization into a fat theory of hegemony seems, in my view, clearly unwarranted. Even granting the fact that subordinate groups of serfs, slaves, or untouchables have historically often had no knowledge of a social order founded on different principles, the inevitability of domination does not necessarily make it just or legitimate in their eyes. Let us instead assume that the inevitability of domination for a slave will have approximately the same status as the inevitability of the weather for the peasant. Concepts of justice and legitimacy are simply irrelevant to something that is inescapably there, like the weather. For that matter, traditional cultivators actually attempt to denaturalize even the weather by personifying it and developing a ritual repertoire designed to influence or control its course.

27. In the West Indies, where agricultural units were much larger on average, where slaves composed the vast majority of the population, and where conditions were materially worse as well, judging from the mortality rates, rebellion was far more common.
28. Traditional peasants not only denaturalize the weather. In rebellions it is common to find traditional peoples wearing charms, amulets, or reciting magic formulas they believe will make them invulnerable to the weapons of their enemies. For several examples of colonial rebellions in...
assume to be inevitable is brought into the realm of potential human control. When such efforts appear to fail, traditional cultivators, like their scientific, modern counterparts, are prone to curse the weather. They, at least, do not confound inevitability with justice.

The thin theory of naturalization is far more persuasive because it claims nothing beyond the acceptance of inevitability. It is, nevertheless, mistaken in assuming that the absence of actual knowledge of alternative social arrangements produces automatically the naturalization of the present, however hated that present may be. Consider two small feats of imagination that countless numbers of subordinate groups have historically performed. First, while the serf, the slave, and the untouchable may have difficulty imagining other arrangements than serfdom, slavery, and the caste system, they will certainly have no trouble imagining a total reversal of the existing distribution of status and rewards. The millennial theme of a world turned upside down, a world in which the last shall be first and the first last, can be found in nearly every major cultural tradition in which inequities of power, wealth, and status have been pronounced. In one form or another most folk utopias have included the central idea behind this Vietnamese folksong:

The son of the king becomes king.
The son of the pagoda caretaker knows only how to sweep with the leaves of the banyan tree.
When the people rise up,
The son of the king, defeated, will go sweep the pagoda.

These collective hidden transcripts from the fantasy life of subordinate groups are not merely abstract exercises. They are embedded, as we shall see later, in innumerable ritual practices (for example, carnival in Catholic countries, the Feast of Krishna in India, the Saturnalia in classical Rome, the water festival in Buddhist Southeast Asia), and they have provided the ideological basis of many revolts.

The second historical achievement of popular imagination is to negate the

which such denaturalization occurs, see Michael Adas, *Prophets of Rebellion: Millenarian Protest against European Colonial Order.*


existing social order. Without ever having set foot outside a stratified society, subordinate groups can, and have, imagined the absence of the distinctions they find so onerous. The famous ditty that comes to us from the English Peasants' Revolt of 1381, "When Adam delved and Eve span, who was then the gentleman," was imagining a world without aristocrats or gentry. In the fifteenth century the Taborites anticipated both a radical equality and the labor theory of value: "Princes, ecclesiastical and secular alike, and counts and knights should only possess as much as common folk, then everyone would have enough. The time will come when princes and lords will work for their daily bread." Lest one confine such leveling beliefs to the Judeo-Christian tradition with its myth of a perfect society before the Fall, note that similar leveling beliefs of religious and secular lineage may be found in most, if not all, highly stratified societies. Most traditional utopian beliefs can, in fact, be understood as a more or less systematic negation of an existing pattern of exploitation and status degradation as it is experienced by subordinate groups. If the peasantry is beset by officials collecting taxes, by lords collecting crops and labor dues, by priests collecting tithes, and by poor crops, their utopia is likely to envision a life without taxes and dues and tithes, perhaps without officials, lords, and priests, and with an abundant, self-yielding nature. Utopian thought of this kind has typically been cast in disguised or allegorical forms in part because its open declaration would be considered revolutionary. What is beyond doubt is that millennial beliefs and expectations have often provided, before the modern era, a most important set of mobilizing ideas behind large-scale rebellions when they did occur.

On the historical evidence, then, little or no basis exists for crediting either a fat theory or a thin theory of hegemony. The obstacles to resistance, which are many, are simply not attributable to the inability of subordinate groups to imagine a counterfactual social order. They do imagine both the reversal and negation of their domination, and, most important, they have acted on these values in desperation and on those rare occasions when the circumstances allowed. Given their position at the bottom of the heap, it is little wonder they should have a class interest in utopian prophesies, in imagining a radically different social order from the painful one they experience. In concrete terms, the seventeenth-century broadsheet depicting a lord serving an elegant meal to a seated peasant was bound to evoke more pleasure from the peasantry than from their social betters. And having imagined a counterfactual social order, subordinate groups do not appear to have been paralyzed by an elite-fostered

discourse intended to convince them that efforts to change their situation are hopeless. I do not by any means wish to imply that the history of peasants and slaves is a history of one quixotic adventure after another or to ignore the chilling effects a crushed insurrection certainly had. Nevertheless, since slave and peasant uprisings occur frequently enough and fail almost invariably, one can make a persuasive case that whatever misperception of reality prevails was apparently one that was more hopeful than the facts warranted. The penchant of subordinate groups to interpret rumors and ambiguous news as heralding their imminent liberation is striking, and I will examine it more closely in chapter 6.

A Paper-Thin Theory of Hegemony

What, then, is left of the theory of hegemony in this context? Very little, I believe. I do, however, want to suggest the limited and stringent conditions under which subordinate groups may come to accept, even to legitimate, the arrangements that justify their subordination.33

Ideological hegemony in cases of involuntary subordination is, I believe, likely to occur only if either of two rather stringent conditions are met. The first of these is that there exist a strong probability that a good many subordinates will eventually come to occupy positions of power. The expectation that one will eventually be able to exercise the domination that one endures today is a strong incentive serving to legitimate patterns of domination. It encourages patience and emulation, and, not least, it promises revenge of a kind, even if it must be exercised on someone other than the original target of resentment. If this supposition is correct it would help to explain why so many age-graded systems of domination seem to have such durability. The junior who is

33. We should, of course, set aside from this discussion two kinds of subordination. First, we exclude the voluntary and revocable subordination typified by entering a religious order. The fact that someone who enters such a life makes a voluntary commitment to the principles that underlie the subordination, principles that are usually marked by a solemn oath, but that may be renounced at any time fundamentally changes the nature of domination. Hegemony, if one could call it that, is established by definition since only true believers enter, and when they cease being believers they may leave. Voluntary servitude for a specified time or voluntary enlistment in the military or merchant marine, which it resembles, is less clear-cut. Entry may not be experienced as voluntary if, say, few other economic opportunities exist and one may not escape subordination until the term of enlistment or servitude expires. In principle, however, the greater the freedom of choice in entry and the greater the ease of withdrawal, the more legitimate the subordination. The second form of subordination we exclude is that of infants and children to parents. The asymmetry of power in this situation is extreme—hence the possibility for abuses—but it is typically benign and nurturant rather than exploitative, and it is a biological given.
exploited by elders will eventually get his chance to be an elder; those who do degrading work for others in an institution—providing they can reasonably expect to move up—will eventually have that work done for them; the traditional Chinese daughter-in-law can look forward, if she has a son(!), to becoming a domineering mother-in-law.34

Onerous and involuntary subordination can also, perhaps, be made legitimate providing that subordinates are more or less completely atomized and kept under close observation. What is involved is the total abolition of any social realm of relative discursive freedom. In other words, the social conditions under which a hidden transcript might be generated among subordinates are eliminated. The society envisioned is rather like the official story propagated in the public transcript or in Bentham's Panopticon, inasmuch as all social relations are hierarchical and surveillance is perfect. It goes without saying that this ultimate totalitarian fantasy in which there is no life outside relations of domination does not even remotely approximate the situation of any real society as a whole. As Foucault has noted, "Solitude is the primary condition of total submission."35 Perhaps only in a few penal institutions, thought-reform camps, and psychiatric wards is one afforded a glimpse of what is involved.

The techniques of atomization and surveillance were employed with some success in the prisoner-of-war camps in North Korea and China during the Korean War. For our purposes what is remarkable about these camps was the lengths to which the captors had to go in order to produce the confessions and

34. The promise of being set free in return for a record of service and compliance can also produce a pattern of conformity that looks much like hegemony. This is an excellent example of how the prospects for the future exert a palpable influence on the evaluation of one's present conditions. This effect is vastly magnified if the possibility of emancipation is mediated solely by the will of the dominant. As Orlando Patterson, (Slavery and Social Death, 101) has observed in the case of slavery, holding out the promise of eventual manumission upon the death of the master was more effective than any whip in gaining steady compliance. The logic is precisely the same as that of those prison systems that hold out the promise of time off for good behavior. And like the incentive of "good time," the possibility of manumission can never produce hegemony because it is, after all, the slave's desire for emancipation, the prisoner's desire for liberty, that is being manipulated. The very premise of the manipulation is that the subordinate will do almost anything—including comply faithfully for an extended period—if that is the price of liberation. Such a pact or contract is possible only on the assumption that the ideology of domination is not hegemonic.

35. Discipline and Punish, 237. Solitude, atomization, and domination are also the themes of some influential interpretations of schizophrenia. Since the experience of victimization and control is an individual one (and not a social one shared by others similarly placed) for the schizophrenic, the boundary between fantasy and action disappears. See, for example, James M. Glass, Delusion: Internal Dimensions of Political Life, chap. 3., and Harold F. Searles, Collected Papers on Schizophrenia and Related Subjects, chap. 19.
propaganda broadcasts they required. The prisoners were driven to extreme physical exhaustion, denied any contact with the outside world, separated and isolated for weeks at a time during constant interrogation. The interrogator alternated between favors and threats, telling the prisoner that he received no mail because his relatives at home didn’t care what became of him. Above all, the captors endeavored to minutely control every action and communication of the captives and to eliminate, with isolation or informers, any possible solidarity or affiliation between them. Draconian conditions did, in fact, produce a small harvest of confessions, and a good many prisoners reported suddenly feeling great affection toward an interrogator who had treated them ruthlessly. What apparently had happened was that the impossibility of validating one’s feelings and anger with others in the same situation—of creating an offstage hidden transcript, a different social reality—had allowed the captors to exercise a temporary hegemony.

I want to emphasize exactly how draconian were the conditions that produced this compliance. Captors were not successful when they permitted prisoners to associate with one another; they had to concentrate on destroying any autonomous subordinate group contact. Even then it was often possible for prisoners to communicate secretly under the noses of the authorities. Taking advantage of small linguistic nuances their captors would not notice, they often managed to insert in a publicly read apology or confession before other prisoners an indication that their performance was forced and insincere. The degree of policing and atomization required are in keeping with what we know from social psychology about acts of obedience to authority that offend one’s moral judgment. In Stanley Milgram’s famous experiments in which volunteers gave what they thought were shocks to subjects who failed to answer questions correctly, several small variations dramatically reduced the rate of compliance. First, if the experimenter (the authority figure) stepped out of the room, the subject would disobey and then lie to the experimenter about the shocks he or she had administered. In another variation of the experimental situation, the subject was provided with one or two peers who refused to administer increasingly severe shocks. With even this modicum of social support, the vast majority of subjects rebelled against the authority of

37. Stanley Milgram, *Obedience to Authority: An Experimental View*, 116–21. Milgram’s experiment showed how easily subjects could be induced to do something against their better judgment and might from one angle be seen as proving the ease of indoctrination. The key fact, however, is that Milgram’s subjects were all volunteers rather than unwilling conscripts. As we have seen in chapter 2 this makes all the difference in readiness to be persuaded.
the experimenter. Willing compliance in this context thus evaporates the moment the subject is not under close observation and whenever the subject is afforded even a small degree of social support for resistance from peers in the same boat.38

It is plausible, then, under certain conditions, to imagine that even an onerous, nonvoluntary subordination can be made to seem just and legitimate. Those conditions, however, are so stringent that they are simply not applicable to any of the large-scale forms of domination that concern us here. Slaves, serfs, peasants, and untouchables have had little realistic prospect of upward mobility or escape from their status. At the same time they have always had something of a life apart in the slave quarters, the village, the household, and in religious and ritual life. It has been neither possible nor desirable to destroy entirely the autonomous social life of subordinate groups that is the indispensable basis for a hidden transcript. The large historical forms of domination not only generate the resentments, appropriations, and humiliations that give, as it were, subordinates something to talk about; they are also unable to prevent the creation of an independent social space in which subordinates can talk in comparative safety.

The Social Production of Hegemonic Appearances

If much of the criticism of theories of hegemony offered above is valid, we would be obliged to find other reasons for compliance and quiescence than the internalization of the dominant ideology by subordinate groups. There are, certainly, a host of factors that might explain why a form of domination persists despite an elite's failure to incorporate ideologically the least advantaged. To mention only a few, subordinate groups might be divided by geography and cultural background, they may judge that the severity of possible

38. Subordinates are never, of course, in precisely the same boat. This raises another question: that of divide and rule. If we imagine, say, that each slave of a given master is treated differently on some uniform scale of harshness or benevolence, then it follows that one half of the slaves in question are treated better than average. This being so, should they not be grateful to be among the privileged and should they therefore not internalize the ideology of slavery? While it is surely true that slaves and other subordinates might strive to please their masters to win such privileges, this does not necessarily imply internalization of hegemonic standards. To assume that it does is to assume that slaves and others are incapable of simultaneously understanding that a form of domination is unjust and that they are relatively better off than other slaves. Consider the following statement made by a recently emancipated slave about her ex-mistress: “Well, she was as good as most any old white woman. She was the best white woman that ever broke bread, but you know, honey, that wasn’t much, ‘cause they all hated the po’ nigger.” Quoted in Eugene G. Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made*, 125.
reprisal makes open resistance foolhardy, their daily struggle for subsistence and the surveillance it entails may all but preclude open opposition, or they may have become cynical from past failures.

What remains to be explained, however, is why theories of hegemony and ideological incorporation have nevertheless retained an enormous intellectual appeal to social scientists and historians. We must remember, in this context, that theories of ideological incorporation have been equally seductive both to mainstream social science and to neo-Marxist followers of Gramsci. In the structural-functional world of Parsonian sociology, subordinate groups came naturally to an acceptance of the normative principles behind the social order without which no society could endure. In the neo-Marxist critique it is also assumed that subordinate groups have internalized the dominant norms but, now, these norms are seen to be a false view of their objective interests. In each instance, ideological incorporation produces social stability; in the former case, the stability is laudable, while in the latter case it is a stability that permits the continuation of class-based exploitation.39

The most obvious reason why notions of ideological incorporation should find such resonance in the historical record is simply that domination, as we have seen, produces an official transcript that provides convincing evidence of willing, even enthusiastic complicity. In ordinary circumstances subordinates have a vested interest in avoiding any explicit display of insubordination. They also, of course, always have a practical interest in resistance—in minimizing the exactions, labor, and humiliations to which they are subject. The reconciliation of these two objectives that seem at cross-purposes is typically achieved by pursuing precisely those forms of resistance that avoid any open confrontation with the structures of authority being resisted. Thus the peasantry, in the interest of safety and success, has historically preferred to disguise its resistance. If it were a question of control over land, they would prefer squatting to a defiant land invasion; if it were a matter of taxes, they would prefer evasion rather than a tax riot; if it were a question of rights to the product of the land, they would prefer poaching or pilfering to direct appropriation. Only when less dramatic measures failed, when subsistence was threatened, or when there were signs that they could strike with relative safety would the peasantry venture on the path of open, collective defiance. It is for

39. There are also interests involved here. For conservative social theorists the notion of ideological consent from below is obviously comforting. For the Leninist left, on the other hand, it offers a role for the vanguard party and its intelligentsia, who must lift the scales from the eyes of the oppressed. If the working class was capable of generating not only the force of numbers and economic leverage but also the ideas of their own liberation, the role of the Leninist party becomes problematic.
this reason that the official transcript of relations between the dominant and subordinate is filled with formulas of subservience, euphemisms, and uncontested claims to status and legitimacy. On the open stage the serfs or slaves will appear complicitous in creating an appearance of consent and unanimity; the show of discursive affirmations from below will make it seem as if ideological hegemony were secure. The official transcript of power relations is a sphere in which power appears naturalized because that is what elites exert their influence to produce and because it ordinarily serves the immediate interests of subordinates to avoid discrediting these appearances.

The "official transcript" as a social fact presents enormous difficulties for the conduct of historical and contemporary research on subordinate groups. Short of actual rebellion, the great bulk of public events, and hence the great bulk of the archives, is consecrated to the official transcript. And on those occasions when subordinate groups do put in an appearance, their presence, motives, and behavior are mediated by the interpretation of dominant elites. When the subordinate group is almost entirely illiterate the problem is compounded. The difficulty is, however, not merely the standard one of records of elite activities kept by elites in ways that reflect their class and status. It is the more profound difficulty presented by earnest efforts of subordinate groups to conceal their activities and opinions, which might expose them to harm. We know relatively little about the rate at which slaves in the United States pilfered their masters' livestock, grain, and larder. If the slaves were successful, the master knew as little about this as possible, although he could certainly know there were losses. We know even less, of course, concerning what slaves said among themselves about this reappropriation of value from the masters. What we do know typically comes to us, significantly, from ex-slaves who had been able to escape this form of subordination—for example, from narratives given by runaways who had made it to the North or to Canada and from accounts collected after emancipation. The goal of slaves and other subordinate groups, as they conduct their ideological and material resistance, is precisely to escape detection; to the extent that they achieve their goal, such activities do not appear in the archives. In this respect, subordinate groups are complicitous in contributing to a sanitized official transcript, for that is one way they cover their tracks. Acts of desperation, revolt, and defiance can offer us something of a window on the hidden transcript, but, short of crises, we are apt to see subordinate groups on their best behavior. Detecting resistance among slaves under "normal" conditions, then, would seem rather like detecting the passage of subatomic particles by cloud chamber. Only the trail of resistance—for example, so much corn missing—would be apparent.

Consider, for example, the difficulties reported by Christopher Hill in his
attempts to establish the social and religious antecedents of the radical ideas associated with the Levellers in the English Civil War.\textsuperscript{40} It is, of course, perfectly clear that the social gospel of the Levellers was not invented on the spot in 1640, but it is another thing to track down its origins. The religious views associated with the Lollards are the obvious place to look. Examining Lollardy, however, is vastly complicated by the fact that the adherents of such heterodox religious views were considered, and correctly so, dangerous to the established order. As Hill observes, "By definition, those who held them [these views] were anxious to leave no traces."\textsuperscript{41} Lollardy was, given the circumstances, a fugitive and underground sect with no means to enforce an orthodoxy on those who believed. It can be glimpsed in reports of illegal preaching, in occasional anticlerical incidents, and in some radically democratic readings of the Scriptures later echoed by the Baptists and Quakers. We do know they preached the refusal of both "hat honor" and the use of honorifics in address, that they believed as early as the fifteenth century in direct confession to God and in the abolition of tithes for all those poorer than the priest, and that, like the Familists, Ranters, and Levellers, they would preach in taverns or in the open air. They thrived best in those areas where surveillance was least—the pastoral, moorland, and forest areas with few squires or clergy. And when they were challenged, they, like the Familists after them, were likely to disavow holding any heterodox views. Hill writes, "This unheroic attitude was related to their dislike of all established churches, whether protestant or Catholic. Their refusal of martyrdom no doubt helped their beliefs to survive but it increases the historians' difficulty in identifying heretical groups with confidence."\textsuperscript{42} The last thing the Lollards or Familists wanted, in this period, was to stand up and be counted. In fact, it is significant that the interest in Lollardy derives, in this case, from the public, open explosion of radical heterodoxy that so typified the English Civil War beginning in 1640. Their subterranean history became a matter of some historical importance because the ideas it embodied could, in the political mobilization and power vacuum of the Civil War, finally find open expression. Without such favorable moments to cast a retrospective light on a previously hidden transcript, one imagines that much of the offstage history of subordinate groups is permanently lost or obscured.

A parallel historical argument could be made about the dissimulation deployed by subordinate groups to conceal practices of resistance. Malay

\textsuperscript{40} "From Lollardy to Levellers," 86–103, in Janos M. Bak and Gerhard Benecke, eds., \textit{Religion and Rural Revolt: Papers Presented to the Fourth Interdisciplinary Workshop on Peasant Studies.}

\textsuperscript{41} Ibid., 87.

\textsuperscript{42} Ibid., 93.
paddy farmers, in the region in which I have conducted fieldwork, have resented paying the official Islamic tithe. It is collected inequitably and corruptly, the proceeds are sent to the provincial capital, and not a single poor person in the village has even received any charity back from the religious authorities. Quietly and massively, the Malay peasantry has managed to nearly dismantle the tithe system so that only 15 percent of what is formally due is actually paid. There have been no tithe riots, demonstrations, protests, only a patient and effective nibbling in a multitude of ways: fraudulent declarations of the amount of land farmed, simple failures to declare land, underpayment, and delivery of paddy spoiled by moisture or contaminated with rocks and mud to increase its weight. For complex political reasons, the details of which need not concern us, neither the religious authorities nor the ruling party wishes to call public attention to this silent, effective defiance. To do so would, among other things, expose the tenuousness of government authority in the countryside and perhaps encourage other acts of insubordination. The low profile adopted by the two antagonists amounts to something of a joint conspiracy to keep the conflict out of the public record. Someone examining the newspapers, speeches, and public documents of the period a few decades hence would find little or no trace of this conflict.

The seductiveness of theories of hegemony and false consciousness thus depends in large part on the strategic appearances that elites and subordinates alike ordinarily insert into the public transcript. For subordinates, the need for protective ingratiation ensures that, once they come under scrutiny from above, the Lollard becomes an orthodox believer, the poacher becomes a peaceful respecter of gentry property, and the tithe evader a peasant ready to meet his obligations. The greater the power exercised over them and the

43. For an extended account comparing this resistance to the resistance of French peasants to the Catholic tithe in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, see my "Resistance without Protest and without Organization: Peasant Opposition to the Islamic Zakat and the Christian Tithe."

44. This raises a political variant of the philosophical question: If unheard by any living creature, does a tree falling in the forest make a sound? Does "resistance" by subordinates that is purposely overlooked by elites or called by another name, qualify as resistance? Does resistance, in other words, require recognition as resistance by the party being resisted? The issue points to the enormous importance of the power and authority to determine (never entirely unilaterally) what is considered the public transcript and what is not. The ability to choose to overlook or ignore an act of insubordination as if it never happened is a key exercise of power.

45. The term comes from Edward E. Jones, Ingratiation: A Social Psychological Analysis, 47. He defines the term as follows: "In protective ingratiation, the goal is not to improve one's outcomes beyond some otherwise expected level, but rather to blunt a potential attack . . . farsightful defensive planning. For the protective ingratior, the world is peopled with potential antagonists, people who can be unkind, hostile, brutally frank. Ingratiation can serve to transform this world into a safer place by depriving the potential antagonist of any pretext for aggression."
closer the surveillance, the more incentive subordinates have to foster the impression of compliance, agreement, deference. By the same token, we know that compliance extracted under such draconian circumstances is less likely to be a valid guide to offstage opinion. Elites also, as we have seen, may have their own compelling reasons to preserve a public facade of unity, willing compliance, and respect. Unless one can penetrate the official transcript of both subordinates and elites, a reading of the social evidence will almost always represent a confirmation of the status quo in hegemonic terms. Just as subordinates are not much deceived by their own performance there is, of course, no more reason for social scientists and historians to take that performance as, necessarily, one given in good faith.

The Interrogation of Power, or, the Use Value of Hegemony

The only irony allowed to poverty is to drive Justice and Benevolence to unjust denials.

—BALZAC, The Country Doctor

We must, on my reading of the evidence, stand Gramsci's analysis of hegemony upside down in at least one respect. In Gramsci's original formulation, which has guided most subsequent neo-Marxist work on ideology, hegemony works primarily at the level of thought as distinct from the level of action. The anomaly, which the revolutionary party and its intelligentsia will hopefully resolve, is that the working class under capitalism is involved in concrete struggles with revolutionary implications but, because it is in the thrall of hegemonic social thought, is unable to draw revolutionary conclusions from its actions. It is this dominated consciousness that, Gramsci claims, has prevented the working class from drawing the radical consequences inherent in much of its action:

The active man-in-the-mass has a practical activity, but has no clear theoretical consciousness of his practical activity. . . . His theoretical consciousness can indeed be historically in opposition to his activity. One might almost say that he has two theoretical consciousnesses (or one contradictory consciousness): one which is implicit in his activity and which in reality unites him with all his fellow-workers in the practical transformation of the real world; and one, superficially explicit or verbal, which he has inherited from the past and uncritically absorbed. But this verbal conception is not without consequences . . . the contradictory state
of consciousness does [often] not permit of any action, any decision, or any choice, and produces a condition of moral and political passivity.\textsuperscript{46}

We have explored, however, something of the imaginative capacity of subordinate groups to reverse or negate dominant ideologies. So common is this pattern that it is plausible to consider it part and parcel of the religiopolitical equipment of historically disadvantaged groups. Other things equal, it is therefore more accurate to consider subordinate classes less constrained at the level of thought and ideology, since they can in secluded settings speak with comparative safety, and more constrained at the level of political action and struggle, where the daily exercise of power sharply limits the options available to them. To put it crudely, it would ordinarily be suicide for serfs to set about to murder their lords and abolish the seigneurial regime; it is, however, plausible for them to imagine and talk about such aspirations providing they are discreet about it.

My criticism of Gramsci, a skeptic might object, is applicable only at those times when power relations virtually preclude open forms of resistance and protest. Only under such conditions are the constraints on action so severe as to produce near hegemonic appearances. Surely, the skeptic might continue, at times of open political struggle the mask of compliance and deference may be shed or at least lowered appreciably. Here would certainly be the place to look for evidence of false consciousness. If, however, in the course of active protest, subordinate groups still embrace the bulk of the dominant ideology, then we can reliably infer the effect of a hegemonic ideology.

It is true that protest and open struggle by subordinate groups have rarely taken truly radical ideological turns. This undeniable fact has been used to reclaim a thin version of the theory of hegemony. One persuasive formulation comes from Barrington Moore:

one main cultural task facing any oppressed group is to undermine or explode the justification of the dominant stratum. Such criticisms may take the form of attempts to demonstrate that the dominant stratum does not perform the tasks that it claims to perform and therefore violates the social contract. Much more frequently they take the form that specified individuals in the dominant stratum fail to live up to the social contract. Such criticism leaves the basic functions of the dominant stratum inviolate. Only the most radical forms of criticism have raised the question

\textsuperscript{46} Selections from the Prison Notebooks, 333.
whether kings, capitalists, priests, generals, bureaucrats, etc., serve any useful social purpose at all.\footnote{Injustice, 84.}

Moore implicitly asks us to imagine a gradient of radicalism in the interrogation of domination. The least radical step is to criticize some of the dominant stratum for having violated the norms by which they claim to rule; the next most radical step is to accuse the entire stratum of failing to observe the principles of its rule; and the most radical step is to repudiate the very principles by which the dominant stratum justifies its dominance. Criticism of virtually any form of domination might be analyzed in this fashion. It is one thing to claim that this king is not as beneficent as his predecessors, another to claim that kings in general don’t live up to the beneficence they promise, and still another to repudiate all forms of kingship as inadmissible.

As one among many plausible ways of distinguishing how deeply a particular criticism cuts into a form of domination, this scheme has certain advantages. My quarrel is rather with the use of this criterion to infer the degree of ideological domination that prevails in a particular setting. By itself, the fact that social criticism remains ideologically limited can never, I am convinced, justify the conclusion that the group which makes that criticism is prevented by a hegemonic ideology from consciously formulating a more far-reaching critique. To conclude that slaves, serfs, peasants, untouchables, and other subordinate groups are ethically submissive merely because their protests and claims conform to the proprieties of the dominant class they are challenging would be a serious analytical error.

The fact is that the public representations of claims by subordinate groups, \textit{even in situations of conflict}, nearly always have a strategic or dialogic dimension that influences the form they take. Short of the total declaration of war that one does occasionally find in the midst of a revolutionary crisis, most protests and challenges—even quite violent ones—are made in the realistic expectation that the central features of the form of domination will remain intact. So long as that expectation prevails, it is impossible to know from the public transcript alone how much of the appeal to hegemonic values is prudence and formula and how much is ethical submission.

The potentially strategic element in appeals to the hegemonic values is apparent from almost any setting of inequality; it follows from the domination of language. To take a banal example, imagine someone appealing to his superiors in a capitalist firm for a raise or protesting his failure to receive a raise others have gotten. So long as he anticipates remaining within the
structure of authority, his case will necessarily be addressed to the institutional interests of his superiors. He may, in fact, want a raise to, say, buy a new car, support a gambling habit, or help fund a fringe political group and feels he is entitled to it for having faithfully covered for his boss's mistakes, and he may say as much to his family and closest friends. None of this, however, will have a legitimate place in the official transcript. He will, therefore, probably emphasize his loyal and effective contribution to the institutional success of the firm in the past and what he can contribute in the future. Strategic action always looks upward, for that is frequently the only way in which it will gain a hearing. The appeal may, of course, be entirely candid, but we cannot judge its candor on the basis of the official transcript alone.

The power of the dominant thus ordinarily elicits—in the public transcript—a continuous stream of performances of deference, respect, reverence, admiration, esteem, and even adoration that serve to further convince ruling elites that their claims are in fact validated by the social evidence they see before their very eyes. Thus the classic claim that "our (serfs, slaves, untouchables) love us" is typically more ingenuous than critics of domination are apt to assume. By a social alchemy that is not, after all, so mysterious, the dross of domination produces the public discursive affirmations that seem to transform that domination into the gold of willing, even enthusiastic, consent.

Most acts of power from below, even when they are protests—implicitly or explicitly—will largely observe the "rules" even if their objective is to undermine them. Apart from the homage to the official transcript implied by the invocation of such rules, they may often be seen as habitual and formulaic, implying little in the way of inwardness. The lettres de cachet addressed directly to French kings, and typically complaining about a personal injustice they wish to see righted by the monarch, make liberal use of grandiloquent language in addressing the Crown. The formulas were known, and a notary could be hired to surround the substantive complaint with the appropriate euphemisms stressing the grandeur and beneficence of the Crown and the humility and loyalty of this particular petitioning subject. As Foucault notes, such formulas "cause beggars, poor folks, or simply the mediocre to appear in a strange theatre where they assume poses, declamations, grandiloquences, where they dress up in bits of drapery which are necessary if they want to be paid attention to on the stage of power." 48 The "strange theatre" to which Foucault refers is deployed not merely to gain a hearing but often as a valuable political resource in conflict and even in rebellion. Examples drawn from a

civilian prison and from patterns of peasant petitioning and revolt should help convey how euphemized power provides the basis for appeals from below.

In his careful description of public strategies used by inmates in a relatively progressive Norwegian prison, Thomas Mathiesen explores how they manage to advance their interests against those of the treatment staff and administration. It matters little for our purposes whether the prisoners view the institution with skepticism or with legitimacy; their conduct is perfectly compatible with either assumption, so long as their strategic understanding is that they will have to continue to deal with the prison authorities, in one form or another. Deprived of realistic revolutionary options and having few political resources by definition, inmates nevertheless manage to conduct an effective struggle against the institution's authorities, by using hegemonic ideology to good advantage. What the prisoners resent most about daily prison life is their powerlessness before the seemingly capricious and unpredictable distribution of privileges and punishments by administrative personnel. In their dogged attempts to domesticate the power arrayed against them and to render it predictable and manipulatable they pursue a strategy that Mathiesen characterizes as "censoriousness." This consists in stressing the established norms of the rulers of their small kingdom and claiming that these rulers have violated the norms by which they justify their own authority. Prisoners press constantly for the specification of procedures, criteria, and guidelines that will govern the granting of privileges (for example, residence in a minimum security block, good jobs, furloughs). They are partisans of seniority as the major criterion, inasmuch as it would operate automatically and mechanically. The wider society from which they come has established values of law-regarding procedures and mechanical equality for citizens that they defy to employ to make their case. Their behavior in this respect is moralistic; it is the staff who are deviating from legitimate norms, not they. The principle of radical indeterminacy once again prevails. It is virtually impossible to know from the official transcript to what degree the argument of the prisoners is strategic in the sense of being a conscious manipulation of the prevailing norms. The officials of the prison would, in any event, be the last to know.

The treatment and administrative staff have, with limited success, attempted to resist the logic of the inmate's case. Their power quite clearly rests on maximizing their personal discretion in apportioning benefits and discipline; it is virtually their only means of gaining conformity from a population that has already been denied its basic freedoms. Deprived of this discretion, their social control evaporates, and in arguing for some latitude of action they

49. The Defenses of the Weak: A Sociological Study of a Norwegian Correctional Institution.
have recourse to the "treatment ideology" of tailoring their conduct to the individual needs of the particular prisoner. For the prisoner, this may simply represent their capacity to punish him for sullenness or sloppy clothes. We have here, then, a useful illustration of how a set of given normative or ideological rules comes to help constitute the exercises of power and conflicts that are easily available within its ambit. The plasticity of any would-be hegemonic ideology which must, by definition, make a claim to serve the real interests of subordinate groups, provides antagonists with political resources in the form of political claims that are legitimized by that ideology. Whether he believes in the rules or not, only a fool would fail to appreciate the possible benefits of deploying such readily available ideological resources.

Use of the ideology of the dominant stratum does not by any means prevent violent clashes of interest; it may in fact be fairly viewed as a common justification for violence. Peasant petitions to the daimyo [feudal barons] in Tokugawa Japan were frequently a prelude to riots and insurrections. Despite capital penalties for petitioning, village leaders did occasionally take this dramatic step and, when they did, their petitions were invariably cast in deferential terms, appealing for the "mercy of the lord" in reducing taxes and invoking a tradition of "benevolent social aid from their superiors." Such wording—even as a prelude to an insurrection—is often taken as a privileged glimpse into the true peasant world view of "benevolent lords and honorable peasants," when, in fact, we are observing a dialogue with power that may have a greater or lesser strategic dimension. One thing, however, is clear. By making appeals that remain within the official discourse of deference, the peasantry may somewhat lessen the mortal risks incurred by the desperate act of petitioning. In the midst of a collective provocation heavy with implicit threat, peasants attempt to cede the symbolic high ground to official values and imply that their quiescence and loyalty will be assured if only the lord abides by their understanding of the hierarchical social contract. Everyone involved knows, certainly, that the petition carries a threat, as virtually all such petitions do, but the document begins by invoking the hierarchical verities that the peasantry professes to accept as given.

The collective insistence, through petitioning, on the "rights" to which subordinate groups feel entitled carries an understood "or else" with the precise consequences of a refusal left to the imagination of the lord. If one can speak of the self-disciplined adherence of an aristocracy to its own code of

50. Over time, of course, the use and manipulation of the ideological rules for novel purposes will transform them in important ways.
values, when that adherence is painful, as noblesse oblige, then one can speak of peasant insistence on elite adherence to its own understanding of the social contract as *paysans obligent*. Such petitions usually refer to the sufferings, the desperation, the tried patience of loyal peasants under taxes, conscription, or whatever, and, as a seventeenth-century French historian correctly observed, "He who speaks of desperation to his sovereign, threatens him." A petition of desperation is therefore likely to amalgamate two contradictory elements: an implicit threat of violence and a deferential tone of address. It is never simple to discern how much of this deference is simply the formula in which elites are addressed—with little significance beyond that—and how much is a more or less self-conscious attempt to gain practical ends by disavowing, publicly, any intention of challenging the basic principles of stratification and authority. We know, for example, from Le Roy Ladurie's reconstruction of the uprising in Romans in 1580, that an insurrectionary atmosphere among the artisans and peasants had taken shape by early 1579. And yet when the Queen Mother Catherine, on a visit to the town, asked Paumier why he was against the king, he is reported to have replied, "I am the king's servant, but the people have elected me to save the poor folk afflicted by the tyranny of war, and to pursue humbly, the just remonstrances contained in their Cahier." Since the moment was not ripe for an open rebellion, it is plausible that Paumier chose to speak prudently. It is also plausible that he used the formulas of respect unreflectively in much the way that standard salutations and closings are employed in contemporary business letters. There is, however, a third alternative, which I wish to explore in detail. It is that subordinate groups have typically learned, in situations short of those rare all-or-nothing struggles, to clothe their resistance and defiance in ritualisms of subordination that serve both to disguise their purposes and to provide them with a ready route of retreat that may soften the consequences of a possible failure. I cannot prove an assertion of this kind, but I believe I can show why it should be seriously entertained.

**Naive Monarchism: “Long Live X”**

In sketching the case for a not-so-naive interpretation of naive monarchism among the peasantry, I rely heavily on Daniel Field's thoughtful study of the

---


53. Ibid., 152, emphasis added. At the same time Paumier did not kneel before Catherine while saying this, an omission the enemies of the popular movement found insolent.
phenomenon in Russia. The “myth” of the Czar-Deliverer, who would come to save his people from oppression, was generally believed to have been the great conservative ideological force in Russian history. Until Bloody Sunday in 1905, when the czar was known to have given orders for troops to fire on peaceful demonstrators, Lenin believed it was naive monarchism that had been the major obstacle to peasant rebellion:

until now [peasants] have been able naively and blindly to believe in the Tsar-batiushka [Deliverer], to seek relief from their unbearably hard circumstances from the Tsar-batiushka “Himself,” and to blame coercion, arbitrariness, plunder, and all other outrages only on the officials who deceive the Tsar. Long generations of the oppressed, savage life of the muzhik, lived out in neglected backwaters have reinforced this faith. . . . Peasants could not rise in rebellion, they were only able to petition and to pray.

Lenin notwithstanding, there is simply no evidence that the myth of the czar promoted political passivity among the peasantry and a fair amount of evidence that, if anything, the myth facilitated peasant resistance.

The myth itself appears to have developed in the seventeenth century during the Time of Troubles and dynastic crises. In one more-or-less standard variant, the Czar-Deliverer desires to free his loyal subjects from serfdom, but wicked courtiers and officials, hoping to prevent this, try to assassinate him. Miraculously, he survives (often saved by a loyal serf) and hides among the people as a pilgrim sharing their sufferings and revealing himself to a faithful few. At length he returns to the capital, is recognized by the people and enthroned, whereupon he rewards the faithful and punishes the wicked. As a just czar he inaugurates a reign of peace and tranquility.

Perhaps the most remarkable feature of the myth was its plasticity in the hands of its peasant adherents. First and foremost, it was an invitation to resist any or all of the czar’s supposed agents, who could not have been carrying out the good czar’s wishes if they imposed heavy taxes, conscription, rents, military corvée, and so forth. If the czar only knew of the crimes his faithless agents were committing in his name, he would punish them and rectify matters. When petitions failed and oppression continued, it may simply have indicated that an imposter—a false czar—was on the throne. In such cases,

54. Rebels in the Name of the Tsar.
55. Quoted in ibid., 2, emphasis added.
56. The parallels with the life of Christ can hardly be inadvertent but, as in other cultures, there were in Russia long traditions of the return of a just king. As in Western Europe the anti-Christ and the tyrant were often assimilated to one another.
the peasants who joined the banners of a rebel claiming to be the true czar would be demonstrating their loyalty to the monarchy. Under the reign of Catherine II there were at least twenty-six pretenders. Pugachev, the leader of one of the greatest peasant rebellions in modern European history, owed his success in part to his claim to be Czar Peter III—a claim apparently accepted by many. As a practical matter, the wishes of the benevolent czar were whatever the pressing interests and tribulations of the peasantry projected onto him; and this, of course, was what made the myth so politically incendiary. The myth of the czar could transmute the peasantry's violent resistance to oppression into an act of loyalty to the Crown. Defending themselves before the magistrate, Ukrainian rebels in 1902 claimed that the czar had given them permission to take grain from the gentry and that they had heard there was a ukase (decree) from the czar to this effect that had been suppressed. Peasants might resist local authorities, claiming they (the officials) were acting against the will of the czar and then reject messages and messengers to the contrary as fraudulent. They might rebel on behalf of reforms in serfdom, or its abolition, which had been decreed by the czar but concealed from them by cruel officials.

In a form of symbolic jujitsu, an apparently conservative myth counseling passivity becomes a basis for defiance and rebellion that is, in turn, publicly justified by faithful allegiance to the monarch! Once the serfs were convinced that their resistance was serving the czar, the submissive patience and prayer advised by the myth was of no avail to officialdom. As Field concludes, “Naive or not, the peasants professed their faith in the Tsar in forms, and only in those forms, that corresponded to their interests. Peasant leaders, finding the myth ready to hand in its folkloric expressions, used it to arouse, galvanize, and unify other peasants. It was a pretext to resistance against heavy odds, and there was no other likely means to that end.”

In each of the two cases examined in depth by Field, it was not entirely implausible to believe that local officials were defying the czar’s wishes. After the emancipation in 1861, the peasants in Biezdne (Kazan Province) were demoralized to discover that with redemption payments, labor dues, and taxes their burdens were, if anything, heavier than before. When one of their number claimed that the emancipation decree granted them complete freedom from such dues—the term volia (freedom) appeared in many contexts in the decree—but that the squires and officials had kept it from being implemented, they leapt at the opportunity, now sanctioned from on high, to refuse payment. Given the fact that they had been formally freed from serfdom, the

57. Ibid., 209.
notion that its full import was being kept from them was not so farfetched. It would not have been the first time nobles and officials had ignored or distorted a decree from the czar. At the same time they drew up a petition to the czar and sent three of their number to Petrograd to deliver it by hand. Whatever they might be charged with, their actions seemed to disavow any temptation to sedition or treason. They avoided questions and, when pressed, “dissimulated.”

The second case occurred in Chigirin District, Kiev Province in the Ukraine. It involved a dispute over land allocations—whether they were to be individual or communal—that had continued for more than seven years. A majority was opposed to the allocations imposed earlier and finally, in 1875, refused to make redemption payments and petitioned the czar in the most deferential terms, referring to a more generous ukase that had been kept from them. One unique feature of the Chigirin episode is that a populist agitator, hoping to spark an insurrection in these troubled waters, arrived in the area with cash and a bogus imperial charter supposedly from the hand of the czar granting them all their demands. He was attempting to use peasant gullibility and naive monarchism to launch a rebellion. The peasantry treated him as they might any outsider: they relieved him of his money, “they were obsequious and compliant in his presence and otherwise went their own way.”

When the imposter was arrested, local villagers, fearful of the consequences for themselves, drafted their own petition to the czar to explain why they might have believed that the czar had decided in their favor. It began, “How could we, simple, backward people, not believe in the kindness of our beloved monarch when the whole world attests to it, when we know of His love and trust for His people, His concern for them . . . ?” Here it is not a question of peasants hilariously slapping their sides or cynically calculating the effect of their phrases. It is, however, a question of understanding at some level the usefulness of naiveté, simplicity, and backwardness in appeals to the czar. If the official view of the peasants as childlike, unenlightened, God-fearing, and basically loyal led to a philosophy of rule that emphasized both strictness and paternal indulgence, this official view was not without its advantages to peasants in a tight spot. By invoking their simplicity and loyalty they

---

58. Ibid., 79.
59. Ibid., 201.
60. Ibid., 198. Speculatively, the form of the classic petition is a threat embedded in a rhetoric of deference. One imagines it being read by officials who routinely skip the rhetoric of deference in order to get to the operative clause, which may state (though in more decorous terms), “If you don’t lower taxes we may make big trouble.” But in the dramaturgy of naive monarchism the petition says, in effect, “Alright, we’ll pretend to be loyal peasants so long as you pretend to be the beneficent czar, which, in this case, means lowering taxes.”
might hope to invoke his generosity and forgiveness as well as that of the judges and police officials they might encounter. And if peasants were notoriously gullible, they could hardly be entirely responsible if they fell prey to clever, seditious propaganda. One can, under the circumstances, scarcely imagine a more effective symbolic rationale for acts of rebellion and insubordination—a rationale that was likely to minimize the consequences of failure in the struggle with gentry and officials over taxes, land, dues, conscription, and grain. A history of the need to dissimulate as well as long practice in the strategic use of hegemonic values are all we need to grasp the use value of naive monarchism.

The usefulness of naive monarchism to the peasantry sprang in part from its value to the czarist bureaucracy. Above all, naive monarchism represented the most comforting interpretation of peasant disorder for those with the most to gain from the existing distribution of property, status, and wealth. If there was discontent, it could be explained by a momentary disturbance of a fundamentally sound and just social order. The serfs/peasants were devoted to the czar and generally met their obligations to the state except when a few agitators or a few rapacious officials or aristocrats provoked them from their allegiance. It sufficed, then, to round up a few agitators or dismiss a few officials and order would be restored. No fundamental changes need be contemplated, and no mass deportations of peasants to Siberia were required. Dealing leniently with the peasants who had expressed their repentance would further confirm the czar's reputation for paternal indulgence, thereby justifying the naive monarchism of the peasantry. And because the peasantry were still naive, backward, and so easily misled—Didn't they admit as much in the petitions?—they needed a strong, authoritarian monarch and his agents to guide and instruct them.

The tacit ideological complicity apparently at work here is a product of the very logic of czarist paternalism. While the peasants could make of naive monarchism an incitement to revolt, they also may well have appreciated the value of the myth of the peasant—the stereotype of the ignorant, dark narod could be as handy on occasion as a simple faith in the czar's concern for his people. In this respect, we must not see the myths of the czar and peasant as an ideological creation of the monarchy, then appropriated and reinterpreted by the peasantry. These myths were rather the joint product of a historic struggle rather like a ferocious argument in which the basic terms (simple peasant, benevolent czar) are shared but in which the interpretations follow wildly divergent paths in accordance with vital interests.

The not-so-naive use of naive monarchism by Russian peasants should give us pause about the analysis of those numerous occasions on which a
rebellious subordinate group invokes the ritual symbols of a conservative hegemony. Throughout Europe and in Southeast Asia, for example, there are long traditions of the return of a just king or religious savior, despite great differences in cultural and religious lineages.61 Such traditions have figured prominently in peasant rebellions and may have served much the same ideological function as the myth of the Czar-Deliverer in Russia. The many variations in what have been, in England, called Church and King riots may well, on closer examination, have an important strategic element to them. In France and Italy in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries it was common for insurgent rioters to cry, “Long Live the Virgin” (Viva Maria) and follow this with particular demands. As Peter Burke has observed, “But it is unlikely that all the rebels were unaware of the strategic value of shouting, ‘Viva Maria!’ a cry which like ‘Vive le Roi!,’ made their cause respectable. In that limited sense religious ideas were instruments in the struggle.”62 We might, in this context, think of shouts of “Vive le Roi,” when they come first in a series, just before, say, “Down with feudal dues and the salt tax” as having the same performative force as the deferential opening of a petition demanding redress for bitter grievances.63 It is the accepted form of address, it costs little, it reassures one’s antagonist that one is not out utterly to destroy him, it claims loyal intentions, it allows the king to grant the petition while appearing to enhance his prestige, and it offers a welcome defensive posture that may help limit damage if the initiative fails. Such gestures may, in some cultural contexts, become as habitual as the ordinary conversational prefaces to complaints by subordinates who are not yet so alienated as to declare war. I have in mind sentences that might begin with “I don’t mean to complain but . . .” or “With all due respect . . .” Any dominant ideology with hegemonic pretensions must, by definition, provide subordinate groups with political weapons that can be of use in the public transcript.

Let us return briefly to the issue of “ethical submission” and hegemony by way of placing the public transcript in its political context. I believe the historical evidence clearly shows that subordinate groups have been capable of revolutionary thought that repudiates existing forms of domination. Schwabian artisans and cultivators in the German Peasant War could imagine that

61. For a brief discussion of these traditions in Europe, see Peter Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe*, chap. 6. For similar traditions in Southeast Asia, see Adas, *Prophets of Rebellion*.


63. This particular shout is reported for sixteenth-century Normandy by David Nicholls, “Religion and Peasant Movements during the French Religious Wars,” in ibid., 104–22.
Christ's crucifixion had redeemed all believers from servitude, bondage, and taxes; untouchables can and have imagined that orthodox Hinduism has hidden the sacred texts proving their equality; slaves can and have imagined a day when they would be free and slave owners punished for their tyranny.

What is rare, then, is not the negation of domination in thought but rather the occasions on which subordinate groups have been able to act openly and fully on that thought. Only under the most extraordinary historical circumstances, when the nearly total collapse of existing structures of domination open unprecedented new vistas of now realistic possibilities, can we expect to witness anything like an unguarded discourse by subordinate groups. In Western history, the German Peasants’ War, the English Civil War, the French Revolution, the Russian Revolution, and the Spanish Republic of 1936 offered such brief and privileged moments. Here one glimpses something of the utopias of justice and revenge that are ordinarily marginalized in the hidden transcript.

Under any other circumstances, which is to say, for the great bulk of political life, including most violent conflict, the stakes are less than the conquest of a new world. The conflict will accordingly take a dialogic form in which the language of the dialogue will invariably borrow heavily from the terms of the dominant ideology prevailing in the public transcript. If the official discourse is one of a Christian ruler and pious peasants, the ideological struggle will swirl around the interpretation of these terms. We have seen similarly how, in a dominant discourse of benevolent czar and loyal serf, the ideological struggle will swirl around the interpretation of these terms and need not exclude violent conflict. A dominant ideology of paternalistic lords and faithful retainers does not prevent social conflict but is simply an invitation to a structured argument. We may consider the dominant discourse as a plastic idiom or dialect that is capable of carrying an enormous variety of meanings.

64. For a pathbreaking analysis of utopian moments in French history—all recapturing in some sense the initial promise of the Revolution of 1789—see Aristide R. Zolberg, “Moments of Madness.”

65. The Filipino revolutionary leader Andreas Bonifacio, for example, issued a manifesto charging the Spanish with having betrayed a pact of brotherhood in which they promised their Filipino younger brothers knowledge, prosperity, and justice: “Do we see them fulfilling their side of the contract which we ourselves fulfilled with sacrifices? We see nothing but treachery as a reward for our favors.” Quoted in Reynaldo Clemeña Ileto, “Pasyon and the Interpretation of Change in Tagalog Society,” 107. As the Spanish have betrayed the self-proclaimed terms of their domination, the Filipino people are absolved of any obligation to obey. Bonifacio, of course, necessarily implies that if the Spanish had lived up to their Christian professions, the Tagalogs would have remained loyal. Did Bonifacio believe this? We cannot know. What we do know, however, is that he chose to address the Spanish in terms they could understand—in the terms of their own rhetorical discourse, which, on this interpretation, justified armed defense.
meanings, including those that are subversive of their use as intended by the dominant. The appeal to would-be hegemonic values sacrifices very little in the way of flexibility given how malleable the terms are and has the added advantage of appearing to disavow the most threatening goals. For anything less than completely revolutionary ends the terrain of dominant discourse is the only plausible arena of struggle.

Exactly how deep this apparent acceptance of the dominant discourse goes is, again, impossible to judge from the public evidence. If we were to be exceptionally meticulous about the conclusions we could legitimately draw from such appearances, we might say that addressing the dominant elite under less than revolutionary circumstances, and given certain constraining assumptions about the distribution of power, the use of the terms of the dominant ideology in the course of political struggle is both realistic and prudent.

Minding the Public Discourse

You have got to be a model thief if I am to be a model judge. If you are a fake thief, I become a fake judge. Is that clear?

—Genet, The Balcony

Any ruling group, in the course of justifying the principles of social inequality on which it bases its claim to power, makes itself vulnerable to a particular line of criticism. Inasmuch as these principles of inequality unavoidably claim that the ruling stratum performs some valuable social function, its members open themselves to attack for the failure to perform these functions honorably or adequately. The basis of the claim to privilege and power creates, as it were, the groundwork for a blistering critique of domination on the terms invoked by the elite. Such a critique from within the ruling discourse is the ideological equivalent of being hoisted on one's own petard. For any particular form of domination one may specify the claims to legitimacy it makes, the discursive affirmations it stages for the public transcript, the aspects of power relations that it will seek to hide (its dirty linen), the acts and gestures that will undermine its claim to legitimacy, the critiques that are possible within its frame of reference, and, finally, the ideas and actions that will represent a repudiation or profanation of the form of domination in its entirety.

66. Moore, Injustice, 84.

67. A suggestive analysis along these lines, dealing with conflicts in the jute mills of Bengal earlier in this century, will serve to indicate how valuable such an inquiry might be. Dipesh Chakrabarty shows how the patron–client style of authority exercised by supervisors in the mills required personal discretion, direct relations of both benevolence and brutality, and the display of
The analysis of forms of domination might well begin by specifying the ways in which the structure of claims to power influences the sort of public transcript it requires. It might then examine how such a public transcript may be undermined or repudiated. If, for example, we were studying the relation between warrior aristocrats of feudal Europe and their serfs it would be important to understand how their claim to hereditary authority was based on providing physical protection in return for labor, grain, and military service. This “exchange” might be discursively affirmed in an emphasis on honor, noblesse oblige, bravery, expansive generosity, tournaments and contests of military prowess, the construction of fortifications, the regalia and ceremony of knighthood, sumptuary laws, the assembling of serfs for work or military campaigns, acts of deference and humility of serfs before their lords, exemplary punishment for insubordination, oaths of fealty, and so forth. The feudal “contract” could be discursively negated by any conduct that violated these affirmations: for example, cowardice, petty bargaining, stinginess, runaway serfs, failures to physically protect serfs, refusals to be respectful or deferential by serfs, and so forth. A parallel kind of analysis might be applied to relations between the Brahmin (or high-caste superior) and the lower caste. Here the basis for the claim to power is based on sacred hereditary status, superior karma, and on the provision of certain presumably vital ritual services that can be performed only by Brahmins due to their status and knowledge. Discursive affirmations might include all the ritual separations of purity and pollution, diet, dress, refinement of manner, presiding at key rites of birth, marriage, death, observance of taboos on commensuality, other forms of segregation by occupation, residence, drinking wells, temples, and so forth. The discursive negation of these expressions of hierarchy might take the form of refusing to abide by rules about pollution and purity, failure by Brahmins to provide ritual services, insubordination in terms of address or posture by untouchables, and so on. This pattern of analysis might be extended, of course, to any particular historical form of domination in comparable terms; for example, certain forms of priestly rule, specific forms of slavery, various power in the form of dress, retinue, housing, and demeanor. By adopting the parental model as the pattern for the relationship, the supervisor was experienced along a continuum from personal despot to kindly father figure. Unlike relations of industrial discipline derived from a combination of contract, the labor market, the division of labor, and the organization of work, control in the jute mills was phrased in entirely personal, direct, and often violent terms. One result, as Chakrabarty shows, is that the resistance to the supervisors, in turn, tended to take the form of personal vengeance and violence. Insults to the dignity of the worker, used as a form of social control, were repaid in insults to the supervisor when that was possible. The form of resistance mirrored the form of domination. Dipesh Chakrabarty, “On Defying and Defying Authority: Managers and Workers in the Jute Mills of Bengal circa 1900–1940.”
monarchical systems, religious prophets within a specified tradition, modern
managerial authority in the firm in Italy or in Japan. Having elaborated the
public transcript required by a specific form of domination, one has gone far to
specify precisely what a subversive act in this context would look like.

Regardless of the particular form of domination, it is a safe bet that a vital
sector of the elite-choreographed public transcript will consist of visual and
audible displays of rank, precedence, and honor. Here I have in mind such
expressions of domination as terms of address, demeanor, speech levels,
codes of eating, dressing, bathing, cultural taste, who speaks first, who gives
way to whom. By the same token whenever the public transcript is breached—
whether inadvertently or by design—it is also a safe bet that such breaches will
disrupt or desacralize the ceremonial reverence.\(^{68}\) For acts of insubordination
of this kind represent a small insurgency within the public transcript.

Just as the official transcript helps define what counts as an insult to the
dominant—as lèse-majesté—it also helps to define which of the practices
that compose the inevitable dirty work of power must be screened from public
view. The very operation of a rationale for inequality creates a potential zone of
dirty linen that, if exposed, would contradict the pretensions of legitimate
domination. A ruling stratum whose claim to authority rests on the provision
of institutionalized justice under law with honest judges will have to go to
exceptional lengths to hide its thugs, its hired assassins, its secret police, and
its use of intimidation. An elite that bases its power on its self-sacrificing,
public-spirited probity will be damaged more by an exposé of corruption in
high places than one based on a patronage machine. Every publicly given
justification for inequality thus marks out a kind of symbolic Achilles heel
where the elite is especially vulnerable.

Attacks that focus on this symbolic Achilles heel may be termed critiques
within the hegemony. One reason they are particularly hard to deflect is simply
because they begin by adopting the ideological terms of reference of the elite.
Although such critiques may be insincere and cynical, they cannot be accused
of sedition inasmuch as they clothe themselves in the public professions of the
elite, which now stands accused of hypocrisy, if not the violation of a sacred
trust. Having formulated the very terms of the argument and propagated
them, the ruling stratum can hardly decline to defend itself on this terrain of
its own choosing. The cowardly lion is a staple of pathos, if not humor, in the
folklore of those who have regarded the lion as a metaphor for courage. An
ascetic priestly caste is profoundly damaged if shown to be promiscuous and
gluttonous; the benevolent czar is profoundly damaged if shown to have

\(^{68}\) See Ranajit Guha, *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency*, esp. chap 2.
ordered the troops to fire on his peacefully assembled, respectful subjects; the slave owner's claim to paternalism is hollow if he can be shown to whip his slaves arbitrarily; and the general is compromised if he abandons his troops in fear for his own life. Any dominant group is, in this respect, least able to take liberties with those symbols in which they are most heavily invested. 69

Perhaps for this reason, as I indicated earlier, so many radical attacks originate in critiques within the hegemony—in taking the values of ruling elites seriously, while claiming that they (the elites) do not. To launch an attack in these terms is to, in effect, call upon the elite to take its own rhetoric seriously. Not only is such an attack a legitimate critique by definition, but it always threatens to appeal to sincere members of the elite in a way that an attack from outside their values could not. The Soviet dissident Vladimir Voinovich captures the critical force of disillusioned believers:

I was a completely harmless member of society. It is the young people, those who display a serious interest in the theoretical foundations of communism and begin immersing themselves in Marx, Lenin and Stalin who pose a much greater danger to the regime. The Soviet authorities realize this. A person who takes theory seriously will, sooner or later, begin comparing it with practice, and will end up rejecting one or the other, and, later on, the two of them together. But a person who has not been seduced by the theory will view the practice as a common and immutable evil—one that can be lived with. 70

The remarkable fact may be that it is when a would-be hegemonic ideology does manage to convince members of subordinate groups to take it to heart that a potentially radical chain of events is set into motion. That is, contrary to the usual wisdom and to Gramsci's analysis, radicalism may be less likely to arise among disadvantaged groups (the vast majority, it appears) who fail to take the dominant ideology seriously than among those who, in Marxist terms, might be considered falsely conscious. In a perceptive study of working-class secondary school students in England, Paul Willis discovered a strong counterculture that produced a cynical distance from dominant platitudes but not radicalism. 71 Paradoxically, it was the "conformists," who appeared, in form at least, to accept the values of the school (the hegemonic instrument par excellence in modern society), who posed the threat. Because they operated as if

69. Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, 193–94. The constraint, I believe, is also self-imposed in part since these are claims that are rarely just a cynical facade for the dominant.
they accepted the implicit promise of the dominant ideology (If you work hard, obey authority, do well in school, and keep your nose clean you will advance by merit and have satisfying work) they made sacrifices of self-discipline and control and developed expectations that were usually betrayed. Employers preferred not to hire them because they were pushy and hard to deal with as compared with the more typical working-class youth, who were realistic, expected little, and put in a day of work without too much grumbling. The system may have most to fear from those subordinates among whom the institutions of hegemony have been most successful.72 The disillusioned mission boy (Caliban) is always a graver threat to an established religion than the pagans who were never taken in by its promises. The anger born of a sense of betrayal implies an earlier faith.

72. One might argue similarly that the institutional centers of the civil rights movement in the U.S. in the early 1960s were churches and universities precisely because the contradiction between the principles of equality and the reality of segregation was particularly striking in institutions making strong moral claims. See Evans, Personal Politics, 32.