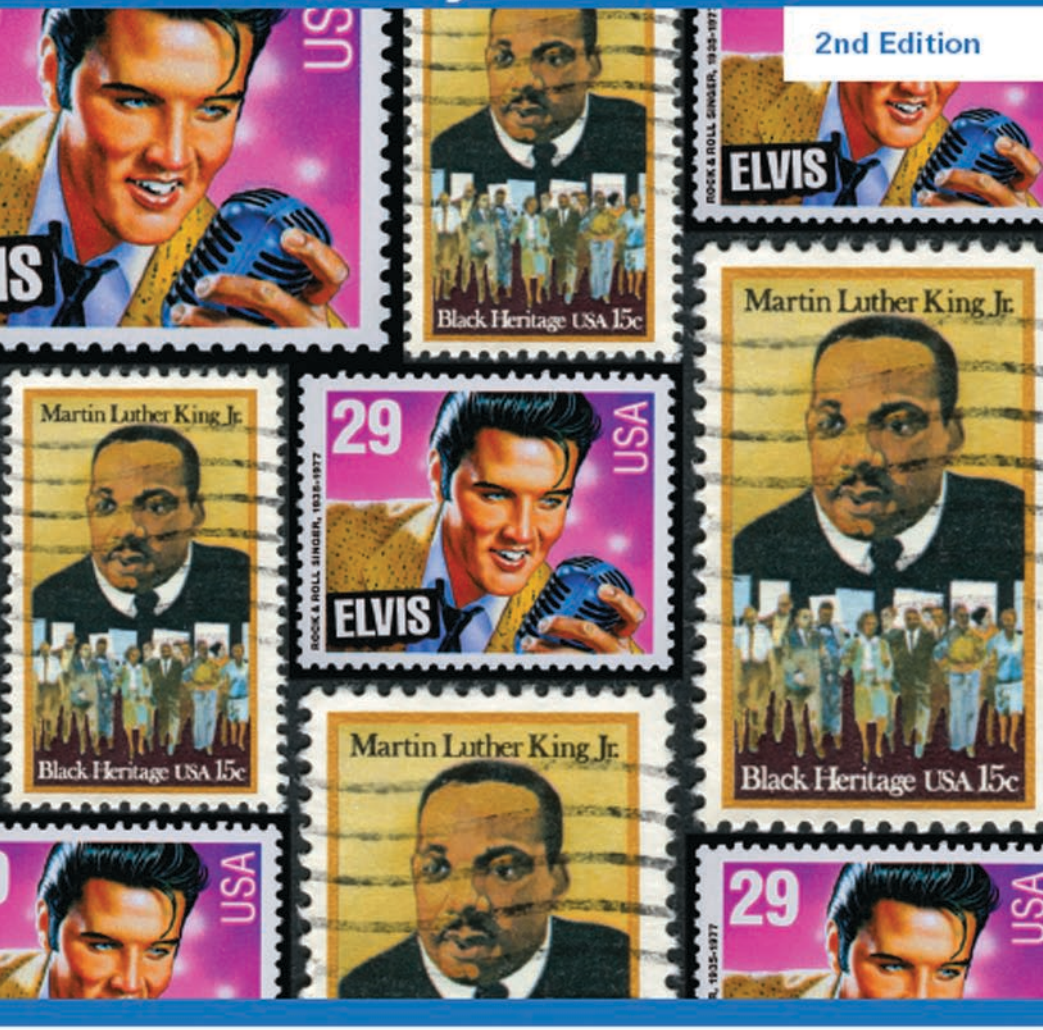
JOHN FISKE

Power Plays Power Works

2nd Edition



With a new introductory essay on
John Fiske's contribution by

BLACK HAWK HANCOCK

ROUTLEDGE

POWER PLAYS POWER WORKS

Second edition

Now, more than 20 years since its initial release, John Fiske's classic text *Power Plays Power Works* remains both timely and insightful as a theoretically driven examination of the terrain where the politics of culture and the culture of politics collide.

Drawing on a diverse set of cultural sites—from alternative talk radio forums, museums, celebrity fandom, to social problems such as homelessness—Fiske traverses the topography of the American cultural landscape to highlight the ways that ordinary people creatively construct their social identities and relationships through the use of the resources available to them, while constrained by social conditions not of their own choosing. This important analysis provides a set of critical methodological and analytical tools to grapple with the complexities and struggles of contemporary social life.

A new introductory essay by former Fiske student Black Hawk Hancock entitled "Learning How to Fiske: Theorizing Power, Knowledge, and Bodies in the 21st Century" elucidates Fiske's methods for today's students, providing them with the ultimate guide to thinking and analyzing like John Fiske—the art of 'Learning How to Fiske'.

John Fiske is Professor Emeritus in the Department of Communication Arts at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, USA.

Black Hawk Hancock is Associate Professor of Sociology at DePaul University, USA.

Also re-issued by Routledge:

Introduction to Communication Studies, third edition
Television Culture, second edition
Reading the Popular, second edition
Understanding Popular Culture, second edition
Media Matters, second edition

POWER PLAYS POWER WORKS

Second edition

John Fiske

With a new introductory essay on *Learning How to Fiske: Theorizing Power, Knowledge, and Bodies in the 21st Century* by Black Hawk Hancock

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group
LONDON AND NEW YORK

Second edition published 2016
by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

and by Routledge
711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

First published by Verso 1993

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Names: Fiske, John.Title: Power plays power works / John Fiske.
Description: Second edition. | London ; New York : Routledge, [2016] | "With a new introductory essay on Learning how to Fiske : theorizing power, knowledge, and bodies in the 21st century by Black Hawk Hancock."—Title page. | Originally published: Verso, 1993. | Includes bibliographical references and index.
Identifiers: LCCN 2015036728| ISBN 9781138888159 (hbk) | ISBN 9781138888166 (pbk) | ISBN 9781315713625 (ebk)
Subjects: LCSH: Popular culture—United States. | United States—Social conditions—1980– | Elite (Social sciences)—United States.
Classification: LCC E169.12 .F65 2016 | DDC 306.0973/927—dc23
LC record available at http://lccn.loc.gov/2015036728

ISBN: 978-1-138-88815-9 (hbk)
ISBN: 978-1-138-88816-6 (pbk)
ISBN: 978-1-315-71362-5 (ebk)

Typeset in Times
by Keystroke, Station Road, Codsall, Wolverhampton

To Lisa, Lucy and in memory of Matthew

This page intentionally left blank

Contents

List of Figures

This page intentionally left blank

Acknowledgments

Who knows where ideas originate? The words in this book are mine, but the ideas to whose circulation they will contribute have been picked up in bits and pieces by my listening, looking and reading; they've been mixed and matched by convivial discussion and lonely thought, honed by friendly criticism and vivified by the interest, concern and enthusiasm of many. One of the many pleasures offered by cultural studies is the originality, enthusiasm and commitment of people working in the field. So the words may be mine, this particular combination of ideas into an argument may be mine—but beyond that, who can say? Though its particular effects may be hard to specify, the formative environment of the Department of Communication Arts at the University of Wisconsin-Madison has been crucial to me. Colleagues such as Julie D'Acci, Lynn Spigel (now sadly ex-), and David Bordwell have contributed more than they probably realize. So too have my graduate students: our Thursday afternoons around the table in room 6041 and the bar in the Red Shed have been my intellectual meat and drink—of gourmet quality. My thanks go to all of you, but particularly to Steve Classen, Aniko Bodroghkozy, Kevin Glynn, Yong-Jin Won, and Robert Dawson. I can identify passages in this book that conversations with each of you have influenced directly. So, too, my graduate students at the University of Minnesota have all contributed indirectly, but Jason Loviglio, Mike Willard and Elizabeth Anderson have been specifically helpful. Lisa Parks has been much more than a research assistant, and Gloria Abernathy-Lear has helped me develop whatever sensitivity I have for African American culture. I also wish to thank Paul Gilroy and Janaki Bahkle for their insightful and productive comments. My study of Black Liberation Radio has been made possible by Mbanna Kantako, Mike Townsend and Ron Sakolsky, who, with Jason Loviglio, have all given me time, material and ideas with a generosity that is all too rare. To Linda Henzl, whose skill, enthusiasm and general support have turned my scribbles, over-scribbles and hieroglyphs into a publishable manuscript, and have kept me (almost) up to my deadlines, I owe much more than mere thanks. And finally, to Lisa, my wife, thank you, thank you, thank

you: readers will not recognize your contribution at all, you have some idea of it, but only I know the whole.

Do I have any regrets? Of course, many: but in particular I regret not having paid enough attention to the interface between American Indians and European American cultures: the gap is due to ignorance, not lack of concern. I hope, however, that my white readers will extend whatever they learn from my attempt to listen to African American voices to other racial and ethnic cultures, both nationally and globally. There are many pleasures in studying culture, not least of which is that the next stage in the project is always just ahead.

Some of the material in this book draws upon previously published work. An account of the culture of homeless men (chapters 1 and 6) has appeared in *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, and some of the material in Chapter 10 has been covered in my essay in *Cultural Studies*, edited by Lawrence Grossberg, Paula Treichler and Cary Nelson.

John Fiske

Madison, December 1992

Learning How to Fiske
THEORIZING POWER, KNOWLEDGE, AND BODIES IN THE 21ST CENTURY

> The boat has been simultaneously the greatest reserve of the imagination. The ship is the heterotopia par excellence. In civilizations without boats, dreams dry up, espionage takes the place of adventure, and the police take the place of pirates.[1]
>
> Michel Foucault

As former students of John Fiske, the question we would always ask was: how does he do that? Specifically, how does John undertake his cultural analysis in a way that is both theoretically driven and empirically rich? What we really wanted to know was how to think like John Fiske.[2] This introduction intends to be an elaboration of some of the facets of John Fiske's thinking which continue to serve as a model for others to emulate. While *Power Plays Power Works* is arguably John's most theoretically challenging book, this introduction is not, in any sense, a traditional introduction where the main themes are expounded upon and a road map of the book is elaborated. Rather, this new introductory essay attempts to grapple with the ways that John melded theory, method, and analysis of social life across his work as a whole. In short, this essay will provide a guide to thinking and analyzing like John Fiske, tying these broader concerns together as a backdrop against which to read *Power Plays Power Works*. This new introduction aims to introduce Fiske's late work to a new generation and to encourage those who are already familiar with Fiske's work to revisit material that has been out of print for some time.[3] In doing so, it contributes to John Fiske's ongoing significance and legacy, and to us his eternal students, a musing on the art he gave us, the elusive art we must all continue to study and master, the art of learning "How to Fiske."

The introduction is separated into three interrelated sections: Section one reflects on theoretical and methodological lessons; Section two reflects on the practice of cultural studies; Section three reflects on the political and personal lessons Fiske imparted. It is necessary to remember Fiske is very much a thinker like Michel Foucault in both breadth and depth. As a result, we cannot simply read his books as standalone volumes apart from the rest of his oeuvre. We must read the articles, interviews, and occasional pieces to help us better understand the books. This is a very important strategy in learning "How to Fiske," since the corpus is of a whole. While the books provide us with greater access to the big ideas, it was often in the shorter, or more specialized pieces where the crystallization of his ideas was worked out. These pieces deepen our appreciation of the books, insofar as they supplement them in that they often contain alternative or different articulations of ideas we encounter in the books. Therefore, I will quote from these materials in several places and allow Fiske's own words to best speak for him.

SECTION ONE: THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL LESSONS

This section discusses several of the seminal theoretical and methodological lessons Fiske "offered" over the years that are representative of both Fiske's written work and his pedagogy in the classroom. It would be antithetical to Fiske's mentoring to call them anything else, as Fiske always provided advice and encouragement, never demanding that any of us adhered to a strict model or code. He always encouraged us to seek out our own opinions and ideas, cultivating our own intellectual identities, while rejecting any slavish mimicry. To put a personal touch on this, my very first private conversation with him came after our evening seminar ended and we walked down the street together to the Living Room, a now long gone University of Wisconsin spot where graduate students and professors would often gather. Against the chilly fall air, I remember that I asked him if something he argued in class could be seen from the opposite position; he turned to me with a wry smile and simply replied, "I'm not telling you to agree with me. It's up to you; you can take it or leave it." With a sense of humility and a flicker of humor, his response let me know that there were always alternatives to be considered, and I've been taking them ever since.

ON BEING A BRICOLEUR

Central to Fiske's thinking is approaching theory as a bricoleur; one takes ideas and concepts wherever one can find them.[4] Since there is no one theory that explains all social conditions, theories must always be open to being connected, combined, deconstructed, and reconstructed as necessitated by the

object they seek to explain. The bricoleur resists falling into any one theoretical tradition or framework. Rather there is only the plurality of tools collected along the long intellectual journey. Therefore the bricoleur must be constantly learning from experience and be attentive to the changing world around him.

In addition to approaching theory as a bricoleur, one must also be attentive to bricolage—the adaptation or adoption of practices, symbols, objects, texts, into different contexts than their previous ones—and how in those different cultural settings their meanings are reworked and resignified. As Fiske discusses:

> popular productivity is a constant process of recombining and reusing the cultural products of capitalism in a form of bricolage (and, as such, does not differ in kind from so-called artistic originality, though it differs greatly in its critical reception and cultural acclaim). Bricolage is, according to Levi-Strauss, the everyday practice of tribal peoples who creatively combine materials and resources at hand to make objects, signs, or rituals that meet their immediate needs. It is a sort of non-scientific engineering, and is one of the most typical practices of "making do." In capitalist societies bricolage is the means by which the subordinated make their own culture out of the resources of the "other."
>
> (Fiske 1989: 150)

Following Fiske, one must be attentive to the bricolage of social life. Just as one approaches theory as a bricoleur, so must one approach what happens in social life the same. For Fiske, this is undertaken by observing and examining what people actually do, in terms of the ways they construct meaningful lives out of the material and symbolic resources around them. Therefore being attentive to culture means being sensitive to the plurality of cultures, subcultures, and lifestyles within which people are engaged.

As a bricoleur, attuned to the bricolage of culture, Fiske also advocated interdisciplinarity, in which one must move across arbitrary disciplinary boundaries, all the while being attentive to their specific analytic terms and concerns. For Fiske:

> cultural studies has traditionally placed itself as an interdiscipline . . . And as such has typically borrowed both theories and methods from its surrounding disciplines—literature, history, anthropology, etc.—but it has borrowed in order to transform, not reproduce, them . . . It's transdisciplinary borrowings are risky but, at times, very productive.
>
> (Fiske 1996a: 371)

Cutting across disciplines, the bricoleur collects tools, not simply to apply them, but rather to rework them and put them to use for new intellectual

projects. Whereas many scholars mark off their separate spheres of expertise or adhere to rigid boundaries and areas of specialization, Fiske advocated bringing together theoretical tools and methodologies from both the humanities and the social sciences. As an interdisciplinarian, Fiske refused to define the boundaries of his intellectual influences or the objects of his inquiries.

As a result, Fiske always cultivated a transliteracy, whereby one read across disciplines, becoming fluent in many disciplines and their key figures. For Fiske, nothing was out of bounds and the wider one read the better armed one was with theoretical tools with which to work. In one of John's classes we were exposed to the African American Studies of Robin Kelley, the cultural anthropology of Levi-Strauss, the linguistics of Voloshinov, the literary criticism of Barthes, the philosophy of Althusser and Foucault, the queer theory of Judith Butler, and the sociology of Bourdieu and Omi and Winant, amongst many others. As demonstrated in *Power Plays Power Works*, Fiske draws primarily from a number of thinkers across multiple disciplines: Mikhail Bakhtin, Michel de Certeau, Michel Foucault, Antonio Gramsci, Stuart Hall, Valentin Voloshinov, and Raymond Williams.[5] While daunting at first, Fiske always reminded us that the limits of our thought were as wide or as narrow as we conceptualized our intellectual horizons.

With transdisciplinarity and transliteracy comes Fiske's focus on translation; doing cultural studies meant being able to translate theories and concepts backwards and forwards in order to make them speak to each other, and to make them applicable and understood. Theory was never jargon for Fiske; rather theory was a set of tools to help analytically frame and interpret social life. Therefore in the classroom he took difficult and dense theoretical works and demystified them by making them accessible. For Fiske, this was a fundamental role of intellectuals; ideas must be made accessible to those invested in the study of social life.

ON THEORY AND THEORIZING

For Fiske, theory must always have an openness; it must always be able to be "surprised" as it is used to interpret the world. While theorizing was always necessary, for Fiske, we must always be mindful never to let theory become too detached from those that are being theorized. As theorists we must work to:

> avoid the risk of implicitly granting . . . theoretical discourse a position of privilege which would reproduce in academic terms the process of subordination which is characteristic of the social order that we wish to criticize and change. Practice may have to be changed into discourse in order to be analyzed; specificities may have to be subjected to generalization

> for their significances to be understood and communicated, however incompletely: but, equally, practice should be allowed to expose the incompleteness of theory, to reveal the limits of its adequacy, and specificity should be able to assert the value of that which generalization overlooks or excludes.
>
> (Fiske 1992: 165)

For Fiske, theory and practice worked together to both explain and question the social world and the way the social world is understood simultaneously. In this sense, all theoretical frameworks are open to being questioned as no one theory explains everything or is universally applicable. For Fiske, different theories serve different purposes, raise different questions, point in new directions, and challenge our assumptions. In allowing our theoretical frameworks to be open, Fiske continually put different theories and theorists into dialogue, complementing and supplementing one another both within and between intellectual traditions.

Throughout his own work, Fiske demonstrated how theorizing often comes by drawing on various traditions and disciplines, while combining and supplementing concepts that don't necessarily appear to fit seamlessly together. One key example we see in *Power Plays Power Works* is the way he conjoins the poststructuralism of Foucault's theory of power and bodies with structural Marxist notions of ideology, consciousness, and class. Fiske juxtaposed concepts to rethink them in terms of their applicability and limitations to illuminate the multifaceted aspects of everyday life. These juxtapositions produced new perspectives through which to examine social life. In doing so, according to Fiske, we must constantly be rethinking, re-creating, reconstructing different perspectives and resist those that impose any monolithic or totalizing interpretations. In this way theory is always open ended to other interlocutors and other ideas.

Following Fiske, theory is used to reject inherited categories and challenge our taken-for-granted assumptions, and to remain reflexive in order to avoid intellectual blindness. For Fiske, we should never be complacent with our theoretical frameworks, or the self-evident nature of the world in front of us. Established norms and ways of life, as well as the politics that support them, were all part of a social order that must constantly be rethought. One must never accept the arbitrariness of existing hierarchies or relations of domination and subordination; one must question the imposition of systems of meaning that legitimize social structures and social institutions in order to challenge, transform, and overturn them.

Fiske made us think reflexively about our use of theory and the contexts within which we put it to use. As seen in *Power Plays Power Works*, Fiske discusses the problematic nature of directly importing European theory into

the American context. He reminds us to be sensitive to the socio-historical-political-economic conditions within which these theories emerged, and they cannot be directly mapped on to the American context with all of its differences. Theories must be reflexively reworked and adapted to the conditions into which they are imported.

Fiske also pushed us to grapple with binary oppositions—macro/micro, structure/agency, domination/resistance, culture/nature, masculinity/femininity, public/private, production/consumption, amongst many others. This was never simply to "deconstruct" them and show their contradictions, but rather to point out the difficulties and challenges that working through them entailed. As Fiske has commented:

> it's actually extremely difficult analytically to trace everything that is going on in any one instance. And, yes, I suppose, because it is easier to make a clear point in an argument, I often do extract particular forces from a circumstance rather than trying to see everything together. I'm trying to figure out ways of analyzing moments of culture, encounters between texts and people, that do give greater regard to this sort of complexity . . . Theoretically, I know the advantages of breaking away from binary oppositions, but in practice it is extremely difficult not to think, write, or talk in a way that isn't at some deep level still informed by binary oppositions–it may be a fault of my writing, it may be a fault of our particular western culture. This way of thinking is so deeply sedimented, it's remarkably difficult to break free of it. Another side of me is that I'm not sure that we ought to. I think if these binary oppositions, these opposing forces, are the sort of common sense of society, if they are the way in which people experience the conflicts of their everyday life, then, maybe, they ought to form the structure of analysis that goes along with them. It is a very, very difficult debating question that one, an important question, but very difficult, I think.
>
> (Fiske 1993b: 59)

While they structure the way we see the world, they are riddled with ambiguity, nuances, and overlaps. Pitting binary oppositions against each other for their analytic utility is to open up ways they must be interpreted and challenged in their use in particular contexts. Definitions of concepts are never total, nor completely precise; rather they are tactical and analytic. Concepts are not stable, but mobile; their value lies in their practical utility. For Fiske, it was only by putting concepts to use that we would best understand them; in this way Fiske forced us to actively grapple with theory and concepts, to see their limitations and possibilities.

Following through on this reflexivity, Fiske also showed us how it was important to develop ways of theorizing which would capture, as well as possible:

> insights into how social differences can be produced and maintained by the people in their own interests. This bottom-up production of difference is likely to be found, inter alia, in the specificities of everyday life . . . to minimize the problems of establishing productive, rather than reductive, relationships between practice and discourse, and between more dominant and more subordinated ways of living in and explaining our social world.
>
> (Fiske 1992: 165)

In doing so, Fiske reminded us of our own positions as theorists in the academy and the need to understand how that played a role in our theoretical approaches. As such, Fiske taught us to be mindful of the ways our theoretical frameworks brought social differences to light. Doing so required a number of methodological strategies.

Finally, and the most important of all of Fiske's lessons on the use of theory, was the role theory played in doing analysis. Theory was never used for the sake of theorizing; rather it was always used to figure out "what's going on." For Fiske, theory was only and always evaluated in terms of its effectiveness; if a theory didn't help Fiske figure out "what's going on," then he wouldn't use it. As a result, Fiske taught us to apply theory to analysis and evaluate theory by how analytically insightful or innovative it could be.

ON MULTI-METHODOLOGICAL APPROACHES

For Fiske, one must always approach social life from a multi-methodological perspective—whether textual, theoretical, empirical—with an ethnographer's eye for detail, nuance, and texture. Just as we think interdisciplinarily, we must proceed in considering the issue of intertextuality for Fiske. Intertextuality is not only a way to question where a text—literally or figuratively in terms of objects, practices, rituals, that are in need of interpretation—begins and ends. Intertextuality for Fiske means thinking historically and contextually, since all texts are situated within broader contexts. Just as theory is open, so are the objects of analysis. As Fiske argues:

> The first thing, obviously, is that there is no such thing as a single meaning of a text. The second thing is, that interpretational criticism is part of the struggle for meaning. Interpretation is not a neutral, a naive, or an objective act. It is part of the process, so that we need to be explicit that the way in which we are interpreting is a politicized and theoretical way, and that it contests other ways. So I will then say that the text itself then should be seen as a resource, a semiotic resource . . . But the people in their different formations will try to put texts to work in quite different ways, so that for me, rather than

> the text being something, a text is something that social formations try to do things with, and it's what they do with it that is more important than the text itself.
>
> (Fiske 1993b: 58)

Fiske stressed context and pressed us to be vigilant about how a text was situated and how texts articulated or were interconnected with other texts. Thinking critically in terms of a text's relations to other texts and contexts requires reflexivity and reflection. For Fiske, we must always be attentive to the specificities of social locations and how those locations are connected to broader social structures and social forces (Fiske 1990a, 1990b).

Fiske also advocated for a telescopic analysis, where one must constantly work back and forth from the micro contexts and the particularities of people engaged in everyday practices to the macro level of social forces that structure societies in inequalities. Doing so opened up culture as an arena of struggle; culture can serve to generate domination and stratification, as well as offer a resource for resistance against those opposing social forces. This telescopic strategy brought together texts, social formations, and historical conditions in order to unearth the social circulation of meanings that infused people's lives with purpose.

Fiske's approach also drew on ethnography (both textual and audience) to supplement other forms of analysis and to bring concrete empirical evidence, such as the specificities of one's material conditions, to bear on analysis. For Fiske:

> ethnography is a discursive and therefore theoretical enterprise, and . . . every stage of the ethnographic enterprise is theoretically driven. The production of the "reality" that is the object of study is theoretically driven, the identification and rejection of data and their ranking in a hierarchy of significance in all instances of theory in practice. Investigation, description, putting-into-discourse, and interpretation are inseparable for they are all interlinked stages in the discursive process. There is no non-interpretive stage of investigation, for the choice of the object of investigation is an interpretive act.
>
> (Fiske 1991a: 334)

As a theoretically driven enterprise, ethnography highlights the importance of description, or articulating the conditions, thoughts, orientations of others, as well as reminding us that the work of interpretation is always inseparable from and constitutive of the entire research process. Furthermore, ethnography assists in the telescopic approach by linking the macro-politics of social structures to the micro-politics of everyday life. In doing so, ethnography illuminates how these intersections are sites of contextually situated struggles

over people's meanings, identities, and values. For Fiske, ethnography must be concerned with:

> Identifying the relationships between material conditions (such as homelessness) and cultural practices (such as watching television) is not only beginning to clarify the object of interpretation, it is beginning the interpretive process itself. But these cultural practices do not merely occur at the intersection of texts with socially situated readers; they occur in a specific environment that needs to be treated as a cultural site structured by the same social conditions as those structuring the intersection of text and reader, and the social production of both. This environment is as *cultural* as any text and any reading practice.
>
> (Fiske 1991c: 457)

Finally, ethnography aids in depicting and capturing the rich texture of everydayness, and the complexity and diversity of local situations within broader structural forces. Mindful of ethnographic limitations, Fiske reminds us that we must be sensitive to the ways that we put the practices and cultures of others into discourse and explanation by undertaking an ethnographic reflexivity whereby "discourse does not have to erase their particularity entirely and does not have to set its own way of knowing as inherently superior, but tries to account for the value of concrete cultural practices in the process of putting them into discourse" (Fiske 1992: 169). Only by approaching theory and method as part and parcel of the intellectual project of cultural analysis can we begin to learn the art of "How to Fiske."

SECTION TWO: LESSONS ON THE PRACTICE OF CULTURAL STUDIES

This section of the introduction turns to look at Fiske's practice of cultural studies and focuses on a number of themes at play in his late work. The first part of this section discusses the role of the popular, popular discrimination, and the culture of everyday life. The second part turns to explore Fiske's engagement with the work of Michel Foucault, particularly around power, knowledge, bodies, and pleasures.

ON THE POPULAR AND POPULAR CULTURE

Fiske traverses the topography of the American landscape to highlight the ways that ordinary people creatively construct their social identities and relationships through the use of the resources available to them, while constrained by social conditions not of their own choosing.

Following Fiske, we must theorize the popular as central to social analysis. The popular, for Fiske, are the textual and performative products and practices that people bring to social life; these contributions can be seen as the positive input of various embodied, concrete contexts of people's creative social formations through which identities and social relations are forged:

> popular culture has to cope but rejects the assumption that the people have no resources of their own from which to derive their coping strategies, their resistances, and their own culture. Popular culture in industrial societies does exist, even though it may never be pure and authentic, for it is always made from cultural resources that are opposed to it, it is always contradictory and inscribed with traces of that to which it is opposed. It is always, then, a culture of struggle, a culture of making do rather than one of making. Popular culture is typically bound up with the products and technology of mass culture, but its creativity consists in its ways of using these products and technologies, not in producing them.
>
> (Fiske 1995: 325)

For Fiske, the popular expresses the meanings, values, and pleasures that people creatively cultivate out of the resources around them. While these resources—the commercial and public/mass culture afforded by post-industrial society—may not be of their own making, they become the raw materials through which people cope with, strategize, and resist against the forces that structure societies in domination and inequality. Therefore the popular is always contradictory, in that it has aspects of both the dominant and the subordinate aspects of society, as well as the terrain of struggle whereby the meanings of everyday life are made. For Fiske:

> Popular culture has to make do with what it has; popular creativity lies in the imaginative use of resources that are not its own to produce something that is its own; popular culture is always deeply inscribed with traces of that which it is not; it is shot through with traces of dominant others whose domination has been tamed and turned. In a multicultural world, popular culture cannot be pure or authentic culture, but must always be hybrid and crossed with the contradictory forces that crisscross the lives of subordinate social formations. Popular culture carries always its own genealogy of that which it used to be, and whatever it is at the moment is always a point in a field of possibilities of that which it might become.
>
> (Fiske 1996b: 10)

For Fiske, popular culture is always defined by its creativity, in that it has no necessary outcome or purpose, but is rather open-ended in terms of what its

consumers can imagine. Furthermore, popular culture is defined by its hybridity. Popular culture is never pure or authentic, since it is always changed, reworked, or refashioned from something previous. In this sense, culture is always in process for Fiske; what must be explored are the complex circuits of culture, the production, circulation, and consumption practices at work in the temporal and spatial context of social arenas defined by conflict and struggle.

ON POPULAR DISCRIMINATION

By juxtaposing the dominant (the culture industries) and the subordinate (the people), Fiske is not seeking to demonize or romanticize; rather he seeks to cultivate a humanism which is irreducible to deterministic abstract theories of society that offer up fatalistic explanations of social life grounded in political economy, patriarchy, or racism. Fiske's work highlights the ways that people construct meaning out of their everyday lives that often go unnoticed or are overlooked, and which often resist or defy the conformity imposed by society. In doing so, Fiske highlights how people exercise "popular discrimination":

> Popular culture in our society is made by the various formations of the people at the interface between the products of capitalism and everyday life. But the products of capitalism always exceed the needs of the people, so popular discrimination begins with the choice of which products to use in the production of popular culture and then passes on to the imaginative linking of the meanings and pleasure produced from them with the conditions of everyday life.
>
> (Fiske 1991b: 103–104)

Following Fiske, popular discrimination helps us understand the relevance that particular cultural products have for specifically located individuals. Furthermore, popular discrimination highlights the activity of producing popular culture; popular culture is made through the interconnections between the meanings and pleasures produced through the "putting to use" of a particular cultural product and the immediate social situations of its users. These meanings are socially and historically specific and will change over time, as the conditions of everyday life change. These investments are not trivial; quite the contrary for Fiske, it is here in the particular culture of practitioners that these objects become deeply significant in their modes of living.

ON THE CULTURE OF EVERYDAY LIFE

The concern with everyday life is central to Fiske's thinking:

> the recovery of the history of everyday life, and the way that the people struggle to maintain some control over their immediate conditions of existence, to enlarge their sphere of control within a much larger sphere of power which is outside their control. The point of contestation between these two forms of power, power over the immediate conditions of one's life, and the power of the large determinative structures, this is the contestation of everyday life.
>
> (Fiske 1993b: 55)

The recovery of something that is too often passed over as trivial or mundane is the primary focus for Fiske. Everyday life contextualizes the ways people try and exercise agency and autonomy within their local circumstances. Fiske contrasts this sense of personal control with larger structural forces and structures that bear down upon us—political economy, laws and social policies, access to institutions and resources, etc. Fiske does so in order to highlight the tensions and struggles that are lived out as two different forms of power at work in all social settings. For Fiske, these contesting powers, as they work themselves out in everyday life, highlight the conflicts of interest that define social life, and the ways ordinary people are, more often than not, more creative and resourceful than is commonly perceived.

As a result, we must remember that for Fiske, following Raymond Williams, "culture is ordinary" and that for the cultural theorist:

> Popular critical analysis and evaluation must recognize that a text cannot be distanced from its uses and users. Texts that once have been made into popular culture are occasionally treated as high culture and hung in galleries or exhibited at film festivals: these exhibitions distance the text from its conditions of popularity and move it toward the transcendent and the universal. The movement toward the transcendent is away from the people, who do not, in general, seek their culture in art galleries, film festivals, and similar sites that are set apart from the mundanity of the everyday; for them, the mundane is the crucial site of cultural significance, for the mundane is the only terrain upon which popular culture can be made and can be made to matter. Culture is ordinary, and the ordinary is highly significant.
>
> (Fiske 1995: 335)

Critical analysis must always be engaged with social life as it unfolds in its specificities. For Fiske, this means we must be attentive to what the activities with which people are engaged mean for them. Therefore, there can never be an abstraction out of those conditions, since detaching a text from its

contexts removes its significance to the people who engage it. This "on the ground" cultural analysis takes culture as "ordinary." For Fiske, it is in the everydayness of life, in the ordinary ways people carve out lives for themselves, in the ways in which they invest their time and energies, that culture matters most. For Fiske, only by viewing culture as ordinary, as everyday, as it is lived out in specific contexts, can we be attentive to the plurality and diversity of social life.

ON FISKE'S ENGAGEMENT WITH FOUCAULT

Whether implicit or explicit, Michel Foucault is the dominant interlocutor in Fiske's late work.[6] Two aspects of Foucault's thought are central to our focus here:

> the ways that knowledge is constructed and circulated, different forms of knowledge, different ways of knowing the world, different ways of knowing oneself. Texts play a part in this, but only a part. I'm again obviously using knowledge in a Foucauldian or post-Foucauldian sense, where it is connected with both power and pleasure. And what I'm interested in, more than Foucault, are the points of control, those specificities, particular moments, when different knowledges and the power that they bear come into contestation. So I want to take fairly abstract systemic notions of knowledge and then try and see exactly how they work in very particular circumstances and how knowledge is put into practice in particular circumstances.
>
> (Fiske 1993b: 60)

> Foucauldian arguments about the disciplinary mechanisms which try to control and organize the body are crucially relevant here. I think that this is one of the most significant shifts in cultural theory within the last generation. The question has shifted away from how ideology works and controls, to how the body works, how the body is controlled—not just the individual body, but the body of the people, the social body, the body politic.
>
> (Fiske 1990c: 6)

As a bricoleur, Fiske does not seek to offer a complete interpretation or to reconstruct Foucault's thought in some systemic way; rather, he highlights those dimensions of Foucault's thought that are most useful for his own intellectual agenda.[7] Fiske's focus is twofold: 1) to draw out Foucault's concern with power relations, that is the plurality of power relations as they circulate throughout society in the multiplicity of networks, systems, forms, mechanisms, and apparatuses by which the normative order of society is imposed; 2) the internalization of power relations, or the embodiment, in our

behaviors, attitudes, and comportments, of the normative order that is socialized into us.[8] Following Foucault, power relations are inextricably intertwined with knowledge; knowledge is constructed and circulated throughout society—predominantly through the sciences, biology, economics, psychology, sociology—and by the translation of these disciplines' claims into fields of practice such as medicine, psychotherapy, and social work, which constitute fields or disciplines of power. Here, knowledges are focused on the imposition of order, social control, and the regulation of behavior and bodies. Technologies of all kinds—medication, behavior modification, management practices, computerized surveillance, and record keeping—are all put to the service of social regulation.[9]

For Fiske, what is most important is to remember that power/knowledge is not always coercive; it is regulatory and order-maintaining of the norms, codes, and rules through which the social organization is produced and reproduced. Power, in this sense, is always both productive and repressive, top down and bottom up, or, as Fiske states in *Power Plays Power Works*, "imperial" and "localizing," in that relations of power can come into contestation as different knowledges collide in particular moments and under specific conditions. Through these juxtapositions, we can see power is not something one has or wields over others; rather, it is constitutive of all social relations, norms, and practices, working on the dominant as well as the dominated. In this way, we can see that power is not centralized, not restricted to political institutions, nor reducible to them; rather, power circulates in a web in which we are all enmeshed.

Fiske's reading of Foucault helps us understand power/knowledge as circulating from above, in terms of authorities and institutions, as well as from below and laterally. Following Foucault, Fiske argues that people/bodies are never fixed or determined universals or essences; bodies are the physical basis of culturally and historically situated constructions. For Fiske, bodies are the terrain of social struggles:

> The body and its specific behavior is where the power system stops being abstract and becomes material. The body is where it succeeds or fails, where it is acceded to or struggled against. The struggle for control, top-down vs. bottom-up, is waged on the material terrain of the body and its immediate context.
>
> (Fiske 1992: 162)

While the body can be controlled and disciplined by society, it may also resist society through its own practices, strategies, and activities.

For Fiske, the body, both the individual and the collective social body of the population, are focal points of analysis. It is the materiality of the body,

and the material conditions within which bodies are situated, that make it a powerful site of contestation over agency and meaning. Through this framework, Fiske seeks to analyze situated social agents who negotiate the world around them with the material and symbolic resources available to them. This agency is fueled by interests and investments, as well as by control over some conditions of one's existence. For Fiske, these are powerful stimulants for people to engage in the production of popular culture as a means of pleasure. Pleasure, for Fiske, is more than just the eroticism found in Freud and psychoanalysis; for him, pleasure is the motivation and investment in which people cultivate their political and social activities:

> trying to understand pleasure that is motivational, that is working towards a progressive or at least confrontational view of the social order and distinguishing this from the sort of ideological pleasure that is the bait or the hook of hegemony, is, I think, very important. We also need to understand that in some way pleasure connects with and is part of our bodily physical experience, it's not purely mental; all the theories of popular resistance in one way or another ground that resistance in the body of the people.
>
> (Fiske 1993b: 56)

For Fiske, pleasure is not imposed or dictated from above, but rather is the visceral pleasure located in the physicality of the body, which connects the individual body, the popular, and the body politic together. For Fiske, this is not some frivolous sense of pleasure; rather it is the materialization of meaningfulness in terms of the lived experience of people. Through creativity, expressions, and cultural practices people create individual and collective identities that defy the forces and structures of domination, inequality, and marginalization that seek to render people docile and dispensable in capitalist societies. As a result, bodies and pleasures become sites of social conflict in the contemporary social order, as people issue challenges to that order. In the face of the anomie created through globalization and neoliberalism, bodies and pleasures become mediums to humanize ourselves and create a sense of meaning and purpose in the immediacy of our everyday lives. Through the critical interrogation of popular culture and the role it serves in everyday life as analyzed through a reconstruction of Foucault's thought, we see how micro and macro contexts are intimately intertwined, as well as how abstract theory can be used to dissect the concrete in the art of learning "How to Fiske."

SECTION THREE: THE POLITICAL AND THE PERSONAL LESSONS

This third section reflects on the political and personal lessons Fiske imparted. First, it explores Fiske's basic assumption of conflict as fundamental to

society; second, it looks at the ways Fiske encouraged us to infuse/relate our intellectual lives with our personal ones and, third, the ways that Fiske envisioned social change.

ON CONFLICTUAL SOCIAL THEORIES

Running throughout the lessons Fiske imparted was a conflictual model of social life. Fiske always advocated for such a foundational view in order to highlight the constant flux and change of social life, as well as the multiplicity of viewpoints and knowledges that contest each other and circulate throughout society. For Fiske, without this focus on plurality and diversity, a focus on social differences, there could be no social change. It is in the control of plurality, the control of difference, that society becomes antidemocratic and totalitarian. As a result, we must concern ourselves with the differences allotted by the dominant social order, but also must be aware of those that exceed or transgress the bounds of the social order. These points of transgression serve as reminders of the limits of the social order and its regulatory power. For Fiske, the cultivation of differences and diversity sustained an open-endedness of people to exercise agency and pursue their own projects. This conflict model of society was critical of notions of liberal pluralism and cultural relativism; these consensus models of social life obscure, rather than illuminate, power relations, as they imply that all views are considered legitimate and taken seriously in the public sphere of debate. Analyzing social differences as conflict-driven opens the door to critiquing the power relations structuring capitalist societies in social inequalities.

ON LOCAL KNOWLEDGES

Through this conflictual model of social life Fiske taught us not only to recognize social differences, but also to be attentive to the local knowledges tethered to those differences. In a multicultural world a multiplicity of knowledges or ways of understanding the world exist and contradict each other. While there may be a purported "official" version of events, there are always a multiplicity of interpretations of those events which exist underneath and are most often discredited, marginalized, or silenced.

These "local knowledges" belong to weaker social formations that may not have the power, money, or resources to circulate their views as widely as others. Just as knowledge disciplines us, from the top down, knowledge can also be cultivated and put to use from the bottom up, as people refuse to be disciplined or comply completely with what they have been told. Knowledge renders the world knowable and controllable, especially in terms of one's

immediate conditions to defend one's social positions, territory, and identity. Local knowledges come in a multiplicity of forms from different vantage points and social positions in society. Just like cultural texts and practices, local knowledges are put to use by the social formations that construct them. Here, Fiske reminds us that different ways of knowing the world are always political and they come with different societal relations. As society becomes more unequal, social differences become exacerbated. For Fiske, as cultural theorists we must always be attentive to local knowledges and the diversity of perspectives so as not to dismiss or homogenize social differences.

ON THE IMPORTANCE OF INTELLECTUAL LABOR

Furthermore, Fiske never let us succumb to the "detached ivory tower perspective" of intellectual life; he took the role of the intellectual and the intellectual labor one produced to be important contributions to society. For Fiske:

> the point of producing knowledge is not just to understand our social conditions but to work to improve them. I wish to live in a society in which social differences are respected and validated and in which power differences are minimized. I believe that the knowledge of our current social conditions produced by conflictual social theories is more likely to work to achieve that end (which requires us to change many aspects of the society in which we live) than is the knowledge produced by consensual theories.
>
> (Fiske 1991a: 334)

Intellectual labor, driven by conflictual social theory, can be put to the service of social change. Conflictual approaches unearth the contradictions in society and expose their mechanisms which generate inequalities. The corpus of Fiske's scholarship works to promote such a democratic advancement. For Fiske, this is never about changing people's consciousness alone; rather it is to provoke people to examine the material conditions of their lives where inequalities are experienced most viscerally. Intellectual labor, for Fiske, must take on all areas of society, from the political to the economic, the educational, and the industrial. However, it is culture for Fiske that remains the central terrain of struggle:

> In multicultural societies the role of popular culture is crucial. Its fluidity and hybridity counter any tendency of identity politics to go too far towards isolationism and essentialism: hybrid culture necessarily has multiple points of entry, its forms invite access from different social positions. Popular culture plays a central role in identity formation, and its hybridity ensures that it will

> always bring traces of other identities into the process. The cultural identities within whose formation it is most active, then, are those that are constituted as a field of possible connections with others, and for them hybrid popular culture can always serve as a terrain whereon these potentialities may be realized. It is always a terrain of possible, and possibly actualizable, alliances. In a world where the management of difference is a key strategy of global capitalism, popular culture's potential to serve as a site where alliances of the people may be formed to oppose those of the power bloc will ensure its increasing importance in the politics, as well as the economics, of postmodernity.
>
> (Fiske 1996b: 12)

Popular culture remains vital for Fiske to the analysis of contemporary social life for a number of reasons. The fluidity of popular culture staves off the essentialism or reification of social identities (racial, class, gender, sexuality), which too often leads to a splintering of social groups, rather than a recognition of their collective interests. Furthermore, popular culture, as defined by its hybridity, always has aspects of multiple identities that open it up to many different social formations at once. Here, popular culture can serve as a vehicle for social connections across groups or as the terrain where different groups can establish alliances around shared perspectives, interests, and politics. In a world defined by conflict, struggle, and division, the dynamism of popular culture affords potential points for these larger social formations to emerge. In emphasizing the increasing importance of the role of popular culture in contemporary society, it is necessary to note Fiske's caveats. In his discussion, he is careful to note that popular culture is a terrain of the "possible connections," that culture has the "potential" where "alliances . . . may be formed." These caveats indicate the way Fiske thinks of social change emerging:

> I'm a highly political person myself. My motivation, I suppose, has changed over the years. At one time it was closer to a fairly regular Marxist sort of desire to change capitalism. The desire to change is still there, but I don't think now that capitalism is vulnerable to overthrow. It's too flexible, it's too good at doing what it does well, which is maintaining its own power. So I think it's more vulnerable to change on the micro level, change from within, evolution from within, a gradual shifting rather than a revolution.
>
> (Fiske 1993b: 52)

For Fiske, the enduring strength of capitalism as a political-economic system led to a change in his thinking about how social change could occur. Rather than thinking about a mass-scale revolution as the key to forging a better

society, as was once popular amongst leftist academics, Fiske took on a more pragmatic and strategic vision of social reform. For Fiske, gradual shifts and changes from within the system that occur at the local level, in the politics of everyday life, may prove to be more effective.

Fiske always cautioned us to remember that the politics of everyday life are never sufficient on their own to create social change. However, everyday life is political, and those politics can be, and often are, possibilities for progressive change. Fiske always encouraged us to see the potential or progressive elements within popular culture and the possible political ends to which people put it to use. While he cautioned that popular culture alone would not produce radical change in society, it was always a resource that could aid in transforming one's control over one's everyday life. As such, the power of popular culture was always in its possibilities, possibilities without guarantees.

ON PASSION AND INTELLECTUAL LIFE

For Fiske, being an intellectual was not simply a choice of career; it was also a choice of how to live. Fiske always encouraged us to draw on our life experiences and to let them infuse our intellectual work with our own interests and passions. In many ways our lives and our work were considered to be of a whole; just as one interrogated one's work, one also needed to interrogate one's life. As in our scholarship, we must continually work to better understand how and where we are embedded in society; we must be reflexive about our own projects and politics so as not to perpetuate the very structures and forces of social inequality we sought to critique. In many ways Fiske issued a call-to-arms; he connected the personal, the political, and the academic by having one inform the others; he challenged us to use the theoretical tools he gave us, not simply for academic work but to live critically, to always be rethinking culture, power, and politics, in a society that too often takes things for granted.

Whether in the classroom, at a social gathering, in his office hours, or during a private conversation on a cool fall evening after a seminar, John Fiske exemplified and practiced what he preached. When Fiske retired from academia in 2000, he walked away to a different life selling pre-industrial antiques. It was at the anniversary of Fiske's tenth year of retirement from the Communication Arts department at the University of Wisconsin that a conference honoring him was held entitled "Fiske Matters." Fiske gave the keynote address, "The Rise of the Individual in Early Modern Europe: Cultural Studies Tangles with Antiques," which blew us all away with his ongoing insight, his creativity, and his wisdom. He may have turned away from his old profession, but the cultural theory flowed out of him and radiated

as brightly as it did back in the days of our graduate seminars. Once again he reminded us of how Cultural Studies enriches our lives and how it can help us better engage the world around us. It was as if Fiske came back just to remind us what a masterful thinker he was and of the power of cultural studies to continue to inform. Fiske always embodied what he did, and he continued to do so, returning that day to lead by example once again.

Fiske always encouraged us to let our passions inform where we took our scholarly work. While not a member of my dissertation committee, it was Fiske who came up with my dissertation topic. I had moved to Chicago in the summer of 1997 and would frequently travel to Madison to meet with Fiske to seek his guidance and enjoy wonderful conversation. That summer I had also become involved with the Lindy Hop revival taking place all over the country. In the spring of 1998 Fiske and I were talking one evening, over some very ordinary red wine at the Living Room, and I began to ramble on about all my experiences in this new fascinating subculture. As I went on from one story to the next, John smiled, let out a laugh, and said: "Why don't you forget about that intellectual history project you're working on; I haven't heard you speak one word about it tonight. This is where you passion is—this is where you're alive. Listen to the way you talk about all these experiences. This is what you need to write your dissertation on." I drove home the next day with this new idea rolling around in my head. I thought to myself—a dissertation on the Lindy Hop revival—how could I possibly give up my "serious scholarship" and undertake such an esoteric project? However, this was a suggestion from Fiske and, more often than not, those suggestions were treasures hiding in plain sight. I remembered the words spoken years before echoing in my head . . . "You can take it or leave it." Some 15 years later that dissertation is now *American Allegory: Lindy Hop and the Racial Imagination*, published by University of Chicago Press. I have Fiske to thank, not only for the idea and inspiration but also for the years of mentoring me and encouraging me every step of the way.

ON LEARNING HOW TO FISKE

While the lessons Fiske imparted extend far beyond the limitations of an introduction, I have hoped to convey some of the most important, to engage not just the material found here in *Power Play Power Works* but throughout all of Fiske's scholarship. In his written work, his teaching, his mentoring, and his life, he taught us to critically question and interrogate the world around us. He remained stalwart in his intellectual endeavors and emboldened us to never give in to apathy, determinism, or pessimism in any of their guises in either our work or our lives. Like the boat's transformative power for Foucault, Fiske cultivated both our intellects and our imaginations.

He inspired us all to try, as best as we could, in learning the art of "How to Fiske."

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my research assistant Joseph Cleary, my colleague Darrel Newton at Salisbury University, DePaul University Information Commons Librarian Krystal Lewis, and University of Wisconsin-Madison Archives Director David Null for their support.

NOTES

1. Foucault (1986: 27). Reproduced with permission of Johns Hopkins University Press.
2. A preliminary version of this introduction was given at "FISKE Matters: A Conference on John Fiske's Continuing Legacy for Cultural Studies," Madison, Wisconsin, June 11–12, 2010.
3. For a reflection on the enduring legacy of Fiske's work, see Henry Jenkins essay "Why Fiske Still Matters" in Fiske (2010a, 2010b, 2010c, 2010d).
4. See Levi-Strauss (1962) for the root of this approach.
5. See Fiske (1993a), p. 33, notes 5 and 8.
6. This is by no means to diminish the importance of Fiske's other interlocutors. An overview of all of them is beyond the scope of this essay. One could have selected Bakhtin, De Certeau, Gramsci, Hall, or Williams, but, given the centrality of Foucault, emphasis was placed there.
7. Fiske draws his reading of Foucault from Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* (1979), *The History of Sexuality Part I* (1978), and the essays and interviews collected in *Power/Knowledge* (1972). It is important to contextualize Fiske's reading in its specific historical time period. When *Power Plays Power Works* was published in 1993, Foucault's lecture courses, which have expanded the depth and breadth of scholarship, especially around the workings of power, were unavailable.
8. My own work continues to be heavily influenced by Fiske; see Hancock (2013).
9. For a reading of Foucault heavily influenced by Fiske, see Hancock and Garner (2009).

REFERENCES

Fiske, John. 1989. *Understanding Popular Culture*. London: Routledge.

——. 1990a. "Ethnosemiotics: Some Personal and Theoretical Reflections." *Cultural Studies*. 4(1): 85–99.

——. 1990b. *Introduction to Communication Studies.* London: Routledge.

——. 1990c. "An interview with John Fiske." *Border/lines.* 20(21): 4–7.

——. 1991a. "Writing Ethnographies: Contributions to a Dialogue." *Quarterly Journal of Speech.* 77: 330–335.

——. 1991b. "Popular Discrimination." In James Naremore and Patrick Brantlinger (Eds.). *Modernity and Mass Culture*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 103–116.

——. 1991c. "For Cultural Interpretation: A Study of the Culture of Homelessness." *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*. 8: 455–474.

——. 1992. "Cultural Studies and the Culture of Everyday Life." In Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson, and Paula Treichler (Eds.). *Cultural Studies*. New York: Routledge, 154–173.
——. 1993a. *Power Plays Power Works*. London: Verso Books.
——. 1993b. "From 'Ideology' to 'Knowledge' and 'Power' Interview with John Fiske by Eggo Müller." *Montage/AV*. 2(1): 52–66.
——. 1995. "Popular Culture." In Frank Lentricchia and Thomas McLaughlin (Eds.). *Critical Terms for Literary Study*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 321–335.
——. 1996a. "Down under Cultural Studies." *Cultural Studies*. 10(2): 369–374.
——. 1996b. "Hybrid Vigor: Popular Culture in a Multicultural, Post-Fordist World." *Studies in Latin American Popular Culture*. 15: 43–60.
——. 2010a. *The John Fiske Collection: Introduction to Communication Studies*. London: Routledge.
——. 2010b. *The John Fiske Collection: Reading the Popular*. London: Routledge.
——. 2010c. *The John Fiske Collection: Television Culture*. London: Routledge.
——. 2010d. *The John Fiske Collection: Understanding Popular Culture*. London: Routledge.
Foucault, Michel. 1972. *Power/Knowledge*. New York: Pantheon.
——. 1978. *The History of Sexuality Part I*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
——. 1979. *Discipline and Punish*. London: Allen Lane.
——. 1986. "Of Other Spaces." *Diacritics*. 16(1): 22–27.
Hancock, Black Hawk. 2013. *American Allegory: Lindy Hop and the Racial Imagination*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
Hancock, Black Hawk, and Roberta Garner. 2009. *Changing Theories: New Directions in Sociology*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
Levi-Strauss, Claude. 1962. *The Savage Mind*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

PART ONE

POWER AND CULTURAL THEORY

This page intentionally left blank

1

POWER PLAYS

AN INTRODUCTORY INSTANCE

It is about 2:00 a.m. on Tuesday, 7 November 1989. As nearly a decade of Reaganomic policies draws to an end, a homeless man in a small Midwestern city slips *Die Hard* into his shelter's VCR. Some fifteen or twenty other homeless men are in the same lounge, all of them white. Some are playing cards, some are reading, some talking, but most are just sitting. Tobacco smoke hangs in the air, and the supervisor sits at his desk just beyond the lounge's always-open door. From here he can observe the men's behavior in this lounge and in the non-smoking one next door.

The beginning of the movie flicks onto the screen, but the men pay little attention; most have seen it before, for it is one of the few violent, masculine movies among the "family" ones that are available to them at the local library. The couple of dollars charged at video rental stores is too much for these men, so they use the free collection at the public library and thus submit their cultural pleasures to a menu drawn up according to someone else's notion of culture-in-the-public-interest as opposed to the commercial interests that inform the selection at the rental stores. Socially similar eyes watch over both the men's behavior in the lounges and the movies on offer at the public library.