quarterTitle

BAUMAN and BRIGGS

halfTitle

Voices of Modernity

Language and Tradition have long been relegated to the sidelines as scholars have considered the role of politics, science, technology and economics in the making of the modern world. This novel reading of over two centuries of philosophy, political theory, anthropology, folklore and history argues that new ways of imagining language and representing supposedly premodern people - the poor, labourers, country folk, non-europeans and women - made political and scientific revolutions possible. The connections between language ideologies, privileged linguistic codes, and political concepts and practices shape the diverse ways we perceive ourselves and others. Bauman and Briggs demonstrate that contemporary efforts to make schemes of social inequality based on race, gender, class and nationality seem compelling and legitimate rely on deeply-rooted ideas about language and tradition. Showing how critics of modernity unwittingly reproduce these foundational fictions, they suggest new strategies for challenging the undemocratic influence of these voices

of modernity.

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Studies in The Social and Cultural Foundations of Language

The aim of this series is to develop theoretical perspectives on the social and cultural character of language by methodical and empirical emphasis on the occurrence of language in its communicative and interactional settings, on the socioculturaly grounded "meanings" and "functions" of linguistic forms, and on the social scientific study of language use across cultures. It will thus explore the essentially ethnographic nature of linguistic date and language practises, whether synchronic or diachronic, whether normative or variational, whether spontaneously occurring or induced by an investigator. Works appearing in the series will make substantive and theoretical contributions to debates over the nature of language's embeddedness in social and cultural life, and over the role of language in sociocultural systems. The series will represent the concerns of scholars in the anthropology and sociology of language, sociolinguistics,

and socioculturally informed psycholinguistics.

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PUBLISHED BY THE PRESS SYNDICATE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE

The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge, CB2 1RP, United Kingdom

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge, CB2 2RU, UK

40 West 20th Street, New York, NY 10011-4211, USA

477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia

Ruiz de Alarcón 13, 28014 Madrid, Spain

Dock House, The Waterfront, Cape Town 8001, South Africa

http://www.cambridge.org

First published 2003

Printed in the United Kingdom at the University Press, Cambridge

Typeset in []

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication data

ISBN 0 521 81069 8 hardback

ISBN 0 521 00897 2 paperback

titlePage

VOICES OF MODERNITY:

LANGUAGE IDEOLOGIES AND

THE POLITICS OF INEQUALITY

Richard Bauman

Charles L. Briggs

CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

listOfIllustrations

Illustrations

Figure 1. Franz Boas's Table of Consonants. From his Introduction to the Handbook of American Indian Languages, 1911 (listed in the bibliography), page 23. I have enlarged it. This appears in Chapter 8. Since the volume was published by the Smithsonian in 1911, I presume that we do not need to seek permission to reproduce it.

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Figure 2. "Lord, I miss English", a *Non Sequitur* cartoon by wiley Miller. This illustration appears in Chapter 9.

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Preface

Back some thirteen years and many life changes ago, we had an idea. Both of us had been thinking about questions of performance, how the enactment of discursive, bodily, and material forms in performative settings produces and transforms people and social relations. But we were unsatisfied with the ability of our own work and other frameworks with which we were familiar to capture the richness of events that we witnessed and the broad political, social, and historical questions that they raised. In particular, the way that friends George and Silvianita López, Francisco Pérez, or José Antonio Pérez used performances as political tools in challenging racism and nation-states seemed to be much more sophisticated than any framework we could muster in accounting for it. Sharing discomfort with received categories of language, aesthetics, culture, tradition, and other truths that generally seemed to be held to be self-evident, we had the vague feeling that some sort of magic act had been performed long before our time that transformed certain problematic

categories into supposedly universal features of the world around us. While we saw our scholarly work as part of a progressive political project, we were not satisfied with our efforts to tie theorizing and analysis to struggles to challenge social inequality and structures of oppression.

At first we agreed to organize a conference. If only a wide range of scholars from different disciplinary backgrounds could get together for a few days, we hoped, our collective wisdom might help us to sort out the problems and chart more productive ways to forge ahead. After a few conversations, though, we decided that a much more sustained dialogue and a great deal of reading would be required. We made the fateful decision: we decided to write a book. Each of us accuses the other of having broached this suggestion. If we had known then that it would take thirteen years and thousands upon thousands of hours of work to accomplish this goal, we would probably have shared one last beer and another collegial abrazo and returned to our individual research projects.

Our initial efforts focused on rethinking theories and analytic frameworks of the twentieth century, particularly those that had come into prominence in the preceding quarter century. We published a few papers, laying out ways of thinking about performance, performativity, text, intertextuality, and similar notions. Although we felt that we had loosened

the grip of some of the demons that were haunting us, we concluded that we had failed to escape the fundamental constraints that limited the ways that we could imagine culture, language, community, tradition, temporality, and power. The great magicians seemed to have begun their work long before, particularly in the early modern period. That's when we really got started.

From that point to the present, we have tried to read works that have shaped received notions of language, nature, history, tradition, politics, society, and science. We have read through three hundred years of what is now classified as philosophy, political theory, anthropology, linguistics, folklore, history, literary theory, sociology, and art history. We had encountered some of these texts in the course of our undergraduate and graduate educations, others in research projects and general reading since that time. And others we read for the first time. But even texts that we knew well seemed suddenly to change in character. Works from the seventeenth century that we had previously appreciated for their sense of temporal and cultural remoteness, for their seeming lack of connection with contemporary perspectives, suddenly seemed to be in close dialogue with those demons that haunted us in the late twentieth century. Hobbes, Locke, Herder, and their kin seemed to be sitting in the room with us as we read. And their presence did not always seem like that of a trusted ally.

These were moments of tremendous exhilaration and not a little despair. We had the sense that we had found many of the doors that blocked passageways to new modes of thinking and acts of political resistance. The ghosts that had left us with vague feelings of intellectual and political claustrophobia suddenly had names, voices, political positions, and historical locations. At the same time, we live in a world in which the pressure to turn insight into lectures and publications is constant. And we had very, very little idea how rereading Kant's first and third critiques and exploring the second critique, his anthropology, and other writings would ever find its way into any texts to which we could sign our names.

We found our collective voice when reading John Locke's Essay Concerning Human Understanding and the second of his Two Treatises of Government. We had, like others, learned to read them separately, as if they were written by two Lockes or were exploring two separate terrains. But then our reading took a subversive turn. What would happen if we read the Essay against the Treatises, to allow our reading of one text to inform the other? Soon we discovered how deeply the project developed in the second Treatise, the famous map of modern politics, depended upon the notions of rational, autonomous, self-aware subjects who could speak with voices that seemed to be divorced from their own

social locations, interests, and particular experiences. It also led us to read the first Treatise seriously—which happens altogether too seldom these days. We discovered that the first blow struck in Locke's attack on Robert Filmer and his Royalist politics was textual; it embodied what we call Locke's anti-rhetorical rhetoric, his development of a new rhetorical framework for undermining certain types of rhetoric. We then read back into the Essay with an eye to how deeply its claims to make language neutral and apolitical formed part of a bold political project. As we read into Locke's writings on money, religion, and education, we learned that Locke had embodied his ideas about the politics of language in attempts to shape what ways of speaking would afford access to power, how privileged discursive practices would be learned, and how would learn them.

Meanwhile, the other member of the team was tracking down some ofLocke's contemporaries in the Royal Society as they journeyed away from scientific experimentation and the Society's quarters in Gresham College into the countryside. Focusing on John Aubrey in particular was initially a side line, an attempt to figure out what the Royal Society crowd was doing when it was not charting modernity in scientific or political terms. Aubrey's inscription of songs, charms, and stories from his nanny and other ignorant country-people, as he characterized them, seemed to be

entirely divorced from what Robert Boyle was doing, for example, with his air pump and other scientific technologies. But then we began comparing notes. The terms, concepts, and rhetorical strategies that one of us was finding in Hobbes, Locke, Boyle, and other students of the modern seemed to be cropping up, generally in inverted ways, in Aubrey. Then another subversive move too place: We began to read Aubrey and other Antiquarians not as pre-Romantics who turned their backs on modern political theory and the tumultuous events of the day but as playing a key role in imagining modernity. A Great Divide could only be projected if premodernity was itself constructed, shaped as a primordial realm that existed apart from modernity; indeed, it was premodern ignorance, magic, superstition, and downright disorder that seemed to make modernity necessary. This part of our reading was triply subversive: we dared to read texts that had been marginalized and largely forgotten alongside canonical works. We read them as part of hegemonic constructions of modernity rather than reflections of premodernity. And we began to read Locke with regard to the role that constructions of day laborers, the illiterate, country people, women, and the residents of Asia and the Americas played in enabling him to define modern linguistic and political practices.

As we looked back at other texts we had examined thus far and

continued to read in other times and areas, we discovered that these neglected ties between language and tradition with science, nature, politics, and society—that is with modernity—were hardly limited to early modern England alone. Right up through much of the work from the second half of the twentieth century that had shaped our own thinking, we found that strategies of writing and reading as well as the institutional structures of the academy placed boundaries between what were construed as autonomous epistemological domains. This is not to say that the story kept repeating itself. Rather, we found that the sorts of boundaries that were constructed, how they were maintained, and the sorts of political and social interests that they served changed dramatically over time, although in anything but a linear fashion. We came to see our own epoch, including many of the critical studies of modernity that had seemed most clearly aligned with our own ways of thinking and our political sensibilities, as embodying ever shifting combinations of different strategies for relating language to science and politics and for positioning notions of tradition (premodernity, the Other, etc.) in relationship to modernity. We did not—nor have we since—gained the impression that we can chart a course for future research and progressive agendas that can simply leave behind these mélanges. But we do feel that we have sorted out some of the most

persistent and poorly understand ways that even progressive intellectuals reproduce modern ideologies and practices, thereby helping to keep structures of inequality and domination in place.

This emergent collective voice was developed through constant correspondence and more long-distance telephone calls than our personal and department budgets could comfortably bear. We also found spaces whenever possible—before or after meetings and conferences or visits to each other's home ground—that enabled us to spend a few days engaged in near non-stop debate. We began to plot texts. Some were chapters that we assigned to one author. Others involved the distribution of sections of a single essay or chapter between the two of us. At first, the passage from conversation to text was difficult. Although it seemed as if we had a shared vision when we exchanged abrazos upon leaving the conference hotel or airport, the texts that emerged from manila envelopes were, to paraphrase Cher, traveling to the beat of quite different drums. While one of us stayed very close to the texts he was analyzing and often focused on valuable precedents for contemporary theorizing, the other had implications that were more broadly synthetic and deconstructive, moving between authors in locating ideological charters for persistent practices of oppression. We agreed a lot about new analytic frameworks, and we published a couple of

papers that suggested how contemporary theories could be rethought. But what to say about the Locke and Aubrey and Kant was a different story.

That we persevered is probably more a tribute to a deep friendship than a sense that realistically we would ever find common ground. Perhaps even more importantly, however, we had the strong sense that we were learning more than at any other period in our lives. Even if no book ever got attached to the project, it was worth it. But after sticking with it for a difficult couple of years, things changed. As before, carefully charting collective textual maps in the form of detailed outlines resulted in drafts that took unanticipated routes; we realized with increasing frequency that we had not followed the course to which we had committed ourselves in the outlines. When each of us read what our collaborator had written during those same months, however, even on a topic that lay at some temporal and topical distance, it seemed as if we had been walking five feet apart the whole time.

It still took many years to reach this moment of sending the final manuscript across the ocean to Cambridge. Beyond commitments to other research projects as well as teaching and administrative obligations—not to mention life's vicissitudes outside the walls of academe—what delayed us in particular was trying to figure out how to locate our voice in relationship

to those of others. We were keenly aware that we were trespassing, reading texts that not only belonged to other disciplines but which had been claimed by well entrenched specialists. In writing about Locke, Herder, and the Grimms Brothers for instance, we were quite cognizant that we would have to respond not only to specialists on each of those writers but to scholars who dedicated much of their scholarly energies to particular texts. Our scholarly instincts told us that we had to master the mountains of biographical, historical, and critical works that had been written about these writers and texts; we also knew that specialists would hold us accountable to them. But we also knew that if we surrendered our readings to their issues and interpretations, our critical edge and the very possibility of analyzing familiar texts from unusual points of departure would vanish. This sense of humility and angst has not gone away over the years. Bitter experience has also taught us that reading texts with long canonical trajectories against the grain and asking critical political questions about them can make people mad, even close colleagues who have agreed with us over the years on a wide range of topics.

As a result, we have completely rewritten most of these chapters several times over. We have also left mountains of text that relate to other authors, periods, and issues to, as Marx once put it, the gnawing criticism

of the mice—or perhaps now the virtual prison house of unused computer files. We decided to focus intensively on texts and authors that we believe to have played crucial roles in shaping how scholars and others are able to imagine themselves, their communities and societies, possibilities for political action, the past and the future. We gained the sense that our subversive readings were less productive when we tried to move too quickly between authors, texts, periods, and places. Rather than systematically tracing historical lines of influence or attempting to include all of the authors, places, and periods that contributed—even significantly—to these debates, we provide extended discussions of a small group of authors and texts, acknowledging that a wide range of others are equally worthy of attention. We hope that our readers will agree that this selectivity is worthwhile even as they tell us of other figures we should have included.

Another problem involved in finding a voice, as M. M. Bahktin showed us, entails finding an audience (really a range of audiences). As the project developed, we found it necessary to enter into a dialogue with readers in a wide range of fields. We thus came to the conclusion that our project would fail if we addressed it to a narrow range of specialists, because we would then (in spite of any protestations to the contrary) be

reproducing the same atomistic reading practices that are bounded by epistemologies and disciplines. We believe that anyone who wishes to think critically about modernity will find this book challenging and worthwhile. We attempt to reach beyond the ranks of scholars who are already interested in questions of language and tradition; we believe that many people who thought that these areas had nothing to do with their work and were best left to specialists mired in academic backwaters will come to realize that some of the most persistent obstacles they face are rooted precisely in the way their conceptions of society, politics, nature, and science contain problematic unexamined assumptions about language, communication, texts, and tradition. Our goal is to get theorists and historians of politics, law, and science, for example, to think seriously about how notions of language and tradition structure their presuppositions and textual practices. We hope that people who consider themselves to be discourse analysts—but who adopt highly contrastive critical versus empirical views of discourse—will find that they have more common ground than they imagined. We hope to foster a dialogue that crosses both disciplines and the boundaries of the academy itself. We hope to have launched such an effort here, to have challenged the problematic constructions of language and tradition—and thus of science, nature,

society, and politics—that emerged from hegemonic modern texts and that hold relations of social inequality in place. But this project involves a much broader range of experiences and perspectives than can be offered by two persistent interlocutors.

* * * * * * * * *

When you work this long and hard on a project, the number of debts you accumulate is staggering. Bauman was a Fellow at the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences in Stanford, California, in 1992–93 (with the support of funds from the Andrew w. Mellon Foundation), just as the project was seriously getting underway. Briggs spent the 2001–2002 academic year there, and the Center provided him with a delightful setting in which to revise several chapters. Both authors received fellowships from the National Endowment for the Humanities in 1989–1990. Bauman was a Guggenheim Fellow in 1990; Briggs was a Fellow at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars in Washington, DC in 1997–98. Without the time for reading, reflection, conversation, and writing afforded by these institutions, we would have been unlikely to have completed the book. We thank the administrations and staffs as well as other fellows for their kindness and stimulation. Indiana University, the University of California, San Diego, and Vassar

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College provided travel and other types of support. Our thinking was stimulated by seminars and working groups sponsored by the Center for Psychosocial Studies (later the Center for Transcultural Studies) in Chicago and the School of American Research in Santa Fe, New Mexico. We thank the American Anthropologist, American Quarterly, the Journal of American Folklore, Pragmatics, and Western Folklore for permission to reprint passages that have been adapted from articles that appeared in these journals and in Regimes of Language, a volume edited by Paul V. Kroskrity that was published by the School of American Research Press.

Conversations with colleagues have informed our thinking and writing in countless ways. While a mere list certainly does not do justice to their contributions, we would at least like to name some of the people who have engaged with us on these issues over the years: Roger Abrahams, Asif Agha, Judith Berman, Iain Boal, Vincent Crapanzano, Steve Epstein, Joe Errington, Don Foster, Sue Gal, Akhil Gupta, Ramón Gutiérrez, Ian Hacking, Richard Handler, Bill Hanks, Galit Hasan-Rokem, Karsten Harries, Michael Herzfeld, Jane Hill, Judy Irvine, Ira Jacknis, Martha Kaplan, John Kelly, Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, Ben Lee, Michael Murray, John Nichols, Robert Norton, Alfonso Ortiz, Hector Romero,

Yolanda Salas, Bambi Schieffelin, Dan Segal, Steve Shapin, Amy Shuman, Denise Silva, Michael Silverstein, George Stocking, Beverly Stoeltje, Jackie Urla, Greg Urban, Lisa Valentine, and Kit Woolard. We have presented papers that emanate from the project at a wide range of academic and cultural institutions in the United States and abroad, and we would like to thank audiences there for questions and comments that contributed to the development of our work. Special thanks are due to James Clifford for challenging us to be explicit about the stakes of our argument. For the following individuals, who read all or part of various drafts, we have only the deepest of gratitude: Ruth Finnegan, Jane Hill, Dell Hymes, Ira Jacknis, George Lipsitz, Michael Silverstein, and Barbara Tomlinson. We thank Judith Irvine, Jessica Kuper, and Bambi Schieffelin for their editorial support and their patience.

This work has gone on so long and taken so many of our waking hours that it is woven into the fabric of our family lives. The forbearance of Beverly Stoeltje and of Clara Mantini-Briggs, Feliciana Briggs, Gabriel Fries-Briggs, and Jessie Fries-Kraemer are inexpressible. We hope that now that all is said and done, they, too, will think that it was all worthwhile. Or at least most of it.