

Always Already Cultural Studies: Two Conferences and a Manifesto

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I

The rapidly increasing visibility of cultural studies in the United States over the past few years gives us an opportunity to reflect on its articulation to existing institutions *in media res*, before those articulations are fixed for any period of time. One of those institutions is the large academic conference, two of which took place within a few months of each other, "Cultural Studies Now and in the Future" at the University of Illinois in April of 1990, a conference I helped to organize, and "Crossing the Disciplines: Cultural Studies in the 1990s" at the University of Oklahoma in October of 1990, a conference (organized by Robert Con Davis and Ron Schlieffer) where I presented an earlier version of this paper. Cultural studies has also recently been the subject of special sessions at regional and national meetings of the Modern Language Association, all of which events together give a fairly good indication of what the future of cultural studies—especially in English—is likely to be. Though cultural studies has a much longer and very different, if still contested, history in Communications in the United States, it is on its very recent commodification in English that I want to focus on here.

I might begin by posing a single strategic question: what does it mean that Robert Con Davis and Ron Schlieffer, in the papers they gave at the Oklahoma conference, felt it appropriate and necessary to refer to the work of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at the University of Birmingham in Britain, and Ellis Miller, presenting the opening talk at the same conference, gave no evidence of knowing anything about it and yet felt fully empowered to define both cultural studies' history and its future? I suppose in the broadest sense it means that the spread of American power and American culture across the globe has led some Americans to believe Disneyland is the origin of the world. I have the easy feeling that if one told Miller he ought to find out about the Birmingham tradition he'd reply that he didn't know such interesting work had gone on in Alabama.

At a regional MLA conference in 1988 I argued that people who claim to be commenting on or "doing" cultural studies ought at least to familiarize themselves with the British cultural studies tradition, beginning with Raymond Williams and moving through Birmingham and beyond. Almost nothing in this tradition is simply transferable to the United States. Williams was partly concerned with defining a distinctly British heritage. The interdisciplinary work at Birmingham was often deeply collaborative, a style that has little chance of succeeding

in American departments and little chance of surviving the American academic system of rewards. But the struggle to shape the field in Britain has lessons we can learn much from, and British cultural studies achieved theoretical advances that are immensely useful in an American context. So that would be part of my answer to the question Jonathan Culler posed, with an air of whimsical hopelessness, in Oklahoma: "What is a professor of cultural studies supposed to know?" Professors of cultural studies need not agree with or emulate all the imperatives of British cultural studies, but they do have a responsibility to take a position on a tradition whose name they are borrowing. Moreover, people with strong disciplinary training who are now feeling their way toward cultural studies have something to gain from encounters with others who have already made such journeys. Leaving open what it will mean to realize cultural studies in America, British cultural studies nonetheless establishes some of what is at stake in theorizing culture in any historical moment.

Immediately after my 1988 talk, my friend Vincent Leitch, who ought to know better, stood up in the audience, waving his arms as he scaled some Bunker Hill of the imagination, and declared that he "thought we had thrown off the yoke of the British two hundred years ago." In September 1990, at an Indiana University of Pennsylvania conference on theory and pedagogy, I heard James Berlin prophesy, with a solemnity nowhere cognizant that he was predicting coals would be brought to Newcastle, that he was simply giving critical theory a new name, that cultural studies would miraculously turn our attention toward "textuality in all its forms." In November of 1990, a panel on cultural studies at the Pacific Coast Philological Association unselfconsciously offered two models of cultural studies: as an opportunistic umbrella for English professors who want to study film or the graphic arts, and as a terrain of vague, metonymic sliding between all the competing theories on the contemporary scene. And at an October 1990 University of Illinois panel on "The Frontiers of Eighteenth-Century Studies" John Richetti, preening himself in the manner of a disciplinary cockatoo, announced that "Eighteenth-century people had been doing cultural studies all along."

I could add other anecdotes. But these are enough to introduce the first points I want to make: of all the intellectual movements that have swept the humanities in America over the last twenty years, none will be taken up so shallowly, so opportunistically, so unreflectively, and so ahistorically as cultural studies. It is becoming the perfect paradigm for a people with no sense of history—born yesterday and born on the make. A concept with a long history of struggle over its definition, a concept born in class consciousness and in critique of the academy, is often for English in America little more than a way of repackaging what we were already doing. Of course nothing can prevent the term "cultural studies" from coming to mean something very different in another time and place. But the casual dismissal of its history needs to be seen for what it is—an interested effort to depoliticize a concept whose whole prior history has been preeminently poli-

tical and oppositional. The depoliticizing of cultural studies will no doubt pay off, making it more palatable at once to granting agencies and to conservative colleagues, but only at the cost of blocking cultural studies from having any critical purchase on American social life.

People interested in theory have often been accused by the Right of facile opportunism. But the historical record actually suggests a very different and much more difficult pattern of struggle and mutual transformation for those invested in the major bodies of interpretive theory. Consider the deep personal transformation, the institutional changes, the wholesale reorientation of social understanding that accompanied the feminist revolution and its extension into the academy. Compare the series of times in this century when taking up Marxism has meant a comparable reorientation of one's whole understanding of society. Even a body of theory like psychoanalysis, which in its academic incarnations has avoided many of its imperatives toward personal and institutional change, has entailed more than adopting a special vocabulary; even for academics, psychoanalysis has meant accepting a view of human agency that isolates them from their colleagues. In Britain and Australia taking up cultural studies has followed the more radical pattern among these alternatives. But not for most disciplines in the United States.

The conference in Oklahoma was part of that repackaging effort. Its joint sponsorship with the Semiotic Society of America suggested as well that semiotics could get new life by being recycled as cultural studies. One also hears graduate students and faculty members talk frankly about repackaging themselves as cultural studies people. The academic job market, to be sure, encourages that sort of anxious cynicism about how one markets one's self. The large number of young people who presented papers at Oklahoma—many of them willing to pay a \$95 registration fee and endure the humiliation of potentially tiny audiences at multiple sessions (there were fifteen simultaneous sessions on Sunday morning at 8:30)—testifies to the sense that putting a “Cultural Studies in the 1990s” label on your vita is worth an investment in exploitation and alienation.

I do not mean to belittle the impulse behind the willingness to cooperate with that kind of structure. The unpredictable realities of the job market are terrifying enough to more than explain graduate students and young faculty members signing on for the odd honorific anonymity that being on a large conference program entails. But I also think there's good reason to bring these realities into the open and subject them to critique.

Indeed, the job market in cultural studies—at least in English—gives a pretty good indication of how the discipline is going to take up this new paradigm. In 1989 a graduate student at Illinois—a specialist in feminist cultural studies with a degree in communications—interviewed for cultural studies positions at MLA. It was quite clear that many departments hadn't the faintest idea what cultural studies was. It was a way to ask the dean for new money by pointing out an area where they needed to catch up and a way for interviewers to make a display of

ignorance look like canny interrogation: “So what is all this cultural studies stuff about anyway?” What better way to ask uninformed questions than in the role of job interviewer? Who cares what serious cultural studies job candidates might think? The search committee has the power, the job, and the money. If the answers are confusing or slightly threatening, the candidate will be out of the room in twenty minutes anyway. The committee, of course, has the only last word that counts. Some departments in effect conducted fake, exploratory cultural studies searches as a lazy way of finding out between cocktails a little bit about what the young people are up to these days. As the Illinois student found out, it all comes down to the final question: but can you fill in when we need someone to do the Milton course?

If one rationale for young people paying to give talks at a cultural studies conference is understandable, the lineup of senior speakers at plenary sessions (the only times when only one session was scheduled) at the Oklahoma conference was less clear: J. Hillis Miller, Jonathan Culler, Robert Scholes, and Gayatri Spivak. Because only Gayatri Spivak has a history of talking about cultural studies, it is safe to conclude that seniority in the broader area of theory in English controlled the choice of speakers. But theory and cultural studies are not yet interchangeable.

I had an uneasy sense that the Oklahoma conference might as well have been called “The 1980s: an MLA Reunion.” Perhaps that's all right. Perhaps not. But there are differences to be marked. They were especially clear in Hillis Miller's talk, which I will concentrate on for several reasons. Scholes addressed cultural studies not at all, though it is possible he believes his sexist presentation (“In the Brothel of Modernism: Picasso and Joyce”) was an example of cultural analysis. Culler dealt with cultural studies only as part of a general survey of contemporary theory, and Spivak, finally, gave an informal talk, not a formal paper. It was only Miller among the plenary speakers who made a full effort to define the project of cultural studies.

As someone who respects and admires much of Hillis Miller's work, especially his elegant phenomenological readings of literary texts, I must in this context, however, nonetheless say that I just don't see its productive relation to the cultural studies tradition. A concern with ethics, central in his recent publications, is not the same as the long cultural studies engagement with left politics. And the internationalization of technology, which was at the center of his Oklahoma talk, “The Work of Cultural Criticism in the Age of Digital Reproduction,” in fact points to the importance of global politics and economics, the global dissemination and localization of cultural power, issues that Miller thinks will be swept aside in a McLuhanesque spread of technology. Indeed, it is only blindness to economics and power and cultural differences that makes it possible for Miller to fantasize that everyone in the world will have a personal computer within a few years.

The effect of Miller's appearance at the first plenary session at Oklahoma was

to give the program an opening benediction, a benediction warranting a humanized, "transnational," confidently democratized version of cultural studies in America. His key role in depoliticizing deconstruction was apparently to be repeated for cultural studies. Indeed, the plenary sessions deferred the centrally political mission of cultural studies until Gayatri Spivak spoke in the final session. Despite their inclusion in many smaller sessions throughout, race, class, and gender were all thus symbolically marginalized or deferred, excluded from the sessions at which everyone was expected to be present, until the end, the last instance that we reach but have no time to discuss.

And in this regard I think it is relevant to recall that Hillis Miller once cosigned a letter (published in the *MLA Newsletter*) warning that an official Modern Language Association position against the undeclared Vietnam war might make its members liable to a charge of treason. I bring this up not to question Miller's position on the war but because the letter pointed specifically to his insistence on the separation between academic and political life, a separation that cultural studies has sought to overcome. What is at stake here is a definition of the nature and limits of cultural studies. Both in the letter and in his efforts to limit deconstruction to a depoliticized version of textual analysis, Hillis Miller has more than once had something to say about the cultural role of English studies. Those views are very much at odds with the heritage of cultural studies. They may well come to dominate the Americanization of cultural studies, but this is not a process that could proceed unremarked.

Of course the definition and disciplinary mission of cultural studies is precisely what is at stake here. As it happens, I was invited to speak at the Oklahoma conference because I helped organize the Illinois cultural studies conference a few months earlier. That conference gave high visibility to the several strands of the British and Australian cultural studies traditions, along with people whose work we thought could gain from being heard in the context of those traditions. Although a number of people attended both conferences, there was no overlap between the speakers at the two conferences. That alone is remarkable. I don't think it would be true of the other major bodies of theory on the scene today. A large conference on Marxism, feminism, psychoanalysis, or poststructuralism—a conference on gender, race, or class—a conference on New Historicism: all these could either have overlapping speakers or at least draw from a pool of people with similar commitments or traditions clearly in dialogue with each other.

Perhaps only in cultural studies as English professors conceive it could two massive conferences have almost no points of correspondence. In this context I do not think an uncritical argument for liberal diversity has much value. Welcoming the opening of the cultural studies field need not necessitate abandoning debate about what enterprises do and do not deserve to use the cultural studies name, about what commitments cultural studies entails. That's not to say I think either the British or the Americans and Australians and Canadians who have learned from them can police the field. In fact I think the more open, generous,

democratic—but less critical—shape of the Oklahoma conference will likely win the day. This much more inclusive vision probably is the future of cultural studies in America. I am merely trying to offer a challenge to that enterprise, even if it is a challenge likely to be swept aside by events.

Of course it is possible that the people organizing the Oklahoma conference invited people long associated with cultural studies—Stuart Hall, Dick Hebdige, Donna Haraway, or others—and that those people declined the invitation. The Oklahoma conference in fact followed what is now the common practice in academia and offered some of its plenary speakers expenses plus a \$1,000 honorarium. But many people won't come for the money. They'll come if the event has an intellectual and political shape and mission that seems important; if it does, as we have found at Illinois, they'll come without an honorarium. In fact, only one person refused our invitation to speak because of the lack of an honorarium.

Actually, the Oklahoma conference did have an implicit but unstated mission. Although some people were invited to participate, most of the papers were given by people who answered an open invitation to submit topics. Essentially everyone who volunteered to give a talk was placed on the program. The result was about 350 papers given in 100 sessions over three days. So the conference, in effect, said here's a self-selected group of North Americans who declare themselves to be doing cultural studies. Let's see where they stand. That's an interesting and potentially important mission, though its value was limited by being undeclared and thus never an explicit subject of discussion during the conference itself.

Incidentally, by current standards Oklahoma's honoraria are quite modest. The annual conference on twentieth-century literature at the University of Louisville gives honoraria of about \$1,500 each to its two keynote speakers, and a recent conference on poststructuralism and New Historicism at Texas A & M University had sliding scales of honoraria up to \$3,000. So Oklahoma can be credited with resisting inflation. I'm not, by the way, faulting people for accepting honoraria. I've never demanded one when asked to speak at a conference, but I've certainly taken them when offered, and I have asked that my expenses be covered. Because that was my status at Oklahoma—expenses paid but no honorarium—I am implicated in the structure I now want to question. A somewhat rude way of putting the issue would be to say that the contemporary North American conference at which a few stars are paid large sums to create the illusion that something is happening at a given campus risks being rather empty. It has now become the standard model of the high visibility conference on campuses in the United States, and I think it deserves frank commentary. People's accomplishments inevitably bring them higher salaries and other benefits. But I don't think the economic hierarchies of the profession need to be maintained at conferences. If they are, we should acknowledge them openly, which most conference organizers are reluctant to do. But it may be better to take the time to conceive a meeting that some key people will feel they cannot miss.

No matter how conferences are organized, they are expensive, and registration fees often make some contribution to the cost. Almost everyone would agree that registration fees should be kept as low as possible. I would add that it is best not to charge registration fees at all to people who are presenting papers. In collecting nearly \$30,000 in fees from people who were presenting papers Oklahoma was, I believe, pushing the economics of large conferences in a regrettable direction. I found myself quite uncomfortable with the idea that other people presenting papers were, in effect, paying honoraria and expenses for a few high-visibility speakers. Because most of the keynote speakers had little or no credibility in cultural studies, I drew attention to this problem by making a rather subversive suggestion: that those who had not yet paid their fee save the university administrative staff a lot of bother by simply passing the money on somewhat more directly. Perhaps, I suggested, you might take a trip to a local shopping mall, purchase \$95 worth of videos, CDs, t-shirts, or other examples of popular culture and give them directly to whichever plenary speaker you think most needs them. He or she would then be better informed about cultural studies next time around.

II

From my perspective, a good deal of what was presented at Oklahoma simply did not qualify as cultural studies. But then the Oklahoma and Illinois conferences represented substantially different views of the state of cultural studies in America. The Oklahoma conference was organized to take advantage of an intellectual and economic opportunity. The Illinois conference was organized partly out of our sense that remarkable new cultural studies work was going on both here and abroad. But we were also responding to a sense of the dissolution and depoliticization of cultural studies in the United States.

Many people came to Illinois out of a need to share what might be left of their common ground and debate the nature of the cultural studies enterprise. Yet the level and nature of debate that resulted was quite different from that at the Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture conference that I helped organize at Illinois in 1983. Marxism then was perceived as simultaneously in crisis and in a heyday of expansion, somewhat as cultural studies is now. But the lines for Marxist criticism were more clearly drawn, and people's allegiances were marked in advance. Thus positions about what did and did not qualify as Marxism were argued forcefully. Fred Jameson could thus announce that he felt like a dinosaur, like the last true Marxist on Earth, in arguing for a traditional revolutionary teleology. Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe on the other hand could argue that one role for Marxism now was to call democratic societies to realize the full radical potential of the beliefs they supposedly espoused.

The situation of cultural studies is rather different; it is in a period of testing the viability of potential alliances. People may hold strong beliefs about the limits of cultural studies but are often cautious about expressing them. It is a body of

thought that now sometimes destabilizes and de-essentializes categories of race, class, gender, and nationality while simultaneously keeping them at the foreground of debate and definition. Moreover, cultural studies can forge problematic allegiances that transgress and realign the subject positions historically produced in terms of those categories. In practical terms this meant that people at the Illinois conference mapped out their models of cultural studies affirmatively, frequently without overtly marking their differences with others claiming title to its terrain.

Despite the uncertainties created by this reticence, the experience of the Illinois conference—together with teaching seminars in cultural studies and writing a book that tried to map out a cultural studies model of a literary genre—leads me to believe some generalizations about the cultural studies enterprise can and must be put forward. I think it is important to try to say both what cultural studies is and what it is not; keeping in mind the well-known series of definitional articles throughout the history of cultural studies,¹ I would like to do so in the form of a series of numbered points, a first draft of one version of a cultural studies manifesto:

1. Cultural studies is not simply the close analysis of objects other than literary texts. Some English departments would like to believe that their transportable methods of close reading can make them cultural studies departments as soon as they expand the range of cultural objects they habitually study. Indeed, cultural studies is usually sold to English departments as part of the manifest destiny of the discipline. Our skills at close reading need to be extended to other cultural domains, it is often argued, lest these domains be left to the dubious care of student subcultures or the imprecise attention of lesser disciplines like speech communication. Similarly, some scholars like the sense of theoretical prestige that an unspecified cultural studies umbrella gives their close readings of nontraditional objects. Indeed, cultural studies often arrives in English departments in the form of an easy alliance between debased textuality and recent theory. But the imminent formal, thematic, or semiotic analysis of films, paintings, songs, romance novels, comic books, or clothing styles does not in itself constitute cultural studies.

2. Cultural studies does not, as some people believe, require that every project involve the study of artifacts of popular culture. On the other hand, people with ingrained contempt for popular culture can never fully understand the cultural studies project. In part that is because cultural studies has traditionally been deeply concerned with how all cultural production is sustained and determined by (and in turn influences) the broad terrain of popular common sense. Thus no properly historicized cultural studies can cut itself off from that sense of "the popular."

3. Cultural studies also does not mean that we have to abandon the study of what have been historically identified as the domains of high culture, though it does challenge us to study them in radically new ways. Since every cultural practice has a degree of relative autonomy, every cultural practice potentially merits

focussed attention. But we need to recognize that autonomy is not a function of intrinsic merit and it is never fixed and never more than relative. The notion of relative autonomy, of course, makes it properly impossible to repeat traditional claims that some cultural production transcends history.

4. Cultural studies is not simply the neutral study of semiotic systems, no matter how mobile and flexible those systems are made to be. There can be a semiotic component to cultural studies, but cultural studies and semiotics are not interchangeable. Cultural studies is not satisfied with mapping sign systems. It is concerned with the struggles over meaning that reshape and define the terrain of culture. It is devoted, among other things, to studying the politics of signification.

5. Cultural studies is committed to studying the production, reception, and varied use of texts, not merely their internal characteristics. This is one of the reasons that cultural studies work is more difficult in periods when the historical record is either fragmentary or highly restrictive in class terms. So long as the difficulties are foregrounded, however, limited but important cultural studies projects can be carried out for earlier periods of history.

6. Cultural studies conceives culture relationally. Thus the analysis of an individual text, discourse, behavior, ritual, style, genre, or subculture does not constitute cultural studies unless the thing analyzed is considered in terms of its competitive, reinforcing, and determining relations with other objects and cultural forces. This task is also, it should be noted, an impossible one to complete in any given instance. But unless the constitutive and dissolving cultural relations are taken as a primary concern the work is not properly considered cultural studies.

This relational understanding of culture was one of cultural studies' earliest defining goals. Yet just what is meant by the relational study of culture has changed and evolved and abruptly shifted throughout the history of cultural studies, from Williams's efforts to describe culture as a whole way of life to the effort by Hall and others to adapt Gramsci's notion of a war of position to discursive and political analyses of contemporary Britain. One could in fact write the history of cultural studies in terms of how it conceives relationality and puts it into practice.

7. Cultural studies is not a fixed, repeatable methodology that can be learned and thereafter applied to any given cultural domain. It is the social and textual history of varying efforts to take up the problematic of the politics and meaning of culture. Its history mixes founding moments with transformative challenges and disputations. To do cultural studies is to take a place within that history.

8. Taking a place within that history means thinking of one's work in relation to cultural studies work on the politics of race. It means taking seriously the way feminism radically transformed cultural studies in the 1980s. And it also means positioning one's work in relation to the long, complex, and often contentious history of cultural studies' engagements with Marxism, from Raymond Williams to Stuart Hall. To treat that history as irrelevant, as many Americans do, is to abandon cultural studies for a fake practice that merely borrows its name.

9. Cultural studies is concerned with the social and political meaning of its own analyses. It assumes that scholarly writing can and does do meaningful cultural work. To avoid facing this challenge and retreat into academic modesty or claims of disinterested scholarship is to hide from cultural studies' historical mission. A poststructuralist academic liberalism might lead one to argue that, because the political effects of discourse are indeterminate and unpredictable, scholarship and politics are best kept separate. Cultural studies might counter by arguing that such arguments do not free us from responsibility for the political meaning of scholarly work. Cultural studies typically accepts the notion that scholarship entails an engagement with and commitment to your own historical context. The choice of what scholarly writing to do involves a decision about what your most effective intervention can be. In much the same way it must be emphasized that cultural studies does not simply offer students a liberal cornucopia of free choices. It urges them to reflect on the social meaning of disciplinary work and to decide what kinds of projects the culture needs most.

10. Cultural studies has a responsibility to continue interrogating and reflecting on its own commitments. In fulfilling this task, however, cultural studies has inevitably had a history that is far from perfect. It needs now to critique its investment in what has been called the left's "mantra of race, class, and gender," categories that are properly considered both in relation to one another and to the culture as a whole. It needs as well to question its recent fetishizing of fandom.

11. The historicizing impulse in cultural studies is properly in dialogue with an awareness of the contemporary rearticulation of earlier texts, contexts, and social practices. In literary studies, New Historicism may sometimes succumb to an illusion of being able to address only the earlier historical period being analyzed but cultural studies properly does not. Being historically and politically here and there—then and now—is part of the continuing and thus necessarily newly theorized burden of cultural studies. Nothing we rescue from forgetfulness or distortion stays the same. To study the present or the past is inevitably to rearticulate it to current interests; that is a problem and an opportunity to take up consciously, not to repress or regret. Cultural studies can never be a simple program of recovery; properly speaking, such programs are not cultural studies. Indeed, a conservative tendency to categorize every limited project of cultural recovery as cultural studies usually signals a high cultural contempt for the things being recovered. The tendency, for example, to classify efforts to recover minority literatures as cultural studies sometimes reflects an assumption that these literatures are inherently inferior or that they lack the aesthetic importance of the traditional canon.

12. In its projects of historical and contemporary analysis cultural studies is often concerned as well with intervening in the present and with encouraging certain possible futures rather than others. Thus as cultural studies people reflect on the simultaneously undermined and reinforced status of the nation-state in different parts of the world they are often also concerned with the future status of

nationhood. An interest in how high technology has changed our lives may be combined with an effort to shape its future impact. The opportunities offered by fragmented postmodern identities are not only to be studied but exploited. A study of the multiple meanings of gender in a given moment may lead to reflection on how our lives may be gendered in the future. For many scholars outside cultural studies such double investments are to be avoided. In cultural studies they can be at the center of the enterprise.

13. Cultural studies accepts the notion that the work of theorizing its enterprise is inescapably grounded in contemporary life and current politics. New social and political realities require fresh reflection and debate on the cultural studies enterprise, no matter what historical period one is studying. Although it is possible to overstate the phenomenon of a local theorizing grounded in current social realities, since such a process involves a rearticulation of previously existing theories, it is nonetheless true that major changes in cultural studies have regularly come from an effort to understand and intervene in new historical conditions. From a cultural studies perspective, then, one never imagines that it is possible to theorize for all times and places. Not only our interpretations but also our theories are produced for the world in which we live.

14. Cultural studies within the academy is inescapably concerned with and critical of the politics of disciplinary knowledge. It is not simply interdisciplinary in the model of liberal diversity and idealized communication. This means that the non-trivial institutionalization of cultural studies within traditional academic disciplines is impossible unless those disciplines dismantle themselves. A first step, for a discipline like English, is to make a commitment to hiring faculty members who do not have degrees from English departments. Otherwise there is little chance that English departments will even admit that literature does not acquire its meaning primarily from its own autonomous traditions, let alone take up the general problematics of culture. Yet while English departments have much to gain from expanding their enterprises to include cultural studies, it is less clear what cultural studies has to gain from being institutionalized in English departments. If it is to be institutionalized at all, cultural studies might be better served by a variety of programs outside traditional departments.

Not every individual cultural studies book or essay can fulfill all the conditions in these fourteen points. But a successful cultural studies project should position itself in relation to these concerns. When it does not take them on directly, they should be implicit in the project's interests, terms, and references. These, it seems to me in 1991, represent some of the key aims and imperatives growing out of thirty years of cultural work. These points, I would argue, are effectively part of the cultural studies paradigm and part of the cultural studies challenge to the contemporary world. Because they are focused on the ways cultural studies has and is likely to continue to change and develop, they are less rigid than the form of a numbered manifesto may lead some readers to think. Indeed, to take up these

points is to write in such a way as to engage in a continual interrogation of what cultural studies is and can be. Thus I have articulated this manifesto at a level of theoretical generality that does not totalize and synthesize all cultural studies projects. These principles do not attempt to anticipate the specific work of local theorizing. To place yourself in relation to the history of cultural studies is precisely to recognize that the practices of cultural studies are not given in advance. They are always to be rethought, rearticulated to contemporary conditions. That imperative to continuing political renewal and struggle is part of what cultural studies has bequeathed to us.

III

It was priorities like these and a sense that, although a great deal of interesting new cultural studies work was being done both here and abroad, the core commitments described above were at risk in the Americanization of cultural studies that led Larry Grossberg, Paula Treichler and me to organize a large international conference in April of 1990. The conference gathered together thirty-three speakers who gave thirty-one long papers offering either their sense of the priorities in cultural studies or a model of cultural studies analysis. There were no concurrent sessions because we wanted the sense of momentum and shared experience that could come from staying together for sixteen sessions spread out over much of five days. Extensive discussions of about forty-five minutes concluded each session. Microphones in the audience relayed all questions, comments, and statements through a public address system, giving them as much presence as comments from the stage. We taped and transcribed the discussions for inclusion in a book based on the conference, as we had with *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*. Although the speakers were all invited, the audience thus had a certain democratic access to the floor and to publication of their comments.

Past experience led us to anticipate that empowering the audience in this way — giving them the basis for shared experience and access to an effective public address system — would also empower discontent. Conferences with large numbers of simultaneous sessions inevitably scatter critique and block people from organizing themselves. Some people felt that the conference model was hierarchical, which indeed it was, though many of the people on stage — two thirds of whom were women or minorities — were very much on the margins of the academy. Some had lost academic jobs or found them only after years of searching. Most were stars in terms of their reputations among cultural studies people but few were stars, say, in terms of their salaries. Another problem came from the sheer size of the audience. As many as six hundred people attended some of the sessions, and this was predictably intimidating to some people, especially those attending their first conference.

It also proved true that our priorities, though shared by many of the speakers and audience members, were not shared by everyone. Our model was better

suited for people committed to a clear intellectual project than for people who were uncertain of their direction and therefore wanted intimate consultation and support. We were interested in establishing models for the discourses of cultural studies, whereas some of the younger people in the audience wanted sessions devoted to their career problems—finding jobs, teaching cultural studies within traditional disciplines. Those are valid concerns, and in retrospect I wish we had taken them up formally. Others felt that the traditional hierarchical conference structure—with its division between speakers and audience—should be abandoned. For us it seemed ironic that this structure should be slated for demolition at the very moment that disenfranchised populations were finally gaining access to the stage. But it was clear that many people felt cultural studies should be reflexive and self-critical about its institutional forms, which is clearly a sound argument. In fact I would agree that intimate conferences with a maximum attendance of fifty are often the most satisfying. But if you are going to advertize a conference with Stuart Hall, Meaghan Morris, Paul Gilroy, Catherine Hall, Simon Frith, Homi Bhabha, Tony Bennett and other people whom American audiences don't often hear in person, then a large audience is inevitable.

The crisis came, as we knew it would, when someone in the audience proposed that the conference be disbanded and the time and space used for free discussion. Larry and I came on stage to remind people that an attractive and comfortable alternative space was available for those who did not want to hear the talks. Of course it did not represent much fun or much of a victory to attend free discussions elsewhere. The only gratifying symbolism would be to take over the main stage. But the job of the conference organizers in such a situation is to ensure that speakers get the chance to read their papers and that those who have come long distances to hear them be able to do so. In fact, though in the spirit of the moment's solidarity, many in the audience will cheer the revolutionary fervor of those who call for the conference to be disbanded, the overwhelming majority want the conference to go on as planned. So we played our role as sympathetic heavies and got the program going again. We gained several things as a result: an opportunity for people to hear a wide range of reflective and politically committed papers on cultural studies, material for a large book that has the potential to be a major intervention in the field, and a more self-consciousness awareness of cultural studies as a force within the academy.

We had invited as speakers not only people long identified with cultural studies but also people whose work we thought gave them a potential relationship to the cultural studies tradition, a relationship we hoped the conference might draw out and establish. The three of us debated over many names before agreeing on a few. That debate was often heated, as we discussed similarities and differences and potential alliance within cultural studies.

The Oklahoma conference went a different route. It was an open admissions cultural studies conference, and even though many of the papers had nothing to do with cultural studies, there was much to be gained from listening to them and

trying to decide where they stood. Such a process of negotiation and debate over what is and is not cultural studies has to take place if cultural studies is to have any intellectual power and political effectivity. Wider alliances need to be formed, but not every alliance is worth the potential price in dissolution and compromise.

Perhaps I sound like a Third Period Stalinist who is not ready to accept the Popular Front coalition of the late 1930s. But we need to remember that the broad, inclusive alliance of the Popular Front had a political mission and a political reason for the compromises it made—the struggle against fascism. Those on the left in America and those committed to progressive projects in humanities departments in universities have a related mission today—the struggle against the global inequities of the Reagan-Bush era, the struggle against the Allan Bloom-Lynne Cheney consensus about American education and American culture, the growing articulation of discomfort and anger over racism and sexism as universities' efforts to become more "culturally diverse" take hold. It is our task to make American institutions nervous about cultural studies. One boundary worth drawing around the cultural studies alliance is between those who will and those who will not join that struggle. The price of depoliticizing cultural studies is not a price we should be willing to pay. There are alliances worth making and alliances too costly to make. If the bargain is that we may have cultural studies so long as we do not criticize the government in our classrooms, we should reject it. Cultural studies does not need to render unto Caesar what is Caesar's.

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Notes

1. For other programmatic statements on cultural studies see Lawrence Grossberg, "The Formation(s) of Cultural Studies: An American in Birmingham," *Strategies*, no. 2 (1989), 114–49, and "The Circulation of Cultural Studies," *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 6 (1989), 413–21; Stuart Hall, "Cultural Studies: Two Paradigms," *Media, Culture, and Society* no. 2 (1980), 57–72, and "Cultural Studies and the Center: Some Problematics and Problems," in Hall, et al, eds. *Culture, Media, Language: Working Papers in Cultural Studies* (London: Hutchinson, 1980); Richard Hoggart, "Contemporary Cultural Studies: An Approach to the Study of Literature and Society," C.C.C.S. Occasional Paper (1969); Richard Johnson, "What Is Cultural Studies Anyway?" *Social Text* 6:1 (1987), 38–40; Meaghan Morris, "Banality in Cultural Studies," *Discourse* 10:2 (1988), 3–29; Raymond Williams, "The Analysis of Culture," *The Long Revolution* (New York: Columbia UP, 1961).

For bibliographies of the work of two key figures, Raymond Williams and Stuart Hall, see "A Raymond Williams Bibliography" in Alan O'Connor, *Ray-*