

Submitted to Cultural Studies -

JANUARY 2006

(Forthcoming)
2008

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Resisting Ecocultural Studies
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Ecoculturalism ought to have transformed cultural studies. However, despite the efforts of cultural theorists to introduce questions involving environment, ecology, biology, and nature (efforts which for the sake of simplification I refer to here as ecoculturalism),¹ the potential for transformation has not been realized.² More than ten years after *Cultural Studies* published its first special issue on cultural studies and the environment (1994), this second special issue evidences a continued peripheral status of ecocultural issues: they are "special," not transformative; they have not contributed sufficiently to a new and better practice of cultural studies.

This article explains why and how ecoculturalism ought to have transformed cultural studies, explores why it has not been transformative, and proposes how it might be made to be so. I organize this task around a consideration of what I perceive to be cultural studies' resistance to, and difficulties with, ecoculturalism. For the turbulence of articulating cultural studies and the "eco"—the term I use here to designate the range of issues relevant to ecoculturalism—exposes both the failure and promise of cultural studies to transform thought and practice. In the end, I urge that we learn from both the failures and the potential; I advocate what at this point may seem counterintuitive, but which I trust will make sense eventually: that we jettison ecoculturalism, in favor of a revitalized commitment to cultural studies.

Resisting Ecoculturalism

Five discouraging forces articulate to render ecoculturalism peripheral to cultural studies (at best) and profoundly difficult for cultural studies (at worst): 1) The eco is marginalized by the weight of the history of cultural studies as the study of popular culture, 2) It is simply too much to ask of a cultural study to consider everything, 3) The eco makes painfully salient the problem of handling that which cannot be reduced to the discursive, 4) The language of the eco requires a fair amount of inelegant stuttering, and 5) Ecoculturalism perpetuates a misleading limitation of what it evokes: the assemblage of culture. Each of these concerns raises progressively more complex difficulties; although each also reveals increasingly more potent reasons to consider the transformative potential of ecoculturalism.

The Eco is Marginal to Popular Culture

The earliest manifestations of cultural studies articulate deep commitments to the everyday expressions of working class life. Recognizing, dignifying, and honoring that life was very much the project of Richard Hoggart in his 1957 *The Uses of Literacy* (1970). Hoggart resisted both the high culture assessment of the working class as uncultured, and the vulgar Marxist assessment of the working class as pitiful, debased victims of the upper class. Rather, the everyday lives of working class people constituted a creative and unique culture that was fully the expressive equivalent of high culture. The historical moment made salient in *The Uses of Literacy* is the effects of modern mass media entertainment on traditional working class culture. Thus much of Hoggart's study is devoted to exploring the daily experience of the working class as expressed in speech, attitudes, clothing, and home as the culture changed creatively in the encounter with new

mass media: newspapers, books, radio, music, advertisements, television, and so on. How culture is lived—lived experience—becomes, for the most part, conflated with the encounter with media. Trained as a literary theorist, Hoggart proposed reading the media as one would read a classic work of literature, but with a new cultural studies orientation. What are the values, feelings, and beliefs revealed by these media and what is it they embody, reflect, or resist? asks Hoggart (1969).

Hoggart's work sets up the question that continues to give shape to cultural studies even today: What is the role of popular media in relations of class and power? From its origins, then, the project is theoretical, empirical, and political: What is the nature of (working class) culture? What is the character of actual (working class) cultures? What is the nature of power in relation to media and class? And what can be done to change those relations?

Theoretically, Raymond Williams and Stuart Hall wrestled with Marxism to develop a concept of culture equipped to make sense of working class life in unequal relations of power (Hall 1992). Williams (1961) contributed a pivotal claim that culture has three aspects: the lived culture, the recorded culture, and the selective tradition (which connects the lived culture with other/past cultures) (p. 66). As with Hoggart, the expressions of the culture that figure in his analysis are speech, education, the popular press, dramatic forms, and literature. In other words, what counts as lived experience is predominantly that which can be assessed through popular media. Further cementing the equation that cultural studies entails the study of popular culture are Hall's analyses of class, race, and media (for example, 1973 and 1980), Hall's theoretical exploration of the "popular" (1981), widely circulated work coming out of the Center for Contemporary Cultural Studies at Birmingham (for example, Hall and Jefferson, 1976), Dick Hebdige's popular book *Style* (1979), and Lawrence Grossberg's work on popular music in the United States (much of it republished in Grossberg, 1997).

This is not all that was going on in cultural studies for sure, but this is the (part of the) story that becomes potent reality: that cultural studies entails the study of popular culture: of music, news, television, film, and literature. A notable early exception is Raymond Williams' 1974 *Television: Technology and Cultural Form* (1992), which advances a critical argument about technology in terms of television's technological form rather than its content. However, Williams's argument does little to change the thrust of cultural studies' commitment to the study of popular culture; even *Television* is in large part about the content of popular television.

It can truly be said that feminism transformed cultural studies, marked by the moment of Angela McRobbie's critique of the subcultural literature (1981), and Hall's work on the articulating role of race (1980). Culture, it became clear, could not be reduced to class, just as it could not be reduced (as the vulgar Marxists would have it) to the economic. Culture could only be understood as articulating class, gender, race, and, later, ethnicity. Consequently, the study of power and popular culture became linked to an understanding of culture as the multiple articulations of relations of identity. Cultural studies has in large part come to be *about* making links between popular culture and class, gender, race, ethnicity, identity, representation, difference, contingency and power.

The defacto impact of understanding cultural studies as consisting of the study of popular culture is that it isn't *about* technology, the environment, biology, ecology, nature, or the body. Unless, that is, the study is organized around popular media presentations of these matters.

Recent examples of this include Kim Sawchuk's analysis of images of the inner body in popular culture and art (for example, 2001) and Nigel Thrift's (2004) analysis of the way that computer software produces new hybrid, "electric" animals. But even such excellent work, which expands the boundaries of cultural studies, does not transform the project. It merely considers the eco as expressed in new and varied popular media. To examine the eco in any other way places a cultural theorist still farther outside the mainstream. This proclivity to work through popular cultural representation constitutes a defacto resistance to the eco as fundamentally transforming cultural studies.

You Can't Include Everything

In the 1980s, Lawrence Grossberg defined the project of cultural studies thus:

Cultural studies is concerned with describing and intervening in the ways discourses are produced within, inserted into and operate in the relations between people's everyday lives and the structures of the social formation so as to reproduce, resist and transform the existing structures of power. That is, if people make history but in conditions not of their own making, cultural studies explores the ways this is enacted within cultural practices and the place of these practices within specified historical formations. (1988, 22)

If those discourses, relations, and practices are constituted of multiple and contingent articulations of difference—of gender, race, class, ethnicity, identity, and representation—as cultural studies claims, then the task of describing, let alone intervening, is enormous. As Grossberg acknowledged:

Apart from the more explicitly theoretically and politically driven questions of what sense one makes of contemporary popular culture and how, it is difficult to know where to begin to describe the terrain itself, to locate its significant exemplars and to identify its most powerful vectors. (1988, 19)

When culture is understood as a complex and ongoing articulation of forces, relations, discourses, and practices that constitute the context of an artifact of popular culture, then the task of analyzing the artifact is to contextualize it, that is, to explore the moving forces, relations, discourses, and practices that constitute it. This is a daunting task; no cultural theorist can ever hope to get it all. At best one can hope to get at what seems most significant at a particular movement given a particular project. Besides, cultural theorists must also be willing to acknowledge that what seems most significant will change; projects must change as the terrain changes and as new knowledge requires. No single study can do justice to the task when you are after a moving target. As I once wrote:

To trace both synchronically and diachronically all the constitutive articulations that can account for any changing identity [or artifact], to critique that configuration, and to offer rearticulations is more than any researcher can hope to accomplish in a lifetime. This is a serious problem in cultural studies, and I am not merely posturing by raising it. It is a

problem that is unlikely to be resolved but will be struggled over as we seek to identify and critique the 'most important' articulations, given our different projects. (Slack 1989, 340).

Enter into this problematic moment the assertions that technology matters, or the body matters, or the eco matters. At the very least, these are structures and/or conditions (with discursive components) that "operate in the relations between people's everyday lives and the structures of the social formation so as to reproduce, resist and transform the existing structures of power." How is it possible to contextualize a television program without including the technological form through which it is delivered? Or the material organization of environmental matter that constitutes it? Or the creation and organization of audience bodies? Bracketing such matters as outside a particular project is only possible if those vectors are determined by the project to be (relatively) insignificant, or if they are simply not "seen."

Even if the significance of the material is recognized, any reasonable cultural theorist might respond, "How can we consider everything? We have to make choices. Besides, to consider technology, the body, or the eco is outside the traditional purview of cultural studies." Any college course on cultural studies will likely emphasize class, gender, race, ethnicity, identity, representation, difference, contingency, and power. It will far less likely include technology, the body, or the eco. If it does, those topics will likely be covered near the end of the class, as examples of how one might apply cultural studies, not how cultural studies has evolved.

But I would have it otherwise. Technology, the body, and the eco are every bit as fundamental to the context of popular culture as gender, race, class, and ethnicity. How could one contextualize a television program without also considering the earthly elements out of which the television and its delivery system are manufactured? The generation of power that enables its creation and distribution? The organization of skills and bodies? The circulation of money? While political economists insist on the political economic aspects of production, cultural theorists ought to go beyond that by insisting on the articulating vectors of technology, the body, and the eco to contextualize the artifact or practice in all stages of circulation: production, distribution, and reception. Whereas feminism forced cultural studies to rethink the necessity of fundamentally human cultural articulating vectors—gender, race, class, ethnicity—the eco ought to insist on the fundamental other-than-human articulating vectors: technology, environment, ecology, biology, and nature. The eco can only be ignored by falling back on a disturbing anthropocentrism, as evidenced by the emphasis on "discourse," in particular the discourse of popular culture.

The Problem of the Discursive

Cultural studies is hobbled by its commitment to the anthropocentric concepts of discourse and apparatus. Cultural theorists enrich the vernacular sense of discourse as that which is communicated in speech or writing with Foucault's definition of discourse as statements or practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak. As explained by Stuart Hall,

By "discourse", Foucault meant "a group of statements which provide a language for talking about—a way of representing the knowledge about—a particular topic at a particular historical moment....Discourse is about the production of knowledge through

language. But...since all social practices entail meaning, and meanings shape and influence what we do—our conduct—all practices have a discursive aspect.” (Quoted in Hall 1997, 44)

Discourse speaks—in some form. It does not speak “of” objects, but figures them. Discourse bestows meaning to the ways that individuals act in particular times and places; it is the process of languaging life. Cultural studies foregrounds this human activity in which even the other-than-human is reined in by, given shape by, and spoken through discourse. In an analysis of everyday life, the goal is likely to be, as Barry Sandywell aspires, to locate “the grammar of ‘everyday life’” (2004, 161).

Focus now on the human centeredness of Grossberg’s definition of cultural studies cited in the previous section: “Cultural studies is concerned with describing and intervening in the ways discourses are produced within, inserted into and operate in the relations between people’s everyday lives and the structure of the social formation....” The relationships among discourse, everyday life and social (i.e., human made) structures are at issue; and the way to access them is through the grammatical structures of everyday life—that is, discursive “texts,” be those literature, music, television, or other popular media texts.

Even if the object of analysis is extended beyond discourse to the “apparatus” (which can be seen as an equivalent to understanding culture in terms of articulation), the tendency is to rely on an anthropocentric conception of apparatus. The debt to Foucault can again be witnessed in the influence of his definition of apparatus, or *dispositif*:

a thoroughly heterogeneous ensemble consisting of discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral and philanthropic propositions—in short, the said as much as the unsaid. Such are the elements of the apparatus. The apparatus itself is the system of relations that can be established between these elements.(Foucault 1980, 194)

This apparatus remains decidedly human centered: Humans assemble institutions, fashion buildings, make decisions and laws, apply administrative measures, and craft statements and propositions. There is nothing explicitly articulated here outside the human. Thus, to the degree that articulating vectors resemble Foucault’s apparatus, the cultural apparatus is understood to be essentially anthropocentric.

Perhaps, a cultural theorist might argue, there is nothing wrong with being anthropocentric: “This is ‘cultural’ studies after all, not eco studies. Cultural studies is unique precisely in that it elevates the role of human culture, specifically the discursive “aspect” of culture.” Even nature is cultural, as argued by Alexander Wilson in his book *The Culture of Nature* (1991).

In response to this superficially reasonable position I garner evidence from ongoing attempts of cultural theorists who seek to acknowledge an increasing multiplicity of factors that matter, beginning with the challenge against reducing culture to economics and class. At is the point the argument gets more difficult, in part because, as the factors multiply, the theoretical language is increasingly challenged to perform in ways it was not designed to perform.

There have long been attempts in cultural theory to grapple with the tendency toward reduction. Earlier I pointed out that cultural studies struggled against reducing the working class to a definition preferred by either the elite upper class or by the vulgar marxists. In doing so, cultural studies boldly resisted the reduction of class to economic determinants. Further, especially after recognizing the articulating significance of race and gender, cultural studies resisted the reduction of culture to class determinants. Indeed, the problem of reductionism has consistently occupied theoretical and practical analysis in cultural studies. Hall's brilliant analysis of Marx's Eighteenth Brumaire (Hall 1977)—in which he demonstrates that not even Marx reduced politics to economic class—offers the quintessential cultural studies warning against reduction.

Hall's arguments drew on the work Louis Althusser (largely in the 1970s) and offered cultural studies further theoretical grounds for resisting reduction. In particular, Althusser's concept of relative autonomy was instructive. Briefly, Althusser posited three levels to the social structure: the economic, the political, the ideological.³ Together these constitute a complex whole, a "structure articulated in dominance" (1970, 202), in which each level exhibits its own logic of development and in which one level or the other will exercise more effectivity than another at any particular time. A change in one level is not necessarily caused by a change in another; a change in one level will not necessarily cause a change in another. Yet, with every change, the whole is changed. The semiautonomous levels in relation constitute the ensemble, or totality. The significance of this contribution can not be overestimated. Hall once characterized Althusser's impact as both theoretical and personal:

"the ensemble of relations which make up a whole society" is "essentially a complex structure, not a simple one.... Another general advance which Althusser offers is that he enabled me to live in and with *difference*. Althusser's break with a monistic conception of marxism demanded the theorization of difference—the recognition that there are different social contradictions with different origins; that the contradictions which drive the historical process forward do not always appear in the same place, and will not always have the same historical effect. We have to think about the articulation between different contradictions; about the different specificities and temporal durations through which they operate, about the different modalities through which they function. (Hall 1985, 91-92)

While it is no longer *au courant* to read or cite Althusser, revisiting relative autonomy offers further support for imagining something other than an anthropocentric cultural studies; it suggests a way of thinking that forbids reducing everything to discourse but without diminishing the fundamental importance of the discursive. While it may be the case that we can only know the world in and through discourse and that the archaeology of the world as we know it is discursive, this does not mean that the world is essentially discursive. The other-than-human can best be understood as having its own origins, as having the potential to function though its own modalities, as being, in short, semi-autonomous. Semiautonomy insists that we acknowledge the "different modalities" though which different vectors function.

Those of us who study technology have had to wrestle with this idea in order to begin to understand the role of technology in culture. In 1985 I argued for cultural studies to develop the concept of a "technological apparatus," which would acknowledge the role of the material "thing"

or mechanism in cultural relations: in relation to economics, politics, and ideology (Slack, 1985). As Latour (1988; 1996) puts it, technology exercises agency too; once created, technology “impinges” back on humans to affect them. To say that does not imply that technology exists outside the discursive, just that it cannot be reduced to the discursive. The physical organization of matter matters, regardless of the human centered processes that bring it into being. The materials out of which any technology is constructed—acknowledged, named, organized, and used by humans—do not owe their existence to discourse any more than politics owes its existence to economics. They are related, yes. They affect each other, yes. But not in the sense that one determines the other. One cannot be reduced to the other..

This acknowledgment of the material, of the “technological other,” requires that we rethink apparatus, so that other-than-human otherness can be acknowledged. Drawing on the work of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, Greg Wise and I offer the term “technological assemblage”—in lieu of apparatus—to suggest a non-anthropocentric apparatus. We argue that “an assemblage is a particular constellation of articulations that selects, draws together, stakes out and envelops a territory that exhibits some tenacity and effectivity” (Slack and Wise, 2005, 129). Assemblage, thought this way, is made up of all kinds of bodies: the bodies of machines and structures, earthly bodies, human bodies, governmental bodies, economic bodies, geographical bodies, bodies of knowledge, and so on. To characterize culture as the intermingling of modalities, we use the term “technological culture” rather than the binary-evoking “culture and technology.” Of course, the discursive figures. An archaeology of knowledge is constituted by creating and designating these bodies as bodies. As bodies, they do not exist outside discourse. Yet none can be contained by discourse. None can be reduced to discourse.

Of course, the eco is still more difficult to fathom than technology using the theoretical language readily available. To use the term culture is to bring into the room the nature/culture split. To use the term environment is to bring into the room the long held belief that it refers to that which surrounds humans (see Slack, 2005, 106). To use the term ecology or biology is to invite the specter of positivistic science and the specter of essentialism that accompanies it. All the terms of the eco—environment, ecology, biology, and nature—suggest an absolute binary distinction between all that is human and all that is not. The tenacity of the binary is tenacious. Yet, to combat the binary with an equally simplified reduction engineered through the discursive is equally unacceptable. Cultural theory would demand that we think the eco without making either mistake. If I belabor this point it is because of the risk that cultural theorists, who are well practiced at defending the cultural against difficult odds, might see in my argument a claim that the eco exists outside, apart from, and wholly independent of discourse. But quite simply, I have not said that. Sadly, that practiced defense of the cultural, has worked to keep cultural studies from developing a much needed way to think and talk about the necessary relatedness, the otherness, and the semi-autonomy of the human and other-than-human world. Laurie Whitt and I struggled to find that language in 1985 when we stated that

What is uniquely human (as well as other-than-human) can then be recognized and respected, including what is of particular concern to us here—that characteristic mode of human being in which life is conducted in discursive conditions not of our own making. These discursive conditions or articulations can assert interconnectedness

(interdependence) or deny it. But on the level of the biotic, no denial of interdependence can conjure it out of existence, or succeed in making it “go away.” (Slack and Whitt 1992, 585)

I’ll put this another way: No matter how successful the discourse of holocaust deniers might be in convincing people that the holocaust was a hoax, and organizing culture to embody that, there is way to bring back those millions of lives. Discourse is simply not the final court in every and all situations. We desperately need a cultural studies that knows how to deal with that possibility in every and all situations.

Cultural studies has been significantly encouraged to trouble the binary distinction between the human and the other-than-human with the image of the cyborg. Popularized by Donna Haraway in her 1985 “A Manifesto For Cyborgs,” the cyborg is posed to break down three boundaries: the boundary between the human and animal, the boundary between organism and machine, and the boundary between the physical and the non-physical (Haraway 1985, 69-71). The cyborg world, Haraway argues “might be about lived social and bodily realities in which people are not afraid of their joint kinship with animals and machines” (72), a fusion of “animal and machine” (95). In her later “The Promises of Monsters,” Haraway claims for science studies what culture studies might acknowledge:

...what science studies as cultural studies do, by showing how to visualize the curious collectives of humans and unhumans that make up natural-social (one word) life. To stress the point that all the actors in these generative, dispersed, and layered collectives do not have human form and function—and should not be anthropomorphized. (Haraway 1992, 333)

While Haraway’s hybrid cyborg promised enormous potential to rethink culture, it brought with it three limiting features: the idea that the cyborg was new, the idea of the cyborg as an identity; and the sci-fi potential of the cyborg.

By casting the cyborg as “a matter of fiction and lived experience that changes what counts as women’s experience in the late twentieth century” (Haraway, 1985, 66), Haraway misses the opportunity to *foreground* the insistence that we have all always been cyborg and that cyborgs do not always have a human component. More recently and more convincingly, cognitive scientist Andy Clarke, in *Natural Born Cyborgs* (2003) argues that “our sense of bodily limits and bodily presence is not fixed and immovable. Instead, is it an ongoing construct, open to rapid influence by tricks and...by new technologies” (59). We have always been hybrid: Bodies have always entered “into deep and complex relationships with nonbiological constructs, props, and aids” (5). Unfortunately, Clarke is clearly unprepared to follow the implications of his own insight. His argument peters out, as though he resists accepting that being naturally cyborg entails some awesome responsibilities: that we ought to look far more critically at the reasons and ways those “machine-parts” of us are developed, implemented, and regulated. Clarke’s argument could benefit greatly from understanding political economy and cultural theory. Reading Haraway and Clarke together can work to enhance awareness that the cyborg, as a moving target, is not always glamorous, blasphemous, playful, resistant, or liberating.

Another important limiting feature of Haraway's cyborg is the emphasis on identity. Identity designates things, persons, subjects, and substances. Identities are points of origin and final destinations. Even when an identity is hybrid, it is a spatiotemporal point formed by the connection of two or more points. If the cyborg is formed by connecting the organic and the machine, the resulting thing is something: an articulated thing, not an articulating process. Contrast the idea of the cyborg thing with Deleuze and Guattari's emphasis on lines over points, haecceity over identity: Haecceity is not identity, but a mode of individuation. It is a way of understanding, not things, persons, subjects, and substances, but the flows that shape bodies under given relations (Deleuze and Guattari, 266): "relations of movement and rest between molecules or particles, capacities to affect and be affected" (261). Haecceities assemble, aggregate, combine, and articulate content and expression in ways that matter. The lines of becoming that constitute haecceity are not defined by points, by identities. Rather, a line of becoming "passes between points, it comes up through the middle, it runs perpendicular to the points first perceived, transversally to the localizable relation to distinct or contiguous points" (293). When an ecoculturalism is based on identity, it gets caught up in a politics of identity: polluters set against environmentalists, pristine wilderness set against civilization, development set against planning, cyborgs set against one another. When someone "gets" that they are cyborg, the work can too easily stop there: "I am cyborg. So what?" By focusing on the flows among the human and the other-than-human, cultural studies can more productively address what is empowered and what is disempowered, what is possible, and what is not. We can consider what new assemblages we might applaud, revel in, support, or see as a way to genuine multiplication. Recognizing that we are cyborg simply isn't enough. When articulation and assemblage are recognized as process, there is simply no stopping point.

Nowhere is the cultural commitment to cyborg identity clearer than in popular science fiction. In these images, the cyborg is reduced to a particular kind of thing: a blend of human organism and machine, a human-hardware hybrid that either threatens "real" humanness or enhances it (or both). With the prevalence of this cyborg in popular film, fiction, and everyday discourse, any theoretical attempt to recruit the cyborg in service of a transformed cultural studies is fighting an uphill battle. The failure of Clarke's book to fully recognize the political implications of having always been cyborg is instructive.

Haraway's attempt to use the cyborg to shock, transgress, and startle us into rethinking the relation between the human and the unhuman, what she calls the natural-social (1992) or later naturecultures (2003), has its limits. In main, the cyborg has become an unfortunately precious image with which to take pleasure in the machine components in our still very human lives.⁴ By 2003, Haraway realizes that the cyborg can no longer "fruitfully inform livable politics and ontologies in current life worlds....By the end of the millennium, cyborg could no longer...gather up the threads needed for critical inquiry." (2003, 4).

Not Tolerating Inelegant Stuttering

What does it take then to gather up the threads needed for critical inquiry? The best critical theorists are those who most elegantly handle the multiplicity of complex threads of the context and weave them into a convincing text. In the world of academic cultural studies, critical inquiry is practically synonymous with writing. The "better" the weaving/writing, the more we

value the theorist. Stuart Hall's enormous skill at weaving threads and writing elegantly provides a case in point. Without in any way diminishing those skills, I would like to suggest that in coming to expect them, cultural theorists often miss significant opportunities to examine, experience, and think about culture in new ways, to weave, as it were, relevant threads. In particular there are opportunities to think through the eco that won't be found in either academic discourse or in widely circulated forms of popular discourse. As Haraway teases, "Anyone who has done historical research knows that the undocumented often have more to say about how the world is put together than do the well pedigreed" (Haraway 2003, 88). There is a lot to learn from the cultural "mutts."

For example, I am thinking here of what I call becoming-with-horse, which is suggested popularly in the "listening to horses" movement. In a much debased form, the movement is expressed in popular media in *The Horse Whisperer*—both the book (Evans 1995) and the movie (Redford 1998). It is more adequately characterized in Monty Roberts' best-selling *The Man Who Listens to Horses* (1997). But there are many, less popular books that cover similar territory in less elegant but effective ways. For example: Tom Dorrance's *True Unity* (1987), Ray Hunt's *Think Harmony With Horses* (1997), Pat Parelli's *Natural Horse-Man-Ship* (1993), Gawani Pony Boys's *Horse, Follow Closely* (1998), and Mark Rashid's *Considering the Horse* (1993) and *A Good Horse is Never a Bad Color* (1996). These less accessible books, and the workshops on "joining up" with horses that are held all over "horse country" (which is anywhere there are horses), reveal a movement of far more significance than is represented in its more popular (more expressively elegant) versions, such as *The Horse Whisperer*. In fact, the far less visible workshops probably constitute the most effective part of the movement.

The movement is exciting for two reasons: First, it suggests a genuine—and promising—transformation in understanding cultural relations among heterogeneous species. Second, it is a popular movement with possibilities for far-reaching consequences. It isn't that the insights offered by the listening-to-horses movement are particularly new. They are, however, being articulated in new ways as part of an emerging cultural assemblage.

The listening-to-horses movement has many different manifestations. At the one extreme (the easiest to grasp within language and the least interesting), it reproduces the problematic of identity. It goes like this: Horses have a language. Humans can learn that language and learn to speak it by performing minor acts of translation. So, for example, walking in a zig-zag fashion as you approach a horse communicates herbivore-grazing rather than predator-stalking. Communication here is nothing more than the connection formed between two identities with two distinct languages, and as such it hardens up those points rather than opening them to multiplicity. If anything, communication in this formulation enhances the power of human identity to exert power over the other. We now have power to cross the species divide, to translate and understand horse language, to communicate to them, and exert a new form of mastery. Horses lose their mystery, their otherness. They are merely the prey animal seeking comfort from predators. The terms are all fundamentally human and language is the language of identity.⁵

There is, however, a much more interesting thread in the listening-to-horses movement. In this thread, there is an attempt to move in the world *with horse*. Communication is not a connection between points or identities. Rather, it looks more what Deleuze and Guattari call "transversal communication between heterogeneous populations" (1987, 239) or a "passage

between heterogeneities”(1987, 250). In this case an active line “will bring other becomings entirely different” and “will induce a transformation of all of the preceding assemblages”(1987, 251). New haecceities assemble, combine and articulate expression and content in ways that open to multiplicity. Horse language is not reduced to human language, horse and human do not become horse-human (like cyborg). Instead a new herd forms, perpendicular to those identities, escaping them. This is not a transformation of essential forms (that would be a problem of identity), but a transformation of what can be expressed and lived, a *becoming-with-horse*. The transformative potential can be glimpsed in the listening-to-horses movement in its practice of “joining up” with horses as opposed to training them. Horses are not trained into being some other imagined identity (the well-trained horse). Rather, horse and human “join up” and *become*—releasing new possibilities, new ways of being and living.

It is difficult to either explain or know what this becoming-with-horse looks or feels like. As the line of flight escapes expressions that “make sense” to us from within the escaped assemblage, language, as Deleuze maintains, “stutters” (Deleuze 1994, 23). When it does not stutter, language is regulatory. Then, as explained by Christa Albrecht Crane, language “functions as an ordering mechanism through a process of normalizing and streamlining variables that are made to function as order-words in support...of social processes.” It “provides a (conceptual) vocabulary with which to make a certain sense of the world and with each other” (Albrecht-Crane 2005, 125). When, however, language stutters, it “ushers in the words that it affects” (23); it uses old and new words in ways that upset the ordering mechanism and open new possibilities. Great writers stutter, Deleuze argues, for they are strangers in the language within which they are required to express themselves (25). Their use of language will seem variously strange, for they are actively drawing new, unfamiliar lines. But not everyone with a line of flight to express may be as talented poetically. Because they may not be great writers, we must work even harder to see through the potentially revealing stuttering. Sometimes, just when you think you are going to get the explanation, the author can’t or doesn’t explain. The words set out, fall short, and are sometimes pulled back—reterritorialized—in terms returned to the abandoned territory. In spite of these “failures,” momentary glimmers open up possibility, multiplicity, and powerful affect. In the listening-to-horses literature, they open up ways of thinking and theorizing the role of the eco in culture in a non-anthropocentric way.

My favorite example of the halting, stuttering explanation of becoming-with-horse is expressed in the writing of Tom Dorrance. I choose him because he stutters the hardest with superficially the least success.⁶ His discourse is the most inelegant. Repeatedly in his books he suffers over his inadequacy with words to explain. His stuttering attests to the failure of existing discourse to characterize a line of flight. Yet he has something important to say. I greatly admire his “failed” attempts at the same time that I glimpse the power of possibility in his idea of “unity.” He writes:

If I could tell people, just go through the motions here, and then they could pick this up and do it, I wouldn’t do anything else but work with people and horses; but I can’t do that. There is something more. It is something that has to come in the unity between the horse and the rider. And there is a delicate line that makes the difference. (Dorrance 1987, 17)

There can be some direction, or support and encouragement, but the *feel* itself can come from no one but themselves; they will know when the feel actually becomes effective, and when they are understanding.

I've looked in dictionaries for the definition for the word *feel*. I haven't been really satisfied with the definitions I've found for this thing I'm talking about with the horse—this thing *between the horse and the person*. (Dorrance 1987, 12).

People like Dorrance give workshops all over the country, working with horses and people in face-to-face interactions to teach the “feel” he speaks of here. Although I have never attended a Dorrance workshop, I suspect that he is more effective at performing relations across heterogeneous species than he is at expressing them in written discourse. I have, however, experienced moments of becoming-with-horse that feel like what Dorrance describes.

Another, more poetic, example of stuttering to draw this transformative line of communication “running perpendicularly to points first perceived” was written in 1954 and has been revived as part of this new movement.⁷ Its revival suggests again that while the insights themselves are not new, they are participating in a process of transforming the concept of culture as anthropocentric as manifest in everyday life—in ways not especially visible in more popular media. It also makes clear that the listening-to-horses movement is not just about horses, but about the possibilities of affective trajectories involving animals generally. This example also illustrates that drawing lines of flight appears “beyond the pale,” as magic, as hokum, as the ravings of weirdos—no matter how serious the efforts. Deleuze and Guattari refer to the “passage between heterogeneities” as “how we sorcerers operate” (1987, 250). In this example, J. Allen Boone tries to describe learning to become-with-dog. It is, delightfully, the language of sorcery:

The most memorable of our silent talks took place out under the stars, where he and I would sit shoulder to shoulder in shared contemplation like a couple of cogitating philosophers. We would first saturate ourselves with distance. We would watch the lovely designs and purpose operating in all things, and we would wonder, and marvel, and ponder. We would listen to the Voice of Existence as it silent spoke in that language which knows no barriers of time, space or species. The magic of the Universe flowed through us, and the dog and I realized our individual and necessary places in that glorious cosmic expression. (Boone 1976, 79)

More recently, the highly accomplished stutterer, Donna Haraway, after abandoning the cyborg, uses dogs as the vehicle to argue for rethinking the relationship between nature and culture. In her provocative manifesto, *The Companion Species Manifesto* (2003), she makes the case for “constitutive relationships” (12) between dogs and human “all the way down”: hence her designation “naturecultures” (12). That relationships are constitutive acknowledges a kind of co-evolutional development, or evo-devo, a evolutionary developmental interdependence, such that we (who and what we have become and are becoming) are co-dependent with the evolutionary development of dogs. As with those writing about, teaching, and performing becoming-with-horse, Haraway explores the historically specific, “joint lives of dogs and people, who are bonded

in significant otherness" (16), but she is out to reveal more than the co-dependence of dogs and humans. She considers the companion species: "A bigger and more heterogeneous category than companion animal, and not just because one must include such organic beings as rice, bees, tulips, and intestinal flora, all of whom make life for humans what it is—and vice versa" (15). Beyond her insight that all species are companion species, she counts the machinic and the textual, for they are "internal to the organic and vice versa in irreversible ways" (15).

In more explicitly academic forms of stuttering, research on the body suggests an especially potent site of both difficulty and possibility in rethinking the co-evolutionary interdependence of the human and the other-than human, in that the body (any body) is both human and other-than-human. This work challenges the idea that the body is "fixed" in any way; not even the boundaries of the human body have been consistently drawn. Rosi Braidotti (2002) claims that the-body is "not an essence, let alone a biological substance, but a play of forces, a surface of intensities" (21). Body boundaries are permeable (Bowen 2005; Hashimoto 2005), constituted in ongoing flows and relations among the material and discursive, organic and inorganic, human and other-than-human vectors, factors, bodies. If even the "human" body is both human and other-than-human—throwing into deep suspicion the very designation "human"—how can cultural studies ever parse the other-than-human as outside of, or insignificant to, the project?

Cultural approaches to studying technology, including Haraway's work on the cyborg, have taught us to recognize the co-evolution of the organic and the machinic. Cultural approaches to text and body have sensitized us to the co-evolution of the organic, the machinic, and the textual. Relatively arcane movements, such as listening-to-horses and companion animal training, reveal cultural sites where important cultural work is undertaken. We need only to put this all together and map out the implications. Because we cohabit an active history, as Haraway puts it (20), living ethically in relations of significant otherness requires "ongoing alertness to otherness in relation" (50)—an otherness that must include the technological, the textual, and the body, as well as the components of the eco: environment, ecology, biology, and nature.

Ecoculturalism Isn't What It is About After All

The weight of the arguments brought together here compel cultural theorists to acknowledge that culture is the site of co-evolutionary development involving factors, vectors, or bodies with a variety of forms: what in inadequately but effectively territorialized language we characterize as organic and inorganic, discursive and non-discursive, machinic and spiritual, human and other-than human (or unhuman in Haraway's terms), the said and the unsaid—expanded vastly beyond the concept of discourse. Just as feminists argued that ignoring gender perpetuates a silence with profound political effects, so too do we ignore technology and the eco with profound political and ethical effects.

My objection to ecoculturalism is this: Like cyberfeminism, feminist cultural studies, ecofeminism, technoculture, technoscience, nature/cultures, or environmental cultural studies, ecoculturalism foregrounds one factor, vector, or body as primary, as especially significant. It is akin to labeling cultural studies through time as class cultural studies, race cultural studies, feminist cultural studies, ethnic cultural studies, difference cultural studies, power cultural studies, techno cultural studies, eco cultural studies, or queer cultural studies. While, especially in the case of feminism, there have been strategic reasons for staking out these prepositional grounds, the

strategy has become an almost magical solution to a much more complex problem. We do not really solve the problem of rethinking culture when we simply add a new preposition to claim a new space: cyber, techno, eco, queer, etc. As cultural theorists, we ought to wrestle with the knowledge that it is impossible to contextualize culture without considering the co-evolution of all these significant articulating vectors, factors, or bodies.

Further, by foregrounding one factor, vector, or body, desirable as well as undesirable baggage is brought along. "Feminist" and "queer" threaten to limit the issue to gender (although they don't necessarily); "environment" requires acknowledging the trajectory of a particular environmental movement (although it doesn't necessarily); eco, bio, and techno insist on engaging the versions of these from a positivistic scientific perspective (although they don't necessarily); "nature" raises the need to confront the nature/culture split all over again, even in the midst of denying the split. So why foreground these terms? Why not just engage in a new, transformed practice of cultural studies?

There are those who call for abandoning cultural studies, in part because the specificity of cultural studies has been lost. Cultural studies has become almost anything—if, that is, you acknowledge the claims of the variety of voices who claim to practice it. My argument here might suggest that we abandon cultural studies on the grounds that the term "cultural," like "nature," raises the need to confront—unproductively—the nature/culture split yet again. Furthermore, "culture" does suggest the anthropocentric. I do not advocate that path, however. Let me be clear. I want to jettison ecocultural studies, but not cultural studies. As problematic as the term "culture" has been, there is reason to embrace it, to insist on the lineage, specificity, and possibilities of it. The term "cultural studies" has won us space, given us a legitimate academic platform from which to observe, learn, communicate with one another, and teach. That is worth building on. But I would urge that we take on the essential and difficult task of specifying what we mean by the "cultural." To do that I insist that we must make a leap into the age we really inhabit, where there is so much at stake in the ways that culture is an active process of articulating flows within which relations of power are reproduced, resisted, and transformed. There are no neatly parsed, fixed "humans" or "other-than-humans," or for that matter, cyborgs, in this concept of culture. There are only intermingling modalities, configuring bodies, geomorphs, biorhythms, herds. If we insist on culture in this non-anthropocentric sense as what constitutes the specificity of cultural studies, then we will have transformed cultural studies and revitalized its potential to describe and intervene in the world.

Acknowledgement

I extend thanks to Patty Sotirin for generous readings and thoughtful insight.

Notes

¹ Laurie Whitt and I (1992) called for an "ecoculturally informed cultural studies" that acknowledges a necessary interconnectedness between the cultural and the biotic (or the other-than-human world), abandons anthropocentrism, and rethinks its project in light of human relations with the other-than-human world. In what was a correct assessment, we wrote then that "We

anticipate the reluctance of cultural theorists to enter this ecoculturalist terrain based on a fear that to reorient cultural studies thus would be to change its project" (589).

² Cultural theorists who have for some time been attending to environment, ecology, and nature include Jody Berland (1994) Andrew Ross (1991), Carole Stabile (1994), Jennifer Daryl Slack and Laurie Anne Whitt (1992; 1994), and Mackenzie Wark (1994).

³ Athusser posits a fourth, the scientific, which doesn't hold up very well in his analysis and, like other scholars, I choose to leave it out of the equation.

⁴ In spite of these cultural limitations it is still possible to use the cyborg to develop an academically responsible (feminist) ethic, as Joanna Zylińska does in *The Ethics of Cultural Studies* (2005, especially 138-158).

⁵ Pat Parelli's *Natural Horse-Man-Ship* (1993) exemplifies this approach. Although I do not contest his horsemanship, his "keys to a natural horse-human relationship" reads like an operations manual. Is the horse here machine, the human the organic, and hoarse-man-ship merely cyborg identity? It may be that Parelli is simply so committed to his mission and to selling boos as a measure of his success that he speaks in the language of an operations manual to make inroads. It is an improvement to treat horses with the kind of acknowledgment Parelli gives them, but the discursive text does not look like becoming-with-horse.

⁶ Dorrance is taken to task severely by Amazon.com reviewers for failing to explain "his method." I take this as an unreasonable demand to demand to speak from within the very assemblage Dorrance is trying to escape.

⁷ Amazon.com recommended this text (Boone 1976) as one I would probably be interested in given the several books on horses that I purchased from them. This suggestion alone draws a link between it and the listening to horses movement.

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