



## Editorial Statement

*Cultural Studies* continues to expand and flourish, in large part because the field keeps changing. Cultural studies scholars are addressing new questions and discourses, continuing to debate long-standing issues, and reinventing critical traditions. More and more universities have some formal cultural studies presence; the number of books and journals in the field is rapidly increasing. *Cultural Studies* welcomes these developments. We understand the expansion, reflexivity and internal critique of cultural studies to be both signs of its vitality and signature components of its status as a field. At the same time, cultural studies has been – and will no doubt continue to be – the subject of numerous attacks, launched from various perspectives and sites. These have to be taken seriously and answered, intellectually, institutionally and publicly. *Cultural Studies* hopes to provide a forum for response and strategic discussion.

*Cultural Studies* assumes that the knowledge formations that make up the field are as historically and geographically contingent as are the determinations of any cultural practice or configuration and that the work produced within or at its permeable boundaries will be diverse. We hope not only to represent but to enhance this diversity. Consequently, we encourage submissions from various disciplinary, theoretical and geographical perspectives, and hope to reflect the wide-ranging articulations, both global and local, among historical, political, economic, cultural and everyday discourses. At the heart of these articulations are questions of community, identity, agency and change.

We expect to publish work that is politically and strategically driven, empirically grounded, theoretically sophisticated, contextually defined and reflexive about its status, however critical, within the range of cultural studies. *Cultural Studies* is about theorizing politics and politicizing theory. How this is to be accomplished in any context remains, however, open to rigorous enquiry. As we look towards the future of the field and the journal, it is this enquiry that we especially hope to support.

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Della Pollock

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## Ted Striphas

### INTRODUCTION

### THE LONG MARCH: CULTURAL STUDIES AND ITS INSTITUTIONALIZATION

THE CONVERSATION on the institutionalization of cultural studies generally proceeds from the rather guarded view that it is full of hazards and pitfalls. Stuart Hall echoes this sentiment when he states, 'the explosion of cultural studies along with other forms of critical theory in the academy represents a moment of extraordinarily profound danger' (1992: 285). But let me advance another – complementary – view, one that guides both this special issue of *Cultural Studies* and its introduction: despite this danger, possibilities still inhere in the prospect of institutionalization. Although this is by no means a grand claim, I suspect not everyone practising cultural studies would be attracted to it immediately. However, given the prospect, even the inevitability of institutionalization, danger, and perhaps more importantly, *possibility* exist alongside one another.

I begin by pointing to a gap evident in the published discourse on the institutionalization of cultural studies. Passing references to the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies notwithstanding, most of the work in cultural studies tends to consider the 'question' of institutionalization with little or no reference to existing institutionalizations of cultural studies (see e.g. Green, 1996; Grossberg, 1996a; Grossberg, 1998; Grossberg *et al.*, 1992; Hall, 1992; Nelson, 1996; Rooney, 1996).<sup>1</sup> This 'oversight' suggests the need to examine the relationship between the meta-discourse of cultural studies and its institutional embodiments, particularly where the former and the latter seem to diverge. There is a tendency, I will argue, to privilege cultural studies' meta-discourse (i.e. what cultural studies *says* it does or should do) over its existing institutional practices. The result is that cultural studies seems to be failing perpetually, insofar as the real constraints – and possibilities – of practising cultural studies in institutions are measured against a more 'authentic' discourse that, on the surface, affords insufficient room for practices that take institutions seriously and work with/in them.

I am committed to the belief that studying the institutionalization of cultural studies must involve the study of specific institutions. Thus, the research for this

article comes from two sources: public information gathered from cultural studies centres and programmes (or programmes affiliated with cultural studies) worldwide; and interviews conducted with the directors and programme coordinators of Griffith University's Key Centre for Cultural and Media Policy (Tony Bennett), New York University's American Studies Program (Andrew Ross), Goldsmith's Department of Media Communications (David Morley), and Georgia Institute of Technology's School of Literature, Communication, and Culture (Anne Balsamo), among others.<sup>2</sup> Much work remains to be done documenting rigorously from the 'inside' the nuances of particular programmes, the strategies by which they have gone about institutionalizing, and how they respond to the ongoing challenges that institutionalization brings. My aim is to place the work and commitments of these centres and programmes alongside cultural studies' meta-discourse and, more specifically, some of its statements on institutionalization.

This article will explore the disjunctures between these discourses and practices, with the larger goal of understanding their function. In the first section, I will argue that institutionalizing cultural studies provides an important, if overlooked mechanism by which we can begin to think about the concrete effects of the common claim that cultural studies, over and above its writing practices, involves intervention. The second section will juxtapose cultural studies' meta-discursive stress on anti- and interdisciplinarity with an emerging commitment to interdisciplinarity on the part of university administrations. I want to suggest that cultural studies' institutional practices run the risk of colluding with the university's new corporatist logic (of which interdisciplinarity often – and ironically – is a symptom), and that specifying more concrete practices at the institutional level offers a means to oppose this new logic. The third section investigates what I will call the 'performative' relationship between the meta-discourse of cultural studies and its institutional embodiments.<sup>3</sup> My goal is to reclaim and affirm institutionally based practices of cultural studies, rather than simply underlining what on the surface appears to be their 'lack' when measured against cultural studies' meta-discourse. I conclude with some strategies for institutionalizing cultural studies.

### Reinventing intervention

What I shall call the 'discourse of intervention' should be seen as potentially problematic, particularly in cultural studies on this side of the Atlantic [i.e. in the US]. Words like 'intervention' and 'interrogation' are meant to signify the cultural studies critic's serious 'oppositional' stance towards hegemonic traditions of knowledge production. . . . But . . . this discourse of intervention seems to *romanticize* the critic's academic role as sufficiently oppositional.

(Pfister, 1996: 296)

I think anybody who is into cultural studies seriously as an intellectual practice must feel, on their pulse, its ephemerality, its insubstantiality, how little it registers, how little we've been able to change anything or get anybody to do anything.

(Hall, 1992: 285)

One of the distinguishing, if not defining characteristics of the practice of cultural studies is its mandate not simply to criticize, but more pointedly to intervene actively in an effort to make, remake and unmake social, political and historical contexts (Grossberg, 1997: 261). '[I]n virtually all traditions of cultural studies, its practitioners see cultural studies not simply as a chronicle of social change but as an intervention in it' (Grossberg *et al.*, 1992: 5). But at the same time, as Pfister (1996) and Hall (1992) argue, cultural studies' claims to intervention often are weak, even romantic, and hence must be measured critically. '[P]olitical action and cultural studies are not interchangeable,' Cary Nelson states. 'It should not be necessary to say this, but apparently it is: Cultural studies is a set of writing practices; it is a discursive, analytic, interpretive tradition' (1996: 278). In other words, we ought to be careful not to overestimate the political effectivity of cultural studies, given that it is, after all, 'just' a set of written critical practices. Or is it? Indeed, cultural studies practitioners are not simply writers, as Cary Nelson would have it. They are also teachers, policy makers, consultants, artists and activists. How one gauges cultural studies' interventions therefore depends on where one locates its practices, i.e. whether one sees those practices limited to written, critical work, or whether one imagines them extending into other areas: namely, into – and out of – institutions like the university.

I would like to argue that the political efficacy of cultural studies remains underestimated when practitioners fail to notice that there exists a gap or disjuncture between cultural studies' ability to intervene as a set of critical writing practices and its ability to intervene as a set of properly *institutional* practices. The latter include: (1) its influences on cultural, media and other policy matters; (2) its manifest political-activist involvement, often mobilized through university-based projects; and (3) its pedagogical work, particularly in terms of teaching future cultural producers. My sense is that specific, institutionalized practices of cultural studies (particularly those in the university) engage in a range of activities that could count as properly 'interventionist'.

Cultural studies at the Key Centre for Cultural and Media Policy at Griffith University, Australia, provides a telling case in point. Built upon Griffith's Institute for Cultural Policy Studies, the Key Centre was established in 1995 through the financial support of the Australian Research Council's Research Centres Program, an arm of the Australian federal government's Department of Employment, Education, Training, and Youth Affairs. It brings together faculty and students from three institutions who maintain an interest in cultural studies and

cultural and media policy: Griffith University; Queensland University of Technology's Centre for Media Policy and Practice; and the University of Queensland's Centre for Media and Cultural Studies. The Centre has established ties to Australian broadcasting regulators, arts administrators, the Australian Film Commission, and even to pay-TV operators. The Centre has become a locus for what are, without question, highly institutionalized and connected practices of cultural studies.<sup>4</sup>

It should therefore come as no surprise that identifying cultural studies simply as a set of writing practices does not quite capture the confluence of activities characterizing cultural studies at the Key Centre for Cultural and Media Policy. Granted, a good deal of work coming from the Centre takes the form of written research: newsletters, books, reports and occasional papers.<sup>5</sup> Nothing would seem to be out of the ordinary until we consider – and these are the factors crucial to intervention – the particular policy orientation of this work and how it subsequently circulates. The Centre supports only works in cultural studies demonstrating a clear commitment to matters relevant to formulating and influencing cultural policy in Australia. 'The perspective that we've taken,' Tony Bennett, the Centre's former director notes, 'isn't to see policy as a convenient or expedient add-on to cultural studies; it is to say you *can't* do it, you're misunderstanding something significant about the role of culture in modern societies if you do not understand the degree to which it is a policy field' (1997: personal communication). This work thus presupposes its circulation through the institutions with which the Centre has established ties. It imagines itself, from the outset, as a direct intervention with particular destinations and effects already in mind, unlike what could be called more 'free-floating' practices of cultural studies.<sup>6</sup>

To be fair, the Centre's work does not produce 'an immediate, nitty-gritty payoff' (ibid.). Its effects are not as direct or as quantifiable as the signifier 'policy' might suggest. Cultural studies does not map so simply into cultural policy. The Centre's interventions are more modest – though they are certainly interventions where effects can be registered. As Tony Bennett puts it, 'It's not that we expect [cultural studies at the Centre] to dictate policy outcomes. We can't. That's not our role. But what we do want to do is to produce the kind of knowledge and argument, etc., that can influence, that can circulate and have a bearing upon the way these things are discussed' (ibid.). So while the Centre may not produce policy *per se*, given the prestige afforded by its national accreditation, and given its significant and direct ties to a range of national institutions, it does participate in policy formation that to varying degrees can bear upon the government of culture in Australia. The Centre's institutional ties enable the circulation of its work in a way that encourages and engenders effects over and above those possible in non-, less- or even differently institutionalized practices of cultural studies.<sup>7</sup>

Recognizing that New York is at once a cosmopolitan city and a locale, the

American Studies Program at New York University weaves issues specific to the city into a distinctly activist-inflected version of cultural studies.<sup>8</sup> American Studies at NYU is not characterized by the parochialism common to many forms of area studies.<sup>9</sup> Revamped considerably since its early days as an American Civilization Program, NYU's American Studies Program is, according to its director Andrew Ross, better characterized as 'post-national American Studies' (1997: personal communication). It offers students a multidisciplinary (or, as it touts itself, a 'postdisciplinary') approach to concerns ranging from science, technology and society to indigenous America, nations and transnationalism to gender, race and sexuality.<sup>10</sup> 'Most of the students,' Ross states, 'probably feel they're doing cultural studies rather than American Studies, although I think overall there's a different flavor to this program' (ibid.). What makes the programme unique, what gives it its 'different flavour', I would like to suggest, stems in part from its ability to register more than the 'vague effects' characteristic of written cultural studies interventions.

The written critical-theoretical documents that often typify the 'output' of cultural studies' work tend not to mark the end point for student projects at NYU's American Studies Program. Through collaboration on projects, students create connections with and among political constituencies and groups implicated in their projects. One recent group project, for example, produced not only essays but also a conference bringing together representatives from New York's garment industry, members of the garment union, activists and intellectuals to discuss sweatshops and labour reform in both theoretical and more immediately practical terms. Another collaborative student project on HIV, sexuality and queer politics developed prevention programmes out of their critical-theoretical work, which the students subsequently took to clubs and bathhouses throughout the city. In general, the work of cultural studies at NYU remains unfinished until it meets with those whose realities it describes and seeks to transform.<sup>11</sup> 'What we tell students is we're producing intellectual-activists here. . . . The work they do . . . is work they can't do outside the academy, but their work has to go beyond the academy' (ibid.). Like policy at Griffith, activism is not simply something added on to cultural studies after the fact; it is constitutive of its practices. The Program maintains an ongoing commitment to forging links among groups and institutions outside of the academy and subsequently to circulate (in various forms) its written practices of cultural studies through them.

Emphasizing cultural studies' written practices also tends to obscure the significance of pedagogy as a site of cultural studies' institutionally based practices. It may be true that pedagogical practices informed by cultural studies register nothing more than the 'vague effects' against which Stuart Hall (1992) cautioned us.<sup>12</sup> On the other hand, they do evince the *possibility* for a particular mode of intervention: specifically, teaching *future cultural producers* from a perspective informed by cultural studies. This suggests another way cultural studies can circulate and resonate – that is to say, how it is effective – outside of the academy.

The Georgia Institute of Technology's School of Literature, Communication, and Culture (LCC), particularly the graduate programme in Information Design and Technology (IDT), represents a significant advance in this direction. The LCC curriculum cannot be characterized as exclusively cultural studies, given that it must also include a range of more traditional humanities courses for students who are majoring in programmes in engineering and sciences (Balsamo, 1997: personal communication). Courses and assignments are apt to evince a bias towards issues related to science and technology, articulated broadly to a humanistic concern with 'culture'. According to Anne Balsamo, director of LCC's graduate programme, 'This is one of the fruitful ways in which cultural studies can be worked into the curriculum. It can lend a rationale to a program that is trying to map a new area' (ibid.). It is precisely here, I would add, that cultural studies registers its effects at (and beyond) Georgia Tech.<sup>13</sup>

To be fair, LCC students for the most part do not produce work that is in any obvious sense identifiable as cultural studies. IDT projects, for example, tend to privilege the practice of multimedia design and project management over, say, an interest in the theoretical underpinnings of such work, despite the fact that theoretically inflected courses inform and complement the more practical or applied dimension of student work. 'We give [students] critical-theoretical tools that are drawn from cultural theory,' Balsamo states, but 'those tools and those concepts [are always] cast in an applied, practical framework' (ibid.). The work or intervention of cultural studies therefore occurs in the first instance, i.e. in the pedagogical practices and perspectives inspiring and orienting LCC courses. The effectivity of these interventions registers when we consider how and where students, in the final instance, might carry on a cultural studies *informed* practice:

Our . . . practical concern, both at the undergraduate and graduate level, is that we know we are educating people who are going to go out and be cultural producers. . . . [Students] are going to be the ones designing the multimedia, designing CD-ROMs, and we think about the fact that these are cultural products that are going to circulate *very* widely and have a great impact on everything from entertainment and our leisure to our educational materials.

(Ibid.)

Thus, despite the fact that student work at LCC may not be exclusively 'cultural studies', the latter none the less subtends and ultimately circulates into the field of cultural production – a crucial terrain for making, remaking and unmaking social, historical and political contexts.<sup>14</sup> All this is to say that institutionalization clearly (but not unproblematically) holds a key for cultural studies to make good on its promises to intervene.

## Discipline and vanish?<sup>15</sup>

In this section I want to consider the question of disciplinarity, as it relates to institutionalization. What do we know about the relationship of cultural studies to the disciplines? On the one hand, a rich body of literature testifies to cultural studies' methodological, theoretical, practical, rhetorical, and even political 'open-endedness' (see Ang, 1996: 238; Grossberg, 1996a: 179; Grossberg *et al.*, 1992: 3; Hall, 1992: 278; Johnson, 1996: 75; Nelson, 1996: 280).<sup>16</sup> On the other hand, many of the arguments against institutionalizing cultural studies turn on the fear that the disciplinary logic endemic to modern universities will close down (i.e. discipline) this productive openness that, like intervention, represents one of cultural studies' key commitments (see Hall, 1992: 285; Nelson, 1996; Rooney, 1996). A prolific (counter-)discourse has developed underlining and insisting upon the need for cultural studies to resist what would seem to be the university's disciplinary pull. These injunctions range from Grossberg *et al.*'s admonition that 'cultural studies is an interdisciplinary, transdisciplinary, and sometimes counter-disciplinary field' (1992: 4) to Cary Nelson's edict that 'If [cultural studies] is to be institutionalized at all, [it] might be better served by a variety of programs outside of traditional departments' (1996: 283). Ellen Rooney, for her part, issues a polemical plea calling for cultural studies to pursue, minimally, 'an anti-disciplinary practice defined by the repeated, indeed, endless rejection of the logic of the disciplines and the universal subject of disciplinary inquiry' (1996: 214). Evidently, then, disciplinarity represents a sore point for cultural studies, particularly as it runs counter to the openness and radical contextualism characterizing its written practices (see Grossberg, 1998: 68; Slack, 1996: 125).

Cultural studies has gained considerable mileage from this now rather hackneyed resistance to disciplinarity. I describe this argument as 'hackneyed' because it seems to have sedimented into a familiar stock of received knowledge. Or, to put it less delicately, cultural studies has developed something of a 'line', so to speak, in response to the 'question' of institutionalization – despite its professed disdain for ready-made answers. When the prospect of institutionalizing cultural studies gets posed, published reactions often tend towards some variation of 'Resist disciplinarity!' I wonder, however, how productive this response is, given the practical and historical exigencies facing cultural studies, particularly as it finds itself increasingly institutionalized. I would therefore like to problematize some of the assumptions undergirding how cultural studies conceives of and talks about its relationship to institutionalization and disciplinarity, in addition to how it describes the relationship between these two structures. Specifically, I want to consider: (1) how actual cultural studies programmes, practically speaking, go about negotiating the institutional/disciplinary space; (2) how, given recent transformations in (North American) universities, fears about disciplining cultural studies may prove less founded than in earlier moments in its history; (3)

how this transformation presents a new set of challenges to cultural studies' ongoing commitment to open-endedness; and finally (4) how cultural studies might respond at the institutional level to these challenges.

### 1 Practically speaking . . .

I am concerned by the polemical announcement of cultural studies' 'anti-disciplinarity', an injunction that, within the limits of my research, seems to lack a discrete or recognizable institutional embodiment. That said, it becomes all the more urgent to point to some of the limits in the written work relative to the pragmatics of institutionalizing cultural studies. To do this we will need to bracket for the time being the assumption that cultural studies somehow betrays its 'true' nature or has been corrupted when it fails to seize every opportunity to make a frontal assault on the disciplinary structures of the university. Suffice it to say for now that such assumptions prioritize and privilege cultural studies' written discourse over its institutional embodiments, as though the former were somehow a more authentic form of cultural studies than the latter.<sup>17</sup>

First of all, specific institutionalizations of cultural studies tend to evince a consistently interdisciplinary, as opposed to an anti-disciplinary orientation. For instance, Tony Bennett characterizes the Key Centre for Cultural and Media Policy as 'an interdisciplinary connector' joining faculty at various universities (1997: personal communication). The Cultural Studies Research Center at the University of California–Santa Cruz maintains a strong commitment to interdisciplinarity by funding collaborative research 'clusters' of faculty and graduate students across the disciplines of the humanities and social sciences (Clifford, 1997: personal communication). Similarly, research centres to be established at my home institution, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and at Goldsmith's College in London will at once tap a disciplinary base of faculty and graduate students while at the same time providing a space for them to undertake research outside of the constraints of their home departments.<sup>18</sup> In addition, at Goldsmith's, cultural studies has been grafted on to the Department of Media and Communications, which awards joint degrees with the sociology and anthropology departments. Finally, despite the fact that New York University's American Studies Program touts itself as 'postdisciplinary' in its literature, all its faculty maintain appointments in more or less 'traditional' departments (Ross, 1997: personal communication).<sup>19</sup>

What I want to underline here is the fact that – and this should come as no surprise – faculty affiliated with cultural studies tend to remain tied to traditional departments. While I do not mean to claim that in maintaining those ties one cannot work to undo them, I think we need to recognize the strong and continuing existence of disciplinary affiliations – and this is crucial – in order to measure the suggestion that cultural studies somehow is (or ought to be), in the last instance, fundamentally anti-disciplinary.

### 2 Undisciplining the university

Practitioners of cultural studies have invested a significant amount of energy cautioning against the centripetal pull of disciplinarity that seems endemic to universities. Yet this argument tends to identify institutionalization with disciplinarity and to ignore non-disciplinary forms of institutionalization. 'The threat is not from institutionalization *per se*, for cultural studies has always had its institutionalized forms within and outside the academy' (Grossberg *et al.*, 1992: 10). The problem is the conflation of institutionalization and disciplinization, and the reduction of the university to an empty bearer of disciplinary logic. Not only does this collapse competing 'diagrams' of power present within institutions into an abstract, indeed totalizing disciplinary regime, it also rests upon a conspicuously ahistorical view of the university. What the discourse of institutionalization needs, then, is a more refined and historicized understanding of the relationship between the university and disciplinarity.

Bill Readings' *The University in Ruins* (1996) documents recent political, economic and organizational transformations in universities.<sup>20</sup> The logic of disciplining knowledge, he claims, is one specific to the university under modernity.<sup>21</sup> He argues that this is being replaced with a new, economically driven impulse to de-emphasize disciplinarity in what he calls the 'post-historical' university or 'the University [*sic*] of excellence' (1996: 6, 17).<sup>22</sup> Whereas the modern university was built upon a characteristically bureaucratic imperative to compartmentalize, the university of excellence maintains a corporatist commitment to downsize and streamline. The reorganization of Georgia Tech's English Department into the School of Literature, Communication, and Culture and the consolidation of its history and sociology departments into the School of History of Technology and Society in the late 1980s are clear examples of this new logic in action. Rather than fixing knowledge into neat and rigid disciplinary units, the contemporary university increasingly seeks ways to undiscipline the disciplines, in an effort to conserve and consolidate resources. Promoting interdisciplinarity serves this efficiency mandate.

Readings' argument has a number of important implications. First, cultural studies' anxiety over disciplinarity begins to seem somewhat misplaced, perhaps even anachronistic, given the ability of the contemporary university to capitalize on interdisciplinarity. This shift in the university poses a new set of challenges to which cultural studies has remained uncharacteristically quiet. Second, the appropriation of interdisciplinarity raises the question of how cultural studies' commitment to interdisciplinarity colludes with the larger strategies of corporatization/capitalization in the university (for example, downsizing, union breaking, etc.). Cultural studies has operated under the assumption that interdisciplinarity necessarily represents something positive, insofar as it challenges disciplinary logics. However, as Readings reminds us, 'interdisciplinarity has no inherent political orientation' (1996: 39). It is precisely for this reason that the

contemporary university is quite capable of appropriating, for explicitly economic reasons, what historically has been cultural studies' measure to resist the 'organizing' logic of the university.<sup>23</sup>

### 3 *Openness at what cost?*

Cultural studies' openness may be considered to be both one of its most enabling commitments and the bane of its existence. While it enables cultural studies' ongoing evolution, its practical flexibility and its radical contextuality, it also runs the risk of evacuating any meaning of 'cultural studies'. Grossberg argues, for instance, that '[a]s cultural studies becomes something of an established position, it loses its specificity' (1996a: 178). Tony Bennett has noted 'the elasticity of usage the term "cultural studies" has acquired,' given that it 'functions largely as a term of convenience for a fairly dispersed array of theoretical and political positions' (1996: 307).<sup>24</sup> Similarly, one of the most striking features of the 'Alan Sokal Affair' was the ease with which cultural studies became a place holder for a number of related, though irreducibly different philosophical and academic formations, including postmodernism, poststructuralism, deconstruction, literary theory, critical theory, sociology and social constructionism.<sup>25</sup> Underlining this slipperiness, Readings (1996: 17) argues:

Cultural Studies . . . arrives on the scene with a certain exhaustion. The very fecundity and multiplicity of work in Cultural Studies is enabled by the fact that culture no longer functions as a specific referent to any one thing or set of things – which is why Cultural Studies can be so popular while refusing general theoretical definition.

Practitioners of cultural studies have to contend with the proliferation of work to which cultural studies has been articulated or with which it has been identified directly. In other words, we need to attend to the ways in which the signifier 'cultural studies' increasingly finds itself emptied rather than occupied.

Clearly, 'what is' cultural studies is something struggled over actively. Not everything is nor can be cultural studies.<sup>26</sup> But I think it would be unwise, in this struggle, to turn a blind eye to the ways in which the contemporary university has been able to seize upon the commitments of interdisciplinarity and openness in order to implement its corporatist restructuring programme. How does the logic of the contemporary university encourage the signifier 'cultural studies' to slide in as the new interdisciplinary master-signifier for the humanities and social sciences?

One form of . . . market expansion is the development of interdisciplinary programs . . . [T]his is a reason to be cautious in approaching the institutional claim to interdisciplinarity staked by Cultural Studies when it

replaces the old order of disciplines in the humanities with a more general field that combines history, art history, literature, media studies, sociology, and so on.

(Readings, 1996: 39)

Indeed, I cannot help but maintain some suspicion about how easily the Provost at my home institution, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, has received and embraced the efforts of the incipient University Program in Cultural Studies. His support suggests to me that either or both of the following has happened: (1) that cultural studies is having some success in rearticulating the imperatives of the university; (2) that it has become, if unknowingly, complicit with some of the university's corporatist/capitalist impulses. As much as I would like to believe optimistically in the former, I cannot entirely discount the latter.

### 4 *Specifying cultural studies*

If in fact cultural studies is being appropriated into the new imperative of the university, then its interdisciplinarity and openness are enabling this to occur. Circumventing or struggling against the university's emergent logic, then, might depend upon undermining one or both of these conditions. Despite the potential traps of interdisciplinarity, I am unwilling to suggest that cultural studies forfeit this commitment. Cultural studies represents a powerful analytic due in part to its ability to poach methods, theories, researches and so on, strategically, from across the broad field of the humanities and social sciences, sometimes even the natural sciences. Foreclosing on this commitment would limit the theoretical breadth and versatility characteristic of cultural studies.

Rearticulating cultural studies' openness, I would like to suggest, affords a better strategy for resisting the new logic of the university. Cultural studies has registered the tension between remaining open-ended and refusing a facile pluralism. Despite attempts to struggle against the latter (see Grossberg, 1996: 179; Hall 1992: 278), I think it is fair to say that cultural studies, as a set of discursive practices, tends in the direction of pluralism rather than specificity. The ease with which cultural studies becomes a place holder for a range of academic and philosophical movements is symptomatic of this tendency. Similarly, the contemporary university's ability to seize upon cultural studies speaks to the fact that it remains too open – practically, theoretically and methodologically. Specifying more distinct practices of cultural studies, then, might begin to provide a strategic way out of the threat of appropriation.

Of course, specifying cultural studies is a tricky and dangerous manoeuvre.

Those of us working in 'cultural studies' find ourselves caught between the need to define and defend its specificity and the desire to refuse to close



off the ongoing history of cultural studies by any such act of definition. This is, it must be said, a very real dilemma.

(Grossberg, 1996a: 179)

That said, I want to refuse to attempt to define cultural studies in any absolute or narrow sense, favouring instead a 'weaker' form of specificity, something more situated and gestural, as it were. A commitment to acknowledge the existing institutionalizations of cultural studies becomes all the more paramount here, especially insofar as some demonstrate 'an ongoing effort to define [their] own local specificity' (Grossberg, 1996a: 181; emphasis added). Griffith University's Key Centre for Cultural and Media Policy provides an excellent example. 'Cultural studies', as an institutionally recognized body at Griffith, is defined around the 'magnet' of policy. Policy orientates the practices of cultural studies, yet it does not absolutize or circumscribe them altogether.<sup>27</sup> Georgia Tech's School of Literature, Communication, and Culture, to take another example, turns to science and technology as its lens to focus cultural studies. Finally, student work at NYU's American Studies Program takes its cue largely from issues specific to New York City, wedding them into a more 'intellectual-activist' kind of cultural studies. These attempts to specify a practice or practices of cultural studies might be taken as heuristic models.

Rather than doing cultural studies *per se* (a phrase that tells us very little) or instituting programmes broadly dedicated to cultural studies (a project open to appropriation by universities), we might be better off specifying our practices locally and 'weakly', which, minimally, will entail qualifying or orientating the practice of cultural studies.<sup>28</sup> While certainly an imperfect and limited strategy, specifying practices of cultural studies none the less begins to narrow the field of theoretical and methodological orientations, political commitments and, most prominently, the subject matter that can be articulated to 'cultural studies' within a given institutional locale. Closing down its openness, if only a little, makes it more difficult for university administrations to encourage cultural studies to stand in as an interdisciplinary master-signifier for humanities and social science curricula. The larger and related 'payoff' amounts to reconstituting a more solid ground upon which cultural studies might resist the university's shifting commitments to (inter)disciplinarity.

### Performing cultural studies

Throughout this article I have pointed to a series of gaps or disjunctures that exist between cultural studies' written practices and its institutional practices. I have privileged the latter over the former. Otherwise, I believe it becomes too easy to underestimate the effectivity of cultural studies' interventions. I could thus quite reasonably be accused of suggesting that cultural studies' institutional

practices are somehow more 'authentic', insofar as they seem to challenge what cultural studies says about itself in written form. This gap needs to be ameliorated rather than expanded any further. I would like to ask: How might we theorize the disjuncture between cultural studies' written practices and its institutional embodiments, such that neither term gets posited as any more real or authoritative than the other?

In fact, these disjunctures are not as absolute as the discussion thus far suggests. We need to explore the function of these disjunctures if we are to see how they might be considered productively, instead of re-inscribing a rigid theory/practice divide. I would like to suggest that cultural studies' meta-discourse serves in a *performative* capacity with respect to its institutional embodiments. Taking my cue from Judith Butler, I understand 'performative' to designate 'no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute its [in this case, cultural studies' meta-discourse] reality' (1990: 136).<sup>29</sup> In other words, cultural studies' meta-discourse does not necessarily have 'to be'; that is to say, it need not map any 'reality', 'existence' or 'essence' of cultural studies, just as gender performance does not map real or essential characteristics of sex or sexuality. Like the discourse of gender, it is less a matter of whether cultural studies' meta-discourse *is*, but rather what it *does*, how it *functions*, the 'reality' it invokes (or tries to invoke) *discursively*. This I see as the explicitly political function of cultural studies' meta-discourse, particularly in relation to its institutional practices and embodiments. It is 'an illusion discursively maintained for the purposes of regulation' (*ibid.*). However, rather than understanding 'regulation' as a modality of discipline (i.e. to normalize or concretize cultural studies' practices and commitments), I see it as a means to pull cultural studies' institutional practices and embodiments away from the centring or normalizing tendencies of institutions such as the university.<sup>30</sup>

So, for example, while Richard Johnson notes rather pragmatically that 'We need definitions of cultural studies to . . . make claims for resources, to clarify our minds in the rush and muddle of everyday work, to decide priorities for teaching and research' (1996: 78), a claim indexing several institutional constraints proper to universities, he can simultaneously claim that 'a codification of methods or knowledges (instituting them, for example, in formal curricula or courses on "methodology") runs against some of the main features of cultural studies as a tradition: [notably], its openness and theoretical versatility' (*ibid.*: 75). Similarly, we might see Ellen Rooney's plea for cultural studies to maintain 'an anti-disciplinary practice' as a deeply politicized touchstone anchoring what seems to be cultural studies' drift towards (inter)disciplinarity (1996: 214).

I want to emphasize that institutionalizing cultural studies implies *necessarily* neither its untimely demise nor its enervation as a critical intellectual-political praxis. Certainly, those risks are there. However, I want to reiterate that it is quite unproductive and limiting to view institutions as sites where only one modality of power (characteristically a disciplinary regime) governs at any given time. In

such a view, the only 'proper' place for cultural studies would be outside institutions like the university. Cultural studies would then become a kind of free-floating intellectual practice, thereby, at the very least, divorcing itself from one of its key sites for intervention (for example, through pedagogy, policy formulation, etc.). We also need to understand that every deviation cultural studies makes from its written discourse, as it infiltrates various institutions, should not be read as an index of its imminent de-politicization. Instead, we need to recognize the dialectical relation between cultural studies' written discourse and its institutionalized forms. We need to strengthen the performative aspect of cultural studies' written discourse, to the extent that it provides a kind of ongoing check, a sort of radical counterbalance, as it were, to the reformist impulses which cultural studies must assume, quite pragmatically, in an effort to negotiate institutional spaces. I see cultural studies' performativity as a way to maintain its political edge, precisely at those moments when and in those spaces where that edge gets threatened.

### Strategies for institutionalizing cultural studies

As I mentioned at the outset of this article, I take as given the fact that possibilities inhere in the institutionalization of cultural studies. But institutionalization is also dangerous, due partly to the contingent and shifting configuration, commitments and alliances of the contemporary university. What follow, then, are some strategies by which to conceive of and go about the project of institutionalization. These are, it must be said, merely suggestions developed out of the context of this study. As such, they must be considered/critiqued/refigured alongside specific historical exigencies and local conditions of possibility.

- *Recognize the insufficiency in talking about 'institutionalization' as an abstract entity.* Rather, we ought to turn our attention towards the ways in which specific cultural studies programmes negotiate the pitfalls of institutionalization, for example, disciplinarity, definition, etc. This will entail engaging in a public conversation about the practical and everyday ways those affiliated with existing programmes have strategized and undertaken this process.
- *Utilize the institutional space to forge connections and alliances.* Cultural studies must always plug into something larger than and outside of itself to be effective. A hermetic or free-floating practice of cultural studies simply will not do, given its political commitments. Building an institutional base for cultural studies thus offers an important foundation for 'building bridges' with other institutions whose projects would be of concern to cultural studies. This will demand, of course, a significant amount of leg-work on the part of those committed to a strong institutional practice, i.e. their 'talking to people and learning what their concerns are and entering into a dialogue with them in that way' (Bennett, 1997; personal communication).

- *Recognize the relation between cultural studies' meta-discourse and its institutional practices.* The fact that some of cultural studies' meta-discourse seems to lack a discrete institutional embodiment does not necessarily guarantee that cultural studies, as a serious and committed left/intellectual/political praxis, has sold itself out at the institutional level. We need to recognize the dialectical, indeed, performative relation the former shares with the latter. This will involve, minimally, coming to terms with the fact that cultural studies simultaneously maintains radical and reformist impulses, which I map very roughly to its written and its institutional practices respectively.
- *Always historicize!*<sup>31</sup> Any attempt to institutionalize cultural studies in the university must account for historical transformations taking place there. We would be wise in this regard not to conflate institutionalization with disciplinization. The challenge for institutionalizing cultural studies may now stem from the fact that universities find themselves turning to interdisciplinary programmes – like cultural studies – as a means to create more surplus value.
- *Specify practices of cultural studies, particularly at the institutional level.* Organizing practices of cultural studies at the institutional level appears to be an urgent project. Such practices will need to be defined 'weakly'; that is to say, in a manner that orientates but does not homogenize the practice of cultural studies in any give locale. It is in this sense that I want to advocate a renewed localism.

It is my hope that these strategies provide a practical guide and, with that, a point of discussion for developing better institutionalizations of cultural studies.

### About this issue

This introduction represents but one statement in an ongoing conversation about institutionalization, a conversation whose complexity is characterized by a profound and often contentious range of questions, responses, perspectives and practical initiatives. The articles that comprise this special issue of *Cultural Studies* dwell within this complexity and make unique contributions to the conversation.

Cultural studies – let's be frank – upsets a lot of people, especially to the degree that it challenges academically established and institutionalized ways of conducting intellectual work. One result has been its widespread public scrutiny, coupled with a series of strikingly vehement (and rarely constructive) attacks on its project. David Morley's article, 'So-called cultural studies: dead ends and reinvented wheels' reads some of these recent attacks on cultural studies symptomatically, for what they reveal of the critics' anxieties. His concerns derive from recent charges that, among its other sins, cultural studies evacuates politics

from its intellectual practices and/or retraces ground already (supposedly) theorized 'adequately' by its disciplinary antecedents.

Resisting the temptation to respond to all of these charges point-by-point, Morley, more productively, takes them as an occasion to reflect upon the relationship cultural studies shares with the more established disciplines, whose representatives now seem to feel threatened by its success. The emergence and influence of cultural studies, he argues, should not be interpreted as some kind of 'paradigm shift' cutting across the human sciences, superseding (some critics would say reproducing) all work that came before it. Instead, he calls for a more 'multi-dimensional model, which builds new insights onto the old, in a process of dialogue and transformation'. Morley's essay demonstrates how attacks on cultural studies require more sensitivity to the ways in which it holds in tension an appreciation of the strengths of a range of disciplinary 'traditions', alongside the need to move forward and build on the interdisciplinarity that is central to its own approach. Certainly, he concludes, there is no future in going back to the 'Good Old Ways' of the established disciplines, as now seemingly advocated by some of cultural studies' more embattled critics.

Meaghan Morris' article, 'Publishing perils, and how to survive them: a guide for graduate students' begins to demystify what for many young scholars is perhaps the most intimidating, frustrating, and indeed opaque aspect of professionalization: academic publishing. A practical 'insider's' guide, Morris' piece sets out to help students strategize where best to begin trying to publish and how then actually to get published. But crucially, her study does not stop there. It also explains how students might begin to get their work read and cited, in addition to how they can start to influence the intellectual agendas of their fields. Her article does all this against the backdrop of the transformations taking place in the publishing industry, transformations that increasingly militate against new and innovative research. Although intended primarily for graduate students, Morris' essay should also resonate with newly established academics, and even those who have published but whose work remains relatively unfamiliar to colleagues in their fields.

Institutionalization can present itself as a sort of blackmail: either you're for it or you're against it; either you're inside the institution and hopelessly co-opted, or you're outside of it, marginalized, but in the only possible 'authentic' position. Alan O'Shea's article, 'A special relationship? Cultural studies, academia and pedagogy' rejects this blackmail. He argues that practitioners of cultural studies always-already operate within and are invested by formal institutional structures. Hence, he takes issue with the alleged transparency of cultural studies' more textually minded or 'deconstructive' interventions. Imagining the critic as a 'semiotic guerrilla', for instance, obscures one's institutional embeddedness, inasmuch as it romanticizes one's marginality. The article turns its sights on pedagogy as a more clearly practical and institutionally self-conscious mode of intervention.

Pedagogy, as O'Shea sees it, promises to make good on cultural studies' desire to meet people 'where they are', while still acknowledging both the teacher's and the student's embeddedness in an institutionally sanctioned relationship of power – a relationship where there exists no clear outside.

Similarly, Tony Bennett's 'Cultural studies: a reluctant discipline' rejects the blackmail of institutionalization. But where O'Shea turns to pedagogy, Bennett moves instead to a re-evaluation of the question of disciplinarity. In a ground-clearing of sorts, Bennett argues that 'if we survey the scene today, cultural studies has all the institutional trappings of a discipline'. This is, indeed, a controversial, even a scandalous argument. And although his concerns lie predominantly with cultural studies in Australia, Bennett, in effect, asks all practitioners of cultural studies to come to terms with its rampant institutionalization and what may now be the antiquated rhetoric of anti/disciplinarity it hides behind. Bennett concludes by deriving a series of traits that seek to describe a cultural studies more confident in the fact that it is, as he puts it, an 'interdisciplinary discipline'.

Finally, the conversation on institutionalization often proceeds as though institution lization just 'happens', i.e. as though university folk just wake up one day to find cultural studies has dropped out of the air and into the curriculum. But the fact is, as we all know, it just doesn't happen that way; institutionalization doesn't take place without significant forethought, planning, leg-work, reflection, explanation, compromise, and, yes, even a little luck now and again. Judith Newton, Susan Kaiser and Kent A. Ono's 'Proposal for an MA and Ph.D. programme in cultural studies at U.C. Davis' offers a model for what an initiative to institutionalize a graduate programme in cultural studies might look like. Its importance comes from, among other things, the methodological lessons that can be extrapolated from it. How does one describe or, to be glib about it, 'sell' cultural studies to an audience that might have no sense of what cultural studies is, much less what it sets out to do? What does it take to institutionalize cultural studies? What questions need to be asked and answered? What justifications need to be made, and to whom? Newton *et al.*'s article is offered, in conjunction with the resource/guide to cultural studies programmes that follows it, as an exemplar for how a group may go about laying the groundwork, proposing and then institutionalizing cultural studies.

### Acknowledgements

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## Notes

- 1 For a text that *does* consider specific institutions, see Berlin and Vivion, 1992; Tony Bennett's article in this issue also engages in this sort of work.
- 2 Interviews consisted of approximately one hour of taped telephone conversations, in addition to a series of e-mail exchanges with: Tony Bennett, former director of the Key Centre for Cultural and Media Policy, Griffith University, Australia; David Morley, head of the Department of Media and Communications, Goldsmith's, University of London; James Clifford, former director of the Center for Cultural Studies and Professor in the History of Consciousness Program, University of California–Santa Cruz; Andrew Ross, director of the American Studies Program at New York University; Dick Hebdige, Dean of Critical Studies, California Institute for the Arts; Anne Balsamo, graduate director at the School of Literature, Communication, and Culture, Georgia Institute of Technology; and Della Pollock, director of the University Program in Cultural Studies, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Selection of these programmes was somewhat arbitrary, based primarily on the presence of key figures in cultural studies whose work leaves little doubt about their credentials. Inevitably this represents an incomplete list. So many other programmes and individuals come to mind: Janet Wolff and Lisa Cartwright at the University of Rochester's Department of Visual and Cultural Studies; Michael Green at the University of Birmingham's Department of Cultural Studies; an emerging programme at the University of California–Davis (see Newton *et al.*'s article in this issue); the programme in cultural studies at George Mason University, and so on. Relative to my selection process, I can only say that the scope of this project is finite and that my selections represent a series of arbitrary closures.
- 3 I will reserve my definition of 'performative' for later in this article.
- 4 It should be noted that there exist few significant foundations in Australia providing funding for research and research initiatives. Hence, most of the financial support for such initiatives comes from the Australian federal government (Bennett, 1997: personal communication).
- 5 Australian Key Centre for Cultural and Media Policy (1997) online, <http://www.gu.edu.au/gwis/akccmp/home.html>.
- 6 I am indebted to Tony Bennett for this particular phrasing.
- 7 This, of course, is subject to change, given the election of a conservative government in Australia.
- 8 The programme does not address only 'local' issues. Students also undertake projects of a more national and international scope. However, the majority of projects seems to maintain a more local or New York City-specific orientation and scope (Ross, 1997: personal communication).
- 9 Of course, the programme does open itself to a different charge of parochialism, given the emphasis placed on issues specific to New York City (*ibid.*). However, I think we need to point out in response to this charge the cosmopolitanism of New York City. As the programme's information flyer points out, New York is a 'global city . . . that comprises many cultures'. See *Graduate Program in American Studies*, 1997.
- 10 *ibid.*
- 11 These projects culminated in Ross (1997a) and *Dangerous Bedfellows* (1996).
- 12 It is in this sense that I cannot agree wholeheartedly with John Storey/bell hooks' claim that, 'the politics of cultural studies are to be found in its pedagogy' (Storey, 1996: 5).
- 13 California Institute of the Arts utilizes cultural studies in a similar manner, where a cultural studies inflected pedagogy informs student art practice.
- 14 While it would be easy to romanticize this sort of pedagogical intervention, we need to be careful not to overly idealize its effectivity. Not every student taking a course informed by cultural studies develops into a progressive and responsible cultural producer. There is (unfortunately) no one-to-one mapping from one point to the other. I also realize that the specific professional constraints may militate against a student's ability to continue to let cultural studies inform her/his practice once hired.
- 15 The title of this section header is appropriated from Ellen Rooney, 1996.
- 16 By open-endedness or openness I refer to cultural studies' unwillingness to 'standardize' methods, theories, objects of study, political commitments/strategies, etc.
- 17 I will elaborate upon the reasons why in the section on 'performing' cultural studies.
- 18 I am indebted to David Morley for alerting me to the establishment of the cultural studies centre at Goldsmith's.
- 19 See *Graduate Program in American Studies* (1997).
- 20 I think it would be prudent here to acknowledge the scope of Readings' work. His discussion of 'the university' pertains largely to those in the Euro-American/North Atlantic part of the world. It would be interesting, in this regard, to consider other contexts as in, say, Australia (where universities tend to be newer) or those in developing/post-colonized nations for that matter.
- 21 Indeed, this logic of difference is a characteristic proper to modernism more broadly. See Grossberg, 1996b, esp. p. 89.
- 22 Readings quite consciously veers away from calling the contemporary university the 'postmodern' university. He states, 'I prefer to drop the term [postmodernism]. The danger is apparent: it is so easy to slip into speaking of the postmodern University as if it were an imaginable institution, a newer, more critical institution, which is to say, *an even more modern* University than the modern University. I would prefer to call the contemporary University "posthistorical" rather than "postmodern" in order to insist upon the sense that the institution has outlived itself.' See Readings, 1996: 6.
- 23 This is not meant to suggest that interdisciplinarity is now unfavourable *tout court*. Indeed, I still see the latter as an important, and for the most part still progressive attribute which cultural studies brings to the university. What I do

- want to emphasize, however, is that we should not accept cultural studies' commitment to interdisciplinarity uncritically, unreflexively or ahistorically, i.e. as an inherent good.
- 24 Myriad other authors have made similar observations relative to cultural studies. See, for instance, Sparks, 1996. Sparks noted back in 1977 (when the essay was first published) that 'A veritable rag-bag of ideas, methods, and concerns from literary criticism, sociology, history, media studies, etc., are lumped together under the convenient label of cultural studies' (ibid.: 14). See also Cary Nelson, 1996. Nelson observes: 'Over the past several years, the phrase *cultural studies* has been taken up by journalists and politicians of the New Right in America as one of a cluster of scarce terms – the others include *multiculturalism* and *deconstruction* – that have been articulated together to signal a crisis in higher education and American intellectual life generally' (ibid.: 284).
- 25 Alan Sokal, a physicist from New York University, published an article in the journal *Social Text* which he subsequently repudiated as a hoax in the pages of *Lingua Franca* back in the spring of 1996. His attack (generally a seductive, if ultimately unconvincing one), concerns what he perceives as the lack of rigour among the intellectual Left in the US, particularly scholarship drawing heavily on continental (for example, twentieth-century French) philosophy. His attack manages to encompass, in rather weak and conflated form, everything from cultural studies to postmodernism, poststructuralism, deconstruction, literary theory, critical theory, sociology and social constructionism. See Alan Sokal, 1996a, 1996b, 1996c; see also Begley and Rogers, 1996; Will, 1996.
- 26 See, for example, Hall, 1992, esp. p. 278; Grossberg *et al.*, 1992, esp. p. 3.
- 27 Cf. Deleuze and Guattari's notion of the axiomatic, which organizes flexibly rather than ordering rigidly. That is to say, axiomatics are directive (orientating) though not homogenizing. See Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 435–7.
- 28 This is not to suggest that either or both of these institutions altogether avoid the dilemmas relative to interdisciplinarity posed earlier in this study. Georgia Tech's programme, for instance, grew out of the very corporatist/downsizing impulse against which I have been cautioning. What I want to emphasize here, however, is the fact that both of these institutions have managed to stake out practices of cultural studies that do not allow the latter to become an empty umbrella term for everything having to do with the humanities and social sciences. These institutions have managed to 'fill up' the signifier 'cultural studies' precisely at that moment when universities attempt to capitalize on that signifier by evacuating it.
- 29 This of course is not meant to suggest that Butler provides a foundation for the notion of performativity, given that the concept 'performativity' always refers to something in excess of gender or textuality – the two attributes that seem to ground Butler's use of the term. In a more general sense, I think my use of 'performative' here is quite consistent with Parker and Sedgwick's appropriation of the term from Austin, which they describe succinctly as 'how saying something can be doing something'. See Parker and Sedgwick, 1995.
- 30 Throughout this paragraph I have emphasized the performative quality of

cultural studies' written discourse for a particular reason: that is, to refuse to lend an air of authenticity to this work, as it is so tempting to fall into this trap (i.e. cultural studies must do what it says it does). This emphasis should be read as a response to what I perceive to be the tendency to place the authenticating moment in cultural studies' written word (see Nelson, 1996; Rooney, 1996) rather than as a suggestion that cultural studies' written work is a 'performance' of what it does in practice. Indeed, I think it would be equally valid to claim that cultural studies' institutional embodiments serve a similar performative function relative to the written work. In other words, both aspects are performances of cultural studies.

- 31 This phrasing is drawn from Jameson, 1981.

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Stuart Hall

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Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies

Edited by David Morley and  
Kuan-Hsing Chen



London and New York

1996

## Cultural studies and its theoretical legacies

Stuart Hall

My title, 'Cultural studies and its theoretical legacies', suggests a look back to the past, to consult and think about the Now and the Future of cultural studies by way of a retrospective glance. It does seem necessary to do some genealogical and archaeological work on the archive. Now the question of the archives is extremely difficult for me because, where cultural studies is concerned, I sometimes feel like a *tableau vivant*, a spirit of the past resurrected, laying claim to the authority of an origin. After all, didn't cultural studies emerge somewhere at that moment when I first met Raymond Williams, or in the glance I exchanged with Richard Hoggart? In that moment, cultural studies was born; it emerged full grown from the head! I do want to talk about the past, but definitely not in that way. I don't want to talk about British cultural studies (which is in any case a pretty awkward signifier for me) in a patriarchal way, as the keeper of the conscience of cultural studies, hoping to police you back into line with what it really was if only you knew. That is to say, I want to absolve myself of the many burdens of representation which people carry around – I carry around at least three: I'm expected to speak for the entire black race on all questions theoretical, critical, etc., and sometimes for British politics, as well as for cultural studies. This is what is known as the black person's burden, and I would like to absolve myself of it at this moment.

That means, paradoxically, speaking autobiographically. Autobiography is usually thought of as seizing the authority of authenticity. But in order not to be authoritative, I've got to speak autobiographically. I'm going to tell you about my own take on certain theoretical legacies and moments in cultural studies, not because it is the truth or the only way of telling the history. I myself have told it many other ways before; and I intend to tell it in a different way later. But just at this moment, for this conjecture, I want to take a position in relation to the 'grand narrative' of cultural studies for the purposes of opening up some reflections on cultural studies as a

practice, on our institutional position, and on its project. I want to do that by referring to some theoretical legacies or theoretical moments, but in a very particular way. This is not a commentary on the success or effectiveness of different theoretical positions in cultural studies (that is for some other occasion). It is an attempt to say something about what certain theoretical moments in cultural studies have been like for me, and from that position, to take some bearings about the general question of the politics of theory.

Cultural studies is a discursive formation, in Foucault's sense. It has no simple origins, though some of us were present at some point when it first named itself in that way. Much of the work out of which it grew, in my own experience, was already present in the work of other people. Raymond Williams has made the same point, charting the roots of cultural studies in the early adult education movement in his essay on 'The future of cultural studies' (1989). 'The relation between a project and a formation is always decisive', he says, because they are 'different ways of materializing . . . then of describing a common disposition of energy and direction'. Cultural studies has multiple discourses; it has a number of different histories. It is a whole set of formations; it has its own different conjunctures and moments in the past. It included many different kinds of work. I want to insist on that! It always was a set of unstable formations. It was 'centred' only in quotation marks, in a particular kind of way which I want to define in a moment. It had many trajectories; many people had and have different trajectories through it; it was constructed by a number of different methodologies and theoretical positions, all of them in contention. Theoretical work in the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies was more appropriately called theoretical noise. It was accompanied by a great deal of bad feeling, argument, unstable anxieties, and angry silences.

Now, does it follow that cultural studies is not a policed disciplinary area? That it is whatever people do, if they choose to call or locate themselves within the project and practice of cultural studies? I am not happy with that formulation either. Although cultural studies as a project is open-ended, it can't be simply pluralist in that way. Yes, it refuses to be a master discourse or a meta-discourse of any kind. Yes, it is a project that is always open to that which it doesn't yet know, to that which it can't yet name. But it does have some will to connect; it does have some stake in the choices it makes. It does matter whether cultural studies is this or that. It can't be just any old thing which chooses to march under a particular banner. It is a serious enterprise, or project, and that is inscribed in what is sometimes called the 'political' aspect of cultural studies. Not that there's one politics already inscribed in it. But there is something *at stake* in cultural studies, in a way that I think, and hope, is not exactly true of many other very important intellectual and critical practices. Here one registers the tension between a refusal to close the field, to police it and,



at the same time, a determination to stake out some positions within it and argue for them. That is the tension – the dialogic approach to theory – that I want to try to speak to in a number of different ways in the course of this paper. I don't believe knowledge is closed, but I do believe that politics is impossible without what I have called 'the arbitrary closure'; without what Homi Bhabha called social agency as an arbitrary closure. That is to say, I don't understand a practice which aims to make a difference in the world, which doesn't have some points of difference or distinction which it has to stake out, which really matter. It is a question of positionalities. Now, it is true that those positionalities are never final, they're never absolute. They can't be translated intact from one conjuncture to another; they cannot be depended on to remain in the same place. I want to go back to that moment of 'staking out a wager' in cultural studies, to those moments in which the positions began to matter.

This is a way of opening the question of the 'wordliness' of cultural studies, to borrow a term from Edward Said. I am not dwelling on the secular connotations of the metaphor of worldliness here, but on the worldliness of cultural studies. I'm dwelling on the 'dirtiness' of it: the dirtiness of the semiotic game, if I can put it that way. I'm trying to return the project of cultural studies from the clean air of meaning and textuality and theory to the something nasty down below. This involves the difficult exercise of examining some of the key theoretical turns or moments in cultural studies.

The first trace that I want to deconstruct has to do with a view of British cultural studies which often distinguishes it by the fact that, at a certain moment, it became a marxist critical practice. What exactly does that assignation of cultural studies as a marxist critical theory mean? How can we think cultural studies at that moment? What moment is it we are speaking of? What does that mean for the theoretical legacies, traces, and after-effects which marxism continues to have in cultural studies? There are a number of ways of telling that history, and let me remind you that I'm not proposing this as the only story. But I do want to set it up in what I think may be a slightly surprising way to you.

I entered cultural studies from the New Left, and the New Left always regarded marxism as a problem, as trouble, as danger, not as a solution. Why? It had nothing to do with theoretical questions as such or in isolation. It had to do with the fact that my own (and its own) political formation occurred in a moment historically very much like the one we are in now – which I am astonished that so few people have addressed – the moment of the disintegration of a certain kind of marxism. In fact, the first British New Left emerged in 1956 at the moment of the disintegration of an entire historical/political project. In that sense I came into marxism backwards: against the Soviet tanks in Budapest, as it were. What I mean by that is certainly not that I wasn't profoundly, and that cultural studies then wasn't

from the beginning, profoundly influenced by the questions that marxism as a theoretical project put on the agenda: the power, the global reach and history-making capacities of capital; the question of class; the complex relationships between power, which is an easier term to establish in the discourses of culture than exploitation, and exploitation; the question of a general theory which could, in a critical way, connect together in a critical reflection different domains of life, politics and theory, theory and practice, economic, political, ideological questions, and so on; the notion of critical knowledge itself and the production of critical knowledge as a practice. These important, central questions are what one meant by working within shouting distance of marxism, working on marxism, working against marxism, working with it, working to try to develop marxism.

There never was a prior moment when cultural studies and marxism represented a perfect theoretical fit. From the beginning (to use this way of speaking for a moment) there was always-already the question of the great inadequacies, theoretically and politically, the resounding silences, the great evasions of marxism – the things that Marx did not talk about or seem to understand which were our privileged object of study: culture, ideology, language, the symbolic. These were always-already, instead, the things which had imprisoned marxism as a mode of thought, as an activity of critical practice – its orthodoxy, its doctrinal character, its determinism, its reductionism, its immutable law of history, its status as a meta-narrative. That is to say, the encounter between British cultural studies and marxism has first to be understood as the engagement with a problem – not a theory, not even a problematic. It begins, and develops through the critique of a certain reductionism and economism, which I think is not extrinsic but intrinsic to marxism; a contestation with the model of base and superstructure, through which sophisticated and vulgar marxism alike had tried to think the relationships between society, economy, and culture. It was located and sited in a necessary and prolonged and as yet unending contestation with the question of false consciousness. In my own case, it required a not-yet-completed contestation with the profound Eurocentrism of marxist theory. I want to make this very precise. It is not just a matter of where Marx happened to be born, and of what he talked about, but of the model at the centre of the most developed parts of marxist theory, which suggested that capitalism evolved organically from within its own transformations. Whereas I came from a society where the profound integument of capitalist society, economy, and culture had been imposed by conquest and colonization. This is a theoretical, not a vulgar critique. I don't blame Marx because of where he was born; I'm questioning the theory for the model around which it is articulated: its Eurocentrism.

I want to suggest a different metaphor for theoretical work: the metaphor of struggle, of wrestling with the angels. The only theory worth having is that which you have to fight off, not that which you speak with profound

fluency. I mean to say something later about the astonishing theoretical fluency of cultural studies now. But my own experience of theory – and marxism is certainly a case in point – is of wrestling with the angels – a metaphor you can take as literally as you like. I remember wrestling with Althusser. I remember looking at the idea of ‘theoretical practice’ in *Reading Capital* and thinking, ‘I’ve gone as far in this book as it is proper to go’. I felt, I will not give an inch to this profound misreading, this super-structuralist mistranslation, of classical marxism, unless he beats me down, unless he defeats me in the spirit. He’ll have to march over me to convince me. I warred with him, to the death. A long, rambling piece wrote (Hall, 1974) on Marx’s 1857 ‘Introduction’ to *The Grundrisse*, in which I tried to stake out the difference between structuralism in Marx’s epistemology and Althusser’s, was only the tip of the iceberg of this long engagement. And that is not simply a personal question. In the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, for five or six years, long after the anti-theoreticism or resistance to theory of cultural studies had been overcome, and we decided, in a very un-British way, we had to take the plunge into theory, we walked right around the entire circumference of European thought, in order not to be, in any simple capitulation to the *zeitgeist*, marxists. We read German idealism, we read Weber upside down, we read Hegelian idealism, we read idealistic art criticism. (I’ve written about this in the article called ‘The hinterland of science: sociology of knowledge’ [1980a] as well as in ‘Cultural studies and the centre: some problems and problematics’ [1980b].)

So the notion that marxism and cultural studies slipped into place, recognized an immediate affinity, joined hands in some teleological or Hegelian moment of synthesis, and there was the founding moment of cultural studies, is entirely mistaken. It couldn’t have been more different from that. And when, eventually, in the 1970s, British cultural studies did advance – in many different ways, it must be said – within the problematic of marxism, you should hear the term problematic in a genuine way, not just in a formalist-theoretical way: as a problem; as much about struggling against the constraints and limits of that model as about the necessary questions it required us to address. And when, in the end, in my own work, I tried to learn from and work with the theoretical gains of Gramsci, it was only because certain strategies of evasion had forced Gramsci’s work, in a number of different ways, to respond to what I can only call (here’s another metaphor for theoretical work) the conundrums of theory, the things which marxist theory couldn’t answer, the things about the modern world which Gramsci discovered remained unresolved within the theoretical framework of grand theory – marxism – in which he continued to work. At a certain point, the questions I still wanted to address in short were inaccessible to me except via a detour through Gramsci. Not because Gramsci resolved them but because he at least

addressed many of them. I don’t want to go through what it is I personally think cultural studies in the British context, in a certain period, learned from Gramsci: immense amounts about the nature of culture itself, about the discipline of the conjunctural, about the importance of historical specificity, about the enormously productive metaphor of hegemony, about the way in which one can think questions of class relations only by using the displaced notion of ensemble and blocs. These are the particular gains of the ‘detour’ via Gramsci, but I’m not trying to talk about that. I want to say, in this context, about Gramsci, that while Gramsci belonged and belongs to the problematic of marxism, his importance for this moment of British cultural studies is precisely the degree to which he radically *displaced* some of the inheritances of marxism in cultural studies. The radical character of Gramsci’s ‘displacement’ of marxism has not yet been understood and probably won’t ever be reckoned with, now we are entering the era of post-marxism. Such is the nature of the movement of history and of intellectual fashion. But Gramsci also did something else for cultural studies, and I want to say a little bit about that because it refers to what I call the need to reflect on our institutional position, and our intellectual practice.

I tried on many occasions, and other people in British cultural studies and at the Centre especially have tried, to describe what it is we thought we were doing with the kind of intellectual work we set in place in the Centre. I have to confess that, though I’ve read many, more elaborated and sophisticated accounts, Gramsci’s account still seems to me to come closest to expressing what it is I think we were trying to do. Admittedly, there’s a problem about his phrase ‘the production of organic intellectuals’. But there is no doubt in my mind that we were trying to find an institutional practice in cultural studies that might produce an organic intellectual. We didn’t know previously what that would mean, in the context of Britain in the 1970s, and we weren’t sure we would recognize him or her if we managed to produce it. The problem about the concept of an organic intellectual is that it appears to align intellectuals with an emerging historic movement and we couldn’t tell then, and can hardly tell now, where that emerging historical movement was to be found. We were organic intellectuals without any organic point of reference; organic intellectuals with a nostalgia or will or hope (to use Gramsci’s phrase from another context) that at some point we would be prepared in intellectual work for that kind of relationship, if such a conjuncture ever appeared. More truthfully, we were prepared to imagine or model or simulate such a relationship in its absence: ‘pessimism of the intellect, optimism of the will’.

But I think it is very important that Gramsci’s thinking around these questions certainly captures part of what we were about. Because a second aspect of Gramsci’s definition of intellectual work, which I think has

always been lodged somewhere close to the notion of cultural studies as a project, has been his requirement that the 'organic intellectual' must work on two fronts at one and the same time. On the one hand, we had to be at the very forefront of intellectual theoretical work because, as Gramsci says, it is the job of the organic intellectual to know more than the traditional intellectuals do: really know, not just pretend to know, not just to have the facility of knowledge, but to know deeply and profoundly. So often knowledge for marxism is pure recognition – the production again of what we have always known! If you are in the game of hegemony you have to be smarter than 'them'. Hence, there are no theoretical limits from which cultural studies can turn back. But the second aspect is just as crucial: that the organic intellectual cannot absolve himself or herself from the responsibility of transmitting those ideas, that knowledge, through the intellectual function, to those who do not belong, professionally, in the intellectual class. And unless those two fronts are operating at the same time, or at least unless those two ambitions are part of the project of cultural studies, you can get enormous theoretical advance without any engagement at the level of the political project.

I'm extremely anxious that you should not decode what I'm saying as an anti-theoretical discourse. It is not anti-theory, but it does have something to do with the conditions and problems of developing intellectual and theoretical work as a political practice. It is an extremely difficult road, not resolving the tensions between those two requirements, but living with them. Gramsci never asked us to resolve them, but he gave us a practical example of how to live with them. We never produced organic intellectuals (would that we had) at the Centre. We never connected with that rising historic movement; it was a metaphoric exercise. Nevertheless, metaphors are serious things. They affect one's practice. I'm trying to redescribe cultural studies as theoretical work which must go on and on living with that tension.

I want to look at two other theoretical moments in cultural studies which interrupted the already-interrupted history of its formation. Some of these developments came as it were from outer space: they were not at all generated from the inside, they were not part of an inner-unfolding general theory of culture. Again and again, the so-called unfolding of cultural studies was interrupted by a break, by real ruptures, by exterior forces; the interruption, as it were, of new ideas, which decentred what looked like the accumulating practice of the work. There's another metaphor for theoretical work: theoretical work as interruption.

There were at least two interruptions in the work of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies: The first around feminism, and the second around questions of race. This is not an attempt to sum up the theoretical and political advances and consequences for British cultural studies of the feminist intervention; that is for another time, another place. But I don't

want, either, to invoke that moment in an open-ended and casual way. For cultural studies (in addition to many other theoretical projects), the intervention of feminism was specific and decisive. It was ruptural. It reorganized the field in quite concrete ways. First, the opening of the question of the personal as political, and its consequences for changing the object of study in cultural studies, was completely revolutionary in a theoretical and practical way. Second, the radical expansion of the notion of power, which had hitherto been very much developed within the framework of the notion of the public, the public domain, with the effect that we could not use the term power – so key to the earlier problematic of hegemony – in the same way. Third, the centrality of questions of gender and sexuality to the understanding of power itself. Fourth, the opening of many of the questions that we thought we had abolished around the dangerous area of the subjective and the subject, which lodged those questions at the centre of cultural studies as a theoretical practice. Fifth, 'the re-opening' of the closed frontier between social theory and the theory of the unconscious – psychoanalysis. It's hard to describe the import of the opening of that new continent in cultural studies, marked out by the relationship – or rather, what Jacqueline Rose has called the as yet 'unsettled relations' – between feminism, psychoanalysis and cultural studies, or indeed how it was accomplished.

We know it was, but it's not known generally how and where feminism first broke in. I use the metaphor deliberately: As the thief in the night, it broke in; interrupted, made an unseemly noise, seized the time, crapped on the table of cultural studies. The title of the volume in which this dawn-raid was first accomplished – *Women Take Issue* – is instructive: for they 'took issue' in both senses – took over that year's book and initiated a quarrel. But I want to tell you something else about it. Because of the growing importance of feminist work and the early beginnings of the feminist movement outside in the very early 1970s, many of us in the Centre – mainly, of course, men – thought it was time there was good feminist work in cultural studies. And we indeed tried to buy it in, to import it, to attract good feminist scholars. As you might expect, many of the women in cultural studies weren't terribly interested in this benign project. We were opening the door to feminist studies, being good, transformed men. And yet, when it broke in through the window, every single unsuspected resistance rose to the surface – fully installed patriarchal power, which believed it had disavowed itself. There are no leaders here, we used to say; we are all graduate students and members of staff together, learning how to practice cultural studies. You can decide whatever you want to decide, etc. And yet, when it came to the question of the reading list . . . Now that's where I really discovered about the gendered nature of power. Long, long after I was able to pronounce the words, I encountered the reality of Foucault's profound insight into the individual reciprocity of knowledge

and power. Talking about giving up power is a radically different experience from being silenced. That is another way of thinking, and another metaphor for theory: the way feminism broke, and broke into, cultural studies.

Then there is the question of race in cultural studies. I've talked about the important 'extrinsic' sources of the formation of cultural studies – for example, in what I called the moment of the New Left, and its original quarrel with marxism – out of which cultural studies grew. And yet, of course, that was a profoundly English or British moment. Actually getting cultural studies to put on its own agenda the critical questions of race, the politics of race, the resistance to racism, the critical questions of cultural politics, was itself a profound theoretical struggle, a struggle of which *Policing the Crisis*, was, curiously, the first and very late example. It represented a decisive turn in my own theoretical and intellectual work, as well as in that of the Centre. Again, it was only accomplished as the result of a long, and sometimes bitter – certainly bitterly contested – internal struggle against a resounding but unconscious silence. A struggle which continued in what has since come to be known, but only in the rewritten history, as one of the great seminal books of the Centre for Cultural Studies, *The Empire Strikes Back*. In actuality, Paul Gilroy and the group of people who produced the book found it extremely difficult to create the necessary theoretical and political space in the Centre in which to work on the project.

I want to hold to the notion, implicit in both these examples, that movements provoke theoretical moments. And historical conjunctures insist on theories: they are real moments in the evolution of theory. But here I have to stop and retrace my steps. Because I think you could hear, once again, in what I'm saying a kind of invocation of a simple-minded anti-theoretical populism, which does not respect and acknowledge the crucial importance, at each point in the moves I'm trying to renarrativize, of what I would call the necessary delay or detour through theory. I want to talk about that 'necessary detour' for a moment. What decentred and dislocated the settled path of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies certainly, and British cultural studies to some extent in general, is what is sometimes called 'the linguistic turn': the discovery of discursivity, of textuality. There are casualties in the Centre around those names as well. They were wrestled with, in exactly the same way I've tried to describe earlier. But the gains which were made through an engagement with them are crucially important in understanding how theory came to be advanced in that work. And yet, in my view, such theoretical 'gains' can never be a self-sufficient moment.

Again, there is no space here to do more than begin to list the theoretical advances which were made by the encounters with structuralist, semiotic, and post-structuralist work: the crucial importance of language and of the

linguistic metaphor to any study of culture; the expansion of the notion of text and textuality, both as a source of meaning, and as that which escapes and postpones meaning; the recognition of the heterogeneity, of the multiplicity, of meanings, of the struggle to close arbitrarily the infinite semiosis beyond meaning; the acknowledgment of textuality and cultural power, of representation itself, as a site of power and regulation; of the symbolic as a source of identity. These are enormous theoretical advances, though of course, it had always attended to questions of language (Raymond Williams's work, long before the semiotic revolution, is central there). Nevertheless, the refiguring of theory, made as a result of having to think questions of culture through the metaphors of language and textuality, represents a point beyond which cultural studies must now always necessarily locate itself. The metaphor of the discursive, of textuality, instantiates a necessary delay, a displacement, which I think is always implied in the concept of culture. If you work on culture, or if you've tried to work on some other really important things and you find yourself driven back to culture, if culture happens to be what seizes hold of your soul, you have to recognize that you will always be working in an area of displacement. There's always something decentred about the medium of culture; about language, textuality, and signification, which always escapes and evades the attempt to link it, directly and immediately, with other structures. And yet, at the same time, the shadow, the imprint, the trace, of those other formations, of the intertextuality of texts in their institutional positions, of texts as sources of power, of textuality as a site of representation and resistance, all of those questions can never be erased from cultural studies.

The question is what happens when a field, which I've been trying to describe in a very punctuated, dispersed, and interrupted way, as constantly changing directions, and which is defined as a political project, tries to develop itself as some kind of coherent theoretical intervention? Or, to put the same question in reverse, what happens when an academic and theoretical enterprise tries to engage in pedagogies which enlist the active engagement of individuals and groups, tries to make a difference in the institutional world in which it is located? These are extremely difficult issues to resolve, because what is asked of us is to say 'yes' and 'no' at one and the same time. It asks us to assume that culture will always work through its textualities – and at the same time that textuality is never enough. But never enough of what? Never enough for what? That is an extremely difficult question to answer because, philosophically, it has always been impossible in the theoretical field of cultural studies – whether it is conceived either in terms of texts and contexts, of intertextuality, or of the historical formations in which cultural practices are lodged – to get anything like an adequate theoretical account of culture's relations and its effects. Nevertheless I want to insist that until and unless cultural studies learns to live with this tension, a tension that all textual

practices must assume – a tension which Said describes as the study of the text in its affiliations with ‘institutions, offices, agencies, classes, academies, corporations, groups, ideologically defined parties and professions, nations, races, and genders’ – it will have renounced its ‘worldly’ vocation. That is to say, unless and until one respects the necessary displacement of culture, and yet is always irritated by its failure to reconcile itself with other questions that matter, with other questions that cannot and can never be fully covered by critical textuality in its elaborations, cultural studies as a project, an intervention, remains incomplete. If you lose hold of the tension, you can do extremely fine intellectual work, but you will have lost intellectual practice as a politics. I offer this to you, not because that’s what cultural studies ought to be, or because that’s what the Centre managed to do well, but simply because I think that, overall, is what defines cultural studies as a project. Both in the British and the American context, cultural studies has drawn the attention itself, not just because of its sometimes dazzling internal theoretical development, but because it holds theoretical and political questions in an ever irresolvable but permanent tension. It constantly allows the one to irritate, bother and disturb the other, without insisting on some final theoretical closure.

I’ve been talking very much in terms of a previous history. But I have been reminded of this tension very forcefully in the discussions on AIDS. AIDS is one of the questions which urgently brings before us our marginality as critical intellectuals in making real effects in the world. And yet it has often been represented for us in contradictory ways. Against the urgency of people dying in the streets, what in God’s name is the point of cultural studies? What is the point of the study of representations, if there is no response to the question of what you say to someone who wants to know if they should take a drug and if that means they’ll die two days later or a few months earlier? At that point, I think anybody who is into cultural studies seriously as an intellectual practice, must feel, on their pulse, its ephemerality, its insubstantiality, how little it registers, how little we’ve been able to change anything or get anybody to do anything. If you don’t feel that as one tension in the work that you are doing, theory has let you off the hook. On the other hand, in the end, I don’t agree with the way in which the dilemma is often posed for us, for it is indeed a more complex and displaced question than just people dying out there. The question of AIDS is an extremely important terrain of struggle and contestation. In addition to the people we know who are dying, or have died, or will, there are the many people dying who are never spoken of. How could we say that the question of AIDS is not also a question of who gets represented and who does not? AIDS is the site at which the advance of sexual politics is being rolled back. It’s a site at which not only people will die, but desire and pleasure will also die if certain metaphors do not survive, or survive in the wrong way. Unless we operate in this tension, we don’t know what

cultural studies can do, can’t, can never do; but also, what it has to do, what it alone has a privileged capacity to do. It has to analyse certain things about the constitutive and political nature of representation itself, about its complexities, about the effects of language, about textuality as a site of life and death. Those are the things cultural studies can address.

I’ve used that example, not because it’s a perfect example, but because it’s a specific example, because it has a concrete meaning, because it challenges us in its complexity, and in so doing has things to teach us about the future of serious theoretical work. It preserves the essential nature of intellectual work and critical reflection, the irreducibility of the insights which theory can bring to political practice, insights which cannot be arrived at in any other way. And at the same time, it rivets us to the necessary modesty of theory, the necessary modesty of cultural studies as an intellectual project.

I want to end in two ways. First I want to address the problem of the institutionalization of these two constructions: British cultural studies and American cultural studies. And then, drawing on the metaphors about theoretical work which I tried to launch (not I hope by claiming authority or authenticity but in what inevitably has to be a polemical, positional, political way), to say something about how the field of cultural studies has to be defined.

I don’t know what to say about American cultural studies. I am completely dumbfounded by it. I think of the struggles to get cultural studies into the institution in the British context, to squeeze three or four jobs for anybody under some heavy disguise, compared with the rapid institutionalization which is going on in the United States. The comparison is not only valid for cultural studies. If you think of the important work which has been done in feminist history or theory in Britain and ask how many of those women have ever had full-time academic jobs in their lives or are likely to, you get a sense of what marginality is really about. So the enormous explosion of cultural studies in the United States, its rapid professionalization and institutionalization, is not a moment which any of us who tried to set up a marginalized Centre in a university like Birmingham could, in any simple way, regret. And yet I have to say, in the strongest sense, that it reminds me of the ways in which, in Britain, we are always aware of institutionalization as a moment of profound danger. Now, I’ve been saying that dangers are not places you run away from but places that you go towards. So I simply want you to know that my own feeling is that the explosion of cultural studies along with other forms of critical theory in the academy represents a moment of extraordinarily profound danger. Why? Well, it would be excessively vulgar to talk about such things as how many jobs there are, how much money there is around, and how much pressure that puts on people to do what they think of as critical political work and intellectual work of a critical kind, while also

looking over their shoulders at the promotions stakes and the publication stakes, and so on. Let me instead return to the point that I made before: my astonishment at what I called the theoretical fluency of cultural studies in the United States.

Now, the question of theoretical fluency is a difficult and provoking metaphor, and I want only to say one word about it. Some time ago, looking at what one can only call the deconstructive deluge (as opposed to deconstructive turn) which had overtaken American literary studies, in its formalist mode, I tried to distinguish the extremely important theoretical and intellectual work which it had made possible in cultural studies from a mere repetition, a sort of mimicry or deconstructive ventriloquism which sometimes passes as a serious intellectual exercise. My fear at that moment was that if cultural studies gained an equivalent institutionalization in the American context, it would, in rather the same way, formalize out of existence the critical questions of power, history, and politics. Paradoxically, what I mean by theoretical fluency is exactly the reverse. There is no moment now, in American cultural studies, where we are *not* able, extensively and without end, to theorize power – politics, race, class and gender, subjugation, domination, exclusion, marginality, Otherness, etc. There is hardly anything in cultural studies which isn't so theorized. And yet, there is the nagging doubt that this overwhelming textualization of cultural studies' own discourses somehow constitutes power and politics as exclusively matters of language and textuality itself. Now, this is not to say that I don't think that questions of power and the political have to be and are always lodged within representations, that they are always discursive questions. Nevertheless, there are ways of constituting power as an easy floating signifier which just leaves the crude exercise and connections of power and culture altogether emptied of any signification. That is what I take to be the moment of danger in the institutionalization of cultural studies in this highly rarified and enormously elaborated and well-funded professional world of American academic life. It has nothing whatever to do with cultural studies making itself more like British cultural studies, which is, I think, an entirely false and empty cause to try to propound. I have specifically tried not to speak of the past in an attempt to police the present and the future. But I do want to extract, finally, from the narrative I have constructed of the past some guidelines for my own work and perhaps for some of yours.

I come back to the deadly seriousness of intellectual work. It is a deadly serious matter. I come back to the critical distinctions between intellectual work and academic work: they overlap, they abut with one another, they feed off one another, the one provides you with the means to do the other. But they are not the same thing. I come back to the difficulty of instituting a genuine cultural and critical practice, which is intended to produce some kind of organic intellectual political work, which does not try to inscribe

itself in the overarching meta-narrative of achieved knowledges, within the institutions. I come back to theory and politics, the politics of theory. Not theory as the will to truth, but theory as a set of contested, localized, conjunctural knowledges, which have to be debated in a dialogical way. But also as a practice which always thinks about its intervention in a world in which it would make some difference, in which it would have some effect. Finally, a practice which understands the need for intellectual modesty. I do think there is all the difference in the world between understanding the politics of intellectual work and substituting intellectual work for politics.

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