Chapter 16

Decentering the Centre: Cultural Studies in Britain and its Legacy

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> 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 . . .
>
> Stuart Hall, "Cultural Studies and its Theoretical Legacies"

Introduction

Recently I wandered into the new multi-storey Borders bookstore and café in Brighton, England, where I live, and asked the sales assistant where I could find the sociology section. "Sociology?," she replied, apparently bemused by my inquiry into such an antiquated subject-matter, "would that be under Cultural Studies?" I checked for signs of postmodern irony in her voice but none could be found; "Sociology . . . *under* Cultural Studies."

Her comments made me reflect on the contemporary state of both sociology and cultural studies within Britain and their somewhat tempestuous relationship. It struck me that cultural studies *appears* to have achieved a dominant, I'm tempted to say hegemonic, position compared to its cognate sibling disciplines. Indeed even to think of cultural studies itself as a discrete discipline with its own methodologies, modes of address, forms of enquiry, boundaries, and history, is something that is often taken for granted, despite the inherently contradictory nature of such a claim. That is, cultural studies can more accurately be read as an explicitly *trans*disciplinary project that owes less to academic notions of bounded, specialized knowledge production, than it does to forms of engaged political critique.

There are as many students studying cultural studies and related disciplines – media studies and communication, film studies, sport and leisure studies, etc. – in Britain as there are students taking courses in "straight" sociology. Indeed there are now a number of joint cultural studies and sociology courses, seemingly a reaction on the part of some sociology departments to stay relevant to a cohort

of students keen to learn more from Roland Barthes and Jean Baudrillard than from Robert Merton and Karl Mannheim. Put another way, cultural studies has become the cool and sexy subject, compared to its apparently dour and anachronistic sociological bedfellow. The contemporary institutionalization of cultural studies, then, requires some critical reflection.

Georg Simmel once noted the impossibility of total knowledge for the modern subject in "being surrounded by an innumerable number of cultural elements which are neither meaningless to him [*sic*] nor, in the final analysis, meaningful. In their mass, they depress him, since he is not capable of assimilating them all, nor can he simply reject them, since after all, they do belong *potentially* within the sphere of his cultural development" (1968: 44). Standing in front of any large bookstore's cultural studies section, it is indeed easy to identify with Simmel's sense of being overwhelmed. So much work is now being produced that falls broadly under the category of "cultural studies" that it is difficult to highlight contemporary trends, or to note what is genuinely new or interesting amongst the waves of words produced.

In this context I will not attempt to map all the contours of cultural studies in Britain, or even suggest that the issues I highlight are the only ones in need of address. Instead I will point towards some key issues that need to be more fully considered than they have been hitherto in thinking about what cultural studies has to offer contemporary analyses of society. In particular I will question the unilinear accounts of the development of cultural studies in Britain that privilege a disengaged academic history and raise some concerns about its current university-institutionalization. Linked to the questioning of cultural studies' official history I problematize the lack of critical reflexivity concerning the embodiment of nationalist ideologies within cultural studies. Finally I look at some examples of contemporary cultural studies work, and ask whether or not cultural studies has really displaced sociology in the way some are prone to suggest, and as the sales assistant, implicitly at least, inferred.

From Hoggart to Hall . . .

There is now something approaching an official history of the development of cultural studies in Britain which has become established as *the* narrative of cultural studies. It is familiar to any teacher who has read student summaries of it and it normally runs something like the following:

Cultural studies started when Richard Hoggart wrote *The Uses of Literacy* in the late 1950s, and Raymond Williams wrote *Culture and Society, 1780–1950* and *The Long Revolution*. (Sometimes mention is also made of E. P. Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class*, but not always, as it is rather long and few contemporary students seem to have the time or patience to actually read it in its entirety.) Then depending on how much the student has researched they will mention Hoggart's appearance in court in 1960 for Penguin Books (defending the

obscenity case against D. H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover*). The story continues that after winning the case Penguin donated some money to Hoggart who then founded a centre at Birmingham University to study culture, which was then "taken over" by Stuart Hall (at which point Hoggart normally exits the story), who became the centre's Director, and who, along with some bright young students, read a lot of French social theory and Gramsci. The Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) thus, during the 1970s and early 1980s, allowed for neo-Marxist-inspired critiques of everyday life that sought to understand how ideology worked in and through popular culture, without privileging a crude Marxist reductionism, and how forms of cultural resistance might emerge – and the rest, as the essays invariably say, is history.

I do not wish to deny that something like the above did indeed happen – clearly certain individuals were important at specific moments and certain institutions did become the focus for particular sorts of intellectual activity. Indeed there are useful introductions to the field of cultural studies, particularly in Britain, that tell this story with some care (see Storey 1996; Turner 1996; Mulhern 2000). Rather than add yet another version to this now well-rehearsed fable I want instead to raise a few concerns about some of the omissions from this narrative.

One of the problems with such accounts is that they tend to highlight the publication of academic *texts* as "producing" cultural studies as an academic discipline taught within universities, rather than seeing such texts themselves as being the outcome of a wider sociopolitical process of education from the 1930s and 1940s aimed at social transformation, situated within adult and workers' education colleges. This is an important distinction, lost on many students, and indeed lecturers, when trying to understand the wider social formation of cultural studies and its purpose. Thus, although many would endorse Hall's view that trying to find *the* origins of cultural studies is "tempting but illusory," and that in "intellectual matters absolute beginnings are exceedingly rare. We find, instead, continuities and breaks" (Hall 1980: 16), most histories of cultural studies still date its start, more often than not, to sometime around 1957.

For many of the predominantly young, white, middle-class university students (for despite Britain's "expansion" of higher education the chances of working-class students reaching university have not increased for 30 years) cultural studies would appear to be little more than a method for deconstructing cultural "texts" using French poststructuralist theory. However, 60 years ago those engaged in trying to understand the political and ideological significance of culture, and in particular popular culture, within society were involved in a different project. For them "cultural studies," if they referred to it at all in that way, was initially concerned with the education of adult workers. It was the hope that a genuinely socialist democratic society could be created that led many tutors to see workers' education and the analysis of everyday life as a form of political struggle. Though there were tensions between those who wanted to promote an explicitly socialist, class-bound, form of teaching aimed at *workers'*

education, as opposed to a more liberal and generic *adult* education for all, the key aim was a form of pedagogical praxis rooted in the day-to-day lived experiences of people for whom formal education had not provided. Though this utopian vision was never entirely fulfilled it did provide the context from which cultural studies could emerge. As Tom Steele succinctly puts it, "from 'the embers of the independent workers' education movement arose the phoenix of cultural studies" (1997: 9).

The key point to remember about Hoggart, Williams, and Thompson is not so much the books they produced at a particular moment but that they were all adult educators at the margins of, or outside, the formal higher education sector, engaged in this political process. Stuart Hall too was an extramural teacher for a while, and it is not a coincidence that he spent much of his professional life at the Open University for mature students, a place where he could teach and communicate with students who had not come from privileged backgrounds, thus continuing the ethos of cultural studies' educational praxis (see "The Formation of a Diasporic Intellectual" in Morley & Chen 1996). It is important to restate the fact that the formation of cultural studies was, first and foremost, a political project aimed at popular education for working-class adults (Steele 1997: 15). There was always a tension then with the provision of such education becoming incorporated – both ideologically and institutionally – within "bourgeois" university departments, which, for the most part, is what did happen. This shift from the autonomous spaces for adult and workers' education and political praxis, to the disciplinary logic of university-based teaching has contributed to narrowing our understandings about the origins of cultural studies and what it is, and could be, today. As Williams himself emphatically noted:

> it can hardly be stressed too strongly that Cultural Studies in the sense we now understand it . . . occurred in adult education: in the WEA, in the extramural Extension classes. I've sometimes read accounts of the development of Cultural Studies which characteristically date its various developments from *texts*. We all know the accounts which line up and date *The Uses of Literacy, The Making of the English Working Class, Culture and Society*, and so on. But, as a matter of fact, already in the late forties . . . even in the thirties, Cultural Studies was extremely active in adult education. It only got into print and gained some kind of general intellectual recognition with these later books. I often feel sad about the many people who were active in that field at that time who didn't publish, but who did as much as any of us did to establish this work. (Williams 1989: 154)

I do not claim this to be a new or original insight. Others have made similar points before in different contexts (for example see Dunn 1986; Laing 1986; Davies 1995; and Dworkin 1997). It is offered instead as a reminder of an aspect of cultural studies' formation that is in danger of becoming exorcised from the collective memory, with problematic results in how we are to conceive of cultural studies' contemporary relevance. When a commentator as astute as Chris Barker can claim that cultural studies' "main location has *always* been institutions of

higher education and the bookshop'' (2000: 7, emphasis added), then a degree of contestation is needed over those accounts which risk narrativizing cultural studies' historical purpose (and present location) into a depoliticized humanities discipline.

What this should alert us to is that although referring to ''British cultural studies'' *may* be a useful shorthand way to highlight some general concerns regarding the place and importance of understanding culture in relation to social reproduction, dominant ideologies, and power relationships, it tends to have the effect of implying a false unity and cohesion that does not exist. Certainly there is cultural studies work (broadly defined) that has taken place in Britain, a particular geographical-national location, but that is not the same thing as claiming there is *a* British cultural studies tradition, which some summaries tend to imply. The work around adult workers' education highlighted above, the more formative and orthodox analyses of society and culture found in Williams, the CCCS's interventionist work in the 1970s and 1980s and the important contributions of feminist analyses, the work of black British postcolonial theorists in the 1990s, the postmodernist influenced ''new ethnographies'' being produced by a number of ''post-CCCS'' researchers, or other centers, such as those at the Open University, University of East London, or Goldsmiths, could all claim to be engaged with cultural studies work.[1] Yet to describe them all as constituting ''British cultural studies'' as though their work shared core conceptual and methodological concerns regardless of time or location, stretches the signifier too far. It is to question such protonationalist imaginings that I now turn.

Questioning the "British" in British Cultural Studies

Whatever may be said in favor of the earlier intellectual engagement with popular culture by those concerned to create a better social environment for the working classes, and cultural studies' educative role in this transformation, certain issues remained marginalized. Feminist scholars in particular have clearly established how many of the studies assumed a normative male bias in their work and often failed to seriously address issues concerning the construction of gender identity, sexuality, and an adequate theorization of patriarchy (see Brundson 1996; Franklin et al. 1991; Gordon 1995; Gray 1997; McRobbie 1994, 2000; Nava 1992). Indeed, many of those who argued that the forms of knowledge taught with the workers' education associations should focus on the analysis of more serious ''public'' issues such as politics, international relations, and the economy, did so on the basis that the ''soft'' disciplines associated with the humanities would emasculate the workers' revolutionary project, revealing certain masculinist and patriarchal assumptions (cf. Steele 1997).

I want, however, to briefly discuss another ''omission'' by highlighting the ways in which some of the claims made defending forms of ''authentic'' working-class communities from the influence of American mass culture have operated

from within particular racialized forms of nationhood. Many of the earlier key studies rarely addressed issues of how racial formation was central in articulating issues of British nationalism, or sufficiently problematized the fact that they often spoke to, and from, a particularly English, not British, sensibility. This theoretical neglect has allowed those who want to trace certain intellectual lineages from the early founding figures, to simply ignore "race" and racialization as core thematics within contemporary cultural studies.

The huge social, cultural, and economic changes that occurred in Britain during and immediately after the 1939–45 war provided the context within which cultural studies was to emerge. Cultural studies can thus be seen as an attempt to provide a set of answers to Britain's decline as a world "superpower" during this time (Hall 1980; 1992). The postwar period also brought with it wider sociocultural changes, especially when, due to acute labor shortages as it rebuilt its social infrastructure, Britain recruited skilled manual workers, as well as nurses and doctors, from its former colonies. The resulting migration of peoples from Asia, Africa, and particularly from the English-speaking Caribbean, was to decisively reshap the nature, content, and style of British politics (Solomos 2000). It was not so much that "race" had now been introduced into the British psyche – it had always been there shaping the customs, mores, and patterns of the metropolis – but rather that whereas Britain's colonial relationships could, at one level at least, be thought of as happening "out there," across the waves, Britain was now, at its center, confronted with the facts of its imperialist legacy – the "island race" no longer seemed so disconnected.

Despite the government's official welcoming attitude, at least until the early 1960s, Asian and black people faced a violent and hostile reception on the streets of Britain. Especially so when the 1970s saw a domestic economic downturn and a wider international recession, fueled by a rapid decline in Britain's manufacturing base, and a rise in unemployment which suddenly left Britain's Asian and black populations politically exposed as "enemies within," supposedly taking the jobs of indigenous British folk. The late 1970s and early 1980s also saw a political swing away from the corporatist politics of the postwar period towards the election of Margaret Thatcher's "New Right" government, which combined a "free-market" economic approach with a more explicitly nationalistic form of politics. "Race," now coupled with immigration, became one of the key political issues encapsulating as it did anxieties over the state of the nation – both economically and culturally – and the crisis of the body politic.

If Munt is correct in suggesting that "the principle that working-class identity emerged into a new self-consciousness after the [Second World] war is pivotal to comprehending the eventual consolidation of working-class cultural studies" (2000: 2), then it was surprising that the reconfigured nature of the working class, fractured, mediated and aligned across new "race" lines, during the 1950s and since, was so poorly theorized within cultural studies until the late 1970s and early 1980s. While Britain was gripped by this sociopolitical maelstrom, cultural studies, still wedded to notions of working-class life as it was thought to have

existed in the 1950s, failed to adequately respond to and understand these changes, seeing any shift from analyzing cultural formation in purely class terms as being a negation of cultural studies' purpose (cf. Owusu 2000).

Notwithstanding the earlier important work of Dick Hebdige and indeed the CCCS's (1978) *Policing the Crisis*, one of the landmark exceptions to this was the publication in 1982 of *The Empire Strikes Back*, regarded by some as one of the CCCS's most important interventions (Solomos & Back 1996: 10; Hall 1996: 270). The book sought to explain how social struggles in Britain had to be set within the context of the political and economic crises of British capitalism, and the ways in which "race" was being used to articulate and "manage" these problems. Even here however the move to open up questions of "race" and nationalism met resistance. As Hall recalls, "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 . . . it was only accomplished as the result of a long, and sometimes bitter – certainly bitterly contested – internal struggle against a resounding but unconscious silence" (1996: 270). Discussing the context for the intellectual work behind the publication of *The Empire Strikes Back* itself, Hall continues, "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" (ibid.).

The concern, which underpinned much of the earlier cultural studies work, to rearticulate and empower forms of working-class resistance by retrieving the importance of culture, forming cross-class allegiances and the place of intellectuals within this, came of course from certain readings of Gramsci and his concept of the "national-popular" (Forgacs 1988; 1999). It is clear that while the national-popular allowed for a space within which critiques of the operation of the state in relation to political strategies could be developed, it also meant that the nation itself was often taken as a given. Hall has identified Gilroy's intervention as marking an important moment in the development of cultural studies away from this unproblematic embrace of "the nation" as a site of political struggle:

> The national-popular has some powerful elements in it, but it also has some worrying ones too . . . it [. . .] inserts us into a curious argument where we suddenly find ourselves at the edge of socialism in one country: the idea that you could create a national-popular conception of the UK which wouldn't have anything to do with anywhere else. It's a very tricky moment. We're only saved from that by the fact that I move out of the Birmingham Centre and Paul Gilroy moves in! If you go down that path too far, thinking that the privileged object of politics must be the nation – the national-popular, rather than the popular – what a bag that puts you in. (1997a: 29).

Certain "celebratory" accounts of the uniqueness of "British cultural studies" often replicate this very problem. That is they fail to note the inter cultural and

transnational intellectual flows that helped shape the theoretical development of cultural studies in Britain, as well as ignoring how the wider globalized social conditions – colonialism and imperialism in particular – allowed for the class-situated form of politics that emerged to occur in the first place, and is presumably why the figure and work of C.L.R. James receives such negligible discussion in many histories.

Paul Gilroy, himself associated with the CCCS in the early 1980s through his co-authorship of the *Empire* book, has subsequently spent much of his career precisely trying to break free from the narrowing of the conceptual gaze in this respect and has therefore had something of an ambivalent relationship to cultural studies (see Smith 1999). In this context, one of the most important cultural studies books is Gilroy's (1987) *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack*. Its blend of social theory, grounded empirical analysis, historical sensitivity, connections to progressive community-based politics, and originality of thought should have made it a key cultural studies text. Indeed many will often cite the book in such a fashion, yet it is often difficult to see that those who claim to have read it have fully taken on board the implications of its arguments. At his Professorial lecture Gilroy explicitly described his project as being unified by his "antipathy towards nationalism in all its forms and a related concern with the responsibility of intellectuals to act ethically, justly, when faced with the challenges nationalisms represent" (1999: 184). For Gilroy questions of "race" as well as the histories of colonialism and Empire are not epiphenomenal to the development of British society. Such processes are central in understanding how Britain's economy had been constructed and its class relations mediated, and subsequently how this affected the formation of its culture more generally, and its sense of national identity. Any cultural studies project had, therefore, to remain cognizant of how "race" acted as a modality through which class and nationalism were lived. In other words, black people, as agents, needed greater recognition in the socio cultural histories of Britain, and the racialized nature of the story itself had to be recognized. Gilroy wrote *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack* as "a corrective to the more ethnocentric dimensions" (1987: 12) of cultural studies:

> I have grown gradually more and more weary of having to deal with the effects of striving to analyse culture within neat, homogenous national units reflecting the "lived relations" involved; with the invisibility of "race" within the field and, most importantly, with the forms of nationalism endorsed by a discipline which, in spite of itself, tends towards a morbid celebration of England and Englishness from which blacks are systematically excluded. (ibid.)[2]

Graeme Turner's otherwise comprehensive account of cultural studies in Britain is a case in point. It is only in the revised second edition, published in 1996, that there is any serious discussion of popular culture's place in the articulation of "race," racism, and nationalism, and only in later editions is there any serious engagement with Gilroy's critique of the "founding fathers" submerged ethnonationalism. If Turner presents a somewhat late acknowledg-

ment, a more worrying example of the disavowal of "race" and its centrality to the formation of cultural studies and the conceptual debates it subsequently followed can be seen in (yet another) recent introduction to cultural studies in Britain. In it the author makes the following perfunctory remarks:

> I shall not discuss [in this book] the emergence of "post- colonial" cultural studies, or the significant recent considerations of race and "otherness" in culture. This is not because I consider these issues unimportant. It is because, for all their undoubted importance, they are not addressed to the central analytic problems of the cultural studies tradition. (Tudor 1999: 7)

Were it not for the fact that such "authoritative" accounts have the potential, and institutionally-invested power, to shape how we understand what constitutes the appropriate field of study within cultural studies – and this relates ultimately to what is taught and who gets to teach the subject – it would be tempting to ignore such misconstrued and ethnocentric positions. However Tudor, and other similar myopic accounts, would do well to read, and *understand*, Gilroy's observations when he notes:

> Looking at cultural studies from an ethnohistorical perspective requires more than just noting its association with English literature, history, and New Left politics. It necessitates constructing an account of the borrowings made by these English initiatives from wider, modern, European traditions of thinking about culture, and at every stage examining the place which these cultural perspectives provide for the images of their racialised others as objects of knowledge, power, and cultural criticism. It is imperative, though very hard, to combine thinking about these issues with consideration of the pressing need to get black cultural expressions, analyses, and histories taken seriously in academic circles rather than assigned via the idea of "race relations" to sociology and thence abandoned to the elephants' graveyard to which intractable policy issues go to wait their expiry. (1993: 5–6)

Given such a climate within cultural studies in Britain it is not surprising that it took American-based authors Houston Baker, Manthia Diawara, and Ruth Lindeborg, and an American publisher, to acknowledge the distinctive contribution of black British scholars to cultural studies, in their 1996 book *Black British Cultural Studies*. Even today the distinctive contributions – tracing issues concerning postcoloniality, diasporic identity, the cultural politics of recognition and difference, and the syncretic nature of culture – found in the work of a new generation of scholars such as Chetan Bhatt, Barnor Hesse, Jayne Ifekwunigwe, Bobby Sayyid, and Lola Young, is still marginalized, with only token acknowledgment given to the likes of Kobena Mercer, Hazel Carby, and Gilroy himself.

An indication of the failure of the earlier cultural studies intellectuals to break free from such forms of ethnic absolutist thinking, and to question the nation-bounded aspects of their intellectual work, can be seen in a discussion of multiculturalism by Richard Hoggart. Hoggart repeats these mistakes in his conflation of nation identity with racialized ethnicity, and his subsequent inability to

decouple discussions of immigration from the national-popular. Hoggart, as most accounts acknowledge, is rightly credited as central to cultural studies' history, so his current demise to that of an increasingly conservative commentator is a minor intellectual tragedy. In *The Way We Live Now* Hoggart rails against those who claim Britain to be a multicultural society ("This is simply not so," 1995: 165) because Britain's ethnic minority groups do not constitute a large enough percentage of the population to merit the description. He goes on to suggest that describing Britain as multicultural gives "ammunition" (ibid.) to white racists – who presumably would then feel justified in thinking that "their" culture was being eroded. Hoggart notes that there "have been large immigrations of people from different cultures in the last twenty or thirty years. These people should be accepted fully" (ibid.).

Hoggart's position fails to account for the protean and synthetic nature of culture generally and national cultures in particular. It is of course misleading, and tautological, to refer to national cultures as "multicultural" in the sense that *all* national cultures are inherently multicultural by the very fact that they will necessarily contain various linguistic, regional, and ethnic groupings as part of their constitution. As authors from Richard Jenkins to Edward Said have noted, diversity and cultural exchange, as regards ethnicity and national identities, is the norm. Yet this was not the point Hoggart was making. In juxtaposing a mythical monocultural Britain, Hoggart inadvertently aligned himself with British right-wing politicians such as Norman Tebbit, who have argued that Britain is, and always will be (assuming immigration is restricted, or even reversed), a monocultural, essentially white, Christian society.

As Hoggart should have known, our understandings about nationality, cultural identity, and difference are not framed by the numerical size of particular groups, but by the ways in which cultures are imagined, narrated, and re-presented in particular settings (see Hall 1999). This often means that migrant groups will have a "disproportionate" effect in changing the national sense of identity – particularly in cultural spheres such as youth cultures and other areas of popular culture – for all citizens in society, in a way that far outweighs their numerical size. Hence why many now reject the term "ethnic minority," for it implies both a homogenous "majority" culture, as well as a discrete and disconnected "minority" culture. If ethnicity is defined in cultural terms the notion of ethnic minority in situations where the supposed minority is culturally dominant – black youth culture being a case in point – becomes somewhat misleading and oxymoronic.

Writing less than ten years earlier about Williams' problematic construction of authentic and inauthentic types of national belonging (see Williams 1983), Gilroy argued that:

> Williams combines a discussion of "race" with comments on patriotism and nationalism. However, his understanding of "race" is restricted to the social and cultural tensions surrounding the arrival of "new peoples." For him, as with the

> right, "race" problems begin with immigration. Resentment of "unfamiliar neighbours" is seen as the beginning of the process which ends in ideological specifications of "race" and "superiority." Williams, working his way towards a "new and substantial kind of socialism," draws precisely the same picture of the relationship between "race", national identity and citizenship as [Enoch] Powell. (1987: 49)

A decade on, Hoggart had theoretically aligned himself, in much the same way, with Tebbit, revealing a problematic neglect and misunderstanding of theoretical conjunctures around "race," nationalism, and cultural formation that cultural studies is still struggling to adequately comprehend.

Contemporary Cultural Studies

If it were possible to trace certain contemporary trends as regards cultural studies work in Britain one would be an implicit, and occasionally explicit, rejection of some of the central concepts developed by the CCCS. For example, Andy Bennett's important studies of musical cultures distance themselves from the overly deterministic class-centered accounts of subcultural theory found within the "classic" CCCS tradition. With the perceived dissolution of Britain's static class structure, Bennett, and other "post-subculturalists" (see Muggleton 2000; and also Miles 2000), focus on understanding people's consumer identifications and lifestyle choices not in terms of "class resistance," and the "authentic" subcultures these social relations produced, but via the subjective accounts through which people give meaning to and construct their own lived experiences; what Muggleton refers to as "postmodern hyperindividualism" (2000: 6).

Ethnographic studies are used as a way of challenging "top-down" concepts such as subcultures, which are viewed as tied to outdated notions of bounded and rigid, class-inflected identities which no longer resonate with the fluid, temporary, and heterogeneous lifestyle patterns of (post)modern groups. Thus Bennett in particular draws as much on Maffesoli's notion of "neotribes" and the work of postmodern cultural theorists such as Steve Redhead as on the earlier work of Hebdige or Hall (see Bennett 1999a, 1999b, 1999c, 2000). As Lovatt and Purkis argue, summarizing a position many of the post-CCCS researchers would identify with to some degree, "we take the view that understanding popular culture requires theoretical flexibility – putting empathy before explanation; thus avoiding the temptation to lapse into objectifying meta-theories of culture" (1996: 249). Where counterhegemonic practices are located they more often than not focus on the body as a site of a subversive, creative, and inherently polysemic form of "political" resistance, such as in Sweetman's ethnographic studies on tattooing and body piercing "subcultures" (1999a; 1999b). Sweetman argues that contemporary culture is marked by a move from stable, collective group identities to shifting, personalized identifications: "contemporary body modification appears to serve less as a marker of group identity, and more as an

expression of the self" (1999b: 71). The strength of this work undoubtedly lies in the renewed interest in carefully constructed ethnographic methodologies that allow for grounded empirical and theoretical work to remain attuned to the subjects researched. What is less clear is whether such work will be able to link to the broader, structural changes within society, within which such cultural practices have to be located, or to discussions of power and inequality within and between these more diffuse social formations, which is something, to date, that often seems missing from these new studies.

However, while it could be argued that there is a "postmodern drift" away from the certainties provided by the neo-Marxist CCCS analyses, so there are also indications of a renewed interest in the class location of many of the subjects of cultural studies analysis. In attempting to rejoin debates influenced by feminism, postcolonialism, postmodernism, and queer theory, that in some accounts have rejected a class framework, Sally Munt argues that "Cultural Studies is above all the stories/study of everyday life, and it is axiomatic to claim that everyday life is saturated with class relations. The fact that not everybody believes this doesn't make it untrue, it merely alludes to the success of entrenched beliefs in liberal pluralism" (2000: 10). This is not based on a nostalgic longing for the "good old days" of Hoggart, Williams, and Thompson, but on a genuine attempt at *rethinking* – as opposed to merely revising or an outright repudiation of – the possibilities and problematics of traditional Marxist models for cultural analysis and the deficiencies of earlier work. Indeed her own work, which has carefully excavated the contours of lesbian identity and queer theory, has always been anchored within broader discussions of nationalism and class identity (see for example Munt 1998).

There are currently other trends within cultural studies that are more problematic and worth briefly noting, though these are clearly not tied to work in Britain alone. Influenced by the popularity of certain forms of deconstruction and the "linguistic turn" more generally within social theory – normally due to poor readings/translations of Derrida – certain philosophical perspectives have gained a degree of currency in reading and interpreting cultural forms in a way that often obliterates the social context within which such practices are embedded. Put another way, there is still much textual analysis of culture that is divorced from the material conditions of its production and consumption and that fails, therefore, to develop a sufficiently integrative mode of analysis – what McRobbie has referred to as the "textual trap" (1994: 39). Being able to deconstruct the dialogic processes of signification, intertextuality, bricolage, and intersubjective interpellation within a Nike commercial is one thing; connecting this to the exploitative economic production of the shoes themselves in southeast Asia, through to their consumption in the deprived inner-cities of the West, and the meanings this produces, is quite another, and a process too often not addressed. As Hall has warned, the institutionalization of cultural studies risks turning it into an esoteric academic pursuit, where "power" and "resistance" can reside everywhere (and therefore nowhere), removed almost entirely

from the everyday experiences of people (see Hall's "Cultural Studies and its Theoretical Legacy," in Morley & Chen 1996, and also Hall 1997a). It is quite clear that cultural studies needs to remain attuned to the political and economic context for the production and formation of culture in the first place, the relationship of this to the articulation of particular ideologies within texts themselves, and how "audiences" read, understand, and make sense of such cultural practices in their day-to-day lives, linking how dominant ideologies attempt, and fail, to interpellate people through culture.

Sociology versus Cultural Studies: Is Anyone Else Bored With This Debate?[3]

Speaking as President at the 1996 British Sociological Association's annual conference, Stuart Hall remarked that he found it surprising that he had been given the honor as he had never considered, and still did not consider, himself to be a sociologist.[4] No doubt many others would have agreed. Hall then outlined the starting-point for the work done at the CCCS during his time at the Center. "We went to [Talcott] Parsons," he said, "and whatever he had rejected, we read." Though used as an amusing anecdote to situate the type of engaged, reflexive, and critical intellectual work done by the Centre it also spoke, perhaps unintentionally, to a tension that has been perceived at least to have existed between sociology and cultural studies. Whereas many sociologists have privileged a form of abstract theory building and knowledge gathering over engaged sociopolitical analysis and action, and have attempted to build a positivistic form of sociology, mirrored to a greater or lesser degree, on the objectives and assumed "objectivity" of the natural sciences, cultural studies has been seen as a debased and ideologically driven political project. As one commentator has noted, sociologists tend to "renounce the moral-critical role of cultural studies, maintaining the traditional social-scientific conception of the scholar as objective and value-neutral" (Wolff 1999: 505). Hall's comments would appear to give credence to such a view. That is, at least as Hall recounts, the work of cultural studies was not concerned to engage with Parsons and certain forms of functionalist theory, but to sidestep the debates altogether and raise other questions about power, ideology, subjectivity, and cultural resistance that could not be framed within the conventional sociological discourses of socialization, norms, and value consensus. Thus while Alvin Gouldner (1970) signaled the coming crisis of Western sociology at the start of the 1970s, and tried to answer that call via a critical engagement *with* Parsonian sociology, cultural studies located, instead, its debates around the very aspects of sociality – everyday life, popular pursuits, and laterally language and meaning – that sociology had failed to adequately analyze.

For some sociologists, cultural studies is almost antisociological in its intellectual approach, which far from helping us to better understand the dynamics of culture's role in the construction of social relations, has now become a "facile and

useless" (Tester 1994: 9) enterprise that is, apparently, "incapable of confronting important questions of cultural and moral value in anything approaching a serious manner" (ibid.).[5] Bryan Turner, Professor of Sociology at Cambridge University, has similarly criticized contemporary cultural studies for being little more than "decorative theory," as opposed to the more substantive offerings grounded in social reality found within sociology and social (as opposed to cultural) theory. Turner rails against those who would privilege certain forms of cultural analysis that are not first and foremost situated within "the social." He does this by contrasting contemporary cultural studies in Britain against the "golden age" of its early development:

> The attempt to submerge the social in the cultural cannot produce an adequate understanding of power, inequality, and social stratification. Cultural studies have lost their roots in the critical tradition of Raymond Williams, Richard Hoggart, and the early Birmingham Centre for Cultural Studies [*sic*], a tradition that was crucially concerned with the loss of community and the power of the media. Cultural theory has become an end in itself – the narcissistic study of its own textual traditions – and has as a result lost its sense of the importance of empirical research. (Turner 2000: xv)

One of the problems in outlining the division in this way is that it necessarily distorts and homogenizes an entire area of enquiry. Many of the leading cultural studies theorists would themselves make similar criticisms about *some* of the work done within the field. Indeed the problems of theoreticism – theory for its own sake, disconnected from empirical engagement – are precisely some of the main problems with contemporary *sociology* and social theory (see Craib 1992; Mouzelis 1995; Seidman 1998). Turner continues his attack by arguing that cultural studies, due to its eclectic and multidisciplinary basis, lacks the intellectual depth and sophistication to "develop a range of concepts with the breadth, scope, and moral seriousness of Weber's notion of rationalization, Marx's concept of alienation, Durkheim's analysis of the sacred, Simmel's understanding of mental life and the city, or Parson's analysis of the democratic revolution in the education system" (2000: xvi).

It would be too easy to counter such a statement with a list of equally significant theoretical contributions from cultural studies theorists, but to do so would be to descend into a form of academic playground fighting ("our concepts are better than yours") which, as I want to stress here, is both unnecessary and counterproductive – even if we could resolve who should be on which "side"; no doubt Simmel would be argued over, though I expect cultural studies theorists would be happy to let the sociologists have Parsons.[6] The point rather is that cultural studies would not wish to deny the importance of such insights, but try to extend them by incorporating them within new frameworks – say in relation to issues concerning governance, cultural regulation, and discursive regimes of power. Such sentiments reveal a defensive and insecure attitude towards cultural studies, which more often speaks to the continuing ontological

and epistemological crises of sociology in the twenty-first century, than it does to cultural studies' alleged moral and intellectual weaknesses. As one critic has lamented, sociology "looks poised to enter the final tragic-heroic Hegelian moment of 'sublation,' in which its immanent truths are in a way preserved, but also superseded, as new carriers of the Idea take flight" (McLennan 1998b: 61). "Is there a future for sociology?," asked Britain's leading sociologist, Anthony Giddens, in his 1996 book *In Defence of Sociology*. He answered; "don't despair! You still have a world to win, or at least interpret" (1996: 7) – hardly a rallying call. It would be difficult to think of a similar angst-ridden proclamation from within cultural studies.

This division between sociology and cultural studies is in many ways a false one, that overstates the extent of divergence and certainly their alleged incompatibility, and overlooks the fact that many of the founding classical theorists of sociology were concerned with aspects of culture and meaning, which to a degree were neglected in the more structural-functionalist approaches of modern sociology (Hall 1997b). Although proponents of cultural studies often claim to have a multi-, if not inter-, disciplinary base, drawing on history, politics, aesthetics, literary theory, and so on, it is actually sociology that provides the major metaconceptual framework for most of the work. Indeed many people who work within "cultural studies," actually do so from within sociology departments, or as Professors of Sociology *and* Cultural Studies (with the sociology normally coming first). Although many sociology departments have now adapted to the influences of cultural studies, in programs of study, Professorial titles, and new research centers, they have not, on the whole, and contrary to some more exaggerated claims, been replaced by cultural studies departments. (Though this is truer of older universities in the UK – the newer "red brick" and post-1992 universities tend to have created a more open space for cultural studies as a discrete area of work.)

To divorce the two makes little sense, distorts their inherently symbiotic relationship as well as failing to acknowledge the pivotal way in which cultural studies has decisively reshaped the theoretical, methodological, and conceptual concerns of sociology over the past 20 years in way which has given sociology new impetus, even as some of sociology's more conventional commentators try to deny this shift.[7] Even during cultural studies' incipient phase of development, figures who would later be seen as key intellectuals in the development of systems approaches to sociology were engaged in work that directly led into the formation of cultural studies. Karl Mannheim, for example, was attracted to the political aspirations behind the adult workers' education associations and their rootedness within working-class communities when he first migrated to England from Germany in the early 1930s. Mannheim's *Ideology and Utopia* was hugely influential on adult education tutors in defining a role for both themselves as educators and their relationship to teaching working-class emancipatory education, and who in many ways was an important conduit for importing European critical social philosophy into the rather empiricist aspects of British intellectual

life at that time, which was to later prove so important to the New Left. As Steele notes, Mannheim's work during, and immediately after, the postwar period: "transformed the existing practice of academic sociology by making it confront the issue of culture and, by harnessing it to the interdisciplinary practices of adult education, paved the way for the post-war generation of cultural studies" (1997: 116).

The influence of cultural studies upon sociology can be seen in other ways too. Alan Tomlinson (1999: 79) notes that a survey of British sociologists in the early 1970s asking them to name their key sociological texts chose Durkheim's study *Suicide*, closely followed by Weber's *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. Just under a decade later, while Durkheim had "slipped" to second, it was Paul Willis's (1977) study of how working-class males were schooled into working-class jobs that was deemed to be one of the best explanatory texts. Tomlinson further points out that Giddens himself when asked to specify an empirical study that best exemplified his theory of structuration – a concept which Giddens had actually "appropriated" from the psychologist Piaget (1971) – pointed to Willis's landmark cultural studies text (see Giddens 1984).

Indeed Giddens' *In Defence of Sociology* has a chapter dedicated to Raymond Williams' work. Gouldner's text too opens with an account of popular culture and uses The Doors' "(Come on Baby) Light My Fire" to illustrate the central thesis of his book – while the city of Detroit was being burned and looted the song was apparently being used by a car manufacturer to advertise their product. It was this "context of contradictions and conflicts that is the historical matrix of what I have called 'the Coming Crisis of Western Sociology' " (1970: xii), noted Gouldner.[8] Even a conventional sociological critic like Bryan Turner concedes that all that may be needed is a reconciliation rather than a divorce, when he notes that the solution to the division "is to make sociology more cultural and cultural studies more sociological" (2000: xiv).

For some, the distinction that Turner tries to draw is not only irrelevant, but unhelpful. Scott Lash, for example, has argued against those within cultural studies (or cultural theory in Lash's vocabulary) who have dismissed "the importance of forms of social life" (1999: 1), as well as those sociologists "who pay scant attention to culture – who neglect the cultural dimension altogether – in favour of the calculated and calculating rationality of actors, systems or massive matrices of quantitative data" (ibid.). Many would respond, no doubt, to both Turner and Lash by pointing out that such a "multidimensional" approach to analyzing culture is exactly what they have been doing all along.

If these dualisms are to be resolved they require more than pious pronouncements, but a genuine rethinking of the nature of sociological enquiry and its purpose. It may be that though they do clearly share common ground, the prioritizing by cultural studies of the constructed nature of language, subjectivity, and identity as a way to understand the operation of power, ideology, and the production of social hierarchies, as opposed to working the other way around – that is, by treating the social as a preexistent given and then trying to understand

how various symbols are then used within that social system – reflects a different standpoint position that can co-exist and need not necessarily be seen as antithetical.

Conclusion

It would be misleading to assume that many of the issues I have highlighted are not currently being debated. The problem is that increased academic specialization often means that there are now large gaps between those who consider themselves "theorists," those who perceive themselves as, first and foremost, "grounded empiricists," and those who still view their roles more widely in terms of pedagogic praxis. While most would argue against this tripartite distinction, it is increasingly the case that forms of critical pedagogy are often seen as being a specialist concern for those interested in the promotion of better teaching and learning techniques. That is, forms of empowerment via the *teaching* of cultural studies are rarely joined up with the theoretical developments and grounded studies of various communities and even less connected to forms of progressive politics or policy concerns – "empowerment" now being reduced to improving teaching techniques so as not to disaffect students (see Buckingham 1998). The notion that cultural studies might form the basis for a democratic mode of emancipatory politics, and how we might reconvene the public sphere to address such pedagogic issues pertaining to cultural politics, is a question that needs to be more fully considered (Giroux 2000). Indeed, rather than seeing cultural studies as engaged in a project to expand our understandings of the scope and delimitations of politics, many on the left in Britain perceive cultural studies as being a form of "postpolitical" negation and disengagement *from* "real" politics, not a means to effect this end. Thus cultural studies is viewed with contempt for being little more than an intellectual Trojan horse allowing the infiltration of postmodern discourses of "difference," which has confused us as to the true (economic) determinants of politics (see Eagleton 1996).

The problem with such accounts is they fail to acknowledge the importance of new social movements to progressive politics, the genuinely radical nature of the "cultural turn" within social theory, and the extent to which it is no longer possible, theoretically or politically, to simply prioritize a reified conceptualization of "the economic" as always being the key determinant of social formation in the last instance. The lip-service given to the importance of nonclass subjectivities by *some* of the more orthodox political-economy approaches is little more than an attempt to recenter modes of analysis that have not developed since the 1970s, often by parodying new social movements as being factional, particularistic, and "merely cultural" (Butler 1998). Discussing this tension between political economy/mass communication scholars and Gramscian/cultural studies theorists, Morley notes that the former:

> have lately been heard to say that, of course, they have always recognized that there was more to life than questions of class and economic determination; that questions of culture and meaning have always been important to them; that, of course, questions of race, gender and sexuality have always been prominent among their concerns; that, naturally, the analysis of low-status forms of fictional media production is important; and that, certainly, they have never thought of audiences as passive dupes or zombies . . . A look back at some early debates between these scholars and those working in cultural studies . . . shows quite a different story, in which all these things that now, it seems, mass communications scholars have "long recognized" have, in fact, had to be fought for, inch by inch, and forced on to the research agenda by those primarily within the cultural studies tradition, against the backdrop of much wailing and gnashing of teeth on the part of the political economists. (1998: 488)

It is doubtful whether those who taught within adult and workers' education colleges during the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s and whose intellectual work was directly connected to political engagement and social change, would recognize what constitutes cultural studies today. This is not necessarily a cause for concern, and it is clearly important to avoid any nostalgic and uncritical notions of the "good old days" of cultural studies in Britain. To argue that cultural studies' emergence within radical adult education needs to be retrieved for the cultural memory need not be mistaken for a "romantic and heroic conceptualisation of cultural studies" (McGuigan 1997: 1) and its "revolutionary" past. To argue for a broader historical understanding of the wider social formation of cultural studies does not negate a critical appraisal of the problematic theoretical absences within earlier work, or suggest that contemporary cultural studies can *only* be about political pedagogical praxis. Nevertheless it does help us to question the ontological and ethical basis of contemporary cultural studies work. This necessitates greater emphasis to be put into thinking through the nature of much research, and its links to public policy concerns, if it is to remain purposeful, and avoid becoming both obscurantist and irrelevant, to the lives of those it seeks to understand. Graeme Turner (1996) is surely right when he argues that cultural studies has presented a radical challenge to the orthodoxies of the disciplines found within the humanities and social sciences, enabling a fuller, richer, and more complex understanding of the role of culture in society. Cultural studies' commitment to understanding and analyzing aspects of everyday life, Turner continues, "has the admirable objective of doing so in order to change our lives for the better. Not all academic pursuits have such a practical political objective" (1996: 234). In the current climate of increasing neoliberal managerialist ideologies saturating university and wider educational life, whether cultural studies in Britain will be able to fulfill its intellectual, political, and pedagogic goals remains, at present, unclear.

To return to my opening observations. I did eventually find the sociology section. It was tucked away at the back of the store next to a fire exit, and in between texts on business management, homeopathy, and a children's

play area. And there was no cultural studies section. Make of that what you will.

Notes

1 Goldsmith's could now claim to be the new center of cultural studies in Britain, at least in terms of the numbers of cultural theorists working there. (That said I am cautious of reinscribing certain institutions as being "central" as this necessarily "marginalizes" other spaces of production. As Turner notes, regarding the neglect of work by those based at Cardiff by many histories, "the field of study has been subject to a degree of metropolitan control and that there are geographical margins as well as theoretical or ideological ones" (1996: 76); see also Schwarz (1994). Currently the University of East London has a number of important cultural studies theorists working across various departments and more formally the Manchester Institute for the Study of Popular Culture, based at Manchester Metropolitan University, has quickly established itself as one of the UK's leading centers for cultural studies research. Thus I certainly do not wish to imply we should necessarily see Goldsmith's-based lecturers' work as "better" than that currently being produced elsewhere.) Goldsmiths' Centre for Cultural Studies, directed by Scott Lash, modestly claims to be a "supradisciplinary center" which is "a locus of intellectual activity and fermentation," though it might well be argued that Goldsmith's less well-known Centre for Urban and Community Research actually comes closer to fulfilling the pedagogic and interventionist ambitions of earlier cultural studies.

2 Gilroy has suggested that "it seems impossible to deny that Hoggart's comprehensive exclusion of 'race' from his discussion of postwar class and culture represented clear political choices" (1996: 236).

3 With apologies to Lawrence Grossberg for paraphrasing this line – see the exchange between Grossberg and Nicholas Garnham over the relevance of more cultural-studies-inflected versions of media studies versus broader, political-economy, approaches in Storey 1998. Aspects of this debate were rehearsed in Ferguson and Golding 1997. Kellner dismissively refers to the earlier debate as "futile" as most of the participants "talked past each other and often substituted personal attacks for discussion" (Kellner 1997: 120). See McLennan 1998a for a survey of the increasingly heated nature of the sociology versus cultural studies debates; see also the essays collected in Long 1997, particularly the chapters by Steven Seidman and Richard Johnson. A convincing response to the criticisms leveled at cultural studies *vis-à-vis* sociology can be found in Morley 1998; see also McRobbie 1999.

4 This is of course a minor, but slightly amusing, occupational hazard for those early inter/multidisciplinary cultural studies scholars who now find themselves elevated through the higher education structure to senior positions, but sometimes within institutions that have not kept pace with the disciplinary changes. Simon Frith, for example, noted his surprise and embarrassment during his inaugural lecture at now being a "Professor of English," even though "I haven't studied English formally since I did O levels" (quoted in Wolff 1999: 499).

5 Such criticisms are not new. Hall, for example, recalls the "blistering attack specifically from sociology" (1980: 21) which was directed at the CCCS, when it was first

opened in 1964, in an attempt to seemingly put cultural studies in its place: "the opening of the Centre was greeted by a letter from two social scientists who issued a sort of warning: if Cultural Studies overstepped its proper limits and took on the study of contemporary society (not just its texts), without 'proper' scientific (that is quasi-scientific) controls, it would provoke reprisals for illegitimately crossing the territorial boundary" (ibid.).

6 It is significant, in this context, that Parsons, in his structural-functionalist approach to sociology, had such difficulty incorporating the types of phenomenological-sociological investigations of urban culture and everyday life that concerned Simmel, which would later be more fully explored by cultural studies, something which Turner here glosses over – see Levine 2000 on Parsons' difficulties with aspects of Simmel's sociology.

7 Or as Gilroy forcefully puts it: "In the field of Sociology, as in many other places, there is a very strong current of resentment which suggests that all of these arguments around culture and its complexities were things that were already known and already practised by Sociologists. I think that's bullshit, but it's very interesting that this position represents itself as common sense . . . What is more of an immediate issue for me is the kind of culturalisation, a novel sensitivity to the workings of culture that has been evident in the implosion and collapse of Sociology as a discipline. This disciplinary predicament has produced a political battle around culture and its workings" (Smith 1999: 18).

8 Some may object to these examples, pointing out that Giddens largely fails to develop any sophisticated analysis of the place of culture *per se*, and indeed that the chapter on Williams is one of the shortest in the book. Further, the first section of Gouldner's opening chapter is actually called "Sociology as Popular Culture," and certainly not a Sociology *of* Popular Culture, clearly a different thing. There are indeed no textual readings of popular culture to be found in either book. That said, both do open up the possibility at least for more sociologically informed analyses of culture and popular culture.

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