

B. AUBREY FISHER MEMORIAL LECTURE

**CULTURAL STUDIES:
What's in a Name?**

**LAWRENCE GROSSBERG
University of North Carolina**

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I'm honored to be here and I'm happy to be back at the University of Utah where, ten years ago, a graduate student's question gave rise to what was subsequently to become one of my most cited articles, "Strategies of Marxist Cultural Interpretation." When Len Hawes invited me to do the Aubrey Fisher Memorial Lecture, I must admit that my first thoughts were a bit uncertain. I wondered what Aub would have thought of my using this space for a lecture on cultural studies. After all, this was not exactly his area. But then I began to remember my own experiences of Aub. I remembered that he was one of the earliest and most forthright supporters of the then newly formed Philosophy of Communication interest group in the International Communication Association, the first home for cultural studies in our discipline, and one of the first in the country, and I remembered the warm and generous encouragement, usually over drinks, that he gave me and my work in cultural studies. So, I thought, maybe the link between Aub and cultural studies is there and I'm just not looking in the right place. And then it struck me. Aub was a devoted teacher, someone who believed in the importance of education and in the fragile power of the student/teacher relationship.

What some of you may not know is that cultural studies, at least in its British configuration, emerged in a pedagogical rather than a scholarly context and was shaped by a particular pedagogical project. The founding figures of British cultural studies started their careers in what in England is called extramural teaching. At the time, these schools, often associated with universities, offered the equivalent of college courses to populations which were actively excluded from English higher education: women, working classes, and minorities. It was here that Raymond Williams, Richard Hoggart, E.P. Thompson, Stuart Hall and others began to ask questions

about culture and power, began to ask questions about the ways in which culture matters to different people. It was here that cultural studies had its birth in England, and it was here that one of the founding insights of cultural studies was first given voice. Raymond Williams put it by saying that the real power in a classroom is the power to define the questions, and, by asking questions, to challenge the comfortable boundaries of the teacher's own disciplinary competencies. That is the power, in a way, that cultural studies asks us to give up as teachers: the power to ask the questions. And, in a way, it was Aub's willingness to give up that power, to recognize that new questions have to be encouraged, that made him an exemplary teacher and someone willing to grant cultural studies its place in the discipline and the classroom. Finally, before beginning, I want to apologize for the overly sermonic tone of my comments; I am afraid the tone is overdetermined by the occasion and the particular argument that I wish to make.

I

One might describe cultural studies these days as the Generation X of the academic world. Like the post-baby boom generation that is referenced in this odd phrase (which yet refuses or is unable to name it), everyone is talking about it but no one seems to know what it is. Lots of people are suddenly claiming to do it while others, nervous about its rather sudden success, are attacking it. Whatever one thinks about it, success seems to be an appropriate description of the history of cultural studies since 1983. Meaghan Morris, the leading figure in Australian cultural studies, has described it as an academic boom. But the problem is that the more successful cultural studies becomes, the less clear it is what cultural studies is. So it may seem reasonable to start by trying to define cultural

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studies, but that is more difficult than it sounds, not only because I am opening myself up to the charge of policing the boundaries, but also because it is, in some way, precisely the difficulty of defining cultural studies that is a key to understanding what it is. Probably no two cultural studies people would agree on a definition. And some of you who think of your work as cultural studies may not recognize yourself in my description; you may not agree with me. But I would like to argue that cultural studies can be defined in a way, that is not so broad as to encompass any study of culture or even any critical approach to culture. It is not equivalent to "critical theory," a term which was used to describe the various theoretical positions that have entered the U.S. academy during the past 25 years. Cultural studies has been influenced by many of these positions: structuralism, post-structuralism, certain traditions in feminism, marxism, and post-modernism, but it is not identified with any of them or with the field of theory in general.

On the other hand, cultural studies is not so narrow as to be identified with a specific paradigm or tradition. There is no one theory or history of cultural studies. The result is that while it is always necessary to ask, Is that cultural studies? What should cultural studies be?, it is never quite clear, even to those of us practicing it, how we are supposed to answer the question. In the past decade, cultural studies has appeared in a wide range of disciplines. And those disciplines—anthropology, sociology, history, literary criticism, women's studies, Black and ethnic studies, etc., in addition to communication and education, have often put something into it, changing its shape and offering new versions of cultural studies. At the same time, cultural studies has appeared in a wide variety of national and ethnic contexts which have also brought different intellectual histories to the task of shaping their own versions of cultural studies.

If there is not a single tradition of cultural studies, it is I think still true to say that British cultural studies is, at least for the moment, central to many of the discussions of cultural studies. It is not that British cultural studies defines an orthodoxy, or that it is in some sense the correct version, but rather, that it has exemplified some important aspects of cultural studies, its practice and its project. And it is, in contemporary discussions, often a common reference point, a common language, across disciplines and tradi-

tions. But even here, when talking about British cultural studies, we have to be careful not to over-simplify the history or the state of cultural studies in Britain. There never was a singular thing called British cultural studies. There never even was a thing called the position of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at Birmingham, which is often mythically and sometimes nostalgically seen as the location of the origin of British cultural studies. There has never been homogeneity and agreement in cultural studies. Even at the Centre, there were always different and sometimes competing, powerfully invested, positions and projects. The differences were both theoretical and political, and they often led to highly charged, emotionally difficult debates. Consequently, even the best histories of the Centre, or of British cultural studies, that have been written manage at best to describe what John Clark calls the diversity that won. There are always voices that were part of the discussion that have been excluded (or that have excluded themselves).

It seems clear that the traditional ways of defining disciplines won't help us understand cultural studies. It cannot be defined by some particular set of objects. It is not—and unfortunately it is too often being used this way—merely an excuse for disciplines to take on new, usually popular cultural objects. Too many people in traditional disciplines seem to think that when they start writing about television, or rock music, etc., they are doing cultural studies. Cultural studies is not defined by an object; you can do cultural studies of almost anything. Nor can it be defined by a particular set of methods (although cultural studies does give any method its own particular inflection and I am convinced that if cultural studies is to develop responsibly, we need to find ways to make our methods more rigorous). Actually, later I will qualify this description but, for the moment, we can say that, often, the objects and methods of cultural studies are taken from the disciplines within which cultural studies is located, if only as an institutional fact.

II

What can we say then about the field of cultural studies? We can say that cultural studies is interested in the relationship between culture and power, although I want to leave those three terms—relations, culture, and power—undefined for the moment. But cultural studies does not reduce culture to power,

nor does it claim that particular relations of power are somehow inherent in, or intrinsic to, specific cultural texts, practices, or relations; rather, it claims that that relationship, however contingent and historical it may be, is its focus. Moreover, it tends to look at culture itself as the site of the production and struggle over power.

One can understand this, perhaps, by looking at the difference between the emergence of cultural studies in Britain and the U.S., both of which were intimately bound up with the particular historical and biographical conditions of its authors. In the U.S., the notion of an American cultural studies is traced back to the work of the Chicago School of Social Thought (which, while giving rise to theories of sociology and social psychology, failed to explicitly develop a cultural studies). To oversimplify, the Chicago School emerged around the turn of the twentieth century, during a period of rapid modernization (connecting the various parts of the country together, and the country with the world), urbanization and immigration. The central experience of the Chicago School, most literally embodied in John Dewey, was the move from (oppressive) New England towns to Chicago, where, ironically, they then mourned the disappearance of community in America. The problem was to find a way to reconstitute community in the nation, in the form of the Great Community. The solution depended upon identifying culture with community and communication; the three terms were taken as equivalent processes. The solution was to foster and expand upon common culture through communication. But this depended upon the assumption that power, that which prevented the process from working, was an extrinsic factor in the relationship, which had to be and could be eliminated. Culture was entirely processual and existed somehow independently of power.

The British context of cultural studies was very different. The question was not the historical loss of community for, as Raymond Williams would write later in his life, "There is more real community in the modern village than at any period in the remembered past."¹ The context immediately after the Second World War did pose a significant social challenge, often understood as the impending threat of Americanization (which was not quite simply another expression of mass society theory). But the terms within which the question of culture was posed were less those

of a perceived social crisis than of a personal experience, immediate and deeply felt, of a distance between community and culture. That distance was the result of spatial and social mobility, as, for example, Raymond Williams and Richard Hoggart moved from, respectively, a Welsh farming village and working class Leeds, to Oxbridge. At Oxbridge, they found that the intellectual world denied not merely the quality but the very existence of a culture in the communities from which they had come. Williams described his own experience of this distance as "that border country so many of us have been living in: between custom and education, between work and ideas, between love of place and an experience of change,"² and he adds a bit further on, "between fellow-feeling and intelligence, between class and knowledge." The distance between culture as community (labor, family, sentiment, etc.) and culture as knowledge defined the problem of living between cultures and the need for a lived or knowable community, the need to find "a position, convincingly experienced, from which community can begin to be known."³ Culture then defined a problem of place and belonging or participation; it was the mediation between social position and experienced identity. Or to put it in different terms, that distance was measured in the movement within the class structures of England; hence, culture was not equated to community and communication. There was never an idealized image of culture.⁴ Nor was power seen as something external, eliminatable, a mere interruption of cultural practices. Instead, they began with the notion that power always fractures culture. Hence, culture was always more than just a process, for it involved struggles between competing sets of practices and relations, and that sense of struggle meant that it was inevitably tied up with relations of power.

Hence, and I take this to be a defining characteristic of cultural studies, the notion of culture itself remains necessarily ambiguous and ambivalent and in that sense, undefinable. It always means more than one thing. It is the ambiguity which Raymond Williams traces back to the origins of modern thinking where culture served both as description of the changes resulting from modernization, and a normative term by which those changes could be judged. Yet there is a second dimension of ambiguity that Williams identifies in the notion of culture: it is, on the one hand, a set of specialized practices (emphasized no doubt because of the literary roots of British

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cultural studies, roots which affirmed the fact that culture matters) and on the other, a whole way of life. Cultural studies has always tried to operate within this doubly productive tension.⁵

Because the field of culture is always changing, because in this fractured relationship marked by power, culture is always contested and struggled over, precisely because of that, as Stuart Hall says, it does matter in any particular context how cultural studies is defined.⁶ Or, to use Cornel West's terms, cultural studies matters because it is about how to keep political work alive in an age of shrinking possibilities.⁷ Consequently, it is necessary to repeat the fact that cultural studies is always open—not just with regard to disciplines, traditions and genealogies, not just with regard to objects, methods, theories and politics—because culture, power and the relations between them are always changing. Thus, while it is the case that there is no single answer to the question, what is cultural studies, it is still necessary to constantly define it because it does matter what it is, and not everything is cultural studies. The answer can only be given in, simultaneously, political and institutional terms, the latter questioning the conditions of possibility of cultural studies at any moment. Insofar as one is attempting to sort out and distribute particular positions, one can only describe it as what Stuart Hall, following Antonio Gramsci, the Italian marxist, calls a unity-in-difference, the bringing together of different positions in some sort of a common project.⁸ Cultural studies is a network of political and discursive alliances, a discursive space constituted by certain trajectories which enables certain kinds of analyses and knowledges.

III

Let me turn my attention, then, to try to say something about this sense of a common project. I think it is possible to describe cultural studies as a certain kind of intellectual practice, a certain style of doing intellectual work, a certain way of embodying the belief that what we do can actually matter. It is a way of inhabiting our positions as scholars, teachers, and intellectuals, a way of politicizing theory and theorizing politics. As an intellectual practice, cultural studies means to disturb and make uncomfortable the traditional ways of doing academic work and the structures of institutionalization, evaluation, and disciplinization that have organized traditional academic practices. This explains one of the most common ways cultural studies is de-

scribed: it is interdisciplinary. By interdisciplinary, I mean to say that it operates at "the frontiers of intellectual life," that it pushes "for new questions, new models, and new ways of study."⁹ Cultural studies cannot avoid a question—say the economic determinations operating—because economics is outside its disciplinary purview. Someone in cultural studies can't use their disciplinary competencies to define (and limit) the questions they are willing to take on, merely where they can begin. I do not mean to say that cultural studies does not exist in disciplines; it is precisely the tension that I think makes it so productive. But too often in the American academy, interdisciplinarity is taken to mean either that you do basically what you have been doing but now, you add some footnotes to sources, usually theoretical, from outside the discipline; or alternatively, it is taken to mean that you do basically what you have been doing but now, you surround it with allusions or information, taken from outside the discipline, to features of the context (usually historical or economic). Cultural studies says that interdisciplinarity work takes work. Let me use an example that Meaghan Morris has recently discussed:¹⁰ the wide spread tendency among cultural critics to quote a single economic source, such as the economic geographer David Harvey's widely discussed *The Condition of Postmodernity*. Harvey gives an economic analysis of the global conditions of capitalism. What Morris points to is the tendency of cultural critics to use Harvey's theories as if they were obvious or commonly accepted. It would be like someone from literature deciding that they need something from communication theory and so, they go off and read someone, probably someone that a colleague has told them about (or perhaps a colleague). And then they quote that person as if they were confident that it is "state of the art" or common sense within the discipline. In fact, a little research in the field of economics will convince anyone that there is as little or even less agreement among economists than there is among communications scholars. Economists disagree about almost everything, even the size of the national debt, as well as its significance. Yet we tend to assume that we can go to a historian, to an economist, to a sociologist, take their description and that makes our work interdisciplinary. Again, interdisciplinarity demands work. You have to become an economist in some sense but you have to

do it differently because doing economics within cultural studies has to be different since it too must be interdisciplinary. In a sense you have to invent for yourself how to do what other fields are already trying to do—hence, the common statement that we are making cultural studies up as we go along. In that sense, as Richard Johnson describes it, cultural studies' interdisciplinarity is an aggressive counterdisciplinary logic.¹¹ It involves taking projects and questions seriously enough to do the work of exploring and explaining the relationships between culture and economy, history, gender relations, social institutions, etc. It involves doing the work to map out the connections to see how those connections are being made and where they can be fought over. This interdisciplinarity is absolutely necessary because cultural studies does not believe that culture can be explained in purely cultural terms, nor does it believe that everything is culture; rather, it believes that culture can only be understood in terms of its relations to everything that is not culture. We must be careful, however, as Tony Bennett has pointed out,¹² not to assume that cultural studies is better than the traditional disciplines because it is somehow more totalizing while they are merely partial. Cultural studies recognizes its own partiality but it constitutes it differently.

Sometimes, interdisciplinarity is taken to mean that cultural studies cannot have discipline in the sense of rigor, that it cannot have reading lists, etc., for after all, these are usually defined only within disciplines. At this point, let me quote one of my favorite passages from Stuart Hall:¹³

Cultural studies' message is a message for academics and intellectuals but, fortunately, for many other people as well. In that sense I have tried to hold together in my own intellectual life, on the one hand the conviction and passion and the devotion to objective interpretation, to analysis, to rigorous analysis and understanding, to the passion to find out, and to the production of knowledge that we did not know before. But, on the other hand, I am convinced that no intellectual worth his or her salt and no university that wants to hold up its head in the face of the 21st century, can afford to turn dispassionate eyes away from the problem... understand what keeps making the lives we live and the societies we live in, profoundly

and deeply antihumane.

There is, in this statement, a very real commitment to knowledge, to rigor, and to intellectual discipline, to knowing more than "the other side," as Gramsci put it. Just as cultural studies as an intellectual practice is neither monolithic nor pluralistic, so too, it is neither authoritarian nor relativist, neither universalist nor particularist. It recognizes that knowledge is inseparable from power and yet, it asserts that the truth and authority of knowledge have to be maintained in the contemporary world. Cultural studies then can be described as a practice which attempts to maintain authority in the face of relativism.¹⁴

The above quote from Hall points to another feature of the intellectual practice that is cultural studies: it operates with a particular relationship between its theoretical work and the historical context in which it is working. Again, let me quote Stuart Hall:¹⁵

In thrusting onto the attention of scholarly reflection and critical analysis the hurly burley of a rapidly changing, discordant and disorderly world, in insisting that academics sometimes attend the practical life where everyday social change exists out there, cultural studies tries, in its small way, to insist on what I want to call the vocation of the intellectual life. That is, cultural studies insists on the necessity to address the central, urgent and disturbing questions of a society and a culture in the most rigorous intellectual way we have available.

Or, to quote Raymond Williams' description of the pedagogical project of cultural studies, it involves "taking the best we can in intellectual work and going with it in this very open way to confront people for whom it is not a way of life, for whom it is not in all probability a job, but for whom it is a matter of their own intellectual interest, their own understanding of the pressures on them, pressures of every kind, from the most personal to the most broadly political."¹⁶

Let me try to explain this idea in greater detail, for I think it is another characteristic of cultural studies. Cultural studies is first of all interventionist, not in the sense that it intends to leave the realm of intellection and carry its practice to the streets as it were. Rather, it is interventionist insofar as it is not theory driven. It does not take its questions from its theory or from its disciplines but

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rather from its own sense (admittedly, perhaps commonsensical) of its historical context and the political questions and possibilities at stake. Raymond Williams said, as I noted at the beginning of my remarks, that the real power is to ask the questions. Cultural studies begins by allowing the world outside the academy to ask the questions of us as intellectuals. Second, for cultural studies, theory is always a response to specific questions and specific contexts; it is measured, it's truth and validity judged, by its ability to give us a better understanding of the context, to open up new, at least imagined, possibilities for changing that context. Thus, in a sense, cultural studies refuses to let theory let it off the hook. If someone's theory tells them the answers in advance, because their theory travels with them across any and every context, I do not think they are doing cultural studies. They may be doing interesting and important work, and their answers may offer important truths.¹⁷ But there is little possibility of surprise or discovery here. Theory and context are mutually constituted in cultural studies.

In that sense, you can not take a theory in cultural studies—for example British subculture theory developed in the 1970s of Hall's theory of Thatcherism as a hegemonic formation developed in the 1980s—and simply move it to a different context and apply it as if it could work there. Theory and context determine each other. And consequently, as we shall see, its anti-essentialism is always contextual and political, rather than epistemological (as in post-structuralism). But this does not mean that cultural studies is anti-theoretical; on the contrary, cultural studies is absolutely theoretical. It is absolutely committed to the necessity of theoretical work, to what Karl Marx called the detour through theory. It does not assume that the questions offered to the intellectual by the historical context render that context available in some directly empirical way. Theory is necessary to gain a better understanding of the context because the context itself has in part already been constructed by theory, or at least by cultural practices, which is not to say of course that the context is in any way reducible to our theoretical or cultural constructions.

What is perhaps most radical here is that cultural studies has a similar relationship to politics and political struggle. Cultural studies believes that politics is contextually specific. The sites, goals, and forms of struggle must be understood contextually. One

can not simply assume that because a certain kind of political struggle made sense in the 1980s it will make sense in the 1990s. One can not assume that because a certain kind of political struggle made sense in England it will make sense in America. But politics, too, must be understood theoretically. Cultural studies demands that we take a certain distance from the existing constituencies of politics. For example, while it may be very reasonable to start with questions of identity in contemporary American politics, it does not follow that we must end up with some form of a politics of identity. Cultural studies proposes that we take a flexible, somewhat pragmatic or strategic and often modest approach to political programs and possibilities. It believes that culture always has effects but its effects are always difficult to find. Similarly, it believes that, as a cultural practice, it has effects but they too will similarly be difficult to identify. Further, it believes that one can always find possibilities for changing any context. In that sense, cultural studies is motivated by a desire to maintain some ground for optimism in the face of overwhelming and quite reasonable pessimism that confronts anyone looking at the contemporary world. Cultural studies critics are fond of quoting Gramsci: "pessimism of the intellect, optimism of the will." What's the point of being so pessimistic that you can not find the will to begin to struggle? On the other hand, what's the point of being so optimistic that you can not find a reason to struggle against the existing structures of power? Thus, while cultural studies often constructs "images of strength, courage, and the will to survive,"¹⁸ and even resist, in the face of overpowering hostility, while it is concerned with people's everyday lives, it does not erase that hostility or the systems of domination that produce it. While it refuses to assume that people are, or to treat them as, cultural dopes, it does not deny that they are often cultural dupes. This is a crucial misunderstanding, I think. If you assume people are so stupid, cultural dopes, that they have no idea of what is being done to them, then, what's the point of education or critical work after all? Moreover, it's probably not the best way to try to organize political change—to start off by telling people that they're too stupid to understand what's happening to them, that they don't understand their own best interests. That does not mean cultural studies doesn't believe people are often duped by contemporary culture, that they

are lied to and sometimes, for a variety of reasons, they either don't know it or refuse to admit it. But above all, cultural studies assumes that power is complex and contradictory and is committed to struggling with and within that complexity. For it is committed to contestation, both as a possible fact of reality, not in every instance, but as a possibility that has to be searched for, and as a description of its own strategic practice. For cultural studies, the world is a field of struggle, a balance of forces, and intellectual work must understand the balance and find ways of challenging and changing it.

IV

I might sum up and extend what I have said about the way cultural studies approaches its "vocation of the intellectual" by suggesting that the practice of cultural studies is radically contextualist. Let me quote here from what is perhaps the classic work of British cultural studies: *Policing the Crisis*, a collective work which first predicted the rise of a new conservative hegemony—Thatcherism. However, *Policing the Crisis* starts off by investigating a specific empirical phenomenon in the 1970s: the appearance of an apparently new crime in England called mugging, and its discovery, not only by the British press but by various state agencies as well. Not surprisingly, according to the press, mugging was a black on white crime. *Policing the Crisis* is largely an account of the social construction of this reality through an analysis of the practices of news production and their relations to institutions and structures of social control. I want to read a quote about how they describe the object of their study—mugging.¹⁹

There are, we argue, clear historical forces at work in this period, shaping so to speak, from the outside, the immediate transactions on the ground between "muggers," potential muggers, their victims, and their apprehenders. In many comparable studies, these larger and wider forces are merely noted and cited; their direct and indirect bearing on the phenomenon analysed is, however, left vague and abstract—part of "the background." In our case, we believe that these so-called "background issues" are indeed, exactly the critical forces which produce "mugging" in the specific form in which it appears.

That is, what they argued was that the very notion of mugging, its existence as a material and cultural form, could not be defined independently of its existence within the context. An event or practice (even a text) does not exist apart from the forces of the context that constitute it as what it is. Obviously here, context is not merely background but the very conditions of possibility of something. It cannot be relegated to a series of footnotes or to an after-thought, relegated to the first or last chapter. It is precisely what one is trying to analyze and it is the most difficult thing to construct. It is not the beginning, but the end of cultural studies, although we might say that it is also the beginning because it is the source of our questions. In this sense, the context is not something empirically given to us beforehand; it has to be defined by our project, by the political question that is at stake. The context can be as narrow as a neighborhood at a particular moment, or Salt Lake City now, or perhaps even some local high school that is having race problems, or it can be as broad as global capitalism after the Cold War.

This contextualism affects every dimension of cultural studies. It affects its theory, which as I've said, must be related not only to its historical context but to its institutional context as well, and it affects its politics. It affects the most fundamental concepts that define the discourse of cultural studies, which now cannot be defined outside the particular context or field of study and struggle: concepts of culture, cultural text and cultural practice; concepts of power and the dimensions along which it is structured—race, gender, sex, class, ethnicity, generation, etc.; and even the form of the relationship between culture and power. The very relationship between culture and society is itself contextually specific—the product of power and hence, they cannot be assumed to transcend particular contexts. Consequently, the commonly held belief that cultural studies is necessarily a theory of ideology, of representation, identity and subjectivity is mistaken. While it is true that cultural studies, along with other critical discourses, has struggled to put these questions on to the agenda, it has never asserted that those are the only effects that cultural practices can have or that they are always the only relevant questions to be asked. There is no guarantee that, in a particular context, culture works as ideology or that the task of cultural studies is to somehow map aesthetics onto the social. That is part of

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what one must discover. To put it another way, the very questions cultural studies asks—its problematics—potentially change in every study. The problematic of one cultural studies investigation is not the same as that of another. But, to reemphasize something I said earlier, it is important to recognize that such a radical contextualism does not entail a commitment to relativism, at least for cultural studies. Cultural studies, while it has no pretensions to totality or universality, does seek to give a better understanding of where we are so we can get somewhere else, hopefully somewhere better; I leave open the question of what is better and how one decides, as well as the question of who "we" are.

Thus, if I were to define the object of cultural studies, I would say it is contexts; cultural studies is a political theory of contexts.²⁰ It is a theory of how contexts are made, unmade, and remade. This is precisely what cultural studies tries to intervene into. It is about the possibilities for remaking the context where context is always understood as a structure of power. But the very structure of the context is precisely where one must go to locate the power that is operating since contexts do not exist independently of power. And if I can define its object as context, perhaps I can define its method as articulation. Articulation is a particular position in what has been, for many years, a major debate within contemporary cultural and political theory. Perhaps more accurately, articulation is a way of strategically avoiding this debate. Let me lay out the terms of this argument. On the one hand, essentialism assumes that things are the way they are because they have to be that way. That is, relationships in history, the relationships that constitute history, are guaranteed, inevitable, intrinsic to the related elements. To be a woman is to have certain experiences. To be black means to have come from Africa. A book has its own proper and correct meaning. The real-intrinsic and essential-interests of the working class define an inevitable relationship between the working class and socialism. The production or origin of something already defines its possibilities—so, for example, something made within a capitalist mode of production is inevitably a commodity and hence, inevitably alienating and fetishized. Or, the ideology of a text produced by capitalists is necessarily capitalist. In essentialist positions, the answers are guaranteed and everything is sewn up in advance. Identities are fixed. Effects are determined before they are even produced, because all the important re-

lations in history are necessary, i.e., necessarily the way they are.

On the other hand, anti-essentialism says there are necessarily no relationships. Relations are an illusion; it is their very appearance that is the product of power, and hence, the only response to a relation is to deconstruct it, to get rid of it, to deny it. A text has no meaning and there are no limits to what it can mean. Perhaps it means whatever a reader wants it to mean. Being a woman has no shared meaning; it does not entail any common experience. And hence, for example, it is difficult to know on what grounds one could organize a "women's movement." There are no relationships in history. Not only are origins (such as capitalist modes of production) not determining, they are themselves not real. The text does whatever it does. The working class has no common interests, and certainly no special relation to socialism (or the Left).

Both of these theoretical positions can be found everywhere in the discourses of cultural theory and criticism. But cultural studies takes neither of those positions; it operates in the space between them. It is politically—strategically—anti-essentialist but it is also anti-anti-essentialist. It says, there are relationships in history but they are not necessary. They did not have to be that way but, given that they are that way, they are real and they have real effects. A text does not have to mean what it seems to mean to 90% of the people who read it. But in fact it does mean that to 90% of the people who read it because the relationship between those words and that meaning has been produced. Those words, that text, have been articulated to that meaning. The working class does not have intrinsic and essential interests which it carries across contexts and over time, but at any moment, it does have interests. Certain interests are articulated to and taken up by the working class. There is nothing essential about the relationship between labor and socialist parties; they certainly did not have to vote Labor or Democrat. It is not intrinsic to being a worker that you think think the Labour Party or the Democrats represent your interests—but for the past fifty years or so, that relationship was real and effective. And now we can understand what Reagan and Thatcher did was not to dupe the working classes into misunderstanding their own interests but to break (disarticulate) the relationship and to create (rearticulate) a new one. That is artic-

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made,
unmade and
remade."**

ulation—the making of a relationship out of a nonrelationship or more often, the making of one relationship out of a different one. It assumes that there are no necessary relations, but relations are real and have real effects.

Hence, a context can be understood as the relationships that have been made by the operation of power, in the interests of certain positions of power. And the struggle to change the context involves the struggle to understand those relations, to locate those relations which can be disarticulated and to then struggle to rearticulate them. To use the most simple and in some sense the most powerful example, the civil rights movement's attempt to say that black is not evil, that Black is beautiful was an attempt to redefine a relationship, to rearticulate it into a different relationship. You will remember, I hope, that I began this paper by saying that cultural studies has to be multiple and changing because the contexts—and within them, the political stakes and potential or actual struggles—are always fluid, multiple, and contradictory. In that sense cultural studies involves learning, as political intellectuals, to live with the complexity, to live with the contradictions, to live with the tensions. It demands that we not reduce reality to the simple terms of any single theory. Cultural studies struggles within the space between, on the one hand, absolute containment, closure, complete and final understanding, total domination, and, on the other hand, absolute freedom and possibility, openness, open-endedness. It believes, with Marx, that people make history but in conditions not of their own making. For cultural studies, contextualism is a model—not only of the social formations of power, but also of its own practice. We can now understand this position, this space, as the commitment to articulation. And articulation is the most basic sense of method operating within cultural studies.²¹ Articulation is the methodological face of a radically contextualist theory of contexts. This means, among other things, that cultural studies is not simply a theory of communication, and that the model of encoding and decoding cannot be universalized for it was, after all, a theoretical response to a specific context and a specific political question. Even the earliest statements of British cultural studies distance themselves from a communicational model of cultural studies. Here I might mention Raymond Williams' famous description of cultural studies as the study of all relations between all of the elements in a

whole way of life. While this is admittedly a romantic ideal of totalization, it points, along with Williams' notion of a structure of feeling, to his radical commitment to contextualism: a text could only be understood by locating it with a structured set of contextual relations. Similarly, Richard Hoggart argued that cultural studies is not concerned with what people do with a text but with what relations the complex text has to the imaginative life of its readers.²² In my own terms, again, cultural studies is about understanding the possibilities for remaking contexts, the very structures of which are the product of relations of and struggles over power.

V

At this point, it may be helpful to reiterate a few points about cultural studies which I have only hinted at previously. Again, I am not trying to describe a single paradigm of cultural studies but rather, a set of strategic tendencies which follow on from its commitment to contextualism, contexts and articulation. First, cultural studies views cultural practices as the site of the intersection of many possible effects. It does not start by defining culture or its effects, or by assuming ahead of time the relevant dimensions within which to describe particular practices. Instead, they are places where different things can and do happen, where different possibilities intersect.²³ Second, cultural studies has a particular view of power according to which: power is complex and contradictory; and it is organized in complex ways, along multiple axes and dimensions which cannot be reduced to one another. You cannot explain gender or sexual relationships through economic and class relationships but you cannot explain economic and class relationships through gender and sexual relationships either. If you change gender and sexual relationships, there is no guarantee that you will change class relationships, and if you change class relationships there is no guarantee that you will change gender and sexual relations. Power is, unfortunately, more complex than we might like. But to be optimistic, power is never totally effective, it never quite accomplishes what it might like to, and there is always the possibility of changing the structures and organization of power.

Third, cultural studies is often presented as a theory of popular culture; while cultural studies has often and continues to talk about popular culture for a variety of reasons, such a view fundamentally misunderstands that, for cultural studies, the popular refers to a

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specific view of the relationship between people and power, to a view of where and how power is located in their lives. For cultural studies, the popular is a field of questions that demands that one examine how power works where people live their lives, in what is sometimes called everyday life. It is true that power operates in institutions and in the state, but what cultural studies is always interested in is how that power infiltrates, contaminates, and empowers the possibilities that people have to live their lives in dignified and secure ways. For if one wants to change the relations of power, if one wants to move people, even a little bit, you must begin from where people are, from where and how they actually live their lives.

Fourth, cultural studies does not believe that you can understand the nature of culture and power by finding origins, by looking for some moment that guarantees the effects of culture. It rejects the notion that because a cultural text is produced as a commodity by capitalism you know ahead of time what its politics are. It rejects the notion that because a text is produced by a racist society you can know ahead of time what the effects of that text are. It rejects the notion that people have some authentic original experience that defines the truth against which power is an external mystifying divine force. Power is there for cultural studies from the very beginning. While it is nice to dream of eliminating power and ideology so that we could get back to some "true" experience as it existed before power reconstructed and misinterpreted it, that is not what power does nor how culture works. That's not how ideology operates. The most basic experiences you have, the things you believe most confidently because they are the most obvious, those are precisely what power and ideology have produced. That which you are sure you can not doubt, that is what you must doubt, because that is what power is most concerned to produce. What you know is there because you have seen it, is precisely what ideology and culture are making you see. We see black and white. We see male and female. We see that these matter, that they make a difference. That is what we are being made to see. But if we could challenge and change these structures of perception and experience, we would not get back to some original untainted truth; there is no such thing. There is no experience to which we can appeal as some kind of original justification for the political visions that we have. We can only struggle between different articulations of reality to find one

that is more humane for all people.

Finally, cultural studies is materialist. It refuses to reduce reality to culture or to any single dimension or domain of existence: biology, economics, state politics, social and sexual relations, culture—all are a part of human reality. While cultural studies might be seen as a version of "the social construction of reality," it does not believe reality is entirely constructed by our social and cultural practices, for there are material realities that are being struggled over in various ways, that are being articulated. Cultural studies believes that all the different forms of that reality, all of the different kinds of practices that human beings are shaped by have to be recognized. They can not be reduced to one another.

VI

I would like to conclude now by pointing to what I take to be two major problems facing cultural studies. I'm aware that my description of cultural studies here may seem—and probably is—rather idealistic. I'm not sure that anyone has ever actually done what I have described, but there are certainly scholars who have made the project comprehensible. But even the best writers in cultural studies have their problems, and I think they are serious and are only now beginning to be confronted. The first is simple to describe. Consider some of the statement incorporated into my presentation about how cultural studies addresses people, not only intellectuals and academics. Think of Raymond Williams' notion that cultural studies is a pedagogical project that we bring to people for whom these issues are real, personal and immediate concerns. Cultural studies has not succeeded in doing that very well. Antonio Gramsci said that there are two functions of the political intellectual: the first is to know more than the other side; the second is to share that knowledge. Whatever one may think of the production of knowledge in cultural studies, it remains largely an academic discourse encircled by its theoretical vocabulary. I do not mean to suggest that we as academics and intellectuals should give up that vocabulary. It is necessary to what we do. I find it ironic that we expect car mechanics to have a technical vocabulary, we expect astronomers and physicists to have a technical vocabulary, but we do not expect people describing what is probably the most complex phenomenon we know of, human society, to have a technical vocabulary. Such vocabularies are

necessary for a number of different reasons, which I will not go into here. But if our car mechanic fails to demonstrate the ability to use the appropriate technical vocabulary, we might reasonably question her or his competence. Of course, we would also like them to explain what is wrong in ways that do not require such competencies. Again, the problem is not the elitism of the vocabulary for it is necessary for the production of certain kinds of knowledge, productions which are, in a sense, always elitist. But production and distribution, however closely articulated, are not the same, and it is the second half of Gramsci's description that we have forgotten: to share that knowledge with people who want to do something with it. That, it seems to me, is the problem facing cultural studies. It is a problem facing us in communications perhaps more profoundly than in any other discipline, not only because communications is such an important political issue in the contemporary world, but also because we are the people who most directly deal with the media by which communication and education would have to be accomplished. And this will no doubt require reconstituting pedagogy in the face of such critical tasks as cultural studies poses. However, it should also be clear that there is no necessary reason why those charged with communicating knowledge have to be the same as those producing it; this is certainly one of the lessons that the New Right has taught us. Perhaps we need to think about educating a generation of students who are more comfortable with both sides of the political function or perhaps we need to think about educating and training students who consciously think of themselves as the translators of knowledge into the public realm: Is it not peculiar that we have journalists trained to report science, but none trained to report social and cultural knowledge?

The second problem is more serious and difficult. Recent work in postcolonial studies, and in certain traditions of cultural studies, has begun to challenge some of the most fundamental concepts and assumptions of cultural studies on the grounds that they are themselves implicated in particularly powerful structures and technologies of power. For example, Gauri Viswanathan has argued that there is a serious problem with the notion of culture as it is used in cultural studies and in particular as it was developed in the work of Raymond Williams.²⁴ Viswanathan challenges

the notion of English culture (and by extension, of any national culture) and argues that, in fact, significant aspects of the English culture of the 19th and 20th centuries were actually developed by the colonial regime in India (as forms of regulation and control) and then exported back to England (also as forms of regulation and control). For example, pedagogical practices that Williams assumes to have been constructed in the English educational system were actually developed as strategic weapons in the struggle to "civilize the colonized masses" and were then brought back to England in order to civilize the working masses. Eventually, they worked their way up into the middle class where they were not only normalized but nationalized as well. What became English culture was not English culture, but part of a global colonial culture that Williams has erased. The very complexity and contextuality that cultural studies is supposedly committed to has been ignored.

In fact, so many of the categories that we continue to use, not only in cultural studies but in cultural criticism more broadly—categories of the nation, culture, society, race, gender, identity, institutions—were, not coincidentally invented or significantly rearticulated at about the same time as the rise of modern society and modern systems of power. Culture, as Raymond Williams points out, was first used in a context outside of agriculture in the early 18th century with the rise of industrial society. As Paul Gilroy has argued, race itself as a category was invented in the 19th century.²⁵ To the extent that culture is always implicated in relations of power, then cultural studies has to begin to examine its own cultural categories. It has to question the concepts that have founded its own critical practices. It must begin to ask, to what extent are we as cultural studies analysts locked into the very systems of power that we are attempting to get out of because we use the cultural practices, categories and concepts of that system of power? There is no easy way out of this dilemma and I refuse to resign myself to it by saying that it is simply the fate of intellectuals. I think that is the lazy way. Instead, what is demanded of us is that we begin to accept the possibility that we can rearticulate (which is not to say escape) our own social and cultural determinations, that we can begin to rearticulate our cultural and historical identities, that we can challenge our inherited philosophical commonsense, in the name of the political struggles that must be carried on if we are to create a better world. •

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1. Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1973, p. 195.
2. Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1973, p. 197 and 207.
3. Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1973, p. ?.
4. This is not entirely accurate, since in Williams earlier theoretical writings, there is certainly an image of an idealized culture which depends upon the projection of a time when culture and community would be equivalent. In fact, the rhetoric of *The Long Revolution* is remarkably similar to that of John Dewey at times.
5. Thus, for example, James Carvey creates a cultural studies by bringing together the Chicago School, and the work of Harold Innis. Similarly, an anthropological cultural studies emerges when the anthropological model of culture is critiqued by, and juxtaposed with, emergent notions of culture in postcolonial studies.
6. Stuart Hall, "Cultural studies and its theoretical legacies," in Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson and Paula Treacher, eds., *Cultural Studies*, New York, Routledge, 1992.
7. Cornel West, quoted in Joel Pfister, "The Americanization of cultural studies," *Yale Journal of Criticism*, 4 (1991).
8. In this sense, cultural studies as a signifier may operate like, e.g., phenomenology. After all, every scholar certainly studies phenomena, but they are not all phenomenologists. Similarly many people study culture (even with a critical bent), but they are not necessarily doing cultural studies.
9. Stuart Hall, "Race, culture and communications: Looking backward and forward at cultural studies," *Rethinking Marxism*, 5-1 (1992).
10. Meaghan Morris, "The man in the mirror: David Harvey's condition of postmodernity," in Mike Featherstone, ed., *Cultural Theory and Cultural Change*, London, Sage, 1992.
11. Richard Johnson, "What is cultural studies anyway?," *Social Text*, 16 (1986/7).
12. Tony Bennett, "Being 'in the true' of cultural studies," *Southern Review*, 26-2 (1993).
13. Stuart Hall, "Race, culture and communication."
14. Here I must agree with Tony Bennett that the commitment to rigor and discipline is often contradicted in practice by what he describes as a "specific political technology of the intellectual"—charismatic authority. Such a technology conflates intellectual work and biographical like, so that someone's ideas are read and judged through their life, and their life is read and judged as the embodiment of their ideas. For Bennett, this is the result of the moral-aesthetic tradition out of which British cultural studies arose.
15. Stuart Hall, "Race, culture and communications."
16. Raymond Williams, "The future of cultural studies," in *The Politics of Modernism*, London, Verso, 1989.
17. I think this describes such important critics as Fred Jameson, discovering once again the class struggle (or the third world struggling against the colonizers), as well as a large number of identity critics discovering once again, apparently to their surprise, that the latest Hollywood production is sexist and racist.
18. David A. Bailey and Stuart Hall, "The critical decade," *Ten* 8, 2-3, 1992.
19. Stuart Hall, Chas Critcher, Tony Jefferson, John Clarke and Brian Roberts, *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State, and Law and Order*, New York, Holmes and Meier, 1978.
20. For cultural studies, the context might be better thought of as specific bits of everyday life, positioned between culture (as a specific body of practices) and social forces.
21. Cultural studies' methods vary widely. Sometimes, articulation is the only way to describe what the critic is doing. More often, however, the method is derived from another disciplinary methodology—ethnography, textual analysis, survey research—but the way it is enacted and interpreted changes significantly as a result of the commitment to articulation.
22. Richard Hoggart, "Contemporary cultural studies: An approach to the study of literature and society," Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies Occasional Paper, Birmingham, 1969.
23. John Frow and Meaghan Morris, "Introduction," John Frow and Meaghan Morris, eds. *Australian Cultural Studies*, Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 1993.
24. Gauri Viswanathan, "Raymond Williams and British Colonialism," *Yale Journal of Criticism*, 4-2 (1991).
25. Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1993.