Cultural Studies and its Theoretical Legacies

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This Conference provides us with an opportunity for a moment of self-reflection on cultural studies as a practice, on its institutional positioning, and what Lidia Curti so effectively reminds us is both the marginality and the centrality of its practitioners as critical intellectuals. Inevitably, this involves reflecting on, and intervening in, the project of cultural studies itself.

My title, "Cultural Studies and its Theoretical Legacies," suggests a look back to the past, to consult and think about the Now and the Future of cultural studies by way of a retrospective glance. It does seem necessary to do some genealogical and archaeological work on the archive. Now the question of the archive is extremely difficult for me because, where cultural studies is concerned, I sometimes feel like a tabula rasa, a spirit of the past resurrected, laying claim to the authority of an origin. After all, didn't cultural studies emerge somewhere at that moment when I first met Raymond Williams, or in the glance I exchanged with Richard Hoggart? In that moment, cultural studies was born; it emerged full grown from the head of the 1960s. I want to talk about the past, but definitely not in that way. I don't want to talk about British cultural studies (which is in any case a pretty awkward signifier for me) in a patriarchal way, as the keeper of the conscience of cultural studies, hoping to police you back into line with what it really was if only you knew. That is to say, I want to absolve myself of the many burdens of representation which people carry around—I carry around at least three. I'm expected to speak for the entire black race on all questions theoretical, critical, etc., and sometimes for British politics, as well as for cultural studies. This is what is known as the black person's burden, and I would like to absolve myself of it at this moment.

That means, paradoxically, speaking autobiographically. Autobiography is usually thought of as setting the authority of authenticity. But in order not to be authoritative, I've got to speak autobiographically. I'm going to tell you about my own take on certain theoretical legacies and moments in cultural studies, not because it is the truth or the only way of telling the history. I myself have told it many other ways before and I intend to tell it in a different way later. But just at this moment, for this conjecture, I want to take a position in relation to the "grand narrative" of cultural studies for the purposes of opening up some reflections on cultural studies as a practice, on our institutional position, and on its project. I want to do that by referring to some theoretical legacies or theoretical moments, but in a very particular way. This is not a commentary on the success or effectiveness of different theoretical positions in cultural studies (that is for some other occasion). It is an attempt to say something about what certain theoretical moments in cultural studies have been like for me, and from that position, to take some bearings about the general question of the politics of theory.
THEORETICAL LEGACIES

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

I entered cultural studies from the New Left, and the New Left always regarded Marxism as a problem, as trouble, as danger, not as a solution. Why? It had nothing to do with theoretical questions such as such or isolation. It had to do with the fact that my own (and its own) political formation occurred in a moment historically very much like the one we are in—namely, I was astonished that so few people have addressed—

the moment of the disintegration of a certain kind of Marxism. In fact, the first British New Left emerged in 1956 at the moment of the disintegration of an entire historical—

political project. In that sense I came into Marxism backwards against the Soviet tanks in Budapest, as it were. What I mean by that is certainly not that I wasn’t profundely and that cultural studies then wasn’t from the beginning, profoundly influenced by the questions that Marxism as a theoretical project put on the agenda: the power, the global reach and history-making capacities of capital; the question of class; the complex relationships between power, which is an easier term to establish in the discourses of culture than exploitation, and exploitation; the question of a general theory which could, in a critical way, connect together in a critical reflection different domains of life, politics and theory, theory and practice, economic, political, ideological questions, and so on; the notion of critical knowledge itself and the production of critical knowledge as a practice. These important, central questions are what one meant by working within shooting distance of Marxism, working on Marxism, working against Marxism, working with it, working to try to derive Marxism.

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

I want to suggest a different metaphor for theoretical work: the metaphor of struggle, of wrestling with the angels. The only theory worth having is that which you have to fight off, not that which you speak with profound fluency. I mean to say something later about the astonishing theoretical fluency of cultural studies now. But my own experience of theory—and Marxism is certainly a case in point—is of wrestling with the angels—a metaphor you can take as literally as you like. I remember wrestling with Althusser. I remember looking at the idea of “theoretical practice” in Reading Capital and thinking, “I’ve gone as far in this book as it is proper to go.” I felt, I will not give an inch to this profound misreading, this super-structuralist mistranslation, of classical Marxism, unless he beats me down, unless he defeats me in the spirit. He’ll have to march over me to convince me. I warned him, with to the death. A long, rambling piece I wrote (Hall, 1974) on Marx’s 1857 Introduction to The Grundrisse, in which I tried to stake out the difference between structuralism in Marx’s epistemology and Althusser’s, was only the tip of the iceberg of this long engagement. And that is not simply a personal argument. In the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, for five or six years, long after the asthma of the organic intellectual is that it appears to align intellectuals with an emerging historical movement and we couldn’t tell then, and can hardly tell now, where that emerging historical movement was to be found. We were organic intellectuals without any organic point of reference; organic intellectuals with a nostalgia or will or hope (to use Gramsci’s phrase from another context) that at some point we would be prepared in intellectual work for that kind of relationship, if such a conjuncture ever appeared. More truthfully, we were prepared to imagine or model or simulate such a relationship in its absence: “passivism of the intellect, optimism of the will.”

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

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

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

There were at least two interruptions in the work of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies: The first around feminism, and the second around questions of race. This is not an attempt to sum up the theoretical and political advances and consequences for British cultural studies of the feminist intervention; that is for another time, another place. But I don't want, either, to invoke that moment in an open-ended and casual way. For cultural studies (in addition to many other theoretical projects), the interruption of feminism was specific and decisive.

First, the feminist critical intervention of 1974 meant the first in quite concrete ways. First, the opening of the question of the personal as political, and its consequences for changing the object of study in cultural studies, was completely revolutionary in a theoretical and practical way. Second, the radical expansion of the notion of power, which had hitherto been very much developed within the framework of the notion of the public, the public domain, with the effect that we could not use the term power—as key to the earlier problematic of hegemony—in the same way. Third, the centrality of questions of gender and sexuality to the understanding of power itself.

Fourth, the opening of many of the questions that we thought we had abolished around the dangerous area of the subjective and the subject, which lodged those questions at the center of cultural studies as a theoretical practice. Fifth, the “re-opening” of the closed frontier between social theory and the theory of the unconscious—psychoanalysis. It's hard to describe the import of the opening of that new continent in cultural studies, marked out by the relationship—or rather, what Jacqueline Rose has called the as yet “unsettled relation” between feminism, psychoanalysis, and cultural studies, or indeed how it was accomplished.

We know it was, but it's not known generally how and where feminism first broke in. I use the metaphor deliberately: As the thief in the night, it broke in, interrupted, made an unreasoned noise, seized the time, crapped on the table of cultural studies. The title of the volume in which this dawn-raised first accomplished—Women Take Issue—is instructive: for they "took issue" in both senses—took over that year's book and initiated a quarrel. But I want to tell you something else about it. Because of the growing importance of feminist work and the resulting feminist movement outside, in the very early 1970s, many of us in the Centre—mainly, of course, men—thought it was time there was good feminist work in cultural studies. And we indeed tried to buy it, to attract good feminist scholars, you might expect, many of the women in cultural studies weren't terribly interested in this benign project. We were opening the door to feminist studies, being good, transformed men. And yet, when it broke in through the window, every single unsuspected resistance rose to the surface—installed patriarchal power, which believed it had disposed itself. There are no leaders here, we used to say; we are all graduate students and members of staff together.

learning how to practice cultural studies. You can decide whatever you want to decide, etc. And yet, when it came to the question of the reading list... Now that's where I really discovered about the gendered nature of power. Long, long after I was able to pronounce the words, I encountered the reality of Foucault's profound insight into the incipient mutual reciprocity of knowledge and power. Talking about giving up power is a radically different experience from being silenced. That is another way of thinking, and another metaphor for theory: the way feminism broke, and broke into, cultural studies.

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

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

Again, there is no space here to do more than begin to list the theoretical advances which were made by the encounters with structuralist, semiotic, and poststructuralist work: the crucial importance of language and of the linguistic metaphor to any study of culture; the expansion of the notion of text and textuality, both as a source of meaning, and as that which escapes and postpones meaning, the recognition of the heterogeneity, of the multiplicity, of meanings, of the struggle to close arbitrarily the infinite semiosis belonging to it, to attract good feminist scholars, you might expect, many of the women in cultural studies weren't terribly interested in this benign project. We were opening the door to feminist studies, being good, transformed men. And yet, when it broke in through the window, every single unsuspected resistance rose to the surface—installed patriarchal power, which believed it had disposed itself. There are no leaders here, we used to say; we are all graduate students and members of staff together.
there is no response to the question of what you say to someone who wants to know if they should take a drug and if that means they'll die two days later or a few months earlier? At that point, I think anybody who is into cultural studies seriously as an intellectual practice, must feel, on their pulse, its ephemeralism, its insignificance, how little the registers, how little we've been able to change anything or get anybody to do anything. If you don't feel that as one tension in the work that you are doing, theory has let you off the hook. On the other hand, in the end, I don't agree with the way in which this dilemma is often posed for us, for it is indeed a more complex and displaced question than just people dying out there. The question of AIDS is an extremely important terrain of struggle and contestation. In addition to the people we know who are dying, or have died, or will, there are the many people dying who are never spoken of. How could we say that the question of AIDS is not also a question of who gets represented and who does not? AIDS is the site at which the advance of sexual politics is being rolled back. It's a site at which not only people will die, but desire and pleasure will also die if certain metaphors do not survive, or survive in the wrong way. Unless we operate in this tension, we don't know what cultural studies can do, can't, can never do; but also, what it has to do, what it alone has a privileged capacity to do. It has to analyze certain things about the constitutive and political nature of representation itself, about its complexities, about the effects of language, about textuality as a site of life and death. Those are the things cultural studies can address.

I've used that example, not because it's a perfect example, but because it's a specific example, because it has a concrete meaning, because it challenges us in its complexity, and in doing has things to teach us about the future of serious theoretical work. It preserves the essential nature of intellectual work and critical reflection, the irreducibility of the insights which theory can bring to political practice, insights which cannot be arrived at in any other way. And at the same time, it rivets us to the necessary modesty of theory, the necessary modesty of cultural studies as an intellectual project. I want to end in two ways. First, I want to address the problem of the institutionalization of these two constructions: British cultural studies and American cultural studies. And then, drawing on the metaphors about theoretical work which I tried to launch (not I hope by claiming authority or authenticity but in what inevitably has to be a polemical, positional, political way), to say something about how the field of cultural studies has to be defined.

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

Now, the question of theoretical fluency is a difficult and provoking metaphor, and I want only to say one word about it. Some time ago, looking at what one can only call the deconstructive deluge (as opposed to deconstructive turn) which had overtaken American literary studies, in its formalist mode, I tried to distinguish the extremely important theoretical and intellectual work which it had made possible in cultural studies from a mere repetition, a sort of mimicry or deconstructive ventriloquism which sometimes passes as a serious intellectual exercise. My fear at that moment was that if cultural studies gained in equivalent institutionalization in the American context, it would, in rather the same way, formalize out of existence the critical questions of power, history, and politics. Paradoxically, what I mean by theoretical fluency is exactly the reverse. There is no moment now, in American cultural studies, where we are not able, extensively and without end, to theorize power—politics, race, class, and gender, subjugation, domination, exclusion, marginality, Otherness, etc. There is hardly anything in cultural studies which isn’t so theorized. And yet, there is the nagging doubt that this overwhelming textualization of cultural studies’ own discourses somehow constitutes power and politics as exclusively matters of language and textuality itself. Now, this is not to say that I don’t think that questions of power and the political have to be and are always lodged within representations, that they are always discursive questions. Nevertheless, there are ways of constituting power as an easily floating signifier which just leaves the crude exercise and connections of power and culture altogether emptied of any signification. That is what I take to be the moment of danger in the institutionalization of cultural studies is this highly rarified and enormously elaborated and well-funded professionalization of American academic life. It is the American cultural studies making itself more like British cultural studies, which is, I think, an entirely false and empty cause to try to propound. I have specifically tried not to speak of the past in an attempt to police the present and the future. But I do want to extract, finally, from the narrative I have constructed of the past some guidelines for my own work and perhaps for some of yours.

I come back to the deadly seriousness of intellectual work. It is a deadly serious matter to come back to the critical distinction between intellectual work and academic work: they overlap, they abut with one another, they feed off one another, the one provides you with the means to do the other. But they are not the same thing. I come back to the difficulty of sustaining a genuine cultural and critical practice, which is intended to produce some kind of original intellectual political work, which does not try to inscribe itself in the overarching metamatter of achieved knowledges, within the institutions. I come back to theory and politics, the politics of theory. Not theory as the will to truth, but theory as a set of contested, localized, conjunctural knowledges, which have to be debated in a dialogical way. But also as a practice which always thinks about its intervention in a world in which it would make some difference, in which it would have some effect. Finally, a practice which understands the need for intellectual modesty. I do think there is all the difference in the world between understanding the politics of intellectual work and substituting intellectual work for politics.

**DISCUSSION: Stuart Hall**

**TOM PRASCH**: I wonder if you could talk a bit about *New Times* as an ongoing struggle within and around English Marxism and cultural studies?

**HALL**: *New Times* is the name of an intervention which a number of people made in the journal *Marxism Today* in a series of essays, partly on economic questions, partly on cultural questions. It could be read as an intersection between a radical political project and a selective number of themes in postmodernism. It takes on certain debates about the nature of the advanced capitalist economy, and about the nature and effect of global integration on that. More than that, it metaphorically renders the enormous breaks and caesuras going on around us in the political life of the world. It registers a series of "New Times" as the conjuncture in which we are living, and in which many of the maps and metaphors of the past, many of the theoretical paradigms that have come to be held in a rather doctrinal way, many of the political programs and strategies of reform are thrown open to inspection. Not tossed away, necessarily, but thrown open to inspection in a kind of critical reflection which, as it were, confesses that most of the time most of the people don’t quite know where they are or where they are going.

In this context, there are many different arguments, which I won’t go into, around whether "New Times" is only a sort of hint of the future, an attempt to read off from certain leading developments in some advanced societies what might be important underlying historical trends. I say that only because the book and the interventions around it and the subsequent debates have often been read as if they were staking out a new position, but it is trying to open new debates. Though it’s perfectly clear from the book that people don’t agree with one another, from one page to another, such are the characteristics of critical and theoretical orthodoxy, it’s assumed that if you write a book you must know what you are talking about; you must already have a position which you are trying to impose on someone else. So we keep saying, "What I’ve just said may not be true. I would like to discuss with other people whether this might be true because we are in ‘New Times.’" Now, it has a bearing, obviously, on cultural studies. Although it doesn’t call itself "cultural studies," many of the people who are contributing to it are people who have been formed within cultural studies in Britain, which by now is a house of many mansions, but a lot of people who are in it don’t know one end of cultural studies from another. It is, obviously, in some ways an attempt to translate some of the modes of work and insights of cultural studies into a wider terrain. Nevertheless, it figures as part of my ongoing responsibility for a debate which is wider, which cannot be contained simply in an academic debate. That’s not to say it doesn’t draw on academic research: there’s a whole literature around flexible specialization and global integration on which the "New Times" debate is drawing. But it is drawing on it in a way which suggests that these are questions that need to be debated in a political as well as an intellectual and cultural-critical-theoretical arena. Those different overlapping arenas of debate do exist; they can be found. And intellectuals who believe in intellectual work as a serious project must try to address those questions to those audiences as part of what they do, as part of a responsibility that is laid on them in trying to be critical intellectuals and to do critical cultural work.

**ROSALIND BRUNT**: I’d like you to say a bit more about Gramsci’s notion of the organic intellectual. I think there’s another point that Gramsci makes which relates to another moment in the Centre which you didn’t raise. This involves my favorite metaphor for the organic intellectual: the whalebone in the corset. This is not only a rather feminized metaphor, but it has that notion that you were suggesting about real rigorous seriousness. I liked that sort of iron discipline of the corset. Also, of course, as a metaphor, it is about being supportive. But where Gramsci used it, what he actually meant it for was talking about contact with the people. I think the point that you didn’t mention in defining the organic intellectual is the way in which you not only transmit to the
people but you learn from them in Gramsci’s sense, I can understand why you didn’t mention it because of all the sentimental populism that it can lead to. But it connects to a very important moment in the Centre For Contemporary Cultural Studies around ethnography. I wondered if you’d care to comment on that.

HALL: I think you not only missed out my silence, but I might just put it that way, butI sensed out the reason for my silence as well. I’ve heard all of the metaphors of the organic intellectual used in ways which simplify the notion and which aren’t critical of their vanguardist implications, or which suggest that it is perfectly easy to find those outside voices and take responsibility for them. The question is how to do it without vulgar popularization, which is not at all what Gramsci means by the mutually educative relationship. I can’t respond in a very adequate way to the question about how one takes that responsibility, partly because it is conjunctural to specific cultures. Indeed, I think that part of the way in which new forms of cultural studies rid themselves of the possible shadow of earlier forms is precisely to go through that argument: how on earth can we make those connections without absolving ourselves of the need for reflection and theoretical work? I think that discussion, difficult as it is, has to be engaged. And certainly the Centre, as you know, did not find it easy. And there isn’t some movement out there waiting for it to be done. So I am very anxious not to suggest that this is an easy evangelical call to arms, as if you could just go out and do it. What I would say is something more like what I meant by the notion of modesty. You have to work under the pressure to find that moment, that connection. And with the sense that when you don’t, even though it may not have been possible, something is missing, some voices which ought to be in your head are not in your head. You have to recognize that the theory is going to run away with you. You’re going to end up at some point with the illusion that you can cover, in the textuality of the critical debate, the whole of the world, not recognizing the worldliness of the object you are trying to analyze and place theoretically.

But let me also say that I think it can be made more often than we think it can. While certain institutional conditions block its being made, being institutionalized also means struggling against the institutional constraints which make it impossible to make those kinds of links, and to write in that kind of way. And the language with which we communicate with one another and do our intellectual work is also part of that struggle to be overheard, if not today, then sometime. That’s what I mean by living with the possibility that there could be, sometimes, a movement which would be larger than the movement of petit-bourgeois intellectuals, if you will forgive my using a vulgar phrase. That’s what I mean by my modesty. Who would imagine that if from within those circles alone the world can be changed, or the power that we talk about in such a wonderfully articulate way could be shifted? It cannot be. I’m not trying to deny the difficulties posed by the political disconnections and fragmentations as the political context in which this work is done. Nevertheless, I think we have to work in the “as if” of the organic possibility.

I know there are lots of objections to the metaphor of the organic intellectual, I have lots of them myself. We have to take seriously Foucault’s suggestion that perhaps the moment of the organic intellectual is over; now we are in another historical moment, that of the specific intellectual. I understand exactly what he means by that because, of course, I don’t propose the organic intellectual as the source of another grand metanarrative or as producing the theory for the movement from outside. Nevertheless, I hold on to the notion of the organic intellectual because I think it puts a shadow across intellectual work. If it’s done with the realization of the worldliness of our object and of our own situation—of the location and constraints of our own institutional position—

it comes out differently. I think it is different when you genuinely feel the pressure on our language, to show its workings, to open itself to accessibility, to open a window, not to disable, not to close out, etc. But this cannot be done at the expense of serious thinking, because the last thing that we want is a roasting populist work that doesn’t tell us anything. My main problem with a great deal of work in cultural studies is that it didn’t tell us anything new. It was a circular exercise and the wonderful thing was that you could arrive back at the beginning by a very long and intellectually rewarding route: The bourgeoisie produces bourgeois culture which exercises bourgeois hegemony. Hoory! That is the last thing that anybody out there needs to be told what they already know. They need the production of new knowledges. We won’t always be able to control the ways in which that’s appropriated or the political conditions in which it’s appropriated, but we need to work as if our work would be better if we could, we need to work with the pressure of that behind us. And that is what I think constitutes what I called our modesty.

ANDREW ROSS: I have a query about a term which you invoked throughout your history of cultural studies—“theoretical gains.” Exactly how does one recognize what theoretical gains are? The term seems to appeal to a narrative of progress which was almost completely problematized by those moments which you described in vivid detail, when gender and race came crashing in through that window.

HALL: I think your criticism is quite right; it does have a sort of narrative of progress smuggled into it. I don’t think I meant theoretical gains in that way but it may be that I did, and that it was part of the unconsciousness of what I was saying, that I meant more than I said, or said more than I meant. What I meant by theoretical gains was that the next kind of work that you feel able to do is done in a profoundly different way because you’ve had to wrestle with a new set of what I call conundrums. You don’t have within a different set of positions and with a set of conceptual insights which have emerged through what I metaphorically called struggling with the angels. I don’t know if that new work has any built-in guarantee that it’s better than the work you did before, quite often it’s not. I’m trying to represent the movement of theory, not from theorist to theorist or problematic to problematic, but from problem to problem . . . I don’t want to say solution because as soon as you get something which resolves a particular theoretical problem, you have instantly to recognize what it doesn’t do.

Let me put it in a concrete way. As I tried to say, I entered Marxism as a problem; I wrestled with Althusser and finally was able to do some work within the framework of a Marxist problematic radically revised by Gramsci. Now, is that a gain? Well, it’s a gain in the sense that I could get something said that I couldn’t get said before. And I could say some different things. But if you think by that that we are now in the Gramscian problematic, we’re also in the problems of the Gramscian problematic. There are problems that Gramsci’s gains present to one, and then you have to look elsewhere, which is what you do. You don’t have to wrestle with a new terrain. So I’m trying to describe what it is I’ve talked about as interruptions in cultural studies, the periods in which work was done, though it was never done in a guaranteed theoretical space, and the movements, a set of theoretical movements, that drove it on.

To be quite honest about your criticism, I guess I do think that some terrain is gained, otherwise I won’t make those moves. I don’t think those gains are guaranteed, but I do think the work is better when someone understands those complexities that one wrestles to gain insight into. Sometimes, they are actually reversals; some of those gains take one into terrains where the work is too facile, very good but empty. There are lots of blind allies. I don’t think that there’s any simple notion of linear progress
in theoretical work. But I do think that one moves from one denaturalized or deconstructed problematic to the gains of another, recognizing its limitations. That, I think, is the infinite open-endedness of critical work, why critical work is always dialogical. It does have the capacity to establish some important conversations on some ground. That’s what I mean by the gain; it gains some ground where thinking can go on around a particular set of problems. It’s almost never stable; it will be punctuated and interrupted by some new thing, not necessarily by a new book or by a new theory but by some new turn of events which requires one to address a problem which shows the underside of the positive ground you’ve gained. Suddenly, it doesn’t explain that stuff, suddenly you’ve got to start again, perhaps from the bad side of the gains that you’ve made. In these ways I’m trying to describe what a critical practice is like which isn’t just circular and repetitious and which has no guaranteed advancement or progress written into it but which continues to be open-ended. In these ways I’m trying to use the term “gains” without looking at an infinite series of interconnected, well-ordered theoretical progressions from position to position.

RUTH TOMASELLI: The question I’m going to ask is an extremely presumptuous one, but I think somebody must voice it and I’ve decided to. I wonder how you would place your notion of the organic intellectual into the world which is made up of our colleagues and our students, because that after all is our world.

HALL: When I said that part of what the Centre was about was trying to produce organic intellectual work, I of course had the question of pedagogy essentially in mind. I don’t think we can divorce theoretical work and pedagogy. At the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies there were only three academics, so the organic intellectuals we were trying to produce were not only ourselves but our students. So the question of pedagogy as a form of organic intellectual production is crucial. I agree with what I take to be an underlying criticism in your comment, namely that when we talk about the institutional position of cultural studies, we often fail to talk about questions of teaching and pedagogy. We talk about intellectual practice as if it is the有机 intellectual in the library reading the right canonical texts or consulting other intellectuals at conferences or something like that. But the ongoing work of an intellectual practice for most of us, insofar as we get our material sustenance, our modes of reproduction, from doing our academic work, is indeed to teach. And I suppose my silence was in not responding to Ros Brunt by saying that the first thing we might make some connection with are our students. Before we invoke the great mass ranks out there, it might be quite important that our students are with us in the project and that we are helping them to conduct a little intellectual work. I’m sorry if I appeared to take that for granted.

JENNY SHARPE: I wonder if you might elaborate upon the notion of “irritable tension” with which you organized your narrative (as opposed to solution and resolution). I was also wondering if this irritable tension could be productive in alliance politics.

HALL: I’ll say just three brief things about the tensions. One of the most important examples for me of a tension which has been enormously theoretically productive for my own work and which I’m damned if I know how to resolve, and which I therefore have to live with, is exactly that triangle that I referred to earlier, which has been put out of the agenda by the intervention of feminism. The interventions between feminism, psychoanalysis, and cultural studies defines a completely and permanently unsettled terrain for me. The gains of understanding cultural questions in and through the insights of psychoanalytic work, especially as those have been reread through the political practices of feminism, opened up enormous insights for me—that’s what I mean by gain. I just feel I know something after that moment that I didn’t know before that I now have to work with. But every attempt to translate the one smoothly into the other doesn’t work; no attempt to do so can work. Culture is neither just the processes of the unconscious writ large nor is the unconscious simply the internalization of cultural processes through the subjective domain. The latter just doesn’t work. Psychoanalysis completely breaks it that sociological notion of socialization; I’ll never use it again. That’s what I mean by interruption: the term falls out the bottom. I cannot explain how social individuals are constituted and reconstructed through the concept of socialization. It just had to go. But I cannot translate the one onto the other. I have to live with the tension of the two vocabularies, of the two unsettled objects of analysis and try to read the one through the other without falling into psychoanalytic readings of everything. It’s the reason why, of many books on the subject, I like Jacques Ellul’s Sexuality and the Field of Vision so much because I think it is a very political book. It’s also a deeply Lacanian book, and the arguments between those two things are unsettled and she just has to say: I know these two things are important, and I know that they’re conjured in a number of extremely complex ways, and I can’t tell you how the translation is effected. That’s what I mean by living in and with tension.

Let me say, secondly, I agree that this is not a question of theoretical practice alone, far from it. I think that just as we have to understand politics as a language we have to understand politics as living with the tension. The notion of a political practice where the conflict is postponed until the day after the barricades precisely defines the politics which I always refused. And if you don’t go that way you go into politics of contention, of continuous argument, of continuous debate. Because what is at stake really matters.

Finally, then, the question of the manner in which our tensions are worked through matters a great deal. I don’t want to prescribe but I want to draw your attention to the problem of courtesy, of living with a tension that matters without eating each other. Because there is a kind of competitive way in which intellectuals live with their tensions in which they can only do so by climbing on the backs of those people whose positions they are trying to counter. We have a great deal to learn about respecting the positions being advanced while contesting them because something important is at stake. I don’t think we’re very good at that. We have a lot to learn about the manners of a genuinely dialogically critical engagement.

MEAGHAN MORRIS: I am not a pluralist but I actually like both these models—organic and specific intellectuals—because I think they describe different kinds of possibility that exist for people in the present, certainly in my country. But one thing that bothers me about the rhetoric of the organic intellectual is the way the problem of theory/practice/politics can get posed. At one moment, you said that if you don’t feel the tensions in your work, it’s because theory has let you off the hook. But sometimes it’s not that theory lets you off the hook, it’s that the academy or the forms of academic institutionalization can drive tension out of people’s work, can absolutely kill the angels in the air. And this, I suppose, is a question about how you see the resilience of cultural studies in the face of that. I’ve seen a moment in another time and place with feminist theory, for example, where a whole group of women who had wrestled with angels for many years suddenly found themselves teaching a curriculum which most of their students found boring and oppressive and irrelevant. And totally unanalytic. But because of the nature of the structural political problems that feminism responds to, that moment passed. More people came in, infused by their criticism, to displace the work we had done, and renewed the whole project of feminist theory. I wonder whether cultural studies has a sufficient identity to do that. The reason I’m not a pluralist is that I don’t think pluralism is an option, I think it’s the problem. I think that when the academy
institutionalizes the fact of pluralism, it makes it hard for people to care about the difference between various arbitrary closures. So what I would want to see is a definition against pluralism. **HALL:** There are really a number of important questions there, and I can't respond to them adequately. But just let me say that I too like both the model of the specific intellectual and of the organic intellectual. I was not trying to ditch one in favor of the other. I tried to represent the second by talking about cultural studies as not having an aspiration to an overall metalevel, as always having to recognize its positioning, as a set of contested localized knowledges, etc. Also, contrary to the promise that in the Gramscian discourse clinches the organic intellectual, namely that there is a party out there to deliver, the party isn't there. So it's the organic intellectuals, metaphorically, as the hope, and it's the specific intellectual as the mode of operation. I also agree with what you said about pluralism. And I think that one of the difficulties for us results because cultural studies has always been interdisciplinary, for very good and, I think, very important reasons. Some of the subversive force of cultural studies, along with a number of other forms of critical work, results from its having contested the institutionalized spaces of knowledge as disciplines and regulators. And so even in its rather loose way, it's surging across the boundaries and taking a number of vocabularies from different places in order to explain a problem. This is one of the most important things about it. But obviously in the moment of institutionalization that can become just an extremely slack form of pluralism.

But the moment of institutionalization has more dangers written into it from the outside as it were. And sometimes this can push people who are trying to do cultural studies in that pluralistic direction. For instance, one of the places where cultural studies is growing is in institutes of humanities which have emerged, out of the enormous good will and funding generosity of universities and institutions, but partly as places where the specific educational attack on the humanities, on the politicization of the humanities, on the destruction of a canon, can be centered. There are places of resistance which have been thrown up around some of that, so that critical intellectual work can get done. Not all the institutes are like that, but I know some where that is one of the reasons why they appear to be very pluralistic, because a number of people are coming under the umbrella of cultural studies as a mode of defense. So let us not fail to recognize that these institutional spaces have really quite specific conditions and constraints and that the work which can be done requires a much more careful job of trying to define what that project is, not in an empty pluralistic way that we've understood before. However, at that point I come to halt because, when pressed to say what cultural studies is and what it isn't, something is to stop short. I have a stake, and cultural studies isn't an easy damn thing. But I think, for one thing, that in the American context it needs a whole range of work to say what it is in this context. What it is in relation to this culture that would genuinely separate it from earlier work or work done elsewhere. I'm not sure that cultural studies in the United States has actually been through that moment of self-clarification. So I don't want to, as it were, impose another set of definitions on it. But I do think it matters what it is in particular situations. I don't think it can be simply a pluralistic umbrella. I think that sort of pluralism is the effect of certain political conditions which are constraints on intellectual work in the academy here. So I'm agreeing with your point—it's not theory that's let you off the hook, it's the precise insertion of a certain kind of critical practice at an institutional moment, and that moment is precisely the moment of academic institutional life in this country, which is a big enterprise to crack.

ALEXANDRA CHASIN: I have been anonymous up til now. Until, I suppose, the moment of speaking. I mean to be both courteous and constructive but I'm also quite serious and I think this stuff really matters. My comment is not addressed to the speaker, although I take profound encouragement from what he has said. I speak now because there is no scheduled place for a participant in this conference to say anything which is not to or from the podium. I take encouragement, too, from previous attempts at intervention, like the remark on Friday by a participant that she felt terrorized. She asserted that there was no room for dialogue among all participants, an assertion which has also been made in the spatial margins of this conference: halls, bathrooms, motel rooms, etc. She said out loud what many others have whispered. I am responding in part to the invitation implicit in the literature of the conference itself, which says, among other things: "increasingly visible, increasingly influential, Cultural Studies is also in the process of being more widely institutionalized and commodified. This conference is designed not only to reflect on these events, but also to intervene in them." It says later, "we welcome substantive comments and questions from all attendants," and I hope that's still true. In its structure, the conference most definitely privileges certain people, empowering them to speak while disempowering others. It also duplicates the traditional structures of power which practitioners of cultural studies almost uniformly claim to be committed to subverting. One or two rounds of applause for graduate student labor and for staff helping with conference "mechanics" does not go very far towards changing the familiar and oppressive division of labor. Allowing people who can afford two dinners in one evening to sough off their extras in the general direction of those who cannot afford the meal pass, or don't want to buy it for health-related reasons, or any other reasons, does not go very far towards rethinking exclusionary practices. The presentation of a solution is mystified by concealing the problem. My friend and I gathered from this that we were not the only ones with a problem, more than this we could only guess. Yet, this issue might have been an opportunity for self-criticism, for reflexivity, for asking the questions of ourselves that we ask theoretically about other institutions, organizations, groups, and even about academia as a whole. Or is it just too embarrassing to talk about meal passes, or child care? Where is our feminism? I do not just level these charges at the organizers, or the speakers, many of whom have made gestures at intervention. I address myself to everybody here, because although in this context silence is not exactly or immediately death, it is frustration and complicity. In order that my words might not be covered over, I come forward with concrete proposals. I hope that the bureaucracy of the conference is not too entrenched to deal with them. It might be useful to organize caucuses for lesbians and gays and for people of color whose work and livelihoods are often more marginalized and threatened than those of practitioners of cultural studies even where those categories overlap. How about small discussions, or working groups? How about some formal treatment or discussion of pedagogy, a subject whose absence here, until a minute ago, surprises and alarms me, since I have personally considered the classroom the place where I might integrate my, of course, politically correct intellectual politics with political action. Since I assume my dissertation will either be read in typescript by four people, or in hardback by twice as many. What about taking a few minutes to open up the floor to suggestions for more constructive interventions than these?

BELL HOOKS: I feel very bad, because one of the things Gayatri Spivak says in Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture is that things in this country always come down to the question of how the room is arranged. When I talk about being terrorized, I wasn't talking about the room, or the microphones; I was talking about how the discourse of
cultural studies as it was being constructed here was silencing certain kinds of people. And I didn't like the fact that it took this personal form of people coming up to me, white people coming up to me, and making very negative comments about me: "Tell

books, come off it, how could you ever be terrorized?" That shows a lack of under-

come to this conference because I am excited about cultural studies. I am excited about it as a critical intervention, as a critical political intervention. And when I felt that I was being marginalized and silenced, I felt that as terror. I felt that as terror about the
dangers of cultural studies appropriating issues of race, gender, and sexual practice, and then continuing to hurt and wound in that politics of domination. And I felt bad because I felt my comments got reduced to this question of the room and the microphones and I was trying to talk about what kind of discourse was being produced here and its implications for political practice. I would much rather have been able to say, around

the question of pedagogy, that I thought a lot about the fact that cultural critique for

see Do the Right Thing and come back and say "Look, we took your class, we understand

this feminist standpoint, but we also think Spike Lee is a down brother so how do we
deal with what we feel we saw in this particular cultural production?" To me, that's

the exciting dimension of cultural studies, that it can take place, not as me writing a

private article, but as a response to students asking what type of critical thinking

allows them to engage this cultural production in a way that informs our political

practice. I hope that clarifies some what I meant by the use of the word "terrorism."

SCOTT COOPER: Stuart, I just wanted to say that I attended your class at the Institute

that took place here at Illinois in 1983 and I share the concerns that were addressed

here. But my concerns have more to do with what cultural studies is becoming in the
college catalog under the letter "C," near Ethnic studies and World Arts and Culture.

In other words, it's going to be denied its political meaning. American institutions of

education are far more powerful than even the people in this room. What I find

lacking in this conference is any sense of the strategies by which we're going to intervene

we need four days of discussion about how we can intervene in the institutions in which

work, rather than four days reproducing the same kind of hierarchy we already have.

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The Promises of Monsters:
A Regenerative Politics for
Inappropriate/d Others

DONNA HARAWAY

If primates have a sense of humor, there is no reason why intellectuals may not share

in it. (Plank, 1989)

A Biopolitics of Artifactual Reproduction

"The Promises of Monsters" will be a mapping exercise and travelogue through mind-

scapes and landscapes of what may count as nature in certain local/global struggles.

These contests are situated in a strange, allogonic time—the time of myself and my

readers in the last decade of the second Christian millennium—and in a foreign, allogonic

place—the womb of a pregnant monster, here, where we are reading and writing. The

purpose of this excursion is to write theory, i.e., to produce a patterned vision of how to

and what to fear in the topography of a impossible but all-too-real present, in order to

find as absent, but perhaps possible, other present. I do not seek the address

of some full presence; reluctantly, I know better. Like Christian in Pilgrim's Progress,

however, I am committed to skirting the slough of despond and the parasite-infested

swamps of nowhere to reach more salubrious environs. The theory is meant to orient,

to provide the roughest sketch for travel, by means of moving within and through a

relentless artifactualism, which forbids any direct sightings of nature, to a science

fictional, speculative factual, SF place called, simply, elsewhere. At least for those whom

this essay addresses, "nature" outside artifactualism is not so much elsewhere as nowhere,

a different matter altogether. Indeed, a reflexive artifactualism offers serious political

and analytical hope. This essay's theory is modest. Not a systematic overview, it is a

little sitting device in a long line of such craft tools. Such sighting devices have been

known to reposition worlds for their devotees—and for their opponents. Optical instru-

ments are subject-shifting. Goddess knows, the subject is being changed relentlessly

in the late twentieth century.

My distinctive theory's optical features are set to produce not effects of distance,

but effects of connection, of embodiment, and of responsibility for an imagined elsewhere

that we may yet learn to see and build here. I have high stakes in reclaiming vision

from the technopornographers, those theorists of minds, bodies, and planets who insist

effectively—i.e., in practice—that sight is the sense made to realize the fantasies of the

phallocentric. I think sight can be remade for the activists and advocates engaged in fitting

political filters to see the world in the hues of red, green, and ultraviolet, i.e., from the

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