BEING "IN THE TRUE" OF CULTURAL STUDIES

I

In his essays on the life sciences, Georges Canguilhem proposes that a history of the sciences should be a history of errors as well as a history of truth, a history of delays and setbacks as well as one of progress. With a view to accomplishing this, he proposes the concept of "scientific ideology" as a means of relativising the distinction between truth and error by converting it into that between a science and its prehistory, and so a distinction internal to that relation rather than one of a general epistemological kind. "A scientific ideology," as he puts it, "comes to an end when the place that it occupied in the encyclopedia of knowledge is taken over by a discipline that operationally demonstrates the validity of its claims to scientific status, its norms of scientificity." (33). If a scientific ideology comes to be named as such only when a science has established itself, the errors which are thus retrospectively attributed to that ideology still constitute a part of the history of the science in question inasmuch as they form the discursive ground which simultaneously sustained and impeded its formation. Such ideologies, Canguilhem suggests, may also have an afterlife, retarding the further development of the sciences they have spawned through the influence they continue to exert on the operative norms and procedures of scientific inquiry.

The fate of Althusserianism, of course, suggests the need for caution in drawing parallels between the epistemic conditions and procedures of the natural and the human sciences. It is Foucault who reminds us that different discursive formations have their own conditions and modes of "being in the true," and that these are not necessarily transportable across and between different fields of inquiry. There have been moments, however, when it has seemed that the relations between cultural studies and its precursors might be cast in the form of a distinction between a science and its ideological prehistory. Stuart Hall’s assessment of Raymond Williams’ role in the formation of cultural studies thus draws on Althusserian terminology, and thereby indirectly on Canguilhem, in interpreting The Long Revolution as “a text of the break” (“Cultural Studies and the Centre” 101) while seeing Culture and Society as still "profoundly marked by the imprint of the tradition to which it was counterposed: and nowhere so much as in its method." (98) — that is, its continued dependency on the techniques of practical criticism.

In the event, however, such conceptions have not had an enduring influence on the ways in which cultural studies is customarily described or on the ways in which its relations to other disciplinary formations — past and present — are characteristically viewed within the literature which has sought to define and specify its distinguishing attributes.
Here, quite different forms and conditions of "being in the true" have come to prevail. To be "in the true" of a discursive formation, Foucault argues, is to obey "the rules of some discursive 'policy' which would have to be re-activated every time one spoke" (cited in Lentricchia 197). In the case of cultural studies, at least two aspects of such a discursive policy can be identified. I shall call these the rule of theoretical and methodological indeterminacy and the rule of wholeness via marginality.

The first rule is succinctly summarised by John Hartley in his observations regarding a widespread reluctance to identify cultural studies in terms of any definite set of substantive theoretical positions or procedures of inquiry. "Cultural studies," he writes, "is notable for its participants' squeamishness about orthodoxy, manifested positively in a commitment to interdisciplinarity, and negatively in the avoidance of authority; it has no unified theory, textual canon, disciplinary truth, agreed methodology, common syllabus, examinable content, or professional body, no bodily integrity at all" (7). Carolyn Steedman, taking an outsider's look at cultural studies from the more secure disciplinary basis of a practising historian, similarly notes a widespread reluctance to codify the knowledge base of cultural studies and an equally marked resistance to the prospect of its institutionalisation as a discipline (617). Tony Dunn exemplifies the position Steedman has in mind when he writes that cultural studies "is a whirling and quiescent and swaying mobile which continuously repositions any participating subject," a project which is destined never to arrive at a definite view of itself as its realisation is to be "forever deferred" (71; cited in Steedman 617).

The second rule offers an ethical-cum-political compensation for this theoretical and methodological indeterminacy in construing social marginality as an experiential route which allows those who travel it to achieve an integrative kind of intellectual wholeness which stands in for theoretical and methodological criteria in furnishing cultural studies with its epistemological protocols. Many social positions might be, and have been, advanced as candidates for this role — social class, gender, ethnicity, subalternity. In what might be regarded as one of the founding examples of this form of being "in the true," the marginality of the "Celtic fringe" as exemplified by Raymond Williams' Welshness was viewed as having allowed Williams to acquire an understanding of British culture as a whole in view of his lived experience of the relations between the culture’s dominant and its resistive elements. "Wales," as Hall put it in his biographical appreciation of Williams, "gave him a perspective on Cambridge — on the way a culture becomes dominant, a 'central system of practices, meanings and values' and the necessary tension between that and the emergent energies and experiences which stubbornly resist it" ("Only Connect" 21).

While not wishing to propose that cultural studies should aspire to the status of a science or that it should develop a theoreticist obsession with identifying its defining characteristics, my purpose here is to suggest that cultural studies does now need to be fashioned into a
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disciplinary undertaking of a more conventional and recognisable kind. This need not be to gainsay its interdisciplinary status, although this should now no longer be allowed as a means of evading difficult questions of theory and method. For if it is true of many systems of thought — and especially so of the disciplines which now comprise the Humanities — that they begin their careers by creating some elbow room for themselves within the interstices of the existing array of disciplinary knowledge. However, the need, then, to define precisely how an emerging system of thought draws on and combines the techniques and methods of existing disciplines into distinctive new configurations cannot be indefinitely deferred. If there has been a reluctance to pursue these questions in relation to cultural studies, this is perhaps attributable to what might be regarded as the third rule of its mode of “being in the true”: the view that cultural studies offers the prospect of a knowledge which, in being “beyond the disciplines,” will also be a knowledge without limits or constraints. To propose a disciplinary future for cultural studies, by contrast, is to envisage that in arriving at a greater degree of definiteness about itself, cultural studies will recognise that, like all other knowledges, its domains and possibilities are circumscribed and limited by both the theoretical and the institutional conditions of its existence. However, a brief detour through the history of cultural studies — or, more accurately, through the history of its histories — will be necessary before such a prospect can be placed on the agenda. For the reluctance to characterise cultural studies in terms of a definite set of theoretical and methodological characteristics is not a result of modesty — far from it. Nor is it because cultural studies lacks a discourse of the truth. Rather, it is a symptom of its subscription to an ethical mode of “being in the true,” a discursive policy which is itself a sign of a continued reliance on the means and forms for authorising statements which characterise many of the traditional Humanities disciplines which it is often supposed cultural studies has displaced and supplanted. And it is in this respect — to recall Canguilhem — that cultural studies is still encumbered by a past that it has yet to break with in order to place its concerns on a more secure and distinctive footing. But this is to conjure with the prospect of a cultural studies whose main epistemological breaks have yet to be made — and this, in turn, is to entertain the possibility that those texts which have so far been viewed as comprising the foundations of cultural studies might still bear the impress of earlier “scientific ideologies” of culture that now need to be jettisoned.

II Historicising Cultural Studies

Now that cultural studies is acquiring its historians, it is relevant to ask: what kind of history — or histories — will prove most serviceable in charting new directions for its future development? The terms in which we are to understand the relations between cultural studies and the earlier disciplinary formations from which it has sought to disentangle itself have a crucial bearing on these issues. Narratives matter and the
kinds of stories we tell ourselves about cultural studies, about how it has or has not passed an epistemological, ethical or political threshold which differentiates it from its disciplinary forebears, will influence how we envisage its future trajectories and seek to contribute to their development. If these questions are to be broached productively, however, cultural studies now urgently needs to do unto itself as it would do, and has done, unto others: namely, to entertain the possibility that cultural studies intellectuals might, in significant respects, have misunderstood their relations to the conditions which have enabled their own practice and conferred on it a social functioning which might not be in accord with their intentions.

The distinction I have in mind here is that suggested by Kurt Danziger in his history of psychology; a distinction between histories written from the point of view of the inside of a discipline, resulting in an account which "always conveys a strong sense of being 'our' history," and histories written from positions that do not necessarily share the "framework of issues and presuppositions from the field that is the object of study" (vi). Most of the accounts of cultural studies that are so far available to us are "insider" accounts written from within its framework of shared assumptions. Better, they are accounts which have helped forge and articulate those shared assumptions and to organise a "we" whose members recognise the history of cultural studies as their own — the history of their trials and tribulations, setbacks and advances. As accounts which have thus been concerned to construct a particular sense of being "in the true" that characterises and distinguishes the cultural studies enterprise, they have all (necessarily) been written from within that truth in the very process of forming it.

The questions I want to ask are: what kinds of issues do histories written in this mode occlude? and how else might we think about cultural studies' own stories and tell them back to it in ways which might prompt some reconsideration about how those who work in this field should view their practice in the context of the relations and conditions which enable it? We were once very adept at identifying the ideological processes that were going on "behind the backs" of other social agents. A question we now need to consider is: has anything been going on "behind the back" of cultural studies that might help identify what it is and what it does more tellingly than the conscious aspirations of its advocates?

The most influential accounts of the kind I have in mind, and whose grain I want to think against, come from, or are organised in some kind of relation to, the story of the Birmingham Centre for Cultural Studies. They include Stuart Hall’s various essays (see “Cultural Studies and the Centre”; “The ‘First’ New Left”; “The Emergence of Cultural Studies”; and “Cultural Studies and Its Theoretical Legacies”), the accounts of others closely associated with the Birmingham Centre — writers like Dick Hebdige, John Clarke, and Richard Johnson — and the accounts contained in influential collections like the Cultural Studies anthology edited by Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson and Paula Treichler. There
are, of course, important limitations associated with these accounts which need to be noted in advance. In spite of their disavowals to the contrary, for example, they have tended to construct a Birmingham-centred myth of origin for cultural studies which has distracted attention from the formative role of other institutions and projects, and particularly that of SEFT whose influence was, for me, in many ways more decisive. Difficulties also arise, as both Meaghan Morris and Graeme Turner have noted, where a more general representative or paradigmatic status is attributed to British cultural studies in view of the distorting effects this often has on debates in other national contexts in intruding into them issues and concerns which have no local currency or provenance. When all this is said and duly acknowledged, however, the Birmingham case remains an important and influential one largely because, as the first fully-developed and broadly circulated account of the development of cultural studies, it has come to function as an exemplary narrative whose rhetorical claims and manoeuvres have been drawn on to help sustain and develop similar stories elsewhere. It is, then, in this light that I shall consider these accounts: as furnishing a template upon which other narratives of cultural studies and, in some respects, the story of cultural studies as a whole have been fashioned.

That the Birmingham story has been able to play this role is attributable, in good measure, to its tendency to proceed as if the history of cultural studies could be adequately represented in the form of a set of theoretical and political struggles viewed and related from the perspective of those engaged in them. Carolyn Steedman has thus noted how accounts of cultural studies tend to be cast in the heroic mould. In doing so, moreover, she draws attention to the fact that, no matter how stridently their claims to non- or even anti-disciplinary status might be pressed, these accounts are very similar to those of conventional disciplinary histories in the rhetorical strategies they deploy. She thus observes, after citing the passage from Tony Dunn discussed earlier:

They all start like that, but within a few paragraphs are well into that most conventional claim for disciplinary orthodoxy — the writing of their own history. (What they are also doing, the historiographically informed observer notes, is defining themselves, finding themselves, through an act of consciousness-raising: telling their own story, reaping all the social and psychic benefits of autobiography and oral history.) (617)

Steedman’s interest in these issues arises from her concern with the relations between history and cultural studies. As a historian who is, understandably, reluctant to see her discipline’s identity entirely submerged within that of cultural studies, her main interest is in how and why the concerns of history and cultural studies have come to run so closely together. Her point — and it is surely correct — is that the conventional accounts of cultural studies are of little assistance in answering questions concerned with detailed and specific issues of this kind. To the contrary, she considers it necessary to look elsewhere — to look at what has been going on “behind the back” of cultural studies by
examining the various conditions and relations which have helped shape its development without necessarily registering themselves in the consciousness of its theorists.

In order to account for the role of history within cultural studies, therefore, Steedman looks not to the field of theory — the influence of Marxist historiography, say — but to the changing forms of history teaching and learning associated with both the secondary and tertiary sectors. Her conclusion, if viewed from the perspective of the resistive credentials which cultural studies has usually laid claim to, might seem quite scandalous — as, indeed, any genealogy of cultural studies should be if it is to generate a productive friction and so, as Foucault suggests, be a history that is “made for cutting” (Foucault 154). For she suggests that the extended concept of culture as “a whole way of life” that has subtended the work of historians within cultural studies owes its influence to a reshaping of the concerns and classroom practices of both history and English secondary school curricula. In short, her argument is that “the culture concept as used by historians, and in some of the models for acquiring historical knowledge within cultural studies” was “actually invented in the schools, between about 1955 and 1975” (619-20). The “virtual disappearance of history as a subject taught to children, its integration into topic and project work” combined with the influence of Piagetian theories of child development dictating “that children should ‘discover’ the past through a study of its artefacts (Clothes, Houses, Food) and through their identification and empathy with people living in the past,” she argues, coincided with developments in the English classroom which had led to the “breaking down of barriers between teachers and taught, common involvement in a common project, a text or groups of texts making inquirers of them all” (619).

This is to suggest that, however radical and innovative they might have seemed at the time, the collaborative aspects of cultural studies teaching and research — issues that have rightly been foregrounded in accounts of the Birmingham Centre — were merely the first transplantation into the Humanities academy of pedagogic relations and practices that were already firmly in place in the schooling system. Steedman’s view of the reasons for the close relations between history and cultural studies at the tertiary level takes this line of reasoning further in viewing the new kinds of training and shifts of emphasis that have accompanied these developments — a shift away from the expensive individual researcher-in-the-archive model of history-training to a view of history as a collective, group-based process of deciphering and contextualising cultural documents — as a necessary practical response to the vast increase in the number of students entering into tertiary Humanities programs.

I am not concerned to assess the specific virtues of this account here. Rather, my interest lies in the type of explanation it offers in seeking a basis for the characteristic traits of cultural studies in the conditions of culture’s pedagogic deployment in the secondary school. This naturally places many of those traits in a new light: subcultural theory loses some
of its radical resonances if viewed as a late echo of a transformed secondary curriculum. In this and other respects, then, Steedman's arguments run against the grain of conventional "insider" accounts of cultural studies and, in doing so, offer a glimpse of what a subversive genealogy of cultural studies might look like — subversive because it suggests that the enabling conditions of cultural studies are located in precisely that sphere, the sphere of government and social regulation, to which cultural studies has usually supposed itself to be opposed.

Considerations of this kind, of course, have received little attention in those accounts of cultural studies which are "in the true". Nor could they have. Mundane institutional particularities are necessarily invisible where cultural studies is viewed as an intrinsically interdisciplinary practice embodying a form of intellectual wholeness beyond the fragmenting effects of institutionalised divisions of academic labour. For this in turn carries with it the view (or, in some cases, requirement) that cultural studies must remain above its institutional determinations — untouched by them — if it is to remain true to itself and avoid co-option. In a way that would usually be denied to any other intellectual or cultural practice which might furnish it with an object of analysis, cultural studies, where this view prevails, is seemingly able to make use of the educational apparatus as no more than a convenient occasion for its own projects.

The point can be illustrated via a much-quoted passage from Stuart Hall which, in accounting for the present-day location of cultural studies within the academy, does so in a manner which simultaneously explains that location away and minimises its significance in construing it as the outcome of entirely circumstantial and contingent considerations. For Hall, the moment of cultural studies' academic institutionalisation was a conjunctural expediency enjoined on it by changing political conditions and, consequently, a moment devoid of any formative significance. Arguing that originally, in Britain, "cultural studies was not conceptualised as an academic discipline at all" but had its roots in the politics of the New Left, Hall construes its move into the university, as instanced by the establishment of the Birmingham Centre, as a convenient refuge for the politics of the New Left — and a basis from which to continue with those politics — in a changed political environment. The argument depends on viewing the extramural departments of British universities as a kind of mid-way staging post for New Left politics on their way from the more general forms of political engagement, which had characterised them in the 1950s, into the academy. Noting that Williams, Hoggart, Thompson and, indeed, he himself had worked in extramural departments (and that they were all, therefore, in direct contact with adult working-class students), Hall goes on:

We thus came from a tradition entirely marginal to the centres of English academic life, and our engagement in the questions of cultural change — how to understand them, how to describe them, and how to theorise them, what their impact and consequences were to be, socially — were first reckoned within
the dirty outside world. The Centre for Cultural Studies was the locus to which we retreated when that conversation in the open world could no longer be continued: it was politics by other means. Some of us — me, especially — had always planned never to return to the university, indeed, never to darken its doors again. But, then, one always has to make pragmatic adjustments to where real work, important work, can be done. ("Emergence of Cultural Studies" 12)

It may well be true, of course, that the experience of working in an extramural context was an important and formative one for Hall, Williams, Hoggart and Thompson. Yet there are grounds for caution about the degree to which extramural departments can intelligibly be construed as margins capable of serving as an originating locale for a radical cultural studies project. As it happens, I too started my career, just a few years later, in the early 1970s, in an extramural department and it was clear to me then, as now, that if a centre/periphery logic is to be used to describe the relations between such departments and the remainders of their universities, then they are more accurately described as the centre’s outposts than as its margins. This was, indeed, an explicit aspect of their conception within the history of the extension movement — a movement which, heir to the civilising and improving mission of the earlier "rational recreations" movement, had been governed by a centre-to-outpost model of knowledge production and dissemination. Such conceptions, moreover, were nowhere more deeply engrained than in extramural conceptions of the nature and function of the literary lesson in their commitment to some version of Leavisism or, by the late fifties and sixties, left-Leavisism. Then again, in so far as extramural literary courses recruited from the working classes — and this was usually only marginally so as, for educational and cultural reasons of the kind that Bourdieu has made us familiar with, extramural courses drew the majority of their students from the middle classes — they usually did so via benevolent associations, like the Workers Educational Association, which typically had few connections with the industrial or political sectors of the working classes.

My point, then, is that the view of the extramural department as a space on the margins of the academy capable of nourishing cultural studies in providing a direct and unmediated contact with "the dirty outside world" of working-class experience will not withstand scrutiny. To the contrary, it provided a highly mediated form of contact with working-class culture and experience, and one whose historical formation disposed it to function more as a vehicle for transmitting the dominant culture to the remoter parts of the social body than as a crucible for the development of a tradition of radical cultural critique.

Questions of historical accuracy to one side, however, perhaps the more substantial point concerns the intelligibility of the argument that the university — once fully entered into — might be used as merely the convenient site for, as Hall puts it, "politics by other means." The argument, as Hall goes on to elaborate it, interprets the decision to take
up an institutional position within the university as the outcome of a strategic adjustment within the politics of the New Left. This institutional move, Hall argues, brought about no fundamental changes in the political agendas of cultural studies. Only the envisaged means changed. As before, the aim was to form a counter-hegemony within British society. Now, however, and adopting a longer political horizon, this was to be brought about by forming a stratum of intellectuals who would function as the organic intellectuals of a counter-hegemonic social movement. Indeed, for Hall, this remains the essential political project of cultural studies. "The fact that we had no greater success than the left has had since in trying to construct a 'historical bloc' out of such heterogeneous social interests, political movements and agendas, in building a hegemonic political practice out of, and with, these differences," he has thus maintained, "does not negate the urgency of the task" ("The 'First' New Left" 33).

Of course, many questions might be asked about the viability of this project and the appropriateness of the expectation that an intellectual discipline — or, more accurately, inter-discipline — might serve as a vehicle for its development. Certainly, the notion that a cultural studies encampment in an English department might fulfill the role Gramsci had earlier envisaged for the Factory Councils now seems, with each year that passes, an increasingly unlikely scenario. To put it bluntly, the prospect of a cultural studies led counter-hegemony is now — or certainly ought to be — as dead as a dodo. The issue I want to focus on here, however — for I think it has a crucial bearing on how we should now think about and debate the future of cultural studies — is the assumption that the institutions and spaces of public education are available in a manner that allows them to be simply used as convenient sites for the political projects which individual intellectualschoose or subscribe to rather than being contexts which necessarily confer their own logic and social direction on the work that is conducted within them.

III Cultural Studies and Pedagogy

While some recognition of these considerations is embodied in conventional accounts of cultural studies, this is so only to the degree that an opposition is posited between, on the one hand, the view of cultural studies as an autonomous cultural, political and educational project which assigns itself its own objectives and, on the other, the danger that it might be institutionally co-opted. These are the terms in which Hall poses the issue in outlining what he sees as the dangers of cultural studies' successes, particularly in America (see "Cultural Studies and Its Theoretical Legacies"), and they organise a recent thoughtful review of the present state of cultural studies offered by Maureen McNeil. What's wrong with such accounts, I want to suggest, is the dualism that organises them — the notion that cultural studies was first one thing, formed up outside the institutions and practices of higher education, and then another as it has come to be co-opted by them. We shall only think clearly
about the present position of cultural studies and its future possibilities if we recognise that, to the contrary, It has been, from the start, a project shaped by the public education system in which it has been located and which has formed its primary (but not only) conditioning context. Moreover, if, as is commonly argued, English comprised the primary disciplinary incubator for cultural studies, we shall fully understand its role in this regard only if we follow Carolyn Steedman’s lead and look to the ways in which many of what are customarily viewed as the formative and distinguishing characteristics of cultural studies were in fact prefigured in the changing norms and practices of English teaching within secondary schooling.

It is, in this connection, important to note that the texts of Williams and Hoggart which have commonly been viewed as foundational in relation to British cultural studies — *The Long Revolution, Culture and Society, The Uses of Literacy* — exerted a considerable influence on the teaching of English in secondary schools a good decade before cultural studies became an identifiable project in the tertiary sector. My own first encounter with these works was in 1962 as a student in a newly-fashioned teaching context — a general studies adjunct to the fifth-form English class in a north of England state grammar school — that was governed by a pedagogic agenda which (although I did not realise it at the time) was that of a left-Leavisism in search of a broader range of texts, outside the literary canon, through which to shape the formative moral and political consciousnesses of a new generation of “English subjects.” Obliging us to read Williams and Hoggart, that is to say, served as a means of negotiating our assent to working on and with popular texts, and with our own everyday experience, as a means of provoking classroom discussion about contemporary social, political and moral issues.

My experience in this regard was, I believe, typical and I mention it here because of the light it throws on the relations between cultural studies and English where these are viewed as practices grounded in the education system. In his estimation of the significance of the early works of Williams and Hoggart, Hall, as we have seen, describes them as “works of the break”, he describes *The Long Revolution*, for example, as having brought the whole English culture and society tradition to “a decisive close.” Subsequent criticisms and debates have given us ample grounds for doubting whether this is so. Ian Hunter has thus demonstrated the Romantic pedigree of Williams’ conception of culture as a “whole way of life” whilst Gauri Viswanathan has called attention to the bias implicit in the method of *Culture and Society* as one “that consistently and exclusively studies the formation of metropolitan culture from within its own boundaries” (49) at the expense of those external conditioning factors which derive from the relations of imperialism. This is said not to diminish the importance of Williams’ work but, rather, to help identify the nature and register of its significance more precisely. For we shall surely misunderstand the character of Williams’ contribution if we interpret it as being of an epistemological kind. It would, for example, be implausible to suggest that his work opened up culture as a new
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continent of knowledge on the model of Althusser’s reading of what Marx did for history (cf. “The Conditions of Marx’s Scientific Discovery”). Rather, his contribution was that of expanding the scope of the moral mission of English in giving it a new set of objects (culture as a whole way of life) to latch on to.

To say this is not to doubt that Williams’ inversion of the moral and political evaluations of Leavisism resulted in a view of culture that helped form the projects of cultural and political critique connected to the New Left. To argue that the institutional underpinnings of cultural studies need to be attended to more closely, and attended to in their positivity as autonomous determinations, is not to propose that the trajectories and problematics of cultural studies can then be reduced to those underpinnings. But if this is so, it is also true to say that the significance of these early texts of cultural studies was not tied to, or limited by, their New Left mobilisation. For they had already acquired a life in the English classroom which bound them to the changing agendas of secondary schooling in a public education system that, for the first time, was on the threshold of feeding into a mass system of tertiary education — and was therefore dealing with populations which did not have access to the canonised forms of high culture which had hitherto served as the pedagogic props for forming the moral and aesthetic sensibilities of elite social cadres. This suggests a certain tension within cultural studies. For while the discovery of the realm of everyday life and culture has commonly been recounted as being fuelled by and enabling a politics of resistance, the pedagogical space within which this discovery has taken place and been put into pedagogical effect is one that has been shaped by a governmental interest in the cultural aspects of population management and regulation. The destiny, if not the mission, of cultural studies may thus, in the long haul, prove to be that of allowing everyday life and cultural experience to be fashioned into instruments of government via their inscription in new forms of teaching and training.

It is in the light of considerations of this kind, then, that I believe it is mistaken to suggest that the positions cultural studies has occupied in the education system can be viewed as merely a set of external contingencies — merely the contexts in which we do our work, setting our own agendas, rather than in any way significantly determining the nature and function of that work as well as the social purposes which it serves. Such views, moreover, have been harmful to the extent that they have led to a low degree of institutional self-reflexiveness on the part of much cultural studies theory and a corresponding incapacity to relate (without reducing) the theory and the practice, the politics and the pedagogy, of cultural studies to the circumstances of its most immediate institutional settings.

A number of options present themselves. One would be to accept that, if the condition of “being in the true” of cultural studies is at all as I have described it, it should then be understood as, properly speaking, a moral discipline which — chiefly by means of practices of textual criticism and commentary — is principally caught up in the processes of
conscience- and person-formation. In this case, cultural studies may, indeed, emerge as the heir of literary studies in its English formation. This is the view Michael Pickering takes in commending cultural studies for having conducted a critique of English for its narrow elitism thereby — in re-integrating formalist analysis with critique on an expanded textual terrain which encompasses the popular — restoring English to itself and its true vocation. It is in this respect, Pickering concludes, that “it is cultural studies rather than English which today approximates closest to the tradition laid down by people like Coleridge, Carlyle, Ruskin, Arnold and Morris” (76).

Put that way, the prospect is a depressing one. Yet this is not to dispute the usefulness of criticism. In so far as cultural studies is inescapably involved in a practical engagement with cultural representations, then so criticism of one kind or another is a necessary part of its concerns. The question, if I may put it this way, is not “to criticise or not to criticise” but how to do so and with what purpose in view. Toby Miller has suggested that any form of cultural criticism so constructs the cultural representations which it takes for its occasions as to engender a form of incompleteness, lack or fault in the reader and, thereby, open up a space in which a career of self-formation or reformation may be initiated (Miller, “Film Theory”). If this is so, the challenge that faces a cultural studies criticism consists in the development of practices of textual commentary that will be alert to both the possibilities and limitations deriving from the different pedagogical situations that will constitute the primary contexts within which those practices of textual commentary are deployed.

It is equally clear, however, that there are many aspects of the organisation and political deployment of culture in social life that could not be adequately understood, or be effectively engaged with practically, if criticism were all that cultural studies had to offer or, indeed, all that it aspired to. Additionally, then, I want to suggest that cultural studies should lay claim to a definite set of knowledge claims and methodological procedures that will be convertible (as one of the points of its application) into clearly defined skills and trainings that will prove utilisable in a range of spheres of practical life. However, this can only happen if cultural studies renounces its aspirations to being a knowledge without limits — for, as I have tried to show, this also means being a knowledge without definite characteristics — and seeks, instead, to become a discipline.

While I do not want, here, to propose a disciplinary inventory for cultural studies it will prove instructive to consider why there has been, and remains, such a marked resistance to envisaging a disciplinary future for cultural studies. One thing is clear: this reticence is not explicable by any properties of the objects of knowledge or critique that cultural studies has concerned itself with. If, as a shorthand, these consist in the relations of culture and power, then these have also been a matter of concern for other intellectual and political projects which have encountered no difficulty in conducting their debates in disciplinary
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IV Disciplining Cultural Studies

In an obituary review of Raymond Williams’ work, Nicholas Garnham, commenting on the difficulty of summing Williams’ achievements, attributes this to “the fact that no coherent theory or method of cultural analysis lies waiting simply to be abstracted from his work” (123). Garnham is consequently obliged to summarise Williams’ accomplishments in the form of a set of quasi-personalised attributes: for example, his refusal to separate his intellectual and creative activities from his political involvements. A survey of these attributes leads Garnham to conclude that Williams’ “work was always serious, in the proper sense of that word, in a way that I think applies to no other writer in our field” (130). In short, what marks Williams out are his exemplary qualities as a person and as an intellectual.

Many other obituary appreciations were driven to the same conclusion. My own attempt to assess the nature of Williams’ legacy concluded that this consisted “not merely in his work but in having lived an exemplary political and intellectual life” (“Holding Spaces” 88). Stuart Hall, in similarly concluding that Williams “was, simply, exemplary,” attributes this to his capacity to overcome the alienating effects of the division of intellectual labour. Explaining why Williams’ work has proved so resistant to disciplinary classification, Hall thus argues that this was because “His cast of mind was intrinsically connective. ’My own view is that we must keep trying to grasp the process as a whole.’ He wrote, as he himself said, ‘against the frame of the forms’” (“Only Connect” 21). If this is the dream of a knowledge without limits, Williams’ accomplishment was not merely to enunciate this dream; he also embodied it, gave it a form and a content in his own life. Williams’ concern with “the process as a whole” was thus not a matter of abstract theoretical principle — like the principle of the priority of the whole over the parts was for Goldmann — but was rather also integrated into the very tissue of his intellectual practice as evidenced by his concern to reach out beyond the academy “to return everyone — critic, politician, student, general reader — to the only subject which really mattered: the central processes of our common life” (Hall, “Only Connect” 21). In these and other ways, Williams personified an anticipatory overcoming of the dualisms produced by the division of labour. “There wasn’t,” as Hall puts it, “the usual rift between thought and feeling, idea and life,
which characterises so much ‘ politicised’ intellectual work” (21).

My purpose in identifying these traits which characterised so many of the tributary reviews written in commemoration of Williams is not to doubt that he was a man of exceptional personal integrity. Rather, my concern, to draw on a distinction Bourdieu proposes in *Homo Academicus*, is with Williams as an epistemic rather than as an empirical individual: that is, with the figure of Williams as constructed within and by the discourses of cultural studies. My purpose, then, is to ask what kind of a discourse of the truth enables (indeed, requires) the utterance of remarks of this kind. For it is clear that this discourse and the opposition which organises it — essentially that between a knowledge whose truth claims are based on criteria of technical competence and one which seeks its basis in the personal qualities of the intellectual — would have no pertinence in other spheres of intellectual inquiry: maths, engineering, economics, or political science, for example. What authorises and produces such remarks, conferring on them their intelligibility and salience, is rather a specific political technology of the intellectual, peculiar to the cultural sphere, within which the exemplary qualities of the intellectual are accorded an epistemic value and status such that they play a crucial role in making the truth manifest and operationalising it. What prompts the use of this particular form of appreciation in relation to Williams, then, is the fact that his work and the ways in which it has been responded to, especially by its take-up in cultural studies, have both remained a part of, and been deeply affected by, the political technology of the intellectual associated with the disciplinary history of English in its dependence on the moral authority invested in the person of the exemplary teacher (see Hunter, *Culture and Government*) — a technology which is, in turn, a particular institutionalisation of the voice of prophetic authority associated with the broader discursive formation of English Romanticism (Holloway, *The Victorian Sage*).

There was, in this sense, nothing new about the tone struck in the obituary commemorations I have briefly summarised (and it is for this reason that I do not think they can be attributed simply to the honorific conventions of the obituary form). To the contrary, the tendency to view Williams’ work through the prism of his life — to see it as an attempt to overcome in theory the oppositions and dualities which he had lived and sought to overcome experientially and practically — has been an enduring feature of Williams criticism and commentary. Richard Hoggart, in reviewing *Culture and Society*, judged the book a product “not only of a mind well-equipped and well-controlled, but of one emotionally well-nourished,” a fine balance of reason, judgement and sensibility which Hoggart interprets as the result of Williams’ biographical bridging of the worlds of formal education and working-class community: “a fine intelligence,” as he puts it, “developed through good educational opportunities; and a sense of local and communal roots which is not sentimental” (172-73). This assessment set a pattern few have departed from, using the metaphor of “border country” to read Williams’ life against his work, and vice versa, to explain how he seems able to cohere
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apparently contradictory elements and to anticipate their eventual full and total reconciliation.

In these respects then, to come to my point, the figure of Williams has been so fashioned as to serve as an emblem for the prospect of a knowledge which, situated on the other side of the fragmenting effects of intellectual specialisation, will not be wracked and torn by its schisms. In effect, Williams has thus served as a kind of symbolic precursor of the intellectual consequences of the condition of a common culture into which the historical process has yet to deliver us. The difficulty this gives rise to, however, is that disciplines become undefinable except in negative terms—except, that is, in terms of the respects in which they fall short of, or fail to contribute to, the holistic and integrative forms of cognition that will characterise inquiry once the limitations of disciplinary boundaries have been surpassed. It is for this reason that cultural studies, in so far as it is heir to such conceptions, has usually proved unable to define itself as a discipline in terms of definite traits and characteristics. Instead, attempts to define cultural studies usually result in an evasion of this task in favour of an anticipatory dissolution of other disciplinary specificities into the cultural studies couldron.

Richard Johnson's essay "What Is Cultural Studies Anyway?" is a case in point, and an instructive one in that, although one of the most taut and constructive definitional discussions of cultural studies yet to be offered, it is ultimately diverted from identifying a set of disciplinary attributes that are specific to it in favour of adumbrating its aspirations towards a form of intellectual completeness. Johnson's purpose, he states, is to consider "arguments for and against the academic codification of cultural studies" and especially to ask, "should cultural studies aspire to the status of an academic discipline?" However, the question is put from a perspective which, echoing the cultural studies discourse of the true, favours an answer in the negative:

A codification of methods or knowledges (instituting them, for example, in formal curricula or in courses on "methodology") runs against some of the main features of cultural studies as a tradition: its openness and theoretical versatility, its reflexive even self-conscious mood, and, especially, the importance of critique. I mean critique in the fullest sense: not criticism merely, nor even polemic, but procedures by which other traditions are approached both for what they may yield and for what they inhibit. Critique involves stealing away the more useful elements and rejecting the rest. From this point of view cultural studies is a process, a kind of alchemy for producing useful knowledge; codify it and you might half its reactions.

("What Is Cultural Studies Anyway?" 38)

Defined in these terms, the issue revolves around an opposition between the academicisation of cultural studies and its capacity to produce "useful knowledge"—a term which, in Johnson's own historical work, recalls the opposition between self-provided forms of working-class education and the mystifying and ideologically misleading forms
of education provided by the state ("Really Useful Knowledge"). Broached in this way, Johnson deflects the question of the definition of cultural studies into a familiar double-bind according to which, the more it succeeds, the more it fails. How, he asks, can students who encounter cultural studies as an orthodoxy — an administered curriculum with its own text books, etc. — be expected to inhabit it critically? And if they are unable to do this, is what they do adequately described as cultural studies? Yet Johnson is quick to recognise the other side of this dilemma (dilemmas are like that) in contending that, without a clear sense of its own disciplinary integrity, cultural studies runs the practical risk that its graduates will prove unemployable just as it entertains the theoretical risk that its identity will be pulled hither and thither by the different disciplines (literature, sociology, history) on which it draws, thus reproducing disciplinary differences within itself in the form of rivalries between, for example, a literary and a sociological cultural studies. The difficulties this prospect of disciplinary divisions within cultural studies occasions for Johnson are instructive.

This would not matter if any one discipline or problematic could grasp the objects of culture as a whole, but this is not, in my opinion, the case. Each approach tells us about a tiny aspect. If this is right, we need a particular kind of defining activity: one which reviews existing approaches, identifies their characteristic objects and their good sense, but also the limits of their competence. Actually it is not definition or codification that we need, but pointers to further transformations. This is not a question of aggregating existing approaches (a bit of sociology here, a spot of linguistics there) but of reforming the elements of different approaches in their relations to each other.

("What Is Cultural Studies" 41)

Viewed in this light, the task of defining cultural studies is reinterpreted as the need to devise ways of integrating different disciplinary perspectives into a moving method which will achieve greater forms of completeness from the point of view of understanding the cultural process as a whole. There is much of value to be learned from the details of Johnson's proposals on this matter. Here, however, I want to focus on the assumption which forms the backdrop to these: the assumption that disciplinary specialisation — or, indeed, any specialising kind of intellectual perspective or focus — must be judged wanting from the perspective of the whole. In reviewing a range of customary oppositions — between culturalism and structuralism, between text-based studies, production studies and the study of lived-cultures — Johnson concludes that each approach "has a rationality in relation to that moment it has most closely in view, but is quite evidently inadequate, even 'ideological,' as an account of the whole" (72-73). However, unless the ways in which the shortcomings of other disciplinary perspectives are to be overcome are specified in terms of definite rules of transformation through which their methods are to be either supplanted by, or integrated into, those of cultural studies, statements of this kind are either
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platitudinous or evasive. What performs this role instead for Johnson is an implicit epistemological norm of totality in which the aspiration towards greater forms of completeness always and necessarily overrides the partialising effects of disciplinary divisions.

Of course, it may well be that a fully hard-and-fast definition of cultural studies is not possible and, certainly, the matter is not one that either needs or merits obsessive attention. However, if we are to recognise the position that cultural studies now occupies within educational institutions, and if we are to take our bearings from this in order to chart possible paths for its future development, a greater degree of definitional clarity and precision would not go amiss. This, however, will only be possible on the condition that we abandon the existing forms of "being in the true" of cultural studies in order to fashion new ones. For the problem has not been any lack of definitional discussion within cultural studies, but rather the ways in which such discussions have been conducted. In his valuable proselytising for and on behalf of cultural studies, Stuart Hall has always insisted that cultural studies can't be just anything. However, as I have argued elsewhere, when he then tries to define its boundaries, the result has often been an identification of a certain style of intellectual work which, in its appeal to the personal qualities of the intellectual, borders on, but without quite becoming, a system of charismatic authority ("Coming Out of English"). It is the contention of this paper that the definition of cultural studies in terms of a set of disciplinary attributes that can be learned and applied is now a better means of ensuring its continued useful and productive development than its conception as an intellectual style to be emulated.

Of course, it might be objected that to abandon the claim to an inherent interdisciplinariness is, at the same time, to sacrifice the virtues of intellectual mobility and flexibility that have been claimed for, and on behalf of, cultural studies. No doubt there are risks of real losses here. In the final analysis, however, the objection cannot be sustained, mainly because of the static, reified and unhistorical view of disciplines on which it rests. This is not merely to reiterate the historical truism that today's disciplines are yesterday's interdisciplines. Rather, the more important point is that, within the social sciences and humanities, most disciplines — of history, sociology, economics, literary studies, art-history, and so on — have in recent decades proved remarkably mobile and flexible, constantly generating new objects of concern and attention within and between themselves without any necessary reference or indebtedness to cultural studies.

The tendency to overlook the historical mobility of disciplines is not entirely accidental. For there is a sense in which the cultural studies discourse of the true both requires and perpetuates a misleadingly petrified account of the disciplines it sees itself as transcending. That other knowledges should be viewed as partial and incomplete is a necessary counter-foil to cultural studies' own claims to embody an integrative kind of intellectual wholeness; the constant demonstration of such incompleteness is, indeed, the means by which the case for wholeness
is advanced. But then this too often means that cultural studies fails to
offer any account of other humanities disciplines which assesses them in
their positivity. One might say that cultural studies needs the disciplines
in that it is only with reference to their one-sided partialities that its own
claims to transcendence can be advanced. A consequence of this,
however, is that cultural studies never says anything about those
disciplines except to point out their incompleteness from the point of
view of the principle of epistemic wholeness it itself aspires to. This is,
indeed, a different process from that which Canguilhem argued ought to
characterise the history of scientific thought. Here, it will be recalled,
new truths establish themselves in and through the process of producing
new objects of knowledge whose characteristics allow previous statements
to be classified as error. This is quite a different process from discounting
disciplines on the grounds of their incompleteness in relation to a yet-to-
be-achieved norm of cognitive wholeness. Cultural studies will acquire
a better understanding of its own concerns and practices as well as their
relations to those of adjacent disciplines — whose practical (as distinct
from rhetorical) transcendence is by no means in sight — if it abandons
its present discourse of the truth and focuses instead on proposing a more
definite and limited set of disciplinary attributes for itself, and views
these, more modestly, as existing alongside other disciplinary norms and
paradigms rather than auguring their dissolution into its own totalising
ambition.

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the first draft of this article. Their insightfulness proved invaluable to me in
finalising the article for publication.

1 George Marcus discusses a related manoeuvre through which specific
knowledge claims are validated in and by the speech of subordinate groups.
He thus refers to Paul Willis’s Learning to Labour as a piece of “ethnographic
midwifery among the proletariat” (181) which authenticates Marxist
criticisms of the capitalist division of labour by means of a ventriloquist
ethnography in which those criticisms seem to be spoken — directly, without
intellectual mediation — by the working classes themselves.

2 A degree of scepticism regarding this claim is called for only because of the
mythological status it has now acquired. McKenzie Wark, for example, has
Williamson, Thompson and Hoggart creating “the first cultural studies
curriculum while teaching adult education courses at Cambridge” because
“they wanted to create ways of teaching the culture of everyday life to the
people who lived it” (13). In fact, of course, none of them taught extramurally
at Cambridge — Williams was at Oxford, Hoggart at Hull and Thompson at
Leeds. I doubt also that any would claim to have organised cultural studies
curricula in their extramural days.

3 Williams’ retrospective account of his years with the Oxford Extra-Mural
Delegacy is much clearer on this matter, especially in his discussion of the
tension between the quite different educational objectives of “adult
education” and “workers education” and the post-war tendency of
extramural provision to move increasingly towards the former (Politics and Letters 78-83). In a later account, by contrast, Williams embraces the terms of Hall's account in attributing the early formation of cultural studies to postwar adult education. Even so, the stress of Williams' account is different in emphasizing not politics but the relations of democratic mutuality between teacher and taught within the extramural class, relations he sees as holding out the promise of a common culture—a promise subsequently denied, in his view, by the bureaucratization of the teacher-taught relation involved in the development of the Open University (The Politics of Modernism 151-62).

4 The stress here on the language of "skills" and "training" is deliberate. One of the most disappointing aspects of the debates surrounding the calls of the Finn and Carrmichael Reports for a greater stress on skills and competency trainings in tertiary education, and for a gradation of skills and competencies capable of connecting the TAFE and higher education sectors, has been the readiness of cultural studies intellectuals to fall into line behind traditional defences of the humanities as a form of education which exceeds the mundane calculus that the notions of skills, trainings and competences imply. In this way, intellectuals who, elsewhere, show a ready theoretical appreciation of Bourdieu's arguments regarding the unequal amounts of cultural capital associated with different trainings and knowledges, and of the role which the distribution of such capital plays in the symbolic legitimation and reproduction of relations of class power, display their practical commitment to cultic conceptions of knowledge on which the power and charisma of the traditional intellectual depend.

5 The issue, of course, is whether such a discourse of the truth should continue to be granted any leeway in the cultural sphere. This question is posed in a very pointed way by R.W. Birchfield in his review of Keywords. As the managing editor for the OED, Birchfield was clearly stung by Williams' suggestion that the OED editors were out of touch with demotic usage, showing an establishment bias in the pattern of their inclusions and exclusions. In rebutting this allegation — and he does so in detail and convincingly — Birchfield proceeds to show how, judged by the standards of the professional lexicographer, much of Keywords is technically flawed. (He suggests the book should be classified in the Dewey system as Education 374 [Adult Education] rather than as a work of primary scholarship.) Birchfield's criticisms are lent particular force in the objection he lodges to the argument that Williams might be especially sensitive to non-official speech because of the borders he has crossed biographically. Birchfield's reply is that, as the son of working-class parents in New Zealand, educated at Wanganui Technical College before going to Oxford, and as a non-conformist and lifelong Labour Party supporter, he might say the same for himself — but soundly concludes that to do so would be irrelevant as such factors have no bearing on the lexicographical practices through which language uses are recorded and registered.

6 Inglis offers a similar assessment but, interestingly, one which sees the need to relate life and work together as a response to Williams' own tendency to push his life to the centre of his work by often forging his subject matter "out of the intersections of career and history, of biography and eventuality" (170). Parrinder adopts a similar perspective but extends it in warning against sentimentalising Williams' biography via picturesque readings of his attempts to straddle the borders between Wales and Cambridge, working-class community and middle-class education, etc. Instead, Parrinder suggests, we should view this aspect of Williams' work as a formative
intellectual strategy, one which asserts the demand that theory must be judged before the court of experience and gives form to the conviction that there is a deep unity to the culture even though its surface might seem fractured.

7 There is, in this sense, a connection between the difficulty critics have experienced in summarising Williams' accomplishments and the parallel difficulties associated with defining the concept of a common culture. For the latter, too, is not definable in terms of any definite set of attributes. The condition of a common culture, Eagleton argued, cannot be defined in that it refers to what is always a necessarily incomplete totalisation: "the culture cannot ever be brought finally to consciousness because it is never fully finished" ("Idea of a Common Culture" 51). Similarly, for Williams, a common culture was not a culture held in common but a common relation to culture understood as a process "in which the people as a whole participate in the articulation of meanings and values, and in the consequent decisions between this meaning and that, this value and that" ("Culture and Revolution" 30). A common culture, as he summarises it at the end of the same essay, is a "free, contributive and common process of participation in the creation of meanings and values" (33). There is a clear connection here between Williams' notion of a common culture and Habermas' concept of an ideal speech community. It is, then, perhaps no surprise that Habermas — as he has since indicated (see "Further Reflections") — should have found Williams' work of major assistance in formulating his critique of the public sphere.

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