
Interrogating Cultural Studies

Theory, Politics and Practice

Edited by
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potential (and in this he is following Aristotle). One kind of potential is an energy that gets used up or exhausted in realisation, as it were: the potentiality in my boyish body, say, to become manly. If or when it does become manly, it is no longer boyish: the condition of manliness, in realising itself, exhausts the potential that was there in the boyish body. Against this is a more interesting potential, such as the potential of the poet to write poems. In this kind, the potential to write is not exhausted once the poet writes her poem, but remains still as potential. Further, she is still a poet even if, at the moment, she is not writing a poem – not realising the potential in an artefact. It follows from this that, in this kind of potentiality, the potential to be must maintain the potential not-to-be.

Following this, we might say that we have two separate kinds of choice. On one hand, we might advocate a potential that is exhausted in its realisation of itself: this is the description of the instrumental knowledge that shapes not only philistinism, but also cultural studies. On the other, we have the possibility of opening ourselves to culture as potentiality; and in this, we become like poets in the sense that we do not exhaust culture in its realisation, but rather acknowledge that its realisation is grounded in the very possibility that it might not come about at all – that culture faces the great literary question of modernity itself: to be or not to be. If we follow this route, then culture becomes a *poiesis*, a making that is endless, endlessly different, and thus endlessly free.

Finally, this conception of freedom is one that is based less on our power to bring things about and more on our capacity to acknowledge our limitations. For it is only by acknowledging that there are such limitations that we might have the humility required to respond to the event that is culture. Such a response is our responsibility.

NOTES

1. F.R. Leavis, *The Critic as Anti-Philosopher* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1982), p. 160.
2. Bill Readings, *The University in Ruins* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1996), p. 102.

15 Unruly Fugues

Lynette Hunter

Legend

c. The written explanatory matter accompanying an illustration, map, etc. Also attrib., as legend-line. (*OED*)

THE MUSEUM

As with other museum pieces, the sections in this commentary are accompanied by a legend, which are as effacing and illuminating as most of those little bits of card placed alongside museum exhibits. They pose seven assumptions about cultural studies in the UK with which I'll try to engage:

1. Cultural studies has a) no position and b) no text [and c) no history].

No position

2. Cultural studies is banal or cynical: a convenient way of finding an institutional name for theory which is a) metadiscursive and therefore without material, and b) interdisciplinary and therefore with no content.

3. Cultural studies is narcissistic: only interested in special interest groups concerned to add to their own 'special rights'.

4. Cultural studies is melancholic and bitter: the acceptable face of a psychological understanding that underwrites essential humanism, that desire is *necessary* and that identity is difference.

No text

5. Cultural studies is thematic: recognising that social and historical context are missing to many textual analyses, yet adding them without rhetorical understanding or textual work.

6. Cultural studies is either technical or transcendent: the place where people go when they feel guilty about not dealing first hand with people or the natural world.

7. Cultural studies is about endless deferral: the place where people go when they get frightened of moral labour, ethical commitment and of things they can't articulate.

Cultural studies has no position

Cultural studies is banal or cynical: a convenient way of finding an institutional name for theory which is a) metadiscursive and therefore without material, and b) interdisciplinary and therefore with no content.

The assumption derives from the sense that cultural studies has no material social context. Yet historically this is questionable. The scientific moves by the 'arts' (ie., critics) to legitimate themselves shortly after universities expanded in the UK at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century, such as definitive bibliography or practical criticism, crumbled by mid-century. They were replaced by philosophical systems such as 'Leavis', yet the gap was more ardently filled by the theoretical developments of post-war European thinkers such as Lévi-Strauss, Jakobson, Lacan, Foucault, Derrida. We know this history, but it had institutional implications that are less well-worked.

I am not an historian of education, but what I saw was that people in many disciplinary areas became interested in the theoretical developments, attended interdisciplinary discussion groups that in effect threatened their disciplinary base. But the second rapid expansion of universities in the UK in the 1960s–1970s led to massive changes in the use of architectural space separating different areas of thinking from each other, to huge numbers of students that upset the balance of discussion and teaching and research, and to the stringent cutbacks of the 1980s – all of which sent many people scuttling back into their baseline disciplines.

But the experience proved the value of the discourse.

From my own perspective the cultural studies project is to provide an account of the rhetoric of culture, which means that it is entwined with an analysis of current modes of western democracy. This is only one way of looking at cultural studies, but I will argue that using rhetoric as a tool to think about cultural studies allows one to work

in other areas than the ideological and hegemonic. Recognising the rhetorical work in cultural studies reminds us not only that culture is rooted in society and history but also that it is messy. It reminds us that discourse is a largely man-made field around which are many other environments. I would like to pursue its effects specifically in the area of situated knowledge and textuality.

The work of cultural studies on the rhetoric of culture is similar to that by other fields in discourse studies such as gender studies, or studies in ethnicity, although to some extent it has come to be the site where coherent theoretical developments in all these areas are explored. Cultural studies arose in its present incarnation as a response to the determinism of New Marxism, especially Althusser. After its elaboration of cultural state apparatuses, its main insight was that not all elements of social relations were interpellated, not all elements of a person were 'called' or hailed. Cultural studies was working from an attempt to account for social change, and its discourse came to offer a rhetoric that promised social change.

Within an Althusserian framework, ideology and the subject engage in a set of relations constrained by representation. There are problems with this that we now see more clearly:

1. subjects are citizens but many people are not full citizens, hence do not stand before the law in the same way
2. subjects are never fully represented by representations, and are therefore always already lacking and in different ways
3. ideology needs stability in order to project representations, stability to maintain society and more importantly markets; such stability is guaranteed in most western nation-states by the family, but this varies from nation to nation with obvious differences challenging stability – although some obvious differences can also maintain stability by becoming the depraved 'other'.

(False) consciousness is the fiction that all this is stable and determined: a Freudian model developed to explain bourgeois necessity/a capitalist model developed to explain psychoanalytic necessity.

Yet although retrospectively problematic, it was an enormously courageous political gesture that was attempting to assault the authoritarian/anarchic divide that characterised much of early twentieth-century political thinking in the West. That divide

encouraged the illusion that individuals could operate in isolation, which may have nauseated Sartre but inspired many others. The divide also encouraged the illusion that authority existed independent of the individual. By insisting on a relation between authority and the individual, even the determinist subject-ideology relation of representation, New Marxism was insisting on a different kind of social interaction and responsibility. Indeed it now looks very honest, precisely because we have come to recognise more overtly that it is only applicable to those citizens who already have power.

The heart of this political gesture was to provide a discourse, a vocabulary, grammar and semantics, that insisted on the relation between authority and the individual, the state apparatus and human beings. Yet what I see as the enforced retreat back to disciplinary bases left a sense that this area of discussion was metadiscursive and divorced from practical issues. That metadiscursiveness had made interdisciplinarity possible – taking over from Latin and then science – with ‘discourse’. However, if metadiscursiveness is held to be inherently divorced from practical issues, not only does discourse become metadiscourse but interdisciplinarity loses its content: if interdisciplinarity is held to be inherently divorced from practical issues not only does it lose its content, but discourse becomes metadiscourse. The debate, interestingly, had itself provided the vocabulary to describe this event. Cultural studies as it came to be called, or discourse studies more broadly, was a postmodern simulacrum. Cultural studies was ‘merely playing games with words’.

Cultural studies follows no different a path than many other institutional disciplines, yet its material reason for practice is to work in an interdisciplinary mode. Hence the apparently inexorable stability it acquires as it becomes part of the nation-state structure of education, demands that it become represented. Once represented it necessarily also puts itself under constraint, because representation makes subjects of us all. Under constraint its political effectiveness may be rendered banal, and may generate Magazine-cultural studies: cultural studies for the cynics, those who have power (or think they should have power) but can’t use it (or can’t use it effectively).

Nevertheless, cultural studies also acquires a position, the hegemonic power to speak to and have an impact on state power. Some of those unruly people who survived came to offer a rhetoric that promised social change.

Cultural studies is narcissistic: only interested in special interest groups concerned to add to their own ‘special rights’.

If cultural studies understands that 1) not all people are subjects/ed in the same way, 2) that the partiality of representation accounted for desire, and 3) that state power is always two-way even if constrained, it deals to a large degree with ‘fit’. Fit is what keeps ideology stable, and cultural studies has often worked by turning to specific fields such as race, gender, and sometimes class, which for the moment of the end of the twentieth and the beginning of the twenty-first century at least, present elements which are radically unfit.

As an institutional discipline cultural studies will have no necessary focus of fit to which to turn, yet it has never looked to the hegemonic activity of its own interdisciplinary mode to articulate the fittingness of its studies. For institutional political reasons its ethos echoes that of other disciplines and is self-evident. In effect it has been left to the cultural studies worker to deal with fit, and I am uneasy about the neglect of the rhetorical effect of relation between the ‘discipline’ and the worker, a neglect which mimics the authoritarian/anarchic divide. In order to recognise the central issues, the individual people working on cultural studies have had to choose to respond to a field of the fit/unfit, often recognising something in their own lives that didn’t fit.

Who were these workers? People in positions of some privilege, because integrated into higher education, yet also often people from particular backgrounds with particular issues that didn’t fit. Cultural studies is partly a response to democracy in first world western states where economic imperialism has constructed a standard of living high enough to promote class mobility for diverse groups. It is no surprise that in the UK cultural studies becomes instituted after the effects of 1968 became interpreted: that people who had moved into positions of relative power in terms of the vote, of income etc., made apparently little difference. Cultural studies is there partly to work out why this is so, and partly to argue for the right to that effectiveness by valuing the cultures of the newly ‘empowered’.

Cultural studies workers were and are partly motivated or impelled by ideologically problematic issues, elements of society that for a wide variety of complex reasons come to the fore and urge their unfittingness on us – and to that extent are assimilated into the ideological process. Stuart Hall, and later Laclau and Mouffe, are good examples of people who shifted the ground for cultural studies

and made the interaction with the ideological hegemonic not determinist, in effect replacing 'ideology' with 'discourse'.

Since cultural studies is fundamentally engaged with nation-state politics, wanting to provide the vocabulary that makes possible the representation of those particulars of life that don't fit, to that extent it is not only challenging the ideological status quo, but also constructing it. It is rhetorically agonistic because it is always bound to the grounds it challenges. Yet it carries on the perception of New Marxism that revolution simply perpetuates repression, and develops a politics of the intellectual (highly unconventional in the UK), the licensed challenger of the state, always compromised but also highly effective. We could say that such activity is overdetermined by the ideological issues with which it engages, but this would not account for the change it both describes, un-writes, and in de-describing affects and effects.

What limits and censors cultural studies is how people deal with the sense of 'fit'. Workers in cultural studies are working from their sense of subjectivity and what has been excluded from it, what cannot be represented, what does not fit. One example might be the bisexual person who in effect lives a life of bisexuality that cannot be represented in current representation. Not that this bisexual life doesn't happen, but that it has no vocabulary of recognition. In cultural studies this seems to pose a splitting of the ways: that non-representation may be thought of as a 'lack' or a 'gap' that fuels empty desire, but it may also be thought of as a lived life with social and political consequences. In either case, to deal with those consequences, the life needs to become visible and audible. With the former, finding vocabulary all too often loses materiality, duplicates the rhetoric of ideology and leaves discourse to be assimilated, while with the latter the situatedness of the life can be more rhetorically effective by building vocabulary that insists that that person becomes integral, necessarily shifting the form of representation itself.

At the same time the process of 'adding to' the special rights of the disempowered does not address the problem of the 'natural rights' of privileged men at the heart of the social contract that binds western nation-states. As Pateman argues, the existence of 'natural rights' makes 'special rights' necessary to deal with exclusion, disempowerment and lack of equity.¹ The weakness of 'special rights' is precisely that they are allocated to a special case. The people with 'special rights' are in fact the privileged, because they have rights not accorded to anyone else. Because of its institutional rhetoric cultural

studies may be seen to be narcissistically arguing for the special rights of particular groups already partly assimilated into ideological representation, rather than speaking from a position of partial disempowerment, exercising its democratic right to be heard and thereby inventing an articulatory for hegemonic integration.

My argument would be that hegemonic articulatory deals with the 'unfittingness' of people mainly in terms of desire and is left helpless with the sense of inadequacy, whereas it derives its effectiveness from unacknowledged situated labour on the textuality of the particular lived experience that articulates need.

Laclau and Mouffe's concept of articulatory,² which as I indicate here is different from 'articulation', is fundamental to the concept of the individual being unrepresented, to a part of their lives being 'under erasure'. In this, cultural studies adopts the critique from psychoanalysis that as subjects, individuals can never be fully represented and are therefore always already with a loss or gap or absence. Stuart Hall describes the steps taken by Foucault in moving from the 'transparent' or fully represented subject to the individual with an identity 'operating "under erasure"'.³ He argues that we still have to think in these terms because it allows us to write in agency and politics. For Hall current discussions of identity 'attempt to rearticulate the relationship between subjects and discursive practices'.⁴ This is 'the point of *suture*'.⁵ At the same time the psychoanalytic artefact of desire skinned over by this suture brings its own problems.

Cultural studies is melancholic and bitter: the acceptable face of a psychological understanding that underwrites essential humanism, that desire is necessary and that identity is difference.

Desire is the unrepresentable, the lack. If desire becomes representable, does it become something else? Has the strategy, where successful, of finding vocabulary and acceptance for previously outlawed sexualities made them no longer part of 'desire'? Is the representability of desire a self-conscious choice to deter, to make secret, to maintain individual isolation and guarantee essence? As Catherine Belsey argues in rehearsing Freud's commentary on the death drive: it entices us beyond pleasure yet that movement is in itself pleasurable.⁶ Do we in effect desire 'desire'? Do we make it exist to explain change? Is it more fun because it is secret? Does it promise,

in its unknowableness, heroism? desire as necessary because it guarantees our identity: an identity that by the presence/absence of a particular desire is different from others, and hence essentialist?

On the other hand do we resist realising desire or, in effect, does deferral have more to do with the frustration of knowing the inadequacy of that realisation? that articulation is in effect another representation, and by definition inadequate since inadequacy is what makes it a representation? Is it because the articulation is a social act, and we know that the community to whom the representation becomes available isn't getting the whole story? that articulation realises only at the cost of constituting a representation, with its own shadows of exclusion? generating melancholy and bitterness?

Another way of looking at this is to remember that very large numbers of people live lives partially if not mainly outwith representation. Does this mean that their whole lives are 'desire'? or are they completely without desire? Can they articulate their lives if representation is wholly inadequate to the realisation? Well, I guess I think they/we/I can, but it's difficult to account for within the pre-dominant model of ideology/hegemony. Cultural studies workers appear to recognise this, and initiated by the spreading democratic franchises of the twentieth century, have built a highly contradictory location for work on identity where people attempt to devise guidelines for thinking about human beings-in-proximity. That contradiction is helpful in addressing state structures of power, but is often at a loss when faced with the messiness of lived lives.

Belsey notes:

The signifiable, translated to the realm of signification and momentarily, provisionally and ultimately ineffectually 'fixed' as the signified, undergoes the pain of a loss, a kind of death; the experience of the part reappears in the present tense as merely differential and differentiated: Other than it is, no more than the lost cause of its own representation.⁷

Yes, but: another way of looking at this is through the textual labour that has pursued signification, thrown out lines of realisation, worked with others on articulation. Belsey continues saying that this status of the signifier necessitates interpretation, however precarious, uncertain, provisional, and that 'what is lost when a need is formulated as a demand reappears as desire'.⁸ Yes, but: what's also

there is that if need is formulated through locatedness, a situated textuality, it does not become a loss or a desire. It makes something. Shifts modality.

The status of the signifier in representation is one of inadequacy, necessary failure. This status will ensure its failure and its construction of desire. Yet just as we may choose to understand that the signifier is inadequate, as have many conventions of post-Cartesian language studies, so we may choose to understand that the signifier is instead, as Wittgenstein and others have suggested, limited, not referring to something else but making itself into significance in the engagement with writer and reader.⁹ If the signifier is limited, inadequacy is not an issue. Nor is failure. Nor is desire-as-lack.

I remember when I, along with many other people, felt completely overdetermined by ideology. I remember working with such contradiction and stress to understand the processes of discursive interaction that eventually became called hegemony. And I remember the frustration of then feeling overdetermined by hegemonic complicity (see Macdonell). But I also remember when I first had the opportunity of working with others on a particular need, something so urgently pressing that we had to engage with its articulation, and realising that this work, although it didn't get rid of ideology and hegemony, simply happened in a different location and with a different rhetoric (Hunter).

Cultural studies without situatedness becomes cynical, banal, narcissistic, melancholic and bitter. It needs location and partiality. Hall suggests that the critique that describes the cultural studies balancing act between ideology and hegemony, between representation and desire, derives from a combination of location and of psychoanalysis that has turned to deconstruction. Belsey's 'precarious, uncertain, provisional'. He adds that, since

they have not been superceded dialectically, and there are no other, entirely different concepts with which to replace them, there is nothing to do but to continue to think with them – albeit now in their detotalized or deconstructed forms ...¹⁰

There are probably no 'entirely different concepts' because concepts are spoken in language, and language is always related. But there is another way of looking at this: from the position of rhetoric and situated textuality.

Cultural studies has no text

Cultural Studies is thematic: recognising that social and historical context are missing to many textual analyses, yet adding them without rhetorical understanding or textual work.

The idea that cultural studies is 'merely playing games with words' largely derives from an understanding that cultural studies is *the* postmodern phenomenon. And postmodernism is a radical challenge to cultural representations, both antagonistic and agonistic, that frequently discards 'history' in order to sever inappropriate referential links. In this it is perceived not to be doing anything different, but merely breaking down what is there. The view is endemic in some political environments where the possibility that the truth of representation is not absolute has led to a tide of absolutist irony: irony that defines all common ground as groundless, all difference as the same. I rarely recognise this kind of postmodernism in the culture of third or fourth world communities. 'Post-colonial' cultures have always lived with a knowledge of the co-existence of different common grounds, difference fostered differently in different places.

If cultural studies is perceived to be merely playing games with words, and not about their incarnation or realisation, then doing cultural studies implies that you are not connected to society, you are just free-floating along the surface. Cultural studies is partly responsible for this because methodologically, just as it has not paid much attention to the relationship between the institution and the cultural studies worker and the resulting implications for ethos/pathos/stance, neither has it paid enough attention to the way it describes texts or textualities. It tends to remain discursive rather than pursue other rhetorical space and stance. I would argue that cultural studies workers recognise precisely that social and historical context are missing from much textual work, but that without an understanding of rhetoric, adding them in leaves them thematic rather than material.

Rhetoric is a word that encompasses all communication in social and historical contexts. Discourse describes part of rhetoric, as does classical political rhetoric to which discourse is intimately related, and as do also Biblical rhetoric, storytelling, poetics and many others. Discursive rhetoric is bound to representation, to lifting it, to altering it, to the agonistic processes of articulation. It contributes

directly to that part of rhetorical study that is concerned with nation-state democracy, and throws into relief the current shift to more democratic rhetorics just as did the civic rhetoric of the sixteenth century. The results of discursive rhetoric are highly effective in immediate political terms because those institutions with effective power can hear what is being said and recognise grounds they understand. They can therefore approach and listen to, if not welcome, the argument. But the discursive is locked into its particular field, the grounds of nation-state ideology. It doesn't look to other modes of rhetoric for help with working outside the double-bind – perhaps because it does not know this is possible, or perhaps because it is simply not aware of them.

Many of the inspirations for cultural studies, such as Michel Foucault or Jacques Derrida, are steeped in rhetoric. Although not interested in using the same elements, they both draw on an extensive methodology. And there are pros and cons: 'rhetoric' as a discipline is heavily influenced by classical rhetoric. For example, Althusserian determinism depends on the classical paradigm of scientific rhetoric for its model of power, and Derrida still has difficulty imagining an individual who is not primarily subjected.¹¹ On the other hand Foucault's shift of position in the 1970s was a shift made possible by simply stepping sideways out of classical rhetoric. But you can't do that if you don't know it's there.

A distinguishing feature of UK cultural studies, despite Raymond Williams, is that most people make little even implicit reference to rhetoric, classical or not, whereas it pervades European and North American studies. Again this has pros and cons: classical rhetoric was the primary discursive structure in which anyone who held power in western Europe, and then in its colonies, was educated for at least ten years of their life, from the medieval period onward. Knowledge of it can be smothering, suffocating, ideologically binding, and you can never leave it completely behind. But once you recognise that it's there you can begin to see/hear/taste/feel if not smell, its extents, its fallings off, its abrupt cessations.

Belsey describes the effect of discursive rhetoric on 'Traditional cultural history' as 'The more totalizing the narrative, the more readable the history': the more thematic the content, I would add. She argues that for a 'material practice' we need 'history at the level of the signifier',¹² and reading that pays attention to the text:

Culture resides primarily in the representations of the world exchanged, negotiated and, indeed, contested in a society. Some of these representations may coincide with existing practices; they may determine or legitimate them; or alternatively, they may challenge them. Representations are not, however, purely discursive; they also have, in my mind, their own materiality. That is to say, culture is in its way *lived*.¹³

If, as Belsey claims, cultural history acknowledges the gap between the past and the present¹⁴ it is 'not in consequence empty, a blank sheet, or a self-proclaimed fiction, ... because we *make* a relation, in both senses of that term, out of *our* reading practices and *their* documents'.¹⁵ This attention to textuality is part of what situates the work socially and historically in a material location. Without it the thematic focus may leave the work banal.

Cultural studies is either technical or transcendent: the place where people go when they feel guilty about not dealing first hand with people or the natural world.

The move to deal with people or the natural world may have a political impetus, which is often misplaced in the sense that work on the material text, whatever it is, is always 'lived' and therefore political. But cultural studies work is also often scientific in its textuality. Science treats language as if it were necessarily inadequate, which is not surprising since modern science has its roots also in classical political rhetoric. The writer of science usually assumes that words will fail to describe the experience of the experiment, hence the focus on informing the reader of how the experiment can be replicated so that we can experience it for ourselves. The words do not acknowledge the difference between signifier and reality, they are simply there to convey information about how to reproduce that reality. Occasionally the science writer writes in the transcendent mode typical of hegemonic poetics, which recognises the inadequacy of language as only surpassable by some heroic gesture of verbal transcendence: the mainstay of modern aesthetics.

It may be significant that people who have tried to position themselves socially and historically with respect to science are not often thought of as doing cultural studies. Donna Haraway, Sandra Harding, Hilary Rose, are not doing cultural studies but SSSY: Social Studies of Science and Technology. There is no cultural studies of

'poverty', as if some conditions implicitly cannot afford irony – a rhetorical stance that maintains what it critiques – as if cultural studies cannot contemplate the possibility that poverty may not go away within the structure of the double-bind.

Furthermore, people who deal with other cultures are anthropologists or ethnologists, not cultural studies workers. Cultural studies workers often position themselves to talk about what they know, and cultural studies is often most satisfying when dealing with its own difference from the representable. Just as it seems less willing to engage with other cultures, it is arguably not as helpful when dealing with the differences we construct in our engagement with others. Belsey indicates her uneasiness with a similar issue but challenges it to engage, saying that cultural historians should be archaeologists, dealing not with synchronicity (ethnology) nor with similarity (anthropology) but with the medium of temporal and spatial difference.

But there is another way of looking at this, for we know that the classical political rhetoric which envelops so many western nation-states does not work in many social and political environments. If we know, not necessarily even as specific knowledge but as tacit knowledge, that the culture and society does not fit, and that rather than having to make it fit there's another place to inhabit, then the work shifts its location. But the rhetorical structures of this kind of work are difficult to pin down. Their usual premise, the value of their own difference, can be similar to that of the cult, but cults assume that once on the inside sameness predominates. Alternatively, the rhetoric can work from the tacit into strategies and a stance close to those enacted by people working on situated knowledge. But no knowledge exists without textuality, and textuality shifts the premise of the work: from the value of its own difference to the recognition that it exists to make difference, both its own and others, and hence must value both.

Cultural studies is about endless deferral: the place where people go when they get frightened of moral labour, ethical commitment and of things they can't articulate.

There is a sense in which deconstruction is sometimes read as 'endless' deferral. Stuart Hall speaks of the need for 'arbitrary closure'¹⁶ in order to make agency possible in these circumstances. Without moments of closure, deferral becomes the 'mise en abyme'

necessitated by the tautological structure of ideology, representation and the subject. Deferral makes possible the artefact of desire central to hegemony and discourse. Belsey argues, despite her insistence on the material, the lived, the reading of text and the making of a relation, that we can only analyse the signifier. It is analysis 'in which not only the real, but meaning too, while not simply lost, is forever deferred and deferred'.¹⁷ But the real that is made in the process of reading the signifiers, no matter whether these be words or gestures or signs in any other medium, is what I call articulation. With articulation we do not analyse the signifier but articulate our process of the construction of difference. Difference isn't just there, we make it. Difference is not only the gap in representation which a certain kind of difference certainly is, but a particular thing made by us in our negotiations and recognitions of others.

A strategy for deferral is to attain agency by temporarily halting its movement, which is perfectly legitimate and often useful, but doesn't do much to representation. Such transcendence is not necessarily an attempt at transparency, yet neither is it attuned to difference, ambiguity and partiality. If we work instead with an understanding (which we put under the work in order for it to have a ground to stand on) of language as limited like most human things are, rather than inadequate, then articulation is action, and different positions of articulation will lead to different kinds of action. If desire becomes the marker of the place where we recognise need, it may also become the place where we meet others and negotiate articulations and make differences. Although poetics is historically the place where people go to articulate something important to them that has as yet no mediation, cultural studies is where people go when they want that articulation to participate in a wider social world. In both cases, unless they are situated the articulation will buy into representation in ways that assimilate the individual.

Nicole Brossard describes the rituals of the process of reading as a) 'trembling' or the recognition of/by the body, b) 'shock' or the consciousness of the suffocating texture of representative words (traditional aesthetics), c) 'sliding' or an intense need to work the skin of the text to a revised ecosystem, what she elsewhere calls the 'holograph', and d) 'breath': the stage for the performance of our reinvention.¹⁸ Reading Brossard's writing is about altering our body memory. We have to learn to breathe with the text, slowly, arresting time, unhinging the representative functions of words, their sounds, their look, their collocations, their syntax and grammar, nudging

them into more appropriate articulation. This we do because the writer is also breathing with the text, through that huge second lung: the skin, the texture of syntax, grammar, wordplay, phonics, and embodying it into different extents and shapes so that we together negotiate its language. The process of doing so, this rhetorical work on textuality, responds to present need and makes the intimate and public social relations of our situatedness. It may also, as another effect, distort representation, torsion it at the surface of containment, and make an impact on discursive power.

Brossard for many years has worked with an idea of 'fiction-theory'¹⁹ that does not represent but gives birth to the 'holograph'.²⁰ It is a holograph because from the discursive position it cannot be translated beyond the frame of hegemony. However if we look at it another way, and think of it in terms of situated textuality, the holograph becomes the structure of another location in which activities happen in a different mode. Discourse does not go away, but its power to define identity, to limit it to agonistic relations with representations, is diminished because we recognise that this is happening in a particular space that does not make up the whole of social rhetoric. The situated becomes a place where what we 'live', the materiality of our relations, articulates the differences we make ourselves into.

The rhetoric of situated textuality suggests not that we are different as a condition of identity, but that we form communities by making the differences between and among ourselves. The former implies that discourse 'does' difference to us, the latter that difference is something we work on in order to communicate and that it affects/effects our culture. Cultural studies could also go in this direction. To do so would add to its capacity for important but short-term effects, an array of long-term strategies, and there are many instances where this would not be appropriate. But there are also many instances where nothing will happen if someone doesn't turn their mind to stepping out of the discursive frame.

THE ARTEFACT

Cultural studies is only valuable insofar as it is positioned and has a text, and therefore engages with history. One way of looking at this activity is to insist on its rhetoricity. By virtue of being instituted it is listened to by institutions and hence by nation-state politics, but it is only effective if it remains an unruly discipline: a) if it is metadis-

cursive, its helpfulness is only from its material knowledge, and b) if it is interdisciplinary it is currently one of our few ways of understanding the material connections and differences between diverse areas of thought and culture. It derives its strength from individual cultural studies workers speaking from or to some position of exclusion and exercising the democratic right to be heard, hence it has to invent articulacy. In doing so it throws into relief the current shift to more democratic rhetorics, and locates highly contradictory work on identity, initiated by the spreading democratic franchises, where people attempt to devise guidelines for valuing human-beings-in-proximity even for elements in their lives that devalue their citizenship and subjectivity in the eyes of the state. Cultural studies recognises the need to engage with the material field of society and what it makes of history and nature, and the importance of articulating the differences that are made. However, without a sense of the situated labour that goes into articulation and the rhetorical stance of situated textuality, articulacy remains in the double-bind of ideology/hegemony, of representation and desire.

Some cultural studies attempts situated textuality, and some doesn't. Why is a different matter.

A MUSING (ON WHAT HAPPENS TO THINGS BEFORE THEY GET INTO THE MUSEUM)

Three interesting patterns around current cultural studies are: 1) the analysis of the Impact of GSAs on ISAs and individuals, and vice versa; 2) the exploration of the mechanisms of hegemonic power and/or the discursive structures of representation in the changing economic situation; and 3) the engagement with practices (our own and/or others') that do not get recognised by representations/sub-jektivities yet which realise us as human beings.

Cultural studies has not been very keen to look outside the cultural boundaries of its practitioners, possibly because it is not well equipped to do so, but there is no reason why it should not. Cultural studies is exceptionally good at understanding how state power works, and is becoming better at understanding how global economic power works. But just as Marxism had to acquire an understanding of the interconnection of other social, cultural, political structures with the economics of the nation state, so we need to acquire an understanding of the interconnection of these elements with global economics: a theory of the GSAs if you like (I think I

would be prepared to argue that global organisation is predicated on state structures). Exploration of the GSAs and their impact on and assimilation into national states and individual life is a logical development, and recent work on communities by Stuart Hall or Pritti Ramamurthy, to name but two, are examples.

But we could hope for more. Cultural studies has explored the ISA-subject or Symbolic-subject, and the hegemony-subjectivity axes largely by putting its practitioners in the position of 'subject', investigating their own subjectivities. This has two effects at least. First, it doesn't investigate the impact on those many people (a majority) who do not appear as 'subjects' within the state. Or even those who do so but to such a marginal extent that their concerns never gather enough mass to become focalised as a disciplinary area in cultural studies. An enormous amount of work is done in the name of cultural studies on biological specificity (what would happen if what cultural studies takes as biology were dropped from the equation?), and virtually none, to take just one example among many, on poverty: do we conclude that most cultural studies workers are not poor? Yet how would cultural studies investigate the discursive elements of lives not recognised as subjected without producing problems analogous to those in anthropology or ethnology? Problems that arise from the epistemological set of the investigator as someone with privileged knowledge – privileged to the extent of being empowered, of being subjects, but only recognising that privilege to some degree.

That privilege can never be displaced, but it is possible to learn about different epistemic sets, about people living and working with sets of practices that do not get articulated in or by national or global state structures. This is the classic position of situated knowledge articulated by Sandra Harding as 'strong objectivity'.²¹ Yet situated knowledge has to be communicated to have any effect on discursive structures, and in that communication, in the textual strategies and techniques, the communicator is realised/made real/engages critically with the reality of another person. The communication, the textuality of the situation, cannot be practised without working with other people, not that they necessarily effect a 'writing down' in whatever medium, but that they are inextricably part of the forming of the text. This is not as easy as it sounds because the rhetorical strategies for texts are ideologically and/or hegemonically bound to the extent that they are 'heard', legitimated and valued. Working with situated textuality means that we are trying to 'hear'

things that can be valued, but which haven't been heard as valuable before – so how do we do so? It's vulnerable-making, risky. We may say things no one else recognises as valuable (till later), we may have to speak in ways no one else hears. *But* cultural studies people, precisely because of their privilege, are in a better position to take risks than many others. But also it's time-consuming and requires commitment to other people, and cultural studies people are often institutionalised into producing work in very short timeframes.

Working on situated textuality also changes us. The second effect of the focus of cultural studies on its own practitioners that I briefly want to look at here, is that it doesn't investigate the sources of subjective agency: what gives us the energy to attempt to change representations. Yes, the theoretical structure of hegemony makes it conceptually possible for us to tell ourselves that we are not over-determined by ideology, that 'desire' can be at least partially represented and publicly recognised. But where does the impetus, even the vocabulary, to do so come from? It's not hegemonic or it wouldn't change the representations. Usually it comes from a position or practice that is happening but is not yet recognised, legitimated or valued, but oppressed, put down, even authoritatively de-legitimised, thus generating a need. This isn't the location of desire: the lack that representation doesn't allow us to pin down, but need: something we practise but which remains unseen and unheard because its articulation upsets or challenges or destabilises the representations on offer, something that is often perceived to threaten other people's subjectivities. Culture exists because it articulates hegemonic structure. To the extent that it changes it changes hegemonic power. But how does culture begin to happen? what is culture before it becomes legitimated as such? where does culture come from? and how does it change hegemonic power?

To work on this, cultural studies practitioners could call on those parts of their lives which do not appear within subjectivity. Subjectivity calls on notions of the 'universal' insofar as it interconnects with the determinations of ideology: representations. Rhetoric tells us we resist representations in different ways. We can recognise that there is something lacking: desire. We can differ from the generalised in our own individualised ways: relativism. We can work with others on the articulation of practices that lie outwith representation: situated textuality. The relative, as an individuated take on representation, is bound to the essentialised self (defined as such by representations in the first place) in a necessary relation. It can

facilitate the recognition of different practices, but doesn't usually face the issue of the destabilisation of subjectivity needed to accommodate them. But we can also work on material practices which are not individuated perspectives on generalised or universal representations, by working on different epistemological sets with texts, with verbal articulations. But even though investigating personal practices, this kind of engagement necessitates working with other people's texts, either mediated or with the person (who may not use words, or use them infrequently, or use them in ways not recognised as 'use'). This is what situates the work, makes it different from subjectivity.

Working on material practices with others to articulate their needs or our own, which is one way of realising a non-essential self, generates value. If we work with someone else (singular or plural) on the articulation of a different epistemological set, which by definition might threaten our subjectivity, in the process we constitute the difference between us. Yet because we are both working on it we value that difference – not just recognise it, tolerate it, hate it, admire it, but value it. The process of learning how to value it will inevitably affect everything else that we do or think. It's like changing your diet, engaging in a new friendship, negotiating situations of trust and/or betrayal (both can be valuable). It's messy because it's only partly predictable insofar as material practices are inflected by representation, and frequently destabilising. And it takes a long time.

NOTES

1. See C. Pateman, *Democracy, Freedom and Special Rights* (Swansea: University of Wales, 1995).
2. E. Laclau and C. Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*, trans. W. Moore and P. Cammack (London: Verso, 1985), p. 94.
3. S. Hall, 'Introduction: Who Needs Identity?', in P. DuGay and S. Hall (eds), *Questions of Cultural Identity* (London: Sage, 1996), p. 2; and also 'Fantasy, Identity, Politics', in E. Carter, J. Donald and J. Squires (eds), *Cultural Remix* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1995), p. 13.
4. Hall, 'Introduction: Who Needs Identity?' in DuGay and Hall, *Questions of Cultural Identity*, p. 2.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 5.
6. C. Belsey, *Shakespeare and the Loss of Eden: The Construction of Family Values in Early Modern Culture* (London: Macmillan, 1999), pp. 169–70.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 176.

8. *Ibid.*
9. See L. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. Anscombe (Oxford: Blackwell, 1967).
10. Hall, 'Introduction: Who Needs Identity?' in DuGay and Hall, *Questions of Cultural Identity*, p. 1.
11. See, for example, J. Derrida, *The Politics of Friendship*, trans. George Collins (London: Verso, 1997).
12. Belsey, *Shakespeare and the Loss of Eden*, p. 5.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 7.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 12.
15. *Ibid.*
16. S. Hall, 'Cultural Studies and its Theoretical Legacies', in D. McLintey and K.-H. Chen (eds), *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies* (London: Routledge, 1996).
17. Belsey, *Shakespeare and the Loss of Eden*, p. 13.
18. N. Brossard, 'Writing as a Trajectory of Desire and Consciousness', trans. A. Parker, in A. Parker and E. Meese (eds), *Feminist Critical Negotiations*, (Amsterdam: John Benjamin, 1992).
19. N. Brossard, *Picture Theory: théorie/fiction*, pref. L. Forsyth (Montreal: L'Hexagone, 1989).
20. N. Brossard, *The Aerial Letter*, trans. M. Wildeman (Toronto: Women's Press, 1988); and *Baroque at Dawn*, trans. P. Claxton (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1997).
21. See S. Harding, *Whose Science? Whose Knowledge? Thinking from Women's Lives* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1991).

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