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## **Monday morning and the millennium : cultural studies, scepticism and the concept of power**

Mark Gibson  
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# **Monday Morning and the Millennium**

## **Cultural Studies, Scepticism and the Concept of Power**

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# Abstract

The thesis examines the use of the concept of power in cultural studies, offering a revisionist perspective on the history of this use. The dominant approach to questions of power in the field, it is argued, is a 'rationalist' one: the various phenomena comprehended under the concept are conceived ultimately as instances of the one phenomenon. This approach implies that positions in relation to power share a common referent, allowing them to be assessed according to general criteria of 'correctness' or theoretical adequacy. It also allows developments in debates around power to be represented in terms of a narrative of enlightenment in which the 'truth' of power is progressively revealed.

As an alternative to this, the thesis develops an 'empiricist' perspective on questions of power. From this perspective, the various phenomena comprehended under the concept are, in fact, distinct. Generalised uses of the singular 'power' do not share a common referent but are imaginative constructions gaining their sense from the particular contexts in which they are used. They cannot be assessed according to general criteria of theoretical adequacy, but only in terms of qualities of response to historical circumstances.

The perspective is used to throw sceptical light on progressivist accounts of cultural studies as having discovered a phenomenon (power) which had not previously been recognised. It is demonstrated that the field has a history which precedes the introduction of generalised references to power. It is further argued that generalised references, when they were introduced, did not identify unrecognised phenomena but merely addressed them in a different way. The conditions for this intellectual shift are

traced to the historical circumstances of the Cold War, particularly to a rapid and massive expansion of tertiary education, government programs and media forms.

A major sub-theme of the thesis is developed around the 'englishness' of cultural studies, where 'englishness' is used in an abstract sense to refer to a certain political response (exemplified by England as an actual polity) to the possibilities of modernity. This response is defined by a tendency to maintain a 'pre-modern' sense of powers as particular and a corresponding resistance to generalised references to power in the singular. It is pointed out that the tension between this tendency and European theoretical imports was very sharply articulated in the early formation of cultural studies. It is further argued that it has never entirely disappeared and has continued, at some level, to define the field.

The significance of this is that cultural studies offers an intellectual resource for thinking about questions of power which is distinct from the European theoretical positions which it nonetheless cites. In the final chapters of the thesis, attention is given to the possibility of making this resource more visible in its own terms as a way of broadening options for the field in responding to changed conditions for intellectual work post-Cold War.

## *Declaration*

*I certify that this thesis does not, to the best of my knowledge and belief:*

- i) incorporate without acknowledgment any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any institution of higher education;*
- ii) contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text; or*
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# Acknowledgments

Intellectual debts can be acquired in curious ways. Much of the initial impetus for this thesis developed while I was teaching at Central Queensland University in the early to mid 1990s. It is unlikely that the history of the 'Central Queensland' moment in Australian cultural studies will ever be told. Even in Australia, few would be aware that it even occurred. Most of the participants would probably want to put it in the past and it would be difficult to communicate to outsiders the strange intensity of intellectual passion which could develop in a small, provincial university seven hours drive up the Queensland coast from the last centre of any real size. I still think that much of that passion was destructive, but its rawness gave me a determination to address certain issues which I may not have gained elsewhere. While now tempered, it still remains somewhere in what follows. For that I thank my CQ colleagues: David Birch, Tara Brabazon, Denis Cryle, Grahame Griffin, Liz Huf, Warwick Mules, Tony Schirato, Errol Vieth and Susan Yell.

The thesis has not been completed quickly, much of it being written while also working full-time. A consequence has been that it has taken shape under three different supervisors. I am fortunate that all have been excellent in different but complementary ways. The thesis would not be what it is without early input and inspiration from John Hartley. John's enthusiasm and generosity have taught me to keep a constant eye on what is of value in cultural studies. His support for intellectual risk-taking – rare, I think, in times like these – was also crucial for the development of my ideas. He has showed a confidence in me throughout the project which I am not sure has always been deserved – even when, as has turned out, it has brought into question some of his own positions. I am equally grateful to Alan McKee who put in most of the hard yards in



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# Introduction

There is no moment now, in American cultural studies, where we are *not* able, extensively and without end, to theorize power – politics, race, class, and gender, subjugation, domination, exclusion, marginality, Otherness etc. There is hardly anything in cultural studies which isn't so theorized ... [T]here are ways of constituting power as an easy floating signifier which just leaves the crude exercise and connections of power and culture altogether emptied of signification.

Stuart Hall (1992: 286)

Perhaps I've insisted too much on the technology of domination and power.

Michel Foucault (1988: 19)

When the most basic concepts ... are suddenly seen to be not concepts but problems ... there is no sense in listening to their sonorous summons or their resounding clashes. We have only, if we can, to recover the substance from which their forms were cast.

Raymond Williams (1977: 11)

In the late 1950s, Raymond Williams set out to map an influential tradition of English thought, a constellation of discourse which gravitated around a single word – 'culture'. By revealing the complicated history of the word, he opened it to the possibility of further development, narrowing the gap between the limited range of established formal usage and new contexts emerging from a rapid democratisation of British society. As Williams was the first to recognise, the project he attempted to give form to in *Culture and Society* (1958) and *The Long Revolution* (1965) was by no means his own invention. It connected not only with other important texts of the time – Richard Hoggart's *The Uses of Literacy* (1957) and E.P. Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963); it also connected much more generally with a diverse range of

initiatives in education, literary discussion groups, film societies, publishing and journalism. Nor was it entirely new. Post-war debates around culture belonged, for Williams, to a history of creative responses to modernity which went back at least to the eighteenth century. Even the more radical democratic initiatives had important precedents. To recognise new groups as participants to debates over culture or to broaden the reference of the term was to contribute to a process – the ‘long revolution’ – which was already some hundreds of years old.

But the field of which Williams is generally credited as a founder, cultural studies, has been organised as much around another word – ‘power’. It often seems, in fact, that ‘culture’ has effectively been displaced. In an essay of the mid 1980s, James Carey suggested that the field might almost be renamed:

British cultural studies could be described just as easily and perhaps more accurately as ideological studies in that it assimilates, in a variety of complex ways, culture to ideology. More accurately, it makes ideology synecdochal of culture as a whole (Carey 1989: 97).

In view of more recent developments, the suggestion may need to be modified. Given the increasing distance from Marxism and the shift in some quarters to genealogy and discourse analysis, the concept of ideology no longer appears so central. It has become clear that the fundamental concept has been, more specifically, the concept of power. But Carey’s general point still holds. As Bruce Robbins (1993: 209) has nicely summarised the transformation of the field since the 1950s, the emblematic figure of Matthew Arnold has been substituted with that of Michel Foucault.

There has never been an equivalent for ‘power’ of Williams’ magisterial survey of the history of ‘culture’. This is not to say that power has not been theorised; it clearly has been – as Stuart Hall puts it, ‘extensively and without end’. In the rejection of the

English literary tradition, in the shift to Marxism and subsequent revisions inspired by Althusser and Gramsci, in the emergence of feminism and post-colonial criticism, and in the turn to Foucault – in all these moves, power has been, in fact, the single most visible theme. Nor has there been any shortage of commentary; each of the twists and turns and revisions in the theorisation of power have been carefully examined and its implications discussed. There is a difference, however, between a history of theories of power and a history of the *concept* of power. Williams' history of the concept of culture rested upon a basic enabling assumption: that the concept does not correspond in a simple way to any positive phenomenon; that there is, in other words, no 'essence' of culture. It is an assumption which allows the uses of the concept to be considered not according to general criteria of correctness or theoretical adequacy, but for how they have responded to historically specific circumstances. Particular uses, for Williams, were not simply descriptive or theoretical but also *ethical*; they involved an active disposition towards certain ways of seeing and, as a consequence, to certain ways of life.

There have been occasional approaches in cultural studies to a similar understanding of the concept of power. Part of my argument in this dissertation is, in fact, that they have been more common than at first appears, running as a continuous submerged current through the development of the field. But the dominant tendency has been the reverse. The clear assumption in most debates over power is that the concept has no history. It has no history because the phenomenon it identifies is universal. While it may be necessary to recognise different forms or 'modalities' of power, the phenomenon itself remains substantially the same. Given this assumption, developments in debates around power can only be understood according to a simple narrative of enlightenment, a narrative in which the 'truth' of power is progressively revealed. That social relations

are relations of power, that power works in the cultural domain through ideology or discourse, that it operates along the axes of gender and race in addition to class, that there are always sites of resistance to power, that there are multiple forms of power – these propositions appear not as intellectual responses to particular conditions but as general laws of human existence. It is true that the internal complexity of theoretical positions on power often allows detailed attention to widely varying historical circumstances, but this does not alter the basic point: there remains a closure to questions of the historical formation of the concept of power itself.

There are good reasons why such a closure might be maintained, particularly at the present time. What is at stake in the concept of power cannot be considered in isolation. Its introduction to debates around culture is linked, in particular, with the complex of social, political and cultural developments associated with the 1960s and 1970s. Despite more than twenty years of intervening history, these developments remain highly controversial with differences continuing to bear in important ways on current forms of public culture. To admit a relativity to the concept of power would appear to weaken the authority of cultural studies in what is often a battleground. There is clear justification for such a concern. In polemics around ‘political correctness’ and other ‘culture wars’ of the 1990s, suggestions that the use of the concept has motivations other than to designate a positive phenomenon have often appeared as little more than a hostile argumentative ploy. Commitments to the concept have been crudely reduced, in attempts to discredit them, to a lust for control over public debate, to a simple resentment or to a naïve romanticism. Nor is the threat only from zealous ideological opponents. Cultural studies has also had to justify itself in the face of more general pressures from market-oriented reforms in the institutions in which it has found a place.

It might seem wiser in this context to shore up theoretical foundations than to expose them to uncertainty.

But the risks for cultural studies may be even greater the other way. The strength of the field has never been simply the objective validity of its claims; it has also been its ability to reach beyond the formal institutional contexts in which such claims are adjudicated to wider constituencies for whom they have *mattered*. There is no doubt that claims in relation to power have connected in this way, but there is little reason to believe that they will necessarily continue to do so – at least, in the same way. In fact, the problem with the concept of power may be that at a certain moment it mattered too much, setting a standard against which anything which follows can only appear inadequate. The danger in this is that cultural studies may become hostage, as John Hartley has put it, to ‘the biorhythms of an ageing intellectual generation’ (1992a: 16). By grounding itself in the experience of a particular historical conjuncture, it may see its relevance fade with the memories of those who were ‘there’. There is an irony here in similarities to the situation of the 1950s. What Williams saw so clearly in relation to ‘culture’ may now apply in relation to ‘power’: to defend a tradition in the use of a term merely on the grounds of a supposed formal correctness is to see it become a reactive formation without the capacity for renewal.

The problem cannot be addressed by developing more sophisticated theories of power. While such a strategy may overcome immediate suggestions of inflexibility, it only postpones the question of motivation. As Chris Rojek has commented of the recent work of Stuart Hall:

One has the feeling that Hall himself is no longer able to give shape to his labours. In reviewing Hall’s work at length, I am struck by the image of a



master builder who has added so many rooms, doors and passages to his house that he is no longer able to find his way around the premises (Rojek 1998: 61).

To be fair to Hall, the significance of claims about power have been clearly related, throughout most of his career, to the circumstances in which they have been made. While this has been so, his openness to correction and modification has been a major strength, preventing the formation of dogmatic tendencies often in the midst of highly polarised debates. As these debates become abstracted from their original points of reference, however, there are real dangers in the situation which Rojek identifies. In failing to address the question of motivations, appeals to complexity leave a vacuum which is all too easily filled by unsympathetic commentators. More seriously still, the field becomes exposed to a further charge of obfuscation. There is, in short, no substitute for explaining openly why the *theme* of power is, or has been, important to pursue.

Or so, at least, I wish to argue. It is necessary, however, to set limits. An enquiry into the motivations involved in the use of the concept of power in cultural studies could easily become unmanageable. In fact, any generalisation about cultural studies has become virtually impossible. The term is now used to cover so many different traditions and styles of work that almost anything which is said of one will not apply to others. The field at the end of the 1990s is quite unlike the English literary tradition reviewed by Williams in the 1950s. Where the latter was bound by national, linguistic and institutional continuities, cultural studies has become a complex international network with little consistency beyond a few shared references and a decision to go by a common name. If, as I have begun to suggest, the meaning of the concept of power is specific to the contexts in which it is used, then the project of charting its various histories would be too large to undertake. The problem is one which I will not attempt

to overcome; to do so would only result in an arbitrariness and tokenism. While Williams' survey of 'culture' is a useful point of comparison, I make no claim to providing the missing companion survey of 'power'.

The aim of the dissertation is more preliminary: to establish that a historical approach to the concept of power is *possible* and to indicate some of the directions it might lead. But even this may seem ambitious. The problem here is almost the reverse of the one above; not the practical difficulties of allowing for local differences, but the theoretical obstacles which must be overcome for such differences to be recognised. A universalism in relation to power appears extremely difficult to avoid.

The point is perhaps best illustrated by a brief review of previous attempts. The most significant of these has been inspired by the work of Michel Foucault. Foucault's major innovation was to suggest that there is no single form of power – that there are, more specifically, other forms than domination. The move has been extremely important in questioning the authority of certain dogmatic positions. By throwing doubt on claims to have identified a single 'truth' of power, it opens a space in which such claims are exposed to historical and ethical considerations. How has the idea of power as domination emerged? What political forms are favoured by continuing to think of power in this way? Foucault has made it possible for these questions to be asked. But however impressive this achievement, it has come at a certain cost. As I argue in Chapter 1, the multiplication of forms of power has the effect of further inflating its ontological status. Power comes to be defined as that which transcends particular historical conditions – an indestructible element which survives any and every change. In some of Foucault's formulations, in fact, power is conceived as a fundamental substrate of all human relations. While removing the ground from one kind of dogma, this puts in place the conditions for another. In weakening the definition of the concept,

it universalises its reference: a certainty as to the *form* of power is replaced by a certainty that everything is explicable in *terms* of power. While power becomes uncertain in its implications, it is further elevated as a master concept.

A similar point could be made of the attempt by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe to identify a discursive aspect to power. In *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (1985), Laclau and Mouffe draw a provocative distinction between 'subordination' and 'oppression'. A relation of 'subordination' is one in which 'an agent is subjected to the decisions of another – an employee with respect to an employer, for example, or in certain forms of family organization the woman with respect to the man, and so on' (153). A relation of 'oppression', by contrast, is one in which relations of subordination have 'transformed themselves into sites of antagonism' (154). The important point is that 'oppression' is not conceived as a timeless or universal phenomenon, but as discursively produced as a result of particular historical developments. The understanding of relations of subordination as 'oppressive' is, for Laclau and Mouffe, a quite specific achievement only made possible by the emergence in modernity of the 'democratic discourse': 'Our thesis is that it is only from the moment when the democratic discourse becomes available to articulate the different forms of resistance to subordination that the conditions will exist to make possible the struggle against different kinds of inequality.' (154)

Like Foucault's pluralisation of forms of power, the argument works to limit universalising claims and allow greater sensitivity to different historical contexts. Claims in relation to oppression can no longer be asserted simply as fact but must be presented more persuasively, openly setting out to win over constituencies to what is only a particular way of seeing. The distinction between 'subordination' and 'oppression' is part of an important attempt by Laclau and Mouffe to insist on the

democratic responsibilities of left political projects. But again, there is a cost in the way their theoretical leverage is achieved. As with any distinction between a 'discursive' and a 'real' aspect of a phenomenon, the aspect which is marked as 'real' – in this case 'subordination' – is further universalised, becoming rigorously set apart from historical considerations. Subordination comes to be conceived by Laclau and Mouffe as a bedrock of power, entirely independent of its various instances or the way it might be framed. There is always a risk, in fact, that the democratic thrust of their argument might collapse. Given the continued assumption of a fundamental underlying phenomenon (subordination), the question must arise whether the independence of the discursive aspect (oppression) can be sustained. Discourses of power remain grounded, ultimately, in a simple universal truth.

A third revisionist approach to theories of power has been to turn them on themselves. A good example of this strategy is an attempt by Bruce Robbins to deflate the authority of Pierre Bourdieu in debates around popular culture. Where, for Bourdieu, we must always inquire into the interests of those who speak of popular culture, Robbins suggests that we might equally inquire into the interests of those who speak of *power* – not least, the interests of Bourdieu himself:

It is hard not to notice ... that Bourdieu's interest in defending the notion of a single 'dominant form' [of culture] coincides with an interest in defending the 'symbolic profits' he himself has drawn from analyzing that dominant form, that is, from the discovery or the invention of 'cultural capital'. The threat to cultural capital posed by cultural studies is clear. For Bourdieu, culture is necessarily empty of any popular or democratic input. Its contents are arbitrary, fixed in advance by the state, and ruled only by the goal of allowing the dominant class to win at the 'main social games' ... If culture's contents were *not* arbitrary ..., if 'the people' had some special access, competence, or authority where culture is concerned, then the system would not work as he

describes ... [T]he metaphor of cultural capital would collapse (Robbins 1993: 208).

A slightly different variant of the argument has been developed by John Hartley in criticism of the 'classic' cultural studies paradigm of the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies. Hartley speculates whether the oppositional intellectuals of the 1970s were interested in the 'manipulation of the masses' because 'some time in the future they hoped they'd be able to have a go at doing that too' (1992a: 25). Similar arguments have also become common in debates within feminism in criticism of fundamentalist tendencies in claims in relation to patriarchal domination (Roiphe 1993; Denfeld 1995; Lumby 1997).

Once again, these arguments are highly effective in unsettling an aura of moral certainty often associated with the use of the concept of power. But they also follow other revisionist approaches in further entrenching the universalism of the concept. The use of theories of power *against* theories of power sets up a vicious cycle in which the attribution of positions to strategies of power becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. What are the interests of Robbins or Hartley in drawing our attention to the interests of oppositional criticism? What are my interests here in drawing attention to their interests? The only conclusion that can be drawn from this game is a confirmation and extension of Bourdieu's reduction of arguments about culture to strategies for the accumulation of cultural capital. While part of the motivation for criticising this reduction may be discomfort with its relentless zero-sum negativity, the criticisms only further eliminate any space for the recognition of other possibilities.

The apparent inevitability of this tendency is confirmed by a recent interest in cultural studies in the class position of intellectuals. As John Frow concludes, in one of the more thorough and authoritative studies of the issue:

A key condition of any institutional politics ... is that intellectuals do not denegate their own status as possessors of cultural capital; that they accept and struggle with the contradictions that this entails; and that their cultural politics, right across the spectrum of cultural texts, should be openly and without embarrassment presented as their politics, not someone else's (Frow 1995: 169).

Like Foucault, Laclau, Mouffe, Robbins and Hartley, Frow is concerned to reject the tendency towards fundamentalism in left political analyses of the relations between culture and power. '[I]t is politically crucial', he warns, 'for intellectuals not to universalize the competences they possess as norms which can be used to totalize the cultural field'. Yet precisely in making the argument, Frow himself 'totalizes the cultural field' in terms of the metaphor of cultural capital and the concept of power. The evidence seems overwhelming: any attempt to intervene against the tendency to universalism in cultural studies is condemned to enter a vortex in which everything else is liquidated before a single, unquestionable certainty – the universality and intractability of power.

The one significant escape from this vortex within the orbit of reference of theoretical debates in cultural studies has been the exception which proves the rule – the provocation by Jean Baudrillard that 'power no longer exists'. The suggestion is one which appears inevitably as the nemesis which awaits the inflation of the concept. For Baudrillard, in fact, it is not so much his *own* suggestion as one which is already implicit in the discourses in which the inflation occurs. At the very point where everything is explained in terms of power, he argues, the concept loses any specific reference and therefore its 'reality principle'. The exemplary case is the meticulous anatomy of power developed by Foucault:

The very perfection of this analytical chronicle of power is disturbing. Something tells us – but implicitly, as if seen in a reverse shot of this writing too beautiful to be true – that if it is possible to talk with such definitive understanding about power, sexuality, the body, and discipline, even down to their most delicate metamorphoses, it is because at some point *all this is here and now over with* ... [W]hat if Foucault spoke so well to us concerning power – and let us not forget it, in *real* objective terms which cover manifold diffractions but nonetheless do not question the objective point of view one has about them ... – only because power is dead? (Baudrillard 1987: 11)

However compelling the internal logic of the argument (and it is difficult to ignore a similarity to the opening quotation from Hall), it has done more to inhibit sceptical approaches to questions of power than it has to encourage them. Any move towards scepticism is immediately embarrassed by an association with ‘unacceptable’ claims. In a world of widening inequalities of wealth and access to resources, of continuing suffering as a consequence of organised violence and of increasing coordination of functions at a global level, the proposition that ‘power is dead’ appears not just absurd but politically irresponsible. To the extent that it has been deemed worthy of notice, it has generally been dismissed out of hand. The spectre of Baudrillard has become the major obstacle to his own suggestion that we ‘forget Foucault’.

It would be foolish, in view of all this, to underestimate the difficulty of developing a sceptical, historical approach to the concept of power. Cultural studies has become, in many ways, an intellectual space in which anything can be questioned – indeed, must be questioned – *except* the universal reference of this one concept. Yet the situation cannot be explained by a lack of awareness of the problems this generates. There is clearly something about the concept which makes it highly resistant to historical understanding.

A promising lead is provided, however, in Barry Hindess’s recent book, *Discourses of Power* (1996). The book is located within political theory rather than cultural studies

and does not address quite the problem I have outlined above, but Hindess's argument can be taken in other directions than he does himself. As presented, his thesis is that there have been two main conceptions of power in Western political thought in the modern period:

One, which has been especially prominent in recent academic discussion, is the idea of power as a simple quantitative phenomenon. Power, in this sense, is nothing more than a kind of generalized capacity to act. The second, more complex, understanding is that of power as involving not only a capacity but also a *right* to act, with both capacity and right being seen to rest on the consent of those over whom power is exercised (Hindess 1996: 1).

The argument is an interesting one in itself and Hindess develops it with exemplary clarity. In doing so, however, he introduces another distinction which is perhaps more significant in its implications – and certainly for the project which I have begun to outline. This is a distinction between general ideas of power (whether as capacity or right) and particular ideas of distinct and specific *powers*. It might be described as a distinction between *rationalist* and *empiricist* concepts of power. It is in the recognition of the possibility of empiricism, I want to suggest, that a window is opened to a cultural history of the concept of power.

The distinction appears most clearly in a discussion of the concept of power in Hobbes' *Leviathan*. Chapter X of *Leviathan* opens with a simple definition: 'The power of a man is his present means to obtain some future apparent Good'. Hobbes amplifies by distinguishing between 'Originall' and 'Instrumentall' powers. The first refers to faculties of body or mind such as 'extraordinary Strength, Forms, Prudence, Arts, Eloquence, Liberality, Nobility'; the second to 'those powers, which acquired by these, or by fortune, are means and instruments to acquire more: as Riches, Reputation, Friends, and the secret working of God, which men call Good Luck'. As Hindess points



out, 'power in this view ... refers to any one, or any combination, of a remarkably heterogeneous set of attributes which appear to have in common the fact that they may be useful to their possessor in pursuit of at least some of his or her purposes' (23). On the basis of this definition, he goes on, 'there would be little that could usefully be said about power in general' (24):

Rather than investigate the properties of power as such, any serious inquiry would have to concern itself separately with the discrete powers associated with extraordinary Strength or Eloquence, or with Riches, the secret working of God and other such attributes, as well as with the diverse uses to which those powers can be put. (24)

There is, however, an inconsistency in Hobbes for he *does* attempt to address the properties of 'power as such'. We must therefore assume, Hindess infers, that there is another understanding of power in play:

one in which power refers not to extraordinary Strength, Eloquence, Riches or whatever, but rather to something that these various attributes are thought to have in common ... some common stuff, some shared underlying capacity or essence of effectiveness, which each of these attributes possesses in some quantity, and which accounts for their utility in obtaining 'future apparent goods' (24-5).

Nor is it only Hobbes who has taken this course. *Most* of those who have since written on power have been reluctant to follow what Hindess calls the 'self-denying ordinance' which the first interpretation would seem to require. The idea of a generalised 'essence of effectiveness' lies at the very heart of modern discourses of power.

In describing the distinction as one between 'empiricism' and 'rationalism', I am using the terms in the sense which Gilles Deleuze derives from the philosophy of David Hume (Deleuze and Parnet 1987; Deleuze 1991). This sense is somewhat different from that suggested by the textbook definition of empiricism as a doctrine that the origin of

all knowledge is to be found in experience. The latter definition is misleading, for Deleuze, because it implies that empiricism is to be distinguished from ‘conceptual’ orientations. What is important, he suggests, is not the recognition or non-recognition of concepts but the *status* which is accorded to them:

The concept exists just as much in empiricism as in rationalism, but it has a completely different nature: it is a being-multiple, instead of a being-one, a being-whole or being as subject. Empiricism is fundamentally linked to a logic – a logic of multiplicities (Deleuze and Parnet 1987: preface).

Whereas, for rationalism, the various phenomena comprehended under a concept are ultimately conceived as instances of the *one* phenomenon, for empiricism they are conceived as distinct. The relation between them is not essential but the result of conventional associations arising from the way concepts are used. As Constantin Boundas puts it in his introduction to Deleuze’s *Empiricism and Subjectivity*: ‘Knowledge is possible because our passions provide our ideas with associative links in view of our actions and ends’ (Deleuze 1991: 6).

The significance of empiricism as applied to the concept of power is that it permits a scepticism in relation to the concept which does not raise the spectre of Baudrillard. The alternative to an unqualified commitment to general theories of power is not an apocalyptic claim that the phenomena to which they refer have somehow ‘disappeared’. Nor is it that the ways in which powers are exercised cannot be described, analysed and, where necessary, criticised. There is nothing to suggest an anti-realism in the sense of a view that powers do not exist or have effects. To adopt an empiricist approach to power does not even require that the term be used only in the plural; while this may be indicative, it is not required. What is at issue is only the question of whether the singular ‘power’ is grounded in a common essence shared by the various phenomena to which it

is applied. A generalised use of the term does not *necessarily* involve this assumption. On first impressions, in fact, there may be little to distinguish an ‘empiricist’ position from a ‘rationalist’ one. Yet the difference in the status attributed to concepts defines quite different intellectual styles. A basis for confidence in generalisations gives rationalism a certain intellectual boldness, particularly at the upper reaches of abstraction. It is empiricism, however, which provides an opening to historical, contextualising modes of inquiry.

Hindess goes some way towards such an inquiry in drawing a connection between generalised concepts of power and the emergence in modernity of the idea of sovereignty. It is in developing an account of the powers of the sovereign that Hobbes is drawn to write of power as a singular, homogeneous phenomenon. He suggests, specifically, that the discrete powers of many individuals might be ‘united by consent’ to form a power greater than all. It is in the disposal of this power that sovereignty is held to consist. As Hindess points out, the suggestion introduces three important propositions which exceed the simple definition of powers as capacities: first, that power is a ‘quantitative and cumulative phenomenon’; second, that it is ‘capable of aggregation’; and third, that it is generally determining of events, those who possess a greater ‘quantity’ prevailing in a global sense over those who possess lesser quantities (Hindess 1996: 25-26).

It is here that Hindess’s empiricist scepticism is decisive in the analysis he is able to provide. In a test of Hobbes’ supplementary propositions, he asks us to imagine a contest between heterogeneous powers: ‘the power of extraordinary Strength on the one side and the power of Riches on the other, or an international dispute in which tanks are pitted against submarines’:

There is little point in considering these cases in terms of the sheer quantities of power involved on the two sides. What matters rather is the presence or absence of conditions under which the means of action available to the contending parties can in fact be deployed ... Means of action of different kinds will be effective under different conditions, and in this respect the idea of an underlying common substance or essence of power is clearly unsatisfactory.

(29)

What is interesting in this analysis is its implication that general discourses of power are not simply descriptive or analytical but also *imaginative*, always exceeding validation by any objective referent. For Hindess, Hobbes' discussion of 'sovereign power' is, in fact, 'less about *power*, understood in the manner of his definition, than it is about the political constitution of society and the character of government' (39). Even Hobbes himself would admit that no ruler is able, in fact, to make effective use of the powers of all of his or her subjects in the way his model requires. His account of the power of the sovereign is 'an unrealized, and almost certainly as unrealizable, aspiration' (38). The generalised notion of power as quantitative, cumulative and globally determining is not descriptive of political arrangements as they exist so much as an ideal of how he would *like* them to be.

My interest in the dissertation is not in the development of sovereignty in seventeenth century Europe, but in the period in which cultural studies has emerged – from the late 1950s to the 1990s. A similar approach to Hindess's can nevertheless be applied. This is not to suggest that the motivations for the use of the concept of power in cultural studies can be equated with those of Hobbes. To the extent that political alignments at the end of the English Civil War can be translated with those of the Cold War, most within the field would see themselves as opposed to the Hobbesian dream of an absolute sovereign power. My argument is only that cultural studies' discourses on power are no less open to what might be described as an 'ethico-historical' mode of criticism. To speak

'against' power does not give the concept any greater certainty of reference than speaking 'for' it. From an empiricist perspective, this is only to say that the knowledge associated with oppositional politics submits to the normal condition of conceptual indeterminacy. It may be important to add, however, that my intention is not to deflate such knowledge. It is, in fact, almost the contrary: to reconnect it, in Boundas' terms, with the 'passions', 'actions' and 'ends' which have made it compelling. To expose the latter without the cover of objective validation may appear embarrassing, but it is only if they are honestly revealed that cultural studies can honour its past while also moving on.

It is necessary in relation to this point to raise one major difference from Hindess: over the historical importance he attributes to empiricism. This he appears to regard as negligible. There is still something in his writing of the Althusserian Marxist of the 1970s, ever in search of the 'epistemological break' between an ideological past and a scientific future (Hindess and Hirst 1977; 1975). The history of the concept of power is dramatised, in his account, as overwhelmingly dominated by essentialism. No good reason is provided for thinking that this is the case. It may be true, as he points out, that those who have written on power have not been satisfied merely to investigate individual powers, but this is no evidence of a general absence of empiricism. By his own account, those who conceive of powers as particular will not be inclined to address power 'as such'. They will address Strength, Eloquence, Riches or any one of numerous other powers each under their individual names. It is only where these are all conceived as aspects of a single phenomenon that a discussion will be framed as a discussion of 'power'. To limit one's focus to discussions which are so framed is *already* to have excluded the alternative. There can be little question that such an alternative exists. In military strategy, sport and body-building; in commentary on political speech-making

and corporate presentations; in financial journalism and household budgeting; particular discussions of Strength, Eloquence and Riches appear at least as common as general discussions of power.

Even where the term ‘power’ is used in the singular, Hindess infers too easily that an ‘essence of effectiveness’ is being presumed. By his own account again, Hobbes does not entirely delude himself that the powers of numerous individuals could ever be put fully at the disposal of the sovereign (Hindess 1996: 38). He is aware, in other words, that his general references to power are not entirely validated by an objective phenomenon. If this is so, then how can we be sure that others have not shared a similar awareness? The question is one which needs to be addressed if the charge of essentialism is to be applied. The presumption involved in general references to power can only be judged in view of what they are *claiming*. Where a use of the concept pretends to pure description, with absolute validation in the phenomenon described, then it does seem fair to characterise the usage as essentialist in the sense which Hindess identifies. At the opposite pole, however, there is at least a potential usage which is openly presented as imaginative or rhetorical. Such usages are perhaps not common within formal political discourse, but if Hobbes is any indication, there *are* usages which fall between the two extremes. In informal contexts, where there is less demand to claim authority, they are even more likely to be the norm. It may be best, in this context, to avoid blanket charges of ‘essentialism’ and seek instead to identify *tendencies*.

The point introduces the main argument of the dissertation: that the history of the concept of power in cultural studies is the history of a tendency from empiricism to rationalism. This history can be traced in at least two major dimensions. The most obvious is simply temporal. Since cultural studies first began to take form in the late

1950s, it has seen an extraordinary explosion of generalised references to power. In the British case at least, such references were almost completely absent from the early work of the field. With the achievement in the 1990s of an international profile, they more or less came to define it. The key moment in this transformation was undoubtedly the 1970s with the uptake of Marxism and the establishment of connections with the 'new social movements'. This is the period in which 'power as such' was adopted as a central focus. But I also want to suggest that the tendency to rationalism has continued throughout the 1980s and 1990s. The shift in this case has been registered not so much in the *appearance* of a generalised concept of power as the status it has been accorded. Contrary to a common narrative in which the 'faith' of the 1970s has given way to the 'scepticism' of the 1980s and 1990s, I suggest that in respect of the concept of power, the tendency has been more the reverse.

The second dimension to this history was a major theme of debates in the early phases of the developments outlined above but has since become relatively submerged. This is a geopolitical – or perhaps rather 'geo-intellectual' – dimension. While cultural studies is almost entirely an English language phenomenon, with strongest bases in the hollowed-out shell of the British Empire, it has become over the last thirty years a highly sophisticated intellectual import operation. The introduction of generalised references to power has coincided with the apparent abandonment of an English (or Anglo-derived) intellectual inheritance and a wholesale resort to continental European 'theory'. This is no accident; as the early entrepreneurs of theory pointed out, English intellectual culture has been strikingly lacking in any sustained address to questions of power in general. It was in covering this lack that the proposal was first developed to look for resources elsewhere.

The full significance of this can only be seen in a longer perspective – a perspective which takes in the discipline of ‘English’ out of which cultural studies for the most part emerged. As Terence Hawkes has argued, English was born in crisis. There is a nice irony in the fact that it gained formal recognition at Cambridge in 1917, the year of the Russian Revolution and the entry of the United States into the war in Europe. The major expansion of English in the period following the First World War was also the period in which ‘Englishness’ was confronted by the two historic challenges: the idea of world revolution and the dynamism of American capitalism:

It might even be reasonable to detect in the invention of the subject itself a major diagnostic response to an early apprehension of the complexities surrounding cultural identity. Current talk of a ‘crisis’ in English neglects that history. There is no crisis *in* English. There was and is a crisis which *created* English and of which it remains a distinctive manifestation: a child of Empire’s decline, we might say, by America out of Russia (Hawkes 1986: 122).

The more recent history of cultural studies might be seen as a late episode of this crisis – an episode which has come to be played out around the concept of power. To present it in its boldest terms, it is a history of the conversion of a major intellectual formation, central to the development of the contemporary global system, from empiricism to rationalism.

Given that I have already indicated a certain preference for empiricism, it may appear that the implication of the thesis is a pessimistic one, perhaps even betraying a nostalgia for an imagined golden age of Anglo ascendancy. This is not at all the impression I want to convey. While I do agree with Hindess that a turn to empiricism is now important in bringing some clarity to discussions of power, the judgement is intended as historical. I have no wish to suggest that the introduction of general references to power has been, in any sense, ‘wrong’ or ill-conceived. To do so would merely reinforce



assumptions that there is a universally 'right' way in which the concept might be used. In addition, however, I will argue that the tendency to rationalism is not irreversible. There are, in fact, a number of signs that empiricism has begun to recapture a certain initiative. Hindess is not entirely alone in exposing generalising theoretical discourses to sceptical inquiry; there has been a range of attempts in recent debates to regain a historical sensibility. It is broadly represented, for example, in the so-called 'new historicism' (Veesser 1989). In the case, more specifically, of cultural studies, it is evident in a developing interest in the history of the field. Particularly significant, in this context, have been a number of attempts to reconnect with the early project before the introduction of generalised references to power (Steele 1997; Pickering 1997; Hartley 1999; Milner 1997).

All that has so far been lacking from these developments is a mature response to the intellectual challenge of general theories of power. The point is well illustrated by a contribution from James Carey. After a compelling account of the early project as one of its leading American exponents, Carey goes on to outline the ways it has been displaced by more recent theoretical concerns. But just at the point where he is moving to propose a program of reconstruction, he admits an obstacle to his argument: 'I know I have not allayed the fear, and perhaps I cannot, that I have again neglected the facts of power, that I have placed too much emphasis on inquiry, community and communication' (Carey 1997: 22). An inability to see a way around this problem appears closely related to an inability to see a positive future for the field. The current sales of books and numbers of students represent, for Carey, a 'false prosperity':

Intellectually and politically cultural studies is not very healthy and I believe its days are numbered except as an irrelevant outpost in the academy. The encounter between British cultural studies and French structuralism and

poststructuralism has been, I think, a deeply deforming episode (Carey 1997: 15).

A similar problem affects the late contributions of Raymond Williams. In the essays collected in *The Politics of Modernism* (1989a), Williams employed his unmatched skills as a cultural historian in an attempt to historicise cultural theory and its sources in European philosophy and aesthetics. But nowhere did he apply those skills specifically to the concept of power. The concept remained, throughout his work, a highly significant absence, an absence which left a damaging suspicion that he never quite succeeded in coming to terms with the major intellectual movements of the last thirty years.

Yet few solutions have been offered by those who have embraced these movements more fully. The obstacle here is a different one: a belief that the problems which have emerged in general theories of power might somehow be resolved through internal reform. Even Hindess appears finally to invest his hopes here. To resort to shorthand, the problem might be given a name: Foucault. For Hindess, Foucault represents a 'radical alternative' to the dominant Western discourses of power, an approach which is free of essentialism but which nonetheless manages to address power in general. Early in his discussion of Foucault, he quotes him in his most sceptical mode:

To ask 'How do things happen?' is to suggest that power as such does not exist. At the very least it is to ask what contents one has in mind when using this all-embracing and reifying term: it is to suspect that an extremely complex configuration of realities is allowed to escape when one treads endlessly the double question: What is power? Where does power come from? (Hindess 1996: 100; original Foucault 1982: 217)

This is evidence, for Hindess, that Foucault penetrated the illusion of generalised references to power: 'Foucault ... concludes that there is little that can be said about

power in general' (Hindess 1996: 141). Yet in the remainder of his exposition of Foucault's work on power, such references mysteriously reappear: 'power requires a degree of freedom on the part of its subjects' (101), 'power is ubiquitous' (150), 'there can be no personalities that are formed independently of its effects' (150). The clear implication is that a general theory of power might somehow be recuperated.

It is tempting to suggest that much of the appeal of Foucault for English-language theorists of Hindess's generation has been a desire to have things both ways. To the extent that Foucault was ultimately committed to a general concept of power, he marks a continuing differentiation from what were once derided as 'atheoretical' approaches, most typical of English intellectual culture, in which power was never framed 'as such'. There is still an aura around Foucault of theoretical radicalism and the promise of revolutionary change. In that sense, he validates the generational experience of those whose intellectual and political formation belongs to the 1970s. At the same time, however, he has provided cover for a retreat to empiricism. The historical inflection of Foucault's writing and his revaluation of 'modesty', 'specificity' and 'complexity' resonate with all the virtues which were dismissed in the first resort to 'theory'. It becomes possible to reconnect with these virtues without having to submit to an awkward historical accounting.

I do not wish to minimise the importance of Foucault in bringing new life to debates in the 1980s and 1990s. But I do want to suggest that appeals to Foucault have now become a serious obstacle to an open assessment of the importance of the concept of power in debates of the last thirty years. In Chapter 1 of the dissertation, therefore, I explain 'Why I am not a Foucauldian'. The chapter is in no way a 'critique' of Foucault, but rather an attempt to locate his significance as an anti-Stalinist intellectual within the post-war Left in France. Like any thinker, I argue, he was bound in various ways by the

context in which he wrote. One of the most important limitations this imposed, from the perspective of my project, was a difficulty, ultimately, in questioning a rationalist concept of power. This limitation is evident particularly in a confusion between the idea of a plurality of powers (an empiricist position) and the idea of a plurality of *forms* of power (a rationalist one). As a point of contrast, I compare Foucault with the English political essayist Michael Oakeshott who can be taken to represent at least one approach to questions of power available within English intellectual culture prior to the formation of cultural studies. I suggest that Oakeshott's position allowed him to take a considerably more sceptical position on these questions than Foucault. While such scepticism came to be defined as 'conservative', it might now be seen ironically as the more 'radical' alternative to rationalism.

In Chapter 2, I continue the argument by locating a strong scepticism towards generalised concepts of power in the early work in British cultural studies of Richard Hoggart and Raymond Williams. While both were interested in questions of class – an interest they shared with Marxism –, they did not represent class relations in terms of power. Such representations were, in fact, specifically rejected, not only as reductive but also as implicitly condescending towards the working class. The identification as 'culture' of areas of life outside the formal domains of art and literature was closely associated with an argument that these areas had their own specific histories, resources and characters which were neither formed by, nor in opposition to, centralised agencies of government, education and the media. The political significance of 'Richard Hoggart's Grandmother's Ironing' was neither as evidence of 'domination' of the working class nor of 'resistance', but rather in its status as unique and particular.

It is against this background that I trace the emergence of a generalised concept of power. Taking issue with a common tendency to suggest that the concept was always

already central to cultural studies (and therefore fundamental to its very definition), I argue that there is a history to its introduction to the field. I illustrate the case with a review by E.P. Thompson of Williams' *The Long Revolution* in which Thompson criticises the *absence* of the concept in Williams' writing. In sketching an alternative to Williams, Thompson anticipates many of the themes of later cultural studies: the concept of ideology, the treatment of culture as a specific instance within larger social totalities, the appeal for a general account of such totalities to European 'theory' and a commitment to oppositional political positions. But in doing so, he establishes a tension with an earlier set of political commitments and an earlier understanding of the significance of extending cultural criticism to popular culture and the 'everyday'.

In Chapter 3, I review the use of the concept of power in the work of Stuart Hall and the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, arguing that even here an empiricism in relation to power continues to exercise a major influence. While the formal adoption of Marxism appears, superficially, to have committed the field to a generalised concept of power (following Thompson over Williams) the 'tension' I identify in the early formation of the field is not resolved. It is manifested, instead, in an increasing contradiction between theoretical statements and more empirically-oriented description and analysis. This contradiction is thematised explicitly by Paul Willis in *Learning to Labour* (1980), through a contrast between the perspectives of 'Monday morning' and 'the Millennium'. Willis presents his theoretical and empirical analyses as having divergent political implications. The theoretical analysis points in the direction of what Oakeshott would call the 'politics of faith', implying an ambition for a general reform of society (the Millennium). The empirical analysis points, by contrast, in the direction of a 'politics of scepticism', suggesting a more limited and immediate attention (Monday morning) to the conditions of civil exchange. The first implies a

generalised (rationalist) concept of power, the second a restricted (empiricist) one. I conclude that both are present within what is often regarded as the ‘classical’ cultural studies paradigm.

In Chapter 4, I consider the emergence of feminism in cultural studies, taking it to be the most important bridge with the politics of the ‘new social movements’. I argue that it is this moment which most clearly confirms the ascendancy of rationalism. Within Marxist theoretical frameworks, especially when applied within single national context such as Britain, there always remained an ambiguity as to whether generalised references to power were a shorthand for the power of a specific state formation or referred to a global phenomenon. With the emergence of feminism, this ambiguity is substantially resolved. Particularly where gender and class are conceived as alternative axes ‘of’ power, power comes to be conceived as universal, varying between contexts only at the level of different forms. It is important to emphasise, however, that I see feminism as much as a *response* to this development as an agent of it. The tendency to rationalism cannot be identified with any single position or movement but needs to be traced in relation to the highly charged political context of the Cold War. Taking the work of Meaghan Morris as an exemplary case, I argue that some of the most significant contributions of feminism to cultural studies have involved an internal critique of rationalism, maintaining a space for sceptical, historical approaches to cultural politics against the pressure to universalism from generalised concepts of power.

In Chapters 5 and 6, I attempt to identify two possible sites for a re-emergence of empiricism. I set both within the context of changes in government, education and media during the 1980s and 1990s – particularly as determined by institutional convergence around models of business management and the disappearance, at the end

of the Cold War, of an alternative ideological pole to state-sponsored capitalism. I argue that there are at least two ways these changes can be read: as the final consummation of a process in which separate powers have become subsumed into one (the power of global capital), or as the point at which the concept of power, in the generalised sense, loses its capacity for discrimination (and hence its meaning). While the latter reading has often been associated with apocalyptic ‘end of the world’ scenarios in the style of Baudrillard, I suggest that it might also be associated with the re-emergence of an empiricist understanding of powers as plural – this possibility being particularly strong in Anglo-derived political cultures with strong empiricist intellectual traditions and histories of sceptical governance.

In Chapter 5, I consider the arguments of Tony Bennett, Ian Hunter, Stuart Cunningham and others for a re-orientation of cultural studies towards questions of ‘policy’ or ‘governmentality’. To the extent that these arguments draw significantly on the work of Foucault, my discussion returns to some of the issues discussed in Chapter 1. As in the case of Foucault, I argue, the insistence by Bennett, Hunter and Cunningham on the ‘specificity’ of institutional mechanisms of power does not free them from the problems associated with a generalised use of the concept. Certain of their positions – and particularly a tendency to accept a closure on dialogue – confirm the limitations which such a use of the concept continues to impose. But there is, I suggest, another potential in the ‘policy’ writing, where institutional specificities begin to emerge as particular ‘powers’ rather than merely as differentiated instances of a global ‘power’.

In Chapter 6, I consider a set of arguments for new directions in cultural studies which might loosely be grouped under the theme of ‘media republicanism’. While the theme is quite widespread – with resonances across a range of writing on postmodernism, ‘new times’, queer theory and new media technologies – I focus on the initiatives of John

Hartley, McKenzie Wark and Catharine Lumby. I suggest that this work might be seen in some ways as the mirror image of the 'policy' position. Where the 'policy' advocates have tended to generalise the concept of power to the point where it accounts for everything, the 'media republican' alternative has been to question its relevance, suggesting that cultural politics be viewed, instead, in terms of pleasure, desire or aesthetic appreciation. Many of the arguments of 'media republicanism' remain heavily shadowed by a generalised concept of power and tend, as a consequence, towards an abstract libertarianism. As in the case of 'policy', however, I argue that there are also significant points of reconnection with empiricism.

It may be worth adding a note, finally, about the selection of examples, which might appear to reflect a rather partial view of cultural studies. I say almost nothing, for example, about the field in America, despite the fact that it now defines the international centre of gravity. One answer to this, as I have already indicated, is that it is simply not possible to address everything. I have found it necessary, in establishing the contexts in which the concept of power has been used, to work intensively with limited examples. The approach makes it difficult to maintain the breadth of reference which is made possible by the assumption of a universal phenomenon, where contexts of use are considered relatively unimportant. There is also, however, a more particular reason why I have chosen the examples I have. They are examples which I have found to best illustrate the existence within cultural studies of an alternative strand to rationalist concepts of power. If my argument about the 'geo-intellectual' dimension is accepted, it is no accident that they come from Britain and Australia. These are the two sites within the present international distribution of cultural studies, in which tendencies to rationalism are perhaps least deeply rooted within a broader political culture. It is only really in the post-war period, then most specifically since the late 1960s, that they have



been significantly exposed to the intellectual currents which have since become so influential.

The United States has a more complicated intellectual history which would need to be examined in more detail than is possible here. While developing from an 'Anglo' base and with its own 'indigenous' traditions of scepticism, it has also been strongly formed by other influences. American intellectual life was profoundly affected by the exodus of European intellectuals to the United States in the period between the two world wars. In contrast to the British and Australian cases, cultural studies in America has always had to define itself against a well-developed theoretical sociology. The revolutionary dynamism of American capitalism has also proved particularly hospitable to what Williams called 'modernist abstractions'. It appears as no accident in this context, that Hall's reservations about recent tendencies in the use of the concept of power should be directed specifically at *American* cultural studies. In this context, the latter is present in the dissertation despite its absence. I take a deliberate detour away from the present definition of cultural studies in order to return to it with the possibility of alternative definitions.

# Chapter 1

## Why I am not a Foucauldian

### On the Peculiarities of the French

For most of the students of our generation – the one that began its course of studies in the 1960s – the ideals of the Enlightenment could not but be a bad joke, a somber mystification. That, anyhow, was what was taught to us. The master thinkers in those days were called Foucault, Deleuze, Derrida, Althusser, Lacan. Merleau-Ponty, the humanist, was old hat, and most of us no longer read Sartre. From the rue d'Ulm to the Collège de France we discovered the philosophers of suspicion: Marx, Freud, and Heidegger of course, but, above all, Nietzsche, the inventor of the 'genealogy' in the name of which we had to treat every discourse as a symptom.

Retrospective illusion or ruse of history? Those who intended to be the heirs of this 'philosophy with a hammer' with which Nietzsche wanted to smash the idols of metaphysics now look like the last creators of a philosophical tradition that has come to its exhaustion. This has become increasingly obvious to our generation (Ferry and Renaut 1997: vii).

The above passage by Luc Ferry and Alain Renaut from the introduction to their collection *Why We Are Not Nietzscheans* – first published in French in 1991 – might be placed ironically beside Michel Foucault's preface, twenty years earlier, to Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus*:

During the years 1945-1965 (I am referring to Europe), there was a certain way of thinking correctly, a certain style of political discourse, a certain ethics of the intellectual. One had to be on familiar terms with Marx, not let one's dreams stray too far from Freud. And one had to treat sign-systems – the signifier – with the greatest respect. These were the three requirements that made the strange occupation of writing and speaking a measure of truth about oneself and one's time acceptable. (Foucault 1983: xi)

From the perspective of English-language cultural criticism, both passages are unsettling, for the periodisation they suggest is out of phase with experience. In Britain, North America and Australia, it was only from around 1965 that the 'way of writing and speaking a measure of truth about oneself and one's time' which Foucault represents as the then established orthodoxy *first began* to be explored. Similarly, those in the English-speaking world who, like Ferry and Renaut, began their studies in the 1960s could not have encountered Foucault himself as an established 'master thinker', as his work was barely known. It is only again twenty years later, as this generation has taken up senior academic positions, that Foucault, Deleuze, Derrida and Lacan could appear as having acquired a certain canonical status (Althusser being the only figure whose 'French' and 'English' fortunes have coincided to some extent). Even in the 1990s, they could still appear in English-language debates as 'new', being juxtaposed with an older order with allegiances still to structuralism, Marxism and various liberationist political rhetorics associated with the social movements of the 1960s and 1970s.

Some familiar stereotypes might be called up at this point in order to suggest conclusions. In the way that the opposition of Francophile and the Anglophile has often been used to organise polemics in cultural criticism, the 'lag' in English-language debates relative to the French could be taken to illustrate the superiority of one or other side. The diagnosis by Ferry and Renaut of a recent shift in the fortunes of theory might be taken, for example, as evidence of the relative intellectual 'backwardness' of Anglo-derived political cultures, what Stuart Hall once described as the 'discipleship through which British intellectuals reproduce today their dependency on yesterday's French ideas' (Hall 1996b: 47).

The argument, in relation to the present, might then run as follows: Having, after twenty years, absorbed the implications of the shift in thought indicated by Foucault in

1972, English-language criticism has failed to recognise that the new concepts and approaches introduced by this shift have now also been superseded. While authorial positions, teaching programs and publishing industries are still consolidating around the figures particularly of Foucault and Deleuze, the debates within which their work emerged have meanwhile moved elsewhere. A story might be told, in short, about the need for further theoretical exertions and a renewed attention to developments in European philosophy.

Alternatively, one might side the other way, citing the apparently relentless turnover of theory as evidence of an unfortunate tendency of the French towards a modish avant-gardism, a tendency which reveals English-language criticism as more solid and dependable. The practical implications of such an assessment would vary according to which point in the change of Parisian fashions one decided to stay with last season's wardrobe. The recent work of Tony Bennett is, perhaps, a good example of an attempt to define a position at the 'near' end of the spectrum – promoting a carefully-tailored Foucauldianism as a kind of 'contemporary classic'. While Bennett's arguments call most explicitly for a commitment to institutional engagement, they are also clearly calculated to hold the line against further revolutions in theory. Incoming fashions seem to him unattractive and poorly-made; all we can hope for is 'perhaps a few more years of heady skirmishing with postmodernism before it goes out of style or a little more sleuth-like searching for subversive practices just where you'd least expect to find them' (Bennett 1992a: 32). It seems best to accept a cut which, while showing a certain sophistication, promises to wear indefinitely.

The sartorial metaphor is difficult to resist. Somewhere towards the middle of the same spectrum we might locate Stuart Hall, never fully won over from 'genuine classic' and showing that it can still be worn with style. Further still towards the end of fashion-

scepticism would be those who have begun to wonder whether it might have been better to stay all along in home-spun tweed. In a recent review of the history of cultural studies, James Carey goes so far as to describe the encounter with Foucault as ‘a particular misfortune’: ‘While Foucault’s historical work contained some extraordinary and extraordinarily useful scholarship, the framework within which it was encased was a bad prescription for democratic politics’ (Carey 1997: 18). But for Carey, the problem can be traced to an earlier moment still, in the adoption of structuralist Marxism and the embrace of Althusser. It is time, he suggests, to reject the prejudice according to which the early, ‘pre-theoretical’ versions of British cultural studies can easily be dismissed as a naive Anglo provincialism: ‘The strength of cultural studies in [Raymond] Williams’s hands, and the same applies to [Richard] Hoggart and [E.P.] Thompson, was precisely its ethnocentrism. Intellectual work ... is always and everywhere decisively touched and shaped by the national formation (and the sub-formations of class, race, gender, etc.) within which it is produced’ (16). The seductions of the Parisian boutiques – past or present – are ones we should resist.

But while distinctions between the French and the English can invoke a rich tradition of colourful caricature, the present situation calls for something rather more complex. The recent generational shift suggested by Ferry and Renaut is not, in fact, the same in kind as the earlier shift suggested by Foucault. Foucault articulates his generational experience in critical relation to an established order of *truth*: ‘a certain way of thinking correctly, a certain style of political discourse, a certain ethics of the individual ... that made ... writing and speaking a measure of truth about oneself and one’s time acceptable’. In elaborating an alternative, and in commending the work of Deleuze and Guattari, he does, admittedly, give a novel twist to the terms ‘theory’ and ‘philosophy’:

It would be a mistake to read *Anti-Oedipus* as *the* new theoretical reference (you know, that much-heralded theory that finally encompasses everything, that finally totalizes and reassures, the one we are told we ‘need so badly’ in our age of dispersion and specialization where ‘hope’ is lacking). One must not look for a ‘philosophy’ amid the extraordinary profusion of new notions and surprise concepts (Foucault 1983: xii).

The criticism of established truths is not to be taken as a preliminary to their substitution with other truths. ‘Theory’ – claiming a comprehensiveness and finality – is to be replaced with ‘theorising’, and ‘philosophy’ with a more active and ongoing ‘philosophising’.

Nevertheless, the critical moment of this intellectual ensemble is very well-formed and its procedures precisely defined. There are, according to Foucault, ‘three adversaries’ confronted in *Anti-Oedipus*:

1. The political ascetics, the sad militants, the terrorists of theory, those who would preserve the pure order of politics and political discourse. Bureaucrats of the revolution and civil servants of Truth.
2. The poor technicians of desire – psychoanalysis and semiologists of every sign and symptom – who would subjugate the multiplicity of desire to the twofold law of structure and lack.
3. Last but not least, the major enemy, the strategic adversary of fascism ... And not only historical fascism, the fascism of Hitler and Mussolini ... but also the fascism in us all, in our heads and in our everyday behaviour, the fascism that causes us to love power, to desire the very thing that dominates and exploits us (Foucault 1983: xii-xiii).

Despite the ‘playfulness’ of Deleuze and Guattari’s arguments, we should not forget, Foucault argues, ‘that something essential is taking place, something of extreme seriousness: the tracking down of all varieties of fascism, from the enormous ones that surround and crush us to the petty ones that constitute the tyrannical bitterness of our

everyday lives.’ (xiv) It is the gravity of this project and the force of critical intellect with which it is pursued which makes Deleuze and Guattari’s work impressive, as it does Foucault’s own writing, giving them both their particular aura and prestige.

It is not difficult to see from this why the articulation of generational difference by Ferry and Renaut cannot take the same form. They are, quite simply, faced with no clear order of truth which might be subjected to critical scrutiny. Some relation must be defined, on the contrary, to an insistent problematisation of truth as such. The profile of the leading figures of the previous generation renders ‘critique’ impossible, condemning it always to find its arguments already anticipated in the object of criticism. The difficulty is similar to the one which André Comte-Sponville identifies in attempting to find a point on which to develop a critique of Nietzsche:

Whatever the position you wish to criticize, the first Nietzschean around ... will always be able to object that Nietzsche said exactly the contrary – and the worst is that the Nietzschean will be right almost all of the time: not that you credited Nietzsche with a position that wasn’t his, but that he always, or almost always, also defended the opposite argument ... Nietzsche makes the position of whoever would [criticize him] in his stead or after him most uncomfortable!  
(Comte-Sponville 1997: 22)

It is no doubt too simple to identify post-1968 French philosophy simply with Nietzscheanism. Nietzsche has not been the only ‘external’ inspiration, and there has also been an extraordinary ‘internal’ inventiveness. There are, however, similarities in the predicament facing any attempt to articulate differences in the form of systematic criticism. The problem consistently encountered by those who have tried is the counter-criticism that they have ‘failed to understand’ the sophistication and complexity of the positions being criticised – a charge, as in the case of Nietzsche, which is often quite justified.

Articulating a certain generational frustration, Comte-Sponville speculates that we may therefore need to ‘give up debate and contend – whether out of submission or lassitude, fascination or rejection – that Nietzsche makes the examination of reasons impossible or obsolete, that we have to take him as a whole or not at all and that we are always wrong to argue with geniuses’ (Comte-Sponville 1997: 22). But as Ferry and Renaut’s collection demonstrates, and Comte-Sponville himself argues, such a conclusion does not necessarily follow. The situation simply means that debate must adopt a different objective and style. The attempt to explain ‘why we are not Nietzscheans’ is not the same as an attempt to demonstrate that Nietzsche or Nietzscheans are *wrong* or their arguments misconceived. The exercise is frankly personalised, explicitly aware of reasoning only from a particular base of experience – a felt sense, in the specific case, that a tradition for which one is expected to show enthusiasm is somehow ‘exhausted’. It does not aim to compel assent from those who hold different intellectual commitments, to demonstrate to Nietzscheans the ‘error of their ways’; only to achieve a recognition of why those commitments may not be shared. The stakes involved in discussion are reduced rather than raised, making possible an approach which is more open, reflective and interrogative. While unable to claim the ‘extreme seriousness’ which Foucault identifies in Deleuze and Guattari, it is an approach which is able to venture out less heavily armed.

My aim in the present chapter is to attempt to explain, in the spirit of Ferry and Renaut, why I am not a Foucauldian. This is not to proclaim myself an *anti*-Foucauldian; it is rather ‘to think with Foucault against Foucault’. Among the paradoxes of articulating any relation to Foucault, it would be possible, in fact, to claim such a project as the only ‘true’ Foucauldianism. Foucault, during his lifetime, frequently expressed distaste for



the idea of an intellectual 'following' and for reasons which clearly went beyond mere personal modesty. As he wrote towards the end of his life:

What is philosophy today if it does not consist *not* in legitimating what one already knows but in undertaking to know how and to what extent it might be possible to think differently? (Foucault 1986: 8-9)

In so far as Foucault's own work now belongs to the body of the 'known', we should, on this advice, undertake to know how and to what extent it might be possible to think differently than he himself did. We should seek to understand the 'Foucault effect' to identify what it is in the discourses of a particular historical moment which has made his arguments seem compelling. And in locating this effect, we should work to develop strategies for escaping its gravitational field.<sup>1</sup>

It may seem from this that I have simply opted for fashion over durability, taking my lead, in a well-established tradition, from new directions in European philosophy. But again, the cross-generational analogies do not hold. Foucault along with the other 'master thinkers' of his generation represents, in many ways, the logical terminus of a particular trajectory in post-war French philosophy (a terminus which Ferry and Renaut identify in shorthand as 'Nietzschean'). To depart from Foucault is not therefore to extend the trajectory, but rather to jump outside it, to reflect upon it from elsewhere. For those who have dedicated themselves to exploring the labyrinth of European philosophy, such a feat may appear implausible, requiring evidence of an insight which somehow transcends more than forty years of highly creative, varied and rigorous intellectual development. My claim is not, however, to an unforeseen stroke of

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<sup>1</sup> The term 'Foucault effect' has been quite widely used (see, for example, the titles of Burchell, Gordon *et al.* 1991; and Bennett 1998: Chapter 3). Curiously, however, the 'Foucauldian' implication is not drawn. Where Foucault uses the idea of 'truth effects', it is almost always associated with a suggestion

theoretical genius; it is rather that the resources for 'thinking differently' can be found in an alternative intellectual tradition which has been maturing for a similar length of time: the tradition, that is, of cultural studies.

#### **PHILOSOPHY AND CULTURAL STUDIES: DIALOGUE MECHANISMS IN THE SEMIOSPHERE**

In *Universe of the Mind*, Yuri Lotman proposes a theory of cross-cultural communication which can be used to clarify this suggestion and lend it perhaps some initial plausibility. According to Lotman, cultures pass through alternate periods of 'reception' and 'transmission'. It appears at times that particular structures – which may range from genres to national cultures – go into decline, becoming inert, reactive or unoriginal. But for Lotman, such periods are better thought of as 'pauses in dialogue' during which the structure absorbs cultural inputs from outside. An example is Italy from the fall of Rome to the Renaissance:

For a certain period [particularly the eleventh and twelfth centuries] Italy became a 'text-receiver'. It 'received' the lyric poetry of the Provençal troubadours, together with the fashion for courtly behaviour and the Provençal language ... Other cultural currents swept it as well: epic poetry from France, Hispano-Arab culture from Sicily ... Finally the influence of the classical 'soil' which though it had died down had never ceased altogether was felt once more (Lotman 1990: 145).

Having passed through such a period, the receiving structure reaches a point of saturation, the language of the transmitting structure is mastered and its texts adapted. When saturation reaches a certain limit, 'the receiving structure sets in motion internal mechanisms of text-production. Its passive state changes to a state of alertness and it begins rapidly to produce new texts, bombarding other structures with them, including

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that we distance ourselves from the 'effect' being observed. Both Burchell *et al* and Bennett look to Foucault, by contrast, for positive theoretical inspiration or support.

the structure that “provoked” it.’ (145) The reversal is often spectacular. In the Italian case, for example:

The result was ... a burst of cultural activity unheard of in the history of world civilization. Over the next centuries Italy became like a volcano spewing out a great diversity of texts which flooded the cultural *oikumene* of the West (Lotman 1990: 145).

When the direction of flow is clearly set, the transmitting culture becomes defined as a ‘centre’ and those who receive its texts ‘peripheries’. In the initial phase, incoming texts in the receiving culture tend to be regarded as ‘true, beautiful, of divine origin etc.’ ‘Already existing texts in “one’s own” language are correspondingly valued lowly, being classed as untrue, “coarse”, “uncultured”’ (146). A strong opposition forms, leaving little option but to declare oneself ‘for’ or ‘against’ the values articulated at the centre. As the relationship matures, however, there is an increasing loss of differentiation as the ‘imported’ texts and the ‘home’ culture restructure each other. When the imported texts are entirely dissolved in the receiving culture, ‘the culture itself changes to a state of activity and begins rapidly to produce new texts’: ‘these new texts are based on cultural codes which in the distant past were stimulated by invasions from outside, but which now have been wholly transformed through the many asymmetrical transformations into a new and original structural model’ (147). At this point, the receiving culture, which now becomes the general centre of the semiosphere, ‘changes into a transmitting culture and issues forth a flood of texts directed to other, peripheral areas of the semiosphere’ (147).

In terms of Lotman’s model, the present state of cultural criticism might be described as a confusion of currents at a change of tide, where the high point of a surge in one direction is already being met by a counterflow. For the past forty years, English-

language criticism has exhibited the classic characteristics of a 'receiving structure', progressing through each of the early phases which Lotman identifies. The corresponding 'transmitting structure' has been a complex of European linguistics, philosophy and aesthetics, particularly as mediated through Paris – a body of texts which became popularly identified in the 1980s by the simple collective term 'French theory'.

Perhaps the exemplary statement, in the initial phase, of the 'coarseness' of 'existing texts in "one's own" language' is Perry Anderson's landmark essay 'The Origins of the Present Crisis', first published in 1964. Surveying the scene of English intellectual life in the 1950s and early 1960s, Anderson could see only a 'miasma of commonplace prejudices and taboos'; a poverty of ideas which he traced to the fact that Britain had failed to make an unambiguous transition to modernity (Anderson 1964: 40). In the absence of major traumatic experiences such as revolution or invasion, it had retained a "feudal" hierarchy of orders and ranks, distinguished by a multiplicity of trivial but ceremonial insignia – accent, vocabulary, diet, dress, recreation etc.' (39). The result was that English political and intellectual culture was fundamentally flawed:

Traditionalism and empiricism ... fuse as a single legitimating system: traditionalism sanctions the present by deriving it from the past, empiricism shackles the future by riveting it to the present. A comprehensive, coagulated conservatism is the result, covering the whole of society with a thick pall of simultaneous philistinism (towards ideas) and mystagogy (towards institutions) for which England has justly won an international reputation (Anderson 1964: 40).

Such gross limitations could only be overcome, for Anderson, by a wholesale rejection of English intellectual traditions and an effort to appropriate 'a wider cultural universe' (Anderson 1980: 149). As editor of the influential *New Left Review* he set out

determinedly to import the resources of European political philosophy, particularly those of 'Western Marxism'.<sup>2</sup> It was through the journal, in conjunction with its publishing arm, New Left Books, that the work of theorists such as Althusser, Gramsci, Sartre, Lukacs and Poulantzas were first given widespread exposure to an English-language readership.

Even those who sought to resist the tide of European theory were forced to recognise its overwhelming intellectual force. The very trenchancy, for example, of E.P. Thompson's attack on Althusserianism in *The Poverty of Theory* clearly betrays a consciousness of defending an embattled position. Thompson's mock deference to Althusser does not conceal a real insecurity in what he called his 'theoretical line of supply':

I commence my argument at a manifest disadvantage. Few spectacles would be more ludicrous than that of an English historian – and, moreover, one manifestly self-incriminated of empirical practices – attempting to offer epistemological correction to a rigorous Parisian philosopher ... I can sense, as I stare at the paper before me, the shadowy faces of an expectant audience, scarcely able to conceal their rising mirth (Thompson 1978: 197).

The famous polemic between Anderson and Thompson over the 'peculiarities of the English' could be read as exemplary of the initial phase of Lotman's cycle of reception, where positions are polarised 'for' or 'against' the incoming cultural influence.

In the subsequent history of the encounter with 'theory', the status of imported texts has become increasingly normalised; earlier antagonisms have come at most to simmer beneath the surface of debate, rarely being defined as an issue in themselves. But throughout the process of negotiation and accommodation, the structural asymmetry in

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<sup>2</sup> Dennis Dworkin has argued that 'Western Marxism' is, in fact, a construction which only makes sense within this conjuncture: '[I]t was precisely because Anderson was not within Western Marxism, because

the relative status of European theory and the local resources of English-language criticism has largely been retained. It is reproduced, for example, by Graeme Turner in what is often cited as the most comprehensive and authoritative introduction to British cultural studies:

The distinctiveness and usefulness of the British tradition of cultural studies ... could be said to lie in its relatively accessible applications of European theoretical models to specific cultural formations (Turner 1996: 4).

Turner does, admittedly, stress that cultural studies is unique in 'the emphasis it has given to "concrete" or applied studies' (4), but the opposition between 'European theoretical models' and their British 'application' attributes the former with a clear priority. The point is significant not because of any unusual emphasis, but because it is so unexceptional. As 'An Introduction', Turner's book is clearly addressing readers who are new to the field, merely stating in an accessible way what is generally understood: as an English-language tradition, cultural studies is derivative, borrowing its intellectual resources from elsewhere.

I do not wish to suggest that there is any inevitability that the direction of intellectual exchange will be reversed, that we might confidently predict that European philosophy is soon to be inundated by a renaissance in English-language criticism. As Lotman warns, his schematic outline of the cycle of transmission and reception may not be fully realised:

It anyway demands favourable historical, social and psychological conditions. The process of 'infection' needs certain external conditions to bring it about and needs to be felt to be necessary and desirable. As with any dialogue a

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he read these thinkers at virtually the same time, and because he thought about them as an alternative to an impoverished English tradition that he represented them as a tradition' (Dworkin 1997: 138).

situation of mutual attraction must *precede* the actual contact (Lotman 1990: 147).

The point remains, however, that reception is an active process which always creates a *potential* for a reversal of the positions in dialogue to occur. No culture is ever simply derivative of another whose texts it imports. A process of translation must occur – in more than a literal sense – producing texts whose meanings are significantly displaced from the context of transmission. While this is often seen as an unfortunate ‘corruption’ of the values associated with the transmitting structure (giving rise, for example, to regrets about the lost subtleties of French texts in English translation), it also provides the basis for a renewal of dialogue; the resources for a new opening when the creative potential of the transmitting structure has exhausted itself.

As a general proposition, the argument is not an exceptional one. The cultural activity involved in reception is widely accepted in ethnographies of cross-cultural exchange and is also well-established in media audience studies. But it is not often applied in thinking about cultural criticism itself. English-language critics are frequently discussed as if they were lesser versions of one or other of the major figures of European philosophy: Descartes, Rousseau, Spinoza, Kant, Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche, Heidegger, Althusser, Foucault, Deleuze, Derrida, Habermas ... Such identifications allow a certain predictable management of debate which neglects the extent to which the positions being discussed may not be owed to any of these figures – or even to philosophy at all. To make this point is not to deny the importance or value of arguments within philosophy; it is merely to suggest that there are other styles of thinking about culture and politics which an insistence on ‘high theoretical’ references may prevent us from seeing. In over-valuing the cultural importance of transmission, the specificity of the receiving structure (in this case cultural studies) is systematically ignored.

## DIALOGIC INITIATIVE AND THE CONCEPT OF POWER

That there is such a specificity will be argued in some detail in following chapters, through a study of the way cultural studies has used the concept of power. I will also make clearer what I mean by a 'counterflow' to European theoretical perspectives. The remainder of this chapter is, however, more preparatory. As Lotman suggests, a precondition for dialogue is that there be a 'situation of mutual attraction'. The mere generation of new knowledge or information is not sufficient for significant exchange. There must first be an *interest* to provide the initial impulse, to overcome occasional failures of connection and to sustain attention to detail. Or as John Hartley (1996) has argued, the development of knowledge cannot be reduced simply to the discovery of information or production of new ideas (however original or creative they may be); it must always also involve the gathering of *readerships* to a proposition or field. This may seem to venture too far in the direction of the sociology of knowledge, giving an inappropriate emphasis to the 'extrinsic' fate of an argument over its 'intrinsic' value, but the principle operates even in the most formal academic contexts: It is not enough in claims to the development of knowledge to show that something *can* be done; it must also be demonstrated that there are reasons for believing that it is worth doing.

As I will argue in following chapters, the 'switch' which has set up a mutual attraction between English-language criticism and European theory has been the intellectual leverage which the latter appears to have over the concept of power. At almost every stage, the introduction of 'theory' has been associated with greater authority in the use of the concept. And at almost every stage, the inadequacy of the local resources of English-language criticism has been associated with a corresponding lack of authority. The fate of European theory within English-language criticism has, in short, been inextricably bound up with the fate of the concept of power. So long as this equation



holds (and assuming that power continues to be regarded as an important if not fundamental concept in debates about contemporary culture), then it will remain difficult to generate substantial interest in the subject I have indicated I wish to consider: the differences of English-language criticism from the theoretical perspectives it imports. Such differences will continue to be regarded as merely a 'corruption' – or at best a worthy 'application' – of more authoritative positions to be found elsewhere. My aim in what follows is therefore to demonstrate that there is at least a *plausibility* that the switch might be thrown the other way; that a certain authority in the use of the concept of power might be developed from within distinctively 'English' intellectual traditions.

My approach in doing so is to stage a dialogue between Michel Foucault and the English political philosopher Michael Oakeshott. The dialogue is intended as a kind of 'probe' disclosing some of the implications of reconstructing an 'English' approach to thinking about power which is not derivative of post-war European philosophy. Taking the arguments of Oakeshott and Foucault as elaborated statements of potentials existing within each tradition, I suggest:

- firstly, that there is a distinctive 'English' way of thinking about power – one that is not anticipated in debates within European-derived theory, and which those debates cannot easily be modified to accommodate;<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> I acknowledge a certain blurring here between European philosophy (a term which would cover a complex and diverse history of debates not only in France but also in Germany, Italy, Spain and other countries) and European-derived 'theory' as it has circulated within English-language cultural studies. It should be made clear that I am not intending to characterise the whole of European political thought – a project which would be absurdly reductive – but only those concepts and emphases (marked particularly as 'French') which have been seen as covering a 'lack' in Anglo-derived intellectual culture. Even in focussing on Foucault, I am considering his work only in its significance within English-language debates around power.

- secondly, that this way of thinking is capable of generating well-developed patterns of response to the cultural and political problems of modernity (or postmodernity), patterns which differ significantly from those associated with European-derived theoretical positions; and
- thirdly, that such patterns suggest an alternative perspective from which to address what Foucault identifies as 'the problem of power', the problem which has provided the motivating impulse for a significant strand of post-war European thought on the relation between politics and culture.

In terms of the overall argument of this chapter, the third of these aims is perhaps the most important. The sense in which I am not *anti-Foucauldian* is that I wish to take seriously the *motivations* of Foucault's arguments while suggesting that they might be responded to in quite a different way.

The choice of Foucault as the figure on one side of this dialogue requires little justification. He is, without doubt, the pre-eminent theorist of power within post-war European philosophy and political thought. The significance of his work in this context is threefold: Firstly, he has sharply characterised the use of the concept in earlier theoretical positions, exposing this use to an unprecedented clarity of focus. Secondly, he has developed a sustained critique of the established usage on the basis of clearly articulated ethical commitments. And thirdly, he has presented an alternative conception which appears to overcome the problems he identifies in the established usage, developing its implications in considerable detail. In all three areas, his arguments have been highly influential, largely defining the horizon of thought in the way power is conceptualised at the theoretical level.

The choice of Oakeshott requires more explanation. If discussions of power in cultural studies are saturated with references to Foucault, he is by contrast almost unknown.

This absence is closely related to the history which I have briefly sketched above:

Oakeshott is one of the thinkers rejected by Anderson in 1964 as most clearly exemplifying the bankruptcy of English political thinking – a bankruptcy revealed at its most acute on the question of power. In the development, over the next thirty years, of what has become cultural studies, the two have only further diverged. In apparent confirmation of Anderson's good judgement, Oakeshott's ideas have circulated mostly in conservative politics. He is sometimes cited in similar contexts to free market individualists such as Friedrich von Hayek and has occasionally been claimed as an intellectual ally by the British Conservative Party (Grant 1990). It is difficult to imagine associations which cultural studies has held in greater suspicion, or which are more remote from the kinds of politics generally associated with Foucault. The case exemplifies a marked tendency for 'English' and 'European' styles of political thinking to become identified with 'right' and 'left' respectively.

To the limited extent that Oakeshott has figured positively in contexts closer to cultural studies, it has not been in connection with the concept of power. In *The Return of the Political*, Chantal Mouffe makes use of some of his arguments in developing the program of radical democracy advanced in earlier work in collaboration with Ernesto Laclau. Mouffe is particularly interested in his distinction between two modes of political association: *universitas*, which involves 'an engagement in an enterprise to pursue a common substantive purpose or to promote a common interest'; and *societas* (or 'civil association'), which implies no common purpose or interest but designates a 'formal relationship in terms of rules' (Mouffe 1993: 66). She argues that *societas* (the

mode which Oakeshott himself prefers) is the sort of concept required for an affirmative understanding of modern democratic regimes:

Indeed it is a mode of human association that recognizes the disappearance of a single substantive idea of the common good and makes room for individual liberty. It is a form of association that can be enjoyed among relative strangers belonging to many purposive associations and whose allegiances to specific communities are not seen as conflicting with their membership of the civil association (Mouffe 1993: 67).

Having found this much of value, however, Mouffe turns to distance herself from Oakeshott precisely on the question of power. 'What is completely lacking in Oakeshott', she argues, 'is division and antagonism' (68-9). The idea of *societas* can be appropriated for democratic politics only on condition that this lack is overcome:

To introduce conflict and antagonism into Oakeshott's model it is necessary to recognize that the *respublica* [formation based on *societas*] is the product of a given hegemony, the expression of power relations, and that it can be challenged ... Antagonistic forces will never disappear and politics is characterized by conflict and division (Mouffe 1993: 69).

While I agree with Mouffe that a democratic potential can be extracted from Oakeshott, my argument below would suggest that this potential can be found not despite but *because of* the way he thinks about power. In affirming, as a matter of commitment, that conflict and antagonism are the fundamental basis of politics, Mouffe does not complement the idea of *societas* but on the contrary compromises it. In her mode of address, she assumes an association with her readers which is closer to *universitas*. 'The left', as she conceives it, is a political association with a 'common substantive purpose'.

It is defined by a 'common interest' in political struggle: to insist on the primary reality of power relations, against the mystifications of conservative hegemony.<sup>4</sup>

This is, however, to anticipate my argument. My purpose in introducing Oakeshott is not, at this point, to raise these larger issues, but merely to establish that he represents a distinctive way of thinking about politics and culture in modernity. There are several reasons for choosing him, in particular, to represent an 'English' style of political thought. He offers, firstly, a highly-developed exposition of this style, advocating explicitly on its behalf. This is unusual. From Samuel Johnson to Raymond Williams, the English tradition in political thinking has been a tradition of *letters* much more than of philosophy. Oakeshott himself was more comfortable as an essayist than as a systematic political 'theorist'. The work from which I wish to draw particularly, *The Politics of Faith and the Politics of Scepticism*, was not published during his lifetime despite the fact that he developed it to the point of a highly-polished manuscript. His editor, Timothy Fuller, suggests that he may have regarded the work as an attempt at self-clarification, abstracting themes from published work where he had not developed them so explicitly. But if it is not the work on which he may have wished to be assessed, it provides an unusual clarity of insight into a certain way of thinking about politics.

Secondly, Oakeshott suggests the possibility of a more sophisticated understanding of the dialogic positions which I have so far been identifying as 'European' and 'English'. His terms 'the politics of faith' and 'the politics of scepticism' cannot simply be mapped onto national, linguistic or geographic categories, but they do stand in some

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<sup>4</sup> There is a certain irony in this, as Mouffe adopts the principle of the fundamental adversarialism of politics from another conservative thinker, Carl Schmidt. Schmidt's arguments are useful, she suggests, in

definite relation. Actual political formations are never, for Oakeshott, pure examples either of 'faith' or 'scepticism'; they are always complex hybrids. There are, however, *tendencies* in some formations towards one or other extreme. England (as an actual polity) has been weighted historically towards the politics of scepticism:

England has been peculiarly the home of this style of government; and in English political literature there are examples of a revealing kind of writing in support of this style of politics which are not easily to be found elsewhere – writing which touches, but lightly, upon principle but which is alive in every line with the idiom of scepticism (Oakeshott 1996: 80-81).

This does not mean that scepticism cannot also be found elsewhere or that there are not English writers who have tended more towards the politics of faith: Oakeshott cites Machiavelli as an early example of sceptical inclinations and Francis Bacon of tendencies towards faith. In attempting to strengthen the case for scepticism, he is far from a nationalist or xenophobe, recognising precedents in Spinoza, Pascal, Montesquieu, Montaigne and Hegel as much as in Hobbes, Hume, Burke, Paine, Bentham, Coleridge, Calhoun and Macaulay.<sup>5</sup>

The importance of this point for my argument cannot be overstated. Since the debates of the 1960s over the 'peculiarities of the English', the single greatest obstacle to a consideration of the differences between English-language criticism and European

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demolishing the pretensions of universalist humanism. He counters the latter by arguing that all forms of political association imply an 'enemy'.

<sup>5</sup> As Oakeshott himself admits, this appears from most perspectives an ill-assorted gallery. The eclecticism merely illustrates, however, that 'faith' and 'scepticism' do not correspond to recognised political positions so much as the style in which those positions are articulated. A tendency towards one or the other cannot be taken to predict, in any situation, which party someone will belong to. In making use of Oakeshott, I want to extend the point by suggesting that the meaning of such terms as 'left' and 'right' are articulated differently in political cultures tending towards scepticism than in cultures tending towards faith. That a spokesman for the slave-holding South in the American Civil War (John Calhoun) can appear as a 'sceptic' does not, therefore, entail that sceptical tendencies in others place them in his company. The ambiguation of political positions at Oakeshott's 'metapolitical' level corresponds to a

theoretical perspectives has been the way 'Englishness' has been ethnicised or personalised. In the absence of any clear identification of the specific character of English intellectual culture, the latter has come to be associated with eccentricities of nation or, in a more alarming way, with *race*. A defining moment in this history – a moment which I will visit again in the following chapter – is the point where Richard Hoggart and Raymond Williams could be associated by a writer as sophisticated as Paul Gilroy with the racist exclusionism of Enoch Powell (Gilroy 1987: 49). Even where assessments of the early 'pre-theoretical' work in cultural studies have been more charitable, they have tended to emphasise the personal or 'folk' qualities of its exponents rather than what it is they actually said.<sup>6</sup> The effect of this has only been to increase suspicions of *ad hominem* prejudices. Having degenerated to a stand-off between high accusations and poorly-articulated intuitions, the debate has reached a stalemate and has largely been abandoned.

Oakeshott's perspective allows the blockage to be removed. A sceptical 'English' style of thought has no more necessary relation to person, race or nation than any other. It is not grounded in an essence but is always, in Lotman's terms, a *translation* of other styles of thought. Recognition of this makes it possible to revisit the 'peculiarities of the English' without having to opt for one or other side of a tired debate. E.P. Thompson clearly had a point in his exasperation at the importers of 'theory' for representing England as if, before their heroic arrival, it had been hermetically sealed off from the world:

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similar ambiguation in European philosophy in debates around the relation to fascism of Nietzsche and Heidegger.

<sup>6</sup> As Tony Bennett points out, good examples of this phenomenon were provided by Williams' obituaries, which tended to emphasise a set of 'quasi-personalised attributes' (1998: 53-54). For a sample, see Garnham (1988), Hall (1988) and Bennett's (1989) own contribution.

Here is an island, and there, across a few wet miles, are Other Countries. Those waters have, on occasion, been crossed. That city, London, is not in the Antarctic but has been, alongside Paris, Vienna and Prague, a great *European* capital. In its East End there have been deposit after deposit of refugee and immigrant workers. In the universities there have been deposit after deposit of emigré intellectuals. Across that water there came, in the 1930s, wave after wave of refugees from Fascism; across that water there went, in the early 1940s, wave after wave of troops to assist in the liberation of Southern and Western Europe; and across that water there came, in the later 1940s and 1950s, a further wave of refugees from Eastern Europe (Thompson 1978: 74-75).

To agree with this does not mean, however, that consistent differences cannot be observed. Perry Anderson was also correct, for example, in pointing out the tendency for the ‘emigré intellectuals’ – from Karl Popper and Ludwig Wittgenstein to Isaiah Berlin, Ernst Gombrich and Lewis Namier – to adapt themselves to English idioms, reinforcing rather than displacing the characteristics of the national culture: ‘Traditional British culture has an elective affinity with certain types of expatriates and not others. It promotes what is attuned to its own inherited nature, and suppresses what is dissonant with it’ (Anderson 1968: 38). ‘Englishness’ as an *intellectual style* can be treated in a way which is taken for granted in European philosophy: its ‘peculiarities’ can be distinguished from the origins of those who have owned or disowned it.

## **FOUCAULDIAN FAITH**

While I have not yet indicated how Oakeshott defines his terms, it may already appear strange that I am opening up a comparison with Foucault on the point of ‘scepticism’. In a simple, unspecified sense of the term, Foucault himself is generally taken to be a profoundly sceptical thinker; one whose very reputation rests on having taken the ground from under such concepts as ‘the author’, ‘sex’, ‘the Enlightenment’ and ‘man’. There is no doubt, in the context in which he wrote, that his arguments were largely designed to undermine certainties. This context was, however, of a very particular kind.



Foucault belonged to a time and an intellectual culture characterised by an extraordinary willingness to entertain abstract schemes of political action, schemes which proposed uncompromising and sweeping changes not only as desirable but as ‘necessary’ or ‘correct’. However much he may have dissented from such schemes (and I have no wish to question that he did), the context leaves clear traces in his positions and concepts if not his whole style of thought.

The most immediate way of gaining a sense of this is to consider the kinds of positions Foucault was debating. A good example is an argument of one of his interlocutors in ‘On Popular Justice: A Discussion with Maoists’, an interview on the subject of justice in a revolutionary society:

Let us suppose that it is desirable that the middle bourgeoisie be rallied to the cause of the revolution, that it is said only the very small handful of archcriminals should be executed, and that these can be identified by objective criteria; then this enemy would not be executed ... This could constitute a perfectly correct policy, as was, for example, during the Chinese revolution, the deliberate minimising of the contradictions between the workers and the national bourgeoisie. I don’t know if it would happen like that here ... It is probable that not all the bosses would be liquidated, particularly in a country like France where there is a large number of small- and medium-sized firms so that this would amount to too many people (Victor in Foucault 1980: 12).

Given that the discussion takes place less than three years after the dramatic *événements* of May 1968, these speculations cannot be entirely dismissed as idle fantasies. The ‘liquidation’ of the bosses (for which we must read their possible *execution*) does not appear as a wild suggestion in a minor fringe publication by a virtual unknown; it is an idea casually entertained by a respected figure close to the centre of French intellectual life. The interview first appeared in *Les Temps Modernes* and the author of the quoted

passage, Pierre Victor, was a co-author and theoretical collaborator with Jean-Paul Sartre.

Most of Foucault's contributions in the interview take the form of sceptical interventions. He questions, for example, whether 'people's courts' are an appropriate instrument for dispensing revolutionary justice; whether they are really, as Victor suggests, a departure from the kinds of oppression which the revolution is designed to overthrow:

Can we not see the embryonic, albeit fragile form of a state apparatus reappearing here? The possibility of class oppression? ... I am wondering whether the court is not a form of popular justice but rather its first deformation (Foucault 1980: 2).

Similarly, Foucault injects doubt into Victor's assumption that there exists among the masses a fully-formed revolutionary consciousness:

You say that it is under the leadership of the proletariat that the non-proletarianised people will join in the revolutionary battle. I entirely agree. But when you say that this happens under the leadership of the *ideology of the proletariat*, then I want to ask you what you mean by the ideology of the proletariat (Foucault 1980: 26).

It is nevertheless clear throughout the interview that Foucault and Victor belong to a common universe of discourse. Certain key words and phrases are freely exchanged ('struggle', 'the revolution', 'the masses', 'the exploitation of the proletariat') and arguments are formed on the basis of shared assumptions about the significance of historical events (the French Revolution, the Liberation, May 1968). There is a sufficient mutuality of views for Victor to conclude at the end of the discussion that 'we agree about the interpretation of actual practices', only having failed to resolve 'philosophical differences' (36).

A similar point can be made about the elaboration of positions at a more theoretical level. However original Foucault's arguments, they were nevertheless developed from the intellectual resources immediately available to him. As he himself indicated in the passage I have cited from the preface to *Anti-Oedipus*, to be an intellectual in France in the period after the Second World War was to define some relation to the overwhelming prestige of Marxism, structuralism and psychoanalysis, three comprehensive systems often brought together in attempted grand syntheses. The version of Marxism in question was also a particular one, heavily inflected by philosophical concerns. Through the influence, particularly, of Jean Hippolyte and Alexandre Kojève's interpretations of Hegel, Marx's writings were traced to their early formation in German metaphysics and read back into its terms. This connection was further reinforced by the absorption of more recent turns in the German philosophical tradition, through the reception of Husserl and Heidegger and the development of phenomenology. The resulting intellectual complex was characterised by an extremely high level of abstraction. While positions and arguments might claim a relation to actual political institutions and processes, they could also be traded backwards and forwards in terms of such general categories as 'the subject', 'structure' or 'the sign'.

But even this does not quite locate the specificity of the context in which Foucault comes to address questions of power. Equally important is an institutionalised set of relations in France between the public figure of 'the intellectual' and political change, a set of relations established in the period of the Enlightenment. As Foucault himself put it:

What we call today 'the intellectual' (I mean the intellectual in the political, not the sociological sense of the word, in other words the person who utilises knowledge, his competence and his relation to truth in the field of political struggles) was, I think, an offspring of the jurist, or at any rate of the man who

invoked the universality of a just law, if necessary against the legal professions themselves (Voltaire, in France, is the prototype of such intellectuals) (Foucault 1980: 128).

The subtle qualification of Voltaire's status as the prototype 'in France' makes it appear that other prototypes might be found elsewhere, but it is not at all clear that this is so. The intellectual as radical jurist was a figure which emerged during a period in which France was, as Yuri Lotman points out, the undisputed centre of the European semiosphere:

What the Renaissance did to Italian culture, the Enlightenment did with French. France had absorbed cultural currents from the whole of Europe but in the age of the Enlightenment she made all Europe speak her language ... [I]n the eighteenth century there was a choice: either to be a follower or an opponent of the ideas of the Enlightenment, namely, religious toleration, the cult of Nature and Reason, and the eradication of age-old superstitions in the name of the freedom of Man. Paris became the capital of European thought, and innumerable texts poured out of France to all the corners of Europe (Lotman 1990: 146).

Foucault's 'in France' is therefore somewhat misleading. The prototype for what he calls the 'general intellectual' *was* French. It may have been exported to many other sites, but if we accept Lotman's view of reception as translation, it cannot have done so without alteration. We should expect to find a significant displacement from the 'original' as it has been transformed by the local formations on which it has been overlaid even as it has also transformed them. It is in France, quite specifically, that there is the continuity of tradition which Foucault identifies. It is a continuity, one might further suggest, which is sustained not only by historical memory or textual reference but also in the legal code, political constitution, education system, in forms of public administration, the articulation of class relations, even in urban design.

It is true that Foucault questioned the assumptions of these intellectual and political traditions. Throughout his work, he insists continually on the recognition of specificities at the empirical level and deliberately refuses universalising claims. These commitments are also explicitly stated in the way he understood his position as a 'specific' intellectual:

My role – and that is too emphatic a word – is to show people that they are much freer than they feel, that people accept as truth, as evidence, some themes which have been built up at a certain moment during history, and that this so-called evidence can be criticized and destroyed ... All my analyses are against the idea of universal necessities in human existence (Foucault 1988: 10).

There is no reason to doubt that these were his motivations, or that his work has often had the effects he wished it to achieve. If there has indeed been a 'Foucault effect', it has been closely associated with a liberating realisation that what is 'accepted as evidence' is more contingent than it sometimes seems. But this should not prevent us from recognising that Foucault was, himself, historically situated and could not avoid carrying over themes and assumptions from the positions he was defining himself against. The very ease, for example, with which he generalised from French historical experience is an indication of a tendency to regard the problems he was considering as more universal than they may be.

The suggestion I want to make in associating Foucault with 'faith' is, therefore, a quite specific one. It is not that, in general terms, Foucault is not a highly sceptical writer; it is simply that his scepticism has a very definite limit. This limit is revealed in the status he assigns to the concept of power. Power is the single major concept where the sceptical principles which he brings to the use of other concepts no longer seem to apply. This is often indicated quite unambiguously:

[I]n a society such as ours, *but basically in any society*, there are manifold relations of power which permeate, characterise and constitute the social body, and these relations of power cannot themselves be established, consolidated nor implemented without the production, accumulation, circulation and functioning of a discourse (Foucault 1980: 93, emphasis added).

It is precisely here that Foucault is *not* a sceptical or 'specific' intellectual. The theme of power is not taken to be one which has 'built up at a certain moment during history'; it is understood to be a 'universal necessity of human existence'. It is easy to be distracted by the emphasis on the *complexity* of power ('manifold relations'; 'permeating, characterising, constituting'; 'establishing, consolidating, implementing'; 'producing, accumulating, circulating, functioning'), a gesture which recognises a variety of *forms*. But the proliferation of modes of operation of power only reinforces the universalising force of the concept. However culturally or historically diverse societies may be, they come to appear as no more than variations on a theme. To push the emphasis on complexity would only be to reduce differences to multiple versions of the same.

This is not, in an absolute sense, a criticism of Foucault so much as a recognition of his limits, a recognition which allows closer attention to what is involved in the translation of his arguments between different contexts. His positions were developed not in a placeless realm of pure theoretical considerations but within active debates with real historical consequences. There is little to be gained by abstracting them from these debates and attempting to judge them according to universal criteria. It is this tendency, more than Foucault's own writings, which I am wishing to identify as 'Foucauldian'.

### **'THE PROBLEM OF POWER'**

It is significant that Foucault said almost nothing directly on the subject of power until after May 1968. By his own account, given in the late 1970s:

When I think back now, I ask myself what else it was that I was talking about, in *Madness and Civilisation* [1961] or *The Birth of the Clinic* [1963], but power? Yet I'm perfectly aware that I scarcely ever used the word and never had such a field of analyses [as developed in later work] at my disposal (Foucault 1980: 115).

Nor was a systematic attention to power to be found elsewhere in political debates or theories in France at the time:

It is hard to see where, either on the Right or the Left, this problem of power could then have been posed. On the Right, it was posed only in terms of constitution, sovereignty, etc., that is, in juridical terms; on the Marxist side, it was posed only in terms of the State apparatus ... Where Soviet socialist power was in question, its opponents called it totalitarianism; power in Western capitalism was denounced by Marxists as class domination; but the mechanics of power in themselves were never analysed (Foucault 1980: 115-116).

This does not mean the *word* (in French, *pouvoir*) was not used; only that it appeared in a casual, unreflective way. Foucault specifically refused the suggestion that his work on power formulated a problem which had not already begun to emerge. What strikes him after 1968 is, in fact, the way in which an extraordinary range of political discourses and rhetorics had *converged* on a single, abstract use of the term, a use designating a general prohibition or 'Thou shalt not':

Thus one single and identical 'formula' of power (the interdict) comes to be applied to all forms of society and all levels of subjection. And so through treating power as the instance of negation one is led to a double 'subjectivisation'. In the aspect of its exercise, power is conceived as a great absolute Subject which pronounces the interdict ... In the aspect of subjection to power, there is an equal tendency to 'subjectivise' it by specifying the point at which the interdict is accepted, the point where one says yes or no to power (Foucault 1980: 140).

The striking clarity of analysis here makes it seem obvious that Marxism and other oppositional political discourses have always been, in some sense, 'about' power. As

Foucault points out, however, they could only appear as such when the general abstraction of post-war intellectual culture was thrown into sharp relief by the urgency of responding to action on the streets:

This task [the analysis of power in itself] could only begin after 1968, that is to say on the basis of daily struggles at grass roots level, among those whose fight was located in the fine meshes of the web of power. This was where the concrete nature of power became visible, along with the prospect that these analyses of power would prove fruitful in accounting for all that had hitherto remained outside the field of political analysis (Foucault 1980: 116).

In other words, power only appeared as a central term of political analysis in France as a result of a specific development: the appearance of a volatile interface between high theoretical discourses and the immediacy of direct political action. As a term which crossed this interface, it also revealed a stark disjuncture in the levels of abstraction on either side. On one hand, it crystallised political theory at its most simplified extreme (the reduction of all political phenomena to a simple binary opposition or 'instance of negation'); on the other hand, it was applied as a description at 'grass roots level' to relations and actions which were finely-textured, complex and often obscure. It is the intellectual and political crisis occasioned by this disjuncture which brings into focus, for Foucault, 'the problem of power'.

There is little evidence to suggest that the first consideration in responding to this crisis was ever theoretical consistency. Foucault himself frequently expressed impatience with attempts to enforce such criteria. It is not, he argued, that global theories have not provided 'in a fairly consistent fashion useful tools for local research':

But I believe these tools have only been provided on the condition that the theoretical unity of these discourses was in some sense put in abeyance, or at least curtailed, divided, overthrown, caricatured, theatricalised, or what you



will. In each case, the attempt to think in terms of a totality has in fact proved a hindrance to research (Foucault 1980: 81).

To look for complete theoretical consistency in Foucault's writings on power is also to read them without reference to their evident motivations. The context in which his thinking on the subject took form was one in which the internal procedures of academic accounting were, for a time, relatively suspended. Even where his arguments are at their most scholarly or theoretically developed, they are always framed by external political considerations.

Almost everything Foucault wrote in the period after 1968 is pervaded, in tone as much as content, by a sense of political urgency. It is easy, from a position of distance, to read his references to 'terrorists of theory', 'fascism', the 'carceral society' or 'the Gulag' as metaphor or hyperbole. But it is clear that he thought of the last of these, at least, as suggesting quite concrete comparisons with an immediate and present reality. He had lived for a time in Poland and had some familiarity with the actual historical experience of Eastern Bloc communism. The Gulag should not be used, he argued, as a mere rhetorical figure signifying 'error'. To invoke it did not mean to denounce it as a betrayal of the revolution or a corruption of the original purity of Marx and Lenin:

On the contrary, it means questioning all these theoretical texts, however old, from the standpoint of the reality of the Gulag. Rather than of searching in those texts for a condemnation in advance of the Gulag, it is a matter of asking what in those texts could have made the Gulag possible, what might even now continue to justify it ... We must open our eyes ... to what enables people there, on the spot, to resist the Gulag, what gives the people of the anti-Gulag the courage to stand up and die in order to be able to utter a word or a poem ... We should listen to these people, not our century-old little love-song for 'socialism' ... The leverage against the Gulag is not in our heads, but in their bodies, their energy, what they say, think and do (Foucault 1980: 135-6).

The appropriateness of the comparison, on the other side, to French intellectual culture, must be assessed in relation to Pierre Victor's casual reflections on whether it would be 'correct policy' to liquidate all the bosses in France or whether this might amount to 'too many people'. It is in relation to these kinds of concerns that the problem of power is addressed.

The central weakness of the dominant conception of power, for Foucault, is not so much a theoretical as an *ethical* one: its inability to offer standards of accountability in engaging at the level of political action. Given the level of abstraction at which power is conceptualised, the translation of arguments to the level of actual institutions and practices becomes arbitrary. In the case of versions of Marxism current at the time, Foucault argued, 'anything can be deduced from the general phenomenon of the domination of the bourgeois class'. One of the reasons for his interest in prisoners, the insane and other marginal but non-proletarian populations is that their anomalous status within capitalism illustrates this arbitrariness so clearly:

The descending type of analysis [starting from the proposition of a fundamental social axis of power], the one of which I believe one ought to be wary, will say that the bourgeoisie has, since the sixteenth or seventeenth century, been the dominant class; from this premise, it will then set out to deduce the internment of the insane. One can always make this deduction, it is always easily done and that is precisely what I hold against it (Foucault 1980: 99-100).

A similar problem can be found in arguments about the political function of sexuality:

Given the domination of the bourgeois class, how can one understand the repression of infantile sexuality? Well, very simply – given that the human body had become essentially a force of production from the time of the seventeenth and eighteenth century, all the forms of its expenditure which did not lend themselves to the constitution of the productive forces ... were banned, excluded and repressed. These kinds of deduction are always possible. They are

simultaneously correct and false. Above all they are too glib, because one can always do exactly the opposite (Foucault 1980: 100).

The problem, for Foucault, was made serious by the fact that the advocates of the theories which made such arbitrary deductions tended to claim an absolute ethical integrity in criticising arbitrariness in the arguments or actions of others. Rather than examining their own shortcomings, 'they contented themselves with denouncing [power] in a polemical and global fashion as it existed among the "others", in the adversary camp' (Foucault 1980: 116). Given that the 'others' were doing the same in reverse, a prospect appeared of an escalating spiral of denunciation both fuelling and fuelled by an increasing ethical and intellectual bankruptcy on all sides. In the light of the comparative points of reference Foucault clearly had in mind, such a prospect could only suggest dangerous political consequences.

### THREE FOUCAULTS: NIETZSCHE, SPINOZA, BENTHAM

Much of Foucault's writing on power is actually quite exploratory, starting simply from a desire to find *some other way* of using the concept. In the 'Two Lectures' from which the above passages are quoted, he entertains a range of possibilities for thinking about power and the provisionality of his ideas is quite explicit: '[W]hat I am saying here is above all to be taken as a hypothesis ... I would like to put forward a few 'propositions' – not firm assertions, but simply suggestions ...' (Foucault 1980: 133). In his work more generally there are at least three identifiable sources of inspiration which are juggled in various combinations and permutations:

The first and most clearly attributed is Nietzsche. Foucault takes from Nietzsche a 'conception of power as the *multiplicity of relations of force within a field of conflict*, where such conflict is seen as the basis of all human relations. He sometimes describes

the position as an inversion of Clausewitz's aphorism that 'war is the continuation of politics by other means'. According to this inversion:

[N]one of the political struggles, the conflicts waged over power, with power, for power, the alterations in the relations of forces, the favouring of tendencies, the reinforcements etc., etc. that come about within [a] 'civil peace' – ... none of these phenomena in a political system should be interpreted except as the continuation of war ... Even when one writes the history of peace and its institutions, it is always the history of war that one is writing (Foucault 1980: 90-1).

An immediate consequence of this conception is that there is no possibility of escaping from or 'transcending' power. This means there can be no moral authority or ethical integrity to be claimed in denouncing it. The very denunciation must be recognised as itself an *exercise* of power, merely one disposition of force among others in an ongoing battle for strategic advantage.

The second inspiration which can be traced is Spinoza. Foucault's argument in *Discipline and Punish* is developed around the idea of 'modalities' of power, of which other social and political phenomena ('the subject', 'man', 'the sovereign', 'discipline' etc.) are all 'effects'. The terms, as well as the insistence on the 'immanence' of phenomena within a single continuous plane of existence, borrow directly from Spinozan metaphysics – the idea, specifically, that all of existence inheres in a single substance. According to the 'Spinozan' option, power is conceived as *the fundamental basis or substrate of human association*. As Foucault puts it in a particularly striking formulation:

Between every point of the social body, between a man and a woman, between the members of a family, between a master and his pupil, between every one who knows and every one who does not, there exists relations of power which are not purely and simply a projection of the sovereign's great power over the

individual; they are rather the *concrete, changing soil* in which the sovereign's power is grounded, the conditions which make it possible to function (Foucault 1980: 187, emphasis added).

The importance of this conception is that it removes any implication of 'negation'. As an immanent principle formally equivalent to Spinoza's God, power can be thought of not as negative but as positive. It does not act 'against' the purposive actions of groups or individuals but 'in and through' them. Foucault makes frequent use of such formulations, particularly in articulating the political status of the 'subject' or 'individual':

The individual is not to be conceived as a sort of elementary nucleus ... on which power comes to fasten or against which it happens to strike, and in so doing subdues and crushes individuals. In fact, it is already one of the prime effects of power that certain bodies, certain gestures, certain discourses, certain desires, come to be identified and constituted as individuals. The individual, that is, is not the *vis-à-vis* of power; it is, I believe, one of its prime effects (Foucault 1980: 98).

A similar argument informs the concept of 'power-knowledge'. If power is the basic substrate of human activity, knowledge cannot stand 'against' power because it is an attribute or *effect* of power. Despite the 'mental' associations of knowledge and the 'material' associations of power, they are substantially identical, differing only as aspects of the same phenomenon.

The third inspiration, perhaps the least well-recognised as such, is Jeremy Bentham. It is clear that Bentham's *Panopticon* is a significant text in the development of Foucault's thinking on power. In an interview, 'The Eye of Power', he relates his encounter with Bentham as a major discovery (Foucault 1980: 146-165). The discussion of the panopticon is central to the argument of *Discipline and Punish* and the positions developed there continue to inform much of his later writing. Foucault takes from

Bentham a conception of power as *a practical capacity to act*. In the case of the panopticon itself the capacity is defined by an architectural arrangement. The situation of an observation tower in a central position surrounded by multiple prison cells creates a potential for a single observer to see many others without themselves being seen. The important point here is that this capacity is independent of the identities or intentions of observer and observed. In other words, power can be thought of as distinct from *agency*. It is not ‘held’ but ‘exercised’; it is not invested in people or classes but is a function of practical arrangements. Capacities or potentials can be described and analysed without reference to those who actually exercise them or the purposes they may have in doing so. Whether or not, for example, the central observer is an agent of the bourgeoisie, the power being exercised has a specificity which remains unchanged.

A clear implication of this is that changing the identities of those who occupy different positions within a political structure may do nothing to change the operation of power. If, for example, the proletariat were to assume control of the state, they may exercise exactly the same powers as were previously exercised by the bourgeoisie. This is one of the major arguments which Foucault uses in the interview with Pierre Victor. If, as Victor suggests, ‘the people’ were to take control of the justice system while retaining the established form of the court, there may be no real change in the configuration of power. For Foucault, the spatial arrangement of the court is more important in defining political relations than the actual identity of the judge and litigants. It is this kind of argument which informs much of his interest in *space*. It is also the basis for the central Foucauldian idea of ‘technologies’ of power. Perhaps most importantly, a ‘Benthamite’ approach to questions of power allows an emphasis on specific ‘mechanisms’, providing a crucial argumentative advantage over approaches which operate only at a more abstract level.

The 'Nietzschean', 'Spinozan' and 'Benthamite' conceptions of power do not appear to have any necessary consistency. Being conceptually quite distinct, they converge or diverge on various points. On the question, for example, of whether power is 'positive' or 'negative', there appear to be three different answers. According to the 'Nietzschean' conception, there must always be some negativity, even if it does not appear in the form of a simple contradiction between monolithic social blocks. In so far as the idea of *conflict* is central to the conception, power is closely identified with the opposition to forces by other forces. According to the 'Spinozan' conception, as I have indicated above, power appears as positive; it is the 'soil' on which all forms of human association are based. According to the 'Benthamite' conception, power is neither positive or negative; such descriptions could only be applied to the actual *exercise* of a power, not to the power itself. On the question of whether power may be overcome or removed, the 'Nietzschean' and 'Spinozan' conceptions would seem to agree in suggesting that the answer is no. Both imply that power is omnipresent and absolute. The 'Benthamite' conception suggests, by contrast, that power may admit at least of degrees. In some societies there are capacities to act which are not available in others. The panopticon, for example, defines a power which did not previously exist. In general, it would seem that the range of powers available increases roughly in proportion to technological development.

#### **IN THE SHADOW OF THE *ANCIEN RÉGIME***

It might appear, in view of this, that it is a mistake to talk of any coherent 'Foucauldian' position on power. But the widespread belief that there is such a position cannot be attributed entirely to misunderstanding. All of Foucault's scepticism in relation to power is balanced against a single over-riding assumption. To return to the terms I proposed in the Introduction, it is the assumption of rationalism. The questions Foucault

asks – ‘What is power?’, ‘How does it operate?’, ‘What forms does it take?’ – all take as given that there is a single phenomenon to be investigated, a phenomenon which can be presumed to exist at all times and independently of the way it might be framed. The various ‘hypotheses’ which are made about power all meet, therefore, as attempts to explain a common object. Foucault never really develops (although he does occasionally recognise) the possibility of a more empiricist view: that the word ‘power’ might actually be referring to *different* phenomena, phenomena whose relation to each other cannot be assumed.

The issue here is clouded, again, by his repeated insistence on multiple *forms* of power. It often appears, because of this, that he is suggesting that the word might be used in different ways. ‘Juridico-discursive’ power is distinguished, for example, from ‘disciplinary’ power. The first belongs to political systems organised around the authority of a sovereign, the second to modern political systems based on more abstract systems of administration. It is easy to infer from this that Foucault does *not* view power as a single phenomenon. Such an inference is made by Hindess in *Discourses of Power*. It also appears in a defence of Foucault by Alec McHoul and Wendy Grace against the criticism that his account of power lacks ‘differentiation’:

This criticism is the result of not grasping Foucault’s emphasis on the *historical* specificity of whatever forms of power exist in a society. It is equivalent to accusing Marx of failing to differentiate systems of economic production (McHoul and Grace 1993: 63).

In one sense, this is clearly correct; if the argument in question is that Foucault sees power as a uniform and unchanging phenomenon, then it can only be described as ‘misinformed’. But there is a different argument which could be made: that precisely in differentiating ‘forms’ of power, Foucault assumes a substantial continuity.



The comparison with Marx might be used, in fact, to illustrate the point. As Jean Baudrillard argued in *The Mirror of Production*, Marx's differentiation of modes of production had a double edge. It admitted a plurality of forms within the sphere of production, but in the very act of doing so it universalised production as the fundamental basis of all human societies:

[D]ifferentiating modes of production renders unchallengeable the evidence of production as a determinate instance. It generalizes the economic mode of rationality over the entire expanse of human history, as the generic mode of human becoming (Baudrillard 1975: 33).

There is a serious point here, however one might view Baudrillard's subsequent attempts to substitute the concept of production with the concepts of simulation and seduction. In comprehending all human societies according to their 'mode of production', Marx assumed that they were organised according to the same rationalising logic as capitalism – around 'relations of production' in the provision of universal 'needs'. Given, however, that all the major concepts by which this logic was identified and analysed emerged specifically in the context of capitalism ('labour', 'surplus value', 'relations or production' etc.), the assumption is questionable. Even as it identifies historical differences, the differentiation of modes of production installs a universalising view of all forms of social organisation *as* modes of production.

A similar argument could be made about Foucault's differentiation between historical 'modalities' of power. Foucault, himself, sometimes invited comparisons with Marxism, particularly in foregrounding his debt to Nietzsche. If Marxism offered a theory of production, he argued, Nietzsche offered a theory of power: 'It was Nietzsche who specified the power relation as the general focus, shall we say, of philosophical discourse – whereas for Marx it was the production relation' (Foucault 1980: 53). The

parallel allows Baudrillard's observations about Marxism to be transposed to Foucault himself. Just as, for Marx, all societies are appropriately characterised according to their mode of production, they are, for Foucault, appropriately characterised according to their modality of power. Just as, for Marx, production remains a constant no matter what other variations may occur, a similar constant is found by Foucault in power. In both cases, a formidable intellectual breadth is enabled by a single simplifying assumption: for Marx, that everything can be viewed under the aspect of production; for Foucault, that everything can be viewed under the aspect of power. While McHoul and Grace are right, therefore, in pointing out that Foucault differentiates between forms of power, there may also be something in the criticisms they are countering. In the very distinction between power and its various 'forms', there is a clear implication that power *in itself* remains somehow essentially unchanged.

It is not my intention to press this point as a criticism of Foucault; it is rather to draw attention, again, to the contextual specificity of his arguments. The pluralisation of forms of power has a clear strategic purpose: to throw sceptical light on ideas of 'liberation' according to which power might be removed or overthrown in the name of 'freedom'. In engaging Marxism and other oppositional discourses, Foucault clearly needed to define some common ground. This is essentially a consensus over the characterisation of the 'before' case in narratives of oppression-liberation (or repression-liberation)<sup>7</sup>, an agreement that social totalities may be comprehensively organised according to a single consistent regime of power. It is from this common

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<sup>7</sup> Foucault distinguishes 'oppression' and 'repression', with reference to eighteenth century political theory, over the question of whether a contractual relation is implied. 'Oppression' exists where a 'sovereign power transgresses the limit set by the terms of a contract with its subjects or citizens. 'Repression', by contrast, applies to situations of domination where no contract is implied – the paradigm case being war. '[R]epression no longer occupies the place that oppression occupies in relation to the

baseline that the point of disagreement is defined. In other words, the rationalist assumption about power is accepted as a condition of entry into major intellectual debates in France at the time.

The real originality of Foucault's work on power is in the interpretation of the 'after' case in narratives of liberation. The historical cases discussed are specifically chosen for this purpose. In *Discipline and Punish* (1979), Foucault is interested in changes in systems of punishment from the end of the eighteenth to the early nineteenth century. The significance of this historical moment is that it is the one, if any, in which the ideas of the Enlightenment were actually put into effect. If a claim is to be made that the Enlightenment bore political fruit in a liberation from the oppressions of the *ancien régime*, then this is the moment where such a liberation must be demonstrated. In *The History of Sexuality – Volume 1* (1981), the other major text in which he develops the concept of power, Foucault concentrates for similar reasons on the emergence of Victorian discourses of sexuality. The significance of this moment is that it is one in which 'repression' is supposed to have been established, providing the backdrop for the sexual 'liberation' of the twentieth century. In the narratives which Foucault attempts to counter, Victorian prudery figures in a similar way to the *ancien régime* – as an 'instance of negation' from which liberation is supposed to have been achieved.

In both cases, Foucault's general argumentative strategy is the same: he attempts to demonstrate that power operates both before *and after* the claimed moment of liberation. In *Discipline and Punish* he argues that the difference between the eighteenth century theatre of public executions and the 'enlightened' penal system which succeeded it was not that one was organised around power and the other around the

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contract, that is, it is not abuse, but is, on the contrary, the mere effect and continuation of a relation of

more 'humane' objective of reform. If the mutilation of the body of the condemned was a graphic illustration of the power of the sovereign under the *ancien régime*, then the system which followed was no less a regime of power. While the arbitrary excesses of corporal punishment may have disappeared, their loss was more than compensated by the obsessive detail of prison schedules and the omnipresence of surveillance:

The true objective of the reform movement ... was not so much to establish new rights to punish based on more equitable principles, as to set up a new 'economy' of the power to punish, to assure its better distribution ... The reform of criminal law must be read as a strategy for the rearrangement of the power to punish, according to modalities that render it more regular, more effective, more constant and more detailed in its effects ... (Foucault 1979: 80)

The argument in *The History of Sexuality – Volume 1* is slightly different as it does not deal specifically with the historical period in which the 'liberation' of sexuality is supposed to have occurred. Foucault attempts to demonstrate instead that Victorian sexuality, far from being 'repressed', was characterised by an 'incitement to discourse':

Since the eighteenth century, sex has not ceased to provoke a kind of generalized discursive erethism ... Incitements to speak were orchestrated from all quarters, apparatuses everywhere for listening and recording, procedures for observing, questioning, and formulating. Sex was driven out of hiding and constrained to lead a discursive existence. From the singular imperialism that compels everyone to transform their sexuality into a perpetual discourse, to the manifold mechanisms which ... incite, extract, distribute and institutionalize the sexual discourse, an immense verbosity is what our civilization has required and organized (Foucault 1981: 32-33).

The significance of the argument is, however, much the same. If the Victorian period was one in which sex was 'driven out of hiding', then a liberation from a Victorian 'repression' of sexuality comes to seem impossible. Any attempt to free the 'truth' of

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domination' (Foucault 1980: 92).

sex from its distorted representations would only reinforce the 'incitement to speak'.

Once again, claims to liberate from power appear instead as the *instruments* of power – as deepening and extending, in this case, the 'singular imperialism' and 'manifold mechanisms' by which sexual practices are organised.

There can be no doubt of the effectiveness of these arguments within the forms of argumentative engagement for which they were designed. But this effectiveness should not be allowed to obscure the historical specificity of those forms themselves. There is always another alternative than Foucault's to abstract narratives of oppression-liberation: that is, simply to question whether the societies, cultures or 'regimes' which are made to represent the 'before' case in such narratives have indeed been comprehensively organised by a single phenomenon – 'power'. This may not have been a realistic option in the context in which Foucault was seeking to intervene, but there is no reason to assume that it has not been elsewhere. As I will suggest below, it is an alternative which emerges quite clearly from the history of English political thought. In Chapter 2, I will argue further that it was explicitly articulated in early British cultural studies, most notably by Richard Hoggart and Raymond Williams. In order to locate the significance of Foucault, therefore, it is not sufficient to compare him only with Marxism or other theoretical positions which are committed to a totalising view of power; it is also necessary to compare him with those which are not.

I do not wish to argue here that the relevance of Foucault be restricted merely to local debates within the postwar left in France. The influence of his work has followed the vector of rationalist concepts of power, a vector which has become so pervasive in left cultural criticism since the 1970s that the alternative has largely been eclipsed. The significance of Foucauldian arguments in this context has been undeniable. My suggestion is only that this context has nevertheless been a particular one. As is clear

from Foucault's writing, French intellectual culture has been profoundly affected by universalist concepts of sovereignty and justice in a tradition which goes back to the eighteenth century. The impulse to totalise around figures of domination and oppression has been renewed periodically and acted upon in ways which are far more than theoretical. It is not surprising, given this, that so many of the intellectual resources for responding to the tendency towards rationalism have come from France. But the strength of French intellectual culture must also be recognised as its limitation. Even in the work of Foucault, there remains a certain blindness to the possibility of empiricism. It is in overcoming this blindness that it becomes important to look elsewhere.

It is significant, in the context of my argument, that Foucault returned again and again, in considering power, to the 'problem of sovereignty'. The importance of the theme is made clear, for example, in his suggestion that 'We need to cut off the King's head: in political theory that has still to be done' (Foucault 1980: 121). The suggestion is revealing in its ambiguity. On the one hand, the argument is clearly that political theory should be less concerned than it is with the 'King's head' – with symbolic representations of the *ancien régime* or their metaphorical equivalents. On the other hand, it still appears necessary to 'cut off' the King's head – presumably at some meta-theoretical level – in order to be relieved of this obsession. There is an important sense in which Foucault, despite all the originality which he brings to the consideration of power, writes in the *shadow* of the *ancien régime*. While he rejects an exclusive focus on a single 'determinate instance' (the sovereign), he retains in doing so the *reality principle* which such a focus allows. Power retains its status as 'fundamental' which is first established by the *idea* of a determinate instance. The entire character of a polity may no longer be condensed in a single person, class or political office, but in more diffuse manifestations there is still a single phenomenon to be observed. In the very

rejection of the Enlightenment model of the 'general intellectual', the universalising tendency of the *philosophes* returns in a reflected form: instead of proclaiming the universality of the 'Rights of Man', Foucault proclaims the universality of power.

### OAKESHOTTIAN SCEPTICISM

If it is unusual to frame Foucault's work in terms of 'faith', it may seem equally strange to frame Oakeshott's in terms of 'scepticism'. It might be conceded that he comes close to Foucault on a number of questions: he rejects interpretative approaches which attribute 'inner' psychological states to political agents, for example, and also dismisses the idea of a universal 'human nature'. But of the two writers, Foucault appears far more searching and insistent in challenging commonly-held beliefs. The difference is not so much one of propositions; it is more a difference of *method*. Foucault assumes the onus of proof and pursues his sceptical claims systematically. He seeks to give them a decisive authority, capitalising on highly-developed philosophical arguments and supporting them also with historical evidence. If Oakeshott adopts sceptical positions, they lack any such hard intellectual edge. He opens *The Politics of Faith and the Politics of Scepticism*, in fact, with an exaggerated gesture of modesty: 'For one who speaks neither as a philosopher nor as an historian and whose knowledge of affairs is no more intimate than the low average of his fellows – for such a person to speak about politics requires an apology' (Oakeshott 1996: 1). Any possibility of a systematic interrogation of concepts or historical interpretations is thus immediately foreclosed.

The weakness of the reason given for assuming a sceptical position on psychological states is typical of Oakeshott's approach:

[B]y 'interpretation' I do not mean discovering something that lies outside the world of activity, discovering (for example) what was 'in the mind' of the ruler before he performed [an] action, or discovering his 'motives' or even his

‘intentions’: these are all unnecessarily complicated and misleading ways of describing what we do when we try to elucidate an action (Oakeshott 1996: 4).

The word ‘misleading’ suggests that there may be some strong case to be made against invoking what is ‘in the mind’, but the suggestion is not taken further. The position is left to hang on little more than the view that reference to psychological states is ‘unnecessarily complicated’. There is no comparison with the rigour of Foucault’s approach to similar questions. Foucault constructs arguments which actively *displace* psychologising interpretations. This is his strategy, for example, in developing the concept of the ‘author function’, a concept which disqualifies reference to authorial intention by reducing the author to a function of discourse (Foucault 1977). Oakeshott, by contrast, offers no strong reason *not* to engage in speculation about mental states; he simply indicates a preference for less elaborate interpretations.

It is precisely this lack of critical ‘edge’ which Perry Anderson observed in the 1960s as typical of English intellectual culture. It was the weakness, for Anderson, which made it a slave to ‘empiricism’. With no disciplined approach to cutting through surface appearances, English intellectual life remained mired in ‘common sense’. Far from demonstrating scepticism, it showed a simple-minded credulity towards the aspect in which evidence was immediately presented – a credulity reflected at the political level in a blind faith in the established order. While activist student movements had developed in Germany, Italy and France, students in Britain remained ‘muzzled and quiescent’, bound by a culture which was ‘mediocre and inert’ (Anderson 1968: 4). The ascendant discipline which elsewhere provided the intellectual basis for a comprehensive and critical social awareness – sociology – had developed only a weak and ineffective presence:



To this day, despite the recent belated growth of sociology as a formal discipline in England, the record of listless mediocrity and wizened provincialism is unrelieved. The subject is still largely a poor cousin of 'social work' and 'social administration', the dispirited descendants of Victorian charity (Anderson 1968: 8).

Nor, according to Anderson, had critical methodologies developed in other disciplines. Under the influence of Wittgenstein, English philosophy had come to 'consecrate the banalities of everyday language' (21). Under Popper and Berlin, political theory was reduced either to a 'manichean morality tale' or a prophylactic against revolutionary ideas (26). While Leavisite literary criticism had some ambition to comprehend social totalities, it offered no general theoretical position: 'The critic does not judge by an external philosophical norm, he achieves a complete internal possession of a work and then fits it into his assessment of other works' (51). The only intellectual achievement of international significance, Keynesian economics, refused to question a cyclical view of time in which all that can be expected are periodic fluctuations of capitalism within a social order which remains unchanged.

In *Arguments Within English Marxism*, Anderson names Oakeshott explicitly as one of the objects of his earlier criticisms, representing him, in fact, as almost the emblem of the 'reactionary consolidation of the 1950s': 'The "left" version of the political culture of the time descended from the maudlin social patriotism of Orwell; the "right" variant from the anthems to the wisdom of gradualist "experience" of thinkers like Oakeshott' (Anderson 1980: 147). Even on the basis of Oakeshott's mode of address, it is not difficult to see the point of antagonism. For Anderson, the symptomatic refusal of British intellectuals to adopt disciplined and systematic methodologies was an implicit claim to *ad hominem* privileges, a claim which could be traced to residual attachments to the imagined virtues of aristocracy:

The aristocrat is defined not by acts which denote skills but by gestures which reveal quintessences: a specific training or aptitude would be a derogation of the impalpable essence of nobility, a finite qualification of the infinite. The famous *amateurism* of the English 'upper class' has its direct source in this ideal (Anderson 1964: 41).

The form of this argument has been reproduced many times since, with various substitutions for the charge of class supremacism. Not to offer a systematic methodology is to refuse to submit to general criteria of accountability; not to submit to such criteria is to rest one's claims on an assumed superiority, if not of class then of gender or race: such inferences have been highly influential, if not decisive, in identifying abstract theoretical argument with the cause of democratic reform.

It is not my intention here to question the positions taken by Anderson or other theoretical entrepreneurs of the New Left in the 1960s and 1970s; they are positions which can only be judged in relation to their time. It is rather to point out that the developments of the intervening thirty years present them in a very different light from the one in which they first appeared, a light which requires us to re-examine the question of 'scepticism'. There is no reason to doubt that the introduction to Britain of systematic theory effectively challenged what had become a reactive, if not reactionary, intellectual culture. The question which cannot now be avoided, however, is what new problems it may have introduced. The irony of Anderson's admiration for the grand totalising moves of French intellectual culture is that at almost the same time French intellectuals themselves were becoming acutely aware of their *costs*. It was these costs, as we have seen, which came particularly to concern Foucault. As he put it in 1976:

[W]hat has emerged in the course of the last ten or fifteen years is a sense of the increasing vulnerability to criticism of things, institutions, practices, discourses. A certain fragility has been discovered in the very bedrock of existence ... But together with this sense of instability and this amazing efficacy of

discontinuous, particular and local criticism, one in fact also discovers something that perhaps was not initially foreseen, something one might describe as precisely the inhibiting effect of global, *totalitarian theories* (Foucault 1980: 80, original emphasis).

The problems perceived by Foucault and Anderson could hardly be more opposed. What appears as the relative *invulnerability* to criticism of things, institutions, practices and discourses in Britain is directly related by Anderson to an *absence* of totalising theory. The relative *inefficacy* of criticism within British intellectual culture was a direct consequence of the fact that the bourgeoisie ‘refused ever to put society as a whole in question. A deep, instinctive aversion to the very category of totality marks its entire trajectory’ (Anderson 1968: 13).

There is a strong association in Anderson’s arguments between systematic criticism and an orientation of belief towards fundamental truths. The model of such an orientation is the French Enlightenment and the revolutionary political movements which have since adopted its universalist premises:

It is a general historical rule that a rising social class acquires a significant part of its ideological equipment from the armoury of the ruling class itself. Thus the universal axioms of the French revolution were turned by the working-class in France against the bourgeoisie which first proclaimed them; they founded a revolutionary ideology directed against the initiators of the revolution (Anderson 1964: 43).

The problem with Britain, according to this argument, was that its entry to modernity never produced a sharply-defined conflict between social classes. As a consequence, the bourgeoisie failed to articulate a totalising vision of society: ‘It handed on no impulse of liberation, no revolutionary values, no universal language’ (43). The New Left project of developing a systematic critique of British society and culture had therefore to import ‘fundamental concepts of man and society’ (Anderson 1968: 5).

Foucault, of course, is highly suspicious of any such 'fundamental concepts'. As I have argued, however, he retains, in his work on power, at least one important 'universal axiom': 'In any society, there are manifold relations of power which permeate, characterise and constitute the social body.' It is this axiom which continues to provide a foundation for systematic criticism. Foucault's procedure in criticising the concepts of 'man' and 'society' is similar, in fact, to Anderson's in criticising the concepts proposed by 'common sense'. The concepts are revealed as relatively insubstantial by shifting the theoretical referent to a *still more* fundamental level of reality. Hence, for example, the categories of 'sovereignty' and 'rights' which are central to Enlightenment models of criticism are exposed as merely a surface distraction:

[T]he theory of sovereignty, and the organisation of a legal code centred upon it, have allowed a system of right to be superimposed upon the mechanisms of discipline in such a way as to *conceal its actual procedures*, the element of domination inherent in its techniques ... The juridical systems ... have enabled sovereignty to be democratised through the constitution of public right articulated upon collective sovereignty, while at the same time this democratisation of sovereignty was *fundamentally determined and grounded in* mechanisms of disciplinary coercion (Foucault 1980: 105, emphasis added).

Foucault is clearly uncomfortable with metaphors of surface and depth. In the following paragraph he hedges the interpretation he has only just offered. He does not wish to suggest, he says, 'that there is on the one hand an explicit and sovereign system of right which is that of sovereignty, and, on the other hand, obscure and unspoken disciplines which carry out their shadowy operations in the depths, and thus constitute the bedrock of the great mechanism of power' (106). But it is difficult to see how he can maintain his critical leverage over Enlightenment categories without committing himself to precisely such a claim.

It would be pushing the argument too far to say of either Anderson or Foucault that they were dogmatic writers. In his essays of the 1960s, Anderson was certainly a vigorous polemicist, but in the context in which he wrote the 'fundamental concepts' which allowed him his intellectual boldness and breadth of vision were not ones which could be applied with any certainty; their introduction to British debates was a speculative adventure, still largely into the unknown. Writing in France, Foucault was far more aware of the order of claims implied in strong forms of criticism, but was also more wary of giving them his unqualified support; his unease at the suggestion that he may have discovered the hidden 'bedrock' of power is typical of his reluctance to be drawn towards authoritative assertions. But the quality of writing in both cases should not prevent us from recognising now that systematic criticism was associated in both with at least an *incipient* intellectual fundamentalism. It is this recognition which gives a quite different complexion to the apparent 'weakness' of the sceptical arguments of a writer such as Oakeshott.

It is typical of Oakeshott that he does not present scepticism as a general philosophical position. The word is used only to refer to a particular attitude towards government and then only in European or European-derived political cultures since the break-up of the medieval system and the development of modernity. His approach is frankly empiricist: generalisations are offered on the basis of specific observations and are always qualified by what the evidence appears to allow. It is not, however, a *positivist* empiricism: observations are not presumed to be a foundation guaranteeing the validity of general claims. Any determinate relation between generalisations and evidence in the analysis of politics is impossible, in Oakeshott's view, because of the ambiguous nature of language:

There are no simple expressions in our political vocabulary, and there are few words which have not done duty, over a period of many centuries, in a great variety of circumstances; and each circumstance, each context, has implanted some special meaning which it is thereafter difficult to exclude ... We do not possess a 'scientific' political language in which each expression has a fixed, simple and universally recognized meaning; we have only a living, popular language, at the mercy of use and circumstance, in which each expression is susceptible of many interpretations, none of which is without force and significance (Oakeshott 1996: 9).

Oakeshott recognises, of course, that terms *can be* given specialist definitions: 'writing may, on occasion, grind its edge to a sharpness and definition it would not otherwise possess' (7). But this is a special case, an 'interruption in the flow of talk and practice, bearing always the strong impress of an individuality'. There is a tendency in specialist approaches to focus on a single aspect of a phenomenon. While they may clarify an understanding of that aspect, there is always a danger that it will then be mistaken for the whole. Such writing is 'not to be despised, but to be used with appropriate caution'.

The difference between this 'appropriate caution' and the more active suspicion of truth claims in Foucault's work on power might usefully be clarified by a distinction made by Comte-Sponville between the classical scepticism of Montaigne and Hume – a scepticism applied to *particular* claims to truth – and the insistent interrogation of the general *concept* of truth in Nietzschean philosophy. Despite apparent similarities, for Comte-Sponville, the two should not be confused. Montaigne and Hume do not seek to challenge the concept of truth as such:

What they question – and what they criticise *in the name of truth* – is the pertinence and ontological reliability of our knowledge: their skepticism is negation not of knowledge but of dogmatism, not of truth but of certitude ... Such skepticism, though radical, remains ... a moderate skepticism: they do not state as Nietzsche does that 'nothing is true' (which would be contradictory: if nothing is true, it cannot be true that nothing is true) ... but – something very

different – that *everything is uncertain*, which is not contradictory (it only follows from it, as Pascal, reading Montaigne had seen, that ‘it is not certain that everything is uncertain’, but that fact, far from refuting skepticism, confirms it ...) (Comte-Sponville 1997: 47-8, original emphasis).

There is perhaps a certain contradiction in Comte-Sponville himself as he sometimes seems, despite his admiration for scepticism, to be seeking a final and decisive argument against Nietzsche. But the distinction he makes is nevertheless revealing. Relating it to my argument above, Oakeshott might be placed in the tradition of Montaigne and Hume. Foucault – at least Foucault the critic of Enlightenment ‘truths’ – tends more towards Nietzsche, seeking paradoxically a foundation against foundationalisms, a foundation which he finds in the concept of power.

### ENGLISH (TRANS)MODERNITY

The central difference between Oakeshott and Foucault in their treatment of the concept of power is that Oakeshott does not write in the shadow of the *ancien régime*. His project is not to cut off the ‘King’s head’ (either in practice or in political theory), nor is it to defend it against attack. It is rather to suggest that there are political traditions in which this figure has always been relatively unimportant. These are traditions in which the ‘King’, or metaphorical equivalents, has never signified power ‘as such’, but only *one* power among others – albeit an important one. The opening to a recognition of this possibility is provided not by any philosophical argument, but by an orientation to different historical experiences. The field of evidence on which Oakeshott draws is not, in the first instance, the French Enlightenment or the revolutions of the late eighteenth century, but the more protracted and obscure entry of British political institutions to modernity. This orientation has a number of significant consequences.

The first is that Oakeshott does not see modernity as involving a decisive rupture from anything which preceded it. In this he confirms a recurrent theme of the debate of the 1960s over the ‘peculiarities of the English’: the absence in English history of any single event in which the transition to modernity was focussed or condensed. As E.P. Thompson put it, with a typically vivid use of metaphor: ‘The Enlightenment proceeded in Britain, not like one of those flood-tides massing against a crumbling dyke, but like the tide which seeps into the eroded shores, mudflats and creeks of an estuary whose declivities are ready to receive it’ (Thompson 1978: 58). The observation was not a point of disagreement. In a discussion of the English Civil War, Anderson presents much the same view, pointing out that the one major political upheaval which might be seen as England’s ‘modern revolution’ cannot easily be forced into such a mould. The stakes were too confused, conflict took place *within* rather than *between* social classes, the terms in which the struggle was conducted were largely religious and those who benefited most from the outcome were not those who had been the most active protagonists. The event did nothing to clarify either an agent or a project of modernity: ‘the ideological legacy of the Revolution was almost nil’ (Anderson 1964: 30).

A second and related consequence of considering the English case is a comparatively long view of modernity. Modern politics, for Oakeshott, ‘are those habits and manners which began to emerge in the fifteenth century and to which our current habits and manners are joined in an unbroken pedigree’ (Oakeshott 1996: 3). He is aware that attributing modernity with such a long life may be surprising: ‘We seem to have got into the habit of thinking that what is significant (whether we like it or deplore it) in current politics dates from the French Revolution, or from 1832 or 1640, and this is unfortunate because by abridging the pedigree of our political character we restrict our understanding of it’ (3). But the sense in taking a long view is confirmed by the field of



evidence he considers. If there is no decisive moment in which modernity was 'inaugurated', then it becomes somewhat arbitrary how far back one chooses to go. In the absence of any essential defining characteristic, attention is directed to a range of external features – hence the focus on 'habits and manners'. At this level, continuities appear which go back well before the breaks or ruptures fixed as periodising limits by more categorical definitions of modernity.

A good example here is Oakeshott's discussion of religious political movements in England in the seventeenth century. If the difference between pre-modern and modern is identified with a distinction between 'religious' and 'secular', these movements are disqualified from any consideration of modern politics. For Anderson, whose model is always the French Revolution, they were politically insignificant: 'Puritanism was a useless passion' (Anderson 1964: 30). But Oakeshott is relatively indifferent to the religious/secular distinction and does not see it as marking a fundamental divide. This allows him to recognise similarities between the English Protestant sects and later political movements of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Their 'modernity' is evident above all, in the dispositions they exhibited towards *government*. While these varied greatly, they all implied an understanding of the potential for government to conduct reforms affecting entire populations. The imagined ends of such reforms were represented in religious terms – the establishment, for example, of a pattern of activity coinciding with 'righteous conduct'. But the relation between religion and politics was quite different from that of the medieval system, in which no such role for government was contemplated. The Puritans, for Oakeshott, were recognisably 'modern'; their religious version of governmental ambition bears comparison to contemporary versions: 'the particular idiom is always less significant than the common understanding of

governing as the activity of imposing a mundane condition of things designated as “perfection” (Oakeshott 1996: 61).

A third consequence of considering the English case is a tendency to attribute a limited role to intellectuals as agents of historical change. Thompson is illuminating here again in identifying the differences between the French and English experiences:

The French experience was marked by a clarity of confrontation, a *levée en masse* of the intelligentsia, a disposition towards systematizing and towards intellectual hierarchy – the staff officers, attachés, and so on, who grouped around the great radical *chef de bataille*. The English experience ... did not encourage sustained efforts of synthesis: since few intellectuals were thrown into prominence in a conflict with authority, few felt the need to develop a systematic critique. They thought of themselves, rather, as exchanging specialized products in a market which was tolerably free, and the sum of whose intellectual commodities made up the sum of ‘knowledge’ (Thompson 1978: 59).

It is not easy, in the English case, to associate modernity with any conscious ‘project’. Incremental changes contributed over long periods to produce major overall transformations, but there was no obvious point at which intellectual interventions might gain a leverage over the process as a whole. Knowledge – characterised more appropriately as a market commodity than as a political weapon – appears as a highly-mediated contributor to political outcomes, and then only as one among others. Its function is more to manage or *respond to* change than it is to direct it.

The key point in all this is that Oakeshott’s considerations begin not with the comprehensive ‘regimes’ of the late modern absolutist state but earlier, in the ramshackle alliances and partial administrative arrangements inherited from the medieval system. This means that the idea of a comprehensive regime becomes relativised, representing a particular *tendency* in European politics, rather than the form

of politics as such. As Oakeshott points out, there could be no question in the medieval system of a single consistent principle informing all social organisation because there was no institution with the means to impose or maintain one. Government was limited as a matter of necessity; all the administrative instruments now taken for granted – ‘the apparatus of banking and book-keeping, the records, registers, files, passports, dossiers and indexes’ (50) – were simply unavailable. The political institutions inherited from the middle ages were, in fact, little more than courts of law: ‘The understanding of government they carried with them was that of a *judicial* activity’ (Oakeshott 1996: 77, original emphasis). It was only gradually, as the possibility of additional functions began to be recognised, that they started to assume a wider authority.

These observations raise two questions which are highly significant for the conceptualisation of power. The first is a question of whether a comprehensive order has ever, in fact, been achieved. If the sovereign state is viewed as a relatively recent development, it comes to seem unlikely that the authorities which preceded it should have so aligned themselves in pursuit of common goals as to constitute a fully-consistent ‘regime’. The second question which arises is how to attribute motivations for such an alignment in the first place. Where a comprehensive order is assumed, this question does not arise because an integration of political functions is taken simply as a given. The only issue from this perspective is the constitution and purpose of particular regimes: Who occupies the position of sovereign? To what ends are activities being directed? But for Oakeshott, there is a prior question which is in some ways more important: What is it that leads political agents to assume the functions of a single order? To suggest that they may be *forced* would be to presuppose an original authority with the means to compel them. Yet the existence of such an authority is precisely what

needs to be explained. Some account is required of the process by which independent activities are willingly subordinated to some larger corporate enterprise.

This perspective means that there is a certain distance or detachment in Oakeshott's use of the concept of power. He clearly does not believe that there is any fundamental principle informing all social organisation. Mouffe is right, to this extent, in pointing out that he does not attribute the same importance to power as do Marxist and post-Marxist political theory. It would be a mistake, however, to infer from this that he has no place for the concept at all. The concept is simply an *empiricist* one in the 'Humean/Deleuzian' sense which I outlined in the Introduction. It gains its meaning not from a supposed objective referent but in relation to the 'passions, actions and ends' which inform its use. The value of Oakeshott is in offering a framework within which the latter can begin to be brought into view. Taken at a general level, this framework is schematic, but there are also signs of a specific address to the context in which it was developed. *The Politics of Faith and the Politics of Scepticism* was first written in the 1930s but was substantially revised in the 1950s. This historical location, combined with Oakeshott's empiricism, make it a useful text for sounding the context of formation of the concept of power at the beginnings of cultural studies.

## THE POLITICS OF SCEPTICISM

Oakeshott's perspective presents no obstacle to *recognising* the sorts of political phenomena described by Foucault. There are, in fact, striking similarities between some of their themes. Oakeshott is interested, for example, in the connection between government and surveillance. There is a certain political logic, he argues, for which governing is conceived as 'minute, inquisitive, and unindulgent: society will become a *panopticon* and its rulers *panoverseers*' (Oakeshott 1996: 29). He makes similar points

to Foucault about the intimate relation which can exist between knowledge and power. The potential for such a relation was recognised early and explicitly by Francis Bacon: 'Knowledge, he perceived, could provide power, and the organized pursuit of knowledge could provide power in great quantity: it was power he was interested in, and he imagined it as the mastery of the world for the benefit of mankind' (55). Such an instrumentalisation of knowledge means that questions of 'truth' and politics become inseparable: '[I]n this understanding of politics, the institutions of government will be interpreted, not as means for getting things done or for allowing decisions of some sort to be made, but as means for arriving at the "truth", for excluding "error" and for making the "truth" prevail' (27).

In Oakeshott's analysis, this tendency requires something more from citizens or subjects than an outward conformity to the law; demands are made over what Foucault would call 'the soul': 'Mere obedience is not enough; it must be accompanied by fervour ... whenever our politics has turned decisively in the direction of the horizon of faith government has always demanded not acquiescence but love and devotion' (97). The similarity with Foucault extends, remarkably, to observations about the potential for ideas of liberation to deepen the operation of power. In the style of politics being considered

the virtue of 'popular' institutions is recognized to be their capacity to provide government with greater quantities of power than any others. 'Democracy' is superior to 'monarchy' because it generates more power; 'divine right' cannot compete with the plebiscite as a source of power; and every extension of the franchise is seen to be an addition to the power at the disposal of government (131).

Finally, there is a tendency in this context for politics to be modelled on war. Each enterprise in pursuit of 'perfection' will both seek to accumulate power and to oppose

other enterprises 'because *ex hypothesi* "perfection" cannot have alternative forms' (105).

Where Oakeshott *differs* from Foucault, however, is that he does not see these tendencies as ever having been fully realised. Modern societies have never actually been panoptic regimes, knowledge and power have never been simply identified, questions of 'truth' and politics have never been completely inseparable, politics has never been entirely modelled on war and government has never fully aspired to command 'the soul'. This is not only because each tendency has been met by 'resistance'. Oakeshott does not deny that the latter exists. The more successful a government in subordinating the diverse activities of a society to a single aim, he suggests, 'the more closely it will come to resemble an alien authority' (95). Those whose activities are being directed will begin to regard government as a phenomenon to oppose or outwit. Government is therefore compelled not only to direct activity but also to 'search for imprecisions in the pattern, the profitless activity of circumventing the minute control it is endeavouring to impose' (95). Such limits can certainly be observed. But the more important point, for Oakeshott, is that all of this is only to characterise the logical extreme of a particular *style* of politics. There is another style which has always had some influence in the development of modern political systems. The tension between the two has prevented the extreme ever from being reached.

It is the distinction between these two styles which provides the terms of Oakeshott's title: 'the politics of faith' and 'the politics of scepticism'. Both are conceived as responses to the *potential* for modern governments to coordinate the activities of entire populations, not only through gross interventions but through a continuous influence over everyday lives. The 'politics of faith' is a response which regards this development enthusiastically, imagining the positive social improvements which it might allow. The

activity of governing is understood in this case to be 'in the service of human perfection' (45). As Oakeshott points out, there are many kinds of perfectionism, but the politics of faith is a specifically modern phenomenon which is quite distinct from others:

perfection itself is understood to be a mundane condition of human circumstances; and the achievement of perfection is understood to depend on human effort. The office of government is to direct the activities of its subjects, either so that they contribute to the improvements which in turn converge upon perfection, or (in another version) so that they conform to the pattern imposed (Oakeshott 1996: 45).

Perfection is not seen as guaranteed by providence or as realised in some transcendent realm. Nor is human improvement regarded as a matter to be left to the devices of individuals or small associations. The impulse to imagine more perfect worlds arises from an appreciation of the novelty of political modernity: 'it is believed that the chief agent of the improvement, which is to culminate in perfection, is government' (24).

The 'politics of scepticism' corresponds, by contrast, to a response of apprehension. It is a style which seeks to restrict the function of government to the maintenance of a 'superficial order'. Whatever reason there may be for endorsing a more ambitious role is seen as outweighed by the dangers. Oakeshott is careful to point out that such a view is very different from opposing government as such or suggesting its abolition:

[A]s a manner of understanding the activity of governing, scepticism is not to be identified with anarchy or with the stark individualism which is often the partner of anarchy. On the contrary, in the politics of scepticism governing is understood as a specific activity, and in particular it is understood to be detached from the pursuit of human perfection (Oakeshott 1996:31).

While scepticism expects little from government, it nonetheless affirms it. The grounds for affirmation do not lie in hopes for what it might achieve so much as in concerns about the consequences of its absence:

The sceptic in politics observes that men live in proximity with one another and, pursuing various activities, are apt to come into conflict with each other. And this conflict, when it reaches certain dimensions, not only makes life barbaric and intolerable, but may even terminate it abruptly. In this understanding of politics, the activity of governing subsists not because it is good, but because it is necessary (Oakeshott 1996: 32).

The view is not as pessimistic as it seems. Oakeshott suggests that the most common version of the politics of scepticism is not based on a rejection of aspirations for human improvement but on a 'prudent diffidence' about government specifically – a view that 'we know too little about the conditions of human perfection for it to be wise to concentrate our energies in a single direction by associating its pursuit with the activity of governing' (31).

It is important to the argument that the politics of scepticism is not seen merely as a reaction to the politics of faith. If anything, for Oakeshott, it is the older of the two styles, approximating more closely the understanding of government inherited from the medieval system. Yet it cannot be interpreted, either, as merely a pre-modern 'residue'. The modern potential of government for an extensive coordination of social activities has required continuous innovation in the definition and practice of government. The key historical achievement of scepticism has been to specify the activity of governing such that 'to govern was not the exercise of an undefined guardianship over the activities of the subject, but the performance of certain public duties ... closer definition of the sphere of the office evoked a limitation of the sphere of activity' (75). Among the more notable examples have been the recognition of the distinction between



government and religion and the development of diplomatic protocols for the conduct of foreign affairs.

In general terms, Oakeshott's sympathies clearly lie with the politics of scepticism. He is particularly critical of the erosion by the politics of faith of ethical limits to government. Governing in pursuit of perfection is, as he puts it, a 'total' activity; the coordination of activities to produce a general improvement requires their subordination to a single purpose:

And this means that every permitted activity is itself an activity of government (and is recognized as such), and that every subject legitimately employed is *eo ipso* an agent of government ... There is, then, in such a community only one work being carried on; and the various manners in which it may be pursued (sleeping, agriculture, painting pictures, nurturing children etc.) are not distinct and independent activities, they are components of a single pattern ... And the threefold division of activities possible elsewhere – governing, going about one's lawful business, and behaving unlawfully – is reduced to two by the coalescence of the first and the second (Oakeshott 1996: 93).

Given that 'perfection' tends to be a receding ideal, government is enjoined to a continuous pursuit of further powers. Each improvement becomes merely a sign of what more could be achieved. Given, too, that modern societies are characterised by competing ideas of perfection, the logical extreme of the politics of faith is a reduction of politics to the 'incitement of power' (103).

Placing Oakeshott in historical context, these criticisms might be read as a thinly-veiled polemic against communism. It is certainly easy to see how he could have been cast as a Cold Warrior. But his position is more complex than such a reading would suggest. To seek any absolute argument against the politics of faith is, for Oakeshott, merely to adopt the style oneself. The attempt to define some fundamental ground for rejecting it reproduces, paradoxically, precisely what it sets out to oppose. Worse than that, it

confirms a 'counterfeit predicament' in which the politics of faith appears as the necessary form of politics as such: 'Consequently, mere denunciation is out of place. We have to recognize [the politics of faith], not in its own terms as a final simplification of politics, but as the exclusive pursuit of one of their potentialities' (127). The most effective strategy in keeping alive alternative possibilities is not so much argumentative as documentary: 'It consists in a more thorough and a more candid study of the history of modern politics. For this will at once reveal strains in our politics other than that of faith and will dispose of this mistaken and disingenuous theory of a single direction' (67).

What is most surprising, given Oakeshott's status as a 'conservative', is his preparedness to concede that there are sometimes good reasons for favouring the politics of faith. The politics of scepticism is not a simple ideal; when it tends to a 'pure' form, it has its own limitations:

Government in this style is, we have seen, primarily a judicial activity; and where men are intent upon achievement, either individual or communal, judicial activity is easily mistaken for a hindrance. It abdicates exactly at the point where the activist expects an assertion of authority; it withdraws where he expects it to proceed; it insists on technicalities; it is narrow, severe and unenthusiastic (Oakeshott 1996: 109).

To suggest possible connections, again, with the historical context, Oakeshott could be read here as joining with the British postwar left in rejecting the legalism and formality of the political culture of the 1930s – the inadequacy, in particular, of its response to the depression and the threat of fascism. The limitations of the politics of scepticism are most evident, he suggests, at times of major social upheaval, when it is likely to be overtaken by 'the nemesis of political quietism' (108). At such times, the style fails in

its own terms: in jeopardising respect for governmental institutions, it weakens their capacity to maintain a relevant public order.

What is important, for Oakeshott then, is merely that some awareness is maintained that there *is* an alternative style of politics to the politics of faith. Scepticism, he admits, 'cannot be said to be the tide which our politics is at present riding':

But the history of politics in the last hundred and fifty years would have been very different from what in fact it has been if the pull of political scepticism had been either absent or weak. In so far as this history has been the story not of the promotion of rapid change or the imposition of a comprehensive pattern of activity, but a succession of political expedients to mediate current changes, to secure workable arrangements and to remove manifest disequilibriums; in so far as speculative ideas and large ambitions have played a subordinate part; in so far as changes have not been pressed to their so-called 'logical' conclusions ... the politics of scepticism, in these, if in no other respects, has made itself felt (Oakeshott 1996: 89).

## **AFTER THE COLD WAR**

To return finally to Foucault and the question I set at the beginning of the chapter, the reason I am not a Foucauldian is that Foucault's use of the concept of power inhibits a recognition of the political complexity which Oakeshott draws our attention to. *Within* the terms of a rationalist concept of power, Foucault's contribution has been highly significant. There can be no question that his pluralisation of forms or modalities 'of' power has had major effects on the discourses in which the term is used. In general, too, many of these effects can be recognised as 'positive', permitting a retreat from common tendencies in left politics towards intellectual fundamentalism. But in the way he achieved these effects, Foucault has made it difficult to think *outside* the terms of a rationalist concept of power. The enclosure of his arguments within a field of debate in which such a concept is presumed prevents it ever from being opened to critical

consideration. There is certainly a complexity to these arguments – it is one of Foucault's most insistent themes – but it is, as Oakeshott might put it, a 'counterfeit' complexity. Any question of whether it is appropriate to characterise social totalities in terms of a single analytic category, 'power', is displaced by questions concerning the *details* of such a characterisation.

How significant is this limitation? How significant, apart from any assessment of Foucault, is the continued attachment in cultural studies to a rationalist concept of power? These are not questions which I want to answer definitively, but to keep open through the remainder of the dissertation. There are reasons, however, for pursuing them with some vigour. The first is an observation of the historical circumstances which now need to be addressed. As has already begun to emerge in the discussion of Foucault, the development of an abstract, generalised concept of power has been closely related to the political climate of the Cold War. Foucault's own interventions in the use of the concept are scarcely intelligible without reference to the explosive interface between Western capitalism and Soviet-style communism. There is no absolute reason to think that concepts developed in this context should not be translated to other contexts. To refuse to expose them to critical scrutiny is, however, to restrict the range of possible responses to new historical circumstances. This is a theme which I will continue to develop throughout the dissertation, particularly in Chapters 5 and 6.

A second reason is more specific to cultural studies. The problem for the field in assuming a rationalist concept of power is that it distorts its sense of itself and its history. To read this history through a lens derived from French debates is to ignore a crucial difference: the relative absence in English-language intellectual traditions of a sustained address to power 'as such'. This difference in initial formation has meant ongoing differences in the whole inflection of the concept of power. In simple terms,

cultural studies has always been alive to precisely the question suppressed by Foucault: 'Why the concept of power?' If the question has sometimes appeared as a challenge from hostile 'outsiders', it has also coloured the entire development of the field. The use of the concept of power has never been able to rest, as in France, on the assumption of an objective referent. It has been negotiated, instead, in relation to historical contexts and with a particularist sense of specific projects. And, in fact, when the history is examined closely, it becomes clear that a scepticism in relation to the concept has not been voiced only by cultural studies' critics: it has pervaded the field itself.

When seen together, these two reasons are doubly compelling. If, indeed, new approaches are needed for thinking about cultural politics after the Cold War, cultural studies may have some of the resources for providing them. Rather than accepting a status as a faded copy or 'application' of European political theory, it might begin to take its own turn in dialogue, proposing alternative understandings of what politics can be.

## Chapter 2

# Richard Hoggart's Grandmother's Ironing

### Cultural Studies 'Before Power'

In an interview with Raymond Williams in the late 1970s, the editorial committee of *New Left Review* summarises a series of responses to questions about his childhood and adolescence:

One might say, then, that in your boyhood there was an absence of the typical town-country relation, absence of direct confrontation between privileged exploiters and working people, an absence of antagonism between manual and mental labour. Your early experience appears to have been exempt from a whole series of typical conflicts and tensions which most people of your generation from working-class families would have felt at some point. Your own history seems to have escaped nearly all of them (*New Left Review* in Williams 1979: 35).

The repetitive emphasis of this resumé – if not by Perry Anderson, then by close collaborators Anthony Barnett or Francis Mulhern – reflects a certain frustration at an inability to locate Williams in relation to structural contradictions in British society. After a failure of various attempts to draw him on the issue, his biography begins to appear as lacking any positive political points of reference, as nothing more than a series of 'absences'. Even the accumulated evidence of these absences leaves Williams unmoved; he does not attempt to deny them: 'I think it is true' (Williams 1979: 36).

Yet his response cannot have been surprising. Williams' view of his own formation remained quite consistent throughout his life. It can be traced back twenty years to

'Culture is Ordinary' (first published 1958), where he denied a sense of contradiction between his Welsh working-class background and studying at Cambridge:

I was not ... oppressed by Cambridge. I was not cast down by old buildings, for I had come from a country with twenty centuries of history written visibly into the earth: I liked walking through the Tudor court, but it did not make me feel raw ... Nor was learning, in my family, some strange eccentricity; I was not, on a scholarship to Cambridge, a new kind of animal up a brand-new ladder. Learning was ordinary; we learned where we could (Williams 1989b: 5).

At this point, furthermore, his self-understanding was clearly consistent with his political vision. Responding to an argument, particularly common among Marxists at the time, that working people were 'excluded from English culture', he dismisses it simply as 'nonsense':

They [working people] have their own growing institutions, and much of the strictly bourgeois culture they would in any case not want. A great part of the English way of life, and of its art and learning, is not bourgeois in any discoverable sense ... The leisure which the bourgeoisie attained has given us much of cultural value. But this is not to say that contemporary culture is bourgeois culture ... There is a distinct working-class way of life (Williams 1989b: 7-8).

It was not only that Williams himself did not feel 'excluded'; he doubted whether any systematic exclusion existed.

The frustration, then, is not one of thwarted expectations but of a more substantial incomprehension: How could Britain's leading socialist writer of the postwar period *not* have been inspired by a stronger sense of social injustice? It is a question which had been raised more aggressively by Anderson in 'Origins of the Present Crisis' where he traced it to the 'proletarian positivity' of the English working class (Anderson 1964: 44). The criticism was extended not only to Williams but also to Richard Hoggart:

The whole dense, object-infested universe described by Hoggart in *The Uses of Literacy* testifies to the monumental positivity of the oldest working-class in the world. Too much so ... The very density and specificity of English working-class culture has limited its political range and checked the emergence of socialism in England. Williams' attempt to solve the difficulty by attributing an indefinite extendability to working-class ... institutions, besides its factual weakness, rests on an evacuation of conflict concepts from his whole idiom (Anderson 1964: 45).

The later interview with Williams, along with others collected in *Politics and Letters*, was conducted in a spirit of reconciliation, occasioned particularly by Williams' much-celebrated turn to 'rejoin a wider international Marxist debate' (*New Left Review* in Williams 1979: 9). Yet it is clear that differences in political assumptions and motivations remain. They are differences which run as continuing tension through the history of the British New Left.

The relation of *cultural studies* to this history is paradoxical. While Williams and Hoggart are generally recognised, together with E.P. Thompson, as the key 'founders' of the field in Britain, it is the position represented by Anderson which is usually taken to *define* it. The consensus here is succinctly stated by Graeme Turner in his introduction to British cultural studies: 'Work in cultural studies has consistently addressed itself to society's structures of domination' (Turner 1996: 5). The view is one for which the early work of Williams and Hoggart can only appear ambiguously – present, as Williams appeared to *New Left Review*, only as an absence. The pair are sometimes referred to, with post-feminist irony, as the 'founding fathers', but if we are to invoke metaphors of patriarchal gender relations they might better be described as 'mothers'. By most accounts, they provided little more than fertile ground on which the seeds of others were laid. As Turner puts it of Williams' *The Long Revolution*, 'it lacks a theory of cultural structure and an appropriate method of textual analysis ... It is



difficult to read the book's focus on the constitutive "patterns" of cultural relationships ... without regretting the absence of structuralist methodologies' (Turner 1996: 55, 57).

The achievement of the book, for Turner, was to offer a receptive matrix for cultural studies, 'ready for the influence of European Marxism and structuralism to provide the methodologies for its future development' (58).

My aim in this chapter is to offer a more positive account of the early initiatives in British cultural studies. My motivation in doing so is not so much to right a historical wrong as to open the way for a different understanding of cultural studies in the present. As I will argue in Chapter 3, the introduction of Marxism and structuralism which occurred during the 1970s was less revolutionary than it has often been seen. The shift was certainly significant, but the new theoretical imports did not enter an empty vessel; they were overlaid on well-formed intellectual and political positions which transformed them as much as those positions themselves were transformed. To represent European 'theory' as providing the only positive terms for the development of cultural studies is, therefore, systematically to distort our understanding of it. Most significantly, it limits the resources on which the field is now able to draw. The situation has a certain perversity: precisely the qualities which have made cultural studies distinctive in relation to comparable intellectual traditions – its *differences* from 'European Marxism and structuralism' – are ruled out of consideration as it seeks to reinvent itself after the Cold War.

At the centre of these issues is the concept of power. The concept is, in many ways, the defining 'absence' attributed to the first generation of British cultural studies, an absence set off against a more recent 'presence'. It is this opposition which determines the peculiar relation of the field to its own past. If, as Turner suggests, it was only with the introduction of European theoretical perspectives that questions of power could be

adequately addressed, then it can only have been then that cultural studies came properly to 'exist'. The ambiguous status of Williams and Hoggart follows directly from this logic. Their absence of address to power locates them outside the field whose birth they can only appear as vaguely 'facilitating'. If the relation, then, between the first and later generations of cultural studies is to be reviewed, it is the use and significance of the concept of power which, above all, must be examined.

My suggestion in what follows is that the point of difference between early cultural studies and later theoretical perspectives needs to be recast. The distinction to be made is not so much *whether* questions of power are addressed as the *style* which is adopted in doing so. To return to the terms of the Introduction, the distinction is between empiricism and rationalism, between an assumption of a plurality of powers and an assumption of a single, global phenomenon 'power'. It is true that the *term* is relatively absent from early British cultural studies, but such an absence cannot be simply equated with an absence of address to the *phenomena* it identifies. What has been at stake in the use of the term (in the singular) is only whether these phenomena should be totalised as instances or aspects of the *one* phenomenon. Any 'absence' from the work of Williams and Hoggart is therefore only a relative one. It is more important in understanding the history of cultural studies to recognise the *presence* of quite a different approach to questions of power (or powers). This approach may have become relatively invisible, but it has continued to exercise a significant influence.

None of this is to judge, in absolute terms, the relative merits of empiricism and rationalism. My position throughout the dissertation is that it there is little sense in doing so. The two intellectual styles respond to different historical circumstances and can only be assessed in terms of the quality of responses *to* those circumstances. The weaknesses of early cultural studies in the context of Britain in the 1970s and 1980s

have been more than adequately rehearsed and were partly conceded, at least by Williams. My proposal is only that recognition also be given to its possible *strengths*. These have sometimes been seen most clearly by observers who are somewhat removed. A striking example is Jean-Claude Passeron's contrast between 'French' and 'English' approaches to the study of class in his introduction to the French edition of Hoggart's *The Uses of Literacy*:

The discussion of the realities of class is certainly to the credit of numerous fractions of the French intellectual milieu, but it is not altogether wrong to suppose that its theoretical and abstract tone serves also to keep at bay a whole set of realities at once simple and scandalous – or worse than scandalous, vulgar. The whole empirical force of these realities is evident when a description at once ethnographic and autobiographical such as Richard Hoggart's brings them into focus directly, above literary artifice and scholarly exercises (Passeron 1971: 130).

Passeron, best-known as a co-author with Pierre Bourdieu (Bourdieu and Passeron 1979; 1990; Bourdieu, Chamboredon *et al.* 1991; Bourdieu, Passeron *et al.* 1994), was fully engaged in precisely the theoretical projects which cultural studies came, after Hoggart, to admire. It is instructive, then, at the point where Hoggart himself has almost been forgotten, to see that a certain admiration has also flowed the other way.

It has often been suggested that one of the revolutionary moments of post-war cultural criticism was Roland Barthes' analysis in 1959 of a cover of the magazine *Paris Match* picturing an African soldier saluting the French flag. As Stephen Muecke writes in his recent book *No Road*, it was, for many, a moment of revelation:

Being at the time of the Algerian war, this image was that of a European power sending a clear ideological message about its relationship to its colonies. But what was new and surprising about Barthes' analysis was that previously nobody expected to find ideology while flicking through popular magazines in the hairdresser's (Muecke 1997: 168).

But exactly contemporary with Barthes' essay was a less-remembered 'English' revolution which needs to be understood in different terms – the moment when Richard Hoggart's grandmother's ironing appeared as an object of serious contemplation before an educated reading public. Unlike Barthes' ideological analysis of popular culture, Hoggart did not seek to connect ordinary experience with issues of world-historical importance, to capture the weighty political significance of ideology or myth. He showed simply that it could be considered in its cultural specificity, for no more than what it is.

## **TWO PARADIGMS?**

Before the case can be made more fully, some work is required to disentangle Williams and Hoggart from received accounts of their significance. The major point of reference here is Stuart Hall's 'Cultural Studies: two paradigms', which set much of the framework for representing the relation between the early initiatives in cultural studies and later theoretical perspectives. The essay is in many ways unique in the sympathy and depth of understanding it shows for both sides. As I will argue in Chapter 3, much of the significance of Hall within British cultural studies has been in maintaining a productive tension between the 'first' and 'second' generations in the field. While he is often read simply as a 'theorist', he has always retained a connection with what he called the 'indigenous' or 'native' tradition (Hall 1996b: 33), a connection which goes well beyond mere sentimental attachment or personal loyalty. But his major public statement on the specificity of this tradition was made at a high point in the ascendancy of European theoretical imports. It is deeply marked by the 'structuralist moment' and has never seriously been revised.

The 'structuralist' bias of Hall's account is evident in its very title. The term 'paradigm' has perhaps softened now to the point where it sometimes means little more than 'approach'. But in the 1970s and early 1980s it had a more precise meaning, derived particularly from Thomas Kuhn's (1970) *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. In drawing his points of contrast, Hall assumes, as Kuhn had argued, that intellectual positions are informed by general governing principles which structure thought and perception. The provenance of the assumption is explicitly anti-empiricist. What is important in examining a position is not – so the argument goes – its relation to 'experience' or 'evidence', but the categories it employs in *organising* experience. The classical exposition of the general perspective is in Kantian and post-Kantian philosophy, in which 'forms' of thought and experience are considered in abstract from their specific 'contents'.

Such a mode of analysis is thoroughly at odds with early British cultural studies. As Hall himself recognises, one of the most distinctive characteristics of the latter was its *resistance* to abstraction (Hall 1996b: 39). This was a resistance, most notably, to the separation out of different instances of the social – 'culture', 'the economy', 'social institutions' – as if these had a merely external or mechanical relation with each other. But it was also a resistance to the separation out of forms or structures of thought and perception from their contents. The style of thought represented by Williams and Hoggart is strongly historical. Ideas, like other cultural phenomena, are related to the particular times and places in which they take form and are not seen as transcending them. Hence there is no question of distinguishing general structures from the various instances in which they are merely 'instantiated' or 'applied'.

What occurs in Hall's essay is not, therefore, a neutral representation of early cultural studies, but an active *translation* of its concerns into a different intellectual idiom. There

is an obvious context for this in his efforts to mediate between different generations and intellectual commitments whose relations had become fraught, if not openly antagonistic. The essay can be read as an attempt to address what he describes at one point as 'the sectarian and self-righteous climate of critical intellectual work in England' in which 'arguments and debates have most frequently been over-polarized into their extremes' (Hall 1996b: 42). The desire to establish a more productive dialogue leads Hall to seek terms in which different positions can be represented to each other. Given the ascendancy of 'structuralism', it is from the structuralist lexicon that these terms are drawn. Hence, early British cultural studies, cast as 'culturalism', is tailored for diplomatic purposes as a fully-respectable 'paradigm'.

Hall's achievement here should not be underestimated. It is probable that no better solution could have been found at the time and it succeeded, at least, in ensuring that dialogue at some level remained open. This does not mean, however, that the strategy remains good for all time. In fact, it has increasingly come to have an opposite function from that which Hall initially intended it. Its long term effect has been to place the early work of Williams and Hoggart in an inherently weak position in which it can be represented only in terms which are not its own. The result has been to burden it with criticisms which appear insurmountable, consigning it effectively to the dustbin of history.

The most damaging of these criticisms have been charges of 'expressivism', 'humanism' and 'essentialism', all of which claim to identify uncritical or dogmatic ontological assumptions. The terms derive from Althusserian Marxism, but have survived well beyond the point where Althusser himself has faded from view. Their sense was originally developed out of quite a specific engagement with 'Hegelian' versions of Marxism which gained considerable influence in France in the postwar

period (Althusser 1971). In the wake of the Liberation, the French Communist Party and other Marxist-inspired left political movements attempted to claim some of the aura of nationalist mythology by emphasising collective human agency in effecting historical change. Support was found at the doctrinal level in the rediscovery of the 'early Marx' which still showed the clear influence of Hegelian conceptions of the realisation of the human subject in History. Althusser's theoretical project can be read as an attempt to head off what he saw as fundamentalist tendencies in this development (Benton 1984: 14ff). While 'humanist' Marxism congratulated itself on its distance from Stalinism, it was, in his view, no less prone to dogma. The root of this dogma lay, he argued, in an absolute faith in a human 'essence' which, while it was held to exist independently of specific historical contexts, was believed nevertheless to 'express' itself in historical processes.

The translation of Althusserianism to the British context was assisted by two factors. The first was an identification by Althusser between 'essentialism' and 'empiricism'. In the French context, 'empiricism' had already become established in left political debates as little more than a term of abuse, being closely associated with the authoritarianism of Stalinist claims to possession of the 'facts' of history. Althusser's provocation was to suggest that humanist Marxism, which saw itself as *rejecting* empiricism in this sense, was in fact little different from the positions it claimed to oppose: If 'empiricism' presupposed an essence in objective reality, then 'humanism' presupposed an essence in human subjectivity; one could be seen as merely the mirror of the other. In the British context, the significance of Althusserianism was quite different. Given that versions of empiricism were openly professed, it did not trap its interlocutors in the contradictions of their own logic, but appeared instead as an assault

on the very style of intellectual debate. The term 'empiricism' functioned, however, as an important point of translation.

The second factor in easing this translation was, ironically, attempts by some to oppose it. The most significant of these for cultural studies was E.P. Thompson's *The Poverty of Theory* (1978). While Thompson was virulent in his opposition to Althusserian 'theoretical practice', his engagement with Althusser succeeded in casting empiricism as, precisely, a 'theoretical' position. The paradox is one which Anderson had recognised as afflicting any attempt to provide empiricism with a general theoretical defence. The most common of these was an appeal to the criterion of 'verifiability'. As Anderson noted, 'Empiricism pushed to this extreme was subversive of the very experience it should have underwritten: the criterion of verifiability was itself notoriously unverifiable' (Anderson 1968: 21). But the significance of Thompson's anti-theoretical theorising goes further than this. In rejecting Althusser's emphasis on 'structure', he appealed to the category of human 'agency', appearing in doing so to confirm his vulnerability to Althusserian criticisms. The emphasis on agency appears not only in overt polemic, but also thematises Thompson's monumental *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963) which, in its framing rhetoric, might perhaps be described as 'expressivist'.

Much of the confusion over the significance of early British cultural studies has resulted from a tendency to make Thompson the representative figure. The precedent here was set, again, by Hall. He is clearly aware in 'Cultural Studies: two paradigms' of substantial differences between Thompson and Williams – differences, as he points out, which were sharply articulated by Thompson himself in a review of Williams' *The Long Revolution*. Yet when he comes to summarise the general principles of 'culturalism', it is Thompson's positions, not Williams', which are abstracted. Hoggart, who showed



little interest in general theoretical debates, disappears from view entirely. The result is that Williams and Hoggart are assimilated first to Thompsonism and then, more bizarrely, to Althusser's 'Hegelianism'. However much Hall resists the polemical tendencies of British Althusserianism, he is compelled in conclusion to indicate general 'weaknesses' in early cultural studies. These are almost exactly the weaknesses which Althusser had identified in 'humanism': a tendency to voluntarism and populism, theoretical inadequacy, a naïve 'expressivist' view of social totalities and a fundamentalism of subjective 'experience'. It is at this point that Hall's continued attachment to early cultural studies comes to *appear*, despite protestations, as little more than sentimental.

The full extent of the damage here becomes evident in Paul Gilroy's *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack* (1987), where the claimed essentialism of Williams and Hoggart becomes further associated with a fundamentalism of race and nation. Gilroy takes the point so far as to associate Williams with the racial exclusionism of Enoch Powell and Peregrine Worsthorne:

The distinction which Powell and Worsthorne make between authentic and inauthentic types of national belonging, appears in an almost identical form in the work of Raymond Williams. It provides a striking example of the way in which the cultural dimensions of the new racism confound the left/right distinction (Gilroy 1987: 49).

It is unlikely that Hall would have pressed quite the same charge, but he contributed to the context in which it could be made. A clear suggestion of his characterisation of Williams was that he claimed experience as 'authenticating' in some absolute sense (see Hall 1996b: 45). This is a characterisation not so much of empiricism as of *positivism*. It is in the confusion between these two that the left/right distinction in British politics is 'confounded'. Significant differences in political and intellectual orientation are erased

as the entire terrain to which they belong becomes identified simply with 'conservatism'.

### **'THE PRESENT VIEW OF THE OBJECT'**

It should now be possible to ask, however, whether this tendency is not reversible.

When viewed outside the context of the debates above, the association between early British cultural studies and 'Hegelianism' appears as highly idiosyncratic. There is no direct evidence in Williams or Hoggart of any significant influence from the German metaphysical tradition. Where the latter is recognised – as an influence, for example, on some of the writers reviewed by Williams in *Culture and Society* – it generally appears in a negative light (see, particularly, his comments on Carlyle in Williams 1958: 76-7). Williams was much criticised, in fact, for his reluctance to engage with continental philosophy. Hoggart was so remote from doing so that the point has not even been considered worth making. Nor were either involved in the kinds of liberationist politics which Althusser set out to criticise in France. The logic of translation from French to English debates belonged to a particular historical conjuncture and has no more substantial justification.

It is questionable whether an alternative philosophical genealogy should be sought for the early work of Williams and Hoggart; it may be better to say simply that it did not owe much to philosophy. It is useful, however, in freeing it from the terms through which it has been read, to consider a *point of intersection* with philosophical concerns. This is in a similarity in key terms and characteristic arguments with the more local tradition of British empiricism. Here there is at least some evidence, the most relevant reference being an essay on David Hume in Williams' *Writing and Society*.

The essay is significant not only in revealing clear connections between Hume's style of thought and Williams' own, but also in indicating how Williams regarded philosophy. He finds a precedent on this question in Hume himself, for whom philosophy was a variety of *letters*:

We can quote his most recent and best biographer, Ernest Mossner, for the opinion that from the beginning Hume 'regarded philosophy as part-and-parcel of literature. To be a philosopher is to be a man of letters: the proposition was received by Hume and the eighteenth century as axiomatic' (Williams 1983: 121).

Williams cites this view in order to revive it; the remainder of his essay is an attempt to show that Hume's philosophy can *still* be read as a certain kind of writing. The important point in the argument is that the specialisation of philosophy in abstract 'reason' does not distinguish it categorically from writing which is immersed in the particularities of 'experience'. It is a point, again, on which Williams follows Hume. As he understands Hume's empiricism, it is not a doctrine that reason gains *authority* from experience, but a view of the two as ultimately *inseparable*.

It is significant that Williams does not attempt to justify this view in general terms; consistent with the style of thought to which it belongs, he traces the circumstances in which it arose. As he points out, Hume's historical position was perhaps unique: it was possible, in eighteenth century Scotland, to recognise the transformative power of a developing capitalist economy, to sense the tempo and texture of modernity, but not yet to have obvious cause to regard it as cataclysmic or revolutionary. The space of his thought was one which was sensitised to the kind of change which has since come to be accepted as an inescapable dimension of modern life, but where it could be considered in a way that was even and contemplative.

It is in this context, for Williams, that the major themes of Hume's philosophy are best understood. The most familiar of these is his empiricist scepticism, his distrust of reasoning from abstract or universalist premises:

I found that the moral Philosophy transmitted to us by Antiquity, labor'd under the same Inconvenience that has been found in their natural Philosophy, of being entirely Hypothetical, and depending more upon Invention than Experience. Every one consulted his Fancy in erecting Schemes of Virtue and Happiness, without regarding Human Nature, upon which every moral Conclusion must depend (Hume quoted in Williams 1983: 123).

Where Williams' interpretation of this differs from most is that he does not take it to be pitched exclusively at the level of formal argument; nor does he see it as preparing the way for an alternative ontology or conceptual system. Its impulse arises, he suggests, from a troubled relation between the formal discipline of writing and the elusive qualities of enthusiasm, passion and warmth of social engagement. It is on this point that Hume considers the weaknesses of other positions:

I have notic'd in the Writings of the French Mysticks, and in those of our Fanatics here, that, when they give a History of the Situation of their Souls, they mention a Coldness and Desertion of the Spirit, which frequently returns, and some of them ... have been tormented by it many Years (Hume quoted in Williams 1983: 123).

And it is on the same point that he is troubled by tendencies in himself:

I dine, I play a game of back-gammon, I converse, and am merry with my friends; and when after three or four hours' amusement, I wou'd return to these speculations, they appear so cold, and strain'd and ridiculous, that I cannot find in my heart to enter into them any farther (Hume quoted in Williams 1983: 127).

For Williams, the whole of Hume's moral philosophy might be read as an attempt to develop a response to this problem – to define a new relation between reasoning and

experience, writing and social engagement, the time of the study and a wider world whose pace was visibly increasing.

The distinctiveness of Hume's approach to this problem lies, for Williams, in a complex relation to *convention*. On the one hand, he directs an insistent scepticism against formalism and dogma, whether in social and political institutions or in thought and writing. As in the case of 'the moral Philosophy transmitted to us by Antiquity', these qualities are taken more generally to imply a fixity and irrelevance. But on the other hand, he openly *appeals* to convention in defining a relation between reason and experience. This is evident in stylistic devices used to engage the assent of the reader, particularly small affirmative judgements on questions where a basis for common agreement is assumed – 'tis evident, 'tis certain, 'tis undeniable'. Hume admits that the use of such expressions might be seen to contradict his scepticism, but defends himself against the charge of authoritarian intent:

[They] were extorted from me by the present view of the object, and imply no dogmatical spirit, nor conceited idea of my own judgement, which are sentiments that I am sensible can become no body, and a sceptic still less than any other (Hume quoted in Williams 1983: 128).

While 'the present view of the object' may be conventional, it is also *negotiable*, being always qualified by the particular circumstances – 'according to the light' (128) – in which it arises. The approach is one which does not judge tradition and convention in themselves, but only for the kinds of communicative relation they do or do not allow.

Williams' commentary on this is as revealing of himself as it is of Hume. While he notes certain limitations in Hume's thinking, and criticises some of the positions which have been abstracted from it, his exposition overall is clearly sympathetic. Most telling, perhaps, is a defence of Hume's position on religion:

[H]ere (we have still to observe, in twentieth-century England as well as in eighteenth-century Scotland) an obstinate kind of questioning, a scepticism, can lead, suddenly, to a cry of fire. Angry prejudices are released, only to turn suddenly and assume the name and body of love (Williams 1983: 130).

There is no question, for Williams, that this concern must be taken seriously; but it is not, he argues, an objection which can be made against Hume. It is true that he questioned the consequences of religion as he saw it practiced and expounded, but this questioning never ignited a desire that the institution of religion itself be destroyed. Hume's temper here is clearly regarded by Williams as a virtue, illustrating precisely the attractions of his style of thought: its ability, particularly, to combine an open tolerance – which does not wish people to be fundamentally other than they are – with a force of critical intellect brought to bear on petty dogmas, tyrannies and complacencies.

There are unmistakable parallels between themes in Williams' own work and those he identifies in Hume. His classic formulation 'structures of feeling', is Humean in exactly the sense which he himself outlines, resisting an opposition between the formal aspects of phenomena and those qualities which give rise to affirmation. The same might be said of the idea of the 'long revolution'. Williams' vision of the process of democratic social transformation is not of one carried forward by 'an obstinate kind of questioning'; nor is it one in which tradition is simply rejected in favour of 'the new'. It is a process in which there is a gradual synchronisation of reasoning and experience, in which traditional institutions and conventions are gradually adjusted to respond to modernity. Perhaps most importantly, there are similarities in the principles employed in judging social or political arrangements. Like Hume, Williams insists on the qualification of judgements by the 'light' in which they are made: '[M]y general position [is] to seek the maximum disclosure of the circumstances of judgment, which would allow someone

else to dissociate himself from it; but then openly and not by a presumptive category' (Williams 1979: 347).

It is here, then, that we might clarify some of the bearings of early British cultural studies. If Hume represents for Williams 'a whole movement of thought – in effect the movement of empiricism' (1983: 126), the 'empiricism' in question has a very different sense from that assumed by Althusser. When Althusser used the term it was an abstract metaphysics which he clearly had in mind – the positing of substances or 'essences' understood as independent not only from theoretical discourse but also from evidence. This is almost the opposite of Humean empiricism, which is distinguished precisely by a *rejection* of the metaphysical category of substance. The category, Hume argued, was a 'fiction of the antient philosophy'. The belief in substances was merely a habit of mind which reconciled the contradictory appearance in phenomena of similarities and variations through time: 'In order to reconcile which contradictions the imagination is apt to feign something unknown and invisible, which it supposes to continue the same under all these variations; and this unintelligible something it calls a *substance, or original and first matter*' (Hume 1978: 220).

Similar caution is required in relation to 'humanism'. If Williams might be described as a 'humanist', it is in the same sense, again, as the term might be applied to Hume. As Williams summarises the basic assumptions, they are of

the shared conventions of humane feeling; the certainty that these are embodied in the common language of approval and disapproval; the conviction that moral activity is the use of this language, and that reasoning is necessary mainly to confirm this use and to expose the inadequacy of other definitions of morals. (Williams 1983: 134)

These convictions might be criticised for many things, but the assumption of an ontological essence in 'man' or 'Spirit' is not one of them. Hume was no less sceptical of such assumptions than he was of a metaphysics of 'substances'. The point of this scepticism, for Williams at least, was precisely to deny to reason any absolute court of appeal. There is no alternative, in the Humean tradition, than to engage communicatively in 'the common language of approval and disapproval'; it is only from this that 'humane feeling' gains its point of reference.<sup>8</sup>

### **'POLICEMEN DON'T SHIT ROSES'**

One of the most immediately illuminating points to begin in considering the relevance of all this to questions of power is Williams' ambiguous 'conversion' to Marxism. Perhaps the most decisive passage appears in a discussion of the concept of hegemony in *Marxism and Literature*. Having given an outline of the concept, Williams considers, then rejects, an objection to its use:

There is of course the difficulty that domination and subordination, as effective descriptions of cultural formation, will, by many, be refused; that the alternative language of co-operative shaping, of common contribution, which the traditional concept of 'culture' so notably expressed, will be found preferable. In this fundamental choice there is no alternative, from any socialist position, to recognition and emphasis of the massive historical and immediate experience of class domination and subordination, in all their various forms (Williams 1977: 112).

This is undoubtedly an important turning point in Williams' writing. His reference to the 'alternative language of co-operative shaping' is very close to a description of his own earlier work and the decision to reject it is clearly arrived at with difficulty. But the

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<sup>8</sup> McKenzie Wark (1997: 194-6) has made a useful suggestion in coining the term 'Humean nature'. The term introduces a similar distinction to the one I am drawing between Humean empiricism and metaphysical humanism.



significance of the turn should not be overstated. The terms of Williams' engagement with Marxism remain very much his own.

The point here was not lost on Terry Eagleton, one of the keenest observers at the time. As both a one-time student of Williams and a rising exponent of Marxist cultural criticism in Britain, Eagleton had an intense interest in the question. Like many others of a younger generation, he clearly sought the vindication of Williams' recognition of Marxist theory, but he could not help but find his turn to Marxism disappointing. The key term in contention is, significantly, 'experience':

It is symptomatic of Williams's whole method that he should point to the *experiential* force of hegemony, as an index of its structural primacy. Hegemony is deeply, pervasively lived ... It goes logically with this confusion that his concept of hegemony is a structurally undifferentiated one: 'a central system of practices, meanings and values' which is not distributed into its constitutive economic, political and ideological formations. Williams's rapprochement with Marxism is still, evidently, a fraught, dissentient, intellectually unclarified affair (Eagleton 1976: 23, original emphasis).

Even in what appears to be Williams' clearest announcement of a commitment to Marxism, there is a crucial reservation. At no point are 'domination' and 'subordination' recognised unequivocally as fundamental social realities; the terms are granted no further validity than that they correspond to a 'historical and immediate experience'. The decision to adopt them avoids any question of final correctness, appearing instead as a choice, given particular political commitments ('socialism'), of an appropriate 'language'. Williams does not so much reject an earlier position as find ways of adapting a Marxist vocabulary to what remains a highly sceptical view of general theoretical principles.

The example is a striking illustration of my overall argument in this chapter: that the concept of power in early British cultural studies is an empiricist one. To use the terms I took from Barry Hindess in the Introduction, there is no assumption of an 'essence of effectiveness'. Where for Eagleton, 'domination' and 'subordination' are properly theoretical concepts, with a validity independent of experience, their status for Williams is quite different. They are concepts which have developed within particular historical contexts and whose meaning goes no further *than* those contexts. Any role for theory is limited, as in Humean philosophy, to a clarification of the ways in which they are used and a demonstration of the inadequacy of attempts to ground them at some more fundamental level. To return, alternatively, to the definition of empiricism proposed by Deleuze, 'domination' and 'subordination' are understood as designating 'multiplicities'. With no guarantee of an essential identity between the phenomena which the terms describe, the latter appear as many, potentially, as the instances in which the terms are used. The same must hold of the concept under which they are most often capitalised: the concept, that is, of power.

But to consider the issues only as they are clarified by an engagement with Marxism is also, in some ways, misleading. It suggests, firstly, that an attention to questions of power is confined to those who use the concept or related concepts in their most generalised forms – to those, that is, who speak of 'power' or 'domination' in the abstract. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, it suggests an equation between generalised concepts of power and a recognition of social *conflict*. This equation is explicit in the way Williams frames his 'fundamental choice': on the one hand, the 'language of co-operative shaping', on the other, the language of 'domination and subordination'. There is no place in this presentation of options for a consideration of

social relations which are *neither* co-operative *nor* subsumed under a generalised rubric of power.

The point is important because it has haunted attempts to resist generalising theoretical tendencies in cultural studies. The problem was already present in Williams, whose work was always highly sensitised to Marxism even when not actually 'Marxist'. It can be stated as a simple dilemma: whether to emphasise conflict or whether to emphasise local differences and historical particularities.<sup>9</sup> The 'fraught, dissentient, intellectually unclarified' character of Williams' Marxism can largely be attributed to a continuing discomfort with settling for either of these options against the other. References to conflict evoke, for Williams, a universal form of human relations, an implication which he must then strain to circumvent. But to avoid such references is to suppress an obvious dimension of social experience. The problem has proved remarkably persistent in cultural studies. As we will see in Chapters 5 and 6 it has re-appeared in recent attempts to disengage from general theories of domination. These attempts have been shadowed by much the same criticism which Anderson made of the early Williams: that he had 'evacuated conflict concepts from his whole idiom'. As Meaghan Morris has put it, borrowing terms from Michel de Certeau, the move against general theories of domination has been accompanied by a loss in cultural studies of a 'polemological edge' (Morris 1990: 31).

For an indication of why the dilemma may be misleading, it is necessary to look to the figure in the development of British cultural studies who was least sensitised to Marxism: Richard Hoggart. There is a paradox here: while Hoggart is further than

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<sup>9</sup> It was a dilemma which was personified, for Williams, by the figures of Marx ('conflict') and F.R. Leavis ('culture'). As is clear from 'Culture is Ordinary', Williams' thought, from his days as a student

Williams from Anderson or Eagleton, he is not so open to their criticisms.<sup>10</sup> There is a directness about social conflict in his writing which is not hedged by elaborate qualifications. A dislike of an artificial smoothing of human relations is, in fact, one of his most persistent themes. As he put it in *The Uses of Literacy*:

'Everyone's entitled to his own opinion' may indicate strength or weakness; but when, as today, it is constantly surrounded by appeals for the 'open mind' and for 'broadmindedness' – open for its own sake and broad enough not to cause any unpleasantness by requiring disagreement from anyone – one knows where the emphasis lies (Hoggart 1957: 177).

Yet Hoggart is the figure, more than any other, who resisted both a generalised concept of power and universalising theoretical tendencies. His blindness to Marxism undoubtedly had its costs – in an inability, particularly, to engage with the concerns of a younger generation. But it is a blindness which may now have a certain virtue.

Hoggart's writing preserves the memory of different understanding of conflict – not as an index of structural contradictions but as a contingent quality of social encounters.

A good example here is his comments on the relation between working class communities and the police – an issue more famously addressed from a 'Marxist' perspective by Stuart Hall and others (1978) in *Policing the Crisis*.

There is no question, for Hoggart, that the relation has always involved a major element of conflict and he is critical of those who fail to recognise it. In an essay

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at Cambridge, was always located somewhere in the tension between these two (see Williams 1989b: 3-18).

<sup>10</sup> It is interesting to note, in passing, that Hoggart's own early impressions of Williams were less than favourable. In a review of *The Critic*, a journal set up by Williams and Wolf Mankowitz as a left engagement with Leavisism, he wrote: 'To begin with there is too much jingling of critical loose change, notably by Raymond Williams, who tricks out the sound stem of a dialogue on actors with rosettes of brightly turned platitudes' (quoted in Steele 1997: 123).

of 1960 on television, for example, he calls attention to the absence of representations of conflict in the popular police drama *Dixon of Dock Green*:

Traditional working-class attitudes to the 'cops' were a compound of suspicion, scorn, laughter, and respect. Compare that with the clean, simplified, kindly figure of the 'cop' in *Dixon*. Where is the world in which the police beat you up at the station if you've made it difficult for them to get you there? in which you suspect they always stick together and will lie to the magistrates to do so? in which you believe they are lenient with the local nobs? (Hoggart 1970: 158)

The observation is not an isolated one; similar criticisms are made of 'concerned' social documentaries: 'on the "colour" problem, nuclear warfare, "the problem of youth", and so on'. These are, for Hoggart, 'informed with intelligent good intentions' but 'almost always off-key, irrelevant to the lived pressure and depth and grotesqueness of "problems"':

Most of them give as nearly as they can a "balanced", an "objective" picture, one which represents a "fair cross-section" of the "typical people" involved in the "problem". I wonder what effect they have at the level at which we say "bloody niggers" or "those damn teenagers ought to be horsewhipped" (Hoggart 1970: 154).

Yet the analysis is quite distinct from a critique of ideology, attempting to expose an 'underlying' structure of relations which there is an interest somewhere in concealing. As Hoggart goes on to clarify his remarks on police violence:

I am not saying these qualities exist all the time and are unrelieved. But one knew and knows that they do exist, within a whole texture of attitudes to the police, a texture that has been formed in the stress of experience, a texture that is not simply mean and suspicious but is subtle and qualified (Hoggart 1970: 158).

As part of a 'whole texture', conflict does not reveal a more fundamental level of reality than other qualities of social relations. It is to be noted in a documentary mode rather than taken up as a key for analytic penetration. Hoggart's lead in this is not so much from any intellectual authority as from traditional English working-class culture. As he relates it in later autobiographical reflections: 'The standard working-class phrase before all discreditable behaviour in the police was the dour: "Policemen don't shit roses"' (Hoggart 1988: 128).

Here, then, is a 'purer' empiricism with respect to power than can be found in Williams. Society, for Hoggart, is composed of a multiplicity of powers – the powers of the police, the magistrates, the bosses, as well as those available to working-class communities. The exercise of these powers is often dominative and sometimes violent, but such qualities do not represent a fundamental social 'truth'. Powers have relations with other powers – the magistrates with certain middle class institutions, the police with the 'local nobs' – but these relations are contingent. They are not reducible to a basic structuring principle which would allow power to be considered as one.

Hoggart is quite *aware* of a more totalising view of power as well as its tendency to fasten on evidence of conflict. He recognises it most explicitly in his essays on student politics and changes in universities during the late 1960s:

The extreme student radicals argue that society is thoroughly corrupted and at bottom authoritarian; that the amiable part-yielding that it (like the universities) seems capable of is worse than frank opposition because, in the end, it gets you nowhere but meanwhile blunts your cutting edge ... The much talked-about patience of the police is only a façade. If anyone really tries to push things to the point at which they challenge the structure, then the mask is dropped and

the police become ruthless, exposed as the agents of naked power (Hoggart 1982: 27).

But Hoggart is more secure than Williams in holding to an alternative view. It is not necessary, as he sees it, to minimise conflict, merely to recognise it as part of a 'mongrel mixture of attitudes': 'There are a great many rigidities and snobberies ... But there are also a great many decencies' (Hoggart 1982: 26).

### THE ORIGINS OF THE (PRESENT?) CRISIS

If my argument so far is generally accepted, the interesting question which emerges is why an empiricism with respect to power has been eclipsed in more recent cultural studies. It becomes no longer possible to offer the common progressivist account according to which later theoretical positions replaced earlier positions because of a failure of the latter to recognise power. Nor can it be suggested that later positions have been superior in their recognition of social conflict. Attention must be directed to quite a different set of questions: Why has there been a tendency to *totalise* power? Why has power come to be considered in the abstract? Why has social conflict been so widely accepted as an index of structural contradictions?

The answers to these questions can only be sought in the contexts in which the developments have taken place. For the British case, this requires us to look more closely at the history of the New Left, particularly its response to a rapid and massive expansion of what John Hartley has called the 'G-E-M' complex, the interlinked agencies of government, education and the media (Hartley 1999: 5-7). The initial catalyst for this expansion was the war, which displaced unprecedented numbers of people from what had been their expected activities

and locations, involving them in more rationalised, centralised organisations.

But the tendency was confirmed in the post-war period. Industrial restructuring, increasing prosperity and a removal of obstacles to social mobility all raised the prospect of a break-up of established class cultures. At the same time, previous limits to cross-demographic communication were breached as business and media organisations moved to establish 'mass' markets and audiences. Further contributing to the tendency was the development of the welfare state which required greater penetration by government agencies into 'ordinary lives'.

The relevance of this to the above discussion is touched upon obliquely in Williams' essay on Hume. The greatest *limitation* of Hume's moral philosophy, for Williams, is that it is not immediately suited to contexts of social diversity. The problem is evident in an ambiguity in Hume's use of the word 'society' itself. At some points, it carries an old sense of 'the company of one's fellows'. Where this is the usage, appeals to shared conventions appear a plausible way of achieving consistency between individual reason and wider 'social' experience. But at other points, Hume refers to 'society' in the more abstract modern sense of a 'system of common life' (involving not only one's 'fellows' but also those with quite different experiences). As Williams identifies the problem:

Hume, unconsciously assimilating 'society', at many points, to a sense not far from the class-based 'company of his fellows', misses what seems to me the central difficulty in his whole argument ... [He] is trying to generalize and even universalize, in the matter of virtue and society, while retaining within this crucial term not only an unconscious particularity but also, largely unanalysed, the essential complexities of the operative and connecting word. (Williams 1983: 140).



In Hume's time, the problem may not have been acute: the intellectual discourse he was engaged in was still, effectively, a dialogue internal to a particular class, gender and geopolitical location. But where this condition no longer holds, the whole approach is brought into question.

If there is any origin of the 'crisis' in English intellectual life identified by Anderson in 1964, it appears to have been here, in the difficulty of adapting an empiricist style to increasingly pluralistic contexts of public discussion and debate. As Anderson, himself, pointed out in 'Components of the National Culture', English cultural criticism up to F.R. Leavis employed a characteristic mode of address. The reader was engaged with a rhetorical question which was implied, if not actually explicit: 'This is so, is it not?' (Anderson 1968: 52) So long as there are sufficient similarities of experience between addresser and addressee for the answer, in general, to be 'yes', then the strategy can work effectively; common ground can be negotiated for more developed arguments. But where, instead, the answer becomes uncertain, the very conditions for public discourse begin to evaporate. The problem is one which British cultural studies has faced from the outset. If anything is shared between Hoggart, Williams, E.P. Thompson and indeed Stuart Hall, it has been a sense of the urgency of addressing it. While immersed within strongly empiricist intellectual traditions, they have been, at the same time, highly exposed to social diversity.

For Hoggart and Williams, this exposure had a strong personal dimension. As 'scholarship boys' who had come to a university education from working-class backgrounds, they had had to negotiate it as part of their own development. As Hoggart put it in *The Uses of Literacy*, the scholarship boy exemplified the 'anxious and uprooted' who could be recognised 'primarily by their lack of poise, their uncertainty' (Hoggart 1957: 291). He found it difficult to identify fully with the class from which he

had come. While normally he might have been inducted into the masculine world of work, his experience was, instead, of doing homework in a space cleared on the kitchen table among piles of ironing and cups of tea:

With one ear he hears the women discussing their worries and ailments and hopes, and he tells them at intervals about his school and the work and what the master said. He usually receives boundless uncomprehending sympathy: he knows they do not understand, but still he tells them; he would like to link the two environments (Hoggart 1957: 296).

Yet the scholarship boy was no more comfortable in the middle-class environment in which he later moved: 'He rarely feels the reality of knowledge, of other men's thoughts and imaginings, on his own pulses; he rarely discovers an author for himself and on his own' (297).

But as Hoggart saw, the scholarship boy was not unique; he was merely one of 'the more sensitive, though now bruised, tentacles of society. The main body of the whole ignores them; but the symptoms they show refer in some degree to all' (317). In the area of education, the scholarship system was only a precursor to a wider expansion of tertiary sector and it is here that the most significant developments occurred. As Tom Steele has pointed out, all the figures most closely involved in the early development of cultural studies began their careers in the area where this expansion first occurred: in adult education or the extra-mural sector of the universities (Steele 1997: 14-16). In a late essay, Williams makes it clear that this is where, for him, cultural studies first took form:

[I]t can hardly be stressed too strongly that Cultural Studies in the sense we now understand it ... occurred in adult education: in the WEA, in the extramural Extension classes. I've sometimes read accounts of the development of Cultural Studies which characteristically date its various developments from *texts*. We all know the accounts which will line up and date *The Uses of*

*Literacy, The Making of the English Working Class, Culture and Society*, and so on. But already in the late forties ... Cultural Studies was extremely active in adult education. It only got into print and gained some kind of general intellectual recognition with those later books (Williams 1989a: 154).

Williams is equally clear on the significance of adult education: it was a context in which modes of address could not be presumed. Like the scholarship boy, WEA or extension students often found themselves unable to 'feel the reality of knowledge on their own pulses'. This did not mean they rejected the knowledge that was offered to them, but it did mean an insistence on two conditions: '(1) that the relation of [it] to their own situation and experience had to be discussed, and (2) that there were areas in which the discipline itself might be unsatisfactory' (Williams 1989a: 156). It was out of this encounter that the new kinds of writing which became known as 'cultural studies' emerged.

The history here has often been framed in terms of relations between 'high' and 'popular' culture, particularly with reference to the confrontation between Leavisite literary criticism and new commercial forms of entertainment. But the problem of address was more general than this suggests. As Hoggart pointed out in his writing on media, it also affected communication internal to 'popular' cultural forms. It was most extreme, in fact, in television, which faced 'a vast, unknown, unassessed, varying audience which has to be *won*':

This situation is not wholly limiting, but it can be inhibiting. How will a miner in South Wales or a woman in a North Yorkshire farmhouse or a solicitor in London take this? Will some be dangerously shocked? Dare I assume this? How far will most people go along with me if I risk this? (Hoggart 1970: 160)

Such anxieties were not restricted to middle- or upper-class elites; they were also felt by those attempting to adapt themselves from older working-class publications: 'writers in

Britain are so used to working within known limits, not only of *genre* but of unconsciously-assumed audience, that they feel outpaced by the imponderables within a new medium of communication' (154).

In considering the emergence, in this context, of a generalised concept of power, two factors appear particularly significant. The first was a widespread appeal, in response to the problem of address, to 'neutral' points of reference free of particular associations with any social group. As Hoggart noted, such an appeal was very marked in the new 'mass' media:

mass communications tend to seek an 'objectivity' which can be pretty well statistically demonstrated, and, if necessary, defended against those literal-minded pressure-groups which haunt all public organs of opinion. It may be, too, that there is a general tendency among individuals ... to hold to what is semi-scientifically demonstrable in preference to that which is called 'mere impressionism' or even 'mere interpretation' (Hoggart 1970: 154).

The suggestion of a more 'general tendency' is confirmed by Anderson's diagnosis, discussed in Chapter 1, of the need in Britain for 'fundamental concepts of man and society'. If Anderson is any guide, there can be little doubt that much of the attraction of European 'theory' in Britain was, initially, its apparent universality. A more abstract analytic vocabulary, augmented by 'foreignness', promised to transcend the particular contextual references of existing class cultures.

The second factor which appears to have favoured a generalised concept of power was increasing levels of social suspicion. One of the clearest analyses of this development is in Williams' discussion in *The Long Revolution* of a common response to the loss of confidence that one's experiences are shared. This is a 'retreat into private worlds' which are set up in abstract opposition to those 'others' – the 'masses' – who belong outside one's immediate sphere of meaning and control:

[I]nevitably, by this extending process, we are all converted into masses, for nowhere, in a world so composed, can our own individuality be fully recognized by others; they are turning away from us to establish their own. This is the experience we are now trying to face and interpret, at the limit of the meanings we know (Williams 1965: 114).

The result of this tendency, for Williams, is a reduction of political options to a choice between 'romantic individualism' and 'authoritarian and abstract social thinking' (130).

The individual or primary group becomes the only recognisable locus of affirmation while social involvement can be thought only in terms of manipulation for extrinsic ends: 'The image of society is then of something inherently bad: a restrictive, interfering, indifferent process, whether it claims the virtues of an established order or the creation of human brotherhood' (128-9).

It seems reasonable to suggest that generalised concepts of power were a condensation of these two factors. If Hoggart and Williams are accepted as witnesses, the pressure to develop an 'objective' social vocabulary coincided in the 1950s and 1960s with a widespread sense of social hostility – an experience which did, in fact, transcend social classes. The concepts of power which began to take form from the late 1960s have sometimes been characterised as associating power with 'badness' or negativity. This association has been criticised, particularly from a 'Foucauldian' perspective, as a preface to suggesting that power might also be thought of as 'positive' or 'productive'. But the more significant development may have been that power was *totalised*. What had previously been understood in Hoggartian terms as distinct and specific powers came to be seen merely as variants – whether 'positive' or 'negative' – of a single, objective social phenomenon.

## OF 'SNAIL-EATING FRENCHMEN'

This development clearly crystallises in British cultural studies during the 1970s. But to proceed immediately to the adoption of generalised concepts of power might give an impression that it represents the only response to the 'crisis' outlined above. I wish to begin an argument here, to be continued throughout the dissertation, that this is not the case. If postwar developments in Britain have favoured generalised concepts of power, there have also been continued efforts to resist them or to dilute their implications. Such efforts have sometimes been identified with conservative opposition to cultural studies, but the situation has been more complicated. As I will point out in Chapter 3, the concept of power was quite well-established in other disciplines and projects before being taken up by cultural studies – not all of them, by any means, identified with the 'left'. The field has not *initiated* its use so much as *responded* to its use by others. If there is any consistent pattern to the response, it has been ambivalence. For every move to engage the concept, there has been a move to back away. The history of cultural studies is as much a history of scepticism towards the concept as it is of enthusiastic embrace.

This scepticism is articulated most clearly in the early work of Hoggart and Williams. In order to understand it, we need to take seriously their reservations about the idea of an objective hierarchy of social privilege or fundamental points of social contradiction. These lie, quite explicitly, in concerns about the ethics of address in contexts of social diversity. The assumption of an objective truth about social relations, however much it seems to involve sympathy for those addressed, leads, as Hoggart and Williams saw it, to an insensitivity in observing their actual circumstances. As Hoggart put it of the 'middle class Marxist':

He pities the betrayed and debased worker, whose faults he sees as almost entirely a result of the grinding system which controls him. He admires the remnants of the noble savage, and has a nostalgia for those 'best of all' kinds of art, rural folk-art or genuinely popular urban art, and a special enthusiasm for such scraps of them as he thinks he can detect today ... Usually, he succeeds in part-pitying and part-patronizing working-class people beyond any semblance of reality (Hoggart 1957: 16).

Williams' position was, at many points, similar. In *The Long Revolution* he rejects the assumption that class mobility from a working-class background can be seen in terms of an upward movement. As he points out, such an idea assumes a general equivalent against which class position can be measured, an equivalent which is implicitly middle class: 'We all like to think of ourselves as standard, and I can see that it is genuinely difficult for the English middle class to suppose that the working class is not desperately anxious to become just like itself' (Williams 1965: 324). The only response to this, for Williams, is to indicate that things can be imagined otherwise:

I can only say for myself that I have never felt my own mobility in terms of a 'rise in the social scale', and certainly I have never felt that I wanted to go on climbing, resentful of old barriers in my way: where else is there to go but into my own life? ... It is ... less the injustice of the British class system than its stupidity that really strikes me. People like to be respected, but this natural desire is now principally achieved by a system which defines respect in terms of despising someone else, and then in turn being inevitably despised (Williams 1965: 349).

The avoidance here of reference to a fundamental social injustice cannot be entirely explained by the uniqueness of Williams' personal experience; it also has a clear political motivation: To appeal to abstract measures of equality and inequality is to assume a general social norm, yet such an assumption is precisely what needs to be put in question in responding to diversity.

It was in the context of these concerns, in fact, that the concept of culture assumed a central importance. The significance of the concept, for Hoggart and Williams, was to *particularise*, to deny points of reference external to the limited contexts in which habits, customs and forms of knowledge have emerged. The strategy is used to exemplary effect in Hoggart's rendition of class difference in *The Uses of Literacy*:

To live in the working-classes is even now to belong to an all-pervading culture, one in some ways as formal and stylized as any that is attributed to, say, the upper-classes. A working-class man would come to grief over the right way to move through a seven-course dinner: an upper middle-class man among working-people would just as surely reveal his foreign background by the way he made conversation (the tempo of conversation, not only the matter of idiom), used his hands and feet, ordered drinks or tried to stand drinks (Hoggart 1957: 32).

The position is contrasted against a view that class can be read off from objective social coordinates. Hoggart does not believe that the working class has generally thought of the highly-educated as structurally dominant; nor does he see that they should: '[T]hey are on the whole just not interested in artists or intellectuals; they know of their existence, but regard them as oddities rarely seen within their orbit, like snail-eating Frenchmen' (183).

The model of foreign relations here is significant. As Williams points out in his essay on Hume, it suggests a possible solution to the impasse of empiricism when faced with diversity. Hume himself was a notable contributor to the recognition of differences in experience where they occurred between different *societies*. To quote an example cited by Williams:

In countries where men pass most of their time in conversation and visits and assemblies, these *companionable* qualities, so to speak, are of high estimation and form a chief part of personal merit. In countries where men live a more



domestic life and either are employed in business or amuse themselves in a narrower circle of acquaintance, the more solid qualities are chiefly regarded (Hume quoted in Williams 1983).

One way of describing the project of early British cultural studies might be as an attempt to apply a similar principle of relativity to comparisons between moral systems *within* particular societies. As Williams puts it in *The Long Revolution*, 'we need to learn ways of thinking and feeling which will enable us genuinely to know each other in the other's terms' (Williams 1965: 117). The problem of address to those whose experiences one does not share is resolved through an appeal to models of translation and diplomacy.

Williams' much-quoted definition of culture as 'the whole way of life' is, in some ways, unfortunate, as it suggests a totalising perspective. As applied by Williams, however, it is the opposite of totalising. The function of the definition is to resist the application of analytic categories which suggest easy equations between different contexts and experiences:

Politics and art, together with science, religion, family life and other categories we speak of as absolutes, belong in a whole world of active and interacting relationships, which is our common associative life. If we begin from the whole texture, we can go on to study particular activities, and their bearings on other kinds. Yet we begin, normally, from the categories themselves, and this has led again and again to a very damaging suppression of relationships (Williams 1965: 56).

To 'begin from the whole texture' is to insist on contextual specificity. To see analytic categories as limited abstractions from that texture, rather than as having a substantive or transcendental value, is to refuse a global perspective. Such a position requires an attention to 'particular activities'; relations between activities can only be seen in terms of imaginative translations.

To put the point, alternatively, in the terms I borrowed from Oakeshott in Chapter 1, the emphasis on 'culture' was, for Hoggart and Williams, an option for a politics of scepticism. The consistent refusal of a generalised concept of power is a refusal also to imagine society as available for comprehensive reform. The relevant contrast is sharply drawn by Williams in *Culture and Society* through a comparison between his own political position and Leninism. All that a socialist should wish for, for Williams, is that the 'channels of communication are widened and cleared'; what emerges as a result must be valued as 'an actual response to the whole reality'. The alternative view is that put by Lenin:

Every artist ... has a right to create freely according to his ideals, independent of anything. Only, of course, we communists cannot stand with our hands folded and let chaos develop in any direction it may. We must guide this process according to a plan and form its results (Lenin quoted in Williams 1958: 283).

Williams' comment on the latter is an acerbic rejection: 'There is no "of course" about it, and the growth of consciousness is cheapened ... by being foreseen as "chaos"' (283).

There is clearly some common ground between this position and certain forms of conservatism. But to move from this observation to simple equations would be to reduce left politics to comprehensive projects of social engineering. If the rigid binarisms of the Cold War often made such reductions difficult to avoid, early British cultural studies serves as a reminder of a greater complexity. A wariness of totalising social visions – including a totalising concept of power – has not been the sole preserve of those with substantial interests to protect; it has also been articulated with the perspective in mind of those with relatively few resources. There are good reasons, from

such a perspective, to have reservations about issuing licenses for an overbearing intrusion of public agencies into everyday lives.

### **'A WHOLE WAY OF CONFLICT'**

Where a generalised concept of power does emerge in British cultural studies, therefore, it emerges as an alternative strand to these already-established positions. The most significant text in this development appears to have been E.P. Thompson's review, mentioned earlier, of Williams' *The Long Revolution*. Despite its slenderness and now relative obscurity, it deserves to be seen as one of the more important documents in the early formation of cultural studies. As Hall (1980) makes clear in his account of the history of the Birmingham Centre for Cultural Studies, it was an essential reference in the early 'curriculum' of the field. In many ways, it can be seen as laying the foundations, in Britain, for what is now recognised internationally as 'cultural studies'.

Thompson's differences with Williams fasten immediately on the theme of social conflict. He opens by taking issue with a line from Williams in a review for the *Guardian*: 'You can feel the pause and effort: the necessary openness and honesty of a man listening to another, in good faith, and then replying' (Thompson 1961: 25). For Thompson, this betrays a misunderstanding of communication, even in the literary tradition to which Williams so often refers: 'Burke abused, Cobbett inveighed, Arnold was capable of malicious intent ...' (25). But more seriously, Williams is charged for complicity with forms of social privilege:

What is evident is a concealed preference – in the name of 'genuine communication' – for the language of the academy. And it is easy for the notion of 'good faith' to refer, not only to the essential conventions of intellectual discourse, but also to carry overtones – through Newman and Arnold to the formal addresses of most Vice-Chancellors today – which are actively offensive (Thompson 1961: 25).

The knife is twisted on the issue of Williams' continued respect for the English literary tradition:

Oh, the sunlit quadrangle, the clinking of glasses of port, the quiet converse of enlightened men! ... [H]ow wide (or narrow) does an opinion have to be to be handled with such deference – does it become part of The Tradition only when it can be washed down with port? (Thompson 1961: 25: 26-7)

The reversal here of Hoggart and Williams is complete: intellectuals are to the working class not as 'snail-eating Frenchmen' but as a fundamentally oppressive social presence: 'the tone of the academy has seemed less than disinterested to those millions who have inhabited the "shabby purlieus" of the centres of learning' (25). Thompson even confirms Hoggart's suspicions of 'middle-class Marxists', casting Williams as a displaced and benighted *Jude the Obscure* (35).

There are many points on which Thompson's arguments might be questioned: If Burke, Cobbett and Arnold were often abusive, how can measured attempts at understanding be associated with the literary tradition? Is 'pause and effort' necessary or likely in smug conversations between class-equals over glasses of port? Is the *figure* of 'pause and effort' intended by Williams as a description of communication in general or an ideal of how it *can be*? But to raise these questions is perhaps to miss the point. Thompson's conflictual vision of the social is not developed out of an argumentative engagement with Williams so much as a reaction to the whole tenor of his writing. He himself may have come closest to the truth in admitting 'I have a real problem with Raymond Williams *tone*' (24).

What Thompson most objects to in Williams is a drift towards a kind of relativism. Williams has 'partially disengaged' from the socialist intellectual tradition (24), he has neglected the 'problems and approaches which have been the particular concern of the

socialist tradition' (28), 'he has tried to take in too much, over-reached himself, and is in danger of losing some of the ground he has really gained' (32), 'he has cast loose his moorings' (34). The thought of Williams at Cambridge – possibly with a glass of port in hand! – presents a category confusion which Thompson clearly finds intolerable. The idea of a 'long' revolution is similarly unacceptable. If there is a revolution, he argues, 'then it is fair to suppose that it is a revolution *against* something (classes, institutions, people, ideas) as well as *for* something' (25). Williams fails to lead people towards 'active confrontation' (28); 'there are no good and bad men in Mr Williams' history, only dominant and subordinate "structures of feeling"' (29).

These objections anticipate a wider reaction against Williams on the part of a younger generation, a good example being Eagleton's judgement on his writing:

an elaborately formal, resoundingly public discourse ... a conjuring of weight out of emptiness which lacks all edge and abrasiveness. Concrete particulars are offered in such a modified, mediated and magisterial a guise as to be only dimly intelligible through the mesh of generalities ... It is a style which in the very act of assuming an unruffled, almost Olympian impersonality displays itself (not least in its spiralling modifications) as defensive, private and self-absorbed (Eagleton 1976: 8).

Thompson's distinction between 'good and bad men' could be seen as responding, more generally, to a widely-felt disgust at a malaise in English intellectual life – a tendency which Anderson memorably described as a 'slow, sickening entropy': 'Today, Britain stands revealed as a schlerosed, archaic society, trapped and burdened by its past successes, now for the first time aware of its lassitude, but as yet unable to overcome it' (Anderson 1964: 50). A desire to inject some structuring principle into public debate can be found even in Hoggart:

We can soon put ourselves in a position in which we lie back with our mouths open, whilst we are fed by pipe-line, and as of right, from a bottomless cornucopia manipulated by an anonymous 'Them'. One would be happier if the dislike of authority were more often an active dislike, implying a wish to stand on one's own feet ... We are moving towards a world of what Alex Comfort has called 'irresponsible obedients'; it would be better if more were 'responsible disobedients' (Hoggart 1957: 196).

Williams appears, in this context, to have been trapped by the very tendencies he so clearly diagnosed. In the absence of a sense of ongoing material bases for shared experience, the very appeal to experience comes to appear as mere subjectivism, lacking in any public principle.

The significance of Thompson's intervention is in offering a vigorous solution. Within the terms of this solution, themes of conflict are only a vehicle for establishing objective points of reference. An important strategy here is a deployment of figures of *violence*. Williams' history of the 1840s is accused by Thompson of ignoring jailings, deaths and tyrannical abuse: 'tens of thousands of handloom weavers starved out of their "whole way of life" at home and with millions starved out theirs in Ireland' (Thompson 1961: 29). But the point is taken further, illustrating precisely why, for Williams, reference to conflict was always fraught with difficulties: 'Suffering', Thompson argues, 'is not just a wastage on the margin of growth: for those who suffer it is absolute' (29). The clear implication is that it licenses a certain categorical absolutism, dividing the world into 'oppressed' and 'oppressors', 'good' and 'bad' men.

Thompson's commitment to certain fundamentals defines an entirely different intellectual terrain, a terrain which can be outlined through a number of significant features. The first are the twin concepts of 'interests' and 'ideology'. Thompson's understanding of conflict as a strictly *social* phenomenon implies objective stakes

around which positions are organised. Material interests are posited as a point of political orientation entirely independent of cultural forms:

[I]t is not clear to me how 'universal participation' or a 'common culture' can 'dismantle the barriers of class' which are also barriers of *interest*: if improved communication enabled working people to understand better the way of life of the corporate rich they would like it less, and feel the barriers of class more (Thompson 1961: 36).

The question here is not whether Thompson sees material interests as *determining* cultural forms – whether, in Marxist terms, he sees a causal relation between 'base' and 'superstructure'. What is important is that he *abstracts* them from each other. It is only at this point that it becomes possible to ask what relations pertain between the abstracted terms. Once this question *is* asked, we are faced with the classical problem of ideology: how does culture contribute to – or how is it determined by – objective regimes of material interest? For Thompson, this is exactly the question which should be posed: '[I]t is only when the systems of communication are placed in the context of power-relationships that we can see the problem as it is. And it is the problem of ideology' (37).

A second major feature of Thompson's program is a redefinition of the concept of culture. This follows from the effective displacement of the concept by the concepts of 'interests' and 'ideology'. If any sense is retained of culture as a 'whole way of life', then the concept comes to do double duty: it appears as both the way of life and an element *within* the way of life.<sup>11</sup> Williams drew attention to this problem in *Culture and*

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<sup>11</sup> John Frow has argued that this confusion remains a basic problem in cultural studies: 'The central "anthropological" version of the concept of culture ... is a serious embarrassment ... The main line of filiation here is to Raymond Williams ... [C]ulture both *is* the "way of life" and is the "meanings and values" *in* that way of life; the "way of life" and the "culture" are at once identical and in an expressive relation based on some ontological distinction between them' (Frow 1995: 7-8). But to trace the problem to Williams is unfair. Frow overlooks the fact that he was the first to point it out.

*Society*, as one affecting the Marxism of the 1930s. The use of the term 'culture' by Marxists was, he argued, inconsistent:

It normally indicates, in their writings, the intellectual and imaginative products of a society; this corresponds with the weak use of 'superstructure'. But it would seem that from their emphasis on the interdependence of all elements of social reality, and from their analytic emphasis on movement and change, Marxists should logically use 'culture' in the sense of a whole way of life, a general social process (Williams 1958: 282).

Thompson approaches the question on the assumption that a distinction between culture and objective 'interests' is a given: 'Any theory of culture must include the concept of the dialectical interaction between culture and something which is *not* culture' (Thompson 1961: 33). This means that the concept acquires the relatively specialised sense of 'the intellectual and imaginative products of a society'. It is defined as a specific instance within social totalities, losing its association with a resistance to analytic abstraction.

A third significant feature is a perceived need for general 'theory' and a turn to European sources to provide it. Once 'interests', 'ideology' and 'culture' are posited as objective social phenomena, then an account of their relations seems to be required. The English literary tradition could not provide such an account because it was not a sociological tradition; it was a tradition of situated argument through imaginative categories of thought. As Thompson points out, Williams is 'still' within this tradition: 'I must record my view that he has not yet succeeded in developing an adequate *general* theory of culture' (Thompson 1961: 28). The lack of a general theory is immediately experienced as embarrassing. For Thompson, Williams' cast of interlocutors were theoretical light-weights who tended to talk 'out of the top of one's head' (30):



The Tradition (if there is one) is a very English phenomenon ... If Williams had allowed himself to look beyond this island, he might have found a very different eleven Players fielding against him, from Vico through Marx to Weber and Mannheim, beside whom his own team might look, on occasion, like gentlemen amateurs (Thompson 1961: 30).

England becomes identified with 'tradition' and a suspicion begins to form over both. Thompson is the first in a distinguished line of intellectual entrepreneurs to propose an import licence for European theory.

But the feature which draws together and thematises all of the above is a generalised concept of power, a concept which is introduced through an appeal to Marxism. In moving from criticisms to constructive suggestions, Thompson proposes a series of transformations which would make Williams' position more acceptable:

[I]f we were to alter one word in Mr. Williams' definition, from 'way of life' to 'way of *growth*', we move from a definition whose associations are passive and impersonal to one which raises questions of activity and agency. And if we change the word again, to delete the associations with 'progress' which are implied in 'growth', we might get: 'the study of relationships between elements in a whole way of *conflict*'. And a way of conflict is a way of *struggle*. And we are back with Marx (Thompson 1961: 33).

As Thompson goes on to summarise his argument, 'what has been left out of Mr Williams notion of "communication" is *power*' (36).

## A REVOLUTION COMPLETE?

At a certain level, it is obvious which of the two strands in early British cultural studies has been dominant in later developments. The field, as currently defined, appears thoroughly 'Thompsonian'. Culture must be placed in relation to real relations of power which are external to it; politics is defined not by dialogue but by 'struggles' in which different interests are structurally opposed; a sophisticated political understanding

requires the rejection of empiricism for the universalist scope of European 'theory'.

These positions have come to be so widely accepted that they rarely appear any longer *as* positions – they are taken simply to be the established ground on which work in cultural studies is able to proceed. In the formal representation of positions, the significant question is only *how* the concept of power is used: Are gender, race and sexual orientation admitted beside class as dimensions of power? Is power considered exclusively in terms of domination? What relations are posited between culture and power?

But to begin from an awareness that a generalised concept of power was not 'foundational' to cultural studies opens the possibility of quite a different question. It allows us ask whether its introduction has succeeded in fully restructuring the field. On first impressions, the answer may appear obvious, but on closer investigation it is much less so. It is, in fact, ironic that Thompson should have been the first great entrepreneur in British cultural studies of European theoretical approaches, for he later became one of their most vociferous opponents (see Thompson 1978). But in this ambivalence, he has not been alone. The pattern of response within the British New Left to the introduction of an abstract theoretical vocabulary might best be described as a complex fracturing, finely graded by degrees of acceptance and resistance. Even those, like Anderson, who could fairly be placed at the 'far' end of the spectrum, have reached their point of reversal (Anderson 1983; 1992: 193-301). However far debates may have shifted from the positions of Hoggart and Williams in the 1950s, it is not at all clear that the influence of those positions – and of the contexts which informed them – has been completely erased. It is to the question of this influence in later developments that I now want to turn.

## Chapter 3

### 'Monday Morning and the Millennium'

The 1970s for cultural studies might be described as the decade of the 'break'. The theme was most sharply focussed in the Althusserian concept of the *coupure épistémologique* – an abrupt transformation from 'ideology' to 'science' – but contemporary accounts of the development of the field abound in references to 'interruptions', 'departures' and 'ruptures'. These are defined in two ways: at a theoretical level, in terms of the new possibilities opened up by the uptake of Marxism, structuralism and European philosophy; and at the political level, in terms of the upheavals of the late 1960s and the possibilities opened up by student activism, feminism and the 'new social movements'. For those who participated in these developments, there was little doubt that something had fundamentally changed.

The point is significant because the 1970s is also the decade in which cultural studies is often assumed to have taken form. It is the decade in which Stuart Hall and the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies produced their most influential work. It is the decade in which communication developed with and between a number of other initiatives, from London and Cardiff to Sydney and Illinois, in a way which has since allowed the field to be projected as more than a local phenomenon. And it is the decade in which something like a 'curriculum' was defined – a set of common references which have provided a basis for the undergraduate programs and publishing industries of the 1980s and 1990s.

The conjunction of the theme of the break with the current constitution of cultural studies presents, potentially, a major obstacle to the argument I have so far developed. The problem is not so much that the account in the last chapter of early British cultural studies may be invalidated; it is more that it may appear as simply irrelevant. If the 1970s were a historical 'caesura' (to use another term of the time), then anything preceding them might be seen as having little bearing on cultural studies as presently defined. It may be conceded that Hoggart and Williams did, indeed, resist a generalised concept of power, yet any attempt to enlarge on the significance of this may be dismissed. The intellectual formation out of which they emerged has clearly been displaced. It could be concluded that cultural studies as now practiced derives from different contexts entirely.

Such a view has well-established precedents. It became common, from the late 1970s, to look for ways in which the field had transcended its early beginnings. Hall's reading of Williams is modelled, for example, on Althusser's reading of Marx. *The Long Revolution* is nominated, together with E.P. Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class*, as a work 'of the break'. The earlier arguments of *Culture and Society* become significant, from this perspective, only in 'writing the epitaph' of the English literary tradition (Hall 1996b: 32). The break in Williams' writing is identified, particularly, in intimations of a generalised concept of power. In an essay of the late 1970s, Hall quotes a line from Williams which he takes to indicate 'a significant modification of his earlier positions': 'in any particular period there is a central system of practices, meanings and values which we can properly call dominant and effective ... which are organized and lived' (Hall 1977a: 332). The suggestion is best developed, for Hall, through Marxist theories of ideology. Althusser and Gramsci come to occupy the space left vacant by the interment of Coleridge, Ruskin and Arnold.

The line between past and present was drawn even more decisively at the political level. An influential statement here was Terry Eagleton's dismissal in 1976 of the program set out in the *Mayday Manifesto* by Williams, E.P. Thompson and a young Stuart Hall:

The essentially liberal conception of socialist organization implicit in the circular totality of the [first] New Left – 'connecting', 'co-operating', 'explaining', 'communicating', 'extending' – was politically sterile from the outset. Only the media could provide a provisional point of intersection between the literary academics and real politics. May 1968, the date of the *Manifesto's* publication in book form, signalled a political moment of rather more import than this well-intentioned offering, before which it was inevitably thrust into oblivion (Eagleton 1976: 18).

The shift in political orientation of the Birmingham CCCS is humorously recorded in a recollection by Hoggart of receiving minutes of a meeting after his departure to become deputy-director of UNESCO: 'One of the minutes had a sentence which said "You've got to recognize that we are now a Red Cell and must have no more to do with the Hoggartian, Matthew Arnoldian literary tradition"'. It was wonderful. In a way, what this student was doing was pointing out the way things had leaned before I left' (Gibson and Hartley 1998: 18-19).

The dissociation of cultural studies from the early British initiatives has greatly increased with the internationalisation of the field. As I will argue in Chapter 4, the development of cultural studies outside Britain has often been identified with anti-colonialism in the ex-British Empire. In Australia, particularly, the desire to find an alternative to the elitism and inertia of academic English has had clear continuities with a long tradition of radical nationalism. The new theoretical perspectives and political possibilities of the 1970s were embraced, in this context, as an opportunity to emerge finally from the shadow of colonialism. Exchanges with British cultural studies have

generally been with the 'post-Hoggartian' CCCS and other sites of theoretical innovation which have themselves been defined in opposition to 'Englishness'.

A good index of the effect of international contexts on British cultural studies has been the changing intellectual identity of Stuart Hall. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, there was little question that Hall's significance was as a leading figure of the British New Left. In the 1980s and 1990s, however, he has become increasingly defined as a 'diasporic intellectual', exemplary for his negotiation of a global structure of relations between 'centres' and 'margins' (see, for example, Chen 1996a). The implications of this redefinition is made clear in a bid by Jon Stratton and Ien Ang to remove any specific reference to Britain in representing the history of cultural studies. For Stratton and Ang, the common element in the field, whatever its location, has been 'the empowering validation of the marginal, although the naming of the marginal differs greatly from one context to another' (Stratton and Ang 1996: 377-8). While Hoggart and Williams are written into this account, their work is seen as flawed by the assumption of a British frame of reference. Hall's recent writing on the politics of race is correspondingly promoted as freeing cultural studies from such a limitation.

There are grounds, however, for questioning whether cultural studies has indeed broken with its past. The very fact that the break must be continually redefined and insisted upon suggests that it has never quite been achieved. As Dick Hebdige admits in relation to his own work in *Hiding in the Light*, the transcendence of early contexts of formation remains incomplete:

My reluctance to acknowledge my own 'englishness' is inscribed in the sources I cite. Many of the theoretical and critical reference points which provide the primary orientations in this book are French. Some are American. A few are Italian and German. Very few are identifiably British. Like so many arts and social science graduates educated in the late 1960s and 1970s, I tried to escape

the English tradition, to find my own 'elsewhere', to stage-manage my own symbolic defection. But in the end, the legacy of an English education (however poorly assimilated, however badly understood) shows through (Hebdige 1988: 11).

While Stratton and Ang might respond to this by urging further efforts to discover an 'elsewhere' – projected now onto the development of cultural studies in Asia – Hebdige's admission suggests that the very attempt to do so be approached with a certain scepticism. Such a scepticism requires a different understanding of cultural studies, at least as the term has been used in Britain. Rather than attempting to define the field in universalist terms – in which perspective associations with 'englishness' appear as an embarrassment – it needs to be seen instead as a specific intellectual formation which has always been defined in part by an 'english' approach to politics and culture.

It is important, in developing this suggestion, to emphasise the inverted commas and use of the lower case. As I pointed out in Chapter 1, there has been a persistent confusion in cultural criticism since at least the 1960s between, on the one hand, a style of thought particularly *associated* with England and significantly related to an English experience of modernity – a style which Oakeshott would call the 'politics of scepticism' – and, on the other hand, essentialist notions of Englishness defined in terms of nation or race. 'Englishness', for Hebdige, is not a matter of identity. It is characterised by a 'sense of awe engendered by the incandescence of the particular, the reverence for the irreducibility of the thing-in-itself and on the other, a faith in correspondence, a faith in the endurance, the relative stability through time of that which *is*' (Hebdige 1988: 11-12). The outlook corresponds to a scepticism towards 'reasoning from universal premises taken on trust from authority': '[W]e are left after Occam, after Bacon, Hume, Locke and Berkeley, to generalise from what we know and see.' (12) The citations here

may be English, but an orientation to the 'incandescence of the particular' is not the same as *being* English in any literal sense.

A number of commentators on the history of cultural studies have rightly criticised 'diffusion' models, according to which the field has spread from an original 'core' at the Birmingham CCCS to other locations. John Frow and Meaghan Morris have argued, for example, that cultural studies in Australia cannot be traced to British origins but has had its own independent contexts of formation:

We suspect that a history of cultural studies in Australia would find that the 1960s and 1970s adult education influence (notably in the Workers' Educational Association) both nourished and perpetuated a strong but informal intellectual culture of autodidactic and amateur practice which shaped the values of many who later became, with the expansion of the education system, professional intellectuals. Our own first encounter with a 'culture and society' approach in the late 1960s came not from reading Raymond Williams but in attending WEA summer schools on film run at Newport Beach in Sydney by John Flaus (Frow and Morris 1993: xxv).

It is possible to agree with this, however, while also pointing out considerable similarities – including traditions of adult education – between British and Australian public culture. This is not to suggest a common English origin or 'essence', but merely to draw attention to shared characteristics of societies whose histories have been closely intertwined. A specificity can be identified in cultural studies which is not reducible to a single or simple derivation.

With this in mind, my argument in the remainder of this chapter is that an empiricism with respect to power persists in what is often taken to be the 'classical' cultural studies of the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies during the 1970s under the directorship of Stuart Hall. My point is not that what holds of the CCCS must necessarily hold for everything which is now called 'cultural studies'. It is merely that



what has been one of the most influential and widely-recognised sites for the development of cultural studies has been informed as much by sceptical 'english' approaches to questions of power as it has by moves to reject them. This is to reverse the onus of proof in the question of relevance. Rather than assuming that an empiricism with respect to power has been a limited case, now only of interest to antiquarians, we can begin to ask where it has *not* had some influence. If there has been no absolute break between the early work in Britain of Hoggart and Williams and the later work of the CCCS, where *is* the rupture or departure which would allow a line to be drawn between an empiricism with respect to power and the present constitution of the field?

#### **'AN INDECENT ADVENTURE'**

The interpretation of the 1970s which I am suggesting could certainly be taken too far. There is little doubt that those involved in the major developments in cultural studies at the time *believed* that the adoption of oppositional forms of politics and general theories of power marked a significant break with the past. This in itself needs to be respected and there is also evidence that the belief was justified. It has to be remembered that the 1970s was a violent decade in which deeply held convictions were often bitterly opposed. In this context, the development of the new positions with which cultural studies became associated required a determination and sometimes courage which should not be ignored.

Two points can be made, however, in moderating the conclusions which might be drawn. The first is that the significance of oppositional politics and general theories of power cannot be separated from the *context* into which they were introduced. As Meaghan Morris pointed out in the late 1970s of the development of Marxist theory in Australia at the time: 'marxism ... has a local subversive potential unthinkable to most

European intellectuals, when deployed in a culture where the most elementary affirmation of the existence of class struggles past or present is capable of triggering explosions right and left' (Morris 1988: 52). Marxism in Australia must be considered, therefore, as a different phenomenon from Marxism in contexts where it has been more deeply-rooted in the political culture. A similar point could be made of psychoanalysis and semiotics which have figured in much the same way as counters within English-language debates. As Morris puts it, 'Marx and Freud have had less the status of master-thinkers, and more the exhilarating effect of an indecent adventure' (52). Even in its representation as 'foreign', imported theory has been significantly transformed by what Yuri Lotman would call the 'receiving culture'.

The same could be said of the political level. As Hoggart pointed out of the British student movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s: 'One would think that the political model being drawn upon had been found somewhere over the mid-Atlantic or mid-Channel, without the intervention of any British history'. Following observations on the subject by Colin Crouch, however, he goes on to suggest that 'in a deeper manner the British student movement, even at its most lively, was nevertheless English to the core in another sense, in that with some exceptions it showed a gentleness rarely found elsewhere' (Hoggart 1982: 54). Claims in relation to 'breaks' or 'departures' need, in other words, to be put in perspective. In local contexts, the adoption of new political models, as of new theoretical approaches, was clearly significant. But this does not mean that it completely displaced what had gone before.

The second point is that the struggles which took place over the new forms of theory and politics were never simply struggles between 'past' and 'present'. In some respects, the conservative defence of 'Anglo' virtues was as different from the traditions it sought to uphold as those who set out to reject them. As Perry Anderson pointed out in his

essays of the 1960s, English intellectual life had been significantly transformed in the first half of the twentieth century. The shift involved its own processes of intellectual importation, through the agency, particularly, of the 'émigré intellectuals' – Ludwig Wittgenstein, Bronislaw Malinowski, Lewis Namier, Karl Popper, Isaiah Berlin, Ernst Gombrich, Hans-Jurgen Eysenck and Melanie Klein. In Anderson's negative gloss:

British empiricism and conservatism was on the whole an instinctive, ad hoc affair. It shunned theory even in the rejection of theory. It was a style, not a method. The expatriate impact on this cultural syndrome was paradoxical. In effect, the emigres for the first time systematized the refusal of system. They codified the slovenly empiricism of the past, and thereby hardened and narrowed it. They also, ultimately, rendered it more vulnerable (Anderson 1968: 19).

While the distinction has often been blurred, the theoretical initiatives of the 1970s were articulated not so much against 'the slovenly empiricism of the past' as against the 'hardened and narrowed' attempt at systematisation – particularly claims to an 'objective' basis for knowledge. To the extent that the latter developed as a complex cross-cultural hybrid, it might as well be described as 'Viennese', 'Polish' or 'Russian' as 'English'.

It is misleading, therefore, to represent divisions as occurring between 'European' theory and 'English' empiricism. They occurred, more accurately, between divergent responses to a particular historical conjuncture, both of which developed out of English intellectual culture while also appealing to intellectual imports. I will argue below that this point is particularly important in understanding the tendency in British cultural studies towards a generalised concept of power. In the case of Hall, at least, a commitment to such a concept developed not so much from criticisms of 'traditional' English intellectual culture as from a desire to resist another kind of import – a

positivism with respect to power associated with American political science, sociology and 'mass communication' theory.

The historical interpretation I am suggesting here is not entirely new. There have always been sceptics about the theme of the 'break'. One of the most interesting and persistent has been Colin Sparks. Sparks spent two years at the Birmingham CCCS in the mid 1970s, but always felt distanced from the main work of the Centre by a more thoroughgoing commitment to Marxism. In an article which first appeared in 1974 in the Centre's *Working Papers in Cultural Studies*, he expressed doubts as to whether the 'conversion' to Marxism was more than superficial. Marxism, for Sparks, was inseparable from its historical relation to working-class political organisation, particularly in Europe (Germany being the model). The latter was never seriously considered by cultural studies:

What happened ... is that a number of thinkers, of varying degrees of ability, were lifted out of the Marxist tradition and gutted quite ahistorically for the light they could shed on other concerns. With staggering arrogance, the collective experience of millions of working people was tossed away with the label: 'profoundly residual' ... There was not, and never has been, any attempt to come to terms with Marxism as a revolutionary practice, any attempt to critically assimilate the history of that practice, any effort to understand or relate to the organisational expressions of revolutionary practice, any recognition of the historical dynamic of that practice (Sparks 1974: 17).

Marxism, in this view, did not constitute a real departure from the early British formation of the field; a methodology was abstracted from the contexts which gave it its sense and grafted onto 'the unreconstructed problematic bequeathed by Hoggart' (16). 'It is not', as Sparks puts it, 'that nothing has changed, but that the transformations of vocabulary and methodology, and even some of the attempts to negate the Hoggartian framework, remain trapped within [the earlier] conception of Cultural Studies' (13-14).

Sparks' position on the relation between Marxism and cultural studies has remained fairly much unchanged over twenty years. In revisiting the subject recently, he restates many of the arguments of the mid 1970s with the added knowledge now that the two have increasingly grown apart. In this longer perspective, it becomes clearer still to him that the relation was never fundamental:

[I]n the current associated with Stuart Hall, the link between marxism and cultural studies was much more contingent and transitory than it once appeared even to its main actors. The initial formation of cultural studies was in part a rejection of the then dominant version of marxism. The later elaboration of marxist cultural studies took place through the appropriation of one particular version of marxism. It was from the start beset by internal intellectual problems arising in part from the radical incommensurability between the project of cultural studies and the variety of marxism adopted. The productive life of this marxist cultural studies was very short: certainly less than a decade and perhaps as little as five years (Sparks 1996: 97-98).

If these estimates are accepted, then Marxism does indeed begin to fade in significance. If the beginnings of cultural studies are dated from the late 1950s, it can be counted as a direct influence for *at most* a quarter of the history of the field.

Sparks' perspective might be dismissed as idiosyncratic, betraying too pure an understanding of Marxism, but it is confirmed to some extent by no less a figure than Hall himself. Speaking at Illinois in 1990, Hall went to some lengths to set the record straight for an international audience:

There never was a prior moment when cultural studies and Marxism represented a perfect theoretical fit ... [T]he encounter between British cultural studies and Marxism has first to be understood as the engagement with a problem ... It begins, and develops through the critique of a certain reductionism and economism ...; a contestation with the model of base and superstructure, through which sophisticated and vulgar Marxism alike had tried to think the relationships between society, economy, and culture. It was located

and sited in a necessary and prolonged and as yet unending contestation with the question of false consciousness (Hall 1992: 279).

If this leaves any doubt, Hall goes on to underline the point: 'the notion that Marxism and cultural studies slipped into place, recognized an immediate affinity, joined hands in some teleological or Hegelian moment of synthesis and there was the founding moment of cultural studies, is entirely mistaken. It couldn't have been more different from that' (280).

A different objection to my argument at this point might be that to question the significance of Marxism is not, in itself, to question the adoption of a generalised concept of power. Certainly, the two cannot simply be equated: feminist cultural studies, black cultural studies, gay and lesbian cultural studies, post-colonial criticism, approaches based on the work of Foucault – all have, in various ways, taken issue with Marxism while using the concept in its most expansive sense. In Chapters 4 and 5, I will argue that a rationalism with respect to power has, in fact, deepened with these later developments. But the historical importance assigned to Marxism is nonetheless significant because of the way it has functioned to imply a settled consensus on the theoretical and political orientations of cultural studies. If, as Hall, puts it, there was a 'founding moment' at which cultural studies was simply 'Marxist', then it can be assumed that a generalised concept of power was firmly established as a starting point on which everything else has grown. If, however, there was no such moment, then the status of the concept begins to appear much less certain.

Many of the 'post-Marxist' initiatives in cultural studies have been introduced, to use terms suggested by John Hartley, according to a logic of the 'ampersand' (Hartley 1999: 20). In the beginning, so this logic goes, the field was concerned with power as it operated along the axis of class. It was realised, however, that such an approach was

limited, ignoring relations of power which operated along other axes. It was necessary, therefore, to supplement class analysis with an attention to other dimensions of social difference – first of gender, then race, then a string of other categories of identity.

Cultural studies, in this context, becomes 'analysis of (insert object of analysis here – film, TV series, cultural form) according to questions of class & gender & ethnicity & sexual orientation & nationality & language-community & age & size & disability &&&' (20). Each initiative made on the basis of this logic, has further entrenched an assumption that previous versions of cultural studies were always already concerned with the operation of power in the cultural domain. It is Marxism, above all, which secures the end of the chain. Even as Marxism is rejected for its exclusive emphasis on class, its historical importance is paradoxically inflated.

A good example here is Angela McRobbie's 'Settling Accounts with Subcultures', one of the most widely cited feminist critiques of the work which developed during the 1970s at Birmingham. There is no question, for McRobbie, that this work can be reduced to Marxist political commitments. The relative lack of interest in home and family in texts such as Paul Willis's *Learning to Labour* and Dick Hebdige's *Subculture* is attributed, for example, to a 'New Left' tendency to see them as a temptation provided by Capital to divert workers and militants away from the 'real business of revolution' (McRobbie 1980: 40). McRobbie's criticisms start from the assumption that the 'subculture' writing aimed to provide an account of 'oppression' and a political program for overturning it. It is clear from the criticisms themselves that 'oppression' is also understood in its most extended sense. McRobbie's argument is that women have been 'excluded' from Willis's and Hebdige's accounts. The argument only works on the assumption that the latter were concerned not with *specific* oppressions but with

oppression *as such*. It is this assumption which generates an expectation that every 'form' of oppression must be recognised.

McRobbie's feminism is 'post-Marxist' in the sense that gender differences are emphasised over those of class. 'In our daily lives', she suggests:

feminists wage a similar semiotic warfare [to male subcultures]. Knitting in pubs, breast-feeding in Harrods, the refusal to respond to expressions of street sexism, the way we wear our clothes – all the signs and meanings embodied in the way we handle our public visibility play a part in the culture which, like the various youth cultures, bears the imprint of our collective, historical creativity (McRobbie 1980: 49).

Yet her position remains heavily dependent on Marxism as a model and point of reference. The semiotic warfare waged by feminists is introduced through comparison with 'the various youth cultures' as theorised by Marxist class analysis. The suggestion that the position of women may be accounted for in terms of a dialectic of oppression and resistance is dependent on an assumption that these terms have already been fully established as an appropriate description of social relations.

The historical importance attributed to Marxism is therefore significant well beyond an assessment of 'Marxist' cultural studies itself. What is at stake, more substantially, is whether a rationalist concept of power has ever been foundational. If it has not, then the implications flow through into feminism, writing on 'race' and all the other 'post-Marxisms'. Once the imaginary anchor of an 'original' Marxist cultural studies is lost, a whole chain of associated reasoning begins to drift. The important point is that cultural studies can no longer be defined as simply 'about' power. It becomes more appropriate to see it as a field which has engaged, more or less critically, with the *concept* of power.



## THE SOCIAL EYE OF CULTURAL STUDIES

The key figure in relation to these questions is undoubtedly Stuart Hall. Hall has always stressed the importance of intellectual cooperation and a significant amount of his work has been co-authored with others, but there is little question that his efforts were crucial in establishing an intellectual space for the work which developed during the 1970s at Birmingham. His adaptation of Marxist concepts and arguments has been more influential than any other and has been widely accepted as definitive. If there was ever a moment in which cultural studies was decisively influenced by Marxism, it is the moment represented by Hall's directorship of the CCCS. If doubts can be raised about the extent of this influence, we must begin to question whether there has ever been a fully 'Marxist' cultural studies.

It is not difficult to show that Hall had well-developed intellectual and political positions before any serious identification with Marxism. His first major publication, *The Popular Arts*, co-authored with Paddy Whannel, closely follows the examples of Hoggart and Williams in its analysis of popular culture. As Hall and Whannel put it themselves: 'They [Hoggart and Williams] have made a major contribution to this whole debate, and our debt, directly and indirectly, to them is immense' (Hall and Whannel 1964: 15). The approach adopted to popular film, television, literature, music and dance is more generally informed by the English literary tradition. Matthew Arnold's *Culture and Anarchy* is described in an appendix as setting the debate about popular culture 'in its proper perspective' (435) and Q.D. Leavis's *Fiction and the Reading Public* as 'still perhaps the best introduction to the subject [of popular literature]' (448). Such references might appear surprising given Hall's 'outsider' status in English intellectual life, but as Chris Rojek (1998: 57) has argued, his education in Jamaica would have given him a far more systematic exposure to the elite values of

British culture than would have been common in English state schools in the 1940s and 1950s.

*The Popular Arts* makes no systematic use of the concept of power, but its argument has a bearing on how the concept might be regarded. Hall's and Whannel's strategy in claiming a space for the serious study of popular culture is similar to the strategies of Hoggart and Williams in gaining recognition for working class culture. It is not to adopt an oppositional stance on behalf of the popular against 'high art', but to contextualise both to the point where they no longer appear in competition:

Popular music, for example, has its own standards. Ella Fitzgerald is a highly polished professional entertainer who within her own sphere could hardly be better. Clearly it would be inappropriate to compare her with Maria Callas; they are not aiming at the same thing. Equally it is not useful to say that the music of Cole Porter is inferior to that of Beethoven ... Porter was not making an unsuccessful attempt to create music comparable to Beethoven's (Hall and Whannel 1964: 38).

The argument is most clearly directed against the assumption of a universal hierarchy of value, but it is also inconsistent with the idea of a structural hierarchy of cultural forms. Like Hoggart and Williams, Hall and Whannel are sensitive to a condescending approach to popular culture which regards it distantly, even if sympathetically, from a presumed position of 'privilege'. The context for this sensitivity is also similar. *The Popular Arts* is embedded in a practical engagement with problems of education. Hall and Whannel are concerned with pedagogical modes of address and work from experience, as teachers themselves, of what students are likely to accept. There is a consistent effort throughout the book to think of differences in other than hierarchical terms.

It is clear from this why Hall should have had an uneasy relation with Marxism. He has described his early political position as of the 'independent left': 'We were interested in marxism, but not dogmatic marxists, anti-stalinist, not defenders of the Soviet Union' (Hall 1996c: 492). His wariness of Marxism appeared to be vindicated following the Soviet invasion of Hungary in 1956 and the ensuing crisis of the British Communist Party. In a 1958 article in the *Universities and Left Review*, he argued that the evolution of capitalism had made Marxist analysis obsolete (Hall 1958). An old sense of class was breaking up as workers began to forge their identities in the sphere of consumption. The 'base and superstructure' metaphor was now inadequate as ownership of the means of production was no longer fundamental. What was needed was an attention to patterns of fragmentation and dispersal rather than a more concentrated structural analysis. This distance from Marxism continued well into Hall's time at the Birmingham CCCS. By his own account of the early period of the Centre: 'for five or six years, long after the resistance to theory of cultural studies had been overcome ... we walked right around the entire circumference of European thought, in order not to be, in any simple capitulation to the *zeitgeist*, Marxists' (Hall 1992: 280).

There is no clear sense, then, in which Hall was 'originally' a Marxist. The important question is the nature and significance of his *turn* to Marxism in the early to mid 1970s. How complete was this turn? What were its circumstances? To what extent did it commit him, and the CCCS, to a rationalist concept of power? The most useful texts to consider here are not so much the mature 'Marxist' manifestos as the more exploratory efforts which preceded them. It is possible to observe in these the points of transition where Hall is considering what to retain from his previous positions, what to leave behind and the stakes involved either way. A good example is 'The Social Eye of Picture Post', which appeared in *Working Papers in Cultural Studies* in 1972, just on

the cusp of the declared 'conversion'.<sup>12</sup> The essay was written in homage to the popular wartime photo-magazine *Picture Post*, but Hall uses it also as an opportunity to take some distance from the 'social democratic' politics with which he had so far identified.

In writing of *Picture Post*, it is almost as if Hall cannot help but show a respectful warmth towards an old love:

*Picture Post* captured for the still commercially-produced 'news' photograph a new social reality: the domain of everyday life. The decisive impact of a *Picture Post* page lies in its ability to *look hard* and *record* ... [T]here is a sort of passion behind the objectivity of the camera eye here, a passion to be *present*. Above all, to present people to themselves in wholly recognizable terms: terms which acknowledged their commonness, their variety, their individuality, their representativeness, which finds them 'intensely interesting' (Hall 1972: 83).

The significance Hall sees in *Picture Post* has strong resonances with his own project of *The Popular Arts*. It was its ability to present popular culture and everyday life simply in its own terms rather than in terms of an abstract hierarchy of relations with other spheres: 'This clarity of attention raises the "unnoticed subjects" to a sort of equality of status, photographically, with the heroic subjects (Prime Ministers) and activities they elsewhere depict' (83). The emphasis is on social variety distributed along a continuum; ordinary lives are documented in 'cross-section' rather than sampled for 'vox pops' (82).

*Picture Post*'s achievement is closely identified by Hall with 'Englishness'. John Hartley has questioned this identification, pointing out that the magazine was originally

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<sup>12</sup> My attention has been drawn to the significance of this essay by John Hartley. For Hartley's own analysis, somewhat different from my own, see his discussion in *The Uses of Television* (1999: 112-126). In the following discussion I am also drawing on an essay of my own on the television coverage of the funeral of Diana, Princess of Wales (Gibson 1999).

the creation of a Hungarian Jew – Stefan Lorant – and relied heavily on the skills of émigré German photographers (Hartley 1999: 116-7). But Hall's use of the term 'English' is not as literal as Hartley assumes. He is clearly aware of the national origins of those involved in *Picture Post*; 'English' is used in a more abstract sense as a description of a certain field of political possibilities. In the later part of the essay, this sense is developed through an extended discussion of George Orwell's wartime hopes for an 'English revolution'. This was to be a non-violent revolution, though catalysed by the war, in which social contradictions were not sharpened but left to fade through no longer being observed. In Orwell's words:

It will not be doctrinaire, nor even logical. It will abolish the House of Lords, but quite probably will not abolish the Monarchy. It will leave anachronisms and loose ends everywhere, the judge in his ridiculous horse-hair wig and the lion and the unicorn on the soldier's cap-buttons. It will not set up any explicit class dictatorship. It will group itself round the old Labour Party and its mass following will be in the trade unions, but it will draw into it most of the middle class and many of the younger sons of the bourgeoisie. Most of its directing brains will come from the new indeterminate class of skilled workers, technical experts, airmen, scientists, architects and journalists the people who feel at home in the radio and ferro-concrete age. But it will never lose touch with the tradition of compromise and the belief in a law that is above the State (Orwell quoted in Hall 1972: 106).

Hall's judgement on this is far from dismissive. '[I]t is worth pondering', he suggests, whether Orwell's powers of foresight were not greater than his reputation, or indeed his own estimate, has led us to believe' (Hall 1972: 106).

It is not in its origins or essence, then, that *Picture Post* was 'English'; it was in participating in the 'structure of feeling' described by Orwell. Williams' concept is, in the context, highly appropriate. As Hall points out, the magazine was similar to other strands of British social documentary in seeking a consistency between structure and

social aspiration: 'The documentary style, though at one level, a *form* of writing, photographing, filming, recording, was, at another level, an emergent form of social consciousness' (100). As with the tradition of documentary film associated with John Grierson (in any case a Scot), *Picture Post* borrowed many of its techniques from continental Europe. But in Britain these techniques were 'domesticated' so that, in Grierson's words, 'an adventure in the arts assumed the respectability of a public service' (97). Whatever its weaknesses, in Hall's view, this tendency also had definite strengths. Most importantly, it 'opened up the difficult space between the "free movement" of art and the social engagement of *rapportage*' (100). The analysis is striking in itself, but is all the more significant given that it was exactly the 'difficult space' referred to which had been staked out by cultural studies.

Yet, despite all of this, Hall's assessment of *Picture Post* is ultimately more reserved. His criticisms start from a simple observation that its momentum was not sustained. From the early 1950s, the circulation of the magazine was progressively eroded by the new 'colour supplements' until its eventual closure in 1957. The latter were a very different media form:

[T]hough ... the art of the photograph has been raised to a pitch of technical perfection, the social rhetoric on which the art is founded is *not* based on the passion to record, inform or document. No one in the Colour Supplements is interested in looking hard or straight: everything is angled, posed, framed, prettied up or cocooned. Men and women, in those glossy pages, *need* to be rich, glamorous, trendy, primitive or degraded. Trapped in the extremes of fantasy or poverty, to be interesting subjects for the camera (Hall 1972: 84).

But in pointing to the demise of *Picture Post*, Hall is also moving to develop a new style of writing which is able to find a level of social engagement in the kind of media environment represented by the colour supplements. It is a style which requires him to

set aside the 'passionate objectivity' of British social documentary in favour of the intellectual resources of European philosophy and aesthetics.

The latter, for Hall, are considered first in historical terms. Indicating an awareness of their context of formation, he relates European thought on the visual image to the revolution in photographic techniques which occurred, particularly in Germany, between the wars. His key witness here is Walter Benjamin:

Benjamin observed that, in the transformation of forms and values consequent upon the revolutionary innovations in the new media of mechanical reproduction, tradition had been shattered forever, and art, in its traditional sense, had lost its 'aura' (Hall 1972: 100).

The promise held out for relocating the scene of thought to this historical conjuncture is immediately indicated through a quotation from Benjamin:

'For the first time in world history, mechanical reproduction emancipates the work of art from its parasitical dependence on ritual ... Instead of being based on ritual, it begins to be based on another practice – politics' (Benjamin quoted in Hall 1972: 100).

It is not just politics which Hall is interested in, of course, but more specifically revolutionary politics (in the 'French' not the 'English' sense). It is the explosive heat generated by the opposition between 'tradition' and 'change' which provides him with a new point of rhetorical engagement.

Having opted in this way, Hall begins to commit himself to the consequences. The most significant of these is that the consistency of 'structure' and 'feeling' is effectively dissolved. In writing of *Picture Post*, Hall uses the term 'structure of feeling' in ways which Williams might have done, but elsewhere the usage is subtly shifted to an equivalent of either 'structure' or 'feeling' in the relatively abstracted sense in which

their separation and formal opposition allows. An example of a reduction to 'feeling' is an interpretation of the politics of *The Mirror*:

[B]y a fortunate series of events, the paper found itself in a position, first, to overhear what was actually being said and felt among ordinary people, and then to be *converted* by this powerful, and changing, 'structure of feeling' (Hall 1972: 95).

The 'structure of feeling' is identified here with 'what is said and felt among ordinary people' (feeling), which is placed in turn in an external relation to the media institution and forms of journalistic writing (structure). Hall goes on to imply that the relation is not only external, but always at some level *contradictory*; the 'authentic trends, moods and attitudes articulated among people' are 'limited', 'altered' and 'transformed' by the media (Hall 1972: 95-96). The popular voice is subverted and controlled by the fixed constraints of convention.

Where the reduction is made to 'structure', the idea of a 'structure of feeling' is overlaid with harder-edged, structuralist concepts which were just beginning to gain currency in English-language cultural criticism in the early 1970s – concepts such as 'logic' or 'code' (although not yet the Althusserian 'problematic'). Hall draws these together in the concept of a 'social eye'. The concept is a deliberate echo of themes developed out of European theories of the visual image in the work of Christian Metz, John Berger and Peter Wollen. As Hall himself observes in a later essay on the concept of ideology, these theories owe most to a quite different intellectual tradition from British empiricism – that of Kantian and post-Kantian philosophy (Hall 1977b: 11ff). Within this tradition, forms of thought and perception are considered in abstract from *what* is thought or perceived. It is this abstraction which opens up the possibility of formal 'critique'. The categories and structures of thought can be systematically considered for



what they make it possible to see or prevent from being seen. In fact, this theoretical work assumes priority, as the categories and structures are regarded as a *condition of possibility* for experience.

It is inevitable, at a certain point, that Hall should use this critical perspective to reflect back on the tradition of social documentary from which he is taking his leave. Hence the 'straightness' of *Picture Post* – its simple use of commonly-understood photographic conventions – begins to be interpreted as a liability. Even as Hall appreciates the magazine for capturing the texture of everyday life in a way which communicated directly to its readership, he criticises its photographic technique as 'not yet revolutionary' (Hall 1972: 83). The tragedy of *Picture Post*, for Hall, is that it neglected the talents of John Heartfield, a founding member of the Berlin Dada group who had emigrated to Britain before the war. Heartfield's experiments in *photomontage* were explicitly designed to 'destroy the "logic" of perception which underpinned bourgeois artistic expression' (Hall 1972: 109). The use of such techniques would have offered the best hope, in Hall's view, of transforming the magazine into a vehicle for the development of a revolutionary political consciousness.

### THE 'SOCIOLOGICAL ENCOUNTER'

It might be concluded from this that Hall's own transformation was complete, that *The Popular Arts* and other early writings can safely be dismissed as juvenilia, of little relevance for the later development of cultural studies. This is perhaps how they would now appear to Hall himself, but a closer examination of the shift suggests a more complex picture.

There is certainly evidence that Hall's new emphasis on structural antagonism comes to organise his whole way of thinking. Towards the end of the essay on *Picture Post*,

social contradictions begin to assume the status of a fundamental truth. In this perspective, Orwell's 'English Revolution' was always ill-conceived and therefore bound to fail:

The war *did* democratize the society to a degree, but the political meaning of the process was never taken up as a conscious strategy nor its full significance, in terms of structural change, ever fully articulated ... The solid foundations of class society in Britain were never really undermined. The message and symbolism of the 'war effort' pulled the classes together in a curious way, thereby working against the necessary division and class-polarization (Hall 1972: 108).

Taken out of context, such passages do, indeed, suggest a systematic 'conversion'. But to read them in this way is to overlook tensions between Hall's theoretical judgements and a milder *historical* mode of assessment. His essay concludes, in fact, with the latter: the demise of *Picture Post* is attributed not so much to a fundamental error as to an inability to adjust to the new political divisions and more ruthless commercial competition of the postwar period: 'Squeezed by the Cold War on the one hand, and the greed and philistinism of commercial journalism on the other, *Picture Post* gave up the struggle ... The era of social democracy was over' (116).

This second perspective suggests the possibility of quite a different reading of Hall. The entire shift in his thinking could be seen, in a sense, as unfolding within a continuing 'English' intellectual identity. That is to say, his recognition of social contradiction and antagonism might be interpreted in a similar way to my interpretation, in Chapter 2, of Williams' recognition of 'domination' and 'subordination': not so much as a recognition of universal social phenomena as a recognition of particular historical *experiences*. The language of 'solid foundations', 'necessary divisions' and 'structural change' would appear then not as elements of a general social theory or political

program but as a *rhetoric* appropriate to the times. Chris Rojek (1998) has made a provocative argument somewhat along these lines, but it is not quite the argument I wish to make. There is too much to suggest that Hall has really been convinced, at times, of an ontological basis for the concept of power. His differences from Williams on this point are significant. My claim is only that Hall's early formation has continued to exercise *some influence* over his later development.

There is evidence of this influence in his impatience with the use of the concept of power in recent cultural studies. An example is the quotation I placed at the opening of the Introduction. Another is some comments, in an interview with Kuan-Hsing Chen, on the difference between the use of the concept by Foucault and the way it has been taken up in American cultural studies:

Foucault is not a political activist in any simple sense, but when you read the Foucault interviews, you know at once that his work has a bearing on resistance, on sexual politics, on '1968', on the debate about the West, the nature of state power, and the Gulag; it has political implications. Wonderfully agile Foucauldian studies can be produced in the American academy which invoke power all the time: every second line is power/discourse, power/knowledge etc., whilst the actual integument of power is absolutely nowhere located in concrete institutions, as it is in *Discipline and Punish* or in the disciplinary regimes of knowledge, as it is in *The Birth of the Clinic* (Hall 1996a: 397).

There is, again, a way of reading this which would preserve the view that Hall's own use of the concept assumes an ontological foundation. This is the implication of his reference to the 'actual integument' of power. But another reading is at least as plausible: that the concept of power only gains its *meaning* from a historical field of reference – in Foucault's case, from sexual politics, '1968', the debate about the West, the nature of state power and the Gulag. The sense of 'political implications' is similar

to passages in which Hall applies the description to Hoggart, Williams and the early British New Left (see, for example, Hall 1996b: 33). What is essential to the application is not reference to power but a directness of relation between concepts, whatever they are, and the contexts from which they have been abstracted.

More substantial evidence can be found, however, in the nature of Hall's adoption of Marxist concepts and arguments. A key point here is that his negotiation of the concept of power is played out against the background of *already established* uses outside cultural studies. It is a point which needs to be emphasised. The concept has become so central to recent definitions of the field that it is sometimes regarded almost as a unique property – the *species differentia* which sets cultural studies apart from other kinds of social or cultural enquiry. There is little, however, to support such a view. Debates around power formed a whole subset of political science well before the concept was taken up in cultural studies and also had a history in sociology. On the political 'right' there was a fully-developed 'pluralist' concept of power, particularly well-represented in American 'mass communication' theory. On the 'left', a different use of the concept was readily abstracted from existing variants of Marxism – from the 'mass society' critiques of the Frankfurt School to the 'bad old' Marxism of the Communist Party – all of which Hall and the CCCS had, until the early 1970s, been determined to hold at a distance.

Hall's negotiation of a position for cultural studies can only be understood in relation to these points of reference. The territory he entered in committing the field to the concept of power was not only occupied, but jealously guarded within the polarised field of the Cold War. In his 1982 essay 'The rediscovery of "ideology": return of the repressed in media studies', he sets out the options with a retrospective clarity. Given, as he takes as a starting point, that some engagement in sociological discourse was necessary or

unavoidable, two major alternatives suggested themselves: the 'European' approach exemplified by the Frankfurt School, 'historically and philosophically sweeping, speculative, offering a rich but over-generalized set of hypotheses' and, significantly defined in reaction against it, the 'American' approach, 'empirical, behavioural and scientific' (Hall 1982: 58). Both of these approaches are, for Hall, unsatisfactory; the program he puts forward, some twenty years before Tony Blair's 'New Labour', is to chart a 'third way' which avoids the problems of both.

Of the Scylla and Charybdis of Marxist 'grand theory' and positivist sociology, Hall is more concerned to avoid the latter. This is not, as the history has often been told, because it did not have a concept of power; it is because of the *nature* of the concept. Hall is quite explicit on this:

Pluralism, as [Steven] Lukes has suggested, did retain a concept of power, based on the notion of 'influence'. A influenced B to make decision X. Certainly, this was a form of power. Pluralism qualified the persistence of this form of power by demonstrating that, because in any decision-making situation, the As were different, and the various decisions made did not cohere within any single structure of domination, or favour exclusively any single interest, therefore power had been 'pluralized'. The dispersal of power plus the randomness of decisions kept the pluralist society relatively free of an identifiable power-centre (Hall 1982: 64).

Hall's objection to this is not that it was 'wrong' in some absolute sense; it is rather that an atomistic conception of power, founded on notions of individual psychology, lent itself to a narrow scientism:

its primary focus was the individual; it theorized power in terms of the direct influence of A on B's behaviour; it was preoccupied ... with the process of decision making. Its ideal experimental test was the before/after one: its ideal model of influence was that of the campaign ... [A] mixture of prophecy and hope, with a brutal, hard-headed, behaviouristic positivism provided a heady

theoretical concoction which, for a long time, passed itself off as 'pure science' (Hall 1982: 59).

Hall's preference, in this context, for the idea of a 'power-centre' cannot be read as an indication that his earlier reservations about Marxism were swept aside; it had an essentially *strategic* motivation. This is clear in his objection to attempts by 'post-Marxist' theorists such as Ernesto Laclau, to weaken the idea of a 'ruling class': 'to lose the ruling-class/ruling-ideas proposition altogether is ... to run the risk of losing altogether the notion of "dominance". But dominance is central if the propositions of pluralism are to be put in question' (84).

If Hall is less critical of Marxism than he is of pluralism, it is only because it appears to offer *some space* for a freer, more experientially-sensitive use of the concept of power. Because propositions in relation to power are framed at a 'macro' level, they are less amenable to claims of scientific verification. Even so, Hall is prepared to accept them only on the evidence of major internal critique and reform. As he puts it himself, 'important modifications to our way of conceiving dominance had to be effected before the idea was rescuable' (Hall 1982: 84-5). All of these modifications are such as to weaken assumptions of a direct relation between concept and referent. In a sense, Hall's wariness of Marxist concepts of power remains quite consistent throughout his intellectual career. He moves to an accommodation with them only on condition that their claims to transparency are significantly weakened.

Hall's first softening towards Marxism follows his encounter with Althusser and the argument that the economic 'base' is determining only in 'the last instance'. From his perspective, this could be seen as much a case of Marxism moving towards cultural studies as of cultural studies moving towards Marxism. The significance of Althusser for Marxist analyses of power was the suggestion that there was no direct relation

between the mode of production and other spheres – particularly the spheres in which meanings and identities were formed. This is no more than Hall had been arguing, against Marxism, in 1958. At the same time, Althusser opened the possibility for Hall of a strategic adoption of the 'proposition of dominance'. The proposition becomes acceptable because its implications are *limited*. The kinds of 'superstructural' analysis developed by cultural studies – in effect a continuation of the projects of Hoggart and Williams – could continue fairly much unaffected because of the assurance from Althusser that the superstructures are 'relatively autonomous'.

But the more significant development was Hall's adoption of Gramsci's concept of hegemony. Despite its deferral of the moment of economic determination, Althusserianism still retained mechanical assumptions and a tendency to cast itself as a 'science'. Gramscianism went much further in weakening the idea that there is any 'foundation' of power. As Hall puts it in his recent attempt to correct historical misconceptions:

while Gramsci belonged and belongs to the problematic of Marxism, his importance for this moment of cultural studies is precisely the degree to which he radically *displaced* some of the inheritances of Marxism in cultural studies. The radical character of Gramsci's 'displacement' of Marxism has not yet been understood and probably won't ever be reckoned with, now that we are entering the era of post-Marxism (Hall 1992: 281).

Hall may be right on the latter point, but it is worth making a suggestion here. What has never explicitly been recognised about Gramscianism is its implication, no less, that the most central political processes cannot be understood in terms of power. The formation of hegemonic blocks is, for Gramsci, a *precondition* for domination. As such, the process of formation cannot be explained in *terms* of domination. The crucial moments in which political alliances are negotiated are moments in which some other dynamic

must be operating. If this were not the case, no distinction could be made between domination and hegemony, 'coercion' and 'consent'. Power is implicitly demoted by Gramsci to the status of a second order concept, describing an effect of other processes rather than a fundamental principle.

It might seem to stretch credibility, given the importance of Gramsci to British cultural studies, that this could be so and yet not have been recognised. If we return to the historical context, however, there are good reasons why the 'radical' implications of Gramsci could never be fully explored. The first is the strategic importance, already noted, of the 'proposition of dominance' in countering the positivist tendencies of political science and sociology. In order for Hall to present a critical alternative to 'pluralism', he had to *appear* to engage in similar positive references to power. For purely pragmatic reasons, a collapse of 'hegemony' into 'domination' is an option which needed to be kept open. Probably more important, though, was the extreme sensitivity, during the 1970s, of professions of belief or disbelief in domination. Not to affirm the reality of domination was to place oneself out of sympathy, as Williams might have put it, with an emergent 'structure of feeling'. As we have seen, this is a problem which Williams himself struggled with. I will argue in Chapter 4 that it became much more acute with the development of feminism. Hall clearly decided, at some point, to make a less hedged affirmation than Williams of the new political forms which burst onto the scene in the late 1960s and early 1970s. This precluded an open scepticism about power.

But the evidence is there that Hall has consistently taken the next strongest option, *tempering* the concept of power in such a way as to prevent it ever from being used with certainty. It is not too much to suggest that the significance of 'Birmingham' cultural studies in relation to the concept is almost the opposite of that which is widely assumed.



It has not been an insistence on the 'fundamental realities' of power, but a resistance to suggestions by others that such realities exist. The problems, for Hall, with pluralism and Marxism are, despite their differences, very similar: too confident a belief that the concept of power corresponds, in a simple way, to some universal or absolute reality. His determination to reject such certainty has never significantly wavered. Hall has sometimes been found theoretically inconsistent (McGuigan 1992; Chen 1996b). He has particularly disappointed his Marxist comrades of the 1970s for appearing to abandon earlier commitments. But to criticise him on these grounds is perhaps to miss the whole 'point' of his work: to maintain a space for a use of the concept which is responsive to historical experiences, yet proofed against familiar tendencies to intellectual fundamentalism. In many ways, this is still the space, adapted to a different context, which he had admired in *Picture Post* – one in which the 'free movement of art' can be combined with the directness of social *rapportage*.

#### **'MONDAY MORNING AND THE MILLENNIUM'**

This account of the history of Birmingham may appear to skate over the surface of a complex series of theoretical developments. But to deal with the latter in greater detail would be to risk subverting my main argument: that these developments have been, *in themselves*, relatively unimportant. What has been significant about the theories of power developed at the CCCS is not their positive claims, but the kinds of openings they have offered through their neutralisation of other claims. In the remainder of this chapter, therefore, I will attempt to indicate what these openings have allowed. I will use as examples the two texts, already referred to, which are criticised by McRobbie in 'Settling Accounts with Subcultures': Willis's *Learning to Labour* and Hebdige's *Subculture: the Meaning of Style*.

If we were to consider only the second half of *Learning to Labour*, all of McRobbie's criticisms might be justified. Willis's discussion of class relations here is a classic piece of Marxist sociological analysis. Cultural phenomena are conceived as a 'surface' behind which it is possible to discern a 'determinate social structure' (Willis 1980: 121). The latter is not precisely defined but is clearly taken to involve the operation of power in its most expansive sense, involving a 'system of exploitation and oppression for working class people' (120). In theorising the relation between surface and depth, Willis proposes a distinction between 'penetration' and 'limitation':

'Penetration' is meant to designate impulses within a cultural form towards the penetration of the conditions of existence of its members and their positions within the social whole ... 'Limitation' is meant to designate those blocks, diversions and ideological effects which confuse and impede the full development and expression of these impulses (Willis 1980: 119).

The distinction provides a framework for interpreting the language, behaviour and other symbolic forms of Willis's object of study: 'the lads', a self-defined group of disaffected boys at a school in an industrial conurbation in the Midlands of England. Willis attributes the counter-culture of 'the lads' with a 'partial penetration' of the system. They correctly perceive that the knowledge offered to them by the school assumes middle class norms of behaviour and has little relevance to working class lives. A full understanding of their subordinate position within a class society is limited, however, by a number of 'mystifications'. These are revealed particularly in their sexism and racism which offer a false sense of superiority over others. It is here that Willis locates the mechanism for the reproduction of labour power within capitalism. The analysis clearly suggests an indulgence towards masculinist forms of English working class culture. Whatever their imperfections, 'the lads' are cast in heroic mode as proto-revolutionary subjects. Sexism and racism are not defined as problems in

themselves, but only as 'diversions' from a political logic organised around class. At the same time, the counter-culture of 'the lads' is elevated to a level of general significance; they are attributed with the status of historical agents through which 'exploitation and oppression' are revealed.

But to concentrate only on these suggestions is completely to ignore the other half of the book: a detailed 'ethnography' of the school and of the fraught relation between teachers and 'problem kids'. Willis not only places this half first, but clearly expects some readers to go no further. 'A general aim of the book', he says,

is to make its arguments accessible to audiences of social scientists, practitioners and general readers ... Practitioners [teachers and careers advisers within schools] may be more interested in Part I [the 'ethnography'] and the Conclusion; social theorists in Part II [the sociological 'analysis']' (Willis 1980: vii).

The book is explicitly designed to work at different levels and employs different modes of address.

As suggested by Willis's advice to his first class of readers (the 'practitioners'), the 'ethnography' is an argument complete in itself, a fully-developed attempt to explain 'how working class kids get working class jobs'. It is an argument which is made in very different terms from those described above. As Willis summarises in introduction:

I want to suggest that 'failed' working class kids do not simply take up the falling curve of work where the least successful middle class, or the most successful working class kids leave off. Instead of assuming a continuous shallowing line of ability in the occupational/class structure we must conceive of radical breaks represented by the interface of cultural forms (Willis 1980: 1).

This is no less than the characteristic proposition, traceable from Hoggart and Williams to the early Hall, that values and forms of understanding are specific to the contexts in

which they develop, having little direct relevance when applied to other contexts. As Willis goes on to expand:

[T]he working class pattern of 'failure' is quite different and distinct from other patterns ... And this class culture is not a neutral pattern, a *mental* category, a set of variables impinging on the school from outside. It comprises experiences, relationships, and ensembles of systematic types of relationships which not only set particular 'choices' and 'decisions' at particular times, but also structure, really and experientially, how these 'choices' come about and are defined in the first place (Willis 1980: 1).

Again, this proposition does not demand a recognition of objective social hierarchies, but, on the contrary, an effort of imagination which would allow us to think of relations in other terms. Willis asks us to question whether the lives of 'the lads' are 'obviously' undesirable and rejects the idea that they 'have no choice' but to take their place at the unskilled end of the labour market. As he points out, they appear in many ways to make more active and conscious decisions than the school 'conformists'; their rejection of institutional recognition and approval requires some determination and even courage. Such behaviour can only be understood if it is recognised that the informal counter-culture might actually be experienced as *preferable* to anything offered by the formal domains of school and career. As one of 'the lads' explains simply: 'we want to stop as we am' (168).

Willis's sympathy with these life-choices is flatly at odds with the construction of 'the lads' as proto-revolutionary subjects. Yet it is not atypical of the work of the CCCS. As Tony Bennett has argued, the working-class male youth 'subcultures' which provided the main object of study for the Centre during the mid 1970s were clearly recognised as *defensive* cultural formations. In the key text of the period, the collectively-authored *Resistance Through Rituals* (Hall and Jefferson 1976), they

are construed as essentially defensive reactions to a situation in which the accommodation between the working-class and ruling-class cultures which had characterised the 1930s and 1940s was profoundly disturbed by the intrusive invasion of the postwar ideologies of consumerism, affluence and growth into the traditional forms of working-class culture (Bennett 1998: 172).

The questions this raises are more complex than Bennett himself realises. The conclusion he draws is that subcultural 'resistances' could never provide a focus for progressive politics: 'Such resistances may be ... factors which a politics should take into account, but they do not amount to a politics or provide an adequate basis for the development of one' (173). The argument is a useful corrective to any view that the Birmingham subculture theorists were, in a simple sense, Marxist 'revolutionaries', but it fails to explain why the subculture writing was widely *perceived* as having political implications.

Like McRobbie, Bennett pays attention too exclusively to positive claims about power, missing a different sense in which intellectual work may be 'political'. This is the sense which Hall had recognised in Orwell's idea of an 'English revolution', where radicalism consists precisely in *denying* a structural foundation for social antagonism, in refusing to construe social relations as necessarily competitive. In *Learning to Labour*, as in *Resistance Through Rituals*, it is a sense which is eclipsed at a formal level by general theories of power, yet without it whole passages of argument can only appear confused or obscure. This is particularly the case, in fact, where Willis comes to draw out the implications of his research at what he calls the 'practical/political level' (Willis 1980: 185).

In a final chapter, titled 'Monday morning and the millennium', his address returns to the teachers and careers advisers, taking up the question of how they might better respond to the problems posed in the classroom by 'difficult' working class kids. Some

tension remains here with the sociological analysis: 'We cannot now naively return to discrete cultural forms and independent cultural initiatives to yield a full and effective programme' (186). But the main thrust of Willis's argument runs entirely the other way. In an impassioned moment of reversal, he points out that practitioners cannot avoid the problem of 'Monday morning':

If we have nothing to say about what to do on Monday morning everything is yielded to a purist structuralist immobilising reductionist tautology: nothing can be done until the basic structures of society are changed but the structures prevent us making any changes ... To contract out of the messy business of day to day problems is to deny the active, contested nature of social and cultural reproduction: to condemn real people to the status of passive zombies, and actually cancel the future by default. To refuse the challenge of the day to day – because of the dead hand of structural constraint – is to deny the continuance of life and society themselves (Willis 1980: 186).

Political activism is actually *opposed* here to the analysis of social relations of power. The latter comes to signify abstraction and removal, a 'contracting out' of day to day problems and the 'active, contested nature of social and cultural reproduction'.

Willis's 'practical/political' suggestions return, in short, to the terms of the 'ethnography'. They centre on proposals for a kind of cultural diplomacy, a set of protocols for engagement between teachers and 'problem kids' which might allow relations to develop more constructively. The key element of this diplomacy is an open recognition of cultural difference and the granting of certain rights to those who are disaffected with the school system to relate to it on their own terms. Some of the specific recommendations for teachers which flow from this are:

\* be sensitive to the double coding of class and institutional meanings so that teaching responses and communications are not mistaken as insults to *social* class and identity

- \* ... Try to limit the scope of the inevitable vicious circle which develops in post-differentiated [antagonistic] relationships.
- \* use where possible small classes ... and techniques of group discussion and collective work. Such techniques ... move towards some kind of organisational unit which might be homologous to the collective processes and forms which are to be explored.
- \* take cultural forms, basic transitions, social attitudes sometimes as the basic texts for class work (Willis 1980: 190-191).

None of these suggestions are revolutionary in the sense of proposing a comprehensive program of social transformation. They do not even seek to question established authority: where antagonism is openly expressed, Willis recommends 'a tactical withdrawal from confrontation but which avoids any simplistic expression of sympathy and maintains a degree of institutional authority' (190). Such authority is necessary, he argues, 'in order to maintain any initiative at all in the particular direction of class[room] activity' (191).

Yet the argument is far from a defence of an authoritarian *status quo*. The effect of the 'ethnographic' argument is to remove the school system and working-class life from the familiar interpretative grid of social hierarchy, creating a corner from which they might begin to relate to each other in different terms. As Willis concludes:

The recognition of commonality in cultural forms and the understanding of their own processes is already to have strengthened an internal weakness, to have begun to unravel the power of the formal [the school system] over the informal [working-class life] and to have started a kind of self-transformation. This may not be the Millennium but it could be Monday morning. Monday morning need not imply an endless succession of the *same* Monday mornings (Willis 1980: 192).

What is 'political' in this position – perhaps even 'radical' – is not so much what it actively seeks, as what it is prepared to *allow*. The 'self-transformation' envisaged by

Willis might be compared to a process of de-colonisation, although its outcome is not even fixed by an ideal of 'autonomy' set up in advance. While the teacher has access to institutional and governmental resources which might determine certain directions, they are enjoined to limit the way these resources are deployed, merely playing 'a sceptical, unglamorous real eye over industrial, economic and class cultural processes' (190). Opportunities are kept open but it is left to others to decide what they want to do or be.

### **THE MEANING OF STYLE**

Hebdige's *Subculture* is a somewhat different text in that it seeks greater consistency between the 'cultural' and 'sociological'. Although published only three years later than *Learning to Labour*, it shows signs of quite significant shifts in the intellectual space of the CCCS. Even in the earlier text, there is a sense that this space is under pressure.

Willis's 'ethnographic' argument is still possible within the formal structure of a 'Marxist' analysis because of the Althusserian alibi that the cultural level is 'relatively autonomous', but there are a number of points at which this alibi appears in danger of giving way. It is only because the 'cultural' and the 'sociological' analyses are kept so distinct that the problems do not become more acute than they are. Once 'culture' is conceived as a particular sphere within a wider social totality, questions inevitably arise about its linkages with other spheres. If the social reality is a 'system of exploitation and oppression for working class people', it is implausible that the cultural level could be insulated from it to the extent which Willis's 'practical/political' suggestions require. The understanding of differences as specifically 'cultural' is eroded in a way that the relative autonomy clause is not sufficient to prevent.

Much of the theoretical development at the CCCS during the mid to late 1970s can be understood as an attempt to address this problem. In a 1977 essay, 'Culture, the Media



and the “Ideological Effect””, Hall admits that the concept of culture continued to have an ‘ambiguous and unspecified relation’ to the models of power and ideology which were being entertained at the time: ‘There seems to be a theoretical discontinuity between the problematic in which the term “culture” has been developed and the terms of classical Marxist theory’ (Hall 1977a: 321). Echoing earlier comments by Williams (1958: 282) on the English Marxism of the 1930s, he points out that culture is made to fit into Marxist models in two different ways: it is sometimes conceived as a general pattern of social organisation (in Williams’ terms, a ‘whole way of life’), at other times as a distinct level of reflection *upon* such patterns (the level associated with language and consciousness) (Hall 1977a: 322). The latter sense assimilates culture to ideology, requiring everything to be referenced to ‘real relations’ at the social level. In so doing, it is quite incompatible with a specifically ‘cultural’ politics of the kind suggested by Willis. But so long as the idea of ‘real relations’ remains, it cannot easily be avoided.

Hall experiments with a number of solutions to the problem.<sup>13</sup> The most significant, however, is an attempt to conceptualise culture as, itself, a sphere of ‘real relations’. Theoretical support for this is found, particularly, in V.N. Volosinov’s (1986) idea of the ‘materiality of the sign’ which licenses a transposition of Marxist concepts of ‘production’, ‘labour’ and ‘struggle’ to the cultural domain. As Hall outlines the significance of the idea in ‘The rediscovery of “ideology”’:

Meaning, once it is problematized, must be the result, not of a functional reproduction of the world in language, but of a social struggle – a struggle for mastery in discourse – over which kind of social accenting is to prevail and to win credibility. This reintroduced the notion of ‘differently oriented social

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<sup>13</sup> Another, which I will not discuss here, is the suggestion that culture might be thought of as the ‘form’ of social existence while the social might be thought of as the ‘content’ (Hall 1977a: 318).

interests' and a concept of the sign as 'an arena of struggle' into the consideration of language and of signifying 'work' (Hall 1982: 77-78).

The argument removes the need for cultural studies to adopt the kind of defensive posture taken by Willis in relation to sociology. The space for considering 'cultural' relations in their own terms is cleared of the threat that it may be closed down in the light of other approaches more committed to naming the 'real'.

It has to be admitted that the implications of this move are paradoxical. In a certain sense, the concept of culture is retained only at the cost of being 'sociologised'. All the concepts and models which had previously been defined as sociological – above all, a generalised concept of power – are imported into 'cultural' analysis. To transform Thompson's charge against Williams – that in fighting the bourgeoisie he became bourgeois (Thompson 1961: 28) – one might suggest of Hall that in fighting sociology he became a sociologist. But to draw this conclusion would be to fail to recognise the complexity of 'Hallism'. Hall's mediations and compromises can certainly be read as an absorption of the concept of culture within sociological models, but they can also be read the other way: as a site where sociological concepts are 'culturalised'. The abstraction of the concept of power from Marxist analyses of economic relations does not leave it unaltered. The dissociation of the concept from its original points of reference leaves it relatively 'theatricalised', opened to metaphorical or figurative interpretations which weaken the suggestion of a simple referential meaning.

This is the intellectual space of *Subculture*. Hebdige opens not in theoretical but in *literary* mode, quoting extracts from Jean Genet's *The Thief's Journal*. In Genet's conflict with police and prison wardens, trivial details assume a symbolic significance. As banal an object as a tube of vaseline takes on a highly-charged meaning as evidence

of his homosexuality and a counter in his struggle. The example is worked into a general social vision:

I was astounded by so rigorous an edifice whose details were united against me. Nothing in the world is irrelevant: the stars on a general's sleeve, the stock-market quotations, the olive harvest, the style of the judiciary, the wheat exchange, the flower-beds ... Nothing. This order ... had a meaning – my exile (Genet quoted in Hebdige 1979: 18).

The passage is clearly suggestive of a rationalist concept of power, but even allowing for a certain justifiable paranoia on Genet's part, it is difficult to believe that this is not, in its original articulation, an *imaginative* vision. In the way it is taken up by Hebdige, its status as such is further confirmed. It is quoted in the context of a discussion of the concept of culture in which he also cites T.S. Eliot's famous definition:

... all the characteristic activities and interests of a people. Derby Day, Henley Regatta, Cowes, the 12<sup>th</sup> of August, a cup final, the dog races, the pin table, the dart-board, Wensleydale cheese, boiled cabbage cut into sections, beetroot in vinegar, 19<sup>th</sup> Century Gothic churches, the music of Elgar ... (Eliot quoted in Hebdige 1979: 7)

The differences between Eliot (culture) and Genet (power) should not lead us to overlook their similarities. In both quotations, the incongruity of the listed objects breaks down any sense that a *substantive* phenomenon is being invoked. Attention is drawn instead to the creative act of association. The literary quality of Hebdige's own writing carries this emphasis over into his descriptions of punk, reggae, rastafarianism and the complex exchanges between different fractions of British working class youth.

It is by no means the *only* emphasis. Hebdige demonstrates that he is also able to write in a sober, 'sociological' mode. The first chapter of *Subculture* presents a condensed

summary of the state of theoretical debate at the CCCS. Here the concept of power is introduced more explicitly:

[I]n highly complex societies like ours, which function through a finely graded system of divided labour, the crucial question has to do with which specific ideologies, representing the interests of which specific groups and classes will prevail at any given moment, in any given situation. To deal with this question, we must first consider how power is distributed in our society. That is, we must ask which groups and classes have how much say in defining, ordering and classifying out the social world (Hebdige 1979: 14).

The passage shows the influence of Hall's theoretical initiatives discussed above and similar passages appear at various points throughout the text. The transitions between them and the more 'literary' mode are eased by the fact that both appear to address questions of power. The contradiction felt by Willis between the perspectives of 'Monday morning' and the 'millennium' are, as a consequence, less awkwardly negotiated.

Nonetheless, a tension remains. It is a more subtle tension than in Willis and therefore easier to miss, but is no less important to Hebdige's arguments or to the political implications of his work. The more empirically-oriented sections of his text are, again, actively subversive of his formally-stated theoretical positions. While the latter suggest an interpretation of culture in terms of power, the former suggest an interpretation of the *concept* of power in terms of culture. What Hebdige develops in his study of British youth subcultures is nothing less than a cultural history of the concept in popular music, fashion, street-level class relations and symbolic representations of colonialism. The effect of this is that the concept becomes absorbed within the kind of 'cultural' understanding which can be traced continuously from Hoggart and Williams.

The key word in Hebdige's empirical analysis is 'dialogue'. His central argument is that youth subcultures in postwar Britain have been the site of a concentrated cross-cultural exchange between the white working class and black immigrants. Musical styles, elements of dress, speech and movement were exchanged particularly between punk and Rastafarianism. With its origins in Jamaica, Rastafarianism introduced potent figures of rebellion and utopian possibility which were given widespread currency through the popularisation of dub and heavy reggae:

All these developments were mediated to those members of the white working class who lived in the same areas, worked in the same factories and schools and drank in adjacent pubs. In particular, the trajectory 'back to Africa' within second-generation immigrant youth culture was closely monitored by those neighbouring white youths interested in forming their own subcultural options (Hebdige 1979: 43).

The intensity of this experience sensitised British youth culture to other traditions of cross-cultural exchange, particularly the 'subtle dialogue between black and white musical forms' in American imports (50), a dialogue which had earlier gone largely unnoticed. In increasing the range of available cultural perspectives, it also made possible new kinds of reflexive awareness within the white working class:

Ironically, those values conventionally associated with white working-class culture (the values of what John Clark calls the 'defensively organised collective') which had been eroded over time, by the relative affluence and by the disruption of the physical environment in which they were rooted, were rediscovered embedded in black West Indian culture ... The skinheads, then, resolved or at least reduced the tension between an experienced present (the mixed ghetto) and an imaginary past (the classic white slum) by initiating a dialogue which reconstituted each in terms of the other (Hebdige 1979: 57).

The result was an extraordinary explosion of cultural possibilities as various class and ethnic fragments interpreted their own positions in each other's terms:

Just as the mod and skinhead styles had obliquely reproduced the 'cool' look and feel of the West Indian rude boys and were systematically placed in the same ideal milieux (the Big City, the violent slums), so the punk aesthetic can be read in part as a white 'translation' of black 'ethnicity' (Hebdige 1979: 64).

It is impossible to ignore the fact that some of the key cultural elements being 'translated' here are figures of power. The black youth cultures which developed in postwar Britain have a similar status, for Hebdige, to Genet's vision of 'an edifice whose details were united against me'. They drew on histories of colonialism not as a direct experience but as a symbolic resource and were articulated in the language of myth and religion. The use of their terms to re-code white class relations was in turn an imaginative achievement. In his final chapter, Hebdige makes this point explicit:

Much of this book has been based on the assumption that the two positions 'Negro' and 'white working-class youth' can be equated. This equation is no doubt open to dispute; it cannot be tested by the standard sociological procedures ... it is there as an immanence, as a submerged possibility, as an existential option; and one cannot verify an existential option scientifically (Hebdige 1979: 131).

The subversive implication of this is clear: no formal equivalence can be drawn between concepts of power. The concept which emerges from the history of black experience does not refer to the same 'thing' as the concept which emerges from the experience of class relations in Britain. The relation between them must be understood not in 'scientific' but in 'cultural' terms.

The political implications of this are similar to Willis's recuperation of the 'cultural'. Hebdige removes us from an intellectual space in which the social appears bound by some 'underlying' principle and therefore available for comprehensive reform. This is a consistent effect, more generally, of the 'subculture' corpus of the CCCS. Its full significance can only be understood in the context of the times. The whole debate about

the direction of British society in the 1970s was pervaded by a sense of 'crisis', widely taken to call for major 'action'. On the political right, such action was envisaged as authoritarian, a determined effort to return Britain by force to an imagined former 'greatness'. On the left, it was envisaged as libertarian, a collective struggle to overturn established institutions conceived as uniformly 'bad'. Within the terms of this conflict, those on the right won out as Thatcherism set the political agenda throughout the 1980s. But the debate itself never accounted for all political possibilities. There was always a more moderate left position, not so far from certain forms of conservatism, which questioned the whole idea of a crisis and the political forms, whatever their political colour, which organised themselves around it. If the work of the Birmingham Centre had any 'default' setting, it was always this latter position.

## Chapter 4

### ‘An Impossible Politics to Live’

#### Gender, geopolitics and generation

In the preface to her recent book, *Too Soon, Too Late*, Meaghan Morris reflects on some thirty years of feminist cultural criticism through a review of the life and work of Claire Johnston, ‘one of the first and most visionary of British feminist theorists working with film in the 1970s’ (Morris 1998: xiii). Morris’s relation to her subject is characteristic in its complexity. One of the reasons she first returned to Johnston’s writing in the early 1990s, she confesses, was to understand ‘why I found it hard then to read [her] essays (along with most other early “second wave” feminist texts)’. But her interest is more than one of self-reflection; it is also motivated by a wish to engage with ‘some recent theses on ethics, truth, and (an often unstated) professionalism that make feminist arts and histories an object of tacit criticism, or even direct attack’ (xxii). Like Morris’s own ambivalence about early second wave feminism, these theses are troubling in that they cannot be dismissed simply as products of neo-conservatism:

They belong to Marxist and liberal critical traditions nominally in sympathy with feminism: they, too, review twenty years of cultural politics, and they do so with an eye to the global tensions that have shaped the 1990s ... Some, like David Harvey’s influential book *The Condition of Postmodernity*, associate feminist aesthetics with ‘nostalgic’ ethnic nationalism and religious fundamentalism; in this view ... feminism can be potentially fascist. Others, like Christopher Norris’s *Spinoza & the Origins of Modern Critical Theory*, passionately defend the possibility of truth and Reason against a ‘postmodern’ *pragmatist* history; for this view ... feminism has not yet happened (Morris 1998: xxii).



A despondency about the legacy of 1970s feminism seems to crystallise, finally, around the fact that Claire Johnston tragically took her own life in 1987, after writing an essay (never published) on why, in Thatcher's Britain, it was impossible to go on. At the time of her death, it was difficult, Morris says, not to read her work 'as though to find out what had "gone wrong"' (xiv). The question is allowed to hang briefly as one that might be asked of feminist cultural criticism more generally.

But despite these depressing points of reference, the argument Morris develops in re-reading Johnston is one of measured optimism. She finds in her work something she did not quite expect to find:

For as time passed, a more complex, less mythical sense of how texts work in history, over time – *her* critical sense, in fact – began to assert itself. Johnston's writing, always historical, nervous of myth, became more a part of my present than it ever had been of my past. It began to be important, not something to disavow, that I was actually reading many of her texts for the first time in my life (Morris 1998: xiv).

The discovery of 'another 1970s' suggests to Morris the possibility of writing a history of feminism as a discourse of *scepticism*. It is true, she admits, that 'most of the dreams of historicism, from bloody revolution to the millenarian community, have been taken up, at one time or another, by some form of feminism'; but there has always been, beside this, a 'basic skepticism about History' which has made feminism 'at once resilient in surviving its own failed experiments and resistant to modes of argument that base their claims on necessity' (xv). It is the resources for such scepticism which are still valuable in the early feminist criticism of writers such as Johnston. The legacy of this work has not been one of defeat but rather of *survival*.

There are some remarkable resonances between this suggestion and themes I have developed over the last three chapters. Morris relates the scepticism she identifies in feminism both to a certain *temporality* and to the category of *experience*. As an illustration of the first of these themes, she cites Ann Curthoys and Lyndall Ryan in one of the early texts of Australian women's liberation: '... we see women's liberation as working for revolution, but not the sort of revolution which is an event that takes two or three days, in which there is shooting and hanging' (Morris 1998: xiv). The tension defined by Curthoys and Ryan is, for Morris, characteristic of feminism generally:

Feminist discourse often stammers when it comes to validating action with a logic of events; it is not that logic is renounced, or history deemed chaotic, but that there is a struggle to name a different temporality ('*not* the sort of revolution which is an event that takes two or three days ...') that might make a *feminist* concept of eventfulness historically intelligible ... To act, as I believe feminism does, to bring about concrete social changes while *at the same time* contesting the very bases of modern thinking about what constitutes 'change' is to induce intense strain, almost a kind of overload, in historical articulation – and sometimes, in feminists' lives (Morris 1998: xv).

The 'struggle to name a different temporality' – one not defined by the ruptural violence of 'shooting and hanging' – is directly related, for Morris, to a struggle to win intellectual recognition for the category of experience. The difficulty of gaining such recognition is, she suggests, a major reason for the 'glossing over of feminist contributions to cultural debate in recent years', as well as the criticisms – implicit or explicit – of writers such as Harvey and Norris:

Looking at these instances in politically engaged, energetic works of theory, I am convinced that something to do with the troubled feminist category of 'experience' is involved in this corporate *unease* about the status of feminist intellectual work. The category of experience has always assumed the irrelevance of opposing living and writing, art and life (Morris 1998: xxii).

But whatever its shortcomings, the archive of feminist cultural criticism remains, for Morris, a reminder of the possibility of a subtle negotiation between temporalities (thematized in the 'too soon, too late' of her title) which permits a sensitivity to experience, not as a stock of generic illustrations but in its 'eventfulness': 'I think that this, more than anything to do with "postmodern" pragmatism, describes the activating principle of Claire Johnston's feminist film history, and provides me with a starting point today' (xxiii).

### **GENDER, GEOPOLITICS AND GENERATION**

Morris's argument provides, itself, a useful starting point for this chapter, in which I want to review the changing definition of the concept of power with the emergence of feminism within cultural studies. It is an argument which is consistent in many ways with the one I have so far developed, but it also adds a complication. While Morris's attempt to recover a sceptical strain in feminism is similar to my own attempt, over the last three chapters, to recover a sceptical strain within British cultural studies, it also differs in identifying the themes of scepticism, experience and 'non-ruptural' temporalities specifically *with feminism*. Feminism is distinguished on the point of scepticism not only from 'many of the left-wing political traditions with which [it] has been associated' (Morris 1998: xv), but also, significantly, from 'Britishness'. Britain figures in Morris's argument in the distinctly unattractive forms of 'British Film Theory prose' and Thatcherism. The first of these she describes as a form of 'Latin': 'a mythic Latin saying "I am an instance of rigorous scientificity"; as [Lesley] Stern says, the effect can be 'sombre, not to say tyrannical'". The significance of Johnston in this context, is that she seemed to escape it: 'she had a way of using that Latin to make it sound like a fart in church' (xvi). In a similar way, she resisted Thatcher's famous

TINA slogan – 'There Is No Alternative' – seeking always to define a horizon of open possibility.

The point assumes greater significance in the longer perspective of Morris's work. In the final essay of her collection, in a reflection on why Australian feminists of her generation often deny the significance of change, she draws attention to the formative experience of growing up in the 1960s:

Change can be quite shocking for white middle-class cold war babies. For all that talk of revolutions, those of us who grew up in Australia did so under a political settlement of immense and dazing stability and in an ideological climate of seemingly endless fatalism ... I sometimes think that the widespread tendency in feminism to know in advance that any event is just more of the same old story, more of the *same* patriarchy, the *same* racism, the *same* form of class exploitation ... is in Australia as much a legacy of the Menzies era (1949-1966) as it is a defense against the disappointments of experience (Morris 1998: 199).

In a recent interview, Morris describes the intellectual establishment of the 1950s and 1960s in terms which resonate with Perry Anderson's 'The Origins of the Present Crisis', refracted and amplified by the tradition of Australian radical nationalism:

I can see why hostility to academics became so strong [in Australia]. From back in the 1890s when Henry Lawson snarled 'Get out of the tracks we travel' to his 'Cultured Critics', the Australian literary academy has largely been so British-oriented, so timorous, dull and mediocre – you get the odd, strange comet like H.M. Green flashing through the sky, but mostly this thick grey pall of Anglophile gloom that we had no literature, no history, no culture ... Anyone with any vitality would want to get away from an atmosphere like that (Morris 1997b: 249).

Morris's own 'getting away' was through French feminism and the resources, more generally, of European philosophy and aesthetics: 'I was lucky to be a student in French at the time when most feminist debates were unquestioningly "English" or "American"

in orientation; I got to read a lot of stuff and think about it years before it was translated' (Morris 1997b: 244).

In fact, Morris's work introduces more than one complication. The theme of scepticism is intersected not only by questions of gender but also by questions of geopolitical relations within spaces shaped by histories of colonialism and by questions of generation. If it is important to Morris that she writes as a feminist, it is almost equally important that she writes as an *Australian*; and she also writes as a member of a generation on the left whose political experience has been shaped by the Cold War. It would be difficult to trace the relation in her work between cultural studies and feminism without also tracing the development of cultural studies as an international field and the formative influence upon it of the rejection of the political and cultural establishments of the 1950s which occurred across most Western countries from the late 1960s. While all three coordinates are important – gender, geopolitics and generation –, none is determining and the complexities allowed by each are multiplied when they are combined.

It may seem wiser, in view of this, to maintain a more limited focus. Given, particularly, that I have concentrated so far on the development of *British* cultural studies, to introduce Morris at this point might seem to widen the scope of my historical argument beyond what is manageable. But part of my extension of the argument in this chapter is that the development of feminism within cultural studies cannot be understood in isolation. In its effect on the concept of power at least, to view it by itself or within a single national context would be to miss its significance. I want also to suggest that attention to the changing definition of the concept allows a number of related developments to be kept in some kind of focus. The emergence of feminism, the internationalisation of cultural studies and the influence of the new social movements of

the late 1960s and 1970s all have at least one thing in common: they have been closely associated with a decisive shift in the use of the concept of power. This is not to say that they are either singly or jointly *responsible* for such a shift, but that in shaping or being shaped by it they share a common history.

This suggestion is in some ways an obvious one. The internationalism of feminism is routinely observed and it is an internationalism which has generally been framed in terms of an analysis, cross-cutting categories of nation and class, of the relation between gender and power. Most of the issues raised by Morris's historical reflections might be related, in one way or another, to questions of power. The 'mythical sense of history' associated with the late 1960s and 1970s, the spectre of a revolution 'in which there is shooting and hanging', the insistence of a certain kind of feminism on 'the *same* patriarchy, the *same* racism, the *same* class exploitation' – all could be understood in terms of particular understandings of power or of the importance of power. Power is also a connecting theme between feminism and the other 'left-wing political traditions with which it has been associated'. It is the concept in relation to which 'patriarchy', 'racism' and 'class exploitation' come to be grouped together, and in relation to which different local instances of each can be broadly identified. It is the concept, finally, which implicitly articulates the generational rejection of the 1950s; it gives sense to Morris's figure of the conservative, Anglophile government of Robert Menzies in Australia, making it translatable with 'similar' figures elsewhere.

Yet the concept of power is rarely included within frames of historical understanding. In Morris's reflections on feminist criticism it is, in fact, strangely absent. It is constantly *alluded* to but never directly addressed. This might perhaps be explained by the fact that it is *so* obvious that it does not need to be made explicit, but there also seems to be another reason. Morris's revision of the history of feminism is a work of subtle

diplomacy: it probes sensitivities – sensitivities which cluster around the concept of power – but is careful never to push its questioning too far. Her negotiation of a continuing space for feminist criticism involves a precarious double act. On the one hand, she attempts to loosen the hold of accumulated dogmas within the critical discourses with which she identifies; on the other hand, she attempts to preserve a sense of a continuing project. As she puts it in the epilogue to *Too Soon, Too Late*, 'it is necessary to gamble on the *openness* of the future, as well as to make a commitment to creating in the present some sense of continuity and solidarity with those who have labored in the past' (Morris 1998: 227). The concept of power is a problem on both fronts. As it is often applied, it denies the 'openness of the future' (there will only ever be 'more of the same'); yet to dismiss it, or even radically revise it, seems to imply a careless disregard – if not brutal rejection – of 'those who have labored in the past'.

Here, finally, is the most difficult problem to be addressed in assessing the re-definition of power at the juncture of gender, geopolitics and generation. It is a problem, I want to argue, which is not confined to feminism, but which makes debates around feminism particularly fraught. It may be impossible to say whether feminism has been more an *agent* of a transformation of the concept of power in cultural studies or a *response* to it, but the association between the two has meant that it has often become burdened with particular praise or blame. My approach in what follows is to attempt to remove some of this burden by placing the development of feminism within a wider history. It is an approach which cuts across the lines which have often been drawn between feminism and its 'others'. One of the effects of this is to neutralise some of the criticisms which Morris, among others, feels to be directed specifically at feminism. But it also neutralises some of the attempts of feminist writers, themselves, to define their 'difference'. The problem I see, specifically, with Morris's identification of feminism

and scepticism is that the form of the relation between feminism and the other 'left-wing traditions' from which she distinguishes it has been reproduced *within* feminism itself, across the lines of race, class and sexual preference. The discovery of sceptical 'islands' on the oceans of History as Myth too easily becomes a way of disowning common problems, permitting a kind of atomism.

While I have no wish to defend the particular claims of Harvey and Norris, I would defend the legitimacy and relevance of their *concern* with problems associated with feminism as they affect the broad intellectual culture of 'the left'. Morris places some question over their relevance at least, describing them as 'major' cultural critics in the sense of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's distinction between 'major' and 'minor' literatures (Morris 1998: xxi). From the point of view of a 'major' literature, cultural production is organised by oppositions between 'writing' and 'living', 'art' and 'life'. It is from this point of view that the confusion of writing and art with experience appears as problematic. But from the point of view of a 'minor' literature – or what Deleuze and Guattari call the 'cramped space' of the minor – the oppositions are never posited in the first place: 'In any cramped space, there is no material basis for opposing art and life ... activism can make a virtue of necessity by demanding a *consistency* between living and writing, acting and thinking, life, art, and labor' (xviii-xix). Feminism, for Morris, took shape within such a space. Its activating principles are therefore invisible to critics like Harvey and Norris.

The notion of 'cramped space' is, as Morris says, a suggestive one in thinking about early feminist practice, but the distinction between 'major' and 'minor' is somewhat forced. Morris is not entirely comfortable with it herself. The concept of the 'minor', she admits, is 'entangled ... in shaky analogies and by a history of its romantic use to celebrate marginality' (Morris 1998: xviii). The concept of the 'major', as applied to



Harvey and Norris, must be hedged by disavowals: 'I have no wish to attack their (historical) position, denounce the limitations of knowledge produced by "white, middle-class males", or renounce the institutions and professions in which feminists now may work' (xxii). Morris's recognition that her criticisms may apply to feminists as well as Marxists and liberals indicates the problem with the terms: they are too generalised to be more than crudely 'applied' in particular situations, so that their use risks degenerating into a form of moralism. In fact, Harvey and Norris are joined in 'majority' even by Claire Johnston. According to Deleuze and Guattari, 'major' literatures are ones which use language in order to 'extract constants from it'. Yet it is exactly such constants which Johnston found plaguing her own feminism, and which Morris suggests may have been the cause of her despair: 'any self chronically dependent for its identity on "seeing the world in a certain way" could find itself subject to an injunction, no longer to *change* the world, but simply to drop out of history' (xx).

The concepts of 'major' and 'minor' do avoid some of the problems of reductivism and negativity in more common distinctions between 'dominant' and 'subordinate' or 'centre' and 'margins'. They are rooted, however, in a form of avant-gardism. As Morris points out, there are important differences from the classical variety: 'in place of an avant-garde negation of art's status in bourgeois society, Deleuze and Guattari offer an *affirmative* project based on mass historical experience' (Morris 1998: xvii). They do not associate 'minority' with a marginal cultural elite who define themselves in opposition to 'society', but with 'colonized, suppressed, or displaced' populations who may actually constitute the *statistical* majority. Yet they retain, nevertheless, an equally important *continuity* with the classical avant-garde. Their concepts are crucially defined with reference to what might be called a 'figure of sameness'. For the classical European avant-garde, this figure was 'bourgeois society'. For Deleuze and Guattari,

the position is taken instead by 'oedipal' formations (as presided over by Freud) or philosophy 'in the shadow of the State' (as presided over by Hegel), which impose a monotonous repetition of themes within intellectual culture. As Morris applies their concepts, it is 'mainstream' academic writing or, more distantly, the 'thick grey pall of Anglophile gloom' of 1950s Australia.

I do not want to question such figures as such. They clearly correspond to profoundly felt experiences and it is not difficult to sympathise with Morris that 'anyone with any vitality' would want to get away from *some* at least of the historical phenomena from which they have been abstracted. What I do want to question, however, is their tendency to harden as the basis for generalised descriptions and forms of criticism. The tendency is one which produces a flat rendition of objects of criticism, inhibiting the possibility of negotiated relationships or temporalities. What may begin in what Morris calls a 'totally intense present' in which every gesture *matters* becomes almost the opposite – a time in which *nothing* matters, because it has always already been spoken for in advance. The concept of power has been, in this context, a kind of 'setting agent', subtly converting critical concepts from specific historical articulations to a level of ahistorical theorising. If this is so, then the absence of the concept from Morris's argument may be far from accidental. To name the concept directly would be to invoke precisely the tendency she is attempting to resist. It would be effectively to shut down on the political scepticism – the sensitivity to 'experience' and 'eventfulness' – which she wishes to sustain.

This point has a particular importance given the specific 'figure of sameness' which has informed many, if not most, of the avant-gardist tendencies of feminist and post-feminist cultural studies – the figure of the 'white, middle-class male' which Morris invokes in order to disavow. The significance of this figure is not only that it has sometimes been an object of simple denunciation within feminism – it has, in fact, been

widely denounced by 'white, middle-class males' themselves. It is also that it often stands in for an Anglo-derived cultural and intellectual inheritance which offers the resources for alternative understandings of politics, culture and historical change. A major tendency of this inheritance may be, as Morris describes its Australian variants, 'timorous, dull and mediocre' – a reactive formation often indistinguishable from anti-intellectualism and made all the more unbearable by an alliance with imperial chauvinism. But if my argument over the last three chapters is accepted, it *also* includes a particularly rich archives of negotiated responses to change in modernity. To permit a blanket characterisation of 'Britishness', particularly within Anglo-derived political cultures, is radically to limit the available resources for a politics of scepticism.

My argument here is emphatically *not* a general criticism of avant-gardism or 'French theory'; it is rather to suggest that their importance be historically contextualised. As Morris says in reflecting on her own work of the late 1970s and early 1980s, it is important to remember how theory can *succeed* in connecting intellectual culture and popular experience:

It was one of those times when there is a coincidence or a *buzz* between theoretical terms and those more widely circulating in the public culture, in an effect that we readily call 'relevance'. At other times, when there is no such coincidence, we may too easily assume that the relationship between theory and public culture is therefore one of irrelevance (Morris 1998: 15).

As Raymond Williams argued in *The Politics of Modernism* (1989a), one of the most remarkable developments in the emergence of post-war mass commercial popular culture has been the 'buzz' between an aesthetic modernism previously limited to very small numbers of writers and artists and far more widespread activities and practices. To historicise this development is not to deny its significance, but rather to test its limits.

### **'AS THE THIEF IN THE NIGHT'**

The argument I am making here can be illustrated most clearly by returning to the British case itself. To allow ease of cross-reference with previous chapters, I will continue to use the example of the Birmingham CCCS. It is an example which indicates, perhaps better than any other, the complexity of relations between feminism, on the one hand, and scepticism, the category of experience and negotiated temporalities on the other – a complexity which makes simple identifications or oppositions impossible.

In a recent account by Stuart Hall, feminism appeared at Birmingham as 'ruptural':

As the thief in the night, it broke in; interrupted, made an unseemly noise, seized the time, crapped on the table of cultural studies. The title of the volume in which the dawn-raid was first accomplished – *Women Take Issue* – is instructive: for they 'took issue' in both senses – took over that year's book and initiated a quarrel (Hall 1992: 282).

In a reflective response to Hall's description, as one of those who 'took issue', Charlotte Brunsdon admits to having at first been shocked by its implication:

When I first read this account, I immediately wanted to unread it. To deny it, to skip over it, to not know – to not acknowledge the aggression therein. Not so much to deny that feminists at CCCS in the 1970s had made a strong challenge to cultural studies as it was constituted then and there, but to deny that it had happened the way here described (Brunsdon 1996: 280).

But Brunsdon recognises that there was, in this immediate reaction, something of a desire 'to have my feminist cake and eat it – to have drafted discussion documents, contributed to presentations and made arguments that attacked "men at the centre", but not to have contributed to feelings of betrayal and rejection'.

If it is difficult, in the case of Birmingham, to place feminism clearly on the side of negotiated temporalities, it is also difficult to place it clearly on the side of scepticism or the category of experience. One of the examples given by Hall of how the debate around feminism was actually played out is a conflict between himself and women at the Centre over whether Raymond Williams should give way on the reading list for the MA program to Julia Kristeva (Hall 1996c: 500). However such a substitution might be viewed, and however appropriate it may have been at the time, it cannot easily be represented as introducing an attention to experience where there had previously been none. Williams, if anyone, was the writer who had established an intellectual credibility for the concept of experience and *The Long Revolution* remains one of the most sustained arguments in cultural studies for a revolution of the kind described by Curthoys and Ryan – ‘not the sort of revolution which is an event that takes two or three days, in which there is shooting and hanging’. Yet it was also Williams whom feminists at Birmingham sought to displace.

It is not even true to say that feminism introduced an attention to *women's* experience. According to Hall, the first collective project of the CCCS was concerned with women's magazines, although the manuscript which resulted was somehow lost:

We took on fiction in women's magazines. We spent ages on a story called 'Cure for Marriage', and all those papers, which were supposed to be written up into a book, then disappeared; which means that moment from the history of cultural studies is lost. That was the Centre's 'pre-feminist' moment (Hall 1996c: 499).

In the light of my argument of the last two chapters, this early 'pre-feminist' interest in questions of gender is not surprising. As Hall points out, the interest of cultural studies in class was, initially, 'in Hoggart's and Williams' sense, not in the classic marxist sense' (498-90). Classes were not conceived in terms of structural principles, but as

cultural complexes embracing a 'whole way of life'. A 'class perspective' did not, therefore, subordinate gender to the level of secondary considerations. As Hoggart argued in *The Uses of Literacy*, there was if anything a tendency for working class intellectuals to *overemphasise* the domestic, 'feminine' aspects of working class life because of their alienation from the public, workplace culture which had traditionally defined working class masculinity (Hoggart 1957: 295). It is not an accident that the figure he himself chose in order to problematise the relation between intellectual culture and working class life was the kitchen table, strewn with piles of ironing and cups of tea.

The respect in which feminism *did* differ from what had preceded it was in its particular emphasis on questions of power – an emphasis clearly underlined by the subtitle of *Women Take Issue*, 'Aspects of women's subordination'. As Hall puts it, cultural studies had previously been 'sensitive to the gender question ... but not very sensitive to feminist politics' (Hall 1996c: 499). What distinguished 'feminist politics' was, above all, 'the radical expansion of the concept of power, which had hitherto been very much developed within the framework of the notion of the public, the public domain' (Hall 1992: 282). This development had implications well beyond considerations of gender itself: after feminism 'we could not use the term power – so key to the earlier problematic of hegemony – in the same way'. It is clear that the expansion of the concept of power was also the key factor in a series of shifts which Hall identifies as accompanying it: 'the opening of the question of the personal as political, and its consequences for changing the object of cultural studies'; 'the centrality of questions of gender and sexuality to the understanding of power itself'; 'the opening of many of the questions we thought we had abolished around the dangerous area of the subjective and the subject, which lodged these questions at the centre of cultural studies as a theoretical

practice'; and "the reopening" of the closed frontier between social theory and the theory of the unconscious – psychoanalysis'.

A certain reading of the history at Birmingham might, in fact, draw exactly the opposite conclusions from those suggested by Morris about the place of feminism within the broader context of left cultural criticism. Feminist criticisms of existing approaches within cultural studies coincided with the effective abandonment of the detailed attention to 'lived experience' which had characterised work on subcultures and working class youth. The new theoretical problems associated with feminism – particularly the 'dangerous area of the subjective' and the 'theory of the unconscious' – were precisely the terrain on which there had arisen the Latinate edifice of 'British film theory prose'. More importantly, feminism increased levels of anxiety about fundamental premises, intensifying pressures for 'rigorous scientificity'. This is clear, for example, in a defence by Hall in 1980 of the increasingly abstract, theoretical tone of debates in cultural studies:

If this has appeared, at times, a form of theoretical self-indulgence, we would simply point to the elegant studies and sophisticated theorizing in our own areas of work which have elaborated their protocols, done their field work, questioned their respondents, read their documents, produced their accounts and results – and all on the unexamined premise that the world, for all practical purposes, is 'masculine' (Hall 1980: 42).

Nor did feminist work at Birmingham achieve notable success in developing new ways of connecting with experience. It is significant that in Brunsdon's retrospective assessment of *Women Take Issue*, the sections which came closest were those which had *not* made the shift from the 'gender question' to 'feminist politics', from older 'culturalist' emphases to an emphasis on questions of power: 'We remained too caught up in the dialogue with the particular form of marxism dominant in CCCS at the time –

in self-justification. The most successful chapters seem those which anticipate future reports of empirical investigation, rather than the attempts to theorize women's subordination at a general level' (Brunsdon 1996: 283).

It is arguable, finally, that the extension of the concept of power associated with feminism was related to an increasingly 'mythic' sense of history. Hall's blanket description of the diverse range of theories, protocols and empirical investigations of pre-feminist cultural studies as 'masculine' is typical of a tendency at the time towards a sweeping characterisation of positions – a tendency which became even more pronounced with the extension of similar arguments to questions of 'race'. The logic of the argument is revealed, for example, in an attack on 'white feminism' by Hazel Carby only two years after *Women Take Issue* in *The Empire Strikes Back*:

Feminist theory in Britain is almost totally Eurocentric and, when it is not ignoring the experience of black women 'at home', it is trundling 'Third World women' onto the stage only to perform as victims of 'barbarous', 'primitive' practices in 'barbarous', 'primitive' societies (Carby 1982: 222).

The significance of the accusatory (or, alternatively, self-flagellatory) tone which appears in much feminist and post-feminist cultural studies is not only that it clearly favours an abrupt rejection of the past (Carby admires 'explosions' in debates in the United States, scorning the reaction in Britain as 'more akin to lighting a damp squib' – 221). It is also that it obscures histories of sceptical alternatives. Only the 'millennial' aspirations of earlier positions are brought into focus and criticised while the attention to 'Monday morning' disappears from view. It is not only that history is represented in mythic terms; myth is represented as the only known *form* of history.

But it would also be a mistake to invert Morris's suggestions, charging feminism with terminating an uncomplicated, sceptical vision of cultural studies and setting the field



on a course towards totalising criticism and defensive system-building. The suggestion of blame in such an interpretation would be a consequence of abstracting feminism from the context in which it took form. Hall's metaphor of a 'thief in the night' may be useful in capturing a sense of disruption and trauma – the assault on positions and ideas which had previously been valued – but it is also misleading in characterising feminism as an autonomous development. The 'radical extension of the concept of power' which Hall attributes to feminism was, in fact, extensively pre-figured in his own work of the mid 1970s. It is true that this work was framed by Marxism, but it was a Marxism modified precisely *not* to limit the understanding of politics to the classical public domain. If, following Volosinov, signification is intrinsically defined by 'struggle', then power must be conceived as coextensive with meaning. The implications may not all have been drawn explicitly, but the 'public'/'private' distinction had already effectively been breached.

The clearest confirmation of this is that gender had begun to be politicised at the CCCS before the development of feminism. *Women Take Issue* was not the first themed issue on women of *Working Papers in Cultural Studies*. While it is rarely mentioned in histories of feminism at the Centre, the 1974 issue was titled 'Women in Sport'. The two papers written to the theme, by Charles Critcher and Paul Willis, were transcriptions of presentations to a symposium organised by the Department of Physical Education at Birmingham University in 1973, more than a year before the formation of the Women's Studies Group within the CCCS. Critcher's paper makes what he calls a 'controversial' suggestion:

It is that by and large female sport is not taken too seriously in our society. This is a general impression gained from various sources, especially masculine ones. It seems to be crystallised in the press treatment of women in sport (Critcher 1974: 15).

In presenting the argument, Critcher admits: 'It is incidentally ironic that I should be doing this analysis. It is a product of the situation I'm describing that a man should be giving this talk at all: lecturing is a very masculine activity' (7). He justifies the exercise, however, by claiming to examine an objective structuring principle which exists independently of individual positions and intentions:

[I]f we're honest with ourselves, we know that we habitually designate certain types of activity as more appropriate for one sex or the other ... I've culled a list of ... habitual expectations from what is a very good college text on the subject of sex roles. The male characteristics come out as: clever, ruthless, logical, competitive, rational, handsome, strong, tall, powerful, aggressive, loyal to friends, making swift decisions, good with money, mechanically-minded. Female characteristics come out as: emotional, kind, intuitive, pretty, small, soft, quiet, weak, tender, gentle, good with children, given to malicious gossip, imaginative but impractical, dithering, feather-brained, no head for business and silly about money (Critcher 1974: 7).

The paper is followed by a discussion – also transcribed – which provides interesting insights into the context of formation of feminism at Birmingham. A number of women express annoyance at what they see as generalising abstractions and hubristic presumption. A response by a sportswoman in the audience, Diana Wilkinson, is illustrative:

Being a rather dithery, feather-brained female I find it rather difficult to follow such an academic talk by such a strong, handsome man good with money, but I would at least like to begin really with a denial of the characteristics you give in the first part when you say you claim these for all sports, because I feel quite strongly that it depends on the sport and on what level (Wilkinson quoted in Critcher 1974: 14).

The objection is endorsed by another contributor to the discussion, Susan Hilliam:

'Charles Critcher said that female sport is not taken seriously. I'd like to ask by whom? Is it by the public at large? Is it by the participants?' (15).

Wilkinson and Hilliam were not members of the CCCS, and were not significantly involved in the development of feminism, but the form of the encounter complicates a simple understanding of feminism as arising from a desire by women to extend the concept of power to questions of gender. Many of the early moves to suggest such an extension appear to have been made by men. In addition to Critcher and Willis, Hall and others also made efforts to sponsor the development of feminist arguments (Hall 1996c: 499). When women at the Centre themselves 'took issue', it was not over a failure by men to include gender within considerations of power; in some cases, it was almost the reverse – over the ease and apparent complacency with which such an extension was *admitted*. In a presentation on behalf of the Women's Studies Group at the time, Brunsdon identified what she called a 'peculiarly oppressive form of sexism' in which 'people individually agree that "women are oppressed", but where there is no collective effort to do anything about it, or even to examine how it operates in practice' (Brunsdon 1996: 283). The criticism is typical of feminist arguments at the CCCS: it was the *response* to the extension of the concept of power which was in question, not the extension itself.

There are obvious reasons why the pre-history of feminism at Birmingham has been relatively ignored. Since *Women Take Issue*, there has been a general embarrassment about the early attempts by men at the Centre to relate gender and power. Hall, for his part, describes his own efforts in the area as 'patriarchal' and unreservedly endorses the move by women to claim feminism as their own: 'Of course, they had to do it. They were absolutely right to do it. They had to shut me up; that was what the feminist political agenda was all about' (Hall 1996c: 499-500). Hall's sense of the inappropriateness of speaking for or on behalf of supposedly powerless others is consistent not only with the objections to Critcher by Wilkinson and Hilliam, but also

with Hoggart's suspicions in *The Uses of Literacy* of 'the middle class Marxist':

'Usually, he succeeds in part-pitying and part-patronizing working-class people beyond any semblance of reality' (Hoggart 1957: 16). But whereas the response of Hoggart, Wilkinson and Hilliam was to resist the implication of totalising theories of power, the solution within post-feminist cultural studies has been more often to insist that 'domination' and 'oppression' be named and criticised only by those who are themselves identified as 'dominated' or 'oppressed'. The interest in questions of subjectivity has been accompanied by a greatly increased sensitivity to the propriety of 'speaking positions'.

There is no doubt that this sensitivity has established important ethical principles for the conduct of highly-politicised debates. But it has also obscured much of the complexity of the development of feminism, making it particularly resistant to historical understanding. The problem is significant not only for the ability of cultural studies to reflect upon its approach to questions of gender; it is also significant for the field more generally. The emergence of feminism coincided with early signs of a dissatisfaction and loss of confidence in the project of cultural studies which has since become far more widespread. It is telling that it was the point at which Hall found himself unable to continue at Birmingham. By his own admission:

the question of feminism was very difficult to take ... [I]f I had been opposed to feminism, that would have been a different thing, but I was for it. So, being targeted as 'the enemy', as the senior patriarchal figure, placed me in an impossibly contradictory position ... I couldn't live part of the time being their teacher, and being their father, being hated for being their father, and being set up as if I was an anti-feminist man. It was an impossible politics to live (Hall 1996c: 500).

There is some suggestion in this that the problem related specifically to Hall's own position, but there is every indication that it was much more general. The contradictions he faced equally affected women at the Centre – they were, in many ways, the reason *why* they 'took issue'. On the one hand, they were encouraged to participate in a collective intellectual enterprise – an enterprise which assumed an equality of status; on the other hand, they were casually referred to as an 'oppressed group'. As this tension developed, it became increasingly unsustainable.

The problem in allowing feminism to appear as an autonomous development is that it contains, rather than substantially addressing, some fundamental problems which emerged concurrently with the extension of the concept of power. The humility of Hall's abdication – 'they needed to shut me up' – is, in a certain sense, admirable, but it also places too much of the responsibility for the complex of changes which occurred around feminism with feminism itself. In the case of the CCCS at least, it is not quite true to say that the feminist agenda was to 'shut men up'. There is an extreme ambivalence in feminist texts of the time about the withdrawal of men from an engagement with what became identified as 'women's issues'. The editorial introduction to *Women Take Issue* expresses strong reservations about the model of autonomy – or as it was described, of 'the "woman question" claimed by, and relegated to, the women' (CCCS 1978: 10). The model was not so much enthusiastically embraced as accepted as a least worst option: 'Sporadic attempts to argue against the "hiving off" of the woman question ... were viewed as double-binding other CCCS members – either we had something to say and we should say it, or else we didn't, and so we should stop making everyone feel guilty'. It is significant that despite the obvious difficulty of relations between men and women at the Centre, two of the eleven authors of *Women Take Issue* – Steve Burniston and Frank Mort – were men.

The evidence suggests that no-one at the CCCS was particularly satisfied with the compromises developed in response to the politicisation of gender and other forms of identity. For Hall, the tendency towards fragmentation coincided with a drift, on his own part at least, towards academicism in the bad sense: 'I thought to myself, "You're becoming a typical disenchanted academic, you must get out"' (Hall 1996c: 500). This is particularly significant given that the intellectual generosity of the Centre had been one of its greatest strengths. It has remained, for Hall, one of the achievements he most wants to remember: 'We tried to do something innovative ... at Birmingham, institutionally. I don't think anybody has come close to the Centre, in terms of producing knowledge through collective working practices' (Hall 1996a: 398). For women at the Centre, the formation of specific 'women's studies' groups was only a marginal improvement on the difficulties of participating in wider forums: 'we assumed an illusory shared feminist position, which ... meant the atmosphere was rather tense, although still easier for women to work in than other CCCS groups' (CCCS 1978: 14). And similar problems arose in the collective address to questions of 'race'. As Paul Gilroy laments in the preface to *The Empire Strikes Back*, 'it has been sad to watch the numbers of our group dwindle as we put our ideas on to paper and real conflicts began to emerge' (CCCS 1982: 8).

Perhaps the most significant effect of the model of autonomy is that it requires the extension of the concept of power to be represented according to a simple narrative of enlightenment. Feminism, black cultural studies, and later post-colonial criticism, are made to appear as having 'revealed' or 'brought to light' timeless phenomena which had previously been invisible or concealed. While this narrative was clearly important in providing fresh inspiration to cultural studies from the late 1970s through the 1980s, it has also contributed to a radical de-historicisation of the concept of power.

Particularly in the more theoretical discourses which developed or consolidated in the field during the 1980s, the concept is presumed to refer transparently to a universal or quasi-universal phenomenon, specified at most with reference to 'patriarchy', 'modernity' or the historical mission of 'the West'. This de-historicisation makes it impossible to consider problems in relation to the specific circumstances in which they arose. While increasingly elaborate theories of power have appeared, very little attention has been paid to the way the concept has been formed by the social, political and cultural contexts of the 1970s. The result is a tendency towards the kind of absolutism observed by Morris: the values which have come to be associated with the 1970s, and most specifically with feminism, must either be defended against the least sign of erosion or simply condemned.

#### THE ORIGINS OF 'TOTALISM'

There is an interesting suggestion in the editorial introduction to *Women Take Issue* of alternative possibilities. One of a number of 'paths not taken' by the Women's Studies Group was an historical analysis of the politicisation of gender during the 1960s and early 1970s. It was a path which was considered precisely in response to limitations perceived in more abstract theoretical approaches – specifically, the theorisation of patriarchy in Juliet Mitchell's influential *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* (1974), which imposed a strict analytic distinction between questions of gender and questions of class:

It was ... because of that separation within theory that we next tried to understand the contradictions of femininity as 'lived' (at the same time holding to class specificity) through a study of the particular historical conjuncture which saw the emergence of the Women's Liberation Movement (CCCS 1978: 13).

That the project collapsed may be an indication not so much that it was weak or ill-conceived as of the *difficulty* at the time of sceptical, historical modes of inquiry. The

reasons for its abandonment were, themselves, contentious, but they were clearly related to the problems discussed above. Relations within the Group became fraught by the antinomies of 'solidarity' and 'individualism' and energies were increasingly absorbed in defining external relations with other work within the CCCS (CCCS 1978: 14).

There are, however, other texts from the time which offer at least some insight into the historical formation of the extended concept of power associated with feminism. Two which are particularly useful, and which were widely referred to in work of the CCCS, are Juliet Mitchell's earlier book *Women's Estate* (1971) and Sheila Rowbotham's *Women's Consciousness, Man's World* (1973), both first hand accounts of the emergence of the women's movement. As Brunsdon suggests, feminism might be seen as 'one of the bridgeheads into CCCS of the new social movements of the late 1960s and the 1970s, of the "new" identities and identity politics' (Brunsdon 1996: 282). I want, in what follows, to take this somewhat further and suggest that feminism might also be seen as one of the bridgeheads into cultural studies of a new understanding of power. It would be too strong to suggest that Mitchell and Rowbotham were fully reflexive on the formation of the concept of power at the time, although at points they come very close. There is, in both their texts, an often contradictory mixture of contextual analysis and appeals to universal principles. But the immediacy of their writing in relation to the political and cultural developments which inspired the women's movement is more revealing of historical specificities than more recent material, even if (or perhaps rather *because*) the latter is more theoretically elaborated.

One of the most illuminating ways to approach Mitchell and Rowbotham might be to compare their writing with the early work of Hoggart and Williams. The similarities between them are, in many ways, striking. Like Hoggart and Williams, Mitchell and Rowbotham are concerned with an expanding interface between the institutions of



government, education and the media and groups (in this case women) who had not previously been represented within them. Like Hoggart and Williams, their thinking on the problems of this interface developed in the context of an interest in education. Rowbotham had taught in technical and further education colleges and for the Worker's Education Association, while Mitchell had taught English literature at Leeds and Reading Universities. Rowbotham's analysis of the problems facing women within an expanding education system could almost have been written as an extension to Hoggart's analysis, sixteen years earlier, of the problems of the 'scholarship boy':

The clash between home values and university or college is extreme for all students from families where higher education is unfamiliar. This is especially true for female students. Girls who go to university encounter capitalism in one of its most sophisticated forms, but their socialization in the family has prepared them for marriage and motherhood, traditional production at home. Temporarily co-workers with boys in the knowledge industry, the contrast between their traditional feminine role and competitive academic life is extreme (Rowbotham 1973: 90-91).

There are also remarkable resonances with Hoggart in Rowbotham's appeal to 'culture' in developing her own personal response to the experience of this disjuncture:

I defended myself implicitly by distinguishing myself in my head from other girls who seemed to accept their fate without resistance. It was easy to develop this sense of separateness because most of the people I was at school with left to go on typing courses. They all became much more smart and confident than those of us who stayed on. I consoled myself by retreating into an intellectual inner world of mysticism and reverie; I read everything I could find which would help me to build an important little private sphere of 'culture' (Rowbotham 1973: 13).

But there are also differences here from the writing of the 1950s. It is significant that Rowbotham associates culture with 'mysticism' and 'privacy'. The emotional and

political intensity of her writing is directly proportional to its withdrawal from established institutions and forms of public culture:

I acquired wild and dangerous notions about sex and marriage which were in marked contrast both to what everyone around me thought and to my own total ignorance in practice ... Only moments of intense subjectivity seemed to have any honesty or authenticity. All removed ways of thinking appeared to me as necessarily suspect ... Every rock record simply was. The words were subordinate to the rhythm and the music went straight to your cunt and hit the bottom of your spine (Rowbotham 1973: 13-14).

That this could not have been written by Hoggart or Williams is not *only* a function of gender; it is equally a function of generation. Rowbotham explores, more fully than Hall or Hebdige, the consequences of the separation examined in Chapter 3 between 'structure' and 'feeling'. For Hoggart and Williams, the negotiation between working-class and middle-class cultural domains was always a matter of translating between sites which had associations both of structure *and* feeling. For Rowbotham, by contrast, the terms – represented now by 'removed ways of thinking' and the libidinal intensity of rock music – are relatively abstracted and opposed.

As I argued in Chapter 3, this opposition is as much a product of historical circumstance as of choice. If there is a site of 'women's culture' which might provide a similar intellectual resource for Rowbotham to the tenements of Leeds for Hoggart or the Welsh border country for Williams, she provides numerous indications of why it can no longer serve quite the same function:

New ways of processing, preserving and selling food, new ways of storing food by refrigeration, mean that the nature of housework has become increasingly a service operation ... There is a rather hopeless last-ditch stand in home-baked bread and health foods. It is evident that such work is a matter of choice, not necessity. It assumes the character of a quaint pursuit, almost a hobby (Rowbotham 1973: 108-9).

The risk of descending into sentimentality or nostalgia, always incipient for Hoggart and Williams, is, for Rowbotham, much more urgent. The intensification of the interface between government, education and media and 'traditional production at home' exposed the latter in quite new ways to the instrumental rationality of public institutions, particularly to those of capitalist enterprise. This exposure opens up a distinction between 'choice' and 'necessity', reducing attempts to articulate the value of social activities not already recognised by public institutions to subjectivity and privacy. As Rowbotham identifies the problem herself: 'Chased out of the dominant mode of production where there is no room for emotion, such characteristics as love, tenderness and compassion assume a mawkish guise from confinement. The family is thus in one sense the dummy ideal, the repository of ghostly substitutes, emotive fictions which dissolve into cloying sentimentality or explode into thrashing, battering, remorseless violence' (59).

The differences might also be considered in terms of organisations of space. The model of relations between cultural domains for Hoggart and Williams might be described as an 'ambassadorial' one. It is significant that Hoggart always referred to the 'scholarship boy' in the singular; he was an individual who, while he may share experiences with others, was also unusual in moving between collective forms of life which were still clearly distinct and relatively stable. In the context of middle-class intellectual culture, the scholarship boy was able to represent the background from which he came. In the context of an adult education class, he was able to represent a middle-class intellectual heritage to those for whom it was not their own. But it never appeared that there might be a single space of representation or a perspective from which one might consider representation in general terms. The context for the emergence of feminism is quite different. As Mitchell commented of the social movements of the late 1960s: 'An

essential and dominant aspect of the common context for these movements seems to me to be the vast expansion in higher education in the first half of the sixties' (Mitchell 1971: 28). The experience of those entering higher education as a result of this expansion was not individual but generational. The ambassadorial model is replaced, for Mitchell and Rowbotham, by a model of *representation* within a newly-defined homogeneous domain.

Joshua Meyrowitz has traced similar developments, in America but during the same period, in relation to media. Meyrowitz points out that the emergence of feminism coincided closely with the maturing of the first television generation – a coincidence, he suggests, which is far from accidental. Irrespective of the particular content of programming, television created 'a greater sense of informational and experiential unity' than was ever possible within a print-based culture (Meyrowitz 1985: 224):

Unlike *McCall's* magazine or the women's page of newspapers, television brought the same information and the same 'outside world' to men and women. And by 1960, television had penetrated nearly 90% of American households ... Television exposed women to many 'male topics' that they might not have chosen to read about in print ... Further, men and women often watched television together, so that it became almost impossible for women and men to pretend that women were ignorant of certain worldly affairs (Meyrowitz 1985: 211).

The last point here is particularly important. The significance of television as a cultural technology is not only in making information available to populations who did not previously have access to it; it is also in radically increasing knowledge of what others know. If cross-demographic exchange of information by print media has similarities to the 'ambassadorial' model of exchange between cultural domains – crossing between sites within a relatively segmented space – , television corresponds more closely to mass higher education. The possibility of conceiving relations in terms of translation or

dialogue is weakened as information and experience are redefined as belonging to a common domain.

As Tony Bennett has argued, there is a close relation between the politics of representation and generalised concepts of power. Using the example of the modern museum, Bennett points out that demands for representational adequacy appeal implicitly to 'a principle of general human universality in relation to which, whether on the basis of the gendered, racial, class or other social patterns of its exclusions and biases, any particular museum display can be held to be inadequate and therefore in need of supplementation' (Bennett 1995: 91).<sup>14</sup> Power is represented in this context as an undifferentiated institutional resistance to demands for greater inclusiveness within some universal forum. If combined with the insights of Rowbotham, Mitchell and Meyrowitz, Bennett's analysis may help us to understand the tendency in the 1960s and 1970s towards generalised concepts of power. If social, cultural and technological developments of the period were such as to produce new spaces in which questions of representational adequacy could be posed, they would also have created the conditions for such concepts to take form.

But the context for the reconceptualisation of power was not only in internal developments within Britain, America or other countries in which the women's movement emerged; it was also the external relations of these countries within the highly-politicised international space of the Cold War. As Mitchell points out of the social movements of the late 1960s: 'These home-based, home-directed fights took over

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<sup>14</sup> Bennett, in fact, goes further than this, making use of Foucauldian arguments to associate generalised concepts of power with a merely 'rhetorical' politics. It could be argued that this association tends towards the kind of 'tacit criticism' of feminism which Morris observes. But it is possible to take the more limited point about the relation between the politics of representation and concepts of power without such an extension. I will discuss Bennett's general position in detail in Chapter 5.

from a preoccupation with world peace and Third World struggles – Algeria, Cuba, Vietnam – yet have never lost the predilection for internationalism which their original inspiration provided' (Mitchell 1971: 20). The originality of intellectuals in the women's movement was to combine the *extensive* reference of the concept of power which had developed in the context of the Cold War and anti-colonial struggles with the *intensive* reference suggested by changes within advanced capitalist societies. As Mitchell puts it:

The Third World revolutions and guerilla warfare provoked new analyses of oppression and new methods of struggle ... The Women's Liberation Movement is, in a sense, a summation of so many tendencies which mark these slightly earlier formations ... The wish to concentrate on specific oppression in one's own country and yet link up with a universal predicament (a reaction to the scope of imperialism?) finds perfect expression in the situation of women ... Women are the most 'international' of any political group, and yet their oppression is experienced in the most minute and specific area – in the home (Mitchell 1971: 21).

In recent reflections on the period, Mitchell gives a striking account of an occasion in which she herself attempted to establish these connections:

I remember sitting at the table with all the men of *New Left Review*, and going round the table with people saying 'Well, I will think about Algeria', 'I will think about Persia', 'I will think about Tangyanika', as they then were, and I said, 'Well, I'll think about women' – and there was silence (Mitchell 1995: 124).

This silence might be construed as a sign of a resistance to the inclusion of women, and it is possible that such a reading may be justified. But there are other reasons why there might have been discomfort. The unlimited reference of the concept of power when taken to extend from the global to the 'most minute and specific' implies a new kind of politics which Mitchell herself described at the time as 'totalism':

'Totalism' ... is the expression of the protest against all oppressed conditions in the form of an assertion of complete liberation involving the overthrow at one blow of the whole capitalist society. In 'totalism' the oppression of one group stands for the oppression of all. Within its undifferentiated inclusiveness there is only place for tactics, not overall strategy (Mitchell 1971: 24).

Even in this description there are suggestions of instability, contradiction and a potential for political despair. Everything appears to be staked on 'overthrowing capitalist society', yet the 'undifferentiated inclusiveness' of the concept of oppression also makes this seem highly unlikely if not impossible. The Marxist internationalism of 'the men' at *New Left Review* was still, in Mitchell's terms, 'strategic'. While the reference of their concept of power was extensive, it was nevertheless limited (to questions relating to regulation of the mode of production and the role of the state), allowing the scope of political action to be specified. In 'totalism', by contrast, strategy becomes unthinkable. Any attempt to engage with power can no longer be specifically directed.

It is clear from Mitchell's account that 'totalism' was associated both with political generosity and serious intellectual ambition. The principle according to which 'the oppression of one group stands for the oppression of all' provides a basis for cooperation between very diverse projects, connecting the otherwise remote experiences of Third World guerilla fighters and suburban 'housewives'. The idea that questions of power might be pursued in the intensive as well as the extensive dimension also suggests the possibility of quite new ways in which they might be addressed. But 'totalism' also produces a number of problems which were widely sensed within feminist writings themselves. The most serious is that while power is negatively identified, it is also conceived in such a way as to appear intractable. As Mitchell has said recently of her motivations for turning to psychoanalysis:

By the end of the decade [the 1960s] there seemed to be something so entrenched about patriarchy ..., that where we had been seeing through the work of Fanon and others that one could have multiple differences, there seemed to be some *absolute* difference that was socially or culturally constructed between men and women, and was more entrenched ... And there was something in psychoanalysis that spoke about the depth of patriarchy, and the really difficult question of eradicating it (Mitchell 1995: 125).

By Mitchell's own account, *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* was written substantially as a response to the perceived 'failure' of the revolutionary movements of late 1960s. The diagnosis of failure is, however, ambiguous. The implication of the concept of power which began to form at the time is that they could not possibly have 'succeeded'. This is not so much because any specific power could not have been displaced or overthrown; it is rather that power was no longer conceived *as* specific. It was understood in such a way as to appear not only as omnipresent but also as necessarily omnitemporal. The significance of the term 'patriarchy', for Mitchell, was not only that it identified the oppression of women; it was also that it introduced a new understanding of power as transcending any particular historical or cultural formation. The emphasis is explicit in her use of a definition of the term from Kate Millett: 'a universal (geographical and historical) mode of power relations' (Mitchell 1971: 65).

Contemporary unease about the direction of cultural politics in the 1970s has since been eclipsed by highly developed criticisms of the period – some of which I will review in Chapters 5 and 6. Many of these criticisms are, however, historically insensitive. It is worth drawing attention to Mitchell's parenthetical question in describing the universalism of the social movements of the 1960s and 1970s: 'a reaction to the scope of imperialism?' The new emphasis on an 'undifferentiated inclusiveness' was not a theoretical proposition put forward in a vacuum, but a response to complex and disturbing developments. Many of the tendencies within left politics of the time can also



be observed in other fields. As Mitchell points out in *Women's Estate*, much of the political rhetoric of the social movements was carried over from the ideological discourses of the Cold War:

A great deal of the radical protest has taken the form of a demand for the realization of the gifts we are supposed to be enjoying anyway ... If the society says we are so lucky, so mature, etc. let's see it ... Of course, freedom, equality and the rights of the individual are fundamental ideologies of a 'free enterprise' economy (Mitchell 1971: 176-7).

A similar argument has been made recently by P.G. Knight about the theme of 'conspiracy' within many of the early American second wave feminist texts. An example used by Knight is the concept of 'brainwashing' in Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*. The emergence of the concept in American public discourse can be traced quite specifically to Cold War contexts, in the attempt by authorities to explain why American troops in Korea had apparently succumbed to an enemy program of propaganda and indoctrination . 'In developing an account of a conspiracy to brainwash American women into domesticity, Friedan draws on one of the key terms of cold war politics' (Knight 1997: 42).

There is little evidence to suggest that the totalist extension of the concept of power was any more unique to left cultural criticism than the concept of freedom or the theme of conspiracy. There are very clear shifts in usage associated with the development of the Cold War. The emergence of superpower confrontation brought an effective end to the pluralist understanding of international politics, deriving from an older European response to modernity, as a web of rivalries and alliances between the 'Great Powers'. While a binary system still has two poles, it is unlike a multi-polar system in the ease with which one pole can be characterised simply as the complement or 'negative' of the other. The logic of superpower confrontation was always such as to suggest a

substantial consistency of power – a potential, at least, to be conceived in rationalist terms as a single global phenomenon. With the loss, after Hiroshima and Nagasaki, of a distinction between military and civilian space, there was an obvious context for an extension of a totalising use of the concept beyond the 'public' domain. It is easy, from a position of historical distance, to criticise or deride Mitchell's hope of 'overthrowing at one blow the whole capitalist society', but in a context where entire societies were held to ransom against the threat of nuclear annihilation, such apocalyptic suggestions belonged to a discursive field with points of reference which were all too real.

The strongest argument against too easy a dismissal of 'seventies politics', however, is that the most important intellectual shift in the cultural politics of the period has not been extensively questioned or revised. It is true that there has been a widespread rejection of the original form in which 'totalism' was articulated, particularly its inflection towards apocalyptic or revolutionary themes. But the most common usage of the concept of power in cultural studies remains 'totalist' in much the sense which Mitchell outlines. Even the strongest critics of the revolutionary political models of the 1970s have generally assumed that power is a universal phenomenon extending from the global to the particular and substantially consistent however diverse its 'forms' or 'modalities'. As I will argue in Chapter 5, one of the most developed lines of criticism – a line associated with an appeal to Foucauldian arguments – has, in fact, only consolidated the universalism in relation to the concept which first emerged in the social movements of the 1960s and 1970s. While an insistence that there is nothing 'outside' power is often represented as a definitive break from the revolutionary aspirations of the latter, it might equally well be represented as a formalisation and logical extension of their central intellectual innovation.

## THE ORIGINS OF BANALITY

The above analysis remains little more than an outline and perhaps overgeneralises on the basis of two rather slight British texts of the early 1970s. But it establishes, at least, that there is a clear case for considering the history of feminism in parallel with a history of the concept of power (a history which needs to be distinguished from a history of *theories* of power, where the object of theory is assumed to be stable and clearly defined). The use of the concept which has developed in association with feminism has a complex formation which could be traced in much greater detail. Rather than developing the case more fully, however, I want in the remainder of this chapter to indicate how it might shed new light on some of the issues raised by Morris about the problematic relation of feminism to its own past and to broader debates in cultural criticism. My argument, specifically, is that a historicisation of the concept of power offers an approach which Morris herself does not consider to countering the tendency of positions to become polarised between a dogmatic defence and a simple dismissal of the political values and modes of analysis established in the 1970s. It allows a recognition of the contributions of feminism to cultural studies to be seen as fully consistent with critical attention to problems it has introduced to the field.

The most important condition for this is care in relating feminism and 'totalism' – or, in the terms I have used in previous chapters, a fully-developed rationalist understanding of power. As Mitchell's analysis makes clear, the two cannot simply be identified.

'Totalism' was never in any sense 'invented' by feminism (or, for that matter, by any other single movement or agency); it emerged in a far more complex way in response to the post-war developments of a mass commercial popular culture, an expanded education system and the Cold War. But for precise historical reasons relating to women's experiences of these developments, feminism has *inhabited the space* of

'totalism' in a way which was not the case of the early formations of cultural studies organised around questions of class. To put it in this way is to suggest a very general framework for assessing both the strengths and possible limitations of feminist contributions to debates about power in cultural studies. In so far as 'totalism' has come to be widely accepted as a theoretical premise, the exploration by feminism of its potentials and problems has been of very general importance. The strength of feminism, I want to suggest, has been in the political and intellectual sophistication of this exploration; its limitation – a limitation whose significance is by no means certain – has been a closure against critical reflection on the premise itself.

A good illustration of this argument, if also a daunting one to frame as an object of criticism, is Morris's own work. There is little difficulty in identifying the strengths of her writing; they are strengths which have made her an inspirational figure well beyond feminism in any strict sense. While she has consistently written as 'a feminist', she has understood feminism not as a specific field of concerns ('the woman question') so much as a position from which to participate in a range of debates, including those of cultural studies. The problems, for Morris, in sustaining such a position are not only 'external', in what she describes as 'the cultural and social conventions that make speaking difficult or impossible for women' (Morris 1988: 7); they are also internal to feminism itself. As she puts it sharply in the title essay of *The Pirate's Fiancée*:

Feminisms both past and present have run into some solid brick walls through trusting too lightly to 'the obvious', assuming a continuous and evenly distributed, consistently significant, oppression of the eternal natural object 'woman' or 'women' through the ages (Morris 1988: 54).

The effort to negotiate a way over or around these 'brick walls' has involved Morris in what might be described as an internal critique of 'totalism'. To emphasise the

constructive dimension of this project, it might be read alternatively as an extended attempt to *make* the space of 'totalism' habitable – to develop, in her own terms, 'enunciative strategies' which *prevent* its politics from becoming 'impossible to live'.

Morris has not, of course, been alone in this project. Many of the problems she has worked to address were identified in the early women's movement by writers such as Mitchell and Rowbotham. Mitchell was concerned, for example, with the *dangers* of the concept of experience as it emerged from the new social movements:

The aspect of the ideological revolution that has enabled the promotion of 'feelings' to the ranks of political action (the 'politics of experience', propagated above all by the Hippies) has certainly had important liberating effects ... However, while being a crucial initiator of Women's Liberation itself, sometimes it has also boomeranged back in a way that has been highly detrimental ... Here, as with all the other radical movements in which they initially participated, women have found their inspiration and their desolation (Mitchell 1971: 38).

Rowbotham was more concerned with the emergence of a fatalistic notion of 'anatomic destiny': 'the different possibilities for men and women are held to be biological and psychological in origin, and thus the need to transform the social relations between all human beings is ignored' (Rowbotham 1973: xii). Feminist writing since the late 1960s constitutes, more generally, an extraordinarily rich archive of practical and theoretical responses to such problems – problems which have been closely associated with a universalist conception of power.

But Morris has been particularly successful in contributing as a feminist to debates in cultural studies. It may be worth speculating on the extent to which this has been related to a specifically Australian political formation. As Andrew Milner has pointed out, there are significant differences between the development of British and Australian cultural

studies. Where the initial problematisation of the old literary conception of 'culture' was developed in Britain in relation to *class*, it was developed in Australia in relation to *nation*:

From at least as early as the 1890s, Australian radical nationalisms had sought to relocate the national community and a putative national literary canon away from the past and toward a liberal-democratic or even socialistic future, away from England and toward Australia. Despite the attenuation of the *Bulletin's* more generalized republican political nationalism, a structural opposition persisted thereafter between the more Anglophile forms of academic literary criticism, on the one hand, and radical nationalist non-academic criticism on the other (Milner 1997: 138).

This opposition crystallised in the 1940s and 1950s, particularly in writing associated with the journals *Meanjin* and *Overland*. It is here, for Milner, that many of the political orientations of Australian cultural studies first took form.

The argument is in itself an illuminating one, but it is particularly provocative if read against the long and complex debate over 'englishness' in the development of British cultural studies. As I have argued over the last three chapters, this has been a debate not only about ethnic or national identity, or the history of British imperialism; it has also been about a particular kind of political and intellectual response to modernity, the legacy of which is deeply at odds with universalising or rationalist uses of the concept of power. If the debate has often been agonised and has never quite been resolved, this is because it has never clearly been settled whether democratic projects are better advanced through the rejection of this legacy or its creative appropriation. It is far from an anomaly, according to my reading, that of the key early figures in British cultural studies, Williams should have spent much of his working life at Cambridge, Hoggart should have titled a book of essays *An English Temper* and Thompson should have passionately defended the 'peculiarities of the English' in the interests, as he saw them,

of *radical* politics. If the tendency in the field has been consistently away from its early formation, the latter has remained a continuing influence on as central and enduring a figure as Stuart Hall.

Any similar trajectory in Australia has been greatly truncated, if not completely bypassed. Williams, Hoggart and Thompson were never a major influence on the work which came to be identified in Australia as 'cultural studies' and there have been no comparable figures to stand in their place. At the same time, Australian debates were remarkably early to anticipate new intellectual directions and particularly to register the significance of theoretical arguments abstracted from the experience of 1968 in France. Milner's comparative analysis of the British and Australian cases suggests a possible explanation: The old identification in Australia between radical democratic politics and a differentiation from England and 'englishness' meant that issues which took decades to resolve in Britain were effectively decided in advance. What appeared for Perry Anderson in the mid-1960s as a 'crisis' of English intellectual culture, appeared for left cultural criticism in Australia as an *opportunity*. Where in Britain the appeal to European 'theory' was associated with a sweeping rejection of local institutions and histories (including, importantly, those of left), it was associated in Australia with a much more *affirmative* project of nation-building.

The comparison could, no doubt, be overdrawn. The picture is complicated by the fact that many practitioners of cultural studies in Australia – among them Milner – have been British migrants. There are also other complexities. Milner is critical of what he sees as a failure of Australian cultural studies to examine the *weaknesses* of the alliance between radical nationalist discourses and the new social movements, particularly a resulting tendency to neglect questions of class. But there has been more attention to the problems of the alliance than his account suggests. A notable oversight is Morris's

essays of the 1980s, many of which deal critically with the 'corporatist' progressivism which developed in Australia during the long period of Labor government from 1983 (see, particularly, Morris 1992a). Despite this, however, the general point still holds. Milner is right, in particular, to point out the significance of differences between Britain and Australia in the relation of cultural studies to the processes of social and economic restructuring which occurred in both countries during the 1980s. Where in Britain the field was strongly formed in critical opposition to Thatcherism, it was formed in Australia by a sense of positive investment in change – a belief that however imperfect or compromised, it was generally producing a more open, tolerant, multicultural society. One of the consequences of this history is that a universalist understanding of power in Australian cultural studies has been relatively uninhibited. The effects can be seen in the work of Morris. While she has always been sceptical in her adoption of theory, there is little evidence that she has ever seriously questioned the extended use of the concept which emerged from the new social movements and which is also characteristic of post-war French philosophy. Such a use has been assumed as a general coordinate in relation to which her position has been defined. This is somewhat obscured in much of her earlier writing as she has often engaged in debate with others less cautious in drawing the implications of 'totalism'. What has been striking in this context is her preparedness to work *away* from strong assumptions about power. There has been a turn, however, in some of her recent work in which certain basic commitments are made explicit. This turn has occurred, significantly, at the point of a widespread popular rejection in Australia of the policies and discourses which developed out of the alliance between the new social movements and the reforming Labor governments of the 1980s and early 1990s. It has also occurred in the context of increasing challenges – both from within and without – to the use of the concept of power in cultural studies.



There is an uncharacteristic defensiveness in some of Morris's responses to this conjuncture. In a recent essay, for example, she responds with irritation to criticisms of cultural studies by newspaper columnist Beatrice Faust as obsessed with 'capitalism, elitism, racism, sexism': 'This is hardly a scandal; after all, what area of the humanities capable of sustaining a skerrick of interest in the great human conflicts of our time is not deeply concerned with these things?' (Morris 1997a: 39) In clarifying her position, she accepts a definition of the field proposed by Tony Bennett:

It now functions largely as a term of convenience for a fairly dispersed array of theoretical and political positions which, however widely divergent they might be in other respects, share a commitment to examining cultural practices from the point of their intrication with, and within, relations of power (Morris 1997a: 39).

Morris proceeds from this definition to point out the internal complexity which it allows:

Cultural studies does *not* ... treat power relations as intrinsically or uniformly bad, and it does not construe power only as an oppressive property that *other* people 'have'. Power is not necessarily a bleak and paranoid concept, and cultural studies is not a discourse of powerlessness (Morris 1997a: 40).

The discussion clearly demonstrates openness in the way power is conceptualised, but the extended *reference* of the concept – in Mitchell's terms, its 'undifferentiated inclusiveness' – is not presented as negotiable.

It is unlikely that Morris would accept such a use of any other term. Much of the rest of her essay is, in fact, concerned with arguing that concepts in cultural studies are – or should be – radically contextual: 'For cultural studies, the theoretical is a response to (or, as Roland Barthes once put it, an "outcome of") specific practices and contexts'

(Morris 1997a: 43). The point is expanded with reference to a similar argument by Lawrence Grossberg (1997):

For Grossberg, 'if someone's theory tells them the answers in advance, because their theory travels with them across any and every context', they are not doing cultural studies – although their work may be interesting and important, and their answers may provide 'important truths' (Morris 1997a: 43).

The significance of this demarcation, for Morris as for Grossberg, is that it disqualifies generalising theoretical discourses, exemplified by the work of literary theorists like Fredric Jameson, from inclusion within the field. The intellectual project which Morris wishes to defend is one where such discourses are not permitted to set terms in advance of attempts to engage with specific issues or contexts.

Morris's work has been, more generally, exemplary of a sceptical approach to the use of theoretical concepts and arguments. This is not to suggest that she has ever been *opposed* to theory. She makes the relevant distinction here in indicating her approach to textual analysis in *Too Soon, Too Late*:

... textual analysis ... is not hostile either to generalizing models (on which it depends for its conceptual materials), or to theorization, but rather assumes that the objects we read can provide, through their material 'resistance' to our acts of abstraction, terms for questioning and revising the models we bring to bear (Morris 1998: 143).

Particularly in her earlier work, Morris has been a theoretical entrepreneur, introducing 'generalizing models' often well before they have been widely known in English-language debates. But she has always assumed that such models have limits – that their status is that of *attempts* at understanding ('acts of abstraction') likely to encounter phenomena or experiences which they cannot readily explain. Rather than working from exposition to formal 'application' (a procedure which always risks an unreflective over-

extension of claims), she has preferred the genre of the essay, entertaining a variety of perspectives in order to explore their explanatory potential while avoiding the suggestion of an unqualified identification with any one.

This approach is not adopted on purist grounds – or as Morris puts it, ‘to tick down my allegiance automatically to a politics (which I do support) of the provisional and definitely uncertain’ (Morris 1988: 51); it is clearly motivated by an attempt to avoid destructive tendencies in debates within left cultural criticism. If Morris has not questioned the extended use of the concept of power, she has been keenly aware of the problems it generates. This awareness is indicated even in her wish to pre-empt a reading of the ‘politics of the provisional’ as merely a matter of ‘automatic allegiances’ – of being, in some abstract sense, on the ‘right side’ in theoretical or political debates. The problem with ‘totalism’ is that it tends to produce precisely this kind of simplification. Its weaknesses here are the obverse of its strengths. In articulating profoundly-felt generational experiences, the concept of power has been associated with a potent moral authority; in its universalising extension, it has invited that authority to be exercised indiscriminately. Where, inevitably, differences have become evident, they have tended to be represented in the form of competing absolutisms. The result is the kind of ethical bankruptcy – what Morris (1988: 53) describes as ‘the politics of the pointing finger’ – which, as I argued in Chapter 1, motivated Foucault’s interventions into left-political debates after 1968 in France.

As a feminist, Morris has been particularly concerned with the consequences of imperious generalisations for the responsiveness of intellectual culture to the experiences of women. *The Pirate’s Fiancée* is framed as a series of attempts to preserve a space for such responsiveness in the face of apocalyptic or absolutist themes which circulated widely in left cultural criticism during the late 1970s and early 1980s.

Morris uses the introduction to take issue, specifically, with the terms of debates around 'postmodernism':

... in spite of its heavy (if lightly acknowledged) borrowings from feminist theory, its frequent celebrations of 'difference' and 'specificity', and its critiques of 'Enlightenment' paternalism, postmodernism as a publishing phenomenon has pulled off the peculiar feat of re-constituting an overwhelmingly male pantheon of proper names to function as ritual objects of academic exegesis and commentary (Morris 1988: 12).

In her analysis of this phenomenon, Morris refuses to fall back on readily available paranoid interpretations for which writing on postmodernism might be read as merely 'the last ruse of the patriarchal University trying for power to fix the meaning, and contain the damage of its own decline' (Morris 1988: 15). It is significant that she chooses, in the first essay of the collection, to identify intolerances – dogmatic attempts precisely to 'fix meanings' – in Mary Daly's *Gyn/Ecology*, one of the more influential feminist texts of the time.

It is this attention to the form of common problems which has made Morris an important commentator on cultural studies. While her location within feminism has meant that she has sensed the problems of 'totalism' with a particular intensity, she has used this location productively to address herself outwards to wider debates in which these problems are shared. Perhaps the key essay in this context is 'Banality in Cultural Studies' (1990) which, in its disturbing combination of directness and sympathy, has come in some ways to haunt the field.

The essay is not an easy one to summarise as it deals with widely different objects. The 'banality' of the title refers both to its specialist use in Jean Baudrillard's theory of the media and to a tendency to anodyne celebrations of popular 'agency' in cultural studies. Baudrillard's work and the 'populist' tendency in cultural studies are themselves

responses to problems in theoretical discourses on power: Baudrillard has attempted to explode the aura of the concept in French philosophy by arguing that in the world of media simulations power, along with 'reality' in a classical sense, has ceased to exist; cultural studies has often resorted to formulaic appeals to the counter-themes of 'resistance' and 'subversion' projected indiscriminately onto popular culture and everyday life. Both solutions are, for Morris, as simplifying and reductive as the problems they seek to resolve:

To simplify matters myself, I'd say that where the fatal strategies of Baudrillard keep returning us to his famous Black Hole – a scenario that is ... grim, obsessive, and, in its enunciative strategies, maniacally overcoherent ... – the voxpop style of cultural studies is offering us the sanitized world of a deodorant commercial where there's always a way of redemption. There's something sad about that, because cultural studies emerged from a real attempt to give voice to much grittier experiences of class, race and gender (Morris 1990: 26).

Although the problems here clearly go well beyond feminism, it is not an accident that it is a feminist critic who should have identified them so precisely. Feminism has always lived in danger, as Morris puts it elsewhere, of becoming 'cruelly bound by repetition, confined by the terms that we are contesting'. Without a continued and active scepticism, 'feminist criticism ties its own hands and finds itself, again and again, bound back home for the same old story' (Morris 1998: 92).

### **THE END OF 'TOTALISM'?**

Why, given all this, has Morris never questioned the generalised extension of the concept of power – the premise which so clearly generates most of the problems she has worked to avoid? It is difficult in the context of present debates for the question to be put in a way which does not seem crudely unsympathetic. As Morris points out in relation to Beatrice Faust, most of those who have recently challenged the investment of

cultural studies in the concept of power have been poorly informed about their objects of criticism. This is true not only of the media polemics which have come to be loosely organised around the theme of 'political correctness'; it is also true of criticisms from *within* cultural studies of earlier approaches in the field – what Morris describes as 'the self-promoting fairy tales of cultural studies today (once upon a time in the seventies, the story goes, feminists had a monolithic view of the media as repressive ...)' (Morris 1998: xxi). The cause of her irritation with these debates could not be more obvious: many of the arguments now being made about the flattening effects of the concept of power – as if as revelations – have been put by feminists like herself for at least twenty years.

But the risk of becoming embroiled in the often ugly and unedifying battles of the 'culture wars' should not prevent the question 'why power?' – or, more precisely, 'why power *in the singular*?' – from being asked. If accepted as genuinely inquiring, it is not as perverse or reactionary as more aggressive or ideologically-weighted phrasings have sometimes made it seem. It may be true, in a very general sense, that any area of the humanities with 'a skerrick of interest in the great human conflicts of our time' must be concerned with 'capitalism, elitism, racism, sexism' – and, as Morris expands for Faust, 'with imperialism and colonialism as well' (Morris 1997a: 39). But it is far from clear whether this is sufficient to resolve the point at issue. A generous reading of Faust's objections might be that they are objections precisely to the insistent thematisation of diverse phenomena under a generalised rubric of 'power'. The reasons for such a thematisation need at least to be explained. It is a recent development within English-language criticism which can be traced to quite specific contexts. It is, in fact, a recent development even within those 'progressive' intellectual projects such as cultural studies which have emerged out of the New Left since the 1950s. And as Morris herself

has been among the first to recognise, it is a development which has produced significant problems – not least, for feminism.

There are a number of reasons why Morris may find it difficult to contemplate an *external* critique of 'totalism'. In her response to Faust, she reveals something of her investment in the concept of power in explaining her position on one of the more highly-charged issues of recent 'culture war' debates – the question of *canons*:

... all my work in cultural studies is connected with those projects *in* literature that have, as [Eve Sedgwick] argues, most effectively challenged not the 'empirical centrality' of the master-canon in the English curriculum, but its 'conceptual anonymity'. I, too, would like to think with Sedgwick that , 'never again need women – need, one hopes, anyone – feel greeted by the Norton Anthology of mostly white men's Literature with the implied insolent salutation, "I'm nobody. Who are you?"' (Morris 1997a: 39)

Like Sedgwick, Morris is concerned to avoid being constrained as simply oppositional; she sees herself as involved in a positive attempt to contribute to 'the proliferation of the "potentially infinite plurality of mini-canons" that follows from the "fracturing" (in Sedgwick's phrase) of the master-canon.' She wishes, nevertheless, to keep faith with a profoundly-felt generational experience of alienation from established institutions of public culture – with a sense of affront, in this case, at the 'implied insolence' of 'white men's Literature'. The expanded concept of power has been too important in articulating this experience – recognition of which has itself been too hard fought – to consider abandoning.

But perhaps more important to Morris's thought on the question is that she has considered it precisely *in terms of* a possible abandonment. The alternative to a continuing commitment to a universalist concept of power tends to appear in her work as *no* concept of power. Her framing of options here is particularly clear in her extended

engagement with the work of Jean Baudrillard (Morris 1984; 1990) and also appears in some of her interventions into debates on postmodernism. In an essay on the property boom in Sydney during the 1980s, for example, she criticises popular discourses which seek to deflate the corporate claim over urban space as merely a projection of petty male egos. Such a response, for Morris, 'misses the point about the role of the "urbanization of capital" in creating economic and social inequalities, precisely at a time when its operations in our cities are reaching new heights of intensity and savagery, directly affecting our lives' (Morris 1998: 128). The criticism is extended to theoretical work, not only of Baudrillard, but also of Robert Venturi, Paul Virilio and Robert Somol. The articulation of the concept of power in these debates is not entirely straightforward, but the ontological solidity of, at least, a certain classical figuration of power is clearly in question. The danger in this, for Morris, is that it deprives criticism of the ability to point out exploitation, social inequality or, as was often the case in corporate strategy during the 1980s, hardened indifference to the effects of economic change.

Given the options considered by Morris, her argument is a strong one. If to question the concept of power is to accept a political quietism, then the motivations in doing so appear dubious, if not vaguely obscene. But it is here that Morris's early rejection of 'englishness' becomes a limitation, for there is always another reading of the loss of a rationalist understanding of power: a return to a more limited, empiricist use of the concept. If, as Baudrillard suggests, 'power' in the expanded sense no longer has any clear referent, this *could* be taken to suggest a more restricted attention to particular 'powers'. What may be at stake, in other words, is not the 'end of politics' as such but rather, in Oakeshott's terms, the nemesis of a certain *style* of politics – the 'politics of faith'. It is true that Oakeshott's alternative, the 'politics of scepticism', is unable to represent powers as instances of global totalities – whether they be 'capitalism',



'patriarchy' or 'Western imperialism' – and may therefore appear to lack critical force. But it does not follow that it is necessarily accepting of quietism. In the present context, in fact, the charges might even be reversed. Thirty years from 1968, the universalist concept of power has become so fraught in its use – so hedged with problems and difficulties – that it is not clear to what extent it is still critically effective. Where any attempt to make it so is neutralised as always already 'heard', the field of criticism becomes prone to inertia, cynicism and complacency. If this is even partly so, a case might be made for scepticism in relation to the expanded use of the concept precisely *in the interests of* a sharpened social criticism.

This is not to say that such a scepticism would necessarily be more successful. It is important to remember why 'englishness' was so widely rejected by those involved in progressive politics during the 1960s and 1970s. My argument throughout this chapter, as in previous chapters, has been that the use of the concept of power in cultural studies has never simply been a matter of choice. The concept is enmeshed in complex ways with contexts and histories which have given it sense. Any attempt to suggest a modification to the use of the concept must take account of these. In some ways, the prospects for an empiricist use of the concept do not seem promising. Many of the contexts which have informed 'totalism' have not disappeared: processes of global integration have only accelerated and the interface between those processes and intimate aspects of everyday lives continues to intensify. But there are other developments – notably the end of the Cold War and a loss of enthusiasm for 'grand' ideological conflicts – which appear more hopeful. It is in this context that I want, in Chapters 5 and 6, to review some recent work in cultural studies which intimates, or at least creates the conditions for, a 'post-totalist' approach to power.

## Chapter 5

### ‘Talking to the ideological state apparatuses’

#### The therapy of governmentality

Cultural studies remains fixated on theoretical and textual orientations which provide little purchase in seeking to equip students with knowledge and skills for citizenship and employment in the 1990s.

Stuart Cunningham (1992: 177)

The problem with aesthetic critique – and with cultural studies to the degree that it is caught in its slipstream – is that it presumes to comprehend and judge ... other cultural regions from a single metropolitan point, typically the university arts faculty. To travel to these other regions though – to law offices, media institutions, government bureaus, corporations, advertising agencies – is to make a sobering discovery: They are already replete with their own intellectuals. And they just look up and say, ‘Well what exactly is it you can do for us?’

Ian Hunter (1992: 372)

... it is only by using the kinds of correctives that would come from putting ‘policy’ into cultural studies that cultural studies may be deflected from ... those forms of banality which, in some quarters, have already claimed it while also resisting the lure of those debates whose contrived appearance of ineffable complexity makes them a death trap for practical thinking.

Tony Bennett (1992a: 32-33)

In the early 1990s, an aggressively revisionist move appeared within cultural studies organised broadly around the theme of ‘policy’. What followed as the ‘policy debate’ was a phenomenon largely confined to Australia and was conditioned in important ways by Australian contexts. But the arguments developed in support of the ‘policy’ position

have gained an international currency and are also matched to some extent by similar arguments elsewhere. Two of the quotations above are taken, in fact, from the proceedings of the conference 'Cultural Studies Now and in the Future' at Illinois in 1990 – the conference which marked, in many ways, the 'arrival' of cultural studies as an internationally-recognised field. The theoretical end of the 'policy' position has developed in close parallel with British work located within 'social theory', particularly as associated with the journal *Economy and Society* and the influence in the field of Foucauldian theories of 'governmentality'. Many of the arguments resonate more generally with diverse attempts across many different sites to define a 'relevance' for progressive projects in the humanities and social sciences in a context where the criteria of relevance have shifted radically since the late 1960s and 1970s when many of those projects took form.

At the centre of the 'policy' arguments have been a set of claims over the use of the concept of power. Interestingly, this has not been a major point of focus in critical responses, most of which have chosen to engage over other issues, but it is quite explicit in programmatic statements of the 'policy' position itself. It is immediately foregrounded, for example, in Tony Bennett's 'Putting Policy into Cultural Studies'. Bennett prepares the ground for his argument with the definition of cultural studies already quoted in the previous chapter as cited by Meaghan Morris:

It now functions largely as a term of convenience for a fairly dispersed array of theoretical and political positions which, however widely divergent they might be in other respects, share a commitment to examining cultural practices from the point of view of their entanglement with, and within, relations of power (Bennett 1992a: 23).

Further clarifying his understanding of the field, Bennett describes it as 'an area of debate in which, certain things being taken for granted, the dialogue can be more

focused' (33). What is 'taken for granted' is that any discussion of culture must relate it in some way to power. 'As such', Bennett concludes, 'the only matter of substance at issue in these debates concerns the development of ways of theorizing the relations between culture and power that will be of service to practical engagements with, and within, those relations' (33). The 'policy' position is advanced as a series of related claims as to the conditions for addressing this 'matter of substance' satisfactorily:

*First*, the need to include policy considerations in the definition of culture in viewing it as a particular field of government; *second*, the need to distinguish different regions of culture within this overall field in terms of the objects, targets, and techniques of government peculiar to them; *third*, the need to identify the political relations specific to different regions of culture so defined and to develop appropriately specific ways of engaging with and within them; and, *fourth*, the need for intellectual work to be conducted in a manner such that, in both its substance and its style, it can be calculated to influence or service the conduct of identifiable agents within the region of culture concerned (Bennett 1992a: 23).

The immediacy of the concern with power recedes somewhat at the level of detail, but the revisionist ambition of the position clearly rests on an argument as to how the concept should be used.

In its initial phase, at least, the 'policy debate' was a somewhat confused one, generating, as John Frow and Meaghan Morris have put it, 'much heat and less light' (Frow and Morris 1993: xxix). The 'policy' position itself has been more contradictory and internally divided than it has often been taken to be or than the presentation of a confident and unified revisionist front has sometimes made it seem. Even individual positions have been paradoxical. Much of the advocacy for 'policy' might be described as a fanatical anti-fanaticism, a totalising critique of totalisation or a fundamentalist anti-fundamentalism. As a number of commentators have observed, calls for 'modesty',

'specificity' and 'pragmatism' have been framed by sweeping characterisations of other positions and highly theorised arguments that involvement in policy formation is not only desirable but somehow ordained by History.<sup>15</sup> There has been a pervasive sense throughout the 'policy' debate of cultural studies at war with itself.

There is no doubt that those aligned with the 'policy' move can claim significant achievements. The establishment, in particular, of an Institute for Cultural Policy Studies at Griffith University, succeeded by the well-funded Key Centre for Cultural and Media Policy, has provided a space for sustained analysis of cultural policy in Australia at a time of very rapid change. But the initiative may seem an unlikely place to look for openings of the kind assayed at the end of the previous chapter. If the 'policy' advocates have vigorously criticised the way the concept of power is used in cultural studies, the one aspect of that use they have *not* criticised has been the assumption that the concept corresponds to a single universal phenomenon. The arguments are 'Foucauldian' in the sense developed in Chapter 1: while there is an insistent emphasis on the specificity of 'mechanisms', 'technologies' and 'modalities' of power, it is never seriously questioned that these mechanisms, technologies and modalities represent different forms of fundamentally the *same thing*. Bennett's identification of power as the 'matter of substance' in debates within cultural studies is, in this context, highly indicative. The very premise of these debates, as he sees them, is that power is a phenomenon which, however diverse its forms and however varied the accounts which may be given of it, retains a substantial consistency.

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<sup>15</sup> For criticisms of the 'policy' arguments see Frow (1992), Jones (1994), Levy (1992), Morris (1992b), O'Regan (1992a; 1992b) and Wark (1992).

One of the effects of the 'policy' intervention has been, in fact, to confirm and formalise the general tendency from empiricism to rationalism traced in previous chapters.

Bennett's assumption of consensus over his definition of cultural studies is as much an indication of the state of the field as it is of his own position within it. It is an assumption which has been widely accepted. While Morris, for example, has been sharply critical of many of the 'policy' arguments, she describes the definition as 'the most relaxed general definition that I know' (Morris 1997a: 39). The definition is also a starting point for the argument of Jon Stratton and Ien Ang, discussed in Chapter 3, for a new 'internationalised' cultural studies. It is against the universalism of Bennett's use of the concept of power that specific associations with Britain come to appear as a limitation (Stratton and Ang 1996: 361-2). The moment of cultural studies' internationalisation has been one in which the extended use of the concept of power which emerged from the new social movements has been prominently foregrounded and largely accepted as defining the field.

In so far as the 'policy' position is 'Foucauldian' – and Foucault is frequently cited as an authority – it might be criticised for the kinds of limitations which I attempted to identify in relation to Foucault's own writings on power in Chapter 1. Questions might be raised, specifically, about claims by the 'policy' advocates to scepticism. It is true, as it is of Foucault, that they have developed corrosive arguments against many of the universalising pretensions common within left cultural criticism. But they retain, in their use of the concept of power, a commitment to universalism – a commitment which has the potential, at least, to produce its own kinds of dogmatism.

Rather than pursuing this line exclusively, however, I want in this chapter to suggest that there are other possibilities opened up by the 'policy' arguments – possibilities which paradoxically subvert their theoretical claims. At a superficial level, the use of

the concept of power by the 'policy' advocates is not greatly removed from other work in cultural studies. The propositions that power can be 'positive' as well as 'negative', that it can work 'in and through' rather than 'over and against' objects of control, that there are no spaces 'outside' power from which it might be criticised, are all quite widely accepted in the field. There is, in fact, some justification in criticisms of the 'policy' advocates as merely asserting, in a polemical fashion, principles which had already been generally established elsewhere. But the single-minded rigour with which they have applied these principles is more important than it may seem. The work of Ian Hunter and Tony Bennett, in particular, has shown a determination to test them to the limit, demanding an absolute theoretical consistency and seeking out the most minor forms of deviationism. If their writing has sometimes had a grim and obsessive tone, it needs also to be recognised as producing novel outcomes. One of these outcomes has been, ironically, to create the conditions for what might be described as a 'post-Foucauldian' cultural studies.

To present my argument here in outline, the explicit position of Hunter and Bennett on power is a 'hyper-rationalist' one. They accept in general terms the universalist reference of the concept which, as we saw in the previous chapter, developed most notably out of the 'totalism' of the new social movements of the late 1960s and 1970s. But they also develop it further. Power is not only taken to be a substantially consistent phenomenon extending from the global to the most local and particular; it is also taken to be all-inclusive – an immanent sub-stratum of all human activities and practices. Many of the theoretical arguments of the 'policy' position involve an attempt to reduce 'culture', in particular, to an effect of power. This is the significance of Bennett's call for the recognition of culture as a 'field of government': given that 'government' itself is understood as a technology of power, culture assumes the status of an

epiphenomenon. But the rationalist absolutism of such arguments is never quite what it seems, for the point at which it is claimed that there is nothing 'outside' power is also the point where the concept itself loses any capacity for discrimination and hence its meaning. The spectre could be raised here of a Baudrillardian 'end of Power', but as I have been suggesting throughout the dissertation, there is also another possibility: the emergence of a 'neo-empiricism' – a non-substantialist understanding of powers (in the plural) as qualitatively distinct.

This might seem an overly ingenious reading of the 'policy' arguments if it were not for the examples chosen by Hunter, Bennett, Stuart Cunningham and others in developing their case at the level of detail. These have been drawn, with few exceptions, from the field of British liberal governance (in the case of Hunter and Bennett) or close derivatives (in the work of Cunningham and others on Australian institutions and cultural industries). One of the most distinctive characteristics of this field, as I argued in Chapter 1, has been a marked resistance to totalising uses of the concept of power. The significance of this has been obscured in the 'policy' arguments by a tendency to subsume examples under generalised theories claiming an almost universal applicability. Hunter and Bennett could, in fact, be seen as marking a 'point of saturation', according to Yuri Lotman's model of cultural exchange, in the absorption since the 1960s of continental European influences in English-language cultural criticism (Lotman 1990: 145-7). There is a negligible trace in their writing of a sense of the 'peculiarities of the English' and they are clearly more at home in European political and cultural theory than in English or Anglo-derived intellectual traditions.<sup>16</sup> There is,

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<sup>16</sup> Hunter is, in fact, explicitly dismissive of the suggestion of differences in English traditions of thought on politics and culture. He has argued, for example, that Leavisite literary criticism is merely a variant form of intellectual paradigms recognisable elsewhere: 'Despite the recent and perhaps understandable tendency to poke fun at [Leavis] as a 'peculiarity of the English', it is worth remarking that Leavis'



nevertheless, a subtle reconnection with the latter at the point where Foucauldian formulations of the specificity of *forms* of power (still in the singular) begin to transmute with a more 'english' understanding – embodied as much in practices as in theories – of the specificity of *powers*.

If this is so, then the 'policy' position might best be seen not as a 'position' at all, but as a contradictory field of potentials. Uneasily suspended between a hyper-rationalism and a neo-empiricism, the 'policy' arguments are inherently fraught with ambiguity. While this is not perhaps the way the 'policy' advocates themselves would want to see them, it makes them a much richer site in considering current and future possibilities for cultural studies than first appears from the narrowly focussed polemics of the 'policy debate'. The interest of the arguments, and of responses to them, is further magnified if read in relation to changes in the context of cultural criticism in which they have taken form. I want to suggest in what follows that the whole field in which 'policy' has become an issue is only fully intelligible against the background of the complex set of political, economic and cultural transformations best identified in shorthand as 'the end of the Cold War'. As a response to these transformations, the discussion surrounding 'policy' is a valuable, if necessarily partial, window on the possible shape of cultural criticism following the long phase of developments which have had their primary point of reference in the explosive upheavals of the late 1960s.

### **GREENFIELD SITES FOR THE STUDY OF POWER**

It is worth considering, as background, the political and intellectual formation of the 'policy' proponents. To do so is immediately to reveal a more interesting relation to the

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organic society is neither more nor less than a transposition of the image of classical Greek society deployed by the German Romantics, and serves a similar function' (Hunter 1988a: 10).

concept of power than Bennett's assumption of the 'taken for granted' would lead us to believe. In contrast to Morris, for whom the assumption is in some ways more easily explicable, Bennett's own formation was not in the new social movements or anti-colonial nationalism but in an earlier moment of the British New Left. His location within the latter follows, almost classically, the pattern established by the first generation of British cultural studies. From a provincial background in the north of England, he began his professional career teaching adult non-degree students in an extra-mural department. His first induction into what was to become known as 'cultural studies' was through Raymond Williams' *The Long Revolution* and Richard Hoggart's *The Uses of Literacy*. As he describes it in a recent essay:

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' (Bennett 1998: 50).

The characterisation of Williams and Hoggart as vehicles for 'shaping moral consciousnesses' marks a divergence from the way they, themselves, understood democratising educational reforms, but it is clear, nonetheless, that they were an important early influence. Hoggart has never appeared in Bennett's published work as a significant figure, but Williams has remained an abiding point of reference.

Bennett(1990: ix) himself has described his debt to him as 'inestimable'.

This background lends a particular significance to Bennett's specialist interests in literary education and museums and public exhibitions. These interests have seemed puzzling to many commentators, especially in the light of his recent attempts to chart

'new directions' for cultural studies. As McKenzie Wark has put it, as a wider criticism of the 'policy' arguments:

The specific institutional histories towards which the policy people gravitate are hardly on the cutting edge of the dynamic transformations of cultural technologies. They are holding up a rear vision mirror. The school, the museum, literature and cinema probably won't mean much to the Nintendo generation that is presently growing old enough to get their own credit cards (Wark 1992: 678).

Wark's response to the 'policy' arguments is characteristic of a more general position which I will review at some length in the following chapter. My purpose in citing it here is only to point out that there is a significance to Bennett's chosen fields of research which such criticisms may fail to recognise. In the context of British liberal governance – and it is this context which Bennett is almost exclusively concerned with – the histories of literary education and the public museum offer models of political and cultural change which contrast sharply with the revolutionary or avant-gardist themes – including Wark's 'Nintendo generationalism' – which have tended to accompany totalising uses of the concept of power.

Evidence of this is strongest, perhaps, in Bennett's work on museums. In an essay included in his recent book *Culture – A Reformer's Science*, he traces the 'museum idea', as it was first described by the American museologist George Brown Goode, to the English social reformer, Sir Henry Cole:

Closely associated with the Philosophical Radicals, and personally acquainted with John Stuart Mill, Cole was well versed in the principles of Benthamism and, through his roles as architect of the Great Exhibition, founder of the South Kensington Museum and the first effective head of the Department of Arts and Science, he sought strenuously to put these principles into practical effect (Bennett 1998: 107).

The model of the public museum established under Cole – a model which was realised in its most exemplary form in the South Kensington Museum – is distinguished by Bennett from the *envoi* system which formed the basis of exhibitionary practices during the Napoleonic period in France. In the latter, 'the system's primary purpose was to embody and circulate an image of state power throughout the nation ... [L]ess importance was attached to the pictures selected ... than the labels accompanying them, which indicated that they were the gift of the Emperor or of the state' (116). If the *envoi* system was organised around the theme of sovereignty, Cole and others schooled in the tradition of utilitarianism were concerned with other questions: 'they constantly stressed art's divisibility, its capacity to be broken down into different quantities from which different degrees and kinds of benefits might be derived' (117).

What Bennett does not say is that among the 'principles of Benthamism' is a position in relation to the concept of power. He allows the Anglo utilitarian tradition to be spoken for on this question by Foucault, equating the differences between the *envoi* system and Cole's South Kensington model with the distinction between 'juridico-discursive' and 'governmental' forms of power. This obscures one of the most significant characteristics of utilitarianism, as of English political thought more generally: its resistance to totalising discourses on power – a resistance which would make it difficult to talk in general classificatory terms of 'forms' of power. The insight which opened the way for Benthamite reforming liberal enthusiasm was not only that power might be distinguished from sovereignty, but that it need not be thought of as a basic structuring principle or continuous sub-stratum of political activity. It is an insight which Bentham himself attributed to the scepticism of David Hume: 'I well remember, no sooner had I read that part of the work which touches on this subject, than I felt as if the scales had

fallen from my eyes. I then, for the first time, learnt to call the cause of the people my own' (Bentham 1988: 51).

But there is, in Bennett's work, a certain understanding of the utilitarian tradition – a sense, at least, of its importance and sometimes a real sympathy for its political achievements. This sympathy shows through particularly in his recent 'policy' arguments, but it can be traced at some level in much of his earlier writing as well. This is not, by any means, to suggest that Bennett's relation to 'englishness' has been a simple one – that his theoretical commitments to Marxism and later Foucauldianism might be stripped away to reveal, in some way, a 'real' position. It is rather to suggest that his 'Marxism' and 'Foucauldianism' be read with a certain caution, as always involving a complex set of translations, negotiations and compromises between quite different political and intellectual formations.

It becomes an interesting question in this context why Bennett should assume so confidently that cultural studies is, and has always been, 'about power' (the usage implying a full-blown rationalist understanding of the concept). In *Culture – A Reformer's Science*, he puzzles over the fact that Williams never gave much attention to the possible meanings of the term 'resistance'. It is, he suggests, a curious omission given the latter's consistent attention to the histories and contexts of use of 'key words':

Resistance is not among the terms ... Williams discusses in his *Keywords*, which is a pity, as some attention to the history and characteristics of its usage might have helped in defining more clearly the assumptions the term brings with it when it is translated from the other contexts of its usage to the cultural field (Bennett 1998: 169).

The point is an interesting one, but it also reveals a curious omission in Bennett's own reading of Williams: he neglects to mention that *power* is not among the terms included

in *Keywords* either. Given the importance he attributes to it in defining cultural studies, the absence, in this case, cannot easily be dismissed as a minor oversight. It has the potential, in fact, to overturn the definition itself. 'Culture, power, resistance: wherever and whenever cultural studies is discussed', Bennett says, 'these three terms are in play':

How is culture tangled up with the exercise of power? What forms of resistance arise from, and are provoked by, these entanglements of culture and power? How can these resistances be translated into, or connected to, something else – organised movements of political opposition, for example? Questions of this kind have been at the centre of debate in cultural studies from the outset (Bennett 1998: 167).

The analysis here of the present state of cultural studies may be a fair one, but the claim in relation to the history of the field shows a peculiar blindness. If the early work of Hoggart and Williams is included – and Bennett never doubts that it should be – cultural studies has *not* always been concerned with questions of power and resistance. The absence of the terms from *Keywords* is more than an oddity: they were simply not important to Williams' early 'vocabulary of culture and society'. On any standard definition of 'the outset', culture was certainly at the centre of debate, but power has only assumed that status more recently.

Bennett's strangely ahistorical perspective on cultural studies' address to 'questions of power and resistance' is given some context by the example he chooses to demonstrate their founding significance: 'They [these questions] are clearly implicated in the very title of *Resistance through Rituals* ..., a book which can deservedly claim to have first placed the trio of culture, power and resistance on the intellectual map of Anglophone cultural studies' (Bennett 1998: 167). The field only really 'begins', for Bennett, with *Marxist* cultural studies. Its origins are to be found in the Birmingham Centre's analysis

in 1976 of working class youth subcultures in which the first systematic use was made of Marxist theoretical models. From this perspective, cultural studies only became fully present to itself – more than ten years after the establishment of its first institutional site, and almost twenty years after *Culture and Society* and *The Uses of Literacy* – at the point where power and resistance joined culture on the terrain of what must previously have been a vaguely-defined pre-history. What this suggests is that Bennett's definition of the field is, at least in the British context, much less 'relaxed' than it seems; it does not simply identify certain common commitments, but functions to exclude any work in which those commitments have not been shared.

It is unlikely that this exclusion is deliberate; it simply never occurs to Bennett that left political aspirations might be articulated in any other way than through a generalised concept of power. Given that the early work in cultural studies clearly had political implications, such a concept *must* have been present, however confused and inarticulate it may have been. Bennett reads Williams' early work, symptomatically, through E.P. Thompson's attempt to reframe it in the review of *The Long Revolution* discussed in Chapter 2:

The gist of Thompson's argument ... was that Williams had gone into the heart of enemy territory in seizing the concept of culture from the monopolistic clutch of the likes of Arnold and Eliot and so redefining it that it could serve as the basis for a new intellectual and political project. This ... is also the status which it has been accorded within cultural studies. (101)

Bennett's characterisation of current orthodoxies in cultural studies may, again, be fair. What is forgotten, however, is that Thompson was highly critical of Williams for his *failure* to represent the English literary tradition as 'enemy territory' – a failure directly related to the absence of any generalised concept of power. Williams is read as if he was making the kinds of claims for himself that Thompson *wanted* him to make.

The confusion goes back before Bennett to the attempt by Stuart Hall to cordialise relations between the 'first' and 'second' generations of British cultural studies. As I suggested in Chapter 3, Hall always retained, beyond a superficial loyalty, a sense of the political importance of the early work in the field. But he also recognised its inability, in the changed political climate of the 1970s, to meet the experiences of a new generation. It was for *this* generation, Bennett among them, that the literary tradition and other institutions of British public culture became defined as 'enemy territory'. It was for this generation, too, that the concept of power assumed a central significance. Thompson's attempted re-casting of Williams as a fully 'revolutionary' figure became a useful means, in the context of the times, for bridging an otherwise fraught generational divide.

Bennett's neglect of the complex history of the concept of power is related, in other words, to a tendency to generalise from a particular generational experience. When he writes that 'We were once very adept at identifying the ideological processes that were going on 'behind the backs' of other social agents' (1998: 43), he clearly wishes to put this in the past. Yet he still equates the 'we' of cultural studies with the generation who came to the field in the 1970s – the generation, that is, who were caught up in the sharpened antagonisms and paranoid suspicions at the domestic flashpoints of the Cold War. However much he now wishes to re-assess the political values and modes of analysis of the time, his work remains profoundly formed by them. In *Culture – A Reformer's Science*, many of the old battle-lines remain drawn between a cultural studies calling attention to 'relations of power' and other forms of criticism characterised as merely concerned with the maintenance of social privilege. In a telling presentation of options, Bennett describes the field as having had to advance 'in the face of those familiar kinds of elitist disdain which typically greet any intellectual project



concerned with power relations of the cultural field rather than simply training the next generation of cultic consumers'(18). It is not necessary to question that 'elitist disdain' has, indeed, existed to suggest that Bennett's readiness to see it as the foundation for entire institutions is generationally specific.

Similar generational prejudices affect much of Bennett's work on museums. In *The Birth of the Museum*, he writes with sympathy of fairs and popular entertainments, but more formal institutions are an object of extreme ambivalence. In an analysis of the North of England Open Air Museum at Beamish, for example, he criticises the way in which subordinate social classes are figured as a 'picturesque element'. The terms in which the ways of life of these classes are represented are, for Bennett, 'so mortgaged to the dominant culture that "the people" are encountered ... only in those massively idealized and deeply regressive forms which stalk the middle-class imagination' (Bennett 1995: 110). What most disturbs him about Beamish is its absence of any recognition of structural contradiction. The museum displays

that distinctively bourgeois countryside of the mind in which the present emerges uninterruptedly from the past in which the presence and leading role of the bourgeoisie is eternally naturalized. This ability to transform industrialism from a set of ruptural events into a mere moment in the unfolding of a set of harmonious relations between rulers and the people may well turn out to be a distinctively English contribution to the development of the open-air museum form (Bennett 1995: 117).

The obvious revulsion here at an 'English' absence of themes of rupture and opposition is all the more striking as the book is framed by arguments about the positivity and productiveness of the governmental administration of culture. It is, in fact, the first in a series, 'Culture: Policies and Politics', designed to promote 'a significant transformation in the political ambit and orientation of cultural studies and related fields' (Bennett

1995: facing page). The transformation is the one urged by the 'policy' arguments for a turn away from oppositional forms of criticism.

It is probably impossible to understand Bennett's conviction in his use of the concept of power without understanding the emergence of the new generalised spaces of representation which I attempted to trace in the last chapter as a context for the emergence of feminism. In a revealing discussion of extra-mural adult education, he contrasts his view of the field with what he calls the 'myth of the margins'. Within the terms of the latter, the extra-mural sector was not only outside but also opposed to the institutionalised intellectual culture of the universities. On the basis of his own experience of the 1970s, Bennett suggests that the situation has always been more the reverse:

... 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 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 and dissemination (Bennett 1998: 47).

There is a brief opening here where a centre/periphery logic appears open to question and Bennett is aware that it may be historically contingent. But the possibility of exploring this contingency is immediately foreclosed by the suggestion that the extra-mural departments have 'indeed' been governed by a centre-to-outpost model. The 'ambassadorial' model of cross-demographic exchange – the model I have suggested informed the view of adult education of Hoggart and Williams – is never considered. There is no question for Bennett that class relations are best understood against the background of a uniform homogeneous space organised by basic structuring principles.

Bennett's view of adult education is highly coloured by his subsequent professional experience as a pioneer of quite a different institutional site – the new universities of the 1960s and 1970s. He takes issue with the 'myth of the margins' in the context of a defence of the course on *Popular Culture* which he took a lead in developing for the Open University. The course was a highly-capitalised operation, taking some eight years from original conception to full preparation, making extensive use of television for delivery and enrolling over a thousand students in its first year (Bennett, Mercer *et al.* 1986: vii-ix). It is obvious, in this context, why an 'ambassadorial' model would have been unworkable. Despite his recent scepticism about the politics of representation, it is clear that Bennett has strong investments in norms of representational adequacy. His major argument on behalf of the Open University model – what made it in his own terms 'radically progressive' (Bennett 1998: 220) – is that it offered degree qualifications, providing formal access for a broad cross-section of students to arenas whose social composition had previously been more limited. Always implicit in such an ideal, as he himself has pointed out, is a principle of general human universality in relation to which exclusions and biases can be criticised. This is more than a minor slippage; at the centre of his work is a basic *commitment* to universalism. The greenfield sites of the new universities have held the promise, for Bennett, of open vistas, uncluttered by outdated and elitist traditions, in which general theoretical arguments about power can be pursued together with a pedagogy devoted to greater representativeness.

### **AN ARCHAEOLOGY OF DISGUST**

If this goes some way to explaining Bennett's assumption of a generalised concept of power, the context for the 'policy' arguments needs to be sought in more recent developments. As is clear from the quotations at the head of the chapter, the arguments

are pervaded by an overwhelming sense of disgust. The project of cultural studies which, for Bennett at least, seemed so promising during the 1970s and 1980s is represented in the 1990s as mired in stasis, irrelevant and banal, yet at the same time blindly hubristic and pretentious in its claims. The aggressiveness of the 'policy' arguments – what Meaghan Morris (1992b: 546) described in reference to Stuart Cunningham as their 'desperately gung ho corporatism' – has largely been motivated by a belief in the need for radical measures to puncture a dangerous complacency and rescue the field from terminal decline.

Perhaps the most useful text to consider here is *Accounting for the Humanities*, a collection of essays from the Institute of Cultural Policy Studies intervening in debates about reforms to the Australian higher education system at the end of the 1980s. The reforms themselves were initiated by John Dawkins' (1988) White Paper as Federal Minister for Employment, Education and Training outlining major changes to funding, structure, management and operations. As Ian Hunter summarises:

The objective of these changes was to harness universities and colleges to the problems of national productivity and national debt. This was to be achieved through an overall expansion of the system and a selective prioritising of those sectors deemed most relevant to 'knowledge-based' and 'value-added' industrial production: engineering, computer and information sciences, business studies and economics, Asian studies. The means of implementing the new policies comprised an increasingly familiar – if politically incongruous – mix of regulatory and de-regulatory strategies. Measures to prioritise strategic research, unify different sectors of the system, establish uniform budgeting procedures and attach funding to output and performance measurement appeared alongside proposals to encourage academic entrepreneurship, give greater autonomy to university managements and admit 'market forces' by part-charging students for their education (Hunter 1991: 7-8).

As Hunter points out, these policies and measures had clear parallels in Britain with the Thatcher Government's educational reforms of the 1980s and were also echoed by policy recommendations of the OECD.

To sketch the context for these changes more widely, they might be related to an institutional convergence of government, education and media around models of business management with the disappearance, at the end of the Cold War, of an alternative ideological pole to state-sponsored capitalism. In a usefully oblique contribution to the 'policy debate', John Frow (1992) places Hunter's contribution to *Accounting for the Humanities* beside Michael Pusey's (1991) *Economic Rationalism in Canberra*. While the arguments and approaches of Hunter and Pusey are very different, they are clearly responding to similar developments. It was not only the relation between government and the education system which was transformed during the 1980s; it was also the organisation and structure of government itself. Pusey's study traces the intellectual formation of senior public service administrators in what he describes as a 'restrictive, technically oriented, neoclassical economics curriculum' increasingly dominant in Australian universities during the postwar period (quoted in Frow 1992: 507). He further documents the ascendancy of 'central agency' departments espousing minimalist *laissez-faire* policies to a position of supervisory and agenda-setting control. Within this new regime, 'program and service' departments (Health, Social Security, Aboriginal Affairs, Community Services, Veterans Affairs and Education) have correspondingly slipped in prestige, occupying a third tier below 'market-oriented' departments representing the vestiges of a Keynesian interventionist state.

In their general character these changes have, of course, been far from unique to Australia. To continue the line of argument of the previous chapter, they could be seen

as a final extension of the tendencies which gave rise, in the late 1960s and 1970s, to a 'totalist' concept of power. If, in the context of the Cold War, it was still possible to invoke alternatives or countervailing forces to market liberalism, by the late 1980s these were becoming increasingly difficult to identify. This has been reflected in much left political writing in an exacerbation of the despair which follows when power is conceived as all-pervasive but remains negatively identified. As Frow points out of Pusey's analysis of economic rationalism, the grim documentation of a relentless advance by abstract technical reason is relieved only by idealised projections of 'the way things used to be'. But as in the case of the 1970s, it would be a mistake to see these tendencies as entirely specific to the left. Similar visions of a universal predicament pervaded the triumphalism of those on the right of the old Cold War divide. The best known example is probably Francis Fukuyama's 'The End of History?':

What we may be witnessing is not just the end of the Cold War, or the passing of a particular period of postwar history, but the end of history as such; that is, the end point of mankind's ideological evolution and the universalisation of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government (Fukuyama 1989: 15).

There is a certain point at which the perspective of the deputy director of the US State Department's policy planning staff and former analyst at the RAND Corporation (Fukuyama) coincides with that of the left sociologist of the 'rationalisation of the public sphere' (Pusey). However stark the differences in their political leanings may be, they confirm each other in their view of what Fukuyama describes as 'the total exhaustion of viable systematic alternatives to Western liberalism' (15).

At the centre of Hunter's response to the Dawkins reforms to Australian higher education is a certain insight – albeit somewhat displaced – into the implications of this

conjuncture for any project claiming to maintain or preserve a space outside 'the system'. If there is a single underlying principle of political organisation, then any attempt to disown or resist it can only rest on an appeal to some transcendent domain free of organisation. As Hunter demonstrates, this has been the logic implicit in many of the arguments for the autonomy of 'the university' against the encroachments of technical reason. It is a logic which is to be found above all in a reactive defence of the humanities:

On the one hand, the governmental discourse seeks to constitute universities as legitimate objects of governmental intervention. It does so by conceiving of their educational activities in terms of the formation of skills and knowledges with calculable, hence plannable, economic outcomes. On the other hand ... the defence of the humanities seeks to establish their institutional autonomy by rendering their ends opaque to all purposive rationality ... Pushed to its extreme, which is not in fact very far from its centre, this defence ends by identifying the autonomy of the humanities with their ineffability (Hunter 1991: 11-12).

The real sting in the argument is in Hunter's diagnosis of the consequences of this identification for any considered assessment of the position and possibilities of humanities education and research: 'Needless to say significant intellectual and political penalties are incurred in trying to calculate one's situation and prospects by proclaiming their incalculability' (12).

The significance, in the 'policy' arguments, of claims over the concept of power has been in making a similar point at a more abstract level. The clearest example here may be a critique by Bennett of Michel de Certeau's theorisation of popular resistance through the influential distinction between 'strategy' and 'tactics'. The discussion is important as de Certeau's position has increasingly come to eclipse earlier discussions of resistance in cultural studies, such as the Birmingham Centre's *Resistance Through*

*Rituals*. This is partly because it has seemed to avoid the rather static oppositional models of resistance often associated with work of the 1970s. It has appeared to provide, as Bennett puts it, 'a more nuanced account of the varied and pliable ways in which the practices of everyday life play in the space of "the other" to warren out a space for the oppressed in which, if nothing else, they are able to "make do"' (Bennett 1998: 174). But de Certeau has also been widely taken up – particularly in the context of cultural studies' internationalisation – because of the relative abstractness of his terms. As Bennett points out, 'the language of "the other" has proved far more mobile than the language of ruling-class and subordinate-class cultures in being transportable across different fields of power (those of class, gender and colonisation) to net the practices of everyday life in a common problematic irrespective of their social locations' (174).

Bennett's criticisms of de Certeau are almost a precise analogue of Hunter's criticisms of the reactive defence of the humanities. The loss of faith in the possibility of locating any stable position independent of the functional requirements of 'the system' is articulated by de Certeau in an extreme literalisation of Foucault's analysis of the disciplinary society. In Bennett's paraphrase:

Panoptic power ... is ubiquitous and all-triumphant: there are no longer any spaces outside it capable of nurturing the cultural resources through which it might be resisted or counter-attacked. All of the fortifications and barriers behind which the subordinate might have developed cultural spaces of their own are down; all of the ditches and banks of civil society within which autonomous forms of life once flourished have been razed. All that exists is absolute power faced with the ultimately atomistic sources of resistance, monadic individuals who, however, have been stripped of all weapons and fortifications except guile, ruse and deception (Bennett 1998: 177).



If the all-pervasiveness of panoptic power presumed by de Certeau is similar to many left political visions of economic rationalism, the implications for attempts to identify alternatives are also much the same. Any claim to avoid collusion with power becomes not only gestural but also necessarily unaccountable. As Bennett asks:

Where do the ruses and tactics come from? What accounts for their guile and deception? No-one can say, and certainly not de Certeau, whose only account of these is to recast them as a series of images which convert any particular resistances on the part of particular actors into the mere contingent stand-ins for, variously, the opacity of popular culture, 'a dark rock that resists all assimilation', 'the enigma of the consumer-sphinx', or for an operational logic which stems from outside culture and history entirely and 'whose models may go back as far as the age-old ruses of fishes and insects that disguise and transform themselves in order to survive' (Bennett 1998: 178-9).

As Bennett points out, de Certeau in fact *prohibits* himself from anything more than poetic allusions. He is obliged 'to forgo the possibility of describing practices in terms of an external analytic vocabulary since this would, *eo ipso*, place him on the side of knowledge and power' (180). In what has been the consistent refrain of the 'policy' arguments, Bennett concludes that the logic of the position requires an appeal to the 'domain of the ineffable' (179).

What most disturbs Bennett about this is that it appears to return cultural studies to everything he thought it had left behind in rejecting the literary tradition:

For haven't we heard all this before? The reading that eludes explicit knowledge; that constitutes itself in a secret place; that remains unfathomable, out of analytic reach: what else is this but to attribute to the reader precisely those properties which the literary reading attributes to the literary text in rendering its meaning undecipherable and undecidable? (Bennett 1998: 183)

What returns here is also an unaccountability, mixed with bad faith, of hierarchical social relations:

For the fathomless depths of the undecipherable reader allow the popular text to be pedagogically organised as a vehicle for inducting students into resistive readings which, with the assistance of the cultural studies teacher, can be corrected, revised and even assessed. It is, however, difficult to see how this is anything but a form of licensed poaching performed under the watchful, tutelary eye of gamekeepers still in the employ of the literary apparatus (Bennett 1998: 184).

After all the efforts to mark out a new intellectual space and after all the attempts to develop a more democratic pedagogy, cultural studies appears, in short, to be nothing more than the 'heir to English' (25).

Much of the provocation of the 'policy' arguments within cultural studies has been in challenging the distinction between the 'old' and the 'new' humanities – between the intellectual establishment of the 1950s and the 'critical' movements of the 1960s and 1970s. The key figure here has been Hunter, on whom Bennett has drawn substantially for his theoretical understanding of literary education. According to Hunter's analysis – which draws, itself, on Weber and Foucault – , cultural studies and other 'oppositional' movements in criticism are merely variant forms of an aesthetic 'practice of the self' with origins in German romanticism. Within this tradition, the aesthetic object is 'essentially a device in a practice of self-problematization' (Hunter 1992: 351). In order to perform such a function it must be construed as devoid of any determinate characteristics, making the act of interpretation a reflection upon the subject interpreting rather the object of interpretation itself:

Its instituted incomprehensibility provides a convenient site for individuals to begin to relate to themselves as subjects of aesthetic experience. This is achieved through the successive counterpointed destruction of one's 'ordinary' responses as sentimental or naïve, as 'too tensed' or 'too relaxed', as moralistic or rhapsodic, and so on (Hunter 1992: 351).

In the necessary inadequacy of their attempts to comprehend the incomprehensible, the subject of aesthetic interpretation comes to recognise their 'ethical incompleteness'.

This recognition provides the condition for a continuous project of self-improvement in which the subject aspires to greater 'wholeness'. It is the basis on which individuals undertake 'a special kind of ethical work on the being whose incompleteness they have accepted as their own' (353).

Cultural studies remains, for Hunter, deeply embedded within this 'ethic of the aesthetic' and has continued to reproduce its characteristic social relations. The rejection of the literary canon and other 'high art' objects of aesthetic appreciation does nothing, in itself, to alter the aesthetic disposition. In so far as canons establish definitive norms of judgement, they are, in fact, inherently problematic; the very condition for aesthetic self-formation is that there be no definitive norms:

The aesthetic is not identified with a particular kind of literary object but with an attitude individuals can adopt in relation to all kinds of objects, literary or not. This aesthetic attitude is the 'critical' outlook arising from the inclusion of these objects in practices of aesthetic problematization. The fact that this practice is carried out using autonomous ethical techniques means that it is not dependent on particular aesthetic objects nor, indeed, on aesthetic objects in particular (Hunter 1992: 356).

From this perspective, the turn by cultural studies to popular culture and the 'political' has only opened up new fields for the aesthetic problematisation. What is more, Hunter argues, the move has not escaped old forms of social hierarchy but, on the contrary, extended them. These forms have never been the simple expression of the dominance of a gender, race, or class, but are a 'direct and autonomous creation of the techniques and functions of the ethic itself' (358). Aesthetic discipline – institutionalised above all in the context of pedagogy – 'provides the means for some individuals to distinguish

themselves from others by problematizing “ordinary” experience and conducting themselves as subjects of a superior mode of being’ (358). In their very rejection of established criteria of taste, ‘critical’ movements in the humanities have continued to cultivate an aesthetic elitism.

There is little in either Hunter’s or Bennett’s arguments to suggest that they may have a context as specific as economic rationalism or the end of the Cold War. Hunter’s analysis of romantic aesthetics provides, in fact, a highly elaborate perspective from which the recent history of cultural politics is relieved of significance. The most obvious target for deflation are claims for the importance – whether political or intellectual – of the revolutionary aspirations of the 1960s and 1970s, but there is a more general flattening of relief within any immediate historical frame. There is a similar evacuation of historical considerations in Bennett’s criticisms of de Certeau. The issue at stake in these criticisms is not the appropriateness of different responses to a particular conjuncture, but the general adequacy of competing theories of power. While it is a requirement for Bennett that such theories *allow* for historical specificities, he assumes that the theories themselves stand outside them.

There are, however, too many coincidences between theories and contexts for this assumption to go unexamined. In his critique of de Certeau, Bennett describes his view of power as an extreme case of a bipolar model of domination and resistance: ‘one in which it is carried to excess in the magnification of one pole of power to the point where it becomes all-encompassing and the diminution of the other to the point where it disappears entirely, becomes a zero power’ (Bennett 1998: 177). The analysis is strongly suggestive of contextual determinants: the magnification of one pole and the virtual disappearance of the other describes, precisely, the end of the Cold War. A similar contextual density could be brought to the loss of distinction between the ‘old’

and the 'new' humanities. If Hunter's analysis suggests an abstract perspective from which they might be identified, the identification has also been realised in more concrete ways. As Denise Meredyth points out in her contribution to *Accounting for the Humanities*, 'traditional' and 'critical' approaches have been thrown together in their common opposition to economically-driven administrative reforms:

Those formerly divided by the critique and defence of cultural heritage or disinterested knowledge have temporarily united against a common enemy, the administrator, supposedly indifferent to the value of personal cultivation, critical education or knowledge for its own sake (Meredyth 1991: 117-118).

Although the implications of the coincidence are not explored by Meredyth, it raises questions about the relation between Hunter's account of the humanities and the predicament of cultural criticism at the end of the 1980s.

If the shrinking to a 'zero point' of any alternative to power is indeed as much an effect of the end of the Cold War as of strictly theoretical considerations, then the theme of the 'ineffable' may best be traced not, as Hunter suggests, to eighteenth century German romanticism but to much more recent developments. The identification of cultural studies with romantic aesthetics may have some plausibility in relation to de Certeau and certain other theoretical positions which gained influence in the late 1980s and early 1990s, but it has less in relation to cultural studies of the 1960s or 1970s. It is difficult to see, for example, that the location of sites of resistance in the Birmingham Centre's *Resistance Through Rituals* involved an appeal to the ineffable. As Bennett recognises, resistance was understood there in far more concrete terms. Working-class male youth subcultures were construed quite specifically as defensive reactions to the intrusion of postwar ideologies of consumerism, affluence and growth into traditional forms of working-class culture (Bennett 1998: 172). Resistance was not associated with obscurity

or evasion but was described as a concrete phenomenon, demonstrable in actual behaviours and involving a specific reconfiguration of elements of traditional English working-class culture.

The very pointedness of Hunter's and Bennett's interventions suggest that the problems they have responded to are more specific than seem. There is a certain consistency in their objects of criticism. The 'policy' arguments have been concerned, firstly, with gaining intellectual leverage over what Hunter calls 'personality as a vocation'. Hunter himself gives the phrase an almost formal definition in the context of his analysis of aesthetics, but it is clear that there is also a specific object in view. It is most transparent, perhaps, in Bennett's concern that cultural studies may have become a field in which 'intellectuals can preen a chic radicalism through the grand gesture of turning their backs on ... institutional contexts' (Bennett 1998: 231). Secondly, the 'policy' arguments have been consistently opposed to theories of the indeterminacy of meaning which became particularly influential in poststructuralist textual analysis during the late 1980s. Hunter develops his argument that the ineffability of the aesthetic object is 'instituted' by taking issue not with older oppositional rhetorics within the 'new' humanities, but with an analysis of pedagogy by American literary theorist Stanley Fish. Whereas, for Fish, students should be taught to 'recognise' the indeterminacy of meaning – implying that it is a 'real' property of texts – , Hunter points out that Fish, in fact, *enjoins* them to see meaning as indeterminate and that he does so in the context of formal pedagogical relations backed by institutional authority (Hunter 1988a: 277-279). There is, finally, a deep ambivalence in the 'policy' arguments towards the form taken by cultural studies since its rapid expansion in the United States. This is evident, above all, in a suspicion towards what Bennett describes as 'the libertarian formulations that have been the worm in the bud of American cultural studies ever since it made its trans-

Atlantic passage' (Bennett 1998: 5). As I have indicated, the 'policy' intervention was launched in the context of cultural studies' internationalisation – an internationalisation which has been strongly identified with its recognition within the American academy. The 'policy' proponents have consistently criticised the tendencies to abstraction and generalisation which have accompanied this development. In the Australian context, the 'localist' aspect of the case has been put most strongly by Stuart Cunningham. Greater attention to questions of policy would, for Cunningham, 'play a central role in Australianising the field because policy issues and processes are by nature more localised and oriented to realisable change' (Cunningham 1992: 22).

The three aspects to the polemical organisation of the 'policy' arguments – against 'personality', against 'indeterminacy' and against abstract universalism – could be seen, together, as a kind of negative imprint of tendencies in left cultural criticism at the beginning of the 1990s. With the loss of confidence in organised forms of left politics as a systematic alternative to state-sponsored capitalism, the oppositional rhetorics established in the 1960s and 1970s have increasingly become capitalised in an individualist rejection of organisation as such. The development is consistent with the shift in the centre of gravity of cultural studies to the United States where traditions of left political organisation have always been weak and where well-established relations between celebrity and the market have made personality not only a 'vocation' but often a highly lucrative one. While the revisionist ambitions of the 'policy' proponents have required them to develop a broad-ranging critique of the field, the central target of their interventions has been a certain kind of figure made possible by the space of intellectual production at the end of the Cold War – a figure claiming recognition and status on the basis of personal experience and identity, proclaiming 'indeterminacy' and 'alterity' but also assuming a universal authority, exemplifying an extreme form of individualism and

commanding prestige within an international star system yet doing so in the name of 'opposition' and 'resistance'.

### **THE EXORCISM OF 'PRINCIPLE'**

It should be pointed out that in many of their reservations about the condition of cultural studies, the 'policy' proponents have not been alone. In some ways they have merely focussed a widespread dissatisfaction with an increasing gap between highly sophisticated theorising and any clear sense of a context in which the outcomes might 'matter'. In a postscript responding to the proceedings from the 1992 conference at Illinois, Angela McRobbie found the only word to describe her feeling about the transformed state of the field was 'panic':

[W]hat has worried me recently in cultural studies is when the theoretical detours become literary and textual excursions and when I begin to lose a sense of why the object of study is constituted as the object of study in the first place. Why do it? What is the point? On my first reading of many of the papers I was gripped by panic. Where have I been for the last five years? Much of this kind of cultural studies does not tally with what I teach, with what I find useful in understanding the everyday world and everyday culture around me (McRobbie 1992: 721).

If 'literary and textual excursions' have become a common object of concern, areas of agreement have also developed in identifying problems at the theoretical level. In their preliminary moves, the 'policy' arguments have often been developed in alliance with others. Bennett's criticisms of de Certeau build, for example, on earlier criticisms by John Frow (1991) and Jeremy Ahearne (1995).

What has distinguished the 'policy' arguments has not been their diagnosis of problems, therefore, so much as the radicalism of their proposed solutions. At the abstract level, best represented by Bennett, this has been to attempt a complete reduction of social and



cultural phenomena to the effects of power. The proposal claims the authority of Foucault's late work on governmentality and is given at least an initial plausibility through reference to nineteenth century administrative programs for reforming the habits, tastes and dispositions of entire populations. As Bennett presents it in 'Useful Culture'

... an understanding of the relations between culture and power in modern societies needs to take account of the instrumentalization of culture which accompanies its enlistment for governmental purposes. For the culture/power articulation which results from these developments is quite distinct from the organization of such relations in earlier societies ... In the early nineteenth century ... we see the sphere of culture being, quite literally, refashioned – retooled for a new task – as it comes to be inscribed within governmental strategies which aim less at exacting popular obedience to a sovereign authority than at producing in a population a capacity for new forms of thought, feeling and behaviour (Bennett 1992b: 401-2).

The attribution of a 'productivity' to power is essential to the argument. Resistance and opposition are not so much eliminated in Bennett's analysis as fully accounted for by the forms of power which they resist or oppose. It becomes pointless, from this perspective, to seek a ground 'outside' power or to hope for tactics which somehow escape it; in contemporary 'governmentalised' societies, our very capacities for 'thought, feeling and behaviour' are entirely *owed* to power.

The position provides an obvious potential for countering emergent tendencies in cultural studies in the 1990s: it makes it possible, in particular, to deflate the aura of the ineffable which has come to be associated with themes of resistance and opposition. The central motif of the 'policy' arguments has been the word 'mundane'. Cultural change, for Bennett, is 'a largely technical matter' in the sense that 'it results from tinkering with practical arrangements rather than from an epic struggle for

consciousness' (Bennett 1992b: 406). The argument has been developed in greatest detail by Hunter with reference to the history of education. For too long now, he argues in *Rethinking the School*,

the school system has been dwarfed by the grandeur of its 'underlying' principles and impoverished by the wealth of expectation invested in it. This book offers an account of the school not as a flawed realisation of a principle but as an improvised reality, assembled from the available moral and governmental 'technologies', as a means of coping with historical contingency (Hunter 1994: 3).

Modern schooling is not owed, for Hunter, to theorists or 'critical intellectuals'; nor is it open to 'principled criticisms'. It has been the product of administrative programs directed at resolving historically specific problems and making pragmatic use of practices and disciplines immediately to hand. It is not to abstract ideals such as the realisation of human potential or political emancipation that we should look if we are to understand the process by which large sectors of the population have acquired a 'moral personality' or the status of citizens: 'it is to the inglorious micro-technics of conscience, patiently adapted from Christian spiritual discipline by the journeymen intellectuals of the state' (142).

The implications of the argument for contemporary debates are drawn quite explicitly:

[T]he idea that 'transformative intellectuals' can exercise 'emancipatory authority', based on their pure insight into the future form of human development, begins to look dangerously self-deluding. Under this degree of moral inflation the teacher's role threatens to break free of its professional and civic moorings, drifting into moral grandiloquence and political fantasy (Hunter 1994: 30).

The most immediate target of criticism here is the 'critical pedagogy' of Henry Giroux and his collaborators,<sup>17</sup> but the arguments also press towards more generalised conclusions. This is particularly the case where Hunter introduces the concept of power:

[W]e must learn to see abstraction as first and foremost a social gesture. The claim to 'pure' theory, made in the name of withdrawing from the power-tainted perceptions of the governmental sphere, is in fact a means of exercising power on and within this sphere, as the claimant reappears wielding the moral authority and social prestige of the untainted theoretical persona (Hunter 1994: 14).

It is not just the understanding of the school which is at stake here; a larger claim is being made about any position which disavows an involvement in the governmental exercise of power. As with Bennett's analysis of resistance, Hunter recognises the position from which such disavowals are made but reduces them to an epiphenomenon of governmental power itself.

The style of argument has been important in questioning the authority of generalising theoretical claims, but it has only been developed at a certain cost. It demands what might be described as a 'governmental absolutism'. Nothing can be allowed to escape reduction to governmental power for to do so would be to concede a space in which 'criticism' and 'resistance' might reclaim an aura of exceptionalism. The result is a return of exactly the kind of universalism which the arguments are designed to overturn. Governmentality is attributed with the status of a fundamental truth, dividing the field of criticism between those who have been enlightened and those who have not. In *Rethinking the School*, Hunter writes tellingly of the need to 'exorcise' what he calls 'the spell of educational principle' (1994: 3). While the metaphor may be intended

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<sup>17</sup> The term 'emancipatory authority' is Giroux's. See Giroux (1989).

ironically, it is also somehow appropriate. There is an obsessiveness in the way the 'policy' proponents have sought to nail down their claims and a dogmatic air of certainty in the way they have addressed alternative positions. As Meaghan Morris pointed out at the time of the 'policy debate', there is, in fact, nothing 'modest' or 'specific' about the polemical form of the 'policy' vision: 'It is a generically neo-marxist grand narrative about the vanguard role of intellectuals in divining the correct road to change' (Morris 1992b: 549).

The irony of this can be traced most clearly in relation to the concept of power. It may already have seemed strange that Bennett should criticise de Certeau for a totalising use of the concept when, as I have argued, his own career has been built on a commitment to a use which tends in a similar direction. But what is stranger still is that Bennett leapfrogs de Certeau with his own proposals. If, for de Certeau, there are still gaps and interstices – albeit mysterious – in the grid of power, the gaps, for Bennett, are closed and the interstices filled in. Admittedly, power has the capacity in Bennett's account to divide against itself so that it appears as having fluid characteristics. Citing Foucault, he argues that

the mechanisms of modern forms of liberal government ... are themselves partly responsible for generating counter-demands on government owing to their inability to entirely satisfy the demands they generate. It is, Graham Burchell contends in summarising this line of argument, 'in the name of forms of existence which have been shaped by political technologies of *government* that we, as individuals and groups, make claims on or against the *state*' (Bennett 1998: 178).

It is important, for Bennett, that the position allows for relations which are 'active and disputatious' (178). Nevertheless, everything is orchestrated by a single principle: the all-pervasive 'political technologies of government'. Even where conflicts arise which

these technologies are unable to resolve, they are conflicts which the technologies have generated in the first place. There is – which is precisely the point – no ‘outside’.

The most serious effects of this absolutism are at the level of political prescriptions. The reduction of activities to governmental ‘technologies’ effectively excludes any recognition of dialogue or of the need for discussion of the kinds of *ends* for which the technologies are employed. This is perhaps most explicit in Hunter’s intervention into the debates around reforms to higher education. The intervention makes extensive use of Max Weber’s argument in ‘Science as a Vocation’ that criteria of judgement are internal to particular ‘disciplines of cultivation’. The argument is useful to Hunter in dismissing the pretensions of generalised forms of critique. But it also presents him with a problem: how to address the question of disputes which arise *between* disciplines. If there are no criteria which operate at this level, then the resolution of such disputes can only be arbitrary: ‘Weber leaves (normative) political knowledge and administration completely beyond the expanding pale of rationality, in the domain of the irrational and incalculable, peopled only by false prophets and demagogues’ (Hunter 1991: 46). The solution to the problem is to be found, for Hunter, in Foucault’s work on governmentality, according to which the array of political technologies, discourses, techniques of calculation and forms of social supervision deployed by government has brought about a ‘gradual transformation of political power into a “rational activity” in the Weberian sense; that is, into an activity responsible for subjecting a department of existence to technical control through the methodical deployment of particular instruments of calculation and intervention’ (46-7).

Politics, in other words, is completely given over to ‘technical control’. In the context in which it appears, Hunter’s argument functions, in effect, as an endorsement of the expert managerialism of economic rationalism. In his review of the argument, Frow

cites a description by Hunter of the bureau as 'an authentic, irreplaceable and irreducible technology for living' whose 'mode of existence places it beyond the political and moral reach of democratic control' (Frow 1992: 515). Frow agrees that this may not be altogether implausible as a description of the current situation; what alarms him, however, is that Hunter not only presents it as an 'eternal, unalterable state of things' but that he seems 'entirely unworried by it'. There are frequent warnings in Hunter's writing of the need to respect the 'fragility' of governing institutions. In *Rethinking the School*, for example, he refers darkly to sectarian violence in Northern Ireland and the disintegration of Yugoslavia as lessons of the costs of failing to do so (Hunter 1994: 157). The point cannot be taken lightly, but the logic of Hunter's position suggests a demand for something more than respect. No alternative is allowed to warring fundamentalisms except a complete subordination of political aspirations to the technical requirements of corporate forms of governance. The implication is clear: the price of security is political quietism.

The conclusion is not unique to Hunter; it follows more generally from the way the 'policy' arguments have worked away from earlier oppositional forms of criticism. At no point in their rejection of the latter have they questioned an instrumentalist view of public institutions as means for determining social outcomes. Bennett has aptly described the 'policy' position as committed to 'talking to the ideological state apparatuses' (Bennett 1992a: 31-33). The formulation is intended to indicate a shift from a hostile Althusserian view of government agencies as instruments of ruling class domination. But there is never any doubt, in the revision of Althusser, that these agencies are indeed 'apparatuses' – that they are fully reducible to an instrumental function of some kind. The mechanical metaphors formed at a moment of alienation from public institutions and associated with accusations of abstract impersonality are

carried over almost without modification in the Foucauldian vocabulary of 'technologies'. However much they are dissociated from suspicions of 'manipulation', they continue to imply a rigorous separation between 'means' and 'ends'. Yet there is nowhere in the 'policy' proposals where 'ends' can be accounted for or addressed. This leaves the proposals unable to recognise any organisation of social activity other than corporate instrumentalism in which desired outcomes have somehow always already been 'decided'.

The kinds of ends assumed by the 'policy' advocates are often, on the face of it, 'progressive', but this does not compensate for the anti-democratic way in which they are framed. The point was made in the 'policy debate' by Meaghan Morris in criticism of Stuart Cunningham's *Framing Culture*. Although Cunningham consistently demonstrates a concern for access and equity in the provision of services and a responsiveness of cultural industries to local demands, his arguments against 'criticism' require these goals to be accepted as 'obvious'. As Morris puts it:

Cunningham assumes that there are given 'progressive policy' outcomes that coincide with the outcomes he desires; these set the standard against which others can be deemed 'politically dubious'. He also accepts that critical activities that *have no bearing* on the policy process must be 'reconstructed' in the national interest, or else confirm their irrelevance; only policy makes the nation, so critics who want to be citizens must make policy (Morris 1992b: 549).

A similar point could be made of many of Bennett's arguments. In *Culture – A Reformer's Science*, he indicates a commitment to developing 'frameworks, customs and procedures ... that will prove capable of managing the complex and highly different forms of cultural diversity which characterise the relations between the Anglo-Celtic, multicultural and indigenous populations of Australia' (Bennett 1998: 104). Citing the

recent popular reaction against government programs in this area, he suggests that 'there is a good deal further still to go before an acceptance of such goals will be firmly secured in "mainstream" Australia'. What is never considered is that the reaction may have been to precisely the corporatist instrumentalism which Bennett so clearly favours – an instrumentalism which identifies target populations for reform according to programs whose aims are to be 'secured' without ever needing to be canvassed openly with those populations themselves.

### **THE EMERGENCE OF NEO-EMPIRICISM**

If these problems are serious, they should not be taken to suggest that the 'policy' arguments be entirely dismissed. As foreshadowed at the beginning of the chapter, the issues are more complex than they seem. There is a milder side to the arguments, where the claim to 'modesty' begins to look genuine – a side which is best captured not by the metaphor of exorcism but by another proposed by Hunter: that of 'intellectual therapy' (Hunter 1994: 172). The stated desire for a move in cultural criticism towards specificity and ethical limitation needs, in itself, to be respected. But the arguments also go further, creating an intellectual space in which such a move can actually begin to occur.

To understand how this could be so, it is necessary to recognise the full paradox of hyper-rationalism. If the extreme totalisation of the concept of power incurs many of the problems of rationalism in an exacerbated form, it is also reveals a point at which they begin to evaporate. However procrustean the 'policy' solutions may seem, they are, in a sense, benignly impotent. The attempt to account for all social activities and practices in terms of governmental 'technologies' eliminates any space in which the arguments themselves could make a difference. To 'put policy into cultural studies' would – if the



arguments are followed consistently – have precisely no effect: the field has always been completely enmeshed in government, hence always already involved in policy considerations. The most abstract dialectician, the most romantic aesthete, the most revolutionary ideologue are all, for Hunter and Bennett, agents of government, exercising power 'on and within the governmental sphere'. To enjoin them to adopt governmental functions, therefore, can only be redundant. Given their absolute determination by governmental technologies, such a function will always already have been assumed. Indeed, even if they were deliberately to reject the injunction, it would only confirm their inability to escape it. The one area where there may be room for change is, ironically, at the level of consciousness, where the agent of government might recover from misapprehension and come to recognise their 'true being'.

Needless to say, the arguments are *not* consistent in drawing these conclusions. In Hunter's *Rethinking the School*, for example, there is a central contradiction in the characterisation of 'principled criticism'. Consistent with the reduction to governmental power, the latter sometimes appears as a mundane epiphenomenon of administrative programs with no independent effects: '[T]he line of critique that flowed through [Wilhelm von] Humboldt and [John Stuart] Mill has had no discernible impact on the development, organisation or reform of the modern school system' (Hunter 1994: 140). Here it would seem that the 'policy' arguments are, indeed, redundant; governmental rationality is in full command and there is nothing of substance that a criticism of criticism could achieve. At other times, however, criticism looms as having a potential for 'extremely damaging consequences' (37); it is framed as a cause for urgent concern in its erosion of the efforts of administrative intellectuals through 'the winds of principle and zealotry' (103). In order to be attributed with such destructive potential, it must also be attributed with some independence. Both Hunter and Bennett have, in fact, explicitly

drawn back at times from the claim that all capacities for reasoning are governmentally formed and circumscribed (Hunter 1994: 163; more ambiguously Bennett 1998: 202).

But even in these contradictions, the arguments have had important productive effects.

In testing rationalism to the point of destruction, they have also neutralised its intellectual force. The major intellectual discovery of the 'policy' arguments may, in fact, be no more than this: that when inflated to the point where it explains everything, the concept of power also explains nothing. In the vacuum thus created, it becomes possible to reconnect with quite a different style of thought – a style in which the scope of the concept was always limited in the first place. It is in this context that Bennett's references to Sir Henry Cole begin to appear not merely as an 'illustration' to theoretical arguments developed elsewhere but as a full citation of an intellectual influence. Similar figures appear in the work of Hunter. To stretch my argument for the sake of provocation, the major 'theorists' of *Rethinking the School* may not be Weber or Foucault, but David Stow and James Kay-Shuttleworth – a Glaswegian philanthropist and social reformer and an English civil servant and founder-member of the Manchester Statistical Society. There is no mistaking Hunter's enthusiasm for the work of these two. The battles pitched around the concept of power can be read, in many ways, as little more than an enabling condition for their voices to be heard.

If the suggestion still appears implausible, it may be worth considering a recent work in which the turn I am identifying is more fully realised: Thomas Osborne's (1998) *Aspects of Enlightenment – Social theory and the ethics of truth*. While Osborne works within 'social theory' rather than cultural studies, his thinking has developed along similar lines to Hunter and Bennett, particularly in finding inspiration in Foucault's work on governmentality. He acknowledges Hunter as one of those, along with Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon, Ian Hacking and Nikolas Rose, who have 'motivated this book

in ways they do not know, and would probably not much like' (Osborne 1998: xv). All belong to an international 'community of discourse' with strongest bases in Australia and Britain, in which similar concepts have been developed and problems addressed.

Osborne describes *Aspects of Enlightenment* as 'stimulated' by Foucault, but as 'emphatically not a "Foucauldian" work' (1998: x). The Foucault that interests him is not a general theorist whose propositions might be 'applied', but a figure who provokes a dialogue over the ethics of intellectual work. He is not 'the subversive continental philosopher, the arcane prophet of transgression, the iconoclastic poststructuralist, the meta-theorist of power, the functionalist theorist of social control, or the gloomy prophet of the totally administered society', but 'a much more buttoned-up animal':

An ethical thinker with a Kantian heritage, a good modernist rather than a faddish postmodernist, a rigorous and not so unconventional historical epistemologist concerned with the 'immature' human sciences and, most unlikely of all, something of an Anglo-Saxon empiricist *manqué* (Osborne 1998: x).

It is with the last suggestion that Osborne takes his biggest risk. The 'Anglo' themes which can also be found in Hunter and Bennett are no longer authorised by Foucault; they come to stand in their own right and even to restructure our understanding of Foucault himself. What Osborne proposes, in short, is nothing less than a reversal of dialogic positions which Yuri Lotman would lead us to expect at the point of saturation at the site of 'reception' in cross-cultural exchange. An 'English' intellectual style, fully restructured by the absorption of European philosophy and political theory, begins unmistakably to assert itself as a possible site of 'transmission'.

This development is conditioned by the evaporation of a generalised concept of power. At a certain level, Osborne's arguments are consistent with Hunter's and Bennett's; in

fact, Hunter's work on the 'ethic of the aesthetic' is cited with approval. But there is also a significant difference. It is a difference which is most evident in his understanding of governmentality, which is conceptualised in terms not of power but of *ethics*:

To talk of modern arts of government is not the same as talking, in epochal terms, about the characteristics of whole societies. The *mentality* in 'governmentality' is important. What is at stake are quite restricted rationalities or mentalities for the governing of conduct, not the structural principles of whole societies; there is a difference between, on the one hand, talking about the transformation from a form of governmentality based on reason of State to one based on something like 'liberalism' and, on the other hand, talking about the transformation from a police State to a liberal society (Osborne 1998: 30).

Governmentality, for Osborne, is not a positive phenomenon; it is an ethical disposition which has been adopted unevenly in the practice of government – a disposition to govern in the name of truth:

Put schematically: to govern in a 'liberal' way – and in the highly restricted sense we need to give to the notion of liberalism here, which is not the sense that is usual in political philosophy – one had to subject the terrain over which one governed to apparatuses of truth, and the knowledge that this supplied would likewise supply the ends of government – the security, welfare and tranquillity of the population (Osborne 1998: 30).

While the reference here to 'apparatuses' continues the use of mechanical metaphors, there can be no doubt about the implications of the position. To recognise the historical emergence of governmentality is not to apprehend a structural principle of social organisation or a new modality of power. It is only to recognise a new ethic informing the conduct of those involved in the specific and limited sphere of government. It provides no grounds whatsoever for general claims about 'relations between culture and power'.

The consequences of this shift extend well beyond the understanding of governmentality itself: it frees Osborne from the fundamentalism with respect to power which still affects the work of Hunter and Bennett. This is clear, for example, in his view of aesthetic discipline and the humanities academy. It is here that he is both closest to Hunter and at the same time furthest away. In general terms, he accepts Hunter's analysis of the 'ethic of the aesthetic', but drops the suggestion that it might be contrasted with a more positive knowledge of 'real' institutional determinants. There is often, in Hunter's account, a thinly veiled sarcasm which comes through, for example, in his description of practitioners of aesthetic discipline as 'moral notables' (Hunter 1994: 166-8). The implication of empty posturing is also clear in Bennett's barbed comments on 'the endless preening of the intellectual persona that is the hallmark of aesthetico-moral styles of criticism' (Bennett 1998: 25). It is an implication which rests on an assumption that aesthetic practices can be set off against 'genuine knowledge' and 'real effects'. These are, of course, the knowledge and effects of power. In Osborne's view of aesthetics, by contrast, there is no such assumption: aesthetic discipline offers no further grounds than governmentality for universal claims or absolute norms of 'good conduct', but it has a rigour and integrity which cannot be dismissed as empty or arbitrary.

In fact, the qualities which Hunter attributes to aesthetic discipline are not dissimilar, for Osborne, to those of the 'arts of government'. To govern in the name of truth is not to govern in the name of *certainty* but almost the reverse. The concept of truth which lies at the heart of liberal governance is, like aesthetic 'wholeness', a constantly receding ideal. The point at which it appears that truth has actually been reached is also the point at which it is most under suspicion as having been lost to dogma, calling for a renewed effort of sceptical enquiry. This is why liberalism places such an emphasis on

intellectual 'freedom': it is only when claims to truth are submitted to an unrestricted scrutiny that truth can be most closely approximated. As an exemplary statement, Osborne cites John Stuart Mill's *On Liberty*:

Truth, in the great practical concerns of life, is so much a question of the reconciling and combining of opposites, that very few have minds sufficiently capacious and impartial to make the adjustment with an approach to correctness, and it has to be made by the rough process of a struggle between combatants fighting under hostile banners (Mill cited in Osborne 1998: 31).

For such a politics, Osborne argues, 'truth is up for grabs *as a question*'; in fact, we might say that what determines the concern for truth in our societies is that we do not know what that concern involves' (32). This is not to say that it is 'ineffable'; the ethic demands, on the contrary, that claims to truth have sufficient definition and accountability to be submitted to critical examination. It is only to say that it cannot be known with certainty.

The similarities between aesthetic discipline and governmentality are captured by Osborne in the phrase which gives him his title: 'aspects of enlightenment'. He uses the word 'enlightenment' advisedly as part of an attempt to escape the terms of a polemic which he sees as having overshadowed work in social theory and the social sciences over the last twenty years – a polemic which has often been organised schematically around '*the Enlightenment*':

It seemed to me ... that these fields were divided by a rather unproductive stand-off between competing positions – foundationalism and anti-foundationalism, realism and relativism, modernism and postmodernism, sensible (often German) rationalists and irresponsible (usually French) post-structuralists and so forth – which, while generating certain lucrative amounts of intellectual drama, tended nevertheless to make something of a mockery of each other (Osborne 1998: ix).

At the centre of these debates – to the extent that they *are* debates – has been a disagreement over the application of reason to matters of social and political organisation. The polarised terms of the disagreement have tended to mean that enlightenment is represented only in the caricatured forms of an 'iron cage' or a 'realm of freedom':

And hence the sense that today many in the human sciences are stuck in the blackmail of a veritable *politics* of enlightenment. This is a politics in the strict sense of the term, one structured by the friend/enemy distinction that Carl Schmitt held to be at the heart of all politics; a resolute logic of being either for or against. And hence, consequently, the anxiety of many in the social sciences and elsewhere who do not quite know where they should stand in relation to this politics (Osborne 1998: 2).

Not to escape from this sort of binarism is, for Osborne, to remain 'perpetually trapped in a cycle of what is best just called *immaturity*, a rather childish polemicism; in a perpetual state of firing blanks at our enemies without ever taking responsibility for the difficulty of cultivating a considered – as opposed to a kneejerk – attitude to the status of truth and the possibilities of criticism' (6).

In developing an alternative sense of enlightenment (firmly in the lower case), Osborne appeals explicitly to English empiricism. Revisiting Perry Anderson's arguments of the 1960s, he rejects the association of empiricism with anti-intellectualism or mere 'common sense', seeing it, rather, as a 'way of stylizing our responsibility towards the truth; basing itself on a form of history that is not related to ideologies of progress or of dogma' (Osborne 1998: 163):

The English ethics of time, one might say, entails a kind of immanent critique of time itself. For the English, it might be said that the lesson of history is that things are contingent, that people act, that people will govern each other in certain ways, and that some things will go wrong, and others may never be

understood. Here enlightenment consists of a kind of contextualist, even ethnographic, attitude to time: to follow its episodes, interruptions and flows, to bring to bear a painstaking erudition on its circumstances (Osborne 1998: 163).

What is important about this ethic of enlightenment, in the context of Osborne's wider project, is that it resists both an appeal to 'fundamental principles' *and* the suggestion of arbitrariness or pure relativity. It is neither foundationalist nor anti-foundationalist, neither realist (in a metaphysical sense) nor relativist, neither 'modern' nor 'postmodern'. But nor is it merely fence-sitting. History is substituted in the place of metaphysics and ideology as the ultimate horizon of cognitive legitimation, producing a distinctive form of criticism and a distinctive model of 'intellectual personality'.



## Chapter 6

### 'Citizens of Media'

[T]he question for cultural studies is whether it has changed enough in response to ... wider social and cultural developments, or whether it has survived into middle-aged respectability with many of its youthful prejudices intact. If so, any apparent innovations that are associated with cultural studies as it gains a firmer foothold in academic institutions (a process most notable in North America), may not be so bold and radical and new after all, but merely the beginning of a spoilt, arrogant, *pouting* phase for a discipline which has abandoned its 1960s idealism and commitment to social change in favour of a belated discovery of its own 'me generation' selfishness.

John Hartley (1992a: 16)

The maintenance of democracy requires a practice within the public networks for responding to events that it was never quite designed to handle ... One has to experiment with relatively freely available conceptual tools and practices and base a democratic knowledge on these. This may involve moving beyond the techniques and procedures of the academy. In Antonio Gramsci's terms, the academic intellectual risks becoming merely a traditional intellectual, one of many layers of cultural sediment, deposited and passed over by the engine of capital and the trajectory of the vector. One has to make organic connections with the leading media and cultural practices of the day.

McKenzie Wark (1994: 20)

Feminism has historically been concerned with the dominant nature of one point of view in the production and consumption of images: a male, patriarchal perspective. Yet, the popular feminist critique of the media has *itself* become a dominant point of view. It has become self-satisfied and lazy. It has failed to take account of changes in popular culture and the media more generally. It is out of touch with the way people consume images.

Catharine Lumby (1997: xxv)

The 'policy' initiative has not been the only response in cultural studies to the convergence during the 1990s of government, education and media or the disappearance of an alternative ideological pole to state-sponsored capitalism. Nor is the generalisation of the category of government the only revisionist move in the field. Roughly concurrent with the arguments reviewed in the last chapter, there has emerged quite a different set of suggestions as to how cultural studies might articulate a new relevance for itself post-Cold War – a set of suggestions which has explored the potential, by contrast, of a generalisation of the category of *media*. While it has not gained quite the profile of the 'policy' initiative and has not occasioned such a focussed 'debate', it is a move which deserves to be recognised as no less ambitious in its claims. Certain emphases, and particularly a tendency to an abstract libertarianism, have led some to see it as little more than a reworking or extension of familiar themes. But to dismiss it on these grounds is to underestimate the challenge it represents. A central motivation of the move, as indicated by the quotations above, is a sense that established positions and commitments have become a liability. The proposed re-invention of cultural studies is as extensive as the 'policy' initiative and offers, I will argue, as important a point of reference for considering future options for the field.

Like the 'policy' arguments, the initiative centred on media – an initiative which I will call 'media republicanism' – has developed, at least partly, in response to perceived problems in established uses of the concept of power. This is clear, for example, in John Hartley's criticisms of the 'pouting' tendency in cultural studies – his diagnosis of the possible 'bad future' for the field. In Hartley's analysis, the theme of power may always have been unfortunate:

In fact it might be argued that the oppositional intellectuals whose early efforts established the theoretical and analytical agenda for cultural studies as an

academic subject were interested in television's potential to manipulate the masses because some time in the future they hoped they'd be able to have a go at doing that too. What's the point of Gramsci if not to show how the hegemonic can be countered, and, once the strategy is determined, who's going to direct it if not the strategists? (Hartley 1992a: 25)

But the problem with the concept has been exacerbated, for Hartley, by the loss of confidence in a coherent left-political alternative at the end of the Cold War. If criticisms of intellectual vanguardism might once have been waved away by attributing a generosity of motive ('advancing the cause of socialism'), the possibility of such a defence has all but evaporated. The danger in this is that cultural studies might degenerate into simple resentment: 'dammit, we *ought* to have won – not least because Stuart Hall is a more congenial, inspiring and convincing political theorist than the "Countess of Finchley" – but we didn't, so *they* must've manipulated the masses' (26). According to such a logic, oppositional criticism becomes little more than a justification of the position of the critic – at best defensive and at worst self-serving in its circular rationalisation of 'youthful prejudices'.

There are obvious similarities between this criticism of criticism and those of the 'policy' arguments. They share a frustration with the limitations imposed by general theories of domination and oppression. But the solution proposed by 'media republicanism' is quite different. Rather than claiming a more sophisticated grasp, either theoretical or practical, of 'relations between culture power', Hartley suggests that cultural studies might direct its attention to other questions entirely, returning, in fact, to simpler motivations which preceded the development of current theoretical paradigms. Revisiting an early article by Stuart Hall, he points out that cultural studies might claim to have its origins in such a revisionism. Defending his position against critics, Hall distinguishes his project from a sectarian leftism for which 'Aunty Dogma still rules the

roost' (quoted in Hartley 1992a: 19). It is this kind of inspiration which Hartley wishes to regain:

[A]s Stuart Hall put it in 1959, the success of cultural studies won't be primarily to 'arm us for the struggle against capitalism' (risking, when we get the theory wrong, 'scientifically constructed bent pitch-forks'); success will be measured against a different yardstick: 'I wrote the article', says Hall, 'because I wanted to know'. Me too (Hartley 1992a: 27).

The appeal to curiosity is not as naïve as it might appear. 'Wanting to know', for Hartley, would align cultural studies with media audiences whose interest in television (or other media) is motivated not by a 'struggle against capitalism' but by pleasure, desire or aesthetic appreciation. The position is supported in more recent work by an historical argument that the public sphere is, in fact, a differentiated aspect of the 'mediasphere'. To affirm motivations for engaging with the latter on positive terms is to expand the potential of democracy.

The 'republican' resonances of the suggestion have been developed most explicitly in McKenzie Wark's *The Virtual Republic*. Following a classical distinction in political theory between republicanism and more formal doctrines of 'social contract', Wark proposes an understanding of political community as based simply on a belief that 'all members ... are equally entitled to have our sympathies extended to them, and from whom we presume a sympathy extends' (Wark 1997: 13). The idea is developed, ironically, with reference to Australia (formally, still a constitutional monarchy) against the counter-example of the United States:

In America, I feel like I am governed by a social contract. I walk around, buy the new issue of the *New Yorker*, ride the subway, read my magazine. It is as if all that connected me to other people was something that kept each of us within a certain limit ... Americans dream of being mugged, bashed, car-jacked or serially killed, so Americans grudgingly pay a few taxes to keep the police up

to speed in an arms race with gangsters, hoodlums, thugs and punks, and to keep one-and-a-half million former fellow citizens in prison (Wark 1997: 10).

Wark admits that this logic by no means captures all aspects of political life in America; nor does he see it as entirely absent in Australia. But he wishes to contrast it with 'another Australia':

The one that makes possible that strange feeling of sympathy I and many other Australians have for each other, as something one just sort of feels without thinking. It's ... the feeling of feeling together, with others, the feeling of belonging to a community of sense. As Larry Grossberg argues, feeling is a much underrated quality of what it is that cements people into the wider world. In both analysis and in culture itself, the affections have been relentlessly privatised, pushed back toward the secret worlds of romance, sex and family, but these are really particular instances of a *structure* of feeling: points from which to reimagine the whole of life and create new figures of speech for it (Wark 1997: 11).

The national comparisons are in some ways a distraction from the general argument. It is no longer to the territorial space of the nation, for Wark, that we should look for the maintenance or development of republican virtues; it is to a 'virtual' terrain which he elsewhere calls 'third nature', 'the terrain created by the television, the telephone, the telecommunications networks crisscrossing the globe' (Wark 1994: vii). It is to the terrain, in short, of the media.

Those associated with media republicanism can claim achievements in precisely the areas which the 'policy' advocates have tended to neglect. They have developed styles of writing and practices of public engagement which permit an open canvassing of the *ends* which left political projects might pursue. These styles and practices have created a bridge between academic and non-academic forums of debate. Among other public engagements, Wark and Lumby have both been regular newspaper columnists and Hartley has also made frequent media appearances. All three write 'out of' academic

genres, attempting to connect with more popular forms of public expression. Equally importantly, media republican themes have created a bridge between intellectual generations, particularly through attention to questions of pedagogy. Where the 'policy' advocates have tended to reduce the ambitions of teaching to a simple transferral of 'skills', 'media republican' arguments have supported pedagogical approaches which aspire to involve a new generation in defining the projects or activities in relation to which skills are defined.

But 'media republicanism' is perhaps an even less obvious place to look than 'policy' for new approaches in the use of the concept of power. The address to questions of power has often been seen, in fact, as a major area of weakness. Where it is not simply absent, it appears at best ambiguous, lacking in any serious commitment. For Greg Philo and David Miller, the kinds of arguments put forward by Hartley are an 'abdication of responsibility', indicating a more general tendency for recent academic cultural criticism to ignore 'the corruption and abuses of power' (Philo and Miller 1998: 47). A similar diagnosis of lack has been made even by otherwise sympathetic critics. In a recent review, Gay Hawkins (2000: 195) describes Hartley's *Uses of Television* as 'a book oozing with ideas and insights. A book that shows once and for all that liking one's object, that recognizing the circuits of desire that shape all intellectual work, is not a recipe for a lesser or uncritical knowledge'. Despite this, however, she feels compelled to enter a criticism: Hartley fails to address 'forms of subjection' which operate in the media. His work, in summary is 'intellectually engaging, challenging and profoundly useful, *except on the issue of rethinking media power*' (198, italics mine).

These criticisms have a context. If there has been no 'media republicanism' debate as such, the initiative is shadowed by two other debates which have dominated many discussions of the state of cultural studies since the late 1980s: debates around

'populism' and 'postmodernism'. Both have themselves developed, at least partly, around positions in relation to the concept of power. The 'populism debate' has been led by critics – often from outside cultural studies – of what is seen as a vapid celebration of popular 'agency', particularly of active media audiences. The theme of the 'active audience' is most strongly associated with arguments which have set themselves against a view of audiences as passive victims of ideological manipulation or 'cultural dopes'. A theoretical basis for such arguments was provided as early as Stuart Hall's (1973) 'encoding/decoding' model of communication, with its recognition of 'negotiated' and 'resistant' readings. But criticisms have been directed most strongly against later work in which resistance to or subversion of 'the dominant' has become the major theme. The figure whose work has been consistently at the centre of criticism has been John Fiske. Jim McGuigan, for example, identifies Fiske as representing a drift in cultural studies towards an 'abjectly uncritical complicity with prevailing "free market" ideology and its hidden powers' (McGuigan 1992: 75). McGuigan frames his critique of cultural studies as generally sympathetic, but in his loss of patience with certain tendencies he echoes many others. Populism has become a spectre haunting the field.

The 'postmodernism debate' is more complicated, ranging across a diverse and often confused assortment of loosely related themes which cannot be summarised in any convenient form. One of the threads which has made the concept of postmodernism controversial, however, is its association with the idea of an epochal shift which has rendered traditional analyses of power irrelevant or beside the point. While the idea is sometimes conflated with positions characterised as 'populist', there is a clear distinction to be made. The suggestion is not that media audiences or other subordinate groups resist or subvert power; it is rather that the forms of power which they might be seen as resisting or subverting (or, for that matter, submitting to) are seriously weakened

– to the point, in some versions, of having disappeared (the work of Jean Baudrillard often taken to mark this extreme). Whether these forms of power have been associated with 'grand narratives', hermeneutic depth, the sovereignty of the nation-state or with the classical phase of industrial capitalism, modes of analysis which continue to oppose them have failed to take account of a new logic at work in the politics of culture. Much of the argument around postmodernism, as with the British debates around 'New Times' (Hall and Jacques 1989), can be attributed to the destabilising effect of this proposition on the critical approaches which emerged from the 1970s.

It is clear why 'populism' and 'postmodernism' have often been confused. Their implications in relation to questions of power occasion similar anxieties – anxieties, particularly, about a loss of political seriousness. The connection was identified by Meaghan Morris in 'Banality in Cultural Studies'. One of the strengths of the essay is that Morris recognises points of convergence between positions without simply collapsing them into each other. As she admits at the outset, there is no obvious logic in reviewing the kinds of arguments associated with Fiske (in the terms above, 'populism') beside those of Baudrillard ('postmodernism'). She brings them together only because they are both sources of irritation for her about the direction of cultural studies. 'But irritation', she points out, 'may create relations where none need necessarily exist' (Morris 1990: 14). During the course of the essay, such relations do indeed begin to emerge:

[I]t is remarkable, given the differences between them and the crisis-ridden society that each in its own way addresses, that neither of the projects I've discussed leaves much place for an unequivocally pained, unambivalently discontented, or momentarily *aggressive* subject. It isn't just negligence. There is an active process going on in both of discrediting – by direct dismissal (Baudrillard) or covert inscription as Other (cultural studies) – the voices of



grumpy feminists and cranky leftists ('Frankfurt School' can do duty for both)  
(Morris 1990: 25).

Morris understands the motivations for rejecting dogmatic tendencies in the use of the concept power; as I argued in Chapter 4, they are motivations which have been central to her own work. Her concern is that the rejection often seems to involve the elimination from analysis of what Michel de Certeau calls the 'polemological'. The basic assumption of a polemological space, for de Certeau, is summed up by a quotation from a Maghrebien syndicalist at Billancourt: 'They always fuck us over' (27). The problem, for Morris, is that while such sentiments undeniably correspond to important fields of experience, they have come to seem inadmissible in cultural studies: the field is 'losing its polemological edge' (31).

The anxiety is a common one, but it has not always been articulated so carefully. If, for Morris, banality is a problem to be worked through, for many it has been simply a charge to lay against others. The result has been an often crude polemic against 'aestheticisation' and triviality, a polemic in which the 'polemological' is implicitly attributed with the status of a fundamental truth. It is a polemic which has been answered, predictably, by counter-charges of essentialism and authoritarianism. Like the 'policy debate', positions have tended to become entrenched, with argument degenerating into accusation and caricature. It is in this context that the 'media republican' initiative has been received. One of the reasons why the novelty of the initiative has not been widely recognised is that it has appeared in many ways to conform to the terms of the polemic. It has to be admitted that there is a certain amount in the arguments to confirm such suspicions. There is a thin line between identifying 'pouting' tendencies in cultural studies, diagnosing the possible irrelevance of 'traditional intellectuals' or criticising feminist analyses of the media as 'self-satisfied

and lazy' and generalised broadsides against 'bad Others'. At points, the arguments seem to *require* such Others in order to launch the claims being made.

The generalisation of the category of media has, itself, a certain polemical function. Like the generalisation of the category of government by the 'policy' advocates, it eliminates any position from which the initiative might be opposed. The strategy here has been demonstrated most effectively by Wark, who counters criticisms of the manipulations or superficiality of the media by insisting that such criticisms are themselves *internal* to the media. How do we know, he asks, that the media often purvey distortions or lies? 'Through other media. Slower and more considered media, like articles in the highbrow monthlies, or earnest, truthful hour-length documentaries, but media all the same' (Wark 1994: 6). A similar point is made in his recent book, *Celebrities, Culture and Cyberspace*:

Robert Hughes once wrote of Andy Warhol that 'he went after publicity with the single-minded voracity of a feeding bluefish'. A great line, but one that begs the question: what kind of fish that would make Hughes? As Catharine Lumby points out, the art critic has an altogether different relation to publicity and celebrity, but a relation to it all the same (Wark 1999: 46).

If, for Bennett and Hunter, there is no escape from governmentality, for Wark and Lumby there is no escape from publicity and celebrity. The implication is a similar absolutism of perspective: the media are our destiny.

This absolutism is open to criticism as generating its own forms of dogma, but my aim in this chapter is to draw attention to other possibilities. Whatever the problems associated with a generalisation of the category of media, it has produced novel effects. One of these effects has been a subtle reconnection with an empiricist use of the concept of power, a reconnection by a different route from that of the 'policy' proponents.

Rather than forcing rationalism to the point of destruction, media republicanism has worked, in a sense, from the 'other side'. At the most obvious level – and the level for which it is most often criticised – the initiative appears simply to avoid the concept. Given that power has normally been associated most strongly with government or the state, the generalisation of the category of media has an opposite implication from the arguments of Bennett and Hunter. Modernity does not appear as an effect of governmental 'technologies' of power but, in Hartley's terms, as an effect of the twin energies of 'freedom' and 'comfort' as articulated through the media (Hartley 1996: 1-29). But an absolutism of media has similar inconsistencies to the absolutism of government. Once everything is theorised as an effect of media, nothing can be identified as particularly so. The concept of media itself loses any specificity of meaning, no longer functioning to exclude other bases of interpretation. It is within this space that a neo-empiricism in relation to power is able to emerge.

My suggestion here is intended to connect with others. In a recent interview, Morris cites Lumby's *Bad Girls* as an example of a tendency she is bold enough to describe as 'a serious post-Cold War movement in letters. Writing for a world not simply divided into camps, yet writing that's prepared to take sides' (Morris 1997b: 255). Of the style which Lumby exemplifies – journalistic and addressed to a general readership, yet informed by academic debates – she says:

I like its vitality as writing. It has a direct but very tolerant mode of address. It has a rhetorical punch, but it doesn't scold and whine. It's 'open' in the sense that it isn't always telling the reader what qualifications the reader needs to be a *good* reader of the book. I don't mean academic qualifications – one of the great things about *Bad Girls* ... is that it doesn't try to make you feel stupid for having read a lot of books ... Which conservative populism does ... (Morris 1997b: 253)

There is a gap, however, between the generosity of Morris's intuitions and her ability to identify how this mode of address is produced. 'In my own academic work', she admits, 'I've been critical of some of the "active consumer" models that Lumby draws on to talk about advertisements' (251). How then, does Lumby escape the irritation which Morris has felt in the past towards 'populism'? It is this gap between intuition and analysis which, in the following, I will attempt to close.

### **A BARD FOR THE NEW CULTURAL COMMONS**

It is useful, again, to sketch in some historical background. Like the 'policy' arguments, the debates outlined above have been affected by profoundly ahistorical assumptions about the concept of power. McGuigan, for example, finds early signs of the 'uncritical populism' of Fiske's later work in the idea of the 'bardic' function of television developed in collaboration with Hartley in *Reading Television* (1978). The analysis rests on an assumption that a generalised (rationalist) concept of power has provided a timeless backdrop against which positions are defined. It is only given this assumption that the idea of a 'bardic' function can be identified with the later themes of 'resistance' and 'subversion'. Yet any attention to the early work of Fiske and Hartley reveals a more complex and interesting history than such an identification suggests.

*Reading Television* was not, in fact, informed by any general theory of power. The book, which became an influential text in the early development of undergraduate teaching programs in cultural studies, was published in Methuen's *New Accents* series edited by Terence Hawkes. In his preface as general editor, Hawkes introduces the series as a response to the challenges posed by rapid and radical social change to the 'central field of what may, in general terms, be called literary studies':

Here, among large numbers of students at all levels of education, the erosion of the assumptions and presuppositions that support the literary disciplines in their conventional form has proved fundamental. Modes and categories inherited from the past no longer seem to fit the reality experienced by a new generation (Hawkes in Fiske and Hartley 1978: 9).

As Graeme Turner (1996: 76-77) has suggested, a history might be written of a lesser-known formation of British cultural studies geographically centred at Cardiff, but also defined by publishing associations with Methuen (later succeeded by Routledge). While developing independently, however, it followed a similar trajectory with respect to the concept of power to the more recognised currents reviewed in Chapters 2 and 3. In its early 'Hawkesian' inspiration, it was most consistent with the projects of Williams, Hoggart and the 'pre-Marxist' work of Hall and the Birmingham CCCS. The *New Accents* series was conceived by Hawkes as extending the methods, approaches and range of objects of literary criticism: 'Each volume in the series will ... stretch rather than reinforce the boundaries that currently define literature and its academic study' (9).

Fiske's and Hartley's approach to television sits squarely within this brief. They introduce their subject by pointing out the historical relativity of aesthetic judgement and the lag between cultural developments, on the one hand, and, on the other, forms of criticism which are able to articulate their significance:

[I]f we are to go by some of the criticisms made about Elizabethan theatres and dramatists by their own contemporaries, we can see that those closest to the scene do not always make the best judgements. After all, Shakespeare himself was called an 'upstart crow' who 'supposes he is as well able to bombast out a blank verse as the best of you' by a fellow playwright, Robert Greene (Fiske and Hartley 1978: 13).

The argument probably draws some of its inspiration from Hawkes' brilliantly revisionist Shakespearian scholarship which 'stretched the boundaries' in the way

literary texts are approached rather than by turning attention to other cultural forms (Hawkes 1986). 'High culture' and 'popular culture' are not set in opposition to each other but revealed as historically determined categories, loosening prejudices which might affect our understanding of that which is classified as belonging to one or other side. The importance of this, for Fiske and Hartley, is that it opens a space in which the intellectual sophistication which has been brought to the study of literature might also be brought to television: 'Elizabethan drama has been subjected to a great deal of scrutiny ... What is lacking in respect of television is this same kind of scrutiny' (Fiske and Hartley 1978: 14).

The intellectual resources called upon in *Reading Television* are eclectic, including American 'mass communication' studies (quantitative content analysis and 'uses and gratifications' theory), semiotics, McLuhanite arguments about the specificity of electronic media and the structural anthropology of Edmund Leach. It is true that within this mix are also Marxist theories of ideology: Roland Barthes' *Mythologies* is an important reference, as is Hall's theoretical work of the mid 1970s. Fiske's and Hartley's political sympathies are clearly left-leaning. The central motivation for the development of television studies, as they see it, is that it might allow a democratisation of criticism:

[T]he kind of analysis which has read Joyce and Kafka without 'reading' television eventually denies to the ordinary viewer the power – even the possibility – of recognizing for himself [*sic*] his own situation in all its complexities and contradictions ... [W]e should, as critics, learn to understand what it is that the language of television is saying to us (Fiske and Hartley 1978: 19-20).

But none of this warrants the attribution of generalised models of domination and resistance. Marxism functions in the text as I have argued it did in much of the work of

the Birmingham CCCS – not to insist on general questions of power but to moderate or even resist them. Structural social contradictions are, for Fiske and Hartley, so restricted as to warrant bracketing from consideration. Media managers and professionals, for example, are not distinguished by class interest from manual workers. While 'relatively privileged' in the premium they are able to set on their labour power, they are 'ultimately just as dependent on selling their labour power as blue-collar workers (103). The practical effect of this analysis is to place television programmers, critics and audiences – in short, the relevant participants in the field being considered – on a plane where there are significant differences but no fundamental divisions.

The idea of television as 'bardic' gains much of its sense from a belief in the possibility of what might be described as a 'cultural commons' – a space which is not segmented by structural oppositions. Television functions, for Fiske and Hartley, as 'a social ritual, overriding individual distinctions, in which our culture engages in order to communicate with its collective self' (85). The proposition is as much ethical as it is descriptive or theoretical. What is called for is approach to television which is routinely assumed in relation to literature or art – an approach which respects the creative effort involved and *starts* from a position of sympathy. As Fiske and Hartley point out, a bard does not simply 'represent' in a neutral sense but performs more actively as a 'mediator of language':

one who composes out of the available linguistic resources of the culture a series of consciously structured messages which serve to communicate to the members of that culture a confirming, reinforcing version of themselves. The traditional bard rendered the central concerns of his day into verse. We must remember that television renders our own everyday perceptions into an equally specialized, but less formal, language system (Fiske and Hartley 1978: 85-6).

The idea of a 'bardic' function clearly does not involve a critique of television as an instrument of social domination, but nor does it involve a bland affirmation of resistance to social relations of power. The generalised concept of power assumed by both positions is simply absent. This does not mean that television is placed beyond demanding criticism, only that criticisms are directed at particular uses or instances rather than the medium as such. Fiske and Hartley conclude with the hope that audiences may become better able to 'understand *and where necessary to challenge* the role that television has hitherto established in society' (194, emphasis added).

The 'where necessary' here is as important as the 'challenge'. The relations between media institutions, critics and audiences are not defined by any *general* form of opposition or conflict. Fiske and Hartley identify more specific contexts in which critical judgements might be made. Hence, for example, police series are reviewed in terms of the adequacy of their symbolic response to the changing social and economic conditions of Britain in the 1970s. *A Man Called Ironside* is read as a 'conscious enactment of the values of an ordered, stable, liberal-conservative society' but one which seeks relevance by relating its nostalgia-based values to the contemporary city (Fiske and Hartley 1978: 171). While refraining from simply condemning the series for its paternalism, Fiske and Hartley point out the crudeness with which it negotiates gender and race relations, concluding that its formula is 'under stress' (178). Moving on to newer series such as *The Sweeney* and *Starsky and Hutch*, they address concerns over their levels of violence. From the point of view of the symbolic resources of a culture, they argue, the problem with screen violence is not violence itself but its frequent association with easy narrative resolutions: 'Television violence too often disposes of really intractable sources of social tension, dislocation or conflict with a neat, bloodless hole in the villain's heart' (180). More extended sequences of violence may, in fact, be



an improvement, allowing space for greater complexity. The ‘prolonged and nasty fights’ of *The Sweeney*, for example, suggest ‘that the old answers will not serve, that problems and conflicts can still be solved, but at greater risk, with greater suffering, and with less confidence in the outcome’ (180).

To revisit *Reading Television* is to throw a different light on Fiske’s and Hartley’s later, independently authored, writing. There is no doubt that a generalised concept of power comes, in both cases, to affect their work. It is most evident in the figure of ‘white patriarchal bourgeois capitalism’ which appears as a framing assumption of Fiske’s *Reading the Popular* (1989a) and *Understanding Popular Culture* (1989b). But even here, it is not clear how much of a shift from earlier positions this figure represents. Its very excessiveness makes it difficult to take seriously. In fact, much of the criticism of Fiske has been directed not so much at his affirmation of popular ‘agency’ as at a general lack of *gravity* in his use of the concept of power. McGuigan is offended as much by the hyperbolic proportions of ‘white patriarchal bourgeois capitalism’ – an ‘empty rhetorical hybrid’ with ‘no real analytic function’ (McGuigan 1992: 72) – as he is by the claims of popular resistance and subversion. His criticisms here extend to Fiske’s lack of respect for the integrity of theoretical positions: ‘He recruits several not entirely compatible theoretical authorities (Bakhtin, Barthes, Bourdieu, de Certeau, Foucault, Gramsci, Hall, to mention a few). They are raided and sanitised ... He is essentially a good populariser of difficult ideas and a bowdleriser of their subversive implications, not by any means an original thinker’ (72-74).

The problem with this assessment is that it associates ‘original thought’ exclusively with theoretical innovation within the terms allowed by a rationalist concept of power. McGuigan admits that Fiske’s observations on popular culture are ‘often quite acute’ (McGuigan 1992: 71), but sees this as merely incidental. Any arguments which are not

connected with general theoretical positions on power are effectively dismissed. The tendency is not unique to McGuigan. Even Morris's analysis shows a certain insensitivity to other possibilities. The style of cultural studies exemplified by Fiske is, she argues,

an apologetic 'yes, *but* ...' discourse that most often proceeds *from* admitting class, racial, and sexual oppressions *to* finding the inevitable saving grace ... And in practice the 'but ...' – that is to say, the argumentative rhetoric – has been increasingly addressing not the hegemonic force of the 'dominant classes' but other critical theories (vulgar feminism, the Frankfurt School) inscribed as misunderstanding popular culture (Morris 1990: 25-26).

The criticism here of simplistic characterisations of 'other critical theories' is probably more than justified, but there is also a volatile counter-charge. A 'yes, but ...' discourse is clearly, for Morris, an *evasive* discourse – one which fails adequately to address 'class, racial, and sexual oppressions'. Despite her efforts to avoid accusations, the analysis carries suggestions of political irresponsibility. The association between concern for the social bases of suffering and a generalised concept of power leaves little space for the recognition of a 'serious' address to the former which conceives them as particular.

To clarify here, there are two quite different ways in which the debate over 'populism' might be read. The first, and by far the most common, is to assume that the debate is internal to the field of options determined by a rationalist concept of power. The question, in this case, is the degree to which consumers, media audiences or socially subordinate groups are able to exercise 'agency' over and against capital, the state or institutionalised forms of domination. This is the understanding of both McGuigan and Morris, and within its terms, their arguments are clearly compelling: in a world shaped by global movements of capital and corporate structures of governance,

uncompromising claims for popular agency appear implausible, if not absurd. The second way of reading the debate, however, is to see a rationalist concept of power not as a premise but as what is *at issue*. The question, in this case, is whether *any* general theory of power is to be taken seriously, whatever its qualifications and subtleties. The claim that the activities and practices of consumers, media audiences or socially subordinate groups are not determined by power would be a claim that they cannot be understood in relation to power, in a generalised sense, at all. My suggestion is not that the latter proposition has ever been made in quite such a pure form. It is rather that the second way of reading the issues has always been somewhere in play, complicating and confusing what is at stake.

#### WAITING FOR GODARD

There are good reasons why a scepticism towards a rationalist use of the concept of power should only appear in a refracted form. As I have argued in previous chapters, rationalism has not been simply a theoretical proposition; it has articulated profoundly felt historical experiences – experiences which those 'on the left' of Fiske's and Hartley's generation have been unavoidably confronted with, if not caught up in themselves. The work of both has been particularly affected by feminism. *Reading Television* was published in the same year as the Birmingham Centre's *Women Take Issue* but remains, in many ways, within an earlier moment. While the book addresses gender relations (as in the analysis of *A Man Called Ironside*), its use of the universal masculine pronoun marks it strikingly as 'pre-feminist'. Much of Fiske's and Hartley's subsequent work can be read as an attempt to recognise and come to terms with the implications of feminist arguments – or, more specifically, of a 'totalist' use of the concept of power. It seems more than an accident, in this context, that Fiske has sought authority for an emphasis on agency from revisionist moves within feminism, or that a

key example in his arguments of the mid 1980s was the identification by young women with Madonna (Fiske 1989a: 95-132). But in sketching the background for 'media republicanism' I will trace the somewhat different course taken by Hartley.

There is a moment in Hartley's writing in which he does appear 'serious' about power – the moment of *Understanding News* (1982). The subject matter of the book suggests, in itself, an engagement with politics proper; among the illustrations discussed are news items covering industrial disputes, the conflict in Northern Ireland and a siege of the Iranian Embassy in London, all set within the highly-charged context of the first Thatcher government. Television stills of pitched battles between demonstrators and police during a visit by Mrs Thatcher to South Wales are metonymic of themes which run throughout the text. Any sense of a 'cultural commons' is substantially weakened; media programmers, critics and audiences are placed on a plane of contradictions in which interests are structurally opposed. Meaning itself is reconceived by Hartley as a terrain of 'struggle':

[S]igns don't command 'general acceptance' in privileged isolation from the contending forces which exist in any society. People struggle over what they should signify ... When [for example] 'he' is used to denote not a male person but any person (male or female), it is aiding and abetting the patriarchal discourse which proposes male as the norm and female as secondary, derived, or just plain invisible (Hartley 1982: 23).

The argument lends itself to systematic theoretical exposition. Chapter titles and subheadings are indicative: 'News as communication', 'Socially structured discourse', 'News and society', 'Relative autonomy and ideology'. The concept of ideology provides a consistent organising framework and Hartley's citations situate him squarely within a broader theoretical project – a project which aims to 'demystify social meanings as part of the effort towards more equal relations between people' (10).

The shift from *Reading Television* cannot be attributed entirely to external developments. There is also a logic internal to Hartley's own arguments. An important component of the early case for considering popular media in similar terms to literary texts was an appeal to Saussurean semiotics, the key proposition being the 'arbitrariness of the sign'. The proposition makes it possible to strip away assumptions of the 'obviousness' of media: if signs are arbitrary, then meaning is *made*; if it is made, then it is possible to consider it in its creative aspect. The argument is enhanced in the case of television by the obvious manipulability of the medium and its capacity for simulation. But the proposition of arbitrariness has a consequence which has rarely been recognised as such: it implies a categorical opposition between the arbitrary and the fixed. The *sense* in which signs are 'arbitrary' within semiotic theory is not a relative one. The point is not to dismiss local or historical reasons, such as the simple existence of a communal habit, for using words or images in particular ways. It is rather that there is no reason *beyond* such contingencies. This absolute conception of arbitrariness implies an equally absolute conception of determination or fixity: meaning could only be recognised as *other* than arbitrary if it were somehow divinely guaranteed.

Hartley's adoption of the principle of arbitrariness has involved him in problems which have consumed the theoretical end of cultural studies since at least the late 1970s, problems which surface particularly in *Tele-ology* (1992b), his collection of essays on television from the 1980s. The most intractable of these has been a dilemma between 'textualism' and 'realism'. Both options are, in their own way, unattractive. The first ('textualism') is to accept the full implications of the arbitrariness of the sign and open oneself to the charge of relativism: the meaning of cultural phenomena is regarded, in this case, as completely indeterminate and infinitely open to interpretation. The second option ('realism') is to suggest some kind of determination – a 'reality' which limits the

play of signification or fixes meaning. The problem here is that given the absolute conception of fixity, such a suggestion can only appear as a form of fundamentalism. Hartley himself likens the dilemma to being forced to perform acrobatics between two diverging ice floes:

The position adopted is precarious – an uneasy balancing act with one foot on a floe called reality and one on a floe called discourse, with nothing more to connect them than the muscular energy of the analyst, whose intervention is always jeopardized by the fact that the two floes are always drifting apart as well as touching. Preoccupied with keeping one's feet together in conditions where any observer can see that sooner or later there's going to be a nasty accident is the occupational hazard of the intervention analyst (Hartley 1992b: 8).

In *Tele-ology*, Hartley does rely largely on 'muscular energy' (a vigorous style), but he has also been involved in more systematic attempts at bridge-building. This is the context for the use of the concept of power in *Understanding News*; it provides the connection between 'text' and 'reality'. Even in *Tele-ology*, where he has clearly become impatient with theoretical options, he describes his approach as 'socio-textual': 'the object of study is the text in its social setting – institutional, historical, political, economic and personal. The most fundamental concern that the analyst has to confront when constructing such an object of study is the question of textual power' (Hartley 1992b: 15). The sense required of the concept here is a highly generalised one – that of a mediator between two abstract theoretical categories.

Within the terms of theoretical debates, Hartley has tended towards 'textualism'. His work of the 1980s is perhaps best known for a strong anti-realism with respect to media audiences – an argument that audiences are 'invisible fictions' produced by institutions (media organisations, universities, governments) for their own rhetorical purposes:

Audiences may be imagined empirically, theoretically or politically, but in all cases the product is a fiction that serves the need of the imagining institution. In no case is the audience 'real', or external to its discursive construction. There is no 'actual' audience that lies beyond its production as a category, which is merely to say that audiences are only ever encountered *per se* as *representations* (Hartley 1992b: 105).

The form of the argument clearly marks Hartley as a partisan of the 'textualist' cause. It is borrowed to some extent from Edward Said's *Orientalism* and follows the latter in associating realism with fundamentalist desires for control over others. Like the populations of colonised territories, Hartley argues, television audiences are 'disorganized communities which have never developed or won adequate means of self-representation, and which exist wholly within the imagination or rhetoric of those who speak on their behalf' (105). The position is highly recognisable in its hostility to claims over the 'real'.

There is a question, however, whether Hartley has ever fully remade himself as a general theorist. At the theoretical level, his arguments have appeared contradictory, sometimes almost wilfully so. Hence, the textualist argument of 'Invisible fictions' is followed in *Tele-ology* by 'The real world of audiences'. The title is not entirely ironic; the essay takes issue with the more systematic anti-realism of Martin Allor for whom 'the audience exists nowhere; it inhabits no real space, only positions within ... discourses' (Allor in Hartley 1992b: 119). Notwithstanding the similarity of this position to his own, Hartley finds it disturbing: 'What struck me about this was not the conceptualization of the audience as existing only within discourse ... but the presumption that *discourse* is "nowhere", "no real space"; that is, not real at all, or opposed to "the" real' (119). In countering this implication he appeals to the philosophy of science of Karl Popper, whose position is underpinned by a belief that questions of meaning can be addressed with reference to an objective external world. The contrast

with his use elsewhere of semiotics and post-structuralism is odd to say the least. But the inconsistency is not atypical. There are contradictions even within the argument of 'Invisible fictions'. Hartley rejects the realist truth claims of others only to make his own. 'Audiences', he tells us, 'treat television shows not as scarce commodities but as public utilities for which they are not prepared to pay' (115). Like the suggestion that audiences should be left to represent themselves, the claim assumes a 'real' audience in precisely the sense which has been dismissed.

It would be possible, of course, to conclude from this, as McGuigan does of Fiske, that Hartley's work is simply confused or 'unoriginal'. But to do so would be, again, to ignore the possibility that arguments may be pitched at another level than general theory. Hartley's reasons, in *Tele-ology*, for engaging with arguments between 'textualism' and 'realism' are not so much a systematic commitment to either as a frustration with the entire debate:

An astonishing aspect of media studies, especially television criticism, is the extent to which it ignores what's on television. Neither film nor literary studies are quite as emancipated from the quotidian products of their media as is TV criticism. And both literary and cinematic critics sometimes intervene directly in their media to make contributions in the form of fiction and films, even occasionally using the medium to criticize or analyse itself. Television studies, in comparison, is still waiting for Godard (Hartley 1992b: 123-4).

Any question of what makes good television is, for Hartley, lost in disputes over the metaphysical status of meaning: 'Such terms as "best", "worst", "taste", "enlightenment", "appreciation" ... belong, of course, to the ideologically unsound branches of evaluative literary criticism that "we" as a discipline have learnt not to touch with a barge-pole in these postmodernist days' (125). It is the loss in this development that he is troubled by:



[P]erhaps we've gone much too far in the opposite direction, covering evaluative judgements in the cloak of disciplinary truths, scientific methods, philosophical niceties. And perhaps we dodge the issue of what we mean by quality by wandering off into aimless discussion of reality (Hartley 1992b: 125).

The question which Hartley wishes to recover here is, in fact, the question of *Reading Television*: How might cultural criticism develop the resources for discussing the quality of media and popular culture without reducing judgement simply to a matter of personal taste? Again, the project implied is an ethical more than a descriptive or theoretical one, a project of bringing definition not to what cultural phenomena are or have been so much as to what we might *want* them to be. As such, it has no necessary relation either to the debate between 'textualism' and 'realism' or to general theories of power.

What this suggests is that the basis for Hartley's recent positions may be neither 'populism' nor 'postmodernism' but the ongoing attempt to develop an ethics of criticism in relation to media and popular culture. This project has, in fact, been remarkably consistent. At a certain point, it seemed compatible with the use of generalised concepts of power. The criticisms in *Reading Television* of the paternalism of *A Man Called Ironside* are clearly located within the ethics of criticism; they are concerned with questions of quality. But Fiske and Hartley define quality in terms of the adequacy with which the program deals symbolically with 'social tension, dislocation and conflict'. These are exactly the kinds of themes which have often been gathered up in the concept of power. Even in *Understanding News*, where the concept is fully adopted and made to perform a more theoretical function, it also articulates responses to specific historical circumstances. A concern for the quality of popular media in Britain during the late 1970s and early 1980s could hardly have *avoided* an engagement with

the theme of power. To have ignored the volatile political confrontations around Thatcherism or the demands of feminism would have been to opt for something similar in criticism to the paternalism of *Ironside*. These confrontations and demands were widely articulated through the concept of power.

But Hartley's project and the use of the concept of power have increasingly diverged. What has changed, from the perspective I am suggesting, is not so much Hartley as the concept of power. His unease with the concept has developed for similar reasons to the ones I identified in relation to feminism in Chapter 4: the emergence of an assumption that it corresponds to a universal or quasi-universal phenomenon. It is probably impossible to locate precisely where this occurs. In *Understanding News*, for example, the abstraction is only partially realised; the text can be read 'backwards' to the concerns around quality of *Reading Television* or 'forwards' towards general theoretical debates between realism and textualism. The overall tendency, however, has been an increasing inconsistency between the concept of power and the earlier ethics of criticism. The definition of quality in *Reading Television* requires a historical sense: 'good television' is that which effectively negotiates change, meeting the challenge of new circumstances by offering to audiences 'confirming and reinforcing versions of themselves'. Such a definition cannot be applied if the object of criticism is construed in universalist terms. Judgement, in the latter case, can only take a categorical form involving claims to a more general theoretical 'correctness'. It is this tendency which, in his recent work, Hartley has sought to resist.

The background to 'media republicanism' would not be complete, however, without also recognising its generational dimension. While Hartley has followed the entire trajectory outlined above, others involved in the initiative have joined debates more recently. More than this, though, the initiative has acquired specific generational

associations. It is not difficult to see, from my argument here and in Chapter 4, why this might be so. Many who have come to cultural studies since the mid 1980s have encountered the concept of power only in its 'hardened' universalist form – often in pedagogical contexts where it has not appeared open to question. While the problems with the concept have been as evident to these entrants to the field as to those involved in its introduction and development, the concept itself has also been relatively detached from the experiences which motivated its introduction in the first place. It has become, as a result, a sensitive point of generational differentiation. Like a number of other attempts to displace its centrality, 'media republican' arguments have figured in attempts to define possible directions for what Henry Jenkins, Tara McPherson and Jane Shattuc (1999) have called 'the next generation'.

Lumby's *Bad Girls* is a good example. The book takes issue with critical positions of an older generation of feminists on advertising, pornography and popular media. Like Hartley, Lumby is concerned at the way generalised positions on power block sympathetic critical discussion of popular cultural forms. She opens, in fact, by echoing Hartley's astonishment at the extent to which 'TV criticism ignores what's on television', asking how prominent Australian feminist Jocelyne Scutt can know that television purveys degrading images of women when she claims not to own a television set. Lumby resists a crude generationalism: 'The enticing sound of sharp generational sword play is all good box-office stuff, but any scrutiny of contemporary feminist debate show that issues don't unpack neatly along generational or even political lines' (Lumby 1997: xviii). But she clearly wishes to open a space in which a younger generation of women might engage in a more subtle and informed criticism of what she describes as 'the contradictory, constantly shifting nature of contemporary mass-media imagery' (xxiii). To do so requires a revisionism in relation to power.

**'WE NO LONGER HAVE ROOTS ...'**

As in the case of the 'policy' initiative, the reservations of the 'media republican' proponents about the condition of cultural studies are quite widely shared. What distinguishes the initiative is, again, the radicalism of the proposed solution. It is a solution, however, which is almost diametrically opposed to that suggested by Bennett and Hunter. Rather than attempting a comprehensive reduction of social and cultural phenomena to the effects of power, the generalisation of the category of media effectively displaces the concept, at least in its rationalist sense.

As Wark pointed out in his response to the 'policy' arguments, Bennett has attempted to solve the conundrums of 'textualism' and 'realism' by subsuming the 'textual' within the 'real', fully accounting for 'textual' phenomena in terms of government, policy and power:

If post-structuralism dissolves the boundary of the literary 'outwards', licensing the application of the techniques of literary criticism to any and every text, then Bennett does the reverse. Rather than broaden the playful indeterminacy of the techniques of literary criticism out to other texts, Bennett wants to collapse the space of criticism in on itself. Into the space of literature he brings the less indeterminate, more 'closed' readings of the past and present offered by history and sociology (Wark 1992: 679).

It is clear from this why the 'policy' proponents have been able to make commanding claims over the use of the concept of power. The concept has been strongly associated in theoretical debates with the side of the 'real', figuring consistently as resolutely opposed to 'playful indeterminacy'. The elimination of the latter (or its retheorisation as a marginal 'effect') appears, in this context, to remove a distraction from the sober analysis of power.

The 'media republican' strategy has been to collapse the boundaries of 'text' and 'reality' in the opposite direction – in the direction, that is, which Wark identifies with post-structuralism. The only qualification is that the category of 'text' is either redefined or substituted with 'media'. Wark, in particular, is careful to avoid any association with the literary provenance of the term. In a deft manoeuvre in the essay cited above, he draws the boundaries so that literature becomes identified with the 'policy' proponents. Invoking a Deleuzo-Guattarian opposition between 'trees' and 'networks' or 'roots' and 'rhizomes', he places literature on the side classically designated as the 'real':

We all have a touch too much *arboreophilia* in us. In a world of electronic networks and archives, we love the old dead trees of knowledge and culture, those broad arbors that shelter and nurture the traditional intellectual ... When Gramsci coined this term, he had in mind the church in prewar Italy. He saw this as a layer of 'cultural sediment' in the social formation ... cemented there by institutional means long after its useful life had expired. Is this true of literature too? (Wark 1992: 683)

It is *Bennett*, in this account, who appears as aligned with literary culture, despite his efforts to escape it. His attachment to institutional solidity associates him with 'cementedness' and 'cultural sediment': 'perhaps his mode of thinking is still too tied to the literary' (683).

But if Bennett and Wark both attempt to disown literature, the symmetrical opposition of their positions is otherwise almost complete. Wark's version of 'media republicanism' has a distinctly 'postmodern' inflection. The world has changed, he argues, in a way which makes traditional analysis of the institutions and politics of the classical public sphere inadequate, or at least seriously incomplete. As he puts it, in what has become a signature aphorism: 'We no longer have roots, we have aerals'. The proposition is elaborated at greatest length in *Virtual Geography* through the concept of

the 'vector'. In its most general sense, borrowed from Paul Virilio (1983; 1986), a vector is 'any trajectory along which bodies, information, or warheads can potentially pass' (Wark 1994: 11). But it is the *media* vector which Wark sees as particularly significant:

The whole thing about the media vector is that its tendency is toward *implicating* the entire globe. Its historic tendency is toward making any and every point a possible point of connection – everyone and everything is a potential object and/or subject of a mediated relation realized instantly ... There is no safe haven from which to observe, unaffected. Nor is there a synoptic vantage point, above and beyond the whole process, for looking on in a detached and studious manner. We are all, always, already – there (Wark 1994: 15).

Wark does not deny a space for the continued analysis of territorial forms and relations, but rejects suggestions that the latter are in any way 'fundamental'. In writing of the 1990 Gulf War, for example, he is prepared to endorse critiques of the Orientalist presumptions of the West (after Edward Said) or the imperial designs of the American state (after Noam Chomsky). He argues, however, that the fields considered by these analyses, as well as the analyses themselves, are now profoundly implicated in, and therefore conditioned by, the 'matrix of vectors' of the media: 'If radical scholarship formerly went to the root of the problems of method and material, now it must tune in to the frequencies of everyday life upon which the vector reshapes everyday life and its scholarly accomplices' (xi).

Hartley's arguments are a little different but have similar implications. They rely more on a reinterpretation of *modernity* than the identification of a shift to *postmodernity*. In fact, the characteristics often seen as postmodern – particularly the absorption of the public sphere by the media – have been, for Hartley, at the centre of modernity: 'the "postmodern" public sphere (the mediasphere) [is] ... a product of ... a history which

goes back further than the familiar "nowist" rhetoric of postmodernity might suggest' (Hartley 1996: 25). In *Popular Reality*, he argues specifically that the modern public sphere was a product of *journalism*. 'The public' appeared first as a *reading* public, only then becoming thinkable in any other sense:

[R]eading publics, and indeed the very idea of the public in the first place, are products of theory, journalism and literature, and were literally brought into being – out on to the streets, acting as the public – by the press ... The public of modernity is coterminous with the readership of the media, and the contemporary media developed as a means to call certain kinds of public into being (Hartley 1996: 53-54).

The case is made with particular reference to the 'big bang' of the French Revolution, 'the most decisive political development of modernity' (2). Hartley traces the background of the revolution in radical pamphleteering, an 'electric fire' which made it possible for the Parisian masses to realise their 'democratic equivalence'. The conclusion he wishes to draw is clear: 'Journalism stands not as a derivative commentator on events decided elsewhere in the public sphere, but as a producer and shaper of those events; and it is not just a distributor of social narrative and political imagery for an audience of private consumers, but the *sine qua non* ("without that, nothing") of complex democratic modernity' (83).

Again, the concept of power is not entirely rejected here, but is very significantly sidelined. The crucial point, perhaps, is that it is not required to mediate between 'text' and 'reality': there are no longer two categories to mediate. As a consequence, it no longer structures analysis in the way that is expected particularly from theories of ideology, appearing instead as relatively incidental. This is one of the most striking and provocative suggestions of the media republican arguments. Hence, for example, Wark is able to write casually in *Virtual Geography* of problems in the management of public

narratives of global media events which 'mere power' cannot meet (Wark 1994: 142). A similar sense of the relative unimportance of power pervades Lumby's *Bad Girls*. The continued existence of patriarchal institutions and attitudes is not denied; they are simply regarded as limited in reach and significance: 'The sheer proliferation of images has eroded the moral authority of any one social order – patriarchal or otherwise' (Lumby 1997: xxiv).

This marginalisation of the concept of power opens a space for other concepts to be brought forward. In the second half of *Popular Reality*, Hartley uses this space to offer unabashedly appreciative readings of what he describes, at one point, as the 'art' of contemporary popular culture and communications media (Hartley 1996: 164). The extended use of the term is borrowed, significantly, from Terence Hawkes, indicating a reconnection with the early inspiration of 'Cardiff' cultural studies and the project of *Reading Television*. A striking example is a reading of a special issue of French *Vogue* featuring Nelson Mandela immediately prior to his election as President of South Africa. The text could hardly suit Hartley's purposes more perfectly. It plays explicitly with allusions to the French Revolution, allowing him to capitalise on his arguments about the origins of political modernity. As an up-market French style magazine, it is closely identified with 'art' in even the most restricted sense. Yet it was also available with accessible English translations on ordinary news-stands, taking its place as 'just another consumer item beside the groceries' (130). Finally, Mandela's presence, not only as subject but also as joint author, makes it unquestionably 'political'.

The last point allows Hartley to launch a direct provocation. Reversing the displacement of aesthetic judgement by theories of power, he suggests that the nature of 'postmodern political journalism' requires the opposite:



Here ... is some of the topography of the mediasphere which takes as its opening theme not the *logic* of critique but the *beauty* of Nelson Mandela. It is as much about style (as befits *Vogue*), as about politics. But still it is about politics, since the issue is given over to a man who was seeking election to head a government; a man who, like the rest of his people, had never been allowed to vote in an election himself, and who had only recently been set free from 27 years in gaol for treason (Hartley 1996: 128).

The onus of proof is thrown back to those who would want to analyse politics in more classical 'realist' terms. Although wealthy Western readers of *Vogue* may not face the practical imperatives of voters in South Africa itself, it would be difficult to deny that 'this is still powerful politics, providing post-national identifications to readerships whose allegiances are no longer defined by their territoriality' (130). The concepts of beauty and style are substituted in place of the concept of power.

Similar substitutions are made by Wark. *Virtual Geography* might be read as an impressive 'space clearing' exercise. The book meets general theories of power on their own terms, demonstrating a breadth of theoretical reference and a confidence in engaging with the political in the strictest sense. The case studies chosen are indicative: the Gulf War, the fall of the Berlin Wall, the student demonstrations and government crackdown in Tiananmen Square and the political management of the 1987 stock market crash. Yet Wark also builds a convincing case that such events cannot be fully explained in terms of a structural analysis of power relations. The 'vector fields' constructed by capital or the state appear quite palpably to escape any purpose for which they may have been designed: 'information wriggles loose, and bites the powerful hand that fed it' (Wark 1994: 181).

In his following book, *The Virtual Republic*, Wark takes up the license which this argument allows. In terms which resonate with Hartley's arguments about the 'art' of popular media, he suggests that a social institution might be defined as

something that extends partial sympathies ... a positive means of artificially extending and integrating the kinds of creative and productive ingenuity of our particular little sympathetic worlds – to enable us to fly. In place of plain stealing, the conventions of property; in place of violence, a common world of conversation (Wark 1997: 13).

The displacement of the concept of power opens the way, again, for relations to be conceived in other terms. Much of the remainder of Wark's book is an attempt to develop a basis for more generous forms of public debate to replace the hardened political oppositions left over from the Cold War. There are clear similarities, too, to Lumby's *Bad Girls*, which attempts to move debates about sexual representations into a space in which structural oppositions of interest are not presumed.

#### **'THAT WHICH EXCEEDS AND ESCAPES ...'**

It has to be admitted that there are certain costs associated with these arguments, costs which are significant as they limit the ability of 'media republicanism' to extricate itself from the problems it attempts to address. If the initiative displaces a rationalist concept of power, it nevertheless remains substantially affected by it. As the concept is not addressed in a more substantial way, it remains always in danger of reappearing. The result is that Hartley, Wark and Lumby sometimes appear unable to move on from polemical opposition to the kinds of positions they wish to leave behind.

In a mirror reflection of the 'policy' arguments, 'media republicanism' tends towards its own form of hyper-rationalism – not, in this case, a hyper-rationalism of power but something closer to a hyper-rationalism of *desire*. The point might best be made

perhaps by comparing the initiative with a full theoretical elaboration of the latter – Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus* and *A Thousand Plateaus*. The comparison is not an entirely arbitrary one. Wark describes his project in *Virtual Geography* as a 'rewriting of the Deleuzo-Guattarian negative historicism of deterritorialization' in terms of his own experience 'to map the difference between my experience and theirs' (Wark 1994: 224). There is no evidence in Hartley's work that he has been influenced by Deleuze and Guattari, but there are surprising parallels between many of his arguments and theirs. The comparison is useful, at least, in highlighting the implications of certain kinds of moves.

Deleuze and Guattari do for the concept of desire what Foucault does for the concept of power. Both attempt to overcome totalising theoretical tendencies by suggesting that there is no single form of the phenomenon to which the concept in each case refers. If, for Foucault, there are multiple forms of power, there are, for Deleuze and Guattari, multiple forms of desire. The position is developed in response to the restrictiveness of psychoanalytic theories for which desire is invariably organised around 'lack':

Unlike psychoanalysis, psychoanalytic competence (which confines every desire and statement to a genetic axis or overcoding structure, and makes infinite, monotonous tracings of the stages on that axis or the constituents of that structure), schizoanalysis [Deleuze and Guattari's proposed alternative] rejects any idea of a pretraced destiny, whatever name is given to it (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 13).

There is no doubt that the pluralisation of forms or trajectories of desire avoids a certain kind of reductionism – a reductionism common within French intellectual debates of the 1960s and 1970s. But as in the case of Foucault's proliferation of modes of operation of power, it also entrenches the universalising force of the concept. To use the distinctions I borrowed from Foucault himself in Chapter 1, the *theme* of desire is not taken to be

one which has 'built up at a certain moment during history'; it is presented as a 'universal necessity of human existence'. The greater the variation allowed *within* desire, in fact, the more it assumes the status of a basic substrate of human existence.

The concept of desire does not have quite this theoretical function in the 'media republican' arguments, but the possibility is never far away. Given the way the arguments have emerged from the stand-off between 'realism' and 'textualism', the category of media has inevitable associations with desire. In Hartley's case, these associations can be traced back to the appeal to semiotics and the principle of the arbitrariness of the sign. In the conclusion to *Understanding News*, he follows Roland Barthes in identifying the recognition of such arbitrariness with *jouissance*. In contrast to mere contentment (*plaisir*), he explains, '*jouissance* describes a more explosive kind of joy – in French the word is synonymous with sexual pleasure' (Hartley 1982: 191). It is this 'active kind of intercourse' which he wishes to inspire in readers by drawing their attention to the textuality of news. The association has persisted into his recent work where the 'textualisation' of the public domain is closely identified with its *sexualisation*. In the *Virtual Republic*, Wark directly equates his concept of the 'virtual' with Deleuze and Guattari's concept of desire, glossing both as 'that which exceeds and escapes naming and classifying, ordering and dominating' (Wark 1997: 184). There are similar associations in Lumby's *Bad Girls* between popular media and liberating sexual release.

The incipient formation of an abstract metaphysics of desire produces a similar tendency to dogmatism in the 'media republican' arguments as does the metaphysics of power of the 'policy' proponents. There is often an air of certainty in the arguments which is compounded, again, by the requirement that nothing be permitted to escape explanation in terms of the favoured category. It is not, of course, that the 'media

republicans' know in advance what form desire will take. In the case of Wark and Lumby, particularly, there is an insistent emphasis on its 'multiplicity' and 'fluidity'. It is rather that they know in advance that everything is traceable to *some* form of desire. Hence, for example, Wark detects a lie in any suggestion that the motivations for participation in the formal institutions of the classical public sphere are significantly different from participation in the worlds of media publicity and celebrity:

Of course people with a strong desire for policy and politics would like to think these are more worthy desires than other kinds, and that the machinery that propagates them is somehow more rational than that which propagates other kinds of desires ... But let's be honest: pop stars, celebrity skin and fashion spreads get some people hard and wet, but a good policy document is what it takes to light some people's fire (Wark 1999: 259).

This goes much further than countering prejudices against popular cultural forms.

'Policy and politics' are forced into an abstract equivalence with 'pop stars, celebrity skin and fashion' by their common reduction to sexual stimulus.

There is another problem here beside a hardening of theoretical certainties. In some ways, Wark's argument *confirms* prejudices against popular cultural forms, simply requiring more formal activities and practices to submit to them as well. The problem is similar to one which Morris identifies in 'Banality in Cultural Studies' in criticism of what she calls the 'distraction model' in cultural studies: 'there are housewives phasing in and out of TV or flipping through magazines in laundromats as well as pop intellectuals playing with quotes' (Morris 1990: 23-4). As Morris points out, the figure of the distracted consumer has, in a term she borrows from Patrice Petro, the 'contours' of a familiar female stereotype: 'distracted, absent-minded, insouciant, vague, flighty, skimming from image to image. The rush of associations runs irresistably toward a

figure of mass culture not as woman but, more specifically, as bimbo' (24). What concerns her in this is not a vestigial anti-feminism:

The problem is that in antiacademic pop-theory writing ..., a stylistic enactment of the 'popular' as *essentially* distracted, scanning the surface, short in attention span, performs a retrieval, at the level of *enunciative* practice, of the thesis of 'cultural dopes'. In the critique of which – going right back to the early work of Stuart Hall, not to mention Raymond Williams – the project of cultural studies effectively and rightly began (Morris 1990: 24).

The stereotypical figure invoked by Wark's 'pop stars, celebrity skin and fashion' is not quite the bimbo of the 'distraction model'; it is perhaps better characterised as the hormone-charged adolescent. But it remains within a range of abstract figures of 'escape'. In the context of the argument, it functions to identify popular culture *essentially* with an absence of organisation or durability of forms.

This identification has the further effect of inhibiting any 'common world of conversation'. The understanding of desire as 'that which exceeds and escapes' places it in opposition to pattern or structure. This makes it impossible to identify areas of shared feeling or commitment (in Williams' terms, '*structures* of feeling'), resulting in a kind of atomism. A good example is a reduction by Lumby of her own sympathetic reading of an advertising image to a simple expression of individual desires:

In arming myself for disagreement with people who see only molestation, degradation and sexual violence towards women in the photograph, I've reinvented it in my favour. I've minimised details which suggest cruelty on the part of the shadowy male figure, and I've opted to see the woman's apparent indifference as a sign of her intellectual self-absorption. I've altered the image in line with my desires (Lumby 1997: xxv).

The admission may be an attempt at honesty, but it also bankrupts any potential for further debate. Sympathy is reduced to a simple calculus of desire: if our desires happen

to coincide with Lumby's we will sympathise with her reading; if they don't we won't. Any attention to the 'art' of cultural forms in *developing* sympathy is lost.

But the most serious problem of the 'media republican' arguments is one suggested by Lumby's analysis of her motivations as 'arming myself for disagreement'. Having denied herself any positive grounds for extending her appeal to others, she is compelled to fall back on negative points of orientation to give her argument some form. The tendency is even more marked in the cases of Hartley and Wark. In *The Virtual Republic*, Wark attributes the poverty of public debate in Australia during the 1990s to the persistence of paranoid fantasies – a tendency to blame an abstract 'they' for all that is wrong with the world:

They are a cancer, a danger and a plague. They are multiplying like mice, but they are masters only of the sterile. Theirs is a life hating ideology. They seek the revenge of the uncreative and to discredit all natural genius. Every time civilisation gets rid of this spectre, it turns up with a new hat on (Wark 1997: 179).

The irony is that this logic might easily be attributed to Wark himself. The difference is only that the 'they' who constitute the threat are not enemies of the moral order but the moralists who attempt to impose one. With the consolidation in Australia of conservative government and occasional outbursts by public commentators against 'political correctness' and 'postmodernism', their numbers in Wark's writing have swelled. His recent book, *Celebrities, Culture and Cyberspace*, abounds with negative figures: 'moralists', 'greying pundits', 'nay-saying celebrities', disdainful litterateurs, 'suburban' arbiters of taste and baby boomer opinion makers or 'Burbles' – 'This is the sound they make in the media – burble burble. But it is also the place – suburbia – from which that sound comes' (Wark 1999: 222). Wark's criticism of these figures is a

generalised one: all are condemned for blocking the free flow of 'information' – another variety of 'that which exceeds and escapes' – and therefore of thwarting desire.

Hartley's arguments are pitched against the 'knowledge class', whose anti-democratic prejudices prevent popular cultural forms from realising their true potential. The term is taken from John Frow who uses it more neutrally to designate 'a class based in the performance of knowledge functions' (Frow 1995: 117). Hartley traces functions back to desires, which he identifies as fundamentally pernicious: the knowledge class is 'the class which wants to take power over information media and cultural technologies like television, not only by running the business on behalf of its shareholders and stakeholders, but by regulating it, and controlling the literacies and discourses by means of which it is understood culturally' (Hartley 1999: 124). The position is unabashedly a conspiracy theory: the reason why public discussion of television fails to realise its democratic potential is a 'knowledge-class conspiracy against the audience – a conspiracy by "opinion leaders" against the led' (125). As with Wark's barbs at 'Burbler's', Hartley's criticisms of 'knowledge-class chit chat' are an indiscriminate broadside, allowing the 'judgmental finger-wagging certainties' and 'pessimistic snobbishness' of Leavisite literary criticism (67) to be identified even with the work of Williams and Hall: 'The radicals of the Left disliked democracy, suburbia and post-political consciousness of the ordinary suburban population as much as did the radicals of the Right. They didn't like popular visual culture's cheerful ordinariness' (121).

There is a crudeness to these polemics which, in any other context, Hartley and Wark would not accept. Their own arguments provide the strongest reasons for rejecting them. As Wark writes in *The Virtual Republic*, 'it's important to get beyond the fantasy of the big bad other':



It might be morally satisfying to be able to polarise the whole space of debate and attribute all the bad stuff to the other side, but I don't think it's a terribly effective cultural politics. The irony is that while I wouldn't deny that there is a little too much 'ideological soundness' in some writing in the humanities, I think they have been remarkably ineffective as instruments of transformation ... Where cultural studies has had some effect, it has ... been through inventing structures that create new possibilities for dialogue (Wark 1997: 173).

In a similar way, Hartley argues for the need to 'go beyond the tradition of binarized, adversarial criticism' (Hartley 1996: 26). Not to do so, he suggests, is to accept a degeneration of criticism to the point where it no longer has any moment of empirical engagement with the field it is supposedly examining. The case he has in mind is the criticism of journalism: 'a theoretical approach which simply denounces journalists as "inculcators of ruling class ideology" gives itself no reason to investigate journalism further – there's no more to be said' (26). But the point must equally apply to the criticism of criticism. The substitution of 'knowledge class' for 'ruling class' does nothing to change the basic structure of criticism and it is in the structure, not the objects as such, that the problem lies.

## THE POWER OF THE IMAGE

It would be a mistake, however, not to look beyond these shortcomings. As in the case of the 'policy' arguments, the tendency to polemic is fuelled, to a certain extent, by a sense of desperation. Having spent most of *The Virtual Republic* pointing out the negative effects of paranoid fantasies, Wark confesses doubts that there is any alternative to their 'relentless logic of otherness':

Perhaps there's no escape – I certainly operate within fantasies of my own. To give just one instance, the fantasy of the cold warriors, whom I would like to see demobilised now that their war is over (Wark 1997: 267).

In a similar way, Hartley often seems to view knowledge production as simply a battle between factions of the knowledge class 'fighting out with each other who gets to speak on behalf of an increasingly unknowable audience, in whose name so much contemporary media "representation" seeks to gain power for its own point of view' (Hartley 1996: 26). But there is also in media republicanism a clear suggestion that something more *should* be possible. And it is a suggestion which is not without justification: the arguments create a space in which a different model of criticism is actually able to emerge.

Perhaps the most significant effect of the media republican arguments is to neutralise the force of generalised theoretical concepts. As in the case of the 'policy' arguments, the extreme extension of the tendency in cultural studies towards conceptual generalisation discloses a paradoxical limit. Once all social or cultural phenomena are conceived as effects of media, the concept of media loses its capacity for discrimination. Once all actions are attributed to pleasure or desire, the terms are emptied of any specific meaning. This is also where theoretical differences begin to dissolve. At precisely the point where 'textualist' polemics are carried to their extreme, denying even a place from which another might speak, they also relent by revealing their impotence. If the media republican arguments are followed consistently, there is nothing to differentiate their advocates from anyone else. Even the most trenchant forms of realism, the most paranoid denunciations of the media, are, in fact, articulations of desire *through* the media. Even Jocelyne Scutt – the feminist critic of television who refuses on principle to own one – is, in fact, a celebrity engaging in the mediasphere. The only level at which she might be distinguished from Hartley, Wark or Lumby is at the level of consciousness. Adversarial critics of the media perceive fundamental differences from others where, in fact, none exist.

It is at this point that the 'openness' and 'tolerance' which Morris finds in Lumby's *Bad Girls* is produced. At a certain level, the book appears merely to perpetuate familiar sectarian tendencies in left cultural criticism. Varieties of feminism which represent the media in negative terms are accused as censorious and identified with 'conservatism'. Yet at crucial points, the charges are dropped as Lumby adopts a more humorous, dialogic tone. In writing of Scutt, for example, she becomes intrigued by the latter's claim to know about television from staying in hotels and motels:

Re-reading her letter now, Dr Scutt's peripatetic viewing habits strike me as more interesting than her refusal to have television in her house. Hotel rooms, after all, are traditional havens for lapses from domestic standards. The minibar, the in-room dining menu and the movie channel call the most virtuous interstate visitor from their laptop. Even for a critic burdened by the most exacting standards, watching television can't be all hard work in this kind of environment (Lumby 1997: x).

Lumby's writing here is more inquisitive than inquisitorial. Scutt is seen as significant enough to engage in debate, but her position is not dramatised as ominous or threatening. Her views are to be argued with, not fundamentally rejected or opposed.

This turn is more than a minor retreat from positions which Lumby is fundamentally committed to. Within the terms of her arguments, varieties of feminism pitched against the 'dominant ideology' do not essentially contradict her own; they merely articulate different desires. Positions are no longer represented as competing to exclude one other, but as belonging to a spectrum on a plane of consistency. A similar openness can be found in Hartley and Wark. To use a term which Wark (1997: 51) himself suggests in *The Virtual Republic*, the media republican arguments produce a 'zone of indifference', a space removed from the rigours of debate in which positions are not required to account for themselves but are accepted simply for what they are. As he points out, such

a zone allows different points of view to be heard on their own terms rather than responded to pre-emptively as a possible threat to one's own. It is in this context that the polemical tendencies of media republicanism no longer define it. Despite his often combative posturing, there is substance to Hartley's claim that the initiative aims at 'cordialisation' (1999: 10). Beyond the polemic, the conditions are created for a genuine intellectual generosity.

The surest way to develop this potential may be, paradoxically, to insist that the terms of the polemic be adhered to more rigorously. So long as the concept of power is merely displaced, media republicanism continues to be haunted by its presence, caught within the field which it seeks to escape. Yet the logic of the arguments press towards its complete elimination. If all relations take place in and through the media, then there is no point at which power in the sense of an external 'reality' could intervene. If the basic principle of all activities and practices is pleasure, desire or aesthetic appreciation, then the concept of power might be fully pensioned off as redundant.

That this final step is not taken is an indication perhaps that, against protestations, Hartley, Wark and Lumby are swayed by the arguments made against them. Despite their idealisation of the 'weightless' domains of popular commercial media (Hartley), the virtual terrains opened up by new media technologies (Wark), or the consensual exchange of sexual representations (Lumby), they still wish to leave a line open to the 'gravity' traditionally associated with discourses of power. The retainment of the concept, even if in a limited capacity, permits a strategic adoption of a 'serious' mode. Hence also the importance of maintaining a range of figures defined by power – a baleful menagerie of knowledge class despots, moralists and censors. In opposing such figures, media republicanism is able to invoke a familiar aura of substance and seriousness, heading off charges of superficiality.

There is, however, a less arbitrary way in which the initiative might be defended: to distinguish between rationalist and empiricist concepts of power, refusing only the former. There is actually a basis for such a move within the media republican arguments themselves. A good example is a discussion by Wark of the political dynamics of the stand-off in 1989 between the Chinese government and protestors in Tiananmen Square. Wark is interested in the disruption to government public relations efforts, at the time of Mikhail Gorbachev's visit to Beijing, by student hunger-strikers: 'The government intended Gorbachev to lay a wreath at the Monument of the People's Heroes ... The students just stole the show' (Wark 1994: 149). The situation demonstrates, for Wark, that 'there are many kinds of power':

There is the power *in* the image, and there is the power *of* the image. Power in the image: Deng and Gorbachev sitting down to lunch. Power of the image: students – kids just like yours, starving themselves. Does that make you feel concern? Or a mite hungry? Either way, it's a powerful image, although not an image of power (Wark 1994: 149).

The distinction between 'power in the image' and 'power of the image' bears closer examination than Wark gives it himself. There is, in fact, a confusion in their common framing as 'kinds of power'. Such a framing suggests that they are different forms of a general phenomenon, yet what is significant about the 'power *of* the image' is its *particularity*. As Wark himself points out, the students ('kids just like yours') did not embody power in the abstract. The power they exercised was contingent, a power which needs to be identified with a limiting article (*a* power). The 'power *of* the image' is, in other words, a power in the empiricist sense.

When considered in the context of Wark's wider project, the point assumes greater significance. If followed consistently, his arguments actually exclude a recognition of power in any *other* sense. If the 'power *of* the image' is a power made possible by a

particular matrix of media vectors (the presence of the American broadcasters CBS and CNN in Tiananmen Square), 'power *in* the image' is distinguished by a supposed reference outside that matrix. The implication is that the power of institutionally-recognised figures (Deng Xiaoping, Mikhail Gorbachev) is formed independently of the media, only, in a secondary way, being represented *in* the media. Yet this is precisely the kind of proposition which media republicanism rejects. If, as Wark insists, there is no space outside the vector field of the media, then to talk of 'power in the image' can only be misleading. The powers of Deng and Gorbachev may have been located within different *kinds* of media – the party document, the government edict, the policy statement – but from a media republican perspective these must be recognised as media nonetheless. The logical conclusion is clear: there is no general phenomenon 'power', only particular powers made possible at different points in the vector fields of contemporary societies.

A similar conclusion can be drawn from Hartley. One of the longest-running distinctions in his work has been between 'social' and 'textual' power. As he puts it in *Tele-ology*: 'categories such as class, nation and gender are not only socio-political but also meaningful'. It is at the level of meaning, in fact, that one finds 'the mechanisms for producing the categories themselves' (Hartley 1992b: 11). There is therefore a legitimate place, Hartley infers, for studying the power of textual phenomena as distinct from power at the socio-political level. It is in this context that he stakes out a place for television studies: 'The most fundamental concern that the analyst has to confront when constructing such an object of study [television] is the question of textual power' (15).

The distinction between 'social' and 'textual' power corresponds closely to Wark's distinction between 'power in the image' and 'power of the image'. As presented, it appears, again, to be a distinction between different 'forms' of power – one which

operates outside the textualised space of the media and another which operates within it. But again there are strong suggestions of quite a different way of presenting things. 'Textual' power is consistently associated with *particularity* as against the relative generality and abstraction of 'social' power. The most extended example in *Tele-ology* is an argument that television provides a model, for modern, industrialised societies, of 'the power of speech'. The medium is the perfect illustration, for Hartley, that "the power of speech" is not individual but social, therefore subject to technological development and historical change in what should be understood not as an innate personal capacity for speaking but a global economy of sense-making' (14). The reference to the 'global' should not distract us from the fact that 'the power of speech' is clearly identified as *a* power, not power 'as such'.

That there are two senses of the word power in play (empiricist and rationalist) becomes all but explicit at points where they are set in opposition to each other. According to Hartley:

The so-called power of speech is socialized, and therefore subject to economic exploitation, technological expansion and, most importantly, power relations. Certain people and classes of people have historically taken the power of speech much further than others, gaining power over the means of its production and circulation (Hartley 1992b: 14)

If the power of speech is 'subject to' power relations, if certain people or classes 'gain power over' the power of speech, then 'power' and 'the power of speech' must be distinct. The basis of the distinction is clear. The power of speech ('textual') is a specific power; to exercise it does not involve a claim to power in the abstract. This is why, for Hartley, it can be regarded positively, being associated with democratic freedoms. While it goes beyond individuals, it does not invoke a single, comprehensive

order. 'Social' power, by contrast, is power, period – power in an abstract, generalised sense.

If the point is brought into relation with Hartley's recent media republican arguments, a similar conclusion follows as in the case of Wark. As his position has become increasingly anti-sociological, the space for a recognition of 'social' power has all but disappeared. If, as he argues in *Popular Reality*, the public sphere is a differentiated aspect of the 'mediasphere', then the only powers which can operate within the public sphere are 'textual' powers. From the discussion above, 'textual' powers are powers *plural*. There is no place, therefore, for a generalised concept 'power'.

### TEXTUALISM OR NEO-EMPIRICISM?

All of this suggests that there may be a different way of viewing 'textualism' in cultural studies from that which is widely assumed. Rather than seeing it as a position within general theoretical debates, it might be seen as a kind of shell for an intellectual mode which cannot be recognised within the terms of those debates. To the extent, at least, that an emphasis on 'text' or 'media' has been used to draw attention to specific powers ('the power of the image', 'the power of speech'), such an emphasis simply cannot be placed in relation to theories about the nature or distribution of 'power'. While textualist arguments may often have been given a theoretical face, they have also functioned to preserve an empiricist sense of the concept of power.

In Hartley's most recent book, *Uses of Television*, the butterfly of neo-empiricism begins to emerge from its theoretical chrysalis. The book makes an interesting comparison to Thomas Osborne's *Aspects of Enlightenment*, where, as I argued at the end of the last chapter, an 'Anglo-Saxon empiricism' (Osborne's term) begins to emerge from the shell of Foucauldian theories of 'governmentality'. Like Osborne,



Hartley reconnects unmistakably with the intellectual resources of 'englishness'. His title is a tribute to Richard Hoggart's *The Uses of Literacy* and Hoggart's approach to cultural studies is kept in view as a positive model throughout. This is more than an isolated reference. *The Uses of Literacy* is, for Hartley, only

one point of culmination in a long-standing series of developments that are by now rather opaque, forgotten, deleted. J.B Priestley, the BBC Light Programme, *Picture Post*, suburbia, ordinariness, non-aligned middle-ground politics, social democracy, G.B. Shaw ... these markers of the semio-history of ordinariness have been somewhat lost, or clouded at least, in the adversarial Left-Right politics of politicized academic study in the 1970s and 1980s (Hartley 1999: 16).

All the touchstones of the 'structure of feeling' from which Stuart Hall regretfully took his leave in the early 1970s are recovered, considered for the way they might be revived.

A good example of where this turn may lead is a suggestion by Hartley that television might be understood as a form of 'teaching'. The suggestion is significant because it implies a consistency between a popular medium (television) and a process with clear institutional associations (teaching). It departs in this from an earlier tendency in Hartley's writing, as in Wark's and Lumby's, to see popular culture as 'exceeding' or 'escaping' structuring principles, the latter being represented only in negative terms. A positive sense of teaching is developed, significantly, from an association by Hoggart between good teaching and 'loving to influence others' (43). Hartley does not seek to hide the loss, in accepting such an association, of any general basis for opposing 'influence' – even the Rupert Murdoch variety cannot be simply condemned – but presents this more as strength than a weakness: 'I don't ask ... you to love Rupert as you might an honoured teacher, but simply ask that the dismissive default setting be

toggled off for a while, until there has been time to see whether cross-demographic communication can be recuperated as positive rather than negative social activity, on the model of teaching, which itself needs to be recuperated in the same way' (32).

This reconstructed Hoggartism is clearly not the same as the original. Hartley seeks to connect with a different world from Britain in the 1950s – a world of *Married ... With Children*, *Absolutely Fabulous*, Alicia Silverstone, an international publishing industry in cultural studies, debates around colonialism, 'globalisation', 'postmodernism'. His arguments are also clearly inflected by different generational experiences – the absorption of European theory, the impact of feminism, the expansion of higher education, the assumption of a more global field of reference. Through all of this, though, there is an important reconnection with the Hoggartian moment in cultural studies. The crucial point, in the argument cited above, is that 'influence' is not conflated with a general phenomenon 'power': 'loving to influence' is not the same as 'taking power over' (46). An alternative is re-activated to general theoretical discourses on power: a more local criticism of distinct and specific *powers*.

# Conclusion

## Reconfiguring Cultural Studies

In an interview, cited earlier in the dissertation, between Stuart Hall and Kuan-Hsing Chen, Hall expresses reservations about attempts to chart new directions for cultural studies:

because the constant pressure, not just to do good new work but always and only to do so by way of repudiating what went before – a sort of desire to advance only by way of wreaking an Oedipal revenge ... feels to me like struggling over a dead body, which if only you could claim it, retrospectively, would validate what you are doing. Whether that is any way to conduct what we have agreed is a necessary struggle to renew cultural studies, I don't know. Not everything can fit in the house, I know, but I sometimes feel it's a struggle over the remains, over the corpse (Hall 1996a: 398).

Speaking for himself, Hall is tired of general debates over the nature and significance of the field:

I don't really want to write about cultural studies, as such, any more ... I want to do some new work, to use cultural studies to open up new questions about globalization, new questions about ethnicity. I want to move it on. I don't want to wrangle with it (Hall 1996a: 398).

But the feeling is not unique to Hall. In a somewhat blunter mode, Meaghan Morris has suggested that controversies over cultural studies in Australia should now be put aside: 'it is high time for more Australian practitioners to put their heads down, ignore the flak, and start producing the substantive accounts of cultural life, past and present, that we claim that our field can generate' (Morris 1997a: 37). A similar desire to 'move cultural studies on' pervades the two initiatives reviewed in Chapters 5 and 6. 'Policy' and 'media republicanism' respond in different ways to a similar nightmare vision: that

cultural studies might become trapped in a snake-pit of left-political sectarianism. Both wish, like Hall, to escape 'wrangling' to engage in work that is 'positive', 'constructive', 'useful'.

This dissertation has shared substantially in these motivations, but has pursued a somewhat different strategy. The problem with the will to 'move on' is that it tends to reproduce the structure of relations which it is designed to avoid. It implies a view of the present and past of cultural studies as tired, spent, something which it is now necessary to 'repudiate'. Even if such criticisms are not made directly, there are continued suggestions of a generalised negative judgement. The problem is magnified by the fact that assessments of *who* is 'moving on' vary according to perspective. There is an irony, for example, in the fact that Hall cites 'Australian cultural studies' as an example of the tendencies he wishes to avoid. The work he has in mind is almost certainly the 'policy' initiative; it is the 'policy' proponents who have been marked in international contexts as 'Australian' (see, for example, Jameson 1993) and Hall himself has been a frequent target of their criticisms. The very desire of Bennett, Hunter and Cunningham to reject 'criticism' in favour of a constructive engagement with cultural policy can be represented, therefore, as a symptom of the destructiveness which is turning cultural studies into a 'corpse'.

The alternative I have adopted has been similar to that suggested by Thomas Osborne for social theory: not so much to propose new initiatives as to recognise 'that we already have plenty of good practices in the social and human sciences, and that things are not quite as bad in theory ... as many seem to think' (Osborne 1998: xiii). The purpose of such an approach is, for Osborne:

to contribute to a reconfiguration of a discipline that is in effect already there,  
not to succumb to the hubris of attempting to reinvent social theory from

scratch, to provide a swingeing critique of everything that has gone before, or to re-evaluate all values (xiii).

The aim is not to clear the ground for a bold new ‘greenfield’ construction, but to work on traditions and practices which already exist in an effort to articulate them to contemporary circumstances. Rather than staging debates between competing foundational or anti-foundational claims (‘Foucault says this ... Habermas says that ... Haraway says this ... Rorty says that ...’), Osborne suggests that social theory might entail ‘a kind of ongoing fieldwork in our existing practices of enlightenment’ (xii).

It is precisely such a ‘reconfiguration’ which I would like, in conclusion, to suggest for cultural studies. If I were to join in finding a ‘fundamental flaw’ in the field, it would be a tendency to look for fundamental flaws. As I argued in Chapter 1, it is a tendency which first developed out of a sense of the inadequacy of ‘English’ intellectual resources in responding to the challenges of post-war developments in politics and culture. At its highest point, in arguments of the 1970s against ‘essentialism’ and ‘empiricism’, it often functioned to bind cultural studies, as criticism was directed outwards at the institutions and locations from which it emerged. But it has always functioned also to divide. The first casualties, in the British case, were Richard Hoggart, Raymond Williams and E.P. Thompson, who were, in varying degrees, excommunicated from the field which they had played a major part in establishing. They were not the last; as Hall points out, the rejection by cultural studies of its own past has become almost routine. The result has been that ‘flaws’ are diagnosed closer and closer to the heart of cultural studies itself. By the 1990s, a curious genre had emerged in which the field was criticised in sweeping terms from positions still ambiguously located within it.

The first way I would summarise the argument of the dissertation, therefore, would be that there are not and have never been fundamental flaws in positions adopted in debates around culture and society. When any serious ‘fieldwork’ is conducted into the history of these debates, the positions invariably appear more complex and interesting than the reductive caricatures which figure in generalised theoretical criticisms. What is revealed are, in Osborne’s terms, a variety of ‘practices of enlightenment’, with limitations certainly but still with possible relevance to problems today.

At the centre of this argument has been a shift of perspective in relation to the concept of power. It is this concept, more than any other, which has served to identify flaws and has been correspondingly associated with claims to a relative theoretical ‘correctness’. My response to debates around power has been to suggest that there are two ways in which the concept may be used: on the one hand, a familiar ‘rationalist’ one, according to which power is conceived as a single homogeneous phenomenon (albeit, in some versions, with many ‘forms’ or ‘modalities’); on the other hand, an ‘empiricist’ one, for which the various phenomena comprehended under the concept are, in fact, distinct. The recognition of the possibility of empiricism defuses the tendency to think in terms of ‘flaws’ or ‘correctness’. It requires us to ask, firstly, whether positions which have not made use of a generalised concept of power are ‘lacking’ in the way that has often been alleged. As I argued in Chapters 1 and 2, it may simply be that they have addressed questions of power (or powers) in an empiricist mode. Secondly, it allows us to consider generalised concepts of power in a different way – not as warranted by an absolute referent, but as imaginative constructions which gain their meaning from the ‘passions, actions and ends’ which have informed their use.

This is not to put forward any general prescription as to how the concept of power should now be used. It is rather to propose a new way of reflecting upon those uses

which already exist. This is why it was necessary to distinguish my position at the outset from 'Foucauldianism'. The arguments I have developed in the dissertation are similar, in many ways, to those widely associated with Foucault. Like Foucault, I have attempted to trace how supposed 'universal necessities' have, in fact, 'built up at a certain moment during history'. The idea of an empiricist concept of power might be seen to resonate with a Foucauldian insistence on the specificity and plurality of forms of power. I am also positively disposed to many of the developments which have emerged from engagements with Foucault's work on 'governmentality'. There is something at stake, however, in resisting the authority of Foucault. As I argued in Chapter 1, Foucault never seriously considered the possibility that the concept of power might be historicised or contextualised in a similar way to other concepts; there is, indeed, a consistent suggestion in his writing on the subject that power must be accepted as a 'universal necessity'. At the same time, he admitted plurality only at the level of different 'forms', reinforcing an assumption that there is a single universal phenomenon. The effect of all this is to leave in place a logic of theoretical correctness.

The point has significant implications for attempts to suggest possible relations between the past and future of cultural studies. From a 'Foucauldian' perspective, the passion which has been invested in the concept of power appears in retrospect as little more than a waste – as misdirected if not fundamentally ill-conceived. There are suggestions of this kind even in Osborne, for whom similar passions in social theory are best characterised simply as 'childish' or 'immature'. While I have some sympathy for such a view, the perspective I have developed does not allow the heat associated with the concept to be so easily dismissed.

It is here, perhaps, that the history of cultural studies offers particularly useful lessons. It could be argued that the field began with precisely the kind of 'fieldwork' which

Osborne recommends, in attempts to extend and adapt to new circumstances what was understood to be a long tradition of thought about 'culture' and 'society'. But cultural studies has always been exposed to contexts which, writing from 'social theory', Osborne does not quite bring into focus. The point could be made by drawing attention to an important *difference* between his project and the early work of figures such as Williams and Hoggart. Osborne does not consider 'practices of enlightenment' in, say, working class life or the activities of those, more generally, who are remote or alienated from formal institutions of government, education and the media. This may not threaten his arguments directly, but it does raise questions about their capacity to provide solutions to current problems.

If the history of cultural studies is any guide, the major intellectual developments of the last forty years have occurred not merely at the level of theory but in response to a rapidly expanding interface between government, education and media and the populations, students and audiences which they administer, teach or address. The key insight of the work of the 1950s was that if serious attention was not paid to the intellectual and ethical practices which these populations, students and audiences *brought with them* in relating to formal institutions, then 'practices of enlightenment' would inevitably appear – and understandably so – as crudely imposed. This is, in fact, much the way they *did* appear to the intellectual generation of the 1970s and it is in this context that both a generalised concept of power and polemical tendencies in debates around culture and society have emerged. However immature these tendencies may be, they are also a symptom of social, political and cultural developments which cannot simply be wished away.

A failure to address these developments similarly affects Bennett's and Hunter's suggestions for reform. In writing of nineteenth century models of liberal governance,



they are often highly persuasive. In a provocative essay in *Culture – A Reformer's Science*, Bennett argues that the nineteenth century museum placed the visitor in 'a particular form of being in time':

Rather than functioning like an ideology which works to secure social relations by inscribing social agents into an historically complacent acceptance of their given positions, typological displays were calculated to produce a regulated restlessness, a worrisome insertion of the self into a developmental time which generated a requirement for a progressive movement through time while simultaneously restraining that movement (Bennett 1998: 163).

Close parallels with this argument can be found in analyses by Hunter of the school playground and the literary text (1988a: 17; 1994: 72-75). His phrase 'supervised freedom' closely echoes Bennett's 'regulated restlessness' and suggests a similar 'being in time'. But nowhere do Bennett or Hunter address the problem of how nineteenth century governmental practices might be articulated to the present. Instead of considering why 'regulated restlessness' has tended, since the late 1960s, to be eclipsed by questions of 'ideology', they effectively dismiss the complex history of cultural politics over the last thirty years as little more than a gross theoretical error. In relation to the *present*, their persuasiveness is abandoned to forced argument: no articulation to current circumstances is necessary, it is implied, governmentality must simply be accepted as having been decreed.

The problem here is more than one of oversight. Without mentioning Williams directly, Osborne (1998: 15) explicitly rejects the idea that enlightenment should be thought of as pertaining to 'a whole way of life'. The reasons for doing so are clear. It is essential to his argument that the ethics of enlightenment be thought of as limited and specific:

... the terminology of ethics is intended to signify something restricted and *deliberate*: that is, something that is not 'ethical' in the sense that it guides all

aspects of the conduct of our life but, on the contrary, something which might involve a deliberate break from everyday life; to submit to an ethic can mean a temporary retreat into a particular commitment, and deliberately and rather artificially even at the expense of other commitments (Osborne 1998: xiii).

Hunter is even more emphatic in distinguishing ethical practices from 'everyday life'. In fact, his entire project could almost be seen as an attempt to wind back Williams. As he describes it himself in the title to a key essay, it is a project of 'Setting Limits to Culture':

Cultural studies has been driven by the imperative to expand the aesthetic concept of culture – the dialectic, the goal of complete development – to all social activities and relations, so that aesthetic fulfilment can be both superseded by and extended to the 'way of life as a whole'. In the light of the preceding discussion it is possible to formulate quite a different imperative: to *restrict* the concept of culture to the specialized practice of aesthetico-ethical self-shaping in which it has pertinence and to begin to chart the limited *degree* of generality it has achieved as a technique of person formation in the educational apparatus (Hunter 1988b: 115).

To generalise the concept of culture is, from this perspective, to risk losing an association with deliberate practices – the sense of specific application which Osborne wishes to capture in the idea of 'aspects of enlightenment'. Culture becomes little more than a weak sociological category with imperialist ambitions, producing a rampant inflation of aesthetic discipline and the elevation of its principles to a universal norm.

My view of this argument is that it correctly identifies a problem but mistakes its origins. The extension of the concept of culture is not attributable to Williams, cultural studies, practitioners of 'the aesthetic' or any other single agency. It is an effect of a general loss of boundaries between practices which were previously relatively distinct. It should be pointed out that the 'aesthetic concept of culture' is not the only category to have been 'expanded'. As Tom O'Regan argued in one of the most considered

contributions to the ‘policy’ debate, a convergence between institutional practices has produced a widespread confusion of ethical protocols. Invoking Robert Merton’s (1968) distinction between ‘attached’ and ‘unattached’ intellectuals, O’Regan draws attention, for example, to the way in which

the rise of consultancy and commissioned research has created opportunities for unattached intellectuals to perform the work of bureaucratic intellectuals. In the process the unattached intellectual’s role as ‘a gadfly, a critic of established policies’ is being superimposed on the traditional function of the bureaucratic intellectual ... The ‘unattached/attached’ intellectual is caught between two different forms of conduct and self-representation (O’Regan 1992b: 519).

While, from one perspective, the ethos of the bureaucrat might be seen as inappropriately exposed to principles deriving from aesthetic criticism, the situation could equally be represented as the reverse. The point could also be generalised: business leaders have become exposed to principles of media performance, journalists to principles of governmental responsibility, politicians to principles of business management, while all have been subjected to demands and expectations generated within practices outside formal institutions altogether.

To hope, in this context, for a reinstitution of traditional distinctions between ethical practices appears simply unrealistic. Towards the end of *Rethinking the School*, Hunter suggests that we disarm forced options and false unities by ‘distinguishing between their components and coaxing them back into their respective spheres of life, inside whose limits they make sense and cause no harm’ (Hunter 1994: 154). The suggestion is in many ways attractive, but fails to address practicalities. If ‘spheres of life’ is taken to designate formal institutions, then the suggestion may amount, in fact, to little more than revulsion at the loss, over the last thirty years, of clear boundaries between culture, government, politics and ‘everyday life’. The case for a recognition of ‘specificities’, in

this case, would not so much ‘coax’ as coerce, requiring everything to return to its ‘proper place’: ‘culture’ to the English Department, ‘government’ to the administrative bureau, ‘politics’ to parliament and ‘everyday life’ to a sphere beyond ethical or intellectual reflection. Such a program would require that the interface between institutional sites – and even more between institutions and ‘everyday life’ – was radically diminished, approximating an age before television, before mass higher education and before the expansion of government programs under the Keynesian welfare state.

A similar reluctance to admit a historical context for antagonisms in cultural studies can be found in the ‘media republican’ arguments reviewed in Chapter 6. It is not, in this case, that there is a failure to recognise a convergence of institutions and practices. It is rather that the resulting terrain is represented as if it is, or should be, free of the sort of problems and tensions which have been articulated through the concept of power. The implications of convergence are considered only in the relatively ‘frictionless’ domains of popular commercial media (Hartley), the ‘virtual’ terrains opened up by new media technologies (Wark) or the consensual exchange of sexual representations (Lumby). Anxieties, hostilities, dissatisfactions – in short, negativities – are, again, dismissed as a superficial intrusion of a single agency. The ‘authentic’ condition of converged terrains is one of democratic innocence; only authoritarians, moralists or the ‘knowledge class’ would seek to represent them otherwise.

As I argued in Chapters 5 and 6, both the ‘policy’ initiative and ‘media republicanism’ make important contributions to changing the terms of debates around power. The most significant of these has been to introduce the possibility of reconnecting with empiricism. But from the perspective of the dissertation, both still remain within the

historical arc of a crisis of 'englishness' identified in the mid 1980s by Terence Hawkes:

As that crisis deepens in the latter years of this century, its displaced academic manifestation finds itself pushed more and more into the foreground, as if the problems were in fact located and might even be solved there. A kind of smouldering hysteria has been no stranger to the field of academic literary criticism in Britain for the last fifty years and more. Accusations, denunciations, reports of traitors and double-agents are not unknown. It is almost as if a way of life were under siege (Hawkes 1986: 122).

Hawkes' points of reference may seem too local to be relevant to cultural studies: the field is not limited to Britain and cannot be identified with literary criticism. But his perspective might be generalised. The debates which have clustered around the term 'cultural studies' have largely developed in sites historically characterised by an empiricist intellectual style. England has a particular – perhaps mythical – status in this context, but is not alone. Nor is literary criticism ('English') the only field in which the problems of empiricism in adjusting to developments of the twentieth century have been played out. Cultural studies, in particular, has been centrally located within this conjuncture.

So long as this history is simply avoided or repressed, unfinished business remains. My aim in all of the above has been to reduce the main obstacle which prevents it from being addressed – a certain aura which has developed around the concept of power. In terms of Yuri Lotman's theory of cross-cultural translation, it can be seen as the aura attributed within a 'receiving' culture to incoming influences for which there are no local resources with which to respond. The most ambitious proposition of the dissertation has been that the historical context informing this situation may now be seen as coming to a close. Options in relation to generalised concepts of power in

English-language cultural criticism have, over the last forty years, been narrowly confined. If not simply embraced, it has been necessary to set up reactive defences against them. Against this background, I have attempted to excavate a 'third way': a sceptical regard for the concept of power which recognises its historical force and relevance but refuses to validate it with the assumption of an absolute referent. Such an alternative has, in fact, always been present at a suppressed level in cultural studies; it only needs now to be crystallised.

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