

CULTURAL THEORY

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SAGE BENCHMARKS IN CULTURE AND SOCIETY

CULTURAL THEORY

VOLUME I
Legacies and Innovations

Edited by
David Oswell



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Editor's Introduction: Cultural Theory – Genealogies, Orientations and Territories

David Oswell

This four volume collection of articles is intended to stand as an indication of the broad multi-disciplinary and complex genealogical field of cultural theory. It goes without saying, but nevertheless needs to be said, that such an endeavour is necessarily partial and conditional on a particular vision of that field and its potential futures. But more than that, the intention in identifying potential journal articles to be included in this collection was not simply to repeat (which is what I do in some respects in this introduction) what is now often a highly standardised and formulaic description of the field of cultural theory either originating with the emergence of the Birmingham School (including the broader contributions from Raymond Williams and Richard Hoggart) or going back to the sociological fathers (Weber, Marx, Durkheim and Simmel) in order to demonstrate the close correlation between social, sociological and cultural theory. This history of the field is often followed through structuralism, poststructuralism to postmodernism. Although such histories and delimitations of the field of cultural theory are not without their value, they repeat a rather linear developmental narrative and singularly fail to account for the wealth of material across and outside a range of disciplines that has a stake in articulating cultural theory. It has been my intention, then, in this collection to provide some detail of this broader field of discussion, to allow for a range of different forms of writing of cultural theory, and to present through the articles chosen in the four volumes a rather complex series of genealogies (that reach back in search of origin stories and texts, at the same time as the field of cultural theory unfolds over the uneven territories of different disciplines and problematics). That said, particular

questions, problems and themes are clearly evident and it is these that structure the four volumes in terms of 'Legacies and Innovations', 'Identity, Experience and Body', 'Environment and Global Humanity', and 'Economy, Technology and Knowledge'. These questions, problems and themes are as much an indication of the future trajectories of cultural theory as to where it has come from.

The Object of Cultural Theory

The specificity of cultural theory, as opposed, for example, to social theory, literary theory or political theory is itself a problem in that it raises the question of whether cultural theory is a theory of culture insofar as 'culture' might be said to designate the object of its study in the same way that politics (and the political) and literature (and literariness) are seen to be the objects of political theory and literary theory (see, for example, De Man, 1982). For sure, such a response seems obvious and, although the questions as to the 'what' or 'how' or 'why' of culture would need to be addressed, we might imagine that cultural theory would address itself first and foremost to those questions and to others within the boundaries of its specified object 'culture'. And yet when we look to what is often and by many seen to constitute 'cultural theory' the object of culture is not always readily, and sometimes not at all, apparent. Certainly Theodor Adorno directly addressed the question of culture, but then much Marxist cultural theory of the 1970s and early 1980s said little of 'culture' and more of 'ideology'. Similarly, much of the continental philosophy and particularly the 'poststructural theory' of the late 1960s, 1970s and 1980s had no regard for culture per se. Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Julia Kristeva and others, for example, were not in the first instance interested in the question of culture and yet they stand as key resources in academic definitions of what constitutes cultural theory. Then again, Stuart Hall, Angela McRobbie, Lawrence Grossberg and others writing on popular culture, for example, more explicitly addressed themselves to the question of culture. My point is simply that cultural theory is not always explicitly about culture in the first instance; theoretical objects ranging from 'commodification', 'textuality', 'screen', 'ideology', 'embodiment' and so on might find a home in a range of disciplines and fields, but that through contiguous family connections they come to shape the uneven terrain of cultural theory; moreover, theoretical resources that are not explicit are made at some point explicit through accumulated tacit cultural theoretical knowledge (inasmuch as we include certain questions, problems and concepts in our understanding and teaching of cultural theory sometimes with little or no reflection) or meta-theoretical surveys of the field (which remind us of and often police the boundaries of a field and its objects).

If indeed cultural theory has as its object culture, then 'culture' as a field of intelligibility has, in some respects, a fairly well mapped out genealogy.

From his earliest writings Raymond Williams sought to trace some of the aspects of a lineage of writers, from the late eighteenth and nineteenth century poets and social commentators to twentieth century literary and cultural critics and to frame this line of cultural expression, which writers such as Matthew Arnold encapsulated in terms of the best that can be said and done (Arnold, 1960), in the context of a groundswell of ordinary and everyday cultural and social practice and the driving forces of economic development and technological innovation. Marxism provided the framework (but certainly not rigid or inflexible) within which an understanding of the relation between culture and society could be understood (Williams 1958, 1965, 1997). Alongside Williams, the historian E. P. Thompson with respect to his and others work on a 'history from below' (Thompson, 1963) and the cultural critic Richard Hoggart with regard to his account of British working class cultural forms and their location within a contextual field of mass entertainment and Americanised popular culture (Hoggart, 1958) helped to provide the broad contours of a programme of empirical and cultural theoretical research from the late 1950s onward.

To a large extent this framing of cultural theory and the premise of its critique of 'high culture' (of culture as aesthetic, as taste, as artistic development and as spiritual deliverance) has been predicated on (and also largely ignored) the longstanding anthropological, and to a lesser and much less explicit extent sociological, research on culture which understood by that term, for example as articulated by E. B. Tylor in 1871 in his *Primitive Culture*, the 'complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society' (1874: 1). In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century this sense of culture was largely indistinguishable, in many treatises, from society itself. Economic, political, scientific and religious life, for example, might be seen as cultural inasmuch as they were forms of association to which one willingly belonged; but equally, and somewhat in contrast, such cultural associations might be distinguished from the structural and enduring features of society, such as family and the state (cf. Dilthey, 1972; Bulhof, 1976).

The idea that the particular groupings of morals, manners, beliefs and habits of humans as social beings constituted distinct, definable and investigable cultures was framed in the context of particular cultural systems in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Of significant importance was the Durkheimian clearing of the ground for an understanding of both the systemic and the symbolic nature of culture (Durkheim, 1995; Durkheim and Mauss, 1967); and of particular importance has been the work of the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure and his premise that culture may be understood in the context of the study of sign systems and that in turn semiology needs to be framed in the context of a general linguistics (Saussure, 1974). It was Saussure and the adoption of his ideas through French Structuralism (through

Claude Levi Strauss, Roland Barthes, Jacques Lacan and others) and beyond that provided the basis for much cultural theory in the proceeding century. As some commentators have noted, there is an affinity between the ideas of both Durkheim and Saussure (see Alexander, 1988; Culler, 1977; Holdcroft, 1991), but what is particularly important is the relation between a systemic understanding of the symbolic nature of social relations, a notion of social solidarity as containing its own immanent regularities, a political and anthropological notion of the people, and the correlation of the ideas of symbolic system, social solidarity and the bounded territorial space of the nation (see Wagner, 2001). It is in this broader context that the human and social sciences of the late nineteenth century bequeathed the fertile soil within which a number of related notions of culture become articulated and distributed (Oswell, 2006). In the development of sociologies and anthropologies of culture across the course of the twentieth century, 'culture' was deployed as a means of understanding national and sub-national social and symbolic systems (for example in the cultural studies analysis of youth sub-cultures in post-war Britain), but its affiliations to 'the nation' were hard to dislodge.

It was culture in its 'ethnographic sense', then, to quote Tylor again, that provided a means of understanding, on the one hand, the social solidarity of a (nationally) bounded unity but also, on the other, the divisions of that society inasmuch, that is, as an anthropological understanding of culture delivered a sense of culture as popular, as against culture as high art and elite practice. And, of course, it was in the tradition of cultural studies cultural theory (from the late 1950s onward) that a bifurcated and differentiated sense of culture could be developed alongside a keen sense of social structure and power relationality (whether, for example, in terms of Marxist analysis, sociological theories of social stratification, neo-Gramscian political theory, Althusserian ideology critique or Foucauldian discourse analysis). The critique of high culture and the deconstruction of an aesthetic notion of culture were underpinned in empirical and theoretical investigation of popular culture in the work of Williams, but also in the writings of Hall and many others working in the cultural studies tradition that developed, in part, in the context of the Centre for Cultural Studies at the University of Birmingham. In these writings popular culture was not to be simply equated with a notion of mass culture or mass entertainment (inasmuch as those latter notions had been the object of criticism in the 1920s, 1930s, 1940s and 1950s for example in the development of Leavisite literary criticism or Frankfurt School critique), but was construed as itself a terrain of struggle and negotiation. Popular culture was certainly constructed in the interplay with notions of 'folk culture', 'high culture' and 'mass culture', but was framed within a neo-Gramscian setting concerning the formation of hegemonic power, most notably theorised by Ernesto Laclau (1977).

Against these, what may be seen to be, 'realist' interpretations of culture (inasmuch as culture is seen to constitute a particular kind of reality that can be investigated (whether through signifying systems, artefacts and documents, or observable lived experience)), Tony Bennett, Ian Hunter and others presented a series of arguments that understood culture itself as a constructed object and as a means through which people and things, individuals and populations might be organised and governed. That is, these writers understood culture not as the medium through which people, things and the world are classified and divided up, but as itself a category and a classification and hence its definition (or its semantic field) raised important questions about its social, political and economic utility. Why, for example, designate some things as 'cultural'? What kind of resource is 'culture', for example, in the context of governing organisational change? Whereas Hunter identified a long running Romantic discourse in discussions of culture (from the eighteenth century to present forms of cultural criticism) that provided the resources for a particular ethical form of shaping the self (Hunter, 1988a), Bennett looked to the role of both aesthetic and anthropological notions of culture in the organisation of forms of cultivation and improvement for working class populations (for example in museum practices) (Bennett, 1992a, 1992b and 1998). In this Foucauldian inspired sense of culture as a resource for government, cultural practices and objects are conceived only inasmuch as they might be utilised in the organisation of the social. Of course, such a notion of culture implies, as both Hunter and Bennett make clear (Hunter 1992; Bennett, 1992a and 1992b), putting limits on the notion of culture, such that its extension across different social practices and spaces (for example, understanding business organisations or sports policy as fundamentally 'cultural') is a consequence of discursive and governmental practice. Such an understanding of the limited meaning and extension of culture implies that social practice and social relations are not always, necessarily and *a priori* construed as 'cultural'. What counts as culture and cultural are themselves consequences of historical and governmental formation.

However, although the placing of limits on culture means that attention must be focussed on the 'how' something is talked about and made cultural, it is certainly also the case that over the course of the twentieth century and increasingly so over the latter part of that century the ascription of things 'cultural' has proliferated. Not least, and importantly, a number of writers have talked about the 'de-differentiation' of the economic and the cultural (Lash and Urry, 1987 and 1994). On the one hand, culture is increasingly seen in economic terms, as an industry productive of value in a modern economy and, on the other, what are perceived and thought of as the cultural sectors are no longer limited to the arts and crafts or even the media, advertising and marketing, such that the very nature of economic organisation is seen to be dependent on the production, distribution and consumption of cultural

value. For some writers, such as the French sociologist Jean Baudrillard, this de-differentiation of culture and economy has meant that culture itself is understood on the model of economic exchange. For others, such as another French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, the investigation of economic and social life through an anthropological lens has meant that the economic can no longer be held up as a singular model of social and cultural action. Nevertheless, what is clear is that there has been a de-differentiation of culture and society inasmuch as the latter has been seen to be mapped over the course of the twentieth century so extensively by the former.

It is not surprising, then, that scholars from across the humanities and social sciences have referred to 'the cultural turn'. Some authors, for example, locate this moment from the 1960s and the development of cultural studies as a consistent body of intellectual work (David Chaney, 1994). Others have located its emergence in the 1930s and 1940s with the development of literary theoretical concerns about mass culture and mass entertainments (Hall 2007). What is clear is that such a cultural turn needs to be understood in historical terms through an analysis of the orientation of social science and humanities disciplines in their turning to studies of culture and the theoretical resources accrued therein in order to understand in many cases longstanding disciplinary questions and issues. This is, as the social and political theorist Kate Nash has discussed, partly historical and partly epistemological (2001). But what is also clear is that talk of any 'cultural turn' has been largely a consequence and reaction, not to the longstanding theoretical development and scholarship on cultural matters, but to the success and international distribution of theoretical work in what is loosely referred to as 'cultural studies', namely that family of ideas and investigation that was initiated in the 1950s and 1960s by writers such as Williams, Hoggart and Hall.

Legacies and Innovations

Lawrence Grossberg in 1986 noted that 'British Marxist cultural studies, in the works of the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, has recently had a significant and influential impact in the United States' (1986: 61). Grossberg also notes, by way of some partial explanation of this phenomenon, that this sudden interest may be due to 'the dissatisfaction with available theoretical paradigms and research programs, the increasing politicization of the academy, the slow incorporation of continental philosophies into the graduate curriculum, and perhaps, most powerfully, the recent visibility of Stuart Hall in the United States' (1986: 61). A few years later, Jeffrey Alexander and two of his colleagues Philip Smith and Steven Jay Sherwood reviewed a collection of papers from a cultural studies conference held in 1990 in the US that was edited by Grossberg and his colleagues

Cary Nelson and Paula Treichler (1992). The review titled 'The British Are Coming... Again! The Hidden Agenda of "Cultural Studies"' (1993) was one platform among many that issued a counter 'strong program' of 'American cultural sociology' and that criticised British cultural studies for its reduction of culture to power and for its ignorance of the longer social scientific field of cultural study that notably included the writings of Marx, Weber and Durkheim, but also the pursuit of, what Alexander has typified in other writings as, a Durkheimian turn and a structural semiotic understanding of the cultural, as found in the anthropological work of Clifford Geertz, Mary Douglas and Victor Turner. Similarly, in a recent study of ideas about culture in an anthropological context, Adam Kuper again rallies against cultural studies, in the context of issues about multiculturalism, not least for its over-politicisation of the study of culture, for its reduction of culture to power, and for its ignoring the longstanding anthropological writings on culture (1999). These criticisms are, in part, valid; but they are notable inasmuch as they paradoxically indicate both how any focus on cultural theory is reduced if it only considers culture within the purview of a rather static and staid paradigm of the 'British Birmingham School' and yet also how pivotal (whether as a point of agreement or disagreement) this school of thinking has been in the development and shaping of contemporary cultural theory.

In many ways, these claims about cultural studies and the development of cultural theory therein have presented a version of theoretical development that was particular to a specific historical-political-theoretical moment, namely the moment of ideology as a concept caught between, on the one hand, the Gramscianism of class alliances and the hegemonic bloc and the Althusserian ideological interpellation of the subject and, on the other, the post-Gramscian and post-Althusserian discourse theory of Ernesto Laclau, Chantal Mouffe and others. Across a number of disciplinary interfaces (e.g. literary theory, art theory, media and communication studies, sociology, etc.) and across a number of journal and conference platforms (e.g. *Screen*, *Media, Culture and Society*, *New Left Review*, *Console-ing Passions*, *International Television Studies Conference*, etc.) the focus on language, subjectivity and the apparatuses of power guided many discussions. For example, the discussions of, what many have referred to as, 'Screen Theory' (see Moores, 1990) articulated structural semiotics, post-Lacanian psychoanalytic theory and Althusserian structural Marxism in order to provide a framework for an analysis of the role of particular ideological mechanisms (notably classic novelistic realism (see Heath, 1976; MacCabe, 1976)) in the construction of the bourgeois gendered subject (see Mulvey, 1974). This model, initially developed in relation to film and cinema, was distributed across other media, such as television and the visual arts, in order to provide an understanding of the role of the apparatus (*dispositif*) in the formation of and control over the subject. At stake in these dialogues was the problematic of representation, not inasmuch as signification might be

constituted as a form of verisimilitude or a mirror on reality, but inasmuch as 'realism' constituted an ideological fiction that framed and locked, not the object, but, the subject within an apparatus of power. The inspiration for much of these discussions was the writing on ideology and social reproduction in the work of Louis Althusser. But his work also connected to debates coming out of France from journals, such as *Tel Quel*, that presented the ideas of Jacques Derrida, Roland Barthes, Julia Kristeva, Michel Foucault and others.

In part distinct, but also convergent on this focus on representation and subjectivity, was an interest in the investigation of lived experience, not inasmuch as it might be formed in the perpetual cycle of ideological control (see Thompson, 1978), but inasmuch as it offered the hope of an understanding of resistance, negotiation, and political agency. Hall's classic discussion of the problematic of structuralism and culturalism is one significant engagement with this issue (Hall, 1980). Initially this discussion posed Althusser against and alongside Gramsci as well as drawing on Williams' ideas about residual and emergent cultures, but latterly Foucault's ideas (1979) about power and resistance helped to shape a way out of Althusserian pessimism (see Smart, 1986). But then also Foucault too, at least in the context of his work on discipline and surveillance (1977a) was seen to provide a too overarching space for power to dominate everyday cultural practices; and, as a counter to that totalising vision, the work of the French anthropologist Michel de Certeau was used to understand the tactics of the everyday (1986; see for example the work of Jenkins, 1992; Silverstone 1994).

For some commentators of this process of thought and engagement, the discussion has been at once too sociological and yet not sociological enough. For example, Alexander in his outline of the 'strong program' in cultural sociology is critical of the lack of classical sociological references in contemporary 'Birmingham School' cultural studies, but he also presents an argument for understanding and investigating culture as autonomous. He berates the 'Birmingham School' for their inability to detach culture from social structure, such that representation, for example, is only understood in the context of what it 'really' represents. As an aside, we should note that there is a tendency (not just on the part of Alexander) to present 'the Birmingham School' as a straw person (as a hollow figure that if such a 'school' existed in the form presented, it is one that has been superseded and criticised by many of those who might be said to belong to such a school); moreover, the writings of 'the Birmingham School' of the 1970s and 1980s are very much symptomatic of the wide ranging and richly textured innovations and debates across cultural theory at the time. Nevertheless, Alexander criticises the Birmingham School inasmuch as he see it as conceptualising meaning as anchored or determined by external forces and relations; he argues that such an approach to culture can be termed a 'sociology of culture' inasmuch as culture is explained only with respect to the "hard" variables of social structure'. In contrast to a

'sociology of culture', Alexander proposes a 'cultural sociology', which aims to study culture itself as an autonomous domain (Alexander and Smith, 2002). Alexander argues that, in the 'strong program' of cultural sociology, culture needs to be investigated, following Geertz, through ethnographic 'thick description' and in the context of a cultural system's 'causal specificity', namely its causal and influential relations 'that guide action on the ground' (Alexander and Smith, 2002: 144). For Alexander, the means of achieving such a 'strong program' lie in the lineage, that Alexander indicates as emerging in the work of Dilthey and then developed in the sociology of Durkheim and in the synthesis of structural hermeneutics (that is a synthesis of a German hermeneutics and a French structural semiology). There are clearly issues (over and above any methodological primary orientation to culture in and of itself) about how it might be possible to conceptualise in a logical manner a domain (in this case a domain of meaning) that is not determined by external forces and relations and yet is itself a determinant of those forces and relations. Moreover, the questions about determination and autonomy are ones that have been long discussed in the context of structural Marxism, for example, in relation to the work of Althusser, Poulantzas and others (see Hindess and Hirst, 1977; McLennan 2005).

In many ways though, Alexander's arguments complement much of the work within and outside cultural studies and across the broader field of cultural research (see, for example, Hall's recent reading of Hoggart's *The Uses of Literacy* 2007), but also they connect with the writings of, for example, Laclau and Mouffe in their pushing of the theoretical idea that discourse is autonomous (1985). In Laclau and Mouffe's deconstructive critique of Marxian theory they foreground the primacy of discourse (see also the criticism by Norman Geras, 1987). They do so in such a way as to draw upon the intellectual resources of the genealogical development of the concept of 'hegemony', from Lenin through to Gramsci and beyond, but by turning any semblance of structural power inside out, such that power relationality and hegemonic struggle are themselves a consequence of discursive antagonism. In this model, discursive articulation constitutes subjectivity and the social not as atomistic or totalising structures, but as open and processual (1985). It is also, in many ways, upon this theoretical ground that we can read the take up of Judith Butler's work on performativity, Hall's later work on identification and various other developments in cultural theory in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Alexander's strong program, although it is much more explicitly sociological and human scientific in its references (Durkheim, Dilthey, Geertz, Turner, Douglas) and dismissive of Marxist and post-Marxist lines of thought, has many intellectual similarities to this theoretical turn. Moreover, his later work develops an interest in performativity (see Alexander 2004), which although more normative in its presentation of the cultural and sophisticated in its systemic modelling, has clear affiliations with the wealth of other work on performativity following Butler's seminal work in the area.

One of the problems of this focus on discourse and discursivity is that it too easily conflates discourse with the symbolic or relies on a model of discourse that is at root linguistic (and often Saussurian). Often confused with a Saussurian model of semiology, Foucault's discussion of discourse (in the context of both his archaeological writing, but especially in his genealogical writing on apparatuses of power/knowledge and on governmentality) is explicitly critical of the intellectual underpinning of any structural linguistic model. The broader theoretical work on the apparatus (*dispositif*), technologies of knowledge and power, and governmentality (notably developed by Paul Rabinow, Nikolas Rose and others associated with the 'History of the Present' groups of the US and the UK) helps to make this explicit, but the work of Ian Hunter on the problematic of representation is especially significant in denuding language of both its individual experiential and its structural linguistic premises in order to place linguistic practice alongside other techniques and devices in the context of more mundane capacities, resources and forms of organisation (Hunter, 1984).

Later cultural theory – drawing on Foucault, but also more readily on the work of the twentieth century French philosopher Gilles Deleuze, on the pragmatist semiotics of Charles Sanders Peirce, on the tradition of 'radical empiricism' from the late nineteenth and early twentieth century philosopher William James, on Henri Bergson's vitalist thinking, and on A. N. Whitehead's discourse on science and nature – has helped to provide an understanding of signification in the context of experience and affective and sensual relationality and in the context of a post-Einsteinian understanding of spacetime. It is this later work on post-phenomenological understandings of experience and the empirical across the human and non-human that has been a driving force of more recent cultural theoretical labour (see for example Adkins and Lury, 2009).

Identity, Experience and Body

Seyla Benhabib, in the closing of her discussion on collective identity and narrative in the context of major global transformation, argues that in the context of migration 'we must have the right to become members of a polity' and that membership should accord with principles of 'human dignity': 'To achieve this, we must indeed renegotiate the normativity of the "logocentric polis". The feminist theorist at the present is one of the brokers in this complex renegotiation of sexual difference and new collective identities' (Benhabib, 1999: 357). Unlike earlier discussion in the twentieth century of class consciousness or the distinction between a class in itself and for itself (Lukacs, Sartre), cultural theoretical debates on collective identity in the latter part of that century have been more reflexively framed in the context of regimes of knowledge and classification. Althusser's claim for the science of Marxism

was always taken lightly within cultural theory, not least because cultural theorists have had a keen sense of their own and others' positionality. Edward Said's presentation of orientalism in the context of an insidious correlation of knowledge and power stands also as one of the contexts of his later writing on the role of the intellectual (Said, 1993). The role of cultural theorist as public and political intellectual is one that draws on the long tradition from Gramsci's writings on the pastoral relation between organic intellectual and the people (Gramsci, 1971 and 1978), from Foucault's genealogy of the social and human sciences and his suggestion of the persona of the 'specific intellectual' (Foucault, 1977b and 1980), but also significantly from Bourdieu's reflexive, strategic and dynamic understanding of social space and the 'genesis of groups' (1985). His understanding of the genesis of groups is one that foregrounds relationality (instead of substance), multi-dimensional topological space (rather than reductionist determination), and strategic symbolic struggle (rather than objectivism and intellectualism). Thus any 'science of classifications' must also be a 'science of the struggle over classifications', as well as an analysis of 'the position occupied, in this struggle over the power of knowledge, for power through knowledge, for the monopoly of legitimate symbolic violence, by each of the agents or groups of agents who are involved in it, whether they be ordinary individuals... or authorized (and full-time) professionals' (1985: 208).

But where Bourdieu offers a sense of the systematic complexity and dynamism of competing claims over classification, knowledge and collective and individual identity formation, it is those cultural theorists who, engaging with structural and 'poststructural' ideas about language and subjectivity, throw in another dimension, namely the problematic of enunciation and the conditions of representability. For Benhabib, narrative and dialogue offer a point of understanding; for others, such as Judith Butler (1988) and Valerie Walkerdine (1989), it is performativity and performance; for Homi Bhabha it is 'writing'. Bhabha, for example, draws on Derrida, Foucault and post-Lacanian psychoanalysis to think through the question of theoretical knowledge as a commitment not to 'the working class', 'women', or the 'Third World' as somehow objects of that discourse, but as elements within a mediated hybrid 'third' space of translation; politics can only become . . . a truly *public* discourse, through a splitting in the signification of the subject of representation, through an ambivalence at the point of the enunciation of a politics' (1988: 9–10). The textuality of 'representation' does not simply deliver individual and collective identities to the political activist or the cultural theorist as if such 'identities' were simply the expression of preformed beings. Rather an understanding of the textuality of representation implies a realisation of the fundamental disarticulation of the subject of enunciation and the subject of the enounced. Language in this sense divides the subject and forecloses any possibility of simply speaking about or for oneself. Any articulation (in this

sense also implying something similar to the Gramscian notion of 'alliance') of identities across the spaces of cultural difference is a negotiation and a cultural invention. In this sense also the epistemological authority of cultural theoretical knowledge to speak for and about collective identity is marked by a fundamental ambivalence, if not impossibility. Such an argument has affinities with arguments about the performative iteration of gender, about the splitting of the gendered subject, about the ambivalence at the heart of sexual and 'racial' identification (Mercer, 1992), and about the process of classed and gendered recognition and misrecognition (Skeggs, 2001). At the heart of this problem lies that problem about the necessity and impossibility of identity that the sociologist Brett St. Louis discusses in relation to the work of Hall (St Louis, 2009).

Of course, also at the heart of these questions and issues lies a fundamental recognition of the alterity at root in the formation and living out of subjectivity. Otherness is not only marked across the imaginary and imaginative geographies of colonial power or in the gendered divisions of labour between men and women, but within the self itself. Paul Gilroy has mapped this alterity at the heart of modernity in the context of a correlation between modern social thought, modern enslavement and the moving space of 'the Black Atlantic' (Gilroy, 1993). In this sense, Hegel is understood as more cultural commentator, than philosopher. The poststructural turn that understood the subject as fundamentally split and other to itself was in part a thinking through of the Hegelian dialectic in the context of post-Saussurian structural semiology as a means of proposing a radical anti-humanism (see Lacan, Kristeva and others). This anti-humanist theme certainly gained ground in the convergence of post-structural theory with science and technology studies. Notably, Donna Haraway's argument regarding the figure of the cyborg was presented as both a means of deconstruction, but also as some have commented as a form of ethical self (Haraway, 1991; Prins, 1995). But then this move also pushed post-structural theories of subjectivity away from their structural centre in the human body; and however decentred the subject had become within poststructural theory it was always resolutely grounded in something identifiably human (through reference to language, the conscious/unconscious split, through metaphors of perception, and so on). The distribution of subjectivity across the human and non-human and across the organic and inorganic implied a need to radically rethink those certainties. It also led some to call a halt, and to insist a return, to a humanism whether as an existential ground or as an ethical presupposition upon which subjectivity itself might be seen to be constituted (see Bell 2001; Levinas, 1969, 1985, and 1998; Soper 2003) or in the form of a political anthropology of collective labouring humanity (for example in Hardt and Negri's figure of the global multitude (2000 and 2004; and cf. Laclau, 2001; Hawkesworth, 2006)).

Although some discussion has become breathless in its excited toing and froing, the direction of discussion has moved to a more concerted attempt to

understand the performative nature of subjectivity, whether individual or collective (as if it were easy to separate the two) in the context of science, technology and nature, not in the sense that these terms constitute unitary domains, but rather in the sense that they signal a series of questions and debates. One important outcome of these discussions and investigations is that the model of the linguistic is no longer held up as the measure of subjectivity. It is significant, for example, that Gilroy in his paper 'Race Ends Here' calls us to explore 'the political technologies at work in mediating our relation to our selves, our humanity and our species'. For him, '[t]his task takes us beyond the discursivity and the semiotics of "race" into a sustained confrontation with human sensorium, with spectatorship, visual apparatuses and optics' (1998: 840). And although phenomenology might appear to offer a move forward, Gilroy argues that 'scientific and biological, historical and cultural, rational and irrational, skin, bone and even blood are no longer primary referents of racial discourse . . . [I]n a space beyond and below that of comparative anatomy, the whole integral body and its obvious functional components no longer delimit the scale upon which assessments of the unity and variation of the species are to be made' (Gilroy, 1998: 845).

Cultural theory has for some time investigated the experiential and the sensory in the distribution of the apparatus, whether in its analogies and metaphors for subjectivity itself (as, for example in Freudian ideas of the relation of the unconscious to conscious in terms of the writing pad (see Derrida, 1978)) or in its discussion of technologies of perception or subject-formation. The post-phenomenological turn in recent years has been less concerned to simply distribute experience through the social and the technological, than to add a more nuanced story of how the sensual has been played out over historical time and space and to add a more detailed sense of the heterogeneous material relationality, for example, across camera and eye, person and pill, cultural concept and student or theoretical physicist and universe (Barad, 1998; Howes and Lalonde 1991; Fraser 2001; Latour, 1988; Penley, 1985; Probyn, 2004; Puwar, 2007).

Environment and Global Humanity

The concerted turn to space in cultural theory in the 1980s and 1990s was facilitated, in part and among other things, by the critique of Hegelian and Marxist dialectics, the foregrounding of Foucauldian understandings of the spatialisation of knowledge and power, the Derridean conceptualisation of *différance* (implying both a synchronic idea of differing and a diachronic notion of deferring), but also the impending sense of the global, or at least the post-national, and a recognition of the frailty of the 'blue planet' (see Franklin et al., 2000). The turn to space was matched also by the foregrounding of those

disciplines, predominantly geography and architecture, which might lay claim to the built and the natural environment; moreover, in turn, these disciplines themselves claimed a privileged position in speaking for space and spatiality (Massey, 2005). In doing so, conceptions of geometric and topological space from mathematics and theoretical physics were used as benchmarks for a variety of reconceptualisations of the spatial, from the lived experience of space to multidimensional spacetime (see Lefebvre, 1991; Massey, 1992; Massumi, 2002). Out of that broad context, and with regard specifically to cultural theory, emerges, I think, three clear routes of passage concerning an increasing, but still somewhat patchy shift from conceptualisations of imagined geographical symbolic space to understandings of the natural-cultural-technological environment, to the problematic of urbanisation as a resounding issue for the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, to a sense of cosmopolitan humanity inasmuch as an understanding of the peopling of global space is a fundamental cultural and political problem.

Over the course of the 1980s and 1990s, spurred on by Frederic Jameson's *New Left Review* article on 'Postmodernism, or the Logic of Late Capitalism' (1984) and Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* (1983) and in the context of Said's understanding of the geopolitical distribution of power and cultural imagination in *Orientalism* (1978), cultural theoretical research deconstructed the fabrication of 'the nation', looked to the role of media and communication technology in that enunciation, attempted to understand the articulations of the local and the global and the domestic and the public, and laid down the sketches of some tentative 'cognitive mappings'. Although in Jameson's eyes historical analysis had been cast aside by the spatialising tendencies of transnational postmodern capital, many of the particular cultural theoretical mappings of culture and power were keen to detail the interrelations of history and space. Moreover, as Doreen Massey had argued, through her sympathetic critique of Laclau's work on discourse and hegemony, it is important to gain a clear sense of how social interaction and the relations between objects don't 'occur *in* space and time', but rather that these relations themselves 'create/define space and time' (1992: 79). The focus on space should not be to the detriment of an analysis of time, as if the two were distinct and separate variables, but rather space and time are co-constructed dimensional effects of action and interaction.

Research on the role of cultural technologies in the constitution of 'the nation' (see Bhabha, 1990; Donald, 1992) were largely concerned with the constitution of that entity as both imagined and symbolic, inasmuch as, in Anderson's terms, the nation is an imagined horizontal solidarity (1983), but also ritualised (in a Durkheimian sense) in modern times through the mass media (Couldry, 2003). Crudely put, the inability to know everyone within a national community is made up by the power of the symbol (for Anderson novelistic and printed, for others, such as Scannell, broadcast radio or televisual

(1988)) and by the insistence of the symbolic as a repeated, regularised everyday practice (see Silverstone, 1994). It was, though, during the 1990s and early 2000s that cultural research began to engage more concertedly with 'material culture' and with the technological. In a sense, the detailing of the processes of construction seemed to require not only a focus on the symbolic and the imagined, but on the particular material assemblages that might be utilised in the forging of a nation or a standardised technological zone (Barry, 2006). Alongside this move to material culture was a greater understanding not only of the construction of social and cultural communities, but of the natural and technological. Nature, in this sense, became increasingly recognised as both a resource and a significant agent in the composition and mobilisation of, for example, national culture in seventeenth century France (Mukerji, 1994) or nineteenth century North America (John, 2001). Said, in his *Culture and Imperialism*, declared that '[t]he main battle in imperialism is over land, of course; but when it came to who owned the land, who had the right to settle and work on it, who kept it going, who won it back, and who now plans its future – these issues were reflected, contested, and even for a time decided in narrative' (Said, 1993: xiii). But what is significant, I think, is that the analysis of the imagined and imaginative geographies, that Said and others talk about, pays regard not only to the human, but to the non-human, such that any common endeavour entails both. The brutal domination and extermination of peoples in imperial expansion, for example, does not occur in geographical landscape space nor even in abstracted time, but rather through the eviscerating, suturing, digging, building and shaping of blood, soil and symbol together.

If an earlier cultural theory was too focused on the symbolic, more recent interventions have sought to understand 'the built' and 'the natural' environment less as two separate and distinct constitutive domains, each with different types of resources and agency, than as hybrid and collectively assembled. Importantly, any division between 'built' and 'natural' environment has been undercut by understandings of the complexity of the material spaces through which we live our lives. The demand to understand 'the information society', for example, was underpinned by an equal demand to understand that phenomenon as material and as political economic. What ensued in cultural research was less a return to base denominators, than an analysis of the complexity of material infrastructures, at once informational, economic, cultural, social, architectural, biological and geographical (see Castells, 1994; Haraway, 1997; Simone, 2004). In this move a significant rearticulation of and mobilisation away from a classical conceptualisation of the city as the locus of both social and political life has occurred (cf. Agamben, 1998). Any notion of the city as a bounded territorial space (within which political association occurs and human organisms live as social and political beings) outside of which in the surrounding environment is a world of nature and barbarians has surely been surpassed. Even those town planners of eighteenth

century Europe (see Foucault, 2007) that took account of both the milieu of a population and their environs (i.e. as that which surrounds the city) understood the externalities of the city as integral to its own composition and day to day living. In the context of, among other things, globalisation and modern media and communication technologies, the city has had a unique, but problematic politics. The huge growth of urban spaces and the forms of life that populate those spaces certainly challenge earlier sociological certainties about the agents and forces of history and social struggle. The great urban spaces of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, such as Mumbai, Shanghai or Mexico City constitute cultural dynamics that we are only just beginning to understand. The 'contradictory cartographies' (Keith, 2009) of the late modern city foreground, just as a starting point, multi-culture, multi-ethnicity, linguistic difference, gendered and sexual self and communal formation, locality and globality, and identity and belonging. The role of the national state and forms of governmentalisation in the policing, securing and regulation of the city through logics of spatial distribution (of peoples and things), through the pathologisation of city spaces (e.g. the slum, the ghetto, the banlieue, etc.), through the deployment of moral welfare programmes (for example, across social state agencies concerning child protection or across cultural agencies such as the museum), and through the incarceration and penalisation of an urban poor have been significant in the shaping of urban life. The more recent political economies of capital and wage labour, which some typify in terms of precariousness or precarity, certainly play a significant role in the dynamics of late modern urban life, whether in Chicago, London, or Mumbai and the role of the state in the social management of 'working' populations is equally significant. As Loïc Wacquant has argued: '*the penalization of precariousness creates new realities, and realities tailor-made to legitimize the extension of the prerogatives of the punitive state according to the principle of the self-fulfilling prophecy*' (Wacquant, 2008: 26). Moreover, as a number of writers argue, the forces of urban governmentality are also increasingly recognised as significantly sub- and supra-national (see Sassen, 1991 and 2006).

It is clear that any attempt to take account of such complexities of construction, experience, and terrain cannot do so from the position of a single 'topography commanded by a geographical and historical vision locatable in a known center of metropolitan power' (Said, 1985: 106). As Morley and Robins have argued, a 'global matrix of unevenly developed regions, cities and localities' (1989: 22) emerged in which the horizon of politics, economics and social organisation was no longer 'the nation'; and yet what appears more clearly now is that the question is not only one of the post-national, but one also of the twin problematic of the topological complexity of spatial scales (not only local, national, regional, and global) and the heterogeneous agency of our material world. In such a context, the urgent need to address the major faultlines of humanity paradoxically become ever more clear. For cultural

theory, the demand to understand culture in the presence of the global is often posed against the multiplication of cultural particularisms (see Bhatt, 2006). Both perspectives often fall at the door of a flawed 'world history' that is presented from the standpoint of a single, perhaps, but not exclusively, 'Western' positionality. Such criticism **has been** thrown in the face of many, from Wallerstein's 'world-systems' theory (1990) to Hardt and Negri's analysis of the constitution of 'Empire' (2000). That said, Gilroy in the opening of a paper published in 2003, states that '[a] widespread failure of imagination has limited the ambitions of a cosmopolitan approach to the political lives of multicultural societies' and that such hope 'has been confounded by the problems involved in producing a worldly vision that is not simply another imperialistic particular dressed up in universal garb' (Gilroy, 2003: 261). In the closing paragraphs of that paper, he appeals to 'humankind', as both anchor and addressee, defined, he says, 'by a sense of the mutability of life' and 'its singularity and continuity'; this appeal, he argues, is rooted in 'an instructive and humble confrontation with the bloody human consequences of awesome, destructive imperial power' and in the context of a demand that the 'object and vulnerable' be 'shielded by others endowed with the more valuable rights-bearing bodies that can inhibit the brutal exercise of colonial governance' (2003: 275). **The visibility** of the cosmopolitan (in all its earthly and heavenly diversity) demands an urgent **as well as political,** ethical clarity.

Economy, Technology and Knowledge

John Hartley has declared that there has been a stand-off between 'culture' and 'business', such that a 'Cold War relationship existed between the disciplines of cultural studies and business studies, characterized by a strong sense of difference and mutual opposition so marked that it often formed part of the self-identification of people on both sides' (2004: 130). He argues that the turn to policy (in the context of the question of governmentalisation) as framed by Tony Bennett and others in Australia in the early 1990s (Bennett, 1992a and 1992b) provided the means of a period of *détente* and furthermore the success of cultural studies and the cultural turn have led those who study business (by which he means in the context of 'business schools') to engage seriously with the problems and issues of culture and cultural analysis. Hartley points to the de-differentiation (although he doesn't use this term) of culture and economy as a broader context for making intelligible this disciplinary impasse. And yet in many ways this rhetorical opposition between those who analyse culture and those who study (and do) business has always been a folly of those disciplinary and political demagogues who would hope to capture us all in their rather local corridor scrap. Outside but also well-within the practices and institutions of both business and culture, for example, economic

historians have looked to cultural practices and media historians have turned to understandings of business models; advertisers have gleaned ideas from cultural theorists and those researching cultures of consumption have thought seriously about the binaries of supply and demand, consumer and producer. Of course, below any Cold War searchlight, fruitful engagement between and across the supposed divides has been ongoing for years.

And yet, Hartley is undoubtedly correct inasmuch as the proliferation of debate and innovation in research concerning, what may crudely be termed (following Fiske, 1987), 'cultural economy' has certainly intensified. In part much of this discussion has unfolded as a consequence of, and certainly contributed to, the epistemological de-differentiation of culture and economy. The model of culture as determined by economic relations faces a critical turning of tables in the 1970s and 1980s. For example, Baudrillard's revaluation of consumption as against production (1975), his critique of the political economy of the sign (1976 and 1981), and his analysis of the order of the simulacra (1983) have often been read in terms of a 'culturalisation' of the economy inasmuch as economic life is seen to be increasingly understood as and determined by symbolic and cultural relations (cf. Lash and Urry, 1987 and 1994). In such an argument cultural studies, literary studies, media studies and those other sciences of culture and the arts are seen to provide a methodological resource for interpreting and reading economic practice as if it were discursive or symbolic practice. In many ways though, and certainly in contrast to this reading, Baudrillard's writings on the **political** economy of the sign and on simulation can be understood as foregrounding (and as symptomatic of), not a cultural, but an economic logic of the sign inasmuch as the sign is understood only inasmuch as it is produced within an economy of exchange. The cultural arts and sciences, in this sense, then, are read in the context of an expansion of capital (as the economisation of culture).

If this discussion warms the fires of an emerging field of cultural economy, it is the interdisciplinary dialogues across science and technology studies, anthropologies and sociologies of the economy, and cultural studies of economic life that have shaped the irons and glazed the pots of cultural theoretical innovation in more recent years. The edited collection by Paul du Gay and Michael Pryke on *Cultural Economy* (2002) certainly oxygenated this debate, but also significantly the writing of the sociologist of science and technology, Michel Callon on the performative framing of economic life and the reactions to that argument have been crucial to thinking about cultural economy. Callon argues that economic interactions (for example as typified in terms of supply and demand mediated through a price mechanism) need to be understood not with reference to culture or society, but in terms of the highly localised interactions of the agents involved. What, for Callon, is interesting in such market interactions is that a contractual arrangement between buyer and seller (such that **a** good can be sold and bought) is such

that it necessitates a framing that excludes contingent cultural and social factors and yet all transactions involve externalities or overflowing that adds value to any market transaction (Callon 1998a and 1998b). Callon's emphasis on the performative nature of the economic can be seen alongside some of the recent research on complex, distributed market relations, for example, on the cultural shaping of financial trading (including the object relationality facilitated through trading screens and the opening up of new forms of temporality by way of futures and derivatives markets (Knorr-Cetina and Bruegger, 2002; Pryke, 2007)). Of course, as Miller's response to Callon testifies, the question of the extent to which an overemphasis on an understanding of the performance of the economic without a correlational understanding of the cultural form of that performance might return the argument yet again to the dominance of an economic rationality is of importance (Miller, 2002).

The writing specifically on cultural economy draws on a strand of research on, what may now be termed, cultural and creative industry. Research on cultural and creative industry (or at least on the film, television, radio, advertising, arts and crafts productive sectors) has a much longer history (Gomery, 1984; Garnham, 1987). And yet, in recent years the explicit nomination of 'the creative and cultural industries' has often been directly linked to instrumental and governmental concerns with making national and regional economies competitive in the context of what are perceived to be the leading-edge sectors of new and growing, global informational and cultural markets. On the one hand, the take-up of academic cultural research and expertise has been welcomed as part of a greater engagement with policy. But, on the other, there has been cynicism about the analytical utility and the political veracity of the nomination 'creative and cultural industries' (Flew, 2004; Donald, 2004; Garnham, 2005; Schlesinger, 2007). One context for understanding the new interest in creative and cultural industry has been the **break-up** of both the media and telecommunications sectors and their re-combination and re-alignment in the context of creative and digital economy. A significant aspect of this transformation has been an understanding of a transition from a model of Fordist industrial social, political and economic organisation to a post-Fordist post-industrial model of organisation, such that the latter no longer ties production, distribution and consumption to massified forms (i.e. the mass audience, mass entertainment, the mass political party, and so on) but facilitates segmented, niche oriented lines of production and servicing (Kumar, 1995). Moreover, in that transition, the value chain, for example, from production to consumption is now seen to be mediated by numerous intermediaries that may be housed within a single organisation or any number of connected organisations concerned with product innovation and design to marketing to sales and so on. Cultural research on various aspects of this transition has proliferated (from representations of new middle class creative entrepreneurs

to new forms of collective symbolic and creative labour and solidarity (Bonner and Du Gay, 1992; McRobbie, 2002; Gill and Pratt, 2008)).

But also significantly, the wider cultural economic context provides a framework for understanding cultural labour and cultural productivity more broadly defined not only with regard to film, television, internet, advertising and other industries of the cultural and creative sectors, but importantly with regard to a diverse array of workers and sites of cultural productivity, including educationalists and sites of learning (Giroux, 2001). In this sense, the model of authorship that had been deconstructed in the academy through the work of Barthes (1977), Umberto Eco (1987) and Foucault (1977C) and many others helped to make intelligible the forms of labour and productivity of a new creative and digital economy. The cultural theoretical declaration that consumers were now producers, that reading was a form of writing, and that reading, moreover, was always a form of power, poaching, and creative mashing was in very broad terms accepted as much by the gurus of the new economy (such as Don Tapscott and Lawrence Lessig) as the spokespersons of the global resistance (such as Hardt and Negri). Just as the classic Marxist concerns with labour process and capital flows have been complexified and detailed with regard to culture, so too the forces of production (i.e. scientific knowledge and technology) have been deconstructed through the prism of cultural economy. Some of this research has revisited the problematic of knowledge and class (in terms of the formation and classification of a knowledge class (Frow, 1993)), other work has subjected technology to the rigorous and reflexive analysis of textual analysis (Woolgar and Cooper, 1999). What has become clearly significant though is not any supposed redistribution of cognitive and cultural powers, but exact and particular lines, trajectories and spaces through which cultural economic relations are formed and concretised.

Concluding Thoughts on the Places and Manners of Cultural Theory

Cultural theory has established itself across a number of disciplinary areas; less a complete identity that has been distributed across other disciplinary terrains as an imperial mission, it can be seen as the ongoing orientation to a series of overlapping, sometimes consistent, sometimes contradictory and antagonistic, contiguous (if not always common) discussions, utilising and drawing upon resources that equally become shared and passed around whether as moments of agreement or critique. Inasmuch as either literary theory or social theory or film theory, for example, are, and have been, also cultural theory, the demonstration of that theoretical turn constitutes something that is as much internal as external to those disciplines. The question, then for example, as to how 'cultural theory' becomes accounted for in the context of

particular institutional and disciplinary and cross-disciplinary fora (such as conferences, journals, edited collections and so on) has rather specific articulations specific to the particular field of study.

That said, if the establishment and development of academic journals and standing conferences is an indication of consolidation and self-reflexivity, then the kinds of conversations that were taking place across a range of disciplinary-specific journals and conferences and other sites in the 1970s and 1980s become institutionalised with the setting up of dedicated cultural theoretical academic journals and standing academic conferences in the 1990s. And yet, also at this moment a greater visibility emerges outside of those new institutional spaces that declare a series of cultural theories of science and technology, of film, of crime, of childhood, of the city, of the economy, and so on. Moreover, it is across those hybrid spaces that cultural theory has developed in a manner less introspective and anxious about its future and more committed to the application and development of theoretical elaboration and investigation in the context of empirical domains. And it is in these more empirically focussed contexts that cultural theory, although certainly not 'positivist' or 'normative', has been seen to be a major intellectual and methodological resource for social understanding that is less iconic, but certainly engaged and relevant, critical and organisational.

Cultural theory occupies a particular space of thought and writing, singular and specific, but equally multiple and complex. The forms of cultural theory are not unitary and importantly they are not dictated by the normativity of style, narrative structure and mode of address that some might typify as philosophical. The resources for argument are not defined through a defensive exclusion or the secondary relegation of the empirical (i.e. as 'example' or 'case study'), but rather defined in the context of culture as both object and resource. Cultural theory is a reflexive engagement with culture inasmuch as that reflexivity orients itself to an intertextual meta-field rather than simply to the object itself. In many ways, cultural theorists, twisting Geertz's formulation of anthropology, not only produce knowledge *about culture*, they investigate, experiment and produce theoretical architectures and concepts *in it*, but also *with it*. Its modes of writing are in many ways a consequence of not only its political genealogy and its interdisciplinarity, but also its particular orientation to the cultural. Firstly, the legacy of the formation of cultural studies in the context of publication platforms, such as the *New Left Review* (and its precursor the *Universities and Left Review*), *Marxism Today*, *Screen*, and others journals, and also book publication series, such as the *New Accents* series edited by Terence Hawkes, seminar and conference fora that included an active student presence meant that the mode of address and the medium of discourse could not be overly 'abstract'. Secondly, the breadth of intellectual resources and the explicit demand of interdisciplinarity (of cultural theory as a field of engagement and not a discipline) meant that the mode of writing and thinking

traversed, for example, from the sociological and the social theoretical to the literary to the philosophical to the anthropological to the Marxist to the historical and to the art theoretical, all of which 'talked theory' in different ways and such that the development of any dialogue across those disciplines articulated a mode of talking that could not be reduced to either the philosophical or the empirical. Thus, even though cultural theory had a definite affinity to certain continental philosophies in the 1970s and 1980s, it could not properly be reduced, for example, to structural Marxism or poststructural theory. The engagement with Althusser or Derrida or Kristeva was never in the mode of philosophy, but as a mode of engagement with the political and as a strategy of articulation across the social sciences and humanities. Thirdly, cultural theory has had a literary and ethnographic sensibility, not in the sense that these are the objects of its inquiry, but in that these constitute (in many ways) its implicit ethic or mode of stylisation. The writers included in these four volumes, for example, do not engage in the beautiful and fraught game of ideas in the manner of philosophy; equally they do not draw conclusions from empirical data and use data as a self enclosed resource; rather they use the data of the world as a varied resource, as texture for a sustained mode of thought. Cultural theory is not, by and large, 'purely theoretical' nor 'purely empirical'; it is a synthetic mode of writing that pursues ideas in the context of lived cultural experience. In that sense, the sociological and historical bifurcation of culture, that Raymond Williams presents in terms of a distinction between culture as aesthetic and lived experience, is properly synthesised in the diverse craft of writing cultural theory (i.e. as both literary and ethnographic).

Cultural theory in this vein would seek to offer theoretical understanding rather than only theoretical explanation, such that whereas the latter implies only a cognitive abstracted grasp of 'the world', the former makes apparent a greater degree of apprehension (in the sense that apprehension connotes a degree of experiential tactility and temporality). That said, these descriptive summations of mine serve to be overturned as cultural theoretical writing extends its engagement with topology, material-semiotics, governmentality and bio-power, and post-phenomenological approaches to the experiential and begins to tackle some of the substantive problems of the twenty-first century concerning organisation over longevity of time, scale, scarcity and material resources, environment and nature, and hybrid collective multiplicitous agency. In the face of these problems, cultural theory will undoubtedly need to converse much more with the natural and mathematical sciences in a manner that is properly dialogical and in the context of, what in the past would have been called, human civilisation (Braudel, 1980).

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