

# Cultural Studies in the English Classroom

Edited by  
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# Table of Contents

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93 94 95 96 97 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

- Introduction: A Provisional Definition  
*James Berlin and Michael Vivion* vii
- Cultural Studies Programs 1
- Introduction  
*James Berlin* 3
- 1 Cults of Culture  
*Michael Blitz and C. Mark Hurlbert* 5
  - 2 Committing the Curriculum and Other Misdemeanors  
*Alan Kennedy* 24
  - 3 Composing a Cultural Studies Curriculum at Pitt  
*Philip E. Smith II* 46
  - 4 A Very Good Idea Indeed: The (Post)Modern Labor Force and Curricular Reform  
*Mas'ud Zavarzadeh and Donald Morton* 66
  - 5 The Syracuse University Writing Program and Cultural Studies: A Personal View of the Politics of Development  
*James Thomas Zebroski* 87
  - 6 One Person, Many Worlds: A Multi-Cultural Composition Curriculum  
*Delores K. Schriener* 95
  - 7 Giving Religion, Taking Gold: Disciplinary Cultures and the Claims of Writing Across the Curriculum  
*Christine Farris* 112
  - 8 "Writing About Difference": Hard Cases for Cultural Studies  
*Richard Penticoff and Linda Brodkey* 123

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## 9

## Cultural Studies and the Undergraduate Literature Curriculum

Anne Balsamo

Cultural studies, in its most recent and most contested form, is a cultural formation in its own right. It is *defined* in one sense by a set of institutional and academic practices that take culture as an object of study. Yet at the same time, the various narratives of its historical development protest that it can not be, and indeed must not be defined at all, least of all by such an objectivist notion of culture. For some critics, cultural studies takes shape as a generalized political response to the postmodern, while for others it emerges more specifically as a response to the crisis in the humanities—a crisis first identified in Britain in the late 1970s and then more recently in the United States (Widdowson; Batsleer, Davis, O' Rourke, and Weedon; Grossberg; Hall; Brantlinger). Whatever the conditions of its origins—an issue I will come back to later in this paper—by the late 1980s cultural studies had become a spectacle in a local economy of names, commodities, and academic discourses. I say "local" because its status here in the United States is not the same as it is in the United Kingdom, or even in Australia. Although certain tendencies are similar across cultural contexts, the institutionalized space of cultural studies in the United States seems to be of a different sort. The focal issue of this essay—the elaboration of a series of undergraduate courses in cultural studies—emerges within a convergence among several strands of cultural analysis that form the context for cultural studies in the United States. These cultural discourses include not only the various narratives of identity of cultural studies but also the set of critical reflections on the intellectual history and blindspots of literary studies, as well as the debates about the politics of academic work and of multi-culturalism. In this essay I

will briefly consider the contribution of these discussions to the development of a curricular agenda for cultural studies, and then describe a series of courses that addresses that agenda. The broad purpose of this essay is to call attention to the institutionalization of cultural studies now going on in English departments in the United States.

### The Turn to Cultural Studies

Several essays reprinted from the *ADE* and *ADFL Bulletin* during the 1980s called for a rethinking of the disciplinary identity of literary studies. Sometimes this impulse was to address the issue, or the impossibility, as Stanley Fish would have it, of interdisciplinarity; in other essays it was to reflect on the place of literary theory in the undergraduate curriculum (Lipking; Prince; Peck). In other instances though, scholars have called for the expansion of literary studies to include broader cultural topics—such as discussions of the power relations that ground the discipline of literary studies itself or the history of the institutionalization of literary discourse (Carby; Winkler). One way that departments of English are beginning to respond to these thoughtful demands is to advertise for entry level positions requiring some background in cultural studies, cultural criticism, or cultural theory. But in some announcements the cultural studies position also called for an expertise in a traditional period specialty. Taken together these moves articulate a rather ambiguous desire on the part of some departments: a desire for scholars who could at once work beyond the currently established disciplinary boundaries of literary studies, but who could, in a funding pinch, I suppose, still deliver traditionally defined courses in period literature.

Behind these more administrative discussions are those that have innervated scholars about the practice of literary study “after the New Criticism.” In one controversial volume titled *Re-Reading English*, Peter Widdowson and others elaborate how the “crisis” (in Britain) in English studies suggests certain questions about the academic orientation of the discipline. These questions are not about differences among interpretive approaches but rather are “question[s], posed from within, as to what English *is*, where it has got to, whether it has a future, whether it *should* have a future as a discrete discipline, and if it does, in what ways it might be reconstituted” (13). Other essays in the book consider the ways that British cultural studies—most notably work associated with the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at Birmingham and the Open University—has been “profoundly instrumental” in challenging the disciplinary conventions of English studies by foregrounding how its intellectual history is also a political history and how literary pedagogy often functions as a “vehicle for [the] ideological

transmission” of class-based knowledges and values. According to these essays, cultural studies does two things vis-a-vis the discipline of literary studies. On the one hand, cultural studies elaborates the ideological work of English departments by provoking a discussion of the manifest purpose of the development of such a field called English studies. On the other, cultural studies offers a model for a transdisciplinary approach to the type of questions that have come to be associated with English studies: namely, questions about readers, writers, texts, and practices of interpretation. What is also abundantly clear from these essays is that the two fields have been entangled throughout their histories, so that although it may *seem* like a radical move on the part of some literature faculty to assert a relationship between them, it is actually the case that the two fields have been mutually determining from their murky beginnings. The question I’d like to address in more detail concerns the way in which cultural studies can contribute to the reconstruction of literary studies curricula in the United States.

In an essay in *College English*, Mary Poovey argues that popular postmodern phenomena, such as rock and roll and MTV, offer a reconceptualization of art that will nudge literary criticism in a new direction—a direction she believes is determined by the same forces that operate on the domain of the popular. In thinking through the changes in the object of literary criticism, Poovey also rethinks the role of institutionalized literary studies. As Poovey rehearses the elaboration of cultural studies offered by Stuart Hall, revising it in keeping with her commitments to feminist poststructuralist theory, she makes explicit what is often only implicit in the discussions mentioned earlier: the turn to cultural studies is seen as a way out of an impasse that literary studies finds itself in between an aesthetist formalism on the one side and a sociological historicism on the other. Poovey elaborates a “three-tiered enterprise” of “cultural criticism” that would involve the following projects:

the study of culture as an independent set of institutional and informal practices and discourses; the study of the traces this larger social formation produces in individual texts; the study of the role our own practice plays in the reproducing or subverting the dominant cultural formation. (620)

Here Poovey lays out the basic project for cultural studies as she reconceptualizes it from within the domain of contemporary literary studies. First, it will be first concerned to identify culture in terms of practices and discourses, not objects and texts; “concepts are seen as the effects of representations and institutional practices, not their origins” (621). Secondly, the individual text is decentered as the focal object of cultural criticism and the process of textual analysis is re-fashioned accordingly to focus on the effects of broader social for-

mations. And finally, but not inconsequentially, this revitalized form of cultural criticism requires the examination of “the conditions of possibility of our own classroom practices.” This last point is not a simple call for enhanced self-reflexivity among literature teachers, although that is probably a necessary moment in such a transformation. Here Poovey argues that we must understand both the way in which our teaching and scholarly practices are determined by broader social forces and the way in which they are also in need of wide-scale revision. All in all, Poovey’s model of cultural criticism raises several issues about the construction of cultural studies courses within a literary studies curriculum: the emphasis on cultural practices, the textual circulation of meanings and interpretations, and the institutionalization of cultural studies as an academic enterprise. For now I would like to consider in greater detail the issue of the name of such cultural criticism or, rather, the contest over the claiming of cultural studies.

### Narratives of Identity and the Rush to Colonize Cultural Studies

Although there is relatively wide consensus on the identification of the founding figures of cultural studies (i.e., Williams, Hoggart, and Thompson), there is less agreement about other key figures and important developments. And for the most part, this lack of agreement is considered to be one of the abiding strengths of cultural studies as an anti-discipline of sorts. In his 1980 article, “Cultural Studies: Two Paradigms,” Stuart Hall begins by stating unequivocally

in serious, critical intellectual work, there are no absolute beginnings and few unbroken continuities. Neither the endless unwinding of ‘tradition,’ so beloved in the History of Ideas, nor the absolution of the ‘epistemological rupture,’ punctuating thought into its ‘false’ and ‘correct’ parts, once favored by the Althusserians, will do. (57)

In this essay, Hall identifies cultural studies as a “problematic” that emerges at a particular historical moment—in this case the mid-1950s—that was in part constructed by two books of cultural theory: Hoggart’s *Uses of Literacy* and Williams’ *Culture and Society*. From here, Hall then offers one possible narrative of the development of cultural studies in light of its organizational and intellectual affiliations with the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) in Birmingham and the scholarship that is marked by the publication of the first seven years of *Working Papers in Cultural Studies*. Ironically, by the end of the 1980s this very same article had itself been written into the narrative accounts of the development of cultural studies as a foundational essay. For example, in an article published in 1989, Lawrence Grossberg offers a more

chronological account of the history of cultural studies as a problematic, in which he narrates how cultural studies changes through its engagement with poststructuralism, feminism, psychoanalysis, and postmodernism (“The Circulation of Cultural Studies” 1989). In offering this account, though, Grossberg stresses the importance of Hall’s initial disclaimer: cultural studies must not be “reduced to a singular position or a linear history” (114). But, as Grossberg goes on to argue, neither should cultural studies “be dispersed into a set of unrelated differences” (114). Grossberg is responding here to what he describes as a set of “potential dangers” in the recent “turn to cultural studies” on the part of some literary scholars in the mid-1980s. He worries that in the gold rush to claim cultural studies as a new academic speciality people would “fail to recognize its history” and in so doing would empty it of its theoretical and, more importantly perhaps, its political specificity.

In part, Grossberg’s apprehensions that the history of cultural studies would be lost or obscured have been waylaid. In two of the most recent books on cultural studies—Graeme Turner’s *Introduction to British Cultural Studies* and Patrick Brantlinger’s *Crusoe’s Footprints: Cultural Studies in Britain and America*—the authors take pains to discuss its historical antecedents in work by Williams, Thompson, and Hoggart. But from here their stories differ dramatically. Taken together, these two books illustrate one of Grossberg’s main assertions about cultural studies: namely, that its identity is “constantly renegotiated as it is repositioned within different political and intellectual maps” (“Formations,” 115). Where Turner emphasizes the media focus of cultural studies by addressing its organizing principles and sites of investigation (subcultures, audience, media), Brantlinger narrates the identity of cultural studies through and in relation to the field of American studies—a discipline that Turner, or others for that matter (Alexander; Becker; Carey; Punter), never mention. In doing so, Brantlinger demonstrates how the story of cultural studies changes as it is framed through different disciplinary lenses, but he also comes the closest to enacting one of the dangers Grossberg feared most: that cultural studies would be emptied of its explicit political critique.

Brantlinger chronicles in greater detail (than does Turner or any other account) the stormy relationship between cultural studies and literary studies, especially, as he describes it, how the focus of cultural criticism shifted from literature to culture to ideology. But in this description Brantlinger keeps the issue of politics at an arm’s length. In a chapter titled “Class, Gender, Race,” he describes the explicitly politically informed intellectual work going on at the CCCS as “work on the question” or the “politics” of representation. This recoding of the politics of cultural studies is readily apparent in his account of the feminist work going on at the CCCS. He fails, for example, to describe

two key issues brought forward by feminist scholars at the Centre at the time he writes about (the time of the publication of *Women Take Issue*): that intellectual work can never be divorced from ideological determinations; and, relatedly, that the institutional context of scholarly work calls into question the political effectiveness of any ideological critique inherent in the Centre's academic work (Balsamo). According to other accounts of the development of cultural studies (notably Stuart Hall 1992), the discussion of these issues that were initially raised by feminists irrevocably changed the nature of cultural studies.

For cultural studies... the intervention of feminism was specific and decisive. It was ruptural. It reorganized the field in quite concrete ways. First, the opening of the question of the personal as political, and its consequences for changing the object of study in cultural studies, was completely revolutionary in a theoretical and practical way. Second, the radical expansion of the notion of power, which had hitherto been very much developed within the framework of the notion of the public, the public domain, with the effect that we could not use the term power... in the same way. ("Theoretical Legacies," 282)

In overlooking the historically specific feminist intervention into cultural studies and reducing the self-reflexive political critique to a matter of the "politics of representation," Brantlinger disseminates a narrative account of the development of cultural studies that glosses over its commitment to interrogate its own institutional position and to critique its own role in the dissemination of dominant ideologies. This becomes a critical oversight in the recent turn to cultural studies in the United States where the multiplicitous identity of cultural studies is celebrated to the exclusion of its concrete historical specificity.

### Cultural Studies Courses

My purpose in the first section of this essay was not so much to tease out the contradictions among various narratives of identity of cultural studies as to identify some of the foundational commitments of cultural studies that should be taken into account when constructing undergraduate courses in cultural studies. At a broad level, the project of cultural studies is to analyze cultural formations or articulations. This implies two dialectically intertwined domains of study: cultural texts and the social arrangements that constitute them—both the "what" that is said, and the social relations that allow or disallow something to be expressed. In his essay titled "What is Cultural Studies Anyway?" Richard Johnson (director of the CCCS after Hall) develops a detailed model and social theory of the production and circulation of meanings

that schematizes the changes in the problematics of cultural studies identified by Hall and Grossberg. In so doing, he delineates three broad cultural studies projects: text-based studies primarily concerned with cultural products; studies that focus on the production of cultural forms, and studies that focus on "lived culture" (including ethnographic studies), especially studies of "reading"—of the way that elements of mass culture are appropriated. In the following section, I describe three undergraduate courses that each address one of the central pre-occupations of cultural studies as elaborated by Johnson. At the introductory level, the "Reading and Writing Culture" course focuses on the constructedness of cultural texts and establishes the centrality of the productive act of "reading." At the second-year level, the "Popular Culture" course investigates what people do with those texts and how popular cultural forms are appropriated in the construction of subjectivity. A third course, simply identified here as "Introduction to Cultural Studies," provides an overview of the historical development of cultural studies tied to changes in its theoretical problematics and its multidisciplinary identity. These courses require not only the refashioning of curricular offerings, but, probably more importantly, the rethinking of actual classroom practices. To the extent that cultural studies also directs critical attention to the conditions of the production of knowledge, it requires, much like feminist studies does, what we do many things differently in our classrooms, in our professional lives, in our scholarship. A fuller account of the pedagogical commitments of the cultural studies teacher is the topic of another paper (Balsamo and Greer, forthcoming); suffice it to note here that discussions of pedagogy are crucial for any consideration of cultural studies courses and are already in process. (See especially: Nelson; Giroux, Shumway, Smith and Sosnoski; Giroux and Simon).

### "Reading and Writing Culture"

One of the first courses I teach in cultural studies focuses on forms of reading appropriate for cultural texts that do not come in familiar literary form. For one opening exercise, I used a clip of the "CNN Headline News" video sequence that served (up until late 1989) as the station's visual and audio trademark. Although the clip only lasts nine seconds, it works well to illustrate how tele-visual material is formally constructed and as a demonstration of the practice of reading a visual text.<sup>1</sup> For this exercise in the practice of "reading culture," students transcribed one segment of a news program that I previously videotaped and put on reserve for them. Using the instructions I provided, they worked in pairs to produce a visually annotated transcript of one short segment. I collate all transcriptions, and redistribute an annotated

script for the entire half-hour program, including commercials. For the next phase of the assignment, students prepared a content and visual analysis of their segment of the show in relation to the entire thirty-minute news program. I asked them to examine its formal aspects, such as the format of the program, how the program moves from segment to segment, the purpose of different segments, and the form of audience address. From here we moved first to a discussion of Stuart Hall's essay, "The Narrative Construction of Reality," then to an elaboration of the role of the media in the construction of "the news," and finally to a consideration of the relationship between the news, narrative, ideology, and culture.<sup>2</sup> For their first paper assignment students were instructed to identify and elaborate one of the narratives that this news program constructs about contemporary United States culture. They were instructed to refer back to the visual and content analyses they produced to support their interpretations.

The "Reading and Writing Culture" course is organized around the study of the construction of meaning and dissemination of knowledge through different forms of cultural expression. The emphasis here is on discovering the "constructedness" of cultural knowledge (Raymond Williams) through a close examination of cultural texts. Throughout this course, the notion of a text is broadened to include nonliterary forms of communication, such as news reports, advertisements, popular magazines, electronic bulletin boards, and subcultural practices. Of equal importance is the investigation of what's involved in reading different types of texts, including those presented visually, tele-visually, aurally (music and speech), spatially, and bodily.

Theoretically, this course is grounded in an understanding of culture as an ensemble of signifying practices; following this, the course is *process oriented* in that the exercises, lectures, and reading material elaborate the ways in which reading and writing are productive cultural *practices* of meaning construction. We move from exercises in seemingly objective methods of analysis (such as content analysis and semiotics), to a discussion of different practices of interpretation (structuralist, feminist, psychoanalytic). In a similar way, we move from the consideration of seemingly objective cultural texts, such as news programs and documentaries, to more interpretive and expressive cultural forms, including special interest magazines, films, and popular fiction. In a broad sense, this course moves from a reflection model of culture to a mediation model, in which culture is understood to be produced through the interactions among texts, formal characteristics, reading, and writing practices.

The objectives for students in this course include: (1) to understand the constructedness of cultural texts and, relatedly, the different ways in which culture is written; (2) to understand how popular media

participates in the social and narrative construction of reality; (3) to gain basic familiarity with notions of semiotics, signification, codes, and conventions; and (4) to investigate what's involved in the practice of reading different types of cultural texts. This course lays the foundation for upper-division cultural studies courses that continue to study different types of texts, and, more importantly, begin to elaborate the process of constructing cultural criticism.

Configured in this way, the "Reading and Writing Culture" course could probably fit into a number of disciplinary curricula. The outline I offer here is for a course that was designed to fit into a literary studies curriculum, positioned conceptually between a "Writing Across the Curriculum" course and introductory literature courses. The second course I describe follows from the first but is specifically designed to address a second preoccupation of cultural studies: the focus on popular cultures and the culture of everyday life. This second course builds on the objectives of the "Reading and Writing Culture" course in that it relies on a broader notion of what counts as a text and defines culture as a complex system of signifying practices, textual dissemination, and productive reception. But in the "Popular Culture" course, the focus shifts to a consideration of the kinds of knowledges that are often subjugated (in Foucault's sense) in the academy—knowledges that can't be generalized or easily determined in advance—the knowledges of pleasure in the consumption of popular culture. In so doing, this course explicitly rejects an elitist definition of culture in favor of a notion of culture as "the expressive practices and involvements of everyday life" (Willis, "Art or Culture?").

#### *"Introduction to Popular Culture."*

In the "Popular Culture" course, I expand the definition of culture to include the practices of everyday creativity that give shape to the process of identity formation. In this course, students are instructed to think critically about the connection between personal identity and popular culture. The framework for such an analysis of youth subjectivity and identity comes from lectures and readings about the subculture work of British cultural studies.<sup>3</sup> Here I introduce the notion of ideology, drawing on James Berlin's elaboration of a social-epistemic rhetoric. As he describes it: "the material, the social, and the subjective are at once the producers and the products of ideology, and ideology must continually be challenged so as to reveal its economic and political consequences for individuals."<sup>4</sup> My ideological aim in this course is to instruct students about the production of cultural criticism as it is developed through a close analysis of subcultural practices and popular cultural texts.

For their first exercise students construct a media autobiography that describes their relation to various forms of popular texts/media, as well as their experience or access to material media culture: Do they own a television? Do they buy music? What kind? What form? What kind of media devices do they use? What signs, symbols, and products do they use to establish an identity? How does a person construct an identity? I ask them to reflect on the forms of popular culture they enjoy and describe the kinds of identities it promotes. From here we move to a discussion of how identity is itself a cultural construction, of the biological, the material, the social, and the popular. As in the first course, the focus here is on the productive act of reading culture in which identity itself, a fiercely individualistic notion, is understood to be a symbolic and creative but no less culturally determined construction.

In the second part of the course I present lectures on the conventions and formal elements of various media and popular cultural forms (music, television and film, dance, and visual art). We discuss the construction of representations of gender, ethnicity, and race, and how these representations are, in turn appropriated, performed, and reproduced. I present background lectures on methods of media studies including encoding/decoding studies and subculture ethnographies.

In the final section of the course, the group project challenges students to critically engage a popular cultural issue. Some of the more successful topics from past courses include: "Whitewashing America: Race and Ethnicity in the Media," "Gender Advertisements: Buying and Selling What," "Media Terrorism: Scandals, Spectacles, and Ethics," and "Selling Science: From Sputnik to Star Wars."<sup>5</sup> The focus of the course now shifts from teacher-centered discussions to student performances and discussions. These projects not only require that students get together outside class, but more importantly that they actively engage their own popular culture and begin to develop investigative research techniques. For many students, these reports often represent breakthrough understandings of what it means to talk about the social construction of something. For other students, the group project offers an opportunity to critically reflect on their own cultural pursuits and to consider what they take to be intensely individual tastes or opinions as determined by broader economic and social relations.

Although the first two courses I've described here focus exclusively on contemporary culture and popular media, I must stress that cultural studies inherits from Marxism a more specific interest in the study of historical forms of subjectivity and material life. As Richard Johnson argues, "All social practices can be looked at from a cultural point of view, for the work they do, subjectively. This goes, for instance, for factory work, for trade union organization, for life in and around the

supermarket, as well as for obvious targets like 'the media'" (45). To offset two common misunderstandings about the study of popular culture, namely, that it is either inherently resistant, or the converse, that it is totally determining, I begin this course with a lecture on the history of mass culture, the construction of the notion of "the popular," and the place of the popular in the academy. The point of this lecture is to historicize the contemporary shape of mass culture and to establish the objective for the rest of the course, which, broadly conceived, is to investigate the ways in which media institutions, personal identities, and "experiences," are subtly shaped but not fully determined by ideology. The next course I describe attempts to lay out the broader history of cultural studies, to show how the focus on contemporary culture is only one moment or site of cultural criticism.

### *"Introduction to Cultural Studies"*

In keeping with the main point of the opening section of this essay, I must reassert that there are as many ways to organize an introductory course in cultural studies as there are narratives about the identity of cultural studies itself. The course I describe here though is intended to fit into an undergraduate literary studies curriculum where the history of the discipline of English studies is not taught.<sup>6</sup> Clearly, any course design would have to take account of the curricular offerings already in place, especially those courses that introduce the variety of contemporary literary criticisms or the range of contemporary interpretive theories.

This course demonstrates two objectives that I think are of importance for an introductory course in cultural studies. Firstly, such a course should elaborate the *specificity* of cultural studies including its historical development out of British literary studies, the formation of the field of study that self-consciously takes the name "cultural studies," and its grounding in Marxist, feminist, and postcolonialist political critiques. The point here is that for all its fluidity and multidisciplinary, "Cultural Studies" nevertheless names an identifiable set of critical projects. In this sense it is important to show how cultural studies emerges (as a "problematic," in Hall's terms) from a set of debates about the relationship between literature and society such that early issues included discussion about literacy, class identity, and national education. Furthermore, it is important to explain that cultural studies is concerned to elaborate the historically specific relation between forms of culture and the articulation of class, gender, racial and ethnic identities, struggles and domination. Secondly, the course must also represent the *heterogeneity* of various cultural studies projects, not only the early projects of Birmingham but also the more recent ones coming out of different disciplinary contexts (i.e., in anthropology,



rhetoric, film studies). This is the point at which the foundational commitments of cultural studies work against its easy codification in an undergraduate program of study. Although there are recognizable founding figures and some agreement on the importance of certain issues and key debates, they cannot be stitched together as a progressive narrative of development. In short, the introductory course in cultural studies must not only relay the specific history of a set of practices, it must also explain how that history is constructed, institutionalized, and most importantly, contested.

This version of the "Introduction to Cultural Studies" course is organized around a set of historical topics. The first section describes the rise of modernism and the development of the concept of mass culture. The broad historical context of the development of cultural studies is elaborated in terms of a set of questions or problematics: how to describe the historical and economic changes of modernism, how to evaluate the rise of consumerism by which a large majority of society gains access to products of culture, and how to assess the role of the media in the production of hegemonic consent. In a broad sense these issues establish the two charges of cultural studies: to contribute to the critical analysis of everyday life and to engage a series of intellectual debates with literary theory, European social and political philosophy, and feminist and postcolonialist theory. In an effort to make this set of issues more concrete, the second section of the course presents the early history of the development of cultural studies in Britain. Here it is important to describe how the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies in Birmingham was organized, in particular as a way of describing in greater detail the issues, essays and debates that were produced by the working group on "Literature and Society." Thus this section would include an overview of different approaches to the study of the relationships among literature, society and culture that could begin, for example, with Raymond Williams' book *Culture and Society*, or with the essay "Literature and Society: Mapping the Field" written by members of the CCCS working group in "Literature and Society." From that point, the course could turn to a discussion of how the relationship between literature and culture has been conceptualized within different traditions of scholarship. This sets the stage for discussions about the process of institutionalization in general, and, more specifically, of literary criticism in the United States. The third and final section of the course presents overviews of the different projects of cultural studies, including those that originated in Birmingham and those that have been initiated more recently in different places in the United States: encoding/decoding studies, subculture ethnographies, media studies, new historicism, symbolic interactionism, ethno-methodology, cultural anthropology, popular culture, American studies,

and feminist cultural studies. In a broad sense, this course organization follows Brantlinger's description of the move from literature to culture to ideology as a way to account for the changes in the preoccupation of cultural studies over the past thirty years.

The structure of assignments depend upon the level and the institutional context of the course, but one of the assignments that has worked well in the past is a modified group project where students work in small groups to investigate the way that culture is studied within different traditions of scholarship. Working from one major text, students use bibliographic research techniques to describe a cultural studies project. The cultural anthropology group, for example, began by elaborating the model of culture implied in *Writing Culture*, by James Clifford and George Marcus, and then identified other people in the field who conceptualize their work as being informed by cultural studies. Another group delineated the differences between various approaches to the study of culture by describing an essay from each of the following approaches: dramaturgical, Marxist, post-structuralist, and feminist.<sup>7</sup> In both cases, the point of the assignment is to facilitate student engagement with cross-disciplinary scholarship and, relatedly, to require them to formulate an account of the central questions or issues that animate other traditions of cultural studies. A related objective for this assignment directs students to identify journals in other disciplines that could inform their own work in literary studies. The assignment could be limited to a description and analysis of only one such project or could function to get students started on their own projects. In this case, the final assignment for the course could require them to present a proposal for a critical cultural investigation of their own design and political investment.

The courses I have described here are only suggestive of the type of cultural studies courses that could be developed within a literary studies curriculum. The construction of a program or emphasis in cultural studies would be best served by taking advantage of other courses that are already in place, such as film studies, women and popular culture, introduction to postcolonialist literatures, the history of rhetoric, survey of contemporary interpretive theory, or literature and the history of ideas. Another important project is to coordinate efforts with other disciplines and programs, to elaborate the connections between cultural studies and traditional departments—communication and media studies, sociology, anthropology, and history—and interdisciplinary programs in women's studies, science and culture, and multi-cultural studies. One of the key issues that this raises concerns the organization of the English department and the process of disciplining knowledge or scholarship. In the introductory course, as well as in graduate seminars, the first item on the agenda considers the insti-

tutional place of the course itself, how it is determined, how it is policed, and how it is contested. This would be one way to provide a space in the organizational structure of the department for the kinds of discussions that Gerald Graff argues are critically important for the ongoing revision of the discipline. In one essay, Graff argues that “the university should subsume literary studies under cultural studies and cultural history, conceived not as a privileged approach but as a framework that encourages ideological dialectic while retaining enough chronological structure to keep focus and continuity from being lost (“Taking Cover” 42). In this sense, Graff’s model for the reorganization of literary studies recalls Mary Poovey’s description of cultural criticism. Both call for a new organization of the curriculum to foreground the set of institutional practices and discourses that organize and discipline knowledge in the humanities. The emphases here, as well as in the cultural studies courses I’ve described, are on cultural practices, social and literary formations, and the conditions of possibility of intellectual work itself. Changes in organizing structures, however, do not necessarily guarantee changes in classroom practices; clearly another front of analysis and revision must address the pedagogical practices of cultural studies teachers. The question remains how such changes will be enacted.

### Strategies and Tactics

I address the practical issue of curriculum construction for several reasons, but I will only elaborate one here now. Feminist teachers, who are already in the academy, must begin to think *strategically* about how to introduce undergraduate students to feminist, antiracist, post-colonialist cultural studies in more formalized ways than through ad hoc writing projects, chance lectures, or serendipitous elective courses. This issue, of course, is related to the question of the institutional context of cultural studies. As a multidisciplinary project, cultural studies could probably fit into a number of departments. Certainly in the last five years a range of disciplines have made claims to some sort of project of cultural analysis in the name of cultural studies, so that in the United States the name identifies a space of cultural contestation among traditional disciplines. Upon closer inspection, we can see how cultural studies is caught in a crosscurrent of institutionalizing forces. Among other things, institutionalization involves strategies of identity formation and reproduction that involve countervailing forces: one of dissemination and dispersal and another of centralization and codification. On the one hand, cultural studies is marked by diffuse boundaries that attest to its theoretical commitments to the *trans*-disciplinary

production of cultural criticism. But on the other, the construction of a narrative of identity is important to legitimate cultural studies as a distinct academic enterprise for purposes of funding, hiring, course design, and curriculum construction.

Given the current set of institutional arrangements, it seems likely that the near future of cultural studies may best be played out in departments of English. But these departments are only one of several possible places for cultural studies. Even though these other places are yet to be determined, no doubt they will be located within institutional networks, which is to say that although they may not be so *centrally* academic (i.e., critical journalism, new social movements, or new art formations), they will still be institutionalized in some way. Within the current configuration of capitalist disorganization, spaces entirely outside of institutional relationships seem to be utopian fantasies. If the current form of hegemonic struggle requires that we take up institutional positions where we can, once there we must work to elaborate the specificity of cultural studies so that it is recognized as distinct from traditional disciplinary programs—that cultural studies is about doing things differently. And yet, the call for specificity, even when offered as part of such open-ended accounts of the commitments of cultural studies, are often taken up as part of the disciplinary and the *disciplining* apparatus of U.S. academic departments in such a way as to produce a deleterious unintended consequence: the formation of a canon of sorts of cultural studies—of popular forms of cultural expression or of certain authors, texts, or practices. In this case, the disciplining of cultural studies produces a palpable tension when a heterogeneous collection of critical cultural projects becomes homogenized by certain practices of institutionalization. I hope I have shown that cultural studies isn’t simply accomplished by replacing so-called “elite” objects of study with “low-brow” texts, nor even by the study of the context of classic texts. Furthermore, to “do” cultural studies is not simply to “do away” with the study of literature. If, in one sense, it is about the study of the production, reception, and circulation of cultural texts, it is also about working-class culture and the production of cultural criticism and hegemonic struggle.

When cultural studies is “done” within the confines of a department of English, it is in fact enacting a *tactical* maneuver to infiltrate the “proper” disciplines. By complicating the reproduction of disciplinary knowledge, it works to open a space for the production of cultural criticism. Furthermore, with its critical focus on the texts of everyday life, it also works to intervene in the reproduction of hegemonic consent. We know that domination is not won for all times, for all situations, but must be continually reproduced over and over in opposition to forces of dispersion and creative resistance—forces that threaten to

destabilize organized consent. Our aim through cultural studies is to amplify such disruptive forces.

### Notes

1. The nine-second sound track begins with three electronic blips, continues with a music interlude, and ends with a deep male voice-over that says, "From Turner Broadcasting System, this is the Headline News Network." The clip visually and aurally establishes a sense of urgency and criticality through the rapid rhythm of edits, the inward movement of the camera, and timbre of the voice-over. The rows of TV monitors symbolize the different "feeds" or sources of information that CNN draws on. These also symbolize the multiple points of surveillance that CNN deploys. The understanding then, is not only that CNN is connected (cybernetically) to the rest of the information world through its many communication channels but that it also has multiple lenses focused on that world, so that the entire world could be said to be under its watchful gaze. The viewer, too, is plugged in to the same cybernetic network. Through the use of a point-of-view shot looking at news copy, news-in-process, symbolically, *CNN Headline News* connects the viewer with a larger, global communication and information network; a network that is signified not as a "global village," with its connotations of simplicity, community, and cohesion, but rather a network that is high tech, up-to-the-minute, that comes to us as a visual reality in virtual space. CNN is our technologized eye and ear on the world; the current—at this moment—world, the "news" world of multinational modernity. The decision to have students watch CNN is not arbitrary, of course. Although some people claim that the news is a high form of masculinist discourse, with the attendant problems of objectivity, rationality, and the different valuation of the public from the private, it is also a broadly available discourse that students are familiar with in some form. There are few other such popular discourses that all students have familiarity with—not so with popular music, fashion, skateboarding, film, or even television programs. The focus on CNN becomes even more interesting lately considering that Saddam Hussein is reported to rely on the Cable News Network as his "sole source of information" about U.S. military deployment (reprinted in the *Chicago Tribune*, 24 August 1990).

2. Other readings for this course are taken from several books in the Methuen series "Studies in Communication" including: *Key Concepts in Communication* (Tim O'Sullivan, John Hartley, Danny Saunders, and John Fiske 1983); *Introduction to Communication Studies* (John Fiske 1988) *An Introduction to Language and Society* (Martin Montgomery 1986); and *Film as Social Practice* (Graeme Turner 1989). Other reading selections come from: *Reading the Popular*, by John Fiske; *Gender Advertisements*, by Erving Goffman; *Image-Music-Text*, by Roland Barthes; and *Female Desires: How They Are Sought, Bought, and Packaged*, by Rosalind Coward.

3. Key texts for this course include *Subcultures: The Meaning of Style*, by Dick Hebdige; Angela McRobbie's critical response to the British subculture work, "Settling Accounts with Subculture: A feminist critique"; *Popular Culture:*

*The Metropolitan Experience*, by Iain Chambers; *Understanding popular Culture*, by John Fiske; and the anthology, *Making Face, Making Soul: Haciendo Caras*, edited by Gloria Anzaldúa.

4. The kinds of questions that Berlin enumerates as part of his elaboration of the social-epistemic rhetoric are similar to the questions I use in the *CNN Headline News* analysis in the "Reading and Writing Culture" course: "Who benefits from a given version of truth? How are the material benefits of society distributed? To whom does our knowledge designate power?" (489). But in the "Popular Culture" course, students confront more explicitly the way in which they are situated and determined by larger social and economic forces (Berlin).

5. Other topics that have stimulated interesting group reports include: "Feminist Media Watch: Transgressions and Transformations," "Women, Technology, and the Future," "Television Ethnography," "Spectator Sports: Bodies in Slow Motion," "Nukespeak: National Security and Imperialism," "Cyberpunk: Postmodern Science Fiction." The reader I prepare for the course includes at least two articles on every topic that I assign as background reading for the rest of the class. The articles also help the students get started on their research and also to allow me to influence the critical angle of the project.

6. In an essay titled "Critiques of Culture: A Course," Jon Cook describes how one such cultural studies course, offered through the School of English and American Studies at the University of East Anglia, was organized "in terms of an unresolved question about the relation between English and European resources" and took up the issue of the state of national culture. This essay is included in a book edited by David Punter, called *Introduction to Contemporary Cultural Studies* (London: Longman 1986) that includes several other essays addressing the problems that arise when teaching cultural studies in Britain. As Punter elaborates in his introduction, although all the essays in this volume address British contemporary culture (after the Second World War), they also cannot avoid reference to historical and international influences.

7. One book that offers an overview of all these approaches, with the notable exception of feminism, is *Culture and Society: Contemporary Debates*, edited by Jeffrey C. Alexander and Steven Seidman. The issue of the relationship between feminism and cultural studies is addressed in my essay "Feminism and Cultural Studies."

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## Cultural Studies Courses