

The Continuing Embarrassment of Culture: From the Culture Concept to Cultural Studies

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“Culture is . . . properly described . . . as having its origin in the love of perfection; it is a study of perfection. It moves by the force, not merely or primarily of the scientific passion for pure knowledge, but also of the moral and social passion for doing good.”

Matthew Arnold (1869)

“Culture, taken in its wide ethnographic sense, is that complex whole that includes knowledge, belief, arts, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society.”

E.B. Tylor (1871)

“That American Studies scholars have found it so difficult critically and systematically to analyze concepts of culture, while invoking the word on any and all occasions, is one of the most curious anomalies of the field, and deserves considerable self-scrutiny.”

Robert Sklar (1975)

“At the very centre of a major area of modern thought and practice, which it is habitually used to describe, is a concept, ‘culture,’ which in itself, through variation and complication, embodies not only the issues, but the contradictions through which it has developed.”

Raymond Williams (1977)

During the last ten years, American Studies seems to have rapidly incorporated the theoretical and methodological strategies of British cultural studies. The speed with which this appropriation occurred has been remarkable and suggests (among other things) a strong pre-existing homology between the two scholarly enterprises. That structural commonality has never been complete, however, and has not always been evident. In particular, Robert Sklar, in an *American Quarterly* bibliographic essay from 1975, highlighted the absence of marxist forms of analysis in American Studies and suggested that the failure to explore this intellectual tradition might go a long way towards explaining the lack of an American Studies “philosophy.” In 1986, Michael Denning proposed that American Studies itself had long functioned as a substitute for an indigenous marxist intellectual tradition. Popular front and cold war “Americanism,” according to Denning, created the special conditions that had blocked the development of an American marxist cultural studies. Yet that same year, the *American Quarterly* published its first article that directly evoked English cultural studies (although, again, the word “marxist” did not appear). And now, only ten years later, the influence of British cultural studies—an unabashedly marxist frame of analysis—on American Studies has proven strong enough to prompt the theme of the 1996 meetings of the Mid-America American Studies Association.¹

It might seem odd that a nationally focused arena of inquiry might take so strongly and so quickly to a foreign-born model of study. After all, the specific forms of British cultural studies grew out of the concrete condition of labor politics and left scholarship in England in the late 1950s and early 1960s. The classic narrative begins with the publications of Richard Hoggart and Raymond Williams in the late-fifties, includes the founding of *New Left Review* in 1960, Hoggart’s organizing of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies in 1964, and Stuart Hall’s leadership of that institution from 1969 to 1979. Stuart Hall’s own narrations of this history describe the turn toward culture in his work and the Centre’s as being wholly the result of strategic political decisions engendered by a crisis of socialism. Whatever one might say about American culture and politics from the late 1980s to the present, it would be difficult to describe it as a crisis of socialism.²

Despite the concrete historical differences between the moment of the development of British cultural studies and the moment of its appropriation by American Studies, I think that a strong homology did exist between the two fields. In fact, I contend that the British form of marxist cultural studies became so appealing to American Studies scholars during the 1980s because it provided compelling new answers to the most central problem that had long haunted the field: how is “culture” itself best understood and best investigated? In the process of developing their own take on the continuing problem of culture, scholars associated with British cultural studies also provided new perspectives on two other problems endemic to American Studies: a) the discipline problem: is

American Studies most fruitfully conceived of as an interdisciplinary arena of inquiry, utilizing cultural criticism to excavate a usable past, or as its own internally consistent and methodologically coherent disciplinary approach to the study of American history? b) the politics problem: what is the proper way to conceptualize the relationship between professional academic work and the extra-academic (if still cultural) politics of American Studies? By the mid-1980s, British cultural studies, which had also explicitly considered each of these problems, and which has continued to address them as part of its own self-criticism, had produced a set of positions that did not solve these problems so much as provide new ways to work and think productively within the tensions they described.³

Most of this essay will be devoted to the central problem: how should one conceptualize and best investigate “culture?” In 1958, Raymond Williams published *Culture and Society 1780-1950*, in which he stated that, “The development of the word *culture* is a record of a number of important and continuing reactions to . . . changes in our social, economic, and political life.” Being such an odd word, whose philological trajectory had carried such historical residue, “culture” troubled Williams. In the course of his investigations, Williams discovered that, “the more closely [he] examined it, the more widely [his] terms of reference had to be set.” For within the historical period Williams was studying, culture emerged “as an abstraction and an absolute . . . a separate body of moral and intellectual activities,” which could provide a “court of appeals,” a distinct realm from which one could judge social processes. That is, “culture” *separated* from “society.” (The epigraph to this paper from Matthew Arnold perhaps best encapsulates this attitude.)⁴

Juxtaposed to that concept of culture, and crystallizing almost at the same time, was the understanding that culture represented, not simply a separate realm of arts and letters, but “a whole way of life,” including material processes and the organization of daily living. This, in effect, was the classic anthropological definition of culture that developed out of the commercial and military requirements of the British Empire, but which Williams was applying to history. (It appears, in one typical formulation by E.B. Tylor, as another epigraph to this paper.) The benefit of the domestic application of this understanding of culture, according to Williams, was that it allowed for the critical evaluation of “different ideas of the social relationship.” That is, the social whole could be best understood and criticized from the perspective provided by this (anthropological) understanding of culture. In this framework, culture *subsumed* society.⁵

From the 1960s into the 1980s, the tension between the concept of culture as a separate realm of artistic and intellectual activity and the concept of culture as a causal agent underlying the whole social process divided American Studies. The more literary minded scholars found themselves excluded from the debate about the culture concept, which was drawn from anthropology and which was being hailed as the basis for an American Studies discipline. During almost the

same period, the dialectical tension between these two understandings of culture prompted British cultural studies to look more closely at structuralist and post-structuralist theories of subjectivity. The belief was that a theory of the subject that acknowledged the contradictions between these two concepts of culture (i.e., that could see the subject as both a product of cultural processes and as an agent in those processes; or, to use marxist terms, that could understand ideology as not simply the reflection of social being [or false consciousness] and then could link this interactive understanding of ideology back to the concept of totality) could result in a more subtle and nuanced understanding of material social and historical transformations. Operating within an explicitly marxist framework, British cultural studies increasingly conceived of culture as a realm of conflict and struggle, striated by power differentials and fragmented along multiple axes of social differentiation (class, of course, but eventually age, gender, race, nation and sexuality). As a result, British cultural studies began to be about, in Richard Johnson's words, "the historical forms of consciousness or subjectivity." When American Studies adopted the strategies of British cultural studies during the 1980s, the benefits it derived from this sustained theoretical thinking included not only a more sophisticated understanding of subjectivity but a more productive, because more fluid, more nuanced, and more precise, understanding of culture.⁶

In 1957, Henry Nash Smith defined American Studies as "the study of American culture, past and present, as a whole" and defined "culture" as "the way in which subjective experience is organized." Smith was discussing "method in American Studies," which had taken the shape of a "problem" because "the investigation of American culture as a whole does not coincide with the customary field of operations of any established academic discipline." Reacting against the New Criticism then dominating literary studies, Smith argued that literature does not belong "to a non-empirical realm of 'ideality' totally divorced from the sordid or commonplace facts of everyday life." Positioning himself contra social scientists, Smith also insisted that the method of quantifying and statistically analyzing elements of content is an insufficient means of capturing "states of consciousness." "The man who conducts the content analysis and identified the obsessive fantasies in the movies describes a world from which freedom is entirely absent and in which consciousness itself is rudimentary."⁷

In the process of describing a methodological conundrum, Smith found himself betwixt and between opposing concepts of culture. For Smith, "the concept 'culture' seem[ed] . . . to embrace the concepts 'society' and 'art,'" and he suggested that "the development of a method for American Studies [would be] bound up with an effort to resolve the dilemma posed by the dualism which separates social facts from esthetic values." While he could not grant the total separation of culture (conceived of as art) and society—this would eviscerate the project of cultural criticism—neither could he accept the determinism that seemed to follow from the social science conception of culture.⁸

The problem for Smith was that social science had linked culture and society in a fashion that he found unacceptable. Within this basically materialist

conceptualization, “social facts” could determine “esthetic values,” but the reverse could never take place. The social scientific concept of culture focused scholarly attention on the typical, on the objects that revealed the patterned aspects of culture. These patterns of thought, belief, values, etc. were instantiated in the structures of society which, in turn, gave rise to each new cultural product. Smith’s problem was that this picture of the relationship did not allow for an active role for cultural criticism, for the effects of individual, perhaps atypical, cultural products such as Smith’s own work (as opposed to an ethnographically described “whole” culture). This form of the relationship between culture and society was unable to conceptualize any process, abstract or concrete, whereby “esthetic values,” whether embodied in high literature or art or any other relatively atypical cultural object (or even in the typical seating arrangements in a church in colonial Virginia), might transform “social facts.” After rejecting the social science view, Smith concluded by suggesting that “no ready-made method for American Studies is in sight,” and that “a new method will have to come piecemeal, through a kind of principled opportunism.”⁹

There were two dominant and opposing reactions to Smith’s rejection of social science, following from the two competing understandings of culture. Those who agreed that literature (and other arts) played a special role in the maintenance *and* the transformation of society continued to work with Smith’s concepts of “myth” and “symbol” in order to explain how culture (that is, literature and art) exerted a “decided influence on practical affairs.” Unfortunately, the process through which this took place remained notoriously fuzzy and poorly thought through. In its most explicit formulation, Leo Marx’s “Defense of an Unscientific Method,” the obscure concept of “literary power” was evoked to explain the historical significance of high literature. Through its dependence on the “inherent capacity of a work to generate the emotional and intellectual response of its readers,” however, the concept of literary power simply reinstated the separation of culture and society that Smith had found troublesome in the first place. Despite these problems, the myth and symbol school, by virtue of its commitment to a critical investigation of American culture and its search for a past that could be useful for this critical investigation, continued to produce many of the most enduring book-length examples of American Studies scholarship.¹⁰

The most forceful overtly theoretical thinking took place on the other side of the divide—among those who espoused the anthropological definition of culture. The development and application of the culture concept was motivated, however, not only by an intellectual distaste for the fuzzy ideas of myth, symbol, and literary power, but also by the desire for disciplinary integrity that had been motivating so much of the anxiety about an American Studies method in the first place.

In 1963, Robert Sykes argued that American Studies was not simply the study of American culture, but constituted a unique approach to this study, “possessed of a logical and methodological unity.” In fact, according to Sykes,

American Studies had become a “specialized branch of cultural anthropology,” much “closer to the social sciences theoretically than to the humanities.” By the early 1960s, the basis of the claim that American Studies constituted its own discipline (and, therefore, was entitled to all the institutional support and perquisites associated with “disciplines” or “departments” rather than “programs” in the American academy) rested on a particular methodology derived from the anthropological understanding of culture. The disciplinary integrity of American Studies was based in its claim to being a social science.¹¹

The first overt statement of this disciplinary philosophy came in Murray G. Murphey’s description of “American Civilization at Pennsylvania.” Published in the *American Quarterly* in 1970, among a set of program and department descriptions from the leading schools in the field, Murphey’s brief article not only described the organizational and institutional development of American Civilization at Penn but went on to stress “the important conceptual evolution which took place during the growth of the program.” For at least ten years, Penn’s American Civilization department had been the locus of the most aggressive articulation and promulgation of the culture concept. In the process, “American Civilization moved from an interdisciplinary to a disciplinary approach, which defined its subject matter as American society and culture, past and present, and its method as that of the social sciences, applied to both contemporary and historical data.”¹²

According to Murphey’s retrospective account, the traditional problems associated with fusing history and the social sciences had not occurred at Penn in the late 1950s. Instead, the problem of interdisciplinarity was focused on the literature/history nexus. Looking backward, Murphey wrote, “In literary scholarship, the criterion of aesthetic worth is absolutely fundamental: the whole discipline is built upon the principle that the greater the aesthetic merit of a work the greater the attention which ought to be accorded it.” This principle ran into trouble, however, when “one [took] the rather crude view of literature [you can almost hear the mockery in his voice, here, can’t you?] that its use as evidence must lie either in describing social phenomena or in expressing popular attitudes and beliefs.” Faced with this demand for crude evidentiary value, “attempts at interdisciplinary fusion collapsed.” “The social science oriented group abandoned the use of literature, while the literary group turned toward the myth-image path opened by Henry Nash Smith.” Even at Penn, this form of interdisciplinarity failed by virtue of the irreconcilable differences between the two understandings of culture.¹³

Freed from the need to create a two-way bridge between social facts and esthetic values, Penn’s American Civilization program began to elaborate “the culture concept,” making it the foundation of its disciplinary approach. Murphey’s definition of culture and some of the methodological consequences that follow from it are worth quoting at length.

By the civilization, or culture, of America we mean the learned repeated behavior characteristic of that society and of the socially significant positions within it. The culture is broadly conceived as including not only patterns of overt action, but the patterns of thought, emotion, belief and attitude which find expression largely through verbal behavior. . . . The culture also includes the whole range of material objects made or used by members of American society. Such objects not only evidence processes by which they were made and in which they were used, but as parts of the environment in which society exists and functions, they are also important determinants of behavior. In every case, our emphasis is upon the systematic character of culture—upon the patterned interaction of individuals as occupants of significant social positions. We are not concerned with the unique event, if such a thing exists, but with what is typical of the group.¹⁴

Penn's American Civilization program developed a coherent and compelling system of study focused on the concept of culture as a "whole," as well as on patterns of behavior within that culture. This research strategy focused on not only the determinants of those patterns, but it also searched for precise causal explanations of historical changes in those patterns. Their adamant refusal to privilege high literature carried a corresponding openness to the daily activities, the popular culture, of groups in America. Following from their anthropological orientation, advocates of the culture concept—especially at the University of Pennsylvania—emphasized an ethnographic method devoted to the description of the complexities of everyday behavior. According to Ward Goodenough, an anthropologist with a profound influence on American Civilization at Penn, "A society's culture consists of whatever it is one has to know or believe to operate in a manner acceptable to its members and to do so in any role they accept for any of themselves. . . . Culture, then, consists of standards . . . for perceiving, believing, evaluating, and acting." Implicit in this ethnographic approach to culture was an invigorating materialism that foregrounded not only questions about the basic organization of American society and its substantive maintenance ("the rules by which nineteenth-century Americans [for example] may have 'catalogued' themselves," in the words of one practitioner) but also the material objects—tools, technologies, artifacts, and decorative arts—which provided an important and often neglected source of evidence. This materialism had much in common with the base/superstructure orientation of marxism, but the culture concept maintained an anthropological emphasis on culture as a whole, not as a fragmented arena of struggle. The issue of change was highlighted by Murphey ("processes of multigenerational change are of central importance") because the anthropological approach was often accused of being too synchronic and inca-

pable of capturing the fluid diachrony that was history's real subject. But the purpose of historical inquiry was left unaddressed. Certain knowledge of the past culture was assumed to be goal enough.¹⁵

It should perhaps not be surprising that the most satisfying book-length enactment of this model was written not by an historian, but by an anthropologist, Anthony F.C. Wallace. In an appendix to his Bancroft Prize-winning *Rockdale*, Wallace laid out a theory of cultural change that may be taken as typical of the anthropological approach to history. Drawing from the work of Thomas Kuhn, Wallace proposed a "General Model of Paradigmatic Processes" to be applied to the understanding of history. While Wallace's theory is intended to describe changes in "theology, art, and literature," the engine that drives such change is understood to be the "functional consequences" of the previously existing paradigm. In every one of Wallace's examples, these functional consequences are material: "the incautious use of DDT," "improved methods of food production [resulting in] . . . a vast increase in the world's population," "the applications of core development in normal science to the creation of new physical, chemical, and biological weaponry." "Rationalization" is the process of cultural response to these material changes, which produces decreasingly satisfying results up to the point when the cultural paradigm must change. While avoiding the marxist terminology, Wallace has described a base/superstructure theory of historical change: material transformations produce changes in consciousness. This theory fits neatly into the anthropological understanding of culture, but it renders irrelevant the project of cultural criticism. A "usable past" could not be abstracted from these unique combinations of material conditions and cultural rationalizations. The moral and social passion for doing good would then seem to have no effect on the material world.¹⁶

Advocates of the culture concept published several programmatic articles during the early seventies, continuing to critique myth and symbol for its reliance on vague categories and detailing further aspects of the anthropological understanding of culture. Bruce Kuklick's "Myth and Symbol in American Studies" has been cited so often that its argument hardly requires repeating here. On the other hand, Gordon Kelly's "Literature and the Historian," deserves scrutiny not only because it cites Richard Hoggart's 1969 publication, *Contemporary Cultural Studies*, but by virtue of the fact that its attempt to deal with literature shared a tremendous commonality with the emergent framework of British cultural studies.

In Kelly's sociology of literature, the literary work appears "analogous to a response to an interview schedule for which the questions have been lost." The interrogation of literature, then, resembles a process of recovering those lost questions in order better to evaluate the text's capacity to act as an informant. Children's literature becomes a privileged genre by virtue of its role in the process of socialization and its rather easily recovered "interview schedule." "Stories for children may be regarded as carefully fashioned strategies—structures of mean-

ing—presumed capable of confirming and reinforcing the allegiance of those children already persuaded of the truths intended in the fiction.” So children’s stories—not an especially literary form—are both crucial to the maintenance of a particular culture and are rather simply interpreted forms of evidence of that culture.¹⁷

In the already cited article on the program at Penn, Murray Murphey had called for investigations of “the cultural function of literature . . . to try to determine what role literature really does play in the lives lived by members of the society.” Sounding very much like a demand for the sociology of literature that Hoggart, Williams, and British cultural studies had been engaged in and were continuing to produce, Murphey’s request suggests that he was completely unaware of this work. Kelly’s article can be understood as an attempt to enact Murphey’s call, and as such bears an extraordinary resemblance to the British scholarship (minus the marxism, of course). Raymond Williams and Richard Hoggart had both advocated reading literature in just this way—as evidence of a “whole way of life.” Hoggart in particular “extend[ed] the methods of ‘close reading’ of texts in the direction of ‘reading a culture,’ and especially popular and working-class culture, where the ‘texts’ are, characteristically, not literary in the traditional sense.” By the early seventies, then, both British cultural studies and Penn’s American Civilization department had developed a strategy for reading literature within a materialist (anthropological on one hand, marxist on the other) framework as a means of understanding a whole way of life.¹⁸

Yet even as Williams was producing persuasive materialist readings of literature, he never abandoned the project of cultural criticism. As early as 1961, in *The Long Revolution*, Williams was arguing that a cultural revolution was intimately and complexly bound up with the industrial revolution. “This deeper cultural revolution is a large part of our most significant living experience, and is being interpreted and indeed *fought out*, in very complex ways, in the world of arts and ideas.” Williams went on to argue that arts and ideas should not be understood as simply the reflection of transformations in the material base. Working through recent developments in the psychology of perception, he showed that the creative act of the artist along with the typical learning of any interested human involve the “continuing organization and reorganization of consciousness” which fundamentally is “the organization and reorganization of reality.” The duality between art and reality, he argued, is false. And cultural criticism, the ongoing conversation about the long revolution, motivated by the moral and social passion for good, can play an agitative role in the progressive transformation of society.¹⁹

Easy enough to say, but the problem of methodology remained. In the developing field of British cultural studies, sociologists of literature continued to read through the work to the culture, developing and extending their materialist framework. While in American Studies, advocates of the culture concept had the advantage of a theory that explained cultural change, focused historical investi-

gations on material processes and structural determinants, and prescribed the form that evidence should take. By the mid-1970s, one specific form of the study of literature had even been readmitted into the fold, with the goal of simply producing historical knowledge.

The concreteness of the social scientific method that was derived from the culture concept lent credibility to the professional academic claim for disciplinary status; however, these methodologies began to merge during the seventies with the techniques advocated by the proponents of the “new” social history. Drawing from a materialist orientation and focusing on social structural determinants, social scientific methods were enabling the writing of new histories “from the bottom up,” giving voice to those populations who had left few, if any, written records. The materialist focus of the new social history syncretized well with work motivated by the culture concept, but it fractured the concept of a cultural whole. Social history tended to focus on smaller groups, on specific populations and their subcultures, weakening anyone’s claim to be considering American culture as a whole. Motivated in part by a critique of elitist and consensus history, the new social history was not simply an internal professional development of the field of history, however. Rather, it also grew out of extra-professional political concerns that derived from the political climate of the late sixties. As Gene Wise has pointed out with respect to American Studies, “After the middle of the sixties, it was hard to assume without question that America is an integrated whole; division and conflict, not consensus seemed to characterize the culture.” In addition, social history had a specifically political critical edge to it. The production of historical knowledge about these groups and the integration of this new knowledge into the story of America had both political motivations and consequences. With its political project and its analytical power, undeniably motivated by a moral and social passion for good, the new social history dominated research in American materials during the seventies, giving rise to new and vibrant subfields of labor history, women’s history and black history. The new social history also had roots in a marxist historiography (owing much to British historians like E.P. Thompson and Eric Hobsbawm) that understood culture to be an arena for social conflict. But even this relatively sophisticated historiographical politics of inclusion did not conceive of an agentive role for cultural criticism. And the disciplinary status of American Studies, for a decade dependent on a social scientific approach to the study of the past, was no longer secure.²⁰

If not consciously, at least coincidentally, Jay Mechling, Robert Merideth, and David Wilson responded to the flowering of social history and the continuing relative incoherence of most American Studies programs by insisting again that the culture concept had to stand at the center of the discipline of American Studies. They argued that while previous American Studies programs had been characterized by a “parcel of noble strivings tied loosely together by individual will and effort, driven by a variety of urges . . . and lacking methodological coherence. .

. . . Properly conceived, [American Studies] has built into it a full, responsive and critical vision of the realities of American culture.” The foundation for that proper conception was the culture concept, and with the culture concept at its base, American Studies could achieve disciplinary status. Speaking from their experience in a fledgling program, this group of faculty from the University of California at Davis was well aware of the problems that followed from the traditional interdisciplinary standing of American Studies in most universities.

Any academic activity that has no control over hiring, lacks a budget, gets administered by a casually appointed committee, staffs its courses by borrowing teachers from their regular work . . . creates courses in an ad hoc fashion, and the like . . . suffers an ill-funded, haphazardly staffed and generally unsystematic organizational structure which gives only the appearance of organic vitality . . . often characterized by blurred vision, intellectual diffuseness and accommodative behavior.²¹

For the Davis faculty, disciplinary standing was the key to a thriving intellectual endeavor, the basis for not only productive research but perhaps more importantly for engaged and engaging teaching. The basis for their claim to the status of a discipline was again the central role given to the culture concept. “The necessary if not sufficient condition for engaging in American Studies is an applicable theoretical model of culture in the largest sense. . . . The concept locates the terms of our activities as scholars and teachers.” Yet the authors of this article did not specify or define what they meant by culture. Although they did wish “to avoid misunderstanding” and so “emphasize[d] that we are not advocating a monolithic consensus or rigidity, they were “reluctant to propose jointly a single theory of culture.” Rather, the value of the culture concept seemed to be its very status as a problem. The “theoretical center of scholarship and curriculums in American Studies” ought to be the “debate” over the meaning of the term. The curriculum described in the article follows through on the unresolved concept of culture, placing the problem of “what is culture” at the heart of required courses. This was not a culture concept that prescribed social scientific methods, but an inclusive and open problematic.²²

By the mid-1970s, then, American Studies found itself with this undefined term at the center of its practice. And it was in 1975 that Robert Sklar remarked on the curious combination of the ubiquity of “culture” in American Studies scholarship with the absence of sufficient theorizing about it. Sklar noted that “in American Scholarship the social sciences dominate the generation of theory, and humanistic scholars have no coherent way to transform techniques and jargons of social science into their own framework.” He went on to suggest that an examination of recent marxist cultural theory might aid the analysis and elabo-

ration of the term, providing new ways to think through the relationships between cultural production and social structure. Among the articles and books cited by Sklar was Raymond Williams's "Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory," first published in 1973.²³

Williams began this highly influential essay with the assertion that "Any modern approach to a Marxist theory of culture must begin by considering the proposition of a determining base and a determined superstructure." Although he wished not to have to begin there, the spatial metaphor of base and superstructure had "been commonly held to be the key to Marxist cultural analysis." The virtue of the metaphor was its insistence on the material basis of cultural production and its assertion that certain forms of cultural production were tied to certain modes of (material) production. But Williams was quick to point out the problems. The standard understanding of the metaphor saw the superstructure—the realm of culture, of arts and ideas—as a mere reflection of the operations of the base. As we might expect, given his commitment to cultural criticism and his opposition to metaphysical dualism, Williams was not satisfied with that formulation. He insisted that

We have to revalue 'determination' towards the setting of limits and the exertion of pressure, and away from a predicted, prefigured and controlled content. We have to revalue 'superstructure' towards a related range of cultural practices, and away from a reflected, reproduced or specifically dependent content. And, crucially, we have to revalue 'the base' away from the notion of a fixed economic or technological abstraction, and towards the specific activities of men in real social and economic relationships, containing fundamental contradictions and variations and therefore always in a state of dynamic process.²⁴

By reconceiving the static model of base and superstructure as a more dynamic interactive system of productive forces in different fields, Williams had suggested the interpenetration of culture and society. Social structures were saturated with and enabled by cultural relations just as cultural forms and expressions were inextricably linked up with social structures. This interactive model of culture and society promised an active role for cultural analysis within a still thoroughly materialist framework.

Sklar was right, of course. This was what American Studies needed. It opened the door to a more complete specification of the role of culture in historical change. It established the possibility for scholars devoted to both the (more traditionally literary) analysis of culture and the (anthropological) culture concept to begin to specify in concrete situations the material conditions for cultural production and the recursive effects of cultural struggle on those material conditions. But Williams's conceptualization was not free of its own problems.

The congeniality of Williams's style, his gentle manner of insisting on the productivity of contradiction—even in his own thought, led critics like Terry Eagleton to call rather harshly for a more rigorous specification of the mechanisms whereby culture, society and (now) subjectivity worked together and against each other. But the vigor of Eagleton's criticisms, motivated by the structuralist marxism of theorists like Louis Althusser, simply testified to the ongoing vitality of marxist cultural theory in Britain. At Birmingham, scholars interested in literary studies were beginning to formulate the difference between Eagleton's and Williams's modes of analysis as structuralism versus culturalism, and were turning increasingly to European theories of signification such as those proffered by the *Tel Quel* group in Paris.²⁵

At the same time, the media studies group at the Centre was moving beyond the traditional "hypodermic" communications models of direct influence and was working out an understanding of the processes of mass communication that questioned both the transparency of the media "message" and the assumed passivity of the audience. This work showed the influence of German marxists like Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer, and Walter Benjamin, while foregrounding Stuart Hall's own insistence that "Ultimately, the notion of the people as a purely passive, outline force is a deeply unsocialist perspective." Their focus on an active audience, on strategies of encoding, decoding, and the concepts of dominant, negotiated, and oppositional readings enabled a more complex analysis of popular culture and mass media than had been typical in media studies. These theoretical positions were operationalized through a research methodology that was based on ethnography. The chief techniques were participant/observation and interviewing, designed to capture the active work of the audience in the transmission of media messages. This data, however, was not allowed to stand for itself; rather, it was analyzed and interpreted with an eye towards uncovering its ideological functioning. Their use of the Althusserian concept of "hailing" and his recognition of "the false obviousness of everyday practice," combined with the Gramscian concepts of cultural hegemony and cultural blocs to render the complex, negotiated, and at times contradictory politics of participation in mass culture.²⁶

With its insistence on the importance of everyday life and the typical experiences of everyday people, its focus on mass forms of entertainment, and its ethnographic techniques, British cultural studies in the late seventies displayed an orientation towards the analysis of culture that had a tremendous amount in common with the American advocates of the culture concept. The culture concept remained an undertheorized element at the basis of American Studies, however, and its lack of theoretical specification had weakened much of the work done in its name. Gordon Kelly's use of Berger and Luckmann's *Social Construction of Reality* represented the most elaborated attempt at theorizing the relationships between culture, representations, and individuals, but their concept of socialization remained monolithic, unable to think through the complex multi-layered struggles that characterize cultural construction in late-modern societies.

Two important breakthroughs took place in the early 1980s. First was the publication of T.J. Jackson Lears's, *No Place of Grace* in 1981. Coming out of the myth and symbol tradition, Lears produced a sophisticated analysis of antimodernism in the years between 1880 and 1920 that benefited from his familiarity with the work of Antonio Gramsci and Raymond Williams. In his preface, Lears argued that he was "particularly concerned with transcending a reductionist or conspiratorial analysis," insisting that "a dominant culture is a continuous process, not a static 'superstructure.'" Yet he was still committed to showing the connections between the forms this culture took and class relations. Marxist cultural theory enabled Lears to conceptualize these complex interactions while maintaining some relative autonomy for the arts and ideas produced at that time. *No Place of Grace* established the value of a more elaborated theory of cultural processes for the field of American Studies.²⁷

Probably the most important development of the early eighties, however, was the publication in 1984 of arguably the most influential book every to come out of Penn's American Civilization department, Janice Radway's *Reading the Romance*. While Lears's book demonstrated the advantages that myth and symbol-oriented scholars could gain from marxist cultural theory, it was Radway's extension of the methodological implications of Penn's approach to literature that set the dominant terms for the influence of British cultural studies on American Studies. Radway was committed to working within the culture concept's empirical approach to the study of literature (as she states in her introduction to the second edition of the book), yet it was her background and training as a literary critic that allowed her to investigate fully "the cultural function of literature . . . to try to determine what role literature really does play in the lives lived by members of the society." For what distinguishes *Reading the Romance* from the model promoted by Gordon Kelly is its simultaneous attention to two fundamentally contradictory aspects of romance reading. Rather than simply being a process of socialization, whereby readers internalized dominant representations of gender roles, romance reading functioned as a means of resisting these dominant roles (by creating a time and a space that was the woman's own) even as it reproduced in pleasurable fantasy the conditions that reinforced patriarchal relations. Demonstrating the value of a truly interdisciplinary approach, Radway used multiple intellectual perspectives to represent the complex and contradictory nature of this popular cultural activity. *Reading the Romance* brought together the opposing definitions of culture that had split the American Studies community. It attempted to produce both a "moral and social" critique of romance reading and an ethnographic description of how this reading fit into a whole way of life. Finally, *Reading the Romance* marked a break from the claims to objective knowledge promulgated by advocates of the culture concept, by virtue of Radway's claim that "there is no context-free unmarked position from which to view the activity of romance reading in its entirety."²⁸

Through the end of the eighties, cultural analysis on both sides of the Atlantic grew ever more self-conscious, ever more aware of the complexities of culture,

ever more attuned to the way that “culture involves power and helps to produce asymmetries in the abilities of individuals and groups to define and realize their needs.” Theoretical investigations of gender led to the problematization of sexuality; the analysis of race made clear both the false basis of the concept and its continuing cultural power; assumptions about nationality and ethnicity were demolished; and the analysis of class formation led to an increasing awareness of the problematic role of academic institutions in the reproduction or transformation of dominant relations.²⁹

Most importantly for American Studies, however, British cultural studies provided a model of the way that cultural theory could be integrated into and inform empirical work. Throughout the eighties, even as the theoretical exploration of cultural processes grew ever more elaborate (and, yes perhaps, arcane), British cultural studies never lost its focus on empirical research in concrete situations. This empirical focus was at least in part a result of the overt and explicit political project that initiated the work at the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) and that continued to motivate its research. But as cultural studies began to be adopted by other institutions, it experienced pressures to professionalize, to codify itself and its practices in order to sustain a certain identity. In 1986, Richard Johnson, then director of the CCCS, observed that while “there are important pressures to define, . . . a codification of methods . . . runs against some main features of cultural studies as a tradition: its openness and theoretical versatility, its reflexive even self-conscious mood, and, especially, the importance of critique. . . . From this point of view, cultural studies is a process, a kind of alchemy for producing useful knowledge; codify it and you might halt its reactions.” The point I want to emphasize here takes off from Johnson’s descriptive phrase “an alchemy for producing useful knowledge.” For Johnson, cultural studies is not simply interested in the production of knowledge for its own sake, but holds out the goal of creating a particular type of useful knowledge—that which would be politically useful. Johnson was quick to qualify the political aspect to cultural studies. “Cultural studies is not a research programme for a particular party or tendency.” But neither is it simply the purely professional pursuit of knowledge. “Above all, perhaps, we have to fight against the disconnection that occurs when cultural studies is inhabited for merely academic purposes.” In Stuart Hall’s words, “if you are in the game of hegemony,” you have “the responsibility of transmitting [your] ideas, [your] knowledge . . . to those who do not belong, professionally, in the intellectual class.”³⁰

Fundamentally, the usefulness of cultural studies derives from a “moral and social passion for doing good,” with the goal of producing a more just “whole way of life.” These extra-professional goals, derived from the contradictory and still conflicting traditional understandings of culture, are part of the definition of its intellectual project. Cultural studies grew out of an engagement with the marxist tradition of cultural analysis yet it is not shy to borrow any tools that might seem to aid the production of the useful knowledge that is its professional object. It has developed and benefited from an increasing sensitivity to issues of race, ethnicity,

gender, and sexuality. It resists the codification of its methods and its theories; it desires to remain resolutely anti-disciplinary; and it remains conscious of the fact that there is always “something *at stake*” in its work. To this extent, cultural studies sounds like nothing so much as the very best American Studies.³¹

In a very important recent article, George Lipsitz has argued that “Studies of culture too far removed from studies of social structure leave us with inadequate explanations for understanding racism and inadequate remedies for combatting it.” Substitute for racism the name of any other social problem and the statement would hold equally true. But when some scholars assert that American Studies practitioners should resort to a simple strategy of speaking the truth about social injustice, they forget that “there is always something decentered about the medium of culture,” and that “struggles over meaning are inevitably struggles over resources.” Culture never holds still when you try to look at it or talk about it, and its destabilizing effects permeate even the most direct analysis of social structures. American Studies has been profoundly influenced by British cultural studies because the latter has provided useful ways of thinking about the relationship between professional demands and the extra-professional political effects of its work, helpful statements about the conditions and benefits of truly interdisciplinary study, and above all useful ways of thinking about this continuing embarrassment—the elusive concept of culture. Of course, the move to cultural studies has simply been the most recent development in the history of American Studies’ efforts to borrow the best thinking of those it encounters. What Raymond Williams said in 1977 is still true, “the complexity of the concept of culture . . . is a source of great difficulty.” American Studies remains the interdisciplinary study of American culture, past and present, with all of the problems, complexities, and contradictions that implies. We continue to need all the help we can get.³²

Epilogue

I came away from the April MAASA conference both thrilled and disturbed—excited about the energy shown by this community of scholars and the diversity of intellectual positions within it, while concerned about the apparent probability that the plenary speakers talked right past each other. As I began to work on revising my paper, I wanted to be sure to respond to some of the criticisms of cultural studies that came up during the conference. But I found it difficult to work my responses into the body of my revisions. So I decided to write this epilogue as a means of encouraging further dialogue across the generations of the American Studies community.

The criticisms of cultural studies raised at the conference seem to me to boil down to three main complaints: 1) cultural studies over-values European theories and de-values American theories, in the process relying on obfuscating language that does not result in better understandings of the problems but which does

distance cultural studies practitioners from other academics and from a larger public; 2) cultural studies practitioners have an impoverished understanding of politics, which inflates the value of academic critique and fails to understand what true commitment and “real” politics involves; 3) cultural studies is weakened by its dependence on an undeveloped definition of culture.

In response to the first criticism, I think the most exciting work in recent American cultural studies involves precisely the examination of indigenous American critical traditions. The work of Frederick Douglass, William James, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, the Beechers, Thorstein Veblen, and many others have become some of the nodal points in the re-examination of the critical tradition in American cultural history—a re-examination made possible by the journey through cultural theory.³³

Furthermore, I believe that cultural studies applied to American materials is what traditional American Studies looks like after it has crawled and clawed its way through the dark tunnel of radical epistemological doubt. I do think that we are in the process of coming out of this tunnel, moving beyond the moment of deconstruction and towards the positive act of speaking what we believe to be true (within an understanding of the multiply contingent basis of belief and truth). That moment of apprehension about our capacity to speak was not simply an imported intellectual fashion, swirling in from Paris, stepping sassily down the walkway before being mass reproduced by sped-up workers in the American knowledge factory. Rather this doubt about the certainty of things, this questioning of our own perspectives and even our own perceptions, has been and continues to be a response to material transformations in the demographic makeup of and the quality of lives led by the Professional-Managerial Class (PMC), the group to which most academics belong and the group that produces most of the students we serve. As Joel Pfister has cautioned us,

those who practice cultural studies in the US academy [along with all others employed within this business] are members of . . . the ‘professional-managerial class,’ a class ‘whose major function in the social division of labor’ is historically ‘the reproduction of capitalist culture and capitalist class relations.’ It is crucial to think about how constructions and promotions of US cultural studies will be complicit in this process of ‘reproduction.’

To my mind, the recognition of this structural function of the class to which we belong gives us a better understanding of the purposes and qualities of the criticism we practice. Yes, it is our job to participate in the reproduction of the PMC; we had better do all we can to make it the PMC we want to live with.³⁴

This process of radically doubting the legitimacy of our own perceptions has created terrible problems when we finally get to the point where we want to

communicate a particular conception to an audience. When the language we use appears obfuscating and unnecessarily complex, that is simply evidence that we are not yet good enough at using the conceptual tools that we have developed in order to produce knowledge from a contingent, unstable, and insecure base. We have to continue to get better at speaking clearly and persuasively because we have to be able to analyze culture *and* communicate the results of our analysis if our criticisms are to have an effect on the shape and quality of the class we serve.

By virtue of our position in the reproduction of class relations, our politics will always be structured by a tension between our immediate professional concerns and interests, and the longer term, extra-professional politics, that, I suspect, motivated many of us to get into this business in the first place. Rather than seeing academic work as a contribution to a political program, I am coming to think of the cultural politics many of us espouse and enact in our professional activities as a form of social ethics—as a discussion and, perhaps, demonstration of the possibility of ethical belief and action in a culture unequally structured by global commodity capitalism. In addition to the ethics we teach, the politics of our professional life also includes the struggle over resources within the academic institution, a struggle which is profoundly shaped by the hierarchical organization of the academy and the centrality of prestige as an organizing principle within this hierarchy. Resources are distributed throughout the academy according to the prestige accruing to the particular college, department, program, or individual. Because we have to pay attention to the operations of prestige throughout the academy, professional politics often takes on the appearance of mere self-aggrandizement. But the professional politics of accruing prestige and competing for resources is absolutely necessary for the effective continuation of the extra-professional political work we perform in classrooms, in publications, and in whatever service we are able to provide to our local communities. It does us no good to decry internal professional politics as somehow less than real politics. Equally, we should never forget that our role in the reproduction of class relations guarantees that everything we do has extra-professional political consequences.³⁵

Finally, I want to respond briefly to Jay Mechling's assertion that cultural studies displays an impoverished understanding of culture. In Mechling's eyes, the definition of culture put forth by cultural studies is underspecified, by virtue of its reliance on Raymond Williams's rather vague historical entymology. Despite the fact that Anthony Wallace does not venture his own definition of culture, Mechling finds a compelling precision in the form that culture takes within the prescriptive statements of Wallace's *Culture and Personality*. The system described in the first chapter of this book does offer a set of detailed schema for analyzing certain cognitive procedures used by individuals to solve problems and it goes on to offer a method for generalizing from observed behavior to patterns in the culture. The system proffered by Wallace is nothing if not precise. While ethnographic methodologies that focus on cognitive approaches to problem solving do offer a reassuring precision, I believe that they

also leave much out of the picture. It seems to me that the most intriguing, perhaps because the most troublesome, aspects of culture operate in the non-cognitive realm, in the pre-cognitive processes of subject formation, the moments of humanness that pre-exist and which embarrassingly continue to undermine the possibility of rationality. To the extent that these pre-cognitive processes are involved in the production of social problems (like the disturbing persistence of racism, homophobia, and sexism along with the apparent willingness to sever the social contract along class lines), then, culture-and-personality ethnographies cannot come to grips with critical contemporary issues, such as the relationships between identity formation and the reproduction of commodity culture, the intertwinings of desire and need, or the complexities of cultural processes structured by power differentials organized around multiple intersecting axes (gender, race, class, sexuality, ethnicity, age, region, nation). These are the issues and arenas of cultural interaction that cultural studies approaches, through their joint focus on accurate description and motivated criticism, can help us not simply to describe and preserve, but to prune, to cultivate, to weed out, and, when nurtured properly, to grow into less diseased and more productive cultures. And I do not believe that a single precisely described research methodology is necessary for this project. The usefulness of cultural studies' understanding of culture follows from its simultaneous insistence on both totality and specificity. We might simply have a division of intellectual labor here (especially in consideration of the fact that I find axioms 2-10 to be so helpful), but I want to make sure that the theoretical differences are understood as clearly as possible.³⁶

Notes

1. I am using "homology" to suggest a dominant structural resemblance between American Studies and British cultural studies. See Raymond Williams, "Typification and Homology," in *Marxism and Literature* (New York, 1977). Robert Sklar, "The Problem of an American Studies 'Philosophy': A Bibliography of New Directions," *American Quarterly* 16 (Summer 1975), 245-62; Michael Denning, "'The Special American Conditions': Marxism and American Studies," *American Quarterly* 38:3 (Bibliography 1986), 356-80; Elizabeth Long, "Women, Reading, and Cultural Authority: Some Implications of the Audience Perspective in Cultural Studies," *American Quarterly* 38:4 (Fall, 1986), 591-612; Jay Mechling, post to H-AMSTDY, May 26, 1995. The move to cultural studies has not been direct or smooth, without controversy or disruption. I would argue, in fact, that the particular trajectory suggested by "From the Culture Concept to Cultural Studies" encapsulates the tensions that tore apart and destroyed the American Civilization program at the University of Pennsylvania.

2. Richard Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy*, (Boston, 1961 [orig., 1957]); Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society 1780-1950* (New York, 1983 [orig. 1958]); Stuart Hall, "Cultural Studies and the Centre: Some Problematics and Problems," in Hall, et al., eds., *Culture, Media, Language* (London, 1980); "Cultural Studies: Two Paradigms," in Tony Bennett, et al., eds. *Culture, Ideology, and Social Process: A Reader* (London, 1981); "Cultural Studies and its Theoretical Legacies," in Larry Grossberg, Cary Nelson, and Paula Treichler, eds. *Cultural Studies* (New York, 1992); "Deconstructing the Popular," in Raphael Samuels, ed. *People's History and Socialist Theory* (London, 1981), 227-240.

3. It ought not to be necessary to point out that the move to cultural studies in American Studies did not occur in an intellectual vacuum. Throughout the 1970s, English departments throughout the American academy found themselves grappling with a variety of interpretive techniques derived from structuralist and poststructuralist theories. These theories had an impact on literary studies first because the dominance of the New Criticism had left the study of literature too separated from social

and cultural contexts. It is important to remember that deconstruction as practiced by Jacques Derrida was a materialist theory of signification, with a clear leftist political project. That deconstruction in America became assimilated to the a-contextual strategies of the New Criticism says more about the professionalism of the American academy than it does about Derridean poststructuralism. History departments felt their own tremors. Hayden White and Dominick LaCapra headed the project of elaborating the consequences that new understandings of signification, writing, and reading might have for historical thinking. This re-thinking of history seemed more active in the realm of intellectual history, again because the study of ideas had in some cases grown too divorced from the material conditions that spawned them, while in other examples intellectual traditions had merely been reduced to those conditions. The *American Historical Review* published several major review articles and forums that mapped the struggles in intellectual history. These articles still provide an excellent introduction to the themes of the debates. Throughout the 1980s, a new cultural history began to show the dominant influence of Michel Foucault's theorizations of power, knowledge, and disciplines. Even anthropology departments were acknowledging the influence of poststructuralist thinking, and here, also, the dominant influence was clearly Michel Foucault. Postmodern ethnography, as championed by Paul Rabinow, James Clifford, George Marcus, Michael M.J. Fischer, and others developed a self-reflexive strategy of concentrating on the power relations inherent in any ethnographic encounter. The developments in each of these fields had their impact on the re-thinking of American Studies. But this essay is devoted to a discussion of the movement from the culture concept to cultural studies within American Studies and so cannot devote the time necessary to mapping the changes within and influences from each of these neighboring disciplines. See Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology* (Baltimore, 1974); and compare to Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (Cambridge, MA, 1980); Hayden White, *Metahistory* (Baltimore, 1973); Dominick LaCapra, *Rethinking Intellectual History* (Ithaca, 1983); John Toews, "Intellectual History After the Linguistic Turn: The Autonomy of Meaning and the Irreducibility of Experience," *American Historical Review* 92 (October 1987), 879-902; David Harlan, "Intellectual History and the Return of Literature," *American Historical Review* 94 (June, 1989); Lynn Hunt, ed., *The New Cultural History* (Berkeley, 1989); James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Cambridge, MA, 1988); James Clifford and George Marcus, eds., *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* (Berkeley, 1986); George Marcus and Michael M.J. Fischer, *Anthropology as Cultural Critique: An Experimental Moment in the Human Sciences* (Chicago, 1986).

4. Williams, *Culture and Society 1780-1950*, xviii-xix.

5. *Ibid.*, xviii, 325.

6. Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, (New York, 1977), pp.17-18; Rosalind Coward and John Ellis, *Language and Materialism: Developments in Semiology and the Theory of the Subject* (London and New York, 1977); Hall, et.al., eds., *Culture Media, Language*; Hall, "Cultural Studies: Two Paradigms;" in Bennett, et.al., eds., *Culture, Ideology and Social Process: "Signification, Representation, Ideology: Althusser and the Post-Structuralist Debates," Critical Studies in Mass Communication* (1985); Richard Johnson, "What is Cultural Studies, Anyway?" *Social Text* 16 (Winter 1986/7), 38-80, quote: 43.

7. Henry Nash Smith, "Can 'American Studies' Develop a Method?" *American Quarterly* 1957 197-208, quotes: 197, 203, 205.

8. *Ibid.*, 206-07.

9. *Ibid.*, 206-07.

10. Smith's definitions of myth and symbol appear in the "Preface to the First Printing" of *Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth* (Cambridge, MA: 1970, [orig. 1950]), xi; Leo Marx, "American Studies—Defense of an Unscientific Method," *New Literary History* 1 (1969); For all the salvos that have been aimed at this article it is important to point out that Marx did suggest a line of investigation that has proven to be among the most fruitful in the new American cultural history when he emphasized "the inherently, inescapably normative character of the intricate, never-ending, and imperfectly understood process which brings the subject matter of the humanities into existence." For excellent examples of myth and symbol scholarship in addition to *Virgin Land*, see in particular R.W.B. Lewis, *American Adam* (Chicago, 1955); Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden* (New York, 1967); Alan Trachtenberg, *The Brooklyn Bridge: Fact and Symbol* (New York, 1965).

11. Richard E. Sykes, "American Studies and the Concept of Culture: A Theory and Method," *American Quarterly* (Summer Supplement, 1963), 253-270; quotes: 270, 254.

12. Murray G. Murphey, "American Civilization at Pennsylvania," *American Quarterly* (Summer Supplement, 1970), 489-502, quotes: 495, 497. For a more extensive discussion of the institutional ramifications of this, see Gene Wise, "Paradigm Dramas in American Studies," *American Quarterly* (1979), 293-337.

13. Murphey, "American Civilization at Pennsylvania," 496.

14. *Ibid.*, p.497.

15. For a detailed description of the procedures for producing this certain knowledge, see Murray G. Murphey, *Our Knowledge of the Historical Past* (Indianapolis, 1973). Goodenough cited

in Richard P. Horwitz, *Anthropology Toward History: Culture and Work in a 19th-Century Maine Town* (Middletown, CT, 1978), 7-8; "the rules . . ." is Horwitz, 8.

16. Anthony F.C. Wallace, *Rockdale: The Growth of an American Village in the Early Industrial Revolution* (New York, 1978), 477-485.

17. Bruce Kuklick, "Myth and Symbol in American Studies," *American Quarterly* 24 (October 1972), 435-50; R. Gordon Kelly, "Literature and the Historian," *American Quarterly* 26 (May 1974), 141-59; Murphey, "American Civilization at Pennsylvania," 498-99; Richard Hoggart, *Contemporary Cultural Studies* (Birmingham, England, 1969).

18. For a discussion of the influence of the early work of Williams and Hoggart on literary studies at the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, see the remarks by The Literature/Society Group, 1972-3, "Literature/Society: Mapping the Field," in Hall, et al., eds., *Culture, Media, Language*, 227-234, quote is from the notes: 300. See also the works by Williams and Hoggart cited earlier.

19. *The Long Revolution: An Analysis of the Democratic, Industrial, and Cultural Changes Transforming Our Society* (New York, 1961), xii, (emphasis mine) 22.

20. Gene Wise, "Paradigm Dramas," 314. Examples of the new social history include, Stephen Thernstrom, *Poverty and Progress: Social Mobility in a Nineteenth Century City* (Cambridge, MA, 1964); David Katzman, *Before the Ghetto: Black Detroit in the Nineteenth Century* (Urbana, IL, 1973); Herbert G. Gutman, "Work, Culture, and Society in Industrializing America, 1815-1919," *American Historical Review* (June, 1973); Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, "Beauty, the Beast, and the Militant Woman," *American Quarterly* 23 (1971), 562-84; Eugene Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York, 1972); E.J. Hobsbawm, *Laboring Men: Studies in the History of Labor* (London, 1964); E.P. Thompson's classic work is, of course, *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York, 1963). Review articles include Alice Kessler-Harris, "Social History," in Eric Foner, ed., *The New American History* (Philadelphia, 1990) and Peter Stearns, "The New Social History: An Overview," in James B. Gardner and George Rollie Adams, eds., *Ordinary People and Everyday Life: Perspectives on the New Social History* (Nashville, 1983).

21. Jay Mechling, Robert Merideth, David Wilson, "American Culture Studies: The Discipline and the Curriculum," *American Quarterly* 25:4 (October, 1973), 363-89, quotes: 366, 365.

22. *Ibid.*, 368, 369, 370, 381.

23. Robert Sklar, "The Problem of an American Studies' Philosophy': A Bibliography of New Direction," *American Quarterly* 27 (Summer, 1975), 245-62, quote: 260; Raymond Williams, "Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory," *New Left Review* 82 (Nov.-Dec. 1973), 3-16.

24. Williams, "Base and Superstructure," 3,8.

25. Terry Eagleton, *Criticism and Ideology* (London, 1976); Louis Althusser, *For Marx* (New York, 1970); and *Lenin and Philosophy* (London, 1971). The *Tel Quel* school included Roland Barthes and Julia Kristeva, whose theorizations of subjectivity and reading became very important for British cultural studies in the late seventies. See Barthes, *Mythologies* (New York, 1972 [orig. 1957]) and *S/Z* (New York, 1974 [orig. 1970]); and Julia Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language* (New York, 1984 [orig. 1974]) and the essays collected in *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art* (New York, 1980 [orig., 1969, 1977]). For a discussion of "Recent Developments in English Studies at the Centre," see the article by The English Studies Group (which included Hazel Carby and Michael Denning) in Hall, et al., eds., *Culture, Media, Language*.

26. See Max Horkheimer and Theodore Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (New York, 1987 [orig. 1944]); Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations* (New York, 1969); Stuart Hall, "Deconstructing the Popular,"; "Signification, Representation, Ideology: Althusser and the Poststructuralist Debates,"; "Cultural Studies: Two Paradigms,"; [each cited above] "Introduction to Media Studies at the Centre," and "Encoding/Decoding," in Hall, et al., eds. *Culture, Media, Language*. The work of David Morley, Charlotte Brunson, and Dorothy Hobson in the analysis of television was particularly important methodologically. See also the "Notes on Method" by Paul Willis in *Culture, Media, Language*. The "false obviousness of everyday practice" is quoted in Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (New York, 1979), 102. The work of the media studies group has had a tremendous influence on communications studies in the United States. This field was probably the first to explicitly acknowledge the dominating influence of the Birmingham Centre's work. See Joel Pfister, "The Americanization of Cultural Studies," *The Yale Journal of Criticism* 4:2 (1991), 199-229 and Larry Grossberg, "The Circulation of Cultural Studies" *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 6:4 (1989), 413-20.

27. T.J.Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture 1880-1920* (New York, 1981), xvii-xviii.

28. Which is not to say that this book has no flaws. Like all cultural analyses, it is partial and perspectival. Janice A. Radway, *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature* (Chapel Hill, second edition(1991, [orig. 1984])); quote: 210; Murphey, "American Civilization at Pennsylvania." This is probably the place to admit that Jan was my graduate advisor. *Reading the Romance* depended on the object-relations form of psychoanalytic theory and, in particular, on the work of Nancy Chodorow. Soon after the book was published, however, Radway became acquainted

with the cultural theory that had been informing the work at Birmingham, and her work took a decidedly marxist turn. Her course at Penn entitled "Literature in American Culture" became an introduction to marxist cultural theory, and the articles she published over the next few years show the increasing influence of this thought. The transfer of the editorship of the *American Quarterly* from Bruce Kuklick to Radway in 1984 might be said to mark—symbolically at least—the beginning of the transition from the culture concept to cultural studies in American Studies, as the journal became increasingly open to discussions of cultural theory. See Radway's "Identifying Ideological Seams: Mass Culture, Analytical Method, and Political Practice," *Communication* 9 (1986), 93-123; "Reception Study: Ethnography and the Problems of Dispersed Audiences and Nomadic Subjects," *Cultural Studies* 2:3 (October, 1988), 359-76; "The Scandal of the Middlebrow: The Book-of-the-Month Club, Class Fracture, and Cultural Authority," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 89:4 (Fall 1990), 703-36.

29. Richard Johnson, "What is Cultural Studies, Anyway," *Social Text* 16 (Winter 1986/7), 43-80, quote: 39; Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York, 1990); Henry Louis Gates, Jr., *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of Afro-American Literary Criticism* (New York, 1988); Kwame Anthony Appiah and Amy Gutmann, *Color Conscious: The Political Morality of Race* (Princeton, 1996); Paul Gilroy, *Ain't No Black in the Union Jack: The Cultural Politics of Race and Nation* (London, 1987); David Roedigger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (New York, 1991); Stanley Aronowitz and Henry Giroux, *Postmodern Education: Politics, Culture, and Social Criticism* (Minneapolis, 1991); Michael Berube, *Public Access: Literary Theory and American Cultural Politics* (New York, 1994).

30. Johnson, "What is Cultural Studies, Anyway," 41, 38, 42; Hall, "Cultural Studies and its Theoretical Legacies," 281.

31. Hall, "Cultural Studies and its Theoretical Legacies." For histories of the politics and extra-professional goals of American Studies, see Gene Wise, "Paradigm Dramas," and Allen Davis, "The Politics of American Studies," *American Quarterly* 42:3 (September, 1990), 353-74.

32. George Lipsitz, "The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: Racialized Social Democracy and the 'White' Problem in American Studies," *American Quarterly* 47:3 (September 1995), 269-87; Elaine Tyler May, "Presidential Address to the American Studies Association," Pittsburgh, October, 1995; Hall, "Cultural Studies and its Theoretical Legacies," 284; George Lipsitz, "Listening to Learn and Learning to Listen: Popular Culture, Cultural Theory and American Studies," *American Quarterly* 42:4 (December, 1990), p.621; Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, 17.

33. For examples of this work see: Cynthia Willet, *Maternal Ethics and Other Slave Moralities* (New York, 1995); James Livingston, *Pragmatism and the Political Economy of Cultural Revolution* (Chapel Hill, 1994); Gillian Brown, *Domestic Individualism: Imagining Self in Nineteenth-Century America* (Berkeley, 1990); Jackson Lears, *Fables of Abundance: A Cultural History of Advertising in America* (New York, 1994).

34. Betsy Erkkila, "Ethnicity, Literary Theory, and the Grounds of Resistance," *American Quarterly* 47:4 (December 1995), 563-94; Pfister, "The Americanization of Cultural Studies," 222, internal quotes from Barbara and John Ehrenreich, "The Professional Managerial Class" in Pat Walker, ed. *Between Labor and Capital* (Boston, 1979)

35. Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production* (New York, 1993) and *Homo Academicus* (Stanford, CA, 1988).

36. Anthony F.C. Wallace, *Culture and Personality* (New York, 1961), 1-44.