

tics of Writing [Manchester UP, 1987] 301). Cultural studies ought to demonstrate just how full a life the literary has in popular culture, a project that will often require building from sources and incidents beneath the notice of scholars—the citation of Graham Greene in a biography of the Sex Pistols, for example. The primary problem with much of the academic work identified with cultural studies simply because it makes forays into mass culture is that it does not reconsider the disciplinary terrain. In a scathing review of psychoanalytic and post-structuralist interpretations of Madonna, Daniel Harris points out that in “spurning the pieties lavished on the canon, academics demonstrate how incomplete the post-modern break with traditional forms of artistic analysis has been, how abysmally they have failed to take popular culture on its own terms” (“Make My Rainy Day,” *Nation* 8 June 1992: 792).

As a result of academic careerism, cultural studies in the United States was conflated with postmodern theory, another trendy field, though a far more dominant one, and quickly became a bandwagon for academic leftists. Stuart Hall noted that “‘cultural studies’ has become an umbrella for just about anything” in American scholarship (“The Emergence of Cultural Studies,” *October* 53 [1990]: 22). University presses, for instance, are free in labeling their publications “literary and cultural studies.” Still worse, according to Barbara Epstein, chair of the History of Consciousness program at the University of California, Santa Cruz, cultural studies enacts what it’s supposed to be studying, the “fascination with being a celebrity” (Tom Frank, “Textual Reckoning,” *In These Times* 27 May 1996: 24). The audience that witnessed the cavalcade of cultural studies stars at the formative University of Illinois conference in 1990 was obsessed with preferment and aggrieved by neglect. One of the organizers of the conference, Lawrence Grossberg, who went on to coedit the proceedings and the journal *Cultural Studies*, effectively installing himself as the CEO of cultural studies in the United States, has argued that cultural studies needs to be crossed with the work of Gilles Deleuze and Michel Foucault (*We Gotta Get Out of This Place* [Routledge, 1992]). The result of this amalgamation with post-modern theory, Epstein observes, is that cultural studies has adopted the widespread poststructuralist silliness of insisting “that nothing is real, everything is a matter of appearances,” and of minimizing human agency (Frank 24). The occasion for her comments was the physicist Alan Sokal’s hoax on *Social Text*, an article baited with the thesis that physical reality is only “a social and linguistic construct” (“Transgressing the Boundaries—Toward a Transformative Hermeneutics of Quantum Gravity,” *Social Text* 14 [1996]: 217). Daniel Harris sim-

ilarly complains that postmodern theorists primarily promote their “most cherished tenet—that . . . there is no stable and empirically verifiable ‘reality’ behind the vagaries and impermanence of language” (793). This anti-materialism completely contradicts the original basis of cultural studies, the materialism exemplified by Raymond Williams and by the efforts of Birmingham mentors such as Richard Johnson to set out a “postpoststructuralist” view of agency that would acknowledge the power of ideology and other social constraints but also the human capacity to negotiate with them.

Considering the complete recasting of cultural studies in the United States, it is hardly surprising that Michael Bérubé would write that no one “really needs or wants to hear the Birmingham-Hoggart-Williams narrative” about the British origins of cultural studies (“Bite Size Theory,” *Social Text* 36 [1993]: 89). Donna Haraway, one of the best-known postmodern theorists associated with cultural studies in the United States, has said with perfect equanimity that cultural studies is about “everything and nothing” (Scott Heller, “Cultural Studies,” *Chronicle of Higher Education* 31 Jan. 1990: A4). That pretty well sums up why, a decade after the literary discovered cultural studies, *PMLA* is still wondering exactly what cultural studies is supposed to do.

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At Indiana University, graduate students in most humanities and social science disciplines can now “minor” in the fledgling Cultural Studies Program. The faculty members in the program represent twelve disciplines, from anthropology to telecommunications. The largest number are from English. Despite much faculty and student interest in cultural studies programs, creating one is an uphill struggle against existing disciplinary regimes. There aren’t many such programs—let alone departments—in North America today, even though many academics want to turn their disciplines, or at least their own teaching and research, toward cultural studies, because of what they see as the arbitrary narrowness of present disciplinary rules, procedures, and objects of study.

For “literary” disciplines (so the story goes), the source of our discontent has been “theory” (especially poststructuralism, Marxism, and feminism). But other forces are reshaping English departments in particular. One is the exponential increase of entire new literatures in English, produced in former British colonies (Australia, India, Nigeria, etc.) and in North America by ethnic “minorities” (African, Asian, and Native American, among others). The long struggle to include American literature in the

English department curriculum is replayed today by ethnic and postcolonial studies. Another catalyst of change is the mass media. Movies and television are by far the most influential contemporary forms of storytelling and drama. Often faculty members in English and comparative literature do much of the teaching about the narrative, dramatic, and aesthetic components of the mass media—logical extensions of literary-critical training.

A further influence, which has caused English departments to rethink and in some cases redraw their boundaries, is the recent development of rhetoric in composition as a separate area of research and teaching, bringing pressure to create rhetoric-and-composition programs independent of literature. Of course, the teaching of writing, especially freshman composition, has been a responsibility of English departments since their origin. But the activity was always relegated to the basement along with the graduate students and part-timers who now ordinarily teach composition, while the tenured literature faculty levitated to the penthouse. It isn't clear whether recent calls to reform English by emphasizing rhetoric instead of literature are defensive measures to keep the rhetoric-and-composition faculty from seceding or more-positive responses to theory and to the linguistic turn inspired by structuralism and poststructuralism. (Introducing *Rhetoric, Sophistry, Pragmatism*, Stephen Mailloux speaks of "the 'rhetorical turn' in the humanities and social sciences" [1].) As theory calls for or becomes rhetorical analysis, rhetoric encroaches on literature and threatens a carnival-esque inversion of the literature-composition hierarchy.

Faculty members who want to engage these new forces constructively often identify with cultural studies. Like rhetoric, culture has always been a category capacious enough to express many interests and arguments. But can traditional disciplines like English give cultural studies programs a positive content? Apart from the unwisdom of exporting disciplinary crises and dissatisfactions into new programs, the key words around which most cultural studies programs circulate are global and contentious. Besides *culture* and *rhetoric*, I have in mind *theory*, *discourse*, *ideology*, and *textuality*. *Semiotics* is a related term with some positive content.

Interest in Marxist theory and ideological critique, especially when applied to recent cultural phenomena and everyday life, has been the main thread connecting the work of the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies with cultural studies programs elsewhere. For cultural studies to have any coherence as a discipline or an antidiscipline, its focus must continue to be on ideology (or power and knowledge) and the social construction of subjectivity; on the politics, institutions, and products of the mass culture industries, including schools

and universities; and on what Michel de Certeau called "the practice of everyday life." As traditionally defined, literature fits into this agenda only tangentially—perhaps merely as one more ideological illusion to be critiqued, together with God, the nation-state, individualism, and "free market" (multinational) capitalism. Whatever else cultural studies may be, it isn't literary (though literature can be one of its objects of analysis). Meanwhile, it seems certain that English departments, along with other humanities and social science departments, will continue to evolve or deliquesce toward cultural studies.

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Reworkings

Cultural studies concerns itself primarily with the symbolic production and contestation of power, of individual and collective identities. It examines how people use symbolic material to construct and dispute meanings and thus to position themselves in their social topographies. Cultural studies maps culture as a site of ongoing struggles over the norms, institutions, values, and tastes that are at the core of social integration. In contrast to traditional approaches to the literary, cultural studies is interested less in textual structures and more in the various extratextual systems of signification by which cultural material acquires meaning in everyday life. Unlike the posthermeneutic exercises of poststructuralism, cultural studies seeks not to liquefy meaning altogether but to show how it is constituted, contested, and multiplied in diverse and historically contingent practices. Tracing everyday routines to find moments of empowerment and coercion, a cultural studies approach to the micro-politics of subject formation cannot do without an ethnographic component.

Many critics wrongly assume that cultural studies implies a radical turning away from the study of literary materials. Literary culture is an essential part of the force field of institutions, meanings, and practices that cultural studies takes as its object; there is no reason that the works of, say, Shakespeare or Goethe cannot be examined from a cultural studies perspective. To be sure, emerging after the great divide between autonomous art and mass culture had broken down, cultural studies does not always discriminate convincingly between materials of greater and lesser significance. It also needs to develop a greater variety of persuasive historiographic perspec-