The Cultural Studies Reader

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the fact that societies are structured unequally, that individuals are not all born with the same access to education, money, health-care, etc., and it worked in the interests of those who have fewest resources. In this it differed not only from the (apparently) objective social sciences but from the older forms of cultural criticism, especially literary criticism, which considered political questions as being of peripheral relevance to the appreciation of culture. For cultural studies, 'culture' was not an abbreviation of a 'high culture' assumed to have constant value across time and space. Another founding text of cultural studies, Raymond Williams's *Culture and Society: 1780–1950* (1958), criticized the consequences of uncoupling 'culture' from 'society', and 'high culture' from 'culture as a whole way of life', although Williams also conceded that it was through this uncoupling that modern culture acquires its particular energy, charm, and capacity to inform.

These two defining features of early cultural studies were closely connected because it is at the level of the individual life that the cultural effects of social inequality are most apparent. Most individuals aspire and struggle the greater part of their lives and it is easier to forget this if one is just interpreting texts rather than thinking about reading as a life-practice. Cultural studies insists one cannot just ignore — or accept — division and struggle. We can ask, how can we approach the question of cultural studies most effectively, so let us turn to the historical conditions which made the discipline possible.

### A BRIEF HISTORY OF CULTURAL STUDIES

Cultural studies appears as a field of study in Great Britain in the 1950s out of Leavisism, a form of literary studies named after F. R. Leavis, its most prominent member. Leavisism was an attempt to redisseminate what is now commonly called, after Pierre Bourdieu, 'cultural capital' — though this is not how it saw itself. Leavis wanted to use the educational system to distribute literary knowledge and appreciation more widely. To achieve this, the Leavisites argued for a very restricted canon, discarding modern experimental works like those of James Joyce or Virginia Woolf, for instance. Instead they primarily celebrated works directed towards developing the modern sensibility of readers, such as Jane Austen, Alexander Pope, or George Eliot — the 'great tradition'. Leavisites fiercely insisted that culture was not simply a leisure activity; reading the 'great tradition' was, rather, a means of forming mature individuals with a concrete and balanced sense of 'life'. And the main threat to this sense of life came from the pleasure offered by so-called 'mass culture'. In this, Leavisism was very much in tune with what cultural studies has come to call the 'social democratic power bloc', which dominated post-war Britain. After the war, Britain was administered by a sequence of governments that intervened in the private sector both socially (in areas like health and housing) and culturally (in education and the arts). When the education system expanded radically through the 1950s and 1960s, it turned to Leavisism to form citizens' sensibilities.

Cultural studies develops out of Leavisism through Hoggart and Williams, whose writings were taken up in secondary schools and tertiary colleges soon after they were written. Hoggart and Williams both came from working-class families; both had worked as teachers in post-compulsory education, though, importantly, in workers' education. Thus they experienced Leavisism ambivalently. On the one hand, they accepted that its canonical texts were richer than contemporary so-called 'mass culture' and that culture ought to be measured in terms of its capacity to deepen and widen experiences; on the other, they recognized that Leavisism at worst erased, and at the very least did not fully come into contact with the communal forms of life into which they had been born. So Hoggart's *The Uses of Literacy*, in particular, is a schizophrenic book. Its first half contains a heartfelt evocation of traditional industrial working-class communities, relatively untouched by commercial culture and educational institutions, while its second half mounts a practical-critical attack on modern mass culture. When Hoggart went on to found the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (henceforth CCCS), a postgraduate and research institute designed to further his work, it began by having to deal with this tension.

Hoggart was able to believe that the celebration of old high culture could fit alongside an evocation of the culture of his youth because both stood apart from contemporary commercial popular culture and so were under threat. The threat to and the final disappearance of traditional British working-class life need to be considered at some length because they were crucial for the early development of cultural studies. (See Laing 1986 for a good account of this history.) Before the war, since the early 1920s, the British economy had been dominated by unemployment — there were never less than a million people unemployed over the period. This was the background of Hoggart's 'traditional' working class. By the end of the 1940s, however, Britain had a full-employment economy, and by the end of the 1950s further shifts in the British economy were well under way. Jobs were moving into the state sector (in 1965 government expenditure had been 36.6 per cent of GDP as against 52.2 per cent in 1967 (Robbins 1963: 369)); small plants were being replaced by larger ones using 'Fordist' production techniques — that is, simplifying workers' tasks on assembly lines — which meant that labour became increasingly deskilled (between 1951 and 1973 the percentage of the work-force...
working in plants which employed over 1500 people increased by 50 per cent (Wright 1979: 40)). Simultaneously, the differential between lower-paid white-collar and the blue-collar workers was decreasing, and large-scale immigration from the colonies during the 1950s meant that many indigenous workers were no longer called upon to take the least desirable jobs. Workers, then, were becoming increasingly ‘affluent’ (to use a media term of the time), at least in so far as they were increasingly able to buy consumer goods like cars (numbers of which increased fivefold between 1950 and 1975), clothing, washing machines, refrigerators, record-players, telephone services (they increased fourfold between 1945 and 1970), and, most important of all, television sets (commercial television does not become widely available in Britain until 1957, the year Hoggart’s book was published). Finally, the large state rehousing programme, compulsory national service in the army (which ended in 1958) and, to a lesser extent, educational reform, making higher education available to a fraction of the working class, also helped break up the culture that Hoggart described.

As the old working-class communal life fragmented, the cultural studies which followed Hoggart’s The Uses of Literacy developed in two main ways. The old notion of culture as a whole way of life became increasingly difficult to sustain: attention moved from locally produced and often long-standing cultural forms (pub life, group singing, pigeon-fancying, attitudes to ‘our mum’, dances, holidays at camps and close-by seaside resorts, etc.) to culture as organized from afar — both by the state through its educational system, and by what Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer (in the essay included here) called the ‘culture industry’, that is, highly developed music, film and broadcasting businesses. This shift of focus could lead to a revision of older paradigms, as when Stuart Hall and Paddy Whannel in The Popular Arts (1964) gave the kind of status and attention reserved by the Leavisites for canonical literature to new forms (such as jazz and film) while devaluing others (especially television and rock music). Much more importantly, however, the logic by which culture was set apart from politics, already examined by Raymond Williams, was overturned. The historian E. P. Thompson, in his seminal book The Making of the English Working Class (1968) and elsewhere, had pointed out that the identity of the working class as working class had always had a strongly political and conflictual component — that identity was not just a matter of particular cultural interests and values. But the fragmentation of the old proletarian culture meant that a politics based on a strong working-class identity was less and less significant: people decreasingly identified themselves as workers (see Roberts et al. 1977).

It was in this context that cultural studies theorists began seriously to explore culture’s own political function and to offer a critique of the social
This time the argument went: it is because meanings are not produced referentially (by pointing to specific objects in the world) but by one sign's difference from another that signs are polysemous. One sign can always both be substituted for by another (in what is called the 'paradigmatic' relation), and enter a sequence of other signs (the 'syntagmatic' relation). More loosely, a sign can 'connote' any number of others: the Marlboro man, for instance, connoting 'toughness' in one context and 'cancer' in another.

The notion of polysemy, however, remains limited in that it still works at the level of individual signs as discrete signifying units. Yet it did lend to more dynamic and complex theoretical concepts which help us describe how cultural products may be combined with new elements to produce different effects in different situations. In this way, cultural production is conceived of as a process of 'hybridization' and 'negotiation'. For instance, the Marlboro man might be made into a shiny, hard-edged polythene sculpture à la Jeff Koons to achieve a postmodern effect in an expensive Manhattan apartment; an ad using the image might be cut out of the magazine and used to furnish a poor dwelling in Lagos as an image of Western affluence and liberty; or it might be parodied on a CD/album cover. Concepts like hybridization, as they developed out of the notion of 'polysemy', return us to a renewed culturalism because they enable us to see how particular individuals and communities can actively create new meanings from signs and cultural products which come from afar. Yet a concept like 'hybridization' still does not account for the way that the meanings of particular signifiers or texts in a particular situation are, in part, ordered by material interests and power relations. The tobacco industry, the medical profession, and a certain stream within the women's movement might struggle over the meaning of 'Marlboro man' for political and commercial reasons: one in order to sell more product; the other to promote health, as well as their own status and earning power; the last to reject an insensitive mode of masculinity. Cultural studies has been, as we might expect, most interested in how groups with least power practically develop their own readings of, and uses for, cultural products — in fun, in resistance, or to articulate their own identity.

This brief historical account of cultural studies' key concepts has not focused on particular works at particular dates. The richness of the research promoted by the CCSU during the 1970s makes that research impossible adequately to represent here. But three particularly influential texts, Paul Willis's Learning to Labour (1977), David Morley's The 'Nationwide' Audience (1980), and the collectively written Resistance through Rituals: Youth Subcultures in Post-War Britain (1976), edited by Stuart Hall and Tim Jefferson, each of which was written from a different space in the spectrum thrown open by the history I have just sketched, can rewardingly be described.
First, Paul Willis’s *Learning to Labour*. Willis used participant observer techniques to describe a group of disaffected boys in a working-class school (the ‘lads’). He showed how they create a ‘counter-school culture’ in which they reject the official logic which legitimizes their education, that is, ‘you obey the teachers because they teach you knowledge which will help you get a better job’. They reject this exchange for several reasons: partly because ‘better jobs’ (i.e. low-paid white-collar or apprentice jobs as against unskilled labouring jobs) involve moving out of the traditions of mateship, hard drinking, excitement, and strong male bonding passed down in their families; partly because those jobs were not necessarily ‘better’ financially, at least in the short and medium term, and didn’t require the kind of knowledge on offer at school anyway; and partly because the lads had a strong sense that the economic system ultimately required the exploitation of some people’s labour power so that the ‘shit jobs’ they would take were in fact necessary rather than worthless. Willis’s work remains close to Hoggart’s in that it involves a certain celebration of traditional working-class culture and it shows how that culture contains a quite accurate political understanding of the conditions of life, even though the lads have little conventional class-consciousness and absolutely no interest in formal political institutions. What is striking about the study, though, is how important both sexism and racism remain to this segment of British working-class culture. Unfortunately, Willis does not address this head-on.

Whereas Willis’s *Learning to Labour* is a culturalist book in the traditional sense, David Morley’s *The ‘Nationwide’ Audience* is one of the first ethnographic studies not of a community (defined in terms of locale and class) but of an audience (defined as a group of viewers/readers), in this case the audience of *Nationwide*, a BBC news-magazine programme widely watched through the late 1960s and the 1970s, and which broadcast mainly local, rather than national or international, stories, somewhat like a US breakfast show. Morley’s study was ethnographic in that he did not simply analyse the programme, he organized open-ended group discussions between viewers, with each group from a homogeneous class/gender/work background (trade-unionists, managers, students, etc.). Indeed his book begins by contesting that image of a large audience as a ‘mass’ which had often been assumed by earlier sociological theorists of the media. His ethnographic approach was all the more a break within cultural studies work on media because, along with Charlotte Brunsdon, he had offered a conventional semiotic ‘ideology-critique’ of the programme in an earlier study, *Everyday Television: ‘Nationwide’* (1978). There, Brunsdon and he had argued that the programme presented an image of the world in which gender, class, and ethnic differences were massively downgraded, and which assumed that ‘we’ (the programme’s implied audience) possess a shared ‘common sense’ based on a practical view of the world, as against ‘intellectual’, political or culturally adventurous views. The programme’s style or ‘mode of address’ was anchored in authoritarian but chatty presenters who embodied its values.

For Morley the textualist approach began to seem limited because it could not fully deal with polysemy. He had to go out into the field to discover what people actually thought about *Nationwide*. But this does not mean that, for him, the programme can be interpreted anyhow, precisely because its ideological orientation – that ‘everyday life’ view of the world – is the code which the programme itself presents as ‘preferred’. To use Stuart Hall’s phrase, the programme is ‘structured in dominance’ because it skews and restricts its audience’s possibilities for interpreting the material it claims to present without bias. Though viewers need not accept the preferred code, they must respond to it in some way. Morley divides the possibilities of decoding *Nationwide* into three categories: (i) an acceptance of the preferred reading; (ii) flat opposition to it (mainly, as it turned out, by being extremely bored by it); and (iii) negotiation with it. His fieldwork findings were somewhat unexpected, though: there was no clear correlation between the socio-cultural position of the groups and their response to the programme, although those, like a group of Caribbean young women, furthest away from the common-sense ‘we’ embodied in the white (and mainly male) presenters, were least able to respond to it. Also some groups (especially students and trainee-managers) understood that the programme was biased (or ‘structured in dominance’) but still accepted its dominant code. Knowing how it worked, not being ‘cultural dupes’, did not mean refusal of its values. And, last, those groups with least social and cultural capital – like the Caribbean women – found the programme too distant from their own lives, preferring less newsy programmes with more ‘human’ stories – like those transmitted by the more market-orientated ITV companies. Though Morley makes little of it, for these groups it was the market rather than the state (through the state-funded BBC) that provided them with what they wanted. In a paradox that helps us understand certain problems at work at the heart of the social democratic power bloc, those who are most vulnerable to market forces respond most positively to its cultural products.

The third, and earliest, book, *Resistance through Rituals: Youth Subcultures in Post-War Britain*, is a collection of essays, each by different authors, each of which comes to grips with the fragmentation of traditional working-class culture in a different way. In general, the authors accepted that the working class was being split, one section being drawn into skilled jobs that would enable them to live like certain elements of the middle classes, another into deskilled, low-status, and often service jobs. However, they
argued that jobs of this latter kind were especially taken by disadvantaged youth, who, inheriting neither a strong sense of communal identity nor values transmitted across generations in families, develop subcultures. These subcultures negotiate with and hybridize certain hegemonic cultural forms as modes of expression and opposition. Dick Hebdige (in an earlier essay than the one included here), for instance, shows how the Mods fetishized style itself as an element of life, borrowing elements from fashions, old and new, turning cultural consumption (the crucial element in the life-practices of the 'affluent' worker) to their own ends. These subcultures are much more creative than Willis's lads or Morley's audience, and, at least in some cases, they use commodities, the primary products of the system that disadvantages them, as forms of resistance and grounds on which to construct a communal identity. Yet, while Learning to Labour allowed the 'lads' voices a great deal of space in the text, and Morley too transcribed actual voices, Resistance through Rituals is primarily concerned to develop a theory of hegemony under the conditions it encounters. This more theoretical approach, characteristic of an earlier phase of cultural studies, has its limits. It means that the writers find resistance to 'hegemony' in subcultural styles rather too easily. The book does not emphasize the way in which newly developed 'youth markets' influenced and promoted subcultural systems - especially in the music and fashion businesses. It also underestimates the impact of the education system, which streamed children after 11 and kept them at school until they were 15 (16 after 1972), generating intense inter-generational bondings unknown before the war. Neither are the Mods, Teds, hippies, and so on seen as trying to have fun or to construct a mode of life for themselves; they are primarily viewed as being engaged in symbolic struggle with the larger social system. Instead, individuals live in a setting constituted by various institutions, or what we can call, following Bourdieu, 'fields' - families, work, peer groups, educational apparatuses, political parties, and so on. Each field takes a particular material form, most having a characteristic space and time attached to them (the private home for family life and most media reception, weekdays for work, etc.). The relation of space to social fields is the theme of the essays by Foucault and Edward Soja collected here. Each field is future-directed and contains its own 'imaginary', its own promise and image of satisfaction and success, its own possibilities for pleasure. Family life, for instance, depends upon images of the perfect family (mum, dad, and a newborn baby, say) and members may feel pleasure when they reproduce that image, even if only for a moment. This 'imaginary' is imaginary because of the limits and scarcities which organize fields - family life is constrained by finances, ageing, and inter-generational conflict, for example. Because of these limits, too, fields are suffused by power relations and tend to be structured hierarchically. After all, not everyone can have equal experience, knowledge, money, or authority. Very hierarchical fields (like schools and offices) are most disciplined and rationalized: in them all activities are directed to a fixed purpose - education in a school, profit in a business. Further, each field has characteristic signifying practices more or less tightly attached to it: the same person may well talk, walk, and dress differently at school (or work) from the way they do in the family, and differently again when socializing with their peers. These signifying practices are structured through scarcity as well. Dick Hebdige has pointed out that punks worked on their body rather than consumption as a means of expression because it was one of the few materials that they could afford.

Each field also contains a variety of styles of belonging: one can be this kind of student or that kind, for instance, a casual filmgoer or a film buff. These fields, then, contain choices of 'self-formation' or what Foucault called 'self-government', though, in highly disciplined and rationalized fields like schools or businesses, these choices are more directed from above than in others. Likewise, individuals can work out strategies by which to advance in a field or to reconcile themselves to their current position: Bourdieu famously showed how members of the working class, unable to afford certain goods or tastes, made a virtue of necessity by saying they didn't like them anyway. On the other hand, possibilities exist for 'transgressive' undermining or 'festive' overturning of routines and hierarchies through passive resistance, ironical mimicry, symbolic inversion, orgiastic letting go, even day-dreaming - as the essays by Richard Dyer, Peter Stallybrass and Alton White, and Michel de Certeau here show. Especially in societies where hierarchies in many fields are rigid, these forms of transgression may themselves become institutionalized - as in Brazil today with its carnival samba schools, or early capitalist Europe with its pantomimes. Finally, each field, to some degree, both defines itself against and is suffused by others: for instance, relations in the workplace
may be modelled on the family (‘paternalism’), though the family is simultaneously a ‘haven’ from work. However, highly rationalized fields (like schools and factories) interact least directly with other fields – they form their own ‘world’. None the less, it is where fields are most rationalized and disciplined that positions held in one internal hierarchy may be converted into a position held in another. Reaching the ‘top’ of the education system helps you start ‘higher’ in the world of work.

What about subjectivity in this schema? The important point is that actual individuals are not ‘subjects’ wholly positioned by the system these fields constitute or the strategies the fields provide. There are several reasons for this: in theory at least, individuals can always make choices which take into account, and thus avoid, the forces they know to be positioning them. Also, because human beings exist as ‘embodied social subjects’ (as Teresa de Lauretis puts it in her essay in this volume), an individual’s relation to the fields continually incorporates and shifts under the impact of contingent givens (skin colour, physical appearance, and so on) and material events (illness, technological breakdowns, and so on) which are not simply determinants of social or cultural forces. Third, language itself intervenes between the individual and the socio-cultural fields that construct his or her positions. Our sense of uniqueness is grounded on our sense that we can say what we like – at least costs nothing (a basic but often ignored point) and complex enough to enable an infinite number of individual speech acts. As deconstructive theorists have pointed out, this is true because of, rather than despite, the fact that private discourse always comes from somewhere else and its meanings cannot be wholly mastered by those who use it. Last, given that individuals live (i) in symbolic structures which let them (within limits) speak for themselves; (ii) in bodies that are their own but not wholly under control; and (iii) in a temporality which flows towards the unknowable and uncontainable, they may find in themselves ‘deep’ selves which cannot be reduced either to the self that freely chooses styles, strategies, and techniques of self-formation or to the subject positioned by external fields and discourses. Modern Western culture, in particular, has given a great deal of value to this form of subjectivity, and cultural studies’ insistence that subjectivity primarily consists of practices and strategies has been targeted against it.

The French model breaks from earlier forms of cultural studies. To begin with, it downgrades the way that economic scarcities operate systematically across many fields. Because it conceives of social fields as ‘partially autonomous’, the French model cannot affirm a central agency that might direct a number of fields to provide a more equitable distribution of resources. In this, it is remote from traditional social democratic politics. Instead, there is a drift to affirm both culture’s Utopian force and those forms of resistance (such as de Certeau’s ‘walking in the city’ in this collection) only possible in the cracks and gaps of the larger, apparently impregnable, system. Somewhat paradoxically, that system is impregnable just because it is less centred around a ‘dominant’ set of institutions or ideology. Why did cultural studies accept relatively depoliticized analyses of this kind? The reasons are to be found in the decline of the social democratic power bloc from the mid-1970s onwards which enabled the so-called ‘new right’ emergence – in the US under Ronald Reagan (1981) and in the UK under Margaret Thatcher (1979). Furthermore, it was in the context of the new right’s emergence that (as we shall see), after absorbing French theory, the discipline orientated itself towards what Cornel West in his essay here calls the ‘culture of difference’ and became a genuinely global movement. In part, cultural studies changed because the student body changed. Students who identified themselves as feminists, members of a particular ethnic or sexual-preference group rather than of a class or a nation, say, were interested in studying culture and theory on their terms, and were ready for more fragmented models of culture and society – models which, strangely enough, echoed Mrs Thatcher’s famous and radical apothegm: ‘There is no such thing as “society”.’

The new right (or ‘Thatcherism’ as I shall often call it, following Stuart Hall) countered the social democrats by arguing, first, that the state should intervene in citizens’ lives to the minimum possible extent so that market forces can structure as many social relations and exchanges as possible, and, next, that the affirmation of internal differences (especially between classes, ethnic groups, and genders) could threaten national unity. The nation was defined in terms of traditional and popular national-cultural images of ‘Englishness’ in Thatcher’s case and ‘Americanness’ in Reagan’s. This was a politics that appealed at least as much to the ‘affluent worker’ as to traditional conservative (in the US, Republican) voters. As long ago as 1957, Richard Hoggart had noted how, with increased spending power, the working class were increasingly evaluating the world in economic, rather than class, terms. Thatcherism was also the product of the social democratic interventionist state’s failure to manage the economy without playing inflation against unemployment, a failure which itself followed increasing economic globalization (especially of the financial sector) and the appearance of economic powers outside the West. (The most prominent events in the process of economic globalization were the 1971 end of the old Bretton Woods agreement by which all major currencies had been pegged against the US dollar; the 1973–4 OPEC cartel; the radical increase of Japanese competitiveness in key consumer-durable markets; the movement of Western manufacturing ‘off
shores' through the 1970s and 1980s, and the immense increase in capacity for information about commodity and money markets to be disseminated quickly and globally. In these terms, Thatcherism is the political reflex of an affluent but threatened first-world society in a post-colonial world order. As Stuart Hall pointed out (Hall 1988), it was able to counter a widespread sense of fragility by taking advantage of a mass of 'popular knowledge' which put the family, respectability, hard work, 'practicality', and order first - a 'popular knowledge' which, as Morley demonstrated, had been, for years, transmitted in shows like Nationwide and its US equivalents. At this level at least, Thatcherism does not draw on the values of traditional high culture; instead it appeals to the social imaginary produced by the market-orientated media.

Thatcherism contains an internal contradiction - between its economic rationalism and its consensual cultural nationalism. The more the market is freed from state intervention and trade and finance cross national boundaries, the more the nation will be exposed to foreign influences and the greater the gap between rich and poor. Thatcherite appeals to popular values can be seen as an attempt to overcome this tension. In particular, the new right gives the family extraordinary value and aura just because a society organized by market forces is one in which economic life expectations are particularly insecure (as well as one in which, for some, rewards are large and life exciting). In the same way, a homogeneous image of national culture is celebrated and enforced to counter the dangers posed by the increasing global nature of economic exchanges and widening national, economic divisions. The new right image of a monoculture and hard-working family life, organized through traditional gender roles, requires devaluation not just of other nations and their cultural identities but of 'enemies within': those who are 'other' racially, sexually, intellectually. It was in this situation that the Birmingham school focused more intensely on the one hand, on feminist work (as by Charlotte Brunsdon, Angela McRobbie, and Dorothy Hobson) as well as on the analysis of racism and a counter-celebration of black cultures (most painstakenly in Paul Gilroy's There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack, 1987); and, on the other hand, on a more straightforward critique of Thatcherism itself, as in the essays collected in Stuart Hall's The Hard Road to Renewal (1988) as well as the earlier collectively written Policing the Crisis (1979). This last book latches on to the mechanisms by which law-and-order issues and racism were gaining ground in the last days of the social democratic power bloc, convincingly demonstrating that law-and-order panics in Britain in the 1970s were produced by tacit alliances between the media and the police - being, in that sense, organized.

As cultural studies responded to the conditions surrounding the new right's emergence, the discipline became internationalized. The main reason for this is simple: analyses of racism, sexism, and the culture industry possessed a wider appeal than analysis of the British working-class culture, particularly in the US or Australia ('New World' states who fancied themselves relatively 'classless' societies). But, when cultural studies moved away from a marxian analysis based on class, it began to approach, if in a different spirit and register, certain Thatcherite themes. After all, both movements were strongly anti-statist; both affirmed, within limits, a decentred view of social organization.

What were the analogies between Thatcherism and cultural studies, politically so opposed to one another? Perhaps most importantly, where new right discourse argued that no state institution could transcend particular interests and legitimately control individual choices best represented in the market, cultural studies criticized the notion that any theory could stand outside the field it claimed to tell the truth about as if it were a 'meta-discourse'. For French theory, 'theory' itself was a discursive practice produced in a particular field with particular power effects: it offers, for instance, the ability rhetorically to master other people's values and 'common sense'. That there could be no transcendent 'meta-discourse' was a crucial thesis in what is sometimes also called theoretical 'postmodernism' - the end of any appeal to those 'grand narratives' by which institutions and discourses bearing the modernizing values of universal liberty, equality and progress were affirmed in the name of a trans-historical, meta-discursive subject. (See the essay by Lyotard below for a description of postmodernism.)

The new mode of cultural studies no longer concentrated on reading culture as primarily directed against the state. Mainly under the impact of new feminist work at first, it began to affirm 'other' ways of life on their own terms. Emphasis shifted from communities positioned against large power blocs and bound together as classes or subcultures to ethnic and women's groups committed to maintaining and elaborating autonomous values, identities, and ethics. This moment in cultural studies pictured society as much more decentred than either the CCCS had in its earliest work or than the French theorists had, as they focused on discipline, rationalization, and institutional fields. However, an immediate problem confronted this new model as it broke society down into fractions united by sexuality, gender, or ethnicity: how to conceive of relations between these dispersed communities? Two solutions were offered, both rather utopian and future-directed: first, new 'rainbow' alliances and cross-identifications could be worked out for particular and provisional social or 'micro-political' ends; second, relations between these