

Culture, Media, Language

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Working Papers in Cultural Studies,
1972–79



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Preface

The Centre for Cultural Studies is a post-graduate research centre at the University of Birmingham; its staff and students research and publish in the field of Cultural Studies.¹ * It was established in 1964 under the Directorship of Richard Hoggart, then Professor of Modern English Literature. The aim was to inaugurate research in the area of contemporary culture and society: cultural forms, practices and institutions, their relation to society and social change. The principal inspiration behind its formation was the work which Richard Hoggart had undertaken in *The Uses of Literacy*—a pioneering study, published in the mid 1950s, offering an analysis of how recent developments were transforming and reshaping the cultures of the ‘traditional’ working class.² The Centre was intended to provide a base for the serious analysis of these questions, within the framework of higher education, and in a centre principally devoted to post-graduate research. In 1968 Richard Hoggart left to become an Assistant Director-General at Unesco, and, between 1968 and 1979, Stuart Hall was its Director.

The Centre has greatly expanded since those early days. It now consists of three staff members, two research fellows working on specific funded projects, and over forty post-graduate research students. It has left the original home provided for it within the English Department, and has gained a reputation of its own in the field on the basis of an independent programme of intellectual work, research and publishing.³ More or less coterminous with its growth—though by no means as the exclusive effect of its work—programmes of study under the general rubric of ‘Cultural Studies’ have been widely initiated in other sectors of education.⁴ This has led to the establishment of Cultural Studies degree courses and research programmes and to an expansion of the Cultural Studies element in a variety of courses and disciplines.

The *raison d’être* of this volume of essays, which is drawn from the Centre’s work up to 1979, is not simply that it reflects the Centre’s work over these years, but that it is addressed to, and may help in, the on-going work of clarification of this emergent field of study. Cultural Studies is not, however, a ‘discipline’, but an area where different disciplines intersect in the study of the cultural aspects of society. The particular complex of disciplines involved, and the types of approach adopted, naturally differ from place to place. This volume, based as it is on the Birmingham Centre’s work, reflects only one particular tendency.

While aimed in general at supporting and underpinning these initiatives, there is no intention that this volume should stamp the field indelibly with the Centre's particular concerns. We hope that the 'openness' of our approach is reflected in the selections which follow, and that readers and users of the volume will bear this *caveat* in mind as they read.

The selection of articles in this volume has been drawn from the first nine issues of the Centre's journal, *Working Papers in Cultural Studies (WPCS)*, from the Centre's list of Stencilled Papers and from some more recent work.⁵ The early issues of the journal are now all out of print. The journal itself has been absorbed into the CCCS/Hutchinson series of books and now appears as the annual 'Special Number', along with other volumes.⁶ In the interim some of those earlier articles and issues, however, have become 'collector's items'. In any event, the founding of the journal was an important moment in the Centre's development, and its early numbers reflect many key themes and topics in the formative phase of Cultural Studies. So we responded positively to Hutchinson's proposal that a selection should be made available, drawing principally on those earlier sources of work, though including one or two pieces in each section more representative of our recent work. A number of things should therefore be said, by way of guidance to the reader, about how the book is organized. First, it does *not* reflect the full range of Centre work. For example, work on the position and oppression of women is the core of the second Special Number already published in our new series, *Women Take Issue*. This theme is therefore not given a section on its own here, though the impact of feminism is reflected in several of the more recent contributions published in this volume (see below). Work in the 'subcultures' area did appear in *WPCS* 7/8, subsequently reprinted as *Resistance Through Rituals*. But this book appeared some three or four years ago. Moreover, there have been important developments in the work in this area, which deserve recognition. The 'ethnographic' emphasis which marked it from the outset has been retained, but its focus has shifted, first, to more 'mainstream' aspects of youth formation (Roger Grimshaw's study of the Scout Movement, extracted here, is an example), and then to the more central institutions and relations (for example, recent work on the transition from school to work of working-class boys and girls; on young manual workers; and women's domestic and paid work). These have thoroughly transformed the earlier, more 'subcultural', concerns.⁷ These developments did seem to require some reference here (see the section on Ethnography). The growing base in Centre work of studies in such areas as education and educational institutions, the family, race and ethnicity, aspects of the state, together with the general redirection of Centre work towards more broadly 'historical' concerns—the analysis of particular periods, the welfare state, work on cultural history and on the problems of history and theory—are not substantially represented in these pages. Some of these

*Superior figures refer to the Notes and references on pages 277–304.

topics are, however, scheduled as the main themes of Centre volumes now in preparation or shortly due to appear: for example, the collection of historical essays on *Working Class Culture* already published, and the volumes on *Unpopular Education, History and Theory* and *Citizenship and the Welfare State*, already planned or completed and due to be published in the Hutchinson series.⁸

These absences have three consequences which readers might bear in mind. First, this collection does not accurately reflect the *present spread* of Centre work. Second, it prioritizes a set of concerns which characterized the Centre's most recent work—mainly from 1972, when the journal was founded, up to about 1978. Third, it gives to Cultural Studies an emphasis on the analysis of texts and cultural forms, rather than on practices and institutions, which obscures more recent developments and which may therefore appear to tie the Centre too closely to its originating topics of interest. While in no way representing a rejection of these earlier concerns, it is important that this selection should not be taken as fixing Cultural Studies in an anachronistic mould. The shifts which have produced new kinds of work must be understood as just as essential to the definition of Cultural Studies as those represented here. The different phases of Centre work are more extensively marked and discussed in the Introduction and section introductions below.

The present volume is divided into four main sections. They deal with ethnographic work, the media, language and English studies. Each has an introductory overview piece, charting the changing interests and directions in these areas. This is followed by a selection of extracts mainly drawn from journal articles, theses or published papers, reflecting projects and seminar work over the period 1972–8. There has been no attempt to update these pieces retrospectively or to bring them into line with present thinking. In this respect, the 'Working Papers' of our title is an accurate guide to actual Centre practice and to how the results of that practice are represented in the volume. The exception is English Studies, which, leaving aside the 'mapping the field' extract (from an early journal, *WPCS* 4), has been largely rewritten especially for this volume and draws mainly on present work. For a time, literary studies as such were not widely pursued in the Centre. It is only more recently that we have again been able to find a serious basis for this work—one which, while drawing on the analysis of texts, breaks with the literary-critical tradition of a too text-bound practice, as well as with the text-context framework of the so-called 'sociology of literature', and relocates both in the analysis of literary formations and in literature as an institutional practice.⁹ There was therefore, in this case, no continuing body of Centre work to draw on. As has already been said, the 'historical' dimension of Centre work is certainly not accurately reflected in these selections. But the move to a more concrete, historical mode of work—one of the most important aspects of recent Centre thinking—is briefly indexed by Richard Johnson's review article, looking back at the Anderson/ Thompson debate about the 'peculiarity' of Britain's historical development, which helped to inaugurate this

historical phase in the Centre.¹⁰ This article therefore forms a second, 'introductory' piece to the volume.

In each section we have retained the different problematics which underpinned our work in these areas at different stages. There has been no attempt to update them in the search for a definitive or 'correct' position. We wanted to stress the necessarily open, provisional nature of work in a novel and emergent area like Cultural Studies. We also wished to underscore the diversity of approaches, the sense of developing from position to position, which has characterized our approach throughout. We have tried, at each stage, to be as rigorous as we could be, within our limits, but we have not presumed to offer a final truth in any of these fields. Orthodoxy here is, in our view, the enemy of a truly 'open' science. A larger issue is signalled here. Intellectual and academic advances in areas cognate to our own have sometimes been marked in recent years by an acute sectarianism, sustained by what has often seemed a false search for scientific correctness. Though we have learned a great deal from, and been instructed by, these advances, we have tried to develop them within a different intellectual practice.

We have, accordingly, consciously adopted the strategy of allowing our stops and starts, our moments of progress, marking time and retreats, our shifts of direction and 'new beginnings' to show through as they actually occurred at the time. Readers must not, therefore, expect to find here a consistent theoretical position, unfolding from the beginning to its appointed conclusion: nor even a unified set of findings. This is definitively not *the* reader in Cultural Studies in general—which is a larger, more ambitious task, remaining to be undertaken. We hope, of course, when such a text (or texts) come to be prepared, that the work of clarification to which the papers in this volume bear witness will be found helpful and instructive. On a less ambitious plane, we hope those now working in Cultural Studies will find here something instructive, both substantively in the areas covered and, more generally, in terms of the necessary perils and costs which attend an intellectual project and intervention of this order. When such a definitive work comes to be written, we feel certain that it will draw fruitfully on wider experiences than we can recapitulate here and will require the mobilization of intellectual strengths and resources well beyond the capacity of the Birmingham Centre. We know it will reflect pertinent differences and variations rather than that spurious unity with which Cultural Studies has sometimes been charged.

The volume as a whole was edited, on behalf of the Centre, by an Editorial Group consisting of Steve Baron, Michael Denning, Stuart Hall, Dorothy Hobson, Andy Lowe and Paul Willis. The Ethnography section was edited by Dorothy Hobson and Paul Willis; the Media section by Stuart Hall; the Language section by Andy Lowe; and the English Studies section by Michael Denning. Steve Baron and Andy Lowe were responsible for the editorial work on Richard Johnson's article. An outline for the Introduction was provided by Stuart Hall and Andrew Lowe and extensively discussed by the Editorial Group. The main

text was drafted by Stuart Hall. The drafts were discussed by the Editorial Group and the Centre as a whole and substantially revised in the light of suggestions proposed. We are especially grateful to Richard Johnson and Michael Green for their detailed comments. Where appropriate, particular articles and extracts are attributed to individual authors, as are the related section introductions. Chris Weedon, Andrew Tolson and Frank Mort were responsible for the extensive new materials contained in the Language section (with additional drafting by Andrew Lowe). With the exception of the opening extract—authored by an earlier Literature Group at the Centre, which was responsible for putting together *WPCS* 4—the section on English Studies has been prepared, discussed and written collectively by the present English Studies Group, 1978–9 (including Janet Batsleer, Rob Burkitt, Hazel Corby, Tony Davies, Michael Denning, Michael Green, Rebecca O'Rourke, Michael O'Shaughnessey, Roger Shannon, Stephen Shortus and Michael Skovmand).

Part One

Introduction

1

Cultural Studies and the Centre: some problematics and problems*

Stuart Hall

The first issue of *Working Papers in Cultural Studies* appeared in 1972.¹ The title ‘Working Papers’ was deliberately intended to set the terms of our approach in a number of respects. This was *not* the scholarly journal of the field—which, indeed, hardly as yet existed.² We laid no proprietary claim on it. We recognized that, if Cultural Studies ‘took off’, it would deploy a greater variety of approaches than we could reproduce within the Birmingham Centre (at that time, less than half its present size). We also recognized that a particular ‘mix’ of disciplines woven together at Birmingham to form the intellectual base of Cultural Studies would not necessarily be reproduced exactly elsewhere.³ We could imagine Cultural Studies degrees or research based, just as effectively, on visual (rather than literary) texts, on social anthropology (rather than sociology) and with a much stronger input of historical studies than we drew on in the early days. Such courses have indeed been initiated since then—with conspicuous success.⁴ The Centre had, perforce, to work with the intellectual raw materials it had to hand. It chose to specialize in those areas which the small staff felt capable of supervising.⁵ It approached the problems of interdisciplinary research from those more established disciplines already present in the complement of staff and students working in Birmingham at that time.⁶ But we tried not to make the mistake of confusing these starting positions—over which we had relatively little control—with a *theoretically informed* definition of Cultural Studies as such. Hence, the journal specifically refused, at the outset, to be a vehicle for defining the range and scope of Cultural Studies in a definitive or absolute way. We rejected, in short, a descriptive definition or prescription of the field.⁷ It followed that, though the journal did not offer itself as a conclusive definition of Cultural Studies, it *did* confront, from its first issue, the consequences of this refusal: namely, the need for a sustained work of theoretical clarification.

On the other hand, the journal was conceived as an intellectual *intervention*. It aimed to define and to occupy a space. It was deliberately designed as a ‘house journal’—a journal or tendency, so to speak. Nearly all of its contributors were Centre members.⁸ Its aim was to put Cultural Studies on the intellectual map. It declared an interest in advancing critical research in this field. The phrase,

‘Working Papers’, however, underlined the tentative character of this enterprise, as we saw it.

In real terms, its publication and production was made possible by a small educational bequest made over to the Centre by Sir Allen Lane and Penguin Books in the early days—and without strings—to give the Centre some small independent financial support.⁹ Otherwise the journal had no official sponsorship or financial support: it was self-financed and self-produced. In conception and execution it was a collective venture, the product of staff and students working together. With the Stencilled Paper series, which was initiated at about the same time, it gave the Centre, and Cultural Studies, a necessary public presence.¹⁰ The first issue was designed and overseen by Trevor Millum, one of our first successful Ph.D students, in a period of post-thesis euphoria.¹¹

The development of the Centre, and of Cultural Studies, can be resumed in a number of different ways. We look at three aspects in this introduction: first, the changes in theoretical perspective and in the main problematics which have staked out the Centre’s development through the 1970s; second, the question of the different areas of concrete research in which the Centre has been centrally engaged; third, the modes of organization, the intellectual practices of analysis and research, through which that work has been practically realized.

Foundations of cultural studies

The search for origins is tempting but illusory. In intellectual matters absolute beginnings are exceedingly rare. We find, instead, continuities and breaks. New interventions reflect events outside a discipline but have effects within it. They most often work to reorganize a set of problems or field of inquiry. They reconstitute existing knowledge under the sign of new questions. They dispose existing elements into new configurations, establish new points of departure. Cultural Studies, in its institutional manifestation, was the result of such a break in the 1960s. But the field in which this intervention was made had been initially charted in the 1950s. This earlier founding moment is best specified in terms of the originating texts, the original ‘curriculum’, of the field—Hoggart’s *The Uses of Literacy*, Raymond Williams’s *Culture and Society* and *The Long Revolution*, E.P.Thompson’s critique of the latter work and the ‘example’ of related questions, worked in a more historical mode, in *The Making of the English Working Class*.¹²

These were not textbooks for the inauguration of a new discipline: though they were the results of disciplined intellectual work of a high order. They were

*This introductory survey was based on outlines proposed by Stuart Hall and Andrew Lowe. It was extensively discussed by the Editorial Group. The main text was drafted by Stuart Hall and revised in the light of comments offered by the Editorial Group and other members of the Centre.

responses of different kinds to a decisive historical conjecture. They brought disciplined thought to bear on the understanding of their own times. They were far from neutral or scholarly: they were cultural interventions in their own right. They addressed the long-term shifts taking place in British society and culture within the framework of a long, retrospective, historical glance. What these writers in their various ways confronted, precisely, was post-war British society, recently emerged from the upheavals of total war, entering a period of change and development whose parameters were set by the terms of the post-war 'settlement'. The depression and the war appeared to have established certain critical breaks with earlier developments. The 'settlement'—defined by the revival of capitalist production, the founding of the welfare state and the 'Cold War'—appeared to bring economic, political and cultural forces into new kinds of relation, into a new equilibrium. But what sort of qualitative break with the past did this constitute? Had there been a decisive rupture with the determining historical forces which had shaped Britain's 'peculiar' route through the earlier phases of industrial capitalist development, or merely their recomposition into new continuities? Was Britain still a capitalist civilization or a 'post-capitalist' one? Did welfare capitalism represent a fundamental or merely a superficial reordering of society? The earlier phases of industrial capitalist development had produced a complex but distinctive type of social formation: what type of social formation was now in the making? Such transformations in the past had entailed profound cultural shifts and upheavals: as E.P. Thompson remarked, when surveying the deep changes in the social apprehension of Time which sustained an earlier moment of 'transition', 'there is no such thing as economic growth which is not, at the same time, growth and change of a culture....'¹³ What did such cultural changes amount to now? What would be the consequences for traditional class relationships, for class formation, and their cultures—hitherto, the very basis of the cultural order itself? Were there new, emergent cultural forces and tendencies? Above all, how were these historical processes to be qualitatively understood and assessed?

These issues were being widely debated at the time. They formed, for example, a constitutive part of the agenda of the early 'New Left', with which many of the contributors identified above had been associated. They set the terms of the post-war 'cultural debate' which, with many changes of emphasis, continues today. They also defined the space in which Cultural Studies emerged, defined its objectives and its agenda. From its inception, then, Cultural Studies was an 'engaged' set of disciplines, addressing awkward but relevant issues about contemporary society and culture, often without benefit of that scholarly detachment or distance which the passage of time alone sometimes confers on other fields of study. The 'contemporary'—which otherwise defined our terms of reference too narrowly—was, by definition, hot to handle. This tension (between what might loosely be called 'political' and intellectual concerns) has shaped Cultural Studies ever since. Each of the books referred to above inhabited this tension in a different way. Each addressed the problems defined by a decisive

conjuncture—even when the mode of analysis was ‘historical’. Each sought fresh direction from within a tradition of intellectual inquiry, which it then both developed and transformed. Each insisted that the answers should match, in complexity and seriousness, the complexity of the issues it addressed. Each supposed that those answers, when and if found, would have consequences beyond the confines of an intellectual debate. This tension necessarily situated Cultural Studies awkwardly with respect to the existing division and branches of knowledge and the scholarly norms legitimated within the higher learning. Marked in this way by its origins, Cultural Studies could in no sense be viewed as the establishment of yet another academic sub-discipline. This prevented its easy absorption and naturalization into the social division of knowledge. It also made the enterprise problematic from the outset in the eyes of the powers that be—with near fatal consequences, on occasions, for the whole venture.

One important question was the relation of Cultural Studies to the existing disciplines in which its problems were being rethought. Could this work be pursued in a disciplined, analytic way, yet break from some of the founding propositions of the intellectual fields in which it was situated? Each of the texts mentioned above referred itself and its readers to existing traditions of thought. The *Uses of Literacy*, which attempted to chart the process of change within the traditional cultures of the urban working class, employed methods similar to those developed by Leavis and the *Scrutiny* critics, attempting to rework their procedures and methods so as to apply them to the study of living class cultures.¹⁴ This aim was altogether different from the purposes behind the initial inspiration of ‘Leavisite’ criticism—and was accordingly repudiated by its ‘master’. The continuities nevertheless remained. For behind the emphasis on ‘practical criticism’ (‘These words in this order’) Leavisite criticism had always, in its own way, been profoundly sensitive to questions of cultural context, the sub-text of its ‘texts’.¹⁵ even if its definition of culture was peculiarly conservative, fundamentally anti-democratic, and depended on the historically dubious search, through an infinite regress, for some stable point of reference in a hypostatized ‘organic culture’ of the past.¹⁶ Leavis himself had always stressed the intricate relationship between the internal organization of experience, through language, in the preferred texts of the ‘Great Tradition’ and the general ‘state of the language’, which he took as a paradigm of the culture.¹⁷ In his ‘Sketch for an English School’ Leavis also revealed a deep, if idiosyncratic, historical sense.¹⁸ The *Uses of Literacy* refused many of Leavis’s embedded cultural judgements. But it did attempt to deploy literary criticism to ‘read’ the emblems, idioms, social arrangements, the lived cultures and ‘languages’ of working class life, as particular kinds of ‘text’, as a privileged sort of cultural evidence. In this sense, it continued ‘a tradition’ while seeking, in practice, to transform it.

Culture and Society undertook a work of contemporary description only in its conclusion. What it did was to resume and trace a tradition of English thought and writing, a line of critical thinking about English culture and society, back to certain social thinkers, writers and intellectuals of the nineteenth and early

twentieth centuries. These writings—now often safely enshrined in academic curricula—Williams revealed as engaged, critical interventions in their own time in a set of key debates about the relations between culture and industry, democracy and class.¹⁹ What united these various writers into a ‘culture-and-society’ tradition, in Williams’s view, was not their particular, often very different, actual positions and judgements, but the mode of sustained reflection they gave to qualitative questions about the impact on culture of the historic transformations of the past. Arnold’s *Culture and Anarchy* and Leavis’s *Mass Civilization and Minority Culture* were both shown as deeply engaged, embattled pieces of cultural criticism, hiding their partisanship a little behind the invocation to a fixed set of standards nominated as Culture with a capital ‘C’. It is true that, in emphasizing this highly literary tradition in critical bourgeois thought, Williams may have underplayed more radical alternative traditions and evidence from more popular, radical and artisan cultures not easily fitted into the literary framework. This was one criticism which Thompson levelled at *The Long Revolution* in a seminal critique, of which he gave a magisterial counter-demonstration in *The Making of the English Working Class*. Nevertheless, the condensations which *Culture and Society* effected—giving the thought of ‘the past’ an immediate reference and connotation in present debates, detaching them from their traditional moorings in the Eng. Lit. syllabus—was formidable.

Yet in reconstituting this tradition Williams also, in a sense, brought it to a decisive close. *The Long Revolution*, which followed almost immediately, was a seminal event in English post-war intellectual life. It marked the opening of a strikingly different kind of reflection on past and present. It linked with the ‘culture-and-society’ debate in its literary-moral points of reference. But in its theoretical mode and ambition it clearly also broke with that tradition.²⁰ It attempted to graft on to an idiom and mode of discourse irredeemably particular, empirical and moral in emphasis, its own highly individual kind of ‘theorizing’. It shifted the whole ground of debate from a literary-moral to an anthropological definition of culture. But it defined the latter now as the ‘whole process’ by means of which meanings and definitions are socially constructed and historically transformed, with literature and art as only one, specially privileged, kind of social communication. It also engaged, if in a highly displaced fashion, the Marxist tradition, and its way of describing the relation between culture and other social practices, as the only viable (but, in its existing English form, unsatisfactory) alternative to more native traditions.²¹ The difficult, somewhat abstract quality of some of the writing in *The Long Revolution* can largely be ascribed to its status as a ‘text of the break’. Bearing in mind the cultural and intellectual climate of the ‘Cold War’ in which it was conceived and written one can only register, without further comment here, the intellectual boldness of the whole venture.²²

It was quickly followed by Thompson’s critique and *The Making*. The latter, in its radically democratic emphasis, and its heroic labour of recovery of popular political cultures hitherto largely lost to serious historical work, is the most

seminal work of social history of the post-war period. It was informed throughout by a sense of how impossible it would be, after it, to give an account of that formative historical 'transition', the 1790s to the 1830s, without a sustained account of the 'cultural dimension'. It was rigorously and, in the best sense, 'empirically' grounded in historical particularity, though its brief opening pages on 'class relationships' constituted a brief but resonant statement, 'theoretical' in effect, if not in manner or intent. Thompson stressed the dimensions of historical agency through which a distinctive class formation made itself—the active tense in the title was fully intentional. His definition of culture was rooted in the collective experiences which formed the class in its larger historical sense. The book situated culture in the dialectic between 'social being' and 'social consciousness'. In doing so, it broke with a kind of economic determinism, and with an institutional perspective, which had marked and limited certain older versions of 'labour history', which it effectively displaced. It also obliquely—by demonstration, as it were—challenged the narrow, elitist conception of 'culture' enshrined in the Leavisite tradition, as well as the rather evolutionary approach which sometimes marked *Williams's Long Revolution*. It affirmed, directly, the relevance of historical work to the task of analysing the present. Thompson insisted on the historical specificity of culture, on its plural, not singular, definition—'cultures', not 'Culture': above all, on the necessary struggle, tension and conflict between cultures and their links to class cultures, class formations and class struggles—the struggles between 'ways of life' rather than the evolution of 'a way of life'. These were seminal qualifications.

All these works, then, implied a radical break with previous conceptualizations. They inflected the term 'culture' away from its traditional moorings, getting behind the inert sense of 'period' which sustained the text/context distinction, moving the argument into the wider field of social practices and historical processes. It was difficult, at first, to give these breaks a precise location in any single disciplinary field. They appeared to be distinctive precisely in the ways in which they broke across and cut between the disciplinary empires. They were, for the moment, defined as 'sociological' in a loose sense—without, of course, being 'proper' sociology.

The break with sociology

Some elements within sociology 'proper' were, indeed, preoccupied at this time with similar themes. One thinks, for example, of the work of the Institute of Community Studies and of the wider preoccupation with the idea of 'community' which could be considered as a sort of analogue, within sociology, of the emergent concern with cultures elsewhere.²³ But by and large British sociology was not predisposed to ask questions of this order. This was the period—the 1950s—of its massive dependence on American theories and models. But American sociology, in either its Parsonian theorization or its structural-functionalist methodology, was theoretically incapable of dealing with these

issues.²⁴ It was systematically functionalist and integrative in perspective. It had abolished the category of contradiction: instead, it spoke of ‘dysfunctions’ and of ‘tension management’. It claimed the mantle of a science. But its premises and predispositions were highly ideological. In fact, it responded to the question posed earlier—what sort of society was this now?—by giving a highly specific historical answer: all post-capitalist, post-industrial societies were tending to the model of the American dream—as one representative work put it, to the ‘first new nation’. It celebrated the triumph of ‘pluralist society’, constantly counterposed to ‘totalitarian society’, a highly ideological couplet which was advanced as a concluded scientific fact. It did not deal with ‘culture’, except within the terms of a highly pessimistic variant of the ‘mass society/mass culture’ hypothesis. Instead, it referred to ‘the value system’ in the singular—into which, as Shils eloquently put it, on the basis of pluralism, the ‘brutal culture’ of the masses was destined to be gradually and successfully incorporated.²⁵ It militantly refused the concept of ideology.²⁶ What was said earlier needs now to be somewhat qualified. It did, after all, provide a sort of reply to the questions being posed: it *transposed* them into its own, highly distinctive theoretical framework. At the same time, it preferred a methodology—the method of the social sciences—modelled on a highly outdated version of the natural sciences, militantly empiricist and quantitative.

Perry Anderson has—in our view, correctly—argued that such a sociology could produce no concept of ‘totality’ and, without that, no concept of ‘culture’ either.²⁷ Anderson argues that this ‘absent centre’ was filled in Britain, but in a displaced form, by other disciplines, in which the concept of ‘totality’ assumed a partial existence. He mentions anthropology and literary criticism; we might now add the ‘new’ social history. One way of thinking of Cultural Studies is as the intellectual space where the convergences between these displaced traditions occurred. ‘Driven out of any obvious habits, the notion of totality found refuge in the least expected of studies....’

This is no mere speculation. It refers directly to the politics of academic life in which Cultural Studies, from the moment of its inception, was immersed. Hoggart’s inaugural lecture, ‘Schools of English and Contemporary Society’, which announced the programme of the Birmingham Centre, was an originating document.²⁸ Its principal way of conceiving the field ought to have given little offence to academic *amour propre*. It indexed Cultural Studies as primarily concerned with ‘neglected’ materials drawn from popular culture and the mass media, which, it suggested, provided important evidence of the new stresses and directions of contemporary culture. This gave the Centre’s initial impetus a distinctly ‘literary’ flavour—with the *Uses of Literacy* as an exemplary feat. It recommended the adaptation of literary-critical methods in reading these texts for their qualitative cultural evidence: a modest proposal—in retrospect, perhaps, too modest. But its relative ‘conservatism’ may have reflected that historic compromise required to get these illicit questions posed at all, within a traditional academic framework. Nevertheless, it triggered off a blistering attack

specifically from sociology, which, while not concerned with such issues, reserved a proprietary claim over the territory. For example, the opening of the Centre was greeted by a letter from two social scientists who issued a sort of warning: if Cultural Studies overstepped its proper limits and took on the study of contemporary society (not just its texts), without 'proper' scientific (that is quasi-scientific) controls, it would provoke reprisals for illegitimately crossing the territorial boundary.

It may be hard for us—confronted as we are now by the immense disarray of 'mainstream' sociology—to recall a time when British sociology was so confident of its claims and proprieties. But this was no idle threat. It was compounded by an equally conservative reaction from those 'humanists' who might have been expected to know better (after all, they too were under notice to quit from an emergent technicist positivism). They regarded 'culture' as already inscribed in the texts they studied and in the values of liberal scholarship. Anything more modern was, by definition, a sign of cultural decline and debasement. Spending time analysing modern cultural forms was a positive collusion with the 'modern disease'. They shared, in fact, with Leavis, the assumption that culture and democracy were unalterably opposed. 'Organic culture' lay irredeemably in the past. Everything else was 'mass culture'. Despite these areas of agreement with what Leavis called the 'diagnosis', they refused his moral seriousness and strenuous programme as too embattled for their tastes. It seemed vulgar, then, to point out that this whole definition of culture had been framed in very specific and peculiar historical conditions: that it entailed its own peculiar reading of history; that it enshrined its questionable ideological judgements as 'truths'; that it was militantly elitist in practice. Cultural studies then was either hopelessly unscientific or a product of the very disease it sought to diagnose—either way, a treason of the intellectuals. The relative caution and uncertainty which accompanied the inauguration of the Centre was due in no small measure to this inhospitable climate. For years 'Cultural Studies' found itself required to survive by running the gauntlet, skilfully, between these two entrenched—but, in their different ways, philistine and anti-intellectual—positions.

This was not without its real effects. When the Centre gained its first funded project²⁹—a study of social change through an examination of the popular press, 1930–64—it was proposed that since we were not equipped to undertake 'proper sociological' investigation, we should analyse the 'texts' by methods of cultural reading, and then the social scientists might be recruited to 'test' our (soft) hypotheses by the appropriate (hard) scientific methods. A not dissimilar argument was advanced when we first applied to the Social Science Research Council (SSRC) for the funds which eventually led to the project undertaken by Paul Willis (and subsequently reported in *Learning to Labour*). Fortunately, so far as the Rowntree project was concerned, this broken-backed strategy found no takers, and we simply had to do the whole job ourselves. Actually, the common meeting-ground in the project itself between these two irreconcilable alternatives

was provided not so much by sociological methods as by a return to the ground of concrete historical analysis. This was the first time, in a real sense, that historical questions came firmly into play within the Centre's practice. In our view, the book which resulted from breaking this methodological sound barrier, and which dissolved the false literary *versus* sociological antithesis—*Paper Voices*—was a much better one than could have been produced in the way originally proposed: and it was the combination of literary and historical work which sustained it.³⁰ This was certainly one early point where the Centre began to desert its 'handmaiden' role and chart a more independent, ambitious, properly integrated territorial space of its own.

The 'sociological encounter' could be described in many different ways. It led to a quite new range of work in the Centre, taking into previous definitions of that work new emphases on 'lived cultures'—the study of youth cultures, for example; the concern with subcultures and the study of deviance; attention to the institutions of schooling and the relations of the workplace. What was also at issue was the need to confront theoretically, and in a manner appropriate to ourselves, the dominant discipline which cast its proprietary shadow across our path. This could not be done by simply grafting sociology on to Cultural Studies from the outside—though this was often what, at the time, 'interdisciplinary' was taken to mean. With the extension in the meaning of 'culture' from texts and representations to lived practices, belief systems and institutions, some part of the subject matter of sociology also fell within our scope. Yet the dominant ways of conceptualizing these relationships within structural-functionalism prevented our posing these questions correctly.

However, it was also clear that there were more mansions in the sociological kingdom than its guardians suggested. Thus began the Centre's appropriation of sociology from within. We staked out a line for ourselves through the 'classic' texts and problems. Here, alternative traditions within sociology itself began to make their appearance. Structural-functionalism turned out to be not science itself but a particular kind of theoretical construct and synthesis, put together in a very specific historical moment: the moment of American world-cultural hegemony. But there were other traditions which *did* attempt to deal with social action and institutions as 'objectivated structures of meaning'. They examined types of historical societies ('capitalist' ones, for example) from the perspective of their ideological formations (for example, the 'Protestant Ethic').³¹ They proposed two types of sociological explanation for cultural phenomena: the societal and historical forces which produced them, and those phenomena analysed in terms of their 'relevance for meaning'.³² In their very different ways these approaches connected with the theory of communication outlined in *The Long Revolution* and the project of 'reading' working-class life in terms of its 'lived meanings' which *The Uses of Literacy* had attempted.

It is clear, in retrospect, where this line of thinking pointed. It tended to give Cultural Studies a distinctively 'Weberian' gloss. This is clear enough in Weber's own work. But similar lines can also be traced elsewhere in the German

idealist tradition and in the famous ‘debate over method’ from which German sociology first emerged.³³ They can be identified with the *verstehen* or ‘interpretative’ hermeneutic stress which characterizes early historical sociology and the *Geistwissenschaft* approach in general (Dilthey and Simmel are representative figures here).³⁴ At the same moment as we began to excavate this neglected tradition in classical sociology, a parallel movement of recovery began within sociology itself. Sociologists began to speak of the ‘two sociologies’—counterposing Weber to Durkheim.³⁵ Gradually these themes began to be reappropriated within ‘mainstream’ sociology itself. They are to be found in the phenomenological reprise associated with Berger and Luckmann’s ‘social construction of reality’ approach and based on the rediscovery of the work of Alfred Schütz;³⁶ later, in ethnomethodology, with its interest in the ‘common-sense’ foundations of social action, its focus on language and conversational analysis as a sort of paradigm for social action itself.³⁷

More significant for us was the rehabilitation of ‘social interactionism’. This had a distinguished, if subordinate, history within American mainstream sociology—especially in the work of Mead and the ‘Chicago School’.³⁸ But it had recently been revived in the writings of Howard Becker and the subcultural theorists.³⁹ They chose to work at a more ethnographic level. They were sensitive to the differences in ‘lived’ values and meanings which differentiated subcultures from the dominant culture. They stressed the importance of the ways in which social actors define for themselves the conditions in which they live—their ‘definitions of situation’. And they deployed a qualitative methodology. This emphasis on qualitative work has exercised a formative influence within Cultural Studies and can be traced in the early work on youth cultures, in Paul Willis’s study of the cultures of school and work and, in more recent research on women, on women’s work and experience.⁴⁰ It posed the question of the status of the experiential moment in any project of research in ‘lived’ cultures as an irreducible element of any explanation.⁴¹ The tension between these experiential accounts and a larger account of structural and historical determinations has been a pivotal site of Centre theorizing and debate since then.⁴² Moreover, the ethnographic tradition linked Cultural Studies with at least two other kinds of related work: with the descriptive emphases of some kinds of social anthropology (for example, the anthropological study of the interpretative schema or ‘folk ideologies’ which social groups employ to give their conditions of existence meaning),⁴³ and with the ‘history from below’ which characterizes the new social history—for example, the ‘oral history’ movement, the work of Centerprise and *History Workshop*, a great deal of feminist historical writing (the work of Sheila Rowbotham, for instance) and that whole body of work inspired by Thompson’s *The Making*.⁴⁴

There was, however, another aspect not so readily assimilated by this route. The ‘lived accounts’ which social actors gave of their experience themselves had to be situated. They had their own determinate conditions. Consciousness is always infused with ideological elements, and any analysis of social frameworks

of understanding must take account of the elements of 'misrecognition' which are involved. They also had material and historical conditions which decentred them from any full 'authenticity': men/women make history, but under conditions which are not of their own making.... This more 'structural' approach had been precisely the purchase offered by structural-functionalism. The problem was that the latter secured its 'structural' view by evading the dialectic between agency and conditions: it thought 'structures' as uncontradictory, integrative, functionalist in an evolutionary and adaptive sense. Weber had rescued the 'meaning' dimension—but at the cost of a heuristic reduction of social action to individual motivation: his 'methodological individualism'. Schutz and the phenomenologists tried to give Weber's 'meaning construction' a more societal dimension—but at the cost of absorbing everything, including the material foundations of culture, into thought and language: the study of historical societies, from this perspective, became a sort of 'sociology of knowledge'.⁴⁵

Much of this emphasis derived from its Kantian or neo-Kantian basis in German idealist thought. But reference to Weber, Simmel and the 'Heidelberg Circle' reminds us of another seminal thinker formed in the same intellectual space: George Lukács. Lukács's name indexes an alternative working through of many of the same problems, but on a 'Hegelian' rather than a Kantian foundation and in the context not of an 'empirical social science' but of 'Western Marxism'.⁴⁶ This term refers to that complex Marxism, consciously counterposed to the vulgar reductionism of the Marxism of the Second and Third Internationals, which was much preoccupied with questions of culture, ideology and 'the superstructures', whose filiation Anderson has recently retraced.⁴⁷ (It was the absence of this brand of Marxism from the English intellectual scene in the 1930s which made Williams remark, in *Culture and Society*, that against the mechanical reductionism of what passed for 'Marxism' in England at that time, Leavis and *Scrutiny* not only 'won' the argument but deserved to win.) It was therefore of the utmost importance that at precisely this moment many of these long-forgotten or unknown 'Western Marxist' texts began to appear in translation, largely through the mediation of New Left Books and Merlin Press. English Cultural Studies thus had to hand, for the first time, an alternative source of theorizing within Marxism about its characteristic problems: in Lukács's literary historical work, Goldmann's *Hidden God*, the first translations of Walter Benjamin, the early texts of the 'Frankfurt School' (known previously only because American 'mass-society theorists' were taken to have successfully refuted Adorno's pessimistic critique), Sartre's *Question of Method*.⁴⁸

These texts marked a decisive second 'break' in Cultural Studies: the break into a complex Marxism. They restored to the debate about culture a set of theorizations around the classical problem of ideologies. They returned to the agenda the key question of the determinate character of culture and ideologies—their material, social and historical conditions of existence. They therefore opened up a necessary reworking of the classical Marxist question of 'base' and 'superstructures'—the decisive issue for a non-idealist or materialist theory of

culture. This reworking of Cultural Studies on the ground of the 'base/superstructures' metaphor was a highly significant moment, which had a formative impact on the Centre's work—for example, in media studies, in historical work, in the debates concerning the methods of ideological analysis, in the kind of theoretical argument sustained at that time in our General Theory seminar (the place where these issues were constantly thrashed out).

It was here that the charge of 'theoreticism' was first advanced. And there is no doubt that the Centre was, for a time, over-preoccupied with these difficult theoretical issues. It has to be said, however, that we had no alternative but to undertake a labour of theoretical definition and clarification at the same time as we attempted to do concrete work in the field. The two could not be separated. The term 'culture' could not be simply taken on loan from other traditions of thought and surreptitiously applied, by infinite extension, to an unfolding series of new objects. It could not just be 'tested' empirically. There were different definitions of the term 'culture'. Each implied a different programme of work. Each was only one term in a matrix of related concepts and propositions. To establish the field required a break with older problematics and the constitution of new ones. More recently, Althusser's discussion of how new knowledges are developed by an 'epistemological rupture' with previous ideological problematics has greatly exaggerated the absolutism of such breaks and has helped to induce a practice in which texts are not only read 'symptomatically', for their underlying problematics, but actually *reduced* to them.⁴⁹ But his general argument stands. Terms and concepts cannot be treated or changed in isolation; they must be judged in terms of their position in a set of concepts—the 'problematic'—and in relation to the 'constitutive unity of effective thoughts that make up the domain of an existing ideological field'.⁵⁰ This is not cited in defence of every twist and turn of the theoretical screw, but it explains the *necessarily* theoretical nature of our enterprise as opposed to the obviousness of empirical common sense.

The break into a complex Marxism was made possible, though not easier, by the creative disintegration from within of sociology itself in its mainstream form. After a period of methodological certainty, sociology too entered its theoretical agony. The theory of the self-regulative properties of advanced capitalist societies was shown to be penetrated by highly ideological notions. More important, the 'tension-managing' capacities of liberal-pluralist societies—for which, at the time, America provided the paradigm case—began to look increasingly precarious under the impact of the political events and upheavals of American society in the late 1960s. Advances were made here not simply by taking thought but through the perceptible impact of real historical events on a particular structure of knowledge. When Martin Nicolaus, the translator of Marx's *Grundrisse*,⁵¹ asked his distinguished American sociological colleagues, 'What is this science which only holds good when its subjects stand still?' he marked not the turning of another methodological corner but the break-up of a certain structure of thought under the force of historical events it could not explain. From

this rupture there emerged new kinds of questions about the ‘politics of culture’ (all that was resumed in the cultural revolution of 1968 and after) which gave the work of the Centre a new dynamic and a new relevance to the emergent contradictions in contemporary advanced societies. The Centre did not, of course, bring about this reversal single-handed: though we were prescient in sensing, quite early, that the whole armour-plated craft of structural-functionalism was less seaworthy than it had appeared. But we did not fire the relevant torpedo. Simply, it became possible to pose—as it were, against sociology—certain ‘sociological’ questions (for example, the question of ideology) to a ‘science’ which had only given us the reassuring vista of the ‘end of ideology’. If the ensuing disarray caused consternation in the sociological camp, it also released intellectual energies, set people free to undertake new kinds of work.⁵² Certainly, so far as Cultural Studies was concerned, it gave us a much-needed theoretical breathing-space. Its effect has been, in the long run, profoundly liberating, intellectually.

New dimensions of culture and the impact of the ‘structuralisms’

From this point onwards, Cultural Studies is no longer a dependent intellectual colony. It has a direction, an object of study, a set of themes and issues, a distinctive problematic of its own.

First, there was the move away from older definitions of culture to new formulations. Culture no longer meant a set of texts and artefacts. Even less did it mean the ‘selective tradition’ in which those texts and artefacts had been arranged, studied and appreciated.⁵³ Particularly it did not mean the values and ideals, which were supposed to be expressed *through* those texts—especially when these were projected out of definite societies in historical time—and deployed as an ‘ideal order’ (what Williams called a ‘court of appeal’), against which the (widely assumed) inevitable process of cultural decline could be measured. These constituted very much the going ‘Humanities’ definition of culture. It seemed to us to ascribe a general and universal function to values in the abstract which could only be understood in terms of their specific social and historical contexts: in short, an ideological definition, as important for what it obscured as for what it revealed. This definition had to be, to use an ugly neologism, ‘problematized’.

The abstraction of texts from the social practices which produced them and the institutional sites where they were elaborated was a fetishization—even if it had pertinent societal effects.⁵⁴ This obscured how a particular ordering of culture came to be produced and sustained: the circumstances and conditions of cultural reproduction which the operations of the ‘selective tradition’ rendered natural, ‘taken for granted’. But the process of ordering (arrangement, regulation) is always the result of concrete sets of practices and relations. In constituting a particular cultural order as ‘dominant’, it implied (though this was rarely

examined) the active subordination of alternatives—their marginalization and incorporation into a dominant structure: hence, also, the resistances, antagonisms and struggles which result from regulation.⁵⁵ Strikingly, these concepts were altogether absent: they had been ‘naturalized’ out of existence. Making culture problematic meant therefore raising these absences to visibility. What were the processes by means of which a dominant cultural order came to be ‘preferred’?⁵⁶ Who preferred *this* order rather than that? What were the effects of a particular ordering of the cultures of a social formation on the other hierarchized social arrangements? How did the preferred cultural order help to sustain ‘definite forms of life’ in particular social formations? How and why did societies come to be culturally ‘structured in dominance’? Broadly speaking, two steps were involved here: First, the move (to give it a too condensed specification) to an ‘anthropological’ definition of culture—as cultural *practices*; second, the move to a more historical definition of cultural practices: questioning the anthropological meaning and interrogating its universality by means of the concepts of social formation, cultural power, domination and regulation, resistance and struggle. These moves did not exclude the analysis of texts, but it treated them as archives, decentring their assumed privileged status—one kind of evidence, among others.

Second, the question of the relation between cultural practices and other practices in definite social formations. Here we posed the issue of the relation of the ‘cultural’ to what we may call—again, for shorthand purposes—the economic, political and ideological instances.⁵⁷ This was part of the project to develop a materialist definition of culture.⁵⁸ It referenced, immediately, the problems of ‘base’/‘superstructure’ and the question of determination. But the classical terms of that metaphor were now clearly inadequate.⁵⁹ The work of revision had indeed already commenced.

Thompson had called attention to the

dialectical interaction between culture and something that is not culture. We must suppose the raw material of life experience to be at one pole, and all the infinitely complex human disciplines and systems, articulate and inarticulate, formalized in institutions or dispersed in the least formal ways, which ‘handle’, transmit or distort this raw material to be at the other. It is the active process—which is at the same time the process through which men make their history—that I am insisting upon.⁶⁰

In the effort to give culture its own specificity, place and determinate effect, *The Long Revolution* had also proposed a radical revision to the ‘base/superstructure’ metaphor. It said, in effect, all the practices—economic, political, ideological, cultural—interact with effect on each other. This rescued culture from its residual status as the mere expression of other forces: but at the expense of a radical relativism, skirting the problem of determination. Other related traditions (Williams at this stage noted the convergences between his own work and that of

Goldmann and Lukács)⁶¹ retained the old ‘base’/‘superstructure’ distinction but expanded the complexity and ‘reciprocal effect’ of the latter (in which culture-ideology was firmly located) on the former. This retained the determinacy—but in an elongated, ‘last instance only’ fashion. Did it go far enough? Sartre attempted to go behind this formulation by isolating the aspect of *signification* as the specifically cultural element:

Because we are men and because we live in the world of men, of work and of conflicts, all the objects which surround us are signs. By themselves they scarcely mask the real project of those who have made them thus for us and who address us through them. Thus significations come from man and his project but they are inscribed everywhere in things and in the order of things....⁶²

These reworkings all tended to bring together again things which had been dispersed into the binary poles of the ‘base’/‘superstructure’ metaphor, on the ground of a common, general *praxis*: human activity, ‘the process through which men made history’, with none of that false abstraction which their assignment to different levels of effective determinacy seemed to imply.⁶³ This was close to the position taken by Marx in *The German Ideology*, with its ‘consciousness/being’ dialectic, and its affirmation that all abstractions could be resolved into the general historical process itself—‘which is nothing but the activity of men’. This had a radically historicized philosophical anthropology as its basis. It entailed a very specific way of conceptualizing the totality: a ‘whole’, in which each social practice mediated every other practice, or, to adopt Williams’s distinctive gloss, conceiving *praxis* as the essential forms of human energy. It also entailed thinking of society as an ‘expressive totality’.

The major phase of theoretical development which followed must therefore be broadly identified with all those influences which interrupted this search for unities and underlying ‘totalities’. These were linked with a different conception of a social totality—as a necessarily ‘complex structure’, which does not express a unity but is ‘structured in dominance’. Here, as Marx argued in the 1857 *Introduction*, unity is the ‘result of many determinations’, the product of a particular articulation of distinctions and differences rather than of similarity and correspondence.⁶⁴ Determinacy had to be thought not as emanating from one level of the social totality—for example, ‘the base’—in a unilinear fashion but as an ‘over-determination’.⁶⁵ The problematic of Cultural Studies thus became closely identified with the problem of the ‘relative autonomy’ of cultural practices. This was a radical break. It goes far beyond the impact of the ‘structuralisms’—though they were instrumental in a major way in bringing this question to the fore. But, actually, the strongest thrust in ‘structuralism’ as a mode of thought is towards a radical diversity—the heterogeneity of discourses, the autonomization of instances, the effective dispersal of *any* unity or ensemble, even that of a ‘relatively autonomous’ one.⁶⁶ So the problematic of ‘relative

autonomy' is more accurately characterized as the site where 'structuralism' and Marxism confront each other at their theoretical limits.⁶⁷ It was precisely at this juncture that Engels began his long, difficult and seminal 'correction' of the economistic and mechanical applications of Marxism which had become orthodox in his time. It is now commonly agreed that what Engels did was to identify the core problem of a non-reductionist Marxism, and to provide the elements only of a possible 'solution': the solutions he offered remain (as, surprisingly, both Althusser and Thompson have recently acknowledged)⁶⁸ unsatisfactory. 'Relative autonomy' is/was therefore not an accomplished position, theoretically secure against all comers. If anything, its inadequacies only reinforced a general recognition of the major *lacunae* in classical Marxist theory in relation to the whole problem of the 'superstructures'. It signalled work to be done, knowledge to be produced—an open Marxism—rather than the application of ready-made schema.

If structuralism forced on us this question in a peculiarly urgent form, it was certainly not alone in this respect. And its 'solutions' were also, themselves, open to serious question. Its formalism and rationalism, its privileging of the highest levels of abstraction as the exclusive mode of operation of 'Theory' with a capital 'T', its obsession with epistemological issues, themselves constituted formidable barriers to the solution of problems which structuralism itself posed. In noting the impact of structuralism, therefore, we are signalling a formative intervention which coloured and influenced everything that followed. But we are *not* charting a fixed orthodoxy to which we subscribed uncritically. Indeed, here we have not a single influence but a succession, a series. Critiques and rejections of structuralism are as significant in this part of the story as influences absorbed and positions affirmed. We attempt to assess this formative phase and to indicate something of its complexity, in a shorthand way, by taking four representative instances, which reinforce the point.

The first can be identified with the initial impact of the early work of Lévi-Strauss and Barthes. Both deployed the models of structural linguistics as a paradigm (some would say, infinitely expandable) for the scientific study of culture. Indeed, then and since language has been used as a paradigm figure through which all social practices could potentially be analysed, in effect holding out the promise—which long eluded the 'human sciences'—of a mode of analysis at one and the same time rigorous, scientific and non-reductionist, non-positivist. Language, which is the medium for the production of meaning, is both an ordered or 'structured' system and a means of 'expression'. It could be rigorously and systematically studied—but not within the framework of a set of simple determinacies. Rather, it had to be analysed as a structure of variant possibilities, the arrangement of elements in a signifying chain, as a practice not 'expressing' the world (that is, reflecting it in words) but articulating it, articulated upon it. Lévi-Strauss employed this model to decipher the languages (myths, culinary practices and so on) of so-called 'primitive' societies.⁶⁹ Barthes offered a more informal 'semiotics', studying the systems of signs and

representations in an array of languages, codes and everyday practices in contemporary societies.⁷⁰ Both brought the term 'culture' down from its abstract heights to the level of the 'anthropological', the everyday.

If the weakness of the positions outlined earlier was their tendency to *dissolve* the cultural back into society and history, structuralism's main emphasis was on the specificity, the irreducibility, of the cultural. Culture no longer simply reflected other practices in the realm of ideas. It was itself a practice—a *signifying* practice—and had its own determinate product: meaning. To think of the specificity of the cultural was to come to terms with what defined it, in structuralism's view, as a practice: its internal forms and relations, its internal structuration. It was—following Saussure, Jakobsen and the other structural linguists—the way elements were selected, combined and articulated in language which 'signified'. The stress therefore shifted from the substantive contents of different cultures to their forms of arrangement—from the *what* to the *how* of cultural systems.⁷¹

This was a radical departure. In Sartre, the link between signification and praxis had been founded theoretically on the intentional and expressive project of men (fetishized, masked by their objectivated, alienated appearance in 'the order of things': see above). Modern structuralism proposed instead to think of men as spoken by, as well as speaking, their culture: spoken through its codes and systems. The latter aspect (the linguistic system, the social part of language, the *langue*) rather than individual utterances (*paroles*) was what could be studied systematically. In this, as in much else, Lévi-Strauss recapitulated, within structuralism, many of the conditions of a 'science of society' first proposed in Durkheim's *Rules of Sociological Method* (for instance, the suicide rate, not individual suicides, was for Durkheim the properly constituted 'social fact').⁷² In the same way Lévi-Strauss established the 'rule' as central in the construction of all ordered human systems. He imposed 'difference' and 'distinction' where previously there had been correspondences and unities (compare Goldmann's protocol for a sociology of literature in *The Hidden God*).

Structuralism thus constituted a fundamental *decentring* of cultural processes from their authorial centre in 'man's project'. Culture was as much constituted by its conditions of existence as it constituted them. It established constraint and regulation alongside expression and agency in the analysis of structured practices. Structuralism thus marked a radical break with the dominant forms of theoretical humanism. It bracketed the terms 'consciousness' and 'intention'. Culture was better understood as the inventories, the folk taxonomies, through which social life is 'classified out' in different societies. It was not so much the product of 'consciousness' as the unconscious forms and categories through which historically definite forms of consciousness were produced.⁷³ This brought the term 'culture' closer to an expanded definition of ideology—though now without the connotations of 'false consciousness' which the term had previously carried.

Lévi-Strauss helped to rehabilitate the work of Durkheim and to demonstrate his varied lineage: where Parsons had worked towards the structural-functional synthesis via the Durkheim of *Suicide*, Lévi-Strauss directed attention to Durkheim and Mauss's *Primitive Classification*, which he identified as an integral part of structuralism's 'uncompleted programme'.⁷⁴ In polemical fashion, Lévi-Strauss privileged the synchronic level of analysis over the diachronic—an anti-historical inversion with which, from the outset, we were far from happy. For, while it powerfully moved the level of analysis back to that of 'system' and 'structure', this was at the cost (never fully reckoned with by its devotees) of reconstituting some of the fundamental positions of structural-functionalism (for example, society as a 'system of systems') which earlier positions had correctly contested. With these costs Cultural Studies had at once to reckon. In a wider sense, Lévi-Strauss tilted the intellectual pendulum sharply from German to French influences and models, and from a neo-Hegelianism to a distinctive variant of neo-Kantianism.⁷⁵ Yet the impact of structuralism, one must repeat, does not consist of positions unqualifiedly subscribed to. We must acknowledge a major theoretical intervention. Whatever else it could not do, structuralism displaced 'man in general' from the full intentional centre of the cultural project. It thus ended a certain theoretical innocence, whatever the critiques of structuralist theories which had then to be made. It made culture, in its expressive sense, conditional—because conditioned. It obliged us really to rethink the 'cultural' as a set of practices: to think of the material conditions of signification and its necessary determinateness.

This may seem strange since Lévi-Strauss, by concentrating so absolutely on the *internal* relations of 'the cultural', effectively side-stepped the issue of determinacy. He resolved the problem cognitively by reference to a set of universal elements and rules common to *all* cultural practices, which he ascribed to the structure of the human mind as such—*l'esprit humain*.⁷⁶ In this sense—as Ricoeur observed and Lévi-Strauss acknowledged—he remained a 'Kantian without the transcendental imperative' (that is, God). He was also, if only in a deep sense, a 'Durkheimian', founding culture at the level of reciprocal exchange rather than on production.⁷⁷ His work also exemplified a sustained formalism—the price of his proper attention to forms. Nevertheless, a conception of determinate practice lay somewhere near the centre of his work. It could not be constrained for long inside its Kantian and Durkheimian brackets, the limits of his structuralism.

This is clearly demonstrated by what rapidly succeeded it—the work of the Marxist structuralists, here personified in the example of Althusser. Marxist structuralism looked initially like a take-over bid; but it is important to see the internal logic which drove structuralism from its Durkheimian to its Marxian inflexion. If language is a social practice, it can be adequately reduced neither to the mere sum of the individual speakers nor to the individual utterances spoken in it. It must be defined in terms of the 'systems of relations' which make these individual interventions possible and which structure, determine and limit them.

There is, despite all their radical differences, a common starting-point here between Durkheim and Marx—in Marx's insistence that we must start with relations, and Durkheim's insistence that the object of social science is 'the social *sui generis*'. On the irreducibility of a 'structure' to the conscious intentions of its individual elements *both* agree—at least as to this necessary level of abstraction. There the salient compatibilities end. For where Durkheim isolated 'the social' (as Lévi-Strauss, following him, abstracted 'the cultural'), Marx insisted on the relations *between* material relations—thinking of 'societies' as ensembles. And where Lévi-Strauss centred his analysis on the 'rule', the codes and formal oppositions, Marx worked from relations and contradictions. Nevertheless, the manner in which Althusser attempted to rethink structuralism on Marxist foundations owed much more to Lévi-Strauss (and through him, inevitably, to Durkheim) than he or his followers have been willing to acknowledge.

Althusser's impact is harder to detail satisfactorily. Here one can only select certain key themes. The first is the break (powerfully established in the early *For Marx* essays) with expressive and totalizing ways of thinking about the relationships between different practices in a social formation. It is well known that there are more ways than one in which this rethinking appears in his work. There is the notion of societies as necessarily complex, unevenly determining and determinate practices, caught in his concepts of 'relative autonomy' and 'overdetermination'. There is the full-blown 'structural causality' of *Reading Capital*, where each practice is only the condensed effect of the structure as a whole. The differences between these positions cannot be commented on further here. Crudely, the important innovation was the attempt to think the 'unity' of a social formation in terms of an articulation. This posed the issues of the 'relative autonomy' of the cultural-ideological level and a new concept of social totality: totalities as complex structures.

Second, but closely related, was Althusser's attempt to reformulate the problem of determination in a non-reductionist way (or ways). Third, there were the varied, sometimes internally inconsistent, ways in which he defined *ideology*. This work on ideology was of special relevance to Cultural Studies. It revived two earlier stresses and added two new ones. It reasserted the conception of ideologies as practices rather than as systems of ideas. It defined ideologies as providing the frameworks of understanding through which men interpret, make sense of, experience and 'live' the material conditions in which they find themselves.⁷⁸ This second emphasis was very close to the 'culture' of Lévi-Strauss; but it employed a more Marxist connotation, stressing the degrees of mis-recognition involved in these framings and classifications of social existence.⁷⁹ Thus, for Althusser, ideologies were those images, representations, categories through which men 'live', in an imaginary way, their real relation to their conditions of existence. To these, Althusser added two further, more controversial, propositions. Ideologies were materially located and were therefore best examined, in their practico-social effect, in the institutional sites

and apparatuses (the ISAs) which elaborated them.⁸⁰ But also ideologies worked by constituting or interpellating 'subjects'. The 'I', the seat of consciousness and the foundation of ideological discourses, was not the integral Cartesian centre of thought but a contradictory discursive category constituted by ideological discourse itself. Here Althusser, whose borrowings from Freud were already strategic (for example, the concept of 'over-determination'), now ambiguously made another, more tactical, 'loan' from the psychoanalytic work of Lacan.⁸¹

The problems with the Althusserian formulations on these key theoretical issues (and on the related epistemological questions concerning the relation between science and ideology, knowledge and the 'real') are well rehearsed and cannot be resumed here. We must include in any such account a substantive critique made from within the Centre itself.⁸² Basically, the concepts of 'relative autonomy' and 'over-determination' proved fruitful and have been developed—even though they are by no means theoretically secure (what is relative? how autonomous is 'autonomy'?). 'Structuralist causality' has been amply shown to be just another, larger, self-sufficient and self-generating 'expressive totality': all its effects are given in the structure which is itself the sum of all the practices—even if this is a totality of a Spinozean rather than a Hegelian variety. Ultimately, it proved both formalist and functionalist in character, giving a basis for Thompson's subsequent caricature of Althusser's 'structure' as a sort of self-generating machine. Althusser's later work—critical of both the formalism and the theoreticism of his earlier efforts—returns us to more acceptable positions, but these are descriptively rather than theoretically established.⁸³

In its integral form, then, 'Althusserianism' remained an internally inconsistent position. In its fully orthodox form it never really existed for the Centre. Few people swallowed *Reading Capital* whole—though elsewhere it did, for a time, acquire doctrinal status. But again the impact was not a matter of mere subscription. Althusser interrupted certain previous lines of thinking in a decisive way. Those who have gone on to further developments nevertheless continue to work and think in his shadow, after his 'break'. Many who have definitively criticized him are still standing on his shoulders.

One last aspect of his influence must be noted. This concerns the ways in which Althusser himself, and those influenced by him, reshaped the central issue of the relationship between ideologies/culture and class formations. Cultures as the lived practices of social groups in definite societies produced, inevitably, a focus on the major social formations of industrial capitalist societies: class formations. In many ways the earlier Marxist tradition—Lukács and Goldmann are good exemplifications here—conducted the analysis of specific cultural formations largely by conceiving them as the products or expressions, at the cultural-ideological level, of the 'world outlooks' or *visions du monde* of particular classes. Class structures, class domination and class contradictions also constituted, at the level of cultures and ideologies, parallel formations—class ideologies. Althusser not only challenged any attempt to reduce the specificity of the 'ideological instance' to the simple effect of the economic base (hence, 'over-