

# THE ACHIEVEMENTS OF CULTURAL STUDIES

# 1

I was among the first (admittedly, of many) to write a book length account of the development of cultural studies (Turner, 1990, 1996a, 2003); the point of my doing this at that time was to try to make cultural studies approaches accessible to a broader readership than those who were going to be reading *Working Papers in Cultural Studies* or the various readers being published through Hutchison, the Open University and so on. Today, the idea of cultural studies still seems to me as important and as relevant as it ever has been. However, what has *happened* to this idea in practice – how it has been implemented in various contexts, what kinds of influence it has had, and ultimately where I worry that it may have lost some of its power – is the topic of this book.

Obviously, there could be quite a bit of debate about what follows – both from inside and outside the cultural studies tent. Indeed, generating debate is one of the objectives of this book. What I would like to do first, however, before properly commencing my critique (although there will be some of that here as well), is to consider what cultural studies has achieved. As a named academic field it has been around for more than 40 years. It has been taught, more or less as a discipline, in universities in the UK and in Australia since at least the mid-1970s and early 1980s. It was slower to start up in Canada while, in the USA, the boom years were the 1990s – although one could argue that it has maintained its presence, if a little more modestly, into the 2000s. Other locations, and there are very many of them now, have their own starting points and narratives of development. For those of us who belong to the first generation of cultural studies scholars, baby-boomers most of us, cultural

studies simply did not exist when we entered the university. Our training was in other, more traditional or established, disciplines – most often in English or sociology – and many of us have stories about our experience of those disciplines that explain what we sought to find in cultural studies. Now, some of us are professors of cultural studies and, whether we like it or not, pillars of the university community. Although it has had more than its share of detractors, critics and sceptics<sup>1</sup>, cultural studies is recognized as a legitimate field of teaching and research in most places around the globe: by universities, national and international research funding bodies, publishers, booksellers, and even the occasional newspaper columnist. That is quite a transformation to have occurred within the careers of one generation – and in an institutional context which is not known for accommodating rapid change. Something has certainly happened – and so there are major achievements to be acknowledged.

This chapter will therefore engage in a (very) selective stock-take of what I think we might claim so far as among the achievements of cultural studies. For a start, I hope that it is uncontroversial to suggest that cultural studies has helped to place the construction of everyday life at the centre of contemporary intellectual enquiry and research in the humanities<sup>2</sup>. Along the way, it has played its part in opening up a number of cognate disciplines – literary studies, history, cultural geography, film and media studies, cultural anthropology, and even sociology – to analytic approaches and theoretical perspectives that have proved significant in their impact. Most particularly, cultural studies enabled the study of the media to be developed in ways that broke significantly with previous approaches by establishing new kinds of critical analytic practice. In general, I am prepared to defend the claim that the landscape of the humanities and the social sciences has been transformed by cultural studies over the past 30 years. I would also be happy to argue that the landscape of public debate has changed significantly as we have witnessed the penetration of cultural studies approaches, discourses and knowledges into public discourse

to an extent that exceeds all expectations. It is easy (indeed, common) to overlook this dimension of cultural studies' impact. I am reminded of David Morley's citation of a book reviewer's comment that cultural studies was no more than a series of 'truisms', and 'so obviously a move in the direction of common sense that it hardly deserves all this attention'. Morley's response – a response that was right on the money in my view – was to point out that 'if the things that this reviewer refers to are now "common sense" they are largely so because work in cultural studies has made them so' (1998: 477).

There is no doubt that cultural studies' achievements are subject to vigorous internal and external debate – its internationalization, for instance, is still not universally regarded as a good thing (I argue at some length in Chapter 5, drawing on the example of the Inter-Asia Cultural Studies movement, that it is among cultural studies' genuine accomplishments). There is also debate about cultural studies' increasing integration with more established disciplines and networks; the fear is that this weakens cultural studies' critical capacity and its foundational challenge to disciplinarity. For some, what amounts to the re-incorporation of cultural studies into the academy may reflect a diminution of its critical project, and thus the beginning of an entropic cycle for the field as a whole. For others, since cultural studies has accomplished the disciplinary corrections it was set up to produce, and since it has neither the aspirations nor the epistemological equipment to become a discipline itself, cultural studies is now effectively over. Finally, there is (always!) debate about how relevant or important the 'project' of cultural studies has remained: its theoretical interest in the analysis of the cultural production and distribution of power, the critical dimension of its practice – and also perhaps the romanticism of its characteristic claim to intervene in the political processes it sets out to examine (Grossberg, 2010: 96–7). In the following chapters, these debates and issues will continue to run under the surface of my account of what has become of cultural studies.

## THE INSTITUTION OF CULTURAL STUDIES

This subheading is a provocative one in this context, perhaps, but it does seem to me that the first thing I need to do is to point to cultural studies' remarkable success at creating space for itself within the university, as well as within other institutional contexts – research funding bodies, for instance – around the world. In at least one case of which I am aware, Lingnan University in Hong Kong, where the 2010 Crossroads conference was held (as we shall see in a later chapter, a very different event from that held in Birmingham!), cultural studies is officially represented as one of the flagship programmes for the whole university. While such institutional success will always be the result of concerted political effort, it is an effort that for much of the history of cultural studies has been disavowed. Readers may remember a special issue of *Cultural Studies* from 1998, edited by Ted Striphas and dedicated to discussing what was at the time deemed to be the 'problem' of the institutionalization of cultural studies. That such a topic was considered to be important reflects the fact that, from its beginning, cultural studies had maintained a principled objection to its own institutionalization. While it certainly sought recognition and respect, it also saw itself as opposed to the disciplinary formations that organized the university and warned against aligning the development of cultural studies' teaching programmes and research agendas too closely with the interests of the institution in which these activities took place. Such an accommodation, it was argued, ran against the grain of cultural studies' critical project. As cultural studies began to expand and internationalize – finding varied ways to establish itself in university systems around the world – many in cultural studies recognized that it was going to be increasingly difficult to maintain such a position<sup>3</sup>. Ted Striphas, in his introduction to the special issue, both reported and challenged the orthodoxies informing this stance:

cultural studies has developed something of a 'line', so to speak, in response to the 'question' of institutionalization – despite its professed

disdain for ready-made answers. When the prospect of institutionalizing cultural studies gets posed, published reactions often tend towards some variation of 'Resist disciplinarity!' I wonder, however, how productive this response is, given the practical and historical exigencies facing cultural studies, particularly as it finds itself increasingly institutionalized. (1998: 459)

Striphas' strategy for challenging this orthodoxy was to frame his approach around how, 'practically speaking', cultural studies practitioners have *actually* dealt with 'negotiating the institutional/disciplinary space'. His introduction is sceptical about the reality ('practically speaking') of the orthodox position; he politely submits that 'the polemical announcement of cultural studies' 'anti-disciplinarity' seems to lack 'a discrete or recognizable institutional embodiment' (480). That is, to put it more bluntly, all the talk about anti-disciplinarity and resistance to the institution loses much of its credibility when we notice that most of it comes from those who have tenured positions teaching cultural studies as a named disciplinary formation through established programmes within the university system. As Tony Bennett, one of the contributors to the special issue, points out: '[if ] we survey the scene today, cultural studies has all the institutional trappings of a discipline' (1998: 530). To deny this would be disingenuous, Bennett suggests, rewriting a history in which the development of cultural studies has in fact always 'depended on definite institutional conditions'. Importantly, he goes on, 'the fact that these do not happen to be entirely the same as those which have sustained the development of other disciplines is ... no reason to characterize them as extra-institutional' (534).

These days, perhaps, many would admit that this resistance to disciplinarity has become more of a fashionable fiction than an actual practice (Chapter 2 takes up this issue), but it was still a question for serious debate at the time Striphas's issue was published – and, indeed, it had taken on added urgency as a direct result of cultural studies' increasing penetration into the American university system. Striphas is quite brave in confronting the issue

head-on: he uses the second half of his introductory paper to defend the pragmatics of institutionalization, and to outline some ways in which this might be accomplished without abandoning the original objectives of the cultural studies project. Along the way, he astutely points out how mistaken it would be to assume any neat homology between interdisciplinarity (or anti-disciplinarity) and a resistance to institutionalization. Indeed, Striphas notes how handy it has been for the corporatizing university, seeking economies of scale and financial efficiencies as well as a competitive position in the market, to make use of interdisciplinarity as an academic rationale for the administrative merging of disciplines, departments or schools. As he sees it, in this context, cultural studies' preferred institutional practices run the risk of unwittingly 'colluding with the university's corporatist logic (of which interdisciplinarity often – and ironically – is a symptom)' (1998: 454). This is one of the earlier warnings about what has in fact turned out to be a significant factor in cultural studies' institutionalization over the last decade. Despite its principled opposition to institutionalization and the corporate university, I think it is possible to see cultural studies as among the unlikely beneficiaries of the neo-liberal attack on the humanities in higher education. While I am not suggesting that such an outcome was something anyone in our field set out to achieve, nonetheless, the fact is that it would be rare these days to find a humanities administrative unit in any university that is not embedded within some kind of multidisciplinary formation. Such a formation might well be the product of a legitimate arrangement of cognate disciplines but it is also just as likely to be the outcome of a cynically arranged shotgun wedding between the academic administrative units concerned. All too often, cultural studies is used as the legitimating, interdisciplinary glue which holds such unions together and, as such, has made itself useful if not indispensable to the whole enterprise.

Even though the 1990s debates about institutionalization still linger somewhere or other, and can still surprise us by resurfacing with renewed intensity from time to time, on the whole it has to



be admitted that talk about cultural studies resisting institutionalization today just sounds like a fantasy. Indeed, if we examined the past decade, it would be much easier to find examples of cultural studies' outstanding success at institutionalization than to find examples of heroic resistance to it. Undergraduate teaching programmes abound, postgraduate students do too; cultural studies research centres have proliferated and prospered; cultural studies academics find themselves on national academic committees, research funding assessment panels, government advisory boards, and in the media. In the most sincere form of flattery, some of our colleagues in other disciplines even find it politic (from time to time) to occasionally pretend to be one of us (I am thinking of the number of research grant applications I see these days, especially from literary studies, which self-nominate as cultural studies in the curious hope of enhancing their chances of success). Even though there are certain places, such as in the UK daily press (most egregiously, in left-leaning 'quality' papers such as *The Guardian*), where cultural studies is routinely parodied and its legitimacy questioned, I think it is defensible to regard this, by and large, as a marker of cultural studies' success rather than its vulnerability.

However, that is not all one would want to say about this. Indeed, in a controversial 2009 article published in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, called 'What's the matter with cultural studies?', Michael Bérubé offers a very different assessment of the institutionalization of cultural studies today:

*Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State and Law and Order* (1978), the Birmingham collection that predicted the British Labour Party's epochal demise, is now more than 30 years old. In that time, has cultural studies transformed the disciplines of the human sciences? Has cultural studies changed the means of transmission of knowledge? Has cultural studies made the American university a more egalitarian or progressive institution? Those seem to me to be useful questions to ask, and one useful way of answering them is to say, sadly, no. Cultural studies hasn't had much of an impact at all. (2009: 1)

While Bérubé acknowledges there are some ‘worthy programs in cultural studies at some North American universities, like Kansas State and George Mason, where there were once no programs at all’ (1), nonetheless he regards this as a disappointingly modest achievement. I am aware that many of Bérubé’s colleagues in cultural studies in the USA were profoundly dismayed by the publication of this piece; the message it sent to deans looking for programmes to cut can’t have been helpful. If we set aside the politics of his intervention for the moment, however, he does have a point. One remembers the high hopes of those introducing cultural studies to America in the early 1990s<sup>4</sup>, as well as the level of hyperbole that surrounded this venture. At the 1990s ‘Cultural Studies Now and in the Future’ conference at Champaign–Urbana, which is so often regarded as the moment when the cultural studies invasion of America was launched, Stuart Hall addressed concerns raised by what he described as ‘the enormous explosion of cultural studies in the US, its rapid professionalization and institutionalization’ (1992: 285). A decade later, in their introduction to a volume which constructs an extremely interesting version of ‘American cultural studies’, Hartley and Pearson (2000) refer to the institutionalization of cultural studies in the USA, as if it had proven to be a more widespread phenomenon there even than its British counterpart had been in the UK; they refer, further, to cultural studies ‘installation in American universities as a mainstream subject for undergraduate and graduate study’ (10). Given the fact that there were, even at the peak of this invasion, only a tiny handful of undergraduate programmes to name themselves as cultural studies (the effect was primarily on graduate programmes), such comments offer us an insight into what had become more like a reflection of the *zeitgeist* that had been whipped up around cultural studies in the 1990s rather than an accurate account of what was actually going on in the universities. Given such hyperbole, it is certainly understandable that Bérubé should regard what has become of this movement as a depressingly modest result.



It is, of course, remarkable when one considers how structurally important America has become to the international institutionalization of cultural studies (the proportion of international journals located there, the number of American scholars who identify with the field, and, most importantly, the crucial role played by the American market for our books), that the cultural studies' institutional presence in the American university system has remained so limited. Bérubé goes on:

In most universities, cultural studies has no home at all, which means (among other things) that graduate students doing work in cultural studies have to hope they'll be hired in some congenial department that has a cultural studies component. The good news on that front is that you can now find cultural-studies scholars working in anthropology, in critical geography, even in kinesiology. In 'museum studies' and cultural ethnography, in the work of Mike Davis and Edward W. Soja on cities, and in analyses of West African soccer clubs or the career of Tiger Woods, cultural studies has cast a wide net. The bad news is that the place where cultural studies has arguably had the greatest impact is in English departments. And though people in English departments habitually forget this, English departments are just a tiny part of the university. (2009: 2)

On the one hand, from what I can tell from my own experience of the USA, this looks like an accurate characterization (even though some respondents to Bérubé's piece described it as a 'Jeremaid')<sup>5</sup>. On the other hand, this situation may well be the predictable consequence of what might now be seen as the unrealistic ambitions that accompanied the development of cultural studies in the USA over the 1990s. Given what is still a relatively traditional, discipline-bound structure for so much of the American higher education system, it is not surprising that American undergraduate programmes have not been quite as eager to take up the interdisciplinary ventures from the 'new humanities' as have their counterparts in the UK and Australia, for instance – and this affects more than just cultural studies.

More positively, it could also be the case that the relative stability of that traditional disciplinary structure probably influenced how easily the established disciplines could afford to absorb, accept or appropriate selected examples of the work coming from cultural studies, gender studies and the like. Furthermore, the distance between the American academy and the coalface of politics always meant that even a highly successful American cultural studies would never have the socio-political purchase that cultural studies has come to enjoy in Britain or Australia. Nonetheless, among the more curious aspects of the international formation of cultural studies – and it is hard to get a reliable figure on this – is the fact that there can't be more than about 20 graduate programmes in the USA at present which use the name 'cultural studies' in their title<sup>6</sup>. There are even fewer undergraduate degrees available in the USA with that nomenclature. This, in a system of more than 2,000 universities. As we go through this book we will repeatedly encounter the paradox that even though the US book market is crucial to cultural studies' commercial success as a publishing category, and even though US universities have provided comfortable homes for many international cultural studies scholars, it has not been the location for cultural studies' most significant institutional success. As Bérubé (2009) says, it is only a tiny presence in undergraduate teaching programmes, it has to fight for space in interdisciplinary initiatives at the graduate level, and it has no presence at all in the school curricula.

You get a very different picture elsewhere; there are certainly many more programmes, proportionally, in the UK, Australia, Canada, Hong Kong and Taiwan, which use the name of cultural studies and which situate themselves explicitly within the field. In the UK, in a system of around 140 universities, by my rough count, there about 10 schools or departments which name themselves as cultural studies, at least 17 undergraduate programmes and 14 graduate programmes. In addition, of course, there would be much cultural studies teaching going on under other names – in departments of English, media studies, communications and so on. Around the world, there are also numerous research centres

devoted to cultural studies research – most notably in the UK but elsewhere as well. Indeed, in Australia, it is the cultural studies research centres such as the Centre for Cultural Research founded by Ien Ang at the University of Western Sydney (and less modestly, the Centre for Critical and Cultural Studies at the University of Queensland) that have been among the most successful humanities research initiatives in recent years. In the UK, Australia and Hong Kong, the influence of cultural studies on secondary school curricula has been substantial.

It is possible, then, to develop an institutional history of cultural studies that would provide us with evidence of its achievements and of its capacity to create an acknowledged space for its knowledges in various contexts. There are limits to what this history can legitimately tell us about ‘cultural studies’, though. It is important to recognize that the institutional histories of cultural studies in the various places it has been established are highly contingent upon the regulatory, political, disciplinary and funding frameworks in place there at the time. To see these histories as in some fundamental, organic, manner emerging from the thing that is cultural studies itself, therefore strikes me as a mistake. In this respect, then, and notwithstanding the long genealogy of debates within cultural studies about its institutionalization, it is inaccurate and unhelpful to think of cultural studies as an institution that operates across national boundaries and jurisdictions in a uniform or consistent manner. So what I want to do now is to talk about cultural studies in what is a slightly more comfortable or consistent formation, as a field of academic practice. I want to consider what cultural studies, thought of in this way, has achieved in terms of influencing or enabling new kinds of work across the humanities.

## **CULTURAL STUDIES AND ...**

We are now in the era of the edited ‘handbook’ – big, compendious beasts aimed at a market seeking something between a

work of reference and a textbook and comprised of either many short, encyclopaedic entries or long, authoritative but synoptic, essays on key aspects of the field in question. As someone who has written textbooks in a number of areas, I find that I am sometimes among those invited to write for these handbooks. Occasionally these invitations concern cultural studies alone, but more often they are about cultural studies and something else – cultural studies and film studies, or media and communications studies, or television studies. In such cases, the editors are usually interested in my discussing how cultural studies has changed the other field of study. At times there is a very specific story to tell – as in the case of film studies, for instance, as we shall see shortly; in other cases, such as television studies, in my view it can be quite difficult to distinguish the distinctive contribution made by cultural studies because the two disciplines have become so thoroughly intertwined (which, of course, could itself be seen as evidence of cultural studies' influence). The point I want to make from this, though, is that this does seem to me to provide clear, if anecdotal, evidence that Bérubé's assessment of cultural studies' impact on the human sciences might be challenged once we move beyond the institutional context and consider instead cultural studies' activity in the free trade of ideas. It has become widely acknowledged, I would suggest, that cultural studies has not only performed its by now notorious role of raiding other disciplines for bits and pieces of their methodologies, but that it has also operated as a contributor to, indeed in some cases an enabler of, the development or renovation of other disciplines.

These activities have been of a varied kind. I don't want to go over the territory explored in the fifth chapter of my *British Cultural Studies: An Introduction* (2003), which traces cultural studies' relations with history, sociology, and a number of other disciplines or fields. Interested readers can follow this up for themselves. Rather, I want to highlight several instances that can serve as examples of the particular kinds of influence I want to suggest that cultural studies has generated. In my first example,

film studies, what cultural studies can claim to have done is to significantly extend the purchase of film studies by showing how it might approach new objects of study, new contexts of consumption, and alternative ways of thinking about how film texts generate both their pleasures and their meanings.

I should admit that I can't claim to be a disinterested observer here. My film studies textbook *Film as Social Practice* (the first edition of which was published in 1988), was explicitly designed as a cultural studies perspective on the study of film. It broke with the aesthetic or predominantly textual modes of analysis that prevailed at the time in order to situate film as a social, rather than only a textual, practice within popular culture. Then, my *The Film Cultures Reader* (2002) highlighted recent directions in the study of film as culture, as industry, or as social practice and included among these directions the influence of cultural studies and cultural history on the methodologies used to study film and popular culture. As I point out elsewhere (Turner, 2008a: 270–1), any demonstration of this influence needs to acknowledge the very different histories of this relationship in, say, the UK or the USA – and the very different formations of both cultural studies and film studies in the varied locations in which they occur. Nonetheless, the story is worth retelling.

When cultural studies began in the USA, it was not much interested in film. That disinterest was at first enthusiastically reciprocated by a film studies that was dominated by an aesthetic and canonical approach to film texts, which was well established as a discrete disciplinary formation, and thus was in little need of constructing alliances with the likes of cultural studies. In the UK, I have suggested, it was very different:

Film Studies took longer to establish itself in the university system, and when it did gain a foothold there, film theory and cultural studies developed more or less in tandem. During the 1970s and the 1980s, proponents of both traditions participated enthusiastically in many of the same debates – albeit often from competing points of view. In the late 1970s, for instance, the Birmingham

Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies devoted a whole research project to debating and refining the textual approaches identified with the editorial position articulated in the pages of the journal, *Screen* (for example, see Hall 1980; Morley, 1980). The popular success and broadly cross-disciplinary application of an early outcome of such debates, John Berger's *Ways of Seeing* (1972), indicates something of the contemporary consensus around the problems to be addressed – and the methodologies available – within cultural, representational, and film theory at that time. (Turner, 2008a: 271)

As the shared interest in understanding the text/spectator/audience relation lost its prominence for cultural studies in the early 1990s, the trajectories of the two fields began to describe different paths. However, the intellectual trade between the two fields continued and, as we shall see, it is probably not controversial to suggest that the British version of film studies has, progressively, taken on a character that owes a significant debt to its connection with work in cultural studies.

In my view, that is all to the good. There are certainly specific areas of film studies which were poorly developed, if not simply ignored, until cultural studies work started to be picked up by film scholars. The 1970s version of film studies – wherever we might want to locate it – was not well equipped to deal with popular cinema, with films that aimed at being entertainments rather than high art. At that time, film studies did not have a developed theory of the popular, and it was to remain untouched for many years by the increasing sophistication of television studies' analyses of the audience, or by cultural studies' broader understandings of media consumption. Film theory's single-minded focus on the text and the 'spectator' meant that it neglected other aspects of the experience of cinema-going – especially those which connected it to the practices of film culture that were more social than aesthetic. Finally, as new technologies emerged and as film culture gave way to screen cultures, it became even less tenable to focus so exclusively upon theories of representation.



British television studies – itself at this point a major focus for cultural studies – needs to be recognized as a serious interlocutor for British film studies as early as the mid-1980s (Kuhn, 1984). Given the strength of British television studies over the 1980s, and given the lack of any particularly strong boundaries between the fields – with scholars moving between them without any indication of breaching a border – it is probably not surprising that the connection between film and television studies resulted in British film studies' transformation over the 1980s and 1990s. By 2000, Gledhill and Williams were telling us we had to 'reinvent' film studies in ways that accommodate the shift towards dealing with popular film genres, film audiences and the social context of film texts, their production and consumption – all employing perspectives that had been shaped by cultural studies. I would regard the work of Yvonne Tasker (1993) on popular action cinema, for example, as representative of such a shift. A broader interest in film as the focal point of a larger set of socio-cultural relations is also evident in Jackie Stacey's study of film audiences, *Star Gazing* (1993). I have characterized this shift as one that takes British film studies from analysing film as an aesthetic object or as representation, towards understanding film as a social practice (Turner, 2008a).

In the USA, the shifts occur slightly later, but they did happen there as well. By the early 1990s, several important US film scholars were explicitly discussing the usefulness of British approaches to popular cinema and its audience. In particular, they drew on Bennett and Woollacott's (1987) study of the reception of the James Bond movies in which the notion of the 'reading formation' – a thoroughly cultural studies contextualization of reception – was outlined. Among the significant contributions to American film studies which make direct use of this work are Janet Staiger's *Interpreting Films* (1992) and *Perverse Spectators* (2000), as well as Barbara Klinger's *Melodrama and Meaning* (1994). More recently, the return of something like a new 'cinema of attractions' (Campora, 2009; Gunning, 1986) through new digital technologies, computer-generated imagery, and the rise of a cinema of

special effects that privileges spectacle over narrative, has challenged film studies to further renovate its understandings of the cultural and technological contexts for both production and consumption.

To widen the frame now, it would not be an exaggeration to claim that film studies, by and large and wherever it is now practised, has experienced something of a 'cultural turn' as it has sought new explanations of the medium's function for its audiences. It is not alone there, of course, and perhaps this might suggest that the influence of cultural studies on the humanities disciplines has been relatively generalized. In my view, however, there are several areas where the influence of cultural studies on film studies has been direct, specific and generative, encouraging the development of a more diverse and pluralistic set of approaches for the discipline. Film studies got what it needed from cultural studies; and it could have got this from nowhere else. What it needed was indeed among the core contributions that cultural studies has made to the new humanities: its theorization of the popular, its interest in the pleasures of consumption and the experience of audiences, its openness to the meaningfulness of the practices of everyday life, and its determinedly contextualized account of representation. The result was a significant expansion of the discipline's purchase and an enhancement of the density of texture in its conceptual frameworks.

My second example highlights a perhaps even more fundamentally enabling contribution that cultural studies has made to the development of the many 'new humanities' interdisciplinary fields that have opened up in the past 20 or 30 years. Cultural studies' extensive theoretical literature has proven particularly helpful as a means of facilitating the intellectual trade across disciplines that shared an interest in the problematic of culture: that is, it provided some methodological strategies, as well as the theoretical rationale, to develop interdisciplinary fields through the mobilization of its conceptualization of culture and its application to particular research sites or problems. (I will return to this in the discussion of internationalization in

Chapter 5.) One of the more explicit examples, where the field in question spent a great deal of time discussing its relation with cultural studies, is American studies.

Over the 1970s and 1980s, a particularly common and fruitful mode of multidisciplinary study was in many places called area studies – Latin American studies, Australian studies, American studies and so on. Most of these programmes – and I graduated from one myself in the late 1970s, the English and American studies programme at the University of East Anglia (UEA) – were in fact loosely structured multidisciplinary programmes in which students could study their ‘area’ (that is, say, America or Australia) from a number of disciplinary perspectives (at UEA, when I was there, the dominant disciplines were literary studies, history and cinema studies). Often there was discussion about the theoretical resources available to make an area study more properly interdisciplinary as distinct from multidisciplinary<sup>7</sup>: that is, to find a way to connect the outcomes of the individual disciplines’ enquiries through a set of analytic or explanatory protocols that would provide the area with something like a methodology or a core theoretical framework. As the contributing disciplines responded to the waves of theoretical development that began hitting them from the early 1970s onwards, and as the tide of European cultural and literary theory rose, there was increasing pressure to find a way to endow area studies with an equivalent level of theoretical sophistication. Cultural studies in Australia, for instance, harangued Australian studies for its lack of ‘theory’ and staged a short-lived campaign to renovate it or perhaps to incorporate it – in the end, to no avail<sup>8</sup>: ultimately, the two fields went their own ways and a tradition that would go on to describe itself informally as Australian cultural studies was the result.

It was different for American studies. From the 1970s onward into the 2000s, American studies has been engaged in a wide-ranging debate about the nature and future of the field: as the so-called ‘myth and symbol’ paradigm was losing its dominance, as new social and political formations demanded to be reflected in

the questions asked by American studies scholars, and as the commitment to ‘American exceptionalism’<sup>9</sup> was questioned. Among these debates, particularly as we head into the 1980s and 1990s, there was a discussion about the usefulness of an upstart British cultural studies in helping American studies deal with what had long been criticized as its failure to ‘critically and systematically analyze concepts of culture’ (Sklar, 1975: 260). From the outside, it seems as if these discussions generated plenty of heat: George Lipsitz dramatizes this by his ironic proclamation that ‘a specter is haunting American Studies, the specter of European cultural theory’:

During the past two decades, European critics from a variety of perspectives have theorized a ‘crisis of representation’ that has called into question basic assumptions within the disciplines central to the American Studies project – literary studies, art history, anthropology, geography, history and legal studies. From the structuralist Marxism of Louis Althusser to the psychoanalytic interventions of Jaques Lacan, from Foucauldian post-structuralism to the French feminism of Luce Irigaray and Hélène Cixous, from Derridean deconstruction to the dialogic criticism of Mikhail Bakhtin, European theory has revolutionized the study of culture. (1990: 616)

Lipsitz’ response to this revolution is to embrace it, highlighting the homology between the politics underpinning so much of European cultural theory<sup>10</sup> with the politics informing the beginnings of American studies in the 1930s, as well as the ‘affinity between European cultural theory and American popular culture’ that makes cultural studies seem a comfortable fit<sup>11</sup> with American studies:

... [C]ontemporary European cultural theory resonates with the categories and questions of American Studies traditions: indeed, it is fair to say that the development of American Studies itself anticipated many of the cross-disciplinary epistemological and hermeneutic concerns at the heart of European cultural theory (622).

Even though parts of the history of American Studies were pre-occupied with what Lipsitz describes as a 'mythical cultural consensus', he argues that this 'did not prevent American Studies scholars from asking critical questions about the relationship between the social construction of cultural categories and power relations in American society' (622). Given that the focus of American studies was upon culture, and given the lack of any American equivalent to the strong ideological impediment to the focus upon popular culture and everyday life experienced in the UK (I am thinking of what is usually called the 'culture and civilization tradition' (see Turner, 2003: 34–8)), there were good reasons why American studies, as it reconsidered what it should do and for whom, might turn to cultural studies. That is certainly how some of cultural studies' advocates within American studies put it; as Barry Shanks described the situation in 1997, cultural studies 'provided compelling new answers to the most central problem that had haunted the field: how is "culture" itself best understood and best investigated?' (1997: 96–7). British cultural studies, Shanks goes on to say, may not have solved this problem for all American studies scholars but it did provide 'new ways to work and think productively within the tensions they described' (97). Importantly, and this is a dimension of the early work in cultural studies that tends to be forgotten these days, Shanks points out that British cultural studies provided a demonstration of how cultural theory could be integrated into, and inform, empirical work. 'Throughout the eighties', Shanks reminds us, 'even as theoretical exploration of cultural processes grew ever more elaborate (and, yes, perhaps arcane), British cultural studies never lost its focus on empirical research in concrete situations'(109), and it demonstrated how these two activities could proceed in a productive partnership.

Most would see American studies as having been transformed over this period, and when you look at subsequent edited collections and anthologies (for example Radway et al., 2009), their task seems to be one of processing that transformation, reporting and explaining it to a still heterogeneous and dynamic constituency of

American studies scholars. Hartley and Pearson, in particular, construct an ingenious blend of American studies and cultural studies to produce the 'American Cultural Studies' of their anthology, that recognizes the part played by both intellectual traditions – the provincial or national tradition of American studies, and the imported and then indigenized contributions from British cultural studies (2000). It is not controversial to argue that, within the practice of American studies in the 1990s and into the 2000s, cultural studies played a significant and perhaps even at times a dominant role in terms of shifting the kinds of subject matter and topics approached within the field (more work on media, popular culture, and everyday life, in the first instance) as well as the theoretical perspectives adopted. The debates did not terminate there, however, and American studies has continued to be a lively, dynamic and highly contested field in which the politics of academic practice has been at the forefront now for quite some time. The media and popular culture end of cultural studies is not so prominent today, I am told by those working in the field, and theoretically inflected modes of cultural history seem to be filling that gap.

I do not claim any recent expertise in American studies, so this is very much an outsider's account; within the field, I am sure there are nuances and complexities I have overlooked. Nonetheless, the point I am making here is not just that cultural studies played an important role in the ongoing transformation of American studies, but that what cultural studies has been able to do – in area studies and elsewhere – is to provide an example of how one might deal with the problematic of culture within an interdisciplinary field. Culture, as imported from cultural studies, was then an enabling concept – not so much because it came with prescribed methods, but because it was already a well-developed (but not settled) focus for further debate, elaboration, analysis and application. Typically, where area studies had maintained their parallel disciplinary models but had largely relied on their juxtaposition as a means of seeking some interdisciplinary exchange, what cultural studies



directly addressed and indeed enabled was the *articulation*<sup>12</sup> of these models and their perspectives. While some area studies and interdisciplinary fields sought out other avenues, it is clear that for many in American studies, as well as in gender studies, sexuality studies and a range of other 'new humanities' fields, cultural studies' capacity to theorize the processes of articulation was a fundamental benefit.

## CONCLUSION

I want to conclude this chapter by returning to the question asked by Michael Bérubé (2009): how have university studies in the humanities changed as a result of cultural studies? That seems to me a thoroughly legitimate question to ask and I want to provide a response.

Now, the first, and to my mind the really obvious, answer to this is that cultural studies rescued the media, contemporary popular culture and everyday life from the neglect (or, worse, from the distaste) of the traditional or established disciplines. I know, of course, that many scholars from these other disciplines – particularly from sociology, anthropology and English – angrily refute this, and indeed regard cultural studies as having appropriated *their* subject areas. I am not going to rehearse what are now very familiar and probably permanently unresolved debates in order to start arguing about this all over again. I am sure most of us long ago lost patience with this dispute. But, for the record, let me simply state that, like just about everybody else in cultural studies, I reject such claims. Certainly cultural studies shared with a discipline such as sociology an interest in some of the same social phenomena, but what has always marked the difference between these two intellectual traditions is cultural studies' theoretical engagement with representation and a commitment to the social and political usefulness of the products of that engagement<sup>13</sup>. Hence, cultural studies' early and distinctive focus on theorizing the text (and, conversely, the empirical disciplines'

disparagement of this work), as well as its application of such theories to the analysis of the contemporary media. However, the crucial point I would want to stress is that, yes, there certainly *are* disciplines which could have seen the things that were done later by cultural studies as among their legitimate objects of enquiry. Largely, however, they ignored them because they did not recognize their importance – until, that is, they were developed as the objects of cultural studies. My characterization of how the established disciplines dealt with the media and popular culture before cultural studies turned up compares their treatment to that of an old car that someone had abandoned to rust in a vacant lot. It was cultural studies that hopped in, hot-wired it and drove it away, took it to the body shop to be repaired and customized, only to find that when they took it out for a spin the previous owners chased them down the road, yelling out ‘Hey, that’s my car!’

My second answer to the question is that cultural studies, in its various formations and influences, has played a part in renovating, recharging or otherwise transforming what gets done in particular disciplines. Again, there is a reasonably extensive literature on this – particularly the relations between cultural studies and history, or cultural geography, or literary studies<sup>14</sup>. By way of providing a further example, a less widely circulated story can be told about cultural studies’ influence on the field of Asian studies in Australia. Asian studies does have a long history there and therefore almost inevitably has retained elements of a residually Orientalist academic practice: even now it still has one or two ‘old China hands’ who maintain an elitist, conservative or traditional view of what constitutes an appropriate research topic – let alone what constitutes an appropriate research method. While Asian studies is plural, the established paradigm for most of the older generation of Asian studies scholars was that they pursued an interest in one particular country rather than a region and, in most cases, this was from a single, traditionally disciplinary, point of view. In the 1990s, as some younger Asian studies scholars with backgrounds in media studies, cultural studies or literary theory

began to take up topics to do with the media, popular culture or the politics of representation around sexuality, gender and ethnicity<sup>15</sup>, and to do so in ways that employed a more comparative research practice, a generational divide developed. While initially this division was policed, if not by blanket exclusion then certainly by the open disparagement of such work within the Asian studies community, cultural studies (and not just in Australia) provided a congenial alternative context in which some of these scholars could publish or present their work. This enabled the coming generation of Asian studies scholars to do work that was dramatically different to that of their predecessors: explicitly theorized, interdisciplinary and comparative, focused largely around issues of representation and popular culture within Asia, their work has found itself uniquely placed to engage productively with the burst of cultural modernization that has transformed so many countries in the region. As international recognition grew, and as Australian cultural studies itself gained prominence and respectability, the new generation of Asian studies scholar was no longer so vulnerable to the disapproval of their colleagues. Today, this new wave of scholars is close to exercising a dominant influence on what constitutes Asian studies in Australia and is constructing closer collaborative ties with the well-established networks of cultural studies scholars within Asia itself. As a result, a field that was looking moribund a decade or so ago is now vibrant and expanding and increasingly transnational: its relations to other interdisciplinary fields – cultural studies, communications studies, gender studies and so on – are prospering, to the benefit of all.

There are many other things one might mention in response to Bérubé's question as a means of nominating what cultural studies can legitimately claim to have achieved. However, that is probably enough for the moment. The task for me now is to begin to focus on some aspects of the practice of cultural studies today, including some that were no doubt the provocation to the rhetorical question mentioned in the introduction – 'Is this what we have become?' It is time to move on to my analysis of some of the more worrying things cultural studies has

become in order to outline my critique of the contemporary practice of cultural studies. When Stuart Hall is reported as saying that he cannot bear to read another analysis of *The Sopranos* (McCabe, 2007: 29), on the one hand, and when so many people are writing analyses of *The Sopranos*, on the other hand, the warning bells for cultural studies should be ringing. I am certainly hearing these warning bells loud and clear, and I want to devote the rest of the book to discussing what I think may have set them off.

## NOTES

- 1 Among my favourite examples of the rancorous dismissal of cultural studies is Bourdieu and Wacquant's thumbnail definition of the field: 'Cultural Studies, this mongrel domain, born in England in the 1970s, which owes its international dissemination (which is the whole of its existence) to a successful publishing policy' (1999: 47).
- 2 Cultural studies is not alone in this, of course, but it has certainly played its part in contributing to what has become something of an ethnographic turn in the humanities and social sciences.
- 3 In Hall's 2007 interview with Colin McCabe, he acknowledges both of these points: 'the institutionalization was inevitable', he says. 'Cultural studies would have disappeared if it hadn't become institutionalised, but the process of institutionalization itself kind of robbed it of some of its cutting edge' (McCabe, 2007: 28).
- 4 The most significant monument to these, of course, is the Grossberg et al. (eds) (1992) *Cultural Studies* anthology taken from the presentations at the famous 'Cultural studies: Now and in the Future' conference at the University of Illinois, Champaign-Urbana, in 1990. This volume carried the promise of changing the face of the humanities and social sciences in America, and certainly achieved extraordinary prominence for some time. One of its most notable reviews was by Bérubé himself: it was featured on the cover of *The Village Voice* (Bérubé, 1992), and it compared the epochal significance of the arrival of cultural studies to the Beatles' first performance at Carnegie Hall.
- 5 It is also supported by the analysis presented in David Shumway's paper at the 2010 Crossroads conference in Hong Kong: 'When Institutions haven't been built: Cultural Studies in the US'.

- 6 In Gilbert Rodman's CULSTUDS list of cultural studies programmes, there are 16 listed which actually use the phrase cultural studies in their title (<http://com.umn.edu/-grodman/cultstud/programs.html> (last accessed 27 January 2010)); In Kansas State University's advice to its students on where they might enrol in a cultural studies graduate programme, 12 programmes are listed. Of these, only seven have the name cultural studies in the title of the school, department or programme ([www.k-state.edu/english/programs/culturalstudies/phd.html](http://www.k-state.edu/english/programs/culturalstudies/phd.html) (last accessed 27 January 2010)).
- 7 At its simplest, a multidisciplinary approach incorporates multiple disciplinary perspectives, independently and discretely applied, whereas an interdisciplinary approach involves a degree of mixing and collaboration between the disciplinary perspectives and thus a way of allowing them to 'talk' to each other. Typically, in the way it has been practised in the humanities, this tends to involve the one person working with the theoretical tools from more than one discipline.
- 8 See Turner (1996b).
- 9 An interesting place to read about these debates is Janice Radway's presidential address to the American Studies Association, 'What's in a name?' (1999).
- 10 Lipsitz is talking about more than cultural studies here: it is the whole enterprise that usually gets labelled Theory. However, it is clear that the cultural studies version of 'Theory' is the one that ends up being discussed at the greatest length in his essay, and it is largely the benefits of cultural studies approaches to which he points.
- 11 It is significant that during this period, Janice Radway, one of the major stars of American cultural studies after her book *Reading the Romance* (1984) was so widely taken up, was the president of the American Studies Association.
- 12 I am using this here in the specialized sense employed within British cultural studies; see, for instance, the short gloss in the introduction to Grossberg et al. (1992: 8), or for a more elaborated discussion see Jennifer Daryl Slack (1996).
- 13 An interesting discussion of the relations between sociology and cultural studies, written well before people's interest in this debate was exhausted, is Janet Wolff's 'Cultural studies and the sociology of culture' (1998).
- 14 I should point out that, in the case of literary studies, my sense is that this story does not necessarily have a happy ending. It may well be that what changed in literary studies was quite fundamental to its claims to

legitimacy. Sociologist Michèle Lamont makes an interesting observation in the context of her examination of the culture of research funding bodies in the humanities: that as literary studies broadened its disciplinary agenda towards cultural studies, and ‘widened their interests to include history and anthropology’, ‘English scholars may have indirectly lowered the value of the purely literary analytical tools’ (Lamont, 2009: 72) – that is, a particular form of close textual analysis. I think there is something to that, as well as to the notion that what the public values about literature is precisely the things that the academy now often disavows – the traditional canon, a notion of a universal aesthetics, and an ethical-moral reading of literary value. Despite the boom in literary theory that so dominated the 1980s and 1990s, my own observation is that in many places now literary studies is a discipline which has lost its coherence as a set of practices and is engaged on a new search for legitimacy.

- 15 Examples of this generation include Kam Louie’s book on Chinese masculinity (2002), Vera Mackie’s study of feminism in Japan (2003), and Antonia Kinnane’s examinations of fashion in China (1999 with A. McLaren and 2007). There are clear continuities flowing from their more cultural studies inflected work to what I might describe more unequivocally as the ‘cultural studies’ generation, which includes scholars such as Stephanie Helmryk Donald, Mark McLelland, Larissa Hjorth, Audrey Yue and Fran Martin.