"Culture Spoken Here"

Transdisciplinarity and Cultural Studies in Universities

Henri Lefebvre described the space of the late twentieth century university as a 'space of damnation'':

The Faculty was conceived in terms of the concepts of the ...productivity of neocapitalist society, but falls short of the implications of such a conception. The buildings and the environment reflect the real nature of the intended project. It is an enterprise designed to produce mediocre intellectuals and "junior executives" for the management of this society, and transmit a body of specialized knowledge determined...by the social division of labour.... Situated in the midst of a civilization which...is based on the City, it might be described as a place of damnation.These functional buildings that are utterly devoid of character...were designed for the functions of education: vast amphitheaters, small "functional" rooms, drab halls, an administrative wing... [Here] manifest poverty sharply contrasts with the utopian and mythical richness of officially proposed culture and officially dispensed knowledge.... This contributes substantially to the disintegration of culture, formal knowledge and institutions (Lefebvre 1969:104-6).

This is a description of the campus at Nanterre, in suburban Paris, which was the scene of the Parisian student uprisings of 1968. However, it could have been - and could be - any one of many campuses, the world over. Highlighting this point, are the continuing struggles over the state and location of campuses and their buildings by students, local elites and academics which continue to 'make good television' and news for media conglomerates. The description coincides well with the atmosphere of many contemporary universities.¹

The usefulness of this quotation is that it shows how the term 'culture' is bound up with notions of civility and civilization. Academic theories of culture used in Cultural Studies have a different conception of culture than policy uses of the term in multicultural societies, and are different again from the conception of culture as 'the arts' typically highbrow arts. Lefebvre starts us off with or feet on the ground with an ethnographic vision of culture as a way of life which is the object of struggle - 'official culture' and its environments against the 'lived culture' of everyday life and its homey settings.

The focus of this paper is the status of cultural studies in North American academia, where is has emerged as both the locus of radicalizing acitvities - for example, the introduction of black feminist theory and postcolonial critique. These have sought to restructure the arts and social sciences on interdisciplinary lines. However, cultural studies has more often than not either been incorporated within traditional-discipline departments as an 'academic ghetto', such as in Sociology or English, or cultural studies has become a kind of interdisciplinary 'no-man's land', caught in a permanent, liminal status, 'betwixt and between' departments and faculties which control access to academic resources. On the one hand, the prevalence of the use of the 'culture' to replace

¹ This paper was first presented in an early version at the Carleton conference, 'Exploring Contemporary Discourse Analysis', Ottawa, and at the 'Cultural Studies in Canada' Conference, University of Toronto. My thanks to Penny Ironstone, Jill Scott, A.N. Packwood and conference participants for their comments. A version was previously published in Portuguese in the Brazilian journal *Logos* 5 1996.p/43-7.

other terms such as 'society' marks 'cultural studies' out as more than an approach, it is a new discourse *on* the social. It also hold the seeds of a transdisciplinarity which promises to not only transgress across disciplines, but to slowly transform them over time.

Cultural studies feels like Lefebvre's 'space of damnation'. Why? It is because we are cast out, outside of the utopian vision of modernity. The contrast of manifest lack, poverty and decline short-circuits founding modernist narratives of progress, freedom and possibility. In a society which apparently has no need of intellectuals (we have journalists) and no need of scholarship (we have databases such as 'Sociofile'), scholarship appears as a simulation of learning and the institutions of higher education as simulacra of universities where credentialism overtakes insight and tenure-oriented research displaces the courageous pursuit of critical thought and the challenge to theorize anew.

Are we condemned to this intellectual space of *damnation*? This is a strong term with tremendous ethical and moral leverage. Perhaps there is a positive aspect to this hell. Lefebvre's complaint is not a planning problem, but a lament for *culture*. I would like to consider the problems posed by cultural research and cultural studies to institutions traditionally oriented to academic disciplines. Where does 'culture' (which comes to us as a topic which induces a mixing of academic domains and a crossing of discipline boundaries) and transdisciplinarity fit in a sustaining vision of the university?

'Culture spoken here' is an aphorism which poses for us a series of questions. What do we mean by 'culture'? What by contrast is "the cultural"? What is cultural studies? Beyond definitions, is "culture" more than a concept: is it a discourse on everyday life? Other than in the pub, where in the university would one look a 'culture' and reflections on 'culture' in the broad sense? To answer such questions I would like to take a brief detour through the historical usage of 'culture'.

'hot flaming cultures'

The anthropologists, Kroeber and Kluckohn cite 164 definitions in their *Culture: A Critical review* of concepts and definitions (1963). Once 'culture' acquired its technical anthropological definition in 1871, no attempt to define the term appears for 32 years. Only six definitions are proposed between 1903 and 1916, but beyond this date up to 1950 157 definitions appear. As they state: "in the first three-fifths of our eighty years, less than four percent [of definitions]; in the last two-fifths, ninety-six percent." (Kroeber and Kluckohn 1963: 292). From their survey, in the most general of terms they conclude that:

culture is a product; is historical; includes ideas, patterns, and values; is selective; is learned; is based upon symbols; and is an abstraction from behaviour and the products of behaviour (Kroeber and Kluckohn 1963: 308).

A list-in-lieu-of-definition alerts one that 'Culture' is a demon word with definitions and usages which overlap because they have been formed historically through borrowing and combining preexisting understandings of the word. 'Culture' seems to include everything. In English prior to the middle of the eighteenth century 'a culture' was a ploughshare or implement for cultivation - a medieval writer speaks of blacksmiths forging 'hot flaming cultures'. The contemporary meaning of 'culture', comes to us from the latin, cultura, (a form of the verb colere meaning tending, honoring or flattering) via the Old French couture to cultivate, till or fashion and then via the German Kultur where the term begins to take on its modern sense of an abstract term for the created aspects of social totality (a style or way of life invented by people).

The notion and debates about 'culture' date from the dawning of the Renaissance idea, receiving motivation from the contention that perhaps "the Moderns' might rival or even surpass 'the Ancients'. Empiricism, and the achievements of science, the development of the vernacular led toward the notion of progress and of the development and cultivation of the spirit of peoples (Voltaire *Essai sur les Moeurs et l'Esprit des Nations* 1756 (1957), later developed in Hegel's posthumous 1837 *Philosophy of History* (see Hegel 1969)). Not only did this conception of progress become accepted but its source was clearly the rational Enlightenment: Reason (Kroeber and Kluckohn 1963: 284).

The German philosophers Herder (1784-1791) and Adelung (1782) developed the philological study of foreign moeurs or customs, as the study of cultures, developing the Germanic sense of Kultur away from the French culture toward the anthropological sense of 'culture-historical types'. The work of Klemm (Allgemeine Culturgeschichte der Menscheit (General Culture History) 1843-1852 10 vols.) is the seminal point at which Kultur comes to take on the sense of a super-organic state or condition which characterizes all societies (cf. Spencer). From Klemm's usage, Edward B. Tylor drew his definition of culture as a 'whole way of life'. This understanding had widespread currency from the mid 1800s onward, given impetus and a strategic function by debates over the merits and perceived superiority of the German 'way of life'. Numerous enumerative definitions followed which attempted to specify the aspects or elements of culture. In English, Matthew Arnold's definition of culture as 'the pursuit of perfection, characterized by sweetness and light' (Kroeber and Kluckohn 1963: 287) in which the sense of cultivation and husbandry predominates. Instead of culture, Kroeber and Kluckohn identify the prevalence of the concept of 'civilization' in British social science until the post-World War II period. This sense continues in English, enshrined in the Oxford English Dictionary where an anthropological sense of 'culture' did not appear until Tylor's definition was cited in the Supplement of 1933, where it remains marginalized to this day:

Culture: the civilisation of a people (especially at a certain stage of its development or history).

Kroeber and Kluckohn treat Tylor's definition as the normative meaning of the word 'culture'. The significant feature of anthropological discourses on society, is the interchangeability of the terms 'culture' and 'civilization'. But the usage today has changed, and is prominently different in cultural This alerts us to the some greater studies. discursive 'stake' than simply denotative precision. Culture is a modern term, but not strictly metropolitan: there is a strong sense of the vernacular and agrarian. By contrast 'civilization' (civilitas) - with its attendant sense of 'civility' has maintained its 'civil' political and urban sense to this day. But while the roots of the word lie in the high-culture language of Latin, its usage was strictly vernacular, and originally agrarian. In its senses of cultivation and of the ploughshare, 'culture' stands in distinction to metropolitan 'civility'. It is a term of the land, and the nation as a situated people. As such it carries a conceptual preference for dwelling and the occupation of space over manners and historical epochs. This is the difference between habit and tradition and selfconscious artifice and the celebration of the longevity of empire. 'Culture' pertains to selfsociability, to a single individual alone or to the group by itself. 'Civility' pertains to interaction with others, to the perception of the group from an external vantage point, and to 'cross-cultural' relations. Despite our tendency to equate the two terms, there is thus a difference between being 'cultured' and being 'civilized'.

In the Anglophone world, 'Culture', as opposed to anthropological studies of cultures and civilizations, takes its place as a field of serious study with the work of Raymond Williams and the development of Cultural Studies based on British Marxist reception of Althusser's critique of ideological apparatuses and institutional practices based in the 'Birmingham School'. This work followed on a long debate in the U.K. running from before World War I, in the work of Leavis, T.S. Eliott, J.B. Priestley and others who exposed the problematic nature of culture as a concept. It is from this work, centred around the 1970s debates of the Birmingham School that 'culture' is perhaps best known to us. It is also in this context of cultural studies that 'culture' looses its established institutional mantel to take on a new one. Its anthropological definitions are left to languish in the unread history of another field and issues of method appear new and startling again.

Kroeber and Kluckohn's study suggests that anthropology has been slow to include values, symbols and meanings in the notion of culture, preferring traditional, ritualized actions, customs, under the influence of the natural history approach of Franz Boas (To this I would add the generally empirical bent of social scientists writing in English through the first half of the twentieth century). The lack of one of the central aspects of contemporary understandings of 'culture', highlights for us the historicity and variability of the concept. Raymond Williams makes values the central point of culture in his book Culture (1981). The lack of theoretical elaboration in Kroeber and Kluckohn text of definitions and numerous 'statements about culture' demonstrates that 'culture' has come down to us as a concept, central in anthropology, which floated free of a *theory* of culture or cultures. This is striking for anyone familiar with the intensity with which students of cultural studies talk 'theory-eze'.

culture is not a concept

Culture is a logical construct in the sense that it takes its place somewhere within a logical framework. But it is moreover a discursive construction. The word 'culture' is deployed in speech-acts and rhetorical projects within the context of a universe of other signs and actions. This discursive formation has its denotative anchoring points in actions but these are already symbolically worked over [Levi Strauss?]. 'Culture' is a discourse on form and a way of moulding diverse elements into a coherent discourse on social totality. It is not a concept, nor a category in the strict philosophical sense which can be simply defined. Instead, culture is a way of talking. 'Culture spoken here' alerts us that 'culture' is not just a term but a language in which everyday human interaction is conceived of in a manner different from, for example, sociology where a stress is placed on 'society' and the social. Different terms used systematically, have the effect of directing and focussing attention on different aspects of social life.

In Tylor's paradigmatic definition, 'culture' is a: 'complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, law, morals, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society' (Tylor 1871:1 Kroeber and Kluckohn 1963: 81). Culture is thus defined ennumeratively as an inclusive concept in terms of an infinite series of elements. These elements exceed the purely social to include a religious, technological and legal dimension. The use of the word 'culture' is the thread which gives this heterogeneous collection of discourses, institutional arrangements, rules, decrees, discussions and propositions a unified character. Apparently unconnected phenomena like art and customs can be unified in the mind and in language (cf. Foucault).

Form is posed as a central concept for any cultural study. In general this is treated at a lower analytical level than that of an overall culture. Form is a concept appropriate to questions of subcultural practice and coding. Yet, form is also relevant to the higher-level of culture and the cultural in the sense conveyed in the statement that "Form is the secretion of culture'. Form is a matter of ordering, or arrangement, of emphasis.' (Kroeber and Kluckohn 1963: 316). The prioritization of form comes from the sociological tradition (Hegel, Comte, Marx, Weber, Simmel...) in which one or another particular form has been argued to be the main dynamic in the historical process: forms of the organization of production; forms of technological control of the environment; forms of religious beliefs and practices; forms of affiliation and so on.

As such 'culture' is an amalgam: it denotes a set of processes and aspects of social action. Culture as a logical construct is not reducible to any of its components. It is more than values alone; more than learned behaviour alone; more than adaptive styles or modes of accomplishing the tasks of everyday life. Tylor's apparently all-encompassing definition has been stated in even more expansive terms as:

> the sum total *and organisation* of the social heritages which have acquired social meaning because of racial temperament and of the historical life of the group (Park and Burgess 1921:72 cited in Kroeber and Kluckohn 1963:89 my italics).

Even while stressing social heritage and historical - traditions? - Park and Burgess take a stab at indicating not only totality but the internal organization of totality. Culture has order besides content and acquires a normative character in the sense that organization is consistently preferred to a disorganized field in the tradition of European thought. The history of the definition is marked by these attempts at enumeration. 'Culture' is the proper name of a *discourse on totality*. Such a totality is more than social, as it ordinates both the meaning *and* identity of material objects. The discourse of culture manifests itself in:

the identities it fixes for its objects;
the methodological space which provides the necessary light' and perspectival 'angle' to establish/view these objects. These tules of encounter'ensure the material stability of the identities first established discursively;

•position of the subject visà visin relationship to the objects and processes specified by the term.

'Culture' as a discourse appears to have had strategic and unifying legislative functions. Do these continue? Does this discourse have a jurisdictional function? That is, does it suggest conventional relations among elements, a division of labour and meaning and relations between other discourses and institutions which actualize this discourse as a nondiscursive political reality? Is 'culture' an efficient way of seeing the world? To answer this we must turn briefly to cultural studies and the cultural, which will bring us back to our opening description of the university. What is cultural studies? Cultural studies is the study of 'the cultural' - but what is 'the cultural'?

The cultural is the arena of historical codes. symbolic re-coding and the actualisation of these codes in everyday life as embodied cultural forms and practices. In this process, abstract structures such as 'culture' and meaning become concrete practices and arrangements in a space. Both its constituents and the space itself are characterised by difference. Gestures of resistance, subaltern forms and codes and oppositional practices are thus seminal. I dub the cultural as an arena because this spatial definition recalls the formal issues raised above. 'The cultural' is thus permeated by and analytically inseparable (in any way, eg. as determined or determining) from the economic (understood in any sense of the term) even while it transcends a patriarchal division of a publiceconomic sphere from a private-domestic sphere.

In general, Cultural Studies has remained reflexive, being conceived in the post-Cartesian awareness of the construction of the subject and the social construction of knowledge. Its anti-normativity lends it the advantage of relativism. However, it forces it out of institutionalized moral political relations in universities which are constructed as relations between disciplines. The 'cultural' is also non-normative and amoral, (ie non-judgemental) but not disengaged (ie. still 'committed'). Nonetheless, it is still critical. Critique need not be anchored in transcendent moral principles built around a conception of universal (male) subject, but may be contingent, ethical and built around the group and forms of social interaction (see Shields 1992a).

damnation and critique

The non-disciplinary status of cultural studies has allowed it to pass through the discipline grid of the university, embedding itself hologrammatically in a succession of fields. Cultural studies has thus been seized upon as a critical space for the reassessment of individual disciplines. However, fewer people have exploited the opportunity for a critique of discipline-boundaries and the Cartesian division of subjects and fields. Ironically, the result is a common set of theoretical references (poststructuralist theory, semiotics, 'ethnographic' studies of the context of textual or artistic production and consumption and so on) which permit crossdisciplinary communication. As a result the tendency to exchange ideas has been amplified.

This space of critique is a political site, but one outside the normal relations of the political. It is an interstice. A site of exclusion, damnation. An unmeasured and incalculable hell-space. It is in Hakim Bey's sense a 'Temporary Autonomous Zone'; Mcluhan calls these 'anti-environments' and also identifies them as sites which have heterotopic potential (the term is Foucault's). Henri Lefebvre calls these 'counterspaces' - like squatted buildings, or slums, outside the territorializing property relations of commodity capitalism as they apply to space. Such spaces allow critical distance. This space induces a forced-comparativism. This is not a truly perspectival relation in which the observer is an objective Cartesian subject outside a pictorial, or social plane. Rather it is a reflexive relation (like a painting where the subjects look out at you as much as you look in at them). An over-riding of the conventionally one-way inside-outside relationships contributes to the maintenance of a perpetual state of self-reflexive critique.

institutions and transdisciplinarity

Who owns this study of the cultural? Which discipline is the rightful heir to the energies unleashed by cultural studies? The answer is none of them, because cultural studies is from *elsewhere*, outside the old metropolitan political and legal conventions of *civilitas*. We could sum this up by saying that cultural studies breaks across the differentiation and specialisms established in modernity between various value spheres and action arenas. Cultural studies is a transdisciplinary field which crosses borders, reverses and even opens up relations, problematizes disciplines, debates the configuration of university faculties and redraws the humanist mapping of knowledges in favour of the subject understood from a post-Cartesian angle. If Cultural Studies is transdisciplinary it is also transgressive. I would like to insist on the

contingency, and reversible duplicity implied in this. We might also usefully force a distinction between transdisciplinarity and interdisciplinarity. This is not the interdisciplinarity of the liberal arts education: jack of all trades and master of none which encourages an obsolete Encyclopaedism and emprisons people within limited knowledges as perpetual 'junior executives' without authority in bureaucratic mechanisms. There is no point drawing upon a range of disciplines if the result is a sort of salad in which tomatoes are still tomatoes, the lettuce distinctly leafy and the garnish an added afterthought of leaking oils. Instead, we need to call down the ambitions of creating something new which resets the horizon of researches (plural). Rather than a salad, what is called for is an effort at transubstantiation: a last supper in which a transformative communion of discipline-knowledges takes place. Transdisciplinarity is the redemptive moment of this space of damnation.

Interdisciplinarity leaves the institution untouched. Transdisciplinarity transforms and reterritorializes the academy from within. It is not just corrosive but productive. It responds to the need for renewal as disciplines pull apart, atomized into easily policed individual researchers by external, institutional and discipline processes.

culture and the everyday

The vernacular, even agrarian heritage of 'culture' leads us to the examination of everyday life, the lived quality of culture and its texts, the performance of reception, the embodying of ideology and the practice of coding. It is a realm in which big and practical knowledges boil. The cultural is the sphere of the mastery of everyday activities including consumption and production. DeCerteau notes that cultural activities involved in consumption are poiesis, another form of production, just hidden because scattered and place-less, which manifests itself through its stylised, meaning-laden ways of using products even if not the production of them (1981:xii-xiii). We might add that *poesis* is linked to an *aesthetics*: an art of living and the production of an ethics.

We have noted above that 'the cultural' is a relational concept in which questions of form are central. (hence ethical and spatialising in the sense of spacing out elements in constellations). Conceived of in terms of value-spheres (Weber), it is the dedifferention of value spheres (Lash 1990). The cultural is social space. Hence the interest in everyday life (McRobbie, Benjamin, Simmel), the shift away from dualistic base-superstructure oppositions such as 'culturalism/structuralism'. Cultural studies includes the study of the broad context of texts and images (ideology), the relationship between meaning and material, and media practices and processes of recoding meaning and material to produce identities and This last necessarily includes representations. physical human bodies and their socially constructed identities. De Certeau asked:

> How does society resist being reduced [to Foucault's system of power?]...'what [miniscule and quotidian] popular procedures manipulate [or deflect] the mechanisms of discipline and conform to them only in order to evade them...what 'ways of operating' form the counterpart, on the [side of the dominated, to]...the mute processes that [Foucault argues] organize the establishment of the socioeconomic order[?] (DeCerteau 1981:xiv)

> Here we have the opening of interest in both processes of symbolic coding of practices in an anti-structural, anti-static direction. The focus is necessarily social, as the realization of individual coding are 'eroded' increasingly quickly by the vigourous ebb and flow of recodings and symbolic recombinations. Connected with practice, the cultural becomes an unstable and powerful arena of social action.

This arena of action is increasingly free of metanarratives, for example, the political ideals of modernity contested from all sides. In this sense, this arena is governed by temporary coalitions: aesthetic actions of combination and composition. 'The cultural' of cultural studies is a useful concept because it provides analytic coherence to the process of recombination of value spheres and social action arenas once kept separate under the conventions of modernity.

Bell hooks notes that it is under the rubric of Cultural Studies that stereotyped racial sexual and ethnic identities have been contested. These have been not only criticized but recoded and then operationalized through concrete symbolic practices such as demonstrations and interventions in not only policy debates but in debates in the popular press on race, ethnic, and gender relations which left new meanings etched on the minds and bodies of the population. Similarly, the distance between the symbolic operations (institutional and methodological) of ethnographic observers to represent research subjects and 'the cultural' itself has been challenged within the discursive terrain of cultural studies (bell hooks). The increased importance of the cultural has given Cultural Studies increased strategic importance. (The significance of the symbolic attests to the reconnection of the aesthetic and the practical, and hence the end of modernity's separated value spheres (cf. Weber)). It is also within cultural studies that an appreciation of the ironic self-implication of people within relations of ruling has challenged simplified histories of domination written only in terms of oppression.

The multiplication of cross-cultural exchanges precludes a global system of cultural meanings being fully secured. This has allowed conventional products to be appropriated in unconventional and sometimes subversive ways, for mass leisure technologies (eg. television) to be used as the tools of political struggle against the State.

critique, institutions and everyday life.

Thus Cultural Studies has combined new levels of activism together with traditional scholarship and often bitter internal criticism of the social order of 'academic ant-hills'. There have been few new areas of reearch and teaching which have been so corrosive to the tradition order of academia, and there have been few so willing to do battle with groups perceived as 'the old guard' in universities. However, I have been concerned in this programmatic manifesto not to sketch lines of advance like the skirmish parties of a modernist avant-garde, but to identify the points of condensation for a paradigmatic reordering of knowledge practices in academia.

Culture as a discourse opens up an unexpected discursive space of critique. As a transdisiplinary 'rave' it passes through the disciplinary structure of the university. Administrative attempts to anchor it to a separate space outside its intersecting disciplines fail even as cultural studies performs a resorting of European knowledges and a recoding of dominant discourses. Imagine: an established alumni of undergraduates with interdisciplinary degrees in cultural studies. Even a professor of cultural studies. Yet no department. Cultural Studies' lack of 'fit' perpetuates its status as a counterspace of critique, a space of damnation. In this vision, the academy could be a utopian locality which provides the culture - petri dish - the crucible for a culture no longer classical, no longer liberal humanist, nor the parade ground of capitalist youth training corps which meets the productive needs of the market and transmit knowledge determined and limited by the social division of labour. This reterritorialization of knowledge is the conjuncture of the institutionalization of cultural studies. This ladies and gentlemen is cultural studies and the new university: an transversal geometry of knowledge.

References

- Adelung, J.C. 1975 (1782). Über die Geschichte der deutscher Sprache ber deutsche Mundarten und deutsche Sprachlehre [und] Vom Urspringe der Sprache und Bildung der deutscehn wörter (Frankfurt am Main: Minerva)
- bell hooks (Gloria Watkins) 1990. 'Culture to Culture: ethnography and cultural studies as critical intervention' Ch. 13 in *Yearning* (Boston: South End Press)
- DeCerteau, Michel 1981. *The Practices of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press)
- Hegel, G.W.F. 1969 [1837]. *Hegel's Science of Logic*,A. V. Miller trans., London: Allen & Unwin.

- Herder, J.G. 192. (1784-1791). Über Literature und Gesellschaft: ausgewählte Schriften C. Tröger ed. (Leipzig: Reclam)
- Kroeber A. and Kluckohn, C. 1963. *Culture: A Critical* review of concepts and definitions (New York: Penguin)
- Lash, Scott 1990. The Sociology of Postmodernism (London: Sage)
- Lefebvre, Henri 1969. *The Explosion: Marxism and the French Upheaval* (New York: Modern Readers)
- Shields, Rob 1991. 'Introduction to the Ethic of Aesthetics' in *Theory Culture and Society* 8:1 (January-February). 1-6.
- Turner, V. 1974. Dramas Fields and Metaphors (Ithaca: Cornell U.P.)
- Tylor, Edward B. 1881. *Anthropology: An Introduction* (London: Macmillan)
- Wells, G.A. 1959. *Herder and After: A Study in the development of sociology* (The Hague: Mouton)
- Williams, R. 1981. *Culture* (Harmondsworth U.K.: Penguin)
- Voltaire, 1957 [1756]. 'Essai sur les Moeurs et l'Esprit des Nations' in R. Pomeau ed., *Oeuvres Historiques* (Paris: Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade)