Key Words

A JOURNAL OF CULTURAL MATERIALISM

1

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edited by

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Key Words: A Journal of Cultural Materialism

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This number of *Key Words* is dedicated to the memory of friend and colleague Brian Doyle (1943-1997). A culmination of Brian's work on the historical and ideological formation of the discipline of English was his influential book *English and Englishness*, published in the Routledge New Accents series in 1989. In recent years, his interests had turned towards what he called 'changing the culture of Cultural Studies', mounting an explicitly humanistic critique of the professionalisation of the discipline and its concern with high theory. He will be sadly missed.

Editorial

Jeff Wallace

Both the title and the sub-title of this new annual journal declare a debt to the work of Raymond Williams. Williams was one of this century's most important and influential socialist intellectuals, creating a body of work which helped to transform literary studies, and to lay the foundations of those disciplines which now combine or cluster around the categories of cultural/media/ communications studies. In his early formation, a love of the analytic and transformative power of literature combined with a political commitment which led to a profound exploration of and critical engagement with Marxism and, in particular, Marxist theories of culture. After this, for Williams, 'literature' and 'culture' could never again be considered without those quotation marks; they were historically-contingent concepts or, in the case of literature in particular, an abstraction from the totality of writing practices in society and the construction of a whole regime — private reading, literary poetics, educational institutionalisation — called 'literature'. Williams's developing materialist analysis of all cultural forms and practices meant an inevitable de-throning of the place of literature in his own work; dividing lines became blurred between his critical and fictional writing and his work on, for example, television, communication technologies, sociology of culture, cultural policy, socialism and democracy, and ecological politics.

At once organising that body of work, and making it distinctive, is what one contributor, Gargi Bhattacharyya, here calls 'that strange endeavour', cultural materialism; and it is to the extension and elaboration of that 'strange endeavour', rather than the work of Williams as such, that this journal is dedicated. While the intellectual and financial support of the Raymond Williams Society has made *Key Words* possible, this is not to say that the formation of the journal, in discussions over the past two years and more, has proceeded without varying degrees of Oedipal anxiety. Another contributor, Steven Connor, argues, albeit in a quite precise sense, that 'Raymond Williams's time is not our time'; a recent and substantial book on cultural materialism, reviewed in this number, suggests that Williams stands for a model of the intellectual, the 'cultural materialist pedagogue', which is increasingly anachronistic in an age when political and technological shifts threaten to render obsolete the traditional image and functions of the university.[1] Yet both accounts in their different ways seem to acknowledge the extent to which Williams anticipated such changes, in a project impelled by the sense of that 'long revolution' which would eventually make possible a socialist future. In the case of *Key Words*, such anxieties simply translate into

[1] Scott Wilson, *Cultural Materialism: Theory and Practice* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995).

a need to ensure that the journal does not become the repository of memorialist or hagiographic functions. *Key Words* will not be 'about' Williams's work, nor will every essay be obliged to make an obeisance, or even critically engage, with Williams. It will, rather, seek to extend Williams's project, recognizing that this process may well involve contestation as much as affirmation, and that the continuing reappraisal of 'cultural materialism' is likely to extend the concept into areas unrecognisable to Williams in his own time.

What, then, of the 'strange endeavour'? In *Marxism and Literature* (1977), Williams provisionally defined cultural materialism as 'a theory of the specificities of material cultural and literary production within historical materialism'.[2] A few brief moments of reflection are enough to indicate the complexity and multivalent possibilities of the term. First, cultural materialism instead of cultural idealism: cultural products do not transcend their conditions of production but are, in a strictly anti-essentialist way, materially *of* those conditions. While this position needs continually to be insisted upon, it can be difficult to know how best or on what grounds to fight for such inclusivity. Moreover, the 'specificity' of culture within historical materialism implies something about the nature of determination which initially appears to counter our first definition. Here, cultural materialism means not the shaping necessity of material conditions on culture so much as the ability of culture to actively, materially re-shape its context. It is in this precise sense that the term most clearly 'differs ... from what is most widely known as Marxist theory, and even from many of its variants'.[3] Cultural materialism was Williams's way of questioning the reductive economism of base-and-superstructure theory, as that theory is popularly (mis?)understood: culture is not to be explained away as the superstructural 'reflection' of some determining economic base, but has its own autonomy and agency, its own role in the contestation and determination of the order of things.

But what does 'culture' mean here anyway? As Gustav Klaus has noted, Williams constructs and exploits an ambivalence between analytic and evaluative senses of the term.[4] First, 'culture' for Williams was 'ordinary', the range of expressions and representations produced by a whole society in its reflections upon itself — or something, indeed, as bafflingly totalistic as a 'whole way of life'. But this inevitably encompasses a second, Arnoldian sense

[2] Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 5.
[3] Williams, *Marxism and Literature,* p. 5.
[4] Gustav Klaus, 'Cultural Materialism: A Summary of Principles', in W.John Morgan and Peter Preston (eds.), *Raymond Williams: Politics, Education, Letters* (Basingstoke and New York: Macmillan and St. Martin's Press, 1993), pp. 88-104.

of culture as the best that is known and thought, incorporating a hierarchical sense of the 'heights' of human achievement, primarily of course in the arts. The former sense was introduced by Williams to contest the latter, laying bare the bourgeois contours of Matthew Arnold's formulation and opening out the possibility of a concept of culture in which the creative achievements of the working class and other unrepresented/'minority' groups would be inherent.

Some might argue that this ambivalence is just too problematic; if culture *can* signify the whole semiotic life of a community, and yet also retain at convenient moments that sense of high, value-laden expression, what then is not cultural? Do we not risk here a descent into that reductive cultural*ism* of which Terry Eagleton, in his writings of recent years, has been so consistently wary? Cultural materialism has, in fact, already trembled under Eagleton's exacting gaze, in the essay 'Base and Superstructure in Raymond Williams'.[5] There, Eagleton maintained that Williams developed the concept out of a mistakenly-literalistic interpretation of Marxian 'superstructure': when Williams protests that he fails to see how art and thought can be consigned to some static or immaterial superstructure, implying thus that 'to label a phenomenon 'superstructural' is somehow to assign it a lesser degree of effective *reality* than an element of material production', he does not see how far, for Marx, superstructure was always a '*relational*' term, that is, it 'identifies those particular aspects of a social practice or institution which act in particular conditions as supports of exploitation and oppression' and 'invites us to contextualise that practice or institution in a specific way'.[6] For Eagleton, then, Williams throws the materialist baby out with the superstructural bathwater: denying that all cultural practice is purely superstructural should not be the same as dismissing altogether the category of 'superstructure' and its relative explanatory force, and the upshot of doing the latter is to make the term 'material' so inclusive as to be meaningless: 'for what, once you have demonstrated that language, culture or even consciousness is "material", do you then do?'[7]

When both constituent terms of the concept appear to encourage flexibility and inclusivity, it may therefore be unsurprising that the label 'cultural materialist' has developed a certain cachet, and this despite the fact that it is difficult to imagine a less modish figure than Raymond Williams. You can, after all, have your stringent political commitment signalled in 'materialist', and even thus have your intellectual activity linked by association with 'the labour

[5] Terry Eagleton, 'Base and Superstructure in Raymond Williams', in Terry Eagleton (ed.),*Raymond Williams: Critical Perspectives* (Oxford: Polity Press, 1989), pp. 165-175.
[6] Eagleton, pp. 168,174.
[7] Eagleton, p. 169.

of manual workers';[8] but your distance can be subtly safeguarded throught the connotations of the 'cultural', conveniently persisting even if explicitly repudiated. Cultural materialism is, perhaps, a way of being a materialist without getting your hands dirty. The current credibility of the concept is surely traceable to Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield's influential adoption and reformulation in *Political Shakespeare: New Essays in Cultural Materialism* (1985), where its critical ingredients are summarised in a brisk fourfold itemisation: historical context, theoretical method, political commitment and textual analysis.[9] The essays in this important interventionist volume take up and extend cultural materialist analysis in at least three characteristic ways: through an emphasis on the *re*-production of culture in changing historical and ideological contexts, closely related in this particular case to the national institutionalisation of 'Shakespeare'; the tendency, associated with the rise of New Historicism, to build complex analyses out of an attention to apparently marginal or superficial aspects of historical or textual detail; and an explicit emphasis on the politics of gender and race in order to redress the clear dominance of a discourse on class in Williams's work. Conversely and arguably, Dollimore and Sinfield's approach loses the complex specificity of cultural materialism as it originated with Williams: the fourfold criteria threaten to make the concept no more than synonymous with that catch-all buzzword of the period, 'Theory'. This conflation is not entirely avoided in Scott Wilson's recent book, combining with a haste to characterise our period as 'postmarxist', which leaves an uneasy feeling that the politics of class which was so central to cultural materialism has been conveniently shelved. 'Theory' in such contexts sometimes looks and sounds like the return of a repressed Arnoldian culturalism, stylised in its high-toned abstraction, and speaking for a radical political commitment but giving up on a central element of the struggle.

It is in the choice of the title *Key Words* that this journal's affiliations are most clearly signalled. Not, of course, that the title was easily arrived at or even unanimously approved. The reference is to Williams's 'vocabulary of culture and society', *Keywords*, first published in 1976 and revised and updated in 1983.[10] It is possible to make out a case for the centrality of this text in his work as a whole; starting out as a literary critic, Williams's methodology was always fundamentally about language, and his first major work and seminal re-writing of the modern British cultural tradition, *Culture and Society 1780-1950*, was built around the emergence of five key terms:

[8] Klaus, 'Cultural Materialism', p. 102.

[9] Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield (eds.), *Political Shakespeare: New essays in cultural materialism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985).

[10] Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A vocabulary of culture and society* (rev. ed. 1983; London: Fontana, 1988).

industry, democracy, class, art, and culture. *Keywords* was a logical continuation of that methodology. But is it now right to foreground the medium of language, when to move from and beyond Williams's work is surely to move into the analysis of a culture in which the word and the book are no longer as secure as before? Or, is this not a narrowing of Williams's own scope, given his awareness of the historicity of literary culture and the technology of writing, his characteristic openness to new cultural forms, and his extensive work in the 'harder' fields of political and technological analysis?

Keywords is, however, in an important sense, not a book about 'language'; still less is it recognisably a 'dictionary', as Debbie Cameron and Gargi Bhattacharyya each argue from different perspectives in this number. This much is clear from the introductory anecdote of the book, in which Williams recalls his meeting in 1945 with a man he had known in the first year of the war. Pondering on the changed situation brings forth a shared recognition: 'the fact is, they just don't speak the same language'.[11] 'Language' here does not mean 'language' in the systemic or formalistic sense: it is a way of saying that things had changed profoundly, in a 'new and strange world', the language being rather the embodiment of those changes, of that world. Similarly, in *Keywords*, words quickly open out into the historical processes of which they are a crucial ingredient; the text is Williams's way of doing history, of a particular, that is to say cultural materialist kind, within which language is not a passive repository of meanings forged elsewhere, but a social agent in itself. *Key Words* — this journal — similarly hopes to track the emergent languages in a new and strange or — so the phrase goes — a 'rapidly changing' world. Our aims are to continue to develop Raymond Williams's project across the whole range of its interdisciplinary concerns; to be forward looking, 'towards 2000' and beyond, seeking new perspectives and alliances within a cultural materialism which is always subject to re-definition; and to function as an exploratory, non-doctrinaire socialist journal, combining a practical, interventionist concern for change with a reflexive concern with the nature of socialist intellectual work, its limits and possibilities.

Is it appropriate to speak of the timeliness of *Key Words*? Thinking of Williams in 1945 irresistibly brings to mind a parallel with the recent Labour landslide of 1 May 1997. Williams was to become deeply frustrated at the failure of the post-war Labour administration to build the foundations of a truly democratic-socialist state, particularly in the realms of education and culture. New Labour may well have been elected because it promises to be better at capitalism than its opponents were; we recall here Williams's belief that 'the system of meanings and values which a capitalist society has generated has to be defeated in general and in detail by the most sustained kinds of

[11] Williams, *Keywords*, p. 11.

intellectual and educational work'.[12] Yet few can forget the upsurge of hope and feelings of liberation in the immediate aftermath of 1 May. Equally memorable was the no doubt carefully-orchestrated transformation of political discourse in the first acts and declarations of the new regime: a vocabulary which we thought had been expunged from parliamentary-political life, articulating values of social equality and humanity, re-emerged. Whatever the dangers ahead, this is surely a good time to launch *Key Words*.

In this first number, it seemed appropriate to include a more direct element of reappraisal of Williams than we would otherwise entertain. The essays by Steven Connor and Terry Eagleton perform this explicit function, while those by Deborah Cameron and Gargi Bhattacharyya approach Williams via new perspectives on *Keywords* itself. In recounting some of the issues emerging from a recent research project into the relations between contemporary discourses on sexuality and the shaping of sexual identity in schools, Richard Johnson indicates the theoretical value of a return to Williams's three constitutive categories for the analysis of cultural formation — dominant, residual and emergent — notably in the process of negotiation between 'materialist' and 'textual' approaches to discourse. Each subsequent number will be partly organised around a specific theme, and here the essays by Bhattacharyya, and in particular by Dominic Head, both point towards our theme for number 2 (1999), which is ecocriticism. Head's argument for a Green critical practice, and his identification of the theoretical issues which such a practice needs to confront, remind us of another kind of concern latent in the concept of cultural materialism: that is, the original association of 'materialism' with ideas of nature, organicism and physical determination or necessity. Raymond Williams's late enthusiasm for a dialogue between socialism and the ecology movement came out of a consistent deconstruction of any 'nature'/'culture' binarism, and the problems implicit in certain textual approaches to literary studies, as indicated by Dominic Head, echo some of Williams's concerns about a textual-theoretical turn in the 1970s and 1980s which had somehow denied this complex dialectic. With such issues as ecocriticism, psychoanalytically-orientated theorisations of the body, and the implications of cybernetics and new information technologies, all on the contemporary critical agenda, this is surely the moment of a fascinating conjuncture between cultural, historical and scientific materialisms.

We encourage publishable correspondence related to *Key Words*, suggestions for books to review, and indeed the submission of potential contributions; see the details on p. ii and pp. 110-11. Finally, we would like to offer thanks to two people whose names do not appear in those of the

[12] Raymond Williams, '"You're a Marxist Aren't You?"', in Raymond Williams, *Resources of Hope* (London: Verso, 1989), p. 76.

editorial group: Tony Pinkney, whose energies lie behind the formation of this journal, but whose evolving commitments have only recently taken him out of its organisation; and Graham Martin, whose enthusiasm, encouragement and practical help really make him a sixth, invisible member.

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November 1997

Raymond Williams's Time

Steven Connor

Is it time for Raymond Williams? In this essay I attempt to characterise some of Williams's attitudes towards political time and futurity, and to bring them into relation with some of the work in cultural and political theory of the last five years, work in which the philosophy of history and the question of time seem to have begun a remarkable revival. I use this as a way of wondering about the timeliness of Raymond Williams's work — about whether his time is still our time and thus whether that work may yet be *in time* for us.

The imagination of futurity seems always to provoke a reflexive concern with the limits of knowledge and possibility of knowledge about limits; the future is the limit of our knowledge, and yet also the promise of surpassing its present limits. In *Towards 2000*, Raymond Williams suggests another relation between knowledge, futurity and limits. The first and concluding chapters of that work point to what Williams sees as the 'systematic cacophony' of distractions from the business of considering and preparing for a future in which it will have been recognised that there are unsurpassable limits to economic and population growth.[1] Later in the book, Williams writes of the dangerous and artificial limiting of the processes whereby one might generate knowledge and acknowledgement of this limitation; of the 'cultural pessimism' which discourages and deters serious reflection on the future, and the hypnotisation by the seemingly monolithic and unchallengeable forces of global capitalism:

> There are very strong reasons why we should challenge what now most controls and constrains us: the idea of such a world as an inevitable future. It is not some unavoidable real world, with its laws of economy and laws of war, that is now blocking us. It is a set of identifiable processes of *realpolitik* and *force majeure*, of nameable agencies of power and capital, distraction and disinformation, and all these interlocking with the embedded short-term pressures and the interwoven subordinations of an adaptive commonsense. (*Towards 2000*, 268).

We can detect in Williams's later writings about the prospects of the 1990s and beyond an interesting vacillation with regard to the question of limits, a vacillation which is the expression of a fundamental dialectic between totalism and wholeness within Williams's conception of freedom, culture and

[1] Raymond Williams, *Towards 2000* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1983), pp. 18-19. References hereafter in the text.

community. On the one hand, there is the experience of frustration and limitation which is the effect of the contemporary abandonment of extended forethought or the *longue durée*. What Williams calls the strategy of 'Plan X' — the strategy of the short-term, the percentage politics of crisis-management rather than progress towards long-range objectives — appears to be the absolute opposite of the numbing assimilatory violence of the modern metanarrative, as routinely decried by the skim-readers of Lyotard. Plan X will involve, not universalist enlargement, but universal limitation of expectation and perspective:

> This, if we allow it, will be a period in which, after a quarter of a century of both real and manufactured expectations, there will be a long series of harshly administered checks; of deliberately organised reductions of conditions and chances; of intensively prepared emergencies of war and disorder, offering only crude programmes of rearmament, surveillance and mutually hostile controls. It is a sequence which Plan X can live with, and for which it was designed, but which no active and resilient people should be content to live with for long. (*Towards 2000*, 268).

The future that Williams warns against is therefore a future in which futurity itself is indefinitely deferred, in a totalisation of the temporary. However, in contrast to this, the future that Williams wishes to recommend is also characterised by limitation, though of a different kind; for he wishes us to move towards an acceptance of the necessary and unsurpassable limits to growth, along with limits both to production and the prestige of the concept of production. At work here is a complex, and, for Williams, uncharacteristically paradoxical account of the nature of human self-making. Marxism shares with capitalism the sense of the unique human capacity for self-making and self-transcendence. For Marx, the future is the always the place in which and the means by which human beings produce their freedom, by energetically extricating themselves from the unfreedom of history. The future is conceived in such a model both as a necessary actualisation of what is latent in the past and the present, and also as a rupture in the fabric of time. This temporal rupture corresponds closely to the rupture between the human and the natural, in which human beings produce value by intervening in the natural condition of things, subduing and transforming nature for their own purposes. In this account, the future is a product of self-invention through aggressive *inter*vention.

Like others, Williams sees modernity as the paradoxical institutionalisation of such rupture, as a continuity forged out of repeated spasms of dehiscence. But then, turning this logic against itself, Williams also

sees the prospect of an intervention, or self-conscious breaking into modernity, which would reverse, and as it were prevent, the very logic of intervention:

> The consciousness of the possibilities of intervention, which inaugurated that phase of history which connects to our own time, is now, at a point of great danger, being succeeded by a new consciousness of its full effects ... It is in this new consciousness that we again have an opportunity to make and remake ourselves, by a different kind of intervention. This is no longer the specialised intervention to produce. The very success of the best and most sustainable interventions has made that specialised and overriding drive containable. Where the new intervention comes from is a broader sense of human need and a closer sense of the physical world. The old orientation of raw material for production is rejected, and in its place there is the new orientation of livelihood: of practical, self-managing, self-renewing societies, in which people care first for each other, in a living world. (*Towards 2000*, 265-6)

Such a world is contained in the sense that the drive to reduce everything to the transformative action of force upon various kinds of object, or raw material, is curbed, in the interests of other kinds of relationship, between persons, peoples, and between people and nature. Such a limitation allows wholeness to flourish. Without it, the totalist emphasis on the drive to escape limits is itself a drastic curtailing of human potentiality.

These and other arguments in *Towards 2000* anticipate many of the debates within and against postmodernity on the left. In 1983, Williams had already noticed the currents which would lead to our current discussions of the 'end of history', and the defeat of political utopianism. In recent years, nobody has brooded with more intensity on this notion than Fredric Jameson, though Jameson's analysis is of a kind that I imagine Raymond Williams would have found uncongenial, or even dangerous, in the extent of its resignation to the claustrophobic temporal conditions from which it seeks only at the last possible moment to extricate itself, like the escapologist extracting every last thrill of apprehension from his audience:

> What we now begin to feel, therefore — and what begins to emerge as some deeper and more fundamental constitution of postmodernity itself, at least in its temporal dimension — is that henceforth, where everything now submits to the perpetual change of fashion and media image, nothing can change any longer. This is the sense of the revival

> of that 'end of History' Alexandre Kojève thought he could find in Hegel and Marx.[2]

What most concerns Jameson is the degree to which such systems not only seem discouragingly immune to innovation or assault, but also appear to interfere with the temporal logic of innovatory or progressive thought:

> The persistence of the Same through absolute Difference — the same street with different buildings, the same culture through momentous new sheddings of skin — discredits change, since henceforth the only conceivable radical change would consist in putting an end to change itself. But here the antinomy really does result in the blocking or paralysis of thought, since the impossibility of thinking another system except by way of the cancellation of this one ends up discrediting the Utopian imagination itself, which is fantasized ... as the loss of everything we know experientially, from our libidinal investments to our psychic habits, in particular the artificial excitements of consumption and fashion. (*ST*, 18-19)

Jameson's craving for a coign of vantage from which to view the all-enveloping phenomena of advanced global capitalism, is in a way predicted by Williams's own obstinate determination to continue thinking and desiring against the grain of the present. What Williams does not anticipate is the new sense of guilty paradox attaching to the imagination of futurity. Williams recognises that for these forces to be knowable and nameable is somehow no longer enough to compel a sense of political alternative, and indeed, he comes close to suggesting that their very knowability and nameability may be a way of defeating critique — as though demystification and exposure had begun to have the effect, following some seductive Baudrillardean logic, or logic of seduction, of consolidating what is demystified and exposed. What is important for Williams is that we break off from the stony, Medusan stare of the immovably actual, and look elsewhere, since 'it is not in staring at these blocks that there is any chance of movement past them. They have been named so often that they are not even, for most people, news. The dynamic movement is elsewhere, in the difficult business of gaining confidence in *our own* energies and capacities' (*Towards 2000*, 268).

It is just this strategy which no longer seems viable for Jameson, who has become so convinced of the unavailability of resources against and resistances to contemporary global capitalism which are not themselves part

[2] Fredric Jameson, *The Seeds of Time* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), p. 19. References hereafter to *ST* in the text.

of its astonishing Protean repertoire of self-securing quick changes. Consider, for example, Jameson's account of the temporal dynamics of the global economy, in which he finds what he calls 'an effacement of the temporalities that seemed to govern an older period of modernity, of modernism and modernization alike' (*ST*, 19). Modernity, in the form of imperial expansion, brought about a collision between its own linear, irreversible, accelerating time and the more sluggish, recursive temporalities of traditionalism, which could often stand as 'the affirmation of a cultural (and sometimes religious) originality that had the power to resist assimilation by Western modernity and was indeed preferable to it' (*ST*, 19). What has now come about for Jameson is the complete digestion of all such alternative or antimodern temporalities within the time of the modern, such that 'nothing but the modern henceforth exists in Third World societies' (*ST*, 20). For Jameson, this is rather confirmed than contradicted by the hysterically-documented rise of cultural archaisms and atavisms, such as so-called religious fundamentalism, which are the fabrications of a past with which no significant continuity can any longer be claimed.

But at this point, something strange occurs, though its strangeness is wholly consonant with the squirming temporal logic that governs the contemporary. For, at the point where the last pockets of 'nonmodern residuality' have been completely mopped up, the time of the modern loses all its tension and definition. It turns out in fact that the modern could only be — or remain — modern as long as it was incomplete (as long as it was not yet modern). Once modernity has come into its own, once it has achieved complete dominion, it has already undergone a change into something wholly different, in an unanticipated mutation that is yet the long-prepared fulfilment of the modern as such, the postmodern. To summarise: modern time can only *be* modern as long as it is not yet modern; the moment modernity comes into being, it is already over and done with. The universality of the modern, which looked at one point as though it would mean a dominion of time as such over the telluric resistances and particularities of place, gives way to a homeostatic or spatialised time:

> The temporality that modernization promised (in its various capitalist and communist, productivist forms) has been eclipsed to the benefit of a new condition in which that older temporality no longer exists, leaving an appearance of random changes that are mere stasis, a disorder after the end of history. (*ST*, 20)

The stopped or sluggish time of the nonmodern, which used to mark the temporal limit or phobic exterior of modernity, then begins to seep back into it,

as modernity, deprived of the possibility of adversary identification against its temporal other, begins to define itself through kinds of mimicry of that other, by busily dismantling or primitivising itself: 'it is as though what used to be characterized as the Third World has entered the interstices of the First one, as the latter also demodernizes and deindustrializes, lending the former colonial otherness something of the centered identity of the former metropolis' (*ST*, 20). Indeed, in Jameson's analysis, this totalisation begins to leak back into the past, in a remark that suggests that even 'authentic' traditionalism 'was of course a construction in its own right, brought into being as it were, by the very activities of the modernizers themselves' (*ST*, 19-20).

Jameson wants to retain his conviction that it is possible to know and name the temporality specific to the postmodern, and thus squint round it to see its dark or further side, in adherence to the Hegelian principle which he announces in his preface that knowledge of a limit is always in a certain sense a surpassing of that limit: 'when we identify a boundary or a limit ... we nonetheless modify that limited situation, that situation or experience of absolute limits, ever so slightly by drawing the situation as a whole inside itself and making the limit now part of what it had hitherto limited, and thereby subject to modification in its own turn' (*ST*, xvi). But this is something very different from the overcoming, or sidestepping of limits proposed by Williams. Where Williams suggests that we avert our gaze from the contemporary, Jameson feels impelled to outstare it, in a Hardyesque 'full look at the worst', or a 'therapeutic' surrender to the astonishment of a Parmenidean vision in which 'the supreme value of the New and of innovation, as both modernism and modernization grasped it, fades away against a steady stream of momentum and variation that at some outer limit seems stable and motionless' (*ST*, 17).

The intimation of certain of these epistemological difficulties with respect to the question of time and of limits in Williams's work is also the mark of their neglect, or Williams's deep disinclination to allow politics to surrender to the fascination of paradox. It is as though Jameson had undertaken to act out in his work that great grudge match between Raymond Williams and Jean Baudrillard which somehow never quite came off in real time. For, a couple of years after Williams produced the book that he named *Towards 2000*, Baudrillard was announcing that 'The Year 2000 Has Already Happened', in an essay that argued (though I am not sure that is quite the right word) that the saturation of information and simulation has now cancelled every transcendence, and especially the transcendence of time and futurity:

> Progress, history, reason, desire can no longer find their exit velocity. These can no longer snatch themselves from a body too dense, that irresistibly slows their trajectories, that slows time to the point that, as

> of now, the perception, the imagination of the future escapes us. All social, historical, temporal transcendence is absorbed by this mass in its silent immanence.[3]

A year or so later, Baudrillard was evoking the eerie sense that the present has predigested, not just the future, but its own finality, in the form of 'the pole of reckoning, dénouement and apocalypse', such that we are in the position 'of having extended our own finalities, of having shortcircuited our own perspectives, and of already being in the hereafter, that is, without horizon and without hope'.[4] We exist in the aftermath of what Baudrillard calls 'the temporal bomb'. 'Where it explodes, everything is suddenly blown into the past ... Look around, this explosion has already occurred'.[5] Jameson clearly has considerable disagreements with Baudrillard, not least in his heroically counterfactual adherence to the possibility of historical transcendence, but goes much further than Williams ever could in acknowledging the temporal claustrophobia of the present.

Baudrillard's and Jameson's shared sense of the appropriation of the future by the postmodern present is in some respects also shared by Emmanuel Levinas, whose account of modern temporality is to be found in a couple of essays from the 1980s, 'L'Ancien et le nouveau', first published in 1982, and 'Diachronie et representation', first published in 1985. Levinas's reading stresses, in traditional wise, the affirmation of freedom from the past that inaugurates the modern: 'Everything is possible and everything is permitted, for nothing, absolutely speaking, precedes this freedom. It is a freedom that does not bow before any factual state, thus negating the 'already done' and living only from the new. But it is a freedom with which no memory interferes, a freedom upon which no past weighs'.[6] This freedom involves a rupture not just with the past, but with the immediate givens of the present, in a systematised, institutionalised suspicion of the self-evident driven by 'the exigency of an extreme lucidity' (*TO*, 125-6). But, increasingly, the process of this self-reflection, or dehiscence of self-differentiation from the past, or from the past in the present, is itself detemporalised, accelerated to the merest

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[3] Jean Baudrillard, 'The Year 2000 Has Already Happened' (original title, 'L'An 2000 Ne Passera Plus'), trans. Nai-fei Ding and Kuang-Hsin Chen, in *Body Invaders: Sexuality and the Postmodern Condition*, ed. Arthur and Marilouise Kroker (Basingstoke: Macmillan 1988), p. 38. Translation modified.

[4] Jean Baudrillard, 'The Anorexic Ruins', trans. David Antal, in *Looking Back on the End of the World*, ed. Dietmar Kamper and Christoph Wulf (New York: Semiotext(e), 1989), p. 34.

[5] Baudrillard, p. 34.

[6] Emmanuel Levinas, *Time and the Other*, trans. Richard A. Cohen (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1987), p. 124. References hereafter to *TO* in the text.

flicker, in which knowledge and present self-identity annul all possibility of what lies before or beyond them.

> As knowledge, thought bears upon the thinkable called being; bearing upon being, it is outside of itself, to be sure, but remains, marvellously, in itself. The exteriority, alterity, or antiquity, of what is 'already there' in the known, is taken up again into immanence: the known is at once *the other* and the *property* of thought. Nothing preexists: one learns as if one *created*. Reminiscence and imagination, secure the synchrony of what, in experience bound to time, was doomed to the difference between the old and the new. The new as modern is the fully arranged state of the world. (*TO*, 125)

Where Hegel claims to hold together history and its transcendence, Levinas argues that the modern, pledged as it appears to be the excitement and emergency of time, in fact abolishes time. The secularising institutional knowledges of modernity thus somersault bizarrely into a mythic or sacred suspension of time:

> Does not time itself — which for everyday consciousness bears all events, and renders possible the play of the old and the new, the very aspiration for the new in the aging of all actuality — lose for modern humanity its innovating virtue and its peremptory powers? What can modern humanity expect from a future which it believes is held in the present of its absolute knowledge, where nothing is any longer exterior to consciousness? (*TO*, 126)

For Levinas, the present is stalled because there is no history that it does not consummate, no possible future that it will not have consumed. Levinas calls this modernity, but it corresponds with the condition of achieved modernity that, for Jameson, itself brings about the shift to postmodernity. Once, the present was emptied out by time; now the present is glutted with it. Rather than being the dimensionless membrane that separates times and tenses, the present envelops all times and tenses, the already of the aorist, the projective possibility of the future transformed into the tense of the 'present perfect'. Levinas's account of things resembles Baudrillard's, in the sense that, from now on, in this dispensation of the modern, time cannot move, but only, so to speak, *engorge*. It is the seeming limitlessness of modern self-knowing, or rather, perhaps, the limitation of modern being to the barren lucidity of mere knowing, which actually locks the modern out from the alterity of the future:

> Time is not a succession of novelties which are made old and aged, but a history where everything comes and goes into a time

> progressively constituting the truth. It is an edification of the true whose completion is like a novelty which does not pass. The novelty of the modern is not, to be sure, the end of everything unknown, but an epoch where the unknown to be discovered can no longer surprise thought with its new alterity. Thought is already fully conscious of itself and of all the dimensions of what is reasonable in reality. (*TO*, 127)

For Jameson and Levinas, in their different ways, the urgency of utopian thinking is no longer directed, as it might have been in earlier, more revolutionary epochs, against the constraints of the past as they bore upon the present. If modernity is inaugurated with the intense libidinisation of the future, then the predicament of the postmodern might be seen to lie in the fact that the future has been so thoroughly colonised and its resources exhausted in advance. Brian Aldiss has a science fiction story called *Dracula Unbound*, in which Bram Stoker's text is rewritten in temporal terms; the story imagines a race of energy-hungry vampires in the far future who have time-travelling powers, and rake back and forth through history, draining away its stocks of life-force.[7] In a ghastly inversion of this scenario, the postmodern present becomes distended with the energies imbibed from the future, such that the future itself becomes an emaciated and bloodless husk. In any case, the problem for the postmodern then appears to be not how to liberate oneself from the past into the future, but how to liberate or conserve the future from the rapacious chronophagy of the present. The future must be husbanded, in a kind of temporal ecologism, preserved in its indeterminate possibility, by not being drawn on by the present, or drawn into it. The future can be, in a sense must be, surmised or indicated, but may never be specified or precisely figured. The future that emerges for Jameson is therefore a kind of algebraic ghost, whose necessity can be assumed but whose forms cannot be made visible — perhaps like the astronomers' projection of the existence of the ninth planet which was not in fact verified by visual observation until 1930 (with the qualification that this unseen future reveals itself according to the logic of catastrophic reversal rather than extrapolation from known laws and tendencies). Jameson's future is thus both a necessity and a negativity, and the work of *The Seeds of Time* is 'to suggest an outside and an unrepresentable exterior to many of the issues that seem most crucial in contemporary (that is to say postmodern) debate. The future lies entangled in that unrepresentable outside like so many linked genetic messages' (*ST*, xiii).

In urging us to defy the ban on long-range social thinking and imagining, Williams may be seen as refusing a certain interdiction of the future

[7] Brian Aldiss, *Dracula Unbound* (London: Grafton, 1991).

that has become general in much left cultural theory, and *Towards 2000* may be said to have offered a preemptive warning against just such an interdiction. Thus, Terry Eagleton, for example, identifies a tradition of Marxist anti-utopianism which he equates with the Judaic ban on idolatry or articulation of the name of God. Those who are lured into utopianism, or political soothsaying, he writes, 'are fetishists, unable to endure the intolerable vision of the future's essential openness, its radical indeterminacy; instead they seek to plug that painful vacancy with some consoling determinateness'.[8]

We might connect this with a tendency within philosophical thinking about the future more generally to focus on the necessary imperfection or openness of the future — not, as might once have been the case in the mode of mere acknowledgement or acceptance, but in the mode of admonition or exhortation, as for example in Derrida's enthusiastic early evocations of a future which 'can only be anticipated in the form of absolute danger ... [and which] can therefore only announce or *present* itself in the form of monstrosity', or in Geoffrey Bennington's more qualified sense — itself derived partly from Derrida's later reflections on time — of the 'future imperfect'.[9] Terry Eagleton audaciously characterises Marxism not as a way of deriving a necessary future from the past and the present, but as a way of unlocking us from the absolutely determined futures that the past and the present seek to enforce, as a way of preserving 'the future's essential openness, its radical indeterminacy'.[10] However, the indeterminacy of the future must be grasped dialectically, which is to say, it cannot be purely or absolutely other, or wholly disconnected from us, since such absolute otherness always in fact secretly emanates from the deepest desires of the present. The future as absolute utopia, absolutely disconnected from the present is always therefore a narcissistic continuation of that present: 'Fetishist future-gazing imagines that we could model the freedoms relevant to a realm beyond necessity on the kingdom of necessity itself; in doing so, it ties us even more deeply to "pre-history", in dreaming of an escape from it'.[11] An authentic indeterminacy, so to speak, must in some paradoxical way arise out of the transformation of determinate conditions in the present. The resolution of this paradox for Eagleton, or at least the enactment of its form, is to be found in Marx's *18th Brumaire*, which insists that we can never predict the content of a post-revolutionary future, only the preconditions which might

[8] Terry Eagleton, 'Marxism and the Future of Criticism', in *Writing the Future*, ed. David Wood (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 177.
[9] Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), p. 5; Geoffrey Bennington, 'Towards a Criticism of the Future', in Wood, *Writing the Future*, p. 28.
[10] Eagleton, p. 177.
[11] Eagleton, p. 179.

project us into it.

Compared with all this, Williams's reflections on modernity and futurity may strike us as at once refreshingly robust and alarmingly rustic. At the beginning of *Towards 2000*, Williams distinguishes two different kinds of utopian thinking, the systematic and the heuristic, the first of which aims at specifying the conditions of a utopia, and the second more generally at educating desire towards utopia. The first of these, for all the notorious difficulties it always encounters, is praised by Williams for the fact that it is 'a kind of whole analysis and whole constructive formation' (*Towards 2000*, 14). Now the word 'wholeness' deserves the Williams keyword treatment, so central is it to Williams's conception of culture, value and the responsibilities of analysis. For the analyst, 'wholeness' means inclusiveness, the refusal of fixation or arbitrary selectiveness in the treatment of social formations — the refusal, for instance, to separate the products of high culture from the political and economic conditions obtaining elsewhere in the culture. It means attention to that 'whole way of life' which Williams had famously identified as the primary meaning of the word 'culture'. But wholeness also signifies a particular value, or a particular way of looking at a culture. To analyse a particular social order, and to speculate meaningfully about its future, it is necessary, not merely to be inclusive, but also to specify what Williams calls (with breathtaking composure) 'the real order of determination between different kinds of activity' in any particular social formation (*Towards 2000*, 15). Wholeness here means more than wide attentiveness, it means an adhesion to the principle of determining integration within any particular order, a commitment to understand what makes a particular society unique. What is more, defining the determining principles of integration at any one moment allows one to define historical movement; spatial or synchronic wholeness rounding itself into temporal or diachronic continuity; to understand how a social order is internally integrated is simultaneously to grasp where it is headed. It is because of this that Williams, like Eagleton, judges systematic utopias as deficient, for in such utopias 'wholeness is essentially *projected*, to another place or time' (*Towards 2000*, 15). What is required is to retain the impulse to wholeness without the accompanying projection, or without the failure of integration that cuts off the satisfactory future from the dubious present. The vision of wholeness must itself be solidary with the unsatisfactory actual.

This association between spatial wholeness and temporal continuity appears in some of Williams's later, and too long deferred discussions of modernism and postmodernism. In the lecture 'When Was Modernism', as skilfully reconstructed by Fred Inglis, that heads Tony Pinkney's edition of *The Politics of Modernism*, Williams offers an analysis which appears to confirm

this link between the wholeness of the moment and the wholeness of duration. Modernism, for Williams, is an immense abstraction, a fixation upon the narrow experience of a small group of metropolitan intellectuals who have in common only their abstract sense of disconnection. The principle of dislocation itself becomes a principle of integration, with the canonisation of modernism in new international capitalism. The disconnection of modernism from a wider, more differentiated modernity also deprives modernism of any meaningful posterity: '"Modernism" is confined to this highly selective field and denied to everything else in an act of pure ideology, whose first, unconscious irony is that, absurdly, it stops history dead. Modernism being the terminus, everything afterwards is counted out of development. It is *after*; stuck in the post.'[12] Williams believes that it will not be possible to move on in any significant way from modernism, until its own larger context has been reconstructed. One must find the future in the neglected past:

> If we are to break out of the non-historical fixity of *post*-modernism, then we must search out and counterpose an alternative tradition taken from the neglected works left in the wide margin of the century, a tradition which may address itself not to this by now exploitable because quite inhuman rewriting of the past but, for all our sakes, to a modern *future* in which community may be imagined again.[13]

Could we be assured that this final formulation represents Williams's own formulation of the problem of modernism — and it may now be impossible to be so assured — it would be worth while spending a little more time considering the significance of what seems on the face of it a remarkable sleight of hand practised in the glide between two ideas of wholeness, from the ideal of a kind of statistical or methodological completeness which would try to see modernism in a wider historical frame, to the possibility of reconnection to a future 'in which community may be imagined again'. Wholeness as a regulative ideal of cultural analysis becomes the guarantee of the desirable wholeness of a particular way of life. It may perhaps be unfair to attribute this way of arguing to Williams, whose later work is often warier and more defended against watery wish-fulfilment of this kind. But what we read in 'When Was Modernism' does seem to reproduce the definitional dither to be found in *Culture and Society* and *The Long Revolution*. The chapter entitled 'The Analysis of Culture' in the latter hesitates, disastrously in my view, between an anthropological view of culture as a whole way of life ('social

[12] 'When Was Modernism', in *The Politics of Modernism: Against the New Conformists*, ed. Tony Pinkney (London: Verso, 1989), pp. 34-5.
[13] Williams, 'When was Modernism', p. 35.

culture' as Williams calls it) and an organicist view of culture as embodied in the selective expression of wholeness in particular artefacts ('ideal culture').[14] In any case, the arguments of the essay also cohere with the ending of *Towards 2000*, which similarly rotates the ideal of a whole analysis of the historical moment into a promise of historical continuation and continuity: the possibility of 'making and sharing' an analysis of our contemporary predicament has been, writes Williams, 'from the beginning, the sense and the impulse of the long revolution' (*Towards 2000*, 269). The contrast is therefore stark between Jameson and Williams; where for Jameson the future is the 'unrepresentable exterior' of the contemporary, for Williams, it is the logical extension of seeing the present and its determining past steadily and whole.

I want in the concluding part of this essay, and in obedience to the requirements of anagnorisis of this kind of investigation, to unveil my own version of a politics of time. My readers will be less than dumbfounded perhaps to hear that this consists of an optimal synthesis of the two politicotemporal sensibilities that I have, no doubt grotesquely, personified in the names of Williams and Jameson.

Raymond Williams's time is not our time; because Williams's work is lodged in and speaks to its own moment, it does not I think respond very adequately to the complexities and convolutions of our contemporary sense of time. In particular, the demand that a socialist politics be linked to a vision of temporal wholeness seems now like an unhelpful and even sentimental homogenisation. The charge could not be that Williams is regressive or crudely programmatic, since he did more in his life than most to show what a complicated thing socialism would have to be if it were ever to come about. But it is true that, for Williams, possessing the future for socialism, or making a socialist future available means an act of temporal synthesis or synchronisation which contemporary cultural developments, not least technological ones, make implausible and reductive. Jameson, on the other hand, though apparently more sensitive than Williams to the paradoxical nature of time and duration in the postmodern, and certainly more alive to the clashing and commingling of different national and cultural temporalities consequent upon colonialism, decolonisation and the recolonisations of global capitalism, is also guilty of a style of analysis which significantly flattens and formalises contemporary conditions. Faced with the accelerating complexity of time in the contemporary world, Jameson as it were speeds up or fast-forwards his analysis to the point at which it yields the stillness or invariance of a system in which mutation is so ceaseless and ubiquitous that difference is abolished. Under these circumstances, it is possible to conceive of things

[14] Raymond Williams, *The Long Revolution* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965), pp. 57-8.

proceeding otherwise, of the liberation of an indeterminate future, only in the purifying modes of catastrophe, or collapse, or ecstasy. The future becomes no more, and no less, than alterity as such: the breaking in of the inconceivable, the surpassing of knowledge, the dissolution of the subject. In the desolate messianics which Derrida has recently been deriving from Heidegger and Levinas, for example, justice is not to be identified with the positive promotion or preservation of known goods, or prevention of known evils, but only with the keeping at bay of anything 'which, rightly or wrongly, is thought of as obstructing the horizon, or simply forming a horizon (the word means *limit*) for the absolute coming of what is completely other, for the future itself'.[15]

Central to the Jamesonian analysis of postmodern times and time in the postmodern, and to that of others too, is the strange convolution whereby time, which had previously been the neutral continuum within which activities of production, distribution and exchange took place, has been drawn into exchange. Time is now a commodity like anything else, and gains in time or speed (for example turnover time) are entirely equivalent to material gains. Time is stockpiled, invested, expended, speculated upon. One of the most important ways in which this is effected in cultural terms is by means of the technologies of storage, reproduction, replication and transmission which are at the heart of the information industries; film, tape, video, TV, and the various media of digital conversion. All this seems to amount to a saturation of the present, traditionally the thinnest and most insubstantial of tenses, by the stored-up potential of imaged and imagined pasts, alternative presents, and virtual futures. The seemingly limitless cultural archive made available by such technologies can be read as an abolition or flattening of history, the replacement of duration, sequence and development with repetition, recursion and instantaneity: this is Baudrillard's reading of the fate of history, as it is Jameson's, in his famous 1984 essay 'Postmodernism: Or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism'. Surprisingly, it also appears to be Derrida's reading of the processes whereby time is currently fabricated by the agencies of the printed and electronic media, which he has summarised with the term 'actuvirtuality'.[16]

But the ending of a certain temporal regime, or dominant mode of historical imagining, should not be mistaken for the collapse of time altogether; there are other alternatives than the rolling river or the stopped clock. I want to suggest that we begin to grasp contemporary culture as the culture of interruptions, by which I mean a culture characterised more by the effect of rhythms and temporalities cutting across and into each other, than by the

[15] 'The Deconstruction of Actuality: An Interview With Jacques Derrida', trans. Jonathan Rée, *Radical Philosophy*, 68 (1994), p. 36.
[16] 'The Deconstruction of Actuality: An Interview With Jacques Derrida', pp. 28-30.

dominance of any single temporal regime, whether it be the teleological uncoiling of the metanarrative, or the ruthless scheduling of time characteristic of modern work-discipline; not the contemporary, then, but what I suggest we call the contemporality of the contemporary. Under such conditions, it is unhelpful to think in terms of the simple antagonism of progressive, or Western, or modern time, and premodern, monumental or recursive time. Peter Osborne has usefully pointed up the necessity of attending to 'the *noncontemporaneousness of geographically diverse* but *chronologically simultaneous* times', and the advantages of 'the complex and differential temporality of conjunctural analysis'.[17] However, I find the tripartite scheme of temporalities to which Osborne appears to accede unhelpfully cramping; this scheme distinguishes only between objective or cosmological time (the time of nature), lived or phenomenological time (individual time experience) and intersubjective or social time (the time of history).[18] Just as individual lives are made up of an ensemble of different durations, periodicities, and rates of elapse, the complex synthesis of which is perhaps all we mean when we use the term the 'subject', so any political collectivity, especially in our contemporary world, is an unstably synthesised ensemble of different temporalities.

Among the different orders of temporality — different speeds, scales, shapes, rhythms and durations — which both traverse and are gathered into the lives of individuals and collectivities might be the following:

- cosmological, or planetary time: the *longue durée*, perhaps the longest of them all, measuring the movement from the origins of the physical universe, including the lifespan of the planet which is now intersecting alarmingly with our own individual lifespans;
- biological time: the time of individual bodily maturation and decay, and the rates and rhythms of reproduction, especially as these are controlled and transformed by ritual or technological means;
- religious or sacred time: the still powerful calendars of redemption and renewal offered by official and unofficial religions;
- public time: for example in the schedules and synchronicities of labour in school and workplace, as well as the professional rhythms of law, education, finance;
- media time: the orderings of timetables and flows, in print and televisual

[17] Peter Osborne, 'Modernity is a Qualitative, Not a Chronological, Category: Notes on the Dialectics of Differential Historical Time', in *Postmodernism and the Re-reading of Modernity*, ed. Francis Barker, Peter Hulme and Margaret Iversen (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992), pp. 32, 37.

[18] Peter Osborne, 'The Politics of Time', *Radical Philosophy*, 68 (1994), p. 4. See, too, his *The Politics of Time: Modernity and Avant-Garde* (London: Verso, 1995).

media, for example in the viewing units analysed by Williams, but also in their mimicry of other temporalities, and their capacity to intervene in other temporalities;

- the time of information: the increasingly shortening time of the circulation of information, and its capacity both to simulate and alter the rate of elapse of other temporalities; as well as the hitherto unprecedented, and still undeveloped power of stockpiling time, or putting it into exchange;
- leisure time: the more or less formal orderings of 'free time', not only in their coordination with other temporalities, but also in their intertranslatability (for the internet-addict, for example, the time of leisure is scarcely to be distinguished from information time);
- political time: the durations and periodicities of institutions and political processes
- popular time: the time of festivities, memorials and anniversaries, as it is variously conjoined with the calendar of public or official memory.

We must add to these the metatemporalities, or concrete composites which determine the relations *between* these temporalities, their ratios, and rates of exchange. If we can include in this last, most important of categories, the different ensembles of temporal orderings that we call 'cultures', then it will become clear that, not merely temporalities, but the modes of metatemporal syncopation and aggregation are themselves subject to syncopation and aggregation. It is here that the importance of technology seems to lie. Far from flattening all these orders into simultaneity, or mere interchangeability, the new technologies of transmission and reproduction are likely to precipitate new complexities and interrelations. Far from being the mirror in which time dissolves, technology is already the switchboard or medium of exchange between different temporalities.

Socialism, or the politics of reaffirmed community is not to be guaranteed either by the temporal wholeness promised by Williams, or by the rattled, overtotalising logic of catastrophe suggested in the politics of time of Jameson or Derrida. Of course, socialism may not be guaranteeable by anything at all, let alone the relative sophistication of its politics of time. But I think that, in order to grasp and inhabit the conditions of contemporality that I have attempted to evoke, the politics of collectivity must learn to live within conditions of syncopation rather than synthesis, and to establish a relation to its times, not of knowledge, but rather of acknowledgement.

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Raymond Williams, Communities and Universities

Terry Eagleton

Raymond Williams writes in the 'community' entry in *Keywords* that 'unlike all other terms of social organisation — state, nation, society, etc. — *it seems never to be used unfavourably*'. This, of course, was before the days of US communitarianism, which seems to mean, among some other finer things, that if you smoke on the street or commit adultery down in South Carolina your neighbours come round in a gang and beat you up. But one sees what Williams means: 'community' is one of those buzz-words, like 'dynamic' or 'open-minded' or 'empowering', which everyone perfunctorily tips their hat to and wouldn't think of challenging (put up your hands all those who see themselves as static, narrow-minded and disempowering). And of course any political term which is automatically acceptable to everyone is, by that same token, pretty useless, it doesn't earn its keep — witness Blair's mindlessly bland rewriting of Clause 4. The problem is that hardly anyone to the left of Ghengis Khan or Alan Clark would think of disagreeing with it, which means it's bought on the cheap. Try the negation test: 'We believe in a society committed to injustice, unfreedom and inequality, where human rights are far from guaranteed, human divisions assiduously fostered and a state of permanent warfare ensured for everyone.' Words which can mean everything or anything mean little or nothing; if everything is 'political' or 'ideological' then the terms are stretched to the point of uselessness (meaning being a differential force), and 'community', Williams suggests, is one of these, in an interesting qualification of one of his central terms.

But actually 'community', as a word, is *not* so much in favour these days, quite apart from right-wing communitarians; it has an ineluctably quaint, archaic, homespun ring to it, suggestive of Morris dancing and village fêtes, a word nobody dares quite sneer at but fewer people take seriously as a political term. Indeed, it almost suggests the *reverse* of the political: the intimate face-to-face group as opposed to anonymous bureaucracy, the affective as against the instrumental, *Gemeinschaft* rather than *Gesellschaft*, the organic as against the institutional. It has a resonance of *piety* about it, not to speak of outright nostalgia, an embarrassing word like 'love' or 'beauty', which it's hard to pronounce in the same breath as 'constitutional nationalism', 'socio-economic structures' or 'semantic materialism'.

Williams, however, was given to embarrassing in this way, in a mutedly provocative spirit, developing a discourse of society in which the affective and the institutional forged strange alliances, and this long before the slogan 'the personal is political' became fashionable. Think of his key concept 'structure of feeling', which is a kind of oxymoron deliberately holding in tension the necessary impersonality and objectivity of 'structure' with the more elusive,

impalpable stress of 'feeling'. Or think of the way his writing continually transgresses the border ('Borders are meant for crossing', he once wrote) between criticism and sociology, the novel and autobiography; and that strange ponderous poetry, conjuring texture and density from abstraction and littered with far too many commas, which is his idiosyncratic prose style, with the sense of a speaking voice, but one formal and somewhat Olympian rather than buttonholingly colloquial. And indeed he spoke much as he wrote, weighing his phrases rhetorically rather than slinging them, like the rest of us, provisionally together. Williams's style is engaged in some project of transforming the received relations between thought and feeling, mind and body, abstraction and concretion, a kind of political enterprise all in itself. He didn't think like conventional critics and he didn't write like them (as Leavis didn't either). And the term 'community', which can suggest at once the face-to-face, but also a wider, even global grouping (e.g. 'the international community') is then one nexus in his work of this constant transgression of the frontier between the subjective and the structural, for which another name is of course 'Literature'. For what is literature but the publicly objectivated expression of the subjective? Williams knew that the personal was always a social definition; that being a person is something you have to become — as opposed to being a human being, which is a matter of having a certain sort of material body — and that if one of those faces round the cradle doesn't actually speak to the baby then it will never learn to become a person at all. He knew that subjectivity is always intersubjectivity, or as they might say these days 'the human subject is that which receives itself back from the place of the Other', which sounds a little more imposing.

But 'community' isn't just a hurrah word, since clearly it can be a negative term, as Williams (despite what some of his critics asserted) was himself well aware. For one thing, it hovers indecisively between fact and value, description and prescription — I mean it can just neutrally describe a certain social segment, as with the American term 'neighbourhood', or as in the 'arms community' (which isn't particularly intimate, affectionate and face-to-face unless you happen to be enamoured of Mark Thatcher); or it can swerve into being a value-term, meaning not just an assemblage of related individuals, but ones related in a particular and positive way, namely through reciprocity and solidarity, 'active mutual responsibility', to steal a phrase from the conclusion of *Culture and Society*. This hesitating between fact and value is one thing the term shares in common with the early Karl Marx's 'species being', his materialist equivalent of human nature, another nexus of fact/value, which seem at once to describe the kind of animals we are anyway — cooperative, social, linguistic, labouring, etc. — but also the sort of creatures we should *aspire* to be. Marx puzzlingly, excitingly seems to think that we can get to the value terms of socialism and communism by starting with what we anyway

factually and materially are, which would certainly violate the distinction of fact and value beloved of post-Humean philosophy. And of course the word 'human' faces both ways in this way too, dispassionately descriptive ('it's human to go to sleep occasionally'), but also normative or evaluative, as in the word 'inhuman'; and indeed evaluative in positive and negative ways, since 'human' can suggest moral weakness ('all too human') as well as compassionate fellow-feeling.

Anyway, one has to be wary of some conceptual sleight-of-hand here, since it's clear that the fact that we are social beings, in the sense of not being able to survive outside society, doesn't entail that we're social beings in the sense of dedicating our energies and passions to one another, seeing our deepest self-fulfilment as lying in the service of others, which is certainly the ethics Williams both espoused and lived. It isn't clear by what slide we can get from one to the other, since someone can of course always concede that we're social beings in the sense of needing each other to survive, without acknowledging that we're social beings in the sense that we are or should be the medium of one another's free self-development, as the *Communist Manifesto* has it. What differentiates a communist ethics from a liberal one is that the communist or socialist believes that if we should all develop our individual energies and capacities, which I think is the moral absolute of Karl Marx, then in a situation where everyone is doing so, this can only be done in and through each other. But one can't just read this off from a factual or anthropological account of the kind of beings we are.

Another term which veers between fact and value in this way is Williams's key word 'culture', which is at once descriptive and evaluative, which denotes on the one hand that without which we literally couldn't survive — human nature is born with a great hole in it where culture has to be or we'll quickly die; we are all born 'prematurely', hence we need culture, unlike badgers — but also that which makes life worth living, that which surpasses what we need for sheer survival. Thus the playwright Edward Bond can actually deny that what we have at the moment *is* a culture because it doesn't, he thinks, welcome the newcomer and give him or her what they need to thrive. 'Culture' swings between a narrow, evaluative aesthetic meaning and a broader descriptive anthropological, and much of the force of Williams's work was devoted towards exploring the relations between them.

'Community' isn't, of course, incompatible with hierarchy. The great conservative communitarian lineage of thought from Coleridge to Heidegger, Yeats and Eliot, envisages an organic community which is nonetheless internally stratified and differentiated. Community and equality don't, in other words, go spontaneously together: you can have a society of equals whose relations are non-reciprocal, or you can have a mutuality of beings which is

graded and ranked. Here lies a vital distinction between Williams's own idea of what he calls early on a 'common culture' and that of, say, T.S.Eliot — for Eliot, like many a radical conservative, believes in a common culture too, as against some liberal atomistic individualism, but one in which what Williams liked to call 'meanings and values' will be defined by an elite and then transmitted downwards (a Fabian model too), so that everyone shares the same culture but at different levels of creation and consciousness. Williams, by contrast, means by a 'common culture' not just one commonly *shared* but one commonly *made*, and this then involves for him democratic socialist institutions of full active participation. Moreover, if everyone is in on the act, if everyone takes part in the conversation, then the culture which results from this is likely to be a great deal more varied and uneven than one forged by an elite and passed downwards, as Williams makes explicit in *Culture and Society*: 'A good community, a living culture, will not only make room for, but actively encourage, all and any who can contribute to the advance in consciousness which is the common need ... Only in the acknowledgment of human individuality and variation can the reality of common government be comprised.' This isn't just a moral imperative, some kind of ethical urging of pluralism, but rather follows *logically* from Williams's redefinition of a common culture in terms of active communal fashioning rather than just common sharing. Any such culture will be vastly more complex, involving a constant negotiation between different interests, than one dominated by a particular predefined set of social values.

Interestingly, then, what for so much postmodern thought is a rigid binary opposition — community, consensus or solidarity on the one hand, heterogeneity, multiplicity, plurality on the other — for Williams went together from the outset; it's an antithesis his work deconstructs. He was always politically partisan and always a pluralist, and the two emphases evolve side-by-side in his work, so that by the time of the *Politics and Letters* interviews he's actively rejecting any *homogeneous* notion of community and stressing instead the inevitable complexity and specialisation of a socialist society. Williams has been rightly criticised for sometimes overlooking ethnic diversity, oddly for a Celt, and indeed he argues unguardedly in *Culture and Society* that 'the area of a culture is usually proportionate to the area of a language', which isn't far from saying that aliens begin at Calais. But even as early as this book he is insisting, as I say, on complexity and specialisation — what has to be secured are the means of community, the appropriate institutions, the material and social conditions of it, but then what individuals and groups will live out within that commonality can't, for him, be predrafted. 'A culture in common in our own day', he writes there, 'will not be the simple all in all society of old dream. It will be a very complex organisation, requiring continual adjustment and redrawing'. So much, then, for the celebrated backward-looking organicist nostalgia of a critic one of whose major works was actually entitled *Towards*

2000.

The postmodern claim that community is inevitably overhomogenising won't, I think, stick with Williams, and neither will the accusation, made by some liberal commentators, that he overlooks the negative aspects of community as a mere defensive solidarity or hanging together. He doesn't at all, not even as early as *Culture and Society*, where he writes of the 'conversion of the defensive elements of solidarity into the wider and more positive practice of neighbourhood'. The idea of community has certainly belonged, among other places, to a radical conservative lineage which aestheticises social life and wants to imbue it with the unity of a work of art — fascism is one of its historical terminuses, where society is seen as an *organic artefact*. But there's a radical as well as a reactionary kind of aestheticising, and as far as the idea of community goes this can be seen in the fact that community, like the work of art in a certain definition of it, is radically an end in itself. There can be no *instrumental* or utilitarian answer to the question, 'Why enter into mutual relations of responsibility with one another?' It is just, as Karl Marx would say, part of our 'species being' to do so, and no more rationally answerable than why we should sing or smile, or why a watch should tell the time: that's its nature and function. The function of human beings, as the radical romantics realised, is to be functionless, to realise their powers and capacities as ends in themselves and to resist a remorseless instrumentalisation of them. It is not to have to justify their activity at the tribunal of utility, or to have to appeal to some metaphysical or transcendental ground to explain that perpetual process of self-fashioning and self-transformation we know as history. And if the work of art is important it's because it provides us with a kind of utopian paradigm or ghostly glimmer of what this way of life might just look like, which is to say that aestheticism in its richest meaning is politically radical (witness Oscar Wilde), and not just some sterile cult of 'art for art's sake'. Williams would, I think, have thoroughly endorsed this, though he had a typical leftist suspicion of the term 'aesthetic', in my view quite misplacedly.

What, then, of the place of the university in all this? I think one of the great differences between Raymond Williams and F.R.Leavis, who otherwise manifest some interesting similarities, is that whereas Leavis was passionately concerned with the university, which in his work assumes the status of some kind of Platonic entity, Williams on the whole was not. He was of course passionately interested in *education*, but his educational ideas were shaped in the so-called 'extra-mural' world (he was, in a sense, extra-mural all his life) and he kept a wary distance from the university proper (though in one of his more cynical moments he once said to me that the difference between adult education and university was that in the first one taught doctor's daughters and

in the other doctor's sons). I think that the formative moment in Williams's ideas of education came decisively in the immediate post-war period, with what he saw as the catastrophic failure of the Attlee government to seize the opportunity to create what he calls in *Politics and Letters* 'new popular institutions of culture and education'. This, for him, was one of the Labour government's most central betrayals; that such an opportunity existed was real to him, but was cynically passed up. Instead, the image of the educational ladder was preserved — a ladder, he reminds us, can only hold one at a time — even if more people, and from different backgrounds, were allowed to pass up it to become card-carrying members of the middle class.

Williams wasn't himself terribly interested in contributing to this process, once the moment of potential transformation had passed, and never, I think, saw teaching in the academic sense as his primary activity. In fact, he didn't consider himself a particularly good tutor, which he wasn't, although he was a superb lecturer. He always operated better with 30 people than with 3, and better still with 300. What he deeply resisted was the Leavisian *displacement* of a desirable society into the university; I mean the way in which Leavis rightly saw that a public sphere of common discourse was vanishing from society, but thought poignantly and fantastically that this could be recreated by the universities, and especially, of all things, by their English departments. These would now have increasingly to play the role of the civilised, intersubjective, discursive, critical consensus which was less and less available in political society as a whole. Williams himself never subscribed to this academicist idealism — for him the structural separation and idealisation of the university was part of the problem, rather than part of the solution, and he never thought, as did the Scrutineers, that you could somehow relaunch a political or critical public sphere from inside one of the very institutions whose sequestration from society as a whole was precisely a result of the disintegration of that sphere. Criticism in the Victorian period could still fulfil certain more general cultural, pedagogical, popularising, broadly political functions — think of Arnold, whom the left love to hate — but from then on, with the increasing professionalisation and specialisation of academic life, it was driven back into the very institutions — universities — which Leavis wanly hoped might become the power-bases for a new kind of cultural critique. Ironically enough, in the late sixties the universities *did* become, ephemerally, the arena or seed-bed of more general social conflict, but this is surely unusual and untypical — revolutions don't characteristically start in universities, and even if they do can't be completed there.

There remains the question of what Williams's own community was. You could say, perhaps, the Black Mountains, but then to say this is instantly to talk about ambiguity and conflict rather than cosy homogeneity. Williams was born on a border between Wales and England, country and city, popular and

educated, working-class and middle-class, manual and mental, and in some sense inhabited this border region all his life. He had to learn to keep his sanity and equipoise in the continual tension between these polarities, knowing as he did that the social reality lay in the *tension*, not either pole taken in isolation, that this was the formative and typical historical experience, not something which lay safely on one side of the border or the other. The border is anyway porous, permeable, since for him 'culture' was never just across it in Cambridge or London. It was already a way of describing the unusually close and supportive community he sprang from, a community which was however by no means, from what one hears of life in Pandy, a pacific place to live. One sense of culture — forms of life — lay on one side of the border, while another sense of it — educated consciousness — lay on the other, and Williams's attempt to interrelate these two meanings of culture is thus among other things a way of trying to make some narrative coherence out of his own life. Anyway, the point is that for him any rigorous inside/outside polarity was deconstructible, a point nowhere more graphically illustrated than in the fact that his father earned his living *within* the community from an industry (the railways) which took men and women outside it. This is surely the meaning of that moment in *Border Country* when Matthew Price, travelling on a train from his Welsh village into the wider culture of England, finds that it is his own father who gives the signal for the train to move onwards and outwards.

Williams moved onwards and outwards, but his ultimate destination was not Cambridge or London, but Europe — Welsh Europe — because from his perspective the nation-state of Great Britain was *both* too big *and* too small. In the present era, Williams saw the valorisation of community in a regional sense as the desire only for a defensive alternative to an 'internationalism' which means little more than the unfettered availability of world markets, labour and resources for transnational corporations (the 'global village' with carefully selected, Net-ready, credit-worthy, faxable citizens, the 'global marketplace' in which all are at stake), quite at odds with socialist internationalism. 'Community' thus becomes distorted into mere defensive tribalism or parochialism, and we end up with the worst of all possible worlds, a bad internationalism and a false, exclusive communitarianism. A 'Welsh Europe' suggests a different way of regarding and describing the 'cosmopolitan', a different order and structure of institutions (overtly political and cultural), as well as a plurality of identities and allegiances, nonetheless forming multiple overlapping *communities*. It was this which Williams, strongly opposed both to the parochial and the all-in-all, always argued for.

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Dreaming the Dictionary: *Keywords* and Corpus Linguistics[1]

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Raymond Williams's *Keywords* is not an easy work to classify.[2] It is a lexicon, but not what we nowadays understand by the term 'dictionary', because there are not enough words in it; those there are have clearly been chosen with particular aims in mind which exceed the conventional dictionary's aims of definition and exemplification. Nor is one ever unaware (as one is, and is meant to be, with conventional dictionaries) of the compiler's shaping intelligence and agenda. In these respects, *Keywords* might seem closer to such 'anti-dictionaries' as Bierce's *Devil's Dictionary* and Flaubert's *Dictionary of Received Ideas*. Unlike them, however, *Keywords* is not intended ironically; and in terms of scholarship it is closer to a 'real' dictionary.

It is also, of course, dependent on one. It is unimaginable that Williams could have written *Keywords* without the *New English Dictionary on Historical Principles* (NED), or as we know it now, the *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED). This monumental work of nineteenth century scholarship remains an indispensable tool for anyone interested in the history of English words and their meanings. As the twentieth century draws to a close, however, someone setting out to compile a new *Keywords* — and the project is regularly mooted, such is the influence and fascination of the original — would have resources to draw on that were not available to Williams. Indeed, our hypothetical compiler might be thought negligent if s/he did not draw on these resources.

This development raises some interesting questions for those who continue Williams's cultural materialist project. There is an eminently materialist argument that the resources available for doing lexicography (or any other kind of scholarship) make a difference to the kinds of lexicography that get done; at the same time, the creation of new resources will be driven in part by intellectual assumptions about what needs to be done, and what methods should be used to do it. So, what is happening to lexicography now, and what are the implications for the cultural materialist study of words as Williams conceived it in *Keywords*?

The most dramatic recent development in lexicography has been the use of computer technology to store and manipulate huge amounts of linguistic data, which can then be used as a basis for dictionary-making — an enterprise referred to as 'corpus-based lexicography'. Of course, strictly

[1] I thank Kay Richardson for her comments on an earlier version of this paper.

[2] Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A vocabulary of culture and society* (rev. ed. 1983; London: Fontana, 1988).

speaking, all modern lexicography has been based on some kind of corpus of data. For pioneers of the 'comprehensive' dictionary of English, men like Nathaniel Bailey and and Samuel Johnson, the corpus typically consisted of previous dictionaries plus the contents of the lexicographer's private library. The NED used a more 'scientific' procedure, asking readers to comb systematically through particular sources and to fill in slips containing standardised information. These slips were sent by the sackload to the editor James Murray, who stored them in pigeonholes in a kind of shed in his garden.

Murray's shed full of paper slips can be seen as the low-tech precursor of today's computerised corpora; as Murray worked on a larger scale than Johnson, today's corpus lexicographers work on a larger scale still. Their corpora contain hundreds of millions of 'running words' of written and also transcribed spoken text: it is as if someone reading for Murray's NED had made out a slip for every single word of every book, magazine and newspaper they read, and for good measure thrown in slips for each word of their breakfast-table conversation.

Large corpora are big business. There is, for example, a corpus in Birmingham known as the 'Bank of English', which currently comprises some 211 million running words of British and American English. It belongs to COBUILD, a joint venture between Birmingham University and Collins Dictionaries, a division of the publisher HarperCollins (the acronym stands for COllins Birmingham University International Language Database). COBUILD's products are aimed at the global English Language Teaching market, which wants dictionaries, grammar books and usage guides based on the most comprehensive, authentic and up-to-date information available. Academics might have dreamt of a 211 million word corpus, but it is doubtful they could have got anyone to fund one without the promise of a healthy return on their investment. As we will see, however, the contents of corpora like the Bank of English are not unaffected by the commercial uses to which they are put.

The size of James Murray's corpus was restricted not only by the dimensions of his shed and the amount of labour he could reasonably demand from volunteer readers, but more significantly by the limitations of his own, or anyone's, ability to process and make sense of patterns in a large set of data using manual searching and sorting techniques. There is no point collecting information you cannot do anything with. Searching and sorting are, however, tasks at which computers are massively superior to humans in terms of both speed and accuracy, and the difference they have made is immense. Anyone who has used the CD-ROM version of the OED will appreciate this point. One would hardly pick up the hard copy of 'A to ANT' with a view to

finding every quotation dated 1850, or every citation of Milton, but on CD-ROM this is the work of a few minutes.

The information that appears in corpus-based dictionaries has been generated by applying computing power to a much larger corpus of material which has been 'tagged' so that it can be searched with concordancing software. Having so much data and being able to search it systematically makes it possible to discover not only what range of meanings a word has, something James Murray also tried to ascertain, but also, by way of frequency counts, which senses are most common in the sample (and by implication, therefore, if the sample is large enough, in usage more generally). You can also look for patterns in a word's collocations, i.e. the other words in whose company it tends to appear. Frequency and collocation were not issues James Murray could address using the methods open to him, since both are essentially statistical concepts requiring large samples and systematic token-counting if generalisations about them are to have any validity.

Though it is never wise to indulge in all-out technological determinism, a materialist must be prompted to consider the effects of technology on what scholars can do, what we think is worth doing and what standards we expect it to be done to. It is of course true that scholars before the computer age did produce concordances and the like, sometimes working with textual corpora of considerable size (though not 211 million words). In retrospect this seems amazing: one hardly knows whether to salute the heroic labour involved or shake one's head over the amount of human error that must have crept in. (On a smaller scale, I now find it difficult to believe that I once compiled indexes to my books without the aid of my word processor's 'search' command. And when I recently did some research in News International's company archive, I was surprised how many important letters from only 15 years ago contained hand-corrected typographical errors that would no longer be tolerated on the most trivial internal memo.) New technologies create new possibilities, new standards, and of course, new products — or new riffs on familiar ones, the dictionary being a case in point.

About fifteen years ago, *The Observer* newspaper carried a review of something called *A Dictionary of Real English*, which appeared to be based on the most literal possible interpretation of the principle (a venerable one in lexicography, but frequently honoured in the breach) of defining words strictly by the way they were most commonly used. *Terminate*, for instance, was described as a verb applying exclusively to trains and pregnancies. The reviewer ended by noting that the dictionary's editor, a Dr Wainwright, was really named 'Wellwright'; but in accordance with his strict belief in the authority of majority usage he had changed his name after observing that most people mistakenly substituted the commoner 'Wainwright'. At this point it dawned on me that the date of this 'review' was April 1.

Today, the imaginary *Dictionary of Real English* no longer looks like such an obvious joke: at least one dictionary based on the Wellwright/Wainwright principle — the COBUILD dictionary — actually exists, and it owes its existence to the riches contained in the Bank of English. In the COBUILD dictionary, the first meaning given for each word is not what a philologist might consider its 'basic' meaning (the earliest attested sense, or the one which is closest to the etymological root), but rather the sense in which it most frequently appears in the corpus. The selling point of this particular dictionary, which is intended for foreign learners of English, is indeed that it describes 'real English': it gives the user not some idealised version of the language but the straight dope on how present-day speakers actually use it. Thus, for instance, the first sense given for the word *gay* is 'homosexual' rather than 'merry' or 'brightly coloured'. The grounds for this decision are not ideological but merely statistical — 'homosexual' is simply the commonest sense in which *gay* turns up in the English sampled by the corpus — though of course the finding opens up interesting questions about the relationship between ideology and statistical patterns in usage, of which more will be said later on.

Obviously, the legitimacy of proceeding as COBUILD's lexicographers do depends on being able to argue that your corpus is of sufficient size, and that it draws on sufficiently varied sources, to be considered representative of English usage at large. It is open to dispute whether any currently available corpus meets these criteria. But the size and provenance of the sample was no less a problem for old-style lexicography, at least to the extent that it claimed to be not prescribing but describing usage at a particular point in time. Even if it retains some of the most obvious biases of its predecessors (most notably towards pre-edited printed materials), there can be no question the COBUILD dictionary samples more, and more varied, sources than James Murray's N/OED.

Many descriptive linguists are enthusiastic about the potential of bigger and bigger corpora to produce more and more accurate generalisations about language as it is actually used and as it changes over time. The distinguished linguist M.A.K. Halliday exclaimed recently in an address to a conference of his colleagues that thanks to new technology, 'at last we have *data*!' And among the things some enthusiasts believe we now have a wealth of valuable data about are the culturally significant shifts in word meaning which interested Raymond Williams.

The linguists Mike Scott and Michael Stubbs have each made proposals about the use of corpora to identify and analyse Keywords in present-day English. Scott proposes statistically rigorous methods for

determining what constitutes a keyword.[3] Stubbs suggests that our new ability to compare the relative frequency of a word's senses and identify its commonest collocations might underpin a more accurate, less purely intuitive, analysis of its meaning and cultural significance.[4] Though I have certain reservations (to which I will return) about the ideological underpinnings of such proposals by corpus linguists, that does not mean I think the proposals themselves are entirely without merit. On the contrary, I agree that some of the things corpus analysis can tell us are interesting and suggestive.

Analysis of a corpus can undoubtedly uncover patterns in the use of words which would not otherwise come to light, since they are not intuitively obvious even to the most observant and sensitive analyst. Who, for instance, would intuit that *cause* has a 'negative semantic prosody' — that is, it collocates in such a way that its implications are usually bad, as with 'cause for concern' — while *provide* by contrast has a 'positive semantic prosody'? If *cause* later undergoes pejoration and comes to mean something like 'bring about unpleasant events or situations', we will have some kind of explanation of why and how this happened, on the assumption that semantic changes, like phonological or grammatical ones, occur because there is variation in actual usage, and over time the balance of the variants shifts. Similarly, if we find that the commonest present-day sense of the word *desire*, as attested in frequency-counts using large corpora, is 'sexual desire', it might lead us to predict that *desire* will go the same way as *lust*, specialising for the sexual meaning and retaining its more 'basic', not-necessarily-sexual sense only in formulaic phrases like 'heart's desire' (cf. 'lust for life'). The case of *desire*, if not perhaps that of *cause*, might illustrate how the ability to track and even quantify changes in usage could contribute usefully to a *Keywords*-style project of relating them to processes of social and cultural change.

Corpus analysis can also yield insights into the connection between language-use and prevailing social relations, which may be relevant to our understanding of future changes. Some linguists have already employed corpora to test, for instance, feminist claims that the ideal or potential, gender-neutral uses of words are not their most common actual uses. An interesting case in point is a study of reciprocal verbs denoting sex, romance and intimacy.[5] Reciprocal verbs are those where the action by definition involves two agents: for instance, *fight*, where if 'Jane fought Mary' then Mary also fought Jane, i.e. either party could appear in the grammatical subject position;

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[3] Mike Scott, 'PC Analysis of Key Words — and Key Key Words' (unpublished paper, University of Liverpool, 1996).

[4] Michael Stubbs, *Text and Corpus Analysis: Computer-Assisted Studies of Language and Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996).

[5] Keith Harvey and Celia Shalom (eds.), *Language and Desire: Encoding Sex, Romance and Intimacy* (London: Routledge, 1997).

and it is also possible to say that 'Jane and Mary fought [each other]', or that 'Jane fought with Mary'. It was found, however, that when the reciprocal verb denoted a sexual act — the obvious example is *fuck*, in principle a clear reciprocal ('A fucked B', 'they fucked [each other]') — gender strongly influenced the patterns of actual usage attested in the Bank of English corpus, along the lines suggested by the feminist aphorism 'men fuck women. Subject, verb, object'. It seems the theoretical reciprocity of the verb *fuck* is negated in practice by the cultural belief that women do not have agency in the context of heterosexual sex. But if we accept that language-use and social relations are intimately connected, we might expect that one index of any change taking place in women's status as sexual subjects will be an increase, at some point in the future, of instances where they are the grammatical subjects of verbs like *fuck*.

Yet the examples just given, in which I have suggested that linguistic data of the kind made available by corpus analysis might help us to predict semantic changes and to make retrospective sense of them, draw attention to a feature of the new corpus-based lexicography that might trouble a cultural materialist: what might be called its 'flight from history'. Old-style lexicography was historical first and last (cf. the original title of the OED, the *New English Dictionary on Historical Principles*). By contrast, the corpus analyst who wants to make observations of a historical nature about words and their meanings will have to bring the history with her from elsewhere, for history is not foregrounded in corpora and corpus-based dictionaries. On the contrary, the COBUILD practice of ranking meanings by their current frequency of occurrence entirely obscures their chronological development.

The entry for *gay*, for instance, which begins with the currently most frequent 'homosexual' meaning, does nothing to elucidate the historical process whereby a word, whose surface semantic connection with same-sex preference is obscure to say the least, came to have that as its commonest sense. From the historically-organised OED, by contrast, we learn that an earlier sense of *gay* pertained to prostitutes and the sex trade (ironically or euphemistically known as 'the gay life'). Because it is obsolete this meaning is not listed in COBUILD at all. Nor does COBUILD give any information from which one might deduce that there is a logic to the fact that 'homosexual' now overrides all other senses of *gay*. When a word becomes strongly associated with a concept that is stigmatised or taboo, many or most speakers will feel obliged to stop using it in any other sense, and in time its other senses will thus become obsolete. We no longer talk about a party being 'gay' in the same way and for the same reason we long ago ceased to talk about having 'intercourse' (in the sense of 'conversation') at the dinner table.

The reasons why history is neglected are probably a mixture of the

commercial (from the perspective of the foreign learners who are COBUILD's market, a word's history is simply irrelevant) and the disciplinary-ideological (by contrast with nineteenth century philology, twentieth century descriptive linguistics privileges the synchronic dimension of analysis over the diachronic). Corpora which are updated regularly (so long as it is without deleting the 'outdated' material) could in time become unprecedentedly rich sources of historical information, but it remains to be seen whether the major players will deem it commercially worthwhile to accumulate such masses of data over the decades or centuries it will take for their potential to be realised.

Mike Scott's proposal for identifying keywords in a more rigorous way than Raymond Williams did rests on wholly synchronic criteria: the central idea is that any word has a baseline frequency in a sample of a certain size, and if it turns up significantly more often than that in a text or set of related texts, it may be in some sense 'key'.[6] This seems to me extremely different from Williams's concept of a keyword: Williams looked for words whose changing uses over time could be shown to connect with important nonlinguistic shifts. It would be difficult, perhaps impossible, to 'operationalise' his criteria in a statistically rigorous and 'objective' way. But if his basic concept of what makes a word 'key' is retained, it means the analyst's intuitions will always play a role, as will access to a traditional historical dictionary. You cannot recover historical and cultural significance by mechanical means, however large the database.

The other potentially troubling characteristic of the new corpora has to do with the sources that they tend to treat as the most important data on contemporary English. I say this is 'potentially' troubling because in fact it raises some interesting questions which the inheritors of Raymond Williams's project would probably answer in different ways.

At the heart of the OED's project to illustrate the changing meanings of words lie the texts that constitute the English literary tradition, and if the observations on language-use made in *Keywords* have any single main source apart from the OED, it is Williams's extensive knowledge of that tradition. All contemporary dictionary-making, by contrast, places much heavier emphasis on sampling non-literary sources, especially mass media sources, and even more especially newspapers and periodicals, which make

[6] Scott, 'PC Analysis'. The same principle has been used in 'forensic linguistics'; for instance, a linguist might try to show that an alleged confession has been falsified by pointing out discrepancies between the frequency of certain key items in this text and other 'authenticated' ones from the same genre. Literary scholars may see an analogy here with some of the methods long in use to authenticate newly-discovered texts as the work of a particular author: what the corpus method claims to make possible is a scaling up of the generalisation from the normal usage of one individual to that of a broader speech community.

up 25% of COBUILD's corpus.

One could, perhaps, defend this emphasis in materialist terms as a recognition of where cultural power (crucially including the power to define and regulate meaning) now truly resides; but that is not the reason why corpus compilers make the choices they do. One reason why they draw so heavily on periodical journalism is, quite simply, that quantities of text are available on CD-ROM and are thus very easy to collect and tag. Another is that dictionary-makers are particularly interested in documenting and dating lexical innovations. Because it is topical, relatively informal and addressed to a mass audience, periodical journalism is often taken to be an important source of new vocabulary, or if not actually the source then at least the best reflection in print of innovations which are gaining currency in spoken discourse. In addition, since present-day lexicographers are no longer committed to representing only the usage of 'the best writers', but are rather aiming at some less elitist and more amorphous concept of 'educated usage', they tend to gravitate to so-called 'middlebrow' sources, meaning those where the usage of the text mirrors the usage of its (literate but not necessarily elite) target audience. Newspapers appear to meet this criterion well, since they often proclaim it as one of their stylistic principles. The 1992 *Times English Style and Usage Guide*, for instance, begins by noting: 'the language of *The Times* should be the language of its readers' .[7]

The policy adopted by many corpus compilers towards print journalism seems to me rather credulous, taking what may well be self-promoting myths about journalism (e.g. that it is on the cutting edge of linguistic innovation) too much at face value. Personally I see some rather pressing objections to newspaper language being taken either as 'representative' or as particularly 'indicative' data. One objection is that journalism is a specialised register with its own, often quite arcane, stylistic norms;[8] it is by no means a straightforward reflection or distillation of the norms observed by educated writers of English in general. Even where close attention is paid to the norms of the target audience, the purpose is not necessarily to *reproduce* them in the newspaper's own usage.

A small illustrative example will clarify this last point. It comes from research I conducted on the style policies of newspapers owned by Rupert Murdoch's News International.[9] The now-defunct midmarket title *Today*

[7] *The Times English Style and Usage Guide* (London: Times Newspapers, 1992), p. 5.

[8] For more on the nature of and ideological reasons for newspaper style rules, see Deborah Cameron, 'Style policy and style politics: a neglected aspect of the language of the news', *Media, Culture and Society* 18 (1996), 2, pp. 315-33.

[9] See Deborah Cameron, *Verbal Hygiene* (London: Routledge, 1995), ch.2. See also Cameron, 'Style policy'.

banned its journalists from using the word *toilet* (instead it prescribed *lavatory*) precisely because *toilet* was thought to have lower middle class connotations, and *Today*'s target readership was lower middle class. The ban thus reflected not readers' actual usage but the social aspirations attributed to them by *Today*'s editorial staff. This is by no means the only case I found of newspaper style not matching the reader's own usage, but rather using a shibboleth to help create 'brand image'. If language historians of the future do not take this into consideration (or cannot, because the sources they use did not do so), they may well come to some odd conclusions about the social distribution of variants like *lavatory* and *toilet*; for example, that the former was typically lower middle class usage while the latter was perfectly acceptable to the upper middle class readers of *The Times*.

The other main problem about taking journalism as your most indicative source is even more directly related to the question of *Keywords*: the range of usage that we find in a corpus of newspaper texts is ideologically very restricted. British national daily newspapers may hold contrasting political positions, but only within a fairly narrow spectrum. There is, therefore, rather little one can say on the basis of data from this source about the sign as a site of ideological struggle.[10]

It would, for example, be very misleading to discuss the recent struggle over 'political correctness' and the associated vocabulary (which must surely contain several candidate keywords, e.g. *racism* and *sexism* as well as *political correctness* itself) by taking newspapers or mainstream periodicals as your main source for how this vocabulary has been used, and how its use has changed.[11] The terms are known to have originated within radical counter-cultural movements, but by the time they started to appear in the press, their meaning had already been appropriated by a liberal discourse which was and is suspicious of, if not overtly hostile to, the phenomena it defined as 'PC'. Almost everything of interest about the linguistic struggle which produced this outcome occurred either in unrecorded spoken interaction or in the marginal/ephemeral publications of the political fringes, left and right.

Historical dictionaries, always heavily biased to mainstream print

[10] This concept is drawn from the work of V.N.Voloshinov: see his *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* (New York: Seminar Press, 1973). On the relationship between Voloshinov's thought and Williams's *Keywords* see Kay Richardson, '*Keywords* revisited: the present as history', *Social Semiotics* 5 (1995), 1, pp. 101-117.

[11] The history of the terms 'politically correct' and 'political correctness', and of the controversy surrounding them, is discussed in more detail in Cameron, *Verbal Hygiene*, ch.4. See also Ruth Perry, 'A Short History Of The Term *Politically Correct*", in Paul Aufderheide (ed.), *Beyond PC: Toward A Politics of Understanding* (St. Paul, MN: Graywolf Press, 1992), pp. 71-9.

sources, might not do much better in this particular case; but there are other cases where the historical dictionary's traditional elitism, its refusal to go all the way with the idea that words mean whatever most present-day speakers and writers use them to mean, makes it a better guide, ironically, to the historical conflicts and contradictions of usage that were such an important focus of *Keywords*. Literary discourse may be a less 'democratic' or demotic genre than newspaper reporting, but it is also less subject to overt and covert ideological policing.

That said, I think the reasons why the OED, though necessary, was not on its own sufficient for Raymond Williams's purposes will continue to apply to radical projects, however large the databases on which future dictionaries are based. In fact, I would be prepared to argue that, for theoretical and methodological reasons, the larger the volume of data, the less revealing it tends to become about how meaning has been made by any but the most 'mainstream' speech communities. This is, if you like, the positivist's paradox: *because* size matters, *because* you care about representative sampling, *because* you can produce such impressive statistics given a sufficiently large and representative sample, you do not hear, or even think it worth trying to hear, the obscure and unrepresentative 'minority' voices who may really have defined a historical moment, even if later they lost out in the struggle for the sign.

As a feminist and political activist who also monitors words professionally and who regularly turns to all kinds of reference materials about them, I am continually amazed by how quickly and completely the most radical or non-mainstream inflections of 'ideological' signs are obliterated from — if indeed they were ever inserted into — the mainstream public record. As many feminists before me have noted, *sexism* is a good example. This term was invented by feminists, who meant by it a systemic oppression of women by men. It has now been recuperated to a liberal discourse in which it means discrimination on the grounds of sex, by either sex against either.[12] That change in itself is not what I am lamenting here; it would be futile to lament it, since the price you pay for getting 'your' words into circulation is losing any exclusive definitional prerogatives over them. What does grate, however, is that the earlier feminist meaning of *sexism* has not merely been downgraded to second or third place in reference sources which purport to define the word:

[12] For a well-documented and insightful account of this recuperation, not only of *sexism* but of a whole set of feminist linguistic innovations, see Susan Ehrlich and Ruth King, 'Gender-based language reform and the social construction of meaning', *Discourse and Society* 3 (1992), 2, pp. 151-66;, and Susan Ehrlich and Ruth King, 'Feminist meanings and the (de)politicization of the lexicon', *Language in Society* 23 (1994), pp.59-76.

it is absent from them. It is as if that use of the word had never existed; and its absence, in turn, obscures the historical developments whereby *any* concept of 'sexism' came into our vocabulary and our consciousness.

Another example was recently pointed out to me by a student in a seminar on dictionaries, who suggested we look up the cluster *anarchy*/*anarchist*/*anarchism*. I confidently expected that whereas the synchronic-realist COBUILD would confine itself to the everyday sense, 'chaos, disorder', the historically exhaustive OED would have at least one quotation illustrating the more technical sense in which the cluster refers to a political philosophy, propounded in any number of published tracts and chewed over in innumerable 'respectable' theses. Not so: the OED is as silent on the explicitly ideological meaning as COBUILD. And once again, this silence (if my own reconstruction of history is not inaccurate), makes it impossible for the typical present-day user of the dictionary to divine why the most common current uses of *anarchy* are so pejorative and/or trivialising. Presumably the word acquired the particular negative connotations it has today by way of negative representations of real historical persons, actions and events (I think, for instance, of those once-popular caricatures of anarchists holding bombs). But no reference is given that might help us connect our present usage with identifiable events in the past.

This is the kind of gap that gets filled, eventually, with platitudinous generalities along the lines of 'X is pejorative because society has always disapproved of what it refers to [e.g. sexual deviants, political extremists, proposals to abolish governments]'. To which one might reply that it is not helpful (and not neutral either) to resort to vague notions of social consensus instead of talking about *specific* historical struggles over meaning.

Arguably, the greatest achievement of *Keywords* was to show how one can fill in some of the gaps in an ordinary descriptive dictionary, using extralinguistic knowledge to suggest how we and our vocabulary got from A to B. Today's corpus linguists and lexicographers sometimes give the impression that what they dream of is a dictionary, or at least a database, so comprehensive that it leaves no gaps; but that is a dream based on a category mistake. Words, and more especially meanings, will always have a hidden history. While computerised corpora do make it easier to bring some aspects of that history to the surface (I think there is value, for example, in the collocational data they can provide), other equally important aspects may be more deeply buried as a result of the methods employed by the compilers and lexicographers: their sampling, their lemmatisation, their emphasis on the synchronic, even the sheer quantity of data they offer may be a hindrance to some kinds of analysis rather than a help.

Perhaps the greatest problem implicit in the corpus dream, however, is its location within a powerful scientific or positivist discourse, whose own

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Keywords are ‘rigour’, ‘accuracy’ and ‘objectivity’. Discursively these qualities figure as self-evident desiderata, and in the new technology that makes possible the giant corpus it appears we have a means to make our wishes come true. But is there not a rather striking tension between the enthusiasm of so many corpus linguists for Raymond Williams’s project in *Keywords* (which was about ideology, and ideologically non-neutral), and their proposal that the ‘best’ or most valid way to undertake that project is by using the tools of a positivist science which claims to be free from ideology?

To wish for a more ‘objective’ *Keywords* is really to miss the point — like wishing Marx had said that ‘92.4 per cent of history is the history of the class struggle’. Corpora may prove useful to a future Raymond Williams, but they are certainly not a substitute for the tools Williams used: his OED, his scholarly judgement, and — not least — the convictions and experiences that went along with his lived commitment to a social and political movement.

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[This essay prefaces a shorter feature which Deborah Cameron will regularly write for *Key Words*. The feature will extend and/or reflect upon Raymond Williams’s *Keywords*.]

Sex, Race and Meat — Cultural Studies, Cultural Materialism and the End of Life as We Know It

Gargi Bhattacharyya

The Project

A rumour goes around at work that, after years of hostility, management want to rename the department after its long-dead ancestor, 'The Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies'. Apparently, it will be good for custom. In these difficult times, nothing works so well as a tried and tested brand-name. Eager to please, we obediently pull out our old sweaters, grow our beards, stage interminable reading groups, in readiness for those curious to witness this freshly refurbished heritage site. After all, the experiment was never completed. Who can tell what this nostalgia-for-a-lost-contemporary cultural studies can achieve?

I receive an invitation to write a piece for a new journal — this journal — a journal which will discuss issues in cultural materialism and build upon the tradition of work established by Raymond Williams. OK, I thought — I know how this works — this is a journal which seeks to re-establish materialist enquiry into cultural matters, which seeks to clarify the wider contexts determining relatively superficial activities, which believes that the study of culture in its widest sense can offer us all an insight into what contemporary life is. Yes, I thought. I understand that project, and I know how to contribute towards it.

What I planned to write was a dutiful daughter's backward glance and future hope — an account of the original *Keywords*[1] which revealed, beyond a doubt, how formative a role it had played in the development of contemporary approaches to the study of culture (in its widest senses ...). In particular, I wanted to chart the continuity between the agenda set by *Keywords*, and some of my own areas of work around issues of 'race' and of sexual identity. This, I hoped, was a way of bridging the rift between different kinds of colleagues and a chance to acknowledge debts as well as the grown-boring-with-repetition differences. After all, I reasoned, hadn't I learned my trade from those with whom I now apparently had no common ground?

What follows is a tangled attempt to pay these respective dues — and get out alive.

[1] Raymond Williams, *Keywords: a vocabulary of culture and society* (London: Fontana, 1976, rev. ed. 1983).

Gargi Bhattacharyya

Forebears

In the preface to *Keywords* Raymond Williams explains that the contemporary world cannot be understood through a series of definitions. Although the dictionary form seems to promise instant access and mastery, in fact *Keywords* is a book which reveals the extent of modern life's mystery. Of course, these disclaimers can never overcome the aura of the form. However ineffable the entries, how can you read this book without a sense that things are being sorted out? These words represent something important about all our lives.

Of course, like any interpretative framework, *Keywords* conjures up its own world, the world to which it holds the key. In many ways, this is the world of that strange endeavour, cultural materialism. There is plenty of healthy respect here for the big boy world of economics and politics proper — an understanding that our destinies are tied to the vagaries of industry and science, democracy and consensus. And because this is a knowing gloss on post-war life, these introductions to big ideas and large structures are cross-referenced with their shadows, the power struggle between bourgeois and worker, the competing appeals of personality and masses.

This is one strand in the handbook — the idea that the shaping force of power in the world can be conceived through these proper nouns. These are still the macro terms which describe processes so large that they become sublimely unrepresentable, certainly bigger than any of us, poor souls who can only scratch about for some weak handle on how our lives are shaped. Of course, the vision of the world as structured by these superhuman forces, humanity's monsters set free to rule their creators, also holds a sense of certainty. If you are looking for grand narratives, this lists all the ones that matter — and even if the shape of the narrative remains mysterious, there is no doubt about the grandness at stake. Individual readers enjoy that special, and perhaps now lost, frisson of being at once powerful and powerless — both centre of the world and subject to unimaginable forces beyond themselves. The themes of *Keywords* stick closely to all these big and contradictory stories of modernity, in the version we take to calling high or late, in recognition that there has been a development of some sort.

Even today, the confused today in which few remember that worker and bourgeois may indicate a long-running and not easily abandoned struggle, these stories of the big wide world retain their attraction. For believers, this is still the shape of our world — and our obedient students continue to read the marked pages, glad to get some handle on such a nebulous system. Hungry for the promise of knowledge, we teachers can forget another strand in the book. Williams explains that after 1945, those

returning from war were bemused by the development of an apparently new language — the metanarrating nouns assembled in *Keywords* promise to illuminate this misunderstanding between generations. Perhaps for us, the problem is in trying to remember this uncertainty. Perhaps this is our own intergenerational miscommunication? Introduced as a textbook, *Keywords* looks like a set of answers. Instead of debates, the entries look like last words — definitive definitions, quaintly reassuring in their out-dated belief in the power of total explanation. What is lost in this reading is the sense that the meanings of these different life-worlds can never be translated and comprehended, the ways in which the particular worlds of Williamsesque localities can never be articulated through the metanarratives of power. *Keywords* may be a best effort at defining key issues in a changing world, but it is also a spoof on the whole endeavour — the most careful entry has no hope of making things clear.

Dictionaries of this sort may be a phenomenon of our age, the age we dream is almost over. We envy the Johnsonian will to mastery, unable to believe that the world ever appeared so exhaustively definable. For us, dictionaries have become an acknowledgment of our failure to master. We swap joke definitions, amused by the pretence that these glosses could reveal some essential meaning about our world. Think of the ever-extending list of (apparently) new phrases, ways of using language which threaten to split us into inpenetrable sub-groups (in a *Guardian* feature entitled 'Glossary for the 90s', phrases are collected which have, allegedly, entered modern living — largely consisting of the linguistic quirks of particular professions and a variety of management terms veiling the ruthless requirements of capital. Part of the amusement stems from no one actually having heard these terms in use). The jokes reveal that we no longer fear exclusion from the in-crowd, because now we know that clever wordplay is just a euphemism for our panic. Secretly, no one believes that phrases can capture an age. Instead, we flap about our age without the aid of these guides.

> I think now that in this postmodern age the increasingly common genre of the dictionary — which has abandoned its linguistic framework and moved over into literature — has less to do with nostalgia than might appear at first. The exercise of this form seems rather to resemble the effort of patients with Alzheimer's disease to find their way around with the help of little bits of paper, notelets, labels, before they (or the world?) sink into complete oblivion. All the various dictionaries in this postmodern age are only an intimation of the chaos of oblivion.[2]

[2] Dubravka Ugresic, *Have a Nice Day* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1994), p. 16.

Isn't this the age which *Keywords* describes?

Fresh Fields

In the second edition of *Keywords*, new themes have emerged. By 1983, we have those particular developments of the postwar European world — *expert*, *jargon* — and their related power-base — *technology*. By 1983 we also get a clearer picture of those preoccupations which infuse Williams's work — *dialect*, *ecology*, *folk*, *ordinary*, *regional*. And, a little askew from this, on the tail of the earlier appearance of *imperialism*, *racial*, *ethnic* and *western* finally get on the list.

Although we all know by now that 'this is a book in which the author would positively welcome amendment, corrections and addition',[3] what gets included is inevitably a kind of recommendation. To the dutiful who seek a framework for their method of study — for all those struggling to claim the study of meaning production for some (increasingly obscure? or increasingly apparent?) democratic project — for those still addicted to the idea that the referent of the term 'culture' is worth a fight. For all of this sad and sorry bunch, what counts as a keyword forms a checklist of how the world might be known. These may not be the answers, but they are the main clues. So, of course, the contents of the list plays a role in the propogation of a particular idea of contemporary knowledge. Of course. So obvious it's hardly worth saying: it matters what is on the list.

The idea of a vocabulary implies that you know where to begin. The list is not exhaustive — but it indicates an allocation of analytic value. These are the building blocks of a more concrete reading, the tool-box of this thing, cultural materialism. However tentative and open the definitions, we know these debates will bring us closer to a world out there to be known.

More than anything, I want all this too: the certainty that this is how to proceed. But, in truth, this is not how things are working out. Before I had planned to offer updated definitions of terms of contention — a fresh instalment of the project, an indication of what passes for cultural materialism these days. In my head, it all seemed simple enough — a quick survey of how certain meanings change and develop, nothing complicated, just an indication of how people argued in our time. I even knew which words I would choose — sex, race and meat — the organising terms which kept me loosely tied to my professional colleagues, and my increasing out-of-control work linked to some notion of a field.

But instead I end up with another fairy tale to add to the collection I

[3] Williams, p. 26.

am remembering. The theme which haunts me is the difficulty of pinning such big ideas down. Instead of snappy entries about recent events, I end up with convoluted stories about our interconnected world.

The story of small girl sex

Once upon a time, not so long ago, there was a young girl called sex, who lived her life peacably, certain of her meaning. True, some people still seemed confused about whether her name refered to a certain shape of body or a certain kind of activity, but these people grew more and more scarce. Most people now realised that the typology which classed bodies as male and female was better named as gender, and that bodies which caught your attention were sexy. Sex, they understood, was an activity — what you did, not what you looked like.

Once all this was decided, the girl sex became an object of high interest to all and sundry. She was the hidden secret to human life, the forgotten sister of economy. What she was gave shape to that thing of public value, work. She was what our bodies chose after survival was assured, the way we understood that thin but crucial line between necessity and pleasure.

No one disputed the claims of the big concepts of the public world. Who didn't feel the weight of power on their back? We all held ourselves taut in the tension between bourgeois and worker, shielding ourselves with the small and big consolations of the ordinary and our community. Our biggest protection was a retreat into the private. As words such as industry have leaped beyond our grasp, becoming more akin to the state than to our everyday busy-ness, the private has become the last haven for our ordinary lives. Yes, we know that '**Private** ... in its positive senses, is a record of the legitimation of a bourgeois view of life',[4] but as the glossary goes on to explain, the general adoption of this idea of bourgeois privilege stands as a resistance to the endless colonising force of capital. This place, at least, is ours alone.

And this was the place of small girl sex. The place where the games she played promised us all that our bodies need not be ordered by the heartless regime of physical need. Of course, it took some time to reach this point of approval. She had been for many years dirty and not to be spoken of, or titillating and not to be valued, or dangerous and not to be continued, or trivial and to be passed over.

But now at last, it seemed that things were changing. Look around, past the shouting. Lots of people are admitting their love. If we access the public, macro, constraining world through the pains and pressures of work,

[4] Williams, p. 243

sex is our escape. This signifies a place apart, a time of our own, the term through which we all claim ownership of our bodies until the world changes. Sex means private which means personal which means it belongs to no one but me. If the world must be alienated, then this is our consolation. We hope.[5]

The story of race

The word which confuses the easy split between public and private bodies, between these two competing yet complimentary regimes of the physical, is that bugbear of the twentieth century — race. Whether or not the question is the colour line, the various and widespread violences of racialisation suffuse the bodily organisation of this century.

Of course, the re-worked *Keywords* includes a discussion of this phenomenon under the term 'racial'. We hear the confusion between classification and hierarchy —

> The transposition from a linguistic to a physical (racial) group was especially misleading when it was combined ... with ideas of a pure stock, or the superiority of the 'Nordic strain' within this, and then the general notion of inherent racial inequalities,[6]

— but our glossary assures us that, beneath all this historical confusion, mixed-up legacies of imperialism, the boundaries remain certain and intact. If only we can put prejudice aside, race can offer another basis for understanding our bodies. Instead of splitting physical experience into the arenas of labouring machine and sensuous flesh, race promises to narrate the meaning of the body without the segmentation into public and private.

In the last flash of the twentieth century, race has become our prime model for bodily interpretation. After our long growth into the divisions between work and home and the meanings bodies take there, by the turn of the new century we realise how uncertain this division has become. Work changed — not in the basic sense of receiving payment for labour, which *Keywords* outlines, but in location, frequency, duration and relation to the rest of our lives. Now the private, personal, out of sight versions of the body as

[5] There is more and more work of a 'cultural materialist' turn in this area. See, among others: Jeffrey Weeks, *Invented Moralities, Sexual Values in an Age of Uncertainty* (Cambridge: Polity, 1995); Ken Plummer, *Telling Sexual Stories* (London: Routledge, 1995); Kobena Mercer, *Welcome to the Jungle* (London: Routledge, 1994); Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (London: Penguin, 1994); Shannon Bell, *Reading , Writing and Rewriting the Prostitute Body* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994).

[6] Williams, p. 249

sexual, sensual, emotional experience more than ever seem to be intruded upon by more public ideas of the body as productive and made subject through discipline. Work disappeared, became scarce and hard to catch, more dangerous, more short-lived. But at the same time it spread its reach, grasping out into areas which we had believed to be quite separate. Now uncertain wages could be worked for wherever and whenever. More than ever, the always blurry division between public and private namings of the body showed itself as unsustainable. The different beings of labouring body and sensuous physique mixed up, swapped places, seemed like the same thing, or parts of the same whole. In this process, the world stopped being split into working body and sexual body — the development of work increasingly revealed the flaws in this split-in-two version of the world. But what other story did we know? How else could we explain the organisation of our bodies into the social?

For us, race is this handy alternative story. Instead of those confusing statuses allotted to certain activities in certain places, the impossible task of narrating bodies according to proprieties of geography and action, here is a fresh narrative which promises to override all those strangely changing names. Race cuts across the stories of public and private, work and sex. Instead, it offers a method of classifying bodies which remains the same in all situations. Whatever you do and wherever you go, the promise is that racial naming will still apply. The myth is that this evaluation of the body and its meanings springs from the body itself. Unlike the understandings which come from work and sex, the ascription of race will, apparently, last for life. However much you alter what you do and where you do it, the meaning will hold.

Of course, as we all know only too well, the ascription of race is not a matter of innocent navigation through a confusing world. It has become our common-sense to think of this ascription of difference as the ascription of hierarchy. Whatever the assurances of our (in some ways) authoritative glossary, the history of the twentieth century reveals racial naming as a trick of the vindictive and the powerful. Unlike the apparently promising pay-off between sex and work, in which everyone gets a shot at being productive and taking pleasure (in theory at least), race says that different people have different capacities. The ascendancy of the so-called Western world is retold as this story of natural justice. If we can only identify the stock of any certain body, we can begin to imagine its destiny. Bodies are inscribed as winners and losers from birth — there may be some debate about the manifestation of this inscription, but the logic of race which underpins this reasoning is one of the key phenomena of our time. Understanding our history depends upon paying attention to the tense dance between sex, work and race in all our lives. This is the awkward daughter's version of cultural materialism which I have inherited, and it has served me well, until now.

Now a new story confuses my old understandings. According to this story, people now forget about work. The empires of former industry have grown into obsolescence and inactivity. And although plenty suffer the poverty of these changes, without work we seem to forget the language of class. The winners of the logic of race fear sex, and through this, fear death. The price of (self-appointed) racial privilege has been to disparage the calls of the body — the physical belongs to other, lesser, people. Sexuality is in the realm of the body, part of this area of instinct not reason, compulsion not choice. However deep the marks of social construction, there comes a point at which our frail and needy bodies call for attention. After so many years of neglect, the white world is discovering this with a vengeance. From everyday health and the power of science to the ability to reproduce the population, the physical weakness of even the most privileged becomes a threat to survival. Once again, old empires seem set to die. The new word which I add to my glossary to explain this change is — meat.

The story is that the Western world — the world which learns to control nature through reason and measure affluence through the consumption of meat — has precipitated its own downfall. Western man is decentred by the lifestyle of his own dominance. Suddenly, domestic animals in the West, most ready marker of cultivated nature, start biting back in unexpected ways.

The Story of the Cannibal Cows

Once, long ago and far away, there was a nation which had lost its footing in the world. Once this had been a place of great influence, a land which centred a far larger dominion. But that time had passed. Now things were bust-up and broken down. The nation was at the bottom of a long decline and people were feeling the knocks. The story of the cannibal cows showed the peculiar madness of creatures who were now consuming themselves.

This is the story which those troubled people told.

Once there was a people who loved cow-meat above all things. To them, this was the most desirable of flavours and the most satisfying of textures. They loved this food so much that they named their most respected national icons for its source.[7] Their near neighbours were more straightforward and called these people rosbif, after their favourite meal. In this land, the cow provides the sanctified meat which must be eaten. The fortunes of this people rest on the recognition that cattle are their close kin — they eat cattle flesh to show their proper respect to this relation. For these

[7] For more on John Bull see John Solomos and Les Back, *Racism and Society* (Basingstoke and London: Macmillan, 1996), p. 163.

people, when cattle fall ill, it can only mean terrible things.

It was not until November 1986 that the Central Veterinary Office officially identified Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE), a previously unknown brain disease which was killing British cattle. The fear which was not yet officially acknowledged was that this disease in Britain's favourite meat supply would cross over and start to affect human beings. In 1986 no official body made any pronouncements about this fear. But rumours live on fear and boredom — and many people whispered that the problem had existed for far longer than was first thought, and that the industry had suspected trouble for years. The rumour increased everyone's suspicions. It took eighteen months until the *public* was told of this new disease. By December 1987 the Central Veterinary Office announced that the only viable cause of the new disease was infected feed, and in particular, feed containing the meat of dead animals. It took until July 1988 for this feeding practice to be banned. It was now that people admitted that infected animals must be slaughtered.

The general public, by and large, trusted their paternalistic rulers. If they said it was safe, then surely it was. Of course, there were the cranks and troublemakers, but they were always there. The Government assured people that BSE outbreaks were local and that the disease would die out. For most people there was no cause for doubt. Still no one said anything about the risk to humans.

In June 1989, the Government announced the infamous offal ban. Now the brain, spinal cord, spleen and tonsils must be removed from cattle over six months old before it could be sold for human consumption. From 1994 this ban was extended. In December 1995 a total ban was placed on the use of the bovine vertebral column in mechanically recovered meat — the meat which, the public learned to its horror, was flushed off the bone and spinal cord with jets of water and then recovered for a range of typically British and troublingly unidentifiable meat products. The new precautions increased people's fears. Now it seemed that those who had eaten cheap meat products during the 1980s — all those pies and pasties, burgers and sausages which litter the diet of most people in Britain — were at more risk of contracting Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease (the human version of BSE) than others.

In the summer of 1989, the Southwood Committee which was advising the Government forecast a peak of 20,000 cases. But by the new panic of 1996, 158,698 had been confirmed as suffering from BSE — this is excluding the rumoured cases before official recognition of the disease in November 1986.

The enormity of these occurences is hidden by our misrecognition of the place of meat in European culture. Now, after so many years of studying, meat seems to be the biggest and most illuminating concept I can think of. More precise than the vague abstractions of economy, meat and its myriad

messed-up associations seems to be my best chance of understanding the European mind in retreat.

I have written elsewhere of the strange dependency on beef which has characterised European ascendancy.[8] We have always known that white people love their domestic animals — in our opinion with unseemly, not to mention unhygienic gusto. What we had never grasped was the foundation of this unshakeable love. How strange to have the mystery explained by one of their own.

In *Ecological Imperialism: The Biological Expansion of Europe, 900-1900*, Alfred Crosby plots euro-ascendancy, particularly in the Americas, as a by-product of ecological factors. This is a visionary and unpopular determinism, an attention to the influence of a wider biology, which deserves following through in its suggestions — a way of thinking about the accident of white domination which looks for concrete advantages, the things which have made the difference. Better this than the lifetimes we have spent in self-blame and incomprehension. This attention to ecology is the first step in a long-running story which tells how white humanity wins favours in the world through luck, chance, accident, certainly no talent of its own. The first piece of luck is dependency on the right kind of basic cultivated food: 'The first maize could not support large urban populations; the first wheat could, and so Old World civilisation bounded a thousand years ahead of that in the New World'.[9] This is luck — your main staple can yield more from early cultivation than those of other climates. To Crosby, this dietary bonus is increased by another stroke of fortune — the ability to digest milk into adulthood. Crosby expands his suggestion to incorporate the role of animals:'The metaphor of humans and domesticated animals as members of the same extended family is especially appropriate for northwest Europeans.'[10] Here is an echo of what we have always suspected — an unseemly intimacy between white people and their pets. This is the minority of the human species and of mammalia more generally who can maintain through to maturity the infantile ability to digest quantities of milk. Not everyone can do this — although again this is down to luck and climate, rather than to the survival skills of a master race. However, the dietary advantages of wheat, meat and milk allows population expansion when numbers are what really count. Although all our memory is full of the

[8] Part of this argument is taken from Gargi Bhattacharyya, 'The Exotic White Man', in *Imperialism and Gender*: *Constructions of Masculinity,* ed. C.E.Gittings (New Lambton, NSW and Hebden Bridge, West Yorkshire: Dangaroo, 1996). It is expanded in Gargi Bhattacharyya, *Dark Fruit, Skin, Flesh, Exotica* (UCL Press, forthcoming).

[9] Alfred W. Crosby, *Ecological Imperialism: The Biological Expansion of Europe, 900-1900,* (Cambridge: Canto, 1986), p. 18.

[10] Crosby, p. 26.

accusation that we have too many babies and that our fecundity devalues each of our individual lives, in fact white people in the past have gained some power from their ability to make and sustain more babies than us. Their basic crop was more easily cultivated; by chance they can digest cow milk, a protein source yielded by their livestock; better diet helps population growth and more people mean more ingenuity, more labour, more chances to make and do more. This is one aspect of the ecological leg-up granted to white people by their surroundings.

Another aspect is that Old World domestication of a variety of animals also gave rise to ambiguous gains in other areas — disease and immunity. Whether or not this is the more crucial factor, there have certainly been times when differing immunities between populations have been a decisive factor in conquest, most obviously and scarily in the wiping out of the original population of the New World. Can this, too, be traced back to a love for animals?

> When humans domesticated animals and gathered them to the human bosom — sometimes literally, as human mothers wet-nursed motherless animals — they created maladies their hunter and gatherer ancestors had rarely or never known.[11]

If you can extend your population through improved diet, the losses of new sicknesses can be absorbed and new immunities developed. People die, but the race prospers. The extended family of north European milk-digesters and their sleep-in livestock grow so numerous and resilient that they want to spread out to other parts of the world.

All those other scary traits of white power — especially the regimes of sex and race, those interconnected technologies of bodily order — spring from the possibilities brought forth by meat. So, of course, the contestation and anxiety around meat in our time cuts deep into the white psyche. More than dinner is being threatened here.

In Britain debate became confused with references to the welfare of cows and threats to national sovereignty and identity — as if killing diseased cattle was a direct attack on the British people. The rest of the world gave up trying to understand this identification between citizen and livestock, and gave up eating British beef altogether. But it was only with this economic sanction that temperatures really started to rise around beef. The government was called upon to act urgently, not because people may die, but because the British farming industry may never recover unless something was seen to be done.

[11] Crosby, p. 31.

Now the hidden horrors of the meat industry made it to the middle pages of the dense print newspapers. It was suggested that meat inspectors had only 17 seconds to inspect each carcass.[12] This at a time when health fears around food were raging and inspectors were being made redundant. Between 1985 and 1995 food poisoning notifications for England and Wales increased four-fold, from 19,242 in 1985 to 83, 346 in 1995 — and although this figure seemed to be levelling off, everyone became more anxious about what they ate. However, despite all this middle-brow anxiety, the Major government continued to propose inaction as the way forward. The other members of the European Economic Community instituted a boycott of British beef until steps were taken to halt the infection. In response, Major mobilised a characteristically British popular xenophobia and declared war on Brussels bureaucrats.

Suddenly, beef was the last stand of a still-Great Britain. Earlier John Gummer had suggested that vegetarianism was unchristian. Now, in the midst of the BSE scare in March 19996, Stephen Dorrell declared that 'the best thing all of us could do is to go and buy beef for Sunday lunch'.[13] Beef was associated with the myth of a white Christian British nation, fighting against the forces of invasive bureaucracy and unBritish habits. John Bull rode again, champion as ever of community and ordinary culture. Jeanette Longfield, director of the National Food Alliance, described the sentiment of the moment when she said, 'Over the past few days, we have been made to feel that eating meat is almost one's patriotic duty.'[14]

But British patriotism has also been structured around images of foolhardy loyalty and disregard of danger. British patriots expect to endanger themselves as proof of their allegiance to their country. It is this indifference to risk which marks them as different from the namby-pamby legion of foreigners undermining the British nation. While Franz Fischler, EU agriculture commissioner, explained that 'The European citizen is justifiably extremely nervous. We have a crisis of confidence on our hands. Consumers have lost faith in the safety of beef in particular and are now challenging the credibility of scientific knowledge',[15] the British citizen, it seemed, viewed the crisis as a test of their own confidence, a dare to the spirit of Britain. Wasn't this just another one of those battles against a mythical enemy?

'Spongiform disease agent, the catalyst of BSE and CJD, has been described by scientists as "the smallest and most lethal living thing"; in some circles it is known as Kryptonite. It survives domestic bleach, high-heat

[12] *The Observer*, 31 March 1996, p. 17.
[13] *The Observer*, 31 March 1996, p. 17.
[14] *The Observer*, 31 March 1996, p. 17.
[15] *The Guardian*, 29 March 1996, p. 7.

cooking and ultraviolet bombardment. It can be transmitted through infected particles as small as the specks used in corneal grafts. It also lives on up to three years after burial.'[16]

Large sections of Britain took this to be the dietary equivalent of the Blitz, and kept on eating cowmeat in the plucky patriotic way they thought appropriate. But the rest of the world was not so feisty. Unless the causes of the disease could be identified and eradicated, who knew if beef was safe? Even if Britain agreed to the selective cattle cull demanded by the European Community, there was no guarantee that customer confidence outside Britain would return. Public fears demanded that this fresh evil be exorcised at source. People began to doubt the power of science and instead looked to magic for protection. The long reign of European ascendancy had promised to subject an unruly nature to the order of reason. Now that order no longer seems sustainable and once again our world has become confused and ungraspable — everyone is looking for a guidebook for the times.

The Business of Cultural Materialism

But what is the source of these new fears? By the time ecolii grips the headlines in the winter of 1996, killing Scottish pensioners with diseased meat products, most people have realised that something has gone wrong with food in the West. We may discipline our bodies through the intertwined regimes of work, sex and race — but our organic frailty re-emerges in our susceptibility to poison. By the end of the twentieth century, the shape-changing world described in *Keywords* produces nourishment which can kill you. Understanding our troubled time means understanding this organic frailty, this limit to our control. It is the ways of living, working, producing and taking leisure, implied in the *Keywords* account, which give rise to the technologised agriculture of progress. Now that we are dying of this same progress, perhaps new *Keywords* will explain what is happening? The deadly contamination of the foodchain feels like the end of this empire — so, for this daughter of cultural materialism, meat looks like the key word of our (passing) time.

Back at the CCCS heritage site, we all thank heaven for a new metanarrative and resume discussion.

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[16] *The Observer*, 24 March 1996, p.16.

Problems in Ecocriticism and the Novel

Dominic Head

Ecocriticism: a new critical field?

The potential significance of ecocriticism is suggested by a comparison with postcolonialist criticism, which continues to dominate contemporary literary studies, and deservedly so: postcolonialist criticism has emerged not just as a means of focusing the processes of decolonization, but also as a felt response to a new era of Western economic imperialism, and as a challenge to homogenizing notions of globalization. In the various fields of literary analysis these are major issues, and ecocriticism appears to offer a new resource for intervention. It has enormous attractions as a critical orientation which gives the impression of being *grounded* in a directly tangible sense: if we have lost the sense of human history as an ultimate horizon, ecocriticism supplies the planet-as-limit in its stead. However, if this seems to be a compelling material anchor for a host of cultural analyses, we may wonder why the greening of literary studies is taking so long to occur in any substantive way.

A fundamental premise of this newly-emerging yet still marginalized discipline is succinctly put towards the beginning of one of the major works in the field to date, Lawrence Buell's *The Environmental Imagination*, where 'an inquiry into the environmental imagination' is said to force us 'to question the premises of literary theory while using its resources to expose the limitation of literature's representations'.[1] If ecocriticism is a diverse field, there is at least this unifying factor: the sense of a mutual interrogation between literary theory and the pastoral in the fashioning of a new kind of critique, underpinned by a commitment to the environment. Consequently, this combined sense of commitment and mutual interrogation is the characteristic feature and the most persuasive evidence in favour of a new critical School. A point to note is that ecocriticism in this definition — in common with other varieties of literary theory and criticism — is about bringing things to *a state of intellectual crisis*.

Some evidence of coherence or unity is certainly necessary in a field which is characterized by a sense of doubt and provisionality, and by the impression of a series of false starts. If Glen A. Love is right that the term 'ecocriticism' was coined in 1978 by William L. Rueckert — and that the first book of ecocriticism (Joseph Meeker's *The Comedy of Survival: Studies in Literary Ecology*) had already appeared (1972) — ecologically-minded critics

[1] Lawrence Buell, *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture* (Cambridge (Mass.): Harvard, 1995), p. 5.

have had more than two decades in which to make themselves heard.[2] In this era literary studies has embraced and developed the insights of Marxist, feminist and postcolonial commentators in sophisticated ways, yet the ecological perspective remains, by contrast, embryonic. The lack of consensus concerning the proper object of ecocritical attention (and concerning what constitutes an ecological perspective) are the surface manifestations of a deeper problem: the challenge (necessarily embodied in any Green outlook) both to 'literature' as category, and to the social function of the critic. However, in considering the various degrees of compromise involved in professional literary production and interpretation, we still need to move forward without too much self-flagellation; and the starting point for the progression is to accept that criticism is about crisis and transition, and that it is not fully functional in a context governed by a willed utopia-already-with-us.

The difficulties for the would-be ecocritic are compounded by the problem of historical location: the requirements of ecocriticism are based on a contemporary agenda — largely inspired by recent scientific discoveries — and it is unclear how these concerns can be made to 'speak back'. The spectre of an ahistorical criticism manifests itself — for example in the ecocritical focus on Wordsworth and Romanticism.[3] The appropriation of the Romantic tradition — justified by historicizing an ecological viewpoint — presents a challenging question: how far are we willing to accept the historical sleight-of-hand, which seems so necessary in ecocriticism, but less so in, say, Marxist or feminist readings? Can this be a legitimate way of making earlier literature relevant in the seminar room, if the approximation is made explicit? Or does it invite the collapse of historical difference, with all the horrors that that implies? It is also easy to see the ecocritical focus on Romanticism, coupled with a mistrust of theory, as an uncomfortable alliance: one is reminded of the view that pre-1960s criticism had its roots in the Romantic movement.[4]

A book that deserves attention in a consideration of this problem of historical location is *William Morris and 'News from Nowhere': A Vision for Our*

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[2] Glen A. Love, '*Et in Arcadia Ego:* Pastoral Theory Meets Ecocriticism', *Western American Literature*, 27 (1992), 3, pp. 195-207 (196-97). Tony Pinkney suggests that the earliest instance of 'ecologically minded criticism' may be Thomas J. Lyon's 'The Ecological Vision of Gary Snyder', *Kansas Review*, 2 (Spring, 1970), pp. 117-24. See 'Naming Places: Wordsworth and the Possibilities of Eco-criticism', *News from Nowhere* (n.s.) (1995), 1, pp. 41-66 (41).

[3] The first major work of British ecocriticism is Jonathan Bate's *Romantic Ecology Wordsworth and the Environmental Tradition* (London: Routledge, 1991). Bate's re-reading of Romanticism inspires Karl Kroeber's *Ecological Literary Criticism: Romantic Imagining and the Biology of Mind* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), p. 18.

[4] See, for example, Raman Selden, *Practising Theory and Reading Literature* (Harvester: Hemel Hempstead, 1989), p. 2.

Time, a collection of essays published by Green Books in 1990, the centenary of *News from Nowhere*. The volume includes attempts to make Morris's utopian vision speak to contemporary ecological concerns. In his review-essay on the book John Goode observed that 'a selective reading, especially one that lifts individual ideas from the text and rearranges them, can certainly produce a green Morris, just as it can produce a bolshevik Morris, a Trotskyist Morris and an anarchist Morris'.[5] Morris presents an interesting test-case: Raymond Williams, for example, detected in his work an early instance of socialism combining with a politics of ecology, rooted in establishing limits to growth.[6] Even here, however, the logic of Goode's reading is apposite: his emphasis is on how *News from Nowhere* makes us focus on the process of political transition rather than on a dream-vision as a blueprint for the future.[7] It seems certain that this kind of stress on the transitional process needs to be incorporated more clearly into the ecocritical approach.

Despite the emphasis of my analysis so far, there are grounds for expecting a more extensive area of commonality between literary theory and the ecocritical agenda. Arguably, the broader Green movement is predicated on a typically postmodernist de-privileging of the human subject. This phenomenon is in tune with a wider cultural decentring drive, and it is a deprivileging which can lead to a possible grass-roots micropolitics. Such a process itself is characterized by a paradoxical combination of decentring and *re-centring*: traditional given hierarchies are overturned — the assumptions on which they are based decentred — and a new, provisional platform of judgement is installed in a qualified recentring.

One construction of ecological thinking can be shown to be based on this same paradoxical combination, and here there is a direct comparison with elements of postcolonial theory, where the colonizer and his discourses are decentred in relation to the colonized (now no longer seen to be at the margin). In some postcolonial texts (including critical works) there is a transitional dynamic in which decolonization is process. This, in a sense, is a qualified recentring where the Other is unable (yet) to reclaim its history.

Superficially, it might seem that ecocriticism could build on this transitional dynamic in approaching the problem of giving 'voice' to the non-human Other. Indeed, there is a tendency within ecocriticism to follow the lead

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[5] John Goode, 'Now Where Nowhere: William Morris Today', *News from Nowhere*, 9 (Autumn 1991), pp. 50-65 (51). The collection under discussion is Stephen Coleman and Paddy O'Sullivan (eds.), *William Morris and 'News from Nowhere': A Vision for Our Time* (Bideford: Green Books, 1990).

[6] Raymond Williams, 'Socialism and Ecology', in *Resources of Hope* (London: Verso, 1989), pp. 210-26 (215-18).

[7] Goode, p. 64.

of critics recouping marginalized voices. However, this also involves a deliberate sleight-of-hand, a problematic process in which an identity is projected onto nature.

Buell's 'aesthetic of relinquishment' involves the need to imagine 'nonhuman agents as bona fide partners', and in his discussion of 'Nature's Personhood' Buell considers how, in environmental law, an identity can be assigned to nature 'to engineer a change in the legal and ethical status quo by a discursive innovation frankly announced as fictive'. The larger claim is that a cultivated emphasis on the kinship between human and non-human is a powerful ideological tool, that 'to change discourse is to change society'.[8]

It is in the spirit of this pursuit of a beneficent ideology that Jonathan Bate has placed emphasis on Wordsworth's naming of places. In Bate's account the act of naming functions as a mediation between a spontaneous and a meditative response, between a 'lived, illiterate and unconscious' response, and one that is 'learned, literate and conscious'.[9] This notion of mediation implies a social unification — for example, between the experiences of shepherd and poet — to match the desired unification between the human and the natural.

Tony Pinkney, in one of the most rigorous pieces of theorized (though agnostic) ecocriticism to date, uncovers some of the problems concealed by this utopian double-unification. Pinkney argues that Bate 'too often takes the ecological will for the actual poetic deed' in his reading of Wordsworth's 'Poems on the Naming of Places'.[10] In 'To Joanna', for example, Pinkney suggests that 'the very lines that Bate takes as evidence of ecological dwelling and holiness are shot through with gender politics and violence'. (In Pinkney's reading the carving of Joanna's name upon a rock is an ambiguous gesture which simultaneously dissipates and memorializes her power: the gesture is a combination of aggression and affection, whereas for Bate 'her name is taken into nature'.[11]) Here is the kind of potential impasse between an ecological view and critical theory that ecocriticism is apt to identify, and I take it as axiomatic that this kind of crisis point — which Bate is also skilled at locating *within* his own work — is potentially very rewarding. One way to make such crisis points productive is to follow the exhortation with which Pinkney ends his essay:

> Eco-criticism will have to learn to read harder if it is to persuade, and for a while at least forgo that 'wise passiveness' which confines it to overt authorial intention. Utopian bridges between language and the

[8] Buell, pp. 179, 203, 204.
[9] Bate, p. 88.
[10] Pinkney, p. 48.
[11] Bate, p. 98.

> non-human or the sentimental and the naïve will have to be built (if indeed they can) on the other side of that textual complexity, that slow and disturbing task of deep reading, which Marxism, feminism and poststructuralism enjoin upon us.[12]

This, indeed, is the nub of the ecocritic's problem: confronting the task of discerning a path through theory which recuperates the non-human through new discursive practices.

Patrick D. Murphy's attempt to do just this — through the inception of an 'ecofeminist dialogics' — is a bold programme for theorizing the voicing of nature. The programme involves a reinvigoration of dialogics, a supplementation of its social and academic focus: 'ecology and feminisms provide the groundings necessary to turn the dialogical method into a livable critical theory, rather than a merely stable one applicable only to literature, language, and thought.' In essence Murphy's use of dialogics dovetails with a new, relativized model of centres and margins: Bakhtin's centripetal/centrifugal dyad, which produces a dialectical understanding of language, and then of ideology, is extended to encompass the new paradigm shift of the age of ecology. Murphy writes: 'the dialogic method is a way to incorporate that decentering recognition of a permanent *in media res* of human life and a constantly widening context for human interaction and interanimation within the biosphere and beyond.'[13]

An essential feature of this extended dialogics in critical practice is, of course, the voicing of the natural world. But when one considers the writers on whom Murphy focuses — Gary Snyder and Ursula le Guin — it is clear that his critical methodology, which is both persuasive and inventive, may need to be tested through an application to writers who are not so evidently in tune with it. This will supply one path away from the 'wise passiveness' which, according to Pinkney, confines ecocriticism to a consideration of 'overt authorial intention'.

Ecocriticism and the novel

The greatest challenge may be to make the novel relevant to this new critical field. The difficulty of the challenge is considerable, given the emphasis on 'textuality' in both novelistic and critical discourse, and the suspicion voiced by some ecocritics that this emphasis might lead readers away from an engagement with representations of the natural. The tendency of the novel to

[12] Pinkney, pp. 59, 66.

[13] Patrick D. Murphy, *Literature, Nature, and Other: Ecofeminist Critiques* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), pp. 4, 15-16, 17.

focus on personal development, and on social rather than environmental matters (and on time rather than place) is sometimes said to create an impression of alienation from the natural.[14] A simple solution would be to detach a consideration of content from form: we might then find much to say about the regional novel, or about narrative fictions written in the utopian and dystopian traditions. But if ecocriticism is to realize its full potential, it will need to find a way of appropriating novelistic form. The focus, here, is our perceived crisis of disconnection from the non-human Other.

A representative ecocritical solution for this crisis of disconnection is offered by Glen A. Love, for whom there may be something redemptive in the literature of place, especially in nature writing which celebrates the natural world as Other. A problem emerges when Love blurs the literature of place from different traditions in his prescriptive cure for our 'communal neurosis', a cure which must come from 'elsewhere': 'John Alcorn finds this "elsewhere" in the English literature of place as revealed in the nature novels of Hardy and Lawrence. For others of us, the literature of the American West constitutes that sort of an alternative.'[15]

The indisputable natural otherness of Arizona, a touchstone for Glen Love, may indeed inspire the kind of celebratory nature writing of which there is a strong tradition in the U.S., and which is directly linked to North American ecocriticism. Yet we must surely baulk at the invocation of Hardy and Lawrence in the same connection: the resonant 'nature' imagery of these novelists has the reverse impetus to that North American wilderness writing which offers a poetic and contemplative elsewhere. Whether we think of Ursula Brangwen's vision of the rainbow above the colliers' houses of Beldover, or of Eustacia Vye atop Rainbarrow, or Tess entering the vale of the Great Dairies like a fly on a billiard table, we are confronted with 'natural' images in which questions of social history and sexual politics are inscribed in the scene or in the landscape. This *inscription*, of course, is directly material in the worlds of these novels, and not only a matter of poetic affinity or correlation. To understand this kind of 'nature novel' one must not forget, in Raymond Williams's words, that 'a considerable part of what we call natural landscape ... is the product of human design and human labour, and in admiring it as natural it matters very much whether we suppress that fact of

[14] For some representative ecocritical concerns about the habits of literary theory, and about the dynamic of fiction, see Buell, pp. 83-114.

[15] Glen A. Love, 'Revaluing Nature: Toward an Ecological Criticism', in *Old West, New West: Centennial Essays*, edited by Barbara Howard Meldrum (Moscow (Idaho): University of Idaho Press, 1993), pp. 283-99 (292). Love refers to John Alcorn's *The Nature Novel from Hardy to Lawrence* (London: Macmillan, 1977).

labour or acknowledge it.'[16] Following the trained critical archaeology this implies, the represented landscape becomes a text in which human interaction with the environment is indelibly recorded: it follows that a Green materialist reading of this inner text cannot divorce the social from the natural, or, indeed, the question of form from content.

This last point is crucial because it places emphasis on 'textuality' in a way which is sensitive to an organic perception of literary form, and which may allay the fears of some ecologically-minded critics concerning a perceived widening gap between world and text in literary studies. Such a perception marks the point where the anti-theorists may find succour in a more literal-minded Green approach which laments, in the words of Wendell Berry, our 'linguistic no-man's land in which words and things, words and deeds, words and people' fail 'to stand in reliable connection or fidelity to one another'.[17] The emphasis on textuality, on complex reading, can easily be associated with an alienated consciousness, divorced from contact with the natural world *and so intimately connected to the systems of eco-damage*. However, the detective work required in the analysis of Hardy's and Lawrence's nature imagery puts this in perspective. The complex layerings of these writers consciously employ a pointed textuality — the encodings and inscriptions of the represented landscapes — as an integral part of their design. The simple point is that a textualizing process, for the novel, belongs to the creative as much as the critical sphere, and that, far from producing alienation, it may indicate the necessary route to an invigorated Green materialism in literary studies.

Yet this reasoning may be redundant, if the novel is peculiarly resistant to the operations of ecocritical enquiry. Here there are grounds for pessimism about the dominance of the novel in twentieth-century literature, since this a mode of discourse which speaks to an increasingly urbanized population whose concerns appear to have no immediate connection with the non-human environment. A Green reading of the genre, baldly summarized in this way, would seem to demand a vulgar ecocritical exposure of what is left out — of the genre's environmental bad faith. Lawrence Buell's solution to the problems involved in the dominance of fictive literary modes (and the effects of this dominance on literary theorists) is to turn to environmental nonfiction — nature writing. There is an elegant coherence to this decision, which leaves in its wake a difficult challenge to re-theorize the study of the novel.

Buell's checklist of the ingredients of 'an environmentally oriented work' is instructive. The first (and most evidently ecocentric) of Buell's four

[16] Raymond Williams, 'Ideas of Nature', in *Problems in Materialism and Culture* (London: Verso, 1989), pp. 67-85 (78).
[17] Wendell Berry, *Standing on Earth* (Ipswich: Golgonooza Press, 1991), p. 134.

requirements is that '*the nonhuman environment is present not merely as a framing device but as a presence that begins to suggest that human history is implicated in natural history*'. One can think of very few novels in which this principle is sustained throughout, and the logic of this requirement may contradict the way in which the novel's role as a social medium is usually articulated. Raymond Williams's unfinished trilogy *People of the Black Mountains* (in which narrative continuity is supplied by place rather than character) could be read as a major experiment in support of this ecocentric principle, but it is hard to conceive of the novel as a genre reinventing itself in this way. Indeed, Buell's conception of the literary involves an 'aesthetic of relinquishment' which 'fits environmental non-fiction better than lyric poetry and prose fiction', because these modes rely on 'the most basic aesthetic pleasures of homocentrism: plot, characterization, lyric pathos, dialogue, intersocial events, and so on'.[18]

From an ecocritical perspective, the advantage of non-fictional nature writing is that it simplifies the processes of discursive mediation in putting readers in touch with the outer reality that is represented. Buell shows how environmental nonfiction can cultivate a new kind of realism — or outer mimesis — which can palliate the over-textualizing tendency of literary analysis which *is* presented, in this argument, as complicitous with our crisis of disconnection. Buell writes of

> a fallacy of derealization: the bourgeoisie's false assumption that environmental interventions in its planned existence are nothing more than fortuitous occasional events. The notion of art (and other cultural practices) as discursive functions carried on within social 'spaces' reinforces this mentality no less efficiently than air-conditioning.

A false ideology is reproduced, so this argument runs, through an *overemphasis* on discursive practices, which have an alienating function analogous to — and intimately connected to — the artificial spaces of late capitalism. The alternative kind of outer mimesis — a palliative process — is represented by environmental representation.

Yet this is not mimesis as imitation. Buell demonstrates 'environmental representation's power to invent, stylize, and dislocate while at the same time pursuing a decidedly referential project'. The apparent paradox of a representation which is stylized yet referential at the same time is aptly illustrated by those field guides containing paintings or drawings which, for example, emphasize only certain markings on a bird or a butterfly. Such representations contain a level of abstraction, yet assist the identification of

[18] Buell, pp. 7-8, 168.

species in the field more effectively than a photographic representation. It is the stylized image which has the greater capacity to put the reader or viewer in touch with the environment.[19]

There are affinities, at a technical level, between this celebration of environmental representation and Paul Ricoeur's tripartite explanation of mimesis in narrative fiction, as representation rather than imitation.[20] $Mimesis_1$ is the stage of preunderstanding of action and the need for it to be mediated in articulation, and a preunderstanding of Being in time. $Mimesis_2$ is the configuration of action in the emplotment of the work itself. Crucially important to this level is how the fictive present in a work of narrative fiction supplies a framework for conjoining recollection and anticipation, a framework which emulates our authentic experience of Being in time. The reading process supplies a bridge to $mimesis_3$. This is the stage of refiguration, which marks the intersection of two worlds: the world of the text and the world of the reader. For Ricoeur, narrative has its full meaning when it is restored to the time of action and suffering in $mimesis_3$. And an essential part of this restoration is a quest for personal identity in the act of reading and interpretation — in our assuming responsibility for a story.

This three-stage mimesis begins with our worldly experience of time and action, traces how these elements of preunderstanding are drawn on in the composition of a text, and stresses a return to the world of the reader in the active process of reception and interpretation. And the more self-conscious and artificial the text is, the more effort is required in its interpretation, and so (if it is successful) the greater its impact will be at the level of $mimesis_3$. As in the field guides in which stylization produces recognition, the novelistic effect is produced by a complex stylization as an integral part of a substantive mimesis.

If there are affinities, technically, between the novel and environmental non-fiction in their mimetic procedures, what is distinctive about the novel in this connection is its dual stress on Being in time and personal growth as structural components. The answer to the question: 'how Green is the novel?' may depend on how these components are viewed. Ostensibly, the stresses on personal time and personal growth might seem catastrophically anthropocentric. Yet, from a pedagogic point of view, these features need not be seen as indices of an unregenerated anthropocentrism, but rather a literary route for changing consciousness, part of that necessary transitional process of bringing things to a crisis. This does not mean, of course, that all novels will treat environmental topics; even so we may have

[19] Buell, pp. 110-11, 99, 97-98.

[20] See Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, translated by Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer (3 vols., Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1984-88).

progressed beyond a simple dichotomy between form and content, with the novel retaining the capacity to treat environmental themes in a manner to create an impact on consciousness at the level of mimesis$_3$.

This notion of bridging world and text — in which a formal capacity is available for the treatment of an apposite content — may also tap into an innate human process of cognition. The possibility of an habitual environmental sensitivity is suggested by the emergent field of literary analysis combined with biological science. If biological science can definitively break down the separation between the human individual and his or her environment — since even our own bodies play host to apparently independent micro-organisms — then the implications for our modes of perception appear to be enormous. Arnold Berleant's aesthetics of environment registers the enormity here. His argument, beginning with the premise that 'person and environment are continuous', necessitates a new understanding of perception in which an aesthetic response is always already a material engagement rather than merely a contemplative one:

> To the extent that every thing, every place, every event is experienced by an aware body with sensory directness and immediate significance, it has an aesthetic element. ... No longer confined to the safe precincts of gardens and parks, the boundaries of the aesthetic must be redefined to encompass all of nature, city as well as countryside, factory as well as museum ... The implications of this affect not only aesthetic theory but value theory in general, indeed, philosophy *en tout*. ... If every *thing* has an aesthetic dimension, then so does every *experience* of every thing, since things stand for us only in so far as we experience them, and an aesthetic dimension is inherent in all experience.[21]

The beauty of this conception of aesthetic experience is that it undercuts the binary opposition between anthropocentrism and ecocentrism, since human perception is continuous with the material world. However, the dismantling of this opposition may be potentially irresponsible if, for example, all human activity is seen as 'natural'. Nevertheless, it appears to offer a way of mitigating the distancing effects of literary mediation, since an aesthetic response is common not just to the refiguration of a literary effect, but to all sensory processing.

It seems to me that an idealistic ecocriticism, in a thorough-going ecocentric form, would need to establish an aesthetic which is very much like

[21] Arnold Berleant, *The Aesthetics of Environment* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992), pp. 4, 10-11.

this, and which demolishes the self-Other dualism. The underpinning is ethical and utopian, as Berleant makes abundantly clear:

> Environmental aesthetics ... deals with the conditions under which people join as participants in an integrated situation. ... An environmental aesthetics of engagement suggests deep political changes away from hierarchy and its exercise of power and toward community, where people freely engage in mutually fulfilling activities.[22]

The actual utopia envisaged by Berleant is also based on a utopian theoretical impulse to reinvigorate the aesthetic. This impulse has credibility in so far as it is based on a prescribed reconception of Being reinforced by biological science. Yet, despite *this* material basis, the projection of a prelapsarian oneness of Being is also strangely abstract, removed from social processes. More important, for my purposes, is the difficulty in making this kind of aesthetic response relevant to novelistic discourse, and here the dream begins to fade. The close reading of novels, after all, trades on the discrepancy and interaction between different ontological (and epistemological) levels, and does so not because it follows an arcane agenda of its own, but because novelistic representations always install these different levels. The literary effect, in general, I am tempted to say, is generated by a kind of self-consciousness which a thoroughly ecocentric criticism might need to extirpate.

One purpose of these reflections is to establish the grounds for a Green reading of the novel, which gets beyond a dependence on content. Can we, then, imagine a novel which incorporates contemporary environmental concerns; which traces the intersection of time and space; which shows how personal time and personal identity are implicated in both social and environmental history; and does all of this — not *despite* — but *because* of its self-consciousness about textuality? I would argue that this is an accurate summary of what makes Graham Swift's *Waterland* the important novel it is.[23]

Waterland is a novel constructed through a combination of different narratives: public, national histories; the history of the Fens; private, 'dynastic' histories (focused on the human interaction with the environment down the centuries); superstition and the supernatural form another element, and equally important is the natural history of the eel. The configuration of these different strands demonstrates a process of siltation in History teacher Tom Crick's quest for personal identity. The quest is conducted through the

[22] Berleant, pp. 12-13.
[23] Graham Swift, *Waterland* (1983; London: Picador, 1984).

uncovering of layers of personal guilt — guilt by historical association as well as the guilt rooted in personal actions.

Even if there is no *overtly* ecological message in this novel, the motif of siltation — as both structure and theme — insists on certain connections in the construction of human identity: the necessary co-existence of private feeling and public event, but also the interdependence of time, place and politics. If the discovery of human siltation brings the past vitally into the present, it does so by insisting on Being in an environment: this has to do not simply with matters of subsistence, but also with environment as a limit to consciousness (there are repeated references to how the flat Fenland landscape may affect the psyche, and adversely so). My point, of course, (drawing on the simplified model of Ricoeur's mimesis) is that Swift makes special use of the formal capacities of the novel in making these connections, most especially a bringing to crisis of personal consciousness through complex configuration. At the level of refiguration the novel forces our analytical hand in a way which redeems much of the negative emphasis.

When Dick — Tom's brain-damaged half-brother — discovers his personal history — the novel's tragic denouement unfolds. He is the product of an incestuous relationship between his mother and his unbalanced grandfather, who has interpellated Dick as 'Saviour of the World'. But the irony of this designation is effaced by Dick's suicide: he dives off the dredger that is his place of work (his business is the control of siltation) and is imagined by narrator Tom Crick swimming out to sea like the eel, the mystical creature with which he has been closely associated. The dive installs Dick as a scapegoat figure, sacrificed in expiation of society's sins. He is the product of a multitude of sins by blood or by association: industrial exploitation; imperialism; sexual jealousy; incest; murder and a lost political vision. Here Dick swims symbolically away from the developed West — the setting sun behind him — to return to his mythic origins. Subtly the focus on Tom Crick is displaced by this ending, which recentres the sense of tragedy on Dick. The personal guilt of Tom Crick has the same components as the collective guilt projected onto Dick as scapegoat for a society's sins. By this correspondence the sense of personal time/personal history becomes necessarily linked to collective goals, which implicitly emerge, through the realization that a disastrous banishing of the natural is the product of modern social and industrial history.

Graham Swift manages to make the *form* of his novel carry this larger agenda, and the effect is by no means unique: it is not difficult to think immediately of a handful of novels which would lend themselves to this kind of analysis — my list would include: Ian McEwan's *The Child in Time*, J. M. Coetzee's *Life and Times of Michael K*, Gabriel Garcia Marquez's *Love in the Time of Cholera*, and Nadine Gordimer's *The Conservationist*. Of course, the choice is selective, but the point is merely that it is possible to list several

novelists to support the projected principles. And this is without having recourse to writers consciously writing in the tradition of the 'regional' novel; or drawing on Margaret Atwood, Ursula le Guin, and the fertile traditions of wilderness and utopian/dystopian writing. My modest — and perhaps rather obvious — suggestion is just this: that the modern novel, with its emphasis on private feeling as the source of public action, can be an appropriate vehicle for a Green agenda, whether creative or critical.

Yet a focus on form will not necessarily produce a pedagogy with pragmatic roots. This is demonstrated by that notional first work of ecocriticism, Meeker's *The Comedy of Survival*. Meeker's thesis, essentially, is that the comic mode should be favoured over the tragic mode, since the latter replicates (and encourages) a now outmoded egocentrism, whereas the former is in tune with a non-destructive and ecocentric world-view:

> If the lesson of ecology is balance and equilibrium, the lesson of comedy is humility and endurance. The comic mode of human behavior represented in literature is the closest art has come to describing man as an adaptive animal. Comedy illustrates that survival depends upon man's ability to change himself rather than his environment, and upon his ability to accept limitations rather than to curse fate for limiting him.[24]

An example that illustrates this principle, for Meeker, is the apolitical philosophy of the old Italian whoremaster in Joseph Heller's *Catch-22*, whose affiliations are shamelessly expedient: once a supporter of Mussolini, he became an anti-fascist when Mussolini was deposed; once fanatically pro-German, he is now fanatically pro-American. The old man (who is a hundred and seven) outrages the idealistic young soldier Nately (who, ironically, dies before he is twenty). 'The old man's morality', concludes Meeker, 'rests upon the comic imperative of preserving life itself at all costs, a principle which overrides all other moral commitments', since

> evolution is just such a shameful, unscrupulous, opportunistic comedy, the object of which appears to be the proliferation and preservation of as many life forms as possible without regard for anyone's moral ideas. Successful participants in it are those who remain alive when circumstances change, not those who are best able to destroy competitors and enemies. Its ground rules for

[24] Meeker, 'The Comic Mode', (extract from *The Comedy of Survival*), in Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm (eds.), *The Ecocriticism Reader* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1996), pp. 155-69 (168-9).

> participants (including man) are those which also govern literary comedy: organisms must adapt themselves to their circumstances in every possible way.[25]

Leaving aside the definition of comedy, the most arresting principle of this analysis is the offence it offers, quite deliberately, to socially-oriented criticism: we are asked to imagine a radically new reading process, requiring us to adopt an unrecognizable model of the social, in which amoral opportunism is to be celebrated. More troubling is that this kind of parallel — between what constitutes a healthy ecosystem, and the principles of an ecocentric human community — remains common in ecological writing and criticism; and surely it is time for us to dispense with such ungrounded analogies. A transitional ecocritical model would make it quite impossible to equate the limits of the ecosystem with the delimitations of society in this way, where both are to be respected as given (another 'wise passiveness'). Indeed, the politics of ecology insists on a causal relationship between the two, in which social structures must be reconceived in order to preserve planetary systems of self-regulation. And if Meeker is right about tragedy, this need not take it beyond the attention of the critic seeking to uncover the contradictions of capitalism and the 'tragedy of development', as Marshall Berman has shown.[26]

My larger — and perhaps more contentious — suggestion is that if the novelist and the critic have no place in a Green Utopia, they do function properly in the transitional context of bringing things to a crisis. If we permit the use of the term ecocriticism to designate the cultural work of this interim, we can do so only by acknowledging that it is underpinned by the kind of 'weak anthropocentrism' that Andrew Dobson sees as essential to the politics of ecology, or ecologism.[27] My worry is that if a transitional dynamic is not cultivated within ecocriticism, together with an acknowledged anthropocentrism, this is a critical practice which will get precisely nowhere, confining itself to an unrealized utopia.

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[25] Meeker, pp. 165-6.
[26] See Marshall Berman, *All That is Solid Melts Into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (1982; London: Verso, 1987).
[27] Andrew Dobson, *Green Political Thought* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1990), pp. 53-67.

Sexual Emergenc(i)es: Cultural Theories and Contemporary Sexual Politics[1]

Richard Johnson

In April 1997, with my co-author Debbie Epstein, I completed a book on sexuality and schooling. *Schooling Sexualities*[2] is part of a research programme on the contemporary politics of sexuality, on the sexual cultures of young people, and on schools as places where sexual identities are formed.[3] In this essay I reflect on some theoretical issues this work has raised. In the current revival of polemic around cultural studies, 'social' (sometimes 'materialist') and 'textual' (usually 'postmodern' or 'poststructuralist') approaches are often placed in stark opposition.[4] Partly in response to this, I propose a materialist use of discourse analysis which explores both the strengths and limits of Foucauldian approaches. I identify the points where it is important to draw on Marxist perspectives and why, revisiting, in particular, Raymond Williams's essays on hegemony in *Marxism and Literature* (1977). I argue that 'academic' literatures — here sexual theories and 'queer theory' especially — should not be viewed as extrinsic to our object of study, as sources of our own approaches merely. Rather, they are part and parcel of the historical process — the discursive and sexual struggles — in which we are all engaged.

[1] This essay is a development of some themes in my inaugural lecture at Nottingham Trent University, 'Scandalous Oppositions: Cultural Criticism and Sexual Regulation in Contemporary Britain', which dealt more fully with the theme of academic knowledges and politics in the sexual domain. I am especially grateful to Debbie Epstein, who helped to develop many of the ideas in both pieces, and to Jeff Wallace, Roger Bromley, Jim McGuigan and Graham Martin for useful comments on an earlier draft of this essay.

[2] Debbie Epstein and Richard Johnson, *Schooling Sexualities* (Buckingham: Open University Press, forthcoming, 1998).

[3] The larger project can be traced through the following associated publications (among others): Debbie Epstein (ed.)*, Challenging Lesbian and Gay Inequalities in Education* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1994); Deborah Lynn Steinberg, Debbie Epstein and Richard Johnson (eds.), *Border Patrols: Policing the Boundaries of Heterosexuality* (London: Cassell, 1997); Mary Jane Kehily, Chris Haywood and Maírtín Mac an Ghaill (eds.), 'The Sexual Politics of Education', Special Issue, *Curriculum Studies,* 4, 2 (1996).

[4] See, for example, several of the essays in Marjorie Ferguson and Peter Golding (eds.), *Cultural Studies in Question* (London: Sage, 1997) and in Elizabeth Long (ed.), *Engaging Sociology and Cultural Studies* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997).

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Schooling Sexualities: The Project

One of the main aims of *Schooling Sexualities* was to explore interactions between public discourses of the sexual and the everyday production of sexual identities in and around the schools. Sexuality in the schools is regulated by the national and local state, political and policy debates, professional (e.g., pedagogic, therapeutic and medical) discourses, mainstream media and commercial popular culture. At the same time, schools are concrete social sites where schoolchildren, teachers and other agents produce themselves as sexual agents, under conditions, including many features of schooling, which they do not choose. Officially de-sexualized, schools are awash with sexual interest. We were especially concerned with lesbian and gay identities, partly to uphold them politically, but also because lesbian, gay and 'queer' standpoints and theories are ways of getting a thoughtful, critical purchase on the dominant sexual paradigms.

The project involved two main kinds of research: 'ethnographic' observation and interviewing in and around the schools;[5] and a kind of cultural-political contemporary history or analysis, focusing on movements in public sexual culture and their more 'structural' determinations. This second aspect was my main interest in the book, though we wrote one ethnographic chapter together. This type of work — the critique of 'the dominant' — has often been neglected in recent polemics.[6] The focus, of critics of cultural studies especially, has been on the analysis of 'media' texts, on popular readership or consumption, and on other forms of so-called 'cultural populism'.[7]

My work for the project included reading selected parliamentary debates, departmental circulars and mainstream media coverage to construct an account of the dominant frameworks and their instabilities and

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[5] I will not discuss the ethnographic work here because it was mainly the responsibility of Debbie Epstein and her co-workers on our project. However we both see the analysis of public culture as incomplete and sometimes misleading without exploring cultural production at the everyday level, just as we also recognise that everyday productions are also discursively formed and in relation to hegemonic forms.

[6] I am thinking particularly of Stuart Hall *et al*., *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, The State and Law and Order* (London: Macmillan, 1978) and of Hall's own subsequent work on Thatcherism. See also a strand of work on educational debates and policy including CCCS Education Group, *Unpopular Education: Schooling and Social Democracy in England since 1944* (London: Hutchinson, 1981) and Education Group II, *Education Limited: Schooling, Training and the New Right Since 1979* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1990).

[7] Jim McGuigan, *Cultural Populism* (London: Routledge, 1992) and some of the essays in Ferguson and Golding and in Long.

contradictions.[8] The contradictions were most evident in what we called 'sexual news', including the 'Back to Basics' scandals of Major's last years and the long-running stories of sexual contestation in state institutions: monarchy, military, the police, the law, the churches and the media themselves.

Our most general concern was to map the field of public discourse around sexual questions. This was important as a way into the public sexual culture which frames school relations and the lives of children and young adults. So what were the dominant or hegemonic definitions in the field of sexual knowledges and what held them in place? How were other elements articulated to the dominant frameworks? How could we understand the longer-standing 'modern' formations: the combination (especially clear in scandal-mongering) of 'excessive speech' about sexuality and its simultaneous closeting or veiling - 'speaking of it *ad infinitum*, while exploiting it as *the* secret', as Foucault puts it?[9] And what about alternative positions around the sexual: were they incorporated into conservative discourses, marginalised, disorganized or sustainedly oppositional? We were especially interested in 'social liberal' positions which were pro-state, pro-education and within limits pro-sex., underpinning public initiatives in health and sexuality education. Finally, what was the relation between public sexual culture and the limited public of the critical academy, including (literary-critical) approaches to the sexual? We read the work of Judith Butler, Eve Sedgwick, Jonathan Dollimore and other 'queer theorists', as well as Foucauldian historians like Jeffrey Weeks and their critics.[10] Putting these theories into the picture meant assessing their explanatory strengths but also figuring out their political potentials in relation to the dominant and its partly incorporated alternatives. After all, these writings — and the social movements from whose activists they stemmed — were all part of the same contemporary social-sexual dynamic.

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[8] In particular I looked at debates around the Family Law Bill of 1996 (divorce) , clause 28 of the Local Government Bill of 1986, legislation and circulars on sex education in the schools, and debates on the age of consent for gay men.

[9] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality,* vol. I (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1981), p. 35.

[10] Judith Butler, *Gender Troubles: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London: Routledge, 1990); Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter* (London: Routledge,1993); Eve K. Sedgwick, *Tendencies* (London: Routledge, 1994); Eve K. Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (London: Penguin, 1994); Jonathan Dollimore, *Sexual Dissidence: Augustine to Wilde, Freud to Foucault* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991); Jeffrey Weeks, *Sexuality* (London: Tavistock, 1986); Martin B. Duberman, Martha Vicinus and George Chauncey (eds.), *Hidden from History: Reclaiming the Gay and Lesbian Past* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1991).

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The take-up of moral traditionalist policies by an electorally desperate government from the mid-1980s lent political edge to the inquiry. The marked oscillation between attacks on lesbian and gay activism and evident signs of difficulty in conventional heterosexual relations sharpened our sense of a turning point in the history of the sexual. We worked on the study from 1991 to 1997, completing it about a month before New Labour's electoral victory of 1 May 1997. Our main study does not deal with the consequences of 1 May for sexual politics - which even now are far from clear.

Poststructuralism and Materialism: General Orientations

Frameworks of analysis are developed in the light of concrete issues and agendas, however hidden by abstraction they may be. But theoretical choices (and innovations) are made and do matter. They steer choices of research materials and methods of reading as well as explanatory accounts. Explicit theoretical choices are made harder but also more significant today because of creative disarray and fragmentation around the competing claims of (various) 'materialist' and (various) 'postmodern' options. Writing about sexuality shares in this: with tensions, for example, between something of a revival of state- and capital- centred approaches (usually within politics or sociology) and the continuing influence of poststructuralist and psychoanalytic frameworks (especially in work in a literary register). Most exciting have been attempts to bring together elements of competing paradigms without loss of coherence, critical edge or explanatory ambition and with political considerations foremost.[11] They parallel general attempts to construct contemporary radical syntheses under titles like 'social postmodernism'.[12]

The positions that inform *Schooling Sexualities* can be expressed as an orientation towards cultural studies and its history.[13] Structuralist and poststructuralist traditions were/are indispensable for opening up the space of specifically cultural analysis against the weight of reductive theories and methods. They allow us to grasp the conditions of social agency in the world, conditions which are not only 'material' or 'political' or 'economic' but also always with a 'cultural' layer or admixture. These social-cultural conditions are

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[11] For examples of this strategy apart from Steinberg, Epstein and Johnson, see Anna Marie Smith, *New Right Discourse on Race and Sexuality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Simon Watney, *Policing Desire: Pornography, AIDS and the Media* (London: Comedia, 1987).

[12] Linda Nicholson and Stephen Seidman, *Social Postmodernism: Beyond Identity Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

[13] What follows is based on the ingestion of many debates, but those in the Politics of Sexuality Group from 1991 onwards, and recorded in Steinberg, Epstein and Johnson, esp. Pp. 4-12, were especially relevant.

strongly determining — involving both 'pressures' and 'limits' in Williams's terms;[14] they are as determining — *in their own ways* — as 'base' or 'structure' in the older Marxist conceptions. Culture is not just the domain of choice, free-will or creativity against the tyrannies of 'system'. It includes the historically-variable terms through which human beings are themselves constituted as social agents, a process which has a definite history and is susceptible to both everyday and long-term organised contestation. Of course these insights arose from social movements first and foremost - and from conservative responses. But the history of theories of culture, power and identity is one place where the differences have registered most explicitly.

Central in the cultural turn, which is also a revolution in political thinking, has been the critique of narrowly juridical and state-centred notions of power. This point is well illustrated in our study. The regulation of sexuality in schools includes definite statutory and administrative controls, around sex education for instance. Public debates, however, do not have to pass into law to be powerful definers. Laws may even be thought to exist, or to apply, when they do not. There is a widespread belief, for example, that Section 28 of the Local Government Act of 1987-8 prohibits teaching about homosexuality in schools.[15] Actually the Section only forbids *local authorities* (no longer primarily responsible for sex education) to 'promote' homosexual relationships. But beyond this narrowly 'ideological' effect of law, public debates and personally mediated social relationships (across many different institutional sites) exercise a continuous 'educational' pressure on all forms of social identification. As soon as this is taken into account, the object of study shifts radically from law or state or formal politics to encompass a range of powerful actions on embodied subjectivities in process, within the complexities of the everyday.

There are important convergences between the developed materialist theories of the 1930s-1970s (the various 'cultural materialisms'?) and the poststructuralist stress on power/knowledge as discourse developed in the wake of 1968 — between, for example, Gramsci and the later Foucault. It remains important to hold the dialogue between these positions open and argue against those — from E. P. Thompson to James Carey — who have wanted to close it down, because they have believed that the encounter with

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[14] Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature*,(Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), pp. 87-88. Williams's account of how the pressures of formations become subjectively active by being 'internalized' is not, however, very satisfactory, and points to the need for a much more complex account of the 'inside' of cultural processes.

[15] Occasions when I heard this assumption being made and agreed to until challenged have included a workshop for teachers of sex education and an activist conference on heterosexism in Higher Education.

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'French' structuralism/poststructuralism 'deformed' some otherwise evolving local politics in Britain or the USA of which cultural studies had been a part.[16] When Gramsci argued against a narrowly coercive definition of state or power, he invoked an expanded notion of education. He also saw education as exceeding nation, though no one was more concerned with national specificity (or opposed to the 'cosmopolitan') than he:

> Every relationship of 'hegemony' is necessarily an educational relationship, and occurs not only within a nation, between the various forces of which the nation is composed, but in the international and world-wide field, between complexes of national and continental civilizations.[17]

For Foucault too the model of power as law was fatally limited, an argument he puts particularly forcefully for sexuality. Non-state non-legal discourse plays the critical part in modern sexual regimes. Power operates not only by repression but through pleasure and incitement; not only through secrecy but through confession:

> Pleasure and power do not cancel or turn back against one another; they seek out, overlap, and reinforce one another. They are linked together by complex mechanisms and devices of excitation and incitement.[18]

One apparently paradoxical conclusion is the importance of applying critical cultural analysis to formal politics, élite ways of life and to the state. In the first part of *Schooling Sexuality,* we focus (some would say as usual!) on powerful, white and usually heterosexual men: MPs, ministers of state, who aspire to be 'educators'. They stress the declaratory force of law in the sexual domain — 'giving out a message from this House'. Yet cultural analysis shows how they are themselves caught in the discursive toils of pleasure and power, publicity and secrets, and act out sexual contradictions, as scandalous subjects themselves or as colleagues sucked into the quick-sands of 'sleaze'. Their responses — rankly hypocritical or narrowly moralistic — give out messages other than those intended. The 'basics' of moral traditionalism were not only revived in the mid-1990s, but systematically 'un-taught', tested to

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16 E. P. Thompson, *The Poverty of Theory and Other Essays* (London: Merlin Press, 1978); cf. James W. Carey, 'Reflections on the Project of (American) Cultural Studies', in Ferguson and Golding, esp. p. 15.

17 Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (eds. and trans.), *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1971), p. 350.

18 Foucault, *The History of Sexuality,* p. 48.

destruction.

It is essential not to fall behind the insights about the importance of the cultural today. Contemporary polemics often replay an older conflict, especially the engagements between 'cultural materialism' and a Marxism that was not 'cultural' at all. The indivisibility of what Williams often called 'the whole social process' was a key theme of New Left cultural theory.[19] However, there is a difference between asserting an all-round connectedness and determinacy and finding ways to give weight and specificity to each moment in a process and to the relations between them. In my opinion — influenced certainly by the Althusserianism of the later 1970s — it was necessary first to have a language for complexity, to free ourselves from the search for social essences, before the earlier cultural-materialist aspiration could be realised.

At the same time, it is an important priority today to embed cultural analysis in an understanding of formal political and socio-economic processes and especially in ways of understanding the pragmatics of everyday living in all its social relations and differentiations. This implies rapprochements with political economy and the study of formal politics and the state. But it also implies a *quid pro quo* on the side of economic and political 'science': to embed *their* own understandings of public politics and economic circuits in adequate (not reductive or derivative) accounts of cultural conditions and processes. Just as cultural production has its own 'material' conditions, so economic production and consumption depend on cultural conditions: knowledges, social values, and priorities, specific ideologies, distinct discursive conditions and forms of identity and subjectivity.

Discourse, Discursive Formation and Strategy

Our preferred approach to 'discourse' in *Schooling Sexualities* is an example of this general position. Discourse, discursive formation and discursive strategy are all categories derived from Foucault's work; they provided starting points for our work on public representations.

Discursive analysis brings into close association ideas of knowledge, power and social identity. In our own work, 'discourse' is not just a description of language, texts or even of culture - as the more linguistic or literary readings imply. Rather, discursive analysis and a text-based method are ways of highlighting the cultural *element* in all social practices, without dividing

[19] e.g. 'Determination of this whole kind — a complex and interrelated process of limits and pressures — is in the whole social process itself and nowhere else' (Williams, p. 87). This is an interestingly Foucauldian proposition!

meaning/ feeling from the other forms of action in the world.[20] At the same time, it implies a criticism of reductive politico-economic arguments: power cannot be reduced to some transparent working of 'interests' or to the realist pursuit of advantage. The question is — advantage according to what criteria, what priorities, what agendas, what discursive formations?

Discourse is used in different ways in concrete analysis. It is used rather strictly, to describe a systematic disciplinary deployment of knowledge and power, especially of a 'scientific' kind· This singular use is important where the boundaries of a key discourse can be identified, so foregrounding particular pressures and border lines. Relatively discrete discourses in the sexual domain include 'public health pragmatism',[21] the medical sciences of venereology and epidemiology (in relation to sexually transmitted diseases, especially HIV and AIDS),[22] the continued medicalisation of the sexual and its increasing therapy-isation, the pivotal role of religion, and the strategic importance of the biology of human procreation. We have only to think through the different meanings of 'natural' or 'normal' when applied to sexual acts or identities, and the closures these deployments achieve, to see the value of this kind of analysis.

Discourse can be used more loosely, adjectivally perhaps, as in 'discursive formation' or 'discursive strategy'· 'Discursive formation' draws attention to *combinations* of discourses and gestures to the dynamics of larger social changes. It attends to inter-discursivity, the dependence of sexual sciences on popular narratives for instance.[23] This usage brings Foucauldian analysis closer to a culturally rich historical materialism. I think that the idea of a *discursive formation*, through present in Foucault's own work especially in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, gains most currency in Britain from the junction of Foucauldian and Gramscian analysis in the work, for instance, of Chantal Mouffe, Ernesto Laclau, Stuart Hall and others who were involved in

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[20] There is a problem about 'feeling' in the Foucauldian version of poststructuralism. I agree with those who have argued that the analysis of discourse needs to be further transformed by an understanding of f/phantasy in one of several psychoanalytic senses, e.g. Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), esp. pp. 66-84.

[21] For example, the pragmatic determination to reduce teenage pregnancy rates or levels of HIV infection. Important though these issues are, to think of sexuality primarily in these terms is very narrowing. See Rachel Thompson 'Moral Rhetoric and Public Health Pragmatism: The Recent Politics of Sex Education' *Feminist Review* 48 (1994), pp. 40-60.

[22] See Peter Redman, 'Invasion of the Monstrous Others: Heterosexual Masculinities, the "AIDS Carrier" and the Horror Genre', in Steinberg, Epstein and Johnson, pp. 98-117.

[23] This is Redman's argument in 'Invasion of the Monstrous Others'.

Birmingham-Essex discussions in the 1970s.[24]

The first task in my own research was to 'map' the different positions taken in formal politics and mainstream media over key sexual issues. The idea of a discursive 'strategy' in *The History of Sexuality* was helpful here. 'Strategy' is one of the modalities of power:

> Discourses are tactical elements or blocks operating in the field of force relations; there can exist different and even contradictory discourses within the same strategy; they can, on the contrary, circulate without changing their form from one strategy to another, opposing strategy. [25]

So 'strategy' refers to a subset of the larger discursive formation, but is itself a combination of discourses, unified around its practical/political tendency and perhaps the specific social identities produced. Strategies link different sites: the family, school and state for instance. Foucault's own 'four great strategic unities' are well known: 'a hystericization of women's bodies', 'a pedagogization of children's sex', 'a socialization of procreative behaviour' and a 'psychiatrization of perverse pleasures'.[26] These strategies form the domain of the sexual itself. Strategy is also where the overall tendency of the discursive field becomes clearer: the privileging of the heterosexual couple, or the production of the homosexual or child as marginalised sexualities. It is 'the strategic envelope' which makes the detailed tactics 'work'. Challenged about the deficiencies around gender or class — major social cleavages — Foucauldians can point to 'strategy' as the process where combined discourses produce larger social divisions.

Sexuality and Discursive Strategies

Theory implies a method. My method was to read each text with a range of questions sensitive to sexual differences: questions about the nature of the sexual (e.g. natural or constructed?); about the evaluation of different sexualities (e.g. 'the family' in relation to homosexualities); about the treatment of marginalised sexualities; about gender constructions and silences; about

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[24] Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (New York: Pantheon, 1972); Stuart Hall, 'The Toad in the Garden: Thatcherism among the Theorists', in Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (eds.), *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1988), pp. 35-73; Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (London: Verso 1985).
[25] Foucault, *The History of Sexuality,* pp. 101-2.
[26] Foucault, *The History of Sexuality,* pp. 104-6.

the state's role in sexual matters; about sexual ethics and their roots (e.g. religion, nature, sexology, convention); and about the construction of child/adult, parent/child and teacher/pupil identities and relations.

Our map of four main strategies was connected to formal politics and to the more politicized of media forms: it was a map of *political* discourses of the sexual. We arrived at a different (but related) map when we focused on commercial popular culture, a key source of sexual knowledges for young people. Political discourses of the sexual are not notably about sexual fun or pleasure; these leak through as scandal.

Neo-Conservatism or moral traditionalism (terms not quite interchangeable) link legitimate sexuality closely to procreation; other sexualities are necessarily thrust to the margin. A key identity in a long history of modern nationalist discourse is a version of 'the family'. Today it is revived or re-naturalised, highly condensed, re-inscribing marriage, and conventional gender roles, divisions of labour and masculinities/femininities and authoritarian relations between adults and children. In the period we studied, moral traditionalism was also strongly defined in relation to its homosexual others, especially to gay activism. It was necessary for the state to defend 'the family' against its many enemies. In more religious versions, family was linked to nation as really or essentially Christian and, by implication, a theocratic notion of the state. The rights of the religious to exempt themselves or their children from over-secularized knowledges and rituals was also sometimes argued for. Children, as sexual innocents, were excluded from the sexual domain, to be protected from premature knowledges and experiences. Parental rights were strongly preferred over children's rights or over those of teachers or social workers.

Like discourse in general, moral traditionalism was far from merely textual. It was embedded in campaigns and policies and, increasingly after 1985, in law and administrative practices. Policies included making divorce difficult, retaining the gay/straight differential in the age of consent, allowing parental withdrawal and insisting on 'family values' in sex education, emphasizing the 'biological', procreative basis of sexuality, reducing resources and increasing surveillance over health education, prohibiting the 'promotion' of homosexuality especially as 'a pretended family relationship' by the local state, and, generally, 'strengthening the family', by discriminating legally and economically against groups held to stand outside or against it, including single mothers. These positions underpinned responses to the 'Back to Basics' sex scandals, especially in Conservative popular newspapers and the Prime Minister's policy of sacking or disowning erring Conservative politicians.

Neo-liberal strategy, our second framework, seems at first sight counterposed to neo-conservatism. Sexuality is seen as personal, individual and private — a matter of choice. Oppression stems from an inquisitorial state

and bad law, not everyday inequalities. Sexual natures and choices among consenting adults are diverse and should be honoured if no-one is harmed. Neo-liberal discourse made a sharp distinction between private morality and public competence; the sacking of ministers for sexual indiscretion was resisted, for example, except where the public interest (e.g. state secrets) was involved.

The relations between the neo-liberal and neo-conservative strands in the New Right have been extensively analysed. Complementarity has often been noted, with neo-liberalism lacking a conception of the social and neo-conservatism providing it with a vengeance as sanctioned hierarchies, tight moral consensus and an authoritarian tendency. It is also clear that conservative discourses, generated and regenerated through moral panics, are held in place by the heightened insecurities which deregulation, reliance on markets and the usual capitalist destruction of social defences have produced. Yet there are tensions too between moral traditionalism and classic liberalism especially perhaps over sexuality. The role of consistent liberals like Edwina Currie and Teresa Gorman in criticizing traditionalist sexual politics is a case in point. The Conservative governments from 1979 to 1997 had to negotiate moral traditionalism and liberal reservations, with traditionalists gaining ground from the mid 1980s. Particular policies, for or against sex education in schools for example, were often contradictory and self-defeating, combining opposed elements in the dominant repertoire. We have also argued, following Eve Sedgwick,[27] that classic liberal emphases underpin the closeting, not only of homosexualities and other sexual minorities, but of sexuality in the culture as a whole, and that the status of the sexual as a perpetual 'open secret' severely limits social-liberal schemes of sex education, and the popular impulses to a more open, exploratory and critical sexual culture in general. At the same time, it allows the scandalous and pornographic representation of sex as naughty and therefore delicious (in the tabloid word 'kinky') to flourish.

We termed the third discursive strategy 'social liberal': 'liberal' because it shares much ground with classical or neo-liberal positions, 'social' because these positions are justified in social not individual terms — social progress, social justice or at least 'tolerance' towards sexual minorities which may form 'communities' to which social rights can be attached. Practically this favours educational solutions with state support: counselling, sex and health education, education for parenting, etc. The state has a role in preventing sexual discrimination but there is a price to pay for 'tolerance'. In social-liberal discourse, marginal sexual communities are often split off from the (national,

27 Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet*.

heterosexual, familial) community as a whole. This may permit 'tolerance', but also ensures that the margins do not affect the centre. This is why these solutions are full of ambiguities for lesbians, gay men and, especially perhaps, for those with a bisexual, transsexual or transgender experience. It is often remarked by lesbian and gay activists that the direct hostilities of Conservative homophobia are easier to deal with than an affectation of acceptance, the withdrawal of personal involvement and an unwillingness to change.

The fourth framework or discursive strategy does not often appear within mainstream media or in parliamentary debates, or appears only in fragments. The fullest elaboration of radical and critical sexual knowledges is to be found in sexual movements and in writers — often academic writers — who have been influenced by activism, for whom indeed, academic research and teaching are seen as political activity. Later in this essay I want to identify these knowledges as 'emergent' in the strongest Williams sense, but first I want to look at some of the limits of the framework I have deployed so far.

Some Limits of Foucauldian Discourse

Foucault's typical object is the emergence of new regulative disciplines - the modern prison, the hospital or clinic, the disciplines of psychiatry, psychology and psychoanalysis. Less common in his work are accounts of struggles between discourses, or of the historical process by which one discursive strategy achieves dominance over others. Certainly he deals with discursive competition. He insists also that discourse-as-power presupposes resistance, so that the force field of a discourse can be reversed. Typically, however, he explores the weaving of many-centred webs of regulation, where the different discourses are co-productive towards the same broad ends. The idea of 'dominant' (or 'subordinate') discourses or discursive clusters does not fit well into his scheme or his conception of power. This passage from *The History of Sexuality* is typical:

> There is no question that the appearance in nineteenth-century psychiatry, jurisprudence, and literature of a whole series of discourses on the species and subspecies of homosexuality, inversion, pederasty, and 'psychic hermaphrodism' made possible a strong advance of social controls into this area of 'perversity', but it also made possible the formation of 'reverse' discourse: homosexuality began to speak in its own behalf, to demand that its legitimacy or 'naturality' be acknowledged, often in the same vocabulary, using the same categories by which it was medically disqualified. There is not on the one side, a discourse of power, and

opposite it, another discourse that runs counter to it.[28]

In the next sentence Foucault refers to 'opposing strateg[ies]' but his refusal of terms like 'dominant' or 'discourse of power' is significant, and, in my view, limiting.

This refusal makes it too hard to analyse discursive formations as examples of social contestation or struggle, in which dominance is never fully achieved for sure; but relations of force, *between* discursive strategies are an important aspect of politics and one way of understanding change. Most of the time, Foucault is giving us accounts of the *terms* of struggle, the broader frameworks within which contestation occurs. It is hard within this method to describe, let alone explain, how and why discursive formations move and change. At what point does reverse discourse, an older style of lesbian and gay politics for instance, force some change in homophobic defences — ever? When, for radical movements themselves, do the limits of reversing dominant discourses — all those 'essentialisms' of race or gender or sex — become counter-productive? How do new formations emerge? Practically, for today, how are we to assess the prospects and vulnerabilities of moral traditionalism and neo-liberalism - as yesterday's 'dominant'? 'Strategy' is usually an accomplishment of tendencies broader than political parties, but hasn't the Blairite victory of 1 May 1997 made a difference and how should we assess its extent and the resultant possibilities? Will it mean, for instance, a development of sexuality education in schools, or a decisive shift away from institutionalised homophobia (in politics, the military or the Churches)? Or will the social-liberal repertoire be curtailed by conservative campaigning and its own contradictions? What, finally, is the potential of our fourth, emergent discursive strategy to re-order the relations of the rest, displacing or re-articulating a conservative dominance? These are important questions politically, and though there are dangers in taking critical agendas too narrowly from an immediate political contingency (from the political memory of Princess Diana for instance) it is reasonable to expect critical theory to help to answer them.

Dominance as Discursive Advantage

The issues may be focused by two questions. How can we understand the 'dominance' of particular discursive strategies in their own day? How and why do the cultural conditions of major social struggles — those over sexuality, for instance — shift and change?

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[28] Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, p. 101.

Sexual Emergenc(i)es

The close reading of (even) public texts will take us some way in the analysis of dominance. This is because power does, in part, operate through texts and through discourses even in the narrowest linguistic sense. Ways and forms of making meaning do set limits to social actions. In the Major years, there are two particular traps, set by contemporary discursive conditions, into which social-liberal discourse and policy (and much of Labour's offering) often fell.

The first is the widespread assumption that sexualities or sexuality is 'natural'. It is sometimes argued that conservatives have been quicker to abandon this belief than liberals and defenders of lesbian and gay rights.[29] It is possible to point to instances like the notorious use of the word 'promotion' in Section 28. Yet there is a difference between the belief that sexual identity is in general socially produced and the common conservative belief in the possibility of perverted sexual development. Within conservative understandings, any young person, given the 'wrong' influences, can be perverted. Perversity, however, remains a deviation, if not from the 'natural' (it happens after all!), at least from the 'normal'. Typically, then, conservative discourse today re-asserts (where it could once assume) the naturalness and normality of heterosexuality and the perversity or dangerousness of other sexualities, including, it often seems, the sexualities of most young people. What anchors this belief, over and over again, is the association of legitimate sexuality - more correctly sex - with procreation and with marriage.

Liberal strategies, far from breaking from the naturalisation of the sexual, have regularly reproduced and extended it. To recognise diversity (as liberal opinion wishes to do) it is necessary merely to proliferate 'natures'. For gay and lesbian activism too this has often seemed the way to make a claim for equal rights. As Tony Blair put it in the age of consent debate: 'It is not against the nature of gay people to be gay; it is in fact their nature'.[30] This argument, however, undermines the claim that education, public debate and cultural activism can improve or reform sexual behaviors and that schools, voluntary associations or the state can have legitimate educational roles. Sexuality is more than a matter of natural urges, controlled or uncontrolled. The liberal acceptance of 'nature' perpetuates thoroughly reductive ideas of the sexual itself, returning them to the dominant model of penetration and procreation, cutting out the growing centre points of sexuality in contemporary culture - as sources of pleasure and identity. The equation of the natural and the procreative is so culturally embedded that to use the argument from nature still countermands the recognition of difference. Nor in the era of

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[29] e.g. Davina Cooper, *Sexing the City : Lesbian and Gay Politics Within the Activist State* (London: Rivers Oram Press, 1994), esp. p. 113.

[30] *Hansard Parliamentary Debates,* 21 February 1994, col. 98.

genetics and neurology is the appeal to the natural any better a safeguard from oppressive manipulation than the argument from culture. As Eve Sedgwick puts it:

> If anything, the gestalt of assumptions that undergirds nature/nurture debates may be in process of direct reversal. Increasingly it is the conjecture that a particular trait is genetically or biologically based, *not* that it is 'only cultural', that seems to trigger an estrus of manipulative fantasy in the technological institutions of the culture.[31]

A second trap is set by the attempt to circumvent the strong emotional investments — the hatred and disgust — that is so often expressed in conservative homophobia; the verbally shocking incitement of the perverse by the allegedly defining act of 'buggery', for instance. As Jonathan Dollimore shows, the energy of the charge of perversity is a fear of proximity, of the too-close-for-comfort.[32] Disgust arises from the fear of being homosexual and the need to police the hetero/homo boundaries especially in relations between men. By contrast, as we have seen, liberal discourse splits off the 'other' sexual categories and practices, as though they hardly existed in the same social space as heterosexuality, marriage and 'the family'. At this distance from the heterosexual self, they may be granted appropriate rights. These two political-psychic economies play off each other. Sexual differences, separated in pluralistic discourse, flow together again with great emotional energy in popular Conservative fantasies. A rationalist social-reforming politics, that exposes only the untruths of opponents' arguments, is not equipped to grasp the nature of this conservative advantage.

This kind of analysis, which draws on discursive and psychoanalytic methods and is attentive to language and the unconscious energies accompanying utterances, can show how social-liberal discourse is contained or disorganized by conservative strategies. Looking more widely, social liberalism has most usually worked within the limits set by the Thatcherite contradictions, rarely succeeding in exploiting or transcending them. In this sense, certainly up to the election of May 1997, we can say that neo-conservatism in combination with elements of neo-liberalism, maintained dominance or hegemony in the sexual field.

Discourse, State, Nation and Capital

A Foucauldian account of discourse can be realised more concretely by

[31] Sedgwick, *Tendencies,* pp. 163-4.
[32] Dollimore, esp. pp. 103-30.

attending - as theorists of sex and gender increasingly do - to the connections between sexualities, nationalities and the state.[33] Discourses of the sexual are often articulated through legislative and administrative practices and through public constructions of nationhood. I agree with writers like David Evans, Davina Cooper and Anna Marie Smith that the study of the sexual is inadequate without reference to formal politics, just as political science has to take on board the determinacy of sexual constructions and relations within the political process.[34] I also agree with Evans, John D'Emilio, Frank Mort, Rosemary Hennesy and others that the long-term history of sexuality cannot be grasped without understanding the many inter-connections with capitalist development in relations of production and consumption.[35]

The state, however, isn't just the state of capital and class. All states are deeply gendered and depend themselves on sexual categories, especially on the procreative heterosexual couple and upon heavily masculinised core institutions.[36] In addition, sex-gender categories play a central role in the cultural construction of the nation(s), the ideologically critical other face of the state. In discourses of the nation, some sexual identities are nationalised, made exemplary or central, while others are thrust to the margins. One of the reasons why we attend closely to parliamentary and official debates, is because of their association with the state and with the meta-narratives of identity around the nation.

An obvious way of assessing dominance, is to trace the impacts of strategies on legislative and administrative solutions — and also the effectiveness of these once passed. Not all forms of power operate through formal politics and the state, but state and formal politics are critical in the struggle of strategies. The tendency for government to drift towards neo-Conservative solutions in the late Major years is a significant indication of the longer term institutional effects of discursive dominance despite the gross disjunctions between the terms of regulation and popular ways of living. Neo-Conservative successes were often so double-edged and unpopular that they

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[33] e.g. George L. Mosse, *Nationalism and Sexuality: Respectable and Normal Society in Modern Europe* (New York: Howard Fertig, 1985); Floya Anthias and Nira Yuval-Davis, *Racialized Boundaries: Race, Gender, Nation, Colour and Class and the Anti-Racist Struggle* (London: Routledge, 1992); Cooper, *Sexing the City*; Andrew Parker, Mary Russo, Doris Sommer and Patricia Yaeger (eds.), *Nationalisms and Sexualities* (London: Routledge, 1992).

[34] David Evans, Sexual *Citizenship: The Material Construction of Sexualities* (London: Routledge, 1993); Cooper, *Sexing the City;* Anna Marie Smith, *New Right Discourse*.

[35] e.g. Evans, *Sexual Citizenship*; John D'Emilio, *Making Trouble: Essays on Gay History, Politics and the University* (New York: Routledge, 1992); Rosemary Hennesy, 'Queer Visibility in Commodity Culture', in Nicholson and Seidman, *Social Postmodernism*, pp.142-186; Frank Mort, *Cultures of Consumption* (London: Routledge, 1996).

[36] R. W. Connell, *Masculinities* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995).

showed the limits, even the absurdity, of this strategy in practice. The many confusions built into recent legislation on divorce are a case in point. Yet both the commodification of the sexual and its legal regulation are achieved in and through discursive as well as other means. To study the 'nationalisation' of sexualities, or the differential control of sexualities through law, or capital's own incitements of a limited sexual diversity, requires cultural analysis as attentive to form and psychic process as any analysis of media texts or everyday discourse.

Williams, the Dominant, the Residual and the Emergent

Faced with the second problem — understanding change in discursive formations — I re-read Raymond Williams's essays in *Marxism and Literature,* especially the chapters on Gramsci's theory of hegemony. Here Williams reflects on the nature of historical cultural formations.[37] He distinguishes three moments in any such analysis: the dominant or hegemonic, the residual, and the emergent. Hegemonic ideas and practices are those which are 'common sense', almost incontrovertible. In the sexual domain the figure of 'the family' is the key example here, a category full of wishing and desiring, yet of very limited historical life. Yet this specific family-man, wife, marriage, children - is the 'normal and natural' means of procreation, child care, inheritance, and mutual support and intimacy. These functions and many others must occur together in the same place and the same set of relationships. It takes a strenuous critical and practical activity to imagine and to sustain other legitimate family forms, or to unpack, disarticulate, all the different functions which 'family' performs.[38] It is important to add that the hegemonic is not necessarily what everyone *practices*, nor even what everyone *believes in*. Hegemony is *not* dominant ideology saturating the whole formation; winning consent is not necessarily agreement. Rather, the hegemonic is that for which 'there is no alternative'. Hegemonic discourses operate in part by attacking, disorganising, nullifying or marginalising other ways of living, which, locally, may be quite developed .

The 'residual' for Williams is ideas and practices which seem old-fashioned, but are nonetheless serviceable for the present, so may be revived, active, even part of the dominant. They are revived in the form of a 'selective tradition' with many elements from the past erased. Moral traditionalist ideas (often associated with religious fundamentalism) function in this way, so that 'the family' is sanctified by religious morality and by the theocratic state. In one way, moral traditionalism is very old today; in another,

37 Williams, pp. 108-35.

38 See the exemplary project in Sedgwick, *Tendencies*, pp. 5-9.

it is very new, inconceivable except as a response to modern sex/gender troubles, definitely 'post-feminist', for instance. It attempts to re-naturalise and re-sanctify social arrangements that have been profoundly disturbed. Interestingly, Williams sees religion and the residual more generally as also a source of oppositional ideas. Contemporary debates within the Christian churches about women and the priesthood and about homo-erotic sex and love show how traditional beliefs may be referenced to conserve or to reform.

The emergent is the most important of the categories here. Most plainly 'new meanings and values, new practices, new relationships and kinds of relationship are continually being created'.[39] But distinctions can be made here too, between the 'merely novel' — we might say fashionable — within the dominant culture and the 'emergent in the strict sense', that is, elements which are 'alternative or oppositional'. One aspect of the emergent stems from what the dominant order 'neglects, excludes, represses or simply fails to recognise'. These elements are almost always, for Williams, associated with a particular social group, and especially with working-class experience. They form a basis for opposition, though also for recuperation and change within the dominant order. Jacques Derrida engages with very similar processes in his idea of 'the trace' (which is surprisingly close to Williams's residual) and the supplement (which is close to Williams's emergent)[40] Williams is particularly Derridean when he makes the intriguing suggestion that often 'what we have to observe is, in effect, a *pre-emergence*, active and pressing but not yet fully articulated', present, for example, in the tension between 'what is lived ' and what is 'thought to be lived'.[41] It is clear that for Williams a 'pre-emergence' may come to play the part of Derrida's 'dangerous supplement',[42] something added that is not just more of what is already present, but something that transforms the whole field.

In the last part of this essay I want to identify some emergent knowledges of the sexual in the contemporary cultural formation. I want to suggest too that we can add to Williams's general argument here. The emergent may not appear as implicit everyday practice, but as something like the opposite of this - ideas which are elaborated all right, often overbearingly so, but restricted by social group or site. Here they constitute what Marx would have called 'a limited material practice'. Academic teaching, research and theorising is an obvious case in point, especially where it takes a super-intellectual or 'difficult' form, calculated, it often seems, precisely not to be popular, but honed to the familiar disciplinary constraints and academic

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[39] Williams, p. 123.
[40] The classic and difficult expositions are in Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1974).
[41] Williams, p. 126.
[42] Derrida, pp. 141-64.

competition. Much of the 'queer theory' I draw on in this paper takes this form, at least in one register of the writing. Typically the work comes out of literary criticism or literary history, informed by poststructuralist and psychoanalytic theory and by some of the most difficult source texts around. But the fact that it often takes an academic form does not mean that the emergent finds its point of inception in the academy. It is clear in the work of these writers that the most powerful generators of new ideas are activity in social movements, personal experience of lesbian, gay or queer lives, or personal affiliation with minority sexual identities. The strongest claim for academic work as a form of the emergent is that it articulates, in a public place, ways of life that are present or immanent at the everyday level. This is to restate a pattern familiar in cultural studies, where new agendas for study arise first in the personal lives of students, amplified and collectivized as social movements or still unnamed cultural currents. The key question has always been how far cultural studies, a political practice in its own (educational) domain, makes its returns, pays its dues, in other political sites.

Really Useful (Sexual) Knowledge

There are four key insights which have the potential to reorganize public sexual culture and therefore the terms on which sexual identities are formed, lived and recognised. In our view, these are the 'really useful knowledges' of the sexual domain, just now. They are useful for their epistemological value: they produce new questions, insights and sexual truths. But they are useful too because they challenge the premises of dominant discourse. They are 'emergent', or 'supplementary', in these senses.

First, sexuality as a domain and sexualities as identities are socially produced. I prefer this term to the more fashionable one - 'culturally constructed'. But the most important aspect of this thesis is its head-on engagement with the strategies of re-naturalisation which we have analysed.

Especially important is the uncoupling of sexuality and procreation. Of course, in our everyday life we know — I think most of us know — that sexuality has very little to do with procreation and very much to do with other things: with pleasure, with comfort, with intimacy, with trust, with friendship, with self-identity (and also with power, oppression, mistrust and disgust). Similarly, most of us also know, I imagine, that sex acts that mimic procreative activity may form a relatively small part of even heterosexual sex. Moreover procreation can now take place outside of sexual activity altogether. I am far from embracing the sciences and technologies of reproduction as simple goods; in the conditions of unequal power which form them they are full of perils. They do make clear, however, that there is no necessary relation

between sexuality as meaningful human activity and the procreation of the species. Human bodies, their possibilities and impossibilities, are important here, but sexual and other social practices refer to and work upon the body, changing its meaning. Over long historical periods they change the human body too. This process has speeded up immensely in the last few decades, so that appeals to the natural or biological are revealed as normative or regulative, not simply given or true. The attempted re-naturalizations of contemporary sexual politics, including some which claim scientific status, are often responses to the challenge of sexual radicalism and its spearhead knowledges. As we argued in *Border Patrols*, borders are often most heavily policed at just the points where they are most contested, fluid and dangerous.[43]

The second item of really useful knowledge is the recognition that sexual identities, like all social identities, are identities formed under pressure. They involve relations of power in their constitution, but they also attract and condense other forms of power. This thesis gains its strategic importance from its engagement with neo-liberal orthodoxies and the practices they uphold, especially the reduction of the politics of sexuality to matters of individual choice and the limitation of public intervention into the private domain. Though privacy may be a value worth defending and can throw up vital defences, the cost is often a closeting or veiling not just of dissident sexualities, but of the public significance of sexual questions more generally. A double movement is implied by this thesis: first, that sexuality as whole needs to come out of the closet, but also that we need to speak about it not just as a matter of individual choice, but as a political question, as a matter of everyday injustice, power and potential human betterment.

The third contemporary thesis, a re-working of older truths, is that people have a hand in making themselves as sexual beings, but under conditions they do not choose. We do not choose our material conditions, or the current state of bodily possibility and impossibility, or the relations of power and emotional dependency in which we are implicated, or the socially-produced language, narratives and images which we must use to represent ourselves. This thesis — and the turn to ethnography and life history in sexual research[44] — directs our attention to sexual biographies but also to collective or group cultures, such as the neglected sexual cultures of children and of young people. This thesis also stresses popular agency in a more realistic way than the idea of choice and market. It shows the regulation of sexual life never works unproblematically, or without unintended consequences. Who would have guessed that Clause 28 of the Local Government Bill would be

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[43] Steinberg, Epstein and Johnson, pp. 11-16.

[44] e.g., Maírtín Mac an Ghaill, *The Making of Men* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1994); Ken Plummer, *Telling Sexual Stories* (London: Routledge, 1995).

such a gift to lesbian and gay activism?

The fourth and in many ways the most important emerging thesis concerns the nature of differences and boundaries in the sexual (and other) domains, such as the boundary between gay and straight identities. We have already seen that these differences are power-laden and relational. To this we must now add that they are always unstable and shifting. Another way of putting this is that the relations between opposed categories are always internal. They involve the internalization of differences: the construction, in the imagined world of the self, of some version of the Other .[45]

This insight allows us to identify and to challenge strategies of splitting, or separation. These strategies are vulnerable precisely because sexual categories are not naturally separate, but must be socially separated by energetic self-production. To produce myself as a heterosexual man I internalize and deal with, usually expel, versions of femininity and of homosexuality. For young men growing up as heterosexual today the real fear, as Mary Kehily and Anoop Nayak have shown, is that they themselves may be gay or 'not proper men' - hence the exaggerated homophobic performances of school-boy cultures.[46] This is one reason why liberal strategies do not succeed. They misrecognise the social, cultural and psychic interdependence of sexual categories, the tremulousness of the borderline. A practical recognition, not only of 'difference' but of internal relations, is critical to a reformation of sexual culture.

The practical implications of this thesis remain far from clear, but the broad tendency chimes with an older socialist sense of human interdependence. Not only do we depend on social co-operation for our means of subsistence, we also construct our identities and subjectivities in deep relations to significant others. This cultural and psychic interdependence, across the relations of power, is the strongest mark of our sociality. And in the same way that unequal power in production changes co-operation into servitude, so unchallenged, untransformed inequalities in the sexual domain turn joy in diversity and the delight of embracing difference into great danger and pain.

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[45] For different versions of this argument, not all in relation to the sexual, see Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (London: Methuen, 1986); Dollimore, *Sexual Dissidence*; Bhabha , *The Location of Culture.*

[46] Mary Kehily and Anoop Nayak, 'Masculinities and Schooling: Why Are Young Men so Homophobic?', in Steinberg, Epstein and Johnson, pp. 138-61.

Reviews

Scott Wilson, *Cultural Materialism: Theory and Practice*.
Blackwell, 1995. ISBN 0 631 18532-1 hb, 0 631 18533-X pb.

Chris Baldick has recently observed how, after becoming established at Johns Hopkins and Yale in the mid-1970s, Derridean deconstruction as a literary-critical methodology later spread to 'the declining British port cities of Southampton and Cardiff.'[1] As a cultural materialist critique of an important tendency within cultural materialism, this looks intriguing; but what can it mean?

At any rate, Scott Wilson's *Cultural Materialism* is a product of the Cardiff school in its attempts to merge Derrida and Lacanian psychoanalysis, via Bataille's theory of general economy, into a new critical practice around literature and culture that would call itself 'cultural materialist'. The bench mark of this practice for Wilson is clearly Sinfield and Dollimore's *Political Shakespeare* (1985); the range of references to subsequent works of critical theory bring to mind, perhaps a shade too conspicuously, a postgraduate reading list in the subject. Ambitious in scope, yet ill-disciplined in design and stylistically overwritten, the book seems to cry out for a firm editorial hand to highlight certain genuinely fresh points of critical intervention whilst thinning out its indulgent excesses.

Wilson's concern is to interrogate the Marxist origins of cultural materialism from the perspective of a 'postmarxism' which 'no longer privileges class in its politics of difference'. After a first section exploring the origins and definitions of cultural materialism, including a useful chapter on the latter's symbiotic relationship with Stephen Greenblatt and New Historicism, the book is organised around three terms central to the politics of cultural materialist practice: value, history and community. Theoretical discussion alternates with practical illustration via Wilson's elaborately-staged readings of Renaissance and Jacobean literature — *The Merchant of Venice vis à vis* 'value', *King Lear* and *The Changeling vis à vis* 'history' — until the final section on 'community'. There, a discussion of the work and cultural reproduction of Oscar Wilde frames the book's distinctive proposal or agenda: that the gay orgy, with examples taken from Foucault, Bersani and Armistead Maupin on San Francisco, and Joe Orton on cottaging in the Holloway Road, can stand as an updated, utopian model of community for our 'postmarxist' age.

The core of Wilson's argument, for this reader at least, is the

[1] Chris Baldick, *Criticism and Literary Theory 1890 to the Present* (Harlow: Longman, 1996), p. 172.

questioning and unravelling of what might be at stake in the injunction 'Always historicize!', so clearly central to any cultural materialist project. If 'political utility' is a guiding principle of cultural materialist criticism, the historicizing impulse has been the primary means of locating a use-value in the literary texts we endlessly re-read. But if our materialism warns us against all absolutes, history itself must submit to dialectical critique. *Why* always historicize? What do we gain from this practice, and what do we lack if we fail to do so? What lies behind the historicist law? 'Both capitalism and its radical critique, Marxism', the argument runs, 'base themselves, one way or another, on utility and production, both hope to make a profit on the investment of labour power'; the common problem, despite the contrast in the way each system disposes of its profit, 'is that such an overwhelming emphasis on utility homogenises society into a machine of production that produces and de-valorizes, as its demonised other, the non-useful, the non-productive, the unemployed even if, or rather even as, it tolerates the unemployed, the non-useful, the deviant, the sexually non-productive precisely as the subordinate, the value-less.'

Overstating the case, perhaps; Wilson draws on the early-seventies work of Baudrillard and Lyotard's *Libidinal Economy* (1993) to thus turn Marxism against itself. But he also persuasively locates in Marx the recognition that 'use-value is impossible to grasp in the object itself'; if, therefore, a 'postmarxist practice like cultural materialism' stays with Marx and use-value, it must also remember that use-value is only realized in expenditure, the moment of its dissipation. Enter Georges Bataille, whose emancipatory notions of 'sovereignty', neither mastery nor servile labour, and of a 'fetishism' uncoupled from the commodity, underpin the possibility of a new mode of criticism which, in the case of Shakespeare for example, is 'alive to the heterogeneous effects of the texts themselves, to their virulence, to effects and affects that can only become manifest in the writing *on* Shakespeare and in performances and readings of his plays.'

Wilson is of course aware that cultural materialism occupies a distinctive position with regard to Marxist historicism. In Lacanian terms, this is located as the 'discourse of the hysteric', characterised by a heightened concern for the subjective partiality of the knower, who thereby becomes a symptom rather than master of the gaze of knowledge. In a shrewd discussion, Wilson lays bare the contradictions to which this inevitably gives rise: a commitment to the history of oppressions is destined to fail if we cannot speak for or about the oppressed without thereby continuing to exploit them. There is, it seems, a price to pay for scrupulous reflexivity.

Along with the question of a new poetics reinvigorated by Bataille, these are important considerations for a continuing cultural materialist

agenda. All the more unfortunate, then, that they are not presented within a clearer and more coherent framework. Given the explicit concern with the politics of representation, mode of address is a problem: who is the book written for, and why? Very early on, mindful that 'students' familiar with Sinfield and Dollimore might need reminding of what 'traditional approaches' to literature are or were, Wilson deconstructs Frank Kermode's introduction to the Arden *Tempest*. This turns out to be a lame exercise in mastery, in which Kermode's old-fashioned liberal humanism is loosely denoted as 'conservative'; 'Theory' surely no longer needs this kind of straw-man defence. But what, then, of the general tone of analysis of the book as a whole? With regard to Judith Butler's work, Wilson intones: 'There is, I would suggest, an alterity to power that has nothing to do with theory, or at least escapes the grasp of theory. It seems to me, however, that the traces of this alterity are disclosed in both the process of power's expenditure and in the heterogeneity that it expels and abjects, the very heterogeneity by which power retroactively, belatedly, produces itself and the visibility of its regulatory norms as an effect of that abjection or expenditure.'

Few are likely to argue, least of all perhaps the students who need to be told who Frank Kermode is. Here we have an equally recognisable form of critical conservatism, narcissistic in its rhythmic incantatory repetition of abstract terms; one does not have to subscribe to the George Orwell school of linguistic clarity to feel that many 'students' will be alienated by such in-talking. In these instances, Wilson writes for a small group of like-minded, probably professional theorists; the book's insistent reliance on secondary sources from critical-theoretical debate of the 1980s and 1990s finally manages to give the impression that these are the parameters of its world (Stephen Greenblatt's essays are, for example, surely only 'famous' in a somewhat restricted sense, his essay 'Invisible Bullets' only 'virtually canonical' likewise).

In a book of this kind, such issues matter. Wilson's whole thrust is that cultural materialism is not as emancipatory as it might be, and his elsewhere-demotic/anarchic register denotes a resolute distancing from traditional academicism. Part of the book's overburdened agenda is to give some indication of what a future literary/cultural studies might look like, the final chapter predicting the dissolution of the 'metaphysical and physical walls of the ivory tower' university and with it the 'cultural materialist pedagogue, the last intellectual action hero'. Here, two narratives are intertwined: first, the Thatcherite transformation of the university according to the 'logics of industrial production and market competition', and second, the continuing revolution in information technology, rendering 'permeable' and 'transparent' the functions and spaces of higher education. Unnervingly, as the rhetoric of cybernetic futurity heightens — 'when technology achieves bio-electronic continuity, when DNA is digitally reproducible and mutable, when subjectivity

opens onto teleneurocontrol fields of synthesized reality surfaces' — it becomes difficult to discern where, if at all, to discriminate between the effects of these two narratives, or how to locate either celebration or disquiet. Statements such as, 'Higher education is no longer about imparting high aesthetic and moral values, tutors no longer develop minds', or the view of a future in which every student 'will have individual tuition from a hologram of Virginia Woolf programmed with the latest views on *écriture féminine',* are intriguing in their ambivalent irony.

What then of Chris Baldick's implicit linking of socio-economic decline and academic deconstruction? Wilson deploys the voice of political indignation about the neoliberal regime which has held power throughout his adult life, yet can be playfully open about its disintegrative effects on educational life, merging them into the decadent prospect of a cyber-future in which the most we can say of its 'new political givens' is that no one knows what they will be. The phrase is Derrida's, and there is a nice contrast to be noted between Wilson's reception of Derrida's book on Marx, and the concurrent response of Terry Eagleton. For Wilson, *Spectres of Marx* (1994) shows Derrida moving 'into the field of cultural materialism at long last', invoking the 'spirit' rather than the 'substance' of Marx for a postmodern world whose unpredictability has always been allowed for in the flexibility of Marxist theory. Astutely, Wilson notes that Marxism was always alive to the complex and perpetually-evolving relationship between the human and the machine. For Eagleton, the book on Marx is an exasperating sign of Derrida's perpetual commitment to the marginal, jumping onto a political bandwagon just at the point when it has finally stalled. Where was Derrida when we needed him? 'Deconstruction, with its preoccupation with slippage, failure, aporia, incoherence, not-quiteness, its suspicion of the achieved, integral or controlling, is a kind of intellectual equivalent of a vaguely leftish commitment to the underdog, and like all such commitments is nonplussed when those it speaks up for come to power.'[2]

Eagleton is a recurrent focus of Wilson's critique in *Cultural Materialism*, first hauled over the coals for suggesting that socio-economic democracy should be prioritised over a sexual dissidence somewhat unfortunately defined as the freedom to 'prance around in a leather apron', and then more generally questioned for his mistaken pursuit of a reappraised set of political use-values for cultural materialist literary criticism. We may indeed be deluded about the extent to which a particular form of literary criticism, or of 'traditional' intellectual work, might be emancipatory. Yet the commitment to the *possibility* of this real power, rendered throughout

[2] Terry Eagleton, 'Marxism without Marxism', *Radical Philosophy* 73 (September/October 1995), p. 37.

Eagleton's work in the principle of clear and witty communication to a general readership, surely needs defending. I would like to believe that Scott Wilson's pessimism about the 'intellectual' who, 'if not dead already, is doomed as a political subject in the sense that he or she can design or direct, predict or even propose any significant political change with any hope that such a proposal will have any consequences', is a product in the intellectual sphere of eighteen years of disempowerment and despair in the political sphere. This has now changed; whatever the deep reservations about our new political settlement, we no longer need to write against the grain of a regime inherently hostile to all principles of dissidence or values of humane socialism. Maybe, then, in Wilson's next book, the context of the political present will gain precedence over the mysterious political givens of the future, and he will have the optimism to develop some of the valuable insights of *Cultural Materialism* in a less stylized and exclusionary form.

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Peter Dalhgren, *Television and The Public Sphere*.
Sage, 1995. ISBN 0 8039 8922-9 hb, 0 8039 8923-7 pb.

Framed within contemporary debates around citizenship and the wider scope of political interests, Peter Dalhgren's latest book displays a significant move away from more traditional objects of 'serious' analysis toward the realm of popular television. Despite this, Dahlgren seems reluctant to surrender the touchstone of news journalism. Yet the book is important in tackling the public sphere as a popular space rather than one confined exclusively to the realm of expert professional voices. Advancing the notion of popular television journalism within the political domain, Dahlgren asserts that it is the entertainment side of television amongst other media which transforms the public sphere — and by implication our sense of community and solidarity.

Dahlgren argues that there can be no easy equation between the public sphere as a forum, where issues of public concern are articulated, and the communication of the idea of a civil society where people do actually meet and interact in order to explore their own sense of personal or political identity. In so doing they are often instrumental in creating communities within and parallel to each other. Looking beyond the realm of newspaper discourse, Dahlgren suggests that the tendency towards media concentration runs counter to some of the attempts to make the media more accountable to the public: 'The more centralised and the more "massive"' the media, the more remote and immune they remain to input from society.' The irony here lies in the fact that a national newspaper, as opposed to a regional or local paper,

will inevitably carry more weight in terms of its editorial voice, and therefore may impact much more powerfully upon civil society at the same time as it remains far removed from the agents within that civil society.

Dahlgren moves the debate about newspaper journalism further in his argument for a public sphere which admits television journalism into what he calls the 'advocacy domain'. He sees television journalism as having enormous responsibilities for maintaining the sense of cultural plurality which in different ways embodies the geographical, political and social dimensions of the nation at large. The function of the 'advocacy domain' is dialogic in so far as it is a site for many voices who may contest established views, and compete with one another for dominance.

Drawing on the work of Gans, Dahlgren calls for 'multiperspective journalism' where truth and reality can be understood as polysemic and dynamic. His definitions of what constitutes journalism admit many forms and genres from audience debate to more elite current affairs programmes. This tolerance at least admits the possibility that the construction of civil society does not occur within a vacuum. Indeed Dahlgren's reference to Walzer implies that too much is at stake to rely upon narrow interpretations of Habermas.

Considering the importance of journalism and the power of television, and having already stated the rubric of causality between current affairs broadcasting and the creation of civil society, Dahlgren concludes that democracy itself is entirely relational. The next theoretical step is an important one: 'treating the boundary between the political and the socio-cultural in a fluid manner, seeing it as permeable and contestable, may well prove to be a crucial feature of democracy's future'.

If we accept Dahlgren's use of Mouffe's contention that democracy exists as a dialogue rather than resolution and therefore exhibits a fluid and discursive tendency within political discourse, then it becomes increasingly apparent that our traditional understanding of the location of the political domain can no longer be seen as removed from the mainstream channels of communication (as evidenced by popular genres such as sit-com, drama and soap opera).

Dahlgren cites the work of Verstraeten whilst arguing his stated aims to rethink the public sphere in ways which acknowledge the transfomative powers of popular entertainment. However neither are prepared to go the extra mile and open up more plurality in the concept of the political domain. It may be that greater emphasis on the political domain as it operates through discourses rather than within genres would enable Dahlgren's work concerning the permeability of political ideas to bring forth other studies where such a hypothesis can be tested empirically.

The strength of this book lies in its attention to theoretical detail, largely in relation to the work of Verstraten and Mouffe, and Dahlgren's readiness to take seriously the role of television entertainment without reducing such questions of citizenship to the level of the parochial. This is very often the end result of work which is primarily fixated on audiences as if watching television were a sufficiently political activity in itself!

This is a book which is readable and scholarly. Rather than an hermetically sealed academic thesis, *Television and The Public Sphere* offers the potential for more questions and further interrogations of the popular entertainment/political domain as well as helping to advance current debates around the public sphere and its many incarnations.

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John Hartley, *Popular Reality: Journalism, Modernity, Popular Culture*. Arnold, 1996. ISBN 0 340 66294-8 hb, 0 340 58489-0 pb.

This book offers a 'critique of academic and professional discourses on journalism, and provides new bridges between contemporary journalism and contemporary theory'. It heralds a 'move from a social science to a cultural studies perspective' on journalism and in doing so it persuasively dispels the alibi of journalism as somehow standing apart from the discourses of popular culture and modernity. It is a timely contribution to the debate emerging within journalism education/training. Similar moves, challenging certain canonical beliefs about journalism which have been generated by and large within the industry itself, are needed within the academic development of the subject if the growth of degrees in journalism is to be more than simply a series of progressions through hoops professionally arranged as if the discourse of journalism or the role of the journalist was unproblematic or, even worse, entirely self-evident.

A good starting point for challenging self-evident notions of the function of journalism would seem to be Hartley's bold definition of journalism as the textual system of modernity and the claim that he will trace a dialogic trajectory between journalism and modernity. In pursuit of this, he opens out the debate from narrow perceptions of journalism as news, to include its marginal elements and its concomitant ingredients of the photo and the advert. Consistent with this iconoclastic ambition he also frees himself from the restrictions of any exclusive brand of analysis and appropriates the concept of 'theory shopping' from Paula Amad. Hartley claims to be re-evaluating the priority of political over cultural determination, to challenge what he considers to be unhelpful and inaccurate binary divisions, and encourages

a more complex approach to public/private, humorous/serious, high/popular culture. To this end, he seeks to broaden the definition of journalistic practice to highlight the margins of what counts as traditional politics and to explore the fullest cultural potential of the practice and texts of journalism.

There is an illuminating repackaging of much work on the limitations of mass media and media audiences and effects and yet it is to the reader that Hartley's attention is turned. A methodological impasse emerges here, since he idealises the reader in a series of his own idiosyncratic and entertaining textual interpretations. I don't have a problem with this (and indeed the accuracy and precision of his own readings bring some delicate observations, such as noting that the stranger in Disraeli's *Sybil*, who knows both nations, is a journalist), but I remain confused as to why he feels it necessary to present this as a study of readership rather than a series of textual analyses. He employs the template of the French Revolution's *Liberté*, *Egalité*, *Fraternité* to explore journalism and its dynamic relationship with the public sphere. One of the problems in using the French Revolution as a generalising paradigm for the emergence of modernity is what to do with cases which diverted from its trajectory. If modernity erupted when sovereignty passed from monarch to the people how did it function where this didn't happen or happened imperfectly? Hartley's foregrounding of the French Revolution comes perilously close to a simple case of retro-idealism — *Zeitgeist* begets the future. Further problems with this methodology occur when he is unable, or unwilling, to bring the French Revolution as paradigm to cohere in his overall argument. It remains an interesting anecdotal exploration, throwing off many illuminating insights but failing to achieve analytical focus.

With reference to the classical public sphere, there seems to be little evidence that it was ever as coherent or as bounded as Hartley implies. Certainly there has been a tendency to close it down analytically for political and definitive purposes, but I think there is a danger of underestimating the importance of the notional nature of that space simply because one cannot indicate quite how and when, in reality, it existed whole. Perhaps the solution lies in admitting that the public sphere was never a physical space but always an imaginary ideal space of enormous creative and emancipatory potential.

Hartley's postmodern public sphere, coupled with his reading of Yuri Lotman, degenerates into a semiological free-for-all, with scant attention paid to the structures and institutions of power and meaning. There would seem little evidence for the claim that the intrusion of the private into the domain of the public sphere is necessarily new or even postmodern, as he implies when writing of 'old-fashioned divisions between the public and the private'. This division is at the heart of ethical debates in and around journalism today.

There is an unwarranted exaggeration in this discussion which leads him to be beguiled by his own hyperbole in moments such as, 'tabloid journalism is founded not on falsehood but on love'. What of the journalism of salacious intrusion into the intimate private sphere of the kiss? Does Hartley offer a one-sided reading of the pleasures and liberationary potential of tabloid excess rather than a view which might at the same time incorporate stories of victimisation? We may not always be talking about the sexualisation of Kylie, but the scandalisation of a Glaswegian housewife, victim of press intrusion.

This hyperbole leads to some outrageous claims borne on the crest of an iconoclastic enthusiasm for praising the rejected other of journalism, its popular and commercial tendencies: 'Citizens of media have no other (than TV) exosomatic mechanism for constituting themselves as society.' There is, similarly, a lack of evidence to support his claim that the media replaced the Church as the great cultural institution. This tendency to retreat into polarised positions keeps emerging throughout. Hartley identifies journalism as a media form which is 'driven by sales rather than being disciplined by truth'. The logical flaw here is that if one wants to flatter the reader, suggesting that the consumption of news is primarily to do with sales does not leave the reader in a very enlightened or empowered position. Truth, as negotiated textually with an audience, is an important concept in popular journalism, but it is a complex truth, involving parody, irony and the other cardinal virtues of postmodernism: sales must pass through the eye of that needle before they will be accepted. Anything else is an unsubstantiated insult to the bulk of the readership which Hartley seeks to celebrate. Increasingly, the democratic potential of Hartley's 'astute reader' implodes under the force of punning and referencing which is likely to privilege only that caste of academic and intellectual reader of which, in the main, he is profoundly suspicious.

Hartley writes of the era 'often dubbed "postmodern" by media and academic commentators alike', and seems undecided whether 'postmodern' belongs in scare quotes or not. This does not generate confidence in the general reader, less still in the sceptical professional who may demand that someone willing to stake a categorical claim for a postmodern public sphere should first be able to delineate it with some degree of consistency. He later writes of a particular cultural example which 'prefigures postmodernism by about eighty years', implying a certainty in the existence and dating of a cultural formation which many have tried but none have succeeded in placing with quite the precision implied here. Such sloppiness does not inspire confidence in his analysis.

Despite claims to the contrary and continual cross-referencing, this work lacks any overall structure. It reads as a series of essays which have been laced together with a retrospective logic. Its goal to destabilise certain canonical beliefs within and about journalism remain very much alive, but the

achievement falls far short of a convincing or coherent case.

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Stuart Hall (ed.), *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*.
Sage, 1997. ISBN 0 7619 5431-7 hb, 0 7619 5432-5 pb.

Representation is a set book for the Open University course, 'Culture, Media and Identity'. Hall introduces the text with the affirmation that representations actively construct meaning; they are not forms reflecting reality. Representation is therefore a 'primary or "constitutive" process, as important as the economic or material base in shaping social subjects and historical events' and deserving of the same degree of analytical attention as these.

Hall's opening chapter fills out this assertion, drawing support from Barthes and Foucault. Major conceptual terms such as *difference*, *causality*, *signs*, *codes* and *relativism* are slipped into an illustrative discussion, so the reader absorbs their import 'naturally'. A clear case is made for the constructionist base of the book, which still manages neatly to account for reflective and intentional models of meaning. *Discourse* is introduced as a critique of both Saussurean and semiotic structuralism, which shifted 'closed-system' work on 'language' into concerns with 'the production of social knowledge' and the relations of power, which regulate and legitimate that knowledge. Hall has managed to clarify complexity in this chapter whilst not shrinking from difficulty, illuminating, for example, Foucault's 'advance' on Marxist models of power/knowledge but also acknowledging how such advances left him open to charges of relativism. The chapter ends with a discussion of the 'subject'. The Velasquez painting 'Las Meninas' (1656) is used to explore the variable meanings available in one image according to subject positions as constructed within the discourse of representation — spectator, artist and the subject of/in the picture. Hall's own comment, at the close of this chapter, is apt for the whole book: 'What we have offered here, is, we hope, a relatively clear account of a set of complex, and as yet tentative ideas in an unfinished project.'.

Peter Hamilton's chapter on 'Frenchness' links neatly to Hall's work on Barthes/Foucault and usefully reiterates some key points. Again the focus

is on visual media — the photograph here, fine art in Hall's account — and again there is a neat integration/explanation of key terms — *paradigm*, *objectivity* and *witness*. A historical overview offers an explanation for the 'widespread nostalgia in recent times for representations of Frenchness in the 1940s and '50s, such as Doisneau's 'le Baisir' (1950). This chapter and Lidchi's, which follows, provide much needed material for courses increasingly pressured to include European and global culture. Hamilton provides a specific, detailed and technical substantiation for both the French focus and the critical treatise on the 'universality' of humanist photography.

Chapter Three replicates the conceptual and theoretical foci of Hall and Hamilton but adds ethnography and consumerism to them. Again the representation is visual: neither art nor photography but the 'poetics and politics of exhibiting in museums'. Lidchi opens the 'cabinet of curiosities' and finds not just objects for our gaze but ideas for our consumption. In ethnographic museums the 'other' is not merely displayed but made sense of for us 'through the filtering lens of a particular discipline', which doesn't discover and reflect other cultures so much as invent and represent them. Lidchi gives a fine account of the representative power of the physically present object — the witness of or testifier to reality — by considering the meaning of 'Comanche', the stuffed remains of a horse from 'Custer's Last Stand'. Encoding and decoding are made easy here, whilst her following section on New Guinea illuminates narrative and myth. The chapter closes with a discussion on colonialism and audience, feeding cleanly into Hall's excellent following chapter, 'The Spectacle of the "Other"'.

This emphasises the way stereotypes work in representing difference, particularly racial and ethnic difference. Hall considers the way in which images of the black body, particularly in sport, resonate with colonial myths of blackness and yet also inform advertising images. He argues that intertextual work can illuminate a discourse of difference and help explore questions of power. In this process, Hall takes on the under-theorised area of the relation between verbal and visual meaning in order to explain why 'difference is both necessary and dangerous'. He considers Saussurean linguistic reductionism, Marxist dialectical linguistics, cultural relativism and psychoanalysis as offering models which explain both the pervasiveness and ambivalence of 'difference' in representation and in analysis. These models are the tools used to investigate the construction of racial difference from slavery to the contemporary 'street style' of black popular culture. Hall takes Dyer's concept of ethnocentric power as informing the stereotyping of racial difference and Kristeva's concept of 'abjection', to explain the normalising of dominance in classifications and the denigration/negation of the 'other'. In texts that exercise of power over meaning is 'marked' in writing, with repetition over time and space adding the legitimisation of ritual to 'a racialised regime of

representation'. In this context, a history of dominant anxiety about blackness 'polluting' whiteness led to a fascination with the black body in terms of its sexual organs, and the concomitant construction of taboos. The result for Hall was a fetishism of parts 'where what has been tabooed nevertheless manages to find a displaced form of representation' . The gaze at the sporting black body is a safe look at the forbidden, which continues to construct racial difference as 'illicit other'. Hall ends by asking whether these codes of representation can be changed and offers three modes of resistance: aggressive reversal of the stereotypes (revenge); positive recoding (black is beautiful); or `from within' looking, using humour (Lenny Henry) or eroticism (Fani-Kayode's photography). The question isn't answered but illuminates the constituents of an ongoing 'politics of representation'.

Sean Nixon shifts the analysis to masculinity with an account of the 'new man'. He offers a useful introduction to an area still under-represented in critical work but the focus on the 1980s makes this section feel both a little out of date and yet not 'historical'. My students have long consigned 'new man' to the bin, and 'new lad' seems about to bite the dust. The up and coming male icon appears to be 'earth man', a.k.a. Swampy and Muppet Dave. The paucity of accounts generally is partly explained by a lack of masculine reflexivity (and men still dominate academia) and partly by the difficulties of mobilising a critical discourse for white, heterosexual, middle class men; dominant masculinity has rarely objectified, leave be abjected itself, except in terms of law. So contemporary, heterosexual, white masculinity remains elusive to cultural and media analysts (although criminologists like Richard Collier are doing interesting work here) and most work on representations of masculinity focus on historical or gay or black maleness. Nixon agues rightly for heterogeneous masculinity and offers a range of evidence through representations, but I'm not convinced either that this is evidence of 'changing masculinities being lived by groups of men' in dominant masculinity or 'that images might have transformed the masculinity of particular groups of men'. It seems to me that dominant representations of masculinity may come and go, as will fashion, but power relations stay the same. The consumption of representation and construction of subjectivity work differently, I suspect, when producer/subject/consumer share dominant interests and values. The chapter favours Foucault on the subject but extends Hall's work on Freud and 'spectacle' into an insightful discussion of narcissism and visual pleasure. The shift toward film and fantasy/fiction as representation connects this to the last chapter on soap opera.

Christine Gledhill begins with a consideration of the consumption of soap opera as producing 'dramatic frisson' in the audience. The association of 'feeling' with 'female culture', she argues, is sufficient for many critics (lay and

professional) to 'abject' soap from the dominant/masculine positive value classification scheme into a place of the 'truly awful'. Moreover, she points out, many feminists have also been critical of the fictional stereotypes in soaps, as if somehow 'real' women are less constructed than represented ones, and/or there is such a thing as a rounded female character, meaningful to all women. A more useful approach to understanding soaps as gender representation, she suggests, is to think of the genre not as a rigid term of classification but as a process of struggle over classification, with referents in the real world. This referential relation of soaps to reality or their 'cultural verisimilitude' can be used to explore the tension between the commercial/ideological pressures on media production, and the audience, with its 'shifting cultural discourses and emerging social groups'. In this approach, soaps relate not to reality directly but to what dominance believes to be reality. Verisimilitude signifies hegemony at work? If so critical readings of soap opera representations can illuminate the 'state of the contest' of gendered and other power relations.

Representation is a powerful teaching tool that often goes beyond its remit to innovate theoretically and analytically. It is occasionally repetitious but this is no bad thing in a textbook, which may be used in discreet sections, nor because it shows students that different academics working in different discourses can concur with, develop and reinforce one another. It certainly privileges visual over verbal representation — which may relate to publishing as well as pedagogic requirements in this multilingual, multicultural global university — visual images do 'travel' better. Yet it is also sensitive to the contributions that linguistic/discourse theories make to our understanding of images as signifying practices. This book is a valuable teaching and thinking resource. It is for the most part cogent, lucid and generous: it includes learning activities, essential reading and many photographs. It is also, simply, interesting, fresh and a good read.

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Sharon Zukin, *The Cultures of Cities*.
Blackwell, 1995. ISBN 55786 436-5 hb, 1 55786 437-3 pb.

As Sharon Zukin herself is at pains to point out, this book represents the latest contribution to an ongoing analytical project, a project which has justifiably established Zukin as one of the preeminent commentators on contemporary urban analysis. From the groundbreaking *Loft Living,* published in 1982, through *Landscapes of Power* (1991), and here in *The Cultures of Cities,* arguably the real strength of Zukin's work stems from the emphasis she places upon the delicate and often problematic relations which exist between

the economic, cultural and political forces which determine the uses of space within our modern cities.

As with her previous books, Zukin's essential point of departure towards attaining a sensitive understanding of the way in which contemporary cities function is a firm reassertion of the role played by material culture in configuring today's cityscapes. In order to begin to grasp the social consequences of the enormous upheavals engendered by the transformation of post-war 'first world' cities from industrial to post-industrial spatial complexes we need to treat seriously the idea that modern cities are as much about the production of symbols as they are about the production of space. At the core of this transformation is the shift from the production of material goods and commodities to that of service provision, and what is entailed in this shift is not simply a shift in occupational patterns and modes of work but a wholesale reassessment of how we conceive of the very function of our cities.

In this respect it is impossible today, Zukin suggests, to consider the financial and economic organisation of cities without also considering their cultural organisation. With this in mind the task Zukin sets herself in *The Cultures of Cities* is indeed an admirable one: to trace the dialogues and relationships between the competing and sometimes antagonistic interests (represented by, for instance, real estate developers, artists, residential security firms, leisure and tourism corporations, immigrants, restaurant workers, 'ordinary citizens' and the like) at play within this new symbolic economy; and to demonstrate practically how these competing interests have produced very definite spatial forms in the particular settings she has chosen for analysis — largely in and around New York city. Ultimately what is at stake in these dialogues and relationships, according to Zukin, is the very definition of a term such as 'public culture' and in whose interest this term can be so mobilised as to best represent.

With such a conceptual framework as this, and with raw material as inherently fascinating as New York to work with, it is extremely disappointing that Zukin has produced a largely uninspiring, although by no means valueless, book. Whilst the book's overall conception may be dynamic and vital, the treatment of many of the specific case studies (for example the redevelopments of Bryant Park and Times Square in central Manhattan) is generally ponderous and pedestrian. One of the primary reasons for this, I think, is Zukin's over-reliance on statistical and factual data. Whilst it is clearly important that such things as employment trends within the service industries and how much and from what source investment monies for particular urban projects derive are accurately represented, there are times when the books begins to read a little like a financial audit of New York's cultural provision. I trust someone like Zukin to know accurately this sort of data in the detail she

obviously does, but it is surely sufficient, given the book's ambitious agenda, for such data to be summarised (and perhaps tabularised) somewhat more rigorously, so that Zukin's more urgent narrative may be allowed to emerge with greater lucidity.

Having made this criticism, it must be stressed that the book does contain one dazzling example of what Zukin is really capable of when she breaks free of what she presumably sees as the necessity for statistical data. The lengthy chapter tracing the shifting social character of two predominantly black shopping districts (Fulton Street in Brooklyn and 125th Street in Harlem) is a genuine *tour de force*, not only for its detailed account of the twentieth century history of the spatio-cultural politics of these particular districts but also because the chapter represents an extremely rare and long overdue attempt to look at the subject of shopping and consumption from a racial and ethnic standpoint. It is, then, only really in this chapter (admirably supported with photographic and cartographic evidence and, it must be said, an appropriate amount of statistical data) that one gets a true sense of what it is like not only to experience a particular space but also those historical forces which have combined to produce its distinctiveness.

Finally, there is one other word of caution that I feel needs to be made about *The Culture of Cities*. Its title is in some ways a misnomer, given that the book is not really about only one particular city. The implication, perhaps, is that we can simply abstract the conclusions Zukin reaches about New York and treat them as typical phenomena occurring in other city settings. It is unlikely that Zukin would endorse this position without qualification. But it is, I feel, incumbent upon her, in the light of the book's title, to emphasise more strongly, and despite the impact of such generalised social and economic phenomena as deindustrialisation, the ultimate uniqueness of all cities. Many have said before that New York is quite unlike anywhere else on earth. But it is precisely the point that anywhere is quite unlike anywhere else on earth.

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