
On the impossibility of a global cultural studies

'British' cultural studies in an 'international' frame

Jon Stratton and Ien Ang

As we approach the end of the century, cultural studies has become one of the most lively and widely-discussed intellectual fields in the international academic world. University programmes, conferences and publications in cultural studies are proliferating massively, suggesting a clear and indisputable boom. The effect of this steady expansion is that there is less and less consensus over what 'cultural studies' means. As a label appropriated in a variety of ways by a diverse and heterogeneous constituency, the identity of cultural studies is becoming increasingly elusive. Contrary to the traditional disciplines, cultural studies refuses to define itself in terms of a distinctive object, nor in terms of fixed theoretical axioms or orthodoxies. As Stuart Hall has put it, '[cultural studies] had many trajectories; many people had and have different trajectories through it; it was constructed by a number of different methodologies and theoretical positions, all of them in contention.'¹

Yet, this recurrent and persistent stress on the 'open and experimental'² nature of cultural studies by its leading practitioners does not imply an unproblematic liberal pluralism. The rhetoric of open-endedness is advanced and promoted precisely in order to demarcate the *distinctiveness* of cultural studies as a particular discursive formation and intellectual practice. Time and again we are told that cultural studies is an interdisciplinary, even anti-disciplinary or trans-disciplinary enterprise. For example, Angela McRobbie claims that '[f]or cultural studies to survive it cannot afford to lose [its] disciplinary looseness, this feeling that (. . .) its authors are making it up as they go along,'³ and Tony Bennett has observed that 'cultural studies comprises less a specific theoretical and political tradition or discipline than a gravitational field in which a number of intellectual traditions have found a provisional *rendez-vous*.'⁴ What informs the *rendez-vous* is not a proper 'object' of study and a fixed theoretical paradigm (as is the case with the conventional academic disciplines) but, in Bennett's words, 'a shared commitment to examining cultural practices from the point of view of their entanglement with, and within, relations of power'.⁵ In this sense, it could be said that what

sustains the intellectual liveliness and dynamism of cultural studies is a desire to transgress established disciplinary boundaries and to create new forms of knowledge and understanding not bound by such boundaries.

But as cultural studies is rapidly becoming an internationally recognized label for a particular type of intellectual work, it is crossing not just disciplinary boundaries, but also cultural-geographical boundaries. Cultural studies is now being practised in many different parts of the world (although definitely not everywhere), and is rapidly becoming a central site for critical intellectualism in the postmodern, postcolonial, postcommunist new world (dis)order. In this development, what has become known, rather misleadingly, as 'the Birmingham School' has operated as a symbolic centre. Bennett's *rendez-vous* has to a great extent been formed, precisely through the magnetic pull and influence of the work produced by the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies in the 1970s and 1980s, creating a loose and fluctuating network of people in diverse institutional locations who now consider themselves cultural studies practitioners, both inside and outside Britain.

In this paper, we want to reflect on some of the theoretical and political consequences of this internationalization of cultural studies, of 'British' cultural studies in particular. Our starting-point is two questions. Who can and does participate in the cultural studies *rendez-vous* now that it has gone 'international'? And second, how can this 'international' *rendez-vous* be meaningful according to the (political) standards of cultural studies itself?

We must recognize, for starters, that the culture of cultural studies, too, is not exempt from power relations. In other words, the cultural studies *rendez-vous* cannot be imagined as an 'ideal speech situation' in which everybody holds the same power to speak and be heard. Thus, if the *rendez-vous* is to be as open-ended and open-minded as cultural studies itself wants to be, the 'internationalization' of cultural studies cannot mean the formation of a global, universally generalizable set of theories and objects of study. At the same time, a *rendez-vous* would be useless if it were merely a juxtapositioning of already fixed positions of difference, which tends to be the case – as we shall elaborate below – when different traditions of cultural studies are defined in unreflexive national terms (and talk about 'British' cultural studies, of course, is doing exactly that). A productive *rendez-vous*, we want to argue, can only take place when we go beyond the international binary. In this chapter, we will develop a strategy to do this by carving out speaking positions and discursive trajectories which are both partial and non-exclusive, both transnationally transportable and contextually specific, both open for conversation and negotiation and subject to critique and reflexivity as these positions and trajectories meet and, sometimes, clash with each other in a continuing *rendez-vous*. In particular, we will discuss and illuminate three positions/trajectories (and the relations between them) which have already

emerged and been circulating in cultural studies: the diasporic, the post-colonial, and briefly, the subaltern. The work of Stuart Hall will serve as a major inspiration in our exploration.

DECONSTRUCTING 'INTERNATIONAL'

First of all, the seemingly innocuous observation that cultural studies is now an 'international' venture needs to be interrogated. In all the enthusiasm currently surrounding the proliferation of cultural studies, one tends to lose sight of the fact that this presumed internationalism is hardly truly international at all. Simon During, working out of Australia and the editor of the recently published *The Cultural Studies Reader* (which is itself a symptom of the cultural studies boom), states quite insouciantly that cultural studies has now become 'a genuinely global movement'.⁶ Yet if we look more closely at who is included in this so-called movement, we must conclude that it doesn't quite deserve the predicate 'international', let alone 'global'.

Take, for example, the book *Cultural Studies*, edited by Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson and Paula Treichler.⁷ This book is the progeny of a conference on 'Cultural Studies: Now and the Future', held in 1990 at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, in the United States. According to the Preface of the book, the conference was attended by about nine hundred people.⁸ The book itself is nearly eight hundred pages long, containing forty papers and articles. In many ways the book is an admirable *tour de force*. It exemplifies the extraordinary breadth of work now going under the banner of cultural studies. At the same time, however, the book can be described as monstrous. Just like Frankenstein's un-named larger-than-life creation, *Cultural Studies* is an excessive book. In an important sense, the book is untitled, as it takes the name of the field it so excessively strives to represent. Borges wrote a short piece entitled 'Of exactitude in science'. Purporting to come from an old travel book, the piece describes how:

[i]n that Empire, the craft of Cartography attained such Perfection that the Map of a Single province covered the space of an entire City, and the Map of the Empire itself an entire Province. In the course of Time, these Extensive maps were found somewhat wanting, and so the College of Cartographers evolved a Map of the Empire that was of the same Scale as the Empire and that coincided with it point for point.⁹

Here, the most complete map is the map which corresponds in size to the area it represents. It was not long before the map fell into disuse. Borges is telling us something about the impossibility inherent in Platonic formulations of representation. He is also reminding us about the relationship between power and representation.

Cultural Studies is a book at least twice to three times as long as the average academic book. This monstrous work, excessively mapping the terrain of cultural studies, is sourced in the United States. In reviewing the book, Fredric Jameson has summed up the nationalities of those included in the book: 'there are 25 Americans, 11 British, 4 Australians, 2 Canadians, and one Hungarian and Italian, respectively.'¹⁰ This is definitely not an evenly spread 'international', let alone 'global' *rendez-vous*. (Though it is difficult to work out quite how Jameson is defining national identity – it would seem to be on the basis of where they work, rather than, say, where they were born or raised, or what passport they have.) What we have here is more than a simple western hegemony; what we have is a new American hegemony in an English-speaking cultural studies. The fact that this American-dominated representation of 'cultural studies' could present itself so self-confidently as cultural studies *per se* is just one illustration of how hegemony derives its effectivity from a self-presentation as universal, one that does not acknowledge its own particularity.

The international dissemination of cultural studies can be compared with that of one of its predecessors: sociology. As a modern discipline, sociology has always presented itself as a universal body of knowledge. Its object of study is 'society' in general. 'Society' operates in sociological discourse as a hegemonic, all-inclusive, singular term, denoting a comprehensive, integrated totality. Driven by a functionalist problematic, this discourse accords a space for internal differences – for example, of class, gender and race – only in terms of (the problems of) inclusion and integration rather than in terms of the radicalization of difference. What constitutes the conceptual limits of a 'society' is rarely discussed; where limits *are* recognized, a society is generally defined as coterminous with the geographical territory of the nation-state: 'American society', 'Japanese society', 'French society', and so on. However, all these national particulars can be specified and described in terms of the presumably universal concepts and theories of a presumably generally-applicable sociological master narrative. In this way, sociology manages to construct a world of separate, clearly demarcated 'societies' whose differences can be contained as mere variations of the same. The 'society' serving as a universal model, of course, at least as American functionalist sociology would have it, is American society – both descriptively and prescriptively. Not only are all other 'societies' judged in terms of their deviation from the American model; they are also supposed to move towards a stage of development of which the American model was deemed the culmination. Not coincidentally, this American-centric paradigm was dominant during at least three decades after the Second World War, the high period of US global superpowerdom.

In this sense, it is ironic to witness a similar process taking place with cultural studies. In the universalizing ambitions displayed by the

publication of a book like *Cultural Studies*, there is the danger that cultural studies could become another modern discipline after all. Yet times have changed. The universalizing force of sociology lay, in the first place, in its basic theoretical claims; for example, that 'society' was a concept of universal applicability. In contrast, McRobbie and Bennett, as we saw at the beginning of this article, are arguing for a cultural studies which is always provisional, that is, not pre-determined by a universal paradigm. One manifestation of this sentiment is a constant oscillation between talk of 'cultural studies' in general and talk of particular 'American/British/Australian/Canadian cultural studies' which presumably would warrant the provisional, context-bound nature of the project as a whole. (And we need to be aware of just how much of the internationalization of cultural studies has been, in fact, occasioned by an exporting of British cultural studies to British ex-settler colonies.¹¹) This acknowledgement of (national) differences has been a more generalized move, even among the Americans. For example, Nelson, Treichler and Grossberg write that '[d]ifferent traditions of cultural studies, including British and American versions, have grown out of efforts to understand the processes that have shaped modern and postwar society and culture.'¹² Jameson's resolve to categorize the contributors to the monstrous Illinois book in terms of their nationality is also an indication of the prominence accorded to national identity as the source for difference and diversity in this international gathering.

However, while this insistence on pluralism predicated on the national is strategically useful as a bulwark against creeping universalism, it also has some problems. As we have already suggested, sociology privileges the universal over national particularities, which are reduced to being versions of the universal concept of the nation-state. Some in cultural studies now seem to want to turn things around: as any tendency towards universalism is now virtually declared a taboo, it is the individual nation-state which is now earmarked as the privileged site of particularity. What we have here is a straightforward inversion of the hierarchies of modern sociology. The problem with this inversion is not so much that it remains within the disciplinary logic of sociology – although this is symptomatic of a residual attachment to some of the disabling assumptions of that discipline, such as the equation of 'nation-state' and 'society' – but that it contains a strategy which makes it difficult to think *beyond* the national. If any work in cultural studies must display its national credentials and define the nation as the constitutive context for its specificity ('British cultural studies', 'American cultural studies', 'Australian cultural studies', and so on), the resulting kind of internationalism would be, as Jameson remarks, 'a kind of United Nations plenary session', in which each group could say its piece and 'was given respectful (and "politically correct") hearing by all the others: neither a stimulating nor a very productive exercise, one would

think.¹³ Indeed. How then can we effectively develop an internationalism in cultural studies that is more than an interchange between already-constituted national constituents? It is this question which guides our explorations in this paper.

Since the Illinois conference and the publication of *Cultural Studies*, the book, several 'international' cultural studies events have been staged in other parts of the world which have explicitly problematized the power of the core and the universalizing tendency which marks that power. We mention three here: the 'Dismantle/Fremantle' conference in 1991, the 'Postcolonial Formations: Nations, Culture, Policy' conference in 1993, and the 'Trajectories: Towards an International Cultural Studies' conference in 1992. The first two took place in Australia, while the third – arguably the most subversive of the three – was organized by Kuan-Hsing Chen in Taiwan.

To date, the Taiwanese conference has proved to be so left-field in the cultural studies project, that its place in the official history of the field remains uncertain. We will return to what this conference represents at the end of this article. The two Australian conferences, on the other hand, were more direct instances of 'talking back' to the Anglo-American hegemony within 'international' cultural studies. The 'Dismantle/Fremantle' conference was organized at Murdoch University and held in the city of Fremantle, Western Australia, with the explicit aim to 'decolonize' cultural studies. As Ien Ang wrote in her introduction to the conference proceedings, published in the journal *Cultural Studies*¹⁴: 'What is needed (. . .) is a *dismantling* of unifying and universalizing definitions of "cultural studies", opening up a space for meaningful *conversation*.'¹⁵ The 'Postcolonial Formations' conference was hosted by Griffith University, Brisbane, Queensland, and was set up to be an international *rendez-vous* with three participants: Australia, Canada and New Zealand. It should be noted that at the Illinois conference, as indicated in Jameson's listing, Australians and Canadians were the only two groupings apart from the Americans and the British with more than one representative; they at least were included in the universalized cultural studies 'society' as established by the Americans. However, as conference organizer Tony Bennett said in his opening address at Griffith, the 'Postcolonial Formations' conference was an initiative precisely of the Australians and Canadians who were at Illinois, as a response to what they considered the scandalous lack of awareness among American and British speakers of the specificity and partiality of their speaking positions. In other words, in this so-called international cultural studies 'society', the Australians and Canadians felt marginalized inasmuch as their positions were marked as particular *vis-à-vis* the universal. This tallies with Australian cultural critic Meaghan Morris's critical observation that 'the word "international" comes to work in cultural studies as it does in the film and record industries – as a

euphemism for a process of streamlining work to be "interesting" to American and European audiences.'¹⁶ The response to this situation, according to Bennett, was to stage a *rendez-vous* among the marginals themselves, bypassing the presence of the hegemonic centre. Seen this way, the appropriation of the specifying category of the 'postcolonial' by Australian, Canadian and New Zealand practitioners of cultural studies can be seen as the strategic invocation of an alternative frame for the meaning of 'international', one that counters the hegemonic 'world' order led by American and British cultural studies.

It is clear, then, that it is no longer possible for a knowledge formation to unproblematically universalize itself without meeting any resistance from those at whose expense this universalizing process is carried out. In this sense, there is promise in Stuart Hall's claim for a cultural studies 'as not having an aspiration to an overall metalanguage, as always having to recognize its positioning, as a set of contested localized knowledges, etc.'¹⁷ It is in this resistance to universalization that cultural studies can assert its difference from a modern discipline such as sociology, and it is in its insistence on the importance of local positioning that cultural studies exposes sociology's complicity in repressing those aspects of the particular which cannot be subsumed under the universal. However, what is at issue is not just a question of prioritizing the particular over the universal. Just as any invocation of the universal is never innocent, any assertion of particularity also cannot go unquestioned. Neither the universal nor the particular are natural categories. As we said before, there are problems with uncritically adopting the national as the privileged site of the particular, as it runs the risk of hypostatizing differences into static, mutually exclusive categories. In other words, what cultural studies needs to do if it wants to avoid universalization is not just valorize any asserted particularity, but reflect on the concrete processes of particularization itself, and to interrogate its politics. The adoption of the category of the postcolonial as a term of self-description by Australians and Canadians is one such strategy of particularization which has the possibility of problematizing both the universal and the national – and we will have more to say about its politics (good and bad) later.

In a more general sense, the construction of positions of particularity is a necessary condition for engendering the contested localized knowledges Hall talks about. In fact, Hall's own work eloquently exemplifies both the productiveness *and* the necessary limits of any particularizing move. As a central figure in the shaping of cultural studies, Hall has repeatedly been asked to formulate and enunciate his 'point of view' – what he calls 'the many burdens of representation' that he has to carry around; 'I carry around at least three: I'm expected to speak for the entire black race on all questions theoretical, critical, etc., and sometimes for British politics, as well as for cultural studies.'¹⁸ In this respect, Hall occupies a unique

position in cultural studies, and over the years he has displayed an admirable flexibility in grappling with and responding to these disparate interpellations (which, of course, he has also conspired in). Of course, these three sites of representation – blackness, Britishness, and cultural studies – are not necessarily connected, but they have become increasingly obviously intertwined, especially in some of Hall's more recent work, where his speaking position has become more unapologetically autobiographical. Hall's understanding of his own intellectual and personal biography is informed by a speaking position which we want to characterize as *diasporic*, and is one trajectory which we want to mobilize in the international cultural studies *rendez-vous*. However, the ways Hall has articulated – and not articulated – the particularity of his speaking position over his career tell us much about the changing formation of cultural studies, especially 'British' cultural studies, to which we now turn.

STUART HALL AND 'BRITISH' CULTURAL STUDIES

American cultural studies didn't acquire its contested hegemony of its own accord. In fact, it is a very derivative hegemony. The symbolic centre of this hegemonic construct is not something 'American' but something 'British': 'British cultural studies'. This is one reason why Stuart Hall was one of the star speakers at the Illinois conference. The received history of cultural studies claims that it originated in Britain in the late 1950s. Its founding fathers were Richard Hoggart, Raymond Williams and, though himself young enough to be a son, Stuart Hall. It is interesting to dwell on this myth of origin, if only briefly, as it sheds some light on some of the contradictions in the whole self-understanding of cultural studies. After all, the discipline of sociology also has three founding fathers: Marx, Weber and Durkheim. The same is the case with English literary studies, the other major disciplinary predecessor of British cultural studies: its three founding fathers were Arnold, Richards and Leavis.¹⁹ Such mythic histories are very modern, not postmodern formulations, not only because they operate within the (white) Great Man (*sic*) theory of (colonial, patriarchal) history but also because they signal their own universalization. As the cultural studies story goes, the originary 'ferment' became particularly explosive during Hall's 'rule' over the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, the place where, again according to the mythology, cultural studies as an institutionalized intellectual practice first began; where, in other words, cultural studies began to operate as a 'society' of its own. The problem with such a mythic history is that it makes it difficult for us to construct a more pluralistic de-centred account of the emergence of cultural studies in different parts of the world. To quote Meaghan Morris, taking up a point made by the Indian-Australian historian Dipesh Chakrabarty, 'the real problem may be that the genre in which "histories"

are being invented for cultural studies often leads people into positing a *single origin* for their practice – something which those same people would never do in any other context.²⁰

This problem notwithstanding, there is now a well-defined if limited genre of writing which might be called 'The way we were at the Birmingham Centre.' John Clarke has told his story in 'Cultural Studies: a British inheritance.'²¹ A less personalized history forms the sub-text of Richard Johnson's 'What is cultural studies anyway?'²². Yet another, also less explicitly personal, history is provided by Lawrence Grossberg in his 'The formations of cultural studies: An American in Birmingham.'²³ The image produced in these stories is one of a constant but productive, and idealized, quarrelsomeness in the original cultural studies 'society'.²⁴ Stuart Hall himself, a great raconteur, has told the story in at least three versions: 'Cultural studies and the Centre: some problematics and problems', 'The emergence of cultural studies and the crisis of the humanities', and 'Cultural studies and its theoretical legacies'.²⁵

Indeed, Hall's contribution to the origin myth – and its implications for understanding its current 'international' significance – is an ambiguous one. By the latest version, he is explicitly self-conscious about his own complicity in the historical production of the myth, describing himself as sometimes feeling like 'a *tableau vivant*, a spirit of the past resurrected, laying claim to an authority of an origin'.²⁶ To be sure, Hall emphatically rejects the founding father status accorded to him in the myth. Cultural studies, he says, did not 'emerge somewhere at the moment when I first met Raymond Williams, or in the glance I exchanged with Richard Hoggart'.²⁷ He continues, speaking at the Illinois conference:

I don't want to talk about British cultural studies (. . .) in a patriarchal way, as the keeper of the conscience of cultural studies, hoping to police you back into line with what it really was if you only knew.²⁸

Hall, then, is clearly aware of the problems of positing British cultural studies – whatever this may be – as the 'core' of an internationalized cultural studies. At the same time, as far as we know, he has never concerned himself with explaining *why* British cultural studies could have met with such a positive reception outside Britain as well (and of course there is no intrinsic reason why he should have). In his earlier work especially, Hall has tended not to be concerned with the transnational dimensions of cultural studies practice; Britain formed both the naturalized boundary and the given context for this practice. In this respect, it is significant that Hall has tended to paint the historical emergence of cultural studies in Britain as an organically British development, a development determined by internal national forces. (As we shall see, this can be debated.) For example, in 'The emergence of cultural studies and the crisis of the humanities' he writes that:

For me, cultural studies really begins with the debate about the nature of social and cultural change in postwar Britain. An attempt to address the manifest break-up of traditional culture, especially traditional class cultures, is set about registering the impact of the new forms of affluence and consumer society on the very hierarchical and pyramidal structure of British society. Trying to come to terms with the fluidity and the undermining impact of the mass media and of an emerging mass society on this old European class society, it registered the cultural impact of the long-delayed entry of the United Kingdom into the modern world.²⁹

Hall's argument assumes that British culture and class relations have had a continuity which resisted the class politics characterizing European modernity elsewhere.

This argument builds on an earlier article by Perry Anderson, 'Components of the national culture', published in 1969. Anderson argues that in Britain, unlike the countries of continental western Europe, an accommodation was made between 'the agrarian aristocracy which had matured in the eighteenth century, and controlled a State formed in its image'³⁰ and the nineteenth-century industrial bourgeoisie. The result of this accommodation was that:

[the industrial bourgeoisie] never generated a revolutionary ideology, like that of the Enlightenment. Its thinkers were confined by the cramped horizons of their class. They developed powerful sectoral disciplines – notably the economics of Ricardo and Malthus. They advanced the natural sciences – above all evolutionist biology with Darwin. But they failed to create any general theory of society, or any philosophical synthesis of compelling dimensions.³¹

According to Anderson, it is for these reasons that there was never a theoretical sociology in nineteenth-century Britain, the modern discipline which – in the continental European context – explicitly constructed a totalized conception of 'society'. In a Lukácsian move Anderson argues that the notion of totality, what we have described as the central universalizing concept of modern disciplines, is a typifying feature of bourgeois ideology; of a bourgeoisie struggling to legitimate its position of power. Anderson goes on to suggest that in Britain's unique circumstances the concern with totalization surfaces in literary criticism, not in a sociology:

Driven out of any obvious habitats, the notion of totality found refuge in the least expected of studies (. . .) English criticism, with Leavis, assumed the responsibilities of moral judgement and metaphysical assertion.³²

Traditional British literary criticism denies that it is a totalizing theoretical project, while presenting itself as a universal practice which naturalized the

moral order of the bourgeoisie. Hall's history bears a remarkable similarity to Anderson's, although it is shorn of Anderson's Lukácsian and structuralist marxist theoretical apparatus. The difference is crucial. Where Anderson argued that the nineteenth-century bourgeoisie was assimilated into the feudal British tradition, Hall describes the post-Second World War period as the moment when the neo-feudal structure of British society was finally destabilized. According to Anderson, literary criticism was a means of preserving the hegemonic collusion of the old (feudal) and the new (bourgeois) dominant classes. Hall, on the other hand, argues that cultural studies came from a new space. It did not originate in the old hegemonic order but came out of the very unsettling of that order, and articulated its project as both trying to understand the new socio-cultural order and critiquing the power relations, particularly those related to class, which pervaded the old order.

In Hall's argument, then, the development of cultural studies takes up the space otherwise occupied by sociological analysis as the United Kingdom finally enters 'the modern world' (or, as some might argue, the postmodern world). The lack of a strong bourgeois theoretical tradition, i.e. sociology, provided the opportunity for the development of a 'British' cultural studies in Britain. What is left out in Hall's history is the role of literary criticism, which makes cultural studies seem to come from nowhere. But we need to remember that the work of Hoggart and Williams precisely grew out of, and away from, literary criticism as the object of study shifts to working-class culture and, in Williams' expression, which still gets regularly invoked by those who identify themselves as practitioners of cultural studies, 'culture as a whole way of life'. Cultural studies, then, in this historical account, is understood as being the product of a very idiosyncratic British historical and cultural conjuncture. What we are presented with here is a uniquely British history for the emergence of cultural studies. However, the historical conditions outlined by Hall as determining this emergence – for example, the growth of the mass media and consumer society – are by no means uniquely British, but have, as we all know, fundamentally transnational dimensions and repercussions.

One problem with connecting the emergence of cultural studies so specifically with peculiar developments in British society, is that it leaves us empty-handed when it comes to accounting for the 'international' dimensions of cultural studies' expansion. At most, we are led to think about this expansion in terms of a progressive diffusion from the Birmingham Centre outwards. And more often than not it is precisely in terms of such a quasi-colonialist expansion that historical accounts of the internationalization of cultural studies have been cast. For example, John Clarke seems to take it for granted that cultural studies is a 'British inheritance' which

[b]y the end of the 1980s (. . .) had long transcended its slender origins, having established itself as a subject within British higher education and having spread internationally, both as a theoretical discourse and a distinctive means of approaching the study of the peculiarities of national cultures'.³³

In this model, cultural studies has spread from Britain, historically one of the arch-colonialist states of the European core, to its (ex)settler colonies – including the United States – and, from there, to the rest of world. That Clarke doesn't query his own use of the term 'international', let alone that of 'national', is not only suggestive of the persistent force of the regime of truth sustained by modern sociology, but also symptomatic of the insularity of much 'British' cultural studies.

It is such a construction which makes it tempting, from a British vantage-point at least, to experience the rapid international success of cultural studies in terms of a dilution of the pure original. This is particularly the case in British responses to the American appropriation of cultural studies. (Significantly, almost no attention has been given by British commentators to appropriations of cultural studies by more peripheral others in the international 'society', such as those in Australia or Canada.) Hall himself, for example, has repeatedly expressed his profound amazement over the rapid ascendancy of cultural studies in the American academic scene. We want to quote him at length here:

I don't know what to say about American cultural studies. I am completely dumbfounded by it. I think of the struggles to get cultural studies into the institution in the British context, to squeeze three or four jobs for anybody under some heavy guise, compared with the rapid institutionalization which is going on in the US. (. . .) So the enormous explosion of cultural studies in the US, its rapid professionalization and institutionalization, is not a moment which any of us who tried to set up a marginalized Centre in a university like Birmingham could, in any simple way, regret. (. . .) And yet I have to say, in the strongest sense, that it reminds me of the ways in which, in Britain, we are always aware of institutionalization as a moment of profound danger. (. . .) Why? (. . .) There is no moment now, in American cultural studies, where we are *not* able, extensively and without end, to theorize power-politics, race, class, and gender, subjugation, domination, exclusion, marginality, Otherness etc. There is hardly anything in cultural studies which isn't so theorized. And yet, there is this nagging doubt that this overwhelming textualization of cultural studies' own discourses somehow constitutes power and politics as exclusively matters of language and textuality itself.³⁴

This is an enormously rich text which says a lot about Hall's most central views of what cultural studies is and should be. His severe objections

against American cultural studies, so politely worded here, are worth exploring further, but this is not the place to do so. Suffice it to say here that this text signals an immense cultural gap between American and British (and more generally, non-American) academic scholarship and critical intellectualism. What interests us at this point is the speaking position from which Hall articulates and constructs what he sees as the major contrast between American and British cultural studies. Hall is very clear that he doesn't want to make American cultural studies more like British cultural studies ('an entirely false and empty case to try to propound'), but the above quote suggests that there are nevertheless pangs of regret in his reflections on what could be called the Americanization of cultural studies, regret over the loss of a 'Birmingham moment' when cultural studies was still a marginalized practice and arguably a more genuinely 'political' one as well, when doing cultural studies was not primarily concerned with academic professionalism but connected with and energized by the metaphor of the organic intellectual. In recalling what the Centre was up to, Hall said to his American audience, with a fine sense of irony:

there is no doubt in my mind that we were trying to find an institutional practice in cultural studies that might produce organic intellectuals. We didn't know previously what that would mean, in the context of Britain in the 1970s, and we weren't sure we would recognize him or her if we managed to produce it. The problem about the concept of the organic intellectual is that it appears to align intellectuals with an emerging historic movement and we couldn't tell then, and can hardly tell now, where that emerging historical movement was to be found. We were organic intellectuals without any organic point of reference; organic intellectuals with a nostalgia or will or hope (. . .) that at some point we would be prepared in intellectual work for that kind of relationship, if such a conjecture ever appeared. More truthfully, we were prepared to imagine or model or simulate such a relationship in its absence: 'pessimism of the intellect, optimism of the will'.³⁵

There is a sense in which the Birmingham moment is constructed in this narrative, if not as the origin, then at least as representing a purer, more authentic, more unco-opted mode of cultural studies. And one has to say that this sentiment has been voiced by more than one early Birmingham inhabitant. McRobbie, for instance, remarks that 'what has worried me recently in cultural studies is when the theoretical detours become literary and textual excursions' and when it loses its 'sense of political urgency'.³⁶ And Hall himself is adamant that the concept of the organic intellectual, despite its apparent non-effectivity in the current conjecture, should be retained today as a guiding principle for cultural studies practice:

We never produced organic intellectuals (would that we had) at the Centre. We never connected with that rising historic movement; it was a metaphoric exercise. Nevertheless, metaphors are serious things. They affect one's practice. I'm trying to redescribe cultural studies as theoretical work which must go on and on living with that tension.³⁷

What concerns us here is not the substantive value of Hall's and McRobbie's objections to the, what they see, as the depoliticization of cultural studies, especially in the United States.³⁸ These are serious issues concerning the place and role of intellectual work today which cultural studies needs to continue to address. However, because this criticism is cast in terms of a *departure* from what was current at the Birmingham Centre, the danger exists that the latter is over-romanticized. It is tempting to compare this with Richard Hoggart's romanticization of traditional English working-class culture in the wake of the post-war advent of American commercial mass culture in *The Uses of Literacy!* 'Americanization', then, proves to be a traumatic experience from the point of view of the British establishment,³⁹ and British cultural studies is clearly, in more than one way, not exempt from it. But the experience of trauma isn't the most congenial starting-point for down-to-earth self-reflection. Criticizing American cultural studies in the name of an idealized British cultural studies past doesn't lead us to understand why cultural studies took the shape and form it did in the United States (including its rapid professionalization, institutionalization and textualization), and how it could become so fashionable in the first place. We are not saying that Hall expressly took up such a British-centred view, but it has been the almost inevitable effect of his very positioning (by others more than by himself) as the Birmingham 'guru', and the authority accorded to his narrative histories where 'Birmingham' is constructed as the original birthplace of cultural studies.

Against this, we want to develop a more pluralist narrative (or set of narratives) of the history of cultural studies, which can account for local or regional variations as well as commonalities in concerns and approaches. We have to recognize that the intellectual practices which we now bring together under the category of 'cultural studies' were developed in many different (but not random) places in the world, and that there were *local* conditions of existence for these practices which determined their emergence and evolution. It is undeniable that 'Birmingham' has played a crucial role in the growth of the international cultural studies network as we know it today. But there was never just a one-sided and straightforward expansion of British cultural studies to other locations; if there ever was such an 'expansion', the reception of British work in these other locations was never passive, but always inflected by local circumstances and concerns. In fact, it is precisely the recognition of this context-boundness of cultural studies which prevents it from becoming another universalizing

discipline. As the editors of a recent Canadian volume, significantly titled *Relocating Cultural Studies*, have put it: 'Unlike established academic disciplines, cultural studies could never aspire to a subject matter capable or deemed capable of being described in terms *abstracted* from the concrete realities it sought to identify and analyse.'⁴⁰ Thus, they say, it is important to explore and recognize 'the renegotiations and changes in cultural studies in the wake of its export from Britain'.

More radically, John Frow and Meaghan Morris, in a recent reader designed to introduce *Australian Cultural Studies*, dispute – or at least vigorously relativize – the centrality of British cultural studies for the development of Australian cultural studies. They offer an alternative history which does not put British work centre-stage but gives much more credit to some enabling aspects of domestic intellectual culture:

Our first encounter with a 'culture and society' approach in the late 1960s came not from reading Raymond Williams but from attending WEA [Workers' Educational Association] summer schools on film run at Newport Beach in Sydney by John Flaus. Flaus works as a teacher in university and adult education contexts, as a critic who uses radio as fluently as he writes for magazines, and as an actor in a variety of media from experimental film to TV drama and commercials. (. . .) we can say that Flaus (like Sylvia Lawson) helped to create a constituency for the project of cultural studies as well as to train a generation of film and media critics. Yet his work, along with the socially mixed but intensely familial urban subculture and small journals networks which sustained it (both of which were historically deeply-rooted in the inner-city life of Sydney and Melbourne) has been erased from those Australian accounts of cultural studies which take their bearings from the British tradition – and then pose problems of application.⁴¹

Of course, no invention of (a) history is innocent; it always represents a partial politics of truth which cannot be separated from a particular perspective. But what this Australian counter-history clearly tells us is that it makes no sense to reduce cultural studies as an 'international' project to a single source from which it all originated; that it might be better to speak about a geographically dispersed plurality of intellectual trajectories and movements, largely in the post-1960s period and in western, English-speaking countries, which, under precise historical conditions which need to be further explored, converged into the aforementioned international *rendez-vous*. How and why British cultural studies (and particularly 'Birmingham') could play a key symbolic role in this international convergence, and the power relations implied in it, remains to be examined. At the same time, it is important also to stress that today 'Britain no longer serves as the centre for cultural studies.'⁴²

QUESTIONING BRITISHNESS

One way to challenge the exclusive Britishness of cultural studies would be to show how it is not enough to explain the emergence of cultural studies in Britain solely out of organic, internal forces. So while it may be true that the condition of 1950s Britain provided a uniquely productive moment for a radical rethinking of 'culture' in the British context – an historic moment which for Hall was articulated intellectually and politically through the New Left,⁴³ it is important not to lose sight of the larger global context which frames the British condition and in which Britain occupies a particular, and changing, position. Thus, if the 1950s signalled the breakdown of traditional British class cultures as a consequence of mass consumerism and the proliferation of mass-mediated culture, this very development signalled not just Britain's 'long-delayed entry into the modern world', as Hall mockingly puts it, but also, more fundamentally, the final moment of the decline of the British empire, epitomized by the Suez crisis of 1956. The late 1950s was the moment when established class hierarchies inside Britain were unravelling. It was also when Britain was forced to recognize its loss of colonial power and its new subordinate position *vis-à-vis* the new western global superpower, the United States. What Hall calls 'the modern world', so to speak, is 'American'.

The ensuing cultural crisis in Britain, then, not only had to do with the unsettling effects of the impact of 'Americanized' consumption and the mass media, but also with the end of the era of British world hegemony. Furthermore, as the structures of the Age of Empire were crumbling, there was a more general eruption of the non-dominant onto the previously neatly hierarchical fabric of British cultural life. It is in this respect that the biographies of the 'founding fathers' are so interesting. They all have backgrounds marginal to hegemonic British culture: Richard Hoggart comes from a northern working-class family, Raymond Williams was Welsh, and Stuart Hall is a black Jamaican. All three occupied contradictory positions within the British social formation: as social subjects who stood in a decentred relation to the dominant national culture, they entered the sites of the very elite of the English academic world – Hall, for example, came to Britain in 1951 to study at Oxford. And without wanting to engage in a humanist biographical determinism, we can still point out that all three worked on a cultural studies in Britain which articulated a redefinition of culture by breaking down, in theoretical terms, the equation of the dominant culture with culture *per se*, opening up the terrain of the cultural for struggle, negotiation, and resistance. In this sense, we can suggest that the energizing impulse of British cultural studies has historically precisely lain in this critical concern with, and validation of, the subordinate, the marginalized, the subaltern within Britain.

In this respect, it is perhaps worth speculating that the success of

cultural studies in the United States coincided with the historical loss of the ability of that country to control the global economy and the increasing recognition that it can no longer dictate the terms of the 'new world order', which, to a certain extent, has sustained the cohesion of American national identity. This loss led to a cultural crisis analogous to that of Britain after the Second World War, and opened up a space for divisions within American society to express themselves in a more antagonistic way than the ideology of pluralism had enabled. Thus, cultural studies has become an intellectual home for the unprecedented eruption of non-dominant race, gender and ethnic voices in the American public arena.

At any rate, the recognition that there is not one 'culture' in 'society' but that any 'society' consists of a plurality of historically specific 'cultures' structured in relations of dominance and subordination to each other, is therefore *the* key theoretical formulation which gave cultural studies the ability to focus on cultural *struggle* – arguably the central theme which interconnects all work in cultural studies, however this struggle is further theorized, together. Hall's reference to E. P. Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class* is exemplary:

Thompson insisted on the historical specificity of culture, on its plural, not singular, definition – 'cultures', not 'Culture': above all, on the necessary struggle, tension and conflict between cultures and their links to class cultures, class formations and class struggles – the struggles between 'ways of life' rather than the evolution of 'a way of life'. These were seminal qualifications.⁴⁴

It is important to point out that these qualifications are seminal in a much more profound sense than just in the British context. Indeed, they might be one of the key reasons for the 'international' attractiveness of the British cultural studies legacy. Graeme Turner, for example, argues that *The Making of the English Working Class* 'opens the way for a new "history from below" which recovers the stories of social formations, of popular cultural movements, of non-institutional and subordinated groups and places them against the large-scale administrative, institutional, and constitutional narratives of traditional histories.'⁴⁵ Speaking from an Australian point of view, Turner continues: 'White Australian histories – as distinct from imperial or colonial histories – have, in a sense, *always* been histories "from below": accounts of a subordinated (that is, a colonised) people, and of their construction of social groups and identities within an extremely repressive and authoritarian social and administrative structure.'⁴⁶ Turner's point here is that it was the opening up of the possibility of a 'history from below' which made British cultural studies relevant to Australians. That is, the point of connection between British and Australian cultural studies here is the empowering validation of the