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articoli e saggi

Questo numero di Anglistica è dedicato interamente agli Studi Culturali, una disciplina e un orientamento critico che questa rivista segue da tempo con interesse.

Nell'attuale fase del suo sviluppo, superato lo stadio di definizione della propria storia, delle proprie ascendenze e caratteri, il campo registra un'esigenza di riflessione critica e autocritica. E' a questa seconda fase di ripensamento che è dedicato il lungo saggio di Richard Johnson rivolto a mettere in questione parametri e procedimenti di analisi più che a offrire risposte definitive alla domanda programmatica che ne costituisce il titolo: «What is Cultural Studies anyway?». Sotto l'influsso combinato di nuovi apporti epistemologici, della spinta del movimento femminista e della crisi del marxismo, l'interesse per la soggettività è venuto ad incrinare le molte e monolitiche certezze positiviste tanto nel campo dell'indagine scientifica che in quello della riflessione politica (che tuttavia rimane una delle preoccupazioni centrali del suo discorso).

Gli articoli seguenti – sul concetto di nazionalismo in Inghilterra (I. Chambers), sull'autobiografismo femminile (L. Curti), sui giovani come problema e sui giovani come piacere (D. Hebdige) e sul camp (G. Merlino) – seguono le tracce della soggettività nella formazione di sistemi formali ed estetici o di concezioni ideologiche e sociali.

Nel primo caso, la 'Britishness' viene osservata nell'epica e nelle 'narrazioni' del quotidiano e quale componente essenziale

di un conservatorismo culturale che è impresso nella coscienza popolare e lascia segni anche nella sinistra inglese tradizionale. Nel secondo, il percorso femminile nella scrittura autobiografica è viaggio da natura a cultura, in faticoso e mutevole equilibrio tra interiorità e socialità, tra mancanza e desiderio, tra possibilità di trovare un proprio ingresso nella storia e rischio di accedere all'immaginario maschile.

Infine, il piacere di esibirsi, di mostrarsi, plasmando corpo e viso creativamente, da parte dei giovani, è il ribaltamento soggettivo di una strategia di osservazione che la società attraverso i media attua nei loro confronti: nelle fotografie documentaristiche ('la verità in bianco e nero') dei momenti di tensione o in quelle patinate e colorate ('i giovani come oggetto estetico') del tempo libero e del piacere. In modo analogo, il camp indica una filosofia dell'apparire più che dell'essere, una estetizzazione della vita che porta modi espressivi ed estetici dell'avanguardia nella cultura popolare. Il saggio di G. Merlino evoca più che spiegare, e descrive per assonanza un fenomeno che si sottrae a ogni razionalizzazione. Il discorso sull'omosessualità maschile iniziato in questo saggio viene approfondito nell'intervita a J. Weeks pubblicata in questo stesso numero.

WHAT IS CULTURAL STUDIES ANYWAY?

by
Richard Johnson

Introduction [1]

I do not want to attempt a definitive answer to my question. And I do not see myself as 'the Director' bringing orders from Rome to an unruly part of an empire. Nor is my question a true inquisition — which you must answer correctly. Instead the question should be asked musingly, with a slight air of bafflement: what *is* cultural studies — anyway?

It may even be as well to correct the grammar: what are cultural studies? This has the merit of admitting a plurality of answers from the different centres, not the single Centre. In Britain, cultural studies is now a movement or a network. It has its own first degrees in several

[1] This paper is a revised and expanded version of talks given at the Department of English at Istituto Universitario Orientale in Naples and at the University of Palermo and Pescara in April 1983. I am grateful to colleagues at Naples, Palermo, Pescara and from Bari for fruitful discussions around the themes raised here. In revising this paper, I have tried to respond to some comments, especially those concerning questions about consciousness and unconsciousness — though not, I fear, adequately. I am grateful to Lidia Curti, Laura Di Michele and Marina Vitale for encouraging the production of this paper and advising on its form, to the British Council for funding my visit, and to friends and students (not mutually exclusive categories) at Birmingham for bearing with very many different versions of 'the circuit'.

polytechnics [2] and its own journals and meetings [3]. It exercises a larger influence on academic disciplines, especially on English studies, sociology, media and communication studies, linguistics and history. So it is important that the different centres communicate about their problems and that is what I want to do today.

In the first part of the paper, I want to consider some of the arguments for and against the academic codification of cultural studies. To put the question most sharply: should cultural studies aspire to be an academic discipline? In the second half of the paper, I'll look at some strategies of definition short of codification, because a lot hangs, I think, on the *kind* of unity or coherence we seek. Finally, in by far the longest part, I want to try out some of my own preferred definitions and arguments.

The Importance of Critique

I want to put the arguments against academic codification first, because in any academic context they are the ones most likely to be missed. A codification of

[2] There are degrees called Cultural Studies at the polytechnics of North East London, Coventry, Portsmouth, Middlesex, and Communications Studies or other degrees with strong cultural studies elements at Sheffield, Sunderland, Bristol, Central London, Wales and Trent. The Open University Popular Culture course team has been another important educational focus.

[3] The most interesting journals include *Media, Culture and Society*; *Screen* (now incorporating *Screen Education*); *Ideology and Consciousness*; *Block*; *Schooling and Culture*; *Theory, Culture and Society; L.T.P. Journal of Literature, Teaching, Politics*; more popular or political magazines with cultural studies interests include *Marxism Today*, *Socialist* and *Spare Rib*. *History Workshop Journal* is increasingly involved in debates with cultural studies traditions. Among feminist journals, *Feminist Review* and *M/F* have many parallel interests. A Cultural Studies Network currently meets three times a year in different centres; an annual conference is planned. The first issue of a new journal, *Formations*, appeared in September 1983, from Routledge and Kegan Paul.

methods or knowledges (instituting them, for example, in formal curricula or in courses on 'methodology') runs against some main features of cultural studies as a tradition: its openness and theoretical versatility, its reflexive even self-conscious mood, and, especially, the importance of critique. I mean critique in the fullest sense: not criticism merely, nor even polemic, but procedures by which other traditions are approached both for what they may yield and for what they inhibit. Critique involves stealing away the more useful elements and rejecting the rest. It involves appropriation not just rejection. From this point of view cultural studies is a process, a kind of alchemy for producing useful knowledge. Codify it and you might halt its reactions.

The history of cultural studies can certainly be written from this point of view, though I have only time to illustrate this with some key cases. The earliest encounters were with literary criticism. Raymond Williams and Richard Hoggart, in their different ways, developed the Leavisite stress on literary-social evaluation, but turned the assessments from literature to everyday life [4]. The application of literary concerns to texts and practices well outside the conventional literary range has been a well-trodden route to cultural studies ever since, whether via the sociology of literature or art, or via film and media studies, or via a concern with language or Marxist critical theory. Williams' own journeys represent the exemplary odyssey here, not least for their political consistency [5]. Thus the appropriations from literary studies have been deep, formative and recurrent — a theme I will return to later.

Similar appropriations have been made from history. The first important moment here was the development of the post-war traditions of social history with their

[4] The key texts are Richard Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy*, Penguin, 1957; Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society*, Penguin, 1958; Raymond Williams, *The Long Revolution*, Penguin, 1961.

[5] They are reconstructed in the fascinating interviews published as *Politics and Letters*, New Left Books, 1979.

focus on popular culture, or the culture of 'the people' especially in its political forms. The Communist Party Historians' Group was central here, with its 1940s and early 1950s project of anglicizing and historicising old Marxism. In a way this influence was paradoxical; perhaps that is why it was rather later and less direct than, say, Hoggart's. For the historians were less concerned with contemporary culture or even with the twentieth century, putting energies instead into understanding the long British transition from feudalism to capitalism and the popular struggles and traditions of dissent associated with it. It was this work which became a second matrix for cultural studies. One strand in our recent work has been to study this earlier project in 'popular memory' as part of a larger appropriation of social-historical approaches [6].

Central in both literary and historical strands was the critique of old Marxism. The recovery of 'values' against Stalinism was a leading impulse of the first New Left, but the critique of economism has been the continuous thread through the whole 'crisis of Marxism' (as it is called) which has followed. Certainly cultural studies has been formed on this side of what we can also call, paradoxically, a modern Marxist revival, and in the cross-national borrowings that were so marked a feature of the 1970s. These patterns of neglects and importations are themselves a fascinating topic. For the moment, it is important to note what different places the same figures have occupied in different national routes. The take-up of Althusserianism is incomprehensible outside the background of the dominant empiricism of British intellectual traditions. This feature helps to the appeal of Philosophy, not as a technical pursuit, but as a generalised rationalism and excitement with abstract ideas [7]. Similarly, it is

[6] See especially Bill Schwarz, '« The People » in history: The Communist Party Historians' Group', in CCCS, *Making Histories: Studies in History-Writing and Politics*, Hutchinson, 1982, though the whole of this volume is relevant.

[7] For a still useful summary of CCCS responses to Althusser

important to note how Gramsci, a version of whose work occupies a place of orthodoxy in Italy, was appropriated by us as a critical, heterodox figure. He provided mighty reinforcements to an already partly-formed cultural studies project, as late as the 1970s [8].

Some students of culture remain 'marxist' in name (despite the 'crisis' and all that). It is more interesting, however, to note where cultural studies has been Marx-influenced. Everyone will have their own checklist. My own, which is not intended to sketch an orthodoxy, includes three main premises. The first is that cultural processes are intimately connected with social relations, especially with class relations and class formations, with sexual divisions, with the racial structuring of social relations and with age oppressions as a form of dependency. The second is that culture involves power and helps to produce asymmetries in the abilities of individuals and social groups to define and realise their needs. And the third, which follows the other two, is that culture is neither an autonomous nor an externally determined field, but a site of social differences and struggles. For me, this by no means exhausts the elements of Marxism that remain active and alive and resourceful in the existing circumstances, provided only they, too, are critiqued, and developed in detailed studies.

Other critiques have been distinctly philosophical. Cultural studies has been marked out, in the British context, for its concern with 'theory', but the intimacy of the connection with philosophy has not been obvious, at least to me, till recently. Yet it is plain that there is a very close cousinhood between epistemological problems and positions (e.g. empiricism, realism and idealism) and

see G. McLennan, V. Molina and Peters, 'Althusser's Theory of Ideology', in CCCS, *On Ideology*, Hutchinson, 1978.

[8] See, for example, Hall, Lumley and McLennan, 'Politics and Ideology: Gramsci', in *On Ideology*. But Gramsci's theorisations are a main presence in much of the empirical work from the Centre from the mid-1970s.

the key questions of 'cultural theory' (e.g. economism, materialism, or the problem of culture's specific effects). Again, for me, a lot of roads lead back to Marx, but the appropriations need to be wider ones. It is interesting, for example, how much cultural studies as a project depends upon the critique of empiricism as a culturally-reductive theory, and how much we have absorbed all (or many) of the anti-empiricist currents of the last twenty years: hence the critique of positivism in social science, of empiricism in history and of models of 'bias' or 'distortion' in leftish media critiques; hence also the fairly temporary attractions of the phenomenological sociologies of the 1960s and the rationalism of the 1970s [9]; hence even the long indecisive tussle with English notions of 'experience', often using these tools [10]. Latterly there have been attempts to go beyond the rather sterile opposition of rationalism and empiricism in search of a more productive formulation of the relation between theory (or 'abstraction' as I now prefer) and 'concrete studies' [11].

There have been tussles with sociologies of different kinds as well. The relation of cultural studies to 'social

[9] See for example the dual debts to Barthes' structuralism and Cicourel's phenomenological sociology in Stuart Hall's early 1970s essays on the media, e.g. 'The « Structured Communication » of Events', CCCS Stencilled Paper, No. 5.

[10] For one version see the debate over E.P. Thompson's history which began with Richard Johnson, 'Edward Thompson, Eugene Genovese and Socialist-Humanist History', in *History Workshop Journal*, No. 6, 1978, continued with other contributions in this journal (Nos 7, 8 & 9) and 'ended' with the papers published in Raphael Samuel (ed.), *People's History and Socialist Theory*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981. Also clarifying on 'experience' is the treatment in Perry Anderson, *Arguments within English Marxism*, Verso, 1980. I have learnt a great deal working with Gregor McLennan on these themes, see especially, Gregor McLennan, *Marxism and the Methodologies of History*, Verso, 1982.

[11] See G. McLennan, *Methodologies* and R. Johnson, 'Reading for the Best Marx: History-Writing and Historical Abstraction', in CCCS, *Making Histories*. This is really continuing the 'same' debate, by other means.

science' is a pretty ambiguous one. We have learned from sociology's concern with social theory and have taken many sociologists' topics, but we have tended to refuse sociology's methods and some features of its (more official) outlook. There are two main exceptions: the adoption of 'qualitative methods' into what I will later call a structural ethnography; and an intimate relation with certain specialist sociologies, especially crime/deviancy, education, and the sociology of sexual divisions [12]. As importantly, cultural studies has deeply influenced many sociologists so that, with the disintegration of sociology as a unified discipline, the two approaches are often indistinguishable [13]. Cultural studies can often rely, however, on the whole-hearted opposition of a quantitative, policy-related and officially-funded sociological mainstream, attached as it is, to a very conservative agenda of research.

More important in our recent history have been the critiques deriving from the women's movement and from the struggles against racism [14]. These have deepened and extended the democratic and socialist commitments that were the leading principles of the first New Left. These focussed primarily on class issues, whether from the point of view of scholarship boys and girls or a middle-class dissidence. If the personal was already political in the

[12] The most striking instance is the work on sub-cultures. See especially S. Hall and T. Jefferson (eds.), *Resistance through Rituals: Youth Sub-Cultures in Post-War Britain*, Hutchinson, 1976 and D. Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*, Methuen, 1979. And compare S. Cohen, *Folk Devils and Moral Panics*, Martin Robertson, 1980, first published 1972.

[13] See, for instance, the papers collected as a result of the British Sociological Association's Annual Conference on culture in M. Barrett, P. Corrigan *et al.* (eds.), *Ideology and Cultural Production*, Croom Helm, 1979.

[14] These are difficult to represent bibliographically, but key points are marked by CCCS Women's Study Group: *Women Take Issue*, Hutchinson, 1978; CCCS, *The Empire Strikes Back*, Hutchinson, 1982. See also the series on Women and on Race in CCCS Stencilled Papers.

first phase of CND, it was oddly ungendered. The democratic foundations of the early movements were therefore insecurely based as a new form of politics. Similarly there were (and are) deep problems about the ethno- and anglocentricity of key texts and themes in our tradition [15]. The contemporary salience in Britain of a Conservative-nationalist and racist politics means these flaws are all the more serious. It is incorrect therefore to see feminism or anti-racism as some kind of interruption or diversion from an original class politics and its associated research programme. On the contrary, it is these movements that have kept the new left new.

The specific results for cultural studies have been no less important [16]. Much more has been involved than the original question — 'what about women?' Feminism has influenced everyday ways of working and brought a greater recognition of the way that productive results depend upon supportive relationships. It has uncovered some unacknowledged premises of 'left' intellectual work and the masculine interests that held them in place. It has produced new objects of study and forced a rethink of old ones. In media studies, for example, it has shifted attention from the 'masculine' genre of news and current affairs to the importance of 'light entertainment'. It has aided a more general turn from older kinds of 'ideology critique' (which centred on maps of meaning or version of reality) to approaches that centre on social identities, subjectivities, popularity and pleasure [17]. Feminists also seem to me to

[15] This is not a new criticism but given fresh force by the 1970s salience of race. See P. Gilroy, 'Police and Thieves', in *The Empire Strikes Back*, esp. pp. 147-51.

[16] Some of these, at an early stage, are discussed in *Women Take Issue*, but there is need for a really full and consolidated account of the transformations in cultural studies stemming from feminist work and criticism. See also A. McRobbie, 'Settling Accounts with Sub-Cultures', *Screen Education*, No. 34, Spring, 1980 and the articles by H. Carby and P. Parmar in *The Empire Strikes Back*.

[17] These moves can be traced, for example, in successive shifts of object and emphasis in media work in the Centre, from work

have made a particular contribution to bridging the humanities/social science divide by bringing literary categories and 'aesthetic' concerns to bear on social issues.

I hope these cases show how central critique has been and how connected with political causes in the broader sense. A number of questions follow. If we have progressed by critique, are there not dangers that codifications will involve systematic closure? Anyway, are there not enough important objects of study irrespective of general definitions? Why not carry out raids from existing work rather than formalise achievements? Why not continue to work freely across disciplinary boundaries, rather than erect new ones? If the momentum is to strive for really useful knowledge, will academic codification help this? Is not the priority to become more 'popular' rather than more academic?

These questions gain further force from immediate contexts. Cultural studies is now a widely taught subject, especially in tertiary education, though not always under this name. Unless we are very careful students will encounter it as an orthodoxy, especially, perhaps, where teacher attachments to the subject are pragmatic. In any case, students now have lectures, courses and examinations in the study of culture. In these circumstances, how can they occupy a critical tradition critically? The problem is especially acute when the impulses that made us critics may be no longer immediate to our students. These are not insuperable problems but they need constant discussion and experimentation. There is no better illustration of a general point — that cultural studies has to be associated with educational innovation, not as an optional extra, but as an integral part of the practice itself.

on news and current affairs, to 'Nationwide' (a popular, light, news magazine), to light entertainment, soap opera, situation comedy etc. See, for example, D. Hobson, *Crossroads: Drama of a Soap Opera*, Methuen, 1982, but also (internal) reports from the CCCS Media Groups for 1979-81. But this has been a quite general move in media work in the late 1970s in Britain.

This is reinforced by what we know — or are learning — about academic and other disciplinary dispositions of knowledge. Recognition of the forms of power associated with knowledge may turn out to be one of the leading insights of the 1970s. It is a very general theme: in the work of Pierre Bourdieu and Michel Foucault [18], in the radical philosophers' and radical scientists' critiques of science or scientism, in radical educational philosophy and sociology and in feminist critiques of the dominant academic forms [19]. There has been a marked change from the singular affirmation of science in the early 1970s (with Althusser as one main figure) to the dissolution of such certainties (with Foucault one point of reference) in our own times. Academic knowledge forms (or some aspect of them) now look like part of the problem, rather than part of the solution. In fact, the problem remains much as it has always been — what can be won from the academic concerns and skills to provide elements of useful knowledge.

Pressures to Define

Yet there are important pressures to define. There is the little daily politics of the college or the school — not so little since jobs, resources and opportunities for useful work are involved. Cultural studies has won real spaces here and they have to be maintained and extended. The context of ('big') politics makes this still more important.

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[18] See, for example, P. Bourdieu and J. Passeron, *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture*, Sage, 1977; P. Bourdieu, 'Cultural Reproduction and Social Reproduction', in R. Brown (ed.), *Knowledge, Education and Social Change*, Tavistock, 1973; M. Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Tavistock, 1973.

[19] B. Easlea, *Science and Sexual Oppression*, Weidenfeld a Nicholson, 1981. G. Whitty and M. Young, *Explorations in the Politics of School Knowledge*, Nafferton, 1976. Thanks also to Maureen McNeil for very interesting discussions on these themes.

We have a Conservative Counter-Reformation in Britain too! One manifestation is a vigorous assault on public educational institutions, both by cutting finance and by defining usefulness in strictly capitalist terms. We need definitions of cultural studies to struggle effectively in these contexts, to make claims for resources, to clarify our minds in the rush and muddle of everyday work, and to decide priorities for teaching and research.

Most decisively, perhaps, we need ways of viewing a vigorous but fragmented field of study, if not as a *unity* at least as a *whole*. If we do not discuss central directions of our own, we will be pulled hither and thither by the demands of academic self-reproduction and by the academic disciplines from which our subject, in part, grows. There is a welcome tendency for cultural practitioners (media workers, designers, artists, photographers, etc) to look to cultural studies to help with problems of practice, but most students of culture learn their skills from academic practices. Academic tendencies, then, tend to be reproduced on the new ground: there are distinctively literary and distinctively sociological or historical versions of cultural studies, just as there are approaches distinguished by theoretical partisanship. This would not matter if any one discipline or problematic could grasp the objects of culture as a whole, but this is not, in my opinion, the case. In my view each approach tells us about a tiny aspect. If this is right, we need a particular kind of defining activity: one which reviews existing approaches, identifies their characteristic objects and their good sense, but also the limits of their competence. Actually it is not definition or codification that we need, but pointers to further transformations. This is not a question of aggregating existing approaches (a bit of sociology here, a spot of linguistics there) but of reforming the elements of different approaches in their relations to each other. I hope to make this very general statement more concrete in what follows.

Strategies of Definition

There are several different starting-points. Cultural studies can be defined as an intellectual and political tradition, in its relations to the academic disciplines, in terms of theoretical paradigms, or by its characteristic objects of study. The last starting-point now interests me most; but first a word about the others.

We need histories of cultural studies to trace the recurrent dilemmas and to give perspective to our current projects. But the informed sense of a 'tradition' also works in a more 'mythical' mode to produce a collective identity and a shared sense of purpose. And I do believe that there are some very powerful continuities to be defined. To me, a lot of them are wrapped up in the single term 'culture', which remains useful not as a rigorous category, but as a kind of summation of a history. It references in particular the effort to heave the study of culture from its old inegalitarian anchorages in high-artistic connoisseurship and in discourses, of enormous condescension, on the not-culture of the masses. Behind this intellectual redefinition there is a somewhat less consistent *political* pattern, a continuity that runs from the first new left and the first Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament to the post-1968 currents. Of course there have been marked political antagonisms within the new left and between new left politics and the intellectual tendencies it has produced. The intellectual detours have often seemed politically self-indulgent. Yet what unites this sequence is the struggle to reform 'old left' politics. This includes the critique of 'old Marxism' but also of old social-democracy too. It involves a constructive quarrel with dominant styles within 'the Labour Movement', especially the neglect of cultural conditions of politics, and a mechanical narrowing of politics itself. This is a loose and a variable political connection, but it is a real one, sometimes investing in autonomous political forms, sometimes forced into intellectual isolation, sometimes finding in Labour, Communist or other radical parties a useful sphere of action.

It is this sense of a connection that has been so important for cultural studies. It has meant that the research and the writing has been 'political', but not in any immediate pragmatic sense. Cultural studies is not a research programme for a particular party or tendency. Still less does it subordinate intellectual energies to any established doctrines. It has quite enough to do to hold together its own immediate constituencies! This political-intellectual stance is possible because the politics which we aim to create is not yet fully formed. Just as the politics involves a long haul, so the research must be as wide-ranging and as profound, but also as politically-directed, as we can make it. Above all, perhaps, we have to fight against the dis-connection that occurs when cultural studies is inhabited for merely academic purposes or when enthusiams for (say) popular cultural forms is divorced from the analysis of power and of social possibilities.

I have said a lot already about the second definitional strategy — charting our negative/positive relation to the academic disciplines. I just want to stress the key point. Cultural processes do not correspond to the contours of academic knowledges, as they are. No one academic discipline grasps the full complexity (or seriousness) of the study. Cultural studies must needs be inter-disciplinary (and sometimes anti-disciplinary) in its tendency. I find it hard, for example, to think of myself as an 'historian' now, though perhaps historian-of-the-contemporary is a rough approximation in some contexts. Yet some 'historian's' virtues seem useful for cultural studies — concerns for movement, particularity, complexity and context, for instance. I still love that combination of dense description, complex explanation and subjective even romantic evocation, which I find in the best historical writing. I still find most sociological description thin and obvious and much literary discourse clever but superficial! On the other hand the rooted empiricism of historical practice is a real liability often blocking a properly cultural reading. I am sure it is the same for other disciplines too. Of course, there are lots of half-way houses, many of them serviceable

workshops for cultural study, but the *direction* of movement, to my mind, has to be out, and away, and into more dangerous places!

Our third definitional strategy — the analysis and comparison of theoretical problematics — was, until recently, the favourite one[20]. I still see this as an essential component in all cultural study, but it has some difficulties as the main definitional strategy, especially as a starting-point. The main difficulty is that abstract forms of discourse disconnect ideas from the social complexities that first produced them, or to which they originally referred. Unless these are continuously reconstructed and held in the mind as a reference point, theoretical clarification acquires an independent momentum. In teaching situations or similar interchanges, theoretical discourse may seem, to the hearer, a form of intellectual gymnastics. The point appears to be to learn a new language, which takes time and much effort, in order, merely, to feel at ease with it. In the meantime there is something very silencing and perhaps oppressive about new forms of discourse. I think that this has been a fairly common experience, for students, on the new cultural studies programmes, even where, eventually, 'theory' has conferred new powers of understanding and articulacy. This is one set of reasons why many of us now find it useful to start from concrete cases, either to teach theory historically, as a continuing, contextualised debate about cultural issues, or to hook up theoretical points and contemporary experiences.

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[20] See, for example, Stuart Hall, 'Some Paradigms in Cultural Studies', *Anglistica* 1978; Stuart Hall, 'Cultural Studies: Two Paradigms', *Media, Culture and Society*, No. 2, 1980 (reprinted in part in Tony Bennett *et al.* (eds.), *Culture, Ideology and Social Process*, Open University and Batsford, 1981) and the introductory essays in Hall, Hobson, Lowe and Willis (eds.), *Culture, Media and Language*, Hutchinson, 1980. These essays are highly compressed versions of the MA Theory Course at CCCS which Stuart Hall taught and which comprised a comprehensive theoretical mapping of the field. See also my own attempts at theoretical clarification, much influenced by Stuart's, in, especially, Clark, Critcher and Johnson (eds.), *Working Class Culture*, Hutchinson, 1979.

Some theoretical issues of the 1970s also seem less pressing. This is partly a criticism of the rationalist mode in which they were posed, but also a reflection of the working through of theoretical difficulties themselves. For me, for instance, the 'culturalist'/'structuralist' opposition is no longer the inhibiting 'impasse' it was four or five years ago. This is because, with different people, I've worked through the range of difficulties posed in that form and in the opposition structure/struggle, culture/ideology, theory/concrete studies, etc[21]. I see the outcome as a strengthened tradition of cultural analysis — of our tradition in the sense sketched above — and one that has taken note of and incorporated the full weight of structuralist critique. This does not mean, of course, that there are no theoretical problems left. There are many, especially in the broad realm of what I would call post-structuralist theories of subjectivity. But they no longer have the same inhibiting force or urgency and seem best worked through in particular projects rather than big 'in-general' debates.

So this takes me to my preferred definitional strategy. The key questions are: what is the characteristic *object* of cultural studies? What is cultural studies '*about*'?

Simple Abstractions: Consciousness, Subjectivity

I have suggested already that 'culture' has value as a reminder but not as a precise category. Raymond Williams has excavated its immense historical repertoire[22]. There is no solution to this polysemy: it is a rationalist illusion to think we can say 'henceforth this term will

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[21] It will be important, however, to return to these issues, sometime, to state 'solutions' more formally and fully than is possible here. The more explicitly epistemological issues are tackled, and (for me) in large part resolved, in Johnson, 'Reading for the Best Marx' (cited above, note 11).

[22] Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society* and the entry in *Keywords*, Fontana, 1976.

mean ...', and expect a whole history of connotations (not to say a whole future) to fall smartly into line. So although I fly culture's flag anyway, and continue to use the word where imprecision matters, definitionally I seek other terms.

My key terms instead are 'consciousness' and 'subjectivity' with the key problems now lying somewhere in the relation between the two. For me cultural studies is about the historical forms of consciousness or subjectivity, or the subjective forms we live by, or, in a rather perilous compression, perhaps a reduction, the subjective side of social relations. These definitions adopt and gloss some of Marx's simple abstractions, but value them also for their contemporary resonance. I think of 'consciousness', first, in the sense in which it appears in *The German Ideology*. As a (fifth) premise for understanding human history, Marx and Engels add that human beings 'also possess consciousness'[23]. This usage is echoed in later works too. Marx implies it when in *Capital*, volume I, he distinguishes the worst architect from the best bee by the fact that the architect's product has 'already existed ideally' before it is produced[24]. It has existed in the consciousness, the imagination. In other words, human beings are characterised by an ideal or imaginary life, where will is cultivated, dreams dreamt, and categories developed. In his earliest work Marx called this a feature of 'species being'[25], later he would have called it a 'general-historical' category, true of all history, a simple or universal abstraction[26]. Although the usage is less clear (and I need to do more work on it) Marx also habitually refers to the 'subjective side' or 'subjective aspect' of social processes.

Of course, all the Marx passages carry colossal incrustations of commentary and meaning. In Marxist discourse (I am less sure of Marx) 'consciousness' has overwhelmingly

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[23] *Complete Works*, Lawrence and Wishart, 1976, Vol. 5, p. 43.
[24] *Capital*, Penguin, 1976, Vol. I, p. 283.
[25] See especially the *Paris Manuscripts of 1844*.
[26] For a discussion of 'general-historical' abstraction in Marx see, Johnson, 'Best Marx', p. 172.

cognitive connotations: it has to do with knowledge (especially correct knowledge?) of the social and the natural worlds. I think Marx's consciousness was wider than this! It embraced the notion of a consciousness of self and an active mental and moral self-production. There is no doubt, however, that he was especially interested in conceptually-organised knowledge, especially in his discussions of particular ideological forms (e.g. political economy, Hegelian idealism etc). In his most interesting text on the character of thinking (the 1857 'Introduction' to the *Grundrisse*) other modes of consciousness, the aesthetic, the religious etc, were bracketed out[27].

In any case, both terms must be read with specifically modern pre-occupations in mind. 'Subjectivity' is especially important here, challenging the absences in 'consciousness'. Subjectivity includes the possibility, for example, that some elements or impulses are subjectively active — they *move* us — without being consciously known. It highlights elements ascribed (in the misleading conventional distinction) to aesthetic or emotional life and to conventionally 'feminine' codes. It focuses on the 'who I am' or, as important, the 'who we are' of culture, on individual and collective identities. It connects with the most important structuralist insight: that subjectivities are produced not given and are therefore the objects of inquiry, not the premises or starting-points. If, therefore, I were forced to chose, I would prefer the more modern term, especially if the full force of (possible) collective identities (implicit in 'consciousness') were preserved.

In all my thinking about cultural studies I find the notion of 'forms' also repeatedly recurs. Lying behind this usage are two major influences. Marx continuously uses

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[27] For the theme of self-production see the *1844 Manuscripts*, but also the description of the labour process in *Capital*, vol. I: 'Through this movement he acts upon external nature, and in this way he simultaneously changes his own nature' (p. 283). For the bracketting out of the artistic, religious etc., see *Grundrisse*, Penguin, 1973, p. 101.

the terms 'forms' or 'social forms' or 'historical forms' when he is examining in *Capital* (but especially in the *Grundrisse*) the various moments of economic circulation: he analyses the 'money form', the 'commodity form', the form of abstract labour etc. Less often he used the same language in writing of 'consciousness' or subjectivity. The most famous instance is from the 1859 *Preface*:

> ... a distinction should always be made between the material trans*form*ation of the economic conditions of production, which can be determined with the precision of natural science, and the legal, political, religious, aesthetic or philosophic — in short, ideological *forms* in which men become conscious of this conflict and fight it out[28].

The passage has been much discussed — for Marx's scientism, for the base/superstructure metaphor, and for a different more expanded notion of ideology than the negative or critical one which Marx usually employs. What interests *me* about it is the implication of a different parallel project to Marx's own. His preoccupation was with those social forms through which human beings produce and reproduce their material life. He looked at social processes as a whole, but from this point of view. He abstracted, analysed and sometimes reconstituted in more concrete accounts the economic forms and tendencies of social life. It seems to me that cultural studies too is concerned with whole societies (or broader social formations) and how they move. But it looks at social processes from another complementary point of view. *Our* project is to abstract, describe and reconstitute in concrete studies the social forms through which human beings 'live', become conscious, sustain themselves subjectively. This includes the 'ideological forms' which Marx lists but also, of course, such everyday phenomena as the stories or projections which you or I tell ourselves when we get up of a morning,

[28] 'Introduction' to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, Lawrence and Wishart, 1971. (My emphasis).

which help us to get up and get going — or send us crawling back under the bedclothes!

The stress on 'forms' is reinforced, for me, by some broad structuralist insights. These have drawn out the structured character of the forms we inhabit subjectively: language, signs, ideologies, discourses, myths. They have pointed to regularities and principles of organisation — of form-fullness if you like. Though often pitched at too high a level of abstraction (e.g. language in general rather than language in particular) they have strengthened our sense of the hardness, determinacy and, indeed, actual existence of social forms which exercise their pressures through the subjective side of social life.

This is not to say that the description of form, in this sense, is enough. It is important to see the historical nature of subjective forms too. 'Historical' in this context means two rather different things. First, we need to look at forms of subjectivity from the point of view of their pressures or tendencies, especially their contradictory sides. Even in abstract analysis, in other words, we should look for principles of movement as well as combination. Second, of course, we need histories of the forms of subjectivity where we can see how these tendencies are modified by the other social determinations, including those that work through material needs.

As soon as we pose this as a project, we can see how the simple abstractions which we have so far used, do not take us very far. Where are all the intermediate categories that would allow us to start to specify the subjective social forms and the different moments of their existence? Yet I hope that what I have said so far may distance us from all the partial and trivial views of cultural studies which, despite the original redefinition of culture, tend to return. Given this definition of 'culture', we cannot limit the field to specialised practices, particular genres, or popular leisure pursuits. *All* social practices can be looked at from a cultural point of view, for the work they do, subjectively. This goes, for instance, for factory work, for trade union organisation, for life in and around the supermarket, as well

certainly for obvious targets like 'the media' (misleading unity!) and its (mainly domestic) modes of consumption.

Circuits of Capital - Circuits of Culture?

So we need, first, a much more complex model, with rich intermediate categories, more layered than the existing general theories. It is here that I find it helpful to pose a kind of realist hypothesis about the existing state of theories. What if existing theories — and the modes of research associated with them — actually express different sides of the same complex process? What if they are all true, but only as far as they go, true for those parts of the process which they have most clearly in view? What if they are all false or incomplete, liable to mislead, in that they are only partial, and therefore cannot grasp the process as a whole? What if attempts to 'stretch' this competence (without modifying the theory) leads to really gross and dangerous (ideological?) conclusions?

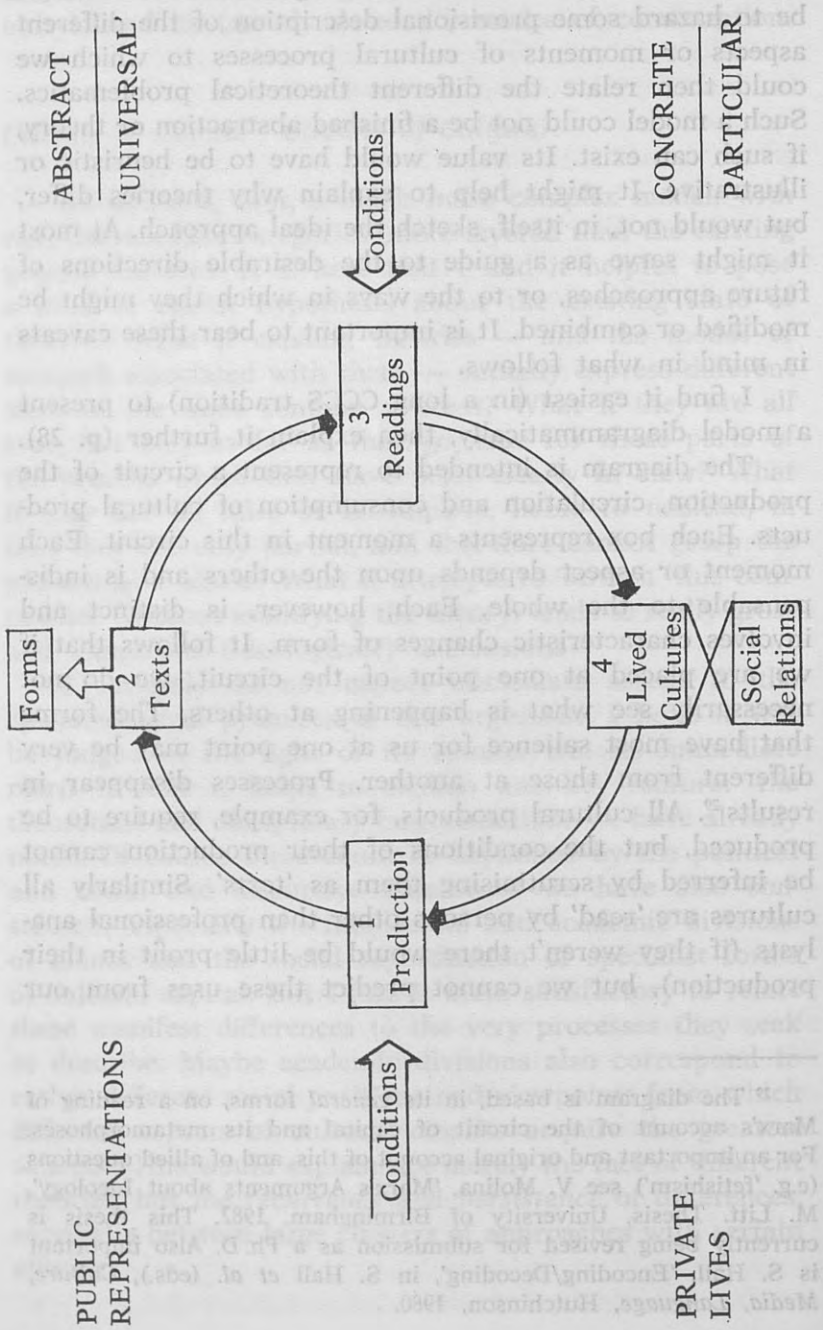
I certainly do not expect immediate assent to the epistemological premises of this argument. I hope it will be judged in the light of its results. But its immediate merit is that it helps to explain one key feature: the theoretical and disciplinary fragmentations we have already noted. Of course these could be explained by the political and social and discursive differences we have also considered: especially the intellectual and academic divisions of labour and the social reproduction of specialist forms of cultural capital. But I find it more satisfactory to relate these manifest differences to the very processes they seek to describe. Maybe academic divisions also correspond to rather different social positions and viewpoints from which different aspects of cultural circuits acquire the greatest salience. This would explain not merely the fact of different theories, but the *recurrence* and *persistence* of differences, especially between large *clusters* of approaches with certain affinities.

The best way to take such an argument further would be to hazard some provisional description of the different aspects or moments of cultural processes to which we could then relate the different theoretical problematics. Such a model could not be a finished abstraction or theory, if such can exist. Its value would have to be heuristic or illustrative. It might help to explain why theories differ, but would not, in itself, sketch the ideal approach. At most it might serve as a guide to the desirable directions of future approaches, or to the ways in which they might be modified or combined. It is important to bear these caveats in mind in what follows.

I find it easiest (in a long CCCS tradition) to present a model diagrammatically, then explain it further (p. 28).

The diagram is intended to represent a circuit of the production, circulation and consumption of cultural products. Each box represents a moment in this circuit. Each moment or aspect depends upon the others and is indispensable to the whole. Each, however, is distinct and involves characteristic changes of form. It follows that if we are placed at one point of the circuit, we do not necessarily see what is happening at others. The forms that have most salience for us at one point may be very different from those at another. Processes disappear in results [29]. All cultural products, for example, require to be produced, but the conditions of their production cannot be inferred by scrutinising them as 'texts'. Similarly all cultures are 'read' by persons other than professional analysts (if they weren't there would be little profit in their production), but we cannot predict these uses from our

[29] The diagram is based, in its *general* forms, on a reading of Marx's account of the circuit of capital and its metamorphoses. For an important and original account of this, and of allied questions (e.g. 'fetishism') see V. Molina, 'Marx's Arguments about Ideology', M. Litt. Thesis, University of Birmingham, 1982. This thesis is currently being revised for submission as a Ph. D. Also important is S. Hall, 'Encoding/Decoding', in S. Hall *et al.* (eds.), *Culture, Media, Language*, Hutchinson, 1980.



[22]

own analysis, or, indeed, from the conditions of production. As anyone knows, all our communications are liable to return to us in unrecognisable or at least transformed terms. We often call this *mis*understanding or, if we are being very academic, *mis*-readings. But these 'misses' are so common (across the range of a whole society) that we might well call them normal. To understand the transformations, then, we have to understand specific conditions of consumption or 'reading'. These include asymmetries of resources and power, material and cultural. They also include the existing ensembles of cultural elements already active within particular social *milieux* ('lived culture' in the diagram) and the social relations on which these combinations depend. These reservoirs of discourses and meanings are in turn a raw material for fresh cultural production. They are indeed among the specifically cultural *conditions* of production.

In our societies, many forms of cultural production also take the form of capitalist commodities. In this case we have to supply specifically capitalist conditions of production (see the arrow pointing to moment 1) and specifically capitalist conditions of consumption (see the arrow pointing to moment 3). Of course this does not tell us all there is to know about these moments, which may be structured on other principles as well, but in these cases the circuit is, at one and the same time, a circuit of capital and its expanded reproduction and a circuit of the production and circulation of subjective forms.

Some implications of the circuit may be clearer if we take a particular case. We can, for example, whizz a Mini-Metro car around it. I chose the Mini-Metro because it is a pretty standard later twentieth-century capitalist commodity that happened to carry a particularly rich accumulation of meanings. The Metro was the car that was going to save the British car industry, by beating rivals from the market and by solving British Leyland's acute problems of industrial discipline. It came to signify solutions to internal and external national threats. The advertising campaigns around its launching were remarkable.

[23]

In one television advert, a band of Mini-Metros pursued a gang of foreign imports up to (and apparently over) the White Cliffs of Dover, whence they fled in what looked remarkably like landing-craft. This was a Dunkirk in reverse with the Metro as nationalist hero. Certainly these are some of the forms — nationalist epic, popular memory of World War II, internal/external threat — that I would want to abstract for further formal scrutiny. But this raises interesting questions too about what constitutes the 'text' (or raw material for such abstractions) in these cases. Would it be enough to analyse the design of the Metro itself as Barthes once analysed the lines of a Citroen? How could we exclude the adverts and garage showroom displays? Shouldn't we include, indeed, the Metro's place in discourses upon national economic recovery and moral renaissance?

Supposing that we answered these questions affirmatively (and gave ourselves a lot more work) there would still be some unposed questions. What was *made* of the Metro phenomenon, more privately, by particular groups of consumers and readers? It would be unwise to infer this form the public representations. For one thing, we would expect great diversity of response. Leyland workers, for example, were likely to view the car differently from those who only bought it. Beyond this, the Metro (and its transformed meanings) found some kind of lodgement in the ways of life and subjectivities of those groups for which it had a salience. It became a way of getting to work or picking the kids up from school. But it may also have helped to produce for example orientations towards working life, connecting industrial 'peace' with national prosperity. Then, of course, the products of this whole circuit returned once more to the moment of production as profits for fresh investment, but also as market researcher's findings on 'popularity' (capital's own 'cultural studies'), and as a stock of public and private meanings. The subsequent use, by British Leyland management of similar strategies for selling cars and weakening workers suggests considerable accumulations (of both kinds) from this episode. Indeed the Metro became a little paradigm,

though not the first, for a much more diffused ideological form, which we might term, with some compression, 'the nationalist sell'.

Publication and Abstraction

So far I have talked rather generally about the 'transformations' that occur around the circuit without specifying any. In so brief a discussion, it is only possible to specify two related changes of form. These are indicated on the left and right hand sides of the circuit. The circuit involves movements between the public and the private but also movements between more abstract and more concrete forms. These two poles are quite closely related: private forms are more concrete, and more particular in their scope of reference; public forms are more abstract but also apply over a more general range. This may be clearer if we return to the Metro and, thence, to different traditions of cultural study.

As a designer's idea, as a manager's 'concept', the Metro remained private[30]. It may even have been conceived in secret. It was known to a chosen few. At this stage, indeed, it would have been hard to separate it out from the social occasions at which it was discussed: board-room meetings, chats at the bar, Saturday's game of golf? But as ideas were 'put on paper' it started to take a more objective and more public form. The crunch came when decisions were made to go ahead with 'the concept' and, then again, to 'go public'. Finally, the Metro-idea, shortly followed by the Metro-car, moved into 'the full glare of publicity'. It acquired a more general significance, gathering around it, in fact, some pretty portentous notions. It became, in fact,

[30] I am afraid this illustrative case is largely hypothetical since I have no contacts inside British Leyland management. Any resemblance to persons living or dead is entirely fortuitous and a pure instance of the power of theory.

a great public issue, or a symbol for such. It also took shape as an actual product and set of texts. In one obvious sense it was made 'concrete': not only could you kick it, you could drive it. But in another sense, this Metro was rather abstract. There it stood, in the showroom, surrounded by its texts of Britishness, a shiny, zippy thing. Yet who would know, from this display, who conceived it, how it was made, who suffered for it, or indeed what possible use was going to have for the harassed-looking woman with two children in tow, who has just walked into the showroom.

To draw out more general points, three things occurred in the process of public-ation. First, the car (and its texts) became *public* in the obvious sense: it acquired if not a *universal* at least a more *general* significance. Its messages too were generalised, ranging rather freely across the social surface. Second, at the level of *meaning*, publication involved *abstraction*. The car and its messages could now be viewed in relative isolation from the social conditions that formed it. Thirdly, it was subjected to a process of public *evaluation* ('great public issue') on many different scales: as a technical-social instrument, as a national symbol, as a stake in class war, in relation to competing models etc. It became a site of formidable struggles over meaning. In this process it was made to 'speak', evaluatively, for 'us (British) all'. Note, however, in the moment of consumption or reading, represented here by the woman and her children (who have decided views about cars), we are forced back again to the private, the particular and concrete, however publicly displayed the raw materials for their readings may be.

I want to suggest that these processes are intrinsic to cultural circuits under modern social conditions, and that they are produced by, and are productive of, relations of power. But the most germane evidence for this, lies in some repeated differences in the forms of cultural study.

Forms of Culture - Forms of Study

One major division, theoretical and methodological, runs right through cultural studies. On the one side there are those who insist that 'cultures' must be studied as a whole, and *in situ*, located, in their material context. Suspicious of abstractions and of 'theory', their practical theory is in fact 'culturalist'. They are often attracted to those formulations in Williams or E. P. Thompson that speak of cultures as 'whole ways of life' or 'whole ways of struggle'. Methodologically, they stress the importance of complex, concrete description, which grasps, particularly, the unity or homology of cultural forms and material life. Their preferences are therefore for social-historical recreations of cultures or cultural movements, or for 'ethnographic' cultural description, or for those kinds of writing (e.g. autobiography, oral history, or realist forms of fiction) which recreate socially-located 'experience'.

On the other side, there are those who stress the relative independence or effective autonomy of subjective forms and means of signification. The practical theory here is usually 'structuralist', but in a form which privileges the discursive construction of situations and subjects. The preferred method is to treat the forms abstractly, sometimes quite formalistically, uncovering the mechanisms by which meaning is produced in language, narrative or other kinds of sign-system. If the first set of methods are usually derived from sociological, anthropological or social-historical roots the second set owe most to literary criticism, and especially the traditions of literary modernism and linguistic formalism [31].

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[31] This is the division between 'structuralist' and 'culturalist' approaches S. Hall and I, among others, have already discussed, but now in the form of 'objects' and methods, rather than 'paradigms'. See sources listed in note 20 above and add R. Johnson, 'Histories of Culture/Theories of Ideology: Notes on an Impasse', in M. Barrett *et al.* (eds.), *Ideology and Cultural Production*, Croom Helm, 1979.

In the long run, this division is, in my opinion, a sure impediment to the development of cultural studies. I will return to its limits and its effects. But it is important first to note the logic of such a division in relation to our sketch of cultural processes as a whole. If we compare, in more detail, what we have called the public and private forms of culture, the relation may be clearer [32].

Private forms are not necessarily private in the usual sense of personal or individual, though they may be both. They may also be shared, communal and 'social' in ways that public forms are not. It is their particularity or concreteness that marks them as private. They relate to the characteristic life experiences and historically-constructed needs of particular social categories. They do not pretend to define the world for those in other social groups. They are limited, local, modest. They do not aspire to 'universality'. They are also deeply embedded in everyday social intercourse. In the course of their daily lives, women go shopping and meet and discuss the various doings of themselves, their families and their neighbours. Gossip is a private form deeply connected with the occasions and relations of being a woman in our society. Of course, it is *possible* to describe the discursive forms of gossip abstractly, stressing for instance the forms of reciprocity

[32] My thinking on 'the public and the private' is much influenced by certain German traditions, especially discussions around Jurgen Habermas' work on 'the public sphere'. This is now being interestingly picked up and used in some American work. See J. Habermas, *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit*, Neuweid, Berlin, 1962; O. Negt and A. Kluge, *Öffentlichkeit und Erfahrung: Zur Organisationsanalyse von Burgerlicher und Proletarischer Offentlichkeit*, Frankfurt am Main, 1972. For an extract of Negt and Kluge's work see A. Matterlart and S. Siegelaub (eds.), *Communication and Class Struggle*, vol. 2. The American journal *New German Critique* has translated parts of Habermas' text, not yet available in full in English, and carries discussion of the debate about 'the public sphere'. See also, for a summary of the arguments, and a first application to British cultural forms, M. Bommes and P. Wright, '« Charms of Residence »: The Public and the Past', in CCCS, *Making Histories*, Hutchinson, 1982.

in speech, but this does seem to do a particular violence to the material, ripping it from the immediate and visible context in which these texts of talk arose. An even more striking case is the working-class culture of the shop floor. As Paul Willis has shown there is a particularly close relationship here between the physical action of labour and the practical jokes and common sense of the workplace [33]. The whole discursive mode of the culture is to refuse the separations of manual practice and mental theory characteristic of public and especially academic knowledge forms. In neither case — gossip and shop-floor culture — is there a marked division of labour in cultural production. Nor are there technical instruments of production of any great complexity, though forms of speech and the symbolic uses of the human body are complex enough. Nor are the consumers of cultural forms formally or regularly distinguished from their producers, or far removed from them, in time or space.

I would argue that particular forms of inquiry and of representation have been developed to handle these features of private forms. Researchers, writers and all kinds of rapporteurs have adjusted their methods to what have seemed the most evident features of 'culture' in this moment. They have sought to hold together the subjective and more objective moments, often not distinguishing them theoretically, or, in practice, refusing the distinction altogether. It is this stress on 'experience' (the term that perfectly captures this conflation or identity) that has united the practical procedures of social historians, ethnographers and those interested, say, in 'working-class writing'.

Compared with the thick, conjoined tissue of face-to-face encounters, the television programme 'going out on the air' seems a very abstracted, even ethereal product. For one thing it is so much more plainly a *re*presentation of 'real life' (at best) than the (equally constructed)

[33] P. Willis, 'Shop-floor Culture, Masculinity and the Wage Form' in J. Clarke, C. Critcher and R. Johnson (eds.), *Working Class Culture*, Hutchinson, 1979.

narratives of everyday life. It takes a separated abstracted or objective form, in the shape of the programme/text. It comes at us from a special, fixed place, a box of standardised shape and size in the corner of our sitting room. Of course, we apprehend it socially, culturally, communally, but it still has this separated moment, much more obviously than the private text of speech. This separated existence is certainly associated with an intricate division of labour in production and distribution and with the physical and temporal distance between the moment of production and that of consumption, characteristic of public knowledge forms in general. Public media of this kind, indeed, permit quite extraordinary manipulations of space and time as, for example, in the television revival of old movies.

I would argue, again, that this apparent abstraction in the actual forms of public communication underlies the whole range of methods that focus on the construction of reality through symbolic forms themselves — with language as the first model, but the key moment as the objectification of language in text. It would be fascinating to pursue an historical inquiry linked to this hypothesis which would attempt to unravel the relationship between the real abstractions of communicative forms and the mental abstractions of cultural theorists. I do not suppose that the two processes go easily, hand in hand, or that changes occur synchronously. But I am sure that the notion of 'text' — as something we can isolate, fix, pin down and scrutinise — depends upon the extensive circulation of cultural products which have been divorced from the immediate conditions of their production and have a moment of suspension, so to speak, before they are consumed.

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[34] The most popular of a number of magazines for teenage girls in Britain. See A. McRobbie, 'Jackie: An Ideology of Adolescent Feminity', CCCS Stencilled Paper, No. 53.

Public-ation and Power

The public and private forms of culture are not sealed against each other. There is a real circulation of forms. Cultural production often involves public-ation, the making public of private forms. On the other side, public texts are consumed or read in 'private'. A girls' magazine, like *Jackie* for instance, picks up and represents some elements of the private cultures of femininity by which young girls live their lives. It instantaneously renders these elements open to public evaluation — as for example, 'girls stuff', 'silly' or 'trivial'. It also generalises these elements within the scope of the particular readership, creating a little public of its own. The magazine is then a raw material for thousands of girl-readers who make their own *re*-appropriations of the elements first borrowed from their lived culture and forms of subjectivity.

It is important not to assume that public-ation only and always works in dominating or in demeaning ways. We need careful analyses of where and how public representations work to seal social groups into the existing relations of dependence and where and how they have some emancipatory tendency. Short of this detail, we can nonetheless insist on the importance of power as an element in an analysis, by suggesting the main ways it is active in the public-private relationship.

Of course there are profound differences in terms of access to the public sphere. Many social concerns may not acquire publicity at all. It is not merely that they remain private, but that they are actively privatised, *held* at the level of the private. Here, so far as formal politics and state actions are concerned, they are invisible, without public remedy. This means not only that they have to be borne, but that a consciousness of them, as evils, is held at a level of implicit or communal meanings. Within the group a knowledge of such sufferings may be profound, but not of such a kind that expects relief, or finds the sufferings strange.

As often, perhaps, such private concerns do appear

publicly, but only on certain terms, and therefore transformed and framed in particular ways. They may be ranked low in public evaluation. The concerns of gossip, for example, do appear publicly in a wide variety of forms, but usually in the guise of 'entertainment'. They appear, for instance, in soap opera, or are 'dignified' only by their connection with the private lives of royalty, stars or politicians. Similarly, elements of shop-floor culture may be staged as comedy or variety acts. Such framings in terms of code or genre may not, as some theorists believe, altogether vitiate these elements as the basis of a social alternative, but they certainly work to contain them within the dominant public definitions of significance.

Public representations may also act in more openly punitive or stigmatising ways. In these forms the elements of private culture are robbed of authenticity or rationality, and constructed as dangerous, deviant, or dotty [35]. Similarly the experiences of subordinated social groups are presented as pathological, problems for intervention not in the organisation of society as a whole, but in the attitudes or behaviour of the suffering group itself. This is 'representation' with a vengeance: representation not as subjects demanding redress, but as objects of external intervention.

If space allowed it would be important to compare the different ways in which these processes may occur across the major social relationships of class, gender, race

[35] There is a very large sociological literature on these forms of stigmatisation, especially of the deviant young. For a cultural studies development of this work see Stuart Hall *et al.* (eds.), *Policing the Crisis: 'Mugging', the State and Law and Order*, Macmillan, 1978. For more subtle forms of marginalisation see CCCS Media Group, 'Fighting Over Peace: Representations of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament in the Media', CCCS Stencilled Paper, No. 72. For current treatment of the left and the trade unions in the British media see the sequence of studies by the Glasgow Media Group, starting with Glasgow University Media Group, *Bad News*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1976. S. Cohen and J. Young (eds.), *The Manufacture of News*, Constable, 1973 was a pioneering collection.

and age-dependence. But one further general mechanism is the construction, in the public sphere, of definitions of the public/private division itself. Of course, these sound quite neutral definitions: 'everyone' agrees that the most important public issues are the economy, defence, law and order and, perhaps, welfare questions, and that other issues — family life, sexuality for example — are essentially private. The snag is that the dominant definitions of significance are quite socially specific and, in particular, tend to correspond to masculine and middleclass structures of 'interest' (in both the meanings of this term). It is partly because they start fundamentally to challenge these dispositions that some feminisms, the peace movements and the Green parties are amongst the most subversive of modern developments.

I have stressed these elements of power, at the risk of some diversion from the main argument, because cultural studies practices must be viewed within this context. Whether it takes as its main object the more abstracted public knowledges and their underlying logics and definitions, or it searches out the private domains of culture, cultural studies is necessarily and deeply implicated in relations of power. It forms a part of the very circuits which it seeks to describe. It may, like the academic and the professional knowledges, police the public-private relation, or it may critique it. It may be involved in the surveillance of the subjectivities of subordinated groups, or in struggles to represent them more adequately than before. It may become part of the problem, or a part of the solution. That is why as we turn to the particular forms of cultural study, we need to ask not only about objects, theories and methods, but also about the political limits and potentials of different standpoints around the circuit.

From the Perspective of Production

This is a particularly wide and heterogeneous set of approaches. For I include under this head, approaches with

very different political tendencies, from the theoretical knowledges of advertisers, persons involved in public relations for large organisations, many liberal-pluralist theorists of 'public communication' and the larger part of writings on culture within the Marxist and other 'critical' traditions [36]. As between disciplines, it is sociologists or social historians or political economists, or those concerned with the political organisation of culture, who have most commonly taken this viewpoint. Literary approaches have often stopped short at the biography of authors and their 'age'. A more systematic approach to cultural production has been a relatively recent feature of the sociology of literature or art or popular cultural forms [37]. These concerns parallel debates about the mass media which are often carried within political science or political sociology, and were originally deeply influenced by the early experiences of state propaganda under the conditions of the modern media, especially in Nazi Germany. Crossing the more aesthetic and political debates has been the pervasive

[36] There is a great deal of practical knowledge about 'communication' in the writing of professionals in these areas. Critically read, much can be learned from these sources. Allied but not identified with explicitly political concerns with communication are the various schools of liberal-pluralist communications research. For a recent overview of these, which however, is profoundly ignorant of the European traditions, see S. Lowery and M. L. De Fleur, *Milestones in Mass Communication Research*, Longmans, 1983. Most of the work on 'the media' within the cultural studies tradition has been based on a critique of these predominantly American tendencies. For a predominantly left-ish collection in this field, illustrating, however, different approaches see J. Curran *et al.* (eds.), *Mass Communication and Society*, Arnold/Open University, 1977, and, more recently, M. Gurevitch *et al.* (eds.), *Culture, Society and the Media*, Methuen/Open University, 1982. Among English representatives of the 'mass communications' schools the work of J. G. Blumler is especially interesting.

[37] Raymond Williams' formulations on the nature of cultural production are especially important here as a much fuller account than most structuralist or semiological versions. See for example, R. Williams, *Culture*, Fontana, 1981.

concern with the influence of capitalist conditions of production and the mass market in cultural commodities on the 'authenticity' of culture, including the popular arts [38]. Studies of production within these traditions have been equally varied: from grandiose critiques of the political economy and cultural pathology of mass communications (e.g. the early Frankfurt School) [39] to empirically very close inspections of the production of news or particular documentary series or soap operas on television [40]. In a very different way still, much modern social history has been concerned with 'cultural production', though this time the cultural production of social movements or even whole social classes. It is important to accept E. P. Thompson's invitation to read *The Making of the English Working Class* from this 'cultural' standpoint, Paul Willis' work, especially *Learning to Labour* representing in many ways the 'sociological' equivalent of this historiographical tradition [41].

What unites these diverse works, however, is that they

[38] These debates are interestingly reviewed in A. Swingewood, *The Myth of Mass Culture*, Macmillan, 1977. See also the first four theoretical review essays in M. Gurevitch, *et al.*, *Culture, Society and the Media*, cit.

[39] The best review of the Frankfurt School in English is David Held, *Introduction to Critical Theory*, Hutchinson, 1981, which concentrates on the clear presentation of often 'difficult' theories. See also P. Slater, *Origin and Significance of the Frankfurt School: A Marxist Perspective*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977. See also A. Arato and E. Gebhardt (eds.), *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader*, Blackwell, 1978.

[40] Among the best close studies of this kind are P. Elliott, *The Making of a Television Series: A Case Study in the Sociology of Culture*, Constable/Sage, 1972; P. Schlesinger, *Putting 'Reality' Together: BBC News*, Constable/Sage, 1978; J. Tunstall, *Journalists at Work*, Constable, 1971; Dorothy Hobson, *Crossroads*, cit.

[41] E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, Penguin, 1963; P. Willis, *Learning to Labour: How Working Class Kids Get Working Class Jobs*, Saxon House, 1977. Both these books are classics in cultural studies, as I understand it. A reading of them should be compulsory, especially for those working with the more formalist models.

all take, if not the viewpoint of cultural producers, at least the *theoretical* standpoint of 'production'. They are interested, first and foremost, in the production and the social organisation of cultural forms. Of course, it is here that Marxist paradigms have occupied a very central place, even where continuously argued against. Early Marxist accounts asserted the primacy of production conditions and often reduced these to some narrowly-conceived version of 'the forces and the relations of production'. Even such reductive analysis had a certain value: culture was understood as a social product, not a matter of individual creativity only. It was therefore subject to political organisation, whether by the capitalist state or by parties of social opposition [42]. In later Marxist accounts, the historical forms of the production and organisation of culture — 'the superstructures' — have begun to be elaborated. In Gramsci's writing the study of culture from the viewpoint of production becomes a more general interest with the cultural dimensions of struggles and strategies as a whole. The long-standing and baneful influence of 'high-cultural' or specialist definitions of 'Culture' *within* Marxism was also definitively challenged [43]. Gramsci was, perhaps, the first major Marxist theorist and communist leader to take the cultures of the popular classes as a serious object of study and of political practice. All the more modern features of cultural organisation also start to appear in his work: he starts to write of cultural organisers/producers not just as little knots of 'intellectuals' on the old revolutionary or Bolshevik model

[42] The forms of 'political organization' were often not specified in Marx or in the theorists who followed him, up to and including, in my view, Lenin. For Lenin, it seems to me, cultural politics remained a matter of organisation and 'propaganda' in quite narrow senses.

[43] Althusser's exceptions of 'art' from ideology are an instance of the persistence of this view within Marxism. It is interesting to compare Althuuser's and Gramsci's views of 'philosophy' here too, Althusser tending to the specialist academic or 'high cultural' definition, Gramsci to the popular.

but as whole social strata concentrated around particular institutions — schools, colleges, the academic specialisms, the law, the press, the state bureaucracies and the political parties. Again, it would be interesting to trace this theoretical movement in its connections with social changes, Gramsci's own location being especially fascinating here, pointing back to the Machiavellian, Jacobin and Bolshevik models and forward to 'the modern Prince' [44].

Gramsci's work is the most sophisticated and fertile development of a traditional Marxist approach via cultural production. Yet I think that Gramsci remains much more the 'Leninist' than is sometimes appreciated in new left or academic debates in Britain [45]. From the work available in English, it seems to me he was less interested in how cultural forms work, subjectively, than in how to 'organise' them, externally. I wonder if I am alone, for example, in feeling real disappointment at his accounts of a possible mass attachment to 'the philosophy of praxis'? He seems here to fall back on a rather mechanical adoption or depends too much on a borrowed and unspecified notion of 'faith' [46].

[44] Especially important here are notes collected under 'Education' and 'The Intellectual' in the English selection from the Prison Notebooks. Q. Hoare and G. Nowell-Smith (eds.), *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, Lawrence and Wishart, 1971. I find the theme of a history of 'intellectuals' and their political connections especially fascinating in Gramsci, not least his tendency to use the language of the past to describe contemporary realities. Thanks also to Michael Green for very stimulating discussions of these themes.

[45] I think the predominant reception of Gramsci in Britain is 'anti-Leninist', especially among those interested in discourse theory. But it may be that CCCS appropriations underestimate Gramsci's Leninism too. I am grateful to Victor Molina for discussions on this issue.

[46] I recognise this sense may be based on a narrow reading of Gramsci, limited by the available translations.

Limits of the Viewpoint of Production

More generally, I find two recurrent limits to looking at culture from this viewpoint. The first difficulty is the familiar one of 'economism', though it is useful, I hope, to restate the problem in a different way. There is a tendency to neglect what is specific to *cultural* production in this model. Cultural production is assimilated to the model of capitalist (usually) production in general, without sufficient attention to the *dual* nature of the circuit of cultural commodities. In this case, for instance, the conditions of production include not merely the material means of production and the capitalist organisation of labour, but a stock of already existing *cultural* elements drawn from the reservoirs of lived culture or from the already public fields of discourse. This raw material is structured not only by capitalist production imperatives (e.g. commodified) but also by the indirect results of capitalist and other social relations on the existing rules of language and discourse, especially, for example, class and gender-based struggles in their effects on the different social symbols and signs. As against this, Marxist 'political economy' still goes for the more brutally-obvious 'determinations' — especially mechanisms like competition, monopolistic control, and imperial expansion [47]. This is why the claim of some 'semiologies' to provide an alternative 'materialist' analysis does

[47] See, for instance, the work of Graham Murdock and Peter Golding on the political economy of the mass media: e.g. 'Capitalism, Communication and Class Relations' in Curran *et al.* (eds.), *Mass Communication and Society*, cit.; G. Murdock, 'Large Corporations and the Control of the Communications Industries' in M. Gurevitch *et al.* (eds.), *Culture, Society and the Media*, cit., for a more explicitly polemical engagement with CCCS work see Golding and Murdock, 'Ideology and the Mass Media: the Question of Determination', in M. Barrett *et al.* (eds.), *Ideology and Cultural Production*, cit. For a reply see I. Connell, 'Monopoly Capitalism and the Media: Definitions and Struggles', in S. Hibbin (ed.), *Politics, Ideology and the State*, Lawrence and Wishart, 1978.

have some force [48]. Many approaches to production, in other words, can be faulted on their chosen ground: as accounts of *cultural* production, of the production of *subjective* forms, they tell us at most about some 'objective' conditions and the work of some social sites — typically of the ideological work of capitalist business (e.g. advertising, the work of the commercial media) rather than that of the political parties, the schools, or the apparatuses of 'high culture'.

The second difficulty is not 'economism' but what we might call 'productivism'. The two are often combined but are analytically distinct. Gramsci's Marxism, for instance, is certainly not 'economistic', but it is, arguably, 'productivist'. The problem here is the tendency to infer the character of a cultural product and of its social use from the conditions of its production, as though, in cultural matters, production determines all. The common sense forms of this inference are familiar: we need only to trace an idea to its source to declare it 'bourgeois' or 'ideological' — hence 'the bourgeois novel', 'bourgeois science', 'bourgeois ideology' and, of course, all the 'proletarian' equivalents. Most critics of this reduction attack it by denying the connection between conditions of origin and political tendency [49]. I do not myself wish to deny that conditions of origin (including the class or gender position of producers) exercise a profound influence on the nature of the product. I find it more useful to question such identifications

[48] These claims have their proximate origin in Althusser's statement that ideologies have a material existence. For a classic English statement of this kind of 'materialism' see R. Coward and J. Ellis, *Language and Materialism: Development in Semiology and the Theory of the Subject*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977. This is rather different from Marx's argument that under particular conditions ideologies acquire a 'material force' or Gramsci's elaboration of this in terms of the conditions of popularity.

[49] This applies to a wide range of structuralist and post-structuralist theories from Poulantzas' arguments against class reductionist notions of ideology to the more radical positions of Barry Hindess and Paul Hirst and other theorists of 'discourse'.

not as 'wrong' but as *premature*. They may be true as far as they go, according to the logics of that moment, but neglect the range of possibilities in cultural forms especially as these are realised in consumption or 'readership'. As a matter of fact I do not see how any cultural form can be dubbed 'ideological' (in the usual Marxist critical sense) until we have examined not only its origin in the primary production process, but also carefully analysed its textual forms *and* the modes of its reception. 'Ideological', unless deployed as a neutral term, is the *last* to use in such analysis, certainly not the first [50].

I still find the debate between Walter Benjamin and Theodore Adorno about the tendency of mass culture a very instructive example here, even though it is rather a 'set piece' [51]. Adorno swept on in his majestic polemic identifying

[50] In this respect I find myself at odds with many strands in cultural studies, including some influential ones, which opt for an expanded use of ideology rather in the Bolshevik sense or in the more Leninist of Althusser's (several) uses. Ideology is applied, in the OU's important popular culture course, for instance, to the formation of subjectivities as such. If stretched thus, I would argue that the term loses its usefulness — 'discourse', 'cultural form' etc. would do quite as well. On the whole, I wish to retain the 'negative' or 'critical' connotations of the term 'ideology' in classic Marxist discourse, though not, as it happens, the usual accompaniment, a 'hard' notion of Marxism-as-science. It may well be that all our knowledge of the world and all our conceptions of the self are 'ideological', or more or less ideological, in that they are rendered partial by the operation of interests and of power. But this seems to me a proposition that has to be plausibly argued in particular cases rather than assumed at the beginning of every analysis. The expanded, 'neutral' sense of the term cannot altogether lay to rest the older negative connotations. The issues are interestingly stated in the work of Jorge Larrain. See *Marxism and Ideology*, Macmillan, 1983 and *The Concept of Ideology*, Hutchinson, 1979.

[51] See especially Theodore Adorno, 'On the Fetish Character of Music and the Regression of Listening', in Arato and Gebhardt, (eds.), *Frankfurt School Reader*, cit.; T. Adorno & M. Horkheimer, *Dialectics of Enlightenment*, Allen Lane, 1973; W. Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in an Age of Mechanical Reproduction', in *Illuminations*, Fontana, 1973.

capitalist production conditions, tracing effects in the 'fetishized' form of the cultural commodity and finding its perfect complement in the 'regressive listening' of fans for popular music. There is a highly deductive or inferential element in his reasoning, often resting on some giant theoretical strides, plotted first by Lukacs. The conflations and reductions that result are well illustrated in one of his (few) concrete examples: his analysis of the British brewer's slogan — 'What We Want is Watneys'.

> The brand of the beer was presented like a political slogan. Not only does this billboard give an insight into the nature of the up to date propaganda, which sells its slogans as well as its wares ... the type of relationship which is suggested by the billboard, by which the masses make a commodity recommended to them the object of their own action, is in fact found again in the pattern of reception of light music. They need and demand what has been palmed off on them [52].

The first four lines of this are fine. I like the insight about the parallel courses of political propaganda and commercial advertising, forced on as it was by the German situation. The reading of the slogan is also quite interesting, showing how advertising works to produce an *active* identification. But the analysis goes awry as soon as we get to 'the masses'. The actual differentiated drinkers of Watneys and readers of the slogan are assumed to act also as the brewer's ventriloquists' dummy, without any other determinations intervening. Everything specific to the enjoyment of slogans or the drinking of beer is abstracted away. Adorno is uninterested, for example, in the meaning of Watneys (or any other tipple) in the context of pub sociability, indexed by the 'we'. The possibility that drinkers may have their own reasons for consuming a given product

[52] 'Fetish Character in Music', pp. 287-8. Later he gives slightly more rounded pictures of types of consumption of popular music, but even his fans' dancing resembles 'the reflexes of mutilated animals' (p. 292).

and that drinking has a social use value is overlooked[53].

This is quite an extreme case of 'productivism' but the pressure to infer effects or readings from an analysis of production is a constant one. It is a feature, for example, of a rich vein of work in cultural studies which has mainly been concerned to analyse particular fields of public discourse. Among CCCS publications *Policing the Crisis* and *Unpopular Education* are cases in point[54]. Both books were analyses of our first two moments — of texts, in this case the fields of discourse about law and order and about public education — and of their conditions and histories of production — law and order campaigns, media *cause célèbre*, the work of 'primary definers' like judges and the police, the role of a new political tendency, 'Thatcherism' etc. Both studies defined and attempted to explain a fundamental sea-change in the whole field of force of public representations. Both studies, but especially *Policing the Crisis*, proved to have considerable predictive value, showing the strengths and the popularity of new right politics before, in the case of *Policing*, Mrs Thatcher's first electoral victory in 1979[55]. Similarly, I believe that *Unpopular Education* contained what has turned out to be a percipient analysis of the fundamental contradictions of social-democratic politics in Britain and therefore of some of the agonies of the Labour Party. Yet, as political guides, both studies are incomplete: they lack an account of the crisis of '1945-ism' in the lived culture of, especially, working-class groups,

[53] For more developed critiques see Dick Bradley, 'Introduction to the Cultural Study of Music', CCCS Stencilled Paper, No. 61; R. Middleton, 'Reading Popular Music', *OU Popular Culture Course Unit*, Unit 16, Block 4, Open University Press, 1981.

[54] CCCS Education Group, *Unpopular Education: Schooling and Social Democracy in England since 1944*, Hutchinson, 1981.

[55] The analysis of Thatcherism has continued to be one of Stuart Hall's major concerns. See the very important essays republished in S. Hall and M. Jacques (eds.), *The Politics of Thatcherism*, Lawrence and Wishart/Marxism Today, 1983. 'The Great Moving Right Show', written before the 1979 election, proved to be especially perceptive.

or a really concrete rendering of the popular purchase of new right ideologies. They are limited, in other words, by reliance upon, for the most part, the 'public' knowledges of the media and of formal politics. Something more is required than this, especially if we are to go beyond critique to help in producing new political programmes and movements. This argument may be capped if we turn to Walter Benjamin. Benjamin certainly took a more open view of the potentialities of mass cultural forms than Adorno. He was excited by their technical and educational possibilities. He urged cultural producers to transform not only their works, but also their ways of working. He described the techniques of a new form of cultural production: Brecht's 'epic theatre'. Yet we can see that all of these insights are primarily the comments of a critic upon the theories of producers, or take the standpoint of production. It is here, still with the creator, that the really revolutionary moves are to be made. It is true that Benjamin also had interesting ideas about the potentiality of modern forms to produce a new and more detached relationship between reader and text, but this insight remained abstract, as optimistic, in the same rather *a priori* way, as Adorno's pessimism. It was not rooted in any extended analysis of the larger experience of particular groups of readers.

Our first case (production) turns out to be an interesting instance of an argument the general form of which will recur. Of course, we must look at cultural forms from the viewpoint of their production. This must include the conditions and the means of production, especially in their cultural or subjective aspects. In my opinion it must include accounts and understandings too of the actual moment of production itself — the labour, in its subjective and objective aspects. We cannot be perpetually discussing 'conditions' and never discussing acts! At the same time, we must avoid the temptation, signalled in Marxist discussions of 'determination', to subsume all other aspects of culture under the categories of production-studies. This suggests two stages in a more sensible approach. The first is to grant independence and particularity to a distinct produc-

tion moment — and to do the same for other moments. This is a necessary, negative, holding of the line against reductionisms of all kinds. But once the line is held in our analysis, another stage becomes quite evident. The different moments or aspects are not in fact distinct. There is, for instance, a sense in which (rather carefully) we can speak of texts as 'productive' and a much stronger case for viewing reading or cultural consumption as a production process in which the first product becomes a material for fresh labour. The text-as-produced is a different object from the text-as-read. The problem with Adorno's analysis and perhaps with 'productivist' approaches in general is not only that they infer the text-as-read from the text-as-produced, but that also, in doing this, they ignore the elements of production in other moments, concentrating 'creativity' in producer or critic. Perhaps this is the deepest prejudice of all among the writers, the artists, the teachers, the educators, the communicators and the agitators within the intellectual divisions of labour!

Text-Based Studies

A second whole cluster of approaches are primarily concerned with cultural products. Most commonly these products are treated as 'texts'; the point is to provide more or less definitive 'readings' of them.

Again, it would be useful, if space allowed, to trace the evolution of this, the characteristic stance of 'the critic'. Two developments seem especially important: the separation between specialist critics and ordinary readers, and the division between cultural practicioners and those who practice, primarily, by commenting on the works of others. Both developments have much to do with the growth and elaboration of educational and especially academic institutions, but it is interesting that the 'modernisms' which have so deeply influenced cultural studies, had their origins as producer's theories, but are now discussed most intensively in academic and educational contexts. I am thinking par-

ticularly of the theories associated with Cubism and Constructivism, Russian formalism and film-making, and, of course, Brecht on theatre[56]. These separations, however, are neither absolute nor permanent, especially if their force is recognised and they are struggled against.

Much of what is known about the textual organisation of cultural forms is now carried in the academic disciplines conventionally grouped together as 'the humanities' or 'the arts'. The major humanities discipline, but especially linguistic and literary studies, have developed means of formal description which are indispensable for cultural analysis of forms of narrative, the identification of different *genres*, but also of whole families of 'genre' categories, the analysis of syntactical forms, possibilities and transformations in linguistics, the formal analysis of acts and exchanges in speech, the analysis of some elementary forms of 'cultural theory' by philosophers, and the common borrowing, by 'criticism' and cultural studies, from semiology and other structuralisms.

Looking at it from outside, the situation in the humanities and especially in literature seems to me very paradoxical: on the one hand, the development of immensely powerful tools of analysis and description, on the other hand, rather meagre ambitions in terms of applications and objects of analysis. There is a tendency for the tools to remain obstinately technical or formal. The example I find most striking at the moment is linguistics, which seems a positive treasure-chest of cultural analysis but is buried in a heightened technical mystique and academic professionalism, from which, fortunately, it is beginning to emerge[57]. Other possibilities seem perpetually cooped

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[56] Particularly useful introductions, in English, to these combined impacts are S. Harvey, *May 1968 and Film Culture*, BFI, 1980; T. Bennett, *Formalism and Marxism*, Methuen, 1979.

[57] See, for instance, the work of a group of 'critical linguists' initially based on the University of East Anglia, especially: R. Fowler *et al.*, *Language and Control*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979; G. Kress and T. Hodge, *Language as Ideology*, Routledge and Kegan

up in the 'need' to say something new about some well-thumbed text or much disputed author. This is sometimes shadowed by a freer-ranging amateurism whose general 'cultural' credentials apparently sanction the liberal application of some pretty common sense judgements to almost everything. Yet the paradox is that humanities disciplines are pre-eminently concerned with identifying the subjective forms of life, are already cultural studies in embryo.

The example of certain types of genre category is very revealing here. Forms, regularities and conventions first identified in literature (or certain kinds of music or visual art) often turn out to have a much wider social currency. Feminists working on romance, for example, have traced the correspondences between the narrative forms of popular romantic fiction, the public rituals of marriage (e.g. the Royal Wedding) and, if only through their own experience, the subjective tug of the symbolic resolutions of romantic love[58]. Provoked by this still-developing model, a similar set of arguments and researches are developing around conventional masculinity, the fighting fantasies of boy-culture, and the narrative forms of epic[59]. As if on a

Paul, 1979. I am especially grateful to Gunther Kress, who spent some months at the Centre, and to Utz Maas of Osnabruck University for very fruitful discussions on the relationship of language studies and cultural studies. See also U. Maas, 'Language Studies and Cultural Analysis', Paper for a Conference on Language and Cultural Studies at CCCS, December 1982.

[58] Much of this work remains unpublished. I very much hope that one of the next CCCS books will be a collection on romance. In the meantime see English Studies Group, 'Recent Developments' in *Culture, Media, Language*; R. Harrison, 'Shirley: Romance & Relations of Dependence', in CCCS Women's Studies Group, *Women Take Issue*; A. McRobbie, 'Working-Class Girls and Femininity', *ibid.*; M. Connell, 'Reading and Romance', Unpublished MA Dissertation University of Birmingham, 1981; C. Griffin, 'Cultures of Femininity: Romance Revisited', CCCS Stencilled Paper, No. 69; J. Winship, 'Woman Becomes an Individual: Femininity and Consumption in Women's Magazines', CCCS Stencilled Paper, No. 65; Laura Di Michele, 'The Royal Wedding', CCCS Stencilled Paper, forthcoming.

[59] Much of this work is in connection with the work of the Popular Memory Group in CCCS towards a book on the popularity

prompter's cue, the Falklands/Malvinas conflict crystallised both of these forms (and conjoined them) in a particularly dramatic and real public spectacle. There is no better instance, perhaps, of the limits of treating forms like romance or epic as merely *literary* constructions. On the contrary, they are among the most powerful and ubiquitous of *social* categories or *subjective* forms, especially in their constructions of conventional femininity and masculinity. Human beings live, love, suffer bereavement and go off and fight and die by them.

As usual, then, the problem is to appropriate methods that are often locked into narrow disciplinary channels and use their real insights more widely, freely. What kinds of text-based methods are most useful? And what problems should we look for and try to overcome?

The Importance of Being Formal

Especially important are all the 'modernist' and 'post-modernist' influences, especially those associated with structuralism and post-Saussurean linguistics. I include the developments in semiology here, but would also want to include, as a kind of cousin-hood, once-removed, some strands in 'Anglo-American' linguistics[60]. Cultural studies has often approached these strands quite gingerly, with heated battles, in particular, with those kinds of text-analysis informed by psycho-analysis[61], but the fresh mod-

of Conservative nationalism. I am especially grateful to Laura Di Michele for her contribution in opening up these questions in relation to 'epic', and to Graham Dawson for discussions on masculinity, war, and boy culture.

[60] Especially those developing out of the work of M.A.K. Halliday which includes the 'critical linguistics' group (note 58) but also feminist linguists influenced by his approach. For Halliday see G. Kress (ed.), *Halliday: System and Function in Language*, Oxford University Press, 1976.

[61] See especially the long, largely unpublished critique of *Screen* by the CCCS Media Group, 1977-78. Parts of this appear in S. Hall *et al.* (eds.), *Culture, Media, Language*, Hutchinson, 1980, pp. 157-173.

ernist infusions continue, and continue to be a source of developments. As someone coming from the other historical/sociological side, I am often surprised and uncritically entranced by the possibilities here. Beyond the dazzle, perhaps there are two main reasons for excitement.

Modern formal analysis promises a really careful and systematic description of subjective forms, and of their tendencies and pressures. It has enabled us to identify, for example, narrativity as a basic form of organisation of subjectivities[62]. It also gives us leads — or more — on the repertoire of narrative forms existing contemporaneously, the actual story-forms characteristic of different ways of life. If we treat these not as 'archetypes' but as historically-produced constructions, the possibilities for fruitful concrete study on a very wide range of materials is immense. For stories obviously come not merely in the form of bookish or filmic fictions but also in everyday conversation, in everyone's imagined futures and daily projections, and in the construction of identities, individual and collective, through memories and histories. What are the recurrent patterns here? What forms can we abstract

[62] I take this to be the common message of a great range of work, some of it quite critical of structuralist formalisms, on the subject of narrative in literature, film, television, folk tale, myth, history and political theory. I am in the middle of my own reading list, delving into this material from a quite unliterary background. My starting points are theories of narrative in general — compare R. Barthes 'Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narratives', in S. Heath (ed.), *Barthes on Image, Music, Text*, Fontana, 1977 and F. Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially-Symbolic Act*, Methuen, 1981, but I am most interested in work, at a lesser level of generality, that specifies the types or *genres* of narrative. Here I have found much stimulus in work on filmic or televisual narratives, see especially the texts collected in T. Bennet *et al.* (eds.), *Popular Television and Film*, BFI/Open University, 1981, but also on 'archetypal' genre forms — epic, romance, tragedy etc. — as in N. Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, Princeton University Press, 1957. My particular concern is with the stories we tell ourselves, individually and collectively. In this respect the existing literature is, so far, disappointing.

from these texts most commonly? It seems to me that in the study of subjective forms, we are at the stage in political economy which Marx saw as necessary but primitive: 'when the forms had still to be laboriously peeled out from the material'[63].

There are a number of inhibitions here. One powerful one is an opposition to abstract categories and a terror of formalism. I think that this is often quite misplaced. We need to abstract forms in order the describe them carefully, clearly, noting the variations and combinations. I am sure that Roland Barthes was right when he argued against the quixotic rejection of 'the artifice of analysis':

> Less terrorized by the spectre of 'formalism', historical criticism might have been less sterile; it would have understood that the specific study of forms does not in any way contradict the necessary principles of totality and History. On the contrary: the more a system is specifically defined in its forms, the more amenable it is to historical criticism. To parody a well-known saying, I shall say that a little formalism turns one away from History, but that a lot brings one back to it[64].

Admittedly Barthes' 'History' is suspiciously capitalized and emptied of content: unlike Marxism, semiology does not present us with a practice (unless it be Barthes' little essays) for reconstituting a complex whole from the different 'forms'. But I am sure we do end up with better, more explanatory, histories, if we have comprehended, more abstractly, some of the forms and relations which constitute them. In some ways indeed, I find Barthes' work not formal enough. The level of elaboration in his later work sometimes seems gratuitous: too complex for clarity, insufficiently concrete as a substantive account. In these and other semiological endeavours do we mainly hear the busy whirr of self-generating intellectual systems rapidly slipping out of control? If so, however, this is a

[63] *Grundrisse*, '1857 Introduction' (ed. and trans. Martin Nicolaus), Penguin, 1973, p. 85.

[64] R. Barthes, *Mythologies*, Paladin, 1973, p. 112.

different noise from the satisfying buzz of a really 'historical' abstraction!

Radical structuralisms excite me for another reason [65]. They are the furthest reach of the criticism of empiricism which, as I suggested earlier, founds cultural studies philosophically. This radical constructivism — nothing in culture taken as given, everything produced — is a leading insight we cannot fall behind. Of course, these two excitements are closely related, the second as a premise of the first. It is because we know we are not in control of our own subjectivities, that we need so badly to identify their forms and trace their histories and future possibilities.

What is a Text anyway?

But if text analysis is indispensable, what is a 'text'? Remember the Mini-Metro as an example of the tendency of 'texts' to a polymorphous growth; Tony Bennett's example of the James Bond genres is an even better case [66]. The proliferation of allied representations in the field of public discourses poses large problems for any practitioner of contemporary cultural studies. There are, however, better and worse ways of coping with them. Often, I think, it is a traditional literary solution that is reached for: we plump for an 'author' (so far as this is possible), a single work or series, perhaps a distinctive genre. Our choices may now be popular texts and perhaps a filmic or electronic medium, yet there are still limits in such quasi-literary criteria.

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[65] By which I mean 'post-structuralism' in the usual designation. This seems to me a rather misleading tag since it is hard to conceive of late semiology without early, or even of Foucault without Althusser.

[66] T. Bennett, 'James Bond as Popular Hero', *OU Popular Culture Course Unit*, Unit 21, Block 5; 'Text and Social Process: The Case of James Bond', *Screen Education*, No. 41, Winter/Spring, 1982.

If, for example, we are really interested in how conventions and the technical means available within a particular medium structure representations, we need to work *across* genre and media, comparatively. We need to trace the differences as well as the similarities, for example, between 'literary romance', romantic love as public spectacle and love as a private form or narrative. It is only in this way that we can resolve some of the most important evaluative questions here: how far, for instance, romance acts merely to seal women into oppressive social conditions, and how far ideologies of love may nonetheless express utopian conceptions of personal relations. We certainly do not *have* to bound our research by literary criteria; other choices are available. It is possible for instance to take 'issues' or periods as the main criterion. Though restricted by their choice of rather 'masculine' genres and media, *Policing the Crisis* and *Unpopular Education* are studies of this kind. They hinge around a basically historical definition, examining aspects of the rise of the new right mainly from the early 1970s. The logic of this approach has been extended in recent CCCS media-based studies: a study of a wide range of media representations of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament in October 1981 [67] and a study of the media in a 'post-Falklands' holiday period, from Christmas 1982 to New Year 1983 [68]. This last approach is especially fruitful since it allows us to examine the construction of a holiday (and especially the play around the public/private division) according to the possibilities of different media and genres, for example, television soap opera and the popular daily press. By capturing something of the contemporaneity and combined 'effects' of different systems of representation, we also hope to get nearer to the commoner experience of listening, reading and viewing. This form of study, based upon a conjuncture which in this case is both 'historical' (the post-Falklands moment of

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[67] 'Fighting Over Peace: Representations of CND in the Media', CCCS Stencilled Paper, No. 72.

[68] This project is not yet completed; provisional title: 'Jingo Bells: The Public and the Private in Christmas Media 1982'.

December 1982) and seasonal (the Christmas holiday), is premised on the belief that context is crucial in the production of meaning.

More generally, the aim is to decentre 'the text' as an object of study. 'The text' is no longer studied for its own sake, nor even for the social effects it may be thought to produce, but rather for the subjective or cultural forms which it realises and makes available. The text is only a *means* in cultural study; strictly, perhaps, it is a raw material from which certain forms (e.g. of narrative, ideological problematic, mode of address, subject position etc) may be abstracted. It may also form *part* of a larger discursive field or *combination* of forms occurring in other social spaces with some regularity. But the ultimate object of cultural studies is not, in my view, 'the text', but the social life of subjective forms at each moment of their circulation, including their textual embodiments. This is a long way from a literary valuing of texts for themselves, though, of course, the modes in which some textual embodiments of subjective forms come to be valued over others, especially by critics or educators — the problem especially of 'high' and 'low' in culture — is a central question, especially in theories of culture and class. But this is a problem which subsumes 'literary' concerns, rather than reproducing them. One key issue here, for instance, is how criteria of 'literariness' themselves come to be formulated and installed in academic, educational and other regulative practices.

Structuralist Foreshortenings

How to constitute 'the text' is one problem; another is the tendency of other moments, especially of cultural production and reading, but more generally of the more concrete, private aspects of culture, to disappear into a reading of the text. Around this tendency, we might write a whole complicated history of formalisms, using the term now in its more familiar critical sense.

I understand formalism negatively, *not as abstraction of forms from texts, but as the abstraction of texts from the other moments.* For me this distinction is critical, marking the legitimate and excessive concerns with 'form'. I would explain formalism in the negative sense (if time allowed) in terms of two main sets of determinations: those that derive from the social location of 'critic' and the limits of a particular practice, and those that derive from particular theoretical problematics, the tools of different critical schools. Perhaps it is worth saying that though there is a clear historical association, especially in the twentieth century, between 'criticism' and formalism, there is no necessary connection.

The particular formalisms that interest me most — because there is most to rescue — are those associated with the various structuralist and post-structuralist discussions of text, narrative, subject positions, discourses and so on. I include here, in a necessarily very compressed way, and without many proper distinctions, the whole sequence that runs from Saussure's linguistics and Levi-Strauss' anthropology to early Barthes and what is sometimes called 'semiology mark 1'[69] to the developments set in train by 'May 1968' in film criticism, semiology and narrative theory, including the complicated intersection of Althusserian Marxism, later semiologies and psycho-analysis. Despite their variations, these approaches to 'signifying practices' share certain paradigmatic limits which I term the 'structuralist foreshortening'. I will describe these briefly, then look at each a little more closely.

They are limited, in a very fundamental way, by staying within the terms of textual analysis. In so far as they go beyond it, they subordinate other moments *to* textual analysis. In particular they tend to neglect questions of the production of cultural forms or their larger social organ-

[69] This term has been used to distinguish 'structuralist' and 'post-structuralist' semiologies, with the incorporation of emphases from Lacanian psycho-analysis as an important watershed.

isation, or reduce questions of production to the 'productivity' (I would say 'capacity to produce') of the already existing systems of signification, that is the formal languages or codes. They also tend to neglect questions of readership, or subordinate them to the competencies of a textual form of analysis. They tend to derive an 'account' of readership, in fact, from the critic's own textual readings. I want to suggest that the common element in both these limits is a major theoretical lack — the absence of an adequate post-structuralist (or should I say post-post-structuralist) theory of subjectivity. This absence is one that is stressed within these approaches themselves; in fact, it is a major charge against old Marxism that they lacked 'a theory of the subject'. But the absence is supplied most unsatisfactorily by twinning textual analysis and psycho-analysis in an account of 'subjectivity' which remains very abstract, 'thin' and un-historical and also, in my opinion, overly 'objective'. To sum up the limitations, there is not really an account or accounts here, of the *genesis* of subjective forms and the different ways in which human beings *inhabit* them.

The Neglect of Production

This is the easier point to illustrate. It is the difference, for example, between 'cultural studies' in the CCCS tradition, and especially the CCCS appropriation of Gramsci's accounts of hegemony and, say, the main theoretical tendency in the magazine of film criticism associated with the British Film Institute, *Screen*. In the Italian context the comparison might be between the 'pure' semiological and cultural studies traditions. While cultural studies at Birmingham has tended to become *more* historical, more concerned with particular conjunctures and institutional locations, the tendency of film criticism in Britain has been rather the other way. Initially, an older Marxist concern with cultural production, and, in particular with cinema as industry and with conjunctures in cinematic

production was common both in Britain and in France [70]. But like the French film magazines, *Screen* became in the 1970s, increasingly pre-occupied less with production as a social and historical process, and more with the 'productivity' of signifying systems themselves, in particular, with the means of representation of the cinematographic medium. This move was very explicitly argued for, not only in the critiques of realist theories of the cinema and of the realist structures of conventional film itself, but also of the 'super-realism' of (honoured) Marxist practitioners like Eisenstein and Brecht [71]. It also formed part of a larger movement which placed increasing emphasis on the means of representation in general and argued that we had to choose between the virtual autonomy and absolute determinacy of 'signification' or return to the consistency of orthodox Marxism [72]. As the elegant, one-sided exaggerations put it, it is the myths that speak the myth-maker, the language which speaks the speaker, the texts which read the reader, the theoretical problematic which produces 'science', and ideology or discourse that produces 'the subject' [73].

There *was an* account of production in this work, but a very attenuated one. If we think of production as involving

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[70] The combination of formal and more historical modes of analysis is clear, for example, in many of the earlier essays in *Cahiers du Cinema*, including the famous analysis of John Ford's *Young Mr Lincoln*. See the collection in J. Ellis (ed.), *Screen Reader I: Cinema/Ideology/Politics*, Society for Education in Film and Television, 1977.

[71] The relation of *Screen*'s theory to Brecht and Eisenstein is rather odd. Characteristically, quotations from Brecht were taken as starting-points for adventures which led to quite other destinations than Brecht's own thinking. See, for example, C. MacCabe, 'Realism and the Cinema: Notes on Some Brechtian Theses' in T. Bennett *et al.* (eds.), *Popular Television and Film*.

[72] See, for example, the culmination of a long exploration of Marxist heterodoxy in A. Cutler *et al.*, *Marx's Capital and Capitalism Today*, 2 volumes, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978.

[73] The original formulation seems to have been Levi-Strauss' on the subject of myth.

raw materials, tools or means of production, and socially-organised forms of human labour, *Screen*'s accounts of film, for instance, focussed narrowly on some of the tools or means of production/representation. I say 'some' because semiologically-influenced theories have tended to invert the priorities of older Marxist approaches to production, focussing only on some of the *cultural* means, those, in fact, which 'political economy' neglects. Film theory in the 1970s acknowledged the 'dual' nature of the cinematic circuit, but was mainly concerned to elaborate cinema as 'mental machinery'[74]. This was an understandable choice of *priorities*, but often pursued in a hyper-critical and non-accumulative way. More serious was the neglect of labour, of the actual human activity of producing. Again this may itself have been an exaggerated reaction against older fashions, especially, in this case *auteur* theory, itself an attenuated conception of labour! The neglect of (structured) human activity and especially of conflicts over all kinds of production seems in retrospect the most glaring absence. Thus, though the conception of 'practice' was much invoked (e.g. 'signifying practice') it was practice quite without 'praxis' in the older Marxist sense. The effects of this were especially important in the debates, which we shall come to, about texts and 'subjects'.

This criticism can be pushed, however, one stage further; no material means of production, no labour, but also a very limited conception of 'means'. In *Screen's* theory for example, there was a tendency to look only at the specifically cinematographic 'means' — the codes of cinema. The relations between these means and other cultural resources or conditions were not examined: for example, the relation between codes of realism and the professionalism of film-makers or the relation between

[74] 'The cinematic institution is not just the cinema industry (which works to fill cinemas, not to empty them), it is also the mental machinery — another industry — which spectators « accustomed to the cinema » have internalised historically and which has adapted them to the consumption of films'. C. Metz, 'The Imaginary Signifier', *Screen*, vol. 16, no. 2, Summer 1975, p. 18.

media more generally and the state and formal political system. If these elements might be counted as means (they might also be thought of as social relations of production) the raw materials of production were also largely absent, especially in their cultural forms. For cinema, like other public media, takes its raw materials from the pre-existing field of public discourses — the whole field that is, not just from the bit called 'cinema' — and, under the kind of conditions we have examined, from private knowledges too. A critique of the very notion of representation (seen as indispensable to the critique of realism) made it hard for these theorists to pull into their accounts of film any very elaborate recognition of what an older, fuller theory might have called 'content'. Cinema (and then television) were treated as though they were, so to speak, only 'about' cinema or television, only reproducing or transforming the cinematographic or televisual forms, not pulling in and transforming discourses first produced elsewhere. In this way the cinematic text was abstracted from the whole ensemble of discourses and social relations which surrounded and formed it.

There was one further major limitation in much of this work, viewed from the perspective of production. There was a tendency to refuse any explanatory move that went behind the existing means of representation, whether this was the language system, a particular 'signifying practice' or, indeed, the political system. The account was foreshortened to textual means and (just) textual 'effects'. The means were not conceived historically, as having their own moment of production. This was not a local difficulty in particular analyses, but a general theoretical absence, to be found in the earliest influential models of the theory. The same difficulty, for example, haunts Saussurean linguistics. Although the rules of language systems determine speech acts, the everyday deployment of linguistic forms appears not to touch the language system itself. This is partly because its principles are conceived so abstractly that historical change or social variation escapes detection, but it is also because there is no true production moment

of the language system itself. Crucial insights into language and other systems of signification are therefore foreclosed: that languages are produced (or differentiated), reproduced and modified by socially-organised human practice, that there can be no language (except a dead one) without speakers, and that language is continually fought over in its words, syntax and discursive deployments. It is interesting that in order to recover these insights, students of culture who are interested in language have had to go outside the predominantly French semiological traditions, back to the Marxist philosopher of language Volosinov or across to particular researches influenced by the work of Bernstein or Halliday.

Readers in Texts; Readers in Society

The most characteristic feature of later semiologies has been the claim to advance a theory of the production of subjects. Initially, the claim was based in a general philosophical opposition to humanist conceptions of a simple, unified 'I' or subject, standing unproblematically at the centre of thought or moral or aesthetic evaluation. This feature of structuralism had affinities with similar arguments in Marx about the subjects of bourgeois ideologies, especially about the premises of political economy, and with Freud's anatomisation of the contradictions of human personality.

'Advanced semiology' presents several layers of theorisation of subjectivity which are difficult to unravel[75]. This complicated set of fusions and tangles combines fine leading insights with theoretical disasters. The key insight, for me, is that narratives or images always imply or construct a position or positions from which they are to be read or viewed. Although 'position' remains problematic (is it a set of cultural competences or, as the term implies,

[75] What follows owes much to the CCCS Screen critique cited above (note 61).

some necessary 'subjection' to the text?), the insight is dazzling, especially when applied to visual images and to film. We can now perceive the work which cameras do from a new aspect, not presenting an object merely, but putting us in place before it. If we add to this, the argument that certain kinds of texts ('realism') naturalise the means by which positioning is achieved, we have a dual insight of great force. The particular promise is to render processes hitherto unconsciously suffered (and enjoyed) open to explicit analysis.

Within the context of my own argument, the importance of these insights is that they provide a way of *connecting* the account of textual forms with an exploration of intersections with readers' subjectivities. A careful, elaborated and hierarchised account of the reading positions offered in a text (in narrative structure or modes of address for instance) seems to me the most developed method we have so far within the limits of text analysis. Of course, such readings should not be taken to negate other methods: the reconstruction of the manifest and latent themes of a text, its denotative and connotative moments, its ideological problematic or limiting assumptions, its metaphorical or linguistic strategies. The legitimate object of an identification of 'positions' is the *pressures* or *tendencies* of the reader, the theoretical problematic which produces subjective forms, the *directions* in which they move is their *force* — once inhabited. *The difficulties arise* — and they are very numerous — *if such tendencies are held to be realised in the subjectivities of readers, without additional and different forms of inquiry.*

The intoxications of the theory make such a move very tempting. But to slip from 'reader in the text' to 'reader in society' is to slide from the most abstract moment (the analysis of forms) to the most concrete object (actual readers, as they are constituted, socially, historically, culturally). This is conveniently to miss out — but not explicitly as a rational abstraction — the huge number of fresh determinations or pressures of which we must now take account. In disciplinary terms we move from a ground

usually covered by literary approaches to one more familiar to historical or sociological competences, but the common new element here is the ability to handle a mass of co-existing determinations, operating at many different levels.

Nor is it merely a question of extra determinations. Also at issue is the availability of materials on which to base an analysis of *any* kind. This is much less of a problem for texts which are publicly available and may circulate, in the case of cinema for example, on a world-wide scale. But the moment of reading is not only relatively more concrete, it is also more private. It is the difference between viewing the film ourselves and grasping its significance for the couple in the back row of the cinema.

It would take us into a long and complicated exploration of 'reading' to try and gauge the full enormity of the leap [76]. There is only room to stress a few difficulties, treating reading, not as reception or assimilation, but as itself an act of production. If the text is the raw material of this practice, we encounter, once again, all the problems of textual boundaries. The isolation of a text for academic scrutiny is a very specific form of reading. More commonly texts are encountered promiscuously; they pour in on us from all directions in diverse, coexisting media, and differently-paced flows. In everyday life, textual materials are

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[76] There seem to be two rather distinct approaches to reading (or 'audiences'), the one an extension of literary concerns, the other more sociological and often growing out of media studies. I find David Morley's work in this area consistently interesting as an attempt to combine some elements from both sets of preoccupations, though I agree with his own assessment that the Centre's early starting-points, especially the notions of 'hegemonic', 'negotiated' and 'alternative' readings were exceedingly crude. See D. Morley, *The Nationwide Audience*, BFI, 1980; 'The Nationwide Audience: A Postscript', *Screen Education*, No. 39, Summer, 1981; *Open University Popular Culture Course*, Unit 12, Block 3, 'Interpreting Television'. There is much of value on more literary aspects of reading in the long-delayed CCCS book on English Studies, currently being considered for publication by Methuen.

complex, multiple, overlapping, co-existent, juxta-posed, in a word, 'inter-textual'. If we use a more agile category like 'discourse', indicating *elements* that cut across different texts, we can say that all readings are also 'inter-discursive'. No subjective form ever acts on its own. Nor can the *combinations* be predicted by formal or logical means, nor even from empirical analysis of the field of public discourse, though of course this may suggest hypotheses. The combinations stem, rather, from more particular logics — the structured life-activity in its objective and subjective sides, of readers or groups of readers: their social locations, their histories, their subjective interests, their private worlds.

The same problem arises if we consider the tools of this practice, or the codes, competences and orientations already present within a particular social *milieu*. Again these are not predictable from public texts. They belong to private *cultures*, in the way that term has usually been used in cultural studies. They are grouped according to 'ways of life'. They exist in the chaotic and historically-sedimented *ensembles* which Gramsci referred to as 'common sense'. Yet these must determine the longer and shorter-range results of particular interpellative moments, or, as I prefer, the forms of cultural transformation which always occur in readings.

All this points to the centrality of what is usually called 'context'. 'Context' determines the meaning, transformations or salience of a particular subjective form as much as the form itself. Context includes the 'cultural' features described above, but also the contexts of immediate situation (e.g. the domestic context of the household) and the larger historical context or conjuncture.

Yet any account would remain incomplete without some attention to the act of reading itself and an attempt to theorise its products. The absence of action by the reader is characteristic of formalist accounts. Even those theorists (e.g. Brecht, *Tel Quel*, Barthes in *S/Z*) who are concerned with productive, deconstructive or critical reading ascribe this capacity to types of text (e.g. 'writable' rather than 'readable' in Barthes' terminology) and not

at all to a history of real readers. This absence of production in reading parallels the ascription of productivity to signifying systems which we have already noted. At best particular acts of reading are understood as a replaying of primary human experiences. Just as an older literary criticism sought universal values and human emotions in the text, so the new formalisms understand reading as the reliving of psycho-analytically-defined mechanisms. Analysis of the spectator's gaze, based on Lacanian accounts of the mirror phase, identify *some* of the notions of the way men use images of women and relate to heroes[77]. Such analyses *do* bridge text and reader. There is a huge potentiality, for cultural studies, in the critical use of Freudian categories, as critical that is, as the use of Marxist categories has become or is becoming. Yet present uses often bridge text and reader at a cost: the radical simplification of the social subject, reducing him or her to the original, naked, infant needs. It is difficult on this basis to specify all the realms of difference which one wishes to grasp, even, surprisingly, gender. At worst the imputations about real subjects come down to a few universals, just as it is only now a few basic features of the text which interests us. There are distinct limits to a procedure which discovers, in otherwise very varied phenomena, the same old mechanism producing the same old effects.

One lack in these accounts is an attempt to describe more elaborately the surface forms — the flows of inner speech and narrative — which are the most empirically obvious aspect of 'subjectivity'. Perhaps it is thought 'humanist' to pay attention to 'consciousness' in this way? But we all are (aren't we?) continuous, resourceful and absolutely frenetic users of narrative and image? And these uses occur, in part, inside the head, in the imaginative or ideal world which accompanies us in every action. We are

[77] See the famous analysis in terms of 'scopophilia', in L. Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', *Screen*, vol. 16, no. 3, Autumn 1975. See also C. Mercer, *Open University Popular Culture Course*, Unit 17, Block 4, 'Pleasure'.

not merely positioned by stories we 'read'; we position ourselves by our constant internal story-telling, stories about ourselves, stories about others. We use 'realist' stories about the future to prepare or plan, acting out scenarios of dangerous or pleasurable events. We use 'fictional' or fantastical forms to escape or divert. We tell stories about the past in the form of 'memory' which construct versions of who we presently are. Perhaps all this is simply presupposed in formalist analysis, yet to draw it into the foreground seems to have important implications[78]. It makes it possible to recover the elements of self-production in theories of subjectivity. It suggests that before we can gauge the productivity of new interpellations, or anticipate their likely popularity, we need to know what stories are already in place.

All this involves a move beyond what seems to me an underlying formalist assumption: that real readers are 'wiped clean' at each textual encounter to be positioned (or liberated) anew by the next interpellation. 'Post-structuralist' revisions, stressing the continuous productivity of language or discourse as *process*, do not necessarily help here, because it is not at all clear what all this 'productivity' actually produces. It is my own view that there is no real theory of subjectivity here, partly because the *explanandum*, the 'object' of such a theory, remains to be specified. In particular there is no account of the carry-over or continuity of self-identities from one discursive moment to the next, such as a re-theorisation of memory in discursive terms might permit. Since there is no account of continuities or of what remains constant or accumulative, there is no account of structural shifts or major re-arrangements of a sense of self, especially in adult life. Such transformations are always, implicitly, referred to 'external' text-forms, for example revolutionary or poetic

[78] Is it significant, for instance, that Barthes does not mention 'internal' narratives in his view of the omnipresence of the narrative form? *Image-Music-Text*, p. 79. Does this absence suggest a larger structuralist difficulty with inner speech?

texts, usually forms of literature. There is no account of what predisposes the reader to use such texts productively or what conditions, other than the text-forms themselves, contribute to revolutionary conjunctures in their subjective dimensions. Similarly, with such a weight on the text, there is no account of how some readers (including, presumably, the analysts) can use conventional or 'realist' texts critically. Above all, there is no account of what I would call the subjective aspects of struggle, no account of how there is a moment in subjective flux when social subjects (individual or collective) produce accounts of who they are, as conscious political agents, that is, constitute themselves, politically. To ask for such a theory is not to deny the major structuralist or post-structuralist insights: subjects *are* contradictory, 'in process', fragmented, produced. But human beings and social movements also strive to produce some coherence and continuity, and through this, exercise some control over feelings, conditions and destinies.

This is what I mean by a 'post-post-structuralist' account of subjectivity. It involves returning to some older but reformulated questions — about struggle, 'unity', and the production of a political will. It involves accepting structuralist insights as a statement of the problem, whether we are speaking of our own fragmented selves or the objective and subjective fragmentation of possible political constituencies. But it also involves taking seriously what seems to me the most interesting theoretical lead: the notion of a discursive self-production of subjects, especially in the form of histories and memories [79].

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[79] The ideas of the last few paragraphs are still in the process of being worked out in the CCCS Popular Memory Group. For some preliminary considerations about the character of oral-historical texts see Popular Memory Group, 'Popular Memory: Theory, Politics, Method' in CCCS, *Making Histories*. I have found some of the essays in D. Bertaux, *Biography and Society: The Life History Approach in the Social Sciences*, Sage, 1981 useful to argue with, especially A. Hankiss, 'Ontologies of the Self: on the Mythological Rearranging of One's Life History'.

Social Inquiries - Logic and History

I hope that the logic of our third cluster of approaches, which focus on 'lived culture', is already clear. To recapitulate, the problem is how to grasp the more *concrete* and more *private* moments of cultural circulation. This sets up two kinds of pressures. The first is towards methods which can detail, recompose and represent complex ensembles of discursive and non-discursive features as they appear in the life of particular social groups. The second is towards 'social inquiry' or an active seeking out of cultural elements which do not appear in the public sphere, or only abstracted and transformed. Of course, students of culture have access to private forms through their own experiences and social world. This is a continuous resource, the more so if it is consciously specified and if its relativity is recognised. Indeed, a cultural self-criticism of this kind is *the* indispensable condition for avoiding the more grossly ideological forms of cultural study [80]. But the *first* lesson here is the recognition of *major cultural differences*, especially across those social relationships where power, dependence and inequality are most at stake. There are perils, then, in the use of a (limited) individual or collective self-knowledge where the limits of its representativeness are uncharted and its other sides — usually the sides of powerlessness — are simply unknown. This remains a justification for forms of cultural study which take the cultural worlds of others (often reverse sides of one's own) as the main object.

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[80] And some of the best and most influential work in cultural studies has been based on personal experience and private memory. R. Hoggart's *The Uses of Literacy* is the most celebrated example, but, in general, students of culture should have the courage to use their personal experience more, more explicitly and more systemically. In this sense cultural studies is a heightened, differentiated form of everyday activities and living. Collective activities of this kind, attempting to understand not just 'common' experiences but real diversities and antagonisms, are especially important, if they can be managed, and subject to the caveats which follow.

It is important to recognise the specific origins of methods which we have adopted here and the usual problems of transformation that are involved. An adequate history of social inquiry would include the forms of philanthropic or state surveillance of working-class populations which have been a feature of the metropolitan societies at least since the late eighteenth century [81]. I include, in the British case, a whole history of 'moral statistics' and empirical sociological inquiry, from the early nineteenth-century statistical societies to much of post-war 'social science'. These regulative paradigms could be usefully compared with those adopted for the scrutiny of peoples on the imperialized peripheries. But attempts to extend a social self-knowledge has also included folkloric or antiquarian adventures into the past and the modern forms of a culturally-rich social history, the *Annales* strands in France, for example, or the Marxist social history tradition in Britain. Nor could we stop with sociological, antropological and historical studies. These are often closely allied with literary or artistic traditions of social realism, and with various genres of autobiography, reminiscence, and oral history [82].

We have to keep a discomforted eye on the historical pedigrees and current orthodoxies of what is sometimes called 'ethnography', a practice of representing the cultures of others. The practice, like the word, already extends social distance and constructs relations of knowledge-as-power. To 'study' culture forms is already to differ from a more implicit inhabitation of culture which is the main

[81] For episodes in this tradition see P. Abrams, *The Origins of British Sociology, 1834-1914*, Chicago University Press, 1968; M. J. Cullen, *The Statistical Movement in Early Victorian Britain*, Harvester Press, 1975; G. Stedman Jones, *Outcast London*, Clarendon Press, 1971. The continuities between twentieth-century sociologies and nineteenth-century inquiry is argued in CCCS, *Unpopular Education* where comparisons are also made with new left traditions.

[82] George Orwell's social commentaries are very relevant here, as in the contemporary (30s/40s) project of 'Mass Observation', part 'literary', part 'anthropological'.

'commonsense' mode in *all* social groups. (And I mean *all* social groups — 'intellectuals' may be great at describing *other* people's implicit assumptions, but as 'implicit' as anyone when it comes to their own.) To go further than this and render such accounts public, activates those relations of power we have already viewed around the circuit.

Of course, there would be qualitative or political discriminations to make in such a history. I do believe that the early years of new left research in particular — the 1940s, 50s and early 1960s — did involve a new set of relations between the subjects and objects of research, especially across class relations [83]. Intellectual movements associated with feminism and the work of some black intellectuals have transformed (but not abolished) these social divisions too. Experiments in community-based authorship have also, within limits, achieved new social relations of cultural production and publication [84]. Even so it seems wise to be suspicious, not necessarily of these practices themselves, but of all accounts of them that try to minimise the political risks and responsibilities involved, or magically to resolve the remaining social divisions. Since fundamental social relations have not been transformed, social inquiry tends constantly to return to its old anchorages, pathologising subordinated cultures, normalising the dominant modes, helping at best to build academic reputations without proportionate returns to those who are represented. Apart from the basic political standpoint — whose side the researchers are on — much depends on the specific theoretical forms of the work, the *kind* of ethnography.

[83] This is forcefully argued by Paul Jones in an article soon to appear in *Thesis Eleven*, Monash University, Australia, 1983.

[84] See D. Morley and K. Worpole (eds.), *The Republic of Letters: Working Class Writing and Local Publishing*, Comedia, 1982. For a more external and critical view see 'Popular Memory', in *Making Histories*, cit. Also instructive is the debate between Ken Worpole, Stephen Yeo and Gerry White, in R. Samuel (ed.), *People's History and Socialist Theory*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981.

Limits of 'Experience'

There seems to be a close association between ethnographies (or histories) based on sympathetic identification and empiricist or 'expressive' models of culture. The pressure is to represent lived cultures as authentic ways of life and to uphold them against ridicule or condescension. Research of this kind has often been used to criticise the dominant representations, especially those influencing state policies. Researchers have often mediated a private working-class world (often the world of their own childhood) and the definitions of the public sphere with its middle-class weighting [85]. A very common way of upholding subordinated cultures has been to stress the bonds between the subjective and objective sides of popular practices. Working-class culture has been seen as the authentic expression of proletarian conditions, perhaps the only expression possible. This relation or identity has sometimes been cemented by 'old Marxist' assumptions about the proper state of consciousness of the working-class. A similar set of assumptions can be traced in some feminist writings about culture which portray and celebrate a distinct feminine cultural world reflective of woman's condition. The term which most commonly indexes this theoretical framework is 'experience', with its characteristic fusing of objective and subjective aspects.

Such frameworks produce major difficulties, not least for researchers themselves. Secondary analysis and representation must always be problematic or intrusive if 'spontaneous' cultural forms are seen as a completed or necessary form of social knowledge. The only legitimate practice, in this framework, is to represent an unmediated chunk of authentic life experience itself, in something like

[85] This is associated with the centrality of an experience of social mobility in the origins of post-war sociology and cultural studies, especially in their more radical moments. To Hoggart's book we might add much of Raymond Williams' work and much research in the sociologies of education, deviancy, sub-cultures etc.

its own terms. This form of cultural empiricism is a dead hand on the most important of cultural studies practices, and is one of the reasons why it is also the most difficult to deliver at all.

There is also a systematic pressure towards presenting lived cultures primarily in terms of their homogeneity and distinctiveness. This theoretical pressure, in conceptions like 'whole way of life', becomes startlingly clear when issues of nationalism and racism are taken into account. There is a discomforting convergence between 'radical' but romantic versions of 'working-class culture' and notions of a shared Englishness or white ethnicity. Here too one finds the term 'way of life' used as though 'cultures' were great slabs of significance always humped around by the same set of people. In left ethnography the term has often been associated with an under-representation of non-class relations and of fragmentations within social classes [86].

The main lack within expressive theories is attention to the means of signification as a specific cultural determination. There is no better instance of the divorce between formal analysis and 'concrete studies' than the rarity of linguistic analysis in historical or ethnographic work. Like much structuralist analysis, then, ethnographies often work with a foreshortened version of our circuit, only here it is the whole arc of 'public' forms which is often missing. Thus the creativity of private forms is stressed, the continuous cultural productivity of everyday life, but not its dependence on the materials and modes of public production. Methodologically, the virtues of abstraction are eschewed so that the separate (or separable) elements of lived cultures are not unravelled, and their real complexity (rather than their essential unity) is not recognised.

[86] Some CCCS work is not exempt from this difficulty. Some of these criticisms apply, for instance, to *Resistance Through Rituals*, especially parts of the theoretical overviews.

Best Ethnography

I do not wish to imply that this form of cultural study is intrinsically compromised. On the contrary, I tend to see it as the privileged form of analysis, both intellectually and politically. Perhaps this will be clear if I briefly review some aspects of the best ethnographic studies at Birmingham [87].

These studies have used abstraction and formal description to identify key elements in a lived cultural ensemble. Cultures are read 'textually'. But they have also been viewed alongside a reconstruction of the social position of the users. There is a large difference here between a 'structural ethnography' and a more ethno-methodological approach concerned exclusively with the level of meaning and usually within an individualistic framework. This is one reason, for instance, why feminist work in the Centre has been as much preoccupied with theorising the position of women as with 'talking to girls'. We have tried to ally cultural analysis with a (sometimes too generalised) structural sociology, centreing upon gender, class and race.

Perhaps the most distinctive feature has been the connections made between lived cultural ensembles and public forms. Typically, studies have concerned the appropriation of elements of mass culture and their transformation according to the needs and cultural logics of social groups. Studies of the contribution of mass cultural forms (popular music, fashion, drugs or motor bikes) to sub-

[87] What follows is based, in rather too composite a way perhaps, on the work of Paul Willis, Angela MacRobbie, Dick Hebdige, Christine Griffin, and Dorothy Hobson and on discussions with other ethnographic researchers in the Centre. See especially, P. Willis, *Learning to Labour*, cit.; P. Willis, *Profane Culture*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978; A. MacRobbie, 'Working-Class Girls and Femininity' and D. Hobson, 'Housewives: Isolation as Oppression', in *Women Take Issue*; D. Hebdige, *Subculture*, Methuen, 1979; C. Griffin, CCCS Stencilled Papers, Nos 60 & 70. For an all-too-rare discussion of method in this area see P. Willis, 'Notes on Method', in S. Hall *et al.*, (ed.), *Culture, Media, Language*, cit.

cultural styles, of girls' use of popular cultural forms, and of 'the lads' resistance to the knowledge and authority of school are cases in point. In other words the best studies of lived culture are also, necessarily, studies of 'reading'. It is from this point of view — the intersection of public and private forms — that we have the best chance of answering the two key sets of questions to which cultural studies — rightly — continually returns.

The first set concerns 'popularity', pleasure and the *use value* of cultural forms. Why do some subjective forms acquire a popular force, become principles of living? What are the *different* ways in which subjective forms are inhabited — playfully or in deep seriousness, in fantasy or by rational agreement, because it is the thing to do or the thing *not* to do? The second set of questions concerns the *outcomes* of cultural forms. Do these forms tend to reproduce existing forms of subordination or oppression? Do they hold down or contain social ambitions, defining wants too modestly? Or are they forms which permit a questioning of existing relations or a running beyond them in terms of desire? Do they point to alternative social arrangements? As I suggested near the beginning of this discussion judgements like these cannot be made on the basis of the analysis of production conditions or texts alone; they can best be answered once we have traced a social form right through the circuit of its transformations and made some attempt to place it within the whole context of relations of hegemony within the society.

Future Shapes of Cultural Studies: Directions

My argument has been that there are three main models of cultural studies research: production-based studies, text-based studies, and studies of lived cultures. This division conforms to the main appearances of cultural circuits, but inhibits the development of our understandings in important ways. Each approach has a rationality in relation to that moment it has most closely in view, but is quite evidently

inadequate, even 'ideological', as an account of the whole. Yet different approaches acquire an independence in the various theoretical paradigms, and are also related to the specialisms of academic disciplines. Each approach also implies a different view of the politics of culture. Production-related studies imply a struggle to control or transform the most powerful means of cultural production, or to throw up alternative means by which a counter-hegemonic strategy may be pursued. Such discourses are usually addressed to institutional reformers or to radical political parties. Text-based studies, focussing on the forms of cultural products, have usually concerned the possibilities of a transformative cultural practice. They have been addressed most often to avant-garde practitioners, critics and teachers. These approaches have appealed especially to professional educators, in colleges or schools, because knowledges appropriate to radical practice have been adapted (not without problems) to a knowledge appropriate to critical readers. Finally, research into lived cultures has been closely associated with a politics of 'representation', upholding the ways of life of subordinated social groups and criticising the dominant public forms in the light of hidden wisdoms. Such work may even aspire to help to give a hegemonic or non-corporate turn to cultures that are usually privatised, stigmatised or silenced.

It is important to stress that the circuit has not been presented as an adequate account of cultural processes or even of elementary forms. It is not a completed set of abstractions against which every partial approach can be judged. It is not therefore an adequate strategy for the future just to add together the three sets of approaches, using each for its appropriate moment. This would not work without transformations of each approach and, perhaps, our thinking about 'moments'. For one thing there are some real theoretical incompatibilities between approaches; for another, the ambitions of many projects are already large enough! It is important to recognise that each aspect has a life of its own in order to avoid reductions, but, after that, it may be more transformative to rethink

each moment in the light of the others, importing objects and methods of study usually developed in relation to one moment into the next. I think this will work — and already works in the best practices — because the moments, though separable, are not in fact discrete. We therefore need to trace what Marx would have called 'the inner connections' and 'real identities' between them.

Those concerned with production studies need to look more closely, for example, at the specifically cultural conditions of production. This would include the more formal semiological questions about the codes and conventions on which a television programme, say, draws, and the ways in which it reworks them. But it would have to include too a wider range of discursive materials — ideological themes and problematics — that belong to a wider social and political conjuncture. But already, in the production moment, we would expect to find more or less intimate relations with the lived culture of particular social groups, if only that of the producers. Discursive and ideological elements would be used and transformed from there too. 'Already' then, in the study of the production moment, we can anticipate the other aspects of the larger process, and prepare the ground for a more adequate account too.

Similarly we need to develop, further, forms of text-based study which hook up with the production and readership perspectives. It may well be, in the Italian context, where semiological and literary traditions are so strong, that these are the most important transformations. It *is* possible to look for the signs of the production process in a text: this is one useful way of transforming the very unproductive concern with 'bias' that still dominates discussion of 'factual' media. It *is* also possible to read texts as forms of representation, provided it is realised that we are always analysing a representation of a representation. The first object, that which is represented in the text, is not an objective event or fact, but has already been given meanings in some other social practice. In this way it is possible to consider the relationship, if any, between the

characteristic codes and conventions of a social group and the forms in which they are represented in a soap opera or comedy. This is not merely an academic excercise, since it is essential to have such an account to help establish the text's salience, for this group or others. There is no question of abandoning existing forms of text analysis, but these have to be adapted to, rather than superseding, the study of actual readerships. There seem to be two main requirements here. First, the formal reading of a text has to be as open or as multi-layered as possible, identifying preferred positions or frameworks certainly, but also alternative readings and subordinated frameworks, even if these can only be discerned as fragments, or as contradictions in the dominant forms. Second, analysts need to abandon once and for all, both of the two main models of the critical reader: the primarily evaluative readings (is this a good/bad text?) and the aspiration to text-analysis as an 'objective science'. The problem with both models is that by de-relativising our acts of reading they remove from self-conscious consideration (but not as an active presence) our common sense knowledge of the larger cultural contexts and possible readings. I have already noted the difficulties here, but want also to stress the indispensability of this resource. The difficulties are met best, but not wholly overcome, when 'the analyst' is a group. Many of my most educative moments in cultural studies have come from these internal group dialogues about the readings of texts across, for example, gendered experiences. This is not to deny the real disciplines of reading, 'close' in the sense of *careful*, but not in the sense of *confined*.

Finally, those concerned with 'concrete' cultural description cannot afford to ignore the presence of text-like structures and particular forms of discursive organisation. In particular we need to know what distinguishes private cultural forms, in their basic modes of organisation, from the public forms. In this way we might be able to specify, linguistically for example, the differential relation of social groups to different media forms, and the real processes of reading that are involved.

Of course, the transformation of particular approaches will have effects on others. If linguistic analysis takes account of historical determinations, for example, or provides us with ways of analysing the operations of power, the division between language studies and concrete accounts will break down. This goes for the associated politics too. At the moment there are few areas so blocked by disagreement and incomprehension as the relationship between avant-garde theorists and practitioners of the arts and those interested in a more grass-roots entry through community arts, working-class writing, women's writing and so on. Similarly, it is hard to convey, in the wake of a lost election, just how mechanical, how unaware of cultural dimensions, the politics of the Labour Party and most left fractions remains. If I am right that theories are related to viewpoints, we are talking not just of theoretical developments, but about some of the conditions for effective political alliances too.

'BEING BRITISH': NARRATIVES OF NATIONALISM

by
Iain Chambers

> Countries don't fall over cliffs. Decline can continue indefinitely.
> M. Rutherford, Political Editor of the *Financial Times*

In her first public speech, after the ending of hostilities at Port Stanley had closed the bloody adventure in the South Atlantic, shortly to be marketed to the public as a video cassette, the British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher pronounced an ominous phrase: 'The lesson of the Falklands is that Britain has not changed'.

As always, Mrs Thatcher successfully put her finger on a contradictory but telling theme. She was personally intent on conjuring up a mystical vision from the past: that moment before the decline had set in, when Britain was still 'great'. But the underlying steady-state condition to which her appeal was addressed — that July afternoon in 1982 at the Cheltenham race course before her cheering supporters — struck deep into the British 'psyche'. It was destined to draw out from the twilight subconscious and parade on the surfaces of the everyday the seemingly indecipherable metaphysics of 'being British'.

The oldest club in the world

> Though modern constitutions typically locate the source of sovereignty in « the people », in Britain it is the Crown in Parliament that is sovereign. Nor is that merely a

> technical point. The political culture of democratic Britain assigns to ordinary people the role, not of citizens, but of subjects ...
>
> R. McKenzie & A. Silver in Nairn (1981)

In the turbulent narratives of modern nationalism, the idea of 'being British' occupies a peculiar position. Although witnessing lengthy struggles to preserve internal national units — Welsh, Scots, Irish — the British Isles have not experienced a serious invasion for a millennium. Partially dismantling the feudal state in the seventeenth century, Britain was also the first nation in the next to experience the fracturing impact and fruits of industrialisation. These and connected precedents provide the present British state with the historical mantle of a benevolent overseer, looking down on more recent nations, born out of more ragged procedures, more hurried and violent clashes.

The 'suppressed superiority' (Tom Nairn) of official British 'ways', hidden behind a self-deprecation that is usually unwilling to acknowledge that nationalism exists at all in Britain, clearly has its roots in the quiet certainties of this stable and now deeply conservative tradition. The paradoxes of 'Britishness' become clearer. Formally one of the least democratic countries in the conduct of its political life — glaringly apparent in its unrepresentative electoral system, the maintenance of a non-elected House of Lords, and the powerful symbology of Monarchy — it can still consider itself one of democracy's champions, one of its brightest jewels. On 3 April 1982, in the parliamentary debate the day after Argentinian forces had occupied the Falkland Islands, we can hear Mr Michael Foot, then leader of the Labour Party, intoning this familiar litany: claiming Britain 'to be a defender of people's freedom throughout the world'.

But then Britain's political tradition is fundamentally patrician. It is not a part of daily events; it is not really the stuff of the streets, bus queues, work place and pub. It involves an institutional nationalism, not a popular

one. Elaborated around consecrated relics and shrines — Westminster, the Monarchy, Oxbridge, the Royal Navy, the public school system — it is as though the spirit of 'History' lays its blessing on the British. In their uninterrupted continuity it is these institutions that provide the comforting guarantees.

> This is in fact why the nationalism of the English appears so 'dormant' and 'unaggressive' ..... simply because the 'people' had so little positive part in creating it, or have forgotten the part they did play. On the whole, they have been forced into the stereotype of the plucky servant who 'knows his place' and, when the trumpet sounds, fights with the best of them. (Nairn 1981, p. 270)

Mr Enoch Powell can give the impression in his public talks that Britain possesses only two universities; elsewhere, figurative mummies — Queen Victoria, Disraeli and Churchill — are periodically unwrapped and dead metaphors (the 'Dunkirk spirit') resurrected. None of this appears ridiculous. The official political consensus, on both sides of the Commons, is too deeply indebted to such appeals to ever take them into serious reconsideration. The isolated few that try are 'vandals', clearly intent on desecrating the 'national heritage'.

This is all part of the perpetual production of the 'nation', of its 'history'. Social memories are colonised and officially rewritten. Historical conflicts, whether the Second World War or the rise of the independent labour movement, are reduced to a shadow play whose central theme invokes the placid movement of accomodation and moderation. Change, if it *must* occur, needs to be imperceptible. This is the triumph of the British 'spirit'.

Secret landscapes

> We drove on and in the early afternoon came to our destination: wrought-iron gates and twin, classical lodges on a village green, an avenue, more gates, open park-land, a turn in the drive; and suddenly a new and secret landscape opened before us.
>
> Evelyn Waugh, *Brideshead Revisited*

Representing the 'nation' to millions of viewers, the contemporary narrative form — television — feeds on a continual diet of 'history'. The chaotic, transitory, and therefore somehow 'empty' present is filled with the authority of the past. Through the zoom lense and individual characterisation, where the 'English', Home Counties' accents, and Westminster invariably stand in for 'British-ness', fictional and non-fictional details acquire their daily currency. Opposing narratives — *Culloden, Days of Hope* — are also seen, but the tendency of tele-history unmistakably lies elsewhere. The 'bias' of *Days of Hope* arouses controversy, the official sweep of *Churchill's People* praise. From the re-presentation of Britain's past through historical figures (Sir Richard Burton, Eleanor Marx), the personalised pageantry of monarchy (*Edward VI, Elizabeth R*) and a long standing romance with the British aristocracy (*Upstairs and Downstairs, Brideshead Revisited*), thousands of television hours are involved. Literary sources lend a further aura of 'Art' to the proceedings while, conversely, contemporary events — The Royal Wedding, the Falklands — become extensions of the native historical epic.

These pan shots of a stylised 'English' experience rendered into 'Culture' provide the pleasures of tasteful kitsch, a 'conservative dream world ... far more synthetic than the most plastic products of Hollywood' (Tom Nairn). Pleasurable viewing, but without irony and only limited alternatives, it all quickly descends into a subconscious pattern of cultural smugness: a crippling spectacle whose narrow limits are lost in that parochial romanticism which is the central vehicle of the 'cryptic nature of English nationalism' (Tom Nairn).

Central to this presentation is the anti-urban, anti-industrial motif of the English countryside: the keeper and restorer of the national life. On 24" colour screens a once 'indeterminate grey' is transformed into an 'attractive or restful green, and carefully studied landscapes become part of the past ...' (Elizabeth Glass Immirzi). Here History and the English are fused together in a timeless embrace. Here there also exists a secret appeal. Inside the optical 'realism',

inside the evocation of tradition and 'nation', the entwining of land and blood beneath blue skies can easily slip into the mindless prescription of a national vision decreed by the mere sweep of an outrageous abstraction: race.

Hand in hand with this bucolic vision goes the separation of 'culture' and 'civilisation' from the workings of the industrial world and the 'masses' whose lives have been forced into its domain. Although by no means only a British vision, this line of reasoning has undoubtedly acquired a persistent force in the formation of a certain 'Britishness' and its public cultures. It has certainly played a central role in the making of the modern British state and conditioned much of the latter's response to deepening economic and political crises in the present century. A patrician distaste for industry, permitted a long life by the alternative outlets of Empire and London becoming the financial capital of the world, and a preference for domestic tranquillity over innovative change, has dominated British cultural and political life for well over a century. The first British salvoes against the aggrandizing 'American model' of development had already been fired, precisely for these motives, towards the end of the nineteenth century.

Of course, there are also other images to collect, equally stereotyped, equally potent: fish and chips out of a greasy newspaper; cramped housing and rain-swept streets; smoke-filled pubs; taciturn faces and clipped replies. These are the picturesque details drawn upon twice a week in Britain's longest running television serial, *Coronation Street*. Now in its twenty-fourth year, the television life of the street offers the comforting signs of the chatter and popular exchange of another Britain quietly going about its business. But, like Nairn's 'plucky servant', the drama of *Coronation Street* naturally remains subordinated to the wider conceits of History: costumed gestures played out between the undisturbed monuments of a sanctified past — the countryside, Oxbridge, the Aristocracy ..... Under the self-satisfied assumption that this mode is somehow 'realistic', a charade of 'Englishness' is enacted out to

the delight and disbelief of television audiences worldwide.

In this 'tasteful', stifling and remarkably immobile context, Britain, a country notable for the absence of a substantial avant-garde in the present century, regularly makes its only significant claim for wider cultural attention via the subversive route of foreign cultures: through the snobbed 'otherness' of America, Afro-America and the Continent.

The ties that bind

> In a gross simplification we can consider 'post-modernism' our incredulity when confronted with meta-narratives.
>
> Jean-François Lyotard

And yet, and yet ..... many of the focuses, concerns and individual biographies involved in 'being British' pass well beyond the world of television or other institutional modes for popularising the 'national' heritage and constructing the character of the 'popular'. If there is an ingrained cultural conservatism, it is not the sole property of a single social class, political party, or narrative form.

As the double knot of economic and political crisis is drawn tighter, the dead appeal of much political, intellectual and cultural leadership is increasingly revealed. For the 'crisis' also involves the fragmentation of a particular historical time, of a temporal scheme that once ordered social matter according to certain criteria. Only the renegades, those who step outside the previous frame, offer the suggestion of novelty, of change. That, in Britain, this possibility should tend to be dominated by the 'Radical Right', that 'Thatcherism' should be the most radical politics to gain a wide consensus in recent times, is fruit for serious consideration. The dreary predictability of previous politics are brusquely galvanised, yanked out of the narrow prospects of 'government' and deposited in the humus of everyday experience. There is a struggle for the politics of the everyday.

When this happens it signals an epochal shift: the game is thrown open. Certain narratives, that is the sequential linking of events that once legitimised power — whether in the modest tale of social democracy or the epic sweep of 'socialism' — no longer command attention. 'Politics' — although its terms are still to be defined — once again becomes a site of construction, popular interest, mobilisation. The horizon of the possible is dramatically altered ...

And still the historical left in Britain clings to more traditional logics — Trade Unionism, the Parliamentary Labour Party, the Working Class, Marxism, Trotskyism: all written in authoritative capitals — like Catholics caught up in the cursed winds of a Reformation. Discussing democracy it finds difficulty in digesting the idea of proportional representation; considering a politics of everyday life that — breaking with 'British masochism' (Stuart Hall) and left asceticism — might recognise a politics of fashion, of style (fashion, style ... !!!) raises only a condescending smile. Behind these official faces is the repression of the new politics of the last two decades, the embarassing legacy of the 'permissive' 1960s: the movement for women's liberation and other forces organised around attention to the textures of the particular, the specific, the personal, the immediate; a politics of everyday life. The historical left's discomfort with these 'intrusions' into the 'real' world of 'politics' has usually been matched by indifference or even hostility to the contributions arising from an imaginative investment in popular culture that has transformed commodities — records, clothes, certain TV programmes, particular forms of transport, or make-up — into loaded signs, and such signs into ways of life and a consequent re-invention of contemporary urban existence that suggest another 'Britain'. This leaves us with a politics narrowed down to a politics of defense, even of despair. It is also a politics of defeat.

Looking backwards for the authority and guide lines to justify its shackled pragmatism — surely a true mark of the numbing 'realism' of an official 'Britishness' — the

historical left only belatedly registers that present day conditions have irreversibly altered. It is playing to an increasingly empty house, and the stage directions have been revised so many times as to be almost illegible, merely rhetorical. Still wedded to the prospects of a dwindling industrial working class, it registers wider structural changes in productive, economic and political life only obliquely. The alterations in labour, social time, work division, and the organisation of employment — non-employment — enforced 'leisure', all raising pressing questions about the working day/week/year/life in the metropolitan centres, regularly finds it politically unprepared.

The riposte is predictably negative, and through a corporative spirit withdraws to an insistence upon the defense of the job, hence, implicitly, of the existing relations of production, of a way of life, of a tradition. I do not want to suggest that an uncritical futurology would be more appropriate in the face of major, often brutal, and invariably disruptive, change. But behind futurology there is the constantly evolving present to be struggled over. This present does not automatically augur a technologically padded paradise of floppy discs, bleeping screens and computer print outs (presented as simultaneously the new driving sector of the economy, of urban life, of leisure), but a new vista of possibilities. It provides a terrain in which previous social relations, organisation and knowledges are thrown into crisis and if not occupied by one set of forces will be by another. The point is that such a struggle — involving an extended sense of 'politics', of 'democracy' — will have to occur on *that* frontier, *within* the discourses of 'modernity', rather than sniped at from the trenches of the old society.

Looking to a tomorrow in order to transform the present and advance not blindly, but open-eyed, into a future, isn't only the prerogative of capitalism and its apologists; it is also the propulsion of the imagination. Only by testing our imagination on the possibilities of the present can we hope to reconstruct both in the realisation

of a 'socialised individuality' (Henri Lefebvre) and enter another history.

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SCRITTURA ALLO SPECCHIO

di
Lidia Curti

Da quel giorno, apparentemente calma, imperturbabile, cominciai a buttare le mie grida su fogli di carta.
(Colette Peignot, detta Laure)

Desiderio e mancanza

L'autobiografia, accanto al diario, viene spesso indicata come itinerario favorito nella scrittura delle donne. Essa occupa una posizione di transizione tra privato e pubblico, tra essere e scrittura, tra io per sé e io per gli altri.

'Scrittura della lacerazione e del doppio' com'è stata definita (cfr. Colaiacomo *et al.* 1981, p. 9) sia nel senso comune ad ogni autobiografia — la divisione tra io narrante e io narrato è forma propria della narrazione, produzione di significato in sé — che in senso specifico ('comunicazione sentita come nudità, come violenza contro se stessa', dice Colette-Laure); testimonianza 'dell'odissea dal mondo interno al mondo esterno' (cfr. E. Rasy 1978, p. 74 e segg.), del difficile viaggio da natura a cultura, del faticoso ingresso nel simbolico, nel linguaggio, nella comunicazione ('eppure penso che quel ch'è scritto deve esser comunicato', prosegue Colette-Laure), tanto che spesso è scrittura sulla scrittura, tesa a ripercorrersi, a ricostruirsi.

Come per Alice, è simile a un itinerario onirico che oscura il confine tra reale e irreale, a un 'passaggio' che richiede mutamenti (di statura, di identità, di modi di ve-

dere), riconoscimenti e disconoscimenti di sé, a un viaggio a testa in giù. Pari al viaggio della nascita, solo più lento, un ri-percorso: « Down, down, down. Would the fall *never* come to an end? » (Carroll 1970, p. 27).

La ricerca di identità, che è scopo dell'autobiografia, passa a un tempo attraverso l'affermazione e la negazione di sé, la perdita di identità (« And now, who am I? I *will* remember, if I can! I am determined to do it », *ibid.*, p. 226): come per Alice entrata nello specchio, la ricerca di sé inizia dalla cancellazione di sé. La costruzione della identità nel linguaggio avviene attraverso il desiderio legato a un vuoto, a una mancanza: « Desire is described as functioning as the zero unit, constitutive and empty of content » (Yates 1983, p. 38).

'Io scrivo'

Il viaggio verso l'esterno è contemporaneamente viaggio verso le origini, verso il basso e il profondo, lontano da se stesse e verso se stesse. Ritornare alla nascita, partire da zero; la ricerca non porta necessariamente alla scoperta ed è fine a se stessa, così come scrivere diventa verbo intransitivo (Barthes).

In questa direzione va l'iterazione della parola 'write' nei primi versi del lungo poema autobiografico di Elizabeth Barrett Browning, *Aurora Leigh*.

> ... I who have written much in prose and verse
> For others' uses, will write now for mine, —
> Will write my story for my better self ... (vv. 2-4)

L'autrice inverte l'itinerario, giunge alla forma autobiografica dopo quella letteraria, e vede in essa — invece dell'alienazione della scrittura spossessante — una ricomposizione di sé.

Aurora Leigh, poema epico in prima persona sui *grandi* argomenti della politica e della società ottocentesca, è innanzitutto la ricostruzione della formazione artistica dell'autrice/eroina (l'io narrante in questo caso ha la doppia voce femminile di Aurora-Elizabeth), del suo

diritto alla voce poetica. Nei primi trenta versi del poema, ella ripete più volte il verbo scrivere, passando dall'uso transitivo (l'oggetto è la scrittura per gli altri) a quello semi-intransitivo, in cui l'azione si avvolge su se stessa ('scriverò per mio uso', iterato nel successivo 'scriverò la mia storia per me stessa'), fino al disancoraggio completo di « I, writing thus, am still what men call young » (v. 9) e infine alla frase completa e autosufficiente « I write » del v. 29. Un presente isolato, circondato dal passato della storia che già comincia per suo conto (« My mother was a Florentine » - prosegue il v. 29): una volontaria sottolineatura della lacerazione temporale pur nella continuità dell'io orgogliosamente affermato e dispiegato.

L'autobiografia cerca infatti di rendere presente il passato senza riuscirci, se non nell'affermazione dell'atto dello scrivere (che è anche affermazione orgogliosa dell'ingresso rivoluzionario del linguaggio femminile nel discorso, argomento principale di *Aurora Leigh* — cfr. Cora Kaplan in Barrett Browning 1982, p. 10 e segg). Essa è fondata su uno scarto di tempo: « Un io impegnato a raccontarsi è costituzionalmente un io diviso, sospeso in un passato in cui *ha vissuto* e un presente in cui, per raccontarsi, *ha cessato di esistere* » (Colaiacomo *et al.*, p. 8). È proprio nella 'assenza dalla vita' che sta uno dei principali ostacoli alla scrittura per la donna: l'allontanamento dal concreto, dal presente, dalla fattività della pratica quotidiana è il momento che divide il diario (che conserva un legame formale con la vita nel suo farsi) dall'autobiografia che richiede la sospensione dal vivere immediato e il salto in un tempo diverso e nel luogo dell'astrazione e dell'immaginario.

La persona della mia vita sono io

La lacerazione di questo scarto, la divisione e frantumazione dell'io può essere nascosta, così come l'io significante può diventare maschera anonima e protettiva, universale livellante e asessuato. L'autobiografia può scusarsi di essere tale, subordinando il mondo interno alla descri-

zione del sociale, nascondendo l'io, appiattendolo, rendendolo trasparente, o addirittura eliminandolo. Ecco cosa dice una socialista inglese dell'inizio del secolo nel racconto del 'suo apprendistato':

> Though for the purpose of describing my craft I quote pages from my MS. diary, I have neither the desire nor the intention of writing an autobiography yet...I can hardly leave out of the picture the experience I have gathered, not deliberately as a scientific worker but casually as child, unmarried woman, wife and citizen. (Webb 1926, p. 27)

C'è il rimando alla scientificità della scrittura 'obiettiva' sul reale di cui la testimonianza personale è garanzia, purgata di ogni soggettivismo. Il richiamo a una metodologia empirica 'al di sopra di ogni sospetto' lo si ritrova nella citazione dei dati anagrafici, nelle fotografie di famiglia, da cui non sono esenti molti scritti autobiografici (Beauvoir, Woolf, Barthes) che pure non rinnegano lo sguardo soggettivo, al contrario della Webb.

Altrove la lacerazione, lo scarto vengono ingranditi e messi in primo piano. Ad esempio, nella forma frammentaria del parlato che è uno dei modi dell'autobiografia, ove « si azzera lo scarto tra essere esterno e divenire interno, si ipotizza l'utopica sintonia tra ritmi biologici e ritmi storici, si progetta l'espulsione di quanto, nel quotidiano, rende mute e comprime ». (Rasy 1978, p. 73)

La sintonia tra 'ritmi biologici e storici' è più spesso presente nelle autobiografie del nuovo femminismo, che sono cronaca di una crescita individuale e collettiva. Verena Stefan, in *La pelle cambiata* (1976), descrive il suo itinerario personale attraverso il « corpo-liquido-rosso » del femminile e allo stesso tempo quello delle donne che hanno vissuto il femminismo di quegli anni in Germania. Ella vince così l'opposizione corpo-scrittura che era sembrata invincibile a Virginia Woolf, quando in *Professions for Women* scriveva: « ... telling the truth about my own experiences as a body, I do not think I solved. I doubt that any woman has solved it yet ». (Woolf 1979, p. 62)

Nell'ultima pagina di questa 'autobiografia di una femminista', l'io protagonista della storia si trasforma in terza persona, si osserva dall'esterno, si dà per la prima volta un nome, esce dall'incognito. « Cloe muove le labbra. la persona della mia vita sono io. la gente si gira a guardarla. che oggigiorno anche giovani donne parlino da sole! » (Stefan 1976, p. 116). Narrarsi equivale a diventare, a essere. L'io in questo caso si rioggettivizza, ma non per spossessarsi. Rivela quella « split intentionality » (Renza 1977, p. 9) che caratterizza l'autobiografia — un io che vuol diventare un 'ella' (egli, secondo Renza) — e la realizza. La transizione è chiusa, l'autobiografia è diventata romanzo.

Al di là dello specchio

... La ricerca di una totalità mitica da ritrovare con l'ingresso nel linguaggio è per Luce Irigaray illusoria. Lo specchio/scrittura per la donna è una trappola, 'il luogo cieco di un antico sogno di simmetria' (Irigaray 1977) che non ha specificità femminile. Guardarsi allo specchio piano per la donna significa vedersi raddoppiata nel suo alter ego maschile. « Non c'è bisogno che ci facciamo una seconda figura, allo specchio, per essere in 'cop(p)ia'. Che ci ripetiamo una seconda volta. Prima d'ogni rappresentazione siamo due » (Irigaray 1978, p. 179).

Ogni teoria del soggetto si trova sempre ad essere appropriata al 'maschile'. Assoggettandovisi la donna rinuncia, a sua insaputa, alla specificità del proprio rapporto con l'immaginario. Si rimette cioè nella situazione di essere oggettivata — in quanto femminile — ad opera del discorso. Come Alice che alla fine del suo viaggio nello specchio si chiede se è stata lei a sognare o è stata sognata. Alice ri-raccontata da Irigaray (« Con i suoi occhi violati. Celesti e rossi. Che conoscono il dritto, il rovescio, e il risvolto; lo sfumato della deformazione; il bianco o nero della perdita di identità » - 1977, p. 6) è andata oltre lo specchio, al di là della sua identità (l'unica che sembri sapere chi è Alice è sua madre). Non la si può nominare, non la si può identificare, è *oltre lo schermo della rappresentazione.*

Condanna finale di ogni scrittura, negazione dell'autobiografia come estrema oggettivazione di sé, o piuttosto affermazione dell'io femminile come entità eccedente rispetto all'immaginario culturale maschile, e che perciò si deve ritrovare non nello specchio, ma al di là dello specchio.....

Io e la 'storia'

Una recente autobiografia inglese si propone sin dal titolo come scrittura allo specchio. Il racconto che Elizabeth Wilson dà di sé in *Mirror Writing* (1982) presenta un io molteplice e rappresentativo dell'Inghilterra del dopoguerra, in particolare quella degli anni sessanta e settanta con i suoi fermenti, movimenti e stili.

È la storia non compiuta di una ricerca di identità e la ricerca dà al discorso frammentario una struttura tematica unitaria, dichiarata, insistita, a tratti ironica, a tratti partecipata. In questo caso, il vuoto, il desiderio, la perdita che danno origine alla ricerca sono legate all'omosessualità dell'autrice — uno dei luoghi specifici di tanto autobiografismo, maschile e femminile — e al suo femminismo, che aggrava e completa il rifiuto dei ruoli assegnati.

La frammentarietà del discorso nasce dalle molte 'narrazioni' in cui si iscrive l'io (la guerra, la famiglia con il suo passato coloniale e l'abbandono del padre, il rapporto con la madre, l'attività politica, la sessualità, la psicoanalisi), strutture precostituite da cui le immagini dell'io traggono per un momento significati compiuti, accendendo quel gioco tra immagine e autoimmagine che è la condizione per uscire dall'esclusione (cfr. Yates 1983, p. 38).

Nello specchio l'autrice ha guardato il mondo come la vittoriana Lady of Shallott, chiusa nel suo giardino segreto, spettatrice distaccata degli avvenimenti (cfr. pp. 99 e 104). Accanto alle fogge e alle acconciature, lo specchio mostra l'Inghilterra del benessere, il boom del lavoro assistenziale, il mondo della cultura hippy, della droga,

dell'edonismo ('il piacere assurto a sistema etico', dice la Wilson con voce moralistica — p. 88), delle manifestazioni pacifiste, della politica omosessuale e femminista. Ma lo sguardo nello specchio è narcisistico. È sulle immagini di sé che viene posto l'accento: dalla ragazzina di quattro anni sulla spiaggia di Sidmouth agli inizi della guerra, nella fotografia che evita di riprendere il filo spinato che è tutt'intorno, alla donna in blue jeans e tacchi alti della dimostrazione politica a Victoria Park nel 1971.

Quest'ultima è l'immagine con cui si apre il libro: « The past is a dream ... Flying my flag of identity I prowl in search of the demonstration, incognito still, alone but aware, visible, in yellow tee shirt, blue jeans, high heels » (p. 1). L'incognito sta per finire, si abbandona l'anonimato, nel ricongiungimento tra politica tradizionale e politica come modo di vita (una delle gravi fratture della sua vita, ad un tempo iscritta al partito comunista e militante del Gay Liberation Front); ci si ritrova nell'identità collettiva, o lo si spera. Non a caso viene rievocato il momento della ricerca e della vigilia, raggelato e fissato nella descrizione iconica. Subito dopo, l'itinerario di ricerca individuale ricomincia, rafforzato da quella stessa politica del privato che è l'essenza del nuovo movimento.

Dallo specchio rimangono esclusi gli altri — le altre, anche le più care: « In every encounter I saw a reflection of myself, distorted, unreal, untrue, yet inescapable, an acute self-consciousness marbled with the unconscious seeping through » (p. 1). Le donne della sua vita sono figure essenziali e mai assenti dalla narrazione, ma esse sono intrappolate nel gioco di rispecchiamento, mute e passive, o nella funzione strumentale a uno dei suoi ruoli favoriti, quello di 'Amante'. Dalla partner stabile della perfetta coppia omosessuale (che si potrà abbandonare solo con l'aiuto della psicoanalisi) a Vanessa, irraggiungibile modello androgino, fino a Hazel e Rosa le cui immagini cominciano ad affiancarsi (nell'ultima 'scena' del libro a sostituirsi) alla sua. Il rapporto con l'altra, nelle figurazioni filmiche e narrative e in quelle della vita reale, accompagna e punteggia inscindibilmente la ricerca di sé.

Io e le mode

« Autobiography became a migration through successive selves » (p. 151): in questa successione di immagini le identità multiple (talvolta reali, talaltra solo desiderate) si trasformano in pose, maschere, icone estetizzanti sulle quali domina quella del dandy, 'che si esprime nell'essere più che nel fare'. Il sociale che tanta parte ha in questo libro, fedele alla tradizione di molte autobiografie di donne inglesi che l'hanno preceduto, viene reso attraverso le superfici, gli stili, le mode. L'immagine della farfalla posata in superfice come una macchia di colore appare ripetutamente: « I fixed myself, like a chloroformed butterfly, on the shimmering surface of city life, extravagant, eccentric, distancing myself in order to 'be different' (p. 69).

La storia si racconta attraverso il taglio dei capelli, dai ricci dell'infanzia allo 'urchin cut' degli anni cinquanta e alla massa fitta e laccata con la frangetta piatta sulla fronte (fissata di notte con il nastro adesivo), e poi di nuovo i capelli cortissimi del periodo in cui comincia a frequentare i bar omosessuali. La confusione dei ruoli sessuali è innanzitutto stilistica e teatrale. Fino ai capelli lunghi degli anni recenti che per lei sono segno di spontaneità e liberazione mentre le altre femministe inglesi se li tagliano, in avversione ai segni della femminilità.

« Is identity then as a stylized mask, personality as display, as disguise, as role? » si chiede l'autrice (p. 150) e in effetti le varie fasi della sua vita vengono viste come *performance* in cornici mutevoli — lo specchio, le fotografie, la finestra, il sogno — e in scenari accuratamente preparati. « I wore a daffodil yellow coat which showed my thighs, with pale tights, patent leather strapped shoes and short, fringed hair, bobbed — 'she breaks just like a little girl', jeered Bob Dylan and the harsh music »: questo ritratto di sé con la musica di Bob Dylan sullo sfondo dà inizio al racconto del suo avvicinamento alla psicoanalisi, nel 1967 (p. 102).

L'esteriorizzazione di sé è a un tempo esibizione e schermo, un mostrarsi che è un nascondersi. « I was always

mad about style » dichiara l'autrice programmaticamente (p. 14). Lo stile diventa strumento di distanziazione, le superfici che si susseguono una galleria di immagini elusive e inafferrabili. « Style means the presentation of the self as a three-dimensional art object, to be wondered at and handled » (Carter, p. 86): l'autobiografia diventa mezzo per fare dell'io un oggetto artistico da costruire ed esibire, oggetto del desiderio mai soddisfatto. Che nella costruzione della scrittura si allontana sempre più.

La sua identità di lesbica — cui si aggrappa come ad un salvagente sin dagli anni dell'università — non le fornisce chiarezze. Il vuoto, l'assenza, la confusione trovano soluzione nella posa come vita esteriorizzata, come identità transitoria. La posa veste, abbiglia, significa — richiama il corpo e lo nega. È il corpo con la sua nuova economia che è al centro dell'io omosessuale, e che tuttavia travalica i confini del femminile o del maschile: « to experience one's body as physical, as corporeal was also less closely related to a sense of gender than might have been expected » (p. 142).

Le domande sulla nuova identità (è identità maschile o femminile? attiva o passiva? come si può voler imitare gli uomini se li si respinge? come si può accettare la 'femminilità' legata a un'immagine di dipendenza? e se la si respinge, come si possono desiderare le donne?) trovano una pausa nell'immagine dell'androgino con la sua ambiguità e leggerezza. Greta Garbo con la stupenda coesistenza di tratti maschili e femminili e soprattutto Marlene Dietrich, che appare spesso travestita da uomo nei suoi film ma viene poi invariabilmente restituita alla femminilità, sono le icone favorite di questa ambiguità erotica (ma anche il protagonista maschile di *Belle de Jour* di Bunuel).

Il romanticismo di questa posizione, che almeno per se stessa l'autrice vede relegata agli anni sessanta, si trasforma in un atteggiamento *camp* verso la vita: « *Camp*, for all its malice, its cynicism, its cool parody, plays with the notion of the impossible narcissistic love for oneself, for one's twin, for one's alter ego ... » (p. 147).

Io e la psicoanalisi

Il viaggio sulla superfice non è disgiunto da quello nell'inconscio. Parallelo al coinvolgimento estetico e politico nel Gay Liberation Front, c'è quello nella terapia psicoanalitica che dura tre anni e procura una spaccatura nella vita dell'autrice. Il capitolo 10 esplora storia ed aspetti del rapporto combattuto e disagevole tra psicoanalisi e femminismo inglese, ma la psicoanalisi è presente anche altrove nel libro, con una tensione non rivelata appieno. Elizabeth Wilson, che in altri scritti ha assunto posizioni di condanna verso la teoria freudiana e si è sempre trovata da un solo lato del dibattito, racconta qui per la prima volta la sua esperienza personale (stranamente confermando una spaccatura tra due voci dell'io e della scrittura che lo stesso femminismo ha iniziato a cancellare).

E sebbene nemmeno alla fine di questo libro abbia risolto la sua ambivalenza (ella continua ad associare la psicoanalisi al ritorno alla maternità, alla famiglia, alla normalità, a quei valori cioè da cui il suo femminismo la allontana), è chiaro che 'quel curioso specchio verbale che è l'ora psicoanalitica' (p. 142) è stato uno strumento dell'esplorazione di sé, della ricerca di quell'essenza intangibile, irreale che è la sua femminilità. La contraddizione sottolinea il carattere di rottura che questa autobiografia ha nei confronti della produzione precedente in cui ella ha esaminato la condizione femminile nel sociale e nel letterario. E lascia tracce in residue intolleranze e critiche verso la politica del corpo e del privato per altro verso al centro di questa autobiografia.

Forse è solo in un sogno ricorrente che ella finalmente affronta la sua psicoanalista Mrs. Z e le dice « I've come to see you because I am uneasy about my femininity » (p. 141). Nella realtà ella si allontana dalla psicoanalisi con il senso di un dovere compiuto, di una verifica — forse più negativa che positiva — portata a termine.

Lo specchio come prisma

La scrittura è il vero luogo di desiderio di questo libro. Nel 1961 l'autrice aveva comprato una macchina da scrivere ed era tornata a casa con l'intenzione consapevole di diventare una scrittrice:

> To 'write' (active) was to affirm a self more real than the work identities so far offered ... The wish to be a Writer (passive) was — even more meretricious — to claim a role ... (p. 70)

Il desiderio di scrivere diviene presto il segreto da 'confessare', un segreto che in qualche modo viene invariabilmente riferito all'altro segreto, quello sessuale: 'la propria identità come segreto colpevole'. Da allora il cammino è stato lungo ed accidentato, si è strettamente intrecciato alla psicoanalisi, alla vita e all'amore con le altre donne, alla militanza nel Gay Liberation Front.

Vent'anni dopo quella decisione, la scrittura autobiografica porta all'incontro dei vari ruoli, momenti e livelli; è scrittura che mostra, come dice l'epigrafe del libro tratta da *Strada a senso unico* di Benjamin, 'il proprio passato come un aborto nato dalla costrizione e dal bisogno'.

Lo specchio della scrittura non offre una superfice piatta, non produce una cop(p)ia, ma una successione di immagini contraddittorie, conflittuali, frammentarie: « the mirror is more like a prism » (p. 156). Esso mostra un mondo in cui bisogna camminare nella direzione opposta per raggiungere la propria destinazione e in cui il dubbio di Alice (« Let's consider who it was that dreamed it all ... it *must* have been either me or the Red King. He was part of my dream, of course but then I was part of his dream too! ») rimane irrisolto.

Anni prima la psicoterapia cui ella si era avvicinata con l'obiettivo di scoprire una sua personalità compiuta e definibile le aveva restituito una identità formata dalle minuzie del quotidiano, da memorie fuggevoli e incerte di incontri ed eventi marginali — dai detriti della vita. Simile alla 'cosa proveniente dagli altri mondi' dei film di fanta-

scienza degli anni cinquanta, una presenza mostruosa e ambivalente al confine tra il liquido e il solido. Sartre, nel descrivere in *L'essere e il nulla* le qualità della 'sostanza' vischiosa, vi incluse le sue caratteristiche femminili: la morbida cedevolezza, la dolcezza malaticcia, la docilità che nasconde 'l'appropriazione subdola del possessore da parte del posseduto' (cfr. p. 112). È questa lettura che induce l'autrice ad associare la sua identità informe, amorfa, inafferrabile (la 'cosa' fluida e limacciosa) alla sua femminilità.

La scrittura autobiografica le è servita ad accettare e a rovesciare tale angosciosa identificazione. Il libro si chiude con la visita a una mostra di arte femminile a tema autobiografico. Una delle sculture è una stanza all'interno di una stanza, con soffitto e pavimento fatto di specchi. L'amica lì incontrata, la 'rivoluzionaria' Rosa che ha scontato il carcere per reati politici, è l'unica ad avere il coraggio di salire sulla pedana a specchio, a non avere paura della miriade di immagini che la riproducono all'infinito, in una citazione rovesciata e forse involontaria dell'ultima sequenza di *La signora di Shangai* (molto simile a quella precedente, e volutamente vendicativa, da Sartre).

Il *magic mirror* del film di Welles sottolinea le ambiguità della 'femmina perversa' del film noir; la spezzatura dell'immagine corrisponde alla sua distruzione. In *Mirror Writing*, lo specchio multiplo che si apre all'infinito da ogni parte afferma 'il momento di identità, il trionfo del momentaneo, vulnerabile io' (p. 160); chiude questa storia autobiografica su una nota di incompiutezza ma non di sconfitta. Non nello specchio ma al di là dello specchio.

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HIDING IN THE LIGHT

by
Dick Hebdige

I shall begin with a proposition — one that is so commonplace that its significance is often overlooked — that in our society, youth is present only when its presence is a problem, or is regarded as a problem. More precisely, the category 'youth' gets mobilised in official documentary discourse, in concerned or outraged editorials and features, or in the supposedly disinterested tracts emanating from the social sciences at those times when young people make their presence felt by going 'out of bounds', by 'resisting through rituals', by dressing strangely, striking...bizarre attitudes, by breaking rules, by breaking windows, bottles, heads, by issuing rhetorical challenges to the Law.

When young people do these things, when they adopt these strategies, they get talked about, taken seriously, their grievances are acted upon. They get arrested, harassed, admonished, disciplined, incarcerated, applauded, vilified, emulated, listened to. They get defended by social workers and other concerned philanthropists. They get explained by sociologists, social psychologists, by pundits of every political complexion. In other words, there is a logic to transgression.

When disaffected adolescents, most especially when disaffected, unemployed, inner city adolescents resort to symbolic and actual violence they are playing with the only power at their disposal: the power to discomfit. The power, that is, to pose, to pose a threat. Far from aban-

doning good sense, they are acting in accordance with a logic which is manifest — that as a condition of their entry into the adult domain, the field of public debate, the place where real things really happen, they must first challenge the symbolic order which guarantees their subordination by nominating them 'children', 'youngsters', 'young folk', 'kids'.

To take one of the more sensational examples: When youths in the inner cities rioted in July 1981, they were visited by senior police officials, journalists, the Prime Minister and Michael Heseltine. They got noticed. Their portraits appeared in the *Daily Mail* and *Camerawork*, *The People* and *TEN.8*. They became visible. The machinery of social reaction was set in motion and this reaction had varied, even contradictory effects. For those youths who got arrested and arraigned before the courts, the riots meant fines or imprisonment, criminalisation, the confirmation, possibly, of a criminal career. More generally, the riots triggered off debates concerning the nature of policing in the 80's, the problem of youth unemployment, the erosion of parental discipline, the implications for Britain's most depressed communities of Government cuts in welfare, housing, education. Money was suddenly found for limited job creation and youth opportunity schemes. Community policing programmes were floated and assessed. Attention was drawn to the damage caused by Thatcherite intransigence. At the same time, the riots served to harden the law and order lobby's opposition to the principle of 'no go area', and were cited in Parliamentary debates to justify the drift into coercion: the introduction of the 'short sharp shock centres', water cannon, tear gas, battle dress, the transplantation of the full technology of crowd control from Northern Ireland to the mainland.

All these conflicting possibilities were licensed by what happened that July, by the riots, the reports and the syndicated photographs of riots: bleak studies of shattered glass, burning buildings and violent confrontation. Those photographs recall a familiar iconography, the iconography of the American city-in-crisis, and were filtered through

the negative mythology surrounding the American metropolis where the city functions as a symbol of the 'modern malaise'. For the last ten years, since the mugging panic of the early 70's, the predatory instincts of this imaginary city, its pathology, have been concentrated in a single image: « The image of the mugger erupting out of the urban dark in a violent and wholly unexpected attack »[1].

In July 1981, that iconography was extended. Behind the headlines, the Parliamentary debates and independent enquiries, lurked the familiar spectre of the solitary black mugger; only now he (and almost invariably it is a 'he') had been collectivised. A new collective subject was proposed — the 'mass mugger' — the unruly, resentful and delinquent black mob.

That's just one example. But the issues raised by the media representation of the riots — issues concerning the marginalisation and scapegoating of black youth, the sources and uses of stereotypical images of the 'youth problem' — are so self evidently serious that they sometimes threaten to obscure the significance of other forms of cultural resistance amongst youth. Pictures of punks and mods and skinheads for instance, are commonly regarded, even amongst many documentary practitioners, as unproblematic, or as distractions from the real issues: visually interesting but ideologically suspect. The subcultures themselves are dismissed on the grounds that they are sexist/racist / brutalised / narcissistic / commodified / incorporated: 'commercial' not 'political'.

I want to question that puritanical distinction between youth in its 'commercial' and 'political' guises, in its 'compromised' and 'pure' forms, the distinction, that is, between the youth market and the youth problem, between youth-as-fun and youth-as-trouble — an opposition which I hope to show has been codified into two quite different styles of photography. I want to challenge that distinction between 'pleasure' and 'politics', between 'advertisements'

[1] S. Hall, C. Critcher, T. Jefferson, J. Clarke and B. Roberts (1978), *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State and Law and Order*, Macmillan.

and 'documentaries' and to pose instead another concept: the politics of pleasure. This will entail tracing back in a rather schematic way, the historical development of youth as a loaded category not only within photography but also within certain branches of journalism and the social sciences.

Youth and the silent crowd

The definition of the potentially delinquent juvenile crowd as a particular urban problem can be traced back in Britain at least to the beginnings of the Sunday School movement — an attempt on the part of the Church to extend its moderating influence downwards in terms both of social class and biological age [2]. Haphazard urbanisation, child factory labour and the physical and cultural separation of the classes into two separate 'Nations' were together held responsible for creating a new social problem: the unsupervised, heathen working class juvenile who appears in contemporary novels, journalism and early Parliamentary reports as a symptom of the industrial city which is itself typically presented in this literature as a 'monstrous' and 'unnatural' place.

One image recurs: the silent crowd, anonymous, unknowable, a stream of atomised individuals intent on minding their own business. One of the major threats which the urban crowd seems to have posed for literate bourgeois observers lay in the perception that the masses were illegible as well as ungovernable. Indeed the two threats, the crowd's opacity and its potential for disorder, were inextricably connected.

[2] See « Imperialism, nationalism and organized youth », by M. Blanch, in *Working Class Culture: Studies in History and Theory* (1979), J. Clarke, C. Critcher, R. Johnson (eds), Hutchinson; also P. Cohen, « Policing the Working-Class City » and I. Pinchbeck & M. Hewitt, « Vagrancy and Delinquency in an urban setting » in *Crime and Society: Readings in History and Theory* (1981), M. Fitzgerald, G. McLennan & J. Pawson (eds), Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Children and adolescents were regarded as a particular problem. During the mid-19th Century when intrepid social explorers began to venture into the « unknown Continents », the « jungles » and the « Africas »[3] — this was the phraseology used at the time — of Manchester and the stlums of East London, special attention was drawn to the wretched mental and physical condition of the young 'nomads' and 'street urchins'. The most celebrated 'sighting' of a working class youth subculture in this period occurs in Henry Mayhew's *London Labour and the London Poor (1851)*, in a section devoted to the quasi-criminal costermongers.

The costers were street traders who made a precarious living selling perishable goods from barrows. The young coster boys were distinguished by their elaborate style of dress — beaver skin hats, long jackets with moleskin collars, vivid patterned waistcoats, flared trousers, boots decorated with hand stitched heart and flower motifs, a red 'kingsman' kerchief knotted at the throat. This style was known in the coster idiom as looking 'flash' or 'stunning flash'.

The costers were also marked off from neighbouring groups by a developed argot — backwards slang and rhyming slang. In coster-speak, beer was 'reeb', the word 'police' was carved up and truncated into 'escop', later the 'copper', finally 'cop'. The newly formed police force (introduced by Sir Robert Peel in 1840) were resented because their supervision of public space in the working class ghettoes was already jeopardising the survival not only of the costers' culture but of their very livelihoods. Charged with the mission of imposing uniform standards of order throughout the metropolis, irrespective of local circumstances, the police were actively disrupting the casual street economy upon which the costers depended.

The mass of detailed observations of urban street life assembled and collated by social explorers like Mayhew

[3] See P. Keating's Introduction to *Into Unknown England 1866-1913: Selections From the Social Explorers* (1976), P. Keating (ed), Fontana.

eventually formed the documentary basis for legislative action, for the formation of charitable bodies and the mobilisation of public opinion through newspaper articles on the plight of what were called the « wandering tribes » of London. In these ways, the social explorers helped to direct the growing moral impetus towards the education, reform and 'civilisation' of the working class masses — an impetus which was itself underwritten by a generalised concern with the problems involved in disciplining and monitoring the shifting urban population.

The Victorian classification of working class youth into 'respectable' and 'criminal' classes, the 'deserving' and 'underserving' poor, the 'delinquent' and 'perishing juveniles' eventually led to the construction of separate educational and punitive institutions. The Ragged Schools were open to all street urchins. The Industrial Schools were designed to inculcate the virtues of factory time-discipline and orderly behaviour and to give young people an opportunity of learning a useful trade. The Reformatories were reserved for the hardened young criminals who would previously have been committed to adult prisons. The progression is a clear one: from reportage to intervention. The traces left by a 'gathering of the facts', motivated as far as the fact gatherers themselves were concerned by Christian compassion, are real enough.

Photography played its part in this process. The fact that photographic records of Ragged School pupils have survived is important. It indicates a new departure: the systematic monitoring by means of photographic plates and daguerrotypes of potential juvenile offenders. As John Tagg has ably demonstrated [4], the scientific administration of the urban setting required for its functioning, a mass of evidence, statistics, documentation, details about the most intimate aspects of individual lives. It required a supportive, efficient bureaucracy.

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[4] J. Tagg, « Power and Photography », in *Culture, Ideology and Social Process* (1981), T. Bennett, G. Martin, C. Mercer, J. Woollacott (eds), Open University.

The camera supplanted earlier systems of classification employed by the police to identify known criminals and record the distinctive features of new ones. By drawing representation closer to reality, photography seemed to make the dream of complete surveillance realisable. Inscribed in photography and photographic practice from its very inception, there were these official documentary uses, this potential for surveillance, by no means neutral, representing rather a particular point of view, particular interests, embodying a desire and a will to know the alien-in-our-midst, the Other, the victim and the culprit.

The technology was adaptable. It translated to new contexts of control. It served the needs of a charitable institution like Doctor Barnado's Home for Working and Destitute Lads as efficiently, as competently as it served the police. Meanwhile, as the middle class market for photographic anthologies began to open up in the latter part of the 19th Century, the 'urchin' and the 'ragamuffin' were prominently featured as 'quaint', low life types in books like Thomson's *Street Life in London* (1876) and the anonymous collection, *Slum Life in Our Great Cities* (1890) [5].

Us and Them: these positions — Us as concerned and voyeuristic subjects, them as brutalised and wayward objects — have persisted in documentary photographs of contemporary victims, contemporary culprits. We can gawp, indulge our curiosity from the safety of our positions out here. The skinhead fixed in our compassionate and judgemental gaze; the skinhead as victim; the skinhead as culprit. The skinhead placed in a context which immediately fits — the urban ghetto. These are our 'unknown continents', our 'jungles'. These are the people we wouldn't dare to stare at in the street. These are the aliens, the Space Invaders. These, it is implied in the cryptic presentations, are the real signs of our times ....

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[5] See H. P. Dyos & M. Wolff (eds), *The Victorian City: Images and Realities, Vol. I* (1978), Routledge & Kegan Paul.

A view from the boys

If we turn from documentary photography to the construction of youth within sociology, a similar pattern, a similar set of relations is disclosed. The category 'youth' emerges in sociology in its present form most clearly around the late 1920's and the responsibility for that construction is generally attributed to the American tradition of ethnographic research, particularly to the work produced by the Chicago school of Social Ecology.

Robert Park and his colleagues at the University of Chicago were concerned with developing a broadly based theory of the social ecology of city life. The high incidence of juvenile crime in inner city areas and the significance of group bonding in distinctive juvenile gangs was explained by these writers through organic metaphors — the metaphors of social pathology, urban disequilibrium, the breakdown of the organic balance of city life. This tradition is largely responsible for establishing the equation, by now a familiar one in the sociology of youth, between adolescence as a social and psychological problem of particular intensity and the juvenile offender as the victim of material, cultural, psychological or moral deprivation. These two enduring images — the more general one of youth as a painful transitional period, the more particular one of violent youth, of the delinquent as the product of a deprived urban environment — are fixed within sociology largely through the work of the Chicago school and of those American researchers who, throughout the 50's and 60's, continued to publish 'appreciative' studies of marginal groups based on the Chicago model.

It is this tradition which produces or secures the frames of reference which then get fixed on to the study of youth in general and which define what is going to be deemed significant and worth studying in the area — the link between deprivation and juvenile crime, an interest in the distinctive forms of juvenile youth culture, the gang, the deviant subculture. Youth becomes the boys, the wild boys,

the male working class adolescent out for blood and giggles: youth-as-trouble, youth-in-trouble.

Girls have till quite recently been relegated to a position of secondary interest, both within sociological accounts of subculture and photographic studies of urban youth [6]. The masculinist bias is still there in the subcultures themselves. Subject to stricter parental controls than the boys, pinioned between the twin stigmas of being labelled 'frigid' or a 'slag', girls in subculture, especially working class subculture, have traditionally been either silenced or made over in the image of the boys as replicas, accessories. That 'tradition' has been broken, at the very least reshaped in punk and post-punk where girls have begun playing with themselves in public: parodying the conventional iconography of fallen womanhood — the vamp, the tart, the slut, the waif, the sadistic maitresse, the victim-in-bondage.

These girls interrupt the image-flow. They play back images of woman as icons, women as the Furies of classical mythology. They make the s-m matrix strange. They skirt round the voyeurism issue, flirt with masculine curiosity but refuse to submit to the masterful gaze. These girls turn being looked at into an aggressive act.

The consuming image: youth as fun

By the 1950's, relative affluence brought the other face of British youth into focus: youth at its leisure: exotic, strange-youth-as-fun. The term 'teenager', invented in America, is imported into Britain and applied by popular weekly journals like the *Picture Post* to those cultures of the 'submerged tenth' of working class youth whose consumption rituals, musical tastes and commodity preferences are most clearly conditioned by American influences.

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[6] See A. MacRobbie, « Settling Accounts with Subculture », in T. Bennett *et al.* (eds) *op. cit.*; « Girls and Subculture », in *Resistance through Rituals*, S. Hall *et al.* (eds) Hutchinson, 1976 and *Women Take Issue*, C. Brundson *et al.* (eds) Hutchinson, 1978.

The word 'teenager' established a permanent wedge between childhood and adulthood. The wedge means money. The invention of the teenager is intimately bound up with the creation of the youth market. Eventually a new range of commodities and commercial leisure facilities are provided to absorb the surplus cash which for the first time working class youth is calculated to have at its disposal to spend on itself and to provide a space within which youth can construct its own immaculate identities untouched by the soiled and compromised imaginaries of the parent culture. Eventually: boutiques, record shops, dance halls, discotheques, television programmes, magazines, the 'Hit Parade'.

The new images are superimposed on the old images: youth as trouble, youth as fun. During the 1950's, the distinction between 'respectable' and 'criminal' classes was transmuted into the distinction between 'conformist' and 'nonconformist', youth, the workers and the workshy, 'decent lads' and 'inverts', 'patriots' and 'narcissists'. The new youth cultures based around consumption were regarded by the arbiters of taste and the defenders of the « British way of life », by taste-making institutions like the BBC and the British design establishment as pernicious, hybrid, unwholesome, 'Americanised'.

When the first rock 'n roll film, « Blackboard Jungle » was shown at a cinema in South London in 1956, Britain witnessed its first rock riot. The predictions were fulfilled: teenaged sexuality dissolved into blood lust. Seats were slashed. Teddy boys and girls jived in the aisles. Those expelled from the cinema vented their rage on a tea-stall situated on the pavement outside. Cups and saucers were thrown about. It was a very English riot. It represented a new convergence: trouble-as-fun, fun-as-trouble.

The two image clusters, the bleak portraits of juvenile offenders and the exuberant cameos of teenage life reverberate, alternate and sometimes they get crossed. By the mid 60's, youth culture has become largely a matter of commodity selection, of emphatically stated taste preferences. Image serves for the members of the groups themselves as a means of marking boundaries, of articulating identity and difference. The regulation of body posture, styles and looks becomes anxious and obsessive. There is even a distinctive mod way of standing. According to one 'face':

> Feet had to be right. If you put your hands in your pocket, you never pulled the jacket up so it was wrinkled. You'd have the top button done up and the jacket would be pulled back behind the arm so that you didn't ruin the line. You'd only ever put one hand in your pocket if you were wearing a jacket... [7].

The circle has now been fully described: fractions of youth now aspire to the flatness and the stillness of a photograph. They are completed only through the admiring glances of a stranger.

A riot of colour

A recent edition of *The Observer Colour Magazine* shows the persistence of familiar strands. Those strands have now been converted into two antagonistic systems. The magazine contains two articles on separate aspects of the youth question. The first deals with community policing in Handsworth. The subject matter is serious, political. It deals with black youth and the police. Real issues are foregrounded. Real problems rendered formidable by the temporal proximity of the riots in July. The photographs are in black and white. They are steeped in the ideology of the documentary photograph, the photograph as evidence, austere, cold, objective. These are real pictures of the real thing. Paradoxically, the black and white system signals that this is real. It is the system for photographers to proclaim their intention to have their work and the issues it raises taken seriously. Black and white has become the real system, the system of high contrast, the colours of confrontation.

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[7] Quoted in R. Barnes, *Mods!* (1980), Eel Pie Publishing.

The next article in the magazine deals with Adam of Adam and the Ants. This is white youth in the leisure mode, relaxed, at home in an attractive, designed environment. The photographs are in colour. The colour system signifies escape, fantasy, a revelling in things. Paradoxically, its relation to the real is less direct. It doesn't claim to strip things down, to reveal the truth. It is content to luxuriate on the surface of things. It advertises. (Adam's face in colour advertises the magazine).

It reflects, it doesn't probe. The two systems are mutually exclusive, the two approaches they embody are incompatible. Youth at play, youth in the consumption mode is incompatible with youth out of work, youth in an ugly mood.

And yet. In the month of the riots, the *Sunday Times* ran an article providing a kind of consumer guide to the various rioting contingents. The categorisation was elaborate: rastas, punks, 2-Tone youths, mohawks. Each description was illustrated by an artist's impression of the relevant type — an identikit for the breakfasting voyeur.

And yet. A rumour circulated in the Press and TV that the looting was being directed and co-ordinated by white youths on scooters equipped with CB radios. And if these stories are regarded as conflation pure and simple, as part of the media conspiracy to trivialise and depoliticise the disturbances, it should also be remembered that political activists who attempted to intervene at Toxteth, to take control, to elevate the outbreaks to the status of 'political confrontations', had, for their own safety, to be escorted from the scene by community workers and the police. They were not wanted. They were not needed.

And yet. A comprehensive, chronological record of the major incidents of the summer of '81, appearing in the journal of the Commission for Racial Equality *New Community*[9] listed alongside the New Cross march and the

[8] J. Kerouac, « Introduction » to *The Americans: Photographs by Robert Frank* (1959), Aperture Inc.

[9] M. Venner, « From Deptford to Notting Hill: Summer 1981 », in *New Community*, Vol. IX, No. 2, Autumn 1981.

Brixton riots, seaside rampages of mods, skinheads, punks and rockers. Sandwiched between the riots of July 10th in Southall, Dalston, Clapham and Handsworth and the police raid on the Front Line on the 15th, we read of a « multiracial mob » of skinheads, Asians and West Indians in Leicester wrecking cars and throwing petrol bombs at the police; of a crowd of black and white youths storming through the centre of Huddersfield. As August drew to a close, so too did the riots. The Notting Hill Carnival passed almost entirely without incidents despite earlier predictions of violence and sabotage. But over the same weekend disturbances occurred at Brighton where a crowd of 300 mods stoned the police and passing cars and threw petrol bombs.

And yet. The typical precipitators of clashes between blacks and the police have not been heavy handed policing of demonstrations and marches but invasions of symbolic space, raids on blues, shebeens, clubs and cafes, the perceived violation of communal space, of spaces for consumption.

A fragmented picture emerges, one which fails to correspond with the neat separations perpetuated within the official discourses of responsible commentary, concerned reportage and social scientific analysis. 'Politics' and 'pleasure', crime and resistance, transgression and carnival are meshed and confounded.

Neither affirmation nor refusal

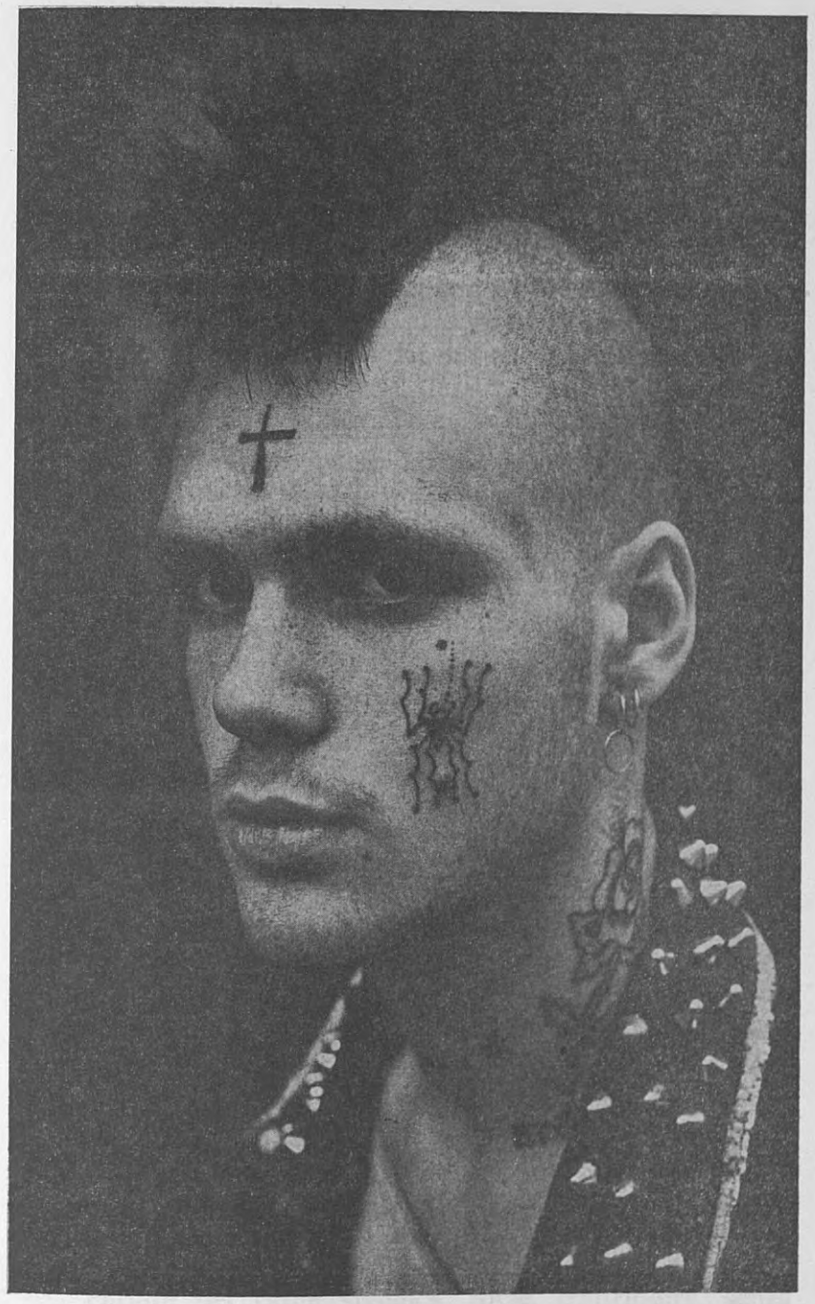
The politics of youth culture is a politics of metaphor: it deals in the currency of signs and is, thus, always ambiguous. For the subcultural milieu has been constructed underneath the authorised discourses, in the face of the multiple disciplines of the family, the school and the workplace. Subculture forms in the space between surveillance and the evasion of surveillance, it translates the fact of being under scrutiny into the pleasure of being watched. Hiding in the light.

The 'subcultural response' is neither simply affirmation or refusal, neither 'commercial exploitation' nor 'genuine revolt'. It is neither simply resistance against some external order nor straightforward conformity with the parent culture. It is both a declaration of independence, of otherness, of alien intent, a refusal of anonymity, of subordinate status. It is an *in* subordination. And at the same time it is also a confirmation of the fact of powerlessness, a celebration of impotence. Subcultures are both a play for attention and a refusal, once attention has been granted, to be read according to the book.

The swear word made flesh ..... youth culture centres on the body — on appearances, posture, dress. If teenagers possess little else, they at least own their own bodies. If power can be exercised nowhere else, it can at least be exercised here. The body can be decorated and enhanced like a cherished object. It can be cut up and 'cooked' like a piece of meat. Self-mutilation is just the darker side of narcissism. The body becomes the base-line, the place where the buck stops. To wear a mohican or to have your face tattooed is to burn most of your bridges in the current economic climate: when employers can afford to pick and choose, such gestures are a public disavowal of the will to queue for work.

Since the 1950's, the 'politics of youth' in this country has been played out, first and foremost as spectacle: as the 'politics' of photogenic confrontations, of consumption and 'life style'. That politics has now entered a new phase. In the current recession, the imaginary coherence of subculture seems about to dissolve under the pressure of material constraints.

During the 1981 July riots, in the decimated inner cities, black and white youths turned to crime and open conflict with the police. After Toxteth and Brixton, the politics of consumption, at least for unemployed youth, seems to be converging on a single point of tension, a simple opposition: desire and the absence of means, a brick and a shop window. The targets for the rioters and looters were in their way predictable enough — not the



(Photo: Derek W. Ridgers)

town halls, the labour exchanges, the schools and factories. Not, at least not often, the police stations but rather the video and hi fi shops, the boutiques and the record stores. The right to consume. For a week or two in 1981, in city centres throughout England, the shopping precinct, that sign of misplaced 60's optimism, took on a grim aspect of the medieval City State, an embattled community of goods under siege. The rows of boarded up shop fronts, reminiscent of the Blitz and science fiction television series, marked a line of defence in a new price war: the end of window dressing as an art form.

CAMP

di
Giuseppe Merlino

Negli schedari della polizia di New York City, **kamp** sta per « known as male prostitute », in Australia è il nome dei bordelli omosessuali; **camp** era la parola slang usata dai dandies per gli appuntamenti con i soldati dei bivacchi estivi di Hyde Park. E poi: **camp** come ghetto omosessuale, come abbreviazione di *campus* (*a camp queen*).

Nel *New English Dictionary* di Murray, **camp** ha il significato di battersi, partecipare a gare atletiche o a gare di bevute, litigare e, certo, quello di campeggiare. È un ricordo del francese « se camper », che è un atteggiarsi « with overtones of theatricality, vanity, dressiness and provocation ».

È un verbo che apre un infinito catalogo dove si raccolgono Monsieur, il fratello di Luigi XIV, e l'abbé de Choisy, Matamoro e Ludwig II, Robert de Montesquiou e George « Beau » Brummell, Beerbohm e gli schizzi di Callot, *early* Disraeli e *late* Boni de Castellane, Barbey d'Aurevilly e Sarah Bernhardt, Cocteau e Prinnie (the Prince Regent) ecc. (l'ecc. segnala la necessaria inconcludenza e la mobilità del **camp**). Un catalogo della Decorazione Assoluta.

Un'etimologia incerta, fantasiosa ed erratica che aggrava lo sforzo definitorio, ma intriga e rilancia la passione decifratoria. Si può subito sospettare che il **camp** sia una parola « vicaria » che indica, tortuosamente, un luogo dell'inadeguato e un gusto dell'atopia.

Parlare del **camp** significa, forse, contribuire, senza

convinzione, ad una storia della sensibilità, e scriverne per frammenti, (e in frammenti retti dalla paratassi), diventa una scelta per la retorica dell'eteroclito, dell'occasionale e dell'interrotto. Una retorica difensiva, forse, ma non autoritaria.

Si scrive sul **camp**, entro il **camp**.

Il **camp** è una macchinazione indolente ma inflessibile contro il discorso serio, colto, fiducioso, ordinatore, legislativo: è un supplemento conturbante che cambia segno al lessico, alle frasi, alle autorità. È un prefisso disinvolto e sovversivo che interrompe l'energia argomentativa del radicale cui si accompagna.

Il **camp** traffica su un digest di stereotipi, è come una sbrigativa riserva algebrica di segni, ma con una intenzione di miraggio e non di comunicazione lineare o di mimesi. (Se mimesi c'è, allora è iperbolica, ipertelica, come dice S. Sarduy, letale: quella del travestito).

Il **camp** è un amalgama analitico di parti di cui ciascuna ha già un senso (è qui la sua complicità con la forma del frammento): un montaggio di citazioni così intenso, così incongruo da formare uno stile e da scoraggiare una tradizione. C'è nel **camp** un rispetto così eccessivo e goloso per la Cultura, da trasformarla in un Monumento in rovina, pronto per il saccheggio; il Monumento, si sa, è destinato all'oblio insieme col sapere che lo decifra, ma il monumento disseminato e ridotto all'insignificante, galleggia e circola, diventa « intimo », resiste, come glossa a un testo assente.

La tecnica del **camp** è quella di un bottino spensierato, di una scorreria mondana, di una collezione di trofei taciturni. La sua figura alta è quella di un « tumulto di libri », quella bassa è l'album. La citazione **camp** la si può dire pseudo-semantica, perché è quella che disinforma, quella destinata a far smarrire: è che il **camp** non sa trattenersi, non ha discernimento, ama la fatalità; la sua cultura e la sua intelligenza sono precipitose. Come il pervertito di Klossowski, il **camp** è ossessionato dall'esecuzione di un unico gesto: è questione di un istante. Il **camp** manca di convinzione, non milita: è istantaneamente entu-

siasta, è un tatuaggio — delebile e parassitario — sull'oggetto che « adora » (testo, corpo, luogo, situazione .....).

È una cultura, quella **camp**, che fa troppo e non abbastanza, che sceglie l'inconcludenza: il **camp** non conosce qualcosa, ma « ne sa qualcosa ».

Il **camp** è un gioco ininterrotto sullo stereotipo: una tecnica agguerrita per farne un punto di partenza di innumerevoli significanti. Lo stereotipo, dopo una cura **camp**, ritorna, ma pervertito — come stenogramma corrotto — nel sistema generale dei segni della intellegibilità; testimonianza di una intelligenza onnivora e distratta. La gregarietà compatta dello stereotipo (identificabile e ripetitivo) si allenta nel **camp**, perché è preso alla lettera: è un puro effetto di linguaggio, non si compone in sistema, trascura di evocare i suoi referenti massicci: il « mondo » diventa irreperibile e lo stereotipo *self-indulgent*. Le passioni, ad esempio, nel **camp** sono prese nella loro banalità: « la passione non è mai altro che quel che se ne dice; intertestuale puro, citazione ..., le passioni sono pezzi di linguaggio già fatti ..., di qui l'idea di una griglia delle passioni ... come raccolta di opinioni » (R. Barthes, *La retorica antica*, Milano, Bompiani, 1979, pag. 88).

Il **camp**, nel suo regolato allontanarsi dal referente, non tende al lessico, ma direttamente, per così dire, alla frase, alla frase già tutta fatta: è la sua predilezione per il luogo comune (come frammento antologico, trasferibile da un discorso ad un altro). Uno snobismo mobile e immotivato gli permette di raccogliere luoghi comuni dovunque e di imporli con un talento che sa usare la coquetterie e il terrore (come la moda, anche il **camp** si vive come una questione capitale: istruttoria veloce e sentenza esemplare; è un discorso dell'esecuzione). Accade anche l'inverso: citazioni rare e preziose, prese nella energia « chiusa » del **camp**, diventano orfane e senza risonanza « colta » (la virgolettatura amata dal **camp** è senso dello spettacolo: la parola fa uno show, non riempie una funzione, ma è anche una secessione, un tirarsi fuori dalle cure del contesto), si allineano nel luogo comune come

elementi di una fraseologia impertinente. Queste torsioni producono una riserva di immaginario: quello che anima i giochi che si possono fare con tutto ciò che si combina e si manipola immotivatamente (senza dare spiegazioni, cioè, e senza alludere ad un segreto): dall'enciclopedia al guardaroba, dal défilé al catalogo, dall'archivio all'attrezzeria.

Il **camp** non desidera prodursi come « sorpresa » per la cultura di massa, ma desidera sorprendere la cultura di massa, scegliendo, usando e idolatrando quel che, inaspettatamente e labilmente, in essa gli piace. Come fa con la moda, anche qui il **camp** mostra una devozione così eccessiva e devota per i clichés che questi vacillano, sono colpiti da fissità e da ipertrofia: il **camp** annuncia così il démodé e ne fa un oggetto ingombrante, sornione e un po' disgustoso, ma irresistibile. Il démodé è uno di quei « misti » che il **camp** predilige: allude (e scredita senza clamore) allo chic (tempo della durata) e alla novità (tempo della « stagione »), e di qui nasce quella familiarità del **camp** con il kitsch, col cheap chic, col dandismo di massa, col pastiche (testimonianza forte di fascinazione e di ripulsa ad un tempo). Il démodé è una delle vie per aggirarsi in quei luoghi « fastidiosi » e tra quelle opere che non fondano nulla, esclusi da ogni riserva del sapere; un modo per produrre e mantenere l'inutilizzabile, una predilezione per l'irrecuperabile.

Il **camp** è un'estetica dell'incrinatura, quella che si dirama lungo i punti di minore resistenza (e di maggiore sensibilità), sotto i colpi dell'evento; la sua figura: un oggetto cloisonné e passivo.

È in questa estetica imprecisa e imprevedibile, « arborea », che il **camp** maneggia una cultura vorace ed eccentrica: non abbastanza enigmatica (perché costruita con « pezzi » tutti intelligibili) per farci godere i piaceri dell'esotico, non abbastanza prossima (o evidente) per farci godere quelli della identificazione. Il testo **camp** sembrerà formato, allora, da allusioni ellittiche, sarà un testo senza unità ma intoccabile: uno spostamento interno, sia pur tenue, lo rovina (« tel un poème qu'on répète dans la

mesure où l'on ne peut en changer aucun mot », G. Deleuze, *Logique du sens*, Paris, Minuit, 1971, pag. 333); sarà un testo intransitivo, godibile e non comunicativo, un testo che resta lungamente « in posa », che avrà un ritmo litanico con cantilene e ritornelli e che vagherà, senza pudore, tra l'erudizione dell'effimero e della mondanità. Una figura prediletta sarà quella dell'autore minore, nel suo senso peggiore di testo ripetitivo e sterile.

Sarà **camp** il *press-book*: il massimo di mitologia che si possa produrre con la massima economia; il romanziere senza romanzo; la vita romanzesca di cui si sa « per caso »; la piccola mitologia d'autore (un biografema) dilatata a cifra di un'epoca (ma poi alla categoria di « epoca » non si crede se non come ad un luogo da arredare); la para-biografia; le iperboli prese alla lettera; gli aneddoti leggendari; la bravura e l'exploit, attutiti da un commento che sottolinei il fortuito e l'accidentale; le idionsicrasie teorizzate con minuziosità; i grandi soshi giapponesi (come i *Momenti d'ozio* di Kenko) pieni di storie per sfuggire alla Storia: una piccola vittoria del potin intemporale; saranno **camp** tutti quei testi che insinuano che le rivoluzioni non liberano l'uomo, ma sono solo il passaggio da uno stile ad un altro; e quei testi innumerevoli e senza scopo che narrano « la scoperta inesausta, l'avventura umana, il pettegolezzo da serve, l'alto barocco stralunato, il gusto dell'elenco e dell'enumerazione, la metafora elegantissima, la curiosità triviale » (A. Arbasino, *I Turchi*, Parma, F.M. Ricci, 1971, pag. 62). È **camp**, poi, quel testo che più che della Turchia finisce con l'interessarsi della turchese.

Sarà **camp** — e geniale — raccontare le rivalità mondane come operazioni militari, e descrivere la Grande Guerra in termini di rivalità mondane e di « argot » (Proust).

Il testo **camp** lo conosciamo per indizi e per tracce: il **camp**, come la mistica, tende ad esprimersi nelle forme più intransitive: la posa, la loquacità volubile, il gusto intempestivo, il raziocinio simulato della maniacalità, ecc.; e questi sintomi tendono a moltiplicarsi e ad intrecciarsi

non per un gusto di occultamento, ma per una indifferenza alla comunicazione.

C'è una torsione fondamentale nel **camp** ed è quella che spiazza i Nomi (gli autori, cioè, le grandi tutele della cultura) e li fa scivolare dai ruoli legali a cifre di sensazioni. I Nomi, alleviati dal dovere, si trasformano, per questa emorragia, in oggetti romanzeschi, in gadgets sonori.

Il Nome non scandisce il testo **camp** (non è il « tempo » dell'autorità: quella che discerne e classifica) ma ritorna come suono (e significante) di godimento: è un ritornello ed è una piccola struttura seduttiva (con giochi interni di nomignoli, soprannomi, anagrammi) in cui si raccolgono, come in una unica rubrica intensa, le sfoglie semantiche più desiderate, in una cronologia che non è quella del destino o del personaggio ma è solo quella delle immagini e del loro piacere. È una temporalità forte e precoce: un effetto che si produce di colpo e che dura. Ancora una volta, nel **camp**, il Nome funziona come una simulazione « bella » (il **camp** chiede che la pulsione stessa sia estetica); il Nome, come dice Cratilo, insegna: ma insegna il piacere nello stupore; è una pratica testuale, « poetica », mai un garante. Ma funziona anche come condensatore o acceleratore di magia: metti un Nome su qualcosa e si trasformerà in oro; è un trucco importante perché tutto si trasformi nel Paese dei Balocchi. Per il Fedele, per lo Snob e per il **camp** vale la pura presenza.

Il Nome dà un alibi di comunicatività al mutismo (valore **camp** e valore iper-erotico, con i suoi idoli: il top-model e il muscle man, il teen-ager e il portoricano, ecc. Esempio di sublime **camp**: Terence Stamp in *Teorema*, angelo e marchetta ostinatamente muto): sta per un'intera dimostrazione di cui, con indifferenza, si fa a meno. È un'ellissi preziosa ed elegante per la sua economia, è un omaggio sobrio a quell'accidia che percorre tutto il **camp** ed è anche una dichiarazione indiretta di non-ingenuità: l'ingenuità è sapere *e* ricordare, avere una dottrina insomma, una fede stupida, il **camp** sa e dimentica.

Il Nome incoraggia la passione **camp** per il massimo

di sottintesi e incoraggia un altro effetto che gli sta a cuore: una permanenza e una fissità nello scorrere velocissimo dei « tableaux vivants » che produce. Il Nome, nella sua funzione linguistica e mai referenziale, agevola quelle « rivoluzioni del desiderio » che il **camp** adora: amare, cioè, sempre la stessa persona ma con delle erotiche diverse.

I Nomi sono anche una rubrica mondana condensata e il piacere che offrono è quello di declinarli perfettamente e frequentemente; il Nome consente di accennare — con molta incredulità — al sociale e di risparmiarsi il politico: un ruolo classico della mondanità.

Il corpo — nel **camp** — non è un limite da superare o da spezzare, ma è un luogo congruo e sufficiente per il teatro della seduzione frigida (quella che non genera storia o rapporto, ma solo culto) e per le tecniche che producono ammirazione estatica. Un luogo che si può riempire indefinitamente, infinitamente inscrivibile, forse calligrafabile. Ancora una volta si tende ad un testo fitto e autofalsificante.

Il **camp** ha per il corpo una predilezione feticistica: il ciuffo, lo sguardo, l'attaccatura dei capelli, il portamento, l'allure, ecc. Il corpo prediletto è quello che provoca fascinazione e lascia attoniti: il bel corpo è siderazione. Il corpo da cui non ci si stacca più è quello ignoto o il corpo superstar, ma sempre inquadrati nei luoghi mitici della topologia **camp** (il caffé, la discoteca, i luoghi più abusati della grande mondanità), tra i suoi accessori più fissi e ripetuti: lacche nere, specchi deformanti, sonorità eccessive. Sono corpi accuditi, fasciati da brandelli di conversazioni, da affabulazioni, da parole d'ordine precarie (forse false), da una grande aura di « sentito dire ». Corpi visti, corpi pubblicitari o che stanno per diventarli, non corpi goduti.

E corpi melodrammatici secondo le sequenze **camp**, dove l'accadimento *deve* essere decisivo, la perfezione schiacciante, accademica, le partenze definitive, le rotture

irrimediabili, la performance folgorante, il « never more » una norma e non una malinconia.

Il **camp** è una pratica esperta della perifrasi, una *delectatio morosa*, un sistema di ritardi per circuire e fissare l'oggetto della propria predilezione. Il rapporto tra il **camp** e il proprio oggetto è la fascinazione (una *jubilatio sine verbis*), la passione eccessiva, quella che si può raccontare solo per dettagli tenui, inattesi e futili: segni incongrui e intensi di un transfert fondamentale.

È una traslazione continua entro l'oggetto « adorato » e perfetto (la « favorite obsession »), senza nessuna apertura metaforica, ma in una esercitazione metonimica « chiusa »; una sperimentazione degli effetti legati a quell'oggetto, con una bella indifferenza alle cause e alla ratio esplicativa: alla responsabilità, insomma. Effetti di una cultura, ad esempio, di cui non si è responsabili: né titolari né eredi.

Il gusto **camp** è, come ogni gusto, un dispositivo di legittimazione, ma la sua modalità è quella di costituire dei complici e non un destinatario o un pubblico. La sua « autorità » è minata dalla insincerità, dalla labilità, dalla incertezza dei criteri che agiscono perentoriamente (v. il gusto **camp** per le rubriche di « in-out » o di « j'aime-je n'aime pas ») ma non si dichiarano che per essere smentiti.

Il **camp** è sedotto da una teoria dell'incertezza, ma, molto di più, da un'incertezza della teoria.

Il gusto **camp** si logora nei margini dell'approssimazione, ma ama questo indugio e lo trattiene; predilige oggetti esauriti perché troppo colmi di memoria o estenuati da usi banali e oltraggiosi, e trae piacere dalla leggera nausea o dis-gusto che ne deriva; al contrario della moda, prolunga questo sfinimento da ripetizione. Ancora una volta la temporalità **camp** non sarà quella del progresso ma, forse, solo quella della mutazione.

Il **camp** sembra seguire una delle procedure della scienza: produrre enunciati e tacere sia sul luogo che sul soggetto dell'enunciazione; ma la combinatoria incongrua

e irresponsabile degli enunciati, la loro non-conclusività, e la loro reticenza finale, invece di un protocollo di tono scientifico, producono un corpo glorioso e mitico della soggettività (come « schiuma anarchica di gusti e disgusti », come « enigma corporeo »).

Il **camp** prende *sul serio* l'umorale, il capriccioso, il leggero, il casuale, la « piccola » simbolica del quotidiano, il tic, ecc. È una poetica, narcisistica, di queste sostanze di scarto.

Il miraggio o il fantasma della maestria — che è quello della catena di enunciati — serve a scoraggiare tutti i fastidi, le trattative e le « spiegazioni » che potrebbero interrompere o sciupare il grande show narcisistico; serve a « non dover rispondere di nulla ».

Il **camp** adora rappresentarsi, ma a distanza, schivando l'interlocuzione e prevenendola con un bavardage senza lacune e senza pause: il mito della perfezione afasica si sostiene con delle crisi di loquacità.

Il **camp**, come si può immaginare, si appropria di ... senza identificarsi a ...; « mes identités me lâchent avant la fin de mes phrases » (R. Camus « Journal d'un voyage en France », Paris, Hachette, 1981, pag. 79).

Il **camp** sembra amare lo spreco. Non per instaurare una modalità di trasgressione (in Bataille c'è del **camp** per contiguità o per contagio, non per « essenza »), ma per inflazionare il mondo della legge, invece di affrontarlo: è un « conspicuous waste » senza origine e senza destinatario (accessoriamente, certo, serve anche ad affabulare i mondi del « beautiful people », ma in modo indeciso. Questo spreco frenetico e privilegiato provocherà un « it's too much » di stupefazione ammirativa? o un sospetto di denuncia? o una testimonianza, senza ruolo, sulla ricchezza capita *solo* come spettacolo ostentatorio?).

Riconoscere la legge autorevole e separarsene: ma solo per una fedeltà alla propria immagine; questo sembra essere il movimento del **camp**, attratto sempre più dalla defezione che dal confronto e più dalla dilazione che dalla

plausibilità. È il ritorno continuo, nel **camp**, del tema della « sprezzatura ». Alla legge non si contesta nulla, ma nulla le si riconosce: la si pone come un oggetto fluttuante che non appartiene ad un soggetto contro un altro (con tutte le chances dialettiche che ne seguirebbero), ma che affascina e ripugna intermittentemente e verso cui si è negligenti. Del dogmatico si può mimare l'allure, e poi distrarsi, dimenticare qualcosa e smagliare così, *senza accorgersene*, lo stretto tessuto dell'autorità.

L'etica del **camp** — se c'è — è un'etica del bluff, per sé e per l'altro; non si desidera dominare, ma, invece, trascinare l'altro nel proprio gioco (tra vittoria e sconfitta si insinua e resta il terzo escluso: il gioco) di infiniti presupposti e sottintesi: un gioco dello smarrimento (e la citazione d'obbligo è quella a Balthasar Gracian), una catena di analogie inadeguate. Se la legge, poi, è un sintomo pericoloso, il **camp**, come per la morte, non dirà altro che « eccola » e volgerà lo sguardo altrove.

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CAMP: A NOTE

by
Iain Chambers

The continual metamorphoses of David Bowie — Ziggy Stardust, Alladin Sane, the thin white Duke, Christopher Isherwood's double — the Pop Art postures of Bryan Ferry of Roxy Music ..... Boy George ..... Michael Jackson ..... all street dandies publicly constructing themselves as the privileged objects of their art.

Giuseppe Merlino's timely survey of the semantic rings that orbit around the vacillating centre of 'camp' provides a necessary reflection on a concept and practice that has come closer and closer to the heart of recent developments in Anglo-American popular culture.

Camp, it is pointed out, involves a strategy of overemphasis, underlining and exaggeration. It leans on the taken-for-granted, whether in taste, style, fashion, or sexuality, until a previous solidity cracks beneath the weight of narcissistic attention, hyperbole and the over-blown; until it becomes 'too serious' to be 'serious'.

The seeming irreverency of Pop Art, the 'revolt of taste' manifested in popular television, pop music and popular culture, has taken the disruptive play of camp from its once privileged site in aristocratic drawing rooms and the extravagant gestures of bohemia and released it into the flux of metropolitan reproduction where the distance between 'life' and 'performance' is lost in an urban collage in which we all become potential 'actors'.

Drawn by this urban culture ever deeper into the maelström of definition confusion, where 'nothing is true — everything is permitted' (Turner/Mick Jagger in Roeg & Cammel's film *Performance*, 1969), where resistance to the promiscuity of mechanical reproduction can only become yet one more 'style' among all the others as the image, the

gesture, passes immediately into common property and the 'copy' is as 'authentic' as the 'original', camp, for all its inbred irony, cannot extract itself from deeper powers. Its heart — the overloading of discourse which comes to rest in the highest investment: the construction of sexuality — still, to return to my list of pop heroes, and not forgetting Marlene Dietrich, remains with the boys ..... it is a privilege that is yet to be expanded.

Le tre rassegne proposte in questa sezione offrono una ricognizione di tre campi che per diversi motivi sono collegati con i fondamenti teorici degli Studi Culturali.

Nelle sue « Note sulle nuove strategie della critica in Inghilterra » M. T. Chialant analizza un gruppo di testi recenti che esprimono l'insoddisfazione sempre più evidente nel mondo anglosassone tra i cultori di studi letterari nei confronti della funzione e del ruolo che essi svolgonoin quanto critici e docenti. L'autrice mette in evidenza – pur con riserve – le potenzialità positive di tale revisione autocritica indotta soprattutto dall'azione combinata di una sofisticata applicazione di parametri ideologici (in particolare quelli dell'analisi marxista) e della sfida epistemologica rappresentata dagli Studi Culturali.

In « Conflicting Theories in Media Studies » I. Connell esamina il problematico rapporto tra l'elaborazione teorica e le possibilità di incidere concretamente sul processo della produzione nell'ambito delle comunicazioni (in specie di quelle televisive). La sua sostenuta analisi delle più aggiornate pubblicazioni sui media rintraccia una delle cause di tale distacco nelle debolezze insite nelle più accreditate teorie critiche e auspica il rilancio della ricerca su basi più realistiche e consapevoli.

In « Gli Studi Culturali e la nuova storiografia in Inghilterra » M. Vitale indaga sul reciproco influsso registrato nell'ultimo de-

cennio tra queste due aree disciplinari. In particolare discute la comune consapevolezza delle implicazioni per il presente della produzione del sapere storico ed il rinnovamento che la costante riflessione autocritica ha introdotto tanto negli Studi Culturali quanto nella più aggiornata pratica storiografica.

NOTE SULLE NUOVE STRATEGIE DELLA CRITICA IN INGHILTERRA

di
Maria Teresa Chialant

« Methodologically speaking, literary criticism is a non-subject. If literary theory is a kind of 'metacriticism', a critical reflection on criticism, then it follows that it too is a non-subject ». Questa sconcertante affermazione (Eagleton, p. 197) può adeguatamente introdurre la discussione di cinque volumi apparsi in questi ultimi anni in Inghilterra e opportunamente sollecitare una più generale riflessione sulla recente produzione di testi che analizzano e commentano tendenze e metodologie della odierna critica letteraria.

La natura della letteratura e la funzione della critica sono sempre state l'oggetto di studio di ogni teoria letteraria, ma recentemente il dibattito negli ambienti accademici britannici — segnatamente presso i Dipartimenti di Inglese — si è fatto particolarmente vivace, a giudicare dal numero di titoli pubblicati.

È difficile stabilire se ciò sia dovuto alla necessità di sistematizzare e rendere più accessibile il complesso e abbondante materiale prodotto dai teorici delle varie scuole europee ed americane; oppure alla crescente insoddisfazione nei confronti dei fini e dei modi dell'insegnamento letterario avvertita da coloro che lo praticano per mestiere; o, ancora, alla ricettività del mercato editoriale che ha scoperto (e non da ieri) un filone d'oro nella « critica alla critica »[1]. Probabilmente tutti questi motivi sono

[1] È quanto suggerisce Christine Brooke-Rose quando scrive che

ugualmente validi. Certo è che questo tipo di pubblicazione testimonia dei conflitti e dei fermenti prodotti dagli ultimi due decenni di intensa attività teorica; segno, da una parte, di difficoltà nella definizione stessa di studi letterari, dall'altra, di attenzione particolare per ciò che Frederic Jameson ha chiamato « metacommentary », e cioè, « a method ... according to which our object of study is less the text itself than the interpretation through which we attempt to confront and to appropriate it »[2].

Che la critica sia sempre più un genere letterario autonomo è opinione diffusa; al « practical criticism » della tradizione anglo-americana si è andato sostituendo un « creative » e « philosophical criticism », indicativo di un senso di violenza e di crisi — crisi del lettore in rapporto al testo, violenza della scrittura come atto di autorivelazione. Afferma Geoffrey Hartman: « Criticism is a relatively free, all-purpose genre, and closely related to the personal and familiar essay ...; it shares its text-milieu with other forms of literature while struggling with its own generic pressures of styles »[3].

A riprova dell'attualità di questo discorso e dell'esigenza avvertita da coloro che producono critica letteraria — applicandola poi nella ricerca scientifica e nella pratica d'insegnamento — di interrogarsi sul significato di tale attività è l'inchiesta promossa in questi ultimi mesi dal direttore della prestigiosa rivista americana *New Literary History* (una vera arena di dibattito critico), dal titolo « Literary Theory in the University: a Survey »[4]. La do-

« the discourse upon discourse » è divenuto un'industria ed è segno di crisi di valore del senso del 'reale' (*A Rhetoric of the Unreal. Studies in Narrative and Structure, especially of the Unreal*, Cambridge, Cambridge U.P., 1981, p. 11).

[2] *The Political Unconscious*, London, Methuen, 1981, pp. 9-10.

[3] *Literature in the Wilderness*, New Haven, Conn., Yale U.P., 1980, p. 233.

[4] *New Literary History*, vol. XIV, No. 2 (Winter 1983), pp. 411-451. Il direttore, Ralph Cohen, ha sottoposto il seguente questionario: « 1) What ought to be the aims and functions of literary theory at the present time?; 2) What practical consequences has

manda « Quali dovrebbero essere i fini e le funzioni della teoria letteraria oggi » — che riecheggia il titolo di un famoso saggio del 1864, « The Function of Criticism at the Present Time », di uno dei padri della moderna critica letteraria, Matthew Arnold — ha stimolato le risposte più interessanti; perciò mi sembra utile farvi riferimento e riportare in breve il punto di vista di tre critici e docenti universitari che, nella loro diversità, rappresentano le voci più significative della nuova generazione all'interno degli « English Studies » in Inghilterra. Per Terry Eagleton (Wadham College, Oxford) uno dei fini della critica letteraria oggi dovrebbe essere « to offer students the conceptual means to connect literary studies to other, arguably more historically and politically important concerns »; per David Lodge (Univ. of Birmingham) il suo valore principale è quello di « serving the cause of the 'better' reading of texts, by enhancing our awareness of the multiplicity and complexity of the process of composition and reading »; mentre per David Punter (Univ. of East Anglia, Norwich) molteplici sono le sue funzioni:

> to address itself to the interpretation of the reading act in the contemporary cultural context ...; to produce a new and more sophisticated understanding of the process whereby text becomes commodity, and cultural intercourse is reduced to the model of exchange of currency ...; to develop ways in which, pedagogically, the blocked circuits which should connect literature with the expansion of the imaginary and of fantasy can be revitalized.

Sembra perciò opportuno esaminare alcuni esempi di riflessione critica su queste tematiche, apparsi di recente in Inghilterra.

Untying the Text, il volume curato da R. Young che si propone di offrire un panorama della critica post-strutturalista, appare piuttosto disomogeneo, pur nell'intento ambizioso, in quanto accosta interventi di provenienza e

theory had in your teaching of literature and in your writing of criticism?; 3) What do you consider the shortcomings of theory, if any, in graduate education? ».

di spessore diversi. Accanto ai contributi dei redattori della *Oxford Literary Review* (tutti docenti di Letteratura Inglese della University of Southampton) e a quelli di alcuni membri della « Yale school of deconstruction » (che figurano nello « honorary committee » della stessa rivista), compaiono saggi di prestigiosi rappresentanti della critica francese contemporanea (alcuni testi sono ristampe, altri appaiono per la prima volta in lingua inglese). Il materiale è distribuito su quattro sezioni collegate fra loro dai raccordi forniti dal curatore: « Text, discourse, ideology », con Barthes, Foucault, Macherey e Balibar; « Structuralism wake », con Riffaterre, Barthes e Barbara Johnson; « Psychoanalysis/Literature », con Maud Ellman; « Rhetoric and deconstruction », con J. Hillis Miller e P. de Man. Sorprende che, nonostante Derrida sia l'ispiratore della « deconstruction theory », nessun suo scritto sia incluso in questa raccolta, mentre è presente un saggio di Ann Wordsworth sul 'decostruzionista-freudiano' H. Bloom. Sebbene R. Young non nasconda le sue simpatie per questa scuola, si ha l'impressione che egli cerchi di mediare fra posizioni anche assai contrastanti fra loro nel tentativo di fornire una visione il più possibile completa e obbiettiva della situazione attuale della critica europea e americana.

Ann Jefferson e David Robey, al contrario, tengono a chiarire nell'introduzione a *Modern Literary Theory: a Comparative Introduction* che la loro è una posizione 'relativista' ma non pluralista, « that is, we are not suggesting that the various theories we have dealt with are all compatible with one another; ... the reader is faced with a choice between conflicting theories » (p. 13). La raccolta comprende sei saggi — due di ciascuno dei curatori, più i contributi di Elizabeth Wright e di David Forgacs (tutti docenti di letterature straniere ad Oxford) — dedicati alle varie scuole, dal Formalismo russo al New Criticism, dallo strutturalismo al poststrutturalismo, che evidenziano i contributi metodologici di altre discipline quali la linguistica e la psicoanalisi e l'apporto ideologico del marxismo.

Un intento meno espositivo e più personale ha il testo di Catherine Belsey che non si presenta soltanto come una

accurata ricognizione della situazione della critica letteraria oggi, ma costituisce anche un esempio tutto britannico di divulgazione scientifica ad alto livello, nonché un importante contributo al dibattito in questo campo.

L'illusorietà della « trasparenza della lingua » è, secondo C. Belsey, il punto di partenza da cui ha preso le mosse la teoria post-saussuriana; essa ha messo in crisi i principi su cui si basava il cosidetto « common sense criticism », primo fra tutti la sua pretesa neutralità ed innocenza ideologica, nonché altri assunti che riguardano la pratica della lettura dei testi, quali il concetto di realismo, la 'autorità' autoriale, la soggettività. La « morte dell'autore » è la 'rivoluzione copernicana' avvenuta in letteratura in questi ultimi decenni, e a decretarla sono stati critici come Althusser e Lacan, Barthes e Derrida, che hanno assegnato alla ideologia un posto centrale. Parallelamente si è affermata la posizione del lettore in rapporto al testo letterario — si pensi alla « reception theory » di Stanley Fish, Wolfgang Iser e Robert Jauss — ed è stato assegnato al critico un nuovo ruolo: da consumatore a produttore del testo.

C. Belsey offre un preciso quadro del panorama critico contemporaneo evitando la consueta suddivisione in scuole e tendenze, ma articolando il suo discorso in sezioni che individuano i nodi cruciali del dibattito (« Criticism and meaning », « Addressing the subject », « The interrogative text », « Deconstructing the text » e « Towards a productive critical practice »). Inoltre, la Belsey illustra questi aspetti mostrando la critica post-saussuriana in azione, cioè applicata a testi specifici. Così, alcuni racconti di Conan Doyle e « The Scholar-Gipsy » di M. Arnold forniscono i campioni su cui essa mostra il funzionamento della « deconstruction theory », che ha messo in crisi la pratica della critica anglosassone sempre alla ricerca di coerenza ed unità nel testo:

> Having created a canon of acceptable texts, criticism then provides them with acceptable interpretations, thus effectively censoring any elements in them which come into collision with the dominant ideology. To deconstruct the text, on the other hand, is to open it, to release the possible positions of its intelligibility,

including those which reveal the partiality (in both senses) of the ideology inscribed in the text (p. 109).

Gli interrogativi finali che si pone C. Belsey — « is literature most usefully seen as a means of access to history (Macherey), or as a way of grasping the present (Lacan and Barthes)? » — lasciano aperti problemi di interpretazione, ma sollecitano anche una pratica critica che cerchi punti di contatto fra le diverse metodologie piuttosto che vederle in alternativa, pur riconoscendone le differenze.

Il problema più di fondo cui l'autrice accenna soltanto — se si possa, cioè, ancora continuare a parlare di *letteratura* — costituisce l'oggetto di *Re-Reading English* (che esce nella stessa collana del saggio di C. Belsey, New Accents). Come viene affermato nella introduzione del curatore, P. Widdowson, questo testo intende essenzialmente rimetter in discussione lo statuto stesso degli « English Studies » in Inghilterra, analizzarne i motivi di crisi, e ipotizzarne una possibile rifondazione. A questo scopo il volume affronta nei quindici saggi che lo costituiscono vari aspetti che illustrano la situazione attuale: la storia e la nascita dell'inglese come disciplina accademica, l'insegnamento letterario 'convenzionale' e le teorie critiche 'radicali' che ne contestano la posizione egemonica, le nuove istituzioni come la Open University, il Council for National Academic Awards e il Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies di Birmingham, che si oppongono al 'vecchio' modo di insegnare letteratura al livello universitario e promuovono la sperimentazione di modelli didattici e di ricerca basati sulla intedisciplinarietà e sul coraggioso rinnovamento degli studi umanistici e delle scienze sociali. Questo volume si propone, inoltre, di mostrare, attraverso una serie di « case studies », l'applicazione di lavoro critico alternativo, che non intende, però — afferma polemicamente Widdowson — sostituire nuovi approcci a quelli tradizionali, o scegliere certi testi piuttosto che altri, bensì tentare una pratica critica diversa: « in the process, the canonic texts are placed in different sets of relations to those of the literary

tradition, ceasing to be 'Literature' in becoming literary texts in history » (p. 11).

La seconda parte del volume comprende alcuni contributi particolarmente polemici nei confronti dell'insegnamento letterario 'tradizionale'. Il saggio di Carole Snee, ad es., propone di combattere l'elitismo degli esistenti approcci critici attraverso un rinnovato « Period Study » della letteratura, che non solo abolisca le divisioni fra testi letterari e testi non-letterari (ma è poi così necessario?) nell'affrontare il tema prescelto (la famiglia, l'oppressione della donna, il tempo libero, ecc.), ma spieghi i modi in cui i significati si producono e si consumano: « *All* texts are concerned with significations of reality, the ordering and representation of aspects of experience, and a proper Period Study would allow us to identify the myriad discourses which constitute our 'world-view', their autonomy and interconnections » (p. 167). Un'affermazione, questa, che non colpisce particolarmente per la sua originalità, e che forse qualunque critico accorto, e di qualunque scuola (vecchia o nuova), sarebbe pronto a sottoscrivere. Un'altra preoccupazione di Carole Snee sono le specializzazioni e le competenze di campo; una insofferenza, questa, che ricorda a chi scrive l'impazienza studentesca del '68 nei confronti degli 'esperti' e degli accademici, delle distinzioni di ruolo fra docente e discente, della posizione di 'autorità' dell'intellettuale di professione o degli autori canonici consacrati dalla tradizione letteraria. L'impressione che si coglie da questo saggio è che il vero cambiamento proposto consista nel detronizzare il testo letterario per far posto ad altri testi, dal momento che gli approcci adottati altro non sono che quello sociologico e quello storicistico. D'altro canto, non si può non condividere l'esigenza espressa da Wendy Mulford d'indirizzare la ricerca su autori e autrici solitamente trascurati/e, che si rivelano interessanti dal punto di vista ideologico:

We should be looking more fully and systematically than our present contextual and period studies allow us at the positioning of writers amongst the forces for change at any given time, and

we should be making it our clear choice to study those periods, organisations and writers whose work is exemplary for us in terms of our social and political struggles today (pp. 188-189).

Re-Reading English è certamente un testo che obbliga a prender posizione, come ha dimostrato l'accoglienza polemica che ha ricevuto in Inghilterra. Da un lato, si è tentati di condividere le riserve espresse da un recensore di parte non sospetta (la rivista *Literature and History* che include P. Widdowson nel comitato di redazione), il quale scrive che « lacking this sense of literature (however perpetually re-read and reconstituted) as part of the education of desire, they too often seem to offer nothing beyond the task of deconstructing conventional critical ideologies and practices, sometimes almost making this an end in itself, which it certainly is not »; dall'altro, va riconosciuto al dibattito che si svolge su questo volume il merito di sollecitare un processo di svecchiamento degli « English Studies », indubbiamente stimolante, e di prendere coraggiosa posizione nei confronti dell'*establishment* accademico, continuando la strada aperta da Raymond Williams con *Culture and Society* e con *The Long Revolution* e dai primi direttori del Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies di Birmingham, Richard Hoggart e Stuart Hall. Che l'ottica dei « cultural studies » sia fondamentalmente politica ed orientata in senso progressista e radicale non emerge soltanto da *Re-Reading English*, ma dal più recente saggio di T. Eagleton, *Literary Theory: an Introduction*. Anche Eagleton s'interroga sul significato che hanno oggi gli studi letterari e provocatoriamente conclude che, essendo la letteratura un'illusione, e dunque anche la teoria letteraria, il suo libro è « less an introduction than an obituary, and we have ended by burying the object we sought to unearth » (p. 204). Ma decretare la morte della letteratura non impedisce ad Eagleton di discutere per duecentoquarantaquattro pagine la tesi principale di questo libro: la teoria letteraria è sempre politica, anche (anzi, specialmente) quando afferma di non esserlo. Su questo punto l'autore torna più volte, con affermazioni in certi casi piuttosto scontate, conoscendo

già i suoi importanti contributi in ambito di critica marxista (« Literature, in the meaning of the word we have inherited, *is* an ideology. It has the most intimate relations to questions of social power », p. 22; o ancora, « The history of modern literary theory is part of the political and ideological history of our epoch », p. 194). In altri casi le dichiarazioni sono più problematiche, come questa che rimanda, inopinatamente, al T. S. Eliot di *Tradition and the Individual Talent*:

> All literary works ... are 'rewritten', if only unconsciously, by the societies which read them ... No work, and no current evaluation of it, can simply be extended to new groups of people without being changed, perhaps almost unrecognizably, in the process (p. 12).

Eagleton individua nelle varie scuole critiche — dalla fenomenologica alla strutturalista alla semiologica — un filo conduttore: il disinteresse per il testo come prodotto storicamente determinato. Il rischio di astoricità e di arbitrarietà è in definitiva l'accusa che egli muove in misura diversa a tutti questi approcci; l'illusione di neutralità e scientificità è la debolezza che vi rileva. Ma la polemica non è condotta in modo né liquidatorio né dogmatico; anzi, per timore di apparire troppo partigiano, l'autore cerca di rimanere fuori dalla mischia in modo forse fin troppo impersonale. A tutti i metodi critici egli riconosce elementi di novità e di originalità che hanno contribuito allo sviluppo di una teoria della letteratura in questi ultimi sessant'anni; è quando si riferisce allo stato attuale degli « English Studies » che Eagleton si fa polemico. Egli non nasconde sfiducia e sospetto per i dipartimenti di letteratura delle università europee ed americane, non soltanto per la loro funzione ideologica, ma anche per la posizione contraddittoria sul piano scientifico che essi assumono:

> Literary theorists, critics and teachers, then, are not so much purveyors of doctrine as custodians of a discourse ... The discourse itself has no definite signified, which is not to say that it embodies no assumptions: it is rather a network of signifiers able to develop a whole field of meanings, objects and practices. Certain pieces of

writing are selected as being more amenable to this discourse than others, and these are what is know as litterature or the 'literary canon' (p. 201).

Eagleton giustamente sottolinea come sia arbitrario far coincidere il discorso critico con la sola letteratura, quando invece, essendo esso per definizione una « rete di significanti », può estendersi a qualunque testo, letterario e non. Esistono infatti inequivocabili relazioni di potere fra coloro che definiscono e tramandano il discorso critico e coloro che sono ammessi a farne parte; potere che si esercita a vari livelli, e non soltanto nelle istituzioni accademiche e nei rapporti fra queste e la società esterna, ma anche all'interno del discorso critico stesso, nel determinare ciò che è accettabile: « the power of 'policing' the language ... the power of policing writing itself, classifying it into the 'literary' and 'non-literary', the enduringly great and the ephemerally popular » (p. 203).

A questo punto Eagleton invoca una reinvenzione della retorica — la più antica forma di critica letteraria — che permetta di affrontare lo studio non soltanto della letteratura ma di tutte quelle « discursive practices » di cui essa fa parte. La nuova retorica, o « teoria del discorso » o « studi culturali » (questi ultimi un po' sbrigativamente inclusi, si direbbe, quale atto di doveroso riconoscimento al suo fondatore, Raymond Williams, al quale è anche dedicato questo libro) avrebbe il compito non indifferente di contribuire a « renderci migliori » (p. 210) — un'espressione piena di speranza ma che suona forse un po' enfatica nel panorama di generale scetticismo in cui si muovono le scienze umane! Eagleton rivendica al critico 'radicale' il diritto e il merito di essere pluralista nelle sue scelte di campo e di metodo, purché queste permettano una trasformazione socialista della società. Va osservato che, nell'attribuire ai « radical critics » una visione insieme liberale e politicamente 'corretta', Eagleton pecca, a mio avviso, di ideologismo; come quando, a conclusione di una sua dichiarazione di sostegno nei confronti delle uniche due forze intellettuali in cui abbia speranza — la critica

femminista e l'emergente movimento di scrittura proletaria —, ricorre a questa allegoria che lascia, a dir poco, imbarazzati:

> *We* know that the lion is stronger than the lion-tamer, and so does the lion-tamer. The problem is that the lion does not know it. It is not out of the question that the death of literature may help the lion to awaken (p. 217).

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CONFLICTING THEORIES IN MEDIA STUDIES

by
Ian Connell

At first sight there seems to be a widespread acknowledgement that fundamental conceptual issues have been satisfactorily resolved. Of course, it is said from time to time that 'more work still has to be done ...'. But this is suggested merely as necessary maintenance and, until quite recently, rarely as an innovatory response to the perception of considerable problems with what has been accomplished. And then there is the steady and increasing flow of publications. Several of these find their way quickly onto the curricula of a growing number of media or communication studies courses, both in higher education and in schools. On this front there is an aura of earnest busyness as yet another book or course is prepared, to deal with yet one more aspect of the media in much the same way that the already featured aspects have been. There is little doubt on the part of initiates that media studies has not only arrived, but also has become a well-established, thriving and productive discipline. But ...

A look that lasts a little longer, or even one that glances at something other than the curricula and publications lists, might just cause a doubt or two. In a period of generally high unemployment and of rising graduate unemployment, media studies looks far from healthy. The National Advisory Board for Local Authority Education (NAB) has used 'graduate employment' as one of the criteria to assess the performance of courses in the further and higher education sectors (i.e colleges of further education

and polytechnics). In November, 1983, it recommended to Sir Keith Joseph, the Education Secretary, the closure of at least two colleges and also of a number of courses including some in humanities, visual and communication studies. Though other factors will have contributed to making these recommendations, the fact that graduate employment from media and communication studies has been low will not have helped. The problem is not just that few are employed in the major media industries, but also that in these industries there is considerable resistance to take on such graduates.

Until NAB began to look tough, this was not really taken too seriously among media studies practitioners, but recently there has been some shifting of attitudes. Some, indeed more than might be imagined, have remained rock-solid behind the critical courses that they run. They do not perceive it as a problem at all, and in a perverse sort of way are quite proud of the fact that 'their' graduates cannot find jobs in « ideological apparatuses » like broadcasting or advertising. To some extent their continued resistance to take some kind of account of antagonistic opinion was made possible by the introduction of Channel Four which seemed to promise the possibility of change within the industry. After all even the Conservative government accepted that it ought to do things (just a little) differently. At last, it seemed, the ideologically pure of heart would find a somewhat more central space in which to operate, experiment and innovate than the rather ramshackle community film/video ones they had been confined to. But the optimism has been short lived. Several of the attempts to produce really alternative programmes — *The Friday Alternative* for example — will be dropped from the Channel, and no doubt there have been many more proposed which will now not see the light of transmission [1].

[1] There are two recently published books that deal with Channel Four. The first, *What's this Channel Four?* edited by Simon Blanchard and David Morley (1982) presents itself as « an alternative report ». It is in fact little more than an expression of minority aspirations for the new channel. Stephen Lambert's *Channel Four, Television with a Difference*, London, BFI, 1982 is altogether more interesting and useful in that it examines the full range of cases that were made for a new channel and attempts to explain why it emerged in the form that it did.

At the same time there have been others, apparently less earnest and committed, who have been trying to pass themselves off as « information technologists » and/or attempting to encourage the development of courses useful to Independent Television industries. Quite what an 'information technologist' does remains for the moment a matter for considerable speculation. The crucial point seems to be that the present government and Mrs Thatcher in particular, are keen to produce some kind of industrial success story and see 'new technology' as the most likely candidate. They are known to be particularly keen to develop direct broadcasting by satellite (DBS), cable television ('narrowcasting'), as well as the range of uses for computers. Usually inquiries about proposed information technology courses are met with a response that includes some reference to this type of hardware, but as yet, these are vague and sometimes accompanied by a degree of recidivism in the use of phrases such as « a critical look at ... » or « the social consequences of new technologies ... »

But despite the warning signs there remains a considerable degree of confidence in media and communication studies as it now is. Is that confidence justified? Without wanting to recommend that it become merely a training ground for the various industries, what, if anything, can it do to prepare students to be 'gainfully' employed there? Does it equip us with the means by which to produce alternative programmes that stand some chance of being transmitted? The answer would seem to be no, given the demise of programmes for Channel Four which drew upon media studies, and in some cases directly involved those who had written critically and/or had been previously involved in empirical research on the mainstream or dominant practices. In short, is media studies at all informative or helpful? Or, is it, as some have been suggesting,

utterly predictable, uninteresting, and worst of all, so conceptually flawed that it is now incapable of producing *constructive* understanding and criticism? To find answers to these questions we must now return to the curricula and the publications.

Given the nature of some of the more recent publications it can be suggested that the conceptual organisation of media studies is indeed quite seriously flawed and thus requires something more than routine maintenance or an overhaul. In a number of ways the proposition that the media operate to sustain the dominant ideology, or just ideology, or the capitalist hegemony is being questioned and found wanting a satisfactory justification. The aims and methods of textual analysis, indeed the very point of textual analysis has also been questioned, so too has been the compartmentalisation of the field: production studies, textual analysis, and various ways of studying consumption have each been constituted as quite discrete areas of work and attempts at a more integrated approach have been few and far between. It has been questioned because it has already led to analytic distinctions being treated as substantive descriptions. In the context of critical media studies there has been remarkably little attention to the ways in which media products circulate and are consumed. David Morley's work *The Nationwide Audience* (1980) which is based upon Hall's 'encoding and decoding' model remains as the only instance. Yet despite this, the field abounds with, sometimes quite outrageous, assumptions about viewing and reading practices. At last, there are signs that a halt to this is being called, but one which involves questioning the adequacy of the 'encoding-decoding' model.

In *Language, Media, Image* (1983) the editors Howard Davis and Paul Walton (both of whom have contributed to the books published on the work of the Glasgow University Media Group) state that there are two clusters of problems confronting students of the media. There are, first, « problems of ideology, distorted communication and cultural hegemony ... », and second, « problems of message encoding and analysis which have led to a search for models

of performance that include social assumptions and conventions and codes which govern the production and reception of messages » (p. 3). (Notice here the implicit assumption that the *same* codes and conventions 'govern' production *and* consumption. Others are less sure that they do than these authors appear to be). To introduce their own essay, 'Death of a premier: consensus and closure in international news', they claim that « one of the publicly and politically important objectives of research into the 'language' of the contemporary broadcast media has been to document bias or systematic distortion in news reporting » (p. 8).

Davis and Walton are right. These have been, and indeed remain the principal problems and objectives of critical media studies. On the various courses, students spend a considerable amount of their time doing little else but learning how to « document » systematic distortion and the techniques which have been devised to spot bias. Unfortunately, much less time is spent elucidating what it can mean to categorise the media as such or the adequacy of the evidence advanced to support some such categorisation. That more time should be, arises from the objections that are now been raised concerning this analytic orientation.

It has been suggested that as it appeared in *Bad News* (1977) for example the allegation of systematic distortion was not so much a conclusion as « opinion formed and held prior to the research which would be insisted upon in any case » (Anderson & Sharrock, 1979, p. 383), and that the research selected only that 'evidence' which appeared to confirm these already held opinions. The main research strategy of such work seems to be to demonstrate that news stories construct a particular account and that there are other, equally plausible if not more adequate accounts. (A surprising feature of the Glasgow University Media Group's research has been their use of newspaper stories to establish the existence of these other accounts and the bias of TV news. *Management Today* and *The Financial Times*, for example, were taken to report ob-

jectively what TV news was taken to have distorted!). But, merely to demonstrate alternatives, to argue that other constructions could have been made is, as Anderson and Sharrock have pointed out, a long way from showing the inadequacies of, say, the account given by TV news. Moreover, such research avoids the question of whether these alternatives are anything more than analytic fictions, that is, devices for stressing the particularity of the account under scrutiny. They most certainly do not demonstrate that the *analytic* reading of materials is that made by the consumers.

By asserting systematic distortion, or bias, it is now usually meant that TV programmes misrepresent social reality because of either (a) the operation of news values, or (b) of dominant ideology; or (c) of dominant ideology by way of a professional code[2]. The first of these has been one of the subjects of the various, major production studies that now exist (which now includes, Elliott, 1972; Schlesinger, 1978; Tracey, 1978; and Alvarado and Buscombe, 1978) where they are written about as that almost intuitive sense of what will make a good story. Such research has presumed that these intervening values are exclusively professional and that they can be taken as one of the indicators of having attained professionalism. It can be argued, however, that such values must be more widely dispersed, otherwise, news stories would be quite unintelligible. (Whether they are regarded as 'biased' or not, is quite another matter, for it is a judgement which is dependent upon first finding stories intelligible). It sometimes seems as if analysts are so locked into their disciplinary values that they find at least certain aspects — the « attention grabbing, eyebrow raising, indignation arousing, titillating, tension generating, interest holding, and amusing characteristics » indicated by Anderson and Sharrock for example — really quite bemusing, suggesting that they

[2] Option (c) does not really have to be discussed on its own as it draws heavily on the ideas proposed by the other two. This option was proposed mainly in the work of Stuart Hall.

do not (wholly) share these values, but given that other people continue to watch TV news and are not always critical of it we can take it that these values are indeed more widely dispersed. These studies of production have limited their observations to the immediate context of production (the newsroom, for example), and have not really considered consumption, and the possible ways in which it contributes to the production of subsequent stories. Because they have not enlarged the horizon, they have not really contributed much to the social specification of the structures they have observed. Indeed they have obfuscated this task of specification by not putting to the test the presumption that they have been dealing with a 'world view' that is professional and only so.

A sub-genre of production studies has been particularly concerned with the economic affairs of the media. 'For a Political Economy of Mass Communications' (1974) and 'Capitalism, Communication and Class Relations' (1977) by Graham Murdock and Peter Golding, and 'Contribution to a Political Economy of Mass Communication' (1979) and 'Public Service versus the Market' (1983) by Nicholas Garnham are perhaps its main examples. This work has advocated the second option, namely that the media are systematically distorted because they express the dominant ideology. According to Nicholas Garnham this simply means that the commercial broadcasting companies express « the preferences of the members of the board of American Telephone and Telegraph and IBM and their corporate clients » (1983, p. 15). According to Murdock and Golding, the pressure to maximise audiences and revenues means that the media draw on « the values and assumptions which are most familiar and most widely legitimated, which almost inevitably means those which flow authoritatively downward through social structure » (1977, p. 38). If we accept such a view and the notion that the « prevailing frameworks of imagery and expression » are « diffused throughout the social structure » before they flow « authoritatively downwards » via the media, we would have to abandon any hope of ever discovering the means by

which all this had been accomplished. The values and assumptions appear to be always already authoritative and prevailing. But, where and by what means have they had their authority established, because in these formulations it is not the media which establish it? The media, in this work, are seen as merely reproducers of meanings, rather than producers of them.

Moreover, contrary to what political economy asserts, it is far from clear that commercialism drives the media to draw upon values from 'somewhere up there'. As I have suggested elsewhere [3], precisely because the media are commercial operations and must pursue profits they have to be sensitive to the market, to patterns of consumption and demand. Such sensitivity has been the stimulus for the development of popular modes of address, for the inclusion in the media's repertoire of *popular* rites and rituals, *popular* structures of thought and feeling which may be said to come from 'down here'. Terry Lovell, in a number of places, has argued convincingly that the media's output must be regarded as considerably more ambiguous than is usual because the constraints which operate upon producers to come up with the use-values associated with entertainment can, she suggests, limit their ability « to produce at the same time a commodity which meets the ideological requirements of capitalism » (whatever they might be!). « It would be foolish », she continues, « to find too much encouragement for revolutionary optimism in these ambivalent elements within popular entertainment. But it would be equally foolish to regard these too pessimistically, in isolation from other contexts » (1981, p. 47 & p. 48). In short, while the 'culture industries' are indeed capitalist organisations it does *not* necessarily follow from this that they put into circulation, and,

[3] The most recent attempt to serve notice to this perspective will be published in *Screen*, 24, 4, 1983. This, in brief, critically examines how political economy has presented the introduction of new technologies and presents a more adequate alternative to its ill-fouded pessimism.

possibly, render hegemonic, only that world view which might be said to belong to those who are rather well off and in so doing distort what seems to be an independent reality.

But there are yet one or two more points to make. We might well want to question Terry Lovell's assessment of the 'revolutionary' possibilities of popular entertainment. We could, not unrealistically, propose that popular entertainment has of late done more to keep alive the possibility and the hope of change in a number of respects — at least — than all those discourses that are usually associated with being the advocates if not the bearers of change and alternatives. As Paul Hirst observed, some years ago, « marxism in western Europe, despite its immense intellectual popularity, has reduced itself as political theory to virtual political irrelevance. The political irrelevance of an orthodoxy waiting for its postulated future » (1979, p. 8). To establish the truth of this proposition, however, we would not only have to demonstrate the political irrelevance of that kind of marxist theory (not a difficult task) which has been reduced to little more than a set of scientistic pretensions, but also the relevance and, of course, the oppositional effect of popular entertainment. As currently practiced, media studies is really not up to this, as it has been too concerned with advancing arguments against popular entertainment because of its supposed conservatism.

We have noted that there is considerable and vigorous attention to demonstrating that the media's output is 'ideological', and sometimes it would seem to this and little else. The use of terms like 'ideology', 'dominant ideology', 'world-view' 'false consciousness', 'hegemony', 'the unconscious' and 'common sense' is prolific and frequently confusing when little care is taken to indicate just how a given term is being used. At times, it can seem as if the main purpose of using them at all is still to perform that kind of cultural policework, which seeks to separate the acceptable from the unacceptable, the dangerous from the relatively harmless (or the 'serious' from the 'frivolous').

In one way or another, explicitly or implicitly, such work suggests that the 'knowledge' constructed in media exchanges is both inadequate and also effective. It is this presumed, though rarely defined or demonstrated, effectivity which is taken to necessitate the critic's concern and attention [4]. Sometimes, it is far from clear by what means this judgement of adequacy is made. That the knowledge in question is different from the critic's, that it may not be liked by, or even, understood by, the critic may be obvious, but such differences do not really furnish the grounds for dismissing the knowledge circulated by the media, as inadequate, as ideological. Then again there are times when it is quite clear that the judgement is based upon the assumption that there can be a clear-cut, unambiguous distinction between on the one hand 'scientific' knowledge and on the other 'ideology', and the further assumption that there are established and satisfactory procedures for spotting this distinction. Recent discussions by Larrain (1981, 1983) and by Lovell (1980) have been productively critical of at least some of the work where such assumptions are made, and have, at the same time, attempted to avoid the solution to the problems which arise from them proposed by, for instance, Paul Hirst, namely to dissolve distinctions between knowledge and being and in so doing the epistemological distinction between ideology and science.

Crucial to this critical discussion is the notion, often implicit, that there can be an abstract master knowledge produced by a practice (Althusser's 'theoretical practice', for instance) which is granted a decisive autonomy from the goings-on of the social formation. Part of Lovell's

[4] This has been taken for granted by so many studies. If the media are as seductive as they have assumed, by what miracle have these concerned critics obtained their apparent immunity? One can only suppose by never allowing themselves to come in contact with anything but the most recent, the most rigorously pure of theoretical texts (discourses).

argument, for instance, is that none of the criteria proposed by Althusser « separately or together, is adequate to the task of demarcation, and that formal criteria alone (are) unlikely to prove sufficient » (1980, p. 52). We are encouraged by her not to attempt any hard-and-fast, absolute distinctions and when we make them to do so with reference to the « mobilisation effect » of the ideas being considered. Both she and Larrain accept that theory or science cannot to treated as if independent, above history as it were, nor as if it were simply a reflection upon or representation of those situations in which it is conducted. Instead it is seen as part of history, as set in a series of relations with all the other dimensions of living.

Their alternatives still leave problems. Interest in the mobilising potential of given discourses on television has to some degree displaced the attempts to castigate them for being ideological, and with this interest has come the suggestion that some discourses can now be viewed as 'progressive' that might otherwise have been dismissed out of hand. This has been the case with two recent BFI publications, or at least with some of the essays contained in *Coronation Street*, published in the TV Monograph series, and *Television Sitcom* published as a BFI Dossier. But how is the progressiveness of a text to be decided? Do we mean that it has the capacity to mobilise people to want to establish some anticipated future state? Or, is it just another way of saying that we/I like or prefer this kind of television? Terry Lovell insists that « it is always necessary *first* to apply epistemological criteria to evaluate the work. Only when the ideas in question have had their inadequacy to their object amply demonstrated, and when the respects in which they are inadequate are also shown to touch upon class interest in a systematic way, is the critique of ideology completed » (p. 53). This can be taken to mean that whatever the nature of the evaluative categories, the work of evaluation must come first, but must be explicit, must clarify just what are the criteria by which evaluations are to be made.

Perhaps Terry Lovell underestimates and misrepresents

the evaluative work to be done. It sometimes seems as if a simple 'truth-error' dichotomy underpins her discussion, with the implication that 'the truth' is relatively easily spotted. In fact the situation is never as simple as this model suggests. It always involves different degrees, not to mention different perceptions of, truth and of error. And, 'adequacy' (as in the phrase « adequate to the real ... ») surely involves something more than mere truthfulness however defined; a proposition may be true by any definition but remain singularly useless. One thing is certain and that is that the choice of criteria for defining adequacy must refer to structures of feeling and thought beyond those which have been traditionally thought of as pertinent to epistemology. In this respect we must finally break from the view that discimination is something to be brought *to* the mass of people in order that they may view or read in a more wholesome way. What this enlightening mission overlooks is that *there are already* developed schemes of evaluation and assessment by which, among other things, adequacy is judged. Instead of riding roughshod over them or dismissing them as (limited) common sense, we might begin to work with them to find ways of incorporating them with the best of the work of professional epistemologists.

Such a project is complex, complex enough at any rate to make understandable the wish to abandon any such evaluation and concentrate instead upon « the conditions and limits of forms of political calculation » (Hirst, 1979, p. 11).

But, we must be fully aware what this would lead to. As Terry Lovell has observed « this position cannot logically generate any politics, only a political discourse, whose effects cannot be gauged. It can only show the irrationality of all political activity, which can never be anything more than whistling in the dark. Paradoxically the only politics which is possible from within this position is a complete voluntarism, in which the political act is a pure act of will which owes nothing to reason, or on the other hand a fatalistic determinism » (1980, p. 38). By all means let

us break with the assumption that there is an uncontaminated master knowledge capable of giving guidance to the practice of politics or of making tv programmes, but let us be aware that this incapacitating option is not the only alternative.

According to Lovell and others judging and evaluating remain, inescapably, a part of media studies (indeed, part of the day-to-day use of the media by *all* who do) and that this can proceed in such a way as to avoid constituting an absolute critical knowledge, as 'the truth'. What is less clear in their position, is just *how* this can be done. In my view it is dependent upon the *socialisation* of media studies. This involves several things but not least it involves equipping media studies to identify what schemes of evaluation there are, what criteria of adequacy are employed by those who may well apply different criteria from those championed by professional students of the media. To do this requires an emphatic shift away from the over-resourced analyses of texts-in-isolation, to that which has usually been designated 'audience analysis', though I also want to suggest moving away from the compartmentalisation that such designations erect.

The track-record of critical media studies in these matters really is abysmally bad. When it is suggested that the media can be regarded as primarily responsible for behaviour that the guardians of the 'public good' find distasteful or destructive, it has been argued, particularly by the more sociologically oriented of media students, that viewing and reading communities are more active than this assertion allows. It is sometime now since James Halloran was arguing that instead of picturing audiences as the direct effects of the media, « we think more in terms of interaction or exchange between medium and audience, and it is recognised that the viewer approaches every viewing situation with a complicated piece of filtering equipment » (1970, p. 19), the nature of which was to become, he recommended, one of the principal objects of research. This 'piece of filtering equipment' has since then been variously named; most recently it has been written

of again, this time as a cluster of competences (cf. Culler, 1975; Brunsdon, 1981; Morley, 1981). But, however it has been named it remains one of the great unknowns.

This is one of the main effects of that « tradition of concerned worry, stretching from Leavis through the Frankfurt School to Colin McCabe », which according to Jim Cook, has it that « popular and/or realist forms don't give people a chance — they are rendered passive by the form and exposed to the 'dominant ideology' it neutrally conveys » (1982, p. 17).Addressing the more sociological parts of this tradition, Anderson and Sharrock have noted that « the reader does not make many appearances in the media literature as anything other than a passive dope » (1979, p. 374). Not infrequently those same sociological writers who have wanted to stress the relative independence of viewers based upon a postulated access to a range of discourses, have also argued something like 'direct effect' when it seems that viewers and readers have adopted courses of action or have produced significances that run contrary to those preferred by their erstwhile defenders.

To Wren-Lewis it seems that something of this happens in the work of David Morley. Writing of Morley's attempts to distinguish *textual subjects* and so-called 'real readers' or historical subjects, Wren-Lewis says that « simply to point a distinction ... is not to deny the a priori existence of an inscribed positionality, merely to question its effectivity. This is to posit an essential preferred reading and a range of (dominant, negotiated, oppositional) responses in relation to it. This is effectively to reproduce the *Screen* position and, by implication, the functioning of the subject in constituting signification is *denied* » (1983, p. 184). Of Morley's attempts to take note of some of the criticisms made of his work on *Nationwide* and the viewing groups *he* constructed for it Wren-Lewis finds that he is not at all convinced that Morley has succeeded, because he retains the *preferred reading* model instead of abandoning it as Wren-Lewis thinks should be done. Redefining the notion of 'inscribed reader' in relation to genres of text rather than individual texts does not help because it once again

« presupposes the research necessary to establish generic unities between texts, particular categories of readers and the relationship between them. Such an approach would limit the scope of a decoding by predefining both genre and audience without providing the empirical evidence necessary to validate statements about the relationship between them » (p. 185-6). This is always a risk when text and reader are separated, and « just as 'effects' research inscribes the text with a meaning in order to categorise responses to that meaning, so the 'preferred reading' ignores "the level at which decoding operates" in order to measure a response to the 'preferred' meaning » — *that produced in the researcher's transformation of textual signifiers into signs*. What Wren-Lewis's critique of Morley's work amounts to is the suggestion that despite appearances it allows us to see only the extent to which particular people agree or disagree with Morley's viewing, or rather, the extent to which Morley views them as having agreed or disagreed.

Given these critical observations of this study, which for some time has been thought of as one of the more useful, we might find ourselves left with Jim Cook's rather depressing observation that « for all the sophisticated elaboration that is possible on such positions, what they never satisfactorily confront are justifications for their imputed effects (ie they never investigate what understandings particular real audiences gain from narratives) nor the nature of the alternatives proposed to the dominant models they so fear. Consequently the proposal for radical deconstructive forms never really demonstrates the ideological superiority such forms are deemed to enable » (p. 17).

To go beyond this state of affairs requires a number of things. Above all it requires that textual analysis be 'decentred'. In the course of doing this, what has been termed « reader-response criticism » might profitably be considered because, according to Jane P. Tompkins, such criticism destroys the objectivity of texts to yield « not a criticism based on the concept of the reader, but a way of conceiving texts and readers that reorganises the distinctions between them. Reading and writing join hands,

change places, and finally become distinguishable only as two names for the same activity » (1981, p.x). The use of the 'encoding-decoding' model has always carried with it an emphasis upon making each moment sharply distinctive; thus 'encoding' has all too easily come to be associated with and studied as the moment of the production of meaning, while 'decoding' has come to be associated more with their (negotiated) reproduction, whatever the rhetoric about it being seen as 'active'. It has always also presumed that the 'text' is transparently available to the analyst, that s/he can intervene inertly to make us all see that range of meanings which texts 'make available'. It is such compartmentalisations and assumptions about the status of analysis that 'reader-response' criticism questions.

One major consequence of this questioning has been to reconsider what textual analysis can accomplish. Once the notion that meaning is inscribed in texts is replaced by the notion that meanings are produced in the course of viewing or reading, what then is the point of analysing the text as such? For some time the text has been regarded as something which exceeds 'authorial' intent — hence the view, for instance, that this intended (dominant) meaning could be negotiated or refused. The more radical of the reader-response critics would now want to argue that there is *no* pre-existent text to be negotiated or refused. Certainly there is a physical-sensory object, an organisation of signifiers, but this becomes meaningful only in the course of being viewed, read, listened to, when « interpretive conventions » (Fish, 1976) are applied or « literary competence » (Culler, 1975) is exercised. If we accept this emphasis on viewing etc. as signifying activities, as activities which really do transform signifiers to signs, then we cannot ask the meaning of a particular text or texts, because meaning is no longer a property of the text, but a product of what is done to it. Textual analysis, some argue, only becomes useful *once* something of the range of viewings has been established. What kinds of texts do these viewings produce, and what do they produce as data are questions

which should precede those dealing more with the 'raw material'.

Clearly such work can be seen as denying or glossing over the problem of the textual determinations upon the meanings produced, in breaking away from that notion of the text as monolithic monument, available for the definitive scrutiny of the critic. Perhaps here the way forward lies in developing the more dynamic model with which Volosinov appears to have worked. He, recommended a conception of the book as a « verbal performance in print » and suggested that « a verbal performance of this kind also invariably orients itself with respect to previous performances in the same sphere, both those by the same author and those by other authors ... Thus the printed verbal performance engages, as it were, in ideological colloquy of large scale: it responds to something, anticipates possible responses and objections, seeks support and so on » (1973, p. 95). To this dynamic model we must add what we have till now spoken of as decoding, to discover, for example, how anticipated responses and objections are dealt with and their consequences.

To begin this some fairly fundamental research is required. As we noted, Wren-Lewis suggested that Morley *presumed* the research necessary to establish generic unities between texts and particular categories of readers as well as the relationship between them. But more than this is presumed by Morley and others. If we assembled a kind of top ten of media studies publications we might well conclude a survey of them with the view that most people watch news, news magazines and current affairs, documentaries, one-off plays which depict subordinate forms of living as they really were/are, and every now and then Hollywood musicals circa 1940. Is this really what people elect to watch, or not? This is not a question that media studies is really equipped to answer.

On the other hand market research, for all its number-crunching proclivities has been attempting to discover just what people watch, when, and whether they will watch something of the same again. For the last two or three

years market researchers have produced evidence of a fairly substantial decline. In July of this year it was reported in the trade press that « TV audiences are now around ten per cent down on last year — when 20 per cent of the viewers disappeared ». Since at least 1980, the number of programmes attaining audiences of 10 million or more has been falling: in September 1980, there were 142 such programmes, in September 1982, there were 57 and in June 1983, the figure was 31, when all but three of the top twenty programmes for the month were the soap operas *Coronation Street, Crossroads* and *Emmerdale Farm.* Research conducted by a number of the bigger ad agencies now concerned that their clients have *no* big rating shows after 8pm when « the all-important housewives with children watch », suggests that « viewers are getting more discriminating, and more fed-up with what they see as cliche-ridden rubbish on TV ». The weekly ratings service provided by BARB (Broadcasters' Audience Research Board) also indicates that the amount of time people spend watching television is on the decrease. If such research findings prove to be accurate can we, for instance, really go on assuming that television, let alone TV news, renders hegemonic the dominant ideology?

Given the almost complete absence of any references in critical media studies to market research of this sort it seems that researchers have been rather too eager to agree with Ehrenberg that market research has been unable to produce much in the way of a « real understanding of how or why consumers make purchasing decisions, and it is often not even known what sort of decisions they make » (1971, p. 68). Perhaps this avoidance of market reesarch has to do with its intimacy with the 'enemy', its supposed incorporation into the ideological machine of the capitalist state! For whatever reason, the potential of such research, even once we have taken into account all its shortcomings, has not been developed as a consequence. For example, it has considerable worth in terms of establishing an adequate account of tele-genres, because it can move us beyond the limitations of those which concentrate

only upon formal properties. We can construct whatever taxonomies of texts we like, but without references to those actually constructed by viewers and readers we must seriously question whether we are doing anything useful.

Clearly each aspect that has been touched on here needs much more discussion if there is to be a useful and productive future for media studies. One thing is certain that is without some such discussion media studies will have no future. The days of critical indulgence when one abstract, theoretical scheme attempted to outsmart last month's are almost over. We inhabit a world which will no longer tolerate such speculative musings and all our railing against it and its so-called reactionary figure-heads confirm the view that we have nothing to offer, that we are irrelevant, embittered and of no consequence. I do not want to deny that some pretty dreadful things have already happened nor that there are more on the way. But, perhaps there has been something positive in them insofar as the need to connect has been palpably demonstrated. Principled pragmatism is the only way forward.

This does not mean abandoning criticism, but rather, reforming it in the light of changing conditions. Television is now not at all what the application of the classic (out-of-date/redundant) models of ideology would picture it as. There have by now been enough demonstrations, surely, to make it clear that it is not at all biased in the ways assumed. So, why do we perpetuate such erroneous views and still base recommendations for alternative practices on them. Certainly the capacity of media studies to offer suggestions for implementable alternatives must now be the measure of its usefulness. This requires making a series of new beginnings some of which have been outlined here. Above all it requires a systematic effort to refrain from dismissing what is currently popular and, by understanding why it is, begin to devise ways in which its potential can be pleasurably and productively developed.

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GLI STUDI CULTURALI E LA NUOVA STORIOGRAFIA IN INGHILTERRA

di
Marina Vitale

In ogni disciplina lo « stato dell'arte » è in continua tensione tra la tendenza a cristallizzarsi in rigidi protocolli procedurali e la spinta a rinnovarsi costantemente nei metodi e nei principi. Negli Studi Culturali, aperti per loro natura a una pluralità di approcci disciplinari, il rischio della sclerotizzazione è di per sé ridotto dal salutare interscambio teorico tra le varie discipline che concorrono a costituirne l'area epistemologica. Ed è anche naturale che, proprio perché tale zona si pone come luogo di scontro e di confronto tra diverse problematiche e metodologie, da essa provengano segnali e incentivi di rinnovamento che contribuiscono ad approfondire, anche all'interno delle singole discipline che vi confluiscono, processi di autocritica e di ridefinizione che ne pongono in discussione gli obbiettivi e gli statuti accademici.

È indubbio, in questo senso, che l'area degli Studi Culturali sta oggi esercitando in Inghilterra un notevole stimolo su un settore particolarmente aperto e radicale degli Studi Storici affinché in tale ambito si operi una revisione di metodi, di finalità e, anzi, in qualche modo, dell'oggetto stesso della ricerca. Ne è testimonianza una gamma ampia e variata di pubblicazioni uscite recentemente sul doppio versante della ricostruzione di specifiche tradizioni storiografiche (spesso sviluppatesi all'interno dell'alveo comune e indifferenziato della « Storia ») rivi-

sitate alla luce delle nuove preoccupazioni teoretiche e su quello della pratica sperimentazione di metodologie innovative su oggetti e campi di analisi che comportano una sostanziale ridefinizione dell'area disciplinare degli « Studi Storici ».

La complementarietà di questo duplice orientamento è esemplificata dalla struttura composita di *Making Histories. Studies in history-writing and politics* [1], un volume collettivo sulla problematica della « costruzione della Storia », anzi delle 'storie', che costituisce il primo risultato di ampio respiro del lavoro di un gruppo di studiosi del Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies dell'Università di Birmingham e che, proprio per il suo carattere di epitome e di contributo insieme, ben si presta per tentare di fare il punto sull'attuale fase del dibattito.

Il gruppo è impegnato da alcuni anni nell'analisi di un'area delicata e vitale degli Studi Culturali costituita dall'intersezione tra coscienza storica e vissuto culturale e sociale, tra ricostruzione memoriale e sedimentazione del comune buon senso. L'interesse storiografico del gruppo si concentra infatti non sul passato ma sulla relazione tra presente e passato e sul ruolo del senso della storia nella dinamica politica e culturale contemporanea e più precisamente sulla funzione di concetti eminentemente 'storici' come la « tradizione » e l'« identità nazionale » nella formazione delle ideologie e nella prassi della lotta politica.

È una preoccupazione, questa, che (soprattutto se tradotta in una pratica politico-professionale militante in cui sfera del politico e sfera dello scientifico si compenetrino) appare tutt'altro che scontata nell'esercizio storiografico. Non è certo un caso che *The History Men*, una storia della storiografia britannica recentissimamente pubblicata da J. Kenyon [2], pur implicitamente dimostrando la natura ideo-

[1] A cura di R. Johnson, G. McLennan, B. Schwartz e D. Sutton, Londra, Hutchinson e CCCS, 1982.

[2] Londra, Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1983. La chiusura del libro alle problematiche e ai dilemmi dell'oggi è drammaticamente sottolineata dalla scelta del titolo che esclude l'intero filone della

logica della pratica storica attraverso l'esposizione della trasformazione dei suoi criteri informatori attraverso i secoli, non spinga la sua trattazione oltre i primi decenni del nostro secolo, lasciando indiscussi i dilemmi attuali della disciplina e le sue connessioni con le problematiche politiche e ideologiche dell'oggi. D'altronde che le discipline storiche, in quanto area accademica, stentino a sottrarsi alla tradizionale identificazione con lo studio del passato è confermato dal fatto che persino uno studioso ben noto per il suo coinvolgimento nelle questioni politiche attuali come E. Hobsbawn, e pur nel clima di rinnovata tensione civile che la campagna antinucleare ha creato in Inghilterra, ha ritenuto di dover giustificare con un'elaborata apologia [3] la responsabilità dello storico di intervenire, *in quanto storico*, sui problemi del presente. Tale bisogno di giustificazione appare tanto più rivelatore in quanto viene da uno storico immediatamente riconducibile ad una corrente storiografica tra le più chiaramente connotate in senso ideologico quale è quella che si esprime sulle pagine di *Past and Present*, la prestigiosa rivista giunta quest'anno al suo centesimo numero e di cui Le Goffe accuratamente riassume come segue il carattere distintivo:

> Riflettere sul senso del passato significa anche interrogarsi sulla funzione psicologica degli atteggiamenti collettivi verso il passato. Il che implica anche una chiarificazione del rapporto tra storia e sociologia che è stata una delle preoccupazioni principali della rivista fin dalla sua fondazione [4].

Ciò che il gruppo di Birmingham propugna è una concezione della storia che non si limiti a registrare la componente ideologico-politica della materia studiata, ma che tenga conto delle implicazioni politiche, per il presente,

storiografia femminista, oggi in rapida espansione e cancella persino la presenza delle numerosissime studiose che esercitano la professione storica.

[3] « Looking forward: History and the Future », *New Left Review*, 125, gen-feb 1981, pp. 3-19.

[4] J. Le Goffe, « *Past and Present*: Later History », *Past and Present*, 100, ag 1983, pp. 3-7.

della produzione dello stesso sapere storico. Come sostiene B. Schwartz a conclusione del suo contributo al volume, la pratica storica non è una 'tecnica' ermeneutica, protetta contro ogni imparzialità ideologica dal rigore della serietà professionale, ma è invece una pratica intellettuale eminentemente politica:

> L'approccio alla storia *in quanto* politica individua la 'costruzione delle storie' e la produzione delle 'memorie' come momento costitutivo delle lotte che hanno luogo nell'ambito delle ideologie e della cultura. È vitale pertanto guardare alla costruzione *attiva* delle concezioni del passato come a un momento di continua ridefinizione di una prassi politica che faccia i conti con le 'memorie' e con le storie reazionarie e le decostruisca. La distinzione tra questo e altri approcci è talvolta sottilissima ... ma è ugualmente importantissima perché comporta la concezione della stessa cultura popolare come luogo di uno scontro, e quindi come problematica. Mette in luce la necessità di concettualizzare le connessioni e le disgiunzioni tra le storie professionali o accademiche e il complesso amalgama di concezioni del passato che fanno parte del 'buon senso' pubblico e privato. Poiché anche le concezioni della storia e le memorie fanno parte di quelle trincee e fortezze della società civile di cui parla Gramsci [5].

[5] « 'The people' in History: The Communist Party Historians' Group, 1946-56 », in *Making Histories*, cit., p. 95. L'originalità di questa concezione ricca e complessa di pratica storiografica attivamente politica risalta con evidenza anche maggiore al confronto con il punto di vista ben più tradizionale di storici che pure occupano posizioni decisamente innovative sullo scacchiere accademico. Si veda, per un'esemplificazione, la conclusione a « People's History or Total History » di P. Burke (in *People's History and Socialist Theory*, a cura di R. Samuel, Londra, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981): « Sebbene io mi consideri storico e socialista, non sono, tuttavia, uno storico socialista, per il semplice fatto che non credo nella storia socialista. Ritengo che usare la storia come arma nella lotta politica sia controproducente: si finisce col credere alla propria stessa propaganda, con l'attribuire al passato una dimensione eccessivamente teatrale e con il dimenticare pertanto la reale complessità delle questioni centrali in un determinato momento storico. Si finisce con l'idealizzare la propria parte e dividere gli esseri umani in 'Noi' e 'Loro' ... » (p. 8).

L'interesse di questo libro trascende tuttavia l'ambito particolare degli Studi Storici poiché si inscrive in un dibattito teorico che ha coinvolto, e spesso drammaticamente diviso, gli studiosi della civiltà e della cultura in Inghilterra. Il dibattito ha interessato infatti il mondo intellettuale britannico ben aldilà delle specificità disciplinari e ha investito con particolare intensità gli ambienti radicali, intrecciandosi con il più generale travaglio vissuto dal marxismo europeo a livello teorico, oltre che nella prassi politica e partitica. Questa difficile fase critica e autocritica ha visto momenti di estrema tensione e non è stato esente da manifestazioni di astiosa faziosità [6] ma è stata anche e soprattutto un'occasione per un genuino e fervido ripensamento di posizioni ideologiche e di pratiche intellettuali. Ne sono risultati un approfondimento del discorso teorico generale e un affinamento degli strumenti argomentativi che hanno contribuito a problematizzare e a trasformare in esperienza significativa e duratura la grande ventata intellettualistica registrata negli anni '70 nel mondo accademico britannico. La critica sistematica condotta dai sostenitori del pragmatismo metodologico tipicamente britannico — autorevolmente rappresentati da E. P. Thompson — contro l'adozione spesso acritica della voga teoretica di stampo althusseriano ha avuto il merito di stimolare una discussione più responsabile e, lungi dal troncare il confronto con gli sviluppi di pensiero europei, lo ha reso, invece, più consapevole, competente e motivato:

[6] La polemica fu condotta su un piano sostenutissimo di astrazione teorica, ma anche con una certa puntigliosità settaria, sulle pagine di varie riviste tra le quali spiccano *Screen* e *Screen Education* sia per l'alto livello di generalizzazione del discorso (fruibile ben aldilà del loro specialistico interesse cinematico o semiologico) che per la virulenza con cui esso si espresse. Nel campo degli Studi Storici una punta estrema di cerebralismo fu raggiunta dagli scritti di B. Hindess e P. Q. Hirst (cfr. in particolare *Pre-Capitalist Modes of Production*, Londra, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975 e il successivo *Modes of Production and Social Formation. An Autocritique*, Londra, MacMillan, 1977).

La mancanza di controllo empirico che Thompson giustamente lamenta nell'opera di Althusser rientra in effetti in una più generale tendenza alla mera speculazione che caratterizza tutto il marxismo occidentale ... e dalla quale si può dire che solo Gramsci sia rimasto esente. Questa propensione così pervicace sta però lasciando il passo a una cultura socialista più solida e riflessiva che ha cominciato a emergere negli anni '70. Da ora in poi il monito di Thompson si ergerà con tutta la sua eloquenza tra questa nuova cultura e ogni tentazione di ritorno al passato.

Così si esprimeva nel 1980 Perry Anderson in un libro [7] che costituì la più spassionata risposta alla sfida lanciata da Thompson in *The Poverty of Theory* [8]; una risposta che, pur restando all'interno del dialogo fraterno tra compagni di una stessa battaglia, non concedeva alcuna attenuante alle esuberanze polemiche del più prestigioso tra gli storici (anzi, forse, tra gli intellettuali) marxisti inglesi.

Con quel suo problematico e spregiudicato manifesto di fede marxista per gli anni '80, Anderson proponeva un'aggiornata anatomia della prassi intellettuale britannica a distanza di più di dieci anni da un'analoga anatomia che egli stesso aveva tracciato nel 1968 [9]. Come l'attuale, anche quell'ormai lontano intervento di Anderson si inquadrava in una celebre fase di scontri svoltisi all'interno dell'allora 'nuova' sinistra intorno alla validità o meno della tradizione autoctona di pensiero filosofico (e soprattutto di quello marxista) nonché all'utilità o al danno dell'empirismo come teoria e come metodo critico [10]. Come allora,

[7] *Arguments within English Marxism*, Londra, Verso, 1980. Tra gli altri numerosi interventi critici suscitati dalla pubblicazione di *The Poverty of Theory* ricopre un particolare interesse la discussione svolta in *Literature and History*, V, 2, aut. 1979, pp. 139-164 (« E.P. Thompson's *Poverty of Theory*: A Symposium ») con il contributo di T. Eagleton, A. Assiter e G. McLennan.

[8] Londra, Merlin Press, 1978.

[9] « Components of the National Culture », *New Left Review*, 50, lu-ag 1968, pp. 3-57.

[10] La polemica scoppiò nell'ambiente e sulle pagine della *New Left Review* tra il 1964 e il 1965 sotto l'urto dell'azione iconoclasta della nuova sinistra che trovava i suoi portavoce più rappresentativi negli allora giovanissimi P. Anderson e T. Nairn i cui articoli

anche oggi lo scontro è stato accompagnato da un intenso ripensamento che trova la sua zona di massima concentrazione nello specifico degli Studi Storici ma che investe senza eccezioni l'intero universo intellettuale britannico secondo sviluppi paralleli o, più spesso, intrecciati con l'attuale crisi di crescita della pratica storica. Si pensi, per fare un solo esempio, allo spostamento su posizioni sempre più esposte all'influsso del pensiero europeo e sempre più saldamente fondate su potenti basi teoriche di un altro pugnace sostenitore della peculiarità nazionale della tradizione radicale britannica quale è sempre stato R. Williams, anch'egli impegnato in un ininterrotto processo critico e autocritico costruito attraverso un dialogo costante con un ampio settore della critica marxista della letteratura e della cultura [11]. E l'accostamento non è casuale: i primi germi dell'attuale diverbio sulla prevalenza da assegnare all'istanza 'culturale' o, invece, a quella 'strutturale' nello studio della società (che è forse l'aspetto dominante della polemica in corso) si trovano proprio nel saggio-recensione che Thompson dedicò a *The Long Revolution* di Williams [12].

esplosivi (cfr. in particolare i numeri 23 e 24) determinarono una rottura insanabile all'interno della redazione e i quali costituirono, insieme con R. Blackburn, la nuova redazione. I prodotti più maturi e tuttora interessanti di tale dibattito sono « The Peculiarities of the English » di E.P. Thompson, pubblicato su *The Socialist Register 1965* (a cura di R. Miliband e J. Saville, Londra, The Merlin Press, 1965, pp. 311-362, e poi ripubblicato in *The Poverty of Theory*, Londra, The Merlin Press, 1978) e « Socialism and Pseudo-Empiricism » di Anderson, pubblicato su *New Left Review*, 35, gen-feb 1966, pp. 2-42.

[11] Questo processo, ricostruito autobiograficamente dallo stesso Williams nel volume-intervista dedicatogli dalla *New Left Review* (*Politics and Letters*, Londra, New Left Books, 1979), può essere rintracciato in tutte le sue opere tra le quali sono particolarmente utili a questo riguardo *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford, O.U.P., 1977), « An Introduction to P. Bourdieu » (con N. Garnham, in *Media, Culture and Society*, Vol. II, 3, lu 1980, pp. 209-223) e « Marxism, Structuralism and Literary Analysis » (in *New Left Review*, 129, 1981, pp. 52-66).

[12] Sui numeri 9 (ma-giu 1961), 10 (lu-ag 1961) e 11 (sett-ott 1961) della *New Left Review*.

Il volume del Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies nasce in questa temperie e si pone come contributo costruttivo, non già proponendo compromessi conciliatori ed elusivi, bensì tentando di individuare e comprendere le insufficienze epistemologiche e le contraddizioni ideologiche caratteristiche della tradizione comune a cui appartengono i vari gruppi di storici radicali a prescindere dalle loro distinzioni politiche interne e dalla loro posizione sullo scacchiere delle competenze disciplinari e degli orientamenti metodologici.

Il valore e l'urgenza di questo sforzo acquistano maggiore evidenza ove si consideri la sostanza della contrapposizione concettuale che ha dilacerato la comunità degli storici negli ultimi cinque o sei anni e l'intensità passionale con cui tale lacerazione è stata vissuta dai protagonisti. Non è questa la sede per ripercorrere la rete delle prese di posizione che in questi anni si sono succedute sull'argomento. Né c'è spazio per dare il giusto rilievo neanche a uno degli scontri più corposamente visibili perché svolto sulle pagine di quattro numeri successivi dell'*History Workshop Journal* con un'intensità polemica ai limiti dell'urbanità e con un largo numero di contributi.

Basti dire che la scintilla fu costituita dalla pubblicazione di un articolo [13] in cui R. Johnson riconosceva il valore innovativo della tradizione storiografica socialista britannica, e in particolare della scuola di Thompson, con la sua enfasi sul ruolo attivo degli anonimi esponenti delle classi sfruttate che la tradizione accademica ufficiale aveva escluso dalla « Storia » e che certo economicismo volgar-marxista aveva relegato nel ruolo di vittime passive del dominio sociale. Ma, allo stesso tempo, criticava la tendenza « culturalista » a sorvolare sugli aspetti economico-strutturali della realtà, sottovalutando le determinazioni, di tipo strutturale appunto, che limitano e a volte stravolgono la consapevolezza sociale degli individui e la loro capacità di costituirsi in soggetti attivi nella lotta di classe.

[13] « Edward Thompson, Eugene Genovese, and Socialist-Humanist History », in *History Workshop Journal*, 6, aut. 1978, pp. 79-100.

Tale miopia « culturalista » veniva ricollegata da Johnson con il rifiuto della teorizzazione tipico del pragmatismo metodologico sostenuto da Thompson. Esso, infatti, mentre permette un'esauriente descrizione fenomenica, non favorisce la comprensione delle sue cause profonde.

La discussione tra « culturalisti » e « strutturalisti » infuriò per almeno un anno, costringendo anche i difensori del pragmatismo antiteoretico a confrontarsi con la problematica teorica sottesa alla propria pratica « professionale ». Ci si limiterà qui a fare un brevissimo accenno almeno a quella che si può considerare la conclusione di un primo stadio di tale polemica, nonché la punta di maggiore interesse teorico del tredicesimo convegno dell'History Workshop [14] tenutosi al Ruskin College di Oxford nel dicembre 1979 e i cui atti sono stati pubblicati in seguito in *People's History and Socialist Theory* [15].

Il contributo più significativo alla discussione fu forse offerto dall'articolato intervento di S. Hall [16] il quale argomentava come la polarizzazione teoria/prassi non comporti solo un problema meramente procedurale, ma strutturi invece dall'interno l'esercizio dello storico. Guardando più

[14] Il movimento di History Workshop nacque nel 1966 come collettivo di storici socialisti e studenti-operai che frequentavano i corsi per adulti del Ruskin College di Oxford e che intendevano mettere personalmente in pratica le teorie sulla costruzione della storia dal basso che in quel periodo cominciavano a farsi strada. In seguito il gruppo si è grandemente ampliato e ha acquistato una indiscussa autorevolezza, confermata dalla grande attrazione esercitata dai suoi convegni annuali, dai suoi seminari tematici e dalla rivista *History Workshop Journal. A Journal of Socialist Historians* (trasformatasi dal 1982 in *A Journal of Socialist and Feminist Historians*). Per una storia del movimento cfr. R. Samuel, « Afterword: History Workshop, 1966-80 » in *People's History and Socialist Theory*, Londra, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981.

[15] *Id.* La sezione intitolata « Culturalism » (pp. 375-408) è specificamente dedicata al resoconto del dibattito sulla contrapposizione tra « culturalismo » e « strutturalismo », ma riverberazioni di questa problematica si possono riscontrare in quasi tutti gli interventi riportati nel volume.

[16] « In Defence of Theory », in *Id.*, pp. 378-385.

da vicino all'opera di Thompson egli notava come l'attenzione analitica e pragmatica della storiografia thompsoniana per l'esperienza concreta e specifica vissuta da individui e da gruppi concreti e specifici rimanga una grande lezione per lo studioso della società, a condizione che essa sia accompagnata dalla capacità sintetica e astrattiva di ricondurre a unità significativa la ricchezza variegata della realtà esaminata; altrimenti il procedimento analitico rischia di imprigionare quella stessa ricchezza nella sua esistenza fenomenica e di impedirne la decifrazione. In tal caso la pratica storica si porrebbe come una specie di maieutica che presuma l'esistenza di « fatti », incontrovertibili nella loro « realtà storica », ai quali basti « prestare attentamente l'orecchio » (secondo un'espressione cara a Thompson) perché essi rivivano restituendoci la vivida esperienza di una realtà lontana.

Ma, come G. Stedman Jones aveva già notato [17] e come lo stesso Hall ha richiamato, è proprio nell'uso del termine (e della categoria) « esperienza » che si rivelano l'originalità e la debolezza insieme del progetto di Thompson, così teso a recuperare e rivalutare la capacità soggettiva degli individui di rispondere autonomamente alle determinazioni storiche di ordine materiale e culturale e così portato ad assumere empaticamente l'ottica di un gruppo sociale (la classe operaia emergente) come lente interpretativa, da smussare e quasi cancellare i confini tra la realtà oggettiva delle condizioni concrete effettivamente date e la realtà soggettiva della consapevolezza sviluppata dagli individui rispetto alle condizioni materiali della propria esistenza.

Dietro la battaglia terminologica si affaccia una contrapposizione sostanziale. Proponendo una (peraltro insostenibile) distinzione tra « esperienza I » e « esperienza II », lo stesso Thompson ha dovuto ammettere l'inadeguatezza dell'uso indiscriminato del termine « esperienza » nella duplice accezione di « esperienza vissuta » e di « esperienza interiorizzata », per esprimere cioè due concetti centrali, ma significativamente distinti, nell'ambito del materialismo storico; così come ha dovuto ammettere che « lo storico, in ogni momento del suo lavoro, si porta dietro la propria formazione e il proprio sistema di valori da cui non può prescindere quando postula un problema o interroga le proprie fonti »[18].

I « fatti », insomma, parlano una lingua tutt'altro che univoca e lo storico, malgrado i suoi sforzi di attenta imparzialità, non potrà che essere selettivo: fino a quando l'interesse per le microstorie e per la storia dal basso non ha stimolato l'orecchio dello storico sociale, facendogli sviluppare raffinate tecniche di « ascolto », la voce degli umili e degli oppressi non è mai stata captata dalla storia e, come Barbara Taylor ha dimostrato in un suo recentissimo libro, « l'orecchio storiografico, almeno fino a pochissimo tempo fa, è rimasto sintonizzato quasi esclusivamente sulla voce maschile »[19].

Il dibattito che si è aperto tra gli storici sulla categoria « esperienza » ha comportato un approfondito ripensamento non solo sulle procedure e sui parametri interpretativi della storia sociale, ma anche sull'oggetto stesso di tale disciplina, tradizionalmente identificato (soprattutto nella storiografia di affiliazione marxista) con la nascita e progressiva emancipazione della classe operaia, con la sua eroica e inarrestabile lotta verso l'affermazione egemonica. Ciò che la polemica ha messo in questione è so-

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[17] In una sostenutissima lettera all'editore pubblicata sul numero 8 di *History Workshop Journal* (aut. 1979, pp. 198-202) la quale rappresentò uno dei contributi più equilibrati e utili a quel dibattito. Cfr. anche, dello stesso Stedman Jones, « The Language of Chartism », in J. Epstein e D. Thompson (a cura di), *The Chartist Experience*, Londra, Macmillan, 1982, pp. 3-58 (in particolare le pp. 11-12).

[18] « Politics of Theory », in *People's History and Socialist Theory*, cit., pp. 396-408. Non è che un'ulteriore conferma della coraggiosa onestà intellettuale di E.P. Thompson l'affermazione che « sebbene tutti assumano grottesche pose epistemologiche, non c'è nessuno, soprattutto in Inghilterra, che non debba ancora imparare l'abbiccì della filosofia della storia ... » (p. 407).

[19] *Eve and the New Jerusalem. Socialism and Feminism in the Nineteenth Century*, Londra, Virago Press, 1983, p. XIII.

prattutto la tentazione, a cui non di rado soggiace la pratica della storia « dal basso », di sostituire la glorificazione dei re e degli eroi con la mitologizzazione di tutto-ciò-che-è-popolare; una tentazione trionfalistica, questa, da cui non si sono salvati né la prestigiosa storiografia laburista, con la sua esaltazione della « gente comune », né lo stesso Thompson, con il suo entusiasmo per la tradizione del « free-born Englishman ».

La reazione contro la storiografia conservatrice che aveva escluso i ceti subalterni dalla considerazione storiografica rischia, insomma, di generare l'eccesso opposto, facendo di essi i veri e consapevoli autori dello sviluppo storico e dotando la capacità di autodeterminazione dei soggetti sociali di una irrealistica libertà dai condizionamenti storici di ordine strutturale e sovrastrutturale. Ma, particolarmente nel clima del dilagante thatcherismo, con la sua sapiente ed efficace utilizzazione degli elementi conservatori della cultura e della tradizione popolare, diventa sempre più importante e urgente non già ricostruire una tradizione popolar-democratica improbabilmente genuina e incontaminata [20], ma piuttosto dipanare la complessa rete di mediazioni e di reciproci condizionamenti che presie-

[20] Un esempio molto noto di questa tendenza sono le nostalgiche ricostruzioni di ambienti e caratteri proletari tracciate da J. Seabrook nelle sue numerose inchieste. Particolare interesse, e non poche polemiche, hanno suscitato *What went Wrong? Working People and the Ideals of the Labour Movement* (Londra, Gollancz, 1978), *Unemployment* (Londra, Quartet Books, 1982) e *Working-Class Childhood* (Londra, Gollancz, 1982) le quali riprendono, esagerandola e in parte stravolgendola, la tesi a suo tempo sostenuta da R. Hoggart in *The Uses of Literacy* (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1958) circa il pericolo dell'erosione della genuina e compatta cultura operaia sotto l'effetto combinato dei media e del consumismo. La maggiore debolezza della tesi di Seabrook è che essa tende a identificare la forza morale della classe operaia troppo esclusivamente con una solidarietà tra poveri che è talmente in funzione della miseria stessa da non reggere al miglioramento delle condizioni economiche: la sua maggiore critica al movimento operaio è, pertanto, di aver concentrato eccessivamente i propri sforzi sugli aspetti materiali della lotta di classe. Tuttavia, malgrado la

dono ai rapporti delle culture emergenti con il sistema culturale vigente e che determinano gli equilibri egemonici. Questa esigenza, politica non meno che culturale, ha innescato un duplice processo di indagine che trova opportuna illustrazione in *Making Histories*.

Da una parte è sempre più indispensabile esplorare quelle aree della cultura popolare in cui è particolarmente evidente il conflitto e la contraddizione tra ciò che « è » e cioè che « è organico alla » cultura popolare/operaia; quelle manifestazioni e quei fenomeni cioè, che fanno indubbiamente parte dell'« esperienza » individuale e collettiva del popolo, ma le cui implicazioni non sono necessariamente democratiche e che anzi, talvolta, non lo sono affatto: l'intera riserva della « memoria popolare », del « buon senso » e del « luogo comune », in cui elementi di resistenza culturale, di irriverenza e di sovversione si mescolano così inestricabilmente con il conformismo e con l'autoritarismo da costituire una zona ambigua e indefinita in cui i significati si ridefiniscono continuamente e in cui la battaglia culturale è ancora tutta da decidere. Questa problematica è affrontata in due dei tre saggi che costituiscono la terza parte del volume del Centro di Birmingham, dedicati rispettivamente a una discussione teorica del concetto di memoria popolare, delle sue implicazioni ideologiche, dei problemi epistemologici e politici che il suo esame comporta [21] e allo studio di un caso esemplare: la costruzione ideologica del paesaggio tradizionale britannico elaborata nel corso degli ultimi sessant'anni dalla politica pubblicitaria della Shell (essa stessa una tipica « istituzione britannica ») [22].

Dall'altra parte si registra il bisogno di rendere quanto

sua evidente deformazione prospettica, la visione di Seabrook ha attirato con forza l'attenzione su aspetti importanti del processo di trasformazione in atto nella cultura operaia inglese.

[21] « Popular memory: theory, politics, method », prodotto collettivo del Popular Memory Group, messo a punto per la pubblicazione da R. Johnson e G. Dawson.

[22] « 'Charms of residence': the public and the past », di M. Bommes e P. Wright.

più trasparenti possibile le condizioni di produzione del sapere storico, non già postulando una impossibile obbiettività 'scientifica' dello storico, ma al contrario riconoscendone la parzialità e individuando la genesi di tale parzialità nella formazione storico-culturale da cui neanche lo storico può astrarsi e, più precisamente, nella specifica cultura storiografica che plasma la sua pratica professionale. Questa tendenza introspettiva sta dando luogo da alcuni anni a questa parte a una fioritura di storia della storiografia, o, per meglio dire, di particolari correnti storiografiche che permettono quel recupero critico delle proprie radici e della propria formazione che è evidentemente sentito come indispensabile premessa a una ridefinizione del proprio ruolo intellettuale e professionale. Questa esigenza (a cui rispondono anche le prime due sezioni di *Making Histories*) è alla base di una serie di pubblicazioni recenti e recentissime tra le quali è opportuno segnalare almeno alcune.

Risale al 1978 la pubblicazione di *The Voice of the Past. Oral History* (Londra, O.U.P.) in cui Paul Thompson rivendicava piena dignità scientifica per un approccio storico (quello della Storia Orale, appunto) che troppo spesso viene considerato come una mera tecnica ancillare di rilevamento di dati e non come una vera e propria angolazione epistemologica caratterizzata da una sua fisionomia distintiva oltre che da una sua metodologia. Infatti, come si legge in apertura del libro, la Storia Orale prende le mosse dalla consapevolezza che il senso della storia e la capacità di ricordare connotano in modo determinante la fisionomia culturale di ogni società (pp. 1-2). Ma poiché il processo di storicizzazione attraverso il quale ciascuno prende coscienza della realtà sociale e del proprio ruolo in essa è per lo più inconscio, confuso e spesso sopraffatto dalle versioni « ufficiali » della medesima realtà elaborate e imposte dalla cultura dominante, i cultori della Storia Orale vagheggiano l'obbiettivo, politico oltre che culturale, di restituire alla gente comune (cioè agli anonimi e innumerevoli soggetti della storia) il diritto di elaborare e sostenere la *propria* consapevolezza storica, che è poi consa-

pevolezza delle relazioni materiali e intellettuali in cui il gioco della dinamica storica li ha fatti ritrovare. È indubbio che la carica sovversiva contenuta in questo approccio ha scosso molte paralizzanti certezze dell'area accademica degli Studi Storici, ma è anche indubbio (come i sostenitori della Storia Orale sono i primi a riconoscere [23]) che tale rinnovamento della prospettiva, per essere salutare, non può certo esaurirsi in un aproblematico trasferimento di autorevolezza dalle tradizionali fonti ufficiali alle fonti orali e indiziarie, con tutto ciò che di aleatorio, contraddittorio e spesso del tutto fuorviante esse presentano [24]. È insieme la forza e la debolezza di questo libro di privilegiare l'esposizione delle possibilità positive del metodo orale rispetto alla critica dei suoi limiti: nell'ansia di esibire credenziali epistemologiche accademicamente ineccepibili, si preoccupa di rivendicare come territorio di pertinenza della Storia Orale addirittura l'intera, millenaria, tradizione storiografica che va da Erodoto a Beda, a Michelet, a Mayhew, ai giorni nostri, e tende invece talvolta a sorvolare su alcune difficoltà stimolanti che il metodo orale incontra proprio perché affronta seriamente una realtà che è in sé problematica. Ne risulta un quadro che, se apre prospettive corroboranti, non rende pienamente giustizia alla capacità di problematizzazione di cui danno invece ampia prova molte eccellenti realizzazioni del campo [25].

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[23] Cfr. soprattutto il capitolo sulla tecnica dell'intervista in *The Voice of the Past*, cit., pp. 164-185.

[24] Per una lucida discussione di tali rischi cfr. la lettera aperta di L. Passerini a *History Workshop Journal*, 11, primavera 1981, pp. 201-203 (« Debate on Method ») e, più esaurientemente, *Storia Orale: vita quotidiana e cultura materiale delle classi subalterne* (a cura di L. Passerini), Torino, Rosenberg e Sellier, 1978. La questione è discussa ampiamente in *Making Histories* nel capitolo dedicato a « Popular memory: theory, politics, method » (Cfr. in particolare le pp. 215-234).

[25] In questo filone sono molto interessanti i volumi pubblicati da Routledge & Kegan Paul nella « History Workshop Series », e, tra questi, soprattutto J. White, *Rotschild Buildings. Life in an East End Tenement Block 1887-1920* (1980) e R. Samuel, *East End Underworld. Chapters in the Life of Arthur Harding* (1981).

L'operazione compiuta da G. McLennan in *Marxism and the Methodologies of History* (Londra, New Left Books, 1981) pur rispondendo a un'analoga esigenza di rivisitare la propria eredità storiografica alla ricerca di una riconferma della propria funzione intellettuale, è tuttavia di segno diverso. Laddove lo sforzo di P. Thompson tende a estrapolare gli obbiettivi e i metodi impiegati nella pratica della Storia Orale ed esibirli in modo normativo, lo scopo di McLennan è invece di mettere a punto finalità e metodologie attraverso una critica incessante dei successi e degli insuccessi registrati dai progetti storiografici di ispirazione e di simpatie marxiste che da Marx in poi si sono proposti di applicare nel concreto delle loro analisi i principi del materialismo dialettico.

Non a caso, essendo McLennan uno dei collaboratori di *Making Histories* [26], molti dei problemi discussi in quest'ultimo volume sono anche al centro di *Marxism and* the Methodologies of History. Tra questi il più rilevante riguarda la non facile esigenza di conciliare il relativismo gnoseologico che deriva dalla critica stringente contro certo pragmatismo aproblematico a cui si è accennato prima e il materialismo ontologico che è alla base della concezione marxista della storia. Da una parte, nell'osservare il successivo emergere di nuovi settori disciplinari nell'ambito degli Studi Storici, McLennan non può che notare che nuovi segmenti della realtà hanno acquistato visibilità e « verità » storica man mano che alle « fonti » sono state poste nuove domande, suggerite da nuovi interessi epistemologici o ideologici, e non può non registrare come questo non faccia che erodere la credibilità dell'esistenza di una « verità oggettiva »; dall'altra l'ortodossia marxista gli impedisce di accettare fino in fondo le conseguenze filosofiche dell'operazione di decostruzione che il suo stesso libro svolge, continuando, in questo, la devastante de-

[26] « E.P. Thompson and the discipline of historical context » (pp. 96-130) e « Philosophy and history: some issues in recent marxist theory » (pp. 133-152) sono i due contributi di G. McLennan a *Making Histories*.

nuncia della manipolazione ideologica della « realtà storica » che Chesneaux aveva fatto in *Che cos'è la Storia?* [27] e che già prima, negli anni '60, era stata avanzata dai filosofi narrativisti con la loro insistenza sulla centralità della strutturazione metastorica della « materia » storica secondo modelli narratologici [28]. Ma è con evidente sgomento che McLennan vede sgretolarsi la certezza nella realtà « fattuale » e tenta infatti di ricomporla ricorrendo a un non troppo coinvincente concetto di totalità:

> Secondo Carr certi « fatti » assumono rilevanza rispetto ad altri perché siamo noi a compiere una selezione rispetto a un ventaglio di nostre convinzioni. In definitiva, quindi, Carr, come Morton White e altri, postula l'esistenza di un mondo fumoso e indefinito di fatti che rimangono nello sfondo finché noi non ne illuminiamo alcuni con un riflettore; o, per usare una sua metafora, noi scegliamo i fatti come si pesca in un oceano e non come si sceglie il pesce dal pescivendolo. Questo sembra inappropriato perché implica l'*arbitrarietà* della nostra selezione, e, insomma, l'impotenza della teoria storica di spiegare le strutture gerarchiche (oggettive) del mondo storico reale oppure di giustificare la scelta razionale di una posizione morale anzicché di un'altra. Sarebbe allora preferibile, come strategia, rifiutare completamente la nozione di fatti discreti ed evitare così la dicotomia di dover scegliere dei fatti anzicché degli altri (pp. 104-105).

È comunque la sincerità con cui vengono esposti dubbi e problemi non risolti che fa di *Marxism and the Methodologies of History* (come di *Making Histories*) un tentativo serio e generalizzabile di risolvere problemi di non facile soluzione. È con assoluta onestà che questi due testi rivanno alle fonti del pensiero socialista alla ricerca di potenzialità non sviluppate, ma anche con umiltà e con la realistica consapevolezza che anche l'opera dei padri fondatori (Marx, Engels, i Fabiani, gli storici comunisti degli anni '50 dei quali l'attuale generazione di storici è diretta filiazione) era umanamente soggetta ai condizionamenti co-

[27] Milano, Mazzotta, 1977.

[28] Per una critica del narrativismo cfr. in particolare le pp. 76-81 del citato intervento di B. Schwartz in *Making Histories*.

muni a tutta la produzione intellettuale ed esposta pertanto in varia misura ai pregiudizi epocali oltre che segnata dalle determinazioni di razza, di sesso e di classe. Questo scavo critico è soprattutto autocritico poiché tende a far affiorare alla coscienza dello storico i condizionamenti a cui egli (o ella) è soggetto/a e che sono così connaturati con la tradizione storiografica da essere diventati « invisibili ».

In questa direzione si muove soprattutto il capitolo di *Making Histories* intitolato « Reading for the Best Marx: History-writing and Historical Abstraction »[29] in cui Richard Johnson si interroga sulla validità, oggi, per lo storico dell'eredità del materialismo storico che è troppo spesso assunto aproblematicamente come mera etichetta dalle scuole storiografiche che si definiscono marxiste. Egli propone perciò una rilettura dell'opera di Marx che ne metta a fuoco sia le lacune rispetto a questioni la cui urgenza oggi si pone più che mai sia le potenzialità che non sono state sufficientemente sviluppate dalla storiografia di ispirazione marxista. Come si legge alle pp. 154-155:

> Larga parte dell'esposizione delle tendenze dello sviluppo capitalistico fatta da Marx rimane valida malgrado il fatto che egli non ha investigato l'intera gamma delle determinazioni storiche ... Ma la sua influenza, tramandata dalle interpretazioni canoniche, presenta dei pericoli. La centralità, oggi, dei conflitti di sesso e di razza impone di ampliare e di trasformare le idee marxiste e di costituire delle nuove aree di conoscenza utile, alcune delle quali possono mettere in discussione gli stessi fondamenti della teoria marxista. Analogamente la crescente importanza della battaglia per la definizione culturale e politica dei 'bisogni' impone di ridiscutere i principi fondamentali del 'materialismo'.

Ciò che gli autori di *Making History*, e R. Johnson in particolare, ricercano nella rinnovata familiarità con l'opera di Marx non è dunque una serie di risposte puntuali a specifici problemi sociologici o storici, bensì un'indicazione di metodo. E tale indicazione ritrovano in quella sofisticata teoria della prassi che non di rado contrastanti

[29] pp. 153-201.

versioni di marxismo hanno (per lo più inconsapevolmente) stravolto o nella direzione di un gretto pragmatismo o in quella di un inconsistente teoreticismo.

È un segno indubbiamente positivo che lo sforzo intenzionalmente diretto a rendere la propria pratica intellettuale cosciente degli aspetti inconsapevoli, contraddittori (e talvolta imbarazzanti) della propria natura ideologica si vada diffondendo nella nuova storiografia in Gran Bretagna. Esso contraddistingue, per esempio, il tentativo compiuto da R. Samuel sulle pagine della *New Left Review*[30] di rintracciare le radici della storiografia socialista britannica in una tradizione ricca e composita, profondamente britannica ma non avulsa dal più generale sviluppo del pensiero europeo; una tradizione in cui il pensiero marxista si è articolato in maniera dialettica su una serie di correnti filosofiche e religiose spesso capillarmente affondate nella pratica quotidiana della gente comune, spesso generose e progressiste, ma anche molto spesso aperte a sconcertanti tranelli:

> Una delle eredità più ambigue della storia radical-democratica è quella del nazionalismo inglese: la convinzione che al popolo inglese sia stato in qualche modo assegnato un posto speciale dalla storia, che la lingua inglese sia superiore alle altre e che la libertà dell'individuo sia più sicura in Inghilterra che fuori ... Tale nazionalismo riemerge come tema centrale negli scritti comunisti del tempo del Fronte Popolare; raggiunge il colmo dell'isterismo negli anni della Guerra Fredda e assurge a una sorta di apoteosi marxista all'inizio degli anni '60, quando si assiste al tentativo generalizzato e intellettualmente azzardato di tradurre un'intera tradizione in termini esclusivamente inglesi (p. 41).

[30] Di questo studio è per ora uscita solo la prima parte (« British Marxist Historians 1880-1980. Part I ») su *Left Review*, 120, marzo 1980, pp. 21-96. Un'analoga preoccupazione autocritica anima il dibattito teorico che si è svolto negli ultimi anni sulle pagine di *Literature and History* riguardo allo statuto ideologico della pratica storiografica (cfr. in particolare C.J.W. Parker, « Academic History: Paradigms and Dialectic », nel fascicolo V, 2, aut. 79, pp. 165-193) e, soprattutto, riguardo all'apporto che un esame incrociato degli statuti disciplinari della Storia e della Letteratura può fornire alla comprensione di fenomeni culturali complessi.

Questo attento processo di scavo autocritico ha già dato risultati molto rilevanti poiché non solo intaccano alcune tesi storiografiche che sembravano incontrovertibili ma soprattutto perché, rivelando la natura ideologica di tali tesi, dimostrano che il circuito delle relazioni tra produzione della storia e produzione delle ideologie (del passato e del presente) è tutt'altro che a senso unico: storiografia e realtà sociale si alimentano a vicenda e partecipano l'una dei conflitti dell'altra. Si pensi al mito del « free-born Englishman », per fare un esempio solo, ma di estrema attualità al cospetto del volto sempre più decisamente reazionario che stanno assumendo le formazioni ideologico-politiche 'popolari' in Gran Bretagna.

Quella del « free-born Englishman », celebrazione del cittadino inglese erede delle antiche libertà anglosassoni, è una fantasia nazional popolare che i movimenti radicale e cartista evocarono dai meandri della 'memoria' collettiva, e caricarono di significati democratici e libertari, assegnandole la funzione suggestiva di incitare al conseguimento dei diritti civili la cui legittimità e attuabilità erano in qualche modo garantiti dalla loro presunta attuazione in un passato 'storico'. Ciò che la nuova storiografia sta mettendo in luce non è tanto, o non solo, che l'assunzione (all'epoca) di una tradizione 'storica' scarsamente attendibile fu poco opportuna perché, con la sua combinazione di fede utopica in una inevitabile reintegrazione (in futuro) di diritti conculcati e di nostalgico rimpianto per una perdita irreparabile, finì con l'obliterare la reale natura degli scontri di potere e di interessi in atto. Ciò che è maggiormente sotto accusa è l'entusiasmo storiografico (inaugurato da *The Making of the English Working Class* di E. P. Thompson) per la tradizione socialista che assunse a emblema l'ideale del « free-born Englishman », tanto più che tale entusiasmo trova il suo corrispettivo in analisi della cultura e del ruolo dell'attuale classe operaia improntate a un moralismo nostalgico-idealista alla J. Seabrook [31]. Il mito 'anglosassone' era profondamente ambi-

[31] Cfr. sopra, nota 20.

guo poiché conciliava spinte di radicalismo populista con elementi di conservatorismo altrettanto populista: non vederne i possibili sviluppi sciovinisti è considerato da più parti come un indiretto sostegno delle posizioni razziste e maschiliste che quel mito ha contribuito ad alimentare.

The Empire strikes back [32], un altro volume collettivo pubblicato, contemporaneamente a *Making Histories*, da studiosi del Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies di Birmingham, è appunto dedicato all'analisi degli elementi razzisti che, sin dall'inizio, erano latenti nel celebre mito 'anglosassone' dell'« inglese nato libero » e che tuttora riaffiorano, in forme aggiornate, non solo nel populismo conservatore di chiara marca gingoista come quello propugnato da E. Powell e più recentemente (ed efficacemente) da M. Thatcher, ma anche in certo operaismo laburista centrato sul nostalgico recupero di un passato operaio autentico e genuino, legato a una realtà locale e circoscritta, senza intrusioni dall'esterno e, inevitabilmente, etnocentrica. Questo volume, animato da un impegno politico doloroso e adirato, ma anche sorretto da una logica stringente e basato su una solida documentazione storica e storiografica, rappresenta un intervento culturale in cui le preoccupazioni politiche e scientifiche non si trovano meramente a coabitare in una inerte giustapposizione, ma nascono le une dalle altre. Esso anzi dimostra che la passione politica, lungi dall'offuscare la lucidità scientifica dello storico, può anzi talvolta contribuire a fargli scoprire implicazioni ideologiche impreviste in tesi storiografiche che erano considerate indenni da parzialità ideologiche o, addirittura, marcate da un'ideologia di segno opposto. E riesce difficile immaginare che siano molti i lettori che seguendo le convincenti, per quanto aggressive, requisitorie svolte in questo libro non si debbano sentire direttamente sotto accusa.

[32] Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (a cura di), *The Empire strikes back. Race and Racism in 70s Britain*, Londra, Hutchinson e CCCS, 1982.

Ma il mito delle titaniche origini anglosassoni è oggi messo alla sbarra anche dalla storiografia femminista, divenuta in breve giro di anni una sezione autorevole degli Studi Storici, con i cui orientamenti non c'è storico che non debba ormai fare i conti. Le recenti pubblicazioni del campo stanno infatti provando che la pretesa obbiettività scientifica che renderebbe lo storico immune dalle determinazioni di sesso è del tutto illusoria. La storiografia femminista non solo continua a portare alla luce oggetti sepolti sotto la polvere dell'oblio — storie di oppressione e di emarginazione, sezioni di una storia globale oscurate dal protagonismo maschile e rimaste « nascoste all'occhio della Storia » (per riecheggiare il titolo dell'ormai classico volume della Rowbotham); essa svolge da qualche tempo un compito ancor più importante, quello di guardare alla storia degli uomini e delle donne non come a due vicende paralelle che, se si incrociano, lo fanno occasionalmente, ma a due aspetti di una stessa complessa realtà che, in ogni suo punto è al centro di campi di forze in tensione — tensioni di classe, di razza, di sesso. È solo da poco che le storiche e gli storici che si definiscono socialisti e femministi hanno scoperto che continuare a privilegiare separatamente l'una o l'altra di tali connotazioni ideologiche rendeva le loro ricerche incomplete, creava una dicotomia debilitante tra le categorie del « pubblico » e del « privato » e condannava l'analisi storica a una visione strabica.

Come dimostra il capitolo di *Making Histories* dedicato a « 'The Public Face of Feminism': Early Twentieth-century Writings on Women's Suffrage »[33] anche le esperienze ascrivibili più decisamente all'ambito della vita pubblica (quali i movimenti suffragisti) erano strettamente intrecciate con la dimensione privata dei rapporti tra i sessi, connotate e condizionate dalle strutture del sentire non meno che da quelle del potere:

[33] pp. 303-324.

> ... nel XIX secolo la divisione tra pubblico e privato divenne uno dei fondamentali principi strutturanti della società. Il movimento per il Suffragio era condizionato dalle definizioni esistenti dei confini tra pubblico e privato e le sue sostenitrici non potevano non ragionare secondo tali categorie. L'ottica in cui le donne conducevano la loro lotta era quella di entrare in pieno nel mondo pubblico e i limiti inerenti a una simile concettualizzazione del mondo non avrebbero potuto essere pienamente compresi fino a quando tale ingresso non avesse avuto luogo. In tale contesto il volto pubblico del femminismo aveva la preminenza. E tuttavia, essere femminista, soprattutto se militante, aveva anche un significato personale che trovava varie forme di espressione anche negli scritti più schiettamente pubblici delle suffragettes » (p. 319).

L'elaborazione e la lotta del movimento delle donne tra la fine dell'Ottocento e l'inizio del Novecento non si esaurì dunque nella rivendicazione dei diritti politici. E fin dall'inizio del secolo donne che del movimento facevano parte o che ad esso erano vicine cominciarono a intuire che la preminenza assunta dalla rivendicazione dei diritti relativi all'ambito pubblico da parte delle donne era essa stessa funzione della distinzione artificiosa tra sfera pubblica e privata che era stata alla base della storica esclusione delle donne dalla gestione del potere e della loro ghettizzazione nella sfera domestica e privata. La rilettura delle lotte per il suffragio femminile che questo capitolo di *Making Histories* conduce sulla scorta degli scritti di tre generazioni di commentatrici, da Olive Schreiner a Vera Brittain, mette in luce i primi passi compiuti verso il superamento della concezione delle sfere separate.

Ma solo di recente si è affermata con chiarezza la necessità di adottare una prospettiva unificata, che metta a fuoco *contemporaneamente* i rapporti pubblici e privati, i conflitti di classe e quelli di sesso nella loro reciproca articolazione. Ne è risultato un vero salto di qualità nella produzione storiografica femminista. Almeno due titoli vanno menzionati, a testimonianza della svolta epistemologica in questo campo estremamente fecondo anche da un punto di vista editoriale.

Il primo è *Sex and Class in Women's History*, un volume collettaneo pubblicato nella « History Workshop

Series »[34] in cui questo orientamento ormai prevalente è esemplificato sistematicamente in otto interessanti saggi alcuni dei quali sono dedicati a problematiche specificamente teoriche[35], altri all'analisi di particolari casi appartenenti alla storia inglese e americana dell'Ottocento e del Novecento. In uno di questi ultimi (« Class and Gender in Victorian England »[36]) Leonore Davidoff ci conduce attraverso i meandri di una segreta e sconcertante vicenda di multiple infrazioni (simboliche ancor prima che materiali) di quelle frontiere di sesso e di classe che nell'Inghilterra vittoriana apparivano sacre e inviolabili, per mettere allo scoperto la rete vischiosa dei collegamenti tra inibizioni e trasgressioni di cui si intessevano la vita sociale e quella culturale di un'epoca troppo spesso considerata come dominata da monolitici modelli di rispettabilità borghese. L'analisi di una storia « privata », così privata da essere nascosta (ma documentata nei diari paralleli dei due protagonisti e in una serie di fotografie provvidenzialmente predisposte, vien fatto di pensare, per appagare la curiosità dello storico futuro), permette all'autrice di osservare da un punto di vista interno al fenomeno il processo attivo e tutt'altro che incontrastato di costruzione dell'ideologia sociale e politica egemone. Arthur J. Munby, di professione funzionario di una istituzione ecclesiastica, era, per vocazione, osservatore e fotografo delle condizioni di vita e di lavoro delle « donne di fatica ». Questo interesse, che richiama le più professionali preoccupazioni antropologiche di un Mayhew o di un Booth, trovava la sua massima espressione in pratiche erotiche meticolosamente costruite come messa in scena di una dramma simbolico con la connivenza

[34] A cura di J.L. Newton, M.P. Ryan e J.R. Walkowitz, Londra, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983.

[35] Tra questi « Freud's Dora, Dora's Hysteria » (pp. 72-113) di M. Ramas è dedicato alla critica della teoria freudiana dell'isterismo, « Examining Family History » di R. Rapp, E. Ross e R. Bridenthal (pp. 232-258) agli orientamenti storiografici degli studi sulla famiglia, e « The Doubled Vision in Feminist Theory » di J. Kelly (pp. 259-270) agli sviluppi attuali delle teorie femministe.

[36] pp. 17-71.

di Hannah Cullwick, umile serva e comprimaria di giochi imperniati sul costante scambio dei ruoli sessuali e delle distinzioni di classe e di razza (le fotografie scattate da Munby la mostrano in una vasta gamma di personificazioni: nei panni di signora borghese, di camerierina, di sguattera, di giovanotto e persino di serva negra e di angelo). L'analisi proposta dalla Davidoff mostra che i « vizi privati » di Munby costituivano l'altra faccia delle « pubbliche virtù » vittoriane, non tanto perché ne rappresentavano l'antitesi (sospinta ai margini dell'universo sociale accettato e ricacciata nell'area tenebrosa delle pratiche clandestine, degradate, peccaminose), quanto piuttosto perché ne erano parte integrante e necessaria. E tanto più interessante le appare questa figura per la sua sia pur embrionale consapevolezza della natura paradossale dell'etica vittoriana:

> Malgrado la sua attrazione, per noi oggi repellente, per certi temi simbolici quali l'equazione tra sporcizia e degradazione da un lato e amore e forza femminile dall'altro; malgrado la sua equiparazione delle donne alle bestie e di ambedue agli schiavi negri e l'individuazione di tutte queste specie inferiori come agenti di una Natura minacciosa e prepotente; malgrado tutto ciò, Munby riuscì a intravedere, sia pur confusamente, una contraddizione basilare della società vittoriana. L'esistenza tranquilla e protetta che conducevano le signore borghesi si basava direttamente sul lavoro delle ragazze e delle donne operaie, le quali attraverso il loro servizio creavano le condizioni materiali necessarie a garantire uno stile di vita borghese tanto per gli uomini che per le donne (p. 60).

Caratteristica comune a questo come agli altri saggi del volume è di non limitarsi a registrare le forme e le condizioni dell'oppressione di cui le donne sono state vittime storicamente, in una sorta di martirologio, ma di sforzarsi invece di comprendere la natura dialettica dello squilibrio di potere tra i sessi indagando, in particolare, sulle responsabilità che alle donne vanno attribuite per aver permesso e facilitato tale squilibrio. Come si legge in « The Power of Women's Networks » di Mary P. Ryan[37]:

[37] pp. 167-186.

> Se crediamo che le donne costituiscano una forza nella storia, e che possano essere artefici della loro storia, allora dobbiamo anche accettare la possibilità che esse abbiano partecipato alla creazione e alla riproduzione degli aspetti più insoddisfacenti del sistema culturale e ideologico dei rapporti tra i sessi (p. 167).

In uno dei saggi più utili del volume (« 'The Men are as Bad as Their Masters ...': Socialism, Feminism and Sexual Antagonism in the London Tayloring Trade in the 1830s »[38]) Barbara Taylor esemplifica ancor meglio la preoccupazione centrale dell'attuale storiografia femminista, di trattare cioè l'analisi dei conflitti di classe e quella delle determinazioni di genere non come due esercizi separati, bensì come un'unica complessa operazione, la sola capace di restituire una realtà poliedrica e intessuta di tensioni che solo artificiosamente possono essere ricondotte esclusivamente all'ambito della dialettica delle classi o a quella dei rapporti tra i sessi:

> Troppo a lungo le storie del socialismo e del femminismo sono state scritte come se si trattasse di due tradizioni omogenee al proprio interno e prive o quasi di relazioni reciproche: il socialismo come la storica marcia del proletariato maschile e il femminismo come la protesta borghese-egalitaria di donne del ceto medio. C'è poco da meravigliarsi, allora, che i punti di contatto tra le due tradizioni sembrassero così pochi. Ma il recente lavoro della storiografia femminista sta cominciando a modificare questo quadro: una trama di impulsi, di idee e di strategie comuni sta cominciando ad emergere, rivelando quelle connessioni tra conflitti di classe e conflitti di sesso che porteranno infine a riscrivere ambedue queste storie, contribuendo anche a trasformare il futuro di entrambe (p. 188).

La magistrale ricerca svolta dalla Taylor in questo saggio relativamente al ruolo della militanza femminile e della centralità della questione femminile nel movimento owenita trova una applicazione ancora più sostenuta in un lavoro poderoso (402 fitte pagine improntate alla più rigorosa serietà professionale) eppure trascinante alla lettura: *Eve and the New Jerusalem. Socialism and Feminism in the Nineteenth Century*[39].

[38] pp. 187-220.

Sulla base di una documentazione imponente, in cui le voci delle più note teorizzatrici dell'emancipazione femminile e quelle dei più illustri codificatori e organizzatori del socialismo cartista e owenita si affiancano a un coro di voci più o meno articolate, ma illuminanti tutte, di anonime lavoratrici, la Taylor ricostruisce un momento particolare di costruzione ideologica e di lotta sociale, quello della formulazione e della progressiva dissoluzione del progetto owenita. In esso gli ideali di eguaglianza e di libertà si applicavano alla trasformazione delle relazioni patriarcali nel campo della sessualità e della riproduzione non meno che alla riforma delle relazioni capitalistiche nel campo della proprietà e della produzione. Come dichiara la stessa autrice:

> Il libro esamina i modi in cui una visione (quella dell'emancipazione femminile come parte integrante di una generale emancipazione sociale) sorse, divenne parte dell'armamentario ideologico di un movimento sociale popolare, e ispirò il tentativo di costruire una nuova cultura dei rapporti tra i sessi in una società lacerata da conflitti di sesso e di classe. Il libro esplora inoltre le ragioni del fallimento di tale visione e la rilevanza di tale fallimento per la politica socialista e femminista di oggi (p. XI).

Non è certo sorprendente che le contraddizioni e i conflitti caratteristici della società circostante si riverberassero anche all'interno del movimento introducendo quella dicotomia tra sfera del pubblico e sfera del privato che contribuì a ricacciare in posizione marginale, ed infine a soffocare, la spinta egalitaria nell'ambito delle relazioni tra i sessi a vantaggio di una priorità (tattica, ma anche concettuale) assegnata alla lotta ingaggiata dal proletariato (considerto come formazione prevalentemente maschile) contro le basi economiche della società di classe. È meno ovvio e scontato, però, che la tradizione storiografica, anche la più democratica e disposta ad apprezzare il valore

[39] Londra, Virago, 1983.

propositivo delle visioni « utopiche », come quella rappresentata da E. P. Thompson, abbia sorvolato sugli aspetti femministi del progetto owenita. Ancora una volta, dietro la spinta progressista costituita dalla costruzione del mito del « free-born Englishman » e della tradizione storiografica socialista che l'ha glorificato, si affacciano inquietanti possibilità oppressive e oscurantiste. Sono queste pericolose potenzialità che i nuovi orientamenti che si affermano nel campo dell'odierna storiografia (come delle altre discipline che confluiscono nel più vasto campo degli Studi Culturali) si sforzano di disinnescare con l'arma dell'autocritica e della messa in discussione dei propri fondamenti epistemologici.

INTERVISTA A JEFFREY WEEKS

(a cura di Roberto Di Napoli)

Fu soltanto nel 1967 che il Sexual Offences Act, decriminalizzando per la prima volta in Inghilterra e nel Galles le attività omosessuali che si svolgevano in privato tra adulti consenzienti al di sopra dei ventuno anni d'età, ha reso relativamente meno pesanti le pressioni legali sugli omosessuali inglesi e ha contribuito, così, al veloce cambiamento della loro sottocultura che è divenuta più articolata e meno furtiva di quanto lo fosse negli anni precedenti. A Londra, ad esempio, ai vecchi pubs che avevano costituito con la loro atmosfera di massima discrezione i luoghi d'incontro preferiti di molti omosessuali negli anni Cinquanta e per buona parte degli anni Sessanta, si sostituirono, dopo il 1967, le nuove discoteche e i nuovi clubs dove gli omosessuali potevano ritrovarsi tranquillamente e divertirsi al suono della pop-music, a patto che non cedessero ad effusioni sentimentali in pubblico. Cominciarono, inoltre, ad apparire, nel mondo dell'editoria inglese, riviste come Spartacus *e* Jeremy *dirette esplicitamente ad un pubblico omosessuale. Ma l'avvento che mutò completamente il volto del mondo omosessuale inglese fu, all'inizio degli anni Sessanta, la nascita e lo sviluppo del Gay Liberation Front che, con la sua ondata rivoluzionaria, infuse in molti omosessuali la forza e la volontà di uscire allo scoperto, di accrescere la loro visibilità. I 'gays' non erano ormai più disposti ad accettare di vivere una doppia vita e a nascondere le loro esigenze sessuali e sentimentali.*

Naturalmente, un processo così massiccio di 'coming out', lungi dall'essersi verificato in una sorta di vacuum

storico, può essere adeguatamente compreso solo se inquadrato nel contesto dei cambiamenti economici, sociali e culturali operati dal neocapitalismo che, a partire dal secondo dopoguerra, ha creato in Inghilterra le condizioni per una maggiore libertà sessuale. Il veloce sviluppo di una società basata sulle leggi del consumo di massa è stato accompagnato da una considerevole erosione dei valori del vecchio capitalismo quali il risparmio, il senso del dovere, il rispetto dell'autorità, l'importanza della famiglia e della nazione. Il crollo di questi valori ha generato la crescita del cosiddetto permissivismo che, con il divorzio operato tra piacere fisico e procreazione, ha contribuito massimamente alla tolleranza di forme di sessualità una volta aborrite, tra cui l'omosessualità. Di questi processi di trasformazione verificatisi nell'ultimo quindicennio nella società inglese tutta e nel mondo omosessuale in particolare, il sociologo Jeffrey Weeks è stato non solo testimone, ma anche partecipe ed interprete.

Oltre ad essere stato co-autore con Sheila Rowbotham del volume Socialism and the New Life *(1977), Jeffrey Weeks ha scritto* Coming Out *(1977), in cui viene ricostruita la storia dei movimenti omosessuali inglesi dalla fine dell'Ottocento ai nostri giorni, e* Sex, Politics and Society *(1981) che esplora i processi di organizzazione e regolamentazione della sessualità verificatisi in Inghilterra negli ultimi centocinquanta anni.*

Specialmente nella prima di queste due opere, Weeks fa convergere la sua esperienza personale, il suo impegno politico di carattere socialista e la tradizione foucaultiana, di cui egli si fa ottimo interprete, in una visione dell'omosessualità originale e complessa. Rifiutandosi, infatti, di considerare questa espressione del sentire umano semplicemente come un elemento discreto e transistorico, Weeks pone alla base di ogni suo discorso la netta distinzione tra i comportamenti omosessuali, che egli considera di carattere universale, e le identità e i « ruoli » omosessuali che, invece, vengono a strutturarsi in specifiche condizioni storiche e culturali. Egli arriva così ad identificare il processo di creazione della figura archetipale dell'omosessuale

come tipico ed esclusivo del mondo occidentale industrializzato, un mondo in cui il sesso è diventato, a partire dal secolo XVIII, oggetto di numerose speculazioni in campo medico-legale, miranti a definire, categorizzare e controllare tutte quelle « anomalie », tutte quelle attività sessuali, cioè, che esulassero dai limiti procreativi del talamo coniugale e che, si credeva, avrebbero avuto effetti devastanti sul tessuto dello stato borghese (cfr. M. Foucault, The History of Sexuality, *Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 1981).*

L'impatto di questi discorsi specifici sull'omosessualità ebbe, naturalmente, effetti negativi su coloro che nel nuovo e punito « ruolo » omosessuale si identificassero, generando in essi terribili sensi di colpa e di inadeguatezza. Ma, allo stesso tempo, afferma Weeks, questo processo di sofisticata stigmatizzazione servì a creare negli omosessuali la coscienza della loro oppressione, coscienza che, sviluppandosi nel nostro secolo, ha avuto il suo sbocco più importante e significativo nella nascita del Gay Liberation Front che ha capovolto le ataviche, negative definizioni dell'omosessualità, facendo di essa un'esperienza degna di essere vissuta felicemente alla pari delle relazioni eterosessuali.

* * *

Q. - *I can find very little information about working-class and black homosexuals in England. Can you help me on this one?*

A. - Well ... Actually my lover is black. He's upstairs. He can tell you much more than I can ... But, as for the working class, if we look historically at the gay scene, we find that, by and large, it's been a world of middle-class and upper-class men who've defined themselves as homosexual; and the people they've had sex with, until very recently, were often working-class men who did not define themselves as homosexual. I think that's changed over the last fifteen, twenty years. Today, by and large, working-class and middle-class people define themselves as gay in the same degree, but I think the tone of the

subculture is set by middle-class male values, because it is dependent upon a certain affluent life-style, free availability and money. Increasingly, the gay scene is around commercial enterprises. In that regard, working-class people are very much co-opted into a middle-class life-style.

Q. - *That's true. In fact, I think the commercial scene is too dominant within the English homosexual subculture at the moment. Do you interpret this phenomenon as a sort of defeat of the gay politics of the last decade?*

A. - Well, it's certainly a defeat in terms of what the gay movement said it wanted, which was to create alternative establishments and so on. But, in another sense, it's not a defeat because what I think has happened is that homosexuality has been incorporated within the commercial world of capitalism; it's been incorporated within the structures of capitalism. In other words, once homosexuals were visible, they became incorporated quite easily as a market into commercialization. I think that's inevitable. In the early days of the gay movement we were utopian in expecting that that would not happen: a small minority of people, and that is after all what we are, can't possibly resist the whole pull of commercialization. One of the good effects of this greater visibility and the incorporation of this visible subculture into the commercial world is that the gay scene has expanded to the benefit of gay people. It's a much more open and bigger and a more available gay scene than ever before. And gay people have gained from that. But there are, of course, negative aspects: heightened exploitation, obsession with appearance, the preoccupation with money and life-style. But, at the same time, there has been something quite positive: the incorporation of a visible subculture into the mainstream of society.

Q. - *Since the beginning of the last decade homosexuals have started defining themselves by rejecting the old categories of « sick », « pervert » and so on. Don't you*

think this new self-definition contributed, in a way, to a new separateness of the homosexual from the rest of society?

A. - This is a very common argument and it has intellectual roots. The influence of Foucault is very strong here; but I think it's wrong. What happens is that there is always a process of definition and self-definition: the world exists as categorization and definition and you can't will yourself out of those. What you can do is to try to transform them, and that's in a sense what gay people have done. They've transformed the negative definitions which are historical. I mean, these definitions had very clear historical roots in the 18th and 19th centuries, but they were very negative definitions. What gay people have done is, by and large, to reverse those definitions and make them positive, but I think that reversal is the first step in challenging them. You can't get round that stage of challenging them. You can't escape the need to define yourself against the dominant definitions, because that's how things change in our society. The analogy I always like is that of the working-class movement: the aim of the socialist working-class movement, historically, has been to get rid of class divisions and establish a classless society, a communist society. But, historically, that occurred through the accentuation of class conflict: they actually defined themselves as a class for itself against the capitalist classes. Similarly, the only way feminists can achieve their aim is by defining themselves as women against the dominant structures which define them as a second sex, just as the only way gays can achieve something is by defining themselves positively, in the first place, against negative stereotypes. Later on, hopefully, these categorizations will begin of disintegrate.

Q. - *Why do you think homosexuals and other « sexual deviants » are considered « folk devils », scapegoats in periods of stress?*

A. - I think this is a difficult question and I struggle with it all the time. I don't think there is any single reason,

because I don't think homosexuals are always scapegoats. If we look at different historical periods, we find different sorts of scapegoats. So the real question is why over the last, say, hundred years the homosexual has been the focus of moral panics. One of the reasons is that our culture has become increasingly obsessed with defining the boundaries between the natural and the unnatural, the acceptable and the unacceptable. Those sharp boundaries have always been in favour of defining the norm, the heterosexual norm, the norms of masculinity and femininity. The problem with homosexuality is that it seems to infringe those norms. It's one of the areas of social life which is formless, it's neither masculine nor feminine according to the norm of definition: it's not productive, it's not procreative, it's not related to the family. And it's because it's outside those norms of our society that homosexuality gives rise to deep fear, because it seems to challenge what is most important to the stability of our society. I don't believe this is really what is most central to the stability of our society. It is what our society thinks that is most important: family life and sharply defined roles between men and women.

Q. - *Do you think religion has something to do with it?*

A. - I think cultural differences matter here. I certainly think that religion had a lot to do with it throughout Europe until the 19th century because the very categories we used were religious categories: the difference between the spirit and the flesh, the sinner and the saint and so on are religious categories. Since the 19th century, by and large, in Western Europe and America those categories have been displaced by medical categories « sick » vs. « healthy ». But I think in certain parts of Europe — Italy is a good example — the religious and the medical definitions are very closely intertwined and that's, of course, largely because of the institutional power of the Catholic Church. The Churches in Britain don't have that same institutional force, partly because of their increased secularization. But I think in Italy, and certain other countries,

like Ireland, you can never escape those religious definitions; so it's like a battle between the more modern forms of control, the medical, and the more ancient, traditional ones, the religious.

Q. - *Let's talk about the modern homosexual subculture now. How far do you think that elements from this subculture have been recycled into the general culture, in terms of style, fashion, values, behaviour, personal relationships?*

A. - In his most recent book, *The Homosexualization of* America [1], Dennis Altman suggests that there is a dual process: (i) of homosexuals being incorporated into American life and (ii) of American life, in turn, being influenced by homosexuals, in terms of style and so on. But he also says that what's remarkable about America is that today homosexuals have been accepted, but homosexuality has not, and that suggests the limits of what has been accepted. As far as the social acceptance of our place in the world today goes, in America and in Britain homosexuals can be invited to dinner parties, they can appear on television, but our society is still terrified by the chaos that may result from the acceptance of homosexuality. This suggests that there is a very limited acceptance of homosexuality in our culture and also a very limited influence of homosexuality on the life-styles of the majority of the population who are not homosexual, who are not defined as homosexual. There are superficial overlaps: for instance in the disco-culture which really took off in the mid-70s in America and Western Europe because of the existence of gays. I think it's now a universal youth phenomenon, but it started as a heterosexual phenomenon in the Sixties and was expanded by gays. Furthermore the gay influence on disco-music has gone back to the general culture, so there is a sort of reciprocal influence. Gays influenced disco-music as Richard Dyer's article on disco-music illustrates [2].

[1] Beacon Press, Boston, 1983.

[2] R. Dyer, « In Defence of Disco », in *Gay Left*, number 8, Summer 1979, pp. 20-23.

Certain types of life-style (trivial things, like the use of keys on each side) have entered into the straight male culture. You can see all sorts of men going down the streets now with their keys dangling from their belts, although it started as part of gay male iconography in America. But, basically, I still think that the cultures are fairly separate, because I still think that homosexuality is antagonistic to the dominant values in our society.

Q. - *In his paper « Pansies, Perverts and Macho Men », John Marshall states: « It is remarkable that in recent years the shift away from images of gender inversion has been so great that there is now a positive identification amongst many homosexuals ... with masculine style and demeanour. This cult of machismo has arrived, interestingly, at the same time as the further relaxation of traditional masculine style within the young heterosexual male population »*[3]*. How could you explain this?*

A. - First of all, I think this machismo of the gay subculture can be exaggerated as can the effemination of the straight culture, but certainly there are tendencies within the gay male subculture to move away from the traditional notion of gays as a « third sex », neither male nor female, towards an affirmation of masculine style and masculine values. Certainly amongst the straight culture there is a greater variety of styles, some of which are, in commercial terms, more effeminate than they used to be.

Q. - *Yes, but in terms of sexual politics are the new images liberating or oppressive?*

A. - I think they are transitional and they are transitional in an important sense, because, over the last hundred years, male homosexuality has been defined as something which is neither proper masculinity nor proper femininity and gay people, in response, have tended to adopt life-styles

[3] In *The Making of the Modern Homosexual*, ed. by K. Plummer, London, Hutchinson, 1981, pp. 152, 153.

and mannerisms (for example camp, drag and effeminate humour) which suggest that we are not really men. Over the last ten or fifteen years, with the expansion of the gay male subculture, we were able to affirm our masculinity, we were able to say « we're both homosexual and men ». Now, in doing that, I think the content of that male, apparently male, macho style has been altered. It's become another form of drag, another form of dressing-up. It's not really the same as traditional masculinity. It's taking the iconography and the style of traditional masculinity and transforming it into something different. So if you go into a gay leather bar, the feeling you get is quite different from the feeling if you go into a straight leather bar. A straight leather bar to me is threatening. If I go into a gay leather bar, I don't feel threatened at all because it's part of the community in which I feel at home. What matters isn't so much the actual clothes or style, but the meaning that's given to those clothes or style. I think that the meaning of the gay male macho subculture is different, so I wouldn't see it necessarily as a reactionary move towards masculinity or social masculine values. I see it as a recognition of our masculinity and its transformation into something distinct.

Q. - *So the gay « macho » style is not in the image of the oppressor, as someone says.*

A. - I don't think so. I think the meaning has been transformed.

Q. - *And what is, then, the psychological significance of these male images for the people who identify with them?*

A. - I think these images say something about the changing relationship between masculinity and femininity, because, traditionally, we have regarded masculinity as being expressed through heterosexuality: masculinity is expressed through fucking women. I think what the transformation of gender and sexual relations, over the last ten to fifteen years, has done is to break that connection — I think

John Marshall's article points to this. But, at the same time, there is a transition; and I think we are going through that transitional phase. But what it does psychologically is to make it possible for men, for gay men, to say « I'm still a man, I'm not a third sex, I'm not a woman: I'm a man, but I'm also homosexual ». And I think the ability to say things like that is psychologically liberating, because it means we don't have to conform to a stereotype of effeminate homosexuality. Actually, in saying « I'm a man and I'm homosexual », we can begin to transform the meaning of both. We are not stuck in the notion that we have to fit into pre-existing notions of what masculinity and femininity are; we can, actually, break with these categorizations. I find it a liberating thing and I think gay men find it liberating in general.

Q. - *What do you think of the « camp » style, then?*

A. - I'm in favour of diversity, of variety, of not trying to fit everyone into a particular mode. Certainly it is true that « campness » is no longer the dominant mode of the gay male subculture as it was up to the Sixties, but I don't think it has disappeared and I think you find a lot of men in leather who are extremely « camp » and there is an incorporation of « campness » into the new macho style.

Q. - *What about magazines such as Him and Zipper which seem to diffuse the « butch » image? How far do you think that's true and what is your opinion of those magazines?*

A. - Well, they are certainly dependent on the fact that these images are developing in the subculture and, of course, at the same time they reinforce it. I think it's a difficult question. They are a sort of soft-porn, they're semi-pornographic, they are not violent or sexually explicit for legal reasons, but they suggest sexuality and sexual images. They recognize that there's been an opening-up for certain fantasy areas, which have been closed to visibility until very recently. Many gay men who were

active in the subculture before the Second World War, in the Twenties and Thirties, had fantasies about meeting masculine men. E. M. Forster, the novelist, for instance, was very attracted to very butch men and so was Edward Carpenter. But today there are no longer gay men who see themselves as really effeminate, looking for a straight man to save them, a butch man to save them. What's now happening is that there is a sort of butchness on both parts, there is a recognition that both partners are dressed in butch clothes and they're both in butch roles, or they're both in femme roles and there is no fixity in these notions: that is why, I think, the macho look is potentially progressive, because it actually says that we can adopt styles that fit in with our fantasies, but these styles are not fixed, they're things we can choose, we can get into and get out of. The fact that lots of people are now into wearing leather and macho styles, far from suggesting the fixity of masculinity, suggests its fragility. What I'm trying to say about *Him* and *Zipper* is that they exist because of that change, it is the recognition that masculinity is something we put on and take off, rather than something we are born with. In that sense they reflect changes that are going on and throw back that reflection on to those who are changing. But, if you ask me what my opinion of *Him* and *Zipper* is, I don't think they're particularly progressive as journals. They're often very bad journals, very right-wing as well.

Q. - *You've just said that* Him *and* Zipper *are soft-porn mags. What do you think of homosexual pornography?*

A. - I think it's different from heterosexual pornography. Heterosexual pornography depends on imbalances of power: men dominate women either sexually or sometimes by violence and so there is a relationship of superior to subordinate. I don't think that's true of gay porn. Gay porn is much more like a narcissistic play, it's putting yourself into the image of the other, you participate much more and the person you are watching is also participating back:

it's much more a relationship of equals. What you see in gay porn are the images either of what you'd like to be or who you'd like to have a sexual relationship with. It's not based on the same power-relationship as heterosexual pornography and that's quite important. I personally don't think heterosexual pornography is as damaging as it has been suggested by some feminists. The obsession of some feminists with pornography is dangerous, because it displaces the problem and the problem isn't that of pornography, the problem is that of sexism, of imbalances of power between men and women, of men being dominant socially and culturally and women being subordinate.

Q. - *Do you think pornography is a sort of commodity?*

A. - Certainly it's a commodity. It's produced for profit, it's part of the commercialization of desire, but I don't think the fact that it's a commodity in itself makes pornography worse or better. It's just one of the facts of us being sexual beings in a capitalist society.

Q. - *Let's go back to politics. England in supposed to have one of the most conservative governments in Europe at the moment. In the light of this new conservatism, do you think there are going to be hard times for the English gays in the immediate future?*

A. - I think there is an apparent paradox. There is no necessary relationship between economic and moral conservatism. For example, although the population is, by and large, extremely conservative on economic matters, at the same time there is still evidence of a growing progressivism on sexual matters. The opinion polls suggest that nowadays more people are in favour of liberal attitudes towards homosexuality than ten years ago. Reagan did not actively support the moral agenda of the far right. In this country Mrs. Thatcher has, by and large, concentrated on economic factors, economic conservatism, economic reaction rather than moral reaction. Reagan and Thatcher are able to maintain a sort of physical hegemony on economic

factors, but not on social and moral factors. I don't think there is likely to be any necessary reaction. There might even be certain gains: for example, during Thatcher's first government, the law was liberalized in relationship to Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Q. - *When did homosexuality become legal in this latter country?*

A. - A few months ago, while Scotland was liberalized two or three years earlier. Moreover, there may conceivably be a relaxation of the law on the age of consent, to eighteen as opposed to twenty-one. So it's a very paradoxical situation and it warns us not to see the far right as a unified block, because it's composed of disparate interests which are held together by certain key issues and I don't think that sexuality is a key issue in this country, at least not yet. But, if I can just say one more thing, although that's the case, nevertheless the general mood of conservatism makes it more difficult to risk. This is having a sort of throw-back effect on gay people. Fewer gay people are likely to take a risk of losing their jobs, for instance, by being too openly gay. The general mood of conservatism permeates the whole population. It's like the backwash of the sea: it has effect over and above the intentions of those straightforwardly conservative.

Q. - Gay News *collapsed in April. Why did that happen?*

A. - I don't believe that has anything to do with the general mood of conservatism. That's very directly related to the profit seeking ambitions of two or three people. The roots of the collapse are deep in the history of *Gay News*: the basic problem was that *Gay News* was never a collective enterprise committed to the gay movement, it was the property of one person. With the economic crisis, the profits that that person had hoped to make became more and more unrealistic and, in the end, the whole deal broke down and the staff of *Gay News* couldn't raise the money to buy it. So, in a sense, the economic

crisis was the last straw, in a situation already foredoomed to disaster; ultimately, the blame lies on too selfish people.

Q. - *I see. I now want to move to another more personal question. You were born and bred in Wales, in one of the most uncompromisingly working-class areas of Britain. As a homosexual, what problems did you have to face during your youth?*

A. - I don't think the working class in this country are any more anti-gay than the middle-class population, but in the South Wales mining areas, where I come from, there is a great emphasis on machismo. Maleness is associated with strength, with male-bonding, with being quite distinct from women, with being physically strong and so on and I, as a young person, wasn't any of those things. I was much closer to my female relatives, my mother, my aunts, I was not physically fit, I was always ill, sort of scholarly, rather than sporty. So in all those sorts of ways I didn't conform. Now, I still can't sort out in my mind whether my sense of being different came from my homosexuality or from the fact that I wasn't a conventional male figure. I believe it's much more the second: I felt different and, in seeking a reason for my difference, I then found it in my homosexuality. But the end result was the same: I felt alienated from my background. I found it very difficult to be relaxed in a working-class area, especially after I came to London as a student, and I have stayed in London ever since. A mixture of things are involved: one is the fact that I wasn't a « conventional male », I wasn't strong and so on; moreover I was gay, but the third factor is the fact that I was highly educated and I took a teaching job in an area which is largely working-class. So it was a mixture of class, sexuality and gender, all mixed-up together ... I found it difficult. Now my family have, by and large, accepted my gayness. I mean, they don't properly understand it, but they have accepted it, they've accepted my friends and lovers and I feel much closer to my relations now than I felt twenty years ago. So I don't think there

is any unsurmountable problem in being working-class and gay. The problem is that we live in a heterosexual society.

Q. - *Finally, how would you describe your involvement in the Gay Liberation Front in the Seventies? And how has coming out into the open changed your life?*

A. - Well, my involvement in the gay movement transformed my life and it's probably the most single formative experience of my adulthood. I was actively gay before I became involved in the gay movement. I had sexual relations, my friends knew I was gay, my family didn't, but I had an active gay life. I was involved in some sort of gay scene and I was fairly open about it or so I thought: it was something that was part of me. But I don't suppose I ever felt that I could be really happy before the Gay Liberation Front and certainly I didn't see the connection between my homosexuality and my politics. What the G. L. F. did was to bring together the various strands of my life: the political, social, cultural and sexual and teach me to see that there was a relationship between them, that I could be a unified person. In a sense, that was the most important lesson of the G. L. F.: it gave me an ideology of what I wanted to attain. I'm not saying I've attained it, the contradictions of my life are still there, the contradictions of the different roles one has in life are still there. I still find it difficult in certain situations to be relaxed, as a lot of gay men, for example, in situations where you are the only gay man in a crowd of heterosexuals. You feel on the defensive then. But now I feel tougher about my defensiveness and I suppose I have a notion of what I want to be, of what I want to do. I consider my gayness not simply as an identity but as a political stance. It's thrown into relief all other areas of my life and, most of all, it's made me see that if a political situation exists that doesn't accept my gayness, my sexuality, my choice of life-style, then it's not me that should change, but politics. That's had a very important influence on my attitude to the socialist tradition. I identify very closely

with the socialists. But it's made me question some of the so-called faiths on which the existing socialisms have been built, for example the importance of the economic over the individual and the economic over the sexual: I actively began to challenge those things over the last five, six years in my writing and my politics. And that's very important. So the influence of the G. L. F. has gone on and on, although, as a movement, it died ten years ago.

recensioni

A. BURGESS, *The End of the World News*, London, Hutchinson, 1982, X + 389 pp.

I have ascertained that, widely published in European picture magazines in the last year of President Carter's tenure, there was indeed a photograph of himself and his lady viewing simultaneously three television programmes. The author's comment on this procedure and its possible application to the craft of the novel provides an evident clue as to his intention in the work you have before you (p. ix).

Queste parole sono tratte dalla prefazione all'ultimo « romanzo » di Anthony Burgess, *The End of the World News*, vergata da un certo John B. Wilson, B. A., che veste i panni fittizi di curatore di un'opera inedita da lui rinvenuta, dopo la morte dell'autore, « in a shopping bag marked UPIM » (p. vii) e composta da materiale tripartito ed apparentemente eterogeneo: la descrizione fantastica della fine del mondo ad opera di un misterioso astro, Lynx, entrato in collisione con la terra alla fine del secondo millennio; una breve biografia di Freud sotto forma di sceneggiato televisivo; il libretto di un *musical* avente per oggetto il viaggio di Trotsky a New York nel 1917. Tre diversi tipi di narrazione che, stando all'opinione espressa dall'autore in una lettera inserita nella prefazione, intendono trattare « the greatest events of the past century: the discovery of the unconscious by Sigmund Freud, the Trotskian doctrine of world socialism, and the invention of the space-rocket » (p. ix). Il titolo dell'opera, che viene presentata al lettore secondo il montaggio messo a punto dal sedicente John B. Wilson, è invece un macabro *pun*, giocato sul doppio senso delle parole che concludono una nota trasmissione radiofonica: « This is the end of the World News » (p. x).

In realtà le numerose informazioni che il lettore riceve in questa breve ma fitta introduzione e che sembrano avere il compito di sciogliere, già prima che si passi al testo vero e proprio, ogni tipo di dubbio che gli ipotetici destinatari possano avere riguardo a struttura, linguaggio e messaggio, appaiono perfettamente in linea con gli intenti di uno scrittore come Burgess che ha già offerto numerose prove di sapiente manipolazione del linguaggio da un

lato e di inguaribile istinto moralistico e pedagogico dall'altro. Discepolo ideale e devoto di Joyce al quale ha dedicato anche uno studio di notevole importanza (*Joysprick*, 1973), del quale gli sono assai cari i *pastiches* linguistici che sovente fa propri, e di Orwell (al quale è dedicata tutta la prima parte di *1985*, 1978), legato ad un albero genealogico che ramifica all'indietro fino allo Swift dei noti versi sul giudizio universale, in *The End of the World News* Burgess chiama a raccolta, per così dire, i cliché narrativi esplorati nelle opere precedenti, per dar vita (o morte) ad una sorta di *summa teologica* polimorfa che ha come oggetto il progressivo svilimento di tutto ciò che è umano, linguaggio compreso, e la messa in atto delle premesse di un chiliasmo negativo che vede la catastrofe come evento prossimo venturo ed inevitabile.

Nell'universo dell'opera, percorso dalle medesime *Durango 99* di cui si erano serviti i giovani teppisti di *A Clockwork Orange* (1962), qui ribattezzati *Teutprots*, segnato dallo strapotere dei mass media come era già avvenuto in *The Wanting Seed* (1962) e da una letteratura contratta in un unico genere, la fantascienza (« scifi, futfic really », p. 29), non c'è posto per arte e poesia. La parola dello scrittore, morto, a detta del curatore, in una toilette (e non si può non pensare al ciclo di *Enderby*, 1963-1974), passa idealmente al protagonista di una delle tre sezioni del testo, Val Brodie, nostalgico cultore dei grandi scrittori del passato ma costretto al ruolo di estenuato insegnante di fantascienza. Quando una umanità ormai allo stremo costruirà una astronave-arca per dar vita nello spazio ad un mondo nuovo che non abbia in sé nulla del vecchio, Val, incluso nel progetto come cronista della spedizione (cioè, quasi come vivente parodia dello scrittore epico), preferirà in un primo momento darsi alla fuga in compagnia di un vecchio attore, Willett. È proprio la sua caratterizzazione come ribelle ad imparentarlo, prima che agli omologhi antieroi orwelliani, alle vicende di Freud e Trotsky, assieme ai quali forma un trittico: tre figure collegate fra loro non idealmente, si badi, ma nella realtà della pagina scritta dove vengono accomunati innanzitutto in quanto artisti (i riferimenti alla qualità *poetica* degli scritti di Freud e Trotsky sono numerosissimi) e poi come portatori di messaggi eversivi in quanto sovvertitori di un ordine antico, sia pur diversamente costituito.

Seguendo in gran parte la verità storica, Burgess li presenta come vincitori e vinti allo stesso tempo: se, infatti, il *Verbo* di Freud e di Trotsky si espande per il mondo con tutti i crismi di una rivoluzione universale, il primo conosce l'amarezza delle spinte centrifughe che si aprono fra i suoi stessi seguaci (soprattutto Adler e Jung), fino a soccombere al cancro che lo divora nel corso di un dialogo che è fra le pagine più belle del libro, mentre l'uomo politico vede il proprio messaggio ridotto alle dimensioni di una « American-born Utopia » (p. 152 e 378) e se stesso esposto ai rischi di una morte immatura:

> Mexico, Mexico,
> A good place to die
> Is Mexico (p. 153 e 379).

La vicenda del poeta Val è simile: rientrato nell'astronave e assunte le funzioni di capo della missione, conosce una vittoria soltanto apparente. Lasciato al compagno di strada Willett il compito di trascinare in un universo morente i cascami di un mondo letterario ormai estinto, affiderà i più importanti compiti direttivi ad un ex-giocatore d'azzardo, così motivando la scelta:

> I mean that all we can reasonably salvage from our past is the game of skill or chance, which is based on the abstraction of number. All else — literature, metaphysics, music — must be accounted mere nostalgia, nothing more (p. 385).

Anche Val, presto, sparirà nel nulla. In un breve epilogo, dove a dialogare sono gli uomini nuovi, i bambini nati nello spazio dopo la distruzione della terra, non è a lui che si accenna, ma ad una vecchia leggenda, all'antichissimo mito della lotta fra il bene e il male (tema ampiamente trattato in *The Wanting Seed*), grottescamente riassunto:

> 'What other myth?'
> 'The one about the badman called Fred Fraud who kept people strapped to a couch and the good man called Trot Sky who wanted people to do what he did and run through space' (p. 388).

Il progetto iniziale di Burgess, come si può notare anche da questa ultima ricapitolazione ironica dei temi del libro, era assai ambizioso: collegare tre esistenze-simbolo, apparentemente del tutto estranee l'una all'altra, a tre forme narrative altrettanto lontane fra loro e dar vita ad un tutto fonico-mimico-descrittivo senza precedenti, dove le singole parti si armonizzassero senza perdere le proprie specifiche caratteristiche. Per quanti sforzi faccia lo scrittore, reale o fittizio che sia, per quanto attivi tecniche di missaggio grafico non peregrine, il risultato rimane inferiore all'attesa. Il lettore non è infastidito tanto dalla riproposta ormai ossessiva di temi su cui Burgess ha insistito in tante opere, sostanzialmente irrilevanti ai fini di una valutazione dei meriti formali dell'opera, né dal tono troppo spesso pedagogico (donde una schiacciante preponderanza dell'esplicito sull'implicito), quanto da una disarmonia non prestabilita nella quale, volendo applicare allo stesso Burgess il linguaggio neotestamentario che tanto gli è caro, « la destra non

sa quello che fa la sinistra ». La pagina scritta ha infatti, per definizione, dei limiti che non è possibile varcare se non con mezzi che il nostro autore non riesce a mettere a punto: non basta interrompere un *song* di Trotsky e riprenderlo dopo qualche pagina perché la macchina dell'opera proceda secondo le intenzioni.

Le tre sezioni conservano i tratti di opere staccate che il lettore può unificare solo « a posteriori », come tre frammenti di un *puzzle* ciclopico che, messi assieme, dovrebbero dar forma ad un quadro credibile della simultanea fine del mondo e del potere creativo della parola:

> The problem is we've inflated language to the limit (p. 25).
>
> God, devil, demiurge, words, words (p. 65).
>
> It's not the words I object to. It's the meaningless of words (p. 181).
>
> Just throw away your syntax [...]
> So let's have no more anguish
> With adverbs and verbs.
> Let language go and languish [...] (p. 264).

Gioco snervato e snervante, questo della inutilità e inadeguatezza della parola e del lamento dell'intellettuale sulla fine del proprio ruolo; gioco che nel libro di Burgess, fra guizzi improvvisi e brillanti manipolazioni linguistiche, si trascina per 389 pagine, tanto da costringerci a ricordare ciò che ebbe a dire una volta argutamente il poeta cinese Po Chu I a proposito del *Tao Te King* di Lao Tzu:

> Quelli che parlano non sanno niente,
> Quelli che sanno son silenziosi.
> Queste parole, così mi dicono,
> Furono scritte da Lao Tzu.
> Se dobbiam credere che Lao Tzu
> Fosse egli stesso 'uno che sa',
> Come sarà che scrisse un libro
> Che conta cinquemila parole?

STEFANO MANFERLOTTI

J. C. HOLT, *Robin Hood*, London, Thames & Hudson, 1982 (1983 paperback), 208 pp.

Professor Holt makes it clear from the start that it is the legend of Robin Hood that interests him, rather than any attempt to identify the historical figure:

> The identity of the man matters less than the persistence of the legend. That is the most remarkable thing about him. And the perpetuation of the legend involves others: those who told the stories and those who listened to them (p. 7).

In particular, his book aims to blow away what he calls the 'smoke-screen' of later make-believe to reveal the elements of the original legend, and to determine in what social milieu and to what social purpose the legend was created and disseminated. It is therefore to the earliest sources of the legend that he turns first.

All we know of the medieval legend of Robin Hood is contained in the five ballads and a play fragment which have survived from the period between 1450 and the middle of the sixteenth century. Clearly, if by that time the legend was attracting the attention of the printers, as in the case of *A Lyttell Geste of Robyn Hode*, printed by Wynkyn de Worde (1492-1534), then it must have already been well known. Indeed the *Gest* has internal linguistic evidence to suggest circa 1400 as a possible date of composition, and there is an even earlier reference to Robin in *Piers Plowman* written in about 1377.

Even at this stage however some degree of 'contamination' had already taken place, and so Holt submits these earliest sources to 'trial by analogue' with other contemporary ballads and romances in order to determine which elements are to be found exclusively in the Robin Hood legend. By eliminating the 'literary chestnuts' he hopes to find a core of material which will then help in tracing the origins of the legend. One fact emerges above all others: 'the nearer Robin gets to Nottingham the less authentic he becomes' (p. 75). The tales that best pass the analogue test, that is that appear to be less derivative, are those based in the Barnsdale area of South Yorkshire rather than the famous Sherwood Forest. The tailoring together of Barnsdale and Sherwood stories in the *Gest* was simply an attempt to impose unity on tales from a variety of different sources.

In the process of his delineation of the original legend, Holt also takes the opportunity to list some of the more pervasive modern (ie. sixteenth century onwards) anachronisms. These include many elements which will be familiar: for example in Robin's death scene, the blowing of his horn and the final bowshot to mark his grave are both eighteenth century additions; Maid Marian is also absent, being a late sixteenth century importation when Robin was absorbed into the May Games.

So far there is little to cause controversy, Holt is summarizing what is generally recognized by medieval scholars and Robin's progress through the centuries has been the subject of previous studies. He does it however with great style, that is to say simply and clearly. Indeed, from this point of view the whole book is a

delight to read. Even in the most complicated exposition the non-specialist reader finds the way clearly signposted and not without touches of humour to lighten the task. Not least, the medieval rhymes have a modern English translation alongside, although the often longer prose extracts do not, perhaps for reasons of space. The book is also very well illustrated both with photographs and woodcuts.

There are issues, naturally, upon which there is less general agreement and here Holt's argument sharpens as he brings into play his immense knowledge of the medieval period. One of the most interesting of these is the dating of the rise of the original legend. Robin Hood has arrived in the twentieth century firmly placed in the reign of Richard the Lionheart (1189-1199) but like his residence in Sherwood, this is not confirmed by the early ballads. In fact, the only definitely traceable historical reference is to 'Edward our comely king', identified by Hunter in 1883 as Edward II (1308-1327) on the basis of a Royal progress which Edward made through the north of England in 1323 and which followed a route similar to that described in the *Gest*. It was the Scottish chroniclers of the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries who first proposed earlier dates, and above all John Major in his *History of Greater Britain* (1521) who placed Robin in the period of Richard I's imprisonment (1193-4). It was this date advanced with no supporting evidence, which gradually gained acceptance. On this occasion as on several others, Holt comments wryly on the ease with which conjecture has become fact at many stages of the telling and re-telling of this legend.

Notwithstanding this, Holt himself favours an earlier dating (although not as early as Major's) and so takes issue with Hunter's hypothesis based on the 1323 progress. Hunter established that a Robyn or Robert Hood entered the king's service shortly after the northern journey. He also found in the Wakefield court rolls a Robert Hood registered in 1316 and 1317. By assuming that they were the same man, he saw correspondences between these records and Robin's entry into the king's service as described in the *Gest*. His own judgement was cautious but once again later writers have accepted his hypothesis as a certainty. Holt considers the evidence in detail and sums up as follows:

> ... there remain two separate men, Robert Hood, tenant of the manor of Wakefield, and Robin Hode, porter of the chamber; there is nothing to identify the two as one and the same person; there is nothing to suggest that the first was a contrariant, still less an outlaw; the second cannot have been the prototype of the Robin Hood of the *Gest* who encountered the king in Sherwood and returned with him to enter royal service. So much for the detail of Hunter's case (p. 50).

This refutation of the hitherto widely accepted fourteenth century dating, based as it is on documentary evidence re-examined by Holt, is one of the important contributions that this book makes to Robin Hood scholarship.

Another is Holt's uncovering of a network of contacts which almost certainly aided the circulation of the legend in its earliest form. Although Hunter's conclusions about the date were wrong, he did direct the search for a source towards the Barnsdale location, which was well-known by the beginning of the fourteenth century as a dangerous area for travellers. And it is this area which provides the clue. Holt discloses that there was a sudden proliferation of 'Robinhood' nicknames and surnames in Sussex around the turn of the thirteenth century. He argues that this combination of surname and Christian name is too unusual to be explained as a form of patronymic and that very probably they were associated with the spreading of the Robin stories. All falls into place when he reveals that the otherwise extremely improbable Barnsdale/Sussex link did actually exist:

> From Barnsdale to Sussex ... seems a far cry. Yet it was not far in terms of feudal property. The Warenne earls of Surrey who were lords of Conisborough and Wakefield in South Yorkshire were also lords of the Rape of Lewes in Sussex. ... In 1296 ... the heir to the Liberty of Leicester in Sussex, where Gilbert Robynhod was a tenant, was married to the honour of Pontefract, within the southern bounds of which lay Barnsdale (p. 53).

It is this link that supplies the cornerstone of Holt's argument on the social origins of the legend. If the extent of the Lancaster and Lacy family estates was an important factor in spreading the tales, then they were clearly carried by social classes with a high degree of mobility, which in medieval times restricts it to the crown, the aristocracy and the landed gentry. The originality and knightly atmosphere of some of the longer poems, parts of the *Gest* for example, also argue for a high level of ministrelsy and therefore an audience capable of substantial patronage. Such patrons would naturally be surrounded by their households and dependents, and it is precisely in the ranks of these retainers that Holt finds what he feels to be the most fertile ground for the legend's growth.

The evidence he produces is as extensive as it is impressive and must needs be simplified here. It rests on the demonstration that the Robin of the ballads is unmistakably a member of the 'yeoman' class and specifically the serving yeoman rather than his husbandman counterpart. The opening of the *Gest* is representative of both the type of address to the audience and the description of Robin which is to be found elsewhere in the ballads:

> Lythe and listin, gentilmen,
> That be of frebore blode.
> I shal you tel of a gode yeman,
> His name was Robin Hode.

Robin's yeoman status is further attested by his weaponry (bow and sword, the tales with the more plebian quarterstaff are of a later date); the repeated references to himself and Little John as being 'curteyes'; and his familiarity with knightly affairs such as mortgage and the world of service. The case is backed by an impressive amount of corroborative detail. One striking example is that the woodcut used in 1491 to show the Knight's Yeoman in Chaucer's 'Prologue' to *The Canterbury Tales* was used again in 1508 as a picture of Robin Hood in the Chapman and Mylar prints, so exactly did the descriptions tally. It is detail like this which makes the book such a valuable source for anyone working in this period. Holt also demonstrates that the legitimate use of feudal power is implicit in the plot structure of these early ballads. Robin combats the unfair or corrupt use of power (especially monastic privilege) but not the foundations of the power itself. He accepts without question the king's authority, his final reward is to enter the royal service and his own relationship with the members of his band is one of a feudal overlord.

Professor Holt is clearly at his most combative here. He takes particular pains at various points in the book to deny that there is any evidence in the early texts to support those social historians like Hobsbawm who see Robin as the archetype of the social rebel, a peasant bandit rebelling against social injustice. That many characteristics of Hobsbawm's 'noble bandit' are not present in the original legend cannot be denied, but the defence is actually much simpler: Hobsbawm does not say they are. His presentation of Robin as the archetype of the social bandit has a respectable pedigree, starting with Ritson in 1795, and as far as the more plebian Robin and his 'robbing the rich to give to the poor' are concerned, Hobsbawm is basing his description on the later legend in which these are both well-established elements.

All this is well-known to Holt, who indeed traces these developments in his chapter on the later legend. His attack on Hobsbawm is therefore all the more revealing, for it betrays a dislike for the later legend which is present in much of what he says. Even while admitting that 'all fancy in legend falsifies, and fancy saturates the tale of Robin Hood' (p. 190) he evidently privileges the early ballad sources at the expense of the legend in its other forms, as can be seen from comments such as this:

> And if Robin is taken over as an expression of present day social malaise or discontent, so be it. But that is no excuse for advancing modern fiction as an explanation of medieval fact (p. 190).

In his anxiety to clear Robin from the taint of subversion, Holt makes this highly characteristic distinction between 'modern fiction' and 'medieval fact' seeming to ignore for a moment that what he is comparing are two different fictions. The legend has changed during the centuries as a result of the demands upon it to reflect the conditions of the audience. The audiences who later enjoyed those 'modern anachronisms' were just as great a factor in the composition of the legend as was the original yeoman audience which Holt has so convincingly posited, and the elements of 'fancy' thus introduced make the ballads just as fictitious as any eighteenth century broadsheet. Of course, Holt takes account of the implied audience in his thesis on the social origins of the ballads, but he undervalues their consequent fictive nature whenever he tries to argue for the 'authenticity' of the Robin Hood they present. This ambiguity of attitude is probably the book's greatest flaw.

It also leads him to a rather harsh judgement on the theory of a popular oral tradition previous to the writing of the ballads; a tradition, so runs the argument, which was very largely emasculated by the courtly minstrels. Holt considers this question when discussing the emergence in the seventeenth century of a more plebian Robin Hood:

> It is tempting to suppose that these tales embody ancient tradition, stemming from the very source of the legend, in which Robin, if not always the hero, was at least the property of the folk ... This cannot be either proved or disproved because in the last resort it depends on assertion and invention. The existence of such a folk tradition is easier to imagine than to refute; but imagination is no substitute for evidence, and, on the whole, such evidence as there is tells against this hypothesis (pp. 170-1).

Again, what is worrying about this argument is the assumed superiority of 'evidence' over 'imagination'. If such an oral tradition is so 'tempting' and 'easier to imagine than refute' then it too should be accorded a certain status, however cautiously. The fact that the ballads presuppose a yeoman audience cannot constitute proof that this was the original audience when the only evidence to the contrary by its very nature cannot exist. Here again, one feels, Professor Holt has been unjustifiably absolute.

There is, then, much in this book which is provocative. In particular this assumption behind many of Holt's comments that the Robin of the ballads is in some way superior to the later version; a point of view understandable from a medieval historian

like Holt, but in the end damaging for a book which claims from the beginning to be about 'a legend rather than a man' (p. 7). It has already led Patrick Wormald, writing in the *London Review of Books* (vol. 5, no. 8), to hymn the book as a refutation of 'the more banally Marxist view of Robin Hood as People's Hero'. The weakness of that argument has been hinted at above, but certainly whoever writes on Robin Hood in the future will have to take Holt into account and meet the challenges which his book contains.

MICHAEL BURGOYNE

D. MORLEY e K. WORPOLE (a cura di), *The Republic of Letters. Working-class writing and local publishing*, London, Comedia Publishing Group, 1982, 155 pp.

L'istituzione letteraria è tutt'altro che una repubblica democratica. Le periodiche riforme che l'hanno investita, in Inghilterra come altrove, si sono risolte, per lo più, in una superficiale revisione dei criteri di inclusione in quella sorta di Almanacco di Gotha che è il canone letterario, ma non ne hanno intaccato la costituzione oligarchica e autoritaria. E sebbene di tanto in tanto il declino (o l'avvenuto crollo) del regno della letteratura venga annunciato dalle sue stesse gerarchie critiche e accademiche ufficiali, la sua struttura continua invece a rimanere salda anche in grazia della sua notevole duttilità che ammette evoluzioni, cooptazioni spregiudicate e persino fronde violente.

Ciò che soprattutto ha resistito immutato è il suo carattere di pratica culturale asimmetrica, basata su una netta distinzione tra momento della produzione e momento della fruizione, un carattere questo che non è uscito scalfito neanche dalle più innovative teorie della ricezione, della pragmatica testuale e cotestuale, della collaborazione produttiva di senso da parte del lettore e persino della produzione di un contro-senso da parte di letture contestatrici e decostruttive.

Né tale carattere è stato minacciato dai tentativi di democratizzazione della pratica letteraria condotti all'insegna di teorie sociali operaistiche sul triplice versante dell'estrazione sociale degli autori, delle caratteristiche ideologiche ed estetiche dei prodotti e della composizione sociale del pubblico. Gli sforzi compiuti in questo senso soprattutto in concomitanza con fasi particolarmente intense di mobilitazione sociale (i moti radicali e cartisti, la radicalizzazione dello scontro ideologico degli anni 1930) non hanno mai messo in discussione la categoria letteratura quale canale privilegiato e unidirezionale della comunicazione ideologica, limitandosi a rivendicare per più ampi strati sociali il diritto di accedere ai vari stadi di tale percorso.

Tanto più interessante risulta pertanto il progetto di cui si discute in *The Republic of Letters* e alla cui realizzazione i due curatori sono tra i numerosi ed entusiastici collaboratori.

Il libro offre una storia e una discussione delle caratteristiche e degli obbiettivi di un movimento (la Federation of Worker Writers and Community Publishers) che propone una concezione della pratica letteraria come attività paritetica (o repubblicana) in cui non solo abbiano diritto di espressione le esigenze e i valori delle culture socialmente subordinate ed emarginate, ma in cui non si ponga neanche la distinzione (funzionale e gerarchica insieme) tra elaboratore e fruitore, e in cui scrittura e lettura non siano due operazioni distinte e separate ma si fondano in un unico processo produttivo. La scrittura, così intesa, non è più l'espressione eccezionale di un talento superiore, bensì l'articolazione di un'esperienza condivisa; non è più un esercizio solitario, ma una pratica comunitaria e genuinamente dialettica. E la lettura, anzicché essere un'operazione fondamentalmente passiva di assorbimento di un messaggio precostituito, diventa un momento inseparabile della produzione; ma non della astratta produzione di un senso in sia pur problematico rapporto con un testo a cui le moderne teorie della ricezione accordano la più assoluta polisemia, ma che è pur sempre cristallizzato nella sua fissità materiale; bensì nella produzione del testo stesso nella sua materialità fisica. Per essere veramente democratica la « Repubblica delle Lettere » deve comportare una totale deistituzionalizzazione della Letteratura, il rovesciamento delle relazioni che questa intrattiene con le strutture del potere sociale non solo e non tanto nei contenuti dei suoi prodotti, quanto nei modi della sua produzione e del suo consumo sociale.

Alla Federazione fanno capo organizzazioni locali (nel libro ne sono elencate 24, ma il loro numero è variabile) che si dedicano alla produzione di testi narrativi e poetici i quali trovano la loro condensazione in forma stampata attraverso un processo collettivo di discussione, lettura e riscrittura che contribuisce da un lato a disperdere il mito dell'eccezionalità creativa che tutt'ora circonda l'operazione della scrittura con effetti paralizzanti soprattutto negli ambienti meno familiari con le pratiche culturali legate all'universo letterario ufficiale, e dall'altro coinvolge nelle varie fasi del processo un numero piuttosto ampio di persone che anzicché sentirsi respinte dalla chiusura ed estraneità dei testi tradizionali possono invece partecipare alla loro elaborazione e, soprattutto, intervenire nella dialettica culturale che li plasma e che da essi scaturisce.

Il libro presenta con entusiasmo e passione i vantaggi e i successi che questa forma comunitaria di elaborazione, distribuzione

e consumo della produzione letteraria ha costituito e costituisce per gruppi culturalmente e linguisticamente emarginati nella società britannica odierna, e in particolare per quelle componenti doppiamente discriminate nella realtà proletaria quali le donne, gli immigrati, i vecchi. Ma non si tratta certo di un libro trionfalistico: esso registra anzi e discute le gravi difficoltà e i problemi di ordine politico, culturale e teorico (oltre che economico) che assediano il progetto dall'esterno e che lo assillano dall'interno. E si tratta di difficoltà e di problemi con la cui vischiosa complessità gli autori si sono misurati nella prassi ma di cui conoscono e discutono la non meno ardua complessità teorica. È sulla base della loro esperienza delle difficoltà concretamente incontrate all'interno dei gruppi per superare limitazioni espressive storicamente interiorizzate che gli autori possono evitare un'accettazione fatalistica di codificazioni (alla Bernstein) dell'azione debilitante di codici linguistici e culturali resi angusti da rigide limitazioni classiste, razziste e sessiste, senza per questo sottovalutare la gravità del fenomeno e individuandolo invece come uno dei campi della lotta culturale:

> The discontinuity between working class language(s) and the various scientific and theoretical discourses which are needed to further our understanding of the world we live in may be most directly explained as a result of the ways in which the educational system itself is, and remains, closed to most working class people. If the children are to be designated 'failures' because they can't connect with the language of the school, the schools ought also to be designated 'failures' because they can't connect with the forms of thought, language and culture which the children bring with them when they arrive at school (pp. 112-113).

Con questa profonda convinzione che le istituzioni che regolano l'organizzazione della cultura (l'istituzione letteraria non meno dell'apparato scolastico) siano esse a doversi trasformare per adeguarsi alle esigenze dei loro utenti, e non il contrario, il movimento che si riconosce nella Federation of Worker Writers and Community Publishers conduce la sua battaglia contro gli organismi istituzionalmente preposti alla difesa dei valori culturali egemoni, primo fra tutti l'Arts Council che con la sua politica di finanziamento delle iniziative editoriali influisce in modo sostanziale sulla loro esistenza. Non a caso la svolta politica recentemente verificatasi in Inghilterra, e quindi anche negli orientamenti dell'Arts Council che fedelmente rispettano le direzioni governative, ha determinato il quasi totale taglio dei finanziamenti assegnati alla Federazione, mettendone in grave pericolo la sopravvivenza.

Ma la battaglia è condotta anche contro i tabù radicati nella coscienza dei singoli e per evitare che i valori dominanti riaffiorino anche nella scrittura 'dal basso' attraverso l'assunzione per lo più inconsapevole dei modelli linguistici e retorici, delle convenzioni di genere e di ogni altra caratteristica formale e contenutistica della tradizione letteraria ufficiale. Sono essenziali in questa battaglia le modalità comunitarie della pratica letteraria inaugurata dal movimento. Come si legge a p. 41:

> This kind of display of the self confidence generated by the new social relationships of writing and reading, are, for the majority of those attending, very important moments in the dis-establishing of literature and the mystique of publishing. For every reading is always permeated by the assumption that listeners are now potential writers themselves.

Ma è altrettanto essenziale non abbassare la guardia neanche per un momento, perché se è vero che gli esiti della battaglia culturale non sono prestabiliti in partenza e il dominio intellettuale non può essere mantenuto per decreto, tale dominio è tuttavia molto insinuante e si presenta spesso in forme subdole. Estremamente delicato è per esempio il ruolo svolto dagli operatori culturali di estrazione borghese, o comunque dotati di una formazione tradizionale, che esercitano una funzione organizzativa e non poca influenza all'interno del movimento. Gli stessi autori e curatori di *The Republic of Letters* sono consci della delicatezza del proprio ruolo:

> There has also been discussion, and different decisions made in different groups, about the role of 'middle-class managers' ... Some groups hold that these can threaten and inhibit working class writers (by their position, not by behaving badly), or have found it hard to create structures that oblige the 'professionals' to share their skill and confidence so that the group can go on without them (p. 12).

Il coinvolgimento personale degli autori e la loro capacità di osservare problematicamente e autocriticamente la propria posizione all'interno del movimento sono tra gli elementi di grande interesse di questo libro che oltre a fornire in una forma rigorosamente piana una discussione teoricamente consapevole ed esperta di un fenomeno culturale delicato e complesso, offre anche ampia informazione sull'attività della Federazione, sulle sue forme organizzative, sulla possibilità di entrare in diretto contatto con le varie sedi, di procurarsi il materiale fin'ora prodotto (e spesso difficilmente reperibile date le caratteristiche artigianali della produzione editoriale e la struttura non commerciale della distribuzione). An-

che la campionatura di brani tratti dalle pubblicazioni fin qui prodotte di cui è costellato il libro costituisce un motivo di grande interesse perché offre un'esperienza diretta di questo tipo di scrittura ed anche perché la sua coralità e l'intima integrazione nel tessuto argomentativo del libro contribuiscono a dare il senso dell'impresa collettiva in cui è impegnato il movimento.

MARINA VITALE

R. WILLIAMS, *Materialismo & cultura* (introduzione di P. Splendore, traduzione di G. Albano e A. Lamarra), Napoli, Pironti, 1983, XI+254 pp.

In Italia si segue con attenzione l'opera di Raymond Williams, scrittore di drammi e romanzi, saggista, *presenza* intellettuale determinante soprattutto per il suo contributo all'affermazione degli Studi Culturali in Gran Bretagna e oltremanica. La diffusione del pensiero williamsiano nel nostro paese è garantita dal vasto interesse dell'Anglistica italiana per la tematica culturale cara a Williams e da una solerte opera di traduzione che riesce a tenere adeguatamente ravvicinate le distanze rispetto alla pubblicazione dei testi originali inglesi. È il caso di *Culture* (1981) appena uscito in italiano a cura di Giovanni Bechelloni con il titolo di *Sociologia della cultura* (Bologna, Il Mulino, 1983), mentre è stato pubblicato da Pironti *Materialismo & cultura*, un volume che raccoglie dieci suoi saggi, selezionati da *Problems in Materialism and Culture* (1980).

Quest'ultima raccolta si vale delle traduzioni puntuali ed efficacemente selettive sulla scala lessicale (peccato che ci sia qualche imperfezione di punteggiatura) curate da Gilda Albano e Annamaria Lamarra. Nell'introduzione Paola Splendore porta avanti con coerenza l'interesse per la produzione scientifica e per la personalità di Williams già dimostrato nell'introduzione all'edizione italiana di *The Long Revolution* da lei tradotta e curata (*La lunga rivoluzione*, Roma, Officina, 1979). In tale introduzione P. Splendore sintetizza in modo lucido ed efficace la 'dinamica' del pensiero williamsiano sottostante a questa raccolta di saggi apparentemente eterogenei e fa risaltare il valore della tecnica tipica dell'autore di mettere a fuoco il proprio « io » che si (i)scrive nella storia come osservatore-partecipante della realtà sociale del proprio tempo.

Materialismo & cultura offre un efficace panorama della produzione saggistica williamsiana degli anni '70 — più precisamente dal 1971 al 1978 — incentrata su alcuni nodi concettuali e pratiche

significanti della realtà contemporanea. La raccolta sembra rispondere ad un bisogno dell'autore, che, a conclusione di un decennio, fa il bilancio della propria attività scientifica, ai fini di una valutazione complessiva e dei fenomeni culturali e dei parametri analitici adottati per la ricerca, nonché per il dibattito dentro e fuori le mura accademiche inglesi e straniere.

L'eclettismo degli interessi di Williams risponde alla molteplicità di stimolazioni che egli ritrova nella complessa materia denominata 'Cultura' — varietà che egli comunque imbriglia in una precisa impalcatura teorica e sulle coordinate di un disegno metodologico organico, frutto di anni di ricerca « solitaria », ma anche di confronto costante sul territorio nazionale e internazionale. *Materialismo & cultura* dà la dimensione dell'ampio spettro d'indagine coperto da Williams in un decennio.

Il volume si apre col saggio 'Letteratura e sociologia', basato su una conferenza tenuta a Cambridge nel '71, in commemorazione di Lucien Goldmann: qui lo studioso britannico definisce, con estrema onestà mentale, la propria posizione di distanza rispetto a certi parametri concettuali del collega e amico, ma pone in evidenza il contributo determinante di Goldman all'analisi della letteratura *nella* « totalità sociale » e ne elogia la « mobilità distaccata » e l'atteggiamento di (auto)sfida permanente quali tratti caratteriali della sua personalità.

I rimanenti saggi mostrano l'ampia gamma di interessi di Williams, che spazia dal riesame dei presupposti teorici del marxismo in chiave filologico-storica all'analisi del 'Darwinismo sociale' nelle sue varie affermazioni storiche, all'interpretazione del termine 'Natura' in prospettiva diacronica; ancora, egli definisce l'*iter* del teatro inglese improntato al realismo/naturalismo collegandolo alle forme di produzione e ricezione del testo (nuova tecnologia della struttura teatrale e mutamenti del profilo socio-economico-culturale del pubblico) e collocandolo nel contesto europeo. Lo studioso, inoltre, delinea un *suo* ritratto del 'Gruppo di Bloomsbury' accentrato attorno alle figure di Leonard e Virginia Woolf, come alternativa al ritratto fornito dalla critica letteraria più ortodossa (Leavis e Annan), alquanto sbrigativa nel definire il gruppo di artisti e studiosi « cultura minoritaria » e « aristocrazia intellettuale ». Williams vede, invece, come 'frammento' organico il sodalizio di amici di formazione cantabrigense, con le sue contraddizioni interne e complesse relazioni con la classe dominante di appartenenza e la macrostruttura sociale, il cui contributo fu determinante per la formazione della « coscienza sociale » nel periodo fra le due Guerre. In 'Utopia e Fantascienza' il critico parte da una griglia a quattro ingressi di tipologia narrativa utopica/distopica e ne illustra le intricate relazioni interne, nonché i rapporti fra questi modi di scrittura e quelli della fantascienza, mostrando come tutte le forme

di ricerca dell'‘altrove’ si rapportano alle dinamiche storico-sociali della macrostruttura di appartenenza. Infine, nel saggio sul ‘Romanzo industriale gallese’ — efficacemente corroborato dall'esperienza personale — lo studioso ne spiega i ritardi e le incongruenze rispetto alla produzione dei narratori inglesi, ne individua le specificità e ne segnala le spinte verso l'autorealizzazione in contesto cosmopolita.

I tratti distintivi dell'autore di *Cultura e rivoluzione industriale* (1958; traduz. 1968), *La lunga rivoluzione* (1961; traduz. 1979), *Marxismo e letteratura* (1977; traduz. 1979) — opere di ampio respiro fra le più note — si ritrovano tutti nel ‘complesso’ di analisi culturale offerto da *Materialismo & cultura*: ci si trova di fronte ad un investigatore tanto più rigoroso nella ricerca quanto più elastico nell'atteggiamento critico e aperto al contributo di altri sistemi d'analisi funzionali al compimento della sua indagine. Nei trattati williamsiani si ritrova un singolare connubio di prima e terza persona singolare e plurale, oltre che interessanti innesti di provenienza umanistica nel *corpus* analitico sostanzialmente storico-materialista — nello specifico, un marxismo rivisitato, per nulla rinnegato bensì riportato alla prospettiva originaria « attiva », fondamentalmente interessata alle « forme variabili, dinamiche e contraddittorie, sia di ‘struttura’ che di ‘sovrastruttura’ ». In questo Williams riconosce il suo pieno debito al pensiero di Gramsci, Lukàcs, Benjamin, Althusser, Volosinov, Goldmann, Brecht, Sartre — per nominare gli autori che più hanno contribuito ad allargare gli orizzonti del suo « materialismo culturale ».

Raymond Williams non corre rischi d'immobilismo: egli rigetta ogni atteggiamento e forma « di carattere rigido, astratto e statico »; nell'impostare il suo discorso critico, predilige partire da una meticolosa ricostruzione del significato dei termini-chiave di cui fa uso — *Keywords* (« parole-chiave », appunto) è il titolo di un suo dizionarietto del '76, compilato per fissare punti di riferimento precisi e sollecitare contributi per la costruzione di un dizionario critico idoneo alla sfera *nuova* degli Studi Culturali. Alla voce ‘Culture’, in *Keywords*, l'autore precisa (*riporto qui in traduzione*):

> È chiaro che, all'interno di una disciplina, va chiarito l'uso concettuale. Ma, in generale, è il raggio e la sovrapposizione di significati che ha valore. Il complesso di sensi dato a un termine indica una argomentazione complessa sui rapporti fra lo sviluppo umano generale e il modo di vita particolare, e tra questi e le opere e le pratiche dell'arte e dell'intelligenza. All'interno di questa complessa argomentazione esistono posizioni fondamentalmente opposte o anche efficacemente integrate; esistono anche — come è comprensibile — molte questioni irrisolte e risposte confuse. Ma tali rapporti dialettici e questioni non possono risolversi con la riduzione della complessità dell'uso effettivo del termine.

Sempre a proposito di ‘Cultura’ e delle variazioni intra- e interlinguistiche si legge:

> La complessità, in ultima analisi, non è nella parola, ma nei problemi che le sue variazioni d'uso significativamente indicano.

L'insistenza sulla dimensione ‘problematica’ della realtà — delle pratiche significanti e delle definizioni formali dei fenomeni culturali — contraddistingue la produzione sia scientifica sia creativa di Raymond Williams (in questa luce, è un neo della impeccabile versione italiana di *Problems in Materialism & Culture* l'aver soppresso quel ‘Problems’ nel titolo dell'opera).

Quanto alla propria posizione teorica, Williams così la delinea in *Marxismo e letteratura* (1977; traduz. 1979):

> È una posizione che posso in breve definire materialismo culturale: vale a dire, una teoria della specificità della produzione materiale culturale e letteraria, interna al materialismo storico. I suoi aspetti particolari appartengono al complesso dell'argomentazione, ma devo dire — a questo punto — che, a mio modo di vedere, si tratta di una teoria marxista, e che anzi, nel suo campo specifico, a dispetto del fatto che — e anche per il fatto che — taluni dei suoi elementi sono così poco conosciuti, essa è parte di ciò che, almeno per quanto mi riguarda, costituisce il nucleo centrale del pensiero marxista.

La chiave di lettura williamsiana delle « strutture del sentire » contemporanee è dinamica, dialettica. Non manca chi gli muove obiezioni, come Thompson e Eagleton, i quali lo accusano di « un senso generico di euforia nel ‘progresso’ » e di pericolose mescolanze « sotto la vuota astrazione antropologica di ‘cultura’ »; ma egli risponde, anzi è il primo a mettersi in discussione: fa parte della sua natura verificarsi costantemente, sollecitare versioni alternative alla sua e incentivare la ricerca, specie — come si è detto — nel terreno relativamente giovane degli Studi Culturali. Egli è la ‘prova vivente’ più valida delle organiche interrelazioni (complesse e, proprio per questo, più stimolanti) tra i modi di porsi soggettivi (di una « coscienza possibile ») e le articolazioni del sociale (della « coscienza reale »); la sua « storia individuale » è sempre e comunque la storia di un « soggetto sociale » in un *continuum* sincronico-diacronico, simultaneamente singolare e plurale, come risulta da questo autoritratto che egli stesso ci fornisce in *Marxismo e letteratura*:

> ... il mio dibattito — lungo, personale, e spesso interiore e solitario — con ciò che avevo conosciuto come marxismo si stava inserendo ora in una ricerca seria e sempre più vasta, su scala internazionale. Ebbi così l'opportunità di confrontare le mie posi-

zioni ampliandole, nel corso di viaggi in Italia, Scandinavia, Francia, Nord-America e Germania, nonché tramite la conoscenza di ospiti provenienti dall'Ungheria, dalla Jugoslavia e dall'Unione Sovietica. Questo libro rappresenta il risultato di tale periodo di discussioni in un contesto internazionale, durante il quale ho avuto per la prima volta nella mia vita la sensazione di appartenere a una sfera e dimensione di *lavoro* a me familiari. Ma in ogni momento, ho tenuto presente i trentacinque anni passati, durante i quali qualunque mio contributo s'era sviluppato in contatto stretto e diretto — anche se spesso non evidente — con le idee e le problematiche marxiste.

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