

The State of Cultural Theory: A Review of Past and Present Fashions

Debra Clarke

It is always important to situate distinctive theoretical developments within the historical conditions of their emergence, yet, in order to fully appreciate the substance of developments within cultural theory, the task seems imperative. There are several reasons. Firstly, much of what can now, in retrospect, be identified as distinctive modes of cultural thought arose within and remained peculiar to a specific geographically-bound location, whether a nation or a continent -- nowhere, for example, is there more apparent a fundamental rift between theoretical modes than that between North America and the European nation-states. Secondly, and paradoxically, a close inspection of the essential propositions characteristic of each reveals some profound parallels, despite the diversity of their material origins. The points of interpenetration between and among new and old schools of cultural thought are sometimes considerable, and the analysis of relations between schools

can often tell more about the way culture has been 'thought' than the analysis of any single case. Thirdly, cultural theorizing is at the present moment so confused and unstable that any discussion of its material development can only aid understanding. The present discussion works towards that end.

One of the more visible cases of cross-fertilization between modes is the relation between the Frankfurt theorists¹ and U.S. currents of the war and post-war periods. While the Frankfurt theorists summoned a considerable authority in their own right (and, importantly, in their own place and time), their work also later shaped nascent American modes of thought about culture: indirectly, through the export of whole propositions and cultural conceptions; and directly, through the exile of individual Frankfurt theorists to the United States. Their importance for the subsequent development of theoretical traditions in their adopted homeland, especially for the development of mass society theory, should not be underrated. The seeming novelty of McLuhanism in the 1960s supplied one of the few contrasts to the otherwise unilinear development of cultural theory in North America throughout the post-war era.

These developments will be outlined first, while later discussion will look to the very different course traversed by European theorists, especially those in Britain, a major site of the current theoretical struggles. It is here that more contemporary attempts to theorize culture have been vigorously pursued. A major concern will be to trace the origin and development of the new 'cultural studies', most closely associated with the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at the University of Birmingham. Lastly, and relatedly, there will be a brief attempt to isolate some sources of the current divisions within "Marxist cultural theory" and to assess, in light of these divisions, the

possibilities for a truly materialist analysis of culture.

Space limitations demand that a good deal be assumed, and that important facets of the literature be excluded. It will not, for example, be possible to outline with rigorous detail the major precepts that delineate each perspective. Instead, our prime purpose is to demonstrate the operation and recurrence of several overriding weaknesses threaded through all of these attempts at theorization; among them, the absence of a well-integrated model of stratification or class conflict. It will be argued that the development and articulation of the assorted theoretical modes was in every case heavily conditioned by (1) the historical circumstances of the assorted cultural theorists, which in turn shaped (2) the means in which 'culture' was conceptualized: aesthetically, anthropologically, or as something more broadly social. Much of this is revealed through the treatment (or 'non-treatment', which is more often the case) of class conflict or even simply some notion of 'social' conflict devoid of class connotations. The failure to incorporate stratification models into their theories about culture led these various theorists to start with either a non-stratified or crudely stratified notion of the way that societies are organized, and hence left them ill-equipped to account for the place of culture therein.

The Radical Pessimism of the Frankfurt Theorists

Established in 1923 as a (somewhat unique) centre for Marxist studies, the Institute for Social Research at Frankfurt was concerned throughout the twenties with the problems of labour and the labour movement, and combined solid empirical work with serious theoretical analysis. Anderson (1976: 32) claims that the Institute occupied a pivotal point of juncture between "Western" and "Eastern" Marxist currents during the twenties, and thus its trajectory was crucial to

the progression of Marxist theory in inter-war Europe. The year 1950, however, threw doubt on its role when Horkheimer assumed control of the Institute (following Grunberg's retirement), at the same time that Lukacs was exiled to Austria and Gramsci was censored, in the interests of his personal safety, even while in prison. Horkheimer was a philosopher whereas his predecessor was a historian. At the outset he established a new orientation to the Institute's work, one that meant less concern with the science of historical materialism and a greater concern with "social philosophy". Soon afterwards the Institute ceased to publish the Archives for the History of Socialism and the Workers' Movement, and in its place introduced the new Journal of Social Research. However tamed in its outward appearances, the 1933 Nazi victory drove most Institute members to the United States, where a new Institute was constituted at Columbia University a year later. Here it was transferred "into a political environment devoid of a mass working class movement even formally committed to socialism, or of any substantial Marxist tradition" (Anderson, 1976: 33).

By the time of its return to Frankfurt in 1949-50, the Institute's period in the States, and the conditions of that period, had already circumscribed the character of the work. Most of the formative work on aesthetic theory, however, was elaborated and shaped during the pre- and post-exile moments of the thirties, a time of titanic class struggles in Austria, France, and Germany. It was in the turbulent climate of this period that the Frankfurt theorists concluded that Marx's projection of capitalist development could no longer be sustained: massive state intervention in the market, the reification of the place of technology and science within the mode of production, and the growth of a consumptionist working class rendered, in their view, the classic Marxist idea

of class struggle obsolete (see Swingewood, 1977: 10-18). Therborn argues that the impact of their experiences with Fascism was so great that it was reified in their subsequent critique of American society, preventing them from making a scientific analysis of American monopoly capitalism, or developing a revolutionary practice' (1970: 69).

What is most problematic about the Frankfurt defeatism is that it survived long enough to colour a good deal of later theoretical work (their own and that of others). A theory of mass society or mass culture was worked out well before their exile to the United States, where it was transferred wholesale to the somewhat different social circumstances of a North American case. The historical specifics of 1930s Germany were generalized to explain the underdevelopment of working class revolutionary potential throughout the Western capitalist world, and it would not be much of a stretch to argue that their historical fatalism, born out of a complex and highly particularized historical moment, grew to underline and characterize both orthodox and unorthodox Marxist analyses of culture. The original impetus to the construction of mass society propositions, complete with visions of "masses duped into false beliefs and bourgeois values", re-appears in later theories of "late capitalism" where, in the work of too many contemporary Marxists, the very use of the phrases "implies that the historically necessary collapse of capitalism has been averted by the conscious ideological and cultural manipulation of the bourgeoisie over the proletariat" (Swingewood, 1977: x).

While it is scarcely a widely held position, Swingewood argues that the development of the capitalist mode of production has served to augment, and not destroy, civil society. Its development has led to a highly complexified social structure where the key institutions of trade unions, political parties, professional associations, and

communications apparatuses are not dominated by a massive and omnipotent state. On the contrary, these institutions exercise a tremendous and unprecedented MEDIATING INFLUENCE that has only now become fully realized in social practice. The emergence of a new and strengthened network of social relations (wherein, for example, working class organizations come to the fore) means that "a far more delicate balance of forces is now capitalism's most characteristic feature" (1977: ix-x). Those contemporary Marxists who suffer the hangover of Frankfurt-style defeatism operate with a monolithic concept of social structure that cuts short the dialectical movement: as Swingewood expresses it, "of course the modern state grows in size and complexity, but as capitalism strengthens the sphere of direct domination so it necessarily creates the basis of a powerful civil society" (1977: x).

Although Swingewood never identifies his alignment explicitly, this is a more properly Gramscian position. To briefly illustrate the kinship with Gramsci, we can simply cite a statement from a 1917 Avanti! article, titled, significantly enough, "Towards a Cultural Association":

At a certain moment in its development and its history, the proletariat becomes aware that the complexity of its life lacks a necessary organization. Thus, it creates one for its own ends, with its strength, and with its good will ... this need will also come into being and be felt in other parts of Italy (other than Turin, where institutions like the Co-operative Alliance were already strong). And the proletariat movement will thereby grow in compactness and victorious energy (Gramsci, 1975: 97).

At the very least, then, there is a need to re-introduce a dynamic into theories about culture. Plainly, there is a good deal more to the process than some simple one-way (and therefore inevitable) domination from above; yet this one-sided and 'one-dimensional' account underlies and pervades the works of both the Frankfurt theorists (notably Adorno and Marcuse) and later U.S. mass society theorists.

Swingewood's argument also suggests that at the root of Frankfurt and mass society conceptions lies the equally fundamental problem of agency (and with it, the problem of determination). The radical pessimism of the Frankfurt theorists amounted to historicism, and traced to their own 'crisis of confidence' in the recalcitrant capacities of the working class. The problem of mediation was, at this early stage, resolved through elimination; the supposed "mass society" contained no mediatory or oppositional institutions, LET ALONE working class institutions and organizations. Once mediation is tossed out, notions of agency quickly follow; the working class was deemed somehow inherently unable to counter-vail the overpowering reifications brought about with the Fascist regime. Faced with a world that appeared beyond human control, a concept of human agency became difficult to digest, and hence the Frankfurt theorists preferred to regard workers (or rather, masses) as resigned and passive, fully prey to powerful, emergent political movements like Nazism (see Swingewood, 1977: 11-12).

The 'crisis of confidence' in working class potential and in the mediating possibilities of particular institutions is evident in the work of Adorno, Horkheimer, Marcuse, and numerous others writing at much later points (see, for example, Sallach, 1974). The notion of a weak civil society is re-affirmed in Mills' influential work, The Power Elite, published in 1956. One might usefully ask how it is that Gramsci managed to surpass the problem in his theorizations about culture and working class potential. Is it possible to introduce a concept of agency without instantly inviting charges of voluntarism (to which Gramsci is always subject)? The Frankfurt kind of radical pessimism does not enter his thought, although Gramsci pondered the same problems while subject to similar historical conditions. Yet for Adorno, Horkheimer, and the others,

history was everything. During the thirties, these thinkers bore witness to the rapid rise of fascism and the complete collapse of European socialism; it seemed that the forces of total reaction had seized the working class and that neither liberal democracy nor the labour movement could withstand the pressures or respond with sufficient strength. Many years later, Horkheimer disclosed the reasoning behind their original affiliation with Marxist thought:

Already near the end of the twenties, certainly by the beginning of the thirties, we were convinced of the probability of a National Socialist victory, as well as of the fact that it could be met only through revolutionary actions. That it needed a world war we did not yet envisage at that time. We thought of an uprising in our own country and because of that, Marxism won its decisive meaning for our thought (foreword to Jay, 1973).²

Whatever 'decisive meaning' Marxism might have had at that early stage was soon extinguished when it became apparent that the collapse of liberal democracy would come about "not in the way Marx had predicted but rather from the combined forces of totalitarian politics (fascism) and totalitarian economics (the growth of giant monopolies and cartels and the fusion of banking and industrial capital)" (Swingewood, 1977: 13). This made possible their desertion of orthodox Marxist principles of determination and led ultimately to a more or less complete loss of commitment to a Marxist account of capitalist development. There are parallels here with the theoretical results of similar disenchantments among British Marxists of the 60s and 70s, and these will be discussed later. At this point it should simply be stressed that the absence of a spontaneous uprising, originating within the German people, led Horkheimer and the others to dismiss the working class entirely as a potentially revolutionary force -- not just the German working class, but the working class-in-general, and this in turn enabled them to easily transfer their conclusions to the American case, where the U.S.

'culture industry' (a concept preferred to 'mass culture') could be equated in its consequences with the German fascist state.

Within this account lies a crucial difference between their conclusions and those of Gramsci. Whereas the Frankfurt theorists developed their notions about cultural potentials and about the future of capitalism itself on the basis of the historical specifics of their own time and place, Gramsci took as his task the development of a whole theory of revolution and of the state THROUGH his analysis of 'what went wrong' in 1930s Italy. This was the raw material of his analysis of 'late capitalism' and of the state, and on this basis Gramsci attempted to specify the appropriate material-cultural conditions under which revolution might be possible and to formulate revolutionary strategies. The difference in theoretical outcomes also points to Gramsci's position as simultaneously Marxist theorist and key political actor of his period -- not true of the Frankfurt theorists, who chose to abandon the political struggles of their homeland and to make sense of these struggles only once safely in exile.

Apart from the kind of elitism contained in their dismissal of the working class, there is, in the work of Adorno and Horkheimer particularly, a familiar elitist conception of culture, though in a somewhat disguised form, where 'high' culture is the means to transform social order through the spread of a critical consciousness. 'Critical' is used in a sense that echoes the appeals of Matthew Arnold (see later discussion). Although the charge is always easy to level, there is also an idealism at work in their underlying theory (or 'non-theory') of social change, one that is later wholly adopted by mass society theorists in the United States. It is most apparent in their later analyses of 'modern' (i.e. U.S.) totalitarianism, where mass culture itself is seen to be the major determinant.

On the one hand, it is possible to draw at least a tentative epistemological parallel between the early Frankfurt work (i.e. pre-1940) and so-called 'immanent structural analysis' (see Slater's argument, 1974). One of the Institute's official histories explained that "we interpret art as a kind of code language for processes taking place within society, which must be deciphered by means of critical analysis" (cited in Jay, 1973: 177). On the other hand, Jay suggests (1973: 178) that their sociology of art refused to reduce cultural phenomena to ideological reflexes of class interests. It is more certain that Adorno, at least, refused to engage in a class analysis of culture; instead, he argued that "the task of criticism must be not so much to search for the particular interest-groups to which cultural phenomena are to be assigned, but rather to decipher the general social tendencies which are expressed in these phenomena and through which the most powerful interests realize themselves" (1967: 30). It seems that Adorno and the others (perhaps including Benjamin) were unable to glean anything more than a crude rudiment of cultural theory out of orthodox Marxism, which, in their view, reduced all culture to 'a bourgeois swindle' and all art to false consciousness or ideology. Exasperated by a vain search for a theory of substance in Marx, the Frankfurt theorists substituted their own "dialectical or immanent critique of art" which "takes seriously the principle that it is not ideology in itself which is untrue but rather its pretension to correspond to reality" (Adorno, 1967: 32). Disastrously, it effectively turned Marx and Marxism upside down, and became inductively non-dialectical. One example of the attempt at a 'dialectical anti-reductionism' lies in Adorno's treatment of one major Marxist category, commodity fetishism. On this point (among others) Adorno disagreed with Benjamin, to whom he wrote on

2 August 1935 that "the fetish character of commodities is not a fact of consciousness, but dialectic in the eminent sense that it PRODUCES consciousness" (cited in Jay, 1973: 181; emphasis added).

More evidence of the Frankfurt antagonism to Marxist orthodoxy can be found in their relations with Benjamin, and particularly in their distrust of his relationship with Brecht. Brecht was admired by the Institute members for his literary and theatrical accomplishments and simultaneously despised for his 'crude materialism'. There are important ways in which Benjamin's work distinguishes itself from the work of Adorno, Horkheimer, and notably Lowenthal, and significantly enough, Benjamin's biography and his pre-war experiences set him considerably apart from the others. Throughout the thirties, for example, he continually resisted the pleas of other Institute members to join them in New York, arguing, as late as 1938, that 'there are still positions in Europe to defend' (cited in Jay, 1973: 197). Benjamin never did make it to the United States, and ultimately committed a tragically needless suicide when denied passage across the Franco-Spain border during a final, resigned effort to flee Europe in 1940 (see Jay, 1973: 197-198). The Institute had not been "entirely enthusiastic about the brand of Marxism Benjamin adopted in the mid-twenties" (Jay, 1973: 201). Unlike the others, Benjamin first encountered historical materialism immediately following the first war and, unlike the others, was active in the pre-WWII Zionist movement, president for a time of the Berlin Free Student Association, and frequent contributor to the journal of Gustav Wyneken's Youth Movement, Der Anfang (Jay, 1973: 159).

In addition to the Institute's discomfort with his acceptance of Brecht's 'crude materialism', Adorno and others were disturbed that Benjamin seemed to share Brecht's optimism about the revolutionary

potential of popular art and technological innovation. On the other hand, Brecht's attitude towards the Institute was not altogether supportive; he regarded them all as 'Tui-intellectuals' who prostituted themselves for American foundation support (Jay, 1973: 201-202). There is also considerable evidence to suggest that Benjamin's essays (including the seminal piece, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction") were often considered 'too radical for their taste' and substantially censored prior to their publication in the Zeitschrift (Jay, 1973: 206).

Benjamin, therefore, and his 'radical optimism' should be set apart from the general work of the Institute prior to 1940 and from what is now referred to as 'the Frankfurt school', since he alone reserved hope for the progressive nature of politicized, collectivized art that accompanied the (mass) mechanical reproduction of artistic and other cultural commodities. The contrast between Benjamin and Adorno is outlined by Benjamin himself in a letter to the latter: "In my work I sought to articulate the positive moments as clearly as you brought the negative to the fore. I consequently see a strength of your work where a weakness of mine lay" (cited in Jay, 1973: 211). His death in 1940 marked the end of any optimistic, revolutionary, or dialectical thrust in Frankfurt cultural theory, and the Institute's subsequent work on mass culture in the 1940s pursued and became limited to static, non-dialectical, empirical studies of, for example, newspaper content. Now fully settled in America, Institute members proceeded to weld themselves more tightly into this mold by eradicating agency once and for all and by arguing that culture was now completely divorced from material production and life. Horkheimer, for example, sowed the seeds for American mass society theory when he suggested, in a 1942 letter to Lowenthal, that reception and absorption had fused into the

same moment, wiping out very definitively notions of subjectivity, voluntarism, or agency:

You lay too much stress on activity vs. passivity, sphere of production vs. sphere of consumption. You say that the life of the reader is scheduled and governed by what he gets, not by what he does. The truth is, however, that doing and getting (have) become identical in this society (cited in Jay, 1973: 213).

And it was Marcuse who argued in 1937 that "the segregation of cultural life from its material base serves to reconcile man to the inequalities implicit in the latter" (Jay, 1973: 215). Not only was any notion of agency discarded, but so also was any concept of mediation and therefore resistance. In light of these developments, the historical and intellectual background to Marcuse's One-Dimensional Man of 1964 scarcely needs to be sketched. In so many ways, it marked the crescendo of all previous Frankfurt work, complete with all of its endemic theoretical faults.

Radical Pessimism and Conservative Optimism: the U.S.

Jay suggests that it was the Institute's critique of mass culture and its related analysis of the American authoritarian potential that most strongly influenced the texture of American intellectual life (1973: 217); firstly, because a good portion of the work was available in English, and secondly, because it coincided with a growing distrust of mass culture on the part of indigenous American intellectuals. Prior to World War II, sociologists like Robert Park and his student Herbert Blumer had conducted relatively isolated and somewhat more optimistic studies of 'mass society'. The mid-forties, however, witnessed a new and renewed interest in the area, and it quickly became fashionable inside and outside the academy. Riesman (The Lonely Crowd) and others popularized the fashion, and the work of the Institute added substance and momentum to the attack (see Jay, 1973:

Swingewood argues, in response to all theories that first posit a 'mass' of undifferentiated non-persons, that 'consumer capitalism, rather than creating a vast, homogeneous and culturally brutalized mass, generates different levels of taste, different audiences and consumers. Culture is stratified, its consumption differentiated' (1977: 20). Yet so overpowering has been the impact of 'mass' theories on all areas of empirical and other work on culture and communication that only recently has it been possible to re-introduce, or perhaps posit for the first time, the notion of a stratified audience (see, for example, the work of Morley, 1975 and 1980). Moreover, 'culture' itself was reified through the progressive, or rather regressive, articulation of mass society theories. Where, for example, is there any careful, thoroughgoing discussion of what culture really means or any critical re-thinking of the traditional definitions? Furthermore, and this is a condemnatory feature of both the mass society and 'culture industry' arguments, the concept of culture 'is severed from production in all but a general and superficial sense; culture is thus transformed into an independent, autonomous realm of human activity (or lack of activity) explicable in terms of its own norms and concepts' (Swingewood, 1977: 25). Finally, and perhaps most importantly, there is nothing INTRINSICALLY unifying about culture, just as there is nothing intrinsically functional about cultural or ideological state apparatuses; it seems at least as likely that culture can be a divisive force. Indeed, if culture is 'a whole way of life', then there is clearly no such thing as a singular, all-embracing 'culture of capitalism'. There are many cultures, and many cultural forms, some of which are appropriated by class-bound groups and some of which are not -- however, in the long run, one's 'whole way of life' is, necessarily, heavily conditioned by

and intimately bound up with one's place within capitalist social relations of production; consumption merely sumptomatizes this fundamental relation.

The theories of mass society and mass culture that came to characterize much of cultural theorizing in the United States hark back much further than the Frankfurt thinkers to Tonnies' *Gemeinschaft/Gesellschaft* distinction and to the classical works of Comte, Spencer, Durkheim, and Weber on the general theme of the effects of industrialization and urbanization. In its contemporary formulations, the new 'mass' media are linked to 'mass' behaviour and then to a new 'mass' culture or mass society, and all this without benefit of historical analysis. The first major problem, then, with later and current versions of mass society theory is that the existence of media of mass communication is first taken as given, and not explained within an account of historical transformations within capitalism that initiated and fostered the rapid growth of mass market production and the mass reproduction of artistic and cultural commodities, which in turn transformed the media into a 'necessary' and 'natural' feature of class domination. Overwhelmingly obvious is its underlying organic-functionalist model wherein all the pieces of the puzzle (mass media - mass behaviour - mass culture - mass society) fit neatly into their allotted and expected roles, a fault made possible by the ahistoricism of the approach, which severely constrains a thorough de-mystification of the media 'effect'. Among other things, the leap between 'mass media' and 'mass behaviour' is far too great, and, considering the obsession with 'doing empirical work' on the media, it is remarkable that few or no studies set out to establish this alleged relationship empirically. If anything, the volumes of (largely American) empirical studies of 'media effects' are, at best, inconclusive (see Klapper, 1960).

A second major problem concerns the absence of a model of stratification, a silence characteristic of all the approaches discussed here and not unique to U.S. mass society theory, although more outstanding in its case. Even writers situated on the left, like C. Wright Mills, operated with no more than a crude concept of stratification (i.e. one large mass and one small elite or elites), and wholeheartedly absorbed and reiterated the reportedly frightful consequences of mass media production. It was Mills who argued, in The Power Elite, that 'the media, as now organized and operated, are ... a major cause of the transformation of America into a mass society' (1956: 315). In a thoroughly non-Marxist fashion, Mills proceeded to argue that the mass media 'created' new forms of dependence and made 'the (classless) masses' newly vulnerable to greater control UNDER power-wielding elites. Miliband reproduced a similar argument some time later in The State in Capitalist Society (1969) and again in Marxism and Politics (1977). The dependence of the individual is intensified by a lack of reciprocal, obligatory moral attachments to others, spurred on by rapid industrial expansion and the existence of disparate value systems, which in turn forced the individual to rely more on extraneous media of communication than on primary group or interpersonal relations in developing a world-view. The centralized authority of mass communication systems thus came to take precedence over micro-social forces in defining the social world for the individual. At a larger scale, the movement towards mass society creates the requisite conditions for totalitarianism by increasing the isolation of the individual, by instilling a singular and all-pervasive ideology in the interests of the dominant elite(s), and by monopolizing media channels and thereby eliminating all contending ideological options (see Clarke, 1978).

The contribution of the Frankfurt theorists to the development of this powerful argument comes through in two senses. Firstly, it is evident in the concentration on the individual and the psychosocial, which points to the relation between the aesthetic studies of the Frankfurt theorists and their investigations of American authoritarianism conducted in the forties, where the relation between culture and politics was thought to be best understood in psychosocial terms. Mass society theorists, however, took up only the psychosocial and dropped any connection between culture and politics, as well as any hint that culture was or could be politicized. Secondly, their influence can be seen in the denial of any remaining mediating forces that might have survived the rubble of mass society's rise to prominence.

A third major problem with mass society or mass culture theories is the moralism that underlies the arguments. On the left, Mills and Marcuse bemoaned the one-directional and one-dimensional flow of information and appealed to social democracy, defining inequality of access to the means of communication as the central problematic, since it obstructs the free flow of ideas and violates libertarian notions about press freedom: ideas flow freely from the elite(s) to the masses and not vice versa, and therefore are not representative of the general population. Accordingly, there is a need to 'democratize' the communication process such that libertarian ideals can be realized in practice. The assumptive principles of their position were thus libertarian, while their proposals were reformist. At the politico-ideological centre, Wirth (1948), Warner (1962), and others modified the essence of mass society theory in a more positive or optimistic light. The development of mass communications and the unproblematically concomitant emergence of 'mass society' were welcomed and thought to be required integrative

forces, vital to social cohesion. Along with the development of mass communications came a newly democratized culture that permitted the greater participation of subordinate social groups in the 'common life' of society. Equality of access to the means of communication was simply assumed. On the right, Blumer (1951), Van Den Haag (1957), Howe (1957), and others decried the emergence of mass society and its cultural vulgarities. Their works were tainted with a romantic, nostalgic yen for 'traditional values', a sense of 'community spirit', and a return to the stability of the extended family (see Clarke, 1976). McQuail (1969: 35) notes some of the consequences of the latter version:

... the sociology of mass communications has not prospered under the shadow of mass society theory. Not only have inappropriate questions been fostered and alternative ones discouraged, but the very weight of intellectual and ideological force behind these theories has discouraged competitors, and forced opponents to appear in the light of apologists for an existing social order, for capitalism and commercial exploitation, for ugliness and incipient totalitarianism.

The parallels with English 'cultural criticism' are apparent here and will become more apparent through the course of later discussion. In the United States, it meant that much of the evidence for a new 'mass society' was based on the mass production of media commodities, notably radio, television, and film,³ which in turn fed the distinctively American brand of 'media sociology'. To understand how this particular specialized discipline took shape historically, we need to consider how the rise of a new 'mass culture' came to be ascribed. It was first necessary to ignore the historical prerequisites for the emergence of a 'popular' culture, and the economic changes that contributed to the growth of the middle class and the spread of literacy, each of which in turn presaged the creation of a truly 'mass' audience (see also Bigsby, 1976). Audience size was assumed to be the contingent, and,

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just as the popular literature of the 19th century presupposed a literate public, so the media of the 20th seemed to require for their viability (and profitability) the capacity to satisfy the desires of a large and seemingly homogeneous audience. The new media of 'mass' communication became coterminous with 'mass' or popular culture.

It is easy to see how this superficial account led, in the 'sociology of mass communications', to a narrowed concentration on audience studies and content analyses, to 'uses and gratifications' research and 'effects' studies,⁴ many of which took their direction from Lasswell's famous dictum: 'Who says what, in which channel, to whom, with what effects?'. Otto Larsen complained in 1964 that this research "tended to view persons as 'targets' of communications impact rather than as part of a total communication process" (1964: 368 369). Most of the work fitted well within the tradition of post-war U.S. empiricism. By their very nature, therefore, these studies necessarily contributed little to a worthwhile or meaningful understanding of communication, and even less to the understanding of culture.

Canada, Innis, and McLuhan

Innis' early analyses of the staples industries led, in his later years, to a special interest in the historical development of communications, and to the production of two major works, Empire and Communications (1950) and The Bias of Communication (1951).⁵ While his commitment to 'technological determinism' is still arguable, it is plain in his work on the communications industries that the developing complexities of communications technology were seen as central to understanding communications and to technological innovations in non-media industries. The predominance of the new 'mass' means of communication over 'pre-printing'

media (e.g. clay, papyrus, parchment) and the decline of the oral tradition were both important elements in shaping potentially emergent forms of social organization. In other words, the types of media dominantly featured in a society, once wholly developed, could be expected to determine the type and quality of human associations characteristic of a period.

Innis also argued that any given medium of communication is biased in terms of either time or space, and tends to 'bias' social organization by encouraging the emergence of particular types of institutions to the exclusion of others, and by imposing on these institutions a particular form of organization. 'Space-biased' media, for example, are, according to Innis, causal in the growth of the state, the military, and decentralized and expansionist institutions, whereas 'time-biased' media facilitate the growth of religion, of hierarchical forms of organization, and of contractionist institutions. Thus for Innis, it is the nature of the medium of communication (oral versus written, time-biased versus space-biased) that determines the nature of social organization; a unique yet unverifiable premise that runs contrary to the bulk of sociological knowledge regarding the growth of particular forms of social organization. Moreover, it would be difficult to make the claim that the argument amounts to a distinctive moment in the development of cultural theory per se, since Innis' concerns were largely limited to the development of a macro-theory of the general historical implications of 'landmark' innovations in communications technology.

Following very closely in Innis' footsteps (if not treading directly on his toes),⁶ McLuhan also stressed the nature of the medium, as opposed to its content or the organization of production, and like

Innis, placed considerable emphasis on technological developments in the communication industries. However, in McLuhan's case, the effects of the medium were directly related to sensory organization, perception, and thought, rather than to social organization and culture. It seems pointless to fully elaborate McLuhan's notions in the context of this discussion. The utility of his formulations is limited for the same reasons that those of Innis contribute little to the formation of a worthwhile theory of culture.⁷ Furthermore, McLuhan's position is not at all internally consistent and has fluctuated considerably with time; more recently, his musings have included a fear of the forthcoming 'homogenization' of the masses,⁸ which smacks of mass society theory and contradicts, in some very essential ways, his earlier arguments.

U.K. Developments: the Foundations of 'Cultural Studies'

A very different sequence of developments characterizes the field of cultural theory in European, especially British, social thought. The differences are exemplified in the work of the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, work that will be referred to here as the 'cultural studies' approach.⁹ Since, in large measure, the material represents both a culmination and a configuration of all past theoretical legacies, it will be useful to outline the traditions out of which cultural studies emerged, and the succession of later 'influences' that penetrated their work, none of which (and this should be borne in mind) qualify as rigorously Marxist approaches. At least five identifiable 'bodies of influence' account for the direction of the work: (1) the early English 'culture critics' (e.g. Arnold and Leavis); (2) Hoggart, Williams, and works of the 1950s; (3) at around the same time, another crucial initiative in the formation of cultural studies, Thompson's

The Making of the English Working Class, and the significance of cultural histories; (4) the later impact of the work of three neo-Marxist theorists (Althusser, Gramsci, and Poulantzas); and (5) structuralism and semiotics. The latter struck the Centre in two successive waves: the first drew largely from the work of Levi-Strauss and Barthes, and the second, more currently fashionable, takes its cues from Lacan, Kristeva, Derrida, and others in France (now dubbed the 'post-structuralists'). The early influences of the English 'culture critics' (Arnold, Leavis, Hoggart and Williams) will be briefly traced, prior to a discussion of the development of the Birmingham Centre work itself.

(i) Arnold, Leavis, and the 'culture critics'

First, we need to look back a considerable historical distance to the origins of debate about popular culture (see Burke, 1978, for a richly detailed analysis of the 'discovery' of popular culture in early capitalist Europe). Debates about popular culture, and notions about what it is, trace to early responses to the commercialization of culture in the first phase of European capitalism. The debate gathered momentum during the 19th century, and was spearheaded by literary critics and 'men of letters'. One of the most influential of the 19th century sources was Matthew Arnold's Culture and Anarchy, originally published in 1869. Significantly, Arnold emerged out of a tradition of literary criticism, was a poet and literary critic, held posts at Oxford, and so forth. Much of Arnold's now classic formulations about culture grew out of his own disenchantment with the increasingly apparent implications of 'the new industrial order', circa 1850. "I see", he wrote in 1848, "a wave of more than American vulgarity, moral, intellectual, and social, preparing to break over us ..." (cited in Arnold, 1938). Arnold's calls for the

establishment of formalized education under the wing of the state were intended to sophisticate the uncivilized masses made newly vulnerable to cultural deterioration, and parallel those of Egerton Ryerson in Canada. Culture, and especially the indoctrination of the new industrial working class into bourgeois culture, was to Arnold the means to secure order, to inject self-discipline, and, in his words, "to do away with classes (read 'class-based cultures')" (1938: 70). Culture was to occupy the new leisure time afforded to the working class through the arrival of industrialization and the mechanization of factory production. The state was to be cast in the role of cultural guardian, and, not unrelatedly, guardian of the new social order:

We have not the notion, so familiar on the Continent and to antiquity, of THE STATE - the nation in its collective and corporate character, entrusted with stringent powers for the general advantage, and controlling individual wills in the name of an interest wider than that of individuals (1938: 75; original emphasis).

Sometime later, once the full sway of industrialization was solidly in place, and it became clear that Arnold's proposals for the administration of culture (and hence the containment of class conflict) through the state were insufficient, literary critics like T.S. Eliot and F.R. Leavis reflected on the cultural changes that had accompanied industrialization and were highly critical of both, more loudly of the former. Their work features the same nostalgic longings for a pre-industrial, non-capitalist society that preoccupied Howe and other American critics in the 1950s; in both cases, these sentiments provided the (weak) basis for a critique of industrial capitalism. The English critics held little stock in the capacity of the bourgeoisie to overcome the "pallid, mechanical, life-denying civilization" that seemed part of the industrialization package (see Swingewood, 1977: 2-10).

Eliot's Notes Towards a Definition of Culture (1962) is exemplary. Here Eliot espoused the view that since culture is inevitably stratified, it ought to be stratified according to "a continuous gradation of cultural levels" (1962: passim). The concept of culture was organic, i.e. the culture of every individual flows from his/her membership of specific groups and classes, which in turn depend for their culture on the whole social order; culture is, therefore, a way of life and all societies witness some form of common culture. Each national culture contains a variety of local cultures which therefore ensure unity and diversity within the whole. Nevertheless, working class institutions and ideals, above all socialist ideals, must be assimilated by the dominant culture. This Eliot made very clear.

Leavis, in Mass Civilization and Minority Culture, written in 1930, accepted that "culture was at a crisis" and blamed mechanization for destroying a genuine "common culture" with widely shared moral assumptions. Like Eliot, Leavis stressed the importance of tradition in the life of a culture and its basis in the "organic community". He rued the demise of some pre-industrial, conflict-free period, the "Old England" where work was meaningful and workers "could, without a sense of oppression, bear with long hours and low pay" (1930: 3-5); see also Leavis and Thompson, 1942: 68-91). In light of Leavis' concern with folk culture, with a common culture that includes the everyday experience of common people within a morally binding community, it is possible to see his legacy to the later concerns of cultural studies. It is also possible to see the theoretical links between Leavis' 'critique of capitalism' and the post-war American 'critique of mass society'.

Williams argues, however, that Leavis' concern with folk culture idealizes feudal, not modern, social relations and attempts to "attach humane feelings to pre-capitalist culture, whereas the historical reality

was of a hard and brutal world dominated by illiteracy, superstition, servility, squalor, and poverty" (1975: 48-51; see also Bigsby, 1976: 16). Williams' own critique of mass society theory and other bourgeois sociologies is most recently set forth in Marxism and Literature (1977), where he argues that the bourgeois concept of 'mass communications' and the related radical concept of 'mass manipulation' both need to be re-worked, if not completely replaced with terms that more cogently specify the movement of hegemony. It is suggested that the concept of the 'mass' has served to merely replace and neutralize the specificity of class structures, while the preoccupation with 'manipulation' has stifled any understanding of the phases of social consciousness that "correspond to real social situations and relations" (1977: 136-137). Attention now turns briefly to the earlier work of Williams himself and to one other equally important figure in the formation of the new cultural studies: Richard Hoggart.

(ii) Hoggart, Williams, and the 1950s

The importance of the literary criticism tradition carries through to the work of Hoggart, which continued that "certain studied romanticism" (Bigsby, 1976: 24) of the English literary approach. Hoggart replaced the conservative nostalgia of Arnold and his descendants with a liberal nostalgia; although, like Leavis, Hoggart argued that a standardized mass culture had overtaken a fractured "urban culture of the people". To Hoggart, working class culture (and he freely made this association) is precisely the same urban local culture of tightly knit communities, where myth, ritual, superstition, fatalism, and short-term hedonism occupy positions of centrality in everyday life. Hoggart's approach to culture is highly selective, impressionistic, and divorces the working class from its position within the division of labour and its place in production

relations. We might also note the absence of any discussion about the role of ideology in the configuration of popular consciousness. The concept of culture is static and passive, and denies culture its active, historical character. Culture is reduced to a series or list of adaptive mechanisms adopted by the working class to ward off the alienation of urban capitalist life. Moreover, the analysis in The Uses of Literacy (1957) deals strictly with superficial aspects of working class existence and is heavily imbued with Hoggart's own romantic reminiscences of his working class youth.¹⁰

Unlike Hoggart, Raymond Williams (the early Culture and Society Williams) offers a more radical approach, yet he still follows Leavis and Eliot and defines culture as an organic, co-operative, and collaborative activity. To Williams, "culture is ordinary" and working class culture is "a basic collective idea, and the institutions, manners, habits of thought and intentions which proceed from this" (1958: 313-314). Like Leavis, this early Williams argues explicitly against Marxist interpretations when he suggests that working class institutions contribute to social growth through their contributions to the development of a common culture. Needless to say, this proposition eliminates all contradiction and conflict, and divests culture of any role in class domination. There is no theorization about cultures in conflict with each other, only "a destructured and static model (where) culture is defined in terms of meanings" (Swingewood, 1977: 43). Furthermore, culture obviously cannot be reduced to (or summed up in) a directory listing of habits, customs, and rituals. If culture is to be understood as a way of life, then it must indeed be understood, in Williams' widely-subscribed phrase, as a WHOLE way of life, and not merely a way of "coping with capitalism".

Above all, culture needs to be understood inside a historical account of class struggle and explained vis-a-vis class interests, through the historical development of classes and class fractions. Some evidence that Williams has now come to recognize this inadequacy appears in Marxism and Literature where he attempts to sketch out the direction of his comparatively recent "embrace" of Marxism¹¹ for a "Marxist cultural sociology" that would be "recognizable, in its simplest outlines, in studies of different types of institution and formation in cultural production and distribution, and in the linking of these within whole social material processes" (1977: 138). Nevertheless, Williams' embrace of Marxism has yet to come full circle: a more faithfully Marxist analysis should not feel it necessary to 'link' culture with material processes -- it should START WITH the realization that culture is, itself, a material process.

(iii) Stuart Hall, the Birmingham Centre, and 'cultural studies'

The importance of Hoggart and the early Williams to the work of the Birmingham Centre cannot be underestimated. Sparks (1977), in fact, starts with Hoggart and Williams and takes their legacy as prime to the early and later Centre work. Cultural studies is usually associated with the work of the Centre at Birmingham (established in 1964), although the late 1970s saw its influence blossom rapidly outward to what is now a whole network of centres (within Britain and without) that follow or attempt to follow the approach. The kind of 'cultural studies' that came to be practiced at the Birmingham Centre was very much an outgrowth of the English tradition of literary criticism (tellingly enough, the Centre was originally subsumed within the Department of English Literature at Birmingham University) and, in many ways, it still has not managed to get beyond the literary and the textual. Sparks even suggests that

"cultural studies took over the total project of Literary Criticism" (1977: 18) with one crucial qualification; namely, the way in which the old opposition of high and low culture was overturned and now understood. While the early conceptualizations of culture remained largely intact, the reverence of Arnold, Leavis, et al. for bourgeois culture was supplanted with a new reverence for working class culture (heavily inspired by Hoggart) that amounts to a kind of perverse elitism. Otherwise, as Sparks observes, there is not a great deal to distinguish the cultural conceptions of the Centre and those of (classical) English literary criticism.

One of the decisive developments at work was a rejection of once-dominant aesthetic definitions of culture (e.g. the 'sweetness and light' that constituted Arnold's vision) and a movement towards anthropological conceptions, with a new focus on the community, especially the urban working class community, as the place where culture is practiced or 'lived' as a relation (note the Althusserian reference). The model represented in Arnold and other liberal versions began with a sharp separation between 'work' and 'culture', thereby discarding determination at the outset, and substituting the vague, empty, and non-contradictory notion of 'commodity'. According to Sparks (1977: 18-22):

That false resolution ... was in fact taken over wholesale by cultural studies. Within that fundamental separation the conception of culture was once again reified to exclude any reference to social antagonism ... the ground was well prepared for a Marxism which systematically evaded the squalid concerns of political parties, trade unions, and all the rest of the baggage of Marxist orthodoxy, and which elevated debates on culture, epistemology, etc., to the centre of theoretical concern.

Similarly, as Sparks argues, the Centre's so-called 'encounter with Marxism' (and this description seems appropriate) is highly problematic. At the surface level, it is evident in the rather marked changes in the

nature of the work produced at the Centre throughout the late 60s and 70s (it's possible to trace these changes through the successive issues of the Working Papers in Cultural Studies, the Centre's journal), whereas at a more fundamental level the transformation to a full-fledged legitimate Marxism is still incomplete. Indeed, one might well argue that such a total transformation can never be realized, that it was stymied at the start by the historical and epistemological traps that the Centre inherited from literary criticism. This is not to say that cultural studies did not have its own very noble beginnings and intentions. Take, for example, Hall's early statement of the Centre's objectives, part of the introduction to the first issue of the Working Papers: "it has been one aim of the Centre to rescue the concept of "culture" itself from its reified form" (1971: 6). Hall enlists the aid of Williams to set in motion this "de-reification", enumerating Williams' three meanings outlined in The Long Revolution (1965). The discussion is worth quoting at some length, since it represents one of the few clear and precise statements of the Centre's original (and, some would argue, still current) conceptualization of what culture is and where it is to be found:

Culture, (Williams) suggested, can refer to 'the description, in lives and works, of those values which can be seen to compose a timeless order, or to have permanent reference to the universal human condition'; it can refer to the 'body of intellectual and imaginative work in which, in a detailed way, human thought and experience are variously recorded'; or it can refer to the 'description of a particular way of life, which expresses certain meanings and values, not only in art and learning but also in institutions and ordinary behaviour'. Our own approach, while drawing on all three of those definitions, adheres most closely to the third. From this perspective, culture is the way social life is experienced and handled, the meanings and values which inform human action, which are embodied in and mediate social relationships, political life, etc. (1971: 6).

This is all well and good, as it stands. It is quite another thing, however, to go on to argue, in the next breath, that this conceptualization "returns

culture to its root in the soil of specific historical and social situations (and) restores the dimension of meaning and praxis to the sphere of human action" (1971: 6). The meaning of culture that Hall identified and adopts simply does not stand up to the grand claims of his next statement. There is a logical (or illogical) leap in the argument, one that carried disastrous results for the way that culture came to be approached through the Centre's subsequent work, and one that facilitated their (false) claim to a Marxist analysis of culture.

The falsity of their claim can be at least partially understood through a consideration of the changed (and rapidly changing) politico-practical position of Centre members, and more generally, of the dislocation of the intellectual through the course of the accelerated rationalization of British higher education during the 1960s and onward. No discussion here could do full justice to the complexities of these developments or their implications for the state of British Marxism. Sparks' discussion of "the new mood of 1968" and "the creation of a new labour aristocracy structurally dependent upon the state machine" (1977: 18-24), Garnham's discussion of "the intellectualist fallacy" (1979), and Anderson's broader discussion of changes within European Marxism during the same period (1976), should all be consulted. Briefly, it meant, in the work of Centre members and others, a movement towards pure theoreticism (spelled out, for example, in the pages of the popular and extremely influential journal Screen); a movement that signifies a very real obstruction to the development of a Marxist cultural analysis (see later discussion). Sparks concludes his account with the cleverly cryptic observation that "given this political and intellectual impasse the popularity of Louis Althusser in British was, one might say, overdetermined" (1977: 22).

Prior to the appropriation of Althusser, however, there is a third influence that intervenes in the early Centre work, namely Edward Thompson's 'cultural history' of the English working class (1963). It is particularly noticeable in their studies of "working class communities" (see, for example, Lidia Curtis et al., 1973), and was concretized in the formation of the "cultural history" sub-group during the mid-seventies. This work, too, started out with worthwhile intentions. There was the initial rejection of the abstract, ahistorical use of the word "culture" in the singular (since, among other problems, it implied some non-existent culture-in-general) and an attempt to give culture, or rather cultures, "a more concrete historical reference" (CCCS, 1976-78: 5-6). One such project, for example, detailed the evolution of post-war youth sub-cultures and was subsequently published in the form of Resistance Through Rituals (Hall and Jefferson, 1976). Curiously, though, the work reads more like the approach of Thompson in The Making of the English Working Class (1963), where 'culture' (not 'cultures') is subjected to historical investigation, and where culture was viewed rather idealistically and class itself was said to happen "when some men, as a result of common experiences, feel and articulate the identity of their interests" (see the important preface, 1963: 9; emphasis added).

While it is rightful to recognize that "a historical perspective lends a necessary specificity to the study of cultures" (CCCS, 1976-78: 6), it is not enough to therefore pose "questions of cultural power and hegemony, of domination and subordination through the exercise of cultural power, and the transmission of cultural skills and competence" (CCCS, 1976-78: 6-7). There is far more to the potency of bourgeois hegemony than simply things cultural, which points to their basic misappropriation of Gramsci's writings (highlighted in their discussion

of the Prison Notebooks: see Hall, Lumley, & McLennan, 1977). This type of approach to the study of either culture or cultures necessarily elevates the object of analysis to the level of concerns about ideology and consciousness, and severs these concerns from things economic and broadly political; it consequently poses a serious contradiction between intent and result in the work of the Centre. One can look more recently, for example, to Richard Johnson's comparative study of the traditions represented by the works of Thompson and Althusser, where Johnson admits that "Thompson's sole and explicit criterion for the existence of class concerns forms of consciousness and collective action or organization: in the Making class is seen as a wholly political and cultural category" (1979: 65) and yet he still goes on, in conclusion, to "insist on the need to retain culture ideology as a couplet, where culture is understood as a ground or RESULT OF THE WORK OF IDEOLOGIES" (1979: 75; emphasis added). While it is perhaps unfair to rob this conclusion of its context in the text of the article, it is nevertheless lucidly illustrative of what remains a fundamentally non-materialist conceptualization of culture in the work of the Birmingham Centre.

A fourth and later influence in the development of cultural studies marks a strong attraction to work carried out in France and elsewhere on the continent. Of the three neo-Marxist thinkers (Althusser, Gramsci, and Poulantzas) whose work touched off and accentuated the Centre's concern about ideology theories (see, for example, Working Papers in Cultural Studies 10, 1977 and the more widely distributed version, On Ideology, 1978), Althusser's work, especially the "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses" or 'ISAs essay', occupied the most central place.¹² Importantly, the interest in Althusser occurred not long after Thompson's work had left its mark, and it is revealing to consider the similar

origins and motives of the two writers. Both Althusser and Thompson set out to establish positions that would stand firmly opposed to Stalinist and exonomistic tendencies in Marxist work,¹³ both formulated their early arguments during a period of cold war hostility, and both attempted to transcend or evade that hostility by developing (in very different ways, of course) Marxist work on non-economic questions (see Johnson, 1979: 57ff). This last commonality is absolutely vital, for it came to be true, tragically, that these works set the direction for most subsequent work on culture and ideology. At this circumstantial moment in European intellectual history the concerns of at least the next decade were firmly grounded, even though the pressing need to polemicize against Stalinist tendencies had long since been removed. Somehow, through the course of later developments in cultural theory, the (ordinarily crucial) concern with the economic was never re-inserted into its proper place, and soon fell into a state of serious neglect.

Without engaging impractically in a full-scale treatise on the relation between Althusserian structuralism and new currents in British Marxism, it is at least possible to briefly summarize some of the most commonly identified weaknesses to be found in Althusser's work on ideology. The usual complaints include the functionalist charges (particularly with respect to his discussion of the system-functions of the ISAs), the internal inconsistencies, the too omnipotent role that is accorded to the state, and, notably, the over-emphasis on reproduction. A major problem regarding the ISAs essay in particular is that, although subtitled "Notes Towards an Investigation" and including Althusser's own admission that "we are advancing in still poorly explored domains" (1971: 269), this single, crude and abbreviated 'exploratory' discussion has been appropriated as a fully-fledged 'theory of ideology'. Not only

does Althusser fail to provide a comprehensive, adequate or even workable theory of ideology, or of the state (although it may be unfair to assess his work against this misread intention), his 'notes' about the state and about ideology, taken together, contain some serious and by now well-acknowledged faults.

Sumner (1979) makes the point that the one-sided concept of ideological reflection has left a persistent perception of ideological transmission FROM ABOVE and ONLY from above, such that, in order to proceed with his argument for the role of the state as the agent of ideological domination, Althusser is compelled to deny the existence of contradictions or practices that might give rise to non-ruling class ideologies, which traps him inside a non-dialectical analysis. Only later does Althusser realize that the emergence of the ISAs and the dominance of ruling class ideologies within them, is possible only through class struggle within the ISAs (e.g. within legal and educational institutions). However, through the artificial insertion of contradictions into the analysis, Althusser reduces ideologies to class ideologies, and hence short-forms the rich and complex ensemble of ideological formations. No longer is it possible to discuss class fractions or class alliances and their subscription to contending ideologies, a relation that becomes lost to analysis forever.

To Sumner (see, in particular, 1979: 25-50, 101-130), Althusser's class reductionism is a serious theoretical limitation: it precludes the understanding of ideological differences that divide or cut across classes, and this is especially problematic since, according to Sumner, these intra-class rivalries and ideological struggles hold the greatest political import for contemporary Marxist analysis. All of these inadequacies, intrinsic to Althusser's theoretical 'notes' about ideology, are uncritically overlooked and hence systematically 'reproduced' in the

Birmingham work on cultures and ideologies. The last important point to note about the absorption of Althusser into cultural studies, however, is that their uncritical (mis)appropriation effectively and solidly wedged the Centre further into the trap of abstract theoreticism.

There is always a danger, in general discussions like the present one, that a review of a given body of literature can appear to attribute a monolithic character to the material. This is in fact somewhat justified in the case of the Centre's work, which is largely collaborative and rarely authored by a single individual, reflecting the organization of the Centre as a uniquely democratic collective and its preference for co-operative, rather than competitive, intellectual activity. (Indeed, outside observers often comment on its 'cult-like' operation). In this sense, charges of theoreticism can be levelled at more than just this or that 'tendency' in the studies of one or more individuals. Mention should be made, however, of some peripheral and 'exiled' Birmingham thinkers who do manage to escape the theoreticist trap. Paul Willis and Dave Morley exemplify the few who pursue more substantive questions: the relation between formalized education, cultural production, and the reproduction of labour power in Willis' case (1977), and the stratification of audience readings in Morley's case (1975, 1980). Willis, for example, acknowledges that trade unions are "by far the most important working class institution", and Sparks notes that this acknowledgement alone "marks an important advance for an institution which, while dedicated to the study of working class culture has not, as yet, produced any major study, either theoretical or empirical, of the trade union movement" (1977: 27-28). Regardless, Sparks holds out little hope for an approach that disregards the contradictory nature of these same working class institutions: "if it is agreed that the culture we are

studying is that of a subordinate class, and that this subordination is something which can be ended, then it follows that a great deal of contemporary working class culture is an historically transient formation" (1977: 28).

One of the problems that rendered the Birmingham and Screen work openly susceptible to charges of theoreticism was its operation in a field traditionally weak in one important sense. Cultural studies was, for some time during its formative period, an 'approach' without a methodology. Literary criticism could offer little on that score, and so for its methodological impetus the Centre turned once more to the continent and to European structuralism and semiotics, the fifth and latest influence that directs their work. This move, it can be argued, did little more than complicate or add to the existing problems of method. Again, it is not possible to demonstrate the full consequences within the limits of this discussion; only a few illustrative points can be made. Murdock and Golding (e.g. 1977, 1978, 1979, 1980), Summer (1979: 131-203), and others have carried out sustained critiques of the methodological faults endemic to 'immanent structural' or semiotic analysis. The former, for example, concede that the approach has opened wide the field of potential objects of analysis to include art, literature, religion, cosmetic fashions, bodily gestures, and many other everyday symbolic forms: "in a field where people are still apt to regard contemporary culture as more or less synonymous with television programming, this contextualization represents a considerable gain in breadth" (1978: 348).

Problems arise, however, when one attempts to unravel the significance of these symbolic forms through the use of immanent structural analysis. Murdock and Golding argue that the epistemological and

methodological principles of the approach irrevocably lead to "a highly asymmetric analysis in which an elaborate anatomy of symbolic forms sits alongside a schematic and incomplete account of social processes" (1978: 349). In other words, there are degrees of contextualization, and cultural studies, however ambitious in its range, has not achieved the greatest degree that it might. To some, this potential is unrealizable: Murdock and Golding, operating within a more orthodox perspective, see no way out, and conclude that "textual and sociological analyses are rooted in fundamentally opposed approaches to the study of culture and ... eventually a choice must be made between the two" (1978: 351). The later, and very different, Williams seems to opt for the latter. In a landmark New Left Review article (1973) that in many ways marks the point of his rupture with earlier theoretical affiliations, Williams asserts that "we have to break from the notion of isolating the object and then discovering its components. On the contrary, we have to discover the nature of a practice and then its conditions" (1973: 16). And, in a 1974 work, Television: Technology and Cultural Form, Williams reiterates the need for a greater degree of contextualization:

To say that television is now a factor in socialization, or that its controllers and communicators are exercising a particular social function, is to say very little until THE FORMS OF THE SOCIETY which DETERMINE any particular socialization and which allocate the function of control and communication have been precisely specified (1974: 120; emphasis added).

Critiques of immanent structural or semiotic analysis most often cite the following major weaknesses of the method: (1) its insistence on the immanent revelations of cultural texts; (2) its inductive epistemological principles; (3) its impressionistic, 'subjective', and inferential nature; (4) its unreplicable (and hence unverifiable) character; (5) its too weighted reliance on the ingenuity of the

individual analyst; and (6) its necessary ahistoricism. Sumner, however, argues that these weaknesses are not immutable, and attempts to salvage the more worthy traits of the approach through his proposals for a "historical materialist semiology" (1979: 207-245). Although still tentative and cumbersome (see the four 'approximations' and their attendant empirical contingents, 1979: 238-245), Sumner's approach contrasts sharply with the enthusiastic Birmingham adoption of the study of the text for the sake of the text.

Indeed, the new currency of debates about authorship represents an alarming 'sign' of further and future over-subscriptions to French structuralism, and especially the new 'post-structuralism' (represented by Derrida, Kristeva, et al.), which is content not only to decompose a text with blind disregard to its material sources and conditions, but to decompose the text FOR THE SAKE OF ANALYSIS ITSELF, and not for the sake of revealing its politico-ideological implications. This is tantamount to "deconstruction for the hell of it", as Norman Snider so pointedly expressed it in, significantly, a recent edition of his 'Trends' column (Globe & Mail, 20 September, 1980). Even those who still perceive their work as part of and contributory to larger politico-practical objectives, still limit their analytical range to the text itself in their explanations (if included) of social process. Murdock and Golding rightfully question the capacity of social texts to reveal all that there is to cultural production and reproduction. Their damning critique of semiotics suggests that what is at stake here is much more than a problem of method:

... it is not just a question of devising more adequate modes of textual analysis and applying them to a comprehensive range of media output ... there is a fundamental methodological difficulty in approaching social and structural relations

through the analysis of texts. However well conceived and executed, textual readings remain a variety of content analysis and as such they suffer from the familiar but intractable problem of inference. It is one thing to argue that all cultural forms contain traces of the relations of production underlying their construction, and of the structural relations which surround them. It is quite another to go on to argue that an analysis of form can deliver an adequate and satisfactory account of these sets of relations and of the determinations they exert on the production process. They can't. In our view the sociology of culture and communication HAS BEEN SERIOUSLY INCAPACITATED by the tendency of over-privilege texts as objects of analysis (1979: 206-207; emphasis added).

What is most alarming about the new 'trend' towards post-structuralist semiotics is that it represents a fundamental inversion of the principles of historical materialism, and yet it operates under the guise of 'Marxist' cultural theory. Rather than refer to these developments as 'neo-' or even 'post-' Marxism, we might more properly identify the latest theoretical fashions as a kind of anti-Marxism. Who better to illustrate this point than Marx himself:

It is, in reality, much easier to discover by analysis the earthly core of the misty creations of religion, than, conversely, it is to develop from the actual relations of life the corresponding celestialized forms of those relations. The latter method is the only materialistic, and therefore the only scientific one (1967: 352n).

Conclusions: Towards a Materialist Analysis of Culture

Despite the promise of the new conception of culture as 'a whole way of life', culture is still treated as a realm apart, both by literary-structural theorists and by more orthodox thinkers. On one side, traditional notions have been extended to encompass a wide range of cultural commodities and symbolic forms; on the other, culture is still separated from work and reduced, in essence, to life styles and not life ways. Both traditions have contributed to the further reification of the concept, abstracted it from the web of social relations, and transformed it into a monolithic notion of not just 'culture as a whole' but 'culture as a whole realm of social life' and therefore, somehow, separable

from other material productions. Meanwhile, mass society theorists (including 'culture industry' theorists) start with a moralistic observation that 'culture' is disintegrating, and proceed to centre entirely on their abstract, ungrounded notion of culture rather than on the specific determinations and historical configurations of cultures within capitalism. The result is "a crude "consumptionist" theory of culture in which subjective judgement and moral evaluation dominate to the exclusion of scientific analysis" (Swingewood, 1977: xi). This underlines even more the need to locate culture by first looking towards production, and by conceptualizing culture itself as first and foremost a material production.

In contrast, all of the approaches discussed start out with either a firm rejection of exasperation with, or sheer desertion of, the principles of materialist analysis, and some, as we have seen, arrive at either an implicitly anti-Marxist or (at best) quasi-Marxist stance. Such categorizations, and the general profusion of labels that attempt to identify the various strands of thought, reflect the current state of theoretical confusion about culture. At least three critical and inter-related problems occupy the current debates: those of mediation, of agency, and of determination. The consequences of the first two of these have already been noted, and therefore greater attention must now be paid to the problem of determination itself.

The conditions that led these problems to attain their acute significance for contemporary cultural theorists are suggested throughout the discussion. Anderson (1976), however, more broadly contextualizes the developments. According to his account, the "organic unity of theory and practice" realized in the generation of pre-WWI Marxists suffered a serious rupture during the five decades between 1918 and 1968. The political forces that came into play following the first World War (e.g.

Fascism and Stalinism) served to sever the bond between theory and practice and to scatter and suppress certain key theorists like Gramsci, Korsch, and Lukacs. From this point forward, the possibilities for a lively and dynamic exchange of Marxist thought, one informed by concrete political practice, were seriously diminished. Moreover, after 1920, most major theoretical works were produced in a context of political isolation and (often) defeatist despair, including: Lukacs' History and Class Consciousness (1923), written during his period of exile in Austria; Gramsci's notes, compiled during his imprisonment under Mussolini's triumphant fascism; the early works of the Frankfurt theorists, written under the conditions of German fascism; Marcuse's Eros and Civilization (1954), produced in the era of McCarthyism in the United States; and Sartre's Critique of Dialectical Reason (1960), which appeared following the Gaullist coup of 1958. Anderson concludes that "the hidden hallmark of Western Marxism as a whole is thus that it is a product of DEFEAT" (1976: 42; original emphasis).

One painful consequence of the impasse brought about by these conditions became "the studied silence of Western Marxism in those areas most central to the classical traditions of historical materialism" (1976: 44); notably, analysis of economic changes within the developing capitalist mode of production, of the significance of the growing state machine, and of the ongoing class struggles within capitalist societies. At the same time, the post-war capitalist economic boom, and with it the global consolidation of capital all around the industrialized world, signalled a new phase of capitalism that seemed to undermine the classical account of its inevitable decline, and posed instead a 'crisis' for Marxist analysis. In light of these circumstances, the appearance of Althusser's works during the 1960s, and their widespread influence, is

readily comprehensible. Althusser's reformulations of the classic Marxist precepts (e.g. the crucial concept of "structural causality" of a mode of production in Reading Capital, and the concept of a social totality "determined in the last instance" by one preponderant level within it, which in itself blew open the whole surge of functionalist attacks, and deservedly so), undermined the already weakened vitality of classical political economy, and led to an inordinate amount of concentration on the study of superstructures, in which analyses of culture and ideology rose to unwarranted prominence. Furthermore, there are those who argue (e.g. Mrudock and Golding, 1979) that ultimately the most dreadful implication of Althusser's work was its final and definitive eradication of one of the core, distinguishing features of historical materialism; namely, the real and ever-present determination of the economic.

The sole outstanding exception to these otherwise pervasive tendencies is represented in the work of one of the last great 'politically informed' Marxist theorists: Gramsci. It is particularly remarkable in that Gramsci's work also concentrated on the study of superstructures, yet "unlike any other theorist in Western Marxism he took the autonomy and efficacy of cultural superstructures as a POLITICAL problem, to be explicitly theorized as such - in its 'relationship to the maintenance or subversion of the social order" (Anderson, 1976: 78; original emphasis). This is the critical difference, although popular misappropriations of his work have themselves 'subverted' the distinctiveness of his approach to culture, and the cryptic nature of his writings has obstructed a clear understanding of their theoretical significance. The construction of a comprehensive Gramscian approach to the study of culture would no doubt be a massive, yet not impossible, project; it would need to take into account and piece together all of the observations about culture (and

ideology) dispersed throughout the voluminous prison notes. The project is made all the more massive by the recent availability of the first English translation of some of the early political writings (Gramsci, 1977, 1978).¹⁴ Nevertheless, in order to fulfill the requirements of a materialist analysis of culture, we might usefully start with Gramsci's seminal works.

It is a tribute to his unique insights that Gramsci, at a very early historical stage, recognized the dangers of and understood the developments behind the growth of idealist elements within Marxist theory:

... the currents which have attempted combinations of the philosophy of praxis with idealist tendencies consist for the most part of 'pure' intellectuals, whereas the current which has constituted the orthodoxy consisted of intellectual personalities more markedly dedicated to practical activity and therefore more closely linked to the great popular masses (1971: 389).

Part of the explanation for this insight lies in Gramsci's frequent polemics against the idealism of Croce, his chief opponent in the local Italian debate. In a similar vein, Gramsci also recognized the overriding problem of determination, and insisted that "it is the problem of the relations between structure and superstructure which must be accurately posed and resolved if the forces which are active in the history of a particular period are to be correctly analyzed, and the relations between them determined" (1971: 177).

With respect to this overriding problem, Garnham (1979) has helpfully identified the roots of the debate about determination in his search for congruities between the work of Screen and historical materialism. In the first place, the imbalanced concern with ideology and culture has placed traditional understandings of determination in doubt.

... the economic is determinant in certain historically specific ways, i.e. each one of us would literally starve

to death unless we entered into this structure of economic relationships. The same cannot be said of many so-called superstructural activities which are in this sense, relatively autonomous, relatively matters of free choice (1979: 125).

Garnham argues that this straightforward distinction has been inflated beyond reason, and that this can be understood in terms of the relatively privileged position of intellectuals within modern relations of production; hence their susceptibility to confusions about determination. The argument suggests that, as a first step towards a materialist approach, we need to remove culture, or at least ideology, from its position of centrality in 'Marxist' thought and work. It may mean, for example, looking for 'culture' in hitherto unlikely places, i.e. inside factories and offices and not just in working or middle class neighbourhoods, and making sense of the findings not with the dubious aid of Althusserian 'theories', but with reference to substantive works like, for example, Beynon's Working for Ford (1973) or Thompson's research on the problems encountered in introducing the notion of regulated working hours in the early moments of industrialization (1967).

A second source of the confusion about determination lies in the associated (and, some would argue, 'manufactured') problem of 'levels', brought on in part by Althusser's re-reading of Capital. In a valiant effort to "bring back the dialectic", Garnham argues forcefully that the whole notion of levels is a false one. Discussions of "levels of the social formation" tend to (incorrectly) specify "discrete areas of concrete social practice (e.g. the economic is material production and circulation, the ideological is concerned with ideas and cultural forms, the political concerned with political parties, the state and so on). On the contrary, levels are not actual social practices but analytically distinct perspectives upon concrete social phenomena which are at one

and the same time economic, ideological, and political" (1979: 129).

A third source of trouble traces to the widely perceived limitations of the classic equation between ideology and false consciousness as well as the opposition between real relations and phenomenal forms, on the basis of which many cultural theorists instantly dismiss Marx as a source of theoretical insight into the workings of ideology and culture. Yet, as Garnham points out:

All that historical materialism posits is that economic class positions produce one set of positions as an average or probabilistically, rather than another. It then sometimes goes on to argue that the gap precisely between the real and 'reality' or between economic relations and phenomenological forms makes possible a disjunction between the real interests and a false consciousness of those interests. It does not necessarily ... then make ideology merely 'the misleading phenomenal form of the real movement'. It claims that, because there is mediation (or relative autonomy or disjuncture or indeed whatever word or theoretical construct one uses to describe the manifestly obvious and anciently attested fact that there is a difference between the real and its representation) there is a possibility of misunderstanding. But it does depend ... upon an assumption of the primacy and determinacy of the real ... Marx certainly, and I believe, Marxism, rests upon the ultimate primacy of the real (1979: 126-127).

Garnham's defense is quoted at length here, since it marks a rare type of intervention into the current debates of Marxist cultural theory. On a more optimistic note, there is some recent evidence that oppositions of this nature are on the increase (see, for example, the debate between Coward (1979), and Chambers et al. (1979). In the interests of a maturing materialist approach to the study of culture, such interventions must be heartily welcomed.

NOTES

1. The unique position of Walter Benjamin vis-a-vis other members of the institute for Social Research is still a subject of debate (see later discussion), and hence the theoretical cohesion suggested by the phrase 'the Frankfurt school' renders its usage somewhat inappropriate.
2. Horkheimer died in 1973. The quotation derives from a letter written to Martin Jay in 1971, subsequently published as the forward to Jay's account of the Institute (1973).
3. A problematic feature of mass society theory is this limited attention to these three media and its relative neglect of other significant culture industries and cultural forms (literature, drama, newspapers, magazines, theatre, etc.).
4. The material imperatives that determined the direction of much American 'mass communications' research are by now well known. The needs of the U.S. private radio industry for some knowledge of its broadcast markets and the requirements of war-time propaganda each figured within the development of the dominant modes of media empiricism. Several leading figures within this tradition were directly employed by private audience research agencies or private research foundations linked to the media industries. In addition, Hovland directed the research branch of the U.S. Army's Information and Education Division (see Golding and Murdock, 1978).
5. Innis' theory is introduced in Empire and Communications (1972) and further developed in The Bias of Communication (1951). Related works include Changing Concepts of Time (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1952) and The Strategy of Culture (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1952).
6. See Carey (1968) for evidence that McLuhan's 'borrowings' from Innis were more than substantial, verging on sheer plagiarism.
7. Their limited utility is illustrated in the fact that few studies have followed or attempted to develop the tradition further. A notable exception is Carpenter's Oh, What a Blow That Phantom Gave Me! (1976). His idle musings, however fascinating to read, demonstrate the impressionistic and fundamentally non-analytical nature of McLuhan's formulations about culture.
8. Keynote address, 11th Annual Conference of the Canadian Association for American Studies, Waterloo, Ontario, 22-25 October 1975.
9. The phrase 'cultural studies' is preferred to 'cultural Marxism' (as some refer to the approach), for reasons that will become apparent.

10. Hoggart shared the anxieties and lived the contradictions of other British working class academics of the 1950s who moved upward through the academy during the post-war expansion of higher education, and, like the others, was compelled by a need to 'settle accounts' with his class origins. The Uses of Literacy should be read in this light.
11. It is indicative of 'the new Williams' that statements like the following appear in the latest text: "It is in practice impossible to separate the development of the novel as a literary form from the highly specific economics of fiction publication" (1977: 137) -- a far cry indeed from the young literary critic of the 1950s.
12. In a revealing admission, Johnson notes that the ISAs essay "has been massively influential, defining, for many readers, the actual terrain of "materialism"" (1979: 58).
13. That Thompson's motives in the production of Making were largely polemical is disclosed in the following excerpt from a recent interview: "The Making of the English Working Class undoubtedly arose from a two-sided theoretical polemic. On the one hand it could not have been written without the extremely firmly, intellectually very well-based, discipline of economic history ... it is a tradition largely contaminated with capitalist ideology ... on the other hand it was in a sense a polemic against abbreviated economic notations of Marxism..." (1976: 4-5).
14. Cavalcanti and Piccone, however, have usefully culled some of the salient writings on culture from these early articles (see Gramsci, 1975: 9-49).

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