

1 Investigating Problems in Cultural Studies

A man will be imprisoned in a room with a door that's locked and opens inwards; as long as it does not occur to him to pull rather than push it. (Wittgenstein, 1980: 42)

Pragmatism could be characterized as the doctrine that all problems are at bottom problems of conduct, that all judgements are, implicitly, judgements of value, and that, as there can be ultimately no valid distinction of theoretical and practical, so there can be no final separation of questions of truth of any kind from questions of the justifiable ends of action. (C.I. Lewis, cited West, 1993: 109)

Introduction

The theoretical and institutional field of cultural studies has developed over the past thirty years or so to a stage where similar problems, issues and debates have emerged from within the literature. This book, a follow-up to my *Cultural Studies: Theory and Practice*, is intended both as a mapping exercise and as an intervention in relation to identified 'problems'. While *Cultural Studies* took a reasonably even-handed stance in describing key debates, *Making Sense* will, as its subtitle implies, be marked by a more provocative voice that, through the choice of 'problems' and the proposed 'solutions', seeks to influence the direction that cultural studies takes at the dawn of the twenty-first century. In doing so, my hope is that cultural studies can be encouraged to take a pragmatist turn.

All books are written with an image of the potential audience in the mind of the author that influences the style and content of the text. I have assumed that the readership for this book will come from the English-speaking world of Australia, the UK and the USA, and I make no pretence to be talking about the specificities of 'culture' beyond those bounds. Thus, when I talk about 'our' culture, and so forth, I mean the broad parameters of western culture. Within those bounds, I am attempting to address two overlapping readerships: new students of cultural studies who want to know about the problems, issues and debates in the field; and those professional academics who are already familiar with the domain and whose interest lies with the problems as problems. This

kind of 'double-coding' involves a juggling act between providing enough background information to make the 'problems' intelligible for the new reader while not boring a more professional audience through repetition of previously stated arguments. Obviously my wish is to have been successful in this objective; where I have not been, I hope readers will bear with me.

The cultural studies family

The problem that has haunted the field since its inception has centred on the character of cultural studies itself. This topic is, I would suggest, more auspiciously pursued with the query 'how do we talk about cultural studies, and for what purposes?' than by asking 'what is cultural studies?' This therapeutic recasting of the question enables us to see that cultural studies is not an object. That is, cultural studies is not one thing that can be accurately represented, but rather is constituted by a number of ways of looking at the world which are motivated by different purposes and values.

Cultural studies is constituted by multiple voices or languages that nevertheless have sufficient resemblances to form a recognizable 'family' connected by 'kinship' ties to other families. Or, to deploy a different metaphor, cultural studies is formed by a series of currents that constitute a distinct stream of thought (albeit one that has tributaries flowing in and out of it) in the sense that, although currents may flow in this or that direction, the stream carves a characteristic pathway. Thus, cultural studies is best understood as a language-game that revolves around the theoretical terms developed and deployed by persons calling their work cultural studies. That is, to use Hall's more Foucauldian language, cultural studies can be grasped as a discursive formation, 'a cluster (or formation) of ideas, images and practices, which provide ways of talking about forms of knowledge and conduct associated with a particular topic, social activity or institutional site in society' (1997: 6).

I began by asking the question 'how do we talk about cultural studies, and for what purposes?' We might usefully follow up this inquiry by asking some further questions, namely:

- What are the constituent parts of the language-game of cultural studies?
- What are the purposes of cultural studies?
- Where are the practices of cultural studies located?

In turn, each of these questions raises a series of issues. Thus, a question regarding the 'location' of cultural studies might give rise to the issues of (a) the institutional boundaries of cultural studies and (b) the global in relation to the local. This general pattern of exploring problems through asking questions that raise further issues is one that is broadly manifested in the organization of each chapter of the book. Having said that, it does not follow that I will be exploring

all possible issues that arise in relation to a given problem. Selection is a necessary aspect of writing any book.

Cultural studies as a language-game

It has always been difficult to pin down the boundaries of cultural studies as a coherent, unified, academic discipline with clear-cut substantive topics, concepts and methods. However, it is equally difficult to do so for sociology, psychology, women's studies, physics, linguistics and Buddhism. Thus Durkheim, in trying to establish sociology as a coherent discipline, instituted a stream of thought that has been influential across time and space. Nevertheless, he did not define sociology for all time since this particular language-game has mutated and splintered. In other words, the problems of definition and disciplinary boundaries are not uniquely problematic for cultural studies (as is sometimes claimed), nor do they pose problems of particular complexity.

Cultural studies has always been a multi- or post-disciplinary field of inquiry that blurs the boundaries between itself and other 'subjects'. Further, cultural studies has been something of a magpie: it has its own distinctive cast, yet it likes to borrow glittering concepts from other nests. There is nothing particularly problematic about this for it produces some original thinking. Here originality is best thought of as the rearrangement and juxtaposing of existing elements to form new patterns. That is, we generate a new way of seeing, a new perspective on or picture of the world in the same way that a kaleidoscope rearranges its existing pieces into new images. Of course, being an academic project rather than an artistic one, cultural studies uses words to write new sentences rather than colours to paint new pictures.

As Grossberg et al. have argued, there are a series of concepts that have been developed under the banner of cultural studies that have been deployed in various geographical sites. These form 'a history of real achievements that is now part of the cultural studies tradition'. To do without them would be 'to willingly accept real incapacitation' (Grossberg et al., 1992: 8). These concepts are tools for acting in the world and their meaning lies in their usage. The purposes for which these tools are commonly employed are those of writing texts and teaching students. Cultural studies, in arguing that language is constitutive of that which it names, must apply that lesson to itself. If words give meaning to material objects and social practices that are brought into view by language and made intelligible to us in terms which language delimits, then the vocabulary of cultural studies performs cultural studies. Thus, as I have argued elsewhere (Barker, 2000), culture, signifying practices, representation, cultural politics, positionality, cultural materialism, non-reductionism, social formation, articulation, power, popular culture, ideology, hegemony, texts, active audiences, subjectivity, identity, discourse and discursive formation are amongst the key theoretical concepts by which contemporary cultural studies has sought to

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explore and intervene in our social and cultural worlds. This is the core of the vocabulary that institutes and constitutes cultural studies.

Any academic vocabulary is located on an institutional map and deployed for particular purposes. Consequently, there remains a distinction between the study of culture and institutionally located cultural studies. Though the study of culture has taken place in a variety of academic disciplines – sociology, anthropology, English literature, etc. – and in a range of geographical and institutional spaces, this is not best thought of as cultural studies. The study of culture has no origins or single site of activity. However, cultural studies as an institutionally located activity did have a moment and place where it named itself. That was the formation and denomination of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at the University of Birmingham in the UK. Here, the quantum leap of cultural studies took it from the nameless to the named – from nothingness to institutional existence. Subsequently, cultural studies has extended its intellectual base and geographic scope. In addition to those situated in the UK, there are self-defined cultural studies practitioners in the USA, Australia, Africa, Asia, Latin America and continental Europe, with each ‘formation’ of cultural studies working in different ways. Thus to map cultural studies is to map its language, its locations and its purposes as it unfolded from its very own Big Bang. This is a genealogy that I do not intend to undertake. However, this argument illustrates the futility of seeking an essence or universal definition of cultural studies.

The current vocabulary of the field suggests that cultural studies is centrally concerned with culture as constituted by the meanings and representations that are generated by signifying mechanisms in the context of human practices. Further, cultural studies is concerned with the construction and consequences of those representations, and thus with matters of power, since patterns of signifying practices constitute, and are constituted by, institutions and virtual structures. For Hall, whose work has been crucial in constituting the domain of cultural studies, culture can be understood as ‘the actual grounded terrain of practices, representations, languages and customs of any specific society’ (1996c: 439). For Bennett, cultural studies ‘is concerned with all those practices, institutions and systems of classification through which there are inculcated in a population particular values, beliefs, competencies, routines of life and habitual forms of conduct’ (1998: 28). For both writers, cultural studies has sought to develop ways of thinking about culture and power that can be utilized by social agents in the pursuit of change. This, for Hall (1992a) at least, is what differentiates cultural studies from other subject areas. Hence, cultural studies is thought of as a body of theory generated by thinkers who regard the production of theoretical knowledge as a political practice. However, we should be careful not to confuse writing as a politically inspired endeavour with other kinds of civic and governmental practices, as many cultural studies practitioners are inclined to do in their enthusiasm to contribute to change and underscore their own relevance.

The purposes of cultural studies

Most writers in the field would probably agree that the purposes of cultural studies are:

- analytic,
- pedagogic,
- political.

Nevertheless, the emphasis given by a number of leading cultural studies practitioners (notably Hall above) has been to argue that it is the politics of cultural studies that endows it with distinctiveness. However, as a body of knowledge, cultural studies is no more and no less political than any other 'discipline' in terms of the establishment of world-views of power/knowledge or the institutional politics of the academy. That being so, it would be less delusional and also practically beneficial to the field if cultural studies were to become more modest in its ambitions. That is, cultural studies must come to accept that its main purpose, enacted through teaching and writing, is restricted to intellectual clarification and legitimization.

Cultural studies writers offer another variety of storytelling in the marketplace. Along with many other good stories, those of cultural studies are best thought of as inspirational guidebooks with consequences. Cultural studies, like other sets of myths and fables, acts as a symbolic guide or map of meaning and significance in the cosmos. As such, it is a potential tool for activists and policy makers rather more than a form of direct political activity. Cultural studies is no less valuable for that: storytellers have had an important role in human history, but we should avoid confusing the power and agency of the King with the play of the Fool (who tells the best stories). Indeed, the linkages between cultural studies and new social movements, which are commonly seen as the former's political agents, are tenuous given that feminism, ecology, peace campaigns, and so forth, do not need cultural studies *per se*. However, our theorizing may be of assistance and, as such, cultural studies may seek to 'clear the way' for activists through problem solving via redefinition and redescription of the world. Nevertheless, being an 'activist' is not a prerequisite for 'doing cultural studies' and 'doing cultural studies' is best thought of not as a form of 'political activism' but as a form of researching, teaching and publishing.

Of course, teaching and the production of knowledge are political in the sense that they are concerned with relations of power. However, it is not particularly helpful to merge such disparate activities as reading, writing, publishing academic books, producing campaign leaflets, picketing, door knocking at election time and teaching a class under the all-encompassing concept of the 'political'. In particular, it is a mistake to equate the demystifying or deconstructing tasks of cultural studies with the activities of new social movements,

policy makers, political parties or the institutions of government. Further, insofar as cultural studies practitioners want to engage in the cultural politics of popular thinking, they should consider more popular forms of publishing (e.g. journalism). Insofar as cultural studies wants to be more institutionally political, it must assist in the formulation and implementation of policy. Both are valued activities but should not be understood as the same pastime.

The locations of cultural studies

The prime locations of cultural studies as a set of practices are academic institutions, for example universities and publishing houses. Cultural studies' position in the higher education systems of the West has inevitably led it to an expansionist trajectory outwards from the terrain of postgraduate research and into attracting degree students with their affiliated funding. This was a response, in part, to the demands of students and the availability of trained staff. However, it was perhaps more tellingly still an answer to the need for funding in a harsh environment. Consequently, as it has become something to be taught, so cultural studies has acquired a multitude of institutional bases, courses, textbooks and students. In due course, this process leads to a certain 'disciplining' of cultural studies. The courses now offered by universities for undergraduate students constitute a broad 'definition' of the parameters of cultural studies. The textbooks that follow, including my own (Barker, 2000), reinforce this process.

Many cultural studies practitioners have felt ill at ease with the forging of institutional disciplinary boundaries for the field. Professionalized and institutionalized cultural studies might, feared Hall, 'formalize out of existence the critical questions of power, history and politics' (1992a: 286). However, not only is this not an inevitable consequence of growth, but expansion in the domain of higher education is a condition of reaching a wider audience. This readership is made up of young people who as graduates will play an important part in the unfolding of the twenty-first century. Indeed, such students are likely to form the backbone of the future cadre of cultural intellectuals, policy makers, workers and managers. As such, they are a socially and politically important audience for cultural studies to address.

Although higher education is a branch of government, and thus teachers are already an arm of the state, higher education remains, at least within liberal democracies, a privileged site of critical inquiry. Few people aside from those working in the academy have the time, resources or cultural protection to carry out such tasks. Writers, researchers and teachers in higher education may not be the 'organic' intellectuals whom the 'pioneers' of cultural studies hoped for. However, they are in a position to speak with, and provide intellectual resources for, new social movements, workers in cultural industries and policy-making bodies. Cultural studies may find it increasingly hard to cling to its romantic and heroic conception of itself as an 'intellectual guerrilla movement waging war on

the borders of official academia' (McGuigan, 1997: 1). Nevertheless, the establishment of cultural studies as an undergraduate subject area does not preclude research centres (now also more numerous) but rather provides new opportunities. Although the move from counter-culture to educational mainstream has not been a comfortable one for everybody, it is now necessary to see cultural studies in a new light and adapt accordingly.

In sum, I have argued that cultural studies is best described as an intellectual enterprise that is constituted by a set of overlapping language-games. The contemporary vocabulary of cultural studies suggests that it is concerned with culture, as constituted by the meanings and representations generated by human signifying practices, and the relations of power and its consequences that are inherent in such representations. The prime purposes of cultural studies, which is located in the institutions of universities, publishing houses and book-shops, are the processes of intellectual clarification and legitimation that could provide useful tools for cultural/political activists and policy makers.

Family therapy: approaching problems in cultural studies

As a general rule, I take a 'problem' in cultural studies to be constituted by a field of recurrent doubts and puzzles centred on specific sites of inquiry that give rise to repeated and as yet unresolved debates in that literature which constitutes cultural studies. Of course, as I indicated above, a problem is never 'one thing' but a clustering of questions and issues.

Therapeutic thinking

In exploring problems within cultural studies, I adopt the characteristically Wittgensteinian tactic of 'therapeutic redefinition' by which problems are dissolved through adopting a 'new way of seeing'. Or, as he puts it, to 'shew the fly the way out of the fly-bottle' (Wittgenstein, 1957: 309). For Wittgenstein, to ask a particular question with a specific grammar is to be already committed to a way of seeing. For example, to ask whether the 'mental' is a process or a state is to trap oneself in a fly-bottle since the question itself depends on a particular (and for Wittgenstein a mistaken) way of seeing.

How does the philosophical problem about mental processes and states and about behaviorism arise? The first step is one that altogether escapes notice. We talk of processes and states and leave their nature undecided. Sometime perhaps we shall know more about them – we think. But that is just what commits us to a particular way of looking at the matter. For we have a definite concept of what it means to learn to know a process better (the decisive movement in the conjuring trick had been made, and it was the very one that we thought quite innocent). And now the analogy which was to make us understand our thoughts falls to pieces. So we have to deny the

yet uncomprehended process in the yet unexplored medium. And now it looks as if we had denied mental processes. And naturally we don't want to deny them. (Wittgenstein, 1957: 308)

Thinking as therapy enables problems in cultural studies to be recast in ways that, while preserving the political significance of the questions and issues involved, take some of the 'heat' out of the debates. It does this by suggesting that it is commonly the character of the question itself that constitutes part of the problem. Thus, to ask the question 'what is cultural studies?' is to assume that there is such a thing as cultural studies that we can know and name. Following Rorty's critique of representationalism (1980, 1989, 1991a, 1991b, 1998a, 1998b), I contend that we cannot know what something 'is' when 'is' suggests either a metaphysical universal truth or an accurate representation of an independent object world. Language does not accurately represent the world but is a tool for achieving our purposes (see Chapters 2 and 3). Knowledge is a matter not of getting an accurate picture of reality, but of learning how best to contend with the world. Since we have a variety of purposes, we develop a variety of languages. Thus in redescribing the question 'what is cultural studies?' as 'how do we talk about cultural studies, and for what purposes?' I made the switch from a question about representation to one concerning language use.

The idea that we cannot definitively say what an event 'is', and that we have different languages for different purposes, is not the preserve of the philosophy of language but is one shared by the 'hard' sciences (Gribbin, 1998). For example, at the core of quantum physics is a wave-particle duality by which all quantum entities can be treated as both waves and particles: as being in a particular place (particle) and in no certain place (wave). Under some circumstances it is useful to regard photons (quantities of light) as a stream of particles, while at other times they are best thought of in terms of wavelengths. Equally, in classical Newtonian physics an electron is envisaged as a particle that orbits the nuclei of an atom (protons and neutrons), while in quantum mechanics it is held to be a wave surrounding the atom's nuclei. Both descriptions 'work' according to the purposes one has in mind: physical phenomena are put 'under the description' (Davidson, 1984) of different models to achieve divergent ends.

My general approach in this book is to try to recast problems in a way that shifts the emphasis from the metaphysical representationalist question 'what is?' to the more mundane and pragmatic issues of language use: that is, 'how do we talk about X?' As Wittgenstein puts it, 'Grammar tells what kind of object anything is. (Theology as grammar.)' (1957: 373). What something 'is' becomes constituted by the use of language within specific language-games. The truth of a matter is culturally and historically specific and changeable, a 'regime of truth' or a condition of being 'in the true', as Foucault (1972) would have it. In this context, problems are 'solved' by being 'dissolved', that is, by redescribing them in a different language. Indeed, any state of affairs can be explicated in a variety of ways, giving rise to variability of accounts. In particular, what may appear as a

problem of binary opposites – e.g. structure and action or freedom and determination – can be grasped as a case of different languages for different purposes. Thus, either/or binaries are dissolved by denying that the problem is best described in dualistic terms at all.

Solving problems in this way is not simply an abstract playing with words, for new descriptions, new languages with which to cope with world, have specific consequences. Thus,

our belief that the picture forced upon us consisted in the fact that only the one case and no other occurred to us. 'There is another solution as well' means: there is something else that I am also prepared to call a 'solution'; to which I am prepared to apply such-and-such a picture, such-and-such an analogy, and so on. (Wittgenstein, 1957: 140)

Consequently, 'what you have primarily discovered is a new way of looking at things. As if you had invented a new way of painting; or, again, a new metre, or a new kind of song' (Wittgenstein, 1957: 401).

Underlying themes

Since each chapter touches on at least three or four issues in the context of an identified 'problem', this book covers a good deal of ground, much of which will be familiar to seasoned readers of cultural studies texts. However, I also include a number of themes and intellectual resources that are less well known in a cultural studies context and that allow us to take a different perspective on familiar debates. Here I want to outline briefly some of the thinking that has shaped the themes of the book and that will be encountered again as the text unfolds.

Philosophic pragmatism

For some twenty years, cultural studies operated inside the broad parameters and problematic of western Marxism. Hence the centrality of the debates about base and superstructure, ideology, hegemony, class determinism and revolutionary politics. In my view we need to understand Marx as a thinker who had some interesting and useful things to say about nineteenth-century capitalism. Some of his analysis is still pertinent today – after all most of us live in capitalist societies – but so much has changed since Marx's time that much of his work has also proved to be misleading. Certainly we cannot any longer sensibly entertain economic reductionism, the overwhelming priority given to class in cultural analysis or the rhetoric of revolutionary politics. Quite apart from the fact that revolution in the West is not even on the agenda, let us not forget that the consequences of twentieth-century social revolution have been fairly disastrous.

As cultural studies unfolded, the influence of structuralism was wedded to

its Marxist foundation. One manifestation of this development was that a rupture appeared between Marxism's stress on political economy and the structuralist emphasis given to language and the autonomy of culture. Later, the break with Marxism was furthered by the widespread embracing of poststructuralism and postmodernism. However, though the work of Foucault and Derrida has much to commend it, both have a tendency to reify language into an autonomous system detached from the everyday practices of human beings. Further, neither has much to say about the gritty world of reformist public politics, preferring the rhetoric of deconstruction and insurgency. In this book I am explicitly suggesting that Rortian pragmatism is preferable to either Marxism or poststructuralism and could provide cultural studies with a more adequate framework than either of these theoretical paradigms.

Pragmatism, as espoused by Rorty (1980, 1989, 1991a, 1991b, 1998a, 1998b), is both anti-representationalist and anti-foundationalist. Anti-representationalism is understood to mean that the relationship between language and the rest of the material universe is one of causality not of adequacy of representation or expression. That is, we can usefully try to explain how human organisms come to act or speak in particular ways, but we cannot beneficially see language as representing the world in ways which more or less correspond to the material world. There are no chunks of language that line up with or correspond to chunks of reality. Above all, there is no archimedean vantage-point from which one could verify the universal 'truth' of any correspondence between the world and language. The anti-foundationalism that follows from this argument suggests that we cannot ground or justify our actions and beliefs by means of any universal truths. We can describe this or that discourse, chunk of language, as being more or less useful and as having more or less desirable consequences. However, we cannot claim it to be true in the sense of correspondence to an independent object world. We can examine the way that the word 'truth' is used, what makes a particular truth claim acceptable to us and our routine deployment of 'mundane realism'. However, we cannot give an epistemological account of truth and must steer clear of philosophical claims about transcendental and metaphysical truth.

These arguments turn our attention away from the search for universal truth and towards justification as the giving of reasons. This reason-giving is a social practice, so that to justify a belief is to give reasons in the context of a tradition and a community. Here, reasons are objective in the sense that they have an intersubjective base in the community norms for reason giving and tend towards agreement on claims that have been merited by practice. However, norms may be contradictory and understood in varying ways by the community. Further, it is possible to investigate an issue with varying degrees of conscientiousness. Thus, justification is a part of an ongoing 'conversation' of humanity, and, however we characterize 'truth', we have no reliable source for it other than our ongoing conversation with each other. Having said that, some practices of knowledge formation have yielded more capacity for predictability and control

of the material world than have others. Thus, physical science has been more able to generate consensus about its forms of understanding than have the humanities precisely because of its predictive reliability.

Pragmatism shares its anti-foundationalism and anti-representationalism with the poststructuralist thinking that is currently ascendant within cultural studies. However, in contrast to poststructuralism, pragmatism combines these arguments with a commitment to social reform. Pragmatism suggests that the struggle for social change is a question of language/text *and* of material practice/policy action. Like cultural studies, in pursuit of a 'better' world, pragmatism attempts to render contingent that which appears 'natural'. However, unlike the revolutionary rhetoric of many followers of poststructuralism, pragmatism weds itself to the need for piecemeal practical political change. In this sense, pragmatism has a 'tragic' view of life for it does not share the utopian push of, say, Marxism. In contrast, it favours a trial-and-error experimentalism that seeks after new ways of doing things that we can describe as 'better' when measured against our values.

Since anti-representationalism, anti-foundationalism and pragmatism do not of necessity support any *particular* political projects, values or strategies, we may feel free to disagree with any of Rorty's programmatic suggestions. Nevertheless, his pragmatism combines a commitment to what cultural studies writers have called 'the cultural politics of difference' – that is, language-based redescriptions of the world which expand the realm of democratic cultures – together with the need for the public policy necessary to maintain it. Within liberal democratic states, a cultural politics of representation and a cultural policy orientation need not be opposed.

Rorty's politics are those of 'liberalism' in a broad sense, while in its particulars he embraces that which Europeans would understand as the social democratic left. Indeed, Gutting (1999) characterizes his Rortian-derived views as being 'pragmatic liberalism'. Here, liberalism involves a balancing act between individual freedom and the reduction of suffering through community action. The hope of liberalism is to find ways for human beings to be more free, less cruel, more leisured and richer in goods and experiences while trying to maximize their opportunities to live their lives as they see fit: that is, to pursue a private project founded on their own values and beliefs while not causing suffering to others. This involves, at least for Rorty, a strong division between the public world and the private project, for liberalism can accept a range of private values that it cannot tolerate in the public domain. Now, the division between the public and the private is contingent on cultural classifications. Indeed, since there can be no such thing as a private language, the private sphere is social and saturated with the power relations of the public world. Further, we need to avoid the implication that the 'private' is always a matter for individuals alone, for there are groups of persons who hold to beliefs that are not in tune with the liberal body politic. That said, the private–public cleavage is a useful one in maintaining our freedoms even while we may accept renegotiation of its boundaries.

Liberal democracy and cultural pluralism work imperfectly. Indeed, the liberal and democratic impulses are not always easily reconciled with each other, while liberal democratic states are themselves vehicles of oppression. Consequently, it is entirely acceptable to liberals to critique those aspects of our societies and cultures that restrict freedoms and cause suffering. This of course has been the central political project of cultural studies. However, liberals in the sense that Rorty deploys the concept do not think that the answers to our contemporary predicaments lie in a revolutionary overthrow of the institutions and practices of liberal societies. Rather, it is argued that all in all there is no viable and practical alternative to liberal democracies that poses less of a threat to our freedoms and welfare. As such, a pragmatic cultural studies can be understood as a critical wing of liberal societies drawing attention to the continuation of suffering without rejecting the fundamental viability of liberal democracy. This commitment does not mean that any particular institution of liberal democracy could not be reformed or that any specific cultural and political direction could not be improved on. Indeed, I understand the 'politics of difference' and the project of 'radical democracy' (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985) that lie at the heart of contemporary cultural studies as redefining liberal democracy in its current manifestations while remaining within its philosophical boundaries.

A commitment to liberal democracy is of course a pragmatic matter. Perhaps one day in the future we humans will come up with a way to live that we consider to be a better one. In other words, our commitment to liberal democracy has no universal foundation that is grounded in a philosophical account of human nature for example – nor does it need one. As Rorty argues, we do not require universal foundations to pursue a pragmatic improvement of the human condition on the basis of the values of our own tradition. For Rorty (1989), the contingency of language and the irony which follows from this (irony here means holding to beliefs and attitudes which one knows are contingent and could be otherwise, i.e. they have no universal foundations) leads us to ask about what kind of human being we want to be (for no transcendental truth and no transcendental God can answer this question for us). This includes questions about us as individuals – who we want to be – and questions about our relations to fellow human beings – how shall we treat others? These are pragmatic questions requiring political-value responses. They are not metaphysical or epistemological issues.

Rorty has often been bracketed with the so-called 'postmodern' philosophers, though he has tried to distance himself from this nomination. However, like postmodernism, pragmatism is against 'grand theory', being in sympathy with Lyotard's (1984) 'incredulity towards metanarratives'. Pragmatists have a radically contingent view of the world where truth ends with social practice. However, this does not mean that all theory is to be jettisoned. Rather, local theory becomes a way of redescribing the world in normative ways. That is, theory may enable us to envisage possible new and better ways of doing

things. Theory does not picture the world more or less accurately; rather, it is a tool, instrument or logic for intervening in the world through the mechanisms of description, definition, prediction and control. Theory construction is a self-reflexive discursive endeavour that seeks to interpret and intercede in the world.

I take modernity and postmodernity to be periodizing concepts that refer to historical epochs. They are abstractions that broadly define the institutional parameters of social formations. As such, I cannot countenance the description of our world as postmodern but prefer Giddens, (1990, 1991) notion of 'radicalized modernity'. As a set of philosophical and epistemological concerns, modernism is associated with the enlightenment philosophy of rationality, science, universal truth and progress. In contrast, postmodern philosophy has been associated with a questioning of these categories – not depth but surface, not truth but truths, not objectivity but social commendation, not universalism or foundationalism but historically specific 'regimes of truth'. However, though reason has turned out to be partial and unbalanced rather than universal and totalizing, pragmatism is still committed to the idea that reason is a useful way of asserting human independence from arbitrary and external authorities (e.g. God and the church). Even Foucault questioned the need to be either for or against the Enlightenment. As Bauman (1991) suggests, the condition of 'post-modernity' can be understood as the modern mind reflecting upon itself from a distance and sensing the urge to change. As such, I prefer to see the self-examination of modernity by moderns as a form of 'reflexive modernism'. Nevertheless, given its common usage in cultural studies, I accept the concepts of a post-modern culture and of postmodernism as a cultural style (see Chapter 3).

Since pragmatism understands the universe as always 'in the making', so the future has ethical significance. We can, it is argued, make a difference and create new, 'better' futures. In this sense, pragmatism insists on the irreducibility of human agency even as it recognizes the causal stories of the past. Agency is to be understood here as the socially constructed capacity to act and is not to be confused with a self-originating transcendental subject. We are not constituted by an inner core that possesses attitudes, beliefs and the capacity to act; rather, we are a network of attitudes, beliefs, and so forth, that does act. Further, pragmatism shares with poststructuralist, post-Marxist cultural studies the idea that social and cultural change is a matter of 'politics without guarantees'. Without Marxism's 'laws of history', politics is centred on small-scale experimentalism, value-commitment and practical action. Here, pragmatism embraces a form of 'ethical naturalism' by which ethics do not need metaphysical foundations to be justified. That is, ethics do not require to be grounded in anything outside or beyond our beliefs and desires. However, to say that morality is rooted in our desires and ways of speaking is not to say that all moral codes have the same status. Rather, moral codes are embedded in our intersubjectivity and acculturation so that ethics are returned to questions of justification. Of course, it is a characteristic of contemporary modern cultures that we participate in a number of traditions and communities so that the justification of ethics becomes an

increasingly complex matter that depends at its best on dialogue and at its worst on a descent into violence.

In sum, I am suggesting that Rorty's work is a valuable addition to the cultural studies repertoire. However, as much can be gained by engaging Rorty in a conversation as accepting what he has to say uncritically.

For example, West (1993), a cultural critic sympathetic to pragmatism, rightly worries about Rorty's failure to analyse *power* and to deploy sociological kinds of explanation to identify the realistic and pragmatic collective routes for social change. That said, cultural studies thinkers with their concern for the province of power in social life are well placed to rectify this weakness. They are also appropriately positioned to critique the stress on individual decision making (i.e. decisionism – see Gutting, 1999) that appears in Rorty's work with a more inter-subjective and cultural account of the actions of persons.

Practices and performances

Contemporary cultural studies has been marked by its emphasis on the constitutive role of language as the means and medium through which we form knowledge about ourselves and the social world. Thus cultural representations are said to work 'like a language'. Indeed, it is argued that to understand culture is to explore how meaning is produced symbolically through signifying practices. This understanding and its application is one of the major achievements of cultural studies. However, a reliance on structuralism and poststructuralism has led cultural studies to postulate language as a 'thing' – an autonomous system with its own rules – rather than as the marks and noises that human beings use to co-ordinate action and achieve purposes.

By contrast, Wittgenstein holds language to be an integral part of practice or conduct so that, for example, when we learn the language of pain 'we learn new pain behavior' (Wittgenstein, 1957: #244, 89). We learn language as an undivided part of learning how to do things. Consequently, new ways of seeing are also new practices or performances. While language-games are rule-bound activities, those rules are not abstract components of language (as in structuralism) but constitutive rules, that is, rules that are such by dint of their enactment in social practice. Thus, the rules of language constitute our pragmatic understandings of 'how to go on' in society, and to know a 'form of life' is to be able to participate in it. Thus, Wittgenstein argues that, when it comes to explaining the word 'game' to others, we are likely to show them different games and to say this is what games are. To know what games are is to be able to play games. As Giddens has argued,

I take the significance of Wittgenstein's writings for social theory to consist in the association of language with definite *social practices* . . . Language is intrinsically

involved with *that which has to be done*: the constitution of language as 'meaningful' is inseparable from the constitution of forms of social life as continuing practices. (1979: 4)

There is stress on social practices, including language as a practice, in the work of Wittgenstein and Giddens that is lacking in both structuralism and poststructuralism (whatever other merits these bodies of work have) and which I commend to practitioners of cultural studies. Indeed, a reliance on structuralism and poststructuralism has sometimes led cultural studies to miss the crucial amalgam that is language and practice. This has resulted in cultural studies venturing along the road of a potentially obscure textualism where the speaking and acting subject is lost from view. I shall argue that cultural studies needs to restore the balance by adding studies of acting persons to its studies of texts and subject positions. It would be beneficial to cultural studies if more stress were laid on the utterances of persons in social contexts, thereby giving our attention to the relation between language and action. This is a matter of languages for purposes. If we want to stress 'interrelatedness', discipline and the need for structural change, the language of codes, discourse and subject positions is our tool. If we want to stress ethics, action, change and uniqueness, we can talk about the utterances of persons in social contexts.

In addition to this stress on practice, the concept of the performative also figures in the work of Wittgenstein, for whom philosophy was a performance (Genova, 1995), as well as in the subsequent speech act theory of J.L. Austin (1962). The theory of the performative unites language and practice for a performative is a statement that simultaneously puts into effect that which it describes. Thus in a marriage ceremony the words 'I pronounce you' are performative. This notion of the performative has been profitably worked by Butler (1993), for whom sex is a discursive-performative construction (though an indispensable one) that forms subjects and governs the materialization of bodies. Performativity is not a singular act or event but an iterable practice secured through being repeatedly performed. Since performativity is not a singular act but a reiteration of a set of norms, it should not be understood as a performance given by a self-conscious intentional actor. In the context of a renewed stress on language and practice, I shall argue that crucial aspects 'culture' can be understood in terms of performances.

The meaning and place of culture

The central concept of culture does not represent an entity in an independent object world but is best thought of as a mobile signifier that enables a series of different ways of talking about human activity that stress divergent uses and purposes. The multitudinous ways that culture has been talked about are

not cases of right vs wrong, for none of them are erroneous in the sense of misdescribing an object. However, they do achieve different purposes and may be more or less applicable in different times and places. The concept of culture is thus political and contingent. As such, cultural studies need not feel impelled to 'define' culture in any ultimate fashion, but may utilize the concept for a variety of purposes.

The concepts of space and place are important elements of any discussion of culture. However, the idea of culture as a 'whole way of life', popularized within cultural studies by Raymond Williams, is problematic in its wedding of culture to bounded places (notably those of the modern nation-state). In the era of globalization/diaspora and the purposes associated with the politics of difference, that is, diversity and solidarity, I argue that culture is best thought of not as a bounded 'unit' but as a set of overlapping 'performative flows' with no clear limits or determinations (chaos culture). Culture can be thought of as the continual hybridization of meaningful practices or performances in a global context. Thus, culture is a matter less of locations with roots than of hybrid and creolized cultural routes in global space. Cultures are not pure, authentic and locally bounded; rather, they are syncretic and hybridized products of interactions across space.

A significant question that has been posed within cultural studies concerns the problem of the relationship between culture and the material. In relation to this issue, I argue the following:

- To point to causal links between material conditions and language/culture (or indeed the linguistic and cultural character of the material and economic) is not to deny the specificity of the other term. That phenomena have material causes does not reduce their significance to the causal agent nor take away their specificities. For example, each of us can trace biological, historical and cultural explanations for our own being, yet at no time are we anything less than unique persons capable of action.
- Since language is a tool for adapting to and controlling the environment, rather than an independent sphere that exists on its own terms to represent the material, then we are in touch with reality in all areas of culture as long as one takes this to mean 'caused by and causing' and not 'representing reality' (see Rorty, 1989). The relationship between language and the rest of the material universe is one of causality and not of adequacy of representation or expression. Human beings are animals who walk the earth, and, as such, language is never divorced from material practice, nor are we ever out of sync with reality by dint of being trapped in language.
- Cultural representations and meanings have materiality, being embedded in sounds, inscriptions, objects and images within books, magazines, television programmes, and so forth. In short, there is no cultural domain that is not material and no material world that is not, for human beings, also cultural.

That is, the material–cultural binary is a hindrance to investigation and should be put to one side.

The question of materialism leads me to another way of considering the meaning and place of culture, that is, in its evolutionary context. Dotted throughout the book are a number of references to the physical sciences and evolutionary biology/psychology in particular. I think that the potential for co-operation between evolutionary biology/psychology and cultural studies is promising. Human culture and human biology have co-evolved and are indivisible in that culture forms an environment for the human body and feeds into evolutionary change. Evolutionary biology is a useful causal story that explains human organisms in terms of relationships and consequences in which history has no *telos*. It dispenses with the idea that either the human mind or the mind of God is the ultimate source of the universe, replacing them both with the indifferent, purposeless and algorithmic processes of natural selection. This view allows us to draw a naturalistic and holistic description of human beings as animals who walk the earth adapting and changing themselves in the context of their environment. That is, we can understand culture as being both a series of adaptations to our physical circumstances and the creation of a new human environment.

Of especial interest here are the developments in evolutionary psychology that explore the cognitive mechanisms that underpin culture. Thus, evolutionary psychologists resist the demarcation between evolutionary and cultural theory, arguing that we should put our understanding of human culture in a wider context. In particular, evolutionary biology and genetic science suggest that there are limits to the plasticity of human capacities and behaviours. This argument necessarily poses a challenge to those who take the logic of social and cultural constructionism to its extreme.

One of the important features of the human condition that is explored by evolutionary psychology but under-examined by cultural studies is the place of emotions in our lives. Truth, knowledge, personal relationships, communication, ethics, behaviour and politics all have an affective dimension. That is, culture involves emotional processes that have, for the most part, been ignored by cultural studies. Cultural studies will always have an inadequate understanding of culture, politics and human behaviour in general until it incorporates questions of emotional response into its repertoire. This is both an intellectual omission and a political error, for cultural politics are driven not only by rational arguments or descriptions but also by emotional attachments and affective symbols. Indeed, in my view the latter is more significant to everyday politics than is rationality.

Some ‘emotions’, I would suggest, are biochemically founded universals of the human condition that are mediated and worked over by culture. Other ‘emotions’ work the other way around: that is, they are primarily cultural dances that set off bodily responses. Thus, emotional behaviour is the outcome of a set

of conditioned bodily responses and learned cognitive appraisal mechanisms. To this situation we add a conscious 'feeling' from our working memory and words that not only label context-specific responses as 'fear', 'anger', 'love', and so forth, but can also themselves set off further emotional responses.

Thus, we can understand emotion as bodily biochemistry plus cognitive and cultural classificatory functions, with language as the most notable of these.

In exploring emotions, I commonly take depression and anxiety as my examples, given that the western world is experiencing something of an epidemic of 'affective disorders'.

Truth, capitalism and cultural politics

One of the central problems that confront cultural studies concerns the grounding of its theory and politics in an era where anti-foundationalism holds sway. While I argue that there are no transcendental truths, only ways of talking in culture, I also suggest that we do not need universal truths to undertake political action. Rather, politics is grounded in the values and world-views of the culture 'we' participate in. Who constitutes the 'we' is a matter of stories of power. This is a world where politics is ironic and without guarantees. I further suggest that the collapse of foundational truth has raised serious doubts about the viability and explanatory power of the concept of ideology. While cultural studies has rightly espoused an anti-representationalist and anti-essentialist view of language, a number of writers within cultural studies seem not to have entirely grasped the contradiction between an anti-essentialist position on language and the concept of ideology as falsehood. Certainly Foucault, perhaps the most cited philosopher in cultural studies, never used the concept of ideology, and for precisely this reason. While we could deploy the concept of ideology to mean the binding and justifying ideas of any group (with no reference to Truth), other words can carry this meaning just as well, so that we might be better advised to drop the concept of ideology altogether.

The concept of ideology, with its connotations of falsity, is one of the legacies of Marxism within cultural studies since it was thought to be the ideologies generated by the ruling class that held 'the people' in chains. British cultural studies of the 1970s and early 1980s was much concerned with Marxism and the attempt to explain the persistence of capitalism while maintaining that its demise could still be brought about. However, it now seems to me that capitalism is transformed and here to stay; indeed, it is capitalism itself that is the contemporary revolutionary force (as it was in Marx's day). Our world currently has no viable alternative to global capitalism. Consequently, there is little choice but to engage in a variety of reformist politics. In this context, cultural

studies could play the useful role of telling stories of resistance informed by a utopian realism that must include their implications for policy development and enactment. Here 'resistance' is tactical and conjunctural rather than absolute or revolutionary. Indeed, it is becoming clear that commodities themselves can be the basis of 'resistance'.

While the pertinence of academic work to other practices of the human project does not appear to worry all scholars, it must concern cultural studies, which has long maintained that it has political applicability. Indeed, this is the basis of Hall's (1992a) distinction between 'academic' work and 'intellectual' work. Cultural studies has long justified itself with the argument that cultural criticism is an aspect of cultural politics. Provided one drops the notion of 'exposing ideology' and settles for the perspective of redescription, this is an acceptable argument. Cultural criticism can act as a tool for intervention in the social world. However, adoption of a certain deconstructive textualism along with the tone of methodological and ethical 'purity' has led some cultural studies writers into 'obscurity'. Consequently, the role cultural criticism could play in feeding more popular modes such as television, film and journalism, as well as providing beneficial tools for the formation of cultural policy, has tended to be ignored. In any case, we should avoid over-inflating the public political value of cultural studies and, in particular, try to avoid mistaking our ethical choices for radical public politics. To confuse ethics with effectiveness or cultural studies with political action is to enact category errors. Instead, the cultural left could make a contribution to the revival of social democracy and the development of democratic politics in the context of globalization: that is, the continuation of the 'long revolution' (without guarantees).

In this vein, Bennett (1992) has urged cultural studies to adopt a more pragmatic approach by working with cultural producers. He argues that the textual politics with which it has been engaged ignores the institutional dimensions of cultural power. This is so because, for Bennett (1998), culture is caught up in, and functions as a part of, cultural technologies that organize and shape social life and human conduct. Culture is a matter not just of representations and consciousness but also of institutional practices, administrative routines and spatial arrangements. While the cultural policy argument has a great deal of merit, it should not be regarded as excluding the work of theory and cultural criticism. Cultural studies needs to accept a kaleidoscope of political action that includes cultural critique, new social movements, social democracy and policy formation. In particular, it is important to continue to debate what the purposes of political action are as well as the means by which to achieve them. Indeed, there is still discussion to be had on the question of what values should guide the 'cultural left'.

It is far from clear that the most often espoused values within cultural studies – equality–justice–solidarity–difference–tolerance–diversity–respect – are mutually compatible. For example, justice may not be best served by the adoption of equality (as sameness), which itself cannot simply mean uniformity and

standardization if we are to respect difference. The modernist goal of equality is beset with problems, and equality of outcome is neither possible nor desirable. Here the pragmatic inclination is to dispense with universal value approaches in favour of context- and tradition-specific resolutions of problems. When respect for difference and the reduction of suffering become our primary values (displacing an unachievable and romantic notion of equality of outcome), we may pursue justice only as a desirable, if imperfectly achievable, end. Indeed, acceptance of the imperfectibility of human beings (as measured against glorified cultural images) and our cultural world is a necessary move for a cultural studies that has been dogged by idealized fantasies of the possible. Dialogue and justice are values that may also guide us through questions of the 'Other'. We may never fully 'know' the Other, but if we approach language as a learnable practical skill and tool (not as something which mirrors the Other), then we can learn to talk amongst ourselves. Pragmatic negotiation is the only way forward.

Most western societies are broadly in post-scarcity situations: that is, no one is starving and few people are poor in an absolute sense. In this context, the problems we face in the West are increasingly psychological rather than material; specifically they are emotional and 'spiritual'. They concern our relations with others, our sense of meaninglessness, our addictions and our mental health. It is in this sense that we need to develop more emotional and spiritual intelligence as resources within our culture that are better able to deal with ancestral emotions that are triggered by contemporary cultural circumstances. The concept of the 'spiritual' is somewhat contemporary in the sense that it is separated from the religious. It does not mean the abandonment of logic and rationality or the embracing of superstition. Rather it means coming to a mature and meaningful understanding of the existential issues of our lives through the development of integrity, wisdom and transcendence. It involves acceptance of one's limitations, groundedness in the ordinary and a willingness to be surprised; what Young-Eisendrath and Miller (2000) call a 'skeptical spirituality'. Indeed, we might see it as a reflexive and ironic spirituality that plays a necessary role in the emotional lives of human beings as currently constituted. We need such a spiritual intelligence in relation to a rampant consumer culture that is producing more discontent than happiness because of the black hole of meaninglessness that remains after consumption is over. We also need it in relation to the stress, fatigue and social isolation that mark western culture.

These developments mean that cultural studies in the West faces a relative shift away from the emancipatory politics of inequality and a move towards the life-politics of meaningfulness while always being aware that the two are not entirely separable.

These are amongst the themes that constitute this book as I investigate problems in cultural studies. I begin in Chapter 2 with some of the problems that surround the central role of language in cultural analysis.