arise when the abstract notion of "citizen" ceases to be an adequate and exhaustive description of the subject, when the apparent blankness and universality of the subject of the state is able to be perceived as the repository of privileged markers of maleness, heterosexuality, and whiteness.

~ 7

Culture Wars and Cultural Studies

Each of the new inter- or trans-disciplinary movements in the humanities and social sciences seems to pose a threat to the cultural canon, to engage in revision of the canon that has been traditionally entrusted to the guardianship of national literature departments. And much of the furor over such movements has occurred in English Departments. Altering the curriculum in English Departments, however, is not the sole or even the primary effect of the rise of Women's Studies, Lesbian and Gay Studies, African-American Studies, or Cultural Studies. They mark instead the incommensurability between reason and history as modes of legitimation for the modern state, once the notion of cultural identity can no longer serve to bridge the abyss. In an entirely welcome sense, they signal the end of "culture" as a regulatory ideal that could unite community and communication so as to allow the analogy between the University and the modern state to function.

Thus far I have argued that the decline of the nation-state as the primary instance of capitalism's self-reproduction has effectively voided the social mission of the modern University. That mission used to be the production of national subjects under the guise of research into and inculcation of culture, culture that has been thought, since Humboldt, in terms inseparable from national identity. The strong idea of culture arises with the nation-state, and we now face its disappearance as the locus of social meaning. Once the notion of national identity loses its political relevance, the notion of culture becomes effectively

unthinkable. The admission that there is nothing to be said about culture *as such* is evident in the institutional rise of Cultural Studies in the 1990s.

It seems to me that this scenario presents a series of options. Either we seek to defend and restore the social mission of the University by simply reaffirming a national cultural identity that has manifestly lost its purchase (the conservative position), or we attempt to reinvent cultural identity so as to adapt it to changing circumstances (the multicultural position). A third option is to abandon the notion that the social mission of the University is ineluctably linked to the project of realizing a national cultural identity, which is tantamount to ceasing to think the social articulation of research and teaching in terms of a *mission*. This is a considerably more difficult proposition to accept for both the right and the left, since it means relinquishing our claim to be intellectuals and giving up the claim of service to the state, even when that would involve a critical reimagination of the state, a counter-state behind which academics have masked their accumulation of symbolic capital for centuries.[1]

A number of factors incline me to think that the third option, which I will develop in Chapter 11, is the framework within which the future of the University as an institution will be sketched out. But first it is important to understand that to ask the question of the University, and specifically of the humanities, in this context is to run a considerable risk. In the 1970s we were (at least, I was) inclined to believe that a mixture of Marxism, psychoanalysis, and semiotics might prove sufficiently volatile to fuel Molotov cocktails. The combination is now sufficiently stabilized to be available over the counter from your local humanities and social sciences departments under a variety of brand names or under the generic label "Cultural Studies." We have to recognize that the grounds on which we used to make large claims for the humanities have been undermined. Unless, that is, we want to end up like the British, who could not resist Thatcherite cuts because they could find no better argument for the humanities than vague appeals to "human richness" in a world in which leisure has already become the primary site of capitalist penetration (as Disney and the Olympics attest).

Current developments in the humanities in the West seem to be centered on two major phenomena. On the one hand, there is the decline in the power of the University over the public sphere, with the concomitant elimination of the intellectual as a public figure. Perhaps surprisingly, I shall argue that this is not necessarily bad news.[2] On the other hand, there is the recent rise of the quasi-discipline of Cultural Studies within the University, which promises to install a new paradigm for the humanities that will either unite the traditional disciplines (this is Antony Easthope's argument) or replace them (this is Cary Nelson's argument) as the living center of intellectual inquiry, restoring the social mission of the University.[3] Perhaps surprisingly, I shall argue that this is not necessarily good news. It seems to me that the idea of Cultural Studies arises at the point when the notion of culture ceases to mean anything vital for the University as a whole. The human sciences can do what they like with culture, can do Cultural Studies, because culture no longer matters as an *idea* for the institution.

I will focus on Cultural Studies, not because it is more important than Women's Studies, African-American Studies, or Lesbian and Gay Studies, but because it is the most essentially academic of these various trans-disciplinary movements. By this I mean that the denunciation of the University as an institution within Cultural Studies is a problem not merely *for* the University but *of* the University. The call to move beyond the University outside academicism is not a response to an act of repression *by* the University; it is a response to the repressed *of* the University itself. To put it another way, the lesbian and gay, African-American, and feminist movements are different in that neither their genesis nor their goals are essentially linked to the University (though the recent emergence of Queer Theory can, I think, be seen as an attempt to academicize Gay and Lesbian Studies in just this way).[4]

Cultural Studies arises, however, *in* the University out of the predicament of those who are excluded from within, who can neither stay nor leave. And the cry of Cultural Studies that the University must be left behind has proved a particularly fruitful way of staying in the University. This is not an attack on practitioners of Cultural Studies for privately seeking the crown of laurel that they publicly refuse in print (the judgment of individual motivations is irrelevant to analysis of the

system); it is merely the observation that the wish to get out of the confines of academe is a wish structurally situated within those confines. Thus, Cultural Studies must be understood to arise when culture ceases to be the animating principle of the University and, as I said earlier, becomes instead an object of study among others, a discipline rather than a metadisciplinary idea.

Now, in speaking of the emergence of Cultural Studies as a transdisciplinary movement we have to be very careful. The British genealogy lies with Raymond Williams and Richard Hoggart, continuing through the Birmingham Centre for Cultural Studies, founded by Hoggart and later directed by Stuart Hall. In the North American sphere, there is the model of "American Studies" and the rise of programs in Communications (always a burning issue in a republican democracy) as further factors. This is not to mention the intellectual genealogy, with its admixture of "left Leavisism," Gramsci on subaltern cultures, Foucault on institutions and the body, and feminism. I do not have the space here to give an exhaustive history of the rise of Cultural Studies; I will simply signal that the best short account of its history is Larry Grossberg's essay "Formations of Cultural Studies: An American in Birmingham" in *Relocating Cultural Studies*.[5] What I want to focus on here are two moments in the development of Cultural Studies.

The first moment occurs in the late 1950s and 1960s, when Williams, like E. P. Thompson, situates culture as a supplement to class analysis, and in resistance to the negative diagnoses of the working class given by more theoretical Europeans such as the Frankfurt School.[6] To speak of working class culture was to refuse to locate the existing working class and its traditions solely as a step on the way to the realization of the proletariat as subject of history, to refuse to treat the workers as primarily a theoretical problem. Williams's insistence that culture is ordinary was a refusal to ignore the actual working classes in favor of the liberated proletarians who were to be their successors after the revolution.[7] The persistence of archaic cultural forms (such as the guild structure of the British Trade Union movement) that interests both Williams and Thompson is a sign that what they like about the British labor movement is that it has never been capable of a purely *political* theory, as Williams notes in *Politics and Letters:* "I think I would say

that the market and democracy are more prominent themes in the sociological tradition in Europe than in the English tradition with which I was concerned, whereas the English tradition was more specifically concerned with industry. It was the very rapid and brutal experience of industrialization in England which was most directly reflected in social thought here."[8]

Both Williams and Thompson spent a great deal of time explaining the social and historical reasons for this relative under-theorization of the British labor movement. First of all, the British proletariat is not the product of a theorization of the effects of industrial society by a Communist Party, is not born like Athena from the head of Zeus with the Communist Party as midwife. The English proletariat had never theorized itself in a modernist way, had never understood itself in the first place as an instance in the general theory of capitalism. In part, this is because the workers' movement in England was the site in which Marx and Engels worked out the materialist dialectic. So that this movement already had to understand itself otherwise, while waiting for the theory of the dialectic to be deduced from it. The proletariat was "proliterate" in advance of its own political theorization. It is for this reason that we should perhaps speak of a "labor movement" rather than a proletariat—a movement that had to make do with its traditions in the absence of a global theory of the condition of the working class in England. And when Engels proposed such a theory it was already too late. The workers were a step ahead of the theorists. Hence the persistence of guild structures in British unions and the weakness of the Trade Union Commission (TUC) relative to central trade union organizations in Europe.

This does not mean for Williams and Thompson that the British labor movement is not modern, simply that its formation did not follow the Enlightenment pattern in which local superstition is replaced by universal theory. British cultural criticism, along with the workers' movement, confronts two issues that mark its difference from the European Marxist critique: a notion of tradition and the experience of the effects of industrialization on this tradition. Here lies a link to Eliot and Leavis in the appeal to the notion of culture in place of historical materialist science. Williams, as a member of a linguistic minority, as

a Welshman, knew enough to mistrust the verticality of Marxist critique, which always claims to occur from a *central* point of wide purview. Both Williams and Thompson knew that such critical verticality went along with Marxist mistrust of the actual practices of the working class, a mistrust of which Williams often complained. Significantly, Williams refused to condemn the workers as "ignorant masses" who needed the theorization of the Party, and he did not want to speak of a "dying culture" along with the Frankfurt School.[9] This has nothing to do with workerism. Williams did not go in for Stakhanovite eulogies. Quite simply, he resisted the reduction of the workers to mere instances in a historical process or a theoretical argument.

He did talk, however, of the "self-realization of the capacity of a *class.*" But what counts is that, as for Thompson, class-consciousness is not simply a matter of realizing where one stands in a theoretical analysis of a system; it is "not just instrumental decision making, within an imposed system, but from the bottom up, as a way of deciding what came first in the society, what mattered in it, what needs and values we live by and want to live by."[10] There is in this remark a certain refusal to accept that social class is determined by position in relation to the mode of production. Even if this sounds naive, what I want to underline is that in Williams's writing the word "culture" indicates a limit to the determination of social meaning in terms of the history of class struggle, a supplement that traverses social groupings in many different fashions. The class struggle is always already a cultural struggle, and Williams refuses to understand culture as the ideological effect of the class struggle as motor of history. Which means that the working class is not significant solely insofar as it is in historical step with the Communist Party's program for the liberation of the proletariat. In other words, Williams is refusing to make the culture of the working class into a mere unspoken referent in the Party's discourse about the nature and goals of society.

The second feature of the appeal to culture in Williams's and Thompson's writings is a resistance to the Arnoldian identification of culture with high culture, an insistence that culture is a whole way of life—an organicism with a widened franchise, which Williams himself called "left Leavisism."[11] This feature of Williams's writing is perhaps most evident in his seminal *Culture and Society,* which proposes a leftist counter-history of the literary-cultural tradition of modern Britain. The structure and mode of Leavis's argument are preserved but the "living culture" that is opposed to the dead hand of industrial civilization is a more open one in its organicism, is less restricted in the class perspective from which it surveys the possibility of a whole society. Hence, wholeness does not mean subjugation or happy impoverishment for the workers, with the total erasure of class mobility or conflict, as it tends to for Leavis. The perspective from which society becomes visible as an organic whole shifts. Where Leavis assumes that it is the caring member of the ruling classes who can see the organic interlinking of society, can value the ruddy-cheeked peasant in his place, Williams and Thompson insist upon the appearance of a vision of social wholeness among popular groups in their everyday struggles.[12] The true culture of Britain is not simply that of a better ruling class but that of a whole people, and the industrial civilization to which it is opposed is clearly marked by Williams as specifically capitalistic in its immorality rather than as simply immorally ugly.

However, the continuity of this vision of culture with the literary culture championed by Leavis and others is apparent, although Williams's Welsh origins are crucial to a widening of the approach in that he makes a less straightforward claim of national legitimacy than does Leavis. In Williams's description in "Culture Is Ordinary" of a journey into the country of his childhood, taking the bus along a Welsh valley, he refers to the expansion of culture as "the necessary changes ... writing themselves into the land, and where the language changes but the voice is the same."[13] This vision of the interaction of symbolic life and landscape is deeply marked by the literary tradition of English Romanticism—an enlarged and less paternalist Wordsworthian vision (and it would be a crude oversimplification to link it to a less idyllic German tradition). However, such a vision also depends upon an acceptance of literary culture as the site where the link forged between a people and its land becomes visible or is expressed. The problems of such a notion of topo-graphy, of land-writing, become apparent once we historically relativize the emergence of literature as the poetry of landscape, and note its links to tourism: be it in the Lake Country

created by Wordsworth, Hardy's Wessex, Joyce's Dublin, or even potentially the Welsh Borders of Williams's own novels.[14]

To link literature to tourism in this way is perhaps impious. Wordsworth himself fought the building of a Lakeland railway whose market he was largely responsible for creating. It is not, however, historically inaccurate. If literature took on the task of charging landscape with meaning, the availability of that meaning for economic exploitation is a more pressing reality today than ever before, to the point where it seems naive to think of tourism as a purely secondary or parasitic function. For instance, the tourist authorities of Venice now offer grants to writers to repeat Thomas Mann's boost to local industry. The cultural meaning that a certain literariness sought to inscribe in the land is— given the economic development of transportation since the beginning of the nineteenth century—no longer available primarily to an aesthetic subject whose isolation might give rise to the illusion of disinterestedness. The capitalization of the meaningful landscape as the object of tourist exchange undermines not only the exclusiveness of high cultural literariness but also the claim that a left-wing cultural resistance might be inscribed in the landscape. This vision of popular culture as a widened or transvalued version of traditional "literariness" is no longer an alternative to the capitalist system; it is always already potentially available for tourist exploitation.

To return to the question of the emergence of Cultural Studies, then, I think Grossberg has put his finger on the issue that ties together the two aspects of Williams's and Thompson's appeal to "culture": *participation*. What unites the attack on cultural exclusion and the resistance to theoretical verticality is the question of participation.[15] In this account, the preference for culture over class comes from a desire that social analysis should not imply total separation (pure critical verticality), which is also a desire not to critique the working class from the transcendent position of the proletariat with which the intellectual identifies. The widening of organicism is produced by an argument for the working class as participating in culture in general. Thus, the critic must participate in the culture that is analyzed, and the object of analysis must participate in culture as a whole.

The second moment in the history of Cultural Studies to which I

want to pay attention comes more recently, around 1990 when several books appeared that seem to mark the acquisition of professional disciplinarity for Cultural Studies: Antony Easthope's *Literary into Cultural Studies;* Larry Grossberg, Cary Nelson, and Paula Treichler's *Cultural Studies;* Graeme Turner's *British Cultural Studies: An Introduction;* and Patrick Brantlinger's *Crusoe's Footprints.*[16] At about the same time, Routledge also started a journal entitled *Cultural Studies.* A phenomenology of the forms of Cultural Studies as displayed or analyzed in these volumes would come up with a number of more or less common practical and theoretical elements characteristic of work in Cultural Studies. Cultural Studies tend to be suspicious of the exclusionary force of certain boundaries: female/male, north/south, center/margin, high culture/low culture, western/other, heterosexual/homosexual. Authority for this suspicion comes primarily from Williams, Foucault, Gramsci, and Hall, to a lesser extent from Haraway, Bourdieu, and Barthes. Now what is remarkable about Cultural Studies as a discipline is how little it has by way of what might be called theoretical articulation, how little it needs to determine its object. Which does not mean that a lot of theorizing doesn't go on its name, only that such efforts are not undertaken in a way that secures the relation of an observer to a determinate set of phenomena or an autonomous object. Thus, no full description of the phenomenology of Cultural Studies is possible from within the consciousness of a practitioner. We cannot provide an account of what it is to do Cultural Studies that is theoretically self-consistent.

In saying this, I want to make it clear that I am not accusing those who practice Cultural Studies of not paying attention to theoretical questions. Quite the contrary is the case, and individual essays calling themselves "work in Cultural Studies" usually display a high coefficient of self-consciousness concerning the theoretical grounding of their methodology. A problem arises, however, when we seek to understand what it might mean to "theorize Cultural Studies," when we ask what the rubric names and what are the essential presuppositions of the new discipline.

When an attempt to theorize Cultural Studies in general is made, as by Antony Easthope for instance, the result is interestingly problematic.

In place of the "old paradigm" of literary studies Easthope offers a "new paradigm" of Cultural Studies, which appears in order to replace the entire swath of disciplines in the humanities and social sciences as a generalized "study of signifying practice."[17] Easthope's book is interestingly symptomatic in that while it can note and list problems in the traditional practices of literary study, the same systematic definition is not proposed for the new paradigm. Hence the new paradigm is characterized above all by resistance to all attempts to limit its field of reference—such as distinctions between high and popular culture, between factual texts (which require historical or sociological study) and fictional ones (which can be read as literary).[18] All manifestations of culture are signifying practice, and all signifying practices are manifestations of culture. This circularity is founded upon Easthope's description of culture as a "decentered totality" of textualities, the analysis of which requires "a methodology appropriate to the concept of a decentered totality, one whose terms relate to each other though not on the basis of a foundational coherence" (119).

Culture, for Easthope, is thus an ensemble of texts without a center. It is basically everything that happens with the proviso that "everything" is understood as inflected by questions of textuality, is understood as signifying practice. If everything is signifying practice, then the study of signifying practice is the study of anything at all; rather than a specific discipline, Cultural Studies would appear to be the refusal of all disciplinary specificity. In short, Easthope does not suggest that Cultural Studies explains things in terms of anything *in particular*. History is important, but it is itself a part of the signifying practices, not a framework within which they are to be understood.

Easthope, to be fair, does present the "terms for a new paradigm," which are "institution; sign system; ideology; gender; subject position; the other" (129). The rather Borgesian metalepsis of the final term in this list is symptomatic of the problem of defining culture, which I have just noted. Easthope's list is exhaustive because anything that is not included in it can come under the term of "the other." Or might do, were "the other" not like all the rest of the terms on the list: merely a *theme*. That is to say, despite Easthope's claim that his choice is not merely casual, these terms are not articulated against one another to

form a theory. They are instead "imbricated" or overlapping, and "others could be easily added to them if required" (130). This final admission reveals the extent to which Easthope's analysis *assumes* rather than defines culture (when it defines culture, the definition is the circular appeal to "signifying practice"). The ensemble of terms is not a theoretical definition, since "crucially no term is originary or foundational, sited as final anchoring point for the others" (137).

The problem with this is not one of argumentation but one of effect. Culture finally becomes an object of study in direct proportion to the abandonment of the attempt to provide a determining explanation of culture. Cultural forms of signifying practice proceed from culture, and culture is the ensemble of signifying practices. In this sense, there is a direct ratio between the intensity of apocalyptic claims for the institutional potential of Cultural Studies and their absence of explanatory power. What allows Cultural Studies to occupy the entire field of the humanities without resistance is their very *academicization of culture*, their taking culture as the object of the University's desire for knowledge, rather than as the object that the University produces. Culture ceases to mean anything *as such*; it is dereferentialized. The difficulty with Easthope's claims, then, is that they are based on the possibility of transferring the critical energy that the German Idealists assigned to philosophical culture, and that Arnold and Leavis assigned to literary culture, to the practice of Cultural Studies. If culture is everything, then the invocation of culture cannot have redemptive force, cannot lend meaning (unity and direction) to symbolic life. In effect, Easthope is offering to recenter the University around a decentered absence that will then be invoked *as if it were a center*.

Easthope's is not the only way of thinking about Cultural Studies, though. One can, for instance, provide a strongly structuralist version of Cultural Studies in which the social anthropology of particular practices is read as a *parole* whose meaning can only be understood in terms of a *langue*—as in Dick Hebdige's reading of subcultures.[19] However, this version encounters problems as well. While it does explain the recurrent usage of counting by decades in Cultural Studies (the fixing of the spatio-temporal coordinates of a particular *langue*, as in "70s British popular music"), such an account misses the interventionist

drive that is so crucial elsewhere, in what Grossberg calls the culturalist version, coming out of the early work of the Birmingham school. Thus, as the editors of *Cultural Studies* tell us, "it is probably impossible to agree on any essential definition or unique narrative of cultural studies."[20]

Exactly the same refusal of theoretical definition marks the introduction to *Relocating Cultural Studies*: "Cultural studies resists being pigeon-holed within the constantly shifting formations of the intellectual map because its concerns are not exclusively or even primarily intellectual ... In addressing contemporary developments in theory and research, this volume does not intend to offer a definitive version of the present condition of cultural studies."[21] What strikes one about the refusal of definition is the fact that it is repeated so many times, by so many people in the "field." Thus the publishing industry gives us textbooks for the disciplinary ensemble, such as *Reading into Cultural Studies*, which overtly presents itself as providing "eleven unrelated essays" whose "common themes, common worries, common regrets" are "striking" to the editors, Martin Barker and Anne Beezer.[22] Barker and Beezer claim that Cultural Studies has come of age as a discipline, pointing to Brantlinger and Turner as chroniclers of its history, but their attempts to characterize its "project" are notably sketchy: "In short, there was a fundamental agenda in early cultural studies which set up broad oppositions between the concepts of power/ideology and culture/participation. However crude and unsatisfactory these terms may be ... that agenda was very different from the one which we see emergent in cultural studies now" (6).

The authors are not much more specific about what is going on now, which is less a theoretical reorientation than a shift of attitude toward the object under study: "We can decipher, then, in a number of authors a deepening concern to understand the values and strengths of the sense-making strategies used by ordinary people" (8). The ambivalence of Cultural Studies' relation to the academy is apparent in the appeal to "ordinary people" as legitimation. The legitimating instance is the passage outside the academy, to the "ordinary people," but at the same time this implies that the authors of academic essays in Cultural Studies are "extraordinary people," vertical intellectuals. And as Barker and

Beezer themselves remark, this shift away from critique to ethnographic witness, the problematization of "decoding the operations of power and resistance" in favor of "giving voice to the meanings that are made in the here and now," has its problems since there is no "conceptual apparatus on which they can any longer be hooked" (9). They call more or less for a return to the master-code of Marxism, insisting that cultural production is still the product of specific material interests and class determinations. As my remarks with regard to the instantiating moment of Cultural Studies may have suggested, to appeal to class "as a category for understanding social relations and systems of activity" in order to reground Cultural Studies is actually to pull the rug out from under Williams's and Thompson's initial suspicion of the explanatory power of class as a theoretical concept (16).

This is not to say, however, that Cultural Studies is without (*pace* Easthope) a center of gravity. Although healthily suspicious of theorization, writers in Cultural Studies do, as I have noted, appeal to a number of "theoretical" texts. In the weighty collection edited by Grossberg, Nelson, and Treichler under the uncompromising title *Cultural Studies*, the editors do not simply refuse to define their eponymous object. They go on to situate Cultural Studies as "an interdisciplinary, transdisciplinary and sometimes counter disciplinary field that operates in the tension between its tendencies to embrace both a broad anthropological field and a more narrowly humanistic conception of culture." This definition is buttressed by the remark that "cultural studies is thus committed to the study of the entire range of a society's arts, beliefs, institutions, and communicative practices" (4). The editors then provide a final specification that such work must also aim to make a political difference.

I focus on this introduction in such detail not because it is either right or wrong, but because it is rather representative. The theme of participation recurs in the desire for academic study to make a difference, to provide an understanding of social transformation and social change such that Cultural Studies may "provide a place which makes judgment and even intervention possible" (15). However, the problem here is that nothing in the nature of this theory of culture implies an orientation to that difference. A political orientation is assumed; how-

ever, the logic in terms of which it is grounded is one of non-specificity. Rather than revealing a positive nature to culture, Cultural Studies, committed to the generalized notion of signifying practice, to the argument that everything is culture, can only oppose *exclusions* from culture—which is to say, specifications of culture. Cultural Studies finds nothing in the nature of its object culture that orients its intervention, other than the refusal of exclusion. This is why political piety is such a burning issue in Cultural Studies debates, precisely because of the anxiety of orientation that such a notion of culture induces. The attack on exclusion is, of course, in a paradoxical critical relation to the status quo.

This problem of orientation becomes particularly acute with the transfer of Cultural Studies to the United States. Since the United States does not legitimate itself as a nation-state by appeal to any particular cultural content but only in terms of a contract among its subjects, there is no automatic political orientation to the excavation and inclusion of the popular. This was not the case in Great Britain, where the study of popular culture was automatically and systematically at the same time cultural critique, since it exposed the structural gap between the ideological state apparatuses and the people they regulated. In the United States, the system is described to itself so that it can work better; it is not overthrown. For example, in the United States it is possible to believe that capitalism's project is hindered by racism and sexism, which should be done away with so as to allow the process of expropriation to work more widely. In Great Britain, such a claim would have struck at the heart of the ethnic cultural identity on which the nation-state was founded, while in the United States it represents no fundamental challenge to the state's promise to itself or to the economic system it harbors. Cultural Studies attacks the cultural hegemony of the nation-state, and the question of its politics becomes troubled when global capital engages in the same attack. The pietistic leftism of much work in Cultural Studies, like the anxieties expressed by Barker and Beezer, is intimately linked to this context—to the fear that there is no longer an automatic leftist orientation to the struggle against cultural exclusion.

What I want to argue is that the emergence of Cultural Studies must

be understood as a symptom, that its fundamental stress on participation (with Williams and Thompson) initially arises from a sense that culture is no longer immanent but is something "over there." In the early 1960s, those excluded from the institutions of culture on grounds of class, race, sex, or sexual orientation try to reimagine their relation to culture. It is no surprise that this takes place most strongly in Britain.

However, the second moment at which Cultural Studies becomes, institutionally speaking, the strongest narrative for humanistic inquiry, marks the impossibility of participating in living culture. This is a crisis for the University in that *Bildung* will no longer fuse the subjective and the objective, and we need to find out another way of understanding how what we say about culture participates in culture. This project achieves critical mass in the 1990s in North America at the point when the story of exclusion does not provide an alibi, when the denunciation of exclusions becomes the only way to understand our abiding sense of nonparticipation *despite the fact that we are no longer excluded.* We are no longer excluded, not because racism, sexism, and class difference have come to an end. They manifestly have not. Rather, we are no longer excluded because, in the strong sense of the word that the Idealists gave it, *there is no longer any culture to be excluded from.* That is to say, the word "culture" no longer names a metadiscursive project with both historical extension and critical contemporaneity from which we might be excluded.

Such an argument, however, needs to be nuanced. Although particular cultural struggles need to be engaged in, particular exclusions also must be combatted. Culture is no longer the terrain on which a general critique of capitalism can be carried out. The problem of Cultural Studies is that it attempts to deliver on the redemptive claims of cultural criticism, while expanding those claims to cover everything. This is why Cultural Studies activities find their most fertile disciplinary homes in expanded departments of national literature. The global system of capital no longer requires a cultural content in terms of which to interpellate and manage subjects, as the rise of polling suggests. The statistical poll performs the work of normalization indifferently to the content of the information it discovers; its hegemony is thus *administrative* rather than *ideological.* What the poll discovers, as it were, is the

"excellence" quotient of an idea, a practice, or a subject. Consensus can thus be achieved without the appeal to the synthesizing power of a metonymic subject of culture (an imaginary single general reader or viewer) as the instance that "makes sense" of symbolic life as a whole. Conformity no longer means conformity to an idea of culture. There is no "common reader" in a regime of excellence, since everyone can be excellent in their own way.

That such a situation is in no way incompatible with racism is something Spike Lee dramatizes very accurately in *Do the Right Thing*, where one of the Italian-American boys claims to be a racist despite the fact that his sporting heroes are, in fact, all African-American. Racism is not, that is, any longer a primarily cultural or political issue. The twin poles of U.S. consumer culture—rock music and organized sports— can cheerfully offer Michael Jackson and Michael Jordan. Another way of putting this would be to say that racism is no longer primarily a matter of *representation*; it is a complex *economic* issue as well as a straightforward *political* one. The discourse of national politics cannot recognize the enormous numbers of African-Americans in U.S. jails as political prisoners, and in order to understand the magnitude of this racism we cannot treat those prisoners as political subjects (they are jailed legally as individual political subjects). Instead, we have to develop an account of economic racism's complicity with the legal apparatus that can imagine a political collectivity that is not modeled upon the nation-state. The nation-state's unification of the field of political life as the representation of a self-identical popular will is structurally complicit with such injustice.

As such, the focus on representations of race and gender in Cultural Studies is a particular symptom of American academics' inability to think beyond the paradigm of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Liberal academics denounce the ideology of race and gender from a position in which it becomes possible to see such representations *as ideological,* without pausing to think that if the ideological has become visible, it is because the high-stakes game has moved to another table. Some will cling to the alibi of ideology and find themselves condemned to denounce every representation as insufficient, every Michael Jordan as an Uncle Tom. For in this paradigm of the Uncle Tom, the black enters representation

as less than s/he should be in the first place, and then is constantly critiqued for not being "real," for not being black enough. While such a denunciation may be accurate enough, none of this will change the fact that a young African-American man is more likely to go to jail than to college. Cultural visibility is not the sole issue, as Martin Luther King knew. The U.S. government has systematically ignored the link he drew between the struggle against racism and the struggle against poverty.

This does not mean that I am arguing against the ethical imperative to denounce racism in all its forms. I am merely arguing against understanding racism as a primarily *cultural* issue, which is to say, as an ideology. As Ronald Judy points out with considerable wisdom, "as long as the approach to Afro-American studies is predicated on a response to the demand for a demonstration of either its instrumental value or cultural worth, Afro-American studies will remain firmly within 'Western' modernity's organizational model of knowledge."[23] In lending primacy to the cultural, critics miss the fact that culture *no longer matters* to the powers that be in advanced capitalism—whether those powers are transnational corporations or depoliticized, unipolar nation-states.

A good example of these problems arises around the question of marginalization. As Grossberg notes in "The Formations of Cultural Studies: An American in Birmingham," a fundamental shift in the modeling of social relations by those working in Cultural Studies occurs when, under the influence of Foucault, we move from vertical models of dominance to a more structuralist account in terms of center and periphery. Instead of speaking of power in terms of the vertical ascendancy of the rulers over the dominated (the classical model of class domination), we speak of multiple marginalized positions in relation to a hegemonic center. This allows relations of power among transverse groups (groups that include members of all social classes, such as women or homosexuals) to be mapped.

And when we speak of mapping, it is possible to understand why the analyses of Pierre Bourdieu have been so attractive to many people in Cultural Studies, since his practice of charting power relations along twin axes of power (symbolic capital and socioeconomic capital) per-

mits the mapping of power relations in both the economic and the cultural fields. The intersection of these axes produces a center, and positions of power are calibrated in terms of closeness to this center.[24]

The general notion of "cultural capital" is one that seems more and more attractive to North American scholars in the humanities. Bourdieu is one of the more frequently cited theoretical authorities in a certain branch of Cultural Studies. I shall discuss his analysis of the events of 1968 later on, but for now I want to ask why a thinker whose analytic mode is conservative and normative (the mapping of social positions as algorithms of deviation within a closed national cultural field) should have been so attractive to those in Cultural Studies, who are normally concerned to make radical claims. This is not simply because Bourdieu's method allows for the mapping of positions that can effectively quantify social capital (although on two axes rather than on a single scale). More fundamentally, the understanding of the model of center and periphery, as if it were a chart like Bourdieu's, allows analysis of power to proceed as usual. The relation between each peripheral position and the center is read *as if it were* a vertical one. The vertical model of power has not been fundamentally altered, merely rotated through ninety degrees. Thus power can be mapped, although with more variables than before. Instead of analyzing cultural domination in terms of relations of class, we map it in terms of class, race, and gender as positions on a scale with two axes rather than one. The rather unfair trick of turning the terms of an analysis back on itself is unavoidable in the case of Bourdieu, since his analysis insists, as John Guillory reminds us in *Cultural Capital*, that there is no way out of the game of culture, which presumably means that one can only either become a more savvy player or seek to modify the rules slightly.[25]

Since Bourdieu has written a book on the University, and since he is currently very popular as a theoretical authority on culture, I want to take the time to trace the problems of his analysis of the system of cultural capital. This analysis is based on two essential assumptions. First, it is assumed that there is only one game: in order for culture to be a relatively autonomous social totality (capable of being mapped on two axes), all cultural games are part of the great game of cultural

capital. Second, there is no way out: the borders of the system are strictly drawn, and within them one can chart the distribution of cultural capital in terms of ratios of differing prestige. The single, closed game is the game of national culture, whose boundaries are accepted without question in order for analysis to proceed. Herein lies the reason for the somewhat surprising fact that Guillory's *Cultural Capital*, a reading of the American University system avowedly influenced by Bourdieu, nowhere discusses Bourdieu's study of the French system, *Homo Academicus*.

Homo Academicus charts the distribution of cultural capital within the French University system. Yet cultural capital can only be mapped within a system that is taken to be strictly closed by national boundaries that are assumed to be absolute. Bourdieu acknowledges that "there is no escaping the work of constructing this object" and enumerates the "finite set of *pertinent properties*" that will function as "*effective variables*" within the system, but he never questions the national boundaries that determine the field within which he proposes to study *Homo academicus gallicus*, even while musing on the question of that field's applicability to readers from other national University systems (xv). Within those fixed national boundaries, the unequal distribution of cultural capital can be mapped in terms of relative distantiation from a center that is located at the intersection of the two axes of institutional-social prestige and intellectual-scientific prestige. As Bourdieu puts it:

> The structure of the university field is only, at any moment in time, the state of the power relations between the agents or, more precisely, between the powers they wield in their own right and above all through the institutions to which they belong; positions held in this structure are what motivate structures aiming to transform it, or to preserve it by modifying or maintaining the relative forces of the different powers, that is, in other words, the systems of equivalence established between the different kinds of capital. (128)

Hence, for Bourdieu in *Homo Academicus* the international prestige of certain French academics is counted only insofar as it registers in

France, which is very little.[26] Hence one might rephrase the slogan of Bourdieu's *Distinction* as "There is no way out of the game of [national] culture."[27]

Bourdieu proposes a system of cultural capital that is analogous to the system of monetary capital, sometimes convergent and sometimes divergent, that allows for a refinement of the theory of ideology. Ideology does not simply reflect or serve economic interests. For Bourdieu, ideology organizes cultural forms within a system that is relatively autonomous of economic determination, but nonetheless it organizes them *according to an economic logic*. This permits a sociological reading of culture as a relatively independent economy in which prestige takes the place of the money form as the unit of value. This may, as Guillory argues, excuse Bourdieu of the charge of "economism"—the claim that cultural forms are superstructural elements that reflect a determinant economic base—but it would still be accurate to call this an economistic analysis of culture.[28] Economistic in the sense that culture is here figured along the model of a restricted economy, a restriction which is based in an unacknowledged acceptance of the fixity of national borders.

Bourdieu wants to get out of the problem of relations of determination between base and superstructure by stressing the analogy between, and the potential convertibility of, monetary and cultural capital. Cultural capital is assumed to be convertible by analogy with money in two senses. First, possession of cultural capital can lead to better economic status within a national social totality. Second, at the international level, cultural capital has different national forms, but all nations have forms of cultural capital. This is the paradox raised by the prospect of comparativist analyses of cultural capital. Each nation would presumably have to possess its own currency of prestige (like money) so that there would be the possibility of conversion between them. The possibility of general analysis implies a World Culture Bank, or at least an International Prestige Fund.

Prestige and money are not, however, directly convertible, although academics have a lot to gain, both analytically and financially, from believing that they may be. They can only appear analogous when analyses are entirely restricted within *national* frontiers, where limited con-

text cultural capital can seem more fungible, since the question of translatability is not posed. Were it to be posed, one would be faced with a problem: instead of describing cultural capital as the currency of a national social totality, one would have to ask "prestige *for whom?*" without having a ready-made answer, because culture would no longer be one game but many heterogeneous games. If cultural capital is something that can be distributed, then class analysis of that distribution masks ethnocentrism. If all cultures are variably capitalized, what is implied is a form of convertibility, and the form of convertibility will favor a dominant definition of culture.

The illusion that ethnocentrism is not an issue arises only when the analysis of cultural capital is played out at the *national* level, where the common currency of cultural capital appears empty of ethnic specificity, residing only in the abstract idea of the nation. From this perspective, the underside of Guillory's rephrasing of the canon debate in terms of the distribution of cultural capital appears: the desire to preserve the form of the nation-state as the fundamental unit of cultural analysis, in a world in which global fusion (Wallerstein's "geo-culture") and national fission threaten its status. What this reveals is the withering of the nation-state in the face of the transnational corporation; the nation-state is no longer the primary instance of the reproduction of capital.[29]

Hence, insofar as Bourdieu (who likes to pretend to objectivity) and Guillory make any proposals for the University on the basis of their analysis, what is proposed is not an alternative to the system but the more equal redistribution of capital *within* the system, which Guillory thematizes as increased "access" to or "accessibility" of cultural goods. Thus Guillory, at the end of his book, proposes the following "thought experiment": What if the system of culture were reorganized so as to permit maximal access to cultural capital? This is the nearest Guillory's book comes to delivering on its many exhortations for "rethinking."[30] One can immediately observe that it begs the thorny institutional questions of *who* will perform this reorganization and *how*. But this is perhaps a churlish cavil. More directly, the Marxist model of distributive justice underlying this suggestion certainly implies that the "dream of consensus," which Guillory has earlier criticized, now has reared its head. Second, such a redistribution of cultural capital would be far less

threatening to the system than Guillory implies. Is not Guillory's proposal heading in the very same direction as techno-bureaucratic culture in the moment when capitalism seeks to expand its consumer base? How would Guillory's redistribution differ from the Thatcherite desire to bring all subjects within the fold of the "property-owning democracy"? Could access to culture be as finely differentiated as income?

We are, I think, entitled to require a far more pointed reflection on the politics of "access" than Guillory supplies. What he does provide, however, is the following conclusion:

> In a culture of such universal access, canonical works could not be experienced as they so often are, as lifeless monuments, or as proofs of class distinction. Insofar as the debate on the canon has tended to discredit aesthetic judgment, or to express a certain embarrassment with its metaphysical pretensions and its political biases, it has quite missed the point. The point is not to make judgment disappear but to reform the conditions of its practice. If there is no way out of the game of culture, then, even when cultural capital is the only kind of capital, there may be another kind of game, with less dire consequences for the losers, an *aesthetic* game. Socializing the means of production and consumption would be the condition of an aestheticism unbound, not its overcoming. But of course, this is only a thought experiment. (340)

These closing words, after 340 dense pages, make a rather particular claim for the redemptive power of the aesthetic. It seems to suggest that we are not yet ready for Kant, that only after Marx has done his work, and the means of production and consumption have been socialized, can we really be Kantians, engaging in the free play of aesthetic judgment in a way that is harmless. Only then, Guillory contends, will the distinctions that arise from the competition of judgments no longer have socioeconomic consequences, merely cultural ones.

This apparent plea for the relative autonomy of the aesthetic turns out to be a staggering privileging of the economic base. Only when it has been put out of the way does aesthetic judgment become free to realize its own essentially harmless nature. Aestheticism is unbound because the differences it makes are no longer real, dire differences. One hears the voice of Fourierism here: let us make the nation a phalanstery, and then we will be artists. This kind of imagination relies on

the possibility that culture may be a closed system, a game with fixed boundaries—those of the nation. This seems to forget the contemporary global development of capitalism as a *jeu sans frontières*, which Guillory elsewhere notes (345n11). Moreover, the argument that culture is a field of essentially harmless differences seems to me dubious, to say the least. It is not just that cultural differences have socioeconomic consequences that makes them count for something, otherwise we would all speak the same language. But to take seriously the fact that we do not all speak the same language, that the "social totality" is not defined by the analogy between an ethnicity, a nation-state, and a national language, would render exhaustive analysis in terms of cultural capital impossible.

The appeal of Bourdieu to thinkers like Guillory and to those who work more closely in Cultural Studies is that he offers an analysis of culture that can take account of its loss of any specific reference—its dereferentialization—while still being able to produce what looks like a positive knowledge about culture, by mapping the distribution of cultural capital in terms of proximity to or distance from a cultural center. I would argue that this is a misrecognition of the contemporary nature of power. Bourdieu and his followers fail to see that the center is not a real place any longer. As Foucault knew, panopticism is only one model of power (though many of his readers tend not to notice this). Culture is not a citadel to be occupied. In fact, no one sits in the center any longer. The center was once occupied by the institution of the nation-state, which embodied capital and expressed it as a culture that radiated across the field of the social. But the decline of the nation-state means that this center is actually a lure. Capital no longer flows outward from the center, rather it circulates around the circumference, behind the backs of those who keep their eyes firmly fixed on the center. Around the circumference, the global transfer of capital takes place in the hands of multi- or transnational corporations. The so-called center, the nation-state, is now merely a virtual point that organizes peripheral subjectivities within the global flow of capital; it is not a site to be occupied. Hence everyone seems to be culturally excluded, while at the same time almost everyone is included within the global flow of capital.

To sum up, the decline of the nation-state means that culture is no

longer a matter of the inclusion or exclusion of a subject in relation to a cultural center, or even of degrees of inclusion. Hence the problematic of participation, since we can no longer tell a story of liberation as the passage from the margins to the center, as the entry into the gates of subjecthood. As academics know very well, the position of enunciation is peripheral: the center is silent. By this I mean that in order to speak in today's academy one is constrained to assume a position of margin-ality. So even conservatives have to tell the story of their own margin-alization from culture in order to speak for themselves. Thus people like David Horowitz or Dinesh D'Souza claim to be assuming a het-erodox position in espousing patriarchy and arguing for the supremacy of Western Culture. What can it mean that those who speak *for the center* need to claim to be marginalized?

It is very tempting to see what Gerald Graff has called the "culture wars" as a healthy sign that the debate on U.S. national culture is once again taking place where it ought to: in the University.[31] Bliss is it in this dawn to be alive, but to be tenured and approaching middle age seems very heaven! Yet is the United States a "country in romance . . . where reason seems the most to assert her rights," like Wordsworth's revolutionary France? What worries me about the American culture wars is that I hear on both sides of the debate a conflation of prescrip-tion and description in the name of national identity: the claim that U.S. national identity is, and should be, reflective of either a selective tradition or a multicultural rainbow.[32] Personally, I am for openness, but I have some suspicions about the way in which defenders of "di-versity" tend to buttress their argument by reference to the real Amer-ican identity as diverse. This is tantamount to reiterating that to be truly American is to be an immigrant, a liberal argument that repeats the Enlightenment trick of establishing an opposition between human culture and nature, placing the native American or indigene on the side of nature rather than culture.

For example, Becky W. Thompson and Sangeeta Tyagi argue in their introduction to *Beyond a Dream Deferred: Multicultural Education and the Politics of Excellence* that "our project . . . is no less than rethinking 'America.' "[33] Now they are clearly concerned to avoid racism, and do indeed list "native Hawaiian" alongside the other variants of "people

of color" who form their contributors. The extent to which this well-meaning collection is prey to an anxiety about the status of the Uni-versity that it cannot directly address can be gleaned from a look at the contributors' notes, which paradoxically stress the marginalization of the contributors in terms of their race, gender, or sexual orientation while also insisting on a concomitant validating closeness to the real.[34] Thus the institutional affiliations of contributors are provided, yet cu-riously in a book on education policy, the focus of the contributors' notes is, in most cases, on extracurricular activities and cultural mar-ginalization. Perhaps lamentably, this focus is probably an intelligent response to current pressures in the academic marketplace, where the "real" or extra-academic has become a prized academic commodity.[35] The contributors' very marginalization from culture's institutions is thus the very ground of their cultural participation. Margin and center no longer serve to explain the dynamic of power.

The logic that invokes the indigene as one name for difference, placed indifferently among a list of others (for fear of exclusion), gives voice to the indigene only at the price of a self-recognition as one immigrant among others, at the price of the qualitative *homogenization* of the very differences that lists such as the following seek to note: "In keeping with our commitment to representation of those who have led the way in progressive educational change, most of the chapters are written by people of color—African-American, Latino and Latina, Asian-Ameri-can, Indian, and Native Hawaiian—in addition to chapters by white women and gay and lesbian people."[36] I indicate the indigene as merely one victim of homogenization in such listings. In general, the effect of multiculturalism is necessarily to homogenize differences as equiva-lently deviant from a norm. This is why multiculturalism replaces na-tional cultural policy for a global economy, whether in the sensitivity training of transnational corporations or in the federal policy of super-states such as Canada or the European Union, which are attempting to align themselves in the global economy. To put this another way, the multicultural argument can turn out to be another form of "Ameri-canization" that rather changes the tone of the claim by the authors of the introduction to be rethinking—which is to say, *redescribing—* America.[37]

While it would be possible to engage in an extended critique of the multiculturalist position, I am for the moment more interested in diagnosis than in denunciation, in trying to understand *why* the debate on national culture in the United States has returned to the University. The so-called debate is less specifically American than it might seem. Rather than being the result of any specific betrayal, it actually draws its energies from an endemic condition of contemporary higher education—the problems raised by the absence of a cultural center.[38] It is in this void that the culture wars arise.

In saying this, however, I do not mean to suggest that those groups who have in the past been the controlling forces of a central culture have either disappeared or resorted to espousing falsehoods about their relationship to cultural power. In this regard, I think Gerald Graff is a bit too quick when, in *Beyond the Culture Wars,* he dismisses as a falsification the story of the marginalization of dead white males that animates the polemics of Allan Bloom, William Bennett, and others. What the right wing is doing has to be understood symptomatically. Graff is correct to point out that the right under Reagan and Bush did, in fact, occupy all the positions of cultural power, while at the same time bemoaning its own exclusion. This is not simply an ideological trick, an attempt to co-opt the allure of the rebel stance, as the fictional Republican candidate does in the film *Bob Roberts.* We need to ask what it means that the holders of cultural power need to portray themselves as unorthodox rebels. It seems to me that the conservative jeremiads are motivated by the fact that their authors feel the emptiness of the cultural power they hold. That is to say, they recognize the powerlessness of the cultural power they hold, and they blame left-wing academics for usurping it. They hold the center, but they know that it is merely a virtual point. The cultural right is not rebelling against its exclusion from the center but against the exclusion *of* the center, its reduction. The "culture wars" thus arise between those who hold cultural power but fear that it no longer matters and those whose exclusion from that cultural power allows them to believe that such power would matter if only they held it.

The relentless self-marginalization of both sides is a self-blinding, a refusal to recognize that the stakes in the game have changed, that the

center actually *does not speak,* that the privileged position of enunciation is not that of the subject who participates in culture. What appears as the self-marginalization of a subject (and is often denounced as the culture of *ressentiment* by those on the right such as D'Souza, liberals such as Robert Hughes, and left-wingers such as Sande Cohen)[39] is the symptom that the nation-state (actual or ideal) no longer exists as a cultural form in which the speaking subject might find him or herself authoritatively reflected. The claim of subjective marginalization masks the fact that with the evacuation of the nation-state as cultural form, enunciation now proceeds from what I would call *peripheral singularities* rather than from traditional citizen-subjects.

I use the term "singularity," drawing on Deleuze and Guattari among others, to indicate that there is no longer a subject-position available to function as the site of the conscious synthesis of sense-impressions.[40] The shift I am proposing is from the category of the subject to a notion of singularity as the way of understanding individual existence. According to Descartes, the thinking individual becomes a subject among other subjects, by positioning him- or herself as the locus of an activity of reasoning. The capacity to reason about one's own thought (to think oneself thinking) is self-consciousness. All individuals share this capacity and are hence interchangeable in principle. For someone like Habermas, this is why we can all agree, or at least agree to disagree; it is the ground of communicability. The subject is thus the fact of self-consciousness and is unmarked by gender, race, etc.

The turn to singularity comes in the wake of questioning the category of the subject and its pretended neutrality.[41] Singularity provides a way of talking about individuals other than as subjects. It recognizes the radical heterogeneity of individuals, the sheer fact that as an agglomeration of matter, history, experience, whatever, you just are not someone else; there is nothing you can be presumed in advance to share with someone else. So when a white-lesbian-woman from the American Midwest (the listing of markers of difference can of course be extended) interacts with, say, a straight-black-man from Liberia, they do not do so on the basis of a shared subjectivity (or even a shared subjective oppression) that would make them transparent to each other in discussion. Rather, singularities *negotiate,* and the structure of singularity

is very odd, since it is not repeatable. Hence a singularity cannot achieve total self-consciousness, since if it did know itself, the self that it knew would not be the same self as the self that did the knowing.

To put this another way, the singularity is a *minimal node of specificity*, which is not structurally homogenized as a subject. This does not make the singular individual a kind of "free radical," to use the language of physics. Singularities are homogenized in mass culture (which makes them into consumer subjects instead of traditional, productive subjects of the public sphere or civic society). In this regard, consumerism is a major index of the insufficiency of the notion of the subject, since traditional accountings for "the subject" cannot even explain why we like to shop, although we know it is a mode of self-victimization not a free and autonomous act: we buy what we are sold, not what we want, and then we end up wanting it. Hence it was necessary for subject-centered theories to develop the notion of ideology and to claim that all shopping for other than necessities of survival was the product of ideological trickery exerted on naive dupes—another narrative of the Fall.

While what I have just outlined may seem like an unnecessarily complicated argument to some, I would argue that the advantage of speaking in terms of singularities is that it offers us a way of discussing the contradictory and multiple ways in which relations of desire (for commodities and other things), power, and knowledge flow among individuals, without having to presume that there is a stable, natural, or logical order of such relations that we have lost and to which we should return. To speak of the "peripheral singularity" is to insist that there is no ideal individual that might achieve either total self-consciousness or a harmonious, balanced relation to others and the world. Peripheral singularities do not stand at the center of culture.

The notion of culture had proposed such a centered subject, who was indeed invoked ideologically to suggest that the logic of cultural participation provided a ground of equality that transcended economic expropriation. The contemporary capitalist economy has laid this ideological veil aside. Thus, although exclusions from cultural representation continue, they can now be thought of as vestigial. The laying aside

of cultural taboos proceeds apace. Madonna, the icon of the Virgin, appears on screen in bed with gay black men, and the spectator situates her- or himself culturally in terms of how shocking this seems. This is what Debord meant by the society of spectacle: the recirculation of what lies outside the system as a value *within* the system, as "shock-value." As Madonna knows, culture is made up of roles and their combinations, not of identities. Everyone can, in principle, participate in culture, have their Warholian fifteen minutes. They can do so because such participation no longer has the meaning for society that it used to, because society is no longer organized in the interest of realizing cultural identity, which has now become an obstacle to the flow of capital rather than its vehicle.

Rather than denouncing this process in the name of hidden or yet-to-be-realized identities, we need to rethink the question of agency, to ask what can be the kinds of agency that can arise among *relays or roles* rather than self-identical subjects. And lest I seem to be merely denouncing Cultural Studies, let me make clear that work in Cultural Studies is structured by this tension: by a general tendency to engage in ideology-critique while realizing its limitations. Sometimes this appears as bad faith (the surreptitious hope that agencies will coagulate into a subject of history, that the theory of "cultural construction" will ground a new historical project). Sometimes it appears as the attempt to do something other than business as usual.

The notion that culture matters is ineluctably linked to the ascendancy of the nation-state as a political formation, and the decline of the nation-state means that the question of power is no longer structured in terms of the inclusion or exclusion of subjects from cultural participation. Instead of subject positions, we should speak of singularities that appear as peripheral in relation to a virtual cultural center that is indifferent to them as subjects (in a way the nation-state was not). In other words, we can write "excellence" at the center of the diagram where once there was "culture." Positions can be mapped in terms of degrees of excellence, and such mapping is the work of bureaucratic institutions such as the University. However, these institutions are no longer cultural in the strong sense, in that our position in

relation to them is not a determinant of meaning, since "excellence," as we have seen in Chapter 2, is not referential but a unit of value internal to the system, the elemental unit of a virtual scale.

This, then, is what it means for me to say that Cultural Studies arises as a quasi-discipline once culture ceases to be the animating principle of the University and becomes instead one object of study among others. The problem of participation becomes most acutely the object of reflection when we no longer know what it would mean to participate, when there is no longer any obvious citadel to be captured. It does not mean that Cultural Studies is foolish, that those who practice it have missed the point. Rather, if culture is everything, then it has no center, no referent outside itself—and facing up to this dereferentialization seems to me to be the task incumbent upon Cultural Studies.

The chance to face up to this issue arises because the endeavor of Cultural Studies is the contemporary way to speculate on the question of what it means to be *in* the University, with the added complication that, unlike German Idealism, speculation itself is not already the answer to the question. Such is the situation of the posthistorical University, the University without an idea. The question remains, then, of how to understand the work that Cultural Studies does—how to conceptualize the mass of analyses as something other than fascinating symptoms of nostalgia for what the University once was. How, that is, can Cultural Studies do something other than critique culture excellently?

The Posthistorical University

How are we to reimagine the University, once its guiding idea of culture has ceased to have an essential function? The last part of this book will seek to sketch the framework within which the transnational comparative analysis of the University might proceed. The general line of this argument will have to take account of the fact that although the University continues to exist, we can no longer continue to understand it solely in terms of its relation to culture. Once transnational capitalism has eroded the meaning of culture, and once the institutional system begins to show itself capable of functioning without reference to that term, then the role of education cannot primarily be conceived in terms of cultural acquisition or cultural resistance. This does not mean that those in the University should abandon critical judgment, become passive observers or even eager servants of capital. As I shall argue, the question of value becomes more significant than ever, and it is by raising value as a question of *judgment* that the discourse of excellence can be resisted. Evaluation can become a social question rather than a device of measurement. Yet to do this will no longer be to point to a notion of what constitutes true value, what really authorizes teaching, since what is at stake is no longer the nature of value but its *function*.

Where excellence brackets the question of value in favor of measurement, replaces questions of accountability or responsibility with accounting solutions, I shall argue that holding open the question of