

# CULTURAL STUDIES

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- ENVIRONMENTAL MATTERS
- COMMUNITIES
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# CULTURAL STUDIES

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## EDITORIAL STATEMENT

*Cultural Studies* seeks to foster more open analytic, critical and political conversations by encouraging people to push the dialogue into fresh, uncharted territory. It is devoted to understanding the specific ways cultural practices operate in everyday and social formations. But it is also devoted to intervening in the processes by which the existing techniques, institutions and structures of power are reproduced, resisted and transformed. Although focused in some sense on culture, we understand the term inclusively rather than exclusively. We are interested in work that explores the relations between cultural practices and everyday life, economic relations, the material world, the State, and historical forces and contexts. The journal is not committed to any single theoretical or political position; rather, we assume that questions of power organized around differences of race, class, gender, sexuality, age, ethnicity, nationality, colonial relations, etc., are all necessary to an adequate analysis of the contemporary world. We assume as well that different questions, different contexts and different institutional positions may bring with them a wide range of critical practices and theoretical frameworks.

'Cultural studies' as a fluid set of critical practices has moved rapidly into the mainstream of contemporary intellectual and academic life in a variety of political, national and intellectual contexts. Those of us working in cultural studies find ourselves caught between the need to define and defend its specificity and the desire to resist closure of the ongoing history of cultural studies by any such act of definition. We would like to suggest that cultural studies is most vital politically and intellectually when it refuses to construct itself as a fixed or unified theoretical position that can move freely across historical and political contexts. Cultural studies is in fact constantly reconstructing itself in the light of changing historical projects and intellectual resources. It is propelled less by a theoretical agenda than by its desire to construct possibilities, both immediate and imaginary, out of historical circumstances; it seeks to give a better understanding of where we are so that we can create new historical contexts and formations which are based on more just principles of freedom, equality, and the distribution of wealth and power. But it is, at the same time, committed to the importance of the 'detour through theory' as the crucial moment of critical intellectual work. Moreover, cultural studies is always interdisciplinary; it does not seek to explain everything from a cultural point of view or to reduce reality to culture. Rather it attempts to explore the specific effects of cultural practices using whatever resources are intellectually and politically available and/or necessary. This is, of course, always partly determined by the form and place of its institutionalization. To this end, cultural studies is committed to the radically contextual, historically specific character not only of cultural practices but also of the production of

knowledge within cultural studies itself. It assumes that history, including the history of critical thought, is never guaranteed in advance, that the relations and possibilities of social life and power are never necessarily stitched into place, once and for all. Recognizing that 'people make history in conditions not of their own making', it seeks to identify and examine those moments when people are manipulated and deceived as well as those moments when they are active, struggling and even resisting. In that sense cultural studies is committed to the popular as a cultural terrain and a political force.

*Cultural Studies* will publish essays covering a wide range of topics and styles. We hope to encourage significant intellectual and political experimentation, intervention and dialogue. At least half the issues will focus on special topics, often not traditionally associated with cultural studies. Occasionally, we will make space to present a body of work representing a specific national, ethnic or social tradition. Whenever possible, we intend to represent the truly international nature of contemporary work, without ignoring the significant differences that are the result of speaking from and to specific contexts. We invite articles, reviews, critiques, photographs and other forms of 'artistic' production, and suggestions for special issues. And we invite readers to comment on the strengths and weaknesses, not only of the project and progress of cultural studies, but of the project and progress of *Cultural Studies* as well.

Larry Grossberg  
Janice Radway

Contributions should be sent to Professor Lawrence Grossberg, Dept. of Speech Communication, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 244 Lincoln Hall, 702 S. Wright St., Urbana, 111. 61801, USA. They should be in triplicate and should conform to the reference system set out in the Notes for Contributors, available from the Editors or Publishers. Submissions undergo blind peer review. The author's name should not appear anywhere in the manuscript except on a detachable cover page along with an address and the title of the piece. Reviews, and books for review, should be sent to Tim O'Sullivan, School of Arts and Humanities, de Montfort University, The Gateway, Leicester LE1 9BH; or to John Frow, Dept. of English, University of Queensland, St. Lucia, Queensland 4072, Australia; or to Jennifer Daryl Slack, Dept. of Humanities, Michigan Technological University, Houghton, MI 49931-1295, USA.



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## **TEXTUALITY AND TECTONICS:** **Troubling Social and Psychological Science**

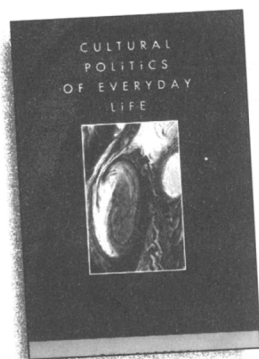
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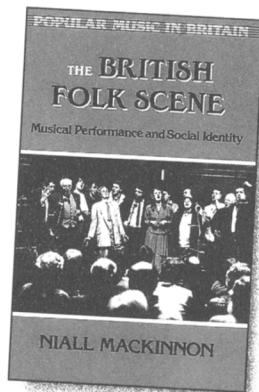
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# INTRODUCTION



# ON ENVIRONMENTAL MATTERS

JODY BERLAND AND

JENNIFER DARYL SLACK

For a long time now we two have been meeting at conferences and talking about the environment. (Indeed, that is how we met. ‘Oh, I know someone else who is interested in the environment. You should meet her!’) It was an oddity then to compose environmental matters in the rhythms of cultural theory. But that is no longer true. How could it be? Environmental matters now touch too many of the notes that make up the (dis)harmonies of cultural studies: they are ‘popular’, in all the various (and problematic) senses of the term; they manifest differential relations of knowledge and power; they invite analyses of their representations and the role of representation; they are theoretically *interesting*, for they provide rich ground to consider the relations of science, technology and contemporary culture; they virtually demand intervention; and, finally, they ‘matter’.

Environmental matters. Matter. Both verb and noun: to be of importance; to be that subject of importance; *and* to be the physical substance of which a physical object is composed. Cultural studies meets the environment rather well prepared to clarify the complexities of the interrelationship of the act of making the *subject* of the environment and of making it an *important* subject. It tackles the old debate about the relationship between nature and culture with a fairly easy response: ‘Nature (and by extension, the environment) is semiotic...it is a cultural construction.’ Hence the coding of culture and of environmental issues, coalitions, movements are understood to have registers in differential relations of power articulating to class, race, gender and ethnicity. Representation matters. Representations matter.

Cultural studies is, however, rather less prepared to handle the ‘problem’ of the ‘physical substance’. The earth. The water. The weather. The non-human. The biosphere. The *end* of the...To make that substance intelligible we necessarily take (and in speaking it, have already taken) as Guattari has put it, ‘a pseudo-narrative detour through the reference systems of myth and ritual, or through self-professedly scientific analysis—all of which have as their ultimate goal the concealment of the *dis-positional* arrangement through which discourse is brought into existence and from which it derives, “secondarily” so to speak, its intelligibility’. (1989:132) Representation matters. Representations matter.

But what then of the earth, water, etc? What of the apprehension of these, not just via concept, but—in addition—via affect? How do we speak of that which is not reducible to the mode in which we speak—both acknowledging the mode in which we speak *and* that which asserts itself apart from having a ‘voice’? There *is* an earth after all. Species do die out. Rains do come down. Toxic wastes do damage. Organisms do attach to place.

We can feel some among you cringing: ‘Here it comes...’, the appeal to totality, to essentialism, to teleology. But as McKenzie Wark argues here, ‘Perhaps...criticism has retreated a little too far from the problems of historical fate and social totality.’ In these pages and elsewhere there is ample evidence of cultural theorists in search of new ways to let matter matter—without resorting to essentialist legerdemain. For example, while Donna Haraway acknowledges that nature is ‘not a physical place to which one can go’ (1992:296), she insists on its artificiality, that is, a recognition that ‘nature for us is *made*, as both fiction and fact’ (296–7). Artifactual ‘nature’ is conceived of as the relationship (the achievement) of many actors: human, non-human (organic and inorganic), technological. Laurie Anne Whitt and Jennifer Daryl Slack contribute to theorizing the context of environmental issues in terms of *particular* communities/environments—which are, through both unity and difference, variously articulated to relations of solidarity and significance. They insist, as does Barri Cohen, on the interpenetration of the human and the other than human in mapping those communities.

From a theoretical vantage point, environmental issues have a particular fascination. They not only challenge the contours of what it means to theorize in cultural studies (how can we understand something as discursive and non-discursive at the same time? nature and not nature? culture and not culture?), they also open up new and compelling ways to analyze contemporary culture. For example, the strange resonance of chaos theory, which emerged from the attempt to break down into mathematics the intricate structures of the weather, and whose conceptualization of structures-inchaos now reverberates in the narratives of postmodernism, science fiction and economics, not to mention scientific and public debates about global warming (see Hayles, 1991). Or, in another vein, the way that critical discourses on gender intersect with ongoing debates about the relationship between biological and technological agency in the construction of the (post)human subject. Or the way that our urban/suburban culture has privileged certain styles of order and beauty in the managed landscape as a permissible index of ‘Nature’ (Wilson, 1991). Or how our problems and affective alliances with ‘Nature’ seem to challenge our endless discoursing on the ‘other’. Not only do these issues invite us to reconceptualize the boundaries between nature and culture; they also provide some useful agitation along the boundaries of science, culture and myth (Brody, 1981).

As we learn to incorporate the environment (or environments) in cultural theory, and as we learn new ways to understand contemporary culture through attention to the environment, there will be, of course, ongoing demands for intervention that both draw on and contribute to our theorizing. Several of the articles in this issue consider sites of ongoing struggle drawing on an expanded sense of the terrain of the environmental. Barri Cohen analyzes the proposed James Bay II project, designed to dam major rivers flowing into James Bay and Hudson Bay, which symbolizes to many not only a struggle over land, but also a larger cultural and political battle about Western and Native relationships with the land. Carol Stabile considers labor practices along the Mexican and US border as a challenge to the environmental preoccupations of North American ecofeminists. In each case, they draw attention to the multiple positions and/or articulations that demand consideration in order to inform the theory and practice of ‘cultural’ activists.

In characterizing and intervening in the nature of the interconnections that constitute environmental matters, we expect that more attention will be directed toward the media, consumption and technology. As Guattari has argued:

It is quite simply wrong to regard action on the psyche, the socius, and the environment as separate. Indeed, if we continue—as the media would have us do—to refuse squarely to confront the *simultaneous* degradation of these three areas, we will in effect be acquiescing in a general infantilization of opinion, a destruction and neutralization of democracy. We need to ‘kick the habit’ of consumption, of television discourse in particular; we need to apprehend the world through the interchangeable lenses of the three ecologies...social ecology, mental ecology, and environmental ecology. (1989:134)

In a similar spirit, Michael X.Delli Carpini and Bruce A.Williams offer a critique of the ways in which both fiction and non-fiction television covers environmental news and issues, focusing on representations of Earth Day. As they argue, such coverage works to exclude responses to environmental problems that might also challenge the simultaneous degradation of culture. Jody Berland offers us an analysis of a variety of ways in which ‘the weather’ is implicated in the social, ecological and mental fabric of our culture. As weather patterns appear increasingly remote, increasingly physical in nature yet increasingly unavailable to unaided human perception, we learn to rely on the military, technological and televisual innovations that bring us our daily forecasts. Then, in a bit of a twist on what you might expect, Wark offers the proposition that it is only in the utilization of new technologies (like computers, electronic mail, fax, etc.)—through which we become still more estranged from nature than we already are—that we can grasp what there is ‘out there’ to grasp about our place in the ‘natural’ world.

Whether we will find ourselves in ‘Nature’, a Third Nature’, or ‘the end of nature’ depends on the concepts we use to map our place in the historicized environments in which we live. There are many problems for cultural theorists to grapple with regarding environmental theory and practice, and we do not pretend to have presented an exhaustive introduction to the issues there are—already!—to deal with. But we bring these together with a renewed commitment to the importance of environmental matters, and with the hope that this issue opens the door to a continuing discussion about their relevance for cultural studies.

This issue is dedicated to Alexander Wilson, *in memoriam*.

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# ARTICLES