

Introduction: Privilege and Delight

Writing a textbook like this requires, above all, thoughtfulness about the students who one hopes will read the book. That is, the process of writing is undertaken to foreground pedagogy, and to take into account the role of the teacher as someone who is invariably constrained in terms of time and resources and who is forever looking for ways to enlarge upon the curriculum, and to provide students with the means by which they can pursue particular interests in more depth without getting lost or straying too far from the starting point of what is usually called course content. My main topic in this book is contemporary cultural theory and its uses in amplifying our understanding of a wide range of everyday social, cultural and political practices. In recent years, teaching at Goldsmiths College in London, I have noticed how exceptionally keen and eager students are to absorb and understand key writers like those whose work I engage with in this book. These students are often frustrated by what they perceive as their own weaknesses when they find themselves struggling with unfamiliar terms, with new vocabularies and with the much wider intellectual context which the writers themselves inhabit. In an inter-disciplinary academic environment, students have to learn how to draw limits on what they can realistically engage with, across diverse fields of intellectual activity. And there are also more limits on time than was the case some years ago. Nowadays undergraduate students usually have to undertake paid part-time work. Under these circumstances they cannot afford the straightforward pleasures of getting lost for days at a time in the library, and they are anxious and fearful when they find that work they know to be important is also even more complex than they imagined. My aim here, is not, however, to try to deliver a quick fix, or a step-by-step guide to cultural theory. Ideally I would like to help students to grasp the importance of this body of work, without being intimidated by it. It is not my intention then to offer a short cut; instead I would like to lead students through a number of themes found in each of the theorists I deal with, and then I would

like them to see how these feed into and shape the field of cultural studies, not as a tightly defined discipline but as a shifting terrain, a site of dispute and contestation.

The model I emulate here is one which dates back to the late 1970s and early 1980s when the Open University in the UK gave the fledgling subject 'cultural studies' an enormous boost by developing a unit in Popular Culture with the unexciting name U203. The distance learning techniques of the Open University require that a good deal of effort is put into preparing course materials, from large unit guides, to set texts, and additional edited collections as well as television and radio programmes. U203 was a milestone event for the future of cultural studies. It presented students with a substantial range of theoretical work from Barthes and Foucault to Lacan, Althusser and Gramsci, while also providing large numbers of case studies and more concrete material, including Tony Bennett's study of James Bond, Dick Hebdige's analysis of youth culture and my own work on *Jackie* magazine (Waites et al., 1982, Bennett et al., 1981). Of course this teaching material was the outcome of the effort of many people. But what I try to hold onto here, 20 or 50 years later, is the accessibility without simplification which characterised U203, and the connection made between cultural theory and various forms of cultural practice. The format I adopt is to present lengthy chapters on six cultural theorists, at the end of which there are extended notes on a topic drawn from the world of political or popular culture, or the arts, which has a particular relation to the work of the cultural theorist, illuminating and complementing the writing, but also, itself, being illuminated in return. In addition, at the end of the book I include two review essays each of which deals with more recent work by Bourdieu et al. (1999) and Butler (2000a).

It is important to draw attention here to the influence which various forms of neo-Marxist theory have had on the formation of cultural studies from the mid 1970s onwards. While to those over the age of 35 this might seem self-evident, to a younger generation it is often perplexing, something which, unless they have academic training already in Marxist-influenced social science subjects, is simply a mark of a bygone era, a time of intellectual and political fervour, a time when it seemed possible to draw on a materialist, class analysis of the whole social world, and make sense of it accordingly. The question is, how much of Marxist theory needs to be available to students of cultural studies today to allow them to understand the historical and intellectual context of more recent cultural

theory? Ideally I would always want to preface a course on contemporary cultural theory with a number of lectures on Marx, and then on Adorno, Benjamin, Althusser, Gramsci, Laclau and Mouffe, and Stuart Hall. For the purposes of this book I have attempted to highlight, where appropriate, the precise way in which the authors I consider here look to and are influenced by Marxist theory, while also challenging some of its underlying principles. In Chapter 1 on Stuart Hall I examine an earlier co-authored article on political communications. This is a piece which offers a different way of carrying out media analysis from what was established in sociology and mass communications at the time. It was also a bold and risky endeavour. The bibliography shows just a handful of texts, the article considers in detail one single television programme. Hall et al. might as well be saying, this is how it can be done, with only Gramsci and Althusser and Roland Barthes hovering in the background. Hall brings the reader with him as he experiments with the possibility of analysing a television text. By this means he also proposes a way of understanding the relation between media, politics and ideology.

In the chapter on Hall I also track his well known analysis of the Thatcher government and the wider political culture it brought into being, and here too we find a loose, improvised yet also accessible style in Hall's writing. Many of the essays on Thatcherism were first published in a magazine with a much wider readership than exists for academic texts. In both the media work and also in his writing on the Thatcher years Hall analyses what he calls a 'complex unity' which emerges as a distinctive modality of power. For Hall this means that power works most effectively through articulation, through making connections across diverse and divergent fields, through a kind of stitching together process which consolidates power by means of negotiation, concession, sometimes reaching for consensus by means of tactical retreat. But this can also be a principle for the left, especially once the idea of the over-arching unity of class, and the relinquishing of other differences in its favour, is abandoned. This kind of thinking continues in more recent work where he participates in debates on multiculturalism. How do we live together and acknowledge differences? Only when there is, yes, a horizon of universalism which expects of us all that we bow to the rights of others to pursue their differences, not in hermetically sealed ways, but rather within a framework of intersection and overlap so that the possibilities for democracy (always unfulfilled) are opened up and extended by this 'complex unity in difference'.

Paul Gilroy's work also proposes a number of themes, the political urgency of which is overwhelming. Over the years they keep drawing his attention; these are the questions of nation and nationalism, belonging and unbelonging, restless diaspora and the utopia of being beyond race. In Chapter 2, I use the term 'black and not-black' to describe the movement in Gilroy's writing, this reverberates because it signals his own 'double consciousness', the necessity of occupying blackness to counter the historical power of racialising discourse and the yearning to be beyond blackness and to live in a world where such a notion, such an observation about a person, that he or she is black or white, is insignificant, and totally unremarkable. Music is the form which Gilroy draws on most heavily to develop his arguments. It provides an incredibly powerful soundtrack to his writing; the complexity of jazz rhythms, the flourishes, the screams and the cries of James Brown, the heavy bass lines of George Clinton's Funkadelic sound, the volume and the profusion and the endless inventiveness of black diasporic musics is what makes Gilroy marvel at such outpouring and it replenishes his own jaded spirits in the face of the negation of his political aspirations. His own entanglement with music such as this, its existence as a lifeline and a space for safeguarding a history and acting as an archive, also provides him with a space for his own habitation. The affects of music and the intensity of these sonic experiences provide Gilroy with a kind of pre-figurative imagining of what might be other than what is.

In Butler, who is already so written about that it is daunting to enter into the arena of Butler scholars, my aim in Chapter 3 is to extrapolate a few key themes in her work and knit these together so that they illuminate for readers some of the key sexual dynamics in contemporary culture. These include, in my view, a new form of gender retrenchment which comes into view, one which seems to take on board the existence of gay and lesbian sexuality, and which also acknowledges gender fluidity and thus the degrees of enactment or performativity which underpin the daily practices of masculinity and femininity. On the basis of this recognised fluidity, there are produced, within the immensely powerful and also inventive terrain of consumer culture, entertainment and popular culture, any number of consolidated codings of sexuality which combine novel aspects of sexual difference with emphatic 'gender normativity'. By absorbing and even celebrating gay and lesbian sexual desires, new representations of sexuality appear all the more able to enforce what it is to be 'a real girl' or 'a real boy'. There

is a lot more work to be done on this area, and students might well want to consider such renewed normativities in more detail, and with this the subtle but heightened levels of sexual exclusion inscribed within the popular narratives of our times, for example, television programmes like *Sex in the City*, *The OC*, *Will and Grace*, *Queer as Folk*, and also in the mainstreaming of soft porn magazines like (in the UK) *Zoo*, *Nuts*, *Loaded* and so on. Butler's inventiveness for the purposes of this textbook lies in three areas. First is her engagement with feminism as it was, and as it might become, in the light of her revising of the previously agreed distinction between sex as given and gender as learnt. Second, there is her re-examination of Freud's understanding of bisexuality and Butler's own account of gender melancholia, and third, there is, of course, her theory of performativity. The close attention given by Butler to everyday political events and processes coincides with a melancholic strand in her writing. There is recognition of the full array of forces which are formidably resistant to a radical sexual politics and to a politics of kinship which do not, inevitably, privilege heterosexual reproduction.

Homi Bhabha's writing usually produces levels of anxiety among students on the basis of its dense, ornate, digressive and unconventional style. I attempt in Chapter 4 to clarify and contextualise. I suggest that one of the keys to this difficulty is that Bhabha himself is an experimental writer, and that the concepts which he creates are also activated in his texts; indeed they provide his writing with form (or anti-form) in much the same way as form is what produces the meaning of literary or artistic works. In this case Bhabha's (anti-) formalism is based on his efforts to write into being the 'third space', to 'move beyond' and also to activate the idea of time lag so that our comfortable western sense of time and viewpoint are overturned, or at least disrupted. In this chapter I concentrate on those aspects of Bhabha's writing which are more directly connected to cultural studies. First, there is his political engagement with class and his argument about how it must give way to multi-culture and to notions of community including those created by migrants and post-colonial artists. Second, I focus on his understanding of post-colonial agency (and cultural translation). This he claims is to be found in writing, art and in the distinctive cultures produced in the borderline negotiations of diasporic peoples as they find themselves drawn towards the cosmopolitan urban centres. Third, I examine one of Bhabha's most brilliant essays where he dissects the racial stereotype drawing on Foucault, Said, Fanon and produces from this dissection a

new understanding of the prevalence and ubiquitousness and repetitiveness of this form on the basis of the troubling gaze with which the racial other, subjugated into apparent mimicry of the dominant culture, looks back at the colonising powers. The requirement as inscribed within the fixed boundaries of the stereotype that he or she be 'more than' in order to be 'less than' offers enormous potential for understanding racial representation across popular culture.

Pierre Bourdieu, who died in January 2002, left behind him a legacy of sociological work the value of which is still to be fully appreciated, at least in the UK. That such prolific studies were produced by this one person who surely must have written night and day, and quite relentlessly, is not just admirable on the basis of the contribution to knowledge, but also itself a kind of act of love, that is love for the social sciences and for the possibility within this field for offering specific ways of understanding how the social world operates so as to shore up power in the hands of already privileged groups. Bourdieu was antipathetic to cultural studies, but this does not reduce my admiration for him; ideally I would like to have been able to persuade him otherwise, but even still his contribution to cultural studies remains outstanding. I outline in detail the differences between his account and those found in cultural studies, I also trace through the incredible significance of his concepts of field and habitus, and I then show how his analysis of taste allows him to develop a sharp understanding of how the realm of consumer culture is a key site for the reproduction of social inequalities and thus for the strengthening of the status quo. In that section I focus on the role of education in the transmission of cultural capital and the function as Bourdieu sees it of the new cultural intermediaries whose roles in the service sector (as for example 'lifestyle gurus' and other similar occupations) produce a kind of widespread and popular 'goodwill' to those social arrangements which are in fact predisposed to act in hostile ways towards the very people who are the subjects of this kind of illusory self-improvement.

The chapter on Jameson allows attention to be focused on Marxism in relation to culture and politics. Once again I extract from the work themes which are useful in relation to an imagined dialogue. Looking back at his magisterial article, in what is now 20 years after publication, we are able to see how utilised his account of postmodernism was as a means of creating heavily inter-textual cultural artefacts which permitted even greater degrees of space for reception and reading by

diverse readers and audiences than had been the case before. In effect, Jameson's analysis has shaped the sensibility of university-educated cultural producers from the late 1980s onwards, or at least this is my claim (which would need of course to be backed up by some grounded empirical research). The actual practices of cultural production is not an area of concern for Jameson himself, but it does allow us to understand something of the fate of postmodern thought in the aftermath of his critique. In particular it goes some way in explaining its most transparent incorporation into fields of so-called quality popular film and television within the Anglo-American world. With the help of Jameson's remarkable analysis of postmodernism, young media and cultural producers and indeed artists were provided with a perfect formula for creating forms inflected with irony, pastiche and knowing self-referentiality. Already Quentin Tarantino and David Lynch were working in this mode, but academic postmodernism (shorn of the Marxist critique) provided substantial cultural capital to graduates in media and cultural studies as they looked for work in media and culture industries. By these means, television also reinvented itself to reach younger and more sophisticated audiences. This is apparent not just in Lynch's *Twin Peaks*, but also in series like *Seinfeld* and *The Larry Sanders Show* and also *The Sopranos* and *Six Feet Under*. In the UK the influence is most visible in television (*The Office*, *The Alan Partridge Show*), where youth audiences are being targeted. It is most obvious in the pastiche shows based on recycling and the injecting of irony into old, out of date, programmes using high levels of audience participation and ribald humour and sexual innuendo against garish, plastic sets and featuring 1950s-style band musicians. (The most recent example is

The many chat shows which follow this kind of postmodern recipe (from *Graham Norton* several nights a week on Channel Four to *Jonathan Ross*, *Johnny Vaughan* and others) demonstrate how it has become the norm to revive, in a knowing manner, this form which in the past seemed to embody the very idea of popular television. By these means the banality of entertainment could be offset by the role of script writers and producers enchanted by the possibilities postmodern theory gave for reinventing television as simulacra (Alan Partridge again). My claim then is that Jameson's work, against the grain of its own Marxism, had an incredible allure and appeal for a post-Marxist culturally oriented generation for whom media and popular culture are omnipresent and for whom (prior to Sept 11th 2001) the western world, although

responsible for enduring inequalities and injustices and despite being in many ways a fearful place, was not a place of war and strife and militarisation. Possibly more so than the other theorists in this book, Jameson's analysis of postmodernism has influenced readers beyond the confines of the academy. These populist readings of Jameson ignored his own repudiation of postmodern eclecticism and the proliferation of styles and instead took his writing as a kind of legitimisation for producing playful and celebratory cultural forms. In fact I avoid the debate on cultural populism in this book and I also avoid in the Jameson chapter the protracted debates about postmodern culture, preferring to concentrate on two related topics: the idea of cognitive mapping and the challenge to Jameson by post-colonial critics, notably Spivak and Bhabha. Both these issues are central to cultural studies in relation to the politics of globalisation and post-colonialism. Where Jameson still seeks a sense of eventual class unity, Bhabha and Spivak insist on the necessity of fragmentation, on new 'third spaces' for thought and for cultural activity. If Jameson seems to speak from a secure seat of power, the Marxist inside the western liberal academy, his post-colonial critics question the basis of this authorisation. It may be apposite to conclude this introduction by pondering the authorisation to speak or write, as I do here, in a teacherly mode. One cannot be unaware of the changes which are transforming the life of the university, and yet the role of pedagogue, and the space and freedoms which that role still permits, is one of privilege and delight.