Beyond the Romance of Resistance: Translating Stuart Hall, and Re-imagining Cultural Analysis

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Abstract: This reconsideration of the "state of Cultural Studies" is developed through teaching a Cultural Studies seminar in Puerto Rico, and via engagement with four "new" books of speeches, political essays, and autobiographical books by Stuart Hall. Drawing in part on non-academic experience, I join in a critique of the field's devolution into a "dogmatic slumber" (Grossberg 4). I call into question a pattern of using claims of marginalization as a claim to power. And I argue that a more processual and less dogmatic form of cultural analysis should in fact be a cornerstone of general education courses.

KEYWORDS: Stuart Hall, Cultural Studies, self-marginalizing, post-structuralism, ethnography, theory wars, Birmingham Center for Cultural Studies, defamiliarization, text, cultural context, self-reflexive.

Prefatory Comments: Questions of Style, and Voice

Cultural Studies is a movement across disciplines where artistic expression, activism, and scholarship take place. In re-considering *the state of Cultural Studies* (while recognizing that such a unity may be illusory), I touch base in all three domains: creative expression, public sphere work, and scholarship. My involvement in Cultural Studies followed this trajectory, first songwriting and activism, and later scholarship.

Here I must address readers directly, with a forewarning about the style of my "stance and engagement" (Hyland 2005). I am arguing for a kind of cultural analysis that is grounded in practical experience. So I find it necessary to defend the value of personal voice. One reader of this project suggested that "detailed personal references seem at odds" with ambitious scholarly inter-weaving. While I share an aversion to the excesses of the *merely* personal, I take issue with the idea that the personal and the scholarly cannot be mutually beneficial. In fact, in agreement with Michael Billig (2013) about the generally atrocious state of social science and humanities writing, I would go further. I align myself with those who have insisted that the loss of personal voice is not only the root of bad, theory-clotted writing, but that such writing can often amount to a sort of self-marginalizing "mental slavery."

The co-existence of a more personal and even literary style of writing, and academic rigor, was generally not an issue before the 1980s. With the influx of theories such as post-structuralism, some writer-scholars began to push back against theoretical abstractions, and bad writing. I will give just two examples, to situate my approach in recent historical examples, specifically in relation to counter-currents in feminism, and ethnography.

In her 1987 essay "Me and My Shadow," Jane Tompkins quotes the late Ursula Le Guin, who differentiated between the "father tongue," which is spoken from above and does not expect an answer, and the "mother tongue," which is conversational. She then puts this theory into practice by pulling Guattari and Foucault off her bookshelf, and "reading them" to her readers. She finds their language "incredibly alienating" and "disappointingly magisterial," and concludes that she is "not willing to go along for the march" (2137, 2139). By contrast, Tompkins observes, "Sometimes, when a writer introduces some personal bit of story into an essay, I can hardly contain my pleasure… I feel I'm being nourished by them" (2131).

I share this feeling of exhilaration when writers combine the personal with the analytical. But the personal became more difficult to integrate, as theorists gained hegemony. This is not un-related to the ascendancy of Cultural Studies in the late 1980s and the 1990s. By 1990, when Michael Kleine published "Beyond Triangulation: Ethnography, Writing and Rhetoric," the field of rhetoric and composition was turning against writerly traditions such as expressivism, or the process school. Kleine felt that compositionists had missed a golden opportunity by not following the lead of self-reflexive ethnography. He issued a polemical call-to-arms:

> We must…*allow ourselves to write even more in the first-person singular*, to write personal diaries--even confessions--about our experiences as ethnographers. *Perhaps these diaries* should…*supplant formal academic articles for a while*. By studying ourselves, we will come to terms with our own rhetoric (my emphasis) (Kleine 124).

This call for a more personal "time out" was not generally followed, as ethnography largely went underground while post-process or "the social turn" achieved apparent hegemony in composition studies. However, there have been numerous writers working on the borderlands between composition studies, creative writing, and cultural studies, such as Wendy Bishop, and Linda Brodkey, who achieve theoretical sophistication through personal narrative.

With the passing of the "theory wars" in composition studies, more pragmatic domains opened such as Writing Studies from about 2003 on, and Creative Writing Studies in the last decade. In these fields, it is possible to fuse a literary personal voice with scholarly grounding. One example of my own work in this mode is "Split-Screen Freedom" (Stephens 2017). In short, the argument for the co-existence of personal voice, literary style, and scholarly rigor has deep roots, disciplinary legitimacy, and an ability to travel. But Cultural Studies, intent on establishing disciplinary credentials, has largely missed out on these developments of integrating personal voice into scholarly work. When I suggest that a more fluid form of processual cultural analysis can benefit from fields such as ethnography, and Creative Writing Studies, this is rooted in personal experience, but it is far from a merely personal style, or opinion.

Let me make clear the context in which I call on personal experience as an entry point to scholarly debates. My personal points of reference, which I believe are relevant to my critique of the romance of resistance, are three-fold: 1) having a background in the *practice* of popular culture, which precedes academic study; 2) living since 2004 primarily outside the continental United States, with nine years residence to date in Jamaica, Saudi Arabia, and Puerto Rico, which means that my point of view will be different from much of Cultural Studies scholarship in either the United States, or Great Britain; 3) working for the past four years as a teacher of Creative Writing, not merely as artistic expression, but as a pedagogy with great relevance for

both other disciplines, and for post-academic life (Stephens 2017). So in cultural analysis, as in Creative Writing, I subscribe to the argument that we cannot retain relevance, as teachers and scholars, if we do not maintain the capacity to speak in the language of cultural practitioners, and creative writers themselves (Leahy 2016, 7).

Thus I want to be clear about what is and is not on my agenda here. I am not offering a comprehensive survey of Stuart Hall's work, or Cultural Studies scholarship, although I dip into both in some depth. I am not going to offer any commentary about the kinds of cultural analysis that might emerge from the various disasters that Puerto Rico has suffered. I do address these issues, and model a more ethnographic form of cultural analysis, in a monograph, "Three Birds Sing a New Song: A Puerto Rican Trilogy on Dystopia, Precarity, and Resistance" (to be published by Intermezzo at http://intermezzo.enculturation.net/). What I *do* offer in the present essay is an often-personal account of a "journey through Cultural Studies," which is something of an outsider's point of view. After attempting to "translate" some of Stuart Hall's posthumously published work, I conclude that although some of Hall's ideas remain useful, the field of Cultural Studies (still) needs to be revitalized (Peterson 1979; Rodman 2015). I offer a preliminary version of a processual theory of cultural analysis as a step in that direction.

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My overview is informed by post-romantic *culture studies*, and critiques of the "culture concept" in anthropology and other social sciences, as well as by my encounters with institutionalized Cultural Studies during the 1990s. The publication of a group of Stuart Hall's speeches, political writings, and a memoir provided a framework for my reconsideration. I have three intersecting objectives. One objective is a reflection about my "walk through Cultural Studies." A secondary objective is to sketch some of what is involved in translating Cultural Studies into Hispano-Caribbean context. It is through my own engagement, and the attempts to "translate Hall," that my critique of the romance of resistance is developed.

A certain touchiness among those committed to defending Cultural Studies as a field, or who feel a possessive insiderness about Stuart Hall's legacy, became evident to me while reading earlier comments from a major Cultural Studies journal. So to the question of "positionality": I use the singular term "culture studies" intentionally to indicate a larger domain of *cultural analysis*. This domain is not co-extensive with Cultural Studies. The "official story" of Cultural Studies, with a root in Hall's tenure at the Birmingham Center for Cultural Studies, continues to arouse respect on my part. When I picture younger readers/ graduate students who are drawing on some variant of "Cultural Studies," I would like for them to maintain a critical perspective towards "official versions," and be aware of a wider set of resources for the study of culture, which the *official version* may at times obscure. I am telling a particular version of this story, which foregrounds the strengths and weakness of my own entry points.

There are three contexts or sources for my re-evaluation of institutional Cultural Studies. First, my entry point was as a songwriter for "politically conscious" dance music in Austin Texas during the 1980s. This was a valuable introduction, since Cultural Studies was, in its origins, an effort to create space to study *how we live through culture*, or cultural expression. Cultural expression as a *lived culture*, rather than the academic study of dead texts, was a primary focus of early Cultural Studies. This was in the first instance *an oppositional move*: rather than focusing on canonical texts or establishment leaders, people who *did* cultural studies were

determined to open space for the practice of, and the study of, *everyday cultures*: popular culture, the material bases of identity politics, etc. (Miller 2006, 1).

My second formative context was grad school in California; especially versions of Cultural Studies to which I was exposed in the University of California in the 1990s. This included study of the work of Stuart Hall. My engagement with several of Hall's books published 2016-17 gives me an occasion to re-evaluate one of Cultural Studies' founding fathers "from the margins," as it were, of the Caribbean region where Hall was born and raised.

The third context is as a professor of English at the University of Puerto Rico-Mayagüez. When I gave a Spring 2017 seminar in Cultural Studies, the way I taught the material was quickly "taken over" by current events, man-made and natural disasters, and wider currents in the Caribbean world. Let me explain. While teaching Cultural Studies I was writing an earlier version of this essay for a University of the West Indies conference, "Whither the Caribbean? Stuart Hall's Intellectual Legacy." I had been a Lecturer of "Cultural Studies and Film" at UWI-Mona from 2004-08. On return I was also critically re-engaging with what I saw as a reactionary conception of race and resistance in Jamaica (Stephens 2011). The voices of racial victimization at the conference reminded me that Jamaicans seem unfamiliar with Hall's critique of "an essentialized conception of race" (2017c, 74), despite their efforts to reclaim him as their own.

My revisioning of Cultural Studies was further reshaped by a series of shocks Puerto Rico suffered in 2017. First there was a severe fiscal crisis, with a U.S. supervisory board taking on oversight of the island's finances. Student strikes shut down University of Puerto Rico for two months. I had framed my seminar through some of Hall's theories, such as conjunctural analysis. Now, unable to meet with students, I analyzed the rhetoric of resistance in Spanish-language commentary about the student strike (Stephens 2018).

Finally, in September 2017, Puerto Rico was devastated by Hurricane Maria, which left the island in a "post-apocalyptic state." Rethinking "the state of cultural studies" in this context, I had little tolerance for theoretical abstractions. And I was impatient with an entrenched romance of resistance. This romance had blinkered both Puerto Ricans who wanted to imagine alternatives to colonial dependency (Acosta Cruz 2014), and many on the liberal-left who glorify and reify opposition wherever it remained, or could be imagined.

The theoretical foundations of Cultural Studies were not always adequate for what I saw in the Caribbean. However, I did find value in a "post-romantic turn" in Cultural Studies, whose proponents were critical of Hall's somewhat rosy view of *symbols of resistance*. Such post-romantic roadmarks (Miles 2014, 76-87) build on earlier critiques of the romance of resistance by anthropologists such as Lila Abu-Lughold, Michael Brown, and Sherry Ortner. However, the post-romantic turn was difficult to teach in Puerto Rico, where opposition to the United States colonial presence often co-existed with a full immersion in U.S. commercial culture (Cruz 2014). In translating Cultural Studies into a form that made sense in "The Last Colony,"[1] I relied on

[1] See Márquez (2015) and Collado-Schwarz (2012).

ethnographic methods, along with key ideas translated by Hall, such as Raymond Williams' "structures of feeling," and Gramsci's often misunderstood concept of hegemony.

A Chorus of Reconsiderations

Many authors of books about the field in recent years have asked variants of Gilbert Rodman's chapter title "Cultural Studies: What's Wrong?" from *Why Cultural Studies?* (2015). In its emergent or *insurgent* era, up through its boom years in the 1990s, Cultural Studies rattled the cage of the status quo. "Done properly cultural studies should agitate, provoke, disturb, and unsettle you," Rodman writes (2). Lawrence Grossberg begins his recent book with a sort of call-to-arms: that teachers, students, and activists who want to renew this spirit of "agitational energy" must take up the challenge "to wake cultural studies out of….its 'dogmatic slumber'" (1992, 4). Stuart Hall anticipated much of this self-critique.

Rodman describes two basic accounts of the field's origins. 1) Cultural Studies was an "offshoot of English that came about when literary scholars turned their attention to the analysis of television, rock'n'roll," etc. 2) "In another version of the story, cultural studies is what happened when communication scholars began to treat the mass media as a form of culture, rather than as an arena where messages and information moved from one point to another" (24).

The latter sounds like the version of "Cult-Stud" I saw as a grad student in Communication at the University of California-San Diego (1992-1996). Coming out of a career in Austin as a songwriter, and having written a thesis about interracial dialogue in rap music, the rebelliousness and interdisciplinarity of Cultural Studies appealed to me. It offered a temporary home, and a forum in which to publish. Yet I soon saw that rebellion was often a pose; it had become a profession. As a field Cultural Studies had often degenerated into versions of, "look, isn't my favorite TV show or pop singer really cool?" And, "don't I seem really oppositional in how I decode the mainstream media?" Stuart Hall himself had a "profound skepticism" about what academic Cultural Studies was becoming (Ang 30); he distanced himself from the superficiality of much of Cultural Studies in its boom period (Bérubé 2009; Raud 2016, 3). He also was critical of the fetishizing of theory by Americans in particular (Slack and Grossberg 1983, xi).

In adapting a flexible form of cultural analysis that can *travel*, and be used in the Writing Studies classes that have become my bread and butter, I have sought to ground Cultural Studies in transferable definitions of culture.[2] Clear working definitions of culture must be at the heart of any attempt to appraise *the state of Cultural Studies*, in my view. Founders like Raymond Williams often drew on anthropology for their definitions of culture (Highmore 2013, 181).

One core definition to which I return is that *cultures are distinguished by patterns that repeat themselves*, or "dynamically recurring patterns in social life" (Heath and Street 2008, 11). This focus on repeating patterns is widespread in cultural anthropology and related fields (Benedict 1934; Geertz 1973; Harris 1974, 144; Peterson 1979, 138; Keesing 1994, 68; Gatewood 2001, 237; Pryor 2004, 397). Culture is our matrix: a mostly invisible, largely unconscious structure.

[2] This is related to, but not the same as the research tradition of "Teaching for Transfer" (TfT), as I discuss in "Transferble Skills" (Stephens 2017a).

Two definitions which I have found valuable are that a) culture is an "*invisible structure of life*" (Reynolds & Valentine 2013, xvii); and b) culture is "a vast unexplored region of human behaviour that exists *outside the range of people's conscious awareness*, a 'silent language' that is usually conveyed unconsciously," as Edward Hall wrote (xix).

Within various GE writing courses, I distill this in three words, for the purposes of my students: culture is an *invisible structuring pattern*. In auto-ethnographies and other assignments, I teach writing students to make the patterns visible, and to narrate their structuring force. I want students to develop a sense of culture as *relational* (Desmond 2014), *distributive* (Rodseth 1998; Gatewood 2001), and attuned to the "connections and interconnections" of lived cultural processes (Abu Lughod 1991, 472).

In developing an interdisciplinary form of cultural analysis, I have found it necessary to address a sustained critique of the view of culture as a *thing*, rather than a process (Evans 2007, 429; Trouillot 2002, 43). A critique of "bounded" culture (Wolf 1972, 6) has continued for decades precisely because static conceptions of culture remain pervasive. Anthropologists have fiercely criticized the essentialist version of *culture-as-other*, which has become hegemonic (Morsy 1988, 70) in the social sciences, in Cultural Studies, and in institutional practice. Static views of culture and identity are pervasive in the cultural rhetorics that have emerged in the wake of Ethnic Studies. Political and educational institutions are deeply invested in essentialized definitions of cultural, ethnic, or racial identity. Surveying the sustained critique of the "bounded culture" concept (Fox & King 2002; Abu Lughod 1991; Fernandez 1994; Trouillot 2002; Bashkkow 2004; Raud 2016), one finds that the largely static, essentialized version of culture which predominated in Cultural Studies has become a poster child for what ails cultural analysis. In his book subtitled *Outline of an Integral Theory of Culture*, Rein Raud voices what I take to be something close to a consensus view, in the broader domain of cultural analysis towards which I am gesturing, when he writes:

> In spite of its original opposition to the oppressive hierarchies of its day, 'cultural studies' have by now become the new orthodoxy, a conservative and state field within which nothing really new has appeared for decades (Raud 2016, 3).

My objective is to attempt to look at institutional Cultural Studies from the outside, and to become more fully aware of the field's repeating patterns, which have aroused such a sustained, often convincing critique. The repeating patterns in a culture are usually invisible to its participating members. Study of our own cultures thus requires a process of defamiliarization. One must *get outside* of a culture, to see it whole. This defamiliarizing process requires one to be a fish out of water, *estranging the familiar* as a way to see "the water"—one's culture—with new eyes. But that would seem to be like "the rich man going through the eye of the needle" for a field now invested "in its own professionalization" (Rodman 2015, ix). Cultural Studies is now firmly entrenched on the inside of universities, and is often self-absorbed, as Hall himself came to believe. To some extent it has become irrelevant to wider disciplinary streams of scholarship.

The repeating patterns I have seen in grad students are like what I experienced at Cultural Studies conferences in the 1990s: expressions of resistance to an *othered center*, an oppressive power. One claims moral superiority from the margins, but these "margins" have become big business, arguably the mainstream in recent publishing and hiring trends. This is what I saw in

California in the 1990s, which was to some degree an outgrowth of oppositional politics of the 1980s, when Cultural Studies was "imported" in the U.S. The political context—Thatcherism in the UK, and the "Reagan Revolution" in the U.S., helps explain the tenor of Hall's reception in the U.S., with the near-reverent attitude certainly conditioned by the fact that Hall was—often a surprise to those who saw him for the first time—a black man of Jamaican origin.[3]

Stuart Hall's American Star Turns: 1983 and 1994

Stuart Hall was 51 years old when he delivered a series of eight lectures at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign in the summer of 1983. Lawrence Grossberg, who became Hall's disciple in the U.S., remembers Hall's 1983 lectures as "riveting." Few knew of Hall's work at the time, but word spread, and hundreds came to hear Hall, some driving for hours. "The mood during the lectures was electric" (Grossberg and Slack 2016, viii). The language used about this theoretical "British invasion" in the Introduction to *Cultural Studies 1983* (Grossberg and Slack 2016, vii-xiv) reminds me a bit of the conversion experiences of Spaniards listening to an emissary of the anarchist Bakunin in 1868, resulting in "marvelous Pentecostal scenes" (Brenan 1964, 141).

Reading this book in 2017, I found myself underlining and "talking back" in the margins throughout. But the language often seemed taxing. Hall's prose reconfirms my long impression that Marxist writers are rarely a pleasure to read. The 1983 conference organized by Cary Nelson and Larry Grossberg, after all, was titled "Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture: Limits, Frontiers, Boundaries." I can look back and understand the perception that Hall was *electric* in person, after watching John Akomfrah's film *The Stuart Hall Project: Revolution, politics, culture and the New Left Experience*. But writings such as Duke UP's releases of Hall's lectures, political writings, and his "memoir" *Familiar Stranger*, don't have the benefit of a Miles Davis soundtrack, which gave me an emotional connection to Akomfrah's film, in which Hall's rich voice and Davis' "lonely fire" music work in tandem.

Davis's music was also a soundtrack for many of my formative experiences. But the only "soundtrack" to Hall's published writing and lectures is a presumed familiarity with Marxist theory. As the *Selected Political Writings* editors observe in their "Introduction," Hall "never… vacated the theoretical terrain of Marxism" (Davison et al 2017, 4). On one level this is an admirable consistency, especially for loyalists to this quasi-faith. But it may also be part of why late in life Hall came to feel like a "dinosaur." As *Stuart Hall Project* and *Familiar Stranger* make clear, Hall's intellectual formation took place primarily during the 1950s. His work on the *New Left Review* is arguably closer to his "true vocation" that his later, often collaborative writings while serving as director of the Birmingham Center for Contemporary Cultural Studies.

The "Cultural Studies" Hall from a Birmingham base, and later the feted Sociology professor at the Open University post in London, were the versions Americans first came to know. But his style remained rooted in Marxist debates of the 1950s, and to a degree the 1960s. Hall's late

[3] Henry Louis Gates first heard about Hall while doing a tutorial with Raymond Williams at Cambridge 1973-74. It was another decade before Gates realized that Hall was black. Forty-odd years later Gates finds it "somewhat astonishing" that Williams never told him that Hall was black (2017, xx).

career as prophet of "race and representation" seems even more distant from his intellectual formation, in my view. But it was his work on "race," reprised in Harvard University Press' publication of his 1994 lectures in *The Fateful Triangle: Race, Ethnicity, Nation*, which has given Hall the most enduring afterlife with United States, primarily in Black Studies now, it seems. The Hall of *Fateful Triangle* was 62 years old, and far removed from both the public sphere debater we see in *Stuart Hall Project*, or the cultural studies guru of the 1983 lectures, with their deep soundings into Marxist Structuralism, and Hegemony. There is only a brief discussion of race in the "Ideology and Ideological Structure" chapter of *Cultural Studies 1983*.

Hall's Afterlife in U.S. Cultural Studies and Identity Politics

When one thinks about an operative matrix for American Cultural Studies, the door-stop volume *Cultural Studies*, published by Routledge in 1992, seemed to have a weight (both literal and metaphorical) that no other text in the field would be able to equal. No less an authority than Dick Hebdige, author of the influential *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*, called this collection "a new agenda for cultural studies in the 90s" (blurb). This book drew from the Urbana-Champaign summer "teaching institute" and conference where Stuart Hall had delivered his inaugural American lectures in 1983. Hall was a sort of godfather to the project.

Those 1983 and 1992 dates also have a personal meaning for me, shaping how I first saw, and later had second thoughts about, *the state of cultural studies*. In 1983, as Hall delivered his seminal lectures, I was beginning my career as a songwriter in Austin. In 1992, I was entering the PhD program in Communication at the University of California-Diego. The interim marked, for me, an evolution from the practice to the scholarly study of popular culture. I remember that the *Cultural Studies* reader was everywhere, assigned by TA's, photocopied by professors, etc. The field of Cultural Studies seemed to have no discernible center, which was a short-term strength, and a long-term weakness. Hall himself threw shade on the faddishness of American Cultural Studies, which "has become an umbrella for just about anything," he remarked in 1990 (22). You could find almost anything you looked for, at least *on the left*.

This collection had a healthy number of black authors. The black American presence in the 1992 tome included Bell Hooks, Michele Wallace, and Cornel West. In addition to Hall, whose "Cultural Studies and its Theoretical Legacies" prefigures *Cultural Studies 1983*, there were two younger Black Brits who had worked with Hall, Kobena Mercer and Paul Gilroy. I met them both in Santa Cruz, and shopped for music with Gilroy in Davis. Gilroy was an academic star then, but many African American intellectuals treated him as an existential threat.

Hall had long been moving away from Cultural Studies *as a fashion*. He described the mid-1960s Birmingham Center as "the locus to which we *retreated* when that conversation in the open world could no longer be continued: it was politics by other means" (Hall 1990, 13). In 1990, Hall was blunt about their outsider status: a) the Humanities were "relentlessly hostile" to Cultural Studies from the start; b) Raymond Williams, Edward P. Thompson, Hall, and Richard Hoggart all came from traditions "entirely marginal to the centers of English academic life" (12); c) Coming in from "the dirty outside world," many "had always planned never to return to the university, indeed, never to darken its doors again" (Ibid). Hall's disdain, decades later, for how Cultural Studies pioneers had been treated, is remarkable. Hall never came to terms with the

notion of Cultural Studies as an academic enclave to which leftists retreated when they no longer had a voice in the public sphere. Hall had a grander view of the role of the public intellectual, which was informed by scholarship, but was not centered on scholarly production.

In later years, Hall focused on diasporic identities, post-colonial theory, and questions of race and multi-culturalism, especially as refracted through young "Black Brit" artists. But what Cultural Studies picked up on from Hall seemed to be primarily two models: his "Encoding and Decoding" theory of media studies, first published in 1973, and the *Resistance Through Rituals* framework (which dates to 1976). My perspective is based both on what I experienced as a grad and post-grad in the 1990s, and on critiques of Hall's romanticized view of symbolic resistance being articulated within the *post-romantic turn* from the late 1990s on. "The problem with the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies' approach," according to critics such as Steve Miles, Simon Winlow, and Steve Hall, is that "it tends to imply that youth cultures are somehow free from the seductions implied by a consumer culture" (Miles 2014, 82). "Perhaps such work over-estimates the extent to which young people were (and indeed still are) capable of reworking the meanings attached to the world of consumerism," Miles suggests. In a review essay which includes a critique of a 2007 re-issue of *Resistance Through Rituals*, Winlow and Hall ask a series of questions which merit being addressed:

> Can genuinely oppositional counter-values [survive when] channels of communication are dominated by consumer values that now permeate every nook and cranny of everyday life? Are young people really subverting the metaphors of capitalism and stamping their own identity on their world because they appear 'creative' when reworking and ritualizing the symbolism of corporate goods? (2007, 395)

In the spirit of Kenneth Burke's *entering a conversation*,[4] I want to suggest the breadth of efforts to rethink resistance. Let's start with the voice of an Arab-American scholar, Rayya El Zein, who in her ethnographic study of Palestinian hip hop artists and their "scenes" says that her decision to "abandon a search for and theorization of resistance" (2017, 95) was rooted in dissatisfaction with the model pioneered by Dick Hebdige and Stuart Hall. El Zein believes this model too often led to merely celebrating resistance (or difference). This problem is rooted in "Foucault's blanketing understanding of power," she argues (92)—rightly in my view (Stephens 2016b). El Zein suggests that "it may be necessary to set aside resistance as the central lynchpin in discussions of politics in cultural production" (92).

The broader field of "Resistance Studies" has called into doubt its ability to recover from its "misplaced moral fervor" (Gledhill 2012, 1), and a "fundamentally romantic" (Ortner 179) impulse to "discover…resistance almost everywhere" (Brown 730). But this self-critique seems mostly absent within Cultural Studies. The urge to "discover resistance everywhere" seems to operate on an unconscious level, as a defining "repeating pattern" of American Cultural Studies.

In 2016, Jameson asked, "do we know any longer what oppositional means in this total system, or what might 'subvert' it, or even function as its critique?" (Baumbach 2016, 144). Implicitly, we *cannot* presume that we any longer clearly understand what "oppositional" means. In fact, it

[4] Kenneth Burke's allegory about listening before joining in a conversation: *The philosophy of literary form: Studies in symbolic action* (1974, 110-111).

is hard to imagine a space within which to practice effective resistance or subversion. Many in the post-romantic turn agree that the idea of "genuinely oppositional counter-values" is delusional, when little or no space remains that has not been permeated by consumer values.

Can we name anything that has *not* been commodified? That question drives Dana Spiotta's novel *Eat the Document*. I have taught this book to hundreds of students in GE courses since 2011, first at the University of South Florida, and then in Puerto Rico. Spiotta, who lived the romance of resistance as a student in the Northwest, defamiliarized *the idea of resistance* in fictional form. Her novel allows us to ask whether youths, or ex-radicals, can really "subvert the metaphors of capitalism" through creative reimagining of corporate symbols. Spiotta does offer, through ex-Weather Underground member Nash, a counter-argument about "keeping resistance vital" by practicing symbolic resistance. The youths in this novel are practicing their resistance chops, just as musicians practice their chops on their instruments between gigs. There is something to be said for muscle memory. In a similar way, perhaps symbolic resistance has a value of simply keeping alive the notion that "another world is possible," as the Zapatistas said.[5]

In 1990 Lila Abu-Lughold voiced her uneasiness with the fixation on "finding resistors" (41). Her critique became mainstream in anthropology. But the compulsion to *find and celebrate resistors* remains normative in Cultural Studies. Recent critiques of the romance of resistance have come from the margins of Cultural Studies, in fields such as Marketing, Management, Urban Studies, and Criminology. A representative sample of revisionist views on the nature of protest is "Anti-corporate protest as consumer spectacle," published by Higgins and Tadajewski in *Management Decision* (2002). The 2011 London riots inspired a questioning of conventional wisdom about the nature of resistance in consumer society. Characteristic of this body of work is Bauman's "uncomfortable suggestion that any such resistance, and the spectacle it entails, *inevitably serves to reinforce the very ideology it is designed to resist*" (Miles 2014, 77 emphasis added). This is certainly the primary conclusion towards which *Eat the Document* points.

From the Outside: Implications of Hall's Critique of Cultural Studies' "Marginality"

Seeking to understand Hall's critique of a romanticized Cultural Studies, I returned "The Emergence of Cultural Studies and the Crisis of the Humanities." Addressing American leftist intellectuals in 1990, Hall gave a heart-felt account of the birth of Cultural Studies. This essay was required reading in my PhD program. Re-reading it in 2017, I see it as a still-timely critique for those who agree that Cultural Studies can be "awakened" or renewed (Smith 2011).

Hall recalls how, under attack by Sociologists and the Humanities, the key work at the Center for Cultural Studies "had still to be invented." Hall describes "a series of raids on other disciplinary terrains" (Hall 1990, 16), since there was no discipline "where one could find the concept of culture seriously theorized" (Ibid, 15). Legitimacy was gained through a "program of translation of European work" (16). Cultural Studies "would not have survived the 1970s," Hall remarks, without this imported European theory. Perhaps so: the theorists Hall names, and relies on in the *1983* lectures—Foucault, Althusser, Gramsci, Marx and Benjamin, were treated as "Ur-texts"

[5] See Stephens (2012) for an extract of my thesis (from University of the West Indies-Mona, 2007) on "The Poetics of Indigenismo in Zapatista Discourse."

everywhere on *the scene*. This led to some flaws: the theoretical foundations of Cultural Studies were largely imported; they were intensely Eurocentric; women were absent in Hall's pantheon. Moreover, I came into academia as a creative writer, so Cultural Studies was tainted, for me, by too much theory-congested writing. Having long admired cultural anthropology in its more literary dress—and having studied self-reflexive ethnography at the University of California-Davis—I was convinced that this repeating pattern, the compulsion to theorize from a European foundation, largely divorced cultural theory from the languages of cultural practice. And the "celebratory" tendency became too much like preaching to the choir for my tastes.

Perhaps Hall's "optimist claims" (Mercer 2017, 10) for alternative cultures are possible--that during crises, "cultural processes anticipate social change" (1992, 10). That has been the hope of many counter-cultures. But an "antiromantic…conception of culture," as Hall remarked in 1983, is less sanguine. A post-romantic conception recognizes that breaking rules "always constitutes another set of rules" (Hall 2016, 70). Today's alternative rock or grassroots resistance is tomorrow's mainstream commodity. Is that the sort of social change that Hall and most Cultural Studies practitioners really envision, and celebrate?

I would like to see more mature forms of critique--especially self-critique. Clear-headed analysis is needed of how repeated claims to *represent the margins*, and to *resist the center*, have become a well-funded, institutionally protected way of arriving at and remaining in the center of academic knowledge production. But the "master-trope" of "focusing on the margins of power" tends to reproduce "established lines of force and authority" (Czaplicka 1995, 3).

The dogmatism noted by Grossberg is similar to a stance in much of composition studies, which long ago became a forum for "preaching" key tenets of Cultural Studies. This has been widely observed, including the ethnographic study by Russell Durst, *Collision Course* (1999). Much of Cultural Studies, in its missionary form, migrated into Freshman English classes. Such content has often been at odds with the pragmatic concerns of most students, with the result that much of Cultural Studies has self-marginalized. Claims to location on the "margins of power" have become a claim to power. There were and are many incentives to claim such a location on the margins, and to speak from these "marginalized" spaces. However, one of the recurring critiques of Cultural Studies as an institution and academic practice is that it is increasingly divorced from its roots—political, and cultural practice. I argue that the claim to marginalization, within institutional contexts, is itself a betrayal of the roots of Cultural Studies.

These original motors of a lower-case cultural studies were seen by Hall and others as having three principal sources:
1) cultural practices outside of academia, including performing/writing about this;
2) political activism using cultural forms;
3) an area of academic inquiry, or some might say, an academic discipline.

Pedagogical considerations were not central for Hall. This is a blind spot in the tradition, other than the demand for classroom consciousness raising or indeed conversion that one finds in Critical Pedagogy in Freirean Cultural Studies. What the future looked like at Cultural Studies' apogee has proven inaccurate. In a 1994 interview with Gary Olson, J. Hillis Miller forecast Cultural Studies as "the future of English Studies" (194, 317). The apogee was misleading. I

would argue that Writing Studies is proving to be the most viable growth area of English Studies, while Cultural Studies operates more on content options—as part of its palette, or tool kit.

In concluding, I want to distill what I have drawn from "Hall and his legacy," as to what remains valuable in teaching cultural analysis to students in a non-dogmatic way.

Four Key Characteristics and Tools of Cultural Studies

From 2010, the primary avenue open to me has been teaching writing. For the most part, these have been General Education classes. Since 2014, my main emphasis has been on Creative Writing, and Creative Nonfiction, as GE courses for STEM students (Stephens 2017a).

Regardless of the class, I always incorporate four key elements which can be credited in part to the lower-case culture studies tradition. I start every class with number one:

1. An expansion and redefinition of what constitutes a **text**.

Students are inclined to define a text as printed words. But any human activity which can be interpreted is a text; activities such as dance, worship, and concerts are therefore texts. Students usually grasp this as an obvious, "previously invisible" truth. This understanding of texts, and textual analysis, has been one of the most valuable legacies of Cultural Studies. But the notion of context-specific-texts has been developed most fully in Rhetorical Genre Studies.

2. Increased attention to **cultural context**.

Cultural Studies has predisposed us to be attentive to cultural context. The Latin *contextus* means to join together; *contexere* means to weave together. Applying this to cultural analysis, one pictures how other texts join with the text in question to produce meaning. "When we try to make sense of a text we always bring to it a set of presuppositions, which provide a framework for our analysis," John Storey wrote in *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture* (2015, 14). This is a thumbnail description of inter-textuality, a cornerstone of any form of cultural analysis.

3. **Social theory**—especially attention to social and political **structures**.

In his 1983 lectures, Hall drew on Durkheim and Lévi-Strauss to argue: "if a society is to reproduce itself, it must also reproduce those collective representations and normative structures" which have "a powerful structuring effect on our behavior" (57-58). Hall notes that "social order is dependent on constraint …. Only through punishment does a society reaffirm its normative integration and the power of its normative structure" (58). "Cultural analysis must always seek to identify," Hall argues, "underlying… *significant* patterns" (34). This awareness of *structuring patterns* is a foundation from which to better understand how direct resistance to the constraints of a social order often merely re-inscribes the underlying pattern.

Hall also re-framed the concept of hegemony in ways that still merit closer examination. Hegemony explains *how the dominant culture re-inscribed both from above, and below*. Hall's adaptation of the theory of *hegemony* can help us understand the limits to mere resistance. Hall's

lecture on "Domination and Hegemony" remains a valuable corrective for the tendency in Cultural Studies to read Gramsci through a reductive version of Foucault, as power imposed from above. By contrast, Hall quotes Gramsci's flexible notion of "organic ideologies" which "organize human masses, and create the terrain on which men move, acquire consciousness of their position, struggle, etc." (165). As a ground or a field, hegemony is not a *thing* which can be imposed, or blindly resisted. "There is never any one, single, unified, and coherent 'dominant ideology' which pervades everything," as Hall puts it (167). Although "hegemony is never without coercion…the moment of hegemony is never a moment of pure coercion" (171). Both coercion and consent are always operative in "systems of exploitation."

This view of hegemony enables Hall's conjunctural analysis. In his *October* essay, Hall in fact described Cultural Studies, in its Birmingham Center origins, as "A Gramscian project" (17). This perspective leads him to a powerful conclusion about "the moment of hegemony": "the notion that this has nothing to do with culture…is absolutely absurd" (1983, 179).

Hall's *Gramscian* view of hegemony was a corrective to The Frankfurt School, which in "vulgar Marxist" mode, saw the cultural industry as a brainwashing process, producing "false consciousness." Veering in the opposite direction, Cultural Studies has allied itself with post-structuralism, and then post-modernism. Having foresworn structure, participants could create "oppositional utopias." This has been one result, perhaps, of the (mis)use of Hall's "Encoding and Decoding" theory, which arguably leaves too much power with the decoder. Simply declaring independence from social or ideological structures does not mean that we are free of their work—the way they "hail" us, as Hall insisted, adapting Althusser.

4. **Self-reflexive mode**

A key component of how I teach cultural analysis is to *connect the dots* between individuals, and their social structure. Drawing on the "Academic Literacies" tradition, as well as ethnography, I want to valorize first-person experience, and combine individuality with cultural specificity in analyzing how we "make" or "consume" culture.

I have come to mistrust missionary-minded education, whether from the right, or the left. The left version of this predominates both in Composition Studies, and in Cultural Studies. Hall concludes his 1990 essay by arguing that people in other fields must be "won over and drawn into an understanding of the large historical/political project that now confronts us" (Hall, "Emergence" 23). Such assertions seem heavy-handed to me, at this remove. More modesty is called for. Our task should not be to recruit students or colleagues to our "project," I believe, but to give students or readers tools to see more clearly, and communicate more effectively, without trying to "win them over," or enlist their (hopefully) enlarged literacies in ideological fashion. This is the crossroads where I feel Cultural Studies has much to gain from dialogue with fields such as Academic Literacies and Writing Studies. Multiple literacies, better listening skills, and effective dialogical communication are all highly valuable in their own right. The time has come for Cultural Studies to emphasize the acquisition of these skills as a proper outcome, and to let go of the ambition to pre-structure or project the way in which students or readers will use them.

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