
Key Words

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edited by

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Key Words: A Journal of Cultural Materialism

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Key Words 3 (2000)

Contributions are now invited for the third issue of *Key Words*, to be published in 2000. Articles for prospective inclusion, which may be on any topic of relevance to the journal, are warmly welcomed, and should reach us no later than **31 December 2000** (see p. ii for the appropriate editorial address). We would particularly welcome contributions on the theme of 'Futures'. Please present submissions according to the style notes which appear on pp. 140-41 of the present issue. We also encourage publishable correspondence and suggestions for books to review.

Editorial

Jeff Wallace

Ecocriticism is the dominant theme of *Key Words 2*. The German elections of 1998 saw the Green Party secure an unprecedented degree of influence. British politics make for an interesting comparison. It now seems clear that Prescott's plans for a re-integrated, modernised transport system, which might begin to address the chaos left by deregulation and privatisation, have switched to a slow track in the Parliamentary agenda of Labour's first term in office. More prominently, at the time of writing, the debates around genetically modified food intensify, and Tony Blair gives Britain the benefit of his own personal conviction that 'GM' food is safe. Does the apparently extended courting of GM food concerns underline the Government's lack of interest in ethical or environmentally conscious questions which might seriously challenge the smooth working of the global market economy?

Hilary Wainwright here highlights a gap between mainstream British politics and emergent modes of ecological politics which exemplify, both nationally and internationally, successful interventions in the production and distribution process, and in the organisation of work. She issues a timely reminder of the missed opportunity of the 1975-79 Labour Government, failing to build on the possibilities of democratic modernisation suggested, for example, by the 'Lucas Plan', and thereby leaving the way clear for the devastating alternative modernities of Thatcherism.

But there is reason to think that changes in the contemporary public domain increasingly problematise the notion of a mainstream/periphery political divide. Ulrich Beck has argued that the very nature of 'risk society', committed headlong to industrial overproduction and thus to the generation of global and incalculable global risks, principally in the form of radioactivity, but also in toxins and pollutants, simultaneously precipitates an '*unbinding of politics*', characterised by a reflexivity implicit in the flourishing of alternative sources of knowledge and modes of political participation.¹

Richard Kerridge presents a set of less optimistic reflections on the power of the cultural sphere. Faced with the indeterminacies of the ecological crisis, environmental narratives such as the contemporary 'ecothriller', TV news bulletin or documentary, solicit an apocalyptic anxiety which is invariably contained in the security of closure or resolution. This sets 'a pattern for our responses to real ecological crisis' — a crisis which is, as Kerridge has elsewhere argued, 'also a cultural crisis, a crisis of representation. The inability of political cultures to address

¹ Ulrich Beck, *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity*, trans. Mark Ritter (London: Sage Publications, 1992).

environmentalism is in part a failure of narrative.²

Both essays remind us of the central question within environmentalism of agency or activism — of how to move or animate, and thus to intervene. It is worth noting that Paul Virilio's recent critique of 'dromospheric' pollution is based on a model of the cybernetic future as a condition of immobility and disability, 'attack(ing) the liveliness of the *subject* and the mobility of the *object* by atrophying the *journey* to the point where it becomes needless.'³ How far might an environmentally informed literary criticism constitute practical intervention? The debate initiated in *Key Words* 1 by Dominic Head is extended here in essays by Gerry Smyth and David Amigoni, each demonstrating that heightened reflexivity which for Beck distinguishes the environmental consciousness and its emancipatory potential. Thus, for Smyth, and somewhat paradoxically, an embrace of the 'ecocritical sublime' as a mode of critical engagement inspired by the 'anti-disciplinary' work of Benjamin, de Certeau and Derrida is qualified by Aijaz Ahmad's misgivings about the inwardness of reflexivity itself. Contesting the terms of Jonathan Bate's comparison of Darwin and Wordsworth as, respectively, scientific and humanistic ecologists, Amigoni argues for a cultural materialism which can overcome this binary opposition in order to see them as engaged in a common discursive struggle within a specific but complex historical paradigm of ecology.

We continue to publish a selection of work outside the dominant theme. Paul Jones argues that the mediation between political economy and cultural studies evident in Raymond Williams's work warns against reductive versions of either discipline. Declan Kiberd projects a post-colonial revision or re-invention of Englishness which might draw on the historically 'parabolic' nature of Irish culture's relation to its imperial oppressor. Jago Morrison finds familiar ideological representations of the deserving and undeserving poor underpinning New Labour's vision of welfare and society. And Deborah Cameron's analysis of 'work-provider' initiates her regular supplement to Williams' *Keywords* project.

University of Glamorgan

² Richard Kerridge, 'Introduction', in Richard Kerridge and Neil Sammels (eds.), *Writing the Environment: Ecocriticism and Literature* (London: Zed Books, 1998), p. 4.

³ Paul Virilio, *Open Sky*, tr. Julie Rose (London: Verso, 1997).

Reading Nostalgia: Histories and Fictions of the Struggling Unemployed

Jago Morrison

In the 1998 government green paper *New Ambitions For Our Country*¹ the first New Labour Employment Secretary Frank Field set out a privatised vision of welfare and society in 2020. Full employment is not amongst Labour's new ambitions. Instead, a community is envisaged 'with people not only taking more personal responsibility for their own and their families' well-being, but also more collective responsibility for policing the new system and preventing fraud' (81). After two decades of Labour government we can expect nothing more utopian than a 'reduction in the proportion of working age people living in workless households' (82). In the twenty-first century, the policy for people with chronic illnesses, disabilities or children is to render them 'in touch with the labour market' (82). In the 'New Welfare Contract' the duties of the individual are to be those of work, independence, saving, the subsidy of other family members and the undertaking 'not to defraud the taxpayer' (80). Within a rhetoric of 'renewal' the social and collectivist aspirations retained within the Beveridge agenda are evacuated in favour of a privatised focus on individual responsibility and achievement:

When William Beveridge, the architect of the post-war welfare state, began his working life, one of his first priorities was to examine the root causes of poverty amid relative plenty — and how to prevent it. This quest remains vital. But it is equally important today to examine why so many people are comfortably off — and how to replicate their success. (33)

Certainly, the constitution of unemployment and poverty as social and historical phenomena has been a significant area of struggle throughout the 1980s and 1990s. According to the British Social Attitudes Survey of 1987² during the height of Thatcherism, less than one in five members of the public interviewed in that year in fact saw a connection between poverty in general and individual or moral factors such as 'laziness or lack of willpower'. Social injustice, bad luck and the broader arrangement of

¹ Department of Social Security, *New Ambitions For Our Country: A New Contract For Welfare*, Cmd 3805 (London: HMSO, 1998).

² P. Taylor Gooby, 'Citizenship and Welfare' in R Jowell *et al.*, *British Social Attitudes Survey: The 1987 Report* (London: SCPR, 1987); cited in Karen Rowlingson, Tim Newburn and Richard Berthoud, *Social Security Fraud: The Role of Penalties* (Department of Social Security Research Report no. 64) (London: HMSO, 1997).

'modern life' (29) were identified by four out of five as the determinants of deprivation. In media discourses throughout the nineteen-eighties and nineties, however, the denial of poverty as a social and economic problem, and the conflation of unemployment with laziness, exploitation and abuse has been a consistent feature.

In Frank Field's green paper too, the attack on unemployment remains oriented most strongly around the elimination of dependency and 'vice', with social responsibility invoked on an individual and moral level rather than a macroeconomic one. The elimination of 'scrounging' remains a crucial concern within a 'modern form of welfare that believes in empowerment not dependency' (20). The development of this privatised focus on both poverty and unemployment can easily be traced within governmental discourses of the last two decades, which characteristically appropriate the language of social responsibility whilst consistently working to erode the welfare consensus. In the rhetoric of New Labour at the end of this period, then, it is possible to see a crucial ambivalence between the languages of social justice and those of a more privatised and moralising agenda originating in precisely such conservative understandings of welfare and unemployment. These struggles over the constitution of joblessness socially, morally and politically need to be traced back to the growth of unemployment and of unemployed protest at the beginning of the Thatcher era, and beyond these to the rewriting of unemployment as a historical phenomenon which is most powerfully associated with the inter-war Depression.

Politics of Nostalgia

Around the 'People's Marches for Jobs' of the early 1980s, in particular, the re-writing of unemployment and unemployed protest within the right-wing media takes place most importantly through the appropriation of a 'labour past'. The reconstruction of a 'Jarrow' nostalgia within the Thatcherite press explicitly facilitates the popular identification of a current unemployed as 'undeserving poor'. The notion of 'nostalgia' itself can be usefully analysed as the recuperation of a 'past' without History's epistemological ambitions. By describing the invocation of 'Jarrow' as nostalgia, then, what I am interested in here is not some simple rejection of 'bad history', but beyond that an examination of the epistemological and political effects which the invocation of 'Jarrow' was able to produce in the media and elsewhere.

If we look at David Hart's 1983 article for *The Times*³ on the

³ David Hart, 'Make the robots march for jobs', *The Times*, 4 June 1983, p. 8.

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People's March of that year it is easy to see how a historicised narrative of unemployment is manipulated to discredit the integrity and indeed identity of a current protesting unemployed. In the context of the run-up to the 1983 British general election a struggle around the 'realism' of Conservative stringencies on tax and welfare spending translates directly to a focus on the 'realism' of unemployment as degradation. The political use of nostalgia in Hart's piece is striking:

Walking a few days ago with the People's March for Jobs through lush country. Huge roadside chestnuts ablaze with white candles, beeches in their first blush of leaf, startled hosts to the 400 £2-a-day-plus-all-expenses-paid unemployed workers in their too immaculate, too well colour-coordinated green and yellow waterproofs as they make their good-humoured way towards the capital.

Noting the large number of expensive, foreign mountain-walking boots, the odd Japanese camera, the discreet vans and trucks with nurses and a rock band in attendance, all deployed by these, supposedly destitute workers, the writer was struck by the contrast between this well-organised, well-financed yellow regiment, led by efficient marshals into halls belonging to the local authority, and the spontaneous Jarrow march that the organisers hoped to emulate; small men, hungry, desperate, stopping for cups of tea and bites of bread where they could get them, sleeping where they could. (8)

Hart's discourse establishes a number of important cultural connections. The holiday atmosphere of the surroundings, natural beauty complemented but simultaneously degraded by the expenses-paid status, the expensive holiday footwear, the camera equipment, the huge expensive hypocrisy of the travellers, forms one key level of the narrative. The nationalist connotations of the 'foreign' and 'Japanese' products wielded by 'this yellow [foreign, cowardly, workshy?] regiment' in their long march through the post-Falklands climate forms another. However, it is the mapping of the 'Jarrow' past which explicitly constructs the pauper/scrounger framework that underpins Hart's imaginary. The solid organisation and finance of the People's March becomes an offence against the hunger of the historic crusaders, the attendant nurses an affront to their mythologised heroism, the standard issue anoraks a mockery of their desperation.

The cultural vision of unemployment presented here is a curiously double-sided one in which, on the one hand, 'pride' becomes the model for a future unemployed, whilst, on the other, the *manufactured* status of the

unemployed marchers itself becomes the desirable model for future labour. For Hart full employment is a 'chimera', and what is wanted is more 'unemployed with pride'. He would like to see more robots in jobs whilst more and more people 'enjoy a wage and the full panoply of benefits that the Welfare State was able to offer' — presumably in the form testified by those cameras and walking boots — generously available as welfare provision in Thatcherite 1983. The invocation here again of the language of social responsibility, glibly conflated with the deployment of a heroic social history, is interesting. If Hart's narrative would like to construct the image of welfare largesse from a caring and socially responsible 1983, it is able to create this impression specifically through a historical opposition of unemployed identities. The 1983 marchers are comfortable, rich, even 'good humoured' — and impotent — precisely in contrast to the social deprivation of a hungry but heroic thirties. The People's marchers themselves are then finally the image manipulators, the history manipulators, who through a hypocrisy which belies the comfort of their own ample circumstances become a double slur on the face of a destitute crusading past.

In Wilfred De'Ath's article for the *Spectator* from May of the same year⁴ the spectre of 'Jarrow' as a cultural-political instrument in nineteen-eighties struggles over tax and spending is invoked specifically through the category of 'nostalgia'. Narrating a conversation with an unemployed toolmaker overlooking the march, he writes:

He and I agreed to a nostalgia for the Jarrow March which, though neither of us was old enough to remember it, must surely have had a far more *authentic* atmosphere, a feeling of hungry men in search of bread and work, than this miserable collection of disco-ridden punks. (15; my italics)

De'Ath's image of the 'authentic' hunger march is constructed very clearly around the twin poles of history and heroism. On first arrival the imaginary is of himself moving with his notebook among the weary and wounded crusaders 'like Henry V before the Battle of Agincourt' (14). Predictably this daydream is soon to be shattered by the depraved appearance and behaviour of his alienated subjects. From the bold intention to join the protest — 'I am unemployed too' (15) — the writer is finally and regretfully forced away from sympathy with the marchers. After having to suffer the hardships of a night at 'an appalling hotel' (15) De'Ath writes that he 'decided not to risk it, electing to spend what was left of the weekend on my

⁴ Wilfred De'Ath, 'Out of Step', *The Spectator*, 23 May 1981, pp. 14-15.

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Oxfordshire estate instead . . . discretion is the better part of valour' (15). Set against the imaginary of himself 'valorously' spurring mythic crusaders on to victory in their struggle is a 'real' counter-narrative of the marchers as a motley crew of deluded and abusive deviants. Army dropouts, punks and 'a large negro' (15) play as extras in De'Ath's 1981 March of the Unemployed. A trade unionist comes forward as one unsavoury characterisation, whilst a 'paranoid' English graduate is another. Interviewing the latter, De'Ath narrates:

Terry told me that unemployment led to mental illness and that the current situation was a deliberate attempt on the part of Mrs Thatcher and her Government to make the whole country mentally ill. (14)

Significantly, the recurrent dialectic of deserving/undeserving poor is set up here partly through the contrast between Terry and his black and punk companions with their organisers on the one hand, and the redundant toolmaker with the Jarrow nostalgia on the other. Balancing the image of a trade union organiser 'working-class people — foul-mouthed, dirty and drunk' (15), is that of a 'very nice' (15) middle-aged traditional working man, worried at his prospects, and presumably with De'Ath disgusted with the antics of his peers. An opposition of 'past values' versus 'present depravity' works explicitly here through a setting of artisan against activist. Again the appropriation of the 'historic' referent is crucial: first Shakespeare's Agincourt and then the 1930s hunger march. A contemporary politics saturated utterly in the imperatives of a Thatcherite economics operates again here through the deployment of nostalgia.

In the *Spectator* Paul Johnson's review of contemporary unemployed protest and the media⁵ involves a more radical epistemological manoeuvre that almost risks tipping over into parody. Focusing specifically on what he presents as its image-centrism, the idea of the march as some sort of orgy masquerading as the righteous sacrifice denoted by its Jarrow credentials is furnished through the words of a *News of the World* reporter: "Night after night, in town after town, teenagers have been on a booze-and-birds spree." He quoted one employed shoe-worker, 'his neck covered in love-bites'" (17). The citation continues with choice quotes: "'a couple of birds" had "streaked round a church hall where we were staying. ... They laid on so much booze for us in Stevenage that I was out of my mind". ... A typist told him: "This march is a great way to spend a few weeks with

⁵ Paul Johnson, 'People's March for Yobs?', *The Spectator*, 6 June 1981, p. 17.

everything paid for" (17). Johnson's laughable use of the booze/'birds' and church/nudity dualisms here is coupled with a more insidious attempt to compromised the popular status of the marchers themselves (the *employed* shoe worker, the exploitative free-rider). The work done by his piece is clearly to subvert the moral force of the protest against unemployment, with a censor's gaze that is both voyeurism and moralism.

Moreover, this particular article goes considerably further, in terms of the 'derealisation' of the People's March as a jobs crusade, than simply attacking any sense of its moral 'authenticity'. The foundation of the march as an expression of popular feeling is also undermined. For example, the article reports organisers walking a hundred yards ahead of the march 'to see to it that the marchers get the proper applause' (17). The 'real' status of the march, as actually having taken place as observed, is further placed directly in question. The People's March in this account becomes a virtual march only, taking place fully not on the streets but on our screens. Johnson's main thrust is clear in his extended citation from the *Sunday Express*:

. . . the large crowds of 'marchers' who appeared on the TV screens were all an illusion. Thus, the Welsh contingent which appeared in Bedfordshire had actually travelled from Newport by coach, and had been specially kitted out with marchers' gear on arrival at the village of Kempston. The South-East contingent also arrived by bus. The marchers present at a civic reception in Stevenage came by bus. Buses took the marchers from Stevenage to Letchworth, from church halls to setting-off point, for meals in Hemel Hempstead and again to the Civic Centre for showers. Buses were available to drive marchers to the 'Carnival against Unemployment' in Lambeth, to a reception by the Brixton black community and to Hyde Park Corner for the Sunday march to Trafalgar Square. Indeed, the big rally in the Square was made possible, said the *Express*, by 'a fleet of 150 luxury coaches, and two special trains' bringing 20,000 motorised marchers' [*sic*] down from Birmingham, and 'other contingents from different parts of the country will also be arriving by train and coach.' (17)

The centrepiece of Johnson's discourse, of course, is more than a derealising of the protest against unemployment, but finally an attempt to undermine the reality of the problem of mass unemployment itself. Citing a journalist from the *Sunday Mirror*, his argument is finally arranged, in the light of the foregoing 'exposé' of the People's March as fraudulent, to raise the wider implications of 'some statistics suggesting that not only the march

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but the whole unemployment scare may be a bit of a con' (17). In the heart of Johnson's narrative of this 'People's March for Yobs', in which the only visible faces of a modern unemployed become those of scroungers and pissheads (and set against a background featuring public nudity and the church in close proximity), there is then, again, the appearance of the Jarrow nostalgia in the form of authentic historical relic. He writes 'even the original banner of the Jarrow crusade had been transported to London for its ritual appearance: insured for £20,000 it was too valuable and fragile to go on the march' (17). On one level, certainly, this introduction seems to work simply to transform the historic crusade itself into another motorised marcher, another 'virtualised' feature of labour history. But on another, we might suggest, it is also working to inscribe the very 'value' and 'fragility' of that work of mythical heroism in the face of a 'present hypocrisy'. The banner, and the history of a 'deserving poor', are deployed as a slice of unemployed reality which enables a modern 'undeserving' unemployed to be de-realised.

Scroungers

Within governmental discourses during the 1980s and 1990s a parallel politics of the scrounger, together with the spectre of fraud and abuse, has been dominant in the constitution of both welfare and unemployment. Indeed the 1991 report of Lydia Morris with Trevor Llewellyn for the all-party Social Security Advisory Committee, *Social Security Provision for the Unemployed*⁶ endorses Golding and Middleton's analysis in *Images of Welfare: Press and Public Attitudes to Poverty*.⁷

Golding and Middleton document press coverage of abuse in the late seventies, showing how individual instances of fraud were generalised into a picture of widespread abuse. In the absence of hard evidence on the extent of abuse there was a tendency to call upon common knowledge and popular belief which, ever since the creation of welfare, had been based on assumptions of abuse. (90)

Here an important link is identified between press attitudes to provision for the unemployed, and the notion of abuse, dependency and erosion of

⁶ Lydia Morris and Trevor Llewellyn, *Social Security Provision for the Unemployed* (London: HMSO, 1991).

⁷ P. Golding and S. Middleton, *Images of Welfare: Press and Public Attitudes to Poverty* (Oxford: Martin Robertson, 1982).

incentives to work. Media coverage of false claims is fingered in Morris and Llewellyn's report as a decisive factor in the formation of public opinion, and the increasing identification of unemployment with 'vice' can easily be highlighted in press reports of the 1990s. A front page *Independent on Sunday* article of 4 July 1993, for example, discussing the position of single mothers in relation to state benefit, quotes one academic (name not cited) to the effect that 'increasing numbers of men are unemployed, engaged in petty crime and are possibly juvenile delinquents' (1). The chaining of unemployment-crime-delinquency here is not framed as argument but casually becomes citation. The linkage of unemployment to laziness, negativity and arrogant dependency moreover becomes a key feature in hegemonic constructions of welfare. Under the stamp of the Employment Department, for example, the White Paper *Employment for the 1990s*⁸ paints a characteristic image of the unemployed as idle scroungers on the edge of the law and of society:

Some are claiming benefit fraudulently while working at least part-time in the black economy. Others seem to have grown accustomed to living on benefit and have largely given up looking for work, despite the high level of job vacancies which are increasingly available throughout the country. Others believe, mistakenly, that they might be financially worse off taking a job or are reluctant to travel daily more than a short distance to where jobs are available. (55)

In the first half of the nineteen-nineties around 1,750,000 governmental investigations were ordered into benefit abuse in Britain.⁹ A labour force survey cited in the white paper quoted above similarly constructs a powerful image of all-pervasive abuse on a vast scale. Five hundred thousand claimants are portrayed freely admitting that they were unavailable for work within two weeks or that they were not interested in finding work at all. Two hundred and thirty thousand more claimants are further cited as not having bothered to look for work for at least four weeks. It is claimed that '70 per cent of unemployed people who agree at their Restart interview to join a jobclub never in fact attend one' (57). Against the background of these officially sanctioned claims, the judgement of Morris and Llewellyn's paper is that on examination, in fact, 'Official sources provide rather scanty evidence of abuse' (125). Despite this, during the last two decades it is absolutely clear that the dominant construction of the unemployed, and specifically of

⁸ Department of Employment, *Employment for the 1990s* (London: HMSO, 1988).

⁹ Rowlingson *et al.*, p. 21.

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unemployed benefit claimants, has been by association with scrounging, abuse and criminality, in a conceptual framework which thus maintains the division of deserving/undeserving poor as a central axis. Self-reliance is placed versus dependency, hard work versus laziness, honest pride versus scrounging and criminality. Further, it is fair to argue that if such a cultural framework around benefit claimants appears dominant then this is indicative of the increasingly hegemonic status of a privatised and moralising conceptualisation of unemployment.

Clearly this kind of construction of unemployment and of the unemployed needs to be distinguished from the leftist tradition in which cycles of joblessness are seen primarily as a social and macroeconomic phenomenon. In William Beveridge's report of 1942, *Social Insurance and Allied Services*, for example, unemployment is clearly designated as an involuntary state, analogous to that of disability. In the wake of continuing reform, it is worth re-stating Beveridge's position on relief:

To reduce the income of an unemployed or disabled person, either directly or by application of a means test, because the unemployment or disability has lasted for a certain period, is wrong in principle. (57)¹⁰

Against this socialist conception, in governmental discourses of the 1980s and 1990s the focus on unemployment has consistently taken the form of an individualist scrutiny in which material and personal degradation itself (in the principle of 'less eligibility')¹¹ is a crucial and explicit moral policing of the unemployed. Exploitation and abuse, right up to the initiatives of Peter Lilley such as 'Spotlight on Benefit Cheats' and the 'National Benefit Fraud Hotline', are perpetuated within the public sphere as a routine association with unemployment. Within dominant media discourse, again, there is a symptomatic deployment of the benefit scrounger paranoia. The PRAXIS documentary *Rich Pickings*,¹² screened in October 1993, for example, features eye-witness style hand-held video footage of name-check raids by social security fraud investigators on casual agricultural labourers suspected of claiming dole whilst working. The figure of the furtive, fraudulent

¹⁰ William Beveridge, *Social Insurance and Allied Services* (Cmd 6404) (London: HMSO, 1942), quoted in A. B. Atkinson, *Poverty and Social Security* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1989), p. 145.

¹¹ The principle of 'less eligibility' denotes the continuing notion that if incentives to work are to be maintained, unemployment benefits must be set low enough so that they remain less attractive than the lowest paid work available.

¹² *Rich Pickings*, prod. John Goddard, dir. Bernard Hall, Praxis, Channel Four, 25 October 1993.

scrounger is foremost: 'As the name check continues, some workers try to leave their workmates behind, and slink off to a getaway van, unnoticed by the investigators'. Fluidly, the camera moves here away from a position of dispassionate observation and towards a gaze of policing.

In the Touch Productions film *The Great Benefit Robbery*,¹³ similarly, the viewer is invited to empathise with the activities of fraud investigators. We are introduced to Leslie, investigating one particular case. She shows us a large box of claim forms, which she explains together with 'many more' are the evidence of 'just one person's activity'. The abuser, notably a black woman, has been witnessed picking up two and a half thousand pounds in social security in only four hours. Another *leaves the airport* in a Daimler limousine before collecting her benefit claim order books. Her two children are chauffeur-driven to their boarding schools 'after the shopping spree to get the clothes — [another voice] — Nothing less you know'. A picture of abuse on a monumental scale is quickly created. Another investigator, Ray, explains that the 'potential' for this case alone amounts to about 'seven and a half million pounds a year. Seven and a half million pounds in *hard cash* . . . Well in excess of the great train robbery,' and further, 'I don't think we've even tackled one per cent of one per cent. It's not millions, it's billions'.

Looking at hundreds of spurious applications for benefits, and accounts of hardship, we are encouraged once again in a sceptical gaze: 'They seem to sort of have made it into a . . . speciality writing sob stories basically. . . Well, some of them, Barbara Cartland eat your heart out, really'. Testimonies of unemployed suffering are presented here as sentimental narratives concocted for the consumption of officialdom, which are likely to be completely fictitious. Meanwhile, the cost of this is framed in terms of social need elsewhere. We are told that the cost of this whole range of abuse is 'the equivalent of some three to four new hospitals for example'. By the end of this particular film, as the camera pans over piles of discarded *Chanel* and *Maxmara* packaging, the discovery of one abusive individual has already extended to over two thousand false identities and five hundred addresses of a phantom unemployed. We have been told that *seventy per cent* of claim order books mysteriously go astray in the London region. Who are the unemployed if so many claimants are just front names? The *Chanel* bags, the limousine, the boarding schools, the pathetic inadequacy of the over-worked investigators to swim against the overwhelming tide of scrounging — all this seems to seek the viewer's outrage. We never see

¹³ *The Great Benefit Robbery*, prod. and dir. Malcolm Brinkworth, Touch Productions, BBC, 29 September 1993.

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urban deprivation, we never see images of material hardship. Unemployment as an economic condition is not a concern here, because what we are offered as before is the agendas of a privatised framework around dependency and morality. Resources, we are encouraged to conclude, should be diverted from benefit to policing. Perhaps the screws of the system should be turned, benefit rules tightened, greedy attitudes stamped out. Once again, we are branding the scrounger, the 'unemployed'.

Unemployed Protest: Hunger Marches and Others

In William Greaves' leader for *The Daily Telegraph*¹⁴ of 20 February 1993 'Jarrow 1936 to 1993: Defiance to Despair' the feckless figure of Thomas, unemployed in Jarrow today, is contrasted with the heroism of Jimmy, representative of the surviving Jarrow marchers, who through gritty endurance won not only honest work for himself but also new industrial investment for his home town. In orthodox fashion, the image of a historical/heroic 'unemployed' holds a modern 'undeserving poor' in place, with a nostalgia of popular protest appropriated to the political interests of contemporary Conservatism. For Greaves and a swathe of other popular commentators, the cultural power of the Jarrow myth is encapsulated in its status as 'a magnificent, swashbuckling, headline-grabbing demand for the right to work.' In his study of unemployed protest in the inter-war period *The Hunger Marchers in Britain 1920-1939*,¹⁵ however, Peter Kingsford illustrates the fragility of popular nostalgias of the 'Jarrow Crusaders' when subjected to a historical scrutiny, pointing out not only their careful political constitution but also their constant patronage by the Conservative Party, the Rotary Club, the Territorial Army and a host of mayoral offices and local authorities.

As he recognises clearly, even the most superficial archaeology of the activities of the Jarrow Marchers immediately uncovers the possibility for dissent from the *Telegraph's* swashbuckling Crusade. What kind of Jarrow Crusade is suddenly opened to view if the marchers include MPs, when they are escorted and entertained along their route by local dignitaries, when they are given guided tours of government and invited to 'tea with management'?¹⁶ Kingsford's analysis works directly then to challenge

¹⁴ William Greaves, 'Tyneside Revisited — Jarrow: 1936-1993, defiance to despair', *The Daily Telegraph*, 20 February 1993, p. 4.

¹⁵ Peter Kingsford, *The Hunger Marchers in Britain 1920-1939* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1982).

¹⁶ *Programme of the Jarrow Men Welcome in London — Great Meeting Held in Hyde Park* (1 November 1936, no publisher; Communist Party Archive).

assumptions about what it might mean to invoke the Jarrow Crusade as a heroic popular past. As he shows, few of the contemporary records bear witness to the ideas of martyrdom, radicalism, or organicity in the service of which the myth of the Jarrow March is most often invoked.

For Kingsford a historical understanding of unemployed protest in the inter-war period and beyond therefore necessitates that we shift the 'image and name of hunger marching' (221) away from Jarrow and towards other protests organised by the National Unemployed Workers' Movement, where it 'belonged properly' (221). Despite this insistence, however, he is himself unwilling to dispense with nostalgia. His first paragraph invokes the example 'against all odds, of these ill-fed, ill-clad, ill-housed heroes — and heroines — of depression' which 'offers a sharp contrast with those shabby decades' (7). His last words, similarly, weigh heavy with the implication of the hunger marchers' powerful historic influence:

At the time some were impelled to join the labour movement, and to become its post-war leaders. . . . The marches may be seen, in A.J.P. Taylor's words, as 'a propaganda stroke of great effect. The hunger marchers displayed the failure of capitalism in a way that mere figures or literary description could not'.¹⁷ A large shift of public opinion towards 'never again' was indicated in the subsequent defeat in 1945 of the politicians held responsible for the 1930s. . . . They had shown that enforced idleness, human dereliction, neglect and misery, 'the expense of spirit in a waste of shame', were not to be taken lying down. (237)

For Paul Bagguley in *From Protest to Acquiescence? Political Movements of the Unemployed*,¹⁸ nevertheless, the historical verdict on unemployed protest in the twentieth century is at once less vague and less edifying. Using a range of statistical and numerical sources within a text punctuated scientifically with tables and graphs, Bagguley seeks explicitly to distance his 'more analytical account' (84) of the NUWM from the 'personal recollections' and 'historical narratives' characterising earlier work such as Kingsford's. In this way Bagguley seeks to challenge our political assumptions by showing a disparity between rates of unemployment and the spread of protest. Looking at the mobilisation of the National Unemployed Workers' Movement of the inter-war period and the People's

¹⁷ Quoted by Kingsford from A.J.P. Taylor, *English History, 1914-1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965), p. 349.

¹⁸ Paul Bagguley, *From Protest to Acquiescence? Political Movements of the Unemployed* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1991).

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Marches in the 1980s he insists firstly that local political organisation must be seen as the crucial condition for effective protest. Secondly, only the 'organisational and cultural resources' (201) furnished through the hegemony of a radical class consciousness in these localised communities can ever provide the environment for successful opposition from amongst the unemployed. It is therefore by contrast to these designated parameters that Bagguley diagnoses in the culture of the unemployed from the 1980s onwards 'an informed and rationalised fatalism about the efficacy of collective action' (203).

Bagguley is not a Marxist, but his underlying narrative is still framed in terms of basic class struggle — Unemployed Workers versus Capitalist State. Protest declines with the fading of once-heroic, radical ideologies of collective action and class consciousness. All practical possibilities for collective action are systematically closed off by a succession of capitalist administrations, through the progressive centralisation and bureaucratisation of relief. Localised political targets and a powerful localised culture are efficiently identified as the privileged parameters for oppositional engagement. These we learn have faded away. The People's Marches are effectively diagnosed as failures, and the inter-war hunger marches ignored as unimportant, in a discourse built around the calculability of official information and reified social data. There is no room here to accommodate the kind of thinking even of A.J.P. Taylor that 'The hunger marchers displayed the failure of capitalism in a way that mere figures or literary description could not'. There is no discursive apparatus here to explore the cultural significance of aspirations underpinning the protests of the NUWM or of the People's Marches. If this is a story at some level about class war, then, it is a story in which the unemployed lose and are going to continue to lose.

The culture of unemployed protest itself during this period, however, certainly does offer the possibility of a different kind of analysis, and the evidence of concerted attempts at counter-hegemonic articulations of unemployment as a collective force for change, both in the 1930s and 1980s. One example of this kind of aspiration is provided by the discussion of the first People's March in *Marxism Today*¹⁹ in December 1981. In 'A Roundtable Discussion: Coming in from the Cold', Tony Benn, Pete Carter and Jack Dromey's attempt to frame this protest contrasts sharply with Bagguley's statistical and scientific analysis, in ways which recall more strongly the Bakhtinian analysis of the carnivalesque²⁰ as a privileged space

¹⁹ Tony Benn, Jack Dromey and Pete Carter, 'A Roundtable Discussion — Coming in from the Cold', *Marxism Today* 25, 12 (December 1981), p. 6-13.

²⁰ See Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Helene Iswolsky (1965; Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1984).

of creative and political potential. Benn's articulation of the People's March of 1981 goes much further than the expression of localised political opposition:

It wasn't simply a moving microphone coming through the country, it was a moving dialogue, a rolling dialogue, and as it rolled it became a way of impacting upon the whole consciousness of the nation. . . . The march was almost a daily newspaper rolling through the country to which people were allowed to contribute their opinion and therefore it broadened and broadened and broadened and made a very profound impact as it went through. It gave hope. (7-8)

Here hunger marching is conceived as a means of transcending the communicative function of conventional protest or publicity stunt, taking on an autonomous meaning and value. Its importance is clearly not envisaged in terms of articulating some pre-conceptualised position or argument. Instead, the argument or dialogue has a development and unstoppable growth of its own. The wide-ranging, all-inclusive Bakhtinian embrace is further invoked by the idea of the march's universal or microcosmic social representation:

Whether it was a glue sniffer, and we had glue sniffers, punks, people who had suffered — epileptics, the disabled — traditional trade unionists, the middle class unemployed teacher.²¹ In other words the March, the 500, was a reflection of the whole breadth of our society. There was something magic about that March. (9-10)

Similarly, an idea of the creative/political force of the People's March is foregrounded under the sign of an organic and inclusive people's voice. 'You see the conclusion I think we are agreed about is that it wasn't just a march, it was the people's voice for a different society' (10). The status of carnival as a dynamic democratic force outside the boundaries of linguistic representation as well as socio-political hierarchy begins to be reached for

²¹ This kind of celebration of the inclusiveness of the People's March is specifically mocked in Paul Johnson's 'People's March for Yobs?' (see note 5). Reviewing media coverage of the event, Johnson says, 'The *Guardian's* man-on-the-march, Martin Walker, enthused: "Blacks, Asians, Punks with moth-eaten haircuts, women and middle-aged men, the marchers seem a microcosm of modern Britain." The *Guardian* quoted the tear-jerking remark of one marcher that the young unemployed "are not just missing out on a job, they are missing out on the whole marvellous experience of trade unionism" (17).

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here. All who suffer social discrimination are drawn to the march as a 'vehicle for their aspirations' and 'drew understanding and encouragement from it' (9). The People's March is 'a remarkable event', 'a remarkable festival, like the Notting Hill Festival' (10) which, far from articulating an authoritarian political agenda, is envisaged as the potential catalyst for a wider counter-hegemonic political awakening. For Pete Carter, the march is seen as the beginning of an alternative not only to a Conservative politics of unemployment but also to 'a labour movement that had been unable to deal in an effective way with this through traditional forms of struggle. . . We wanted the March to be a vehicle for the intercourse, the exchange of ideas, because we haven't necessarily got the alternative' (6-7). The carnivalesque potentiality of the protest is therefore to be understood not primarily in terms of party-political oppositionism but instead in terms of the desire for a wider and more 'direct' kind of communication which, rather than propagating a premeditated agenda, is instead to provide the conditions in the early 1980s for a fresh articulation of the political:

It may be that what you really discovered was a new way of communicating with people. . . . It was a way of communicating that was immediate, that was direct, that involved people in doing something and out of which will come a perception that must move them away from the structure of society as it now exists. (13)

Perhaps the most important feature of 'hunger marching' as a cultural phenomenon is its status as a highly public and publicised *performance of labour supply*. In this sense these most iconic of unemployed protests could be argued to be ultimately submissive to a business agenda, in the sense that they illustrate in the clearest possible way the supply-side pressure of surplus labour which is classically the attendant to workforce insecurity.

In the explosion of protest in the early Thatcher years that culminated in the People's Marches for Jobs, however, it is possible to see the development of a much broader kind of aspiration, for a collectivist and even carnivalesque rewriting of unemployment and the dominant social agenda. In the case of NUWM protests, moreover, the notion of the hunger marches as a visible employable force can be problematised far more radically. Not least, this is because of the culture of political violence they partly celebrated.

The regularity of street fighting amongst the radicalised unemployed against police and local authorities is reflected in the oral accounts collected

in Ian MacDougall's *Voices from the Hunger Marches*,²² as well as in the social-historical work of Ralph Hayburn.²³ Harry McShane's *Three Days That Shook Edinburgh*,²⁴ moreover, leads us to the same impression. In 1933, McShane's recording of the Scottish Hunger March resonates with the impression of violence. 'Despite sneers, insults, batonings, jailings, the agitation had developed, thousands of meetings held, incessant delegations and deputising, huge popular petitions containing the demands of the unemployed organised, mass demonstrations held. Clashes with the police were frequent (in Glasgow, due to plain clothes policemen provocation [*sic*], a fierce fight took place on Glasgow Green and fourteen policemen were injured)' (4).

In *The Insurgents in London*²⁵ Wal Hannington describes a mass procession of the unemployed on 22 November 1922, the climax of the first national hunger march, accompanied by demands for a confrontation with the Prime Minister. Characteristically, his account sits ill with the popular nostalgia for a heroically long-suffering unemployed in the inter-war period. Jack Riley, leader of the Kent contingent, is quoted at the public rally in Trafalgar Square: 'We don't care for the men in blue or the men in khaki. The time will come when the workers will organise their own army, and then God help them'.²⁶ In the more extensive *Unemployed Struggles*,²⁷ Hannington cites accounts in the press of police barricades across Whitehall, with machine gun nests on the tops of surrounding buildings. His own eye-witness narrative portrays a tense scenario in which large forces of mounted and foot police 'were being moved to strategical positions', in which all traffic had been stopped, government buildings were barricaded and their windows boarded up.

More broadly in the patterns of unemployed protest in the inter-war period, moreover, can be read a counter-hegemonic culture of direct action. McShane's *Three Days That Shook Edinburgh* narrates how Scottish marchers, refused accommodation in Edinburgh, chose Princes Street as

²² Ian MacDougall (ed.), *Voices from the Hunger Marches*, vol. 1 (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1990).

²³ Ralph Hayburn, 'The National Unemployed Workers' Movement, 1921-36 — A Re-appraisal', *International Review of Social History* 28 (1983), pp. 279-95, and 'The Police and the Hunger Marchers', *International Review of Social History* 17 (1972), pp. 625-44.

²⁴ Harry McShane *Three Days That Shook Edinburgh — Story of the Historic Scottish Hunger March* (Glasgow: NUWM, 1933).

²⁵ Wal Hannington, *The Insurgents in London* (London: NUWM, 1923).

²⁶ Trafalgar Square rally, 19 November 1922 (Kingsford, p. 50).

²⁷ Wal Hannington, *Unemployed Struggles 1919-1936: My Life and Struggles amongst the Unemployed* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1973), p. 84.

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their bed for the night: 'Right along the South pavement in the most aristocratic street in Britain lay the Hunger Marchers — blankets and newspapers spread out for mattresses! The wealthy dress-suited plutocracy as they came out from their clubs and banquets, goggled, absolutely goggled!' (12-13). In the beginnings of protest in the period after the First World War, *The Times* reports the planning of a campaign by the NUWM to plant pellets of stinking gas in the tube stations and subways of London. Sometimes martyrs sleeping through snow and rain on the steps of a public war memorial, sometimes soldiers, sometimes criminals, sometimes anarchists planting gas bombs in the heart of London's soft underbelly: historically marginalised traces of the protesting unemployed suggest a continual pulling-away from dominant articulations of the unemployment as a social and political phenomenon, and a constant and conscious departure from the subjectivities made available to the workless.

For the *hunger striker*, the refusal of food could be seen performatively as laying open power's inscription on the body — either through emaciation or through force-feeding. Looking at the *hunger marcher's* performance, by contrast, what is conventionally presented, as in the Jarrow Crusade, is the subject's dependence on acceptance of food from wealth and authority along its route of travel. However, the improvisations of the NUWM can be seen as displaying a consistent concern to overturn the cultural implications of this format for protest. In their performative use of food itself, far from a submissive extension of the begging bowl, we can see an interrogation of the hegemonic frameworks of charity, poor relief and subsistence benefits. In *The Insurgents in London*, for example, Hannington reports how the men, arriving in Luton, dine not at the workhouse but in local 'swell restaurants' (22), simply directing their bills to the authorities for payment. Further, the hunger marchers' use of ritual to interrogate the legitimacy of Poor Relief begins to be related in the *Nottingham Evening Post*²⁸ in November 1922. Dissatisfied with their treatment by Rugby local authorities, and by the repetitive diet of 'bully' (corned) beef, which they had been offered at workhouses along their route, the men conduct a symbolic burial in the town's market square. A can of bully beef is draped with a miniature union jack, and a mockery of the burial service said over it. Solemnly, the company engage in the singing of hymns,

²⁸ 'Bully Beef Buried — Unemployed in Mock Funeral at Rugby', *Nottingham Evening Post*, 13 November 1922), p. 1. A similar story can be found in the same newspaper ten days previously. There, in 'Fed Up With Cheese — Fastidious "Hunger Marchers" at Loughborough', 7 November 1922, p. 4, one of the Loughborough Guardians is quoted as saying, 'They won't come here again, because we wouldn't find them feather beds and blankets.'

whilst marchers with walking sticks formally 'present arms'. Certainly, in the 1922 national march importance is constantly given to the transgression of official regulations on relief. In this formal burial of food itself, however, whilst the marchers are clearly concerned with breaking down the relief-granting procedures of officialdom, they are at the same time motivated to overlay with a form of *ceremonial* their tactics of defiance. Comedic performance gives a newly subversive voice to the familiar demand for 'decent diet'. The very rituals for the legitimisation of a system perceived as oppressive are ironically commandeered in the service of that legitimacy's debunking.

Reading later in the new year, we learn in *The Insurgents in London* of a return by the hunger marchers to Rugby as part of a drive for fresh recruits. When the authorities again refuse to supply anything but the 'casual' diet — in an implicit conflation of unemployment with pauperism — Hannington narrates that he arranged for a public meeting to distract police whilst he and a small party broke into the local workhouse, stealing twenty-eight pots of jam. The following morning a ceremonial march is organised through the town and back to the workhouse 'with empty jam pots hoisted on our sticks'. There, out of all the empty pots, an altar is built before the workhouse master and guardians. Finally, and to a formal choral accompaniment 'with as much solemnity as the occasion would permit, the Red Flag was presented to the flag bearer over the empty jam pots' (24).

Beyond the assumptions of both Kingsford and Bagguley around the aims and constitution of hunger marching as a form of protest, the performative culture amongst the radicalised unemployed in this period in fact denies reduction to its local political effects, or to its direct influence on media discourses or on government. The *Daily Herald* of 4 November 1922, indeed, quotes the leader of the Rhondda valley contingent, W. Mainwaring, to precisely this effect: 'At all events, the trickle of these little streams from all parts of the country just now will awaken the public to the fact that we are not a newspaper paragraph, or a recorded statistic, but men who wear boots and clothes, who eat, drink, sleep, love, and laugh and cry like themselves. We are sick of being a newspaper paragraph' (Kingsford 41). This quotation, like much in Kingsford's history, passes without analysis. But with a different discursive strategy from his, it helps us to re-inscribe the hunger marches in terms of their resistance to totalisation as 'publicity stunts', centred wholly on the aim of influencing, for example, discourses on unemployment in the press. Rather, as I have suggested, it is possible to find signs of attempts to define their performance in explicit antithesis to dominant commercial media-based forms of public information and propagation. Much more promising from an analytical point of view might be the possibilities for seeing in them the ironic enactment of alternative myths

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and histories of unemployment. The parade of empty jam pots, held up on sticks like some triumphal display of decapitated heads, in the same way as the military funeral of the bully beef, could be read as culturally threatening to the extent that it was a transgression in performative terms of accepted modes of popular protest. All of these stagings could be read as functioning in generically similar ways, by positioning an ironic reflexivity rather than simply an anger against the governing machinery of the dominant culture.

If the jam pots become the centre of a comedy of subversion, then, they become also the centre of a theatrical celebration — of a victory over social injustice, and over the use of civic authority for political ends, of the compulsory redistribution of wealth, and of the triumph of the streetwise over official surveillance. The collective power of the marchers is not simply used to obtain food by force. The hunger marchers are instead concerned performatively to interrogate the rituals of socio-cultural legitimation. Similarly when marchers dine at the Ritz, we can read beyond and around the simple notions of collective coercion and theft. Local government is made to fund the equal right of the jobless alongside the representatives of privileged society to 'the best'. The Ritz itself is appropriated as an icon of privilege, enabling the articulation of opposition to material inequality and injustice in a way which could only have been done less powerfully elsewhere. The procession and ritual of the jam pots, then, can be seen as staging the legitimation of an oppositional ethics and social relations. If the jam pots are symbols of one momentarily vanquished power, they are also symbols of the momentary ascendancy of another. They become an equivocal reminder of the well-known caps of liberty, held aloft on sticks by the ill-fated Blanketeers, at Peterloo, and by the Chartists. In the burial of the bully beef, similarly, what is staged is not a sullen refusal. Instead the demand for decent provision is mediated through a performative irony which both mocks at official rituals of legitimation and parodically asserts its own principled status, its own claims to cultural legitimacy.

As elsewhere in the press, in the *Daily Sketch* of November 2, 1932, the protesting unemployed are 'hooligans' and 'roughs out for trouble' (3). In the *Spectator* of 23 May 1981 they are still a 'miserable collection of disco-ridden punks' (15). Indeed, across much of the cultural and historical range of right-wing discourse from the 1930s onwards, from tabloid reporting in defence of Baldwinian employment policies to the 'Spotlight on Benefit Cheats' of Peter Lilley, the ideological thrust is consistent — a privatisation and moralisation of unemployment.

To make an adequate reading of unemployed protest during the whole of this period, then, we need to focus firstly on the challenges it attempts towards these hegemonic constitutions of unemployment. Secondly, it is necessary to understand some of the ways in which these

challenges are marginalised within popular discourse in favour of the construction of a more culturally assimilable unemployed, most often under the sign of 'Jarrow'. In Benn, Carter and Dromey's discussion of the first People's March for Jobs we can see one attempt to frame popular protest as an open and creative medium for social and historical transformation. The protests of a radicalised unemployed in the inter-war period, moreover, can be seen as a challenge to dominant ideas, not only in terms of its use of violence but also in terms of the interrogative and creative forms of its protest. Within the leftist culture of direct action against unemployment in the 1920s and 1930s, certainly, can be seen an attempt to extrapolate from the immediacy of joblessness as a social phenomenon a broader critique of conservative discourses, and in particular against the dominant constitution of employment orientated around the privatisation of wealth and of the individual.

I have argued here in relation to the culture both of the People's Marches and of the NUWM that, as much as any attempt at media or governmental influence, the political force of the hunger marches in particular needs to be seen as iconic, performative, aspirational, symbolic. The possibility that they hold out is that of an alternative and counter-hegemonic constitution of unemployment on the left, in which collective rights are really matched by collective responsibilities. In the language of New Labour, it could be argued, these socialist commitments are not yet totally expunged. Indeed, the articulation of a New Deal on employment can certainly be understood on one level both as a rejection of the right-wing conception of welfare as 'simply a low-grade safety net for the destitute' (*New Ambitions*, v) and of 'the waste of talents and resources represented by long-term unemployment' (25). In terms of its major emphases on notions of independence, personal/family responsibility and the elimination of abuse, however, Field's project for 'Welfare 2020' at the same time illustrates a crucial slippage within the language of New Labour, between the traditional leftist commitment to fair and full employment and the continuing hegemony of the conservative discourses we have seen around work and welfare. Consistently, there is a central tension between the collectivist rhetoric of community and the privatised language of 'self help'. Between the discourses of social justice and those of privatisation, in other words, the constitution of unemployment remains a site of struggle.

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'The problem is always one of method...': Cultural Materialism, Political Economy and Cultural Studies

Paul Jones

In a 1995 colloquy in *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* and more recently in the related volume, *Cultural Studies in Question*,¹ the relationship between a political economy of communications and culture and the field of cultural studies has been much in dispute. Nicholas Garnham's charges against contemporary cultural studies, Lawrence Grossberg's defence in reply and even Graham Murdock's attempted mediation all supportively invoke the work of Raymond Williams.² Williams's early work in particular is seen as a common point of departure which even suggests, for Garnham, a lost unity of political economy and cultural studies.³ Such wholesale resort to Williams's authority thus provides a suitable entry point into consideration of the relevance and coherence of his cultural materialism.

For this debate also serves as a reminder of 'unfinished business' in the reception of Williams's mature project. While the announced cultural materialism was quickly and, by and large, sympathetically discussed amongst British political economists,⁴ it fared less well within cultural studies where Williams was already being positioned, alongside Richard Hoggart, as a fading founding father. Moreover, there is evidence that Williams himself saw a greater affinity between his cultural materialism and political economy than cultural studies.⁵

¹ Marjorie Ferguson and Peter Golding (eds.), *Cultural Studies in Question* (London: Sage, 1997).

² Respectively, Nicholas Garnham, 'Political Economy and Cultural Studies: Reconciliation or Divorce?', *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 12, 1 (1995), pp. 62-71; Lawrence Grossberg, 'Cultural Studies vs Political Economy: is Anybody Else Bored with this Debate?', *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 12, 1 (1995), pp. 72-81; and Graham Murdock, 'Across the Great Divide: Cultural Analysis and the Condition of Democracy', *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 12, 1 (1995), pp. 89-95.

³ Nicholas Garnham, 'Political Economy and the Practice of Cultural Studies', Ferguson and Golding, p. 57.

⁴ E.g., Nicholas Garnham, 'Toward a Theory of Cultural Materialism', *Journal of Communication* (Summer 1983), pp. 314-29.

⁵ Compare his enthusiasm for the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies two years after its founding with his swingeing critique of the influential 1977 CCCS collection, *On Ideology*; Raymond Williams, *Communications*, (1966; 2nd ed., Harmondsworth, Penguin 1971), p. 11; Raymond Williams, 'The Paths and Pitfalls of

Yet Williams's warmest embrace of political economy occurs within the late rearticulation of cultural materialism as a sociology of culture.⁶ There cultural studies is located as a 'branch within sociology', cultural sociology, which is 'necessarily and centrally concerned with manifest cultural practices', while the political economy of culture 'is especially necessary and welcome, and should be seen as not only distinct from, but complementary to, a cultural sociology'.⁷

Only in *The Sociology of Culture* did Williams cease to elaborate his mature project in relation to literary studies. The continuing debt to literary studies remains obvious in cultural studies today but understandably has appeared anomalous to political economists.⁸ Yet this peculiarly British legacy did help to define the political economy of communications against a conservative functionalist and positivist sociology of mass communications.⁹

Garnham's opening complaint against cultural studies was that in its attempts to avoid the risks of economism and in its celebration of resistant consumption, it had lost contact with the issue of production *per se* and thus a conceptual means of establishing the basis of much social inequity. Whereas, in contrast, 'at the heart of political economy lies a concern with the relationship between justice on the one hand and the structural inequalities of the mode of production on the other'.¹⁰ While this is undoubtedly correct, it is also true that political economy is better known for the latter rather than the former.

The ostensible point of contention between the protagonists in the debate is the relationship between their respective positions and such normative social critique. This points to a need for clarification of the relationship between normative critique and methodology in all these fields. However, while methodological differences are much discussed in the debate, there has been little attempt to link systematically the invocation of Williams or cultural materialism with the issue of social critique. This is because discussion of these matters tends to become trapped within the 'scientific' parameters set by the Althusserian resurgence of Marxism

Ideology as an Ideology', *Times Higher Education Supplement* (10 June 1977), p. 13.

⁶ Raymond Williams, *The Sociology of Culture* (1981 [as *Culture*]; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995) p. 32.

⁷ Williams, *The Sociology of Culture*, pp. 14, 33.

⁸ E.g., Garnham's complaint that the key citation from Williams in one of Garnham's defining essays 'is hidden, gnominically, in a book of literary theory'; Nicholas Garnham, 'Contribution to a Political Economy of Mass Communication', in R. Collins *et al.* (eds), *Media Culture and Society: a Critical Reader*, (London: Sage, 1986), p. 9.

⁹ Richard Collins *et al.*, 'Introduction', Collins *et al.*, p. 2.

¹⁰ Garnham, 'Political Economy and the Practice of Cultural Studies', p. 68.

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within the English-speaking academy in the 1970s.¹¹ Eagleton's critique of Williams thus remains influential within cultural studies — and, to a lesser extent, within political economy — despite its being almost entirely informed by that now-defunct Althusserian scientism. One significant legacy of this is Eagleton's titular bifurcation of 'criticism' and 'politics'.¹²

It is also the case that Williams failed to articulate adequately the role of critique in the mature project. A clear declaration never emerged during his movement from 'Cambridge literary criticism' to a redefinition of the 'object' of his research via an expanded conception of *cultural production* (not 'culture') within his sociology of culture. In terms of the Marxian base and superstructure metaphor, this move produced two sets of 'bases', one 'general' and one 'cultural' (without employing the concept of mode of production as such). While he provided for himself a means of establishing forms of determinacy between the former and latter, this left little room for an account of the elaborated 'ideologies' which bear normative concepts such as Garnham's 'justice'.

Further elaboration of this argument is best undertaken by means of a critique of the abovementioned interpretative orthodoxy as it is encapsulated in the charge of 'culturalism'. Only then is it possible to sketch a plausible role for critique, especially 'Frankfurt' ideology critique, within the cultural materialist sociology of culture.

Problems in 'Culturalism' and 'Cambridge'?

The cultural studies claim to Williams as a founding father is at best ambivalent. Stuart Hall's paradigmatic characterisation of the field as a competition between 'culturalist' and 'structuralist' paradigms has consolidated into an orthodoxy best exemplified by Graeme Turner's recent textbook introduction in which the culturalism/structuralism binary is sequentially narrativised and Williams located within the former.¹³ Accordingly, Turner acknowledges Williams's 'definitions' as foundational for the field of cultural studies but laments the lack of a corresponding

¹¹ Cf. Ted Benton, *The Rise and Fall of Structural Marxism: Althusser and his Influence* (London: Macmillan, 1984).

¹² Terry Eagleton, 'Criticism and Politics: the work of Raymond Williams', *New Left Review* 95 (1976), pp. 3-23.

¹³ Stuart Hall, 'Cultural studies: Two Paradigms', *Media, Culture and Society* 2 (1980), pp. 57-72; Graeme Turner, *British Cultural Studies: An Introduction* (2nd ed., London: Unwin Hyman, 1996). But cf. Andrew Milner's commentary, which suggests that Hall's own position can be read as much less sympathetic to culturalism than Turner's: Andrew Milner, *Cultural Materialism* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1993), p. 80.

methodological legacy in his work. This 'methodological absence' might have been filled, for Turner, by structuralist semiotics. The possibility that this mismatch is the product of a misconstrual of Williams's 'definitions' does not arise. In one very revealing formulation, Turner states Williams 'founds a tradition that others develop'.¹⁴

I have described elsewhere the more routinised versions of this selective tradition as 'The Myth of "Raymond Hoggart"'.¹⁵ In this process Williams's work is conflated with Hoggart's as *definitionally* foundational, then set aside for various kinds of alleged theoretical inadequacies. Such accounts fail to acknowledge Williams's critiques of Hoggart and his mature rearticulation of his project.

Hall's first such assessment of Williams pre-dates the 'two paradigms' thesis and even by 1980 it may have been possible to argue that Williams's cultural materialism was still underdeveloped. However, it is also the case that as recently as 1997 Hall has *reiterated* his critique's basic premisses.¹⁶ In 1993 Hall articulated this critique — which always takes the form of a 'break thesis' modelled on Althusser's account of Marx's intellectual development — thus:

In his discussion of culture, in the famous chapter on 'The analysis of culture' in *The Long Revolution*, his pathbreaking attempt to break with the literary-moral discourse of *Culture and Society* into a more sustained effort of general theorising, the key conceptual move he makes is from an abstract definition of culture — 'a state or process of human perfection' — to culture as 'a description of a particular way of life which expresses certain values not only in art and learning but in institutions and ordinary behaviour'. Culture, he insisted, with his characteristic inflection on 'our common life' is 'ordinary'. The analysis of culture, from such a definition, he argued, 'is the clarification of the meanings and values implicit and explicit in a particular way of life, a particular culture'. Characteristic here is not only the movement from abstract ideal to concrete, from texts to their contexts of institutional life and ordinary behaviour; but also the breaking down of artificial distinctions between art and literature — the signifiers of 'culture' in the first, as it were, 'Cambridge' sense — and what he called

¹⁴ Turner, p. 54.

¹⁵ Paul Jones, 'The Myth of "Raymond Hoggart": on "Founding Fathers" and Cultural Policy', *Cultural Studies* 8, 3 (1994), pp. 394-416.

¹⁶ Stuart Hall, 'Interview: Culture and Power', *Radical Philosophy* 86 (November/December, 1997), pp. 25-6.

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‘the general social organisation’.¹⁷

This ‘break thesis’ is, by itself, unsustainable on simple philological grounds. According to Hall, this break occurred sometime between the publication of *Culture and Society* in 1958 and *The Long Revolution* in 1961. On his own account, the phrase ‘culture is ordinary’ sums up the ‘later’ position. Yet the article of that name was published in 1958, the same year as the ‘pre-break’ *Culture and Society*.¹⁸ That article anticipates many of the more overtly empirical sociological dimensions of *The Long Revolution*. Any such examination of the two books, especially in relation to contemporaneous articles, suggests strongly that they were published by the ‘same’ author but merely had different foci. Indeed, Williams retrospectively described their composition as virtually a joint process.¹⁹ In the introduction to *The Long Revolution* he notes the continuity between elements of the two books and regards the completion of both as the ending of ‘a stage of my life’.²⁰

It follows from this that either *Culture and Society* does not operate in some anterior ‘literary-moral discourse’ or that Williams saw a continuing role for some such critical practice. The central problem with Hall’s account is that Williams never did make the linear moves he lists above but rather argued *dialectically*. The very section of *The Long Revolution* on which Hall relies most discusses *three*, not two, meanings of ‘culture’. The first is an ideal sense which is not reducible to a ‘Cambridge’ sense of the arts but is recognisable as including the progressive Enlightenment ideal of *kultur*. This is separated from a second sense, the documentary, which Hall does not mention. Within this Williams effectively corrals Matthew Arnold’s more static ‘culture’ that it is the function of Arnold’s criticism to disseminate. This is closer to Hall’s ‘Cambridge’ sense. To the extent that Williams does endorse the position Hall cites — what he calls ‘the social definition of culture’ — he does so on the explicit understanding that it *includes* elements of the other definitions²¹. However, his final position is one which attempts to accommodate all three. He comes to a similar conclusion in ‘Culture is Ordinary’ — that given the choice between the two senses of culture Hall invokes above — the arts-based ‘Cambridge’ one and the anthropological

¹⁷ Stuart Hall, ‘Culture, Community, Nation’, *Cultural Studies* 7, 2 (1993), p. 351.

¹⁸ Raymond Williams, ‘Culture is Ordinary’, in Norman McKenzie (ed.), *Conviction* (London: MacGibbon and Kee, 1958).

¹⁹ Raymond Williams, *Politics and Letters: Interviews with New Left Review*, (London: NLB, 1979), p. 133.

²⁰ Raymond Williams, *The Long Revolution* (1961; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965), p. 15.

²¹ Williams, *The Long Revolution*, p. 58ff.

— he ‘insists on both and the significance of their conjunction’.²²

In *The Sociology of Culture* Williams revisits these questions and locates his own work within an account of those sociological traditions relatively unknown to him in the earlier discussions. Yet again, even in this much later account, he stresses the dimension of *convergence* between intellectual traditions.²³

The consistent implication developed in these discussions is that this convergence of the multiple meanings of ‘culture’ is an advantageous one. This is because the very conjunction necessarily leads, in Williams’s view, to sociological analysis and social critique. ‘The social’ need not be held conceptually distinct for social critique to emerge from the convergence of the meanings of ‘culture’.

There are obvious ambiguities in this somewhat enigmatic position. However, it is completely and utterly incompatible with Hall’s attribution to Williams of a definition or redefinition of culture as merely ‘a whole way of life’ or ‘whole ways of life’. Hall’s much-imitated occasional shorthand tends to reduce Williams’s position to the mere advocacy of culture as a generic, or perhaps, as in the above passage, even particular, ‘way of life’. Rather, Williams had quite consciously chosen to use culture as ‘a whole way of life’ *instead of* the category of ‘society’.²⁴

But Hall would undoubtedly insist that even the mature project is vulnerable to the charge of ‘culturalism’ — i.e. a loss of the social determinacy and specificity of ‘the cultural’. Hall sourced this term to Richard Johnson but its coinage occurred, ironically, in one of the first defences of Williams against Eagleton by Anthony Barnett.²⁵ Hall assesses Williams’s ‘culturalism’ largely according to the criterion of his adherence to the (non-vulgar) Marxist principle of determination and the allied base and superstructure metaphor. Given Hall’s premisses, this is not unreasonable. Culture as ‘a whole way of life’ can be seen roughly to correspond with ‘the base’, ‘arts and learning’ with ‘superstructure’. Largely in agreement with Eagleton, Hall believes Williams abandons the metaphor completely for a relativised societal model of ‘indissoluble elements of a continuous socio-

²² Williams, ‘Culture is Ordinary’, p. 76.

²³ Williams, *The Sociology of Culture*, p. 9.

²⁴ Williams, *Politics and Letters*, p. 154.

²⁵ Hall, ‘Cultural Studies’, p. 64; Richard Johnson, ‘Three Problematics: Elements of a Theory of Working Class Culture’, in John Clarke *et al.* (eds.), *Working Class Culture: Studies in History and Theory* (London: Hutchinson/CCCS, 1979); Richard Johnson, ‘Histories of Culture/Theories of Ideology: Notes on an Impasse’, in Michele Barrett *et al.* (eds.), *Ideology and Cultural Production* (London: Croom Helm, 1979); Anthony Barnett, ‘Raymond Williams and Marxism: a Rejoinder to Terry Eagleton’, *New Left Review* 99 (1976), pp. 47-64.

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material process'.²⁶ This 'interactionist' perspective, Hall argues, is broadly consistent with that Williams first articulated about 'culture' in *The Long Revolution*.

Johnson's 1979 argument is more subtle than Hall's and also addresses the mature works of Williams published to that date. However, Johnson establishes the basis for Hall's tendency to ignore the specificity of the mature work by arguing that the same 'experiential paradigm' is at work throughout. After citing passages from both *The Long Revolution* and *Marxism and Literature*²⁷ he argues as follows:

The procedure of both these passages is to identify certain distinctions, to insist that there can be no adequate general formulation of relations between different spheres, and finally, to insist on the importance of totalities or 'constitutive social processes' that lie behind the distinctions anyway. In practice this procedure amounts to the collapse of distinctions, since the weight of the argument is always about their essential artificiality. 'Experience', it seems, can always grasp a process that is beyond or beneath analytical distinctions and which they may (perhaps must?) obscure. Collapses of this kind can be seen all the way through *Marxism and Literature*. The distinction between economic production and other practices disappears in the expansion of production as an undifferentiated concept akin to 'creativity'. The term 'material' is applied to all aspects of a social and political order in a parallel expansion.²⁸

Johnson's presumption of the need to maintain boundaries and distinctions owes much to the Althusserian model of a social totality divided into 'levels' and 'practices'. The accusation that Williams rejected all such theoretical distinctions is unsustainable. Rather, as Johnson acknowledges elsewhere, Williams rejected only a *prioristic* theoretical presumptions. Yet Johnson's criticism of the risks of Williams's expansive semantic practice is largely valid, as Williams had already conceded.²⁹ Crucially, however, the passages Johnson cites from Williams provide no evidence of his contention that Williams's methodological alternative to a *prioristic* analysis is merely an appeal to 'experience'. No such appeal is made in either.

Similarly, in the following passage Johnson provides perhaps the

²⁶ Hall, 'Cultural Studies', p. 101.

²⁷ Respectively, *The Long Revolution*, p. 136, and Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), pp. 81-2.

²⁸ Johnson, 'Three Problematics', p. 218.

²⁹ Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, p. 93.

most pivotal (re)formulation of the charge of culturalism:

As literary critic and cultural theorist, Williams does stress certain kinds of practices, all of them broadly cultural, and, within that, mainly literary. Other practices tend to be marginalised or defined away. There is no check on this from theoretical controls. Thus the early works are particularly inattentive to political processes, a tendency which Williams himself has acknowledged. The tensionless expansion of 'culture' replaces struggle over values and definitions. Though some of this is repaired in later work, there is a persistent neglect of the particular character and force of economic relations and therefore of economic definitions in relation to class. This 'culturalism' is described by Anthony Barnett, the most careful of Williams's critics, as 'a kind of inversion of economism, a reduction 'upwards'. This is the characteristic tendency of 1950s' and 1960s' texts in both history and 'literary sociology'. It is very characteristic of Hoggart's *The Uses of Literacy*, for example, from which both economic production and politics are literally absent.³⁰

Three theses would appear to be present in this argument: (a) that Williams does not 'set boundaries' to the concept of culture and fails to define it as more than 'way of life'; (b) that as 'literary critic and cultural theorist' Williams marginalised other practices, especially political practices; and (c) that this culturalism is typical of the 'literary sociologies' of the 1950s and 1960s, the best example of which is Hoggart's *The Uses of Literacy*.

Again, within this argument are valid observations. Williams does indeed privilege literary practices in his analyses of aesthetic culture. Likewise, it is true that he conceded that he displaced concepts such as the state in his work as he assumed they were adequately theorised by others; but he did not marginalise politics as such.³¹ The crucially invalid step, however, is the last, in which Johnson substitutes Hoggart for Williams. In fact, Williams criticised Hoggart on issues (a) and (b) himself.³²

It is also significant that Johnson openly declares earlier in the essay that the main problem with 'the culture problematic' is that as that 'tradition was an overwhelmingly literary one, the debate was evaluative

³⁰ Johnson, 'Three Problematics', p. 218.

³¹ Raymond Williams, 'Notes on Marxism in Britain Since 1945', *Problems in Materialism and Culture* (London: NLB, 1980), p. 244 (a revision of an article first published in 1976).

³² Jones, 'The Myth of "Raymond Hoggart"', pp. 398-401.

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rather than analytic'.³³ The apparent rejection of the former for the latter is perhaps the most characteristic feature of the charge of 'culturalism' and what most marks its obsolescent Althusserianism. As we have seen, it is also the element that Stuart Hall continues to promote.

Williams's undeclared mode of normative (rather than 'evaluative') critique of socio-cultural works and forms emerges as the pivotal feature of the cultural materialist project most vulnerable to continuing attempts to maintain the myth of Raymond Hoggart. This begs the somewhat repressed question in Williams scholarship: what then is the relationship between his 'evaluative' (including literary) analyses and his 'other' analyses?

Hall and Johnson tended to see Williams's evaluative analyses as a 'literary-moral discourse' from which he needed to 'break'. Hall is at least right in arguing that Williams was trying to break with a 'Cambridge' cultural legacy and Turner is correct in pointing to a certain ambiguity in Williams's methodological position. What Williams did retrospectively admit to breaking from was the evaluative discourse of 'Cambridge literary criticism' 'as an intellectual discipline'.³⁴

But what did he break *towards*?

It is clear that he did not merely move towards one, arguably dominant, understanding of cultural studies: the textual analysis (informed by the structuralisms as in, for example, the early Barthes) of a broader range of cultural objects (recast as 'texts') than 'literature'. This is the current manifestation of what Johnson called 'literary sociology' in 1979 and the methodological correlate of Hall's attributed change in Williams's 'definition of culture' to the 'ordinariness' of a 'way of life'.

Here Graham Murdock's moderating contribution to the political economy *versus* cultural studies debate has much clarifying relevance³⁵.

Enter the Mediator

Murdock identifies a retreat from judgment in much cultural studies practice into relativist analysis of merely 'contemporary culture' which, if accepted, '...is to abandon entirely Williams's critical project'.³⁶ Accordingly, he rescues Williams's declaration that 'culture is ordinary' from a mere

³³ Johnson, 'Three Problematics', p. 212.

³⁴ Raymond Williams, 'My Cambridge', *What I Came To Say* (London: Hutchinson Radius, 1989), p. 13.

³⁵ I refer here to both Murdock's contribution to the 1995 colloquy and its significantly different reworking, 'Base Notes: the Conditions of Cultural Practice', Ferguson and Golding, pp. 86-101.

³⁶ Graham Murdock, 'Base Notes', p. 92.

celebration of the everyday³⁷ and reinserts it into his advocacy of a fully participatory democracy.³⁸

Murdock acknowledges Williams's recognition of the democratising potential of 'new media' for such a project and his further recognition of the value of a political economy of communications in assessing the derailment of such historical possibilities. However, he also argues that Williams fails to integrate this recognition into his cultural materialism. Murdock defers to Eagleton at this point and attributes this failing to Williams's alleged 'misreading' of the base and superstructure metaphor. While Murdock reconstructs Williams's redefinition of 'determination', he also effectively concurs with Johnson's charge of culturalism concerning Williams's attempt to 'extend the notion of material forces so that symbolic activities could be reclassified as part of the base, producing a new approach, which he called 'cultural materialism'.³⁹

Ironically then, one of the 'collateral' effects of the political economy *versus* cultural studies debate has been to 'update' the 1970s charge of culturalism. These two issues of (a) poor integration of democratising aims into the cultural materialism and (b) the 'culturalist' consequences of Williams's revisions to the base-superstructure metaphor, need to be separated. Let us take the second first.

'The problem is always one of method...': from epochal to homological analysis

Williams's critique of the base and superstructure metaphor does not merely rely on an ontological assertion about superstructural 'materiality' but rather, as Johnson almost recognises, on *the application of a paradigm of production to the field of culture*, especially by the typological development of the category of means of cultural production.

This production paradigm, as stated earlier, has the initial effect of duplicating the component categories of 'the base' (i.e. forces and relations of production) within the field of culture. Figure 1 briefly outlines potential conceptual consequences of such a move (some of which go beyond the scope of this article). This schema differs significantly from Johnson's view

³⁷ Grossberg comes close to asserting this interpretation of Williams (and so of employing 'Raymond Hoggart') in his reply to Garnham; see Grossberg, p. 74.

³⁸ Murdock, 'Base Notes', p. 93.

³⁹ Murdock, 'Across the Great Divide', p. 92; Murdock, 'Base Notes', p. 97; cf. Terry Eagleton, 'Base and Superstructure in Raymond Williams', in Terry Eagleton (ed.), *Raymond Williams: Critical Perspectives* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989), pp. 165-75.

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that Williams merely proposes an undifferentiated expansion of 'production'.

Figure 1 **The Production Paradigm and 'Culture'**

	forces of production, i.e. labour plus varying means of production	relations of production
'general'	means of 'general' production	social divisions of labour based in ownership of means of production.
'cultural'	means of communication (aka means of cultural production)	social divisions of intellectual labour based in ownership of means of cultural production and distribution of cultural 'skills'.

As Markus indicates, far from having 'misread' such matters, any conceptual dilemmas which result for Williams are the same as those of other proponents of similar schemas such as Theodor Adorno.⁴⁰

The general productive forces are seen to exercise determinacy upon the cultural productive forces *homologically* (cf. below). Nor does Williams reject out of hand Marx's mode of determination of 'the superstructural'. Rather, he rejects the *epochal* model in Marx's *1859 Preface* for that Marx actually *applies* in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*. Marx's practice there largely conforms with Williams's redefinition of determination as the setting of pressures and limits.⁴¹

⁴⁰ György Markus, 'Marxism and Theories of Culture', *Thesis Eleven* 25 (1990), pp. 91-106; Paul Jones, 'T.W. Adorno and Raymond Williams: Fellow Travellers After All?', in Deborah Chambers and Hart Cohen (eds.), *Proceedings of the 1990 Australian Cultural Studies Conference* (Kingswood, New South Wales: University of Western Sydney/Nepean Press, 1991), pp. 187-94.

⁴¹ Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works, Volume 11* (1852; London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1979) pp. 103-97. For Williams's preference for *The Brumaire* over 'The 1859 Preface' see Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society* (1958; London: The Hogarth Press, 1990), pp. 266-7 and 280-84, and also Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, pp. 76-7. For Williams's linkage of *The Brumaire* with homological analysis see Raymond Williams, 'Marx on Culture', *What I Came To Say*, pp. 223-224. The key passage in *The Brumaire* is Marx's famous discussion of the political reproduction of the 'limits' of the 'petit bourgeois' mentality. Williams emulates this in his analysis of the Bloomsbury group: Raymond Williams, 'The Bloomsbury Fraction', in *Problems in Materialism and Culture*, pp. 148-69.

Confusion has arisen because Williams's famous 1973 essay on these matters does not discuss *The Brumaire* and only develops its 'positive' case schematically.

That essay and his acknowledgement of Lucien Goldmann's work in 1970 are usually seen as announcing the beginning of his *rapprochement* with the 'Western Marxist' tradition.⁴² But an equally strong thematic in those essays is the relationship between literary criticism and sociology. All the conceptual problems and innovations of the base and superstructure essay, for example, are discussed within literary analysis, rather than an 'anthropological' conception of culture and the 'true crisis' in the titular cultural theory is seen to turn on definitions of aesthetic culture (art). Indeed it is feasible to argue that in this period Williams is most concerned with *the methodological implications of the abandonment of the 'object' and 'methodology' of orthodox 'Cambridge' literary analysis*. At best he struggles to articulate his alternative normative critique.

The engagement with Goldmann allows Williams to acknowledge that 'The problem is always one of method':

To have a sociology only concerned with abstract groups, and a literary criticism only with separated individuals and works, is more than a division of labour; it is a way of avoiding the reality of the interpenetration, in a final sense the unity, of the most individual and the most social forms of actual life.

The problem is always one of method, and this is where ... [Goldmann's] idea, of the structures of the genesis of consciousness, must be taken seriously. We are weakest, in social studies, in just this area: in what is called the sociology of knowledge but it is always much more than that, for it is not only knowledge we are concerned with but all the active processes of learning, imagination, creation, performance.⁴³

Significantly, however, Goldmann's own conception of homological analysis of the relationship between structures of consciousness and literary works — genetic structuralism — is rejected as too 'epochal'. The ground is laid for the reception of the more conjuncturally specific project of Antonio Gramsci in 1973.

Williams pares down his final methodological assumptions in the

⁴²Raymond Williams, 'Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory' (revised) and 'Literature and Sociology: in Memory of Lucien Goldmann' (revised), in *Problems in Materialism and Culture*, pp. 31-49 and 11-30 respectively.

⁴³Williams, 'Literature and Sociology', p. 29.

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latter to the following:

But I am saying that we should look not for the components of a product but for the conditions of a practice. ...

... The recognition of the relation of a collective mode and an individual project — and these are the only categories that we can initially presume — is a recognition of related practices. That is to say, the irreducibly individual projects that particular works are, may come in experience and in analysis to show resemblances which allow us to group them into collective modes. These are by no means always genres. They may exist as resemblances within and across genres. They may be the practices of a group in a period, rather than the practice of a phase in a genre. But as we discover the nature of a particular practice, and the nature of the relation between an individual project and a collective mode, we find that we are analysing, as two forms of the same process, both its active composition and its conditions of composition, and in either direction this is a process of extending active relationships. This means, of course, that we have no built-in procedure of the kind which is indicated by the fixed character of an object. We have the principles of the relations of practices, within a discoverably intentional organisation, and we have the available hypotheses of dominant, residual and emergent.⁴⁴

Murdock understandably finds this too schematic.⁴⁵ However, these hypothetical assumptions were later reworked, qualified and elaborated in conjunction with the production paradigm. 'Organisation' in the above, for example, re-emerges as a chapter in *The Sociology of Culture*.⁴⁶ More fundamentally, the search for 'resemblances' consolidates into Williams's mode of homological analysis, which is applied, for example, 'superstructurally' to intellectual 'formations' and 'basically' to means of communication as means of production.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Williams, 'Base and Superstructure', pp. 48-9.

⁴⁵ Murdock, 'Base Notes', p. 89.

⁴⁶ Williams, *The Sociology of Culture*, pp. 206-33.

⁴⁷ Space does not permit adequate elaboration here. For the former see the references in footnote 41 above. For a detailed exegesis of the latter see Paul Jones, 'The Technology Is Not The Cultural Form? Raymond Williams's sociological critique of Marshall McLuhan', *Canadian Journal of Communication* 23 (1998), pp. 421-52. I would suggest that this mode of analysis goes some way towards answering Murdock's complaint that Williams fails to integrate his respect for political economy into his own work.

Williams so hones a form of conjunctural or micrological analysis which is specifically designed to address ‘... manifest cultural production which, by the nature of its forms, is not, or not primarily or only, the expression of formal and conscious beliefs: not philosophy or religion or economic theory or political theory or law but drama, fiction, poetry, painting’.⁴⁸ Now, this setting aside of ‘superstructural’ normative ideologies helps situate the other issue raised by Murdock, Williams’s poor integration of the democratising norm into cultural materialism. For clearly, participatory democracy and its informing philosophies and political theories *are* very significant normative ideologies for Williams. However, as with his inattention to the state, he tends to take it as given that these have already achieved an analytic recognition to which he is adding innovations. A methodologically reflective acknowledgement of the critique of normative ideologies as such does occur, though, in his sympathetic discussions of the Frankfurt School.

Fellow travelling culturalists? Frankfurt ideology critique and the public sphere

We have already seen that Williams’s production paradigm for culture was anticipated by Adorno. However, even the suggestion of a parallel between Williams’s work and that of the Frankfurt School still seems almost absurd to many and would certainly be deemed so by the cultural studies orthodoxy recounted. Williams’s hostility to the ‘mass culture’ thesis, in any form, is so well-documented that, even allowing for the very different reasons for its advocacy by, say, Leavis and Adorno, how, it might be asked, could Williams possibly have had anything in common with the Frankfurt project?

The immediate answer to this question is, in brief, that he did share with members of the Frankfurt School *at least* an interest in a mode of critique of ‘high culture’ which aimed to maintain its critical utopian dimensions.

The texts which record Williams’s initial reception of the translation of some major works of the Frankfurt School — characteristically, book reviews — support this view.⁴⁹ Predictably, Williams does state his ‘radical disagreement’ with the mass culture thesis in both reviews but nonetheless confesses to the following in the second: ‘A more helpful element of the School’s work can be seen in its searching analysis of concepts in *Aspects*

⁴⁸ Williams, *The Sociology of Culture*, p. 27.

⁴⁹ Raymond Williams, ‘On Reading Marcuse’, *Cambridge Review* (30 May 1969), pp. 366-8; Raymond Williams, ‘The Frankfurt School’, *The Guardian* (14 February 1974), p. 14.

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of *Sociology*.⁵⁰ some of this is remarkably liberating and challenging, at the very foundations of the subject.⁵¹ In retrospect, it is hardly surprising that Williams found this 'searching analysis of concepts' so helpful. Adorno and Horkheimer (in *Aspects*), Marcuse and Habermas all practise what often seems a mode of historical semantics identical to Williams's.

Marcuse, for example, published an essay in 1965 called 'Remarks on a Redefinition of Culture' which bears an uncanny resemblance to Williams's historical semantic discussions of the concept (from which, however, Marcuse drew remarkably different conclusions from Williams's concerning educational systems).⁵²

Williams appears to have been unaware of that essay but asserted very strong affiliations with some of Marcuse's work in his other review, a 1969 essay on *Negations*, a selection of articles written by Marcuse between the 1930s and 1960s. Williams distances himself from Marcuse's position on 'the condition of the proletariat in advanced capitalist society'. That said, however, he goes on to indicate more fundamental common intellectual interests in this long but remarkable passage:

My interest, and it is deep, is in what can be loosely called the German rather than the American work, and this is in fact predominant in *Negations*. For historical reasons, we have been separated, in Britain, from a critical and philosophical tradition which, when we re-encounter it in Marcuse or in Lukács, is at once strange and fascinating: at once broader and more confident, more abstract and yet more profoundly involved than our own. I felt the size of this gap, and yet the interest and pleasure of a possible bridge across it, in one of Marcuse's essays from the thirties ... 'The Affirmative Character of Culture'. The particular interest of the essay, for me, is that its analysis corresponded so closely with a central theme of *Culture and Society*, and that both were historical treatments, of very much the same problem, which were yet continents of countries apart in method and in language. It was a marvellous moment of intellectual liberation to read across that gap into a mind which in all but its most central area of value and concern was so wholly other and strange.

⁵⁰ Frankfurt Institute for Social Research, *Aspects of Sociology* (1956; London: Heinemann, 1973).

⁵¹ Williams, 'The Frankfurt School', p. 14.

⁵² Herbert Marcuse, 'Remarks on a Redefinition of Culture', *Daedalus* 94, 1 (Winter 1965), pp.190-207.

Affirmative culture was the historical form in which were preserved those human wants which surpassed the material production of existence.

This was exactly my own conclusion, of the essential origin and operation of the idea of culture, as it developed in England after the Industrial Revolution, at a time when we were very close, especially through Coleridge and Carlyle, to the German thought to which Marcuse's arguments relate. It is a sense of meeting after a long separation. ... [I]t indicates in a very sharp and uncompromising way an issue that has been at the centre of my own concern since I returned to Cambridge: the social and political use of what appears to be the ideal or the beautiful content of what Marcuse calls 'affirmative culture'. That is, an idea of culture represented human values which the society repressed or could not realise. As such it was critical. But the form of the separation became at a certain point (in England, perhaps, in the late nineteenth century, when the ethos of what we call traditional Cambridge was formed) a ratification, a system of values against social involvement and social change. The ideality of the culture — always to an important extent genuine — seemed to require preservation and protection from a pushing, materialist social world.⁵³

This passage does far more than merely acknowledge a commonality between Marcuse's 1937 essay and the *Culture and Society* of 1958. Despite its aside concerning *initially* different methodologies, it provides a different route 'out' of Cambridge literary criticism — and, indeed, the charge of 'culturalism'. It constitutes a near recognition by Williams that he shares with members of the Frankfurt School the key practice of their *Critical Theory*: 'emancipatory' ideology critique.

Broadly, by such ideology critique is meant an immanent analysis of the utopian claims of an ideology where 'ideology' refers to 'elaborated' ideologies (and thus would include what Williams saw as one of the available meanings of 'ideology'). The utopian claims of such ideologies, their emancipatory promise, are seen to derive from their 'content' but are, of course, subject to socio-historical delimitation which is traceable to 'external' determinants but also immanently present in 'closures of thought' which contradict the ideology's broader emancipatory claims.⁵⁴ Such

⁵³ Williams, 'On Reading Marcuse', pp. 367-8.

⁵⁴ György Markus, 'On Ideology-Critique — Critically', *Thesis Eleven* 43 (1995), pp. 66-99.

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contradictory features render these ideologies susceptible to the role of 'court of critical appeal' or instead (or perhaps as well) to one of legitimation. Williams's own account above of Marcuse's 'affirmative culture' thesis provides a rudimentary demonstration of this undoubtedly dialectical mode of analysis.

For Adorno it is in analytic pursuit of the contradictory 'pretensions' of such embedded claims that immanent criticism 'perceives those (antinomies) of society'.⁵⁵ It is this consequence of immanent ideology critique which, in turn, necessitates a complementary move to a fuller sociological analysis, including a sociology of culture. On the question of how this complementarity is articulated and executed, Adorno and Williams would part company.

This is sufficient to assert that rather than a 'literary sociology' — Johnsons's philological basis, as we have seen, of Hall's charge of 'culturalism' and, indeed, the myth of 'Raymond Hoggart' — Williams instead practises 'emancipatory' ideology critique. I would suggest that this is the characteristic technique in all Williams's major 'cultural' critiques, from the historical semantic analysis of particular 'keywords' through much of his literary criticism and on to his recovery of the emancipatory potential within superficially unpromising aesthetic and theoretical texts.

Such an expanded conception of 'cultural criticism' is a more appropriately dialectical mode of application of Williams's dialectically 'expanded' conception of 'culture' than the reductivist attribution of 'a whole way of life' which has dominated much discussion of his work. That is, the dialectically expansive conception of culture should be seen as enabling an expansive mode of immanent socio-cultural *critique* rather than merely an expanded 'object' of analysis devoid of an appropriate 'methodology', as Turner has implied.

It most likely will remain a mystery why the deep interest in 'the German work' Williams expressed in the essay on Marcuse did not develop as strongly as his undoubtedly much more critical and detailed dialogue with 'the French' did. Accordingly, this identification of Williams's mode of critique with Frankfurt ideology critique must remain a heuristic proposition. There is no doubt that Williams could not have fully embraced the 'universalist' tendencies in Frankfurt ideology critique. For such a mode of analysis is, like Goldmann's rejected genetic structuralism, highly prone to an 'epochal' overstatement based on what Williams always saw as an illegitimate *a priorism*. Yet, as we have seen, Williams was prepared in the case of Goldmann to develop his own, more subtly historicised, version of

⁵⁵ Theodor Adorno, 'Cultural Criticism and Society', *Prisms* (1955; Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1984), p. 32.

homological analysis. Such a reflective declaration might also have been possible with ideology critique. The de facto ideology critique Williams practices usually does incorporate a homological analysis of relevant social determinants.

Habermas's public sphere thesis is perhaps the most famous contemporary example of emancipatory ideology critique.⁵⁶ It is precisely Williams's capacity for a more historically nuanced recognition of media and cultural specificity in his writings which has recently attracted public sphere theorists, including Habermas, to his work.⁵⁷ The strongest case political economists have made against contemporary cultural studies is their claim to a more fully articulated normative goal, as in Garnham's invocation of social justice. Since at least the mid 1980s this articulation has often been made in reference to Habermas's public sphere thesis. In contrast, that thesis has been largely rejected or sidestepped in cultural studies,⁵⁸ most obviously in John Hartley's recent *Popular Reality*.⁵⁹

Both cultural studies orthodoxy and political economists' appreciations have tended to limit methodological assessment of Williams's project to the question of determination. What has been missing from the political economists' reception of Williams is a recognition of a commonality which goes beyond a political economy of culture itself and the advocacy of a participatory democracy.⁶⁰ Williams's cultural materialism not only shares these interests with contemporary political economy but also offers a

⁵⁶ Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1962; Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1991).

⁵⁷ E.g. Geoff Eley, 'Nations, Publics, and Political Cultures: Placing Habermas in the Nineteenth Century', in Craig Calhoun (ed.), *Habermas and The Public Sphere* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1993), pp. 289-339.

⁵⁸ Cf Murdock's similar comments in relation to citizenship; Murdock, 'Across the Great Divide', p. 93.

⁵⁹ John Hartley, *Popular Reality: Journalism, Modernity, Popular Culture* (London: Edward Arnold, 1996). I have tried to elaborate these distinctions in a review essay on Hartley's book, 'Between Cultural Studies and Critical Sociology: the Public Sphere, Counter Public Spheres and Journalism', *Media International Australia* 87 (1998), pp. 121-133. For Hartley's response, see John Hartley, 'This Way Habermadness Lies', *Media International Australia* 88 (1998), pp. 125-35.

⁶⁰ Hannu Niemenen's recent *Communication and Democracy: Habermas, Williams and the British Case* (n.p.: Finnish Academy of Science and Letters, 1997) argues strongly for the recognition of Williams's parallel contribution to this 'emancipatory' normative discourse but characterises the basis of his position as one drawn from 'the literary tradition' (p. 16). This is an underestimation of Williams due to Niemenen's confinement of his study to Williams's early work. As the discussion above suggests, the commonality could be seen as greater because of Williams's *de facto* embrace of Frankfurt ideology critique but must be regarded as 'sociologically tempered' from overly universalistic claims by his mature sociology of technology and cultural forms.

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potential means of *methodologically embedding* an emancipatory ideology
critique within a shared critical sociology of culture.

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Reinventing England¹

Declan Kiberd

'Virtues are individual; vices are national.' That witty Enlightenment formulation gained added authority through the twentieth century, as nationalists of one kind or another wrought havoc. By the 1980s the very notion of international solidarity had changed its meaning, having ceased to denote the pooling of national resources and become instead an alternative to nationalism, an international style. All talk was of 'world novels' and 'world music' in a global economy. Yet just a few weeks ago cricket fans celebrated a famous victory in the test series with South Africa by waving English flags rather than Union Jacks. The Cross of St George flies ever higher on these occasions, while cultural nationalism enjoys a new vogue even among exponents of left-liberal Critical Theory. John Rutherford's *Forever England* concludes with a lament that 'England' remains as yet undefined.²

Only rare contemporary thinkers such as Tom Nairn have registered the fact that, far from being only a backward-looking philosophy, nationalism might also be the sign and shape of the future.³ The collapse of communism in 1989 simply speeded up a process which had marked a growth from about fifty recognised nation-states in 1945 to something more like two hundred as the century ends. Critical Theory is now becoming open to the suggestion that many 'international' arrangements from Great Britain through the European Union to the Organisation of African States may be little more than mechanisms for reinforcing the hegemony of one strong power at the expense of all others. As yet, however, it has scarcely learned how to explain what happens to the people-nation which allegedly enjoys such hegemony. In *The Satanic Verses* a character remarks that so much of their history happened overseas that the British don't know quite what it all means.⁴ The same might be said of many other peoples as well.

If social class has not become the basis of international solidarity which radicals once hoped it might be, perhaps a new kind of nationalism can, permitting peoples to pursue legitimate interests as a brake upon the global economy. Tom Nairn has complained that events since 1989 have prompted no new theories to explain the resurgence of nations.⁵ Instead commentators have resurrected all the old left-liberal warnings against

¹ This is a shortened version of a keynote lecture delivered at a conference on 'Intercultural Relations' at Trinity College, Dublin, on 13 May 1998.

² John Rutherford, *Forever England* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1997).

³ Tom Nairn, *Faces of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1996).

⁴ Salman Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses* (London: Viking, 1988), p. 343.

⁵ Nairn, pp. 59ff.

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chauvinism and fascism, using the tools of yesterday to analyse the challenges of tomorrow. But perhaps some of the even older analyses, now forgotten in some quarters but still a part of the cultural record, could be of help to us now.

To explain this, I'll begin with the situation I know best. Post-colonial theory has talked itself into a profound depression on the subject of nationalism, which it routinely accuses of inscribing into its own actions and texts all the major tyrannies of the imperial system which it promised to extirpate. So, in Irish terms, the old colonial capital Dublin was allowed to continue swelling at the expense of the provinces; a compulsory version of Standard Irish was beaten into children as once a compulsory version of Standard English had been imposed on them; and British guns which had been used to suppress the 1916 rebellion were called back by Michael Collins to quell radical republicans.

But, if the post-colony carries the after-image of empire on its retina, might not the process be more complicated? Perhaps the colony before independence might be found to have borne a proleptic image of a liberated home country. The postboxes in Dublin whose *Victoria Regina* insignia were spray-painted green by nationalists too poor or exhausted to imagine an alternative are often cited as an instance of post-colonial torpor. But they may tell a deeper story, for Ireland in the 1830s and 1840s had a streamlined postal system well before England. The 'laboratory theory' of history reminds us that, for the rulers of Westminster, nineteenth century Ireland was a sounding-board, a place in which intrepid experiments could be tried, a land that existed in a parabolic relation to England.⁶ Some of the successful experiments were so radical that even a century later they have not been fully implemented in England: the delinking of an official connection between the Protestant church and state, the dismantling of a feudal aristocracy, and so on. The colony was, in short, not only a site of nightmarish fears but also an anticipatory illumination of real potential, an image of a future England. Shaw liked to joke that all Englishmen should be sent for a spell in Ireland, so that they might learn flexibility of mind.⁷

Shaw was, of course, a reader of Marx, who had argued that Ireland was the key to revolution in Britain, since overthrow of the old paternalist aristocracy was more likely to occur in the land of the Fenians first. Far from being saved by British radicals, the Irish saw themselves as saving them: for the project of 'inventing Ireland' presupposed the task of 'reinventing

⁶ For the exemplary application of the parabolic interpretation, see the writings of Gearóid Ó Tuathaigh, especially *Ireland Before the Famine 1798-1848* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1972).

⁷ Quoted by Michael Holroyd, 'GBS and Ireland', *The Sewanee Review* LXXXIV, 1 (Winter 1976), p. 41.

England'. Hence the involvement of a Land League leader like Michael Davitt in the Labour interest during the general elections in Britain. That process was reciprocal, however, indicating that it was not only among left-wing activists that the dialectic was at work. Many traditional Englanders, sensing that a pristine version of their own cultural heritage was still to be encountered on the other island, came over to savour its ruralist ethos and Elisabethan locutions. Some, like Wilfred Scawen Blunt, found themselves also supporting the Land League. Ireland just might be, as Shaw liked to suggest, the last spot on earth still producing the ideal Englishman of history, the freedom-loving defender of rural life,⁸

Blunt saw no contradiction between his support for the Land League which sought to expropriate landlords and his continuing prosperity as a landholding aristocrat in the south of England. He has been accused of misreading the political message of the Land League — but did he? After all, what followed the League's campaigns was not the communitarianism of Davitt's dream but a much more English kind of property-owning democracy. Anyway, whether Blunt's interpretation was right or wrong is scarcely important now. He is significant, rather, as an example of the emerging sort of intellectual who sought to undo the deforming effects of the British empire (with all its energy-sapping demands for service and self-extinction) on the English folk mind. Some of these intellectuals, from Blake to William Morris, were social radicals, while others were highly conservative Little Englanders. Today, after Powellism, Little Englanders often get a bad press, but their ideological range was broad enough to comprehend such figures as H.G. Wells, George Orwell and (in our own time) Tony Benn.

Wilde and Shaw were early exponents of this viewpoint. They considered that the strain of running an empire had left Britain a deeply distorted society. Whatever the material benefits (and they were questionable), the psychic costs were just too high. In order to harden themselves for the task of military coercion and colonial administration, the British had devalued in themselves all those qualities of poetry, sensitivity, and imagination once celebrated by a Shakespeare or a Blake.⁹ And the projection of despised or soft 'feminine' qualities onto Celts or Indians had led inexorably to a diminishment of womanhood at home. The colonial adventure had led not just to suffering overseas, but had corrupted domestic British society to the core. Worse than that, it had left the English with their own unresolved national question, for the motive of imperialism might not,

⁸ G.B. Shaw, 'Preface', *John Bull's Other Island* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1988), p. 18.

⁹ Ashis Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self under Colonialism* (Bombay: Oxford University Press, 1983), pp. 7ff.

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after all, have been economic gain so much as an attempt to escape from some terrible emptiness within. In the very act of escaping, some hoped to find the 'England' which had eluded them at home. But, apart from the Noel Coward and Gilbert-and-Sullivan caricatures, few people had any clear idea as to what 'England' might mean.

Wilde and Shaw thus believed that England was the last, most completely subjugated of all the British colonies. Their espousal of androgynous heroes and heroines may be seen as a critique of the prevailing macho-imperial styles. 'I would give Manchester back to the shepherds and Leeds to the stock-farmers,'¹⁰ proclaimed the youthful Wilde, already as worried as any BBC2 presenter about the disappearing English countryside. 'Home Rule for England' became Shaw's favourite slogan, and whenever he was asked by bemused Londoners for the meaning of the terrible words 'Sinn Féin' he would reply 'It is the Irish for "John Bull"'.¹¹

That programme of English self-recovery had a set of cultural corollaries, best outlined by W.B. Yeats. His rereading of Shakespeare at the start of the century was based on the attempt to restore an 'English' in place of a 'British' Shakespeare — one who loved the doomed Celtic complexity of Richard the Second and scorned the usurper Bolingbroke's merely administrative guile. If Edward Dowden had praised Shakespeare for mastering 'the logic of facts' in pursuit of the imperial theme, Yeats saw him rather as one who would never deny his own or imagination for the sake of mere power. Bolingbroke, like all usurpers, was in flight from his own emptiness "and saw all that could be seen from very emptiness".¹² In his own plays Yeats sought to recover the earlier verbal energies of the English, the poetry of the carnivalesque. His resolve to tour London, Oxford and Cambridge with them was based less on a forelock-tugging desire for ratification in the great cultural centres of Britain than on a thoroughly admirable ambition to unfreeze the drama of post-Victorian Britain from its torpor, by restoring to it some of the authentic energies of English poetic drama. For he, too, was anxious, in inventing Ireland, to reinvent England.

Just how prophetic much of this was may be seen in any number of ways. I take, as a random sample, some of the London Sunday newspapers of April 1998. One contained a lengthy review of A. S. Byatt's attempt to define an English canon of shorter narrative prose in *The Oxford Book of English Short Stories*. The general verdict was that this was a difficult but

¹⁰ Quoted by H. Kingsmill-Moore, *Reminiscences and Reflections* (London: Methuen, 1930), p. 45.

¹¹ G.B. Shaw, *The Matter with Ireland*, ed. David H. Greene and Dan H. Laurence (London: Hart-Davis, 1962), p. 149.

¹² W.B. Yeats, *Essays and Introductions* (London: Macmillan, 1955), p. 108.

fascinating task, one which might be taken further. In the 'Review' section of *The Sunday Times* of 26 April, the historian David Starkey followed a somewhat different line under the provocative heading: 'Hooray, England Doesn't Exist':

Once upon a time we were rather proud of this absence of national(ist) paraphernalia. H.G. Wells, that quintessentially English socialist, looked at plump, beer-swilling Bavarians squeezed into lederhosen and raw-boned Scots in kilts, and thanked God that the English had no national dress. But, as the world map has ceased to be coloured pink abroad and as the United Kingdom comes apart at the seams at home, we English have started to feel distinctly underdressed in the fashion parade of nations. And we are grasping at straws to cover our nakedness.

The reason for that crisis was the opportunist equation in the 18th and 19th centuries of Englishness with Britishness. Britain was really a flag-of-convenience for English interests but the price was that many specifically English traditions, such as the frock coat, were adopted as British and, therefore, imperial-international style. Even as it puffed Englanders up, the British scheme sucked from them what cultural identity they had achieved.

One of the insignia that the British imperial scheme did not rob England of was its cult of success. As W.B. Yeats wrote in an essay on Shakespeare, "the popular poetry of England celebrates her victories; but the popular poetry of Ireland remembers only defeats and defeated persons".¹³ Now, despite the shapes currently being thrown in the name of Cool Britannia, even that has gone. David Starkey ended his *Sunday Times* article by posing a stark choice to the 'survivors': either to parade around with red roses and the Cross of St George or to decide that 'nationhood is a busted flush and become the first truly global multicultural society'. To some eyes that phrase 'truly global' might look suspiciously like some new post-modern version of the Pax Britannica .

On the editorial page of the same edition of *The Sunday Times* Ferdinand Mount wrote a thoughtful essay complaining that the Union was being 'kebabbled' (a telling coinage) by devolution in Scotland, Wales and Ireland. (On that very Sunday morning over in Dublin, the Irish Taoiseach Bertie Ahern was solemnly, if absurdly, insisting at a 1916 commemoration that the Belfast Agreement removed 'the British element' from the Irish

¹³ W.B. Yeats, 'The Literary Movement in Ireland', in Lady Gregory (ed.), *Ideals in Ireland* (London: Batsford, 1900), p. 101.

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equation.) Ferdinand Mount predicted that the Scottish National Party would engineer a bust-up with London, but that the loyalty of its diverse people to the United Kingdom idea would win though in the end. Asking just how far Prime Minister Tony Blair wanted to go in Balkanising Britain, he pointed very persuasively to the endless interactions of Welsh, Scots, Irish and English: 'as intermarriage and work further mongrelise us, it seems an odd time to split off into separate nations after three centuries together.'

But just how 'together' did these peoples ever manage to be? Linda Colley's *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837* suggests an answer implicit in the *double entendre* of the word 'forge'. 'It was an invention forged above all by war'¹⁴ she says downrightly at the outset — war against the Other that was Catholic Europe. But now both the empire and Protestant faith which gave that warmaking some meaning have all but disappeared, and so the question of separate nationalisms re-emerges, just as it is re-emerging among the nationalities of Eastern Europe which were held formerly as part of the Soviet scheme. Any Irish person who marvels at the immense 'militaria' sections in British bookshops (presumably bought by people who yet subscribe to the myth of 'the fighting Irish') can only endorse Colley's view that 'this is a culture that is used to fighting and has largely defined itself through fighting'.¹⁵

Those writers of English Romanticism who objected to the imperial agenda, such as William Blake, insisted that it would be better to build a Jerusalem 'in England's green and pleasant land', and from the later 1780s the rebirth of England as England became a major theme of poets.¹⁶ Many sensed that the strain of running a far-flung empire could bring down the home country. Edmund Burke suggested as much in his impeachment of Warren Hastings and Edward Gibbon openly toyed with the analogy in his *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. But fighting .a common external enemy helped to forge a unity at home, and to head off energies which might in peacetime have led to internal conflict. Perhaps Mr Blair is trying to find a peacetime way of saving the union by making it more fuzzy and less abrasive at the edges. However, once unleashed, the genie of devolution may, as Mount fears, take many people much further than they intended to go. That is certainly the interpretation which both Sinn Féin and the Irish government are banking on. There is a passing phrase in the Belfast Agreement of last April, which, though it went unremarked in the British press, gives the Irish hope. Strand 3, Article 2, says, *inter alia*, that membership of the British-Irish Council will comprise representatives of the

¹⁴ Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), p. 5.

¹⁵ Colley, p. 9.

¹⁶ John Lucas, *England and Englishness* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1991), pp. 75ff.

British and Irish Governments, devolved institutions in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, when established, and, if appropriate, elsewhere in the United Kingdom, together with representatives of the Isle of Man and the Channel Islands. That can only mean some sort of parliament in England, so Bernard Shaw may have his wish after all.

Where might all of this lead? Where will the British Council stand in ten years' time? Perhaps its delegates and speakers will find themselves offering lectures on Milton, Blake and Shelley, safe in the knowledge that contemporary writing, post-colonial literature and cultural studies can all be left to the department of English in the local university. Certainly, the coming decade will witness many battles on the Bennite left as well as the Thatcherite right to reclaim and redefine an idea of Englishness. John Major's much-documented 'lift' of a passage from an essay of George Orwell on the theme was one kind of manifesto for a Protestant, cricket-playing, village culture. Tony Benn's invocation of the Levellers and Diggers is another. Even the developing republican undertone may ultimately be connected back to the monarchy, which was apparently so secure in the latter half of the 1700s that people felt free to engage in all kinds of subversive debate. One consequence was that Americans came to believe that, under the skin of monarchy, England was actually a republic in all but name.¹⁷

As these debates take on more focus, we may find that they have been already rehearsed in the dramatic art of England for the past two generations. I have sometimes wondered what might ensue if we were to carry forward the logic of Yeats's rereading of Shakespeare and subject some of the plays of 'modern Britain' to a post-colonial interpretation, to take them, no less than *Midnight's Children* or *Borstal Boy*, as post-colonial texts. One could, for example, analyse John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* as a year-of-Suez drama and treat it in the light of some of the themes adumbrated in this essay. Jimmy Porter's late speech could then be read as climaxing in that long-postponed confrontation of the British male with his repressed *anima*:

There aren't any good, brave causes left. If the big bang does come, and we all get killed off, it won't be in aid of the old-fashioned grand design. It'll just be for the Brave New Nothing-very-much-thank-you. About as pointless and inglorious as stepping in front of a bus. No, there'll be nothing left for it, me boy, but to let yourself be

¹⁷ Gordon S. Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* (New York: Vintage, 1991).

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butchered by the women.¹⁸

Porter's indictment is not that the upper-class is tyrannical, but rather that it has no remaining code of belief at all. Though seeming a rebel, he is really a superstraight. To himself, of course, he appears effeminate, a half-man. Brave enough to admit the *anima* as none of his military forefathers could do, he is nonetheless unnerved by that very freedom, and seeks to ratify his jeopardised sense of his own virility in talk and acts of downright misogyny.

The diagnosis offered by Osborne is astoundingly similar to that made by D.H. Lawrence after the previous world war, When the attempt at blood-brotherhood fails, one is left only with 'cocksure women and hensure men', leading to a moment when 'men lose their hold on the life-flow'.¹⁹ Lawrence's remedy was to flee the country on the grounds that 'England's done for ... in England you can't let go'.²⁰ Jimmy Porter cannot leave but, remaining, he becomes a study of what Lawrence might have become — a powerless witness of the decline of romantic England from a dynamic, open society to a packaged heritage industry. Porter's wife and her friends will stay in old cottages and visit ancient churches not because they retain any belief in the traditional codes, but simply as a style option, a matter of external form. Jimmy Porter is appalled: 'Reason and Progress ... the old firm is selling out ... all those stocks in the old free enquiry'.

For all his faults, Porter sees the English past as something to learn *from*. For his wife's friends, it is something to learn *about*, something now museumised but scarcely the basis for a national future. Porter's analysis of upper-class paternalism and pusillanimity is sound enough. The problem is that he has not worked the dialectic through and so his revolt in the end is less against the imperialism of the upper-class than against the timidity with which its members gave the empire up. The rebel is a conservative at heart and there are moments in the play when he voices a very personal resentment against those seductive British forces which dispossessed his generation of the idea of England:

I think I can understand how her daddy must have felt when he came back from India, after all those years away. The old Edwardian brigade do make their brief little world look pretty tempting All homemade cakes and croquet.... Still, even I regret it somehow, phoney or not, If you've no world of your own, it's rather

¹⁸ John Osborne, *Look Back in Anger* (1957; London: Faber, 1966) p. 51.

¹⁹ D.H. Lawrence, *Selection from Phoenix*, ed. A. A. H. Inglis (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979), pp. 373-4.

²⁰ D.H. Lawrence, *Women in Love* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969), p. 341.

pleasant to regret the passing of someone else's.²¹

The clashes between Jimmy Porter and his wife might be taken as a version of the class war disfiguring British society, after the safety valve of empire has been removed, with the Welsh lodger Cliff cast in the role of a reluctant Celtic witness who is constantly tempted to opt out of the entire arrangement. Too young to have fought in World War Two, too old to forget, Osborne's generation could never subscribe to the warlike old Britannia described by Linda Colley. So it had no option but to look back in a kind of muffled anger on the rhetoric of a diminished empire.

One of the major themes of John Osborne's autobiography, *A Better Class of Person*, is, in fact, the sheer impossibility of recovering a personal or national past. England, allegedly underwritten by centuries of tradition, is depicted as a geriatric in the grip of a terminal amnesia. The famous challenge posed by E.M. Forster in an essay on racial purity is repeated: 'Can you give the names of your eight great-grandparents?' Forster had argued that the betting would be 8-1 against and, true enough, the young Osborne never could find out who his ancestors were or what they did. All he ever got were vague anecdotes from family members who never asked the boy about himself. The autobiography (a far finer work than the plays) becomes a long protest against the conditions of its own impossibility, and against a family which, having no sense of its own tradition or nation, substituted for them a tissue of platitudes about class and empire.²²

It was only a matter of time before a play devoted to emptying the word 'Britain' of its residual content was staged. There was a certain inevitability about the fact that this finally came to pass at the National Theatre in London. Howard Brenton's 1980 drama *The Romans in Britain* implied an equation between the Roman rape of ancient Britain and the contemporary conduct of the British Army in Northern Ireland. At a time when the SPQR mentality, not to mention the study of Latin, had ceased to be a dominant element even in the public schools, Brenton might have seemed open to the allegation of taking a cheap and easy potshot. But his play was truly probing in suggesting a Celtic basis for British culture. Britain's current Irish enemies were their own secret doubles, just as King Arthur was 'one more fucking mick'.²³ Irish audiences knew that the converse was also true, in the sense that Sinn Féin leaders with names like Adams and Morrison had genealogies pointing back not to a Celtic past but, more likely, to Cromwell's invading soldiery. Yet Brenton chose not to make

²¹ Osborne, p. 49.

²² John Osborne, *A Better Class of Person* (London: Methuen, 1981).

²³ Howard Brenton, *The Romans in Britain* (London: Methuen, 1980), p. 75.

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that point.

Some accused him of being over-anxious to dismantle a British nationalism but unwilling to subject Irish nationalism to an equally stringent critique. In fact, Brenton portrayed the Irish (especially the women) as no less bloodthirsty than their enemies. Nevertheless, he did allow a sort of glamour to the Irish side. In the play they have a cultural code in which they believe, one that gives their lives coherence, whereas the members of the British Army do not. Brenton was setting his face less against national essences than against imperial ideas. It was the British scheme which he wished to drain of meaning, the better to make way for an English nation sufficiently at ease with itself not to want to run other people's affairs. The lesson was that already taught by Lévi-Strauss: our own system is the only one we can reform without destroying.

The current vogue for Irish plays in the London theatre (19 were playing at one time in March 1998) may indicate another theatrical revival among the Irish, but its location in the English capital also suggests that many of these plays — such as Frank McGuinness's *Mutabilitie* — allow audiences to approach their own national question from a safe remove. Once again, Irish culture exists in a kind of parabolic relation to England's; once again, the Irish in renovating their own consciousness, may also be helping, wittingly or unwittingly, to reanimate England's.

Englishness surely needs redefining. It is a mark of how sunken beneath the level of consciousness it now is that in large tracts of the world people entirely miss the element of parody in a comic-opera song like 'He is an Englishman' or in the drawing-room plays of Oscar Wilde. Those works which are known to be parodic, such as the lyrics of Noel Coward, have been esteemed among formerly colonised peoples for what are at best dubious reasons: they allow people to laugh gently at Englishness, while also reassuring them that as an act it is hilariously easy to mimic. But what is mimicked is not Englishness so much as an unconvincing, unconvicted imitation of those 'higher home types' who never really existed. The post-colonial diagnosis which Douglas Hyde reported from Ireland and Homi Bhabha from India may now be found to trouble the citizens of London and Manchester themselves, for they also are making the painful discovery that to be anglicised is not at all the same thing as to be English.²⁴

The inner history of England will be found eventually elsewhere — not in a people given to play-acting (was it really *Englishmen* who went out in the mid-day sun?) but in a people who were, and remain, rather

²⁴ See Douglas Hyde, 'The Necessity for Deanglicising Ireland', in Sir Charles Gavan Duffy (ed.), *The Revival of Irish Literature* (London: A. P. Watt, 1894), pp. 87ff.; and Homi K Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994).

suspicious of play-actors. These are the people of whom E. P. Thompson and Christopher Hill, A. S. Byatt and E. M. Forster have written so well, the ones who (in Thompson's telling phrase) need saving from the enormous condescension of posterity. Whether they also need saving from the enormous condescension of those Irish who tried to help them to help themselves is another matter. But it should be said that the project sketched by Shaw and Wilde in no way militates against a multi-cultural society. Since all identity is dialogic, 'England' is more likely to achieve a satisfying definition in endless acts of negotiation with those of other identities, not just Irish and Welsh, but Indian and Trinidadian too. In that way, England might once again become truly interesting to the English.

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Keywords: 'Work Provider'

Deborah Cameron

In discussions of the British Labour government's planned 'fairness at work' legislation during the summer of 1998, one proposal to deal with a loophole in current employment law caused particular controversy. Some workers were being excluded from protection against unfair dismissal because they were in the increasingly common position of not being employed directly by the organisation they worked in; rather they were working under the auspices of an independent contractor or agency. The government proposed that even where no contract of employment existed between the business and the worker, workers should have legal redress against unfair treatment in their workplace. Businesses, however, feared they might become liable for all kinds of expenses and other obligations they had previously avoided. Attempting to assuage those fears, Ian McCartney, the minister responsible, said that Labour's intention was not to place new burdens on business; it was merely to bring the law into line with the reality of today's more 'flexible' working arrangements, and clarify the relationship between people and their 'work providers'.

It was the phrase 'work providers' that caught my eye. Whoever coined it presumably did so because 'employer' in this context is inaccurate: the problem precisely concerns people who do not have a direct contract of employment with the organisation they work in. Nevertheless, 'work provider' is an interesting choice — a choice that tells us something about the social and economic order we now inhabit.

For speakers of British English today, the term *provider* is, among other things, part of a vocabulary of what commentators have called 'marketisation', which in turn is a highly salient development of the past 15 years. For instance, the introduction of an 'internal market' in the National Health Service involved redefining the players in that service as 'providers' and 'purchasers' of healthcare. (Simultaneously, for at least some purposes, patients were redefined as 'users'.) 'Work provider' has something of the same technocratic quality.

At the same time, though, Michael Stubbs has pointed out on the basis of investigations into a large corpus of present-day English that *provide* has a 'positive semantic prosody'.¹ It collocates with other words in

¹ See Michael Stubbs, *Text and Corpus Analysis: Computer Assisted Studies of Language and Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), p. 174. (The analysis of *provide* is credited to another corpus linguist, Susan Hunston, but no reference is given.) The aims and methods of corpus linguistics are discussed further in Deborah Cameron, 'Dreaming the Dictionary: Keywords and Corpus Linguistics', *Key Words: A Journal of Cultural Materialism* 1 (1998), pp. 35-46.

such a way that its meaning is typically positive. If something is described as being 'provided' the implication is that it is a good or desirable thing. Using 'provide' in conjunction with obviously undesirable things can be anomalous, as in

Bill provided John with a smack in the mouth.

The automobile industry is one of America's leading providers of environmental pollution.

More exactly, the object need not be inherently desirable, but using *provide* or its derivatives² generally implies it is something wanted by the recipient, as with

Ann provided Betty with the poison to kill Carol.

The government has been criticised for its provision of armaments to repressive regimes.

It is interesting to consider the prosody of *provide* in the context of the historical record as outlined in the Oxford English Dictionary. The Latin root, *providere*, means to foresee, and this was the earliest meaning of the English verb *provide*, though its current meaning derives from the somewhat later sense, 'supply or furnish for use; yield, afford'. However, before *provide* was in use as a verb, the related word *providence* was already established in English. One of its senses was specialised to the concept of divine providence: 'foreknowing and beneficent care and governance of God [or nature, etc.]'. This is the only sense in which *providence* still has (limited) currency, and it is obviously a positive one. A related, secular term, *provident*, survives most commonly in the formula 'provident society', referring to a type of institution that benefits members by providing for their future economic needs. *Provider*, though neutrally defined in the relevant OED entry ('one who provides or supplies; a purveyor') has also acquired positive overtones in modern usage: a 'provider' or 'good provider' is what the traditional husband and father should aspire to be. It is not unreasonable to suggest, then, that even now the terms *providence/provide/provider* can

² A caveat is necessary here; as Michael Stubbs has reminded me (personal communication), corpus studies show that the derivational forms of any given word can behave very variably. That *provide* has a positive semantic prosody does not necessarily imply *provider* or *providence* must. However, although my remarks here are not based on a corpus study, I believe the positive prosody is probably shared by all these items.

Keywords: 'Work Provider'

readily evoke the idea of a beneficent patriarch — be he the Lord of All or just the head of the household — with the power to foresee and take care of our needs.

'Work provider' hovers uneasily between the technocratic register of marketisation and the older, more positive associations just discussed. Although its unfamiliarity and technocratic associations make it unlikely to conjure up any lingering notions of divine providence, my own gut reaction when I initially came across it was to suspect an attempted transfer of the (secular) positive meaning into the sphere of contemporary capitalism, just at the moment when all traces of paternalism — beneficent or otherwise — are being ruthlessly erased from corporate culture (and political culture too; it has recently been made very clear that the welfare state can no longer be expected to provide for everyone from cradle to grave). It also struck me that even within the less emotive, technocratic register, the term 'work provider' has the effect of inverting the classical marxist analysis, according to which the 'providers' of work are the workers themselves, while capitalists are its 'purchasers', and furthermore are able to buy on terms wholly unfavourable to the workers. Whichever way one looks at it, 'work provider' seems like a term designed to gloss over the structural fact of exploitation.

On reflection, I don't think it was Ian McCartney's conscious intention to present capitalists in a positive light; on the contrary, the government was seeking to curb a new form of exploitation at work (avoiding the employer's responsibility to employees by not employing them directly). Unable to use the word 'employer' without confusing the issue, McCartney reached for an alternative that would be neutral as to the worker's contractual position. Nevertheless, his finding *provider*, which as I have pointed out is not a wholly neutral term, rather than some other expression, may be indicative of widely shared *subconscious* beliefs about work which have much to do with recent economic and social changes.

Taking her cue from Raymond Williams's discussion of *work* in *Keywords*, which traces the word's specialisation to the meaning 'waged work', Kay Richardson has pointed out that in some contemporary contexts that specialisation is being undone.³ Her example is *workfare*, a blend of 'work' and 'welfare' which names a kind of work done not for wages but to prove the worker's moral fitness to receive state benefits. Another supposed function of workfare is to socialise the unemployed into the disciplines of waged work, which is held to be 'good for them' in the sense of improving their prospects of finding 'real' work later on.

There is, of course, a long history of social policy-making based on

³ See Kay Richardson, 'Keywords revisited: the present as history', *Social Semiotics* 1, 5 (1995), pp. 101-117.

the premise that work is good for you (an obvious antecedent of workfare is the workhouse). What seems novel in the idea of 'work providers' is less the idea of work as a good in itself than the idea that capitalists, in making jobs available, are not merely serving their own interests but those of the workers and the society as a whole. Presumably this is linked to the particular anxieties and insecurities of an age of globalised competition. Now that capital moves across borders without restriction, national governments have less power than ever to control the workings of the economy. Companies can announce (as Rover did recently) that they are moving their operations to a more favourable location, leaving governments to cope with the consequences, including sudden large-scale unemployment. In this age of insecurity⁴ (or in managerial euphemism, 'flexibility'), there is a material basis for the unspoken assumptions beneath the language of 'work providers'. In a buyer's market for labour, the provision of work — on just about any terms — may indeed be seen as a service. And from the politician's point of view, jobs are now among the most important 'products' of capitalist enterprise.

The increased salience of this viewpoint has been underlined by media reporting of a spate of recent industrial closures. Although news reports did mention what was produced at, for instance, the Siemens factory in the North East whose closure was announced during the summer of 1998 (the facility made semiconductors, and it closed because their price had been driven down by Asian 'overproduction'), what was seen to be most important was the production by this foreign-owned company of work for British people to do. Those who felt the government ought to intervene in some way argued this not on the basis that Britain needed to go on making semiconductors (whereas in the past closures had been contested using the argument that, for instance, Britain needed to retain its car industry or its coal mines), but on the ground that politicians should exert themselves to preserve the nation's dwindling and uncertain supply of jobs. Indeed, politicians' awareness of that argument had been a major reason for Siemens setting up the factory in the depressed North East in the first place: in this case, as in many others, the government offered incentives to a potentially significant 'work provider', the nature of the company's business being less relevant than its potential impact on employment statistics.

Provider was once a synonym for *purveyor* (in fact these are what historians of language call 'doublets', exact equivalents borrowed from different sources, in this case Latin and Old French). Today there is a

⁴ The phrase 'age of insecurity' and the broad outline of the economic analysis I draw on throughout this piece are taken from Larry Elliott and Dan Atkinson, *The Age of Insecurity* (London: Verso, 1998).

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difference, in that the rather archaic *purveyor* suggests buying and selling in a way *provider* no longer necessarily does. Yet perhaps the phrase 'work provider', or rather the changed cultural context in which that phrase has appeared, restores something of the old equivalence. Work is figured as a valuable and scarce commodity to be traded in the relentlessly competitive global market. Governments act as 'middlemen', trying to 'buy' jobs for their own citizens by offering incentives to overseas investors. Sociologists talk about the 'work poor' (people in households where no one has a job, or communities where most households contain no working members) and the 'work rich' (people in households where both/all adults have jobs, and often spend most of their time working). Politicians in the British Labour Party base their welfare strategy on the need to combat 'social exclusion', which is equated not simply with being poor but specifically with being 'work poor', deprived of the opportunity to work. Social commentators and 'futurologists' posit a world in which having a 'real' job will be a status symbol in its own right.

Labour's fairness at work legislation may be bold by the standards of recent British political history, but it is inevitably framed within the larger context where governments, like their citizens, are ever more vulnerable to the power of multinational capitalism to wreak social and economic havoc. The hand of divine providence has been supplanted in our mythology by the invisible hand of the market; but one is apparently no less capricious than the other.

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Wordsworthian and Darwinian Excursions: Ecology, Colonialism and Cultural Materialist Criticism¹

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I

Let me begin with two images of natural landscape; one with, and one without, figures. First William Wordsworth from *The Excursion* (1814):²

A HUMMING BEE — a little tinkling rill —
A pair of falcons wheeling on the wing,
In clamorous agitation, round the crest
Of a tall rock, their airy citadel —
By each and all of these the pensive ear
Was greeted, in the silence that ensued,
When through the cottage threshold we had passed,
And, deep within that lonesome valley, stood
Once more beneath the conclave of a blue
And cloudless sky.— Anon exclaimed our Host,
Triumphantly dispersing with the taunt
The shade of discontent which on his brow
Had gathered,— ‘Ye have left my cell,— but see
How Nature hems you in with friendly arms!’ (III, l.1-14)

And now Charles Darwin, from the *Journal of Researches* (1839), otherwise known as his record of the voyage of HMS *Beagle*:

In the midst of such scenery we anchored at Cape Turn, close to Mount Sarmiento, which was then hidden in the clouds. At the base of the lofty and almost perpendicular sides of our little cove was one deserted wigwam, and it alone reminded us that man sometimes wandered into these desolate regions. But it would be difficult to

¹ I would like to thank the following for their thoughtful and constructive criticism: the editorial board of *Key Words*, especially Jeff Wallace, and the journal's anonymous reader. I would also like to thank Julie Sanders, Martin Hewitt, Roger Ebbatson, Tim Barringer and Kate Flint for providing me with opportunities to present earlier versions of this work to responsive audiences.

² William Wordsworth, *The Excursion* in *Poetical Works*, ed. Thomas Hutchinson and Ernest de Selincourt (rev. new ed., 1936; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981).

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imagine a scene where he seemed to have fewer claims or less authority. The inanimate works of nature — rock, ice, snow, wind, and water — all warring with each other, yet combined against man — here reigned in absolute sovereignty.³

In Wordsworth's Lake poetry the human is fully integrated with nature. Inviting sights and sounds greet the speaker as he crosses the liminal space of his Host the Solitary's cottage door: birds in flight around the crest of a rock, a humming bee, a tinkling rill. The 'pensive ear' is liberated from its melancholy as 'Nature' takes the person in her 'friendly arms'. Darwin's mountainous South American landscape is, by contrast, a sublime, inhospitable wilderness. Humanity's absence is evidence of a struggle with nature's elements, from which nature has emerged as victor: the only sign of human colonisation, a wigwam, has been deserted.

Darwin's reading of Wordsworth has been addressed by a number of Darwin scholars. Edward Manier, Marilyn Gaull and Gillian Beer have focused on Darwin's reading of Wordsworth's poetry, particularly *The Excursion*, during the period in the late 1830s when he was writing up his *Beagle* narrative, beginning his famous Transmutation Notebooks, and contemplating what was to become *The Origin of Species* (1859).⁴ Beer, Manier and Gaull have focused, respectively, on the extent to which Wordsworth's *Excursion* furnished Darwin with a fiction of development; the means for imagining the interaction between human mind and universe; and, in Gaull's words, 'a narrative structure that would accommodate the experience of his voyage.'⁵

New questions, however, have to be asked of the Wordsworth-Darwin relationship in the light of emerging cultural work on past representations of landscape, environment and ecology. Such a focus complicates the received view that Darwin was imaginatively indebted to Wordsworth's account of

³ Charles Darwin, *Journal of Researches into the Natural History and Geology of the Countries visited during the Voyage of H.M.S. 'Beagle' Round the World* (2nd ed.; London: John Murray, 1876), p. 241.

⁴ Darwin described these two years and three months as 'the most active ones which I ever spent'; see Charles Darwin, *Autobiography* in Charles Darwin and Thomas Henry Huxley, *Autobiographies*, ed. Gavin de Beer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), pp. 47-8.

⁵ See Gillian Beer, 'Darwin's Reading and the Fictions of Development', in David Kohn (ed.), *The Darwinian Heritage* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985); and Edward Manier, *The Young Darwin and His Cultural Circle: A study of the influences which helped shape the language and logic of the first drafts of the theory of natural selection* (Dordrecht/Boston: Reidel, 1978), pp. 89-96; and M. Gaull, 'From Wordsworth to Darwin', *Wordsworth Circle* (1979), 10, pp. 33-48: Gaull uses 'voyage' in two senses, principally referring to Darwin's intellectual journey — but behind this is the sense of the actual voyage which he undertook on the *Beagle*; pp. 44-5.

humanity's intercourse with nature. As my example above suggests, Darwin's sublime wilderness without figures appears to be a stoic acceptance of the inhuman, and, further, seems to validate a distinction between this writer and Wordsworth that Jonathan Bate draws in his book *Romantic Ecology: Wordsworth and the Environmental Tradition* (1991). For Bate, Wordsworth is the pre-eminent humanist contributor to the romantic environmentalist tradition; Darwin may decorate his texts with the language of the romantic sublime, but his scientism seriously impairs his contribution to the kind of imaginative ecological cognition that Bate values.

In this essay I shall argue a somewhat different line. Instead of seeing Darwin as purveyor of an ecological vision inferior to Wordsworth's, I shall present Wordsworth and Darwin as writers who found themselves in a common struggle to re-configure an account of the relation between nature and humanity in terms of what has come to be recognised as an ecological paradigm. The effort of re-thinking was made more complex by the inevitable presence of discourses of nation, commerce, race and class, and the ideological pressures that these exerted. In this respect colonial 'excursions' — the colonies as both an imagined solution to national crisis and an estranging encounter with otherness — became the site of convergence for the rather different conclusions that Wordsworth and Darwin reached in their acts of re-configuration. My practice is to perform a cultural materialist analysis which pays close but contextually aware attention to contests over resonant signs and notations which were shared and re-worked between Wordsworth's 'poetry' and Darwin's 'science'. My point is to argue for the extension of a dialectical analysis that will form the basis of a cultural criticism with green awareness, rather than, in my view, the less satisfactory ecocriticism.

II

Raymond Williams expanded his vocabulary of culture and society in 1983 by adding 'ecology' to the lexicon of keywords.⁶ In 1982 he published an essay entitled 'Socialism and Ecology' as a contribution to a sustained engagement with such 'new' political formations as the peace movement and decentralising regionalisms. 'Socialism and Ecology' argued, on the one hand, that the new politics of environmentalism advanced a necessary critique of the traditional socialist emphasis on the economics of production. On the other hand, Williams argued that the ecology movement could not avoid difficult political

⁶ Raymond Williams, 'Preface to the Second Edition' (1983), *Keywords: a Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (1975; London: Fontana, 1988), p. 27. In all, twenty-one words were added.

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choices, and the complex questions of address and response that such highly charged signs and notations anticipate.⁷ Clearly in the early 1980s a new sense of political urgency and possibility propelled 'ecology' into the second edition of *Keywords*.

But locating a language of ecology which had been shared between generations was more difficult. In the characteristic mode of *Keywords*, a genealogy of the word 'ecology' was explicated, making clear its origins in, and its crucial relations to, the discourse of nineteenth-century evolutionary, materialist biology.⁸ In 'Socialism and Ecology' Williams uses these origins to estrange us from present-day meanings of ecology: the word's resonances within late nineteenth-century ethico-religious debates in which socialism had a stake were radically distinct from the specifically environmentalist political debates of the 1980s.⁹ Despite this difficulty, environmentalist concerns and anxieties were integral to the material determinants which, for Williams, generated the long revolution. The shock that came from the observation of environmental transformation and devastation was registered long before the twentieth century. As Williams notes, his earliest major book, *Culture and Society 1780-1950* (1958), records the complex cultural response to the accelerated environmental degradation caused by rapid urbanisation and industrialisation in nineteenth-century Britain.¹⁰

For Williams an ideological perspective intervenes with the failure to recognise that this was (and is) a reified, exploitative and speeded up version of a continual process of transformation which arises from the myriad interactions between habitats and inhabitants (human and non-human animals).¹¹ Of central importance in sustaining Williams's position in this respect is *The Country and the City* (1973), a work which is at once a social history of conventions for representing rural and urban environments, and a refutation of the simple oppositions of pastoral conventions delivered through a complex reading of the historical and material interconnectedness and co-

⁷ This was originally given as a talk to the Socialist Environment and Resources Association, and later published as one of their pamphlets. See Raymond Williams, 'Socialism and Ecology', *Resources of Hope: Culture, Democracy, Socialism*, ed. Robin Gable (London: Verso, 1989), pp. 210-26, viii.

⁸ Williams, *Keywords*, p. 111.

⁹ Alluding to Haeckel's definition of ecology (see note 16, below), Williams points out that Haeckel's work was significant 'because it was a materialist account of the natural world and among other things a physiological account of the soul. This found its place in the fierce debate about the relation between socialism and religion and other ethical systems, which was central in the socialist movement of that period. So that although there was a relation between a version of ecology and a problem in socialism it was not one of much contemporary significance' ('Socialism and Ecology', p. 210).

¹⁰ Williams, 'Socialism and Ecology', p. 212.

¹¹ See Raymond Williams, *Towards 2000* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1983), p. 261.

dependency of rural and urban habitats. In a book whose opening premise foregrounds the problem of subjectivity, perspective and language, this early excursion into cultural materialism suggests that in grasping the extent of the modern environmental crisis — and the capitalist mode of production that accelerates it — a sense of the ideological forms of expression which glimpse, occlude and seek to grasp the dynamics of the crisis, needs also to be realised.¹²

I have traced the emergence of Williams's ecologically sensitive cultural materialism in order to question the so-called 'ecocritical' basis of Jonathan Bate's argument with cultural materialism and its New Historicist variant. Jonathan Bate describes his *Romantic Ecology* as 'a preliminary sketch towards a literary ecocriticism'.¹³ Indeed, the self-acknowledged provisionality of what is, nonetheless, a ground-breaking sketch, needs to be both respected and applauded. But the way that Bate frames his preliminary sketch is very bold indeed. Writing in the light of the collapse of soviet communism in Eastern Europe, he proposes nothing less than the historical necessity of a turn away from 'red' Marxist-oriented criticism, to 'green' ecocriticism.¹⁴

For Bate it is the New Historicists' critique of romantic ideology as pursued by Jerome McGann, Alan Liu and Marjorie Levinson, which exemplifies the failings of 'red' criticism. According to Bate, a method committed to historicising Romanticism has suppressed the historical importance of environmentalism and ecology to Romantic poetry. And in turn Bate vigorously contests the reliance of New Historicism on a methodological insistence on the recovery of the real conditions of exploitation and conflict suppressed beneath poetry's calm, contemplative surface.¹⁵ Bate constructs an opposition between New Historicism and its failure to evaluate poetry satisfactorily due to its determination to read suspiciously; and Hazlitt's humanist critical view of poetry as 'that fine particle within us' which expands and refines being. Bate's ecocritical project sees itself as heir to the latter.¹⁶ This raises questions about the status of discourses of nature; their relationship to discourses of criticism; and the relations between literary and non-literary

¹² Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City*, (1973; London: Hogarth Press, 1985), pp. 297-8, 301.

¹³ Jonathan Bate, *Romantic Ecology: Wordsworth and the Environmental Tradition* (London: Routledge, 1991), p. 11.

¹⁴ Bate, p. 1.

¹⁵ New Historical critical method is summed up for Bate in the moment from Alan Liu's book, *Wordsworth: The Sense of History* (1989) when Liu charges Wordsworth with suppressing Napoleon's historic crossing of the Alpine Simplon Pass by means of the poet's apostrophe to the individualistic Imagination which retrospectively celebrates the poet's own journey through the pass (book VI of *The Prelude*); see Bate, p. 3.

¹⁶ Bate, p. 17.

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discourses of nature sought by that criticism.

It is clear that Bate locates the sources of ecocriticism in selective traditions and formations of discourse. In a discussion of the coining of the term 'ecology' — attributable to the zoologist Ernst Haeckel in 1866¹⁷ — Bate sets out his grounds for arguing for the recovery of a British ecological literary tradition. The distinctiveness of the British tradition derives, for Bate, from his claim that American writers such as Thoreau were surrounded by an environment that was vast, whereas the British tradition 'is much concerned with *localness*'. But there is an additional distinction, and one which draws upon the work of the Darwins (Erasmus and Charles). Although Wordsworth and Thoreau may have responded imaginatively to environments of different scales, they were brothers as ecological humanists: 'Where the Wordsworths and Thoreau stand apart from the Darwins and Haeckel is in their emphasis on a symbiosis between the economy of nature and the activities of humankind.'¹⁸ Writing by ecological humanists, Bate claims, inspires in readers a responsiveness to symbiotic relationships which scientific writing cannot begin to approach. In making this claim Bate underestimates the imaginative and cognitive power of scientific discourse, and its borrowings from literary discourses. At the same time, literary discourses are themselves always already 'contaminated'. Indeed, it is necessary to acknowledge the 'unhomeliness' of discourses, even in Wordsworthian poetry with its apparently 'secure' attachment to the local. Ecology is, according to the Greek root of the word, knowledge of a familiar habitat and its workings (*oikos* = household). However, justifications of an unhomely colonialism are present in *The Excursion*; and a colonial context — removal from the familiar, the local — enabled Darwin to see apparently homely natural relations in a new light.

III

Wordsworth's *The Excursion* is a poem which has long been out of favour, but which Jonathan Bate seeks to resurrect as a canonical environmental text.¹⁹ For early nineteenth-century readers of Wordsworth, *The Excursion* — a poem

¹⁷ 'By ecology we mean the body of knowledge concerning the economy of nature — the investigation of the total relations of the animal both to its inorganic and organic environment; including, above all, its friendly and inimical relations with those animals and plants with which it comes directly or indirectly into contact — in a word, ecology is the study of all those complex interrelations referred to by Darwin as the conditions of the struggle for existence.' See Robert P. McIntosh, *The Background of Ecology: Concept and Theory* (1985), pp. 7-8; quoted and cited by Bate, p. 36.

¹⁸ Bate, p. 39

¹⁹ See Bate, ch. 3.

in nine books featuring the discussions and wanderings of the poet and a group gathered around a philosophic pedlar, the Wanderer — was Wordsworth's great philosophical statement (*The Prelude* was not published until 1850). Recalling a period of intense intellectual activity, Darwin records his 'delight' in reading *The Excursion* 'twice through' between 1837 and 1839.²⁰

For Darwin, home from his life-changing *Beagle* voyage and deep in his transmutational speculations, his 'delight' must have been attributable to complex pleasures of recognition. For instance, book III ('Despondency'), which narrates the tragic life history of the Solitary, includes a meditation on geology and its meanings (ll. 178-192), and asks rhetorically about 'Our origin, what matters it?' (l. 238). It concludes with an account of a consoling voyage to settle in North America, and the desire to commune with 'Primeval Nature's child' (l. 919), or 'that pure archetype of human greatness' (l. 951), but culminates in disillusionment at the discovery 'in his stead' of 'A creature, squalid, vengeful and impure;/ Remorseless and submissive to no law/ But superstitious fear and abject sloth.' (ll.953-5) As Marilyn Gaull points out, the Solitary's account of a native American is strikingly similar to Darwin's own expression of disgust at his first sight of the Fuegians of Tierra del Fuego as recorded in the *Journal of Researches*.²¹

Book III of *The Excursion* illustrates an important aspect of this great nature poem, namely the sense of environmental diversity and otherness that its complex arrangement of narratives and voices seeks to celebrate yet contain.²² Whilst this otherness is measured against the sustaining vision of the English Lakes, the place of the poem's enunciation and promise of resolution, the poem registers a very clear sense of the unhomeliness of the world beyond Grasmere and the colonial networks that grant access to it.

When we begin to look at Wordsworth's poem in this way it becomes clear that Bate's defining sense of the 'local' is under pressure from these networks and their consequences. The Wanderer, at home in the Lakes, still acknowledges the presence elsewhere of 'social Industry' and '... a huge town, continuous and compact/ Hiding the face of earth for leagues' (VIII, ll.117, 120-1). The earth's face is obliterated by 'Abodes of men irregularly massed/ Like trees in forests' (VIII, l. 123-4), an image of encroachment which strikingly uses the language of nature to signify the threat of civilisation. The Wanderer's tendency to blend conventions of expression prefigures an observation of the

²⁰ Darwin, *Autobiography*, p. 49; see also Gaull, p. 42.

²¹ Gaull, p. 43; for the passage from Darwin cited by Gaull see Darwin, *Journal of Researches*, p. 213.

²² See the note which Wordsworth appends to the line 'Of Mississippi, or that northern stream', *Excursion*, III, l. 931, an elaborate quotation ['one of the finest passages of modern English prose.— W.'] celebrating the American wilderness, from notes to William Gilbert's poem, 'The Hurricane'; Wordsworth, pp. 727-8.

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meshing of agricultural and industrial practices and an account of a system of trade:

'He sees the barren wilderness erased,
Or disappearing; triumph that proclaims
How much the mild Directness of the plough
Owes to alliance with these new-born arts!
— Hence is the wide sea peopled, — hence the shores
Of Britain resorted to by ships
Freighted from every climate of the world
With the world's choicest produce. Hence that sum
Of keels that rest within her crowded ports,
Or ride at anchor in her sounds and bays;
That animating spectacle of sails
That, through her inland regions to and fro
Pass with the respirations of the tide,
Perpetual, multitudinous. Finally,
Hence a dread arm of floating power, a voice
Of thunder daunting those who would approach
With hostile purposes the blessed Isle'. (VIII, ll. 129-45)

If Williams came to analyse the enmeshed relations between agricultural and industrial capital in *The Country and the City*, then Wordsworth, through the Wanderer, had already figured it here in 1814, glimpsing the 'alliance' between the plough and the 'new-born arts' of industry. It is, however, the troping of the trade system, a consequence of this alliance (the repetition of 'hence'), which is notable in this passage. In the first reference to trade networks and the destination of imports, trade figures as ships. Subsequently, the reader is presented with metonyms of ships — 'keels' and 'sails'. Finally, the representation of the guarantors of shipping routes is transported to another domain of discourse: naval power and military violence has become, by means of a body metaphor, 'a dread arm of floating power, a voice/ Of thunder'. The closer to organised materialities of power and domination the poem treads, the greater the tendency to resort to a language which both elevates and mystifies it, and which works, in short, ideologically.

This effect can be traced again in the final book (IX) of the poem, the highly philosophical 'Discourse of the Wanderer', in which the blueprint of a new society is mapped out. The Wanderer articulates his vision from the shores of Windermere and Grasmere, and yet these nourishing local habitats will not, by themselves, be able to sustain this solution, given the obliteration of the 'face' of the earth by human population growth, as the Wanderer acknowledges:

'With such foundations laid, avaunt the fear
Of numbers crowded on their native soil,
To the prevention of all healthful growth
Through mutual injury! Rather in the law
Of increase and the mandate from above
Rejoice! — and ye have special cause for joy.
— For, as the element of air affords
An easy passage to the industrious bees
Fraught with their burthens; and a way as smooth
For those ordained to take their sounding flight
From the thronged hive, and settle where they list
In fresh abodes — their labour to renew;
So the wide waters, open to the power,
The will, the instincts and appointed needs
Of Britain, do invite her to cast off
Her swarms, and in succession send them forth;
Bound to establish new communities
On every shore whose aspect favours hope
Or bold adventure; promising to skill
And perseverance their deserved reward.' (IX, ll. 364-82)

The Wanderer's solution to the environmental and social crisis of modernity clearly responds to a Malthusian paradigm. Wordsworth had read Malthus's *Essay on the Principle of Population* (1798), and although he would not write formally against its consequences until 1835 — a point I will return to towards the end of this essay — in this context the mechanical 'iron law' of the theory is refuted.²³ For the dangers of over-population will be countered by the colonial drive of 'Albion's noble Race' (l. 393), amongst whom 'the discipline of slavery is unknown' (l. 351).

This solution echoes, but is more organisationally intensive than, the Solitary's lone excursion to North America in book III. Again, troping is highly significant. Wordsworth's image of organised population dispersal is articulated through the image of swarms of bees, a pastoral notation resonant with poetic authority and tradition, after book IV of Virgil's *Georgics*. Wordsworth's image of the bees equates colonial activity with nature and benevolent elements: pure 'instinct' takes the 'industrious' bees abroad, and the air itself affords their 'easy passage'. Wordsworth, as we have seen, glimpses the meshed relations between pastoral and industry, but here organised colonial practices acquire

²³ Duncan Wu points out that Wordsworth acquired a copy of Malthus in 1798, and probably read it immediately; Duncan Wu, *Wordsworth's Reading: 1770-1799* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 94.

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their legitimacy from an appeal to, and monological identification with, nature.

If *The Excursion's* commitment to the harmonious ecology of the 'local' is fraught with unhomely pressures that give rise to exploitative global solutions, then its related appeal to 'nature' is similarly troubled. Jonathan Bate's claim regarding Wordsworth's acute ecological perception of the symbiosis between the economy of nature and human activity needs to be assessed against the Wanderer's image of the honey bee colonists. In *The Excursion's* image of population dispersal, nature imposes no limits on the bees of Albion. And this is a powerfully ideological trope which posits unmediated equivalencies between the instincts and ends of bees, and an expansionist nation.²⁴

If ecocriticism is to claim intellectual effectiveness, it does seem to me that ideological analysis has a part to play. In one sense, a theory of ideology implies a cognitively responsible stance towards the prodigiously difficult task of grasping the material workings of the real, which are inevitably complex and multi-layered. Clearly it is essential to maintain a sense of the linguistic and affective specificity of the poetic act and its construction of an aesthetic situation. Yet it is also necessary to acknowledge that poetry is, to use Isobel Armstrong's recent formulation, an attempt to re-fashion cognitive space by means of social struggles for the sign.²⁵ Whilst poetry achieves this in a specific and highly complex affective manner, Armstrong's formulation implies the need to situate the strenuous work of poetic and aesthetic discourses in relation to generically different yet topically cognate discourses. And, in turn, a prosaic discourse which aims to re-fashion the cognitive space within which to articulate the symbiosis between the activities of humankind and the economy of nature will also enter into struggles for the sign.

Darwin was creating new cognitive space when he wrote about humble-bees — wild bees — in 1841. His brief article appeared in a homely setting, addressed to the readers of the *Gardeners' Chronicle and Agricultural Gazette*.²⁶ However, whilst framed by a homely context, the essay subtly re-orders relations in the home, if home is taken to be the market-garden and the assumption of human dominion over its produce. As is common in Darwin's work, the essay contains acute and detailed observations of natural and, as it

²⁴ For an account of the role that actual bees, and other animals and organisms, have played in the history of colonial expansion, see Alfred W. Crosby, *Ecological Imperialism: The Biological Expansion of Europe, 900-1900* (1986; Cambridge: Canto/Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 95-6.

²⁵ Isobel Armstrong, 'Textual harassment: the ideology of close reading', *Textual Practice* 9, 3 (1995), pp. 401-420.

²⁶ 'Humble-Bees', the *Gardeners' Chronicle and Agricultural Gazette* 34 (21 August 1841), p. 550; reprinted in Paul H. Barrett (ed.), *The Collected papers of Charles Darwin*, vol.1 (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1977), pp. 142-5.

will turn out, cultural relations. Darwin's immediate aim is to make readers aware of the means by which humble-bees bore holes in the corollas of flowers, and thus extract the nectar by means of a short cut, instead of entering via the petals and brushing their bodies over the stamens and pistils as, Darwin states, 'nature intended them'. But Darwin is involved in a minor controversy here, and polemic drives his argument. He is responding to an earlier correspondent who, having himself noted the tendency of bees to bore holes in plants, argued that the bees' nefarious activity was the cause of kidney bean crop failure. The earlier correspondent urged that the bees' nests be destroyed at the end of the summer, and children be employed to catch and kill female bees as soon as the first bean-plant blossoms have expanded, to prevent crop destruction.

Darwin defends the bees; literally defends them from mass destruction at human hands in a language riddled with strategically placed social evaluations — they are 'industrious, happy-looking creatures' which don't deserve to be 'punished with...severity'.²⁷ Moreover, Darwin contends that the bees' boring of flowers' corollas actually protect the flowers' petals. Darwin urges that florists — who seek to sell flowers on the strength of a culturally elaborated sense of beauty — should be grateful to the bees. We can see then that for Darwin, natural activities are subject to modification and change — bees go beyond 'what nature intended' — and that this has subtle ecological implications for human cultural adornments, discriminations and practices, not least regarding the moral status of animals.²⁸ Darwin's defence of the bees urges the reader to grasp the interwoven economy of human and insect agencies. The cognitive space that Darwin creates from rigorous observation and a discourse with resonant social accents points to why it is questionable to draw too rigid a dividing line, as Jonathan Bate does, between the 'scientism' of Darwin and the 'literary', humanistic ecology of Wordsworth.

IV

Darwin wrote his piece on humble-bees two years after the publication of his

²⁷ Darwin, 'Humble-Bees', p. 144.

²⁸ Ted Benton argues that 'many animal species display a complexity, diversity and adaptability in their behaviour which is denied in Marx's view of them as rigidly stereotypical in their species-characteristic mode of life'; and that historical potentiality (of the kind which Darwin identifies in his note on humble-bees) is an argument in favour of the moral status of animals (which, again, is implicitly recognized in Darwin's note). See *Natural Relations: Ecology, Animal Rights and Social Justice* (London: Verso, 1993), p. 41.

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Journal of Researches. I want now to turn to Darwin's colonial excursion on the *Beagle* as an ecological education mediated by observation, texts, and intellectual formations. Darwin's excursion exposed him to contrasting scenes of beauty and savagery, abundance and destruction. If Darwin could applaud the fruits of England's 'noble race' of industrious, bee-like colonisers — as he did when he admired the pastoral charm of a farm in New Zealand²⁹ — then he also had to confront the dark side of colonialism, in the form of the Argentine General Rosas's genocidal onslaught against the indigenous population of the pampas, and the disturbing means by which it was justified to him, borrowed from animal husbandry: "what can be done? they breed so".³⁰ Such scenes prompted Darwin into an estranging form of ecological cognition.

As Janet Browne's recent biography of Darwin has illustrated, the voyage of the *Beagle* was a colonial mission *par excellence*, for the naval vessel was a pathfinder for 'the dread arm of floating power':

The whole point of the British Admiralty's desire to chart southern Latin America was to enable informed decisions to be made on naval, military, and commercial operations along the unexplored coastline of Buenos Aires and to enable Britain to establish strong footholds in these areas, so recently released from their commitment to trade only with Spain and Portugal.³¹

On arrival in the distant and bleak Falkland Islands in the South Atlantic, Darwin recorded in his diary that it was 'surprising to see how Englishmen find their way to every corner of the globe'.³² Yet there was nothing fortuitous or arbitrary about their distribution, for the *Beagle* took Darwin 'along the strands of a well-organised web of empire'.³³ It is the environmental epistemology conveyed by the intellectual networks comprising this 'web of empire' that has been recently recovered by Richard Grove in *Green Imperialism* (1995).

Grove's work represents a major re-assessment of the practices of European colonial administration. Grove identifies an environmental consciousness which emerged out of the often enlightened networks of colonial administrators and scientific observers.³⁴ His thesis is that between the late

²⁹ Darwin, *Journal of Researches*, p. 425.

³⁰ Darwin, *Journal of Researches*, p. 102.

³¹ Janet Browne, *Charles Darwin: Voyaging* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1995), p. 181.

³² For an account of Darwin's visit to this location see Richard Grove, 'Charles Darwin and the Falkland Islands', *Polar Record* 22, 139 (1985), pp. 413-20.

³³ Browne, p. 183.

³⁴ Darwin's observations of variations between different aboriginal species of giant Galapagon tortoises were greatly assisted by Nicholas Lawson, 'the vice-governor' of Charles Island, as Darwin describes him; Darwin, *Journal of Researches*, p. 382.

seventeenth century and the mid-nineteenth century, European colonial administrators and scientists, in a critical response to the accelerated environmental degradation which resulted from the exploitation of resources in the colonies, forged an unprecedented ecological awareness. From the seventeenth century on, Grove's colonial administrators and naturalists were witnesses to a dramatic and speeded up version of a continual process of transformation which arises from the myriad interactions between habitats and inhabitants. In other words, they had an early, microcosmic exposure to an environmental crisis which later observers of industrialisation in Britain recorded in the writings which Raymond Williams came to group in *Culture and Society*. The intellectual response of the administrators and naturalists was, as Grove details, collectively to elaborate an environmental epistemology which established links between deforestation, climatic change, degenerative environmental effects, and the threat of extinction.

Darwin's *Journal of Researches*, especially in its first edition of 1839, carried notable traces of this environmental epistemology and the textual forms in which it had been recorded for public circulation.³⁵ Moreover, in being preoccupied with the explanation of the processes leading to the mass destruction and extinction of species, Grove argues that Darwin's text was drawing on an extensive body of work recorded by colonial officials, such as that undertaken on the island of St Helena, which, Grove argues, became 'pivotal' for the formation of Darwin's revolutionary theories of endemism and, thereby, natural selection.³⁶

The place of the *Journal of Researches* in Darwin's intellectual genealogy needs to be considered carefully. The Darwin of the *Journal* is not the fully-fledged transmutationist Darwin of *The Origin of Species*. Darwin may speculate that species are destroyed by 'some check which is constantly preventing the too rapid increase of every organised being left in the state of nature' — but this is in the 1845 second edition, some seven years after the fateful re-reading of Malthus.³⁷ Even so, Grove reminds us that Darwin was alert, in his *Beagle* diary, to 'the deleterious impact of human occupation on [St

Browne has pointed out how important Nicholas Lawson was to Darwin's observations and his emerging species theory; see Browne, p. 304, and ch. 13 in general.

³⁵ See Robert Fitzroy, *Narrative of the Surveying Voyages of His Majesty's Ships 'Adventure' and 'Beagle' Between 1826 and 1836, Describing Their Examination of the Southern Shores of South America And the 'Beagle's' Circumnavigation of the Globe*, vol. 3 (London: Henry Colburn, 1839), pp. 157-8. Cf. Richard Grove, *Green Imperialism: Colonial Expansion, Tropical Island Edens and the Origins of Environmentalism, 1600-1860* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 345, 404-7.

³⁶ Grove, *Green Imperialism*, pp. 361-3.

³⁷ Darwin, *Journal of Researches*, p. 176; this speculation does not appear in the 1839 first edition of the account of the voyage; see Fitzroy, pp. 210-12; for Darwin's reading of Malthus, see *Autobiography*, p. 71.

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Helena] and the 'limitations imposed by an island on a colonising species'; in other words, a Malthusian paradigm structured Darwin's observation even before his re-reading of Malthus in 1838.³⁸ According to a Malthusian way of seeing, landscape was conceived as geometric space; it was divided into complex, intersecting zones supporting 'organised beings' whilst setting them against one another in their struggles for food.³⁹

Malthus thus became a significant component in Darwin's ecological education in the colonies. By contrast, as we have seen, for Wordsworth the colonies were the means by which Malthusian pessimism could be resisted, and 'nature' — Albion's swarming bees — the metaphorical means of its expression. Wordsworth responded more forcefully to one of the consequences of Malthusian doctrine in his 'Postscript' of 1835, in which he registered a protest against the Poor Law Reform. It is by focusing on this text that I want to return to the topic of the transference of notations between Wordsworth and Darwin, and the consequences for the elaboration of ecological cognitive space.

When Darwin read Wordsworth between 1837 and 1839 whilst completing the *Journal of Researches* and beginning his transmutation notebooks, he clearly absorbed particular notations that resonated powerfully for him; and not only from the poetry but also from Wordsworth's 'Prefaces' and prose works. As Gillian Beer points out, an entry in Notebook M indicates that Darwin had read and was re-working Wordsworth's meditations on poetry and 'the Man of Science' in the 'Preface' to *The Lyrical Ballads*.⁴⁰ It is possible then that Darwin was familiar with Wordsworth's 'Postscript' of 1835, a supposition strengthened by what may be a conscious echo of the rhetoric of the 'Postscript' in Darwin's *Journal of Researches*.

Wordsworth's 1835 argument against the Malthusian political economy which underpinned the 1834 Poor Law turns on the construction of an analogy

³⁸ Grove, *Green Imperialism*, p. 363.

³⁹ See James Paradis, 'Darwin and Landscape' in *Victorian Science and Victorian Values*, ed. James Paradis and Thomas Postelwait (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1985); see also Jeff Wallace's commentary on this essay in 'Introduction: Difficulty and Defamiliarisation' in David Amigoni and Jeff Wallace (eds.), *Charles Darwin's 'The Origin of Species': New Interdisciplinary Essays* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), p. 38.

⁴⁰ The relevant entry reads: 'Pleasure of imagination, which correspond to those awakened during music — connection with poetry, abundance, fertility, rustic life, virtuous happiness — recall scraps of poetry ... I a geologist have ill defined notion of land covered with ocean, former animals, slow force cracking surface etc. truly poetical. (v. Wordsworth about sciences being sufficiently habitual to become poetical.)' Quoted in Beer, 'Darwin's Reading and the Fictions of Development', p. 546. The relevant passage from the 'Preface' begins 'The knowledge both of the Poet and the Man of Science is pleasure'; see Wordsworth, p. 738.

between the starving but civilised Englishman deprived of outdoor relief, and the savage hunter-gatherer who struggles to find food:

Suppose the objects of our sympathy ... wandering about as strangers in streets and ways, with the hope of succour from casual charity; what have we gained from such a change of scene? Woeful is the condition of the famished Northern Indian, dependent among winter snows, upon the chance passage of a herd of deer, from which one, if brought down by his rifle-gun, may be made the means of keeping him and his companions alive. As miserable is that of some savage Islander, who, when the land has ceased to afford him sustenance, watches for food which the waves may cast up, or in vain endeavours to extract it from the inexorable deep. But neither of these is in a state of wretchedness comparable to that which is so often endured in civilised society.⁴¹

By comparing states of hardship endured by people in savage and civilised states, and reversing the conventional hierarchy, Wordsworth is drawing upon an estranging literary device, the cultural (pre)history of which has been recently traced by Carlo Ginzburg.⁴²

In Darwin's hands this device, used by Wordsworth against Malthusian social theory, is glossed with an estranging twist which frames a form of ecological cognition. When Darwin came to write of the Fuegian in the *Journal of Researches*, he echoed Wordsworth's rhetoric of the 'miserable savage', styling the Fuegian 'the miserable lord of this miserable land'. But whereas Wordsworth's Island savage is isolated from the foodstocks of 'the inexorable deep', for Darwin the deep becomes knowable through a remarkable piece of writing on the 'wonderful' kelp, a species of sea-weed:

A great volume might be written, describing the inhabitants of one of these beds of sea-weed. Almost all the leaves ... are so thickly incrustated with corallines as to be of a white colour ... On the leaves, also, various patelliform shells, Trochi, uncovered molluscs, and some bivalves are attached. Innumerable crustacea. On shaking the great entangled roots, a pile of small fish, shells, cuttle-fish, crabs of all orders, sea-eggs, star-fish, beautiful Holothuriae, Planariae, and crawling nereidous animals of a multitude of forms, all fall out together. Often as I recurred to a branch of the kelp, I never failed to

⁴¹ Wordsworth, p. 758.

⁴² Carlo Ginzburg, 'Making Things Strange: the Prehistory of a Literary Device', *Representations* 56 (Fall 1996), pp. 8-28.

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discover animals of new and curious structures ... I can only compare these great aquatic forests of the southern hemisphere, with the terrestrial ones in the intertropical regions. Yet if in any country a forest was destroyed, I do not believe nearly so many species of animals would perish as would here, from the destruction of the kelp. Amidst the leaves of this plant numerous species of fish live, which nowhere else could find food or shelter; with their destruction the many cormorants and other fishing birds, the otters, seals and porpoises, would perish also; and lastly, the Fuegian savage, the miserable lord of this miserable land, would redouble his cannibal feast, decrease in numbers, and perhaps cease to exist.⁴³

The kelp is at once a complex organism and an environment, its roots, branches and leaves seen as geometric spaces providing zones of shelter and sources of food to numerous species, each characterised by remarkable variations in structure. Darwin conveys a description of harmony and balance, in which modern ecology might see a self-sustaining Eco-system.⁴⁴ Yet the vision is, in its emphasis on intersecting spaces, foodstocks and populations, paradigmatically Malthusian. In time Darwin would come to see the enormous variety of structures as having been produced under pressure of competition and struggle.

Prior even to the elaboration of the theory of natural selection, disequilibrium — practically manifest in Darwin's simultaneous observation and destruction of a habitat — is imaginable and imagined. Darwin's observation of the abundance of varied life forms dependent on the kelp leads him to construct a thought-provoking analogy between destruction of terrestrial and aquatic forests, itself perhaps informed by Humboldt's revolutionary analysis of the complex chain of environmental consequences that follow from terrestrial deforestation, which Darwin would have known.⁴⁵ This in turn leads to the imaginative construction of the links in a food chain, the collapse of which would lead to the extinction of the ironically ennobled variety of *homo sapiens* — the 'miserable' Fuegians of 'miserable' Tierra del Fuego. Contrary to Wordsworth's sense in the 1835 'Postscript' that the sea provides a secondary, arbitrary and unreliable source of sustenance for when the savage's land supplies fail, Darwin sees land and its populations as dependent on the

⁴³ Charles Darwin, *Journal of Researches*, p. 240.

⁴⁴ See Peter J. Bowler, *The Fontana History of the Environmental Sciences* (London: Fontana, 1992), pp. 537-46.

⁴⁵ 'During my last year at Cambridge I read with care and profound interest Humboldt's Personal Narrative' (Darwin, *Autobiography*, p. 38). Richard Grove analyses Humboldt's pioneering insights into deforestation as presented in the *Personal Narrative*; see *Green Imperialism*, pp. 366-8.

'inexplorable' depths: estrangement resides in the boundary between land and sea being conceptually reconfigured. Moreover, according to this form of cognition, cannibalism is imagined less as a function of innate savagery — the other of civilisation — and more a last resort driven by the absence of other viable food stocks.

Whether or not Darwin was conscious of Wordsworth's 'Postscript' of 1835, it remains the case that this passage from the *Journal of Researches* works with some strikingly similar notations, though, cognitively, to quite different ends. Whilst Wordsworth attempts to shock his audience into the realisation that the Malthusian Poor Law has reduced the free-born civilised Englishman to a worse state than a starving savage, Darwin uses a Malthusian paradigm and the image of the savage to make us aware, in Ted Benton's words, 'of that complicated web of interdependencies which make up nature's "economy"', and thus the means by which 'humans are ecologically ... bound together with non-human species'. The implications here are far reaching, for as Benton goes on, there is, as Darwin came to see, a Malthusian path to a recognition of 'human *kinship* with non-human animals [which] affords new ways of thinking about human nature itself'.⁴⁶

It is perhaps strange — and estranging — to contemplate such a reading of Malthus's ideas, held by many to be ideologically pernicious in the nineteenth century and since. Yet, as Raymond Williams has acknowledged, Malthus's theory is crucially concerned with 'the relation between population and resources', a link to the nineteenth-century biology which helped to shape the diverse early meanings of ecology, and thus of importance to social theory and the appreciation of sustainable limits.⁴⁷ As Andrew Ross argued in the same year that Jonathan Bate published his work on ecology, "'limits"..is already one of the more important political keywords of our time."⁴⁸ Ross added that the 'language of "limits" can have different meanings in different contexts', and thus the contested politics of this keyword will shape the direction and focus of hermeneutical practices: accordingly authoritative texts and established intertextual networks will be re-evaluated many times over. In this essay I have traced in the established Wordsworth-Darwin relation ecologically resonant languages of symbiosis and limits emerging from generically diverse

⁴⁶ Ted Benton, 'Science, Ideology and Culture: Malthus and *The Origin of Species*' in Amigoni and Wallace, p. 91.

⁴⁷ Raymond Williams, 'Social Darwinism' in *Problems in Materialism and Culture* (London: Verso, 1980), p. 87; for a view of the importance of Malthus and population theory to present-day green politics see the extracts from Sandy Irvine and Alec Ponton's *A Green Manifesto* (1988), reprinted in Andrew Dobson (ed.), *The Green Reader* (London: André Deutsch, 1991), pp. 55-8.

⁴⁸ Andrew Ross, *Strange Weather: Culture, Science and Technology in the Age of Limits* (London: Verso, 1991), pp. 5.

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sources which organise socially shared, yet ideologically contested, signs and notations.

Am I saying then that, contrary to Jonathan Bate's view, Darwin is, after all, a source of ecocritical richness? Not really, for it seems to me that Jonathan Bate's 'ecocriticism', in being very close to literary criticism as traditionally constituted, is likely to lead us precisely to these kinds of questions, but unlikely to advance us much further. Cultural materialist analysis can best embrace a politically nuanced awareness of past representations of nature and ecology by learning from Andrew Ross's dialectical approach to conflicts between present-day ecological critiques and counter-critiques which attach contrasting and strongly contested orders of priority to the reform of either natural relations or social relations.⁴⁹ Rather than concluding that Wordsworth has a better appreciation of the symbiosis between humans and animals — or, tit for tat, that Darwin does — it is more productive to grasp dialectically the fact that Wordsworth and Darwin's texts represent and occlude the place of the human-social in nature's economy in different ways at different times. We cannot simply come to rest, fatalistically, with Darwin's image of humanity decentred by the kelp: we also have to keep this in dialectical tension with Wordsworth's image of protest against poverty in which human exploitation of humans serves as a model for the domination of non-human animals and resources.

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⁴⁹ Ross, *Strange Weather*, pp. 116-17.

Raymond Williams and Contemporary Political Ecology

Hilary Wainwright

In an essay of 1984, 'Between Country and City', Raymond Williams called for 'a new kind of political ecology [...] which can trace the processes [of the unbalanced and often reckless use of non-renewable resources] to the economic and social structures which develop and are strengthened by them, and which can reasonably propose alternative kinds of economic and social organization'.¹ The essay is a striking reminder of how Williams's understanding of political ecology was grounded not only in the literature of earlier radicals with an environmental sensibility, from Wordsworth through Blake to William Morris, but also in an impressively practical knowledge of technological interventions in nature — agriculture was his speciality. Fifteen years on, in 1999, with a new generation of rebels who fuse an ecological with a humanistic challenge to the ravages of multinational capital, it might be an appropriate moment to take a fresh look at Williams's call.

First, I will explore critically the work of William Morris. Williams believed that Morris provided a foundation or, perhaps more loosely, an inspiration for the necessary innovations in both socialist and ecological thinking. Williams also identified flaws in Morris's vision which a convincing political ecology must resolve. Second, I will explore the uneven and unfinished manner in which over the past fifteen years or so the call for a new political ecology has been heeded. I will indicate how the development of a new ecology relates to the diverse and messy rethinking of the socialist left.

Morris wove together romantic traditions arising from revulsion at the physical devastation wrought by the industrial revolution with emerging socialist traditions whose main concern was poverty. While the romantics yearned for a pre-industrial order, in harmony with nature as they nostalgically assumed, the socialists looked to the expansion of production as the antidote to poverty. They proposed an economy planned by the state to bring about this expansion and redistribute its fruits.

The thread of insight with which Morris brought these two divergent traditions together came from his inside understanding of the character of production itself. His originality lay in his perception that what orthodox socialists of his day treated as the socially neutral production process, from the design through to the use to which the product is put, is imbued with

¹ Raymond Williams, *Resources of Hope: Culture, Democracy, Socialism*, ed. Robin Gable (London: Verso, 1989), p. 233.

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social and moral values. Drawing no doubt on his own craft practice as well as his more theoretical reflections, he could see that social, moral and aesthetic choices are made in the course of investment, design or manufacture, if only implicitly, that reject one set of production priorities in favour of another. It is blindness to see production as a linear process, or to think of it as an abstract generality. There can be different kinds of production: damaging as well as useful production, production that is ugly as well as production that is beautiful and life enhancing. Describing Morris's distinctive contribution to the development of socialist argument, Williams wrote about how 'from the use of his own hands, from the observation of natural processes, [Morris] was deeply aware of what work on physical objects really means'.² Morris's socialism urged different priorities for production, not simply more of it. 'Don't tell me that it is needed for production, tell me production for what and who needs it,'³ he said. The transformation necessary for democratic control over such matters is not simply one of replacing private owners with the state. If the very purpose and content of production must be subjected to social scrutiny, then its socialisation will have to reach far deeper than its ownership.

Such a starting point leads to debate on the criteria of production; criteria based on qualitative understandings of human need rather than either scale of output or rate of growth. However, the dominant socialist tradition, in Morris's time and to the present day, emphasised the expansion of production, without consideration of kinds of production (beyond issues of arms and, sometimes, luxury products) as a goal of socialism. With this went a highly instrumental, not to say domineering approach to nature, by which natural resources were treated as simply a means of production.⁴

This stance towards nature was and is one element of the intellectual template of the socialist orthodoxy of the mid/late twentieth century. It presumes 'nature' to be a given, socially and morally neutral phenomenon, which once conquered or mastered potentially provided resources for the infinite expansion of production. The other side of the template is the presumption that technology, the ways in which material components of a production process combine to make it work, is similarly social neutral: a given set of tools driven by those who own the means of production.

On this template, politics focuses on the ownership of the means of

² Williams, p. 215.

³ Quoted by Williams, p. 217.

⁴ See Red Green Study Group, *What On Earth Is To Be Done? A Red-Green Dialogue* (Manchester: Red Green Study Group, 1995) for a useful summary of eco-socialist critiques, as well as a comprehensive summary of issues of controversy between reds and greens.

production and the redistribution of its surplus. The politics and hence priorities of the production process itself, including therefore the relations between production and the environment, were postponed until after a change in ownership; and if and when this was achieved environmental issues were often promptly forgotten (though questions of health and safety for workers and the wider community undoubtedly received more attention under a nationalised coal industry in Britain, for instance). The issues normally at stake in relation to production were mainly limited to the distribution of the wealth it generated — whether through the state via taxation, or through the trade unions bargaining over the surplus created from their members' labour. The function of trade unions, it was assumed, was to bargain over the proportion of the surplus that went to wages rather than profits. The content of production was presumed to be a given; a part of the context, not the subject of negotiations.

These are crude sketches. But after all, the ideas that have political force, whether as guides or as rationalisations or mystifications, tend to have had all their rugged complexity weathered away. It is their basic logic which influences events or the perceptions of those who participate in or are effected by such events. I am focusing on the crude logic of the socialist orthodoxy of the past century in order to explore the force of Williams's use of the word 'new' in his call for a new political ecology.

His call required a new foundation for ecology as well as for socialism. The obverse of orthodox socialist thinking on production has been a 'green' thinking in which 'nature' has an intrinsic value that is pitched against the priorities of production. Such thinking shared with the dominant socialist tradition the assumption that production or 'industrialisation' can be viewed in an abstract, aggregated way as if there is but one direction production can take. It saw industrial production as intrinsically destructive. Hence green politics frequently emerged as an opponent of socialist politics. William Morris and also, a little later, Edward Carpenter, were significant exceptions precisely because their socialist imagination centred on a different quality of production and assumed choices should be made about the kinds of intervention in nature made in the course of production.

But even Morris's arguments were weakened by a nostalgic fantasy for an era in human history when nature was clean, idyllic, unsullied by human intervention. It was from a somewhat rosy view of the Middle Ages that Morris drew his image of this simple order. The result was that his insight into the character of production was not applied to the developing technology of his time, to identify whether and how it could be used to fulfil the values of beauty, usefulness, social justice and democracy. Instead his vision of the socialist future laid out in *News from Nowhere* looked almost exclusively backwards for its design of the social institutions through which

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to fulfil these values. Thus his attempt to imagine London as a city organised around the principle of 'useful labour not useless toil' comes near to being a reconstruction of the medieval world. At times Morris was uneasy with this nostalgic idealisation of nature and conceded that if a machine could save boring work and make time for other things we should use it. The fact that he did not turn this unease into arguments for alternative directions for the new technologies of the day helps to explain why Morris's practical political influence has been limited.

Williams sweeps firmly aside nostalgia for a simple natural order. In his view such a fantasy has fatally undermined the ecologically minded socialist tradition. 'The association of that notion of deliberate simplification, even regression, with the idea of a socialist solution to the ugliness, the squalor and the waste of capitalist society has been very damaging,' he argues. *News from Nowhere* illustrates the problem. As an imaginative work celebrating friendship, leisure, space and visual beauty it is inspiring, but politically it is a missed opportunity. Contrary to Morris's professed beliefs, the priorities of production, of human sustenance, are not so much questioned as pushed out of sight. In calling for a new political ecology, Williams clearly believed that the problems of ecology had to be solved in modern terms, through alternative ways of being modern, rather than resurrecting a mythical pre-industrial order. He documents a real history of human intervention in the natural environment — including both the ecological disasters and the human benefits that these interventions have brought about — and distinguishes this from what he calls 'the weak version of the environmental case' that presumes a pre-industrial order that never intervened in nature. By implication, intervention in nature is part of the human condition.⁵

Although Williams's essay was primarily a development of socialist theory, the confidence with which he wrote arose in part from innovative contemporary practice. This included trade union and local authority initiatives which vividly illustrated an alternative form and direction for modernisation. The 1970s and early eighties were a moment when different directions for modernity were being struggled over in macro and global economic management, in the organisation of the state and political parties, in the workplace, and throughout society. The relentless expansion of production had not overcome poverty. In capitalist societies the gulf between rich and poor on a global scale had widened, and the redistributive measures of post-war social democracy had significantly eroded inequalities of wealth only in Scandinavia. In the Soviet bloc the extremes were avoided

⁵ Williams does not make this point explicitly. Kate Soper, however, develops it in impressive depth in *What is Nature* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995).

but a certain drabness of existence persisted as well as gross and repressive inequalities of political power. And the majority of people in the North, West and East were in the contradictory position of daily work routines that were mind-numbingly dull, at the same time as education was leading them to expect much more from their working lives. In capitalist countries, and in a more disguised way in the factories of the command economies, the imperatives of mass production and the Fordist assembly line were being confidently if sometimes anarchistically challenged. In effect, though not in full consciousness of what they were doing, these workers were resisting the priorities of production laid down by those with political and economic power. They were asserting their own and their colleagues' well-being and autonomy against the maximisation of production.

In a few instances they are asserted alternatives. Well-organised shop stewards' organisations which challenged management's prerogative to close factories and define people's skills and efforts as 'redundant' found themselves questioning what was being produced, for what purpose and how, and proposing their own answers. The alternative corporate plan for 'socially useful production' drawn up by trade unionists working on components for military aircraft at Lucas Aerospace is the best known example, and one whose importance Williams quickly understood.

The draughtsmen (there were very few women involved) at Lucas Aerospace worked at the cutting edge of the then new computer controlled technology; they and the craftsmen and women on the factory floor had a strong sense of the value of their labour. When told their skills were no longer needed they questioned the company's priorities and demonstrated, with designs of alternative products, how their skills could be put to good use. Their plans included an innovative bus for road and rail (now produced in Germany), energy saving products, medical equipment (including devices enhancing the capacities of the disabled — 'what can kind of society is it that can fly a man to the moon but allows its blind people to hobble along with a stick?' they asked). The impetus to draw up a plan concerned with production itself (including the design of the machinery used in the production process) came out of a recognition, reminiscent of William Morris, that a change in ownership was not enough. In formulating the 'new concept' some workers drew on beliefs and experiences beyond the workplace. Others became enthusiastic for the alternative plan because of personal experience of disabled children, transport problems in their own localities, or their awareness of technical opportunities that could be grasped to improve the quality of life, yet which management ignored.⁶

⁶ See Hilary Wainwright and Dave Elliott, *The Lucas Plan: A New Trade Unionism in the Making* (London: Allison and Busby, 1982).

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Unlike Morris, however, they did not look back. They believed in the benefit of technological innovation but only on the understanding that the direction technology took was not a physical phenomenon, out there, beyond human choice. On the contrary, it involved as many moral and social choices as any conventionally political issue such as money and property. In this sense they overcame in practice the simplifying nostalgia for a pre-industrial order that, Williams argued, had doomed ecological socialism to the margins.

But just as Morris's vision of useful work for all was influenced, on his own admission, by his circumstances as a man of means who could afford to work as he liked, so the Lucas workers' plan for socially useful production was made possible by the power and self-confidence of workers' organisations in engineering in the years following the post-war boom. The election of a Labour government, which for a brief moment was committed to industrial policies that took workers and their organisations seriously as producers and creators (and not simply as wage earners), allowed workers' self-confidence to become an aspiration for self-management. The Lucas plan was not the only such outcome of the unique circumstances of the seventies: workers in Chrysler, Alfred Herberts, Vickers and British Leyland expressed the same contempt for their managements' ability to manage in a socially responsible way. Like the Lucas workers they demonstrated in detail the very different way they would run production.

These exceptional developments were the outcome of a brief and hence easily overlooked moment in British labour history. Although the 'Lucas Plan' (as it became known) struck a popular chord, the Labour government eventually, after a sustained struggle, sided with management and the status quo — both in terms of technology and industrial relations. As a party which in office has always ended up at the centre of the British political spectrum it was unlikely that Labour would have done otherwise — though in the case of industrial policy as on other issues, the party's activist base has always ensured that the leadership has to fight to maintain control. Labour's conservative response to these innovative plans meant a lost opportunity to develop alternatives which could have helped to avoid defeat in the coming onslaught of free market economics.

The corporatist industrial policies of the post-war settlement, including the 1964-70 Labour government of Harold Wilson, with cosy relationships between the Department of Industry, company management and the occasional national trade union official, were in need of modernisation, but there was more than one way to modernise. The ideas associated with the radical shop stewards movement and Tony Benn in the seventies had many limitations — they were, after all, untested — but they contained the germ of a strategy for modernisation based on industrial

democracy, the creativity of labour and the design of new technologies to meet the expanding demands for greater effectiveness in environmental protection, health treatment, transport and other spheres of social need. By its suppression of these and other attempts at a social democratic modernisation, the 1975-79 Labour government helped to prepare the way for Margaret Thatcher, who was able to blame both an un-modernised trade union movement and an unreformed state for the growing problems of the British economy, and to attack them with a vengeance. The result in Britain has been a destruction of the sources of public power autonomous from, or resistant to, the market, which provided space and support for experimentation in alternative, ecologically sustainable, forms of production and technological change.

Germany's very different history confirms, negatively, the connection between British Labour's own inability to modernise, on democratic socialist terms, and the strength of the free market right. In Germany, a very much more democratic constitution — with proportional representation and powerful regional government — and a post-war tradition of industrial democracy has allowed an ecological socialism to gain political and economic legitimacy. Hence, an alternative view of modernity to that dictated by the market has an influence on mainstream debate, whether through the Greens or through radical, albeit minority, sections of the trade unions and the Social Democratic Party. An ecological socialism is similarly influential in Sweden, Denmark, Norway and, increasingly, France. I do not want to imply that we are about to see the end of capitalism in any of these countries; simply that free market ideas have not taken the pervasive hold they have in Britain and that, in these parts of Europe, the ecological and radically democratic impulses that started in the late sixties have gained sufficient political sustenance to take root and become part of the debate about the future direction of these countries' economy and polity.

Another example of a country where an ecologically minded socialism continues to contest for the future of the country is Brazil. There, it was a party based on militant trade unionism and rural revolt, the Workers' Party, which in the eighties led the 'modernising' struggle against the old corruption. The central themes of its programme were economic and political democracy and land reform. In the past 15 years it has managed to unite almost all progressive social movements and gain enough credibility to win municipal and regional power and eventually to garner 30% of the votes in the national elections for President. In fact, it was the impetus of modernisation from the left and the threat it represented which awakened Brazil's industrial and landed establishment to the need to construct their own form of modernisation to protect their considerable vested interests in the status quo. This 'modernisation' took the form of an unholy alliance

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between Fernando Henrique Cardoso, an erstwhile left intellectual, the party of the landlords and Brazilian big business. Cardoso stabilised the currency, put an end to rampant inflation and opened the economy to the global market.

The modernising element of his programme was the dismantling of elements of the corporate state, but whereas the Workers' Party proposed to democratise it, Cardoso sold off its most valuable resources. At the same time, he left more or less intact the concentrated land ownership that has made millions of peasants landless, and refused to tackle the similar concentrations of wealth which make Brazil one of the most unequal countries in the world. In spite of national defeats, the Workers' Party has managed to hold its own at a municipal and regional level. This has enabled it, amongst other exemplary experiments, to put into practice an innovative strategy for political participation: 'the participatory budget'. This is a process, involving an annual cycle of neighbourhood assemblies voting for priorities and electing delegates to city-wide and sectoral assemblies, by which citizens formulate and negotiate their proposals for municipal expenditure. It is a practical, working example of an alternative strategy for tackling the corruption and clientism of the old order. Moreover it combines representative and participatory democracy in such a way that municipal policies draw on the practical local knowledge which is so vital to identifying ecological needs.

Did Margaret Thatcher's combination of an authoritarian state and a rampant market kill off in Britain the stirrings of an ecologically minded socialism that elsewhere have become forces to be reckoned with? Or has it found new ways to flourish? My argument will be that the character of the workers' initiatives I described earlier in this essay, the way they challenged the direction and application of technology without being 'anti-technology', was in tune with a wider scepticism about the confident claims of science and technology — or the governments and corporations which control them — to be able to solve the problems of the world. The organisations behind these initiatives in the seventies and early eighties might well have been defeated, but events, from the nuclear accidents of Long Island and Chernobyl, through BSE to genetically modified food, have deepened the questioning of the way in which science and technology are organised and controlled. And the questioning is not from an armchair.

As fewer and fewer corporations compete for a more sophisticated and tight market a new battleground has emerged in which protesters have surprised themselves with the power they have as consumers or in their appeal to consumers. It is the battle over the brand. The value of a company now resides in the product or company's image rather than its factories. Advertising and marketing become the prime means to competitive

advantage. Corporations have become less vulnerable to trade unions but more vulnerable to criticism or protest which in some way soil the brand image. Evidence of this is McDonald's extraordinary reaction to the two environmental and labour activists who handed out scruffy leaflets daring to criticise the company on the grounds that it underpaid its workers, used advertising techniques which exploited children, sold food of low nutritional value, and destroyed the environment in the process. When Helen Steel and Dave Morris refused to withdraw their accusations, the company brought the 'McLibel Two' to court on charges of libel. In the end, it was McDonalds who were in the dock and who incurred costs of over £10 million. And the final result, a judgement against McDonalds on three of Steel and Morris's criticisms — low pay, exploitative advertising and food of dubious value — did a lot more to damage McDonald's image than the initial leaflet. It was as if the imperative to control and protect the brand image undermined the company's capacity for rational judgement.

The other side of this case, and one of the reasons why it escalated so dramatically beyond McDonalds expectations, was that the stand taken by the McLibel Two became a focal point for people's concern at the unethical activities behind the labels on their daily food and clothing. The globalisation of capital boomerangs back on the companies who think they have benefited from the new freedom of trade and capital movement, because the way in which the North depends on the exploitation of the people and environments of the South is more direct and more transparent. Frequently it happens under one roof, through one corporation, even if they in turn use a chain of sub-contractors. It is all the more easy to target. Challenges to global inequality have increasingly focused on the products we consume, exposing the inhumane or wantonly destructive conditions under which they are produced and encouraging us to decide what we buy on ethical grounds. Alerting us to the social consequences of what we condone when we buy Nike, Nestlé, or Reebok has created a powerful movement. It has brought economics back to the cultural sphere, to the things that affect people's daily lives and pleasures. It is a consciousness that challenges the very notion of a 'consumer', in Williams's words: 'a way of seeing people as though they are either stomachs or furnaces ... a specialised variety of human being with no brain, no eyes, no senses but who can gulp'.⁷ Consumers are becoming economic citizens demanding control over what they gulp and how it has been produced. Companies have tried somewhat pathetically to assuage consume anxieties and stem the movement of protest, with promises to put pennies towards the restoration of Venice or to plant trees. But the ethical consumer movement is

⁷ Williams, p. 216.

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unimpressed. It is encroaching on the control of the production chain itself.

This is best illustrated through the work of Twin Trading, a fair trade company originally set up by the Greater London Council and now at the frontiers of new ecologically and democratically minded economics. It targets the traditional chain of producer, such as African cocoa farmers or coffee producers, middlemen, multinationals who control the brand, and the retailers who control what goes on the shelves. It is a chain which grossly exploits the producer and treats the consumer in exactly the way Williams describes, as a mere mouth to be filled or body to be clothed, lacking all curiosity or moral sensibilities. In the case of both coffee and cocoa, Twin is trying to turn this on its head by linking the farmer producers to the consumers with benefits for both. Take its latest initiative, the production of a chocolate bar called Divine Chocolate. The chain is controlled by a company, the Day Chocolate Company, set up by Twin and jointly owned by the Ghanaean cocoa farmers union and Twin. The farmers have rid themselves of the kind of middleman who works for the big brand names and squeezes their prices to make money for themselves, and instead have formed their own cooperative union, the Kuapa Kokoo farmers union. They get two thirds of the profit from the sales and they decide on how this should be distributed. For example, the unions' assembly often decides to fund village schools, wells and other local needs. In other words, not only does this attempt to practise fair trade link producers and consumers, giving both more control over their daily lives, but it also illustrates a more effective approach to economic justice. A democratic and egalitarian distribution of the surplus from production is built into the production and marketing process rather than being something the state has to correct, usually inadequately, through taxation.

Another advantage of a democratically controlled production chain is that there is no speculative demand for money. Everything is a direct transaction. This raised for Twin the wider issue of finance. They are discussing the creation of a cocoa bank to bring finance under the control of the chain. One of the numerous problems with capitalism, evident in recent crises that have been highly destructive of the real economy, is that money, through speculative investment, becomes a way of making money, and the process of making money gains its own dynamic; the possessors of money have more control than they deserve in terms of their contribution to the real economy. Twin are trying to explore where the purpose of money can be more directly correlated with a desired activity as democratically defined by consumers and producers. How, in other words, can you make finance serve the needs of the real economy without losing the distinctive discipline necessary for financial matters?

The process of creating a democratically controlled production

chain has led Twin to discover and consider how to intervene in the knowledge or in fact, the advertising economy. As we have seen, this is where the brand image is constructed and purveyed; this in a modern capitalist economy is where the power and the profits lie. This is where the conventional company spends millions which an alternative organisation like Twin does not have. Yet Twin, like all attempts to create democratic and ecologically sensitive enterprises that are at the same time alternatives to, yet also in, the market, could not ignore the need to transmit knowledge to the consumer. Conventionally this knowledge is controlled and transmitted by advertising but Twin, Traidcraft and other 'third sector' enterprises have to develop alternatives, through their own networks. In effect they are trying to reinvent the brand by creating the connection between consumer and producer as a more equal and direct relationship.

In recent years there has been a burgeoning of organisations like Twin which seek to put democratic, ecological and egalitarian values into practice here and now. Across Europe, the not-for-profit 'third sector' has the highest growth rate in terms of employment. It is often associated with, and indeed provides a base for, effective campaigning networks. A recent example is the network of activists, North and South, which spread information and organised, especially through the internet, to halt what was to be the climax of de-regulation: the Multi-Lateral Agreement on Investment. If this agreement had been carried through — as it still well might through other routes — it would have given multinationals the right to roam the globe without constraint, pushing aside national or continental standards to protect labour, culture or the environment.

Through these and many other networks a new ecology is definitively being created. Its location has moved from the factory floors and design rooms to the shop floor, the media and the global economy. But how far is it political ecology, which was after all what Williams called for? Mainstream politics sometimes seems to be moving on another orbit. Even as I write, in the midst of the challenge to companies producing genetically modified food, Tony Blair announces that unless we continue with these experiments we will not be 'at the cutting edge of twenty-first century technology', completely missing the point implicit in much of the protest: that there are choices to be made in the way we advance technology. It is not a linear process that we have constantly to 'catch up with'. Others in the government are declaring an open ended moratorium. But something more is needed. There is an alternative for feeding the world hunger. A sustainable agriculture is steadily and significantly influencing farming systems throughout the world. This type of farming integrates natural process such as nutrient cycling, nitrogen fixation, soil regeneration and pest predators into food production processes. It minimises the use of

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pesticides and fertilisers that damage the environment or harm the farmers or the consumers, and it uses the knowledge and skills of the farmers. Its basic challenge is to maximise the use of locally available and renewable resources. The best evidence that it can work comes from those very countries of Africa, Asia and Latin America that are said to need genetic engineering technologies most. It does not rule out the possibility that GM crops could make a contribution to food production, but this could only be if technologies are produced by public-interest bodies which make them available to poor farmers.

Now is not the place to describe the successes of this sustainable agriculture. The point for the argument about political ecology is that this alternative, like fair trade and cooperative production and provision of services, is already being put into practice. In the broad sense of politics, concerned with power in society and how to change it, most of these initiatives are political, consciously or not. But what is their significance for politics as it is conventionally defined, as concerning the state? The socialist orthodoxy, with which I contrasted Williams at the beginning of this essay, saw change as coming primarily, sometimes exclusively, through the state; the task of the party was to gain state power by parliamentary or revolutionary means. The broad and the narrow sense of politics were one and the same thing. My argument from the standpoint of an ecological socialism is that politics in the narrow sense does not have a monopoly on the power to change; indeed it has several specific and limited functions to support initiatives — including working micro-alternatives — struggling to transform economic and social relations in the course of everyday life.

Williams expressed a similar view at a time when the kind of alternatives described in this essay, varied as they are, were just emerging. 'It is my own belief,' he said, 'that the only kind of socialism which stands any chance of being established, in the old industrialised bourgeois-democratic societies, is one centrally based on new kinds of communal, cooperative and collective institutions, in which the full democratic practices of free speech, free assembly, free candidature for elections but also open decision-making, of a reviewable kind, by all those concerned with the decision, are both legally guaranteed and, in now technically possible ways, active.'⁸ These new organisations need a voice within parliamentary institutions at every level. And as pressures for democratisation, at least in Scotland and Wales, successfully challenge what Williams aptly called Britain's periodically elected 'court', there is some chance that stronger voices for a new political ecology will emerge. But a political organisation truly engaged in such a socialist ecology will need to be far more modest

⁸ Williams, p. 272.

than political organisations normally are. For the motor for ecological change, whether in economic, technological or cultural relations, is coming from action *within* those relations. The role of political representatives would be to raise the profile of these initiatives, winning support for policies which redistributed power and resources in their favour, to take veto action against the present unaccountable concentrations of power. In other words, to create space for alternatives to flourish.

Perhaps the fact that Britain's undemocratic electoral system and increasingly centralised government has squeezed the ecological left virtually out of parliamentary politics could become an advantage. There are now several generations of ecologically minded socialists, or more generally social justice activists, who have extensive experience in building alternative institutions and maintaining sustained campaigns for social and economic change. Exactly how complementary forms of political representation will emerge is unclear, especially in England. But such people power in actual, living social transformation is, as Williams might have put it, one of our 'resources of hope'.

Hippies, Liberals, and the Ecocritical Sublime

Gerry Smyth

Introduction

Ecocriticism looks set to emerge as a major academic industry in the new millennium. A number of factors have contributed to an intellectual climate in which a criticism focused upon environmental concerns can flourish. These factors include a revitalised geographical discipline; a growing scepticism towards the historical imagination in general, and towards institutionalised historiography in particular; environmental exploitation on an unprecedented scale; and the socio-political demands of a world increasingly organised around the control of space.¹ Only time will tell if the undoubtedly genuine impulse to raise consciousness and to mobilise intellectual and material resources against impending ecological disaster will survive the processes of reification and appropriation which already threaten the field. In the meantime, as with any major new academic initiative, the rise of ecocriticism involves both the reformulation of the canon in the light of new concerns and perspectives, and the undertaking of a wide programme of meta-discursive work as critics, theorists and philosophers deliberate upon the field's appropriate methodologies and archives. There is deliberation also regarding the very possibility of ecocriticism itself and its role within what might be seen as, at worst, a culpable, at best, a collusive intellectual-institutional establishment. This essay engages with, and partakes of, that meta-discourse; and insofar as the question of culpability and/or collusiveness remains unanswerable, I offer the following thoughts with an awareness that they might ultimately be part of the problem rather than a contribution to any solution.

In this essay I consider the function of personal memory and local environment in ecocritical discourse, and for sake of convenience I approach this subject by way of my own professional and personal experiences. Let me say immediately that readers will not be forced to endure any tearful confessions of environmental misuse or to partake in some form of communal 'eco-outing' — not that I believe that the witnessing and/or embarrassment attending self-disclosure cannot be useful critical

¹ The literature is vast on each of these subjects, but for indicative references see the materials gathered in Michael Keith and Steve Pile (eds.), *Place and the Politics of Identity* (London: Routledge, 1993); Keith Jenkins (ed.), *The Postmodern History Reader* (London: Routledge, 1997); Andrew Dobson and Paul Lucardie (eds.), *The Politics of Nature: Explorations in Green Political Theory* (London: Routledge, 1993); and Georges Benko and Ulf Strohmayer (eds.), *Space and Social Theory: Interpreting Modernity and Postmodernity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997).

tactics. In this context, rather, the intention is to explore the dynamics of ecocriticism at a time when its characteristics are still relatively unformulated.

Econfession

The field of intellectual inquiry with which I am most familiar — Irish literary history — is one that could be expected to interface significantly with a criticism organised around issues of landscape, nature and space.² In terms of both natural and built environments, an ecocritical perspective reveals the extent to which Irish literary expression has from its beginnings been thoroughly infused with environmental and spatial concerns. These concerns, moreover, persist into the present, so that it is possible to analyse modern Irish literature in terms of its engagement with a range of discourses the roots of which lie in the island's unique spatial and ecological history. For example, there has emerged in recent years a kind of fiction which deliberately engages with discourses of genealogy, local history and local geography — all crucial elements, I would suggest, for any engaged ecocriticism. Thus, Roddy Doyle's *Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha* explores the ways in which individual consciousness is subtly yet indissolubly enmeshed with specific physical environments, in this case the (fictional) modern Dublin suburb of Barrytown. In *The Woman's Daughter* Dermot Bolger produces a mythology for the (actual) working-class suburb of Finglas on Dublin's north side, reconfiguring modern urban alienation in terms of a much more glamorous gothic discourse equipped to reveal the persistence of the past in the present. Similarly, in *Reading in the Dark*, Seamus Deane inserts minor familial crises into much greater human and natural temporalities, speculating on the absolute interpenetration of the local and the universal. Whereas Doyle delineates the restrictions and the compensations of late twentieth century urban lifestyle in brilliant detail, Bolger and Deane attempt to defamiliarise received spatial discourses by tracing the ways in which late twentieth century life continues to be shaped by private and public discourses embedded in a range of spatial and

² There is a long tradition of Irish literary criticism focused upon issues of landscape and environment. Brian Graham (ed.), *In Search of Ireland: A Cultural Geography* (London: Routledge, 1997) represents the first incursion of the 'new' geography into Irish Studies; see, in that volume, Patrick Duffy, 'Writing Ireland: Literature and art in the representation of Irish place', pp. 43-63.

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environmental practices.³

Besides trafficking in these 'universal' ecocritical themes, each novel depicts actual topographical locations with which their authors are closely associated: Dublin's northside in the case of Bolger and Doyle, Derry City and environs in the case of Deane. In other words, there is an obvious (if ambivalent) personal investment in the fictional text, and this highlights a particular aspect of modern Irish fiction which makes it amenable to ecocriticism: autobiography. For one consequence of the rise of ecocriticism as an intellectual-institutional practice is the vogue for criticism cast in the confessional mode. Of course, there is a sense in which all criticism — indeed all discoursing — is self-constitutive in as much as it postulates an individual subject enunciating an intended message for other subjects. But I think there is a special sense in which ecocriticism encourages self-reflection and (subsequent) self-disclosure, insofar as the objects of analysis (locality, environment, positionality, spatial power, etc.) appear to invite the speaking subject to reflect upon the circumstances under which the ability to speak was formed. The option (embraced by the novelists) to mobilise personal experience as part of the representing process is one traditionally denied to the academic critic. However, with the onset of a critical programme aimed specifically at the local and focused deliberately upon the formation of the subject in relation to environment, it is an option that is increasingly available. Confessional ecocriticism, as we shall see, may also appeal to those frustrated or embarrassed by what are widely perceived to be the untenable (not to say ineffectual) claims of academic discourse, yet who are forced by the lack of alternative critical genres to continue operating within received parameters.

Without labouring the obvious links, let me offer an example relating to the three novels mentioned above and my own capacity as would-be ecocritic with the ability and/or right to engage with them. On reading these texts I was in each case drawn to consider the village of Tallaght where I grew up, located about seven miles southwest of Dublin city centre. In the 1960s, Tallaght was a one-street village with a small working-class estate called St. Maelruans on one side, an area of middle-class bungalows on the other, and only a Dominican Priory and an unreliable bus service to distinguish it from the other villages ringing Dublin City. These days Tallaght is notorious throughout Ireland (and beyond, with the diaspora) as the foremost symbol of the massive housing programme undertaken by Dublin County Council since the 1970s. With a population in excess of 100,000,

³ Dermot Bolger, *The Woman's Daughter* (1987; London: Penguin, 1992); Seamus Deane, *Reading in the Dark* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1996); Roddy Doyle, *Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1993).

Tallaght has moved from backwater to suburban sprawl in less than a generation. There are parts of the conurbation that make Barrytown and Finglas look like quaint villages; and for every tale of community mobilisation and resistance there is another of alienation and breakdown. Tallaght is creeping, holding the mirror up to modern Ireland as it does so and demanding that the gap between official ideology and the realities of those who continue to suffer under that ideology be acknowledged.

There is another 'Tallaght', however, surviving beneath the accretions of recent years. The backwards glance reveals a series of images which place *the local* within a series of wider contexts: the 1867 'Battle of Tallaght', a skirmish related in some obscure way to the Fenian rising of that year; the medieval townland of Uppercross on the edge of the Pale under constant threat from the O'Tooles and O'Byrnes in the Wicklow Mountains to the south; the monastery confirmed to the See of Dublin by Pope Alexander III in 1179 and subsequently the location of the country palace of the Archbishops of Dublin; the religious community devastated by a Viking raid in 811; the order founded by the monk Máel Ruain in 769 that was at the centre of the religious debates of the eighth and ninth centuries. It was against the backdrop of these debates that Oengus the Culdee (an anglicised rendering of 'Céle Dé', meaning 'serving companion of God') went to Tallaght to complete his famous *Martyrology*, a text of which the great nineteenth-century Irish scholar Eugene O'Curry said: 'No other country in Europe possesses a national document of so important a character'.⁴

There is also evidence of pre-Christian culture in Tallaght, and it may be that the decision to site a monastery here in the middle of the eighth century 'was a conscious attempt to impose the Christian stamp on a site which had previously had strong pagan associations'.⁵ Even the Celts were interlopers: according to the eleventh-century *Lebor Gabála Éirenn* (the *Book of Invasions*, a chronicle recounting the 'history' of Ireland from the time of the Creation), Tallaght was the site of a legendary race called the Parthalonians who ruled the area for 300 years before being wiped out by a plague. 'Tamhlacht' (rendered 'Tallaght' by O'Curry himself in 1837 during his fieldwork for the Ordnance Survey of Ireland), means 'plague burial' in Gaelic, and an important Bronze Age cemetery has in fact been discovered

⁴ Eugene O'Curry, *Lectures on the Manuscript Materials of Ancient Irish History* (1861; Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1995), p. 370. See also Whitley Stokes (ed.), *The Martyrology of Oengus the Culdee* (London: Henry Bradshaw Society, 1905).

⁵ Deirdre Flanagan and Laurence Flanagan, *Irish Place Names* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1994), p. 145.

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in the hills overlooking the town.⁶

These two representations of Tallaght — postmodern city-region, historical palimpsest — resonate with the work of the three novelists mentioned, and indeed throughout much contemporary Irish culture. In other words, all the elements that make contemporary Irish fiction so amenable to an ecocritical reading are present in this critic's own local history and environment. Now, I have no desire to claim any privileged status for this mode of experience as brought to bear upon the cultural artefact. The point, rather, is this: it would appear that ecocriticism provides a space for the systematic activation of the local and the autobiographical in ways that traditional criticism does not. There is something, both in the subject matter and in the characteristic methodologies, that invites the deployment of local historical and environmental perspectives. The *eco*, in other words, might function to problematise the *criticism*, mitigating that moment in which the secondary (critical) text covers the primary (cultural) text in terms of a range of privileged, prescriptive languages. It might do so by revealing the thorough interpenetration of primary and secondary discourses, and by demonstrating that the moment of (critical) speaking is thoroughly informed by, because formulated on the basis of, (cultural) environment.

Readers will note the subjunctive mood predominant in the previous paragraph. This is not only because there exists as yet only a limited ecocritical archive against which these claims could be tested.⁷ It is also because there are many ways to use the local and the autobiographical, each engaging with different assumptions and each having different implications. Some of these uses, as mentioned at the outset, might on consideration be found to be less than progressive from an ecological perspective. For anyone looking to mobilise the local and the autobiographical as radical ecocritical resources, the question becomes: how do I, as a privileged, empowered subject speaking from the present, insert myself into a relationship with my own past? This question might be reformulated as: what is the function of personal experience as an analytical

⁶ For O'Curry's notes on the Tallaght district see Michael O'Flanagan (ed.), *Letters Containing Information Relative to the Antiquities of the County of Dublin Collected During the Progress of the Ordnance Survey in 1837* (Bray, 1927), pp. 39-47. On the emergence of the modern name of 'Tallaght' see P. W. Joyce, *The Origins and History of Irish Names of Places* (Dublin: McGlashan and Gill, 1869), pp. 150-51. On the 'cist burials' of Tallaght see Geraldine Stout and Matthew Stout, 'Patterns in the Past: County Dublin 5000 BC-1000 AD' in F.H.A. Aalen and Kevin Whelan (eds.), *Dublin: From Prehistory to Present* (Dublin: Geography Publications, 1992), pp. 5-41.

⁷ But note the significant amount of anecdotal discourse in the essays collected by Cheryl Glotfelty and Harold Fromm in *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology* (London: University of Georgia Press, 1996).

category?, or, with a nod towards Spivak, as: how can the local speak? Posed thus, there is an assumption that the local *can* speak, but not unproblematically. The question encompasses problems of positionality and ideology as well as considerations of genre and representation, and in the remainder of this essay I wish to consider the forms that a confessional ecocriticism might take, as well as the issue of what, in political terms, might be at stake for such a discourse.

Ecoguilt

Without doubt, modern attitudes to human manipulation of the natural environment are governed by feelings of guilt, decline and pessimism, and these feelings underpin many of the characteristic forms and insights of an incipient ecocriticism. Of course, there are degrees of guilt, and an ecocriticism driven by this emotion is broad enough to encompass a number of positions. At one end of the continuum there is a quasi-mystical attitude towards nature and a relationship with the local environment that might be termed 'hippie'. At the other end is a more secular and liberal tradition concerned to trace the ways in which humanity and the natural environment have in fact been thoroughly enmeshed throughout history, and to discover the ways in which these links persist in the cultural memory of communities and individuals. Although variants of these traditions may be found throughout Western history, in their modern forms they represent an attitude towards the natural environment that has its roots in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century debates which saw a Neo-classical tradition (in which cultivated nature 'was a vast homology for social and political order') slowly giving way to a Romantic one (in which 'nature was a vast freedom and otherness beyond the control of society and politics but yet instructive in being so').⁸

A caricature of Romantic ecoguilt might run as follows. The earth is a living, self-regulating organism which human intervention has brought to the point of destruction. Humans have an intimate relationship with Nature, yet since the beginning of civilisation the species has attempted to dominate the non-human rather co-exist with it. At every stage in Western history, from ancient Greece through the Renaissance and on to the Enlightenment, we have privileged the rational over and above the natural in a series of ever more sophisticated attempts to master Nature and harness its power

⁸ John Wilson Foster, 'Encountering Traditions', in John Wilson Foster (ed.), *Nature in Ireland: A Scientific and Cultural History* (Dublin: The Lilliput Press, 1997), pp. 23-70.

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for human ends. The West has evolved to the point where it has lost sight of 'the nonrational intangibles that sustain the human spirit'; worse still, at the end of the twentieth century it is dragging the east and the south with it.⁹ Mesmerised by the here and now, blind to our responsibilities towards other times and places, we have embraced a way of life organised around discourses of efficiency and immediacy, and which depends upon the systematic exploitation of non-renewable resources. Urgent practical measures are required to alleviate the problems which already seriously threaten life on the planet. More importantly, we require a long-term programme of re-education designed to make human agents aware of the consequences of their actions. Such a programme would involve putting individuals and communities back in touch with their local environments, so that they might appreciate the natural and cultural factors which have contributed to their own possibility, while also revealing the ways in which the local and the global are mutually implicated in a subtle yet ineluctable chain of cause and effect, action and consequence.

Given its unique geo-political and environmental history, it should not be surprising that Irish culture has produced versions of this particular environmental attitude. The profile just described is suggestive of the work of Seamus Heaney, and not just for the mid-seventies 'hippie' persona of the 'long-haired and Thoughtful ... wood-kerne'.¹⁰ In fact, Heaney's career thus far reveals a fascination with the relations between (his own) local cultural history and the natural environment. Amongst other things, his poetry draws on the tradition known as 'Dinnshenchas', a body of ancient toponymic lore committed to writing in the eleventh and twelfth centuries 'in which the land of Ireland is perceived as being completely translated into story: each place has a history which is continuously retold'.¹¹ Although this dimension is largely ignored, Heaney's poetry has proved fruitful for many of the new ecostudies focused upon 'the poetry of place' and related issues.¹²

⁹ Stephen S. Birdsall, 'Regard, respect, and responsibility: sketches for a moral geography of the everyday', *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 86, 4 (1996), pp. 619-29.

¹⁰ Seamus Heaney, 'Exposure', *North* (London: Faber and Faber, 1975), p. 72-3.

¹¹ 'Dinnshenchas', in Robert Welch (ed.), *The Oxford Companion to Irish Literature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), pp. 149-50.

¹² See "'Art a paradigm of earth": the poetry of Seamus Heaney', in Terry Gifford, *Green Voices: Understanding Contemporary Nature Poetry* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), pp. 94-113; 'Seamus Heaney: From the "older dispensation" to "the country of the shades" in Edward Picot, *Outcasts from Eden: Ideas of Landscape in British [sic] Poetry since 1945* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1997), pp. 205-67. Heaney himself has engaged critically with issues of environment and local history in essays such as 'The Sense of Place', in

The celebrated image of ‘digging’ from the early poem of that title, for example, could stand as an emblem for the entire ecocritical project, with its implicit promise of greater levels of authenticity below the cultural topsoil, and its invitation to the reading subject to join the poetic persona on a quest for some kind of reconciliation between the cultural (digging as writing) and the natural (digging as physical toil).¹³ Similarly, in later collections such as *Field Work* and his translation of the medieval Irish epic *Sweeny Astray*, Heaney continues to engage with a range of subject matters — placenames, memory, climate and identity — which seems to invite ecocritical perspectives.

In these terms, the task of the ecocritic is to seek out those moments which bespeak the survival of older, (and thus) more authentic modes of local environmental experience beneath the accumulations of later years. Such a project has two crucial and related elements: the mobilisation of the speaking subject’s local experience, and the defamiliarisation of received critical genres. This is because traditional critical discourse is understood to function in ways that make it difficult to adapt to ecocritical concerns. For at the same time as it insists upon a rational, coherent, progressive discourse in which the critic performs specific work upon the text with a view to modifying the reading subject’s consciousness, traditional literary criticism denies any active or interventionist role for the critical subject, implicating him instead in a stance of ‘wise passiveness’ apparently encoded into the text.¹⁴ The ‘secondary’ critical discourse merely uncovers

Preoccupations: Selected Prose 1968-1978 (London: Faber and Faber, 1980), pp. 115-30, 131-49 respectively.

¹³ Seamus Heaney, ‘Digging’, *Death of a Naturalist* (1966), reprinted in *New Selected Poems 1966-1987* (London: Faber and Faber, 1990), pp. 1-2. Heaney’s archaeological motif resonates through the ‘landscape and memory’ thesis of Simon Schama (*Landscape and Memory* [London: HarperCollins, 1995]), who writes: ‘[It] is just because ancient places are constantly being given the topdressings of modernity (the forest primeval, for example, turning into the “wilderness park”) that the antiquity of the myths at their core is sometimes hard to make out. It is there, all the same ... To see the ghostly outline of an old landscape beneath the superficial covering of the contemporary is to be made vividly aware of the endurance of core myths’ (p. 16). This is the kind of historical vision decried by Michel Foucault, insofar as ‘[It] seeks the continuities of soil, language, and urban life in which our present is rooted’, when in fact ‘[The] purpose of history ... is not to discover the roots of our identity, but to commit itself to its dissipation’ — see ‘Nietzsche, Genealogy, History’ (1971), in Paul Rabinow (ed.), *The Foucault Reader: An Introduction to Foucault’s Thought* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984), pp. 76-100.

¹⁴ See Dominic Head, ‘Problems in Ecocriticism and the Novel’, *Key Words: A Journal of Cultural Materialism* 1 (1998), pp. 60-73. The phrase ‘wise passiveness’ is from Wordsworth’s ‘Expostulation and Reply’, first published in *Lyrical Ballads* in

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the meaning already embedded within the 'primary' cultural text; the critic is a conduit rather than an actor, saying again in 'real', less figurative language what the author has already said in the text.¹⁵

The charge is that such a model of cultural production and critical reproduction is in fact fully implicated in the principles of logic, authority and identity responsible for the current environmental crisis. What is required instead is a criticism enabled to reveal the interpenetration of the local and the global, and to point to the ways in which reading subjects might identify these moments of interpenetration in their own lives. This would be a radically interventionist and transformative discourse, one alive to the contingency of intention and sympathetic to the insertion of the critic (and by invitation the reader) as an active component of the meaning-making process. By altering both the range of its subject matter and the forms of its interventions, ecocriticism cast in this mode (so it goes) offers to expose the contradictions upon which traditional practices are founded, while at the same time resisting the recruitment of critical discourse for complicit socio- and politico-cultural activities.

While there is much that is valuable in this 'hippie-liberal' position, at the same time it raises a number of serious problems. Besides general susceptibility to accusations of irrationalism and anti-humanism, three specific points are worth mentioning briefly. In the first place, despite the invocation of community this position might be considered ultimately individualist and deterministic. The critical model described above is one in which work is filtered through a series of individual consciousnesses (the author, the critic, the reader) by means of a specific kind of revelatory task performed by the critic upon the text. The critic is enabled to interpret authorial intention in the light of specific environmental determinants, and to invite the reader to empathise in terms of similar factors bearing upon their own lives. 'Determination' in this sense, however, is a deeply reactionary category, as local environment becomes *constitutive* of the individual rather than, as Aijaz Ahmad would have it, a reference 'to the givenness of the circumstances within which individuals *make* their choices, their lives, their histories.'¹⁶ Focused upon the individual in this way, ecological concerns are left particularly vulnerable to reification and further misrepresentation. It

1798; see M.H. Abrams (gen. ed.), *The Norton Anthology of English Literature* (New York and London: Norton, 1979), pp. 153-4.

¹⁵ On the contradictory nature of the dominant forms of twentieth century literary criticism see Roland Barthes, 'Criticism as Language' (1963), reprinted in David Lodge (ed.), *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism* (Harlow: Longman, 1972), pp. 647-51.

¹⁶ Aijaz Ahmad, *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures* (London: Verso, 1992), p. 6, original emphasis.

might even be claimed that the privileged Western élites who have fastened onto the ecological crisis have contributed to a situation in which a *light green* vogue for a number of privileged environments has replaced a *deep Green* concern with global ecology.¹⁷

Secondly, it would appear that the local environment is being represented in this model like one of those marginalised and misrepresented subaltern subjects which have become the focus of contemporary radical theory. Yet, as the example of postcolonialism has revealed, in attempting to allow the subaltern to speak, the critic risks complicity 'in the persistent constitution of Other as the Self's shadow'.¹⁸ The empowered ecocritic identifies his local environment as a valuable Other, and attempts to 'represent' it within a privileged intellectual-institutional context. In doing so, however, he risks re-appropriation and misrepresentation of that absent 'voice' — in this case, his own past — which cannot represent itself and must be represented. This is because the local is conceivable only within terms of an 'absolute space' specifically calibrated to reproduce a model of power — i.e. capitalism — which is profoundly damaging to the environment.¹⁹ Thus, the confessional ecocritic looking to retrieve the local as environmental resource is out-manoeuvred, 'caught', as Robert Young writes in an analogous context, 'within the very terms that are being disputed'.²⁰

Finally, and emerging from the two previous points, this model of ecocriticism is open to accusations of essentialism, as it looks to replace one (bad) first cause — Rationalism — with another (good) one — Nature. Nature, that is, is imagined as a grand narrative capable of healing the rift that human arrogance has allowed to form between the local and the global, between the individual event and the over-arching structure. It is this rift

¹⁷ Andrew Dobson, *Green Political Thought* (London: HarperCollins, 1990), makes a sharp distinction between *reformist, light-green environmentalism* which supports 'affluence and technology rather than calling them into question' (p. 7), and *radical, dark-Green ecologism* which 'concerns a desire to restructure the whole of political, social and economic life' (p. 3).

¹⁸ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Can the subaltern speak?' (1988), in Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (eds.), *Colonial Discourse and Postcolonial Theory* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993), p. 75.

¹⁹ On 'absolute space' see Neil Smith and Cindi Katz, 'Grounding Metaphor: Towards a spatialized politics', in Keith and Pile, pp. 67-83, where they write: 'Absolute space is the space that is broadly taken for granted in Western societies — our naïvely assumed sense of space as emptiness — but it is only one of many ways in which space can be conceptualized ... It is not space *per se* that expresses power, but the thoroughly naturalized absolute conception of space that grew up with capitalism, and which expresses a very specific tyranny of power' (pp. 75-6).

²⁰ Robert J. C. Young, *White Mythologies: Writing History and the West* (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 169.

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that, in the form of communal displacement and individual alienation, is claimed to be at the root of all the problems confronting the planet and its inhabitants today. But the problem of returning to Nature as first cause is: where do you begin? At what moment in history did the human species slip from a proper balance with the natural environment towards the disruptive technocracy which characterises life in the West (and soon, the world) today? What measure of human modification of Nature is acceptable, and who is to say? In fact, once the absolute priority of Nature has been established, human civilisation can only be measured in terms of greater or lesser deviancy, and the route to fundamentalism is opened.

Heaney's poetry is susceptible to all of these criticisms. Is not the supposedly 'natural' act of 'digging' just as contingent and as historical — in other words, just as cultural — as the act of writing? Does it not represent the refinement of the landscape by organised human activity? Is not the spade related in some very obvious ways to all those examples — from the driftnet to the internet — of the systematic human assault upon planetary ecology? Most crucially, perhaps, is the natural essentialism underpinning Heaney's work not significantly related to a kind of local essentialism, thus rendering his work 'profoundly symptomatic of the continuing meshing of Irish cultural nationalism with the imperial ideology which frames it'?²¹

These same problems confront the critic looking to engage with this particular environmental vision. In the case of Tallaght, for example, there are many opportunities to make telling ecocritical points given the locality's present predicament and the rich cultural history noted above. The image of an eighth-century monk beavering away in the Tallaght scriptorium on a document of major historical significance is a wonderfully attractive one for anyone looking to breathe life into a modern local community denied the oxygen of cultural authenticity. As Michael Keith and Steve Pile argue, it is '[by] mobilizing a territorialized sense of both place and community identity [that] local community groups [force] themselves on to the political agenda'.²² But Oengus's text, as already noted, was part of the process whereby early Irish Christianity annexed Celtic paganism and reactivated it in the name of a particular form of rationality designed to reveal God's word as the basis of all human and natural life. There is, in other words, nothing inherently progressive, in ecocritical terms, about Oengus or his Martyrology or the context in which he wrote it. Any recruitment of these would represent

²¹ David Lloyd, "Pap for the dispossessed": Seamus Heaney and the Poetics of Identity', *Anomalous States: Irish Writing and the Post-Colonial Moment* (Dublin: The Lilliput Press, 1993), p. 37. For a feminist critique of Heaney's geo-aesthetic see Catherine Nash, 'Remapping and renaming: new cartographies of identity, gender and landscape in Ireland', *Feminist Review* 44 (Summer 1993), pp. 39-57.

²² Keith and Pile, 'Introduction Part 1: The politics of place ...', p. 16.

a form of discursive violence performed upon the local past in the name of my particular concerns in the present. In fact, I do not believe it possible to access Tallaght as an ecocritical resource in this mode without leaving myself vulnerable to accusations of individualism, misrepresentation and essentialism, and without in some way supporting the discursive systems against which I wish to cast my critique.

All told, the range of 'hippie-liberal' options remain problematic for ecocriticism, and it thus becomes incumbent on those concerned to consider what other possibilities exist for an enabling activation of local environment which does not in some way partake of (and thus vindicate) those very discursive systems which are at issue.

The Ecocritical Sublime

These criticisms of the hippie-liberal paradigm emerge from a fundamentally different way of understanding the world and its functions. To argue that resistance is in constant danger of reproducing those discourses responsible for creating and sustaining asymmetrical power relations is to engage with a mode of analysis derived from an intellectually dominant 'postal' complex, encompassing the holy trinity of post-structuralism, postmodernism and postcolonialism. Eclectic in inspiration and diffuse in application, such a complex may nonetheless be postulated in theoretical terms, and loosely defined as a critique (or a deconstruction) of received binary thought coupled with an awareness of the dangers of converting the Other into the Same, even (or especially) in the name of radical politics.²³ From this perspective, local environment is neither the (hippie) first principle against which we measure our decadence nor the (liberal) recess of the community's cultural imagination, although for strategic purposes we can (indeed, must) still engage with those particular forms of praxis. In 'reality', local environment is nothing more than the product of particular ways of perceiving and ordering the world, a construct which we are routinely invited to take as the basis for subjectivity rather than the means by which subjectivity is constituted.

Taking its cue from the work of scholars such as Foucault, Lefebvre, and Soja, the 'postal' complex informs much of the 'new geography' which has emerged in recent years, encouraging 'an understanding of space that, like identity, is never fixed, monolithic, and bound, but is open to interventions when theorized through nonessentialist

²³ Spivak's 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' represents an attempt to cross-fertilise postmodernism, post-structuralism and postcolonialism.

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theory'.²⁴ The new geography reveals its 'postal' inheritance in its implicit assumption that the function of the 'discipline' (such as Geography) as it has emerged in established intellectual-institutional contexts is not only to allow privileged subjects to make meaningful statements within particular (privileged) terms of reference, but ultimately to disseminate the disciplinary principle itself. This has given rise in turn to a concern to recover 'subjects' and/or terms of reference that have evaded or been marginalised by the disciplinary gaze: madness, meaninglessness, luck, chance, passion, atmosphere, the body — as Lefebvre writes, 'the vast store of non-formal knowledge embedded in poetry, music, dance and theatre.'²⁵ The discipline, in other words, attempts to engage with all those forms of experience which have traditionally formed the constituency of the *undisciplined* artistic imagination, such as may be found in the creative writing of Bolger, Deane, Doyle and Heaney. Moreover, because of the recalcitrant and refractory nature of these experiences, it becomes necessary to modify the forms through which the discipline operates so that the critic may engage with these 'subjects' and these terms of reference in ways that do not serve the disciplinary principle. For present purposes, I refer to this anti-disciplinary project as 'the ecocritical sublime'.²⁶

With the promise of more enabling models of human-environment interaction, the new geography constitutes a corrective to hippie-liberal guilt. This in turn has led to the possibility of different ways to access personal local environment as an ecocritical resource. But having once

²⁴ Wolfgang Natter and John Paul Jones III, 'Identity, Space and other Uncertainties', in Benko and Strohmayer, p. 142. Foucault's work on geography was speculative and occasional, but see 'Questions of geography' in Colin Gordon (ed.), *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1980), pp. 63-77; 'Space, knowledge, and power' in Rabinow, pp. 239-56; and 'Of other spaces', *Diacritics* 16 (Spring 1986), pp. 22-7. See also Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, tr. Donald Nicholson-Smith (1974; Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991), and Edward Soja, *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory* (London: Verso, 1989).

²⁵ Lefebvre, p. 406.

²⁶ The notion of the 'ecocritical sublime' invoked here represents a critical engagement with the ideas of Jean-François Lyotard in *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, tr. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (1979; Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), in which he calls for 'new presentations, not in order to enjoy them but in order to impart a stronger sense of the unrepresentable' (p. 81). The 'ecocritical sublime' also bears comparison with Hayden White's notion of an 'historical sublime' which, unlike modern Western historiography, admits the incalculable impact of elements such as meaninglessness, will, passion and revenge. See 'The Politics of Historical Interpretation: Discipline and Desublimation' in *The Content of the Form* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), pp. 55-83.

acknowledged this possibility, the issue (which constitutes the main point of overlap between the 'postal' complex and the new geography) arises as to the forms through which such a critical discourse might be articulated. Once again, we are faced with the question of discovering ways to allow 'the subaltern' — that is, some putative subject constituted as 'Other' within certain privileged terms of reference — to speak. Many possibilities suggest themselves, some of which I have broached in passing. But the work of three figures is particularly relevant: Walter Benjamin, Michel de Certeau and Jacques Derrida.

Benjamin destabilises essentialist uses of space (and the stable identities which they support) through a self-conscious deployment of techniques borrowed from fiction (characterisation, narrative, figurative discourse) and art (montage). His model of counter-hegemony engages a radical contextualising imagination which views 'spaces as indeterminate, localized, and temporary nodal points that are "essentially" un-fixed and productive of contestatory possibilities based on juxtaposition, withdrawal, and dislocation'.²⁷ De Certeau places the minuscule and quotidian operations of the human body at the centre of spatial politics. He was concerned to explore 'the innumerable practices by means of which users re-appropriate the space organized by techniques of sociocultural production', and the ways in which physical bodies 'trace out the ruses of other interests and desires that are neither determined nor captured by the systems in which they develop'.²⁸ The supposedly 'simple' act of walking in the city, for example, offers a use of the 'urban text' which in its uniqueness and its interaction with other walkers eludes official legibility — eludes, that is, the political prescriptions encoded into social space. Finally, Derrida introduces the possibility of a criticism under erasure, that is, a form of discourse in which the self (as subject) simultaneously constitutes and deconstructs the self (as object). Against Foucault's model of confessional discourse as internalisation of power, a reading from Derrida opens up the subversive potential of confession, revealing its implication in 'a form of reason which contravenes the formal rationality it springs from'.²⁹ The appeal of these figures for the 'ecocritical sublime' lies in their practice of a politics of 'disidentification', as they may be seen to dispute not only the practical applications of spatial power, but also the forms through which the

²⁷ Natter and Jones, p. 155. See Walter Benjamin, *One Way Street and Other Writings*, tr. Edmund Jephcott and Kingsley Shorter (London: NLB, 1979).

²⁸ Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, tr. Steven Randall (1974; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), pp. xiv, xviii.

²⁹ Robert Smith, *Derrida and Autobiography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 3. For a Foucauldian analysis, see Jeremy Tambling, *Confession: Sexuality, Sin, The Subject* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990).

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spatial is formulated and made available.

In the Irish intellectual formation, which came late to the notion of disciplinarity but embraced it all the more fervently for that, the possibility of extending the forms by means of which 'primary' cultural phenomena are critically engaged is now under serious consideration. The historian Ciarán Brady writes:

The media by which historians may represent their pursuit of an irrecoverable past have yet ... to be fully explored. The open adoption of fictive modes in a manner that at once acknowledges history's impotence and attempts to transcend it is a strategy that has attracted some of the bolder scholars. And the generally positive response of historians and non-historians to some of these borderland essays suggests that they have gone some distance to restoring the equilibrium of ignorance between writer, reader, and the fragmentary inheritance upon which the dialogue of history depends. Yet the blending of accidentally surviving reliques with imagined evidence deliberately created to fill the gaps is a strategy beset by conceptual problems, and one that requires the sustained exercise of a creative force that goes far beyond a merely well-informed talent for pastiche. The sincerity of the attempt does not guarantee its success.³⁰

Any emerging Irish ecocriticism will confront problems similar to the ones which have beset the disciplines of History and Geography in the 'postal' era, and will be attracted to similar remedial manoeuvres. In the case of Tallaght, for example, it is eminently possible to imagine both 'primary' contexts and 'secondary' practices conducive to the kinds of critical engagement theorised and practised by Benjamin, de Certeau and Derrida. From the critics' uncontrollable usages of its textual traces to the inhabitants' unmappable usages of its endless housing estates, Tallaght past and present is amenable to an ecocritical discourse deploying techniques of 'juxtaposition, withdrawal, and dislocation' in order to reveal the struggles for power which are embedded in the local environment. By engaging with such techniques, it might be possible for the ecocritic to explore these extraordinary/everyday usages in ways that reinforce neither discipline nor disciplinary principle.

Yet, as Brady's closing caveat suggests, any attempt to adapt these

³⁰ Ciarán Brady, "Constructive and Instrumental": The Dilemma of Ireland's First "New Historians", in Ciarán Brady (ed.), *Interpreting Irish History: The Debate on Historical Revisionism* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1994), pp. 30-31.

theories for practical critical purposes would be susceptible to the wider critiques mounted against the 'postal' complex generally and the new geography in particular. The characteristic 'strategic' nature of 'postal' discourse, and the abundance of ironic and provisional critical practices to which it has given rise, are now widely regarded as decadent, incoherent, élitist and collusive. Almost before the new geography has had an opportunity to make an impact on the intellectual-institutional mainstream, it has been confronted by a 'new essentialism' dissatisfied with the self-consciousness of modern criticism, and looking to identify much more tangible spatial practices as the basis for discourses of identity. Aijaz Ahmad, to take one prominent example, has attacked 'postal' theory for offering 'false knowledges of real facts', and for its construal of rhetoric as meaningful politics. For him, the formal experiments encouraged by 'postal' theory have given rise to a series of frankly offensive critical practices characterised by a 'kind of ironic self-referentiality and self-pleasuring' — critical onanism for the privileged.³¹

From this perspective, in fact, the 'ecocritical sublime' is as problematic as the established hippie-liberal paradigm it looks to replace. Whereas the latter is perceived to be limited by an ultimately uncritical engagement with received (asymmetrical) spatial parameters, the former is attacked for its precipitate collapse of those parameters and its scepticism towards the possibility of a coherent, effective, non-repressive, shared cultural identity. For me, Tallaght exists somewhere between these two models: simultaneously a *place* giving rise to texts and practices amenable to strategic ecocritical intervention, and a series of indefinite *spaces* over which a highly contextualised critical imagination ranges.³²

Conclusion: Ecomaterialism?

What is missing from this analysis of the possibilities for a future ecocriticism attempting to exploit the radical potential of confessional discourse? In a publication taking its title from the work of Raymond Williams, and including the word 'cultural materialism' in its subtitle, the answer must be obvious. I have suggested that we should acknowledge the positive contribution of traditional hippie and liberal perspectives, while

³¹ Ahmad, pp. 34 and 6-7. See my 'Irish Studies, Postcolonial Theory and the "New Essentialism"', *Irish Studies and Postcolonial Theory: A Special Number of the Irish Studies Review* (forthcoming, Autumn 1999).

³² On the difference between 'space and 'place', in both practical and philosophical terms, see Edward Relph, *Place and Placelessness* (London: Pion, 1976), and Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (London: Edward Arnold, 1977).

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remaining wary of the implications of a 'sublime' breakthrough. Just as ecomaterialism has been 'shadowing' my analyses throughout, I would like to end with the 'shadow' suggestion that academic and aesthetic work (and such division of intellectual labour is instructive) of a man who called green socialism 'the most hopeful social and political movement of our time'³³ might be one place to continue working for an ecocriticism worth the name.

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³³ Raymond Williams, 'Between Country and City', in Simon Pugh (ed.), *Reading Landscape: Country — City — Capital* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990), p. 18.

BSE Stories

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For anyone suffering from new-variant CJD, BSE is the end of everything. For people close to these sufferers, BSE is a catastrophe. For beef farmers it is a disaster that threatens income and livelihood. What will be the cultural effects of all this? BSE is a story of uncertainty, a calamity which may produce lasting changes or none. In this article I will look at the narrative genres that have been called on to tell the BSE story, and at the way these genres have shaped that story.

Two narratives appear to be unfolding together. One is a narrative of return to normality. Step by step, the disease is being eradicated from cattle herds. Consumption of beef in Britain has almost returned to former levels. As I write, European agriculture ministers have just voted to remove the ban on beef exports. Beef on the bone may soon be back. The old assumptions and habits, thrown into such confusion by BSE, can return.

But the other narrative tells of an intractable crisis, in which every piece of good news seems to be followed by a twist back into fear. It was suggested recently that the disease may now be in sheep. Two days after the lifting of the export ban, *Newsnight* on BBC2 discussed a proposal to administer a new drug to anyone receiving a blood transfusion, to reduce their vulnerability to BSE. The next day, a *Dispatches* documentary reported scientific speculation that many fatalities previously attributed to Alzheimer's disease may in fact have been cases of CJD, possibly contracted from meat.¹ Reassurance is given and then snatched back. A threat familiarised in one form comes creeping at us in another. Are these the last spasms of a fading anxiety, or will the problem flare up again? Most important of all, will the disease prove only to have reached a small number of victims, or will there be a large epidemic? Is the story ending or beginning?

In this indeterminacy, the BSE story is typical of environmental narratives. We have been here before. Chernobyl was another event that, as its drama unfolded, seemed likely to be a great turning point. If we could only get out of this one safely, things would *surely* have to change. Now Chernobyl appears to have made little difference to the world-wide use of nuclear power. Horrifying reports come periodically (at ten year anniversaries and the like) from the region surrounding the reactor, but to the television audience in Britain these reports do not function primarily as warning. Instead they show the *legacy* of Chernobyl, the terrible remainder of an event receding into history, encased in particular, local detail.

¹ *Newsnight*, BBC2, 25 November 1998; *Dispatches*, Channel 4, 26 November 1998.

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Chernobyl has not functioned — and could not function — as the event which changed everything. Normality reasserts itself quickly.

Such events are rapidly familiarised. If we are not personally the victims of these terrors, we are quickly permitted to turn our attention away from them. They become background stories, part of the stock of the situation we appraise each day. Environmentalism is in a difficult position here, one full of traps. Sometimes environmentalists are accused of cherishing fantasies of apocalypse.² This accusation is often made cheaply, but it does ask some disturbing questions of environmentalists, who may at times find themselves frustrated at the ease with which normality returns after a disaster. The frustration arises from a perception that the underlying conditions which led to the disaster have not been addressed — but in showing this feeling, environmentalists can appear reluctant to relinquish an emergency which carried the possibility of change as well as calamity.

Environmentalists must always be careful of this distinction. For such honourable, uneasy frustration is uncomfortably close to several less honourable things. The scorned prophet may be tempted to prophesy disaster with a hint of relish. In an environmentalist this relish is in particularly bad faith, suggesting that the prophet himself does not take the threat wholly seriously. Fantasies which compensate for a sense of powerlessness arise usually in response to a normality felt to be permanent. One of the most important tasks for the new ecocriticism is to make explicit the precise function of apocalyptic fantasy; which means acknowledging and describing the pleasures of this genre.

While much environmentalist commentary and activism draws its temper from environmental science, and consists of patient observation of interdependencies, there is also, of necessity, a much more agitated mood. Environmentalists frequently feel that time is running out. They feel panic in the face of the world's indifference. Sometimes this fear finds expression in fantasies of apocalypse — or rather of the almost-apocalypse, the escape narrow and frightening enough to stop industrial capitalism in its tracks. This is the ecological disaster as warning: the shock we needed, the lesson administered by providence to open our eyes just in time.

Hollywood ecothrillers such as *Jurassic Park* (1993) and *Waterworld* (1995) depict the ecological catastrophe as a result of capitalist *hubris* and an opportunity for heroism and Edenic rebirth.³ A significant variation on the redemption theme is provided by Paul Watkins's novel

² Tom Athanasiou has a useful discussion of this in *Slow Reckoning* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1997), pp. 73-82.

³ I have discussed some of these issues in 'Ecothrillers: environmentalism in popular culture', *The English Review* 8, 3 (February 1998), pp. 32-5.

Archangel (1995),⁴ an action thriller about a struggle between a logging company and an eco-saboteur in an American old-growth forest. The novel ends with a last-minute change of heart by the owner of the company. Matthew Hall's thriller of urban ecology *The Art of Breaking Glass* (1997)⁵ has a similar reversal at its climax. Thus, ecological threats can be deployed for their scariness without ecological *solutions* being considered or given literary form. These genre-thrillers manage to exploit environmentalism's topicality, and genuinely acknowledge some of its concerns, without venturing into the sort of unreconciled critique of industrial capitalism that would impede resolution of the plot. Through climax and closure, these novels express the comforting notion that capitalism may be subject, not to the full range of political forces, but to free individual consciences at the top. In these novels, the consciences of secretly tormented industrialists are the chink in the system's armour. Through this opening, environmentalism can penetrate to the human, responsive, emotional core of an externally hard and impersonal system. The struggle of the environmentalist thus becomes an effort to fight through the outer layers and touch the system's heart. The narrative of environmentalist action turns into that most masculine of narratives, the story of two strong men engaged in a personal struggle which is also a form of intimacy.

Such ecothrillers have a predictable ambivalence about the disasters they summon up, the same ambivalence a crime thriller has about violent crime. The disaster is a warning, something ostensibly there to frighten us into changing our ways. Yet it is also a source of pleasure. The excitement the thriller generates depends on the eruption of danger.⁶ The threat has to be genuinely appalling, but has also to be under the plot's control, so that closure can take place and survival be guaranteed. This is a kind of pact between the thriller and its audience.

A particularly 'dangerous' thriller may test this pact to the limit, by presenting events so terrible that they threaten the possibility of closure: events from which there may be no recovery. One such thriller is the macabre detective movie *Seven* (1995), directed by David Fielder and written by Andrew

⁴ Paul Watkins, *Archangel* (London: Faber and Faber, 1995).

⁵ Matthew Hall, *The Art of Breaking Glass* (London: Orion, 1997).

⁶ See Marti Kheel, 'From Heroic to Holistic Ethics: the ecofeminist challenge', in Greta Gaard (ed.), *Ecofeminism: Women, Animals, Nature* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993), pp. 243-71. Kheel argues for a holistic ethics to replace the heroic ethics which provide the narratives into which ecological dangers usually fall: 'Western heroic ethics is designed to treat problems at an advanced stage in their history — namely, at the point at which conflict has occurred. Prevention is simply not a very heroic undertaking. How can you fight a battle if the enemy does not yet exist? It is far more dramatic to allow disease and conflict to develop and then to call in the troops and declare war' (p. 258).

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Kevin Walker. In this film, a young detective, excited by danger and confident of his ability to face horrors, investigates a series of bizarre and appalling murders. With composure, he faces shocking sight after shocking sight. Each time, the audience is given a brief glimpse of the grotesquely tortured corpse which this detective and his more world-weary partner have to examine. At the climax, the young detective is tricked into opening a box which contains the severed head of his wife. This time the audience is given no glimpse. The sight which will shatter the detective is protectively withheld from the viewer. *Seven* thus manages to have the allure of a dangerous movie that breaks taboos, while retaining the notion that there must be limits: that there are some things we must not familiarise by looking at them for more than an instant, and some, held in reserve, that we must not see at all. Taboos are not broken here for the sake of abolishing them, but for the momentary shiver of exposure; they are then re-established. The young detective's hubris meets a nemesis. His former confidence that he was tough enough for anything is revealed as a horribly costly naïveté, while the audience, which has shown a similar, if vicarious, bravado, is now brought up short. Since the character has to suffer the terrible sight while the audience is spared or denied it, the effect is to distance character from audience. The detective cannot recover but will soon disappear from view. The audience, however shaken, will collect themselves and leave the cinema — and will contain these shocks by acknowledging them as the devices of a white-knuckle genre whose well-understood design is to catch us unawares, make us jump, challenge us as to how much we can take. Even as the detective is traumatised, he is confirmed as the hero on the frontline, the guardian who faces horrors so that we will not need to, and pays a terrible price.

Seven is not a film about ecological threats (though it has an apocalyptic tone, deploys nightmarish images of urban detritus and degradation and shows us human bodies as inert waste and residue). It is, however, a film about limits, and the relationship between excitement and fear. It is a film which both exploits and challenges popular desire for the thrill of danger. Such thrillers enable us to solicit catastrophe while remaining sure of our security. This sets a pattern for our responses to real ecological crisis; a pattern extremely difficult to escape. On television, especially, styles and structures continually move across from fiction to non-fiction. Documentaries about health hazards or environmental threats now routinely employ stylistic features from horror films: creepy tinkling music to make us feel nervous, or sudden explosive chords to make us jump. Tom Jagtenburg and David McKie have recently analysed television news as 'a branch of

show business⁷ which borrows many narrative devices from thrillers and other genres. In news reports of ecological disasters, Jagtenburg and McKie find a pact between the arousal of fear and the provision of surrounding security — similar to the pact struck by ecothrillers:

Night after night the bulletins intone habitual responses to predominantly negative happenings. They don't so much inform their viewers about what has happened on any specific day as continuously replay variations on their one solitary question: Is our world safe? Although a part of modernity's reflexivity, television newsreaders also perform a comforting ritual. Each night, they run an impressive list of troubles past us, and although these might not be immediately resolved, we are still invited to rest easy.⁸

Jagtenburg and McKie argue that this primacy of reassurance makes television news 'dangerously frivolous', and that, paradoxically, it is television comedy, officially a frivolous zone, that is capable of the serious work of exposing the mechanisms of false reassurance. Jagtenburg and McKie cite a joke by Lenny Henry: 'The nuclear power plant at Windscale has been renamed Sellafield because it sounds nicer. In future, radiation will be known as magic moonbeams.'⁹ The joke expresses a heartening mistrust of official statements, and encourages a counter-culture of irreverence which at times gathers enough force to challenge the authority of governments. But the pact here is only slightly different from the pact operated by the thriller. Comedy occupies a well-defined cultural space. It would have to be exceptionally powerful and eerie to break out of that space. Jokes have their own closure. Their formal completeness is its own reward. See, we're not fooled, they proclaim, in a gesture that usually requires no further action.

A character in Don DeLillo's novel *White Noise*, aware that a cloud of dangerous chemicals is moving towards his home, says of his son:

He continued to watch me carefully, searching my face for some reassurance against the possibility of real danger — a reassurance he would immediately reject as phony.¹⁰

⁷ Tom Jagtenburg and David McKie, *Eco-Impacts and the Greening of Postmodernity* (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 1997), p. 65.

⁸ Jagtenburg and McKie, p. 68.

⁹ Jagtenburg and McKie, p. 69.

¹⁰ Don DeLillo, *White Noise* (London: Picador, 1986), p. 117.

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Public response to ecological dangers could often be called perverse. The abrupt shifts between intensity of fear and resumption of normality must be disconcerting both to environmentalists and to those who deplore environmentalism. Popular concern about the environment finds numerous cultural expressions in such areas as education and leisure (the extraordinary popularity of television wildlife documentaries, comparatively neglected by Media Studies and Cultural Studies, is only the most obvious example). At times environmentalism seems to be everywhere — yet environmental priorities make so little political headway, so little impression on the economic calculations of governments and individuals. It is as if environmentalism has been defined, by the tacit agreement of the majority, as a purely cultural practice, or even a leisure activity. In its many cultural spaces, environmentalism can express and speak to the intensest fears and yearnings, but outside those spaces we are suddenly deaf to environmental arguments. Whether in the lives of individuals or in social policy, environmentalism encounters acute difficulty in moving beyond these cultural spaces: within them it is permitted the headlong rush of fantasy. The intensity of environmentalist fear and longing derives in part from this confinement, this pent-up, protected condition.

This co-existence of mutually contradictory discourses and priorities was exposed and endangered as the BSE story developed. Gaps between discourses widened, became visible. The question now is whether they will be covered over once more.

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On March 20, 1996, Health Secretary Stephen Dorrell announced that he had now been advised of a probable link between new variant CJD and 'mad cow disease' — a link the government had for eight years attempted frantically and irritably to deny. Sales of beef collapsed. The European Community imposed its export ban. The press was full of horrifying speculations about the possible size of the epidemic to come. *The Observer* of March 24 was particularly scary, conjuring up a scenario of Britain twenty years on as a desperate, sealed-off quarantine zone, administering free euthanasia on the NHS to hundreds of thousands of CJD-sufferers.

Remarkably, this first reaction was followed by a reversal. Phil McNaghten and John Urry, analysing the story in the context of a larger (and extremely valuable) study of the complex pattern of different attitudes and spaces that comprises environmentalism, note that 'overnight, science

appeared to have changed its mind.¹¹ The Labour opposition, which had intermittently seen the issue as one upon which the government could be attacked, seemed to be wrong-footed by the government's use of the issue to mobilise anti-European sentiment. The wider questions raised by BSE seemed as unmanageable for the opposition as for the government. Rapidly, the issue came to be discussed mainly in terms of the need to protect the beef industry. McNaghten and Urry follow Barbara Adam in remarking that 'the issue rapidly shifted from a health crisis to a beef crisis, from one of public safety to anxiety about job losses and the need to safeguard a key industry.'¹² Car stickers appeared saying 'Stuff the EU. Eat British beef.' Incredulous fury was expressed that anyone (but especially the Germans) should decline to risk a terminal brain disease for the sake of protecting British farmers. German insistence on the export ban was widely interpreted as motivated by commercial self-interest; the human self-interest involved in wishing to preserve one's life was discounted and excluded. Some pubs in farming areas held beef-eating contests. Domestic sales of beef quickly returned to 80% of the totals usual before Dorrell's announcement.

Why was such a reversal possible? Part of the answer may be that the alternative, the uncertainty combined with the unthinkable possibility of widespread latent infection, was too hard to bear. In *Timescapes of Modernity*, Barbara Adam analyses the reception and news management of the BSE story in the weeks following the Dorrell statement. Her analysis forms part of a larger argument, that environmental threats pose particular problems for our customary methods of analysis and emplotment. Adam suggests that contemporary culture lacks narratives and methods of self-orientation capable of doing justice to these threats. Many environmental hazards 'are marked by latency and remain invisible for long periods of time'.¹³ Such hazards evade representation but provoke fear. They induce the kind of panic horror films generate but carefully ration: the panic of feeling stalked by an invisible enemy. Individuals are under pressure to act quickly to protect themselves, without being able to see what form significant action could take. In the case of food contaminated by an infective agent such as BSE, there may be a huge disproportion between the size of the dose and the scope of its effect, between the triviality of the action (something so small and so normal as to escape notice) and the immensity of the eventual consequence.

Adam contends that our dominant narratives and modes of evaluation cannot accommodate such disproportions, which seem more aptly described

¹¹ Phil McNaghten and John Urry, *Contested Natures* (London: Sage, 1998), p. 258.

¹² McNaghten and Urry, p. 258; Barbara Adam, *Timescapes of Modernity: The Environment and Invisible Hazards* (London: Routledge, 1998), pp. 184-5.

¹³ Adam, p. 47.

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by chaos theory than by the Newtonian scientific tradition with its search for measurable cause and effect.¹⁴ Noting the primacy given to 'visibility, materiality and space'¹⁵ in the Newtonian tradition, and in official assessments of evidence of threat, Adam proposes that we should adopt instead 'a timescape perspective'. By this she means an effort of the imagination towards acceptance of indeterminacy; a willingness to see landscape in terms of both visible detail and hidden or latent process; an interest in what has been excluded from any given picture; a recognition of the emotional effects of huge disproportions between the range of individual choice and that of large-scale or long-term ecological processes. Her proposal recalls the efforts of early twentieth-century Modernist writers such as Virginia Woolf and Ford Madox Ford to find forms of narrative capable of registering the lived complexity of temporal and spatial relations; experiments which involved disruptions to the tight coherence of narrative and of the self as narrator or protagonist.¹⁶ Adam also has points in common with Donna J. Haraway's demand that scientists should relinquish the stance of disembodied, objective observer, and should instead place themselves, as embodied observers, into the scientific accounts and narratives they produce, acknowledging their own precise position.¹⁷

Two aspects of BSE/CJD, both noted by Adam and by McNaghten and Urry, are particularly apt to undermine our sense of security, orientation and self-determination. We are powerless because we may have contracted the infection ten years ago, before anyone had heard of it, and we are powerless because we may have caught it from an activity no one could have thought of as dangerous (cue the creepy tinkling music). No precautionary principle could have warned us.

The implications of this go way beyond BSE as a specific danger. Trust in the most ordinary actions and continuities is put in question. And not only can we now see that we were deprived of the power to take meaningful actions in the past: we are similarly deprived in the present. There is no action we can take to extricate ourselves from the indeterminacy. We simply have to wait and see. The thriller works us up and then withholds its climax. Barbara Adam's argument seems especially pertinent here: the timescapes of the dominant forms of contemporary narrative, from thrillers to documentaries and news reports, cannot

¹⁴ Adam, pp. 39-43.

¹⁵ Adam, p. 37.

¹⁶ For a discussion of Modernist literary innovation in relation to various concepts of time, and to ecological degradation, see Paul Edwards, 'Time, Romanticism, Modernism and Moderation in Ian McEwan's *The Child in Time*', *English*, 44, 178 (Spring 1995), pp. 41-55.

¹⁷ Donna J. Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (London: Free Association Books, 1991), pp. 183-201.

accommodate the timescape of BSE/CJD, with its unknown rates of infectivity and unknown incubation period. Not only was there an overwhelming temptation to reassert the normality that these narratives could deal with; there was a vacancy, a hiatus.

A further answer is suggested if we look at cattle as cultural signifiers. Crucially, BSE revealed the countryside and farming not as pastoral alternative to industry, but as industrial. Cattle in English culture, from art and literature to advertising, are mainly signifiers of rural peacefulness. In conventional eighteenth- and nineteenth-century landscape paintings, they speckle the distant fields or stand knee-deep in rivers. Most importantly nowadays, cattle, especially Friesians and Holsteins, are an utterly familiar component of the landscape for people who drive into the countryside. Cattle stand for an ideal of dreamy provincial contemplation; for notions of the countryside as the home of enduring, pre-industrial, natural wisdom. This is pastoral as traditional consolation for mutability and stress. These are the traditional meanings of cattle for the visitor, the tourist or weekender, for whom the countryside means beauty and recreation. In the absence of many large wild animals in Britain, cattle may even function, in people's imaginations, as easily observed wildlife.

It is a commonplace that British farming is amongst the most industrial in the world, and that as a consequence the British rural landscape is one of the most heavily polluted and regulated.¹⁸ Alongside this generally recognised reality, however, there persists with extraordinary durability the perception of the countryside as pastoral landscape. If the countryside is our place of leisure, not work, it is easy, especially in areas of dairy or hill farming, not to 'see' industrial farming when we look at the landscape: we are adept at shading it out, not allowing it to intrude.¹⁹ Intensively reared animals are concealed in buildings; pesticides and herbicides are invisible. BSE disrupted the peaceful co-existence of the pastoral and industrial perceptions. BSE was an intrusion of the industrial into the pastoral, with the vengeance of a recognition long repressed.

Pastoral images of cattle were now replaced by the endlessly replayed image of a cow being shovelled by fork-lift truck through the door of a furnace. The image carried a disturbing suggestion of a joint being put into an oven. The camera peered voyeuristically into the centre of the blaze. Worse, television in investigative mode took us inside slaughterhouses and rendering factories; but this turned out to be television in horror-film mode

¹⁸ For recent confirmation, see Graham Harvey, *The Killing of the Countryside* (London: Vintage, 1998).

¹⁹ See Harvey, pp. 35, 79, and Bill McKibben, *The End of Nature* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990), pp. 52-3.

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as well, showing glimpses of sordid backyards and bloodstained rooms resembling the hideous inner chambers of murderers in slasher movies. The shots of these places sometimes resembled photographs of crime-scenes in basements. The concealed activity that we glimpse taking place was the dismembering and dissolution of the animal body, visible in puddles of blood, oozing of grease, coatings of dispersed fat, and piles of discarded, possibly rotting bits.

Like other health scares, BSE suddenly challenged people to shine a light into the forbidden recesses of industry, culture and their own bodies. Too little knowledge was suddenly replaced with the threatening potential of too much. In its imagery, BSE confronted the public with spectacles of bodies — animal bodies — being rendered, bursting out of their limits and being boiled down to an essence which would then disperse uncontainably. The dissolution of bodies appeared first as a ruthlessly managed process, but then, revealing the hubris of this notion of control, as an unmanageable process, uncontrollable. That which is dispersed ceases to be containable and seems to be present everywhere: beef derivatives were revealed to be ingredients of biscuits, yogurt, medicines, ice cream. Semen, tallow and gelatin, the three beef derivatives whose export was banned by the European Community in addition to the ban on meat itself, seemed to stand for the uncontrollable afterlife of the body, after the extinction of the self. Against such dispersal, acts of volition by the good old humanist unified self — mere resolutions not to eat the stuff — were powerless. As were narratives giving primacy to that self.

The vengeful disruption of pastoral by some sordid, repressed, murderous and abject force is a staple of the horror genre. Such eruptions are usually followed, however, by climax, purging, cleansing, recognition of error, restoration of order. Such resolutions are barely available to the BSE story. Recognition of error cannot, as yet, be followed by absolution. One temptation, therefore, is to attempt to restore pastoral as a separate domain, without this restoration having been earned by resolution. The Countryside Alliance, which organised spectacular protest marches of country people through London in 1997 and 1998, emerged to campaign against the proposed abolition of hunting with hounds. Yet it is a more diffuse movement than this suggests, and has developed out of a general sense of economic and cultural crisis in rural areas, intensified by a series of blows to the economic viability of livestock farming. The greatest of these blows was BSE. The Alliance continues to appeal to the emotions involved in the anguished defence of the beef industry in farming areas, and especially to the intensity of denial required by this defence. Much of the Alliance's literature invokes the idea of a rigid split, a gulf of incomprehension, between town and country. Often, the defensive tactic is to deny validity to urban perceptions of the countryside. Or, rather, it is to attempt to restore the co-existence of pastoral idealisation and industrial

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practice, an arrangement dependent on the avoidance of collisions between the two. BSE raises questions about farming methods, about the free market and deregulation, about secrecy and the rights of consumers to information about what goes into their bodies, about ownership. These questions will be lost if that compact between industry and pastoral is restored.

Bath Spa University

Conference Reports

From the Inhuman to the Human: *Culture and Environmentalism* Conference, Bath Spa University, 3-5 July 1998

The chief organisers of this conference, Greg Garrard and Richard Kerridge (both from Bath Spa University), had decided to demonstrate environmentalism's pervasive presence across the humanities by choosing a diversity of speakers — from ten different countries, from Australia to Estonia — and of genre: included were papers on literature, art, cultural theory, philosophy, photography, video, film, TV, history, and mapmaking. Prominent was literary criticism, and the conference ended with the inaugural meeting of *ASLE UK*, the *Association for the Study of Literature and the Environment*. However, the literary papers alone testified to the diverse sources ecocriticism has at its disposal. Chronologically, contributions ranged from re-appraisals of canonical figures (Bacon, Spenser, Ruskin, Woolf) to the 'greening of contemporary fiction' (Edna O'Brien, Don DeLillo, Michael Crichton), while geographically, the continents were represented by papers on Alice Walker, J M Coetzee, the Estonian theologian Uku Masing, and Rudy Wiebe's portrayals of native Canadians.

This abundance of sources, critical approaches and sympathetic minds was manna for those of us 'ecocritics' used to working in isolation. Yet there are dangers, both in the implication of a body of work with little focus and, in the contrast between (say) Wiebe and DeLillo, in predicating that dichotomy between 'nature' and 'culture' which haunts ecological theory. Last year, in the *Times Higher*, Marilyn Butler dismissed ecocriticism as 'old-fashioned and nostalgic writing about nature under a new, trendy name', an unfair comment, perhaps, but one that can be traced to the prior dominance of two important but limited sources — Wordsworthian idealism and American transcendentalism. What pleased me most of all about this conference was the emergence of a broader, more sophisticated critical approach to the nature/culture opposition.

The tone was set by two plenary speakers. On the final day, Kate Soper, in her lecture 'Nature and Culture: The Mythic Register', identified two contrasting approaches to ecocritical work: a juxtaposition between 'truthful' nature (notions of 'dwelling' and 'back to nature') and cultural 'construction'; or, a recognition that culture and nature shape each other (I liked another speaker's anecdote about Thoreau's trips out of Walden Forest to give his laundry to his mother!). She advocated the second approach, arguing that if we perceived ourselves as simultaneously *a part of* and *apart from* nature, we could retain the integrity of human culture, while understanding, also, that ecological principles — e.g. the sustainable society — were humanly rewarding.

This clarified the argument made by Louise Westling, president of ASLE, in the opening plenary. Westling's lecture, 'Ecocriticism for the Millennium', outlined two tasks for ecocriticism which paralleled the two components of *nature* and *culture*. The first was to respond to accusations of naïve idealism (made by postmodern critics) by developing more complex, theoretical approaches to representing nature. The second was to form links with other emancipatory discourses. Not only had ecocriticism neglected 'marginalised' or oppressed groups (indeed, no speaker discussed the ecological facets of postcolonial writers such as James Ngugi and Wilson Harris); too often 'green' perspectives had given a platform to, for instance, a reactionary anti-modernism that often filtered into neo-fascism (see Anna Bramwell's work on Henry Williamson). The conference was shaped by these two interconnected tasks and it is worth reflecting upon each in turn.

The dominant concept used in discussions of how we construct the 'non-human' was Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology. In his paper 'Against Postmodernist Culture: Merleau-Ponty's Green Phenomenology', Leonard Scigaj employed it to counter 'post-structural literary criticism ... [that] derives from Derrida's deconstruction of presence in language and the absence of the original referent'. Merleau-Ponty identified a 'pre-reflective' first stage of cognition — prior, that is, to the intervention both of the egocentric 'I' and cultural convention — meaning that phenomenology, while accepting that representations of 'nature' do become 'culturally constructed', nevertheless also insists that the original stimulus comes in our response to natural 'phenomena'. This both distinguishes it from mimesis and engenders an awareness that, ultimately, human culture is embedded in the natural world.

Phenomenology also allows for a re-affirmation of the 'non-human'. Ecological theorists have long argued that Enlightenment philosophers — Descartes and Bacon, in particular — reduced nature from the metaphor of 'living organism' to that of 'machine', marking what Carolyn Merchant calls *The Death of Nature*. Here, several speakers suggested that literary texts could re-create non-human 'living systems', excavating a literary tradition of resistance to Cartesianism running through writers such as Keats, Richard Jefferies, and Andrew Young, and exemplified in Gerard Manley Hopkins' use of sprung rhythm to re-create the movement of *The Windhover*.

... how he rung upon the rein of a wimpling wing
In his ecstasy! then off, off forth on swing ...

The most provocative argument, however, came in Hugh Dunkerley's paper, 'The Virtual Poet: Hyperreality, Poetry and Nature'. He claimed that Ted Hughes' phenomenology enacted a reversal of Wordsworthian nature writing. Rather than use nature to explore human emotion, Hughes employs human

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metaphor to serve non-human living forms, restoring a sense of the integrity of other species by dwelling upon their 'alive-ness'. He illustrated this through Hughes' *Saints Island*, a poem (notably) about that most ephemeral of creatures, the mayfly:

They jig in a spin, in a column. They are tossed and
are tossed—
Their happiness is to prolong this.

The problem with this phenomenological approach, however, is that it potentially goes too far in privileging the non-human. Several speakers referred to the concept of *inhumanism*, seeing things from the perspective of other creatures. Two objections can be made to this concept. First, texts can only ever make representations from a human perspective. This came across in two interesting papers on natural history documentaries, Ros Coward's plenary on 'Television Natural History Programmes' and Mark Haslam's 'Nature through the Silver Cage: Films and Nature Documentaries'. Both argued that claims of 'realism' are counteracted by technical artifice (special effects, staged incidents), by human value judgments (Ros Coward spoke of the hierarchy of subjects — big cats, polar bears, etc.), and by the use of 'nature' to reinforce social values. (What also springs to mind here is Desmond Morris's pseudo-scientific study of the sexuality of apes, made to affirm notions of universal heterosexual monogamy.)

The other problem is *inhumanism's* unfortunate connotations. Its awkward ambiguity is reminiscent of the similarly poorly-named concept 'commonsense racism', conjuring up uncomfortable reminders of the dark side of ecological theory: Williamson's fascism, for instance, and Garrett Hardin's argument (in 'The Tragedy of the Commons') for ending third-world aid to preserve resources. It is these dangers that necessitate ecological theory's alliance with questions of human fulfilment and emancipatory practice as it moves into the social realm.

The solution to this resides in retaining the phenomenological stress on human *culture's* embeddedness in *nature*, a point made by Jeremy Hooker in his paper, "'Ditch Vision": an alternative idea of the "wild" in English writing', which was a specific critique of inhumanism. Referring to Jefferies, he argued for the importance of the local, the 'common', in providing everyday experiences of nature in which defence of wilderness becomes simultaneously a 'defence both of the environment *and* of community and individuality' (sentiments also evident in John Clare). This becomes highly charged, politically, where environments are contested, as we saw from a number of papers on colonialism and the direct link between land ownership and environmental representation. Notable was John MacKenzie's 'Imperialist

Texts and the Environment' and more specific papers such as Tessa Hadley's 'Nature and Novels in South Africa: Nadine Gordimer and J.M. Coetzee', and Kate Rigby's 'Myth, Memory, Attunement: Australians in search of Spirit of Place', which offered an interesting variation in analysing the painful cultural 'distance' European-Australians felt from the land.

Ultimately, what I found missing from this conference was discussion of how literary figures have directly confronted ecological problems. I can think of at least two periods in which this has been commonplace: post-colonial writing (as mentioned) and Victorian social criticism where Dickens, Morris and John Ruskin all translated critiques about Victorian civilisation's loss of its sense of embeddedness into specific eco-criticism (see, for example, Ruskin's attacks on air pollution, water pollution, deforestation). Yet perhaps these are matters of detail, to be explored later. For what became apparent here was an exploration (already occurring, for instance, in politics and sociology) of how ecocriticism might connect with wider environmental discourse and practice.

This was particularly evident through a welcome re-appraisal of the Enlightenment, long regarded as the 'root of our Ecologic Crisis', as Lynn White Jnr's seminal essay puts it. Kate Soper's use of Adorno and Horkheimer's 'Dialectics of Enlightenment' signalled a shift. She argued that *both* 'return to nature' and 'over-progress' would 'degrade' humanity, calling to mind Jefferies' *After London* (1885) in which Felix, the central character, retreats from a polluted London ('suffocated in noxious filth') to the countryside, only to find a state of rural poverty which is no better. A similar perspective appeared here, for instance, in papers on ecofeminism, notably Caroline New's reminder, responding to the essentialist equation that Woman = Nature (in 'The Womanly Ethics of Ecofeminism'), that a return to subsistence economies would be anything but empowering for women.

All this was drawn together in Jonathan Bate's closing plenary, which argued that an ecocriticism connected to the Enlightenment's positive qualities — scientific know-how and political democracy — would help build models for the future. How, precisely, this might be achieved was crystallised in the debate engendered by Greg Garrard's paper, 'Is the World an Aesthetic Phenomenon?'. His argument, that we need aesthetic 'values' to feel and therefore defend 'nature', was countered by the objection that society, hegemonically, structures such feelings. Yet, as John Foster reminded us, in his paper 'Criticism and Environmental Responsibility', contemporary environmental debate has brought these two approaches together. Projects such as the survey into *Public Perceptions and Sustainability in Lancashire* reflect a growth in what's called 'Community Visioning'. Here, environmental policy is developed through qualitative research, people reflecting upon their embeddedness in both the surrounding natural environment *and* the local community (in the ways Jeremy Hooker described). Literature, it seems to me,

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cultivates and articulates these sentiments in the 'phenomenological' writing of, for example, Clare, Hopkins, and Hughes. Yet it can also influence social discourse, offering both historical examples of environmental argument (e.g. in Ruskin or Morris) *and* a space in which to explore new ideas. An example of this was Lisa Garforth's suggestion, in her paper 'Ecotopian Fiction and the Sustainable Society', that 'green' utopian novels (Le Guin, Callenbach) offer a platform for imagining and testing out visions of a sustainable society.

With such potential it is, perhaps, no surprise that Louise Westling described ecocriticism as flourishing in North America (1000 ASLE members and publishers clamouring for manuscripts). However, in Britain, as Dominic Head reminded us, in 'Reading Towards 2000', it has yet to achieve such momentum and, more importantly, is under siege from the increasing professionalisation of the Academy, visualised by Williams and highlighted in the growth, throughout the 1980s and 90s, of subject areas such as Business Studies or, more specifically still, Tourism or Accountancy.

Yet this conference was testimony to ecocriticism's general vigour. Jonathan Bate praised the supportive atmosphere and creative interdisciplinarity in evidence. Reflecting on this, it occurs to me that contemporary spaces do exist for ecocritics. Interdisciplinarity's structural equivalent is the modular system, a tool of academic professionalisation that, nevertheless, also offers ecocritics the opportunity to form alliances between literary theory (shed of its own insularity and jargon) and once-distant subjects such as environmental science (likewise). Furthermore, the dilution of higher education, in the 'short courses' and seminars designed to bring in yet more cash, might also enable us to build bridges with the wider environmental movement, allowing a flourishing ecocriticism the chance to contribute to 'community visioning' and to help contest how we treat both nature *and* each other. In that respect, this conference represented an important starting point.

John Parham, University of East London

Marxisms Beyond Marxism: First Annual Conference of the Marxist Cultural Network, Liverpool John Moores University, 23 May 1998

While the death of Marxism has been announced by leaders of liberal democracies, and corporate conglomerates as the final victory for the naturalisation of capitalism, British cultural workers have also become complicit in repressing Marx's intellectual legacies. Radical bookstores have begun to replace Marxist book sections with 'New Age' and 'Self-Help'

shelves at the very moment that capitalism has intensified its offensive throughout the world. In academia, strains of postmodernism, feminism, post-colonialism and post-structuralism claim the untenability of Marxist theory and praxis. However, there are also those who feel that Marxisms have gained from these theoretico-political engagements and that claims for the singularity of Marxism have been unhistorical. The Marxist Cultural Network and its annual conference aims to offer a site for entertaining these engagements on the contested terrain of Marxian thought: hence 'marxisms'. While sources as surprising as *The New Yorker*, *The Independent* and *The Modern Review* have recently suggested that a funky Marx is 'back', for some he never went away, and has just been reinvented.

Despite the hostility to Marxism in mainstream American culture, a small group of marginalised academics have attempted to maintain discussion of Western Marxism through a network group and an annual ten day summer school called the Marxist Literary Group/Institute of Culture and Society. Its intellectual success has been disproportionate to its numbers. The members of this group including Fred Pfeil, Ron Strickland, Wahneema Lubiano, Paul Smith, Michael Sprinker, Fredric Jameson, Richard Dienst, Gayatri Spivak, Tom Moylan, John Beverley, Tim Brennan, and Neil Lazarus, and many more have made important contributions to critical theory. The summer school has succeeded in bringing radical intellectuals from a variety of disciplines and perspectives to a communal atmosphere of informed debate and educational exchange. In addition, the group has renewed itself with young academics/activists and responds in the press and other publications to current cultural-political issues in America. This group remains an important reason for the survival of interdisciplinary Marxist thought in America today.

As academic Marxism has gained a new-found, but carefully demarcated, academic credibility in America — with a recent Biennial conference sponsored by the journal *Rethinking Marxism* attracting over 1,000 participants — in Britain the residues of Marxism seem scattered or dormant within the new corporate university machines. Marxism is at once present in most cultural studies, literary theory, and sociology courses, and at the same time stripped of its critical power through its subsumption to 'learning outcomes', stunted 'modularity', and secondary textbooks with palatable versions of 'Marxist approaches' and preoccupations with 'coverage'. Many Marxist-informed theorists such as Fanon, Bakhtin, Baudrillard, Spivak, Lyotard, Gramsci, Lacan, Bourdieu, Williams, Zizek and others have gained important academic currency, but the 'M word' has largely been silent in discussions of them. Marxism is apparently now no longer 'interesting' to either the generation caught up in the fraught Althusserian debates of the Seventies, or a new professionalised generation

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whose intellectual commitment was more informed by what can generously be called the radical uncertainty of postmodernist politics. The vestiges of Marxism are perhaps more apparent in activist organisations such as the Socialist Workers' Party, Revolutionary Communist Party and Militant, but despite the global capitalist offensive of recent years there has been relatively little solidarity amongst these organisations, and an ongoing scepticism of the variety of Marxist work produced within the academy.

Nonetheless, Marxist critical work has continued, and journals such as *New Left Review*, *Radical Philosophy* and *Race and Class* continue to keep intellectual debate on the Left alive, and have been joined in the very recent past by *Key Words*, *Historical Materialism*, and *Cultural Values*. These journals offer evidence of a 'return to Marx' at the very moment when New Labour hegemony confirms that British parliamentary politics has largely severed itself from socialist traditions, never mind Marxist-informed thought. It is with this recognition that we sought to make a modest contribution to the revivification of Marxism, not as a monolithic tradition with which various groups authenticate themselves, but as an area of constructive intellectual debate and strategic theoretical/political intervention. Our one day conference brought together a range of committed intellectuals displaying some of the marxisms being practised today both within and without the British university.

The aim was to create an atmosphere that both encouraged discussion from all the participants and attempted to break down some of the conventional barriers of the academic and party political speaker/audience divide. All speakers were encouraged to be relatively informal even if they had prepared talks. In addition, there were no simultaneous sessions, so that all participants could engage as part of a developing series of discussions throughout the day. These principles were usually followed by speakers and participants with a few exceptions. Paul Smith and Jamie-Owen Daniel set the tone of the conference by providing an informative report on the history and activities of the Marxist Literary Group/Institute of Culture and Society in the United States (for a short history of this group and information about how to join the listserv, see the internet site of its journal, *Mediations* [<http://www.cas.ilstu.edu/english/mediations/welcome.html>]). This group served as one of the impulses for our desire to form a comparable network of Marxist-informed 'intellectuals', and provides an alternative model to the hierarchical party organisations and academic associations that predominate both here and in the States. We wanted to provide a different space for Marxism to be discussed productively and critically, without reducing it to the pursuit of a 'party line' or the rigid formality of a professional club. We hope that further activities will emerge from the membership of the network, such as reading groups,

research seminars, publications, and the co-ordination of other forms of praxis.

Our day of discussion continued with Paul Smith's consideration of the problems of recent globalisation theory and the apparent decline in class consciousness as the 'North' has moved towards a service sector economy. He identified the ideology that promoted the contradictory forces of increased competition and the merging of companies into ever bigger transnational corporations. The discussion argued for a reinterpretation of 'sweatshops' to include and articulate the low paid alienation of white-collar jobs such as word-processing: what Stanley Aronowitz calls the 'cybernation' of labour. The first discussion forum on 'intellectuals and political praxis' was initiated by three short position papers by Judith Williamson on 'Marxism in the Mainstream', Joe Sim on 'Intellectuals, the State and Social Science Research', and John Rees, who was 'Against Academic Marxism'. The position papers ranged in level of 'praxis' from the consideration of the moments of everyday face-to-face engagement, to the potentials of an organic intellectual operating within the constraints of an academic ideological state apparatus, to the prioritisation of 'intellectuals' joining in international labour strike action. Though these realms do not seem mutually exclusive, the prioritisation of different forms of political praxis defined quite a divisive debate. In the following discussion participants distanced themselves from 'academic marxism' (if not Marxism in the academy), though it was never clearly explained what constituted 'academic Marxism'. Instead, the discussion focussed on the micro-politics of everyday life or the greater struggle of international labour action. Unfortunately, Joe Sim's intervention remained undiscussed, despite the fact that it dealt with a specific material praxis that related to many of the people in the room: that is, the way that universities, publishers and research-granting bodies effectively censor or devalue research that produces certain kinds of conclusions. However, despite the two Gramscian references, it was a particular brand of 'classical Marxism' that set the agenda for discussion, as some participants named Marxist politics to be something that occurred outside the classroom in the realm of the 'real'. This was surprising since, for many of us, mass higher education has become the most immediate and broadest public sphere in our lives, and may be a space of productive theory and praxis that is less separate than ever from the mainstream.

Jamie Owen Daniel's exposition of Ernst Bloch's utopian theory against the pessimism of postmodern fatalism, provided a reflective transition to the next panel discussing the role/relevance of Marxism from different theoretical perspectives. Patrick Williams used the illustrative figures of Cabral and Ngugi to emphasise postcolonialism's marxist legacy,

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Bill Martin recalled Sartre's theorisation of the revolutionary intellectual in relation to May 1968, and Stuart Sim claimed that in the light of postmodernism, postcolonialism and feminism, Marxism was only valuable as a theory of economic critique, not socio-political exposition or action. However, post-marxism was described as only a negative position (a critique of Marxism) and the discussion produced an extended interrogation of the limited version of classical Marxism that Sim was using. There was a spirited discussion of post-colonialism as a theoretical legacy of Marxist thought rather than a break from it, but time did not allow for a more nuanced examination of the nature of 'post-Marxism'. This is clearly an area for much further network discussion and research, especially since there is a whole tradition of critical Marxism since Lenin and Trotsky which rarely informed the discussion. During the conference there was a constant return to Marx, with *The German Ideology*, *Communist Manifesto*, *Grundrisse* and *Capital* being cited specifically. It is clear that the rereading of these classic texts in the light of the contemporary conjuncture would be a productive area for future debate: there are already proposals for local reading groups along these lines. More specifically, the several modes of dialectics appealed to during the day warrant further examination. Terry Eagleton ended the day with a philosophically poetic discourse on the critical nuances and ethical relevance of Marxism today.

This day marked the beginning of what we hope will be a productive point of engagement for all those interested in Marxist research and critical practice. Our sense is that many of the participants have university affiliations and most of these work within the fields of sociology, cultural studies and literary theory. We do not want to limit our appeal to this constituency, so autodidacts and non-institutionally bound 'intellectuals' (in the broadest Gramscian sense) are encouraged to participate. We need to re-emphasise that this network is non-sectarian, has no 'party-line', and that we hope the space will be used productively to discuss issues and work on collective projects.

Ross Dawson, Liverpool John Moores University
Sean Homer, University of Sheffield

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Hannu Nieminen, *Communication and Democracy: Habermas, Williams and the British Case.*

The Finnish Academy of Science and Letters, 1997. ISBN 951 41 0824 8.

Hannu Nieminen has produced, to his considerable credit, the first extended comparison of the work of Jürgen Habermas with that of the late Raymond Williams. Similarities between these two thinkers are often noted but nobody has previously examined them in such depth. Before considering the similarities between Habermas and Williams, however, it is important to mention their manifest differences. Habermas writes in a continental European and specifically Germanic mode of high theory and grand abstraction. Although difficult to understand and vehemently opposed to poststructuralist fashion, Habermas is widely acknowledged, nonetheless, as the greatest living social theorist. Williams's idiom, in contrast, is much more literary, historical and concrete. His early work, however, was frequently criticised for its abstract and generalising qualities but only by commentators immunised by British empiricism against continental philosophising and utterly ignorant of its value.

In spite of sharp differences of intellectual tradition and rhetorical style, though, Habermas and Williams typically worked on similar problems of political theory. They are both radical democrats with an uneasy yet fraternal relationship to Marxism. Both Habermas and Williams, moreover, resisted economistic Marxism and stressed the determinate importance of communication. What makes their work so interesting now, in my opinion and also, I suspect, in Nieminen's opinion, is that they were never tempted by undemocratic strains of Marxism and they always kept in touch with older and, as it turned out, somewhat more resilient intellectual and political traditions. They both cleave to Enlightenment assumptions concerning critical reason and the production of knowledge in the interests of emancipation.

Nieminen does not provide a full-scale comparison of the *oeuvres* of Habermas and Williams. Instead, he confines his discussion mainly to Habermas's first major work of 1962, which was translated into English in 1989 as *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, and Williams's influential trilogy, *Culture and Society* (1958), *The Long Revolution* (1961) and *Communications* (1962). These are indeed classic works and are worth rereading. However, there are problems with Nieminen's strategy, especially with regard to Habermas. *Structural Transformation* was a comparatively immature work for Habermas, certainly if one takes his subsequent development of a theory of communicative action into account. Nieminen does, however, register Habermas's later revisions to his conceptualisation of

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the public sphere, particularly around the debate that followed the belated publication of *Structural Transformation* in English. There is less of a problem with the treatment of Williams since the trilogy is central to any understanding of his thought. Still, Nieminen should have considered *Towards 2000* (1983) as a revision of certain aspects of *The Long Revolution*. Also, any future comparison would need to address the similarities and differences between Williams's development of cultural materialism and Habermas's theory of communicative action.

The problem for Nieminen is how to account specifically for the historical nexus of communication and democracy in Britain. Habermas has shown little interest in Britain except for the emergence of 'public opinion' there in the eighteenth century, in which modern principles of rational-critical debate amongst acknowledged equals were articulated. Nieminen accuses Habermas of idealising the bourgeois public sphere and criticises his pessimistic account of its decline during the nineteenth century. As in so many other commentaries on Habermas's original thesis, the historiographical critique, reiterated by Nieminen, misses the point badly, which is to do with the principles of public debate and struggles to realise them now rather than quibbling over their inadequate realisation in the gentlemen's clubs of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It is tantamount to saying that democracy itself is a discredited ideal because ancient Greek citizens are known to have been exclusively male and slave-owners. Similarly, Williams is considered insufficiently democratic since, for Nieminen, his understanding of a common culture turns so much on the rights of cultural workers, that is 'intellectuals', and is less concerned with the communicative entitlements of everyone.

Quite apart from his emphasis on cultural production and in spite of his Welshness, Williams was preoccupied with what used to be called 'the condition of England question': hence, the detailed inquiry into the breakthroughs and frustrations of 'the long revolution' in a particular state formation where he would have liked himself to advise on policy but was never asked except for a brief engagement with the Arts Council. Like Habermas, Williams did, however, function as a public intellectual, commenting critically on the issues of the day and viewing his responsibilities as not just academic. It is strange, then, to see Williams treated in such an academicist manner, as in Nieminen's conceptual analysis in the first half of his book. This half of the book is dry and repetitive. The second half of the book, in which Nieminen seeks to provide a revised history of British journalism and politics, is a more enjoyable and illuminating read. In the end, however, it all boils down, for Nieminen, and disappointingly for the reader, to the distortions brought about by Britain's lack of a written constitution, a sort of Charter 88 position. Somehow, and in a longer historical perspective,

according to Nieminen, things would have been so much better had the British experienced a proper bourgeois revolution, like the Americans and the French did; which is hardly a novel thesis. So, Habermas is simultaneously wrong and right. In the absence of a formal constitution, the bourgeois public sphere in Britain was little realised, contrary to Habermas's argument in *Structural Transformation*. Yet, Habermasian proceduralism may still be the solution. Undoubtedly, a formal constitution is preferable, in theory, than British custom and practice. This cannot, however, possibly be the main reason why the modern media in Britain contribute insufficiently to democracy. Williams believed it had something to do with capitalism and he hoped to see all institutions increasingly socialised. And, in *Towards 2000*, he pointed out why the problems of communication and democracy could no longer, if ever, be addressed exclusively within the frame of a nation or nation-state, which is exactly what Nieminen tries to do with regard to Britain. There are virtues in his narrowness of focus but a greater breadth of consideration would have been more useful. The interesting historical phenomenon, for present understanding, is to do with what has happened during the past forty years to confirm Habermas's pessimism and to make Williams's optimism look starry-eyed. Nieminen, unfortunately, has little to say about that.

Jim McGuigan, Loughborough University

Marjorie Ferguson and Peter Golding (eds.), *Cultural Studies in Question*.

Sage, 1997. xxvii+247pp. ISBN 0 8039 7924 X.

'This volume was borne of a deep sense of unease.' These opening words of the preface set — or at least attempt to set — the critical agenda and the tone of this collection. We hardly expect from the title a celebration of cultural studies, but neither is this simply a critical 'state of the art' review. Rather the scene is set for a series of diagnoses and prescriptions for an ailing patient that has outgrown its strength or — worse — developed unhealthy, debilitating habits as a result of falling in with bad company.

Or so one might assume from the editorial introduction. Here Ferguson and Golding present a comprehensive, and in places incisive, critique of what they take to be the prodigal career of cultural studies. But it is one articulated from a very particular — and some will feel unjustifiably lofty — vantage point. This discursive position is crucial in appreciating the critical stance of the book. The editors are, from the first, explicit about their

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social science as opposed to ‘humanities’ backgrounds, and there is no harm in this. But, more provocatively, there is an equally explicit editorial distinction established which places cultural studies firmly in a subordinate position — revealed, for example, in the telling reference to ‘cultural studies’ *contribution* to our field of media and cultural analysis’ (emphasis added). All the tropes of ‘unease’, ‘concern’ and ‘anxiety’ for the current state of cultural studies can, in fact, be understood in terms of this assumption of its servicing role in the more significant (social scientific) field of ‘media and cultural analysis’. Understood thus, cultural studies is not doing its job, not making its proper contribution. It has got diverted, fickle creature that it is, ‘from the still alive and critical issues at the heart of the social sciences, towards the study of cultural forms inherited primarily from the humanities’.

It’s easy to see how this could seriously get people’s backs up. For it is not just a matter of the old game of academic territorial boundary walking and the construction of knowledge hierarchies. Whether cultural studies properly belongs within the social sciences is not merely an intellectual question — accountable in terms of what might be called the ‘Boolean algebra’ of knowledge. Rather, there is a deeply contentious assumption here over the political-intellectual ‘project’ of cultural studies from its inception that many — and not only those whose work is ‘textual’ and makes principled use of humanities methods — will simply not share. It is a pity that this stance is so foregrounded in the preface and introduction. For not only does it serve to maintain the very academic divisions that cultural studies has for so long struggled to escape; it also detracts seriously from some of the valid critical points about the current state of the field that are to be found here and, in much more variety, in the actual contributions.

So read on. And if you recommend the book to your students — as you should — make sure they too get beyond the introduction. For here they will find a more nuanced picture of what is wrong — and even in places what is right — with cultural studies in the 1990s. Overall, they will also find more of a sense of a debate about directions from *within* the field of cultural studies. Though most contributors come, like the editors, from a social-scientific background, they do not all reproduce the assumptions about the serious centre of gravity of social-cultural analysis, and the subaltern role allocated to ‘the humanities’, that characterise the editorial voice. True, there is a good deal of agonising over the good old binarisms. The ‘political economy vs. cultural studies’ couple is invoked with such numbing regularity as to demand heartfelt assent to Larry Grossberg’s question, ‘is anyone else bored with this debate?’ (see ‘Cultural Studies vs. political economy: is anyone else bored with this debate?’, *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 12, 1 [1995], pp. 72-81). But where the contributions get beyond ritual reiteration of entrenched positions — as in Graham Murdock’s

elegant and revealing critical re-reading of Raymond Williams's materialism — the possibilities for a creative rapprochement can be glimpsed, along with some flashes of the intellectual and political excitement that marked the early 'transgressive' work of cultural studies.

Murdock's contribution — along with most of what is best here — defies the book's rather specious two-part structure: 'Questions and Critique' and 'Answers and Alternatives'. As indeed it should. For any serious, engaged critique will surely combine something of the two. Thus Douglas Kellner's piece, which ends part one, is far from a simple diagnostic exercise: rejecting the 'false dichotomy' of the political economic and the cultural, most of this chapter is concerned with the 'answers' to be found in a 'multiperspectival' approach combining textual analysis, political economy and audience reception work. Though admittedly programmatic, this chapter — like Murdock's — at least sets to work on the complex connections between the various levels of analysis that constitute the domain of the cultural, rather than simply bemoaning the turpitude of the field. Equally, McGuigan's interesting chapter in part two is partly inflected towards the 'answers' to be found in the turn towards policy concerns (something also urged with great clarity by Denis McQuail in part one). But this is certainly not presented merely as a prescription or a regimen — the healthy exercise that the ailing patient must take. Rather this 'answer' is cautiously approached and placed in the context of a searching critique of both the populist tendencies in the field, but also of the dangers of an overly instrumental approach to cultural policy — as instanced in Tony Bennett's recent interventions.

In short, the virtues of this book will not be discovered by reading it in the way in which the editors direct us. Instead I found it better to abandon any presuppositions established by the book's structure, and to take individual chapters as self-contained reflections which, time and again bring to the fore the still unresolved question of the *specificity* of the 'cultural'.

One way in which this was illuminated was in the debate about cultural policy — posing the question of how this can be addressed without reducing culture to an instrumental, servicing posture. Another was — rather to my own surprise — in the two American perspectives that open the book. Although James Carey will certainly irritate many on both sides of the Atlantic with his airy dismissal of a field 'whose days are numbered except as an irrelevant outpost in the academy', we shouldn't rise to the polemical bait. Reading on, there is a fascinating alternative story here of the tradition of American pragmatism — specifically of Dewey — in constructing a principled political approach to cultural analysis. This may not be one immediately palatable to all of us who have been nourished in the Marxist tradition, but it provides a good deal of food for thought on the specificity of

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culture — here understood in a moral-political tradition unhampered by the (still lingering) central metaphor of base and superstructure. In a similar spirit of escaping from shibboleths, I felt *some* sympathy with Todd Gitlin's argument that cultural studies should divest itself of political pretensions' in the sense, at least, that it should 'not claim to be politics'. What I take him to mean is that there is specific work for cultural studies to do and that this should not be sacrificed to any extrinsic political programme. Lots of room for argument here of course but, again, we have a polemical position which should make us productively doubtful about some "foundational" suppositions of the practice of cultural studies. In this at least I can agree with the editors' call for constant questioning of intellectual practices, and warnings about 'the emergence of an orthodoxy, a canon of founding fathers, defining work and myths of origin'. Whatever else it does, this book will certainly be useful in disturbing such complacency.

But I have a final complaint, and one I think the editors must expect. The book is lamentably narrow in its geographical compass. Apart from John Downing's chapter on Eastern Europe, and a brief recognition of Latin American work in the introduction, the book represents cultural studies as almost exclusively a transatlantic affair. Every one of the thirteen chapters is written by either a British or an American academic. Not a single contribution from any other western — European, Australian — perspective, let alone from the distinctive bodies of work now well established in Asia and Latin America. If renewal and invigoration of cultural studies is the apologia for the collection, it is inexplicable that these voices are not heard here.

John Tomlinson, Nottingham Trent University

Michael Pickering, *History, Experience and Cultural Studies*.

Macmillan, 1997. ISBN 0-333-62109-3 hb, 0-333-62110-7 pb.

This is a tale of two paradigms, an attempt to reopen a conversation between social history and cultural studies. Pickering argues that the discipline of cultural studies has lost touch with its historical roots and drifted into an introspective circle of self-reflexive theorising. The key to reopening the forgotten connection between cultural studies and social history is the neglected and sometimes derided category of 'experience', a term Pickering describes as 'wonderfully awkward'. The challenge of talking about 'experience' is that it pulls us back from the post-structuralist retreat into theory; at the same time it requires a critical rigour ignored by many of its

critics.

Inevitably this argument leads us back to the origins of cultural studies in the work of Raymond Williams and Edward Thompson and the subsequent stand-off between 'culturalists' and 'structuralists'. If all of this sounds like familiar territory, Pickering is unapologetic. As he points out, the story of cultural studies is not one of 'relentless progressivism' and new protagonists have continued to chew on the bones of old arguments. The pendulum of academic fashion has meanwhile swung from empirical, historical forms of inquiry to theoretical attempts to deconstruct knowledge and power, and back again. Pickering reminds us that, historically, the various and even contradictory aims and interests in early cultural studies first converged in a shared concern with 'experience'. This was the common ground where social history, popular culture, feminism and critical theory originally met. Writing about 'experience' was never just about 'getting our facts straight', and Pickering warns against 'experiential sentimentalism' and the collapsing together of popular cultural and cultural populism in a naïve bid for authenticity. This was of course the criticism directed against the pioneers of cultural studies by the *nouvelle vague* of structuralists and post-structuralists. Part of Pickering's mission is to rescue cultural studies and social history from 'the enormous condescension of post-structuralism'. Writers like Williams and Thompson were never 'transfixed like rabbits in the headlights of their empirical objects of remembering and remaking'. What Williams and Thompson share with a number of more recent feminist writers (e.g. Anne McClintock, Catherine Hall) is an historian's interest in 'experience'. This interest cuts both ways. A critical engagement with the social forces and structures which lie behind specific texts, historical events and cultural products is allied with a respect for the autonomy (and unpredictability) of the subject.

So far so good. However, sometime in the late 1980s, cultural studies took an 'unfortunate' and decisive turn away from material questions of social and economic forces to textual questions of semiotics and language. This led to a form of 'linguistic determinism' which derided the historian as reality's fool. Cultural studies became increasingly caught up in its own methodological complexities. Critical hermeneutics took centre stage at the expense of 'experience' and the historical dimension, so influential in the work of Williams, was lost. Pickering cites Joan Scott as an example of 'experience' taking second place to the discourse of 'representation'; Scott appears to 'displace social violence, the violence of rape, wife-beating and the brutal assault of old women in the course of robbery to forms of discourse about it'. According to this circular logic, even to address women's 'experience' of violence is to stand accused of participating in the "discourse" of oppression'.

Reviews

One of the strengths and weaknesses of Pickering's argument and his approach is his relentless even-handedness. He avoids 'heated polemic' and 'rearguard revivalism' because, as he rightly points out, these kinds of academic arguments regularly degenerate into name-calling and selective misquotation. Poking fun at 'straw targets' or using a 'single lazy sentence' to discredit an entire *oeuvre* does not advance serious argument. Pickering is careful to criticise the 'tainted objectivity' of the historian no less than the 'tainted subjectivity' of the cultural theorist. Historians, he argues, need the theoretical 'grit' of cultural studies if they are to avoid spurious short-cuts to 'authenticity', just as much as those in cultural studies need to remember their history. But as Pickering acknowledges, not many historians are naïve enough to ignore that history is a selective process; the day has surely passed when historians needed to take lessons in methodology from semioticians. His real aim is, after all, to put some of the grit of experience back into cultural studies. Here a more one-sided, polemical argument might have been more effective

Pickering is uncharacteristically rude about old-fashioned 'English' studies, likening the discipline to the Marie Celeste, drifting aimlessly through the sea of humanities, abandoned by its crew, its rigging of Leavisite certainties in tatters. Yet the analogy could well be applied to cultural studies itself. Where cultural studies once applied a necessary critique to the self-confirming certainties of literary and historical studies, many of the formal questions and populist contents have since been absorbed by other disciplines, including English. Debates about representation, language and critical hermeneutics have come to resemble a methodology in search of a subject, an endlessly procrastinating critical preamble cut loose from its disciplinary context.

Ironically, Pickering himself sometimes appears trapped in the 'unfortunate turn' of linguistic determinism. For all his demands that cultural studies reacquaint itself with social history, his critique often lacks a historical dimension. When, for example, did the 'unfortunate turn' to theory occur? What were the historical circumstances and experiences which drove academics in the late 1980s and 1990s to abandon the political commitments of their predecessors? Pickering rightly points out that cultural studies began with an attempt to democratise education, in defiance of academic standards of form and content. Yet that attempt has largely been forgotten, and the discipline has evolved its own critical orthodoxies and codes, no less exclusive than the Leavisite canon. Above all, the democratic political commitments of Williams and Thompson have too often been rejected in favour of a 'grandiosely unspecific revolutionary rupture' which manages to combine academic self-aggrandisement with political impotence. Pickering briefly relates this historical trajectory to 'experience',

citing his own story as a young sociology student, rebelling against the shibboleth of 'liberal-humanism'. However, this intriguing possibility of relating the story of cultural studies, with its successive self-denials and denunciations (of Leavis, Marx, Williams, etc.), to personal experience and historical context is not pursued.

Instead of examining the historical and personal contexts of the retreat into theory, Pickering's principal strategy is to analyse the 'key words' in the cultural studies lexicon, from Williams's 'structure of feeling' to Hall's 'two paradigms' of cultural studies, to Wilhelm Dilthey's nineteenth century analysis of 'experience'. While this semantic approach does yield some interesting insights, notably in the sections on Williams and Dilthey, Pickering tends to analyse his 'key words' from within the discipline of cultural studies, rather than through the broader political and historical frame favoured by Williams. The result is a sometimes frustratingly circular and impenetrable narrative. Too often, the reader is left to eavesdrop on internal conversations within the cultural studies academy, while Pickering rounds up the usual verbal suspects (structure, subject, hermeneutics, difference). The overriding irony in Pickering's plea that cultural studies escape the straitjacket of linguistic determinism and reconnect with the wellspring of experience is that his own argument occasionally appears more concerned with nuances of language than with the historical experience of his subject.

Despite this criticism, the strength of Pickering's basic argument survives the occasional lapses into jargon. In the end the most appealing aspect of the book is its plea for intellectual humility. Paying attention to 'experience' means listening to the voices of ordinary men and women who make their own history, rarely in conditions of their own choosing. This in turn means reconnecting to the original democratic impulses of Thompson and Williams and accepting the limits of academic research. We cannot really 'empathise' with our subjects, nor can we speak of them with authority, whether we choose the blunt instrument of empirical enquiry or the crude template of determining 'structures'. But this should not prevent us from the attempt. As Thompson pointed out twenty years earlier (in *The Poverty of Theory*), the retreat into theory, the pseudo-scientific jargon of methodological navel-gazing, the knowing strictures on the unknowableness of the subject, can only end in intellectual sterility. The modernity, even the post-modernity, of Williams and Thompson lay in their willingness to embrace the uncertainties and contingencies of 'experience'. The category of experience, a word which Pickering places at the heart of his argument, is not just the point where cultural studies and social history intersect. It also remains a touchstone for those who would take cultural studies forward in the direction mapped out by Williams and Thompson — democratically inclusive, historically nuanced and