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Global Cultural Studies?

(on Ackbar Abbas and John Nguyet Erni, eds.,
Internationalizing Cultural Studies: An Anthology [Oxford:
Blackwell, 2005]; and Michael Denning, *Culture in the Age
of Three Worlds* [New York: Verso, 2004])

In May 2010, I cotaught a class rather grandly called “Un panorama de los estudios culturales contemporáneos” to postgraduate students in the humanities at the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM). I was told that this would be the first time a course focused on cultural studies would be taught at the university at the graduate level. Having had some previous experience teaching courses on the subject outside Canada, where I teach, I had a sense of what to expect. The fact that there had yet to be a class on cultural studies was not evidence of a lack of knowledge about the subject among students or professors (indeed, one of the professors who sat in on the course, Dr. Ana Elena González Treviño, was well into the process of putting together a Spanish-language cultural studies anthology), but rather an indication of blockages or limits in university curricula and the structure of faculties and departments. In the age of the Internet, and with increasing numbers of scholars traveling, studying, and spending time abroad, there are very few places—in fact, I would say *none*—that are not familiar with the pantheon of figures that make up contemporary theory or the approaches to the critical study of culture they represent. By contrast, the degree to which the larger “cultural turn” in the human sciences of which cultural studies is a part has penetrated the structures of higher education is much more varied around the globe. Representing primarily humanities disciplines, the students in my UNAM class had little trouble with the theoretical points and claims that I was intent on making and were well versed in contemporary theory, even if they had never had the opportunity to formally take a course devoted to cultural studies and were unlikely to be able to get a degree in the subject anytime soon, if ever.

So what exactly does one accomplish through a course simultaneously familiar and foreign? What I found myself doing at UNAM, in part because this is what the students found most intriguing, was

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1 turning into a native informant, drawing my case studies and exam-
2 ples from Canadian culture and society. This was more productive
3 than I might have expected. Mexico City's avenues hum with the life
4 of street vendors who plunge into traffic at the first hint of a red light,
5 so the idea of a moral panic built up around squeegee kids eager to
6 clean your windshield for a buck or two (as was the case in Toronto
7 during the premiership of Mike Harris) laid bare some important dif-
8 ferences around the social configuration of public space in Mexico and
9 Canada. When I showed the UNAM students a video of the open-
10 ing of a Tim Hortons coffee shop for Canadian soldiers in Kandahar,
11 I was asked whether university students in Canada had responded by
12 boycotting the chain, on and off campus. Once again, the fact that
13 such actions did not take place—indeed, would not have even occurred
14 to most Canadian students—drew attention to the varied operations
15 of politics in the two countries and to differences, too, in the nature of
16 the contemporary university environment. The existence of cultural
17 studies courses and programs in Canada and their lack in Mexico
18 cannot be taken as a sign of the political leanings of faculty or stu-
19 dents on campus. At the same time, the fact that students at UNAM
20 still have to work through a fairly traditional curriculum to get their
21 degrees cannot help but have some impact on the reproduction and
22 legitimation of knowledge, which has broad political and social reper-
23 cussions that might be hard to trace but are nevertheless significant.
24 The exchange of national-cultural situations, events, and circum-
25 stances against the background of a shared global critico-theoretical
26 discourse—heavily weighted toward ideas emerging from Anglo-
27 American and European traditions—proved to be remarkably inter-
28 esting and full of productive insight, even if it was not quite how I
29 imagined the course would proceed. On reflection, I was not sure
30 *what* I was expecting, given that I cannot help but feel suspicious
31 about the implications of either a shared, near-universal theoretical
32 discourse *or* a too-quick and too-easy reliance on differences shaped
33 by national geographies at a time when the globe is shaped through
34 and through by a capitalist commodity culture that renders what may
35 be distinct cultural contents into quite similar social forms.

36 We are at a moment so saturated with the discourse of the global
37 that we might have expected by now to have had a book or books that
38 would venture a conjunction between “global” and “cultural studies”
39 in their titles—books that capture that strange stew of similarity and
40 difference, familiarity and foreignness I experienced at UNAM. It
41 comes as somewhat of a surprise, then, that to date there is no anthol-

ogy, monograph, or collection that has explicitly taken the name “global cultural studies,” even if only for the marketing bump one might expect from such a title. Several volumes—some now a decade-and-a-half old—have positioned cultural studies in relation to *globalization*, including edited volumes by Ann Cvetkovich and Douglas Kellner and, more recently (and more successfully, if idiosyncratically), Christopher Leigh Connery and Rob Wilson. And it appears to be relatively unobjectionable to speak about a “transnational cultural studies,” one which focuses on movements across national borders, diasporic identities, and the “fault lines between global powers and processes,” and which Simon During has characterized as a likely successor to postcolonial studies (24). Yet there seems to be hesitation about aligning “global” directly with cultural studies. Why might this be? I can’t help but think that the students at UNAM and I were engaged in discussions about a cultural studies now properly global (even with books in France on the subject)¹ in a warts-and-all kind of way: shaped around concepts from the North but including at least some critical voices and ideas from the local; assisted by near-universal research and teaching tools, from library databases to Google and YouTube; and inflected by the specificities of local and national contexts, histories, and circumstances, though with a clear sense of the manner in which power operates globally through capitalist economies, systems of knowledge and communication, military power, and political influence. There might be no accepted canon of texts and no agreed upon approaches. But why not declare this kind of cultural studies to be global? Why the apparent hesitation in doing so?

It doesn’t take much reflection to recognize what is at stake here. The refusal of the adjective “global” has nothing to do with the spatial arena in which the ideas, concepts, and figures associated with cultural studies operate. As any number of recent studies point out, cultural studies is hardly wedded to the nation or to some sub-national idea of the local that would exclude global forces and flows; indeed, the problem posed by extranational or postnational forms of belonging might, as During indicates, be seen to be an especially important area of concern for cultural studies. Monographs and edited collections examining the operations of culture in relation to power in reference to places and spaces around the world abound. Cultural studies is no longer limited to the English-speaking academy. For many, this is as promising as it is worrisome. It is one thing to see a global cultural studies as a practice that takes the globe as its space of inquiry or that takes seriously the forces associated with globalization in its

1 investigations (this is presumably why Arjun Appadurai's *Modernity*
 2 *at Large* remains a touchstone text for many scholars). It is another
 3 to consider the social and political implications of the globalization
 4 of theory or of cultural studies itself—that is, of the global spread
 5 of a specific system of concepts, texts, and theoretical and analytic
 6 approaches, however radical or progressive they might be. The global-
 7 ization of cultural studies in this second sense suggests a failure of
 8 mission—the transformation of an antidisciplinary practice into an
 9 institutional, disciplinary structure, now represented by organizations
 10 across the world;² or just as problematically, the (relatively) uncritical
 11 spread to the globe of ideas generated primarily via the power and
 12 capital of the US academic system, repeating a colonizing gesture that
 13 cultural studies had long sought to challenge and critique (see Casa-
 14 nova; Cusset). Writing in 1996, Jon Stratton and Ien Ang had already
 15 warned that “the ‘internationalization’ of cultural studies cannot mean
 16 the formation of a global, universally generalisable set of theories and
 17 objects of study” (363). A global cultural studies might suggest that
 18 this is in fact what has happened, despite all intentions to the con-
 19 trary: the “cannot” Stratton and Ang insist upon points to a hope rather
 20 than an assessment of the actual state of things—a normative appeal
 21 to a limit that has long since been overrun by theory books available
 22 at the click of a button on the Internet and video clips of David Har-
 23 vey and Slavoj Žižek on BBC's *Hard Talk* accessible night and day
 24 via YouTube.

25 There are two ways in which the political and epistemological
 26 problem that the “global” seems to pose for cultural studies has been
 27 addressed to date. The first has been to explicitly thematize and try to
 28 overcome some of the problems and limits of the globalization of cul-
 29 tural studies by taking steps to renew and expand the field. The sec-
 30 ond is to reframe the task of cultural studies by offering a new narra-
 31 tive of its post–World War II history, one that positions it in a wholly
 32 new relation to the global, in contrast to the one imagined by Stratton,
 33 Ang, and others. Michael Denning's *Culture in the Age of Three Worlds*
 34 takes the latter—and, to my mind, more interesting—direction; the
 35 much more common move, however, as in Ackbar Abbas and John
 36 Nguyet Erni's *Internationalizing Cultural Studies*, is to attempt to
 37 imagine a global that does not immediately suggest a universal set of
 38 concepts whose origins lie in Western philosophy. In either case, con-
 39 fronting the global produces interesting insights into the position of
 40 cultural studies as a scholarly and political project at the outset of the
 41 twenty-first century. The verdict? A dissolution of cultural studies into

an indeterminate if wider set of critical tasks and approaches, if for different reasons in each of the two cases—the first, as a result of cultural studies’ driving imperative of differentiation and inclusion (a contradiction only on the surface of things); the second, because globalization effectively names the end of the historico-political moment to which cultural studies was a critical response. I recognize that I’m focusing here on two texts that are now a half-decade old. I would argue, however, that between them these texts stage the key issues for cultural studies when it comes to global and that we have yet to move beyond the problems and possibilities they outline.

Abbas and Erni’s massive collection opts for the gerund “internationalizing” quite consciously, in order to insist on a process that cultural studies is still undergoing, as opposed to what a title like “global cultural studies” might suggest: a collection of—well, of what? Sample work from every continent? Essays from (in a liberal, pluralistic move) an appropriately wide selection of cultural and linguistic backgrounds? Research that cites Stuart Hall and Raymond Williams but also work that avoids all such references and sticks to obscure (for Western readers) local-national referents? And work identified as “cultural studies” by what standard or measure? By whom? Stratton and Ang draw attention to an epistemological challenge for cultural studies as it becomes internationalized. If it becomes universalized as an academic practice, it fails to be “as open-ended and open-minded as cultural studies itself wants to be”; on the other hand, “a *rendez-vous* [of intellectual traditions] would be useless if it were merely a juxtaposition of already fixed positions of difference” (363). In constructing their anthology—the first and still only one to attempt explicitly to map out cultural studies work in different parts of the world in a form that is more than a collection of national exempla³—Abbas and Erni try their best to find a position between a grouping of differences and a book that would constitute a field report on the degree to which cultural studies has spread from North to South, from West to the Rest. For them, “internationalizing” means to directly challenge

a certain parochialism [that] continues to operate in Cultural Studies as a whole, whose objects of and languages for analysis have had the effect of closing off real contact with scholarship outside its (western) radar screen. In the current moment of what we call the “postcolonial predicament” of Cultural Studies, in which a broad hegemony of western modernity is increasingly being questioned among Cultural Studies scholars from around

1 the world, we must consider any form of internationalization
 2 as an effort—and a critical context—for facilitating the visi-
 3 bility, transportability, and translation of works produced out-
 4 side North America, Europe and Australia.(2)
 5

6 It is for precisely this reason that the book is framed as initiating a
 7 project rather than announcing a critical canon for a larger geopo-
 8 litical field.

9 This process of internationalizing cultural studies might be
 10 understood as a necessary step in the movement of cultural studies
 11 from its present dispersed forms to a global cultural studies *in the sin-*
 12 *gular*: internationalizing leads to an outcome, some conjunction of
 13 aims and imperatives in global space. Abbas and Erni suggest as much
 14 when they describe a critical shift “towards a [general] politics of
 15 knowledge and culture, which we believe is the major trajectory in
 16 Cultural Studies” (4). It is clear from their introductory comments
 17 that the encounters they stage with other traditions that have also
 18 problematized the relation of knowledge and culture in the manner of
 19 North Atlantic cultural studies are not meant to stop at a display of a
 20 happy plurality of forms of cultural criticism around the world but are
 21 rather intended to reinforce the power of cultural studies as a critical
 22 practice able to challenge its origins in Western modernity and under-
 23 stand the historical configurations of knowledge and power (includ-
 24 ing a disequilibrium in the power of knowledge generated at differ-
 25 ent parts of the globe) that are its own conditions of possibility. Many
 26 of the names in this anthology will be familiar to those who con-
 27 duct research in cultural studies, including Ashis Nandy, Vandana
 28 Shiva, Lila Abu-Lughod, Umberto Eco, Simon During, Néstor García-
 29 Canclini, and others. Similarly, the nine sections of the book are each
 30 introduced and edited by stars in the field (Greg Wise, Della Pollack,
 31 Cindy Patton, Toby Miller, Erni, Abbas, Dominic Pettman, Wimal
 32 Dissanayake), with the exception of relative newcomer Ping-hui Liao,
 33 who offers an interesting introduction to part 8, “Global Diasporas.”
 34 Some sections do a better job of internationalizing—that is, introdu-
 35 cing new voices and genealogies of cultural critique to the field of
 36 cultural studies—than others. Dissanayake’s section on “Race, Eth-
 37 nicity, and Nation” has to be counted as one of the disappointments,
 38 comprising as it does selections from Kwame Anthony Appiah, Cor-
 39 nel West, Paul Gilroy, Partha Chatterjee, and Arjun Appadurai that
 40 have been widely reproduced; this doesn’t seem to constitute much of
 41 an attempt to recast the narrative of cultural studies as it moves into

the twenty-first century. Taken as a whole, however, Abbas and Erni's book raises important questions about the operations of cultural studies in the global era and pushes us to consider seriously what the dissolution of (what Ulrich Beck has described as) "methodological nationalism" means for how it now understands its own politics. If this book does not answer all of the questions it poses, nor move far enough away from the mainstream of cultural studies, the virtue of posing the question of a global cultural studies in the form of an anthology is that we are given a concrete starting point from which to continue the task of internationalizing this critical practice. For instance, at a minimum, Dissanayake's choices give us something against which to pose counterarguments. What would cultural studies look like if it framed its investigations of race and nationalism not though the Western academic legacies one finds in the work (however productive) of Appiah and Appadurai, but through the writing of José Martí, Frantz Fanon, the Brazilian critics Antonio Candido and Roberto Schwarz, the Nigerian writers Wole Soyinka and Chinua Achebe, and so on? One could argue that my counterproposal depends on a too-easy gesture to geographic distinctions and an appeal to spaces whose critical capacity is imagined as secured precisely by virtue of being outside the main critical touchstones on race. This is just the sort of discussion that needs to take place in cultural studies as it probes its relationship to the global, and this volume enables it.

In paraphrasing Cindy Patton's contribution to the anthology, Abbas and Erni point out that it is "not Cultural Studies *per se* . . . but the broad and dispersed project of cultural decolonization around the world that shapes many critical initiatives, small and large, that can be referred to as Cultural Studies" (8). This sentence would be a tautology if the first and second references to "Cultural Studies" did not evoke different formations: the first, the messy slough of critical practices emerging from and organized around the study of culture and power, based in the university and having roots (directly or indirectly) in the ideas of the Birmingham School; and the second, a more generalized and generalizable form of critique that one finds outside this lineage—outside in the sense both of thinkers not located in Western cultural studies *and* of historical antecedents whose ideas can now be identified as forming a precursor to the political imperatives driving the larger practice of an international cultural studies (think, for example, of C. L. R. James). Trying to get away from the singular origin of cultural studies by rediscovering neglected voices is a laudable aim. One wonders, however, if the move from the first cultural

1 studies to the second via work that addresses “the politics of knowl-
2 edge and culture”—the minimal connective tissue suggested by Abbas
3 and Erni to hold together different kinds of work—opens up the field
4 of cultural studies to all kinds of critical work on culture in *and* out-
5 side universities across the world. The work of essayists, critical jour-
6 nalists, nonfiction writers, cultural producers, antiglobalization activ-
7 ists, and the like has focused just as intently on the political uses and
8 abuses of knowledge and culture as has “cultural studies,” which has
9 come increasingly to signify only the academic version of such prac-
10 tices. We might then want to ask whether such a broad category—a
11 politics of knowledge and culture—is sufficient to enable work from
12 different regions to find enough in common to constitute the intel-
13 lectual and political project that has been associated with cultural
14 studies to begin with. Abbas and Erni’s anthology is driven by an
15 imperative to ensure that cultural studies becomes global in the *right*
16 way, that is, in a manner other than through the spread of Western
17 thinkers, writings, and ideas to the world (about which Stratton and
18 Ang warned). Both the anthology and much cultural studies work on
19 globalization is preoccupied with the production of that apparent
20 guarantee of political aims that emerges from cultural studies’ open-
21 ness to global *difference*—as opposed to methodological or political
22 *similarity* that might define various critical approaches to cultural
23 studies *as* cultural studies—rather than with critique in general. And
24 yet, internationalizing cultural studies seems to mean making it into a
25 practice less distinct, as something that now names a huge range of
26 critical initiatives. There is nothing wrong per se with such a radical
27 pluralization of cultural studies; indeed, this might even be a welcome
28 development and in line with some of its original ambitions as a criti-
29 cal practice. What is missing in Abbas and Erni’s text is the needed
30 metareflection on the structural circumstances of critical thinking
31 in the global era that produce the conditions for what appears to the
32 authors to be an epistemologically and politically necessary shift of
33 the first cultural studies—a Western, university-based practice—to
34 the second cultural studies—criticism involving culture, knowledge,
35 and power in general. Without it, it is unclear what is directing or
36 enabling this project of internationalizing, other than the internal
37 drive of a practice willing to bring itself to an end in order to follow
38 through on a desire not to globalize in the bad, wrong way.

39 Michael Denning’s *Culture in the Age of Three Worlds* offers
40 another way of thinking about what might constitute a global cul-
41 tural studies. In *Culture*, an underappreciated work full of powerful

ideas, Denning prompts us to consider where cultural studies finds itself now by examining where it—and the study of culture more generally—has been. In doing so, he engages in a powerful renarration of the genealogy of cultural studies. Like Abbas and Erni’s collection, this new narrative brings voices outside Western cultural studies into the mix; it does so, however, through a much broader and deeper consideration of the study of culture in the twentieth century and its relation to the dynamics of power, economics, and social change. To begin with, Denning rejects the connection of culture to geography that impels us to think about globalization as the mixing and matching of previously distinct national zones of cultural production. Cultural geography is pushed to the background in order to frame cultural studies in relation to economics and labor on a global scale—not a global that has only recently arrived with the end of the Cold War, but one that has been there during the entire period in which culture has been conceptualized in the way we moderns understand it: as that area of social practice and experience *other than* economics, politics, society, and so on.⁴ In Denning’s view, our current moment of globalization (post-1989) means a suspension of the dynamics that animated typical understandings of cultural studies and its politics. He argues that in important ways “cultural studies” is *over* and that to imagine a global cultural studies as one whose concepts and ideas are identified and guaranteed by a plurality of geographic origins is to miss the fundamental political dynamic of the present moment. Denning’s book is a collection of twelve previously published essays (from as far back as 1986), each of which deals with the past, present, and future of cultural studies. Several of these are by now well known, including “The Socioanalysis of Culture” (published in Pease and Wiegman) and “The End of Mass Culture” (in Naremore and Bratlinger as well as other places). The introduction written for the book plays an especially important role because it offers an account of what Denning sees as the broader logic linking these pieces together, offering retrospectively a metanarrative of the critical itch that the essays on topics from Tocqueville’s *Democracy in America* to the impact of globalization on culture were meant to scratch. On the whole, *Culture* is intent on tracking the emergence of cultural studies, a practice that Denning understands both more widely and more narrowly than is usual. On one hand, he sees it as the name for an always already global phenomenon related to the cultural turn in the second half of the twentieth century; on the other hand, he is unequivocal about identifying cultural studies with a specific historical moment—that of the age of the

1 three worlds (1945–89)—that is now past. He writes: “The academic
2 triumph of cultural studies in the 1990s came as the age that gener-
3 ated it was disappearing” (3). This has led to a fundamental misunder-
4 standing of what globalization means for cultural studies:

5
6 The cultural turn marked New Lefts in all three worlds. This
7 was rarely noticed at the time, because the dramatic differences
8 in form and strategy between the social movements of the First,
9 Second, and Third worlds overshadowed common concerns.
10 And most contemporary accounts of cultural studies still miss
11 the global aspects, and see its spread at the end of the century as
12 an example of the globalization of North Atlantic academic
13 trends But a closer look at the various New Left intellectual
14 formations in each of the three words suggests that they under-
15 went parallel or analogous cultural turns. (6–7)

16
17 Why might this be the case? Denning points to two reasons. First,
18 mass commodity culture emerged around the world after World
19 War II, with implications for how one had to understand the relation-
20 ship of culture to society. It is still all too common to assume that it is
21 only with 1989 that there is a real as opposed to formal subsumption
22 of the world by commodity culture. Denning argues that the com-
23 modity had impacts in the Second and Third worlds as well, and not
24 just in the way usually imagined, that is, through cultural imperialism
25 from the First World that had to be combated by (what one might
26 describe as) policies of national-cultural import substitution. Second,
27 New Left politics associated with the cultural turn in each of the
28 worlds had to consider the importance of various forms of cultural
29 politics associated with the “reshaping of everyday lives and struggles
30 of subaltern classes” in the context of mass culture and new technol-
31 ogies of communication and information (5). Denning suggests that
32 the similarities and underlying connections among the modes of cul-
33 tural critique that took place in all three worlds can only be seen now,
34 at the moment “the three worlds dissolved into one,” a moment in
35 which a planet already shaped by global forces became understood
36 through the lens of globalization (9).

37 While he makes a convincing case that cultural studies should
38 be seen as always already a broader phenomenon—a point that chal-
39 lenges projects like Abbas and Erni’s to some degree—the claim that
40 cultural studies comes to an end in 1989 is, surprisingly, asserted more
41 than argued for. “If cultural studies is now in crisis or in question, it is

less because it is overvalued than because its moment, the age of the three worlds, is over" (10). If the link between cultural studies and the three worlds is dependent on the always suspect geopolitical game of temporally belated and advanced zones named by the terms "developed" and "developing," surely this does not end with a sudden switch of narrative from the logics of the Cold War to those of neoliberalism. Nor, one would think, has the importance of a political approach to culture come to an end; indeed, Denning mounts a spirited defense of contemporary cultural studies against critics who would decry it as a form of *merely* cultural (i.e., not "real") politics (147–66). This leaves the politics of the New Left, and perhaps uncharitably, it is hard not to read *Culture* as an attempt to make sense of what happens to the cultural turn not just when the narrative of globalization replaces that of the three worlds but when it is no longer fueled by the energies of a global New Left, which seems to have lost whatever force it once had. But to characterize Denning's text as one motivated by such a loss would be a mistake. If Abbas and Erni make a project of internationalizing cultural studies as a practice, Denning's essays constitute attempts to confront the new circumstances of the present, moving us forcefully beyond protracted antinomies in our understanding of commodity culture by pushing cultural studies to one side. "Paradoxically," he writes, "it is the end of the age of three worlds . . . that makes its history haunt every account of globalization" (27). *Culture* is a book that consists of a stock-taking of revolutionary moments of change—1492, 1791, 1848, 1945, 1968, 1989—in order to generate new ideas and concepts about the politics of culture. It does so in part by writing a history of the twentieth century "that does not take the nation-state as the central actor" (28), which would mean, too, to think about culture throughout the century as existing in other than the silos of national geography. For Denning, it seems essential to leave cultural studies behind in order to properly make sense both of the global era and of the moments that brought us to our present conjuncture. Again, we emerge into the global only by suspending cultural studies—not its general politics, perhaps, but certainly some of the guiding aims and imperatives that held disparate projects together, even if loosely.

Do we need a global cultural studies? What (if anything) do we lack in its absence? The "global" implies a dispersion of the field into innumerable projects dealing with both large- and small-scale issues and problems, with perhaps a greater suspicion toward national narratives (though this has long been there) and greater attention

1 toward forces, linkages, movements, and effects that work across
 2 borders (and so too has this). Some twenty years into its life as a con-
 3 cept, it is hard not to see globalization as little more than an ideologi-
 4 cal concept—a guise for forms of political and social maneuvering
 5 now more accurately identified as neoliberalism. The avoidance of an
 6 easy embrace of the global by cultural studies can be seen as exhibit-
 7 ing the same productive caution and wariness that Suman Gupta
 8 identifies in the tendency for literary studies to have in general side-
 9 stepped globalization in favor of other extra- or postnational concepts,
 10 whether motivated by normative or by empirical needs. It can also,
 11 however, be seen as a limit or problem, at least if those of us engaged
 12 in cultural studies abandon the promise also named by the global and,
 13 by being too comfortable in our gestures of epistemic and ethical
 14 openness to “other” forms of cultural studies, fail to articulate a narra-
 15 tive that acts as a counterweight to a neoliberal political ethos that
 16 remains dominant despite the crash of 2008.

17 Cultural studies has now too complicated and diverse a history
 18 to try to control or patrol it through definitions that insist that this
 19 or that example of criticism be considered as belonging to the fold
 20 and others shunned; the stream of books (still!) proposing to explain
 21 or make sense of cultural studies, or “debates” about what counts as
 22 political cultural criticism and what does not (such as that staged
 23 between Francis Mulhern and Stefan Collini in *New Left Review* [see
 24 all cited]), confirm more than challenge this fact. Even so, one can
 25 point to two imperatives at the root of cultural studies that consti-
 26 tuted a break with the forms of cultural criticism that came before it.
 27 The first is an insistence on the absolute centrality of those objects and
 28 practices consigned by an earlier schematization of knowledge to “cul-
 29 ture” to the shape and character of every element of contemporary life
 30 and experience, and in a new and more profound way in the present
 31 than in the past. This is the aspect of the cultural turn emphasized by
 32 Denning. But there is also the reverse insistence: that if culture is (say)
 33 essential to understanding the economy (a point made crystal clear
 34 in recent books by Bret Benjamin and by Edward LiPuma and Ben-
 35 jamin Lee), economic and political conditions are not just reflected
 36 in culture but shape it in fundamental ways that criticism cannot
 37 avoid addressing. It is a shift in our understanding of culture that has
 38 become widely accepted, inside and outside the academy (as Benjamin
 39 Kunkel writes, the idea that “economic conditions necessarily carve
 40 out whatever room for manoeuvre artists and writers enjoy; that much
 41 Marxism any liberal citizen might have accepted or even, under post-
 modernism, found impossible to deny”).

The second imperative driving cultural studies had to do with the mass university and its democratizing possibilities. Raymond Williams's powerful idea that "culture is ordinary" constituted a direct affront to the guardians of the archives and mechanisms of legitimate knowledge in the humanities and social sciences. Whether or not there have been actual programs of study named cultural studies in any given university, the broader imperative to open up and change both the subjects of the human and social sciences and the methodological approaches to them has paid dividends and had unquestionable effects. Cultural studies seems to have had to play a perpetual game of catch-up in this regard: first, working to change the content of curricula when the mass university was already in place, then managing the Cold War challenge of the ideologies of area studies and the production of the national citizen-subject, only to find a growing disinterest in the university on the part of the state (at least in its nonprofessional elements) in the era of globalization. At the present moment, I worry less about our need to pay attention to the status and outcome of the first imperative than the second. As I write (October 2010), news of possible UK government reaction to the Browne report on university funding includes an acceptance of its recommendation to lift caps to tuition and of the implementation of a severe reduction in funding transfers, with a specific focus on cuts to the arts and humanities. In California, tuition has risen at state universities by 60% between 2004 and 2008 alone (Newfield). Similar developments are taking place in state university systems across the globe. Given the source of funding for universities, responses to these developments are most commonly framed within the context of an appeal to national narratives of development and growth; even Christopher Newfield's otherwise excellent assessment of the situation of US universities makes an appeal to international competition as a reason for continued state support of higher education. Might there not be room for an appeal here, too, to the hope that the phrase "global cultural studies" contains? This has nothing to do with what texts make up the discipline (such as it is) or whether and to what degree we make sure to damp down the imperializing tendencies of Left theory, but rather with the possibility of a cross-cultural, postnational, anticapitalist narrative of what social life might look like—the discovery and invention of new political coordinates that can produce collectivities as well as attending to differences. If all we are left with are forms of online autodidacticism of the kind celebrated recently by Bill Gates and epitomized by the anti-intellectual intellectualism of (Glenn) Beck University, we are in trouble.

1 Notes

2 1. See, for instance, Mattelart and Neveu; and Macé, Maigret, and Glevarec.

3 2. As I point out in "Cultural Studies and the Transnational," there are now
4 cultural studies associations in Austria, Australia/New Zealand, Canada, Japan,
5 Taiwan, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the United States; centers, net-
6 works, and programs in many more nations, including China, Croatia, Denmark,
7 Finland, Germany, India, Israel, Jamaica, the Netherlands, South Korea, Sweden,
8 Turkey, and Venezuela; and conferences and colloquia held in still other locations,
9 such as Portugal and Greece. There is also a large, international organization: the
10 (International) Association of Cultural Studies (ACS), which has held biannual
meetings since 1996.

11 3. I am here reminded of the dismissive if not entirely inaccurate account of
12 cultural studies offered by Pierre Bourdieu and Loïc Wacquant:

13 . . . Cultural Studies, this mongrel domain, born in England in the 1970s,
14 which owes its international dissemination (which is the whole of its exist-
15 ence) to a successful publishing policy. Thus the fact, for instance, that this
16 "discipline" does not exist in the French university and intellectual fields did
17 not prevent Routledge from publishing a compendium entitled *French Cul-*
18 *tural Studies*, on the model of *British Cultural Studies* (there are also volumes
19 of *German Cultural Studies* and *Italian Cultural Studies*). And one may fore-
20 cast that, by virtue of the principle of ethnico-editorial parthenogenesis in
21 fashion today, we shall soon find in bookstores a handbook of *French-Arab*
22 *Cultural Studies* to match its cross-channel cousin, *Black British Cultural*
23 *Studies* which appeared in 1997 (but bets remain open as to whether Rout-
24 ledge will dare *German-Turkish Cultural Studies*). (47)

25 4. One can easily see where culture fits into Immanuel Wallerstein's descrip-
26 tion of the roots of the contemporary organization of academic social science:

27 From the dominant liberal ideology of the nineteenth century which argued
28 that state and market, politics and economics, were analytically separate
29 Society was adjured to keep them separate, and scholars studied them sepa-
30 rately. Since there seemed to be many realities that apparently were neither
31 in the domain of the market [economics] nor in that of the state [political
32 science], these realities were placed in a residual grab-bag which took as com-
33 pensation the grand name of sociology Finally, since there were people
34 beyond the realm of the civilized world, . . . the study of such people encom-
35 passes special rules and special training, which took on the somewhat polem-
ical name of anthropology. (Qtd. in Denning 4).

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