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Resistance! Cultural Studies and the Question of Cultural Change

Questions about the origins and possibilities of cultural change seem to belong to the province of Cultural Studies. But what exactly are Cultural Studies? Most certainly an approach that is still in search of self-definition and academic respectability. Frequently, Cultural Studies appear as a field without a specific research programme and the confusing variety of approaches currently discussed under the label of Cultural Studies seems to confirm the suspicion that 'anything goes'.[1] But there is a misperception here: despite the impression of an often chaotic diversity, Cultural Studies have been shaped and driven by certain key questions from the start.

To counter negative images of an 'anything goes'-activity, Cultural Studies have taken two major approaches: one can be called the democracy- or democratization-argument, the other the theory-and-method approach. In the democracy-argument, the case for Cultural Studies is based on a challenge to the authority of high culture which it considers elitist and therefore not representative of the culture of any given society. If we place high culture at the centre of our research programs and curricula, as the philologies and literary criticism have done for a long time, we are restricting ourselves to the culture of a privileged minority. In contrast, Cultural Studies want to regain respect and recognition for cultural forms that have been dismissed or ignored by the elites. To extend literary studies into Cultural Studies is thus an act of cultural democratization. Raymond Williams was the first scholar to give this argument legitimacy in his seminal study *Culture and Society*, and much work in the British Cultural Studies movement, especially by the Birmingham School, has followed this line of argument.

In the theory-and-method approach, on the other hand, academic respectability is sought through theoretical and methodological self-reflection. From this point of view, academic respectability must be gained by intellectually rigorous discussions of the theoretical premises and interpretive methods of a field of study. This is a strategy first developed in post-World War II literary studies in an attempt to rescue the study of

[1] Even Stuart Hall, for many observers the leading scholar in Cultural Studies, has commented on the state of Cultural Studies at American universities by saying: "In the United States (...) 'cultural studies' has become an umbrella for just about anything ...". Hall, "The Emergence of Cultural Studies and the Crisis of the Humanities," *October* 53 (1990): 22.

literature from the suspicion of an impressionistic armchair criticism. It resulted not only in a gradual intellectualization of literary studies but also in the emergence of literary theory as almost a separate field whose intellectual prestige, at least temporarily, seemed to exceed even that of philosophy. Following the cue of literary theory, Cultural Studies have therefore begun to produce a growing body of surveys of the theories and methods on which work in Cultural Studies has been or should be based.

If we want to approach the topic of this essay — the question of cultural change — from any of these two perspectives, we would have two different options of how to proceed: to deal with questions of cultural change from the perspective of the democracy-argument would mean to analyze how far the democratization of culture has advanced and what is still standing in the way of its complete success. Such an analysis would run into a problem that Raymond Williams and Richard Hoggart had already encountered earlier, namely to determine to what extent standardized forms of popular culture produced by the culture industry can be regarded as forms of a democratic culture.[2] From the perspective of the theory-and-method approach, on the other hand, we would have to compare the strengths and weaknesses of various conceptualizations of cultural change such as theories of cognitive dissonance, crisis and chaos theory, autopoiesis, emergence, recursive loops, desire, genealogy, or resignification. However, as a never-ending flow of textbooks and anthologies demonstrates, such surveys and comparisons can be endlessly repeated without ever arriving at any conclusive results. The reason is simple: any theory can only be fully understood and evaluated in its explanatory power when we consider it as a form of symbolic action, that is, when we ask ourselves what it is actually designed to do, or, to put it differently, what its function is. Why, then, were Cultural Studies created in the first place and for what purpose?

The misperception and misunderstanding of the goals of Cultural Studies have their origin in an often re-enacted founding act of the field, the discussion of Matthew Arnold's notion of culture, which is customarily used to illustrate an elitist reduction of the idea of culture that has to be overcome by a more democratically-minded approach. And indeed, Arnold makes a strong case for a culture that insists on the highest standards. His definition of culture rests on the criterion of perfection and finds expression in his often-quoted definition of culture as the best that is thought and known in the world. However, Arnold does not come up with this definition because he is an undemocratic snob, but because he has a specific view of the development of modern societies. In the first chapter of *Culture and Anarchy*, "Sweetness and Light," Arnold describes culture as an expansion of our human powers and then goes on to explain why such an encouragement of self-development was indeed badly needed at the time:

> If culture, then, is a study of perfection, and of harmonious perfection (...) it is clear that culture, instead of being the frivolous and useless thing which Mr. Bright, and Mr. Frederic Harrison, and many other Liberals are apt to call it, has a very important function to fulfil for mankind. And this function is particularly important in our modern world, of which the whole civilisation is, to a much greater degree than the civilisation of Greece and Rome, mechanical and external, and tends constantly to become more so. But above all in our own country has culture a weighty part to perform, because here that mechanical character, which civilisation tends to take everywhere, is shown in the most eminent degree. Indeed nearly all the characters of perfection, as culture teaches us to fix them, meet in this country with some powerful tendency which thwarts them and sets them at defiance. The idea of perfection as an inward condition of the mind and spirit is at variance with the mechanical and material civilisation in esteem with us, and nowhere, as I have said, so much in esteem as with us.[3]

Arnold's argument can best be understood in the larger context of theories of modernity.[4] Throughout the 19th century, modernity was seen not only as a source of progress but also as a potential source of human self-alienation. As innumerable philosophers, social theorists, and cultural critics argued, modernity generated such alienating phenomena as bureaucratization, standardization and commodification and led to a far-reaching, often radical dissolution of tradition, family, and other social bonds. "All That Is Solid Melts Into Air" is the famous phrase from the Communist Manifesto which Marshall Berman uses to describe the modern experience of constant change and permanent instability.[5] And yet — this is one of the main explanatory

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[2] Hoggart, Richard, *The Uses of Literacy. Aspects of Working-Class Life with Special Reference to Publications and Entertainments* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1957).

[3] Matthew Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy* (1869; Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1971) 48-49.

[4] This is confirmed by Arnold's comments in his book *Civilization in the United States*. At first sight, these comments are a far cry from the condescending views of most English commentators on the U.S. In particular, Arnold praises the modernity of American society: "Perhaps it is not likely that any one will now remember what I said three years ago here about the success of the Americans in solving the political and social problem. I will sum it up in the briefest possible manner. I said that the United States had constituted themselves in a modern age; that their institutions complied well with the form and pressures of those circumstances and conditions which a modern age presents." Arnold, *Civilization in the United States. First and Last Impressions of America* (Boston: Cupples and Hurd, 1888) 159. However, what is lacking in the United States is a form of civilization that goes beyond the political and the social and is defined by the criteria of distinction and beauty: "The human problem, then, is as yet solved in the United States most imperfectly; a great void exists in the civilization over there; a want of what is elevated and beautiful, of what is interesting." (181) Modern conditions in political and social life are not sufficient without "that real sense of elevation which human nature (...) instinctively craves" (183). Or, to put it differently: modernity without "real civilization" remains void.

[5] Berman, Marshall, *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air. The Experience of Modernity*

challenges modernity poses –, the majority of people, at least in Western societies, seem to submit voluntarily to these conditions of modern life. Hence, the theoretical conundrum for current critical theories lies in the problem of consent. How is it possible, in view of innumerable critical analyses of modern existence, that people do not openly revolt but accept these conditions? The orthodox Marxist explanation is based on the concept of ideology in the sense of false consciousness, something that British Cultural Studies could not accept, because it had put its hopes for political change on residues of lived traditions of the working class that resist complete ideological control. What followed were recurrent attempts to clarify the exact nature of the relations between material conditions and culture, until critics like Stuart Hall and others within the British Cultural Studies tradition began to accept cultural radicalism's explanation, which is that of subjectivation/subjection[6]: The explanation of the phenomenon that the oppressed do not gain a clearer sense of their oppression is no longer based on a theory of ideological indoctrination; rather, it is attributed to the fact that their perceptions and values are already culturally constituted, so that the exertion of power remains invisible to them. But if the system works so cunningly and effectively, how does one account for subversive ideas or for ideological struggle? Or, to add another key term to our discussion, how is it still possible to think resistance? In Cultural Studies, the terms consent, resistance and change are inextricably linked with one another: if culture, whether in the form of ideology, hegemony, or subjection, is cunningly engineering consent, how is change possible? Only if individuals find ways to resist those effects of 'normalization'.

Cultural Studies have emerged not out of a systematic research programme but as a response to certain key issues in the analysis of modernity. Strictly speaking, they are really theories of modernity. British Cultural Studies alert us to modernity's far-reaching commodification of the life-world but tells us not to despair, because there are, after all, subcultures that have developed creative forms of resistance. Niklas Luhmann and General Systems Theory, on the other hand, claim that there is no need for resistance because modern systems in their tendency toward continuous self-differentiation will undermine all attempts at centralised control.[7] Wolfgang Iser, in his recent essays on culture and Cultural Studies, extends and strengthens Luhmann's argument even further by his insistence on the creative unpredictability of recursive feed-back loops.[8] On the Althusserian and, above all, the Foucauldian side, the debate has been carried beyond Marxist analyses of modernity and the critical theory of the Frankfurt School and has come to focus on how modern societies manage to establish consent by disciplinary regimes of subjection – which has opened up an entirely new debate on the question of how, and on what grounds, resistance is still possible. At first sight, these approaches may appear strikingly different, but at a closer look they are generated by the same challenge, an analysis of, and response to, modernity.

But let us get back to Arnold for a moment: following the example of Goethe and others, Arnold tries to counter the effects of modernity by his pleas for a culture of self-development which draws on "the best that is known and thought in the world" in order to mobilize resources that would empower human beings to counter the effects of "the mechanical and material civilisation in esteem with us."[9] The reason why high culture and high literature played such a crucial role for intellectuals and cultural critics of the 19th century, so that they would finally become the centerpiece of the emerging philologies as well as of school and college curricula in the humanities, is not that these intellectuals were inherently elitist – many of them were not – and therefore drew on high culture and high literature as a welcome means of class distinction. The main reason is that, on the basis of a particular analysis of modernity, culture emerged as the main resource of resistance against what Max Weber would later call the iron cage of rationality and Max Horkheimer, Theodor W. Adorno, and other Frankfurt School cultural critics such as Herbert Marcuse would discuss as instrumental reason.[10] It is striking indeed to realize to what extent Arnold shares their view of modern civilization as inherently mechanical and alienating: in modern life, he argues, phenomena such as progress, wealth, even religion become ends in themselves and hence, as he calls it, mere machinery. The use of culture, on the other hand, consists in the potential to help us, by

(New York: Penguin, 1988).

6   These terms refer to the double meaning of Foucault's term 'assujetissement' which refers to both "the becoming of the subject, but also the process of subjection: one inhabits the figure of autonomy only through becoming subjected to a power, a subjection which implies a radical dependency." Judith Butler, "Subjection, Resistance, Resignification: Between Freud and Foucault" The Identity in Question, ed. John Rajchman (London: Routledge, 1995) 229. Stuart Hall employs the terms "subjection/subjectification" to describe the same paradoxical doubleness, in Hall "Who Needs 'Identity'?" Questions of Cultural Identity, eds. Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay (London: Sage, 1996) 10.

7   Cf. William Rasch's characterization: "Modernity is the structure of contingency that forces selections, which, in turn, force further selections, none able to assert its own necessity." William Rasch, Niklas Luhmann's Modernity. The Paradoxes of Differentiation (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2000) 2.

8   Wolfgang Iser, Kultur: Ein Rückkoppelungsprozess, Working Paper No. 124 (Berlin: John F. Kennedy-Institut, 2000).

9   Arnold, Culture and Anarchy 49.

10 Fred Inglis suggests the terms technicism and instrumentalism as an alternative. Inglis, Fred, Cultural Studies (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993) 114, 125.

means of a spiritual standard of perfection, to recognize phenomena such as wealth or technological progress as "but machinery."[11]

In the 20th century, this analysis of modernity was further radicalized by cultural critics such as Horkheimer and Adorno who gave the concept of instrumental reason an almost totalitarian dimension and who resorted to an aesthetics of negation as the only possible way to resist the totalitarian tendency of the system. Horkheimer and Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment* contains one of the most emphatic pleas for the anti-totalitarian potential of hermetic avant-garde forms of high art ever published, and, at the same time, one of the most scathing criticisms of popular culture (or as they called it: the culture industry). In Cultural Studies, this chapter on the culture industry (and Adorno's provocative essay on jazz music) have often been cited as examples of a highly prejudiced, elitist approach to popular culture. But, again, such a criticism never bothers to understand the reasons why these widely acclaimed intellectuals would take such a seemingly 'undemocratic' stand: for Horkheimer and Adorno, the triumph of the American culture industry signalled the final collapse of the possibilities of a culture of self-development, as it had still been envisioned by Arnold and other critics of the 19th century, because mass culture, as a highly standardized and commodified form of culture, seemed to demonstrate that the forces of instrumental reason had finally invaded the last realm of resistance, that of culture. This fear explains the almost hysterical pitch of their comments on the American culture industry which put off a following generation like mine that had grown up with American popular culture in the post-War years and could not simply dismiss its own cultural socialization as pathological.

In this situation, Raymond Williams showed the way out. Again, however, I want to argue that the historical significance of his position is often populistically reduced, for example, when critics draw on him as authority for an egalitarian analysis of culture as a whole way of life or praise his concept of structures of feeling as a methodologically innovative alternative to a mirror-image theory, or when they see him as a critic who saved working-class culture from elitist disdain. Indeed, it was his goal to rescue working-class culture from such a dismissal and to develop a terminology that would help us to grasp its function and merits, but these merits were not tied to any particular forms or objects. Williams needed the merits of a whole way of life in order to locate resources for resistance not in idea of a whole way of life in order to locate resources for resistance not in single objects but in a particular structure of feeling, namely that of solidarity. Single objects within working-class culture may be without aesthetic merit in themselves and are, in effect, often lacking in taste and

artistic skill, but the context of solidarity in which they assume their function in working-class life transforms their cultural significance.[12] Their function can thus not be assessed by an interpretation of single cultural items but only through an analysis of the whole way of life in which they are embedded.

This was an ingenious New Left attempt to re-empower the working class by removing questions of cultural identity from the authority of party functionaries and by linking it to cultural practices of the working class instead. However, the main promise of these cultural practices lies in the fact that they function as a resource for resistance. For Williams, they hold a much better prospect for resistance than high art because they possess a collective dimension that high cultural forms lack. In other words: Williams does not transform literary studies into Cultural Studies because, in quasi anthropological fashion, he wants to do justice to the full scope of cultural forms of any given society. He develops Cultural Studies as a form of analysis in order to describe working-class culture as an exemplary culture of resistance on which hopes for withstanding the instrumental reason of modernity can best be based.[13] Yet, as Henning Ziegler has recently argued, "much of contemporary cultural theory seems to follow a cycle of singling out a revolutionary subject and watching it fail the test of real-life politics."[14]

The development of British Cultural Studies after Williams provides a case in point. While Williams was still confident that the solidarity of working-class life would be able to resist the ideological impact of modern mass culture, Richard Hoggart in *The Uses of Literacy* already struggled with the realization that this mass culture had become the major form of working-class culture, so that the potential of working-class culture for resistance appeared seriously compromised. The following development of

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[11] Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy* 51.

[12] Cf. Francis Mulhern's analysis of The Long Revolution: "The object of the theory is not 'a whole way of life' – which, as critics have pointed out, would be 'society', not 'culture' – but the relations that make it such. Culture, then, is not the whole, nor is it only coextensive with the whole. It is rather, the principle of whole-ness in social life." Francis Mulhern, *Culture / Metaculture* (London: Routledge, 2000) 89-90.

[13] Mulhern rightly extends that argument to Cultural Studies as a whole: "Cultural Studies has favoured a radical expansion of the field of relevant inquiry, and a strictly egalitarian ethic of attention within it. Any form or practice of signification is in principle eligible, without any presumptive test of 'quality'. But these are studies with a mission that is not merely sociological or anthropological. The justifying purpose of Cultural Studies has been to revoke the historic privileges of 'culture with a capital C' (the sovereign value of Kulturkritik) and vindicate the active meanings and values of the subordinate majority (the so-called 'masses') as core elements of a possible alternative order." Mulhern, *Culture / Metaculture* xviii.

[14] Henning Ziegler, *Dissent on the Net: Cultures of Electronic Resistance in the United States* (Berlin: M.A. Thesis, 2003) 6.

British Cultural Studies can be seen as a long drawn-out struggle against this disillusionment. One way out was to continuously redefine, and, in the process, to narrow down, the social group that could still be considered as holding a potential for resistance, a trajectory that, after the disenchantment with the working class in the sixties, led to certain youth subcultures, and then, after the revolutionary potential of these subcultures had also been questioned by an increasing commodification of 'dissent', to a redefinition of resistance as semiotic guerrilla warfare, as for example in Dick Hebdige's influential study on style in youth subcultures. (In American Studies, an equivalent is provided by the ongoing romance with ethnic subcultures and the tacit hope that they can take the place of the lost revolutionary subject, the working class.) Altogether, this search for last sites of resistance has been one of continuous retreat.

While the British Cultural Studies movement tried to uphold an – increasingly more diffuse – hope that a social base could still be found for resistance, continental cultural criticism, in merging Marxism and structuralism, put the analysis of modernity on new grounds by arguing that invisible forms of domination had become more and more pervasive and effective, so that, in an act of self-submission for which Foucault's interpretation of Bentham's Panopticon became the inspiration, people had unwittingly internalized the system's power effects and had subjected themselves to their own domination. Structures of feeling and lived experience were replaced by discursive structures of interpellation and subject positioning which then became the new focus of cultural analysis. In Foucauldian discourse analysis, New Historicism, and Race and Gender Studies, the major goal of analysis is to make visible this assignment of subject positions and to explain how cunningly cultural texts manage to produce effects of subject formation and subjection, up to a point in some radical forms of Foucauldian and neo-historicist power analysis where resistance appears to be only another script of the system and even desire becomes an agent of power.

This was an ingenious attempt to explain the puzzling phenomenon of consent, but it also created new problems. If power is all-pervasive, how is it still possible to think resistance? A comparison between Adorno and Foucault is instructive here. As Axel Honneth has pointed out,[15] both cultural critics provide powerful critiques of modernity in which the consequences of the Enlightenment are radically reinterpreted: instead of a story of gradual emancipation, we get a story of ever more refined systemic control. Both critics want to highlight the all-embracing nature of these new cultural forms of control by focusing on those dimensions of human existence that seem to be the most private, intimate and subjective, the psyche and the body. Bu whereas for Adorno the psyche is the site where the deformation brought about by modernity is most consequential, because instrumental reason has now also invaded a last possible source of negation, Foucault goes even further and considers psychic life itself as only an effect of the disciplinary regime of the body. This shift of emphasis is significant: the psyche, no matter how deformed and manipulated it may be, still retains a last potential for negation because the unruly unconscious cannot be completely controlled. Foucault, on the other hand, erases even this last, though already faint prospect for resistance by eliminating interiority altogether, so that the body, in quasi-behavioristic fashion, becomes the passive object of disciplinary regimes and representations. Subjection can be direct and all-pervasive, because it affects the body directly.

One can argue, in effect, that all forms of cultural radicalism which emerged after the 1960s have one common goal, namely to reject the possibility of negation on which modernism and the New Left had still based their hopes for resistance.[16] In contrast, Foucauldians and New Historicists claim that negation, and especially negation by means of the aesthetic, may be the greatest delusion of all. Adorno's individual still has a, though much diminished, possibility to draw on culture for a utopian counter-perspective, Foucault's individual is entirely subject to discursive structures. What for Adorno constituted a last hope for resistance has now become part of an all-embracing system of control. The power of art becomes the art of power; the aesthetic dimension is reconceptualized as only another powerful instrument of creating subject positions.

Critics have pointed out that such a model of subject formation precludes any role for agency, but, what is perhaps worse, it also eliminates the nourishing utopia of Cultural Studies, the possibility of resistance, because it leaves the question unanswered what might prevent the insertion of individuals into the subject positions constructed by discourses of power. Thus, eventually even Foucault himself looked for a way out of the prison-house of discourse which he himself had constructed. In his late works, he finds a way to evade subjection by the forces of modernity through an ethics of self-care that is based on a pre-modern, pre-Enlightenment self.[17] The most influential revision within the Foucauldian paradigm, however, was provided by Judith Butler. Her starting point in her programmatic essay

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[15] Axel Honneth, "Foucault und Adorno. Zwei Formen einer Kritik der Moderne," 'Postmoderne' oder Der Kampf um die Zukunft, ed. Peter Kemper (Hamburg: Fischer, 1988).

[16] On this point, see my distinction between political and cultural radicalism in "The Humanities in the Age of Expressive Individualism and Cultural Radicalism," The Future of American Studies, eds. Donald E. Pease and Robyn Wiegman (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002) 211-230.

[17] Michel Foucault, "The Ethics of the Concern of the Self as a Practice of Freedom," Ethics. Subjectivity and Truth, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: The New Press, 1997) 281-301.

"Subjection, Resistance, Resignification: Between Freud and Foucault" is the observation that in his description of power effects as inscriptions into the body, Foucault circumvents the question of interiority, "leaving," as Butler puts it, "that interiority as the malleable surface for the unilateral effects of disciplinary power."[18] In contrast, Butler still looks for instances of psychic resistance to normalization and finds them in moments of non-identity created by the need to secure subjection by means of reiteration, that is, by performativity. These short moments of non-identity open up the possibility of resignification. But where does the motivation for this act of resignification come from? The question is crucial because it is linked to the theoretical key issue of why the individual submits voluntarily to her own subjection. To put it in the briefest possible way, Butler's answer is that, paradoxically, subjection also provides recognition (and hence stimulation); even in moments of stereotypization or stigmatization there is thus a motive for reiteration.

Butler's argument has become a model for almost all of the following attempts in Cultural Studies to revive the idea of resistance without giving up the basic premise of cultural radicalism, that of an all-pervasive dominance of the system by means of discourses that create subjects and/or subject positions. Performance and performativity, the performative deferral of meaning, and the nomadic subject have all played a role in this. But the attempt to get out of the dead-end of subjection has also found expression in a theoretical move away from the concept of the subject to that of identity. In effect, the idea of multiple, heterogeneous, or hybridized identities has become the new mantra in Cultural Studies on which all hopes for cultural resistance are now based. Under the highly pluralized state of modernity which Western societies have reached, it is no longer convincing to put one's hope on a particular class or a social group, or on a particular subculture, or on a particular semiotic practice. There is no longer an outside of the system. The best one can hope to achieve, it seems, are short performative moments of non-identity in which a potential for resistance is opened up.

An interesting illustration of this trajectory from class politics to a new politics of cultural difference is provided by the work of Stuart Hall, in many ways the most representative Cultural Studies scholar of them all.[19] In

following the lead of Raymond Williams, Hall started out as a New Left intellectual who regarded Cultural Studies as a way to re-empower the working class. Then, when the working class ignored that offer, his work turned to an analysis of the reasons for the disinterest the working class seemed to show in its own liberation. Under the influence of the structuralist turn in the humanities, the idea of lived experience, which had been supposed to function as a corrective of ideology, was discarded, and the term ideology revived. This raised the analytical problem of how to avoid a monolithic concept of ideology as an all-encompassing system of representation. The answer was provided by Gramsci's concept of hegemony which modifies ideological effects through a number of factors such as historical specificity, national differences, regional unevenness and the non-homogeneous character of the class subject. Once this is accepted, race and gender can become equally valid categories of cultural analysis, because they, too, can provide crucial sources of identity, pretty much in the same way in which lived traditions of the working class were said to function as sources of working-class identity. Yet, in order to prevent an essentialist definition of race or ethnicity, and hence a compromised form of identity politics, identity has to be redefined as positionality, and difference has to be conceptualized not in terms of unbridgeable racial otherness, but as a positional, conditional and conjectural construct. As Hall puts it in his essay "Who Needs 'Identity'?": "Identities are thus points of temporary attachment to the subject positions which discursive practices construct for us."[20]

The replacement of the concept of a monolithic subject by the idea of multiple, heterogeneous identities or, in a slightly different but related form, by the idea of multiple subject positions constructed by discursive practices, can be seen as another attempt to escape the dead end of cultural radicalism's power analysis and, specifically, its idea of subjection. Although both concepts, that of the subject and that of identity, can be considered cultural and discursive constructs, the term identity nevertheless opens up a greater range of variations: an individual can only be one subject but can have various, changing identities. This, in fact, is the reason why Race and Gender Studies have to 'heterogenize' the concept of identity, for as long as it is conceived as 'coherent', it still resembles the subject effect and misrecognition analyzed by Foucault, Althusser and Lacan. But by escaping the monolithic power effects of subjection through a concept of identity redefined as temporary attachment to a discursive subject position, another problem is created, because resistance now appears to be completely individualized. How is common political action still possible in a world of individuals with multiple, shifting identities? The answer is provided in an

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[18] Butler, "Subjection, Resistance, Resignification" 232. For an argument, developed within postcolonial studies, that "culture demands and gains its force through a process of interiorization," see also Suzanne Gearhart, "Colonialism, Psychoanalysis, and Cultural Criticism: The Problem of Interiorization in the work of Albert Memmi," *'Culture' and the Problem of the Disciplines,* ed. John Carlos Rowe (New York: Columbia UP, 1998) 190.

[19] The following part of the essay draws on a more extended analysis of the development of Hall's work in my essay "Stuart Hall: From New Left Politics to the New Cultural

Politics of Difference," *Zeitschrift für Anglistik und Amerikanistik* 50:4 (2002): 331-352.

[20] Hall, "Who Needs 'Identity'?" 6.

analysis of Hall's position by Homi Bhabha: "For Hall, the imperative is to construct a new social bloc of different constituencies, through the production of a form of symbolic identification that would result in a collective will".[21] Indeed, Hall himself emphasizes the role of identification: "Identification means that you are called in a certain way, interpolated in a certain way: 'you, this time, in this space, for this purpose, by this barricade with these folks'".[22] Identification thus provides the basis for sharing "an imagined community of some kind with others"[23]. Fittingly, the example Hall provides in his essay "New Ethnicities" for a new cultural politics of difference is the model character of a powerful movie, "My Beautiful Laundrette." By doing so, Hall acknowledges, although tacitly and without really thematizing or theorizing this fact, that the only mode in which shifting positionalities can still be authorized convincingly in a cultural politics of difference may be the aesthetic mode. The one dimension of culture which Hall, in keeping with an anti-aesthetic bias of Cultural Studies, regarded with suspicion throughout his work, the aesthetic, returns with a vengeance.

In seeking common ground for a cultural politics of difference, Hall's changing views on what could possibly constitute resistance finally led to an aestheticization of politics. By 'aestheticization' I do not mean a form of legitimation based on the authority of a particular aesthetics. 'Aestheticization' here refers to a mode of authorization that no longer relies on a systematic philosophical, political or moral argument but on the power of a particular image, representation, or performance. The logic of this move to aesthetic modes of authorization is confirmed by Cornel West, another major proponent of a new cultural politics of difference,[24] who, in *Race Matters*[25], criticizes major groups in the Black community for their lack of solidarity and then, in the preface to the more recent *Cornel West Reader*, somewhat resignedly resorts to the Russian writer Chekhov as one of the last remaining hopes for solidarity, because, as West puts it, Chekhov's work "is grounded in a magnificent compassion for each of us".[26] The political solidarity that is undermined by pluralization has to be regained through another source, that of aesthetic experience, which thereby becomes the only remaining hope left for cultural transformation.

If the only way in which resistance is still possible is by temporary attachment to a discursive subject position that invites identification, then the aesthetic mode becomes the main and supreme source of resistance – and also of cultural change and cultural transformation. This is a surprising result indeed for an approach that set out to replace the category of the aesthetic, equated with high culture, by a democratic politics and constituted itself in the rejection of the idea of the aesthetic as the most promising resource for resisting the onslaught of modernity. Ironically, it is a result that brings us back to Matthew Arnold who insisted on aesthetic experience as the most important hope for social transformation. What has changed is not that aesthetic experience has been replaced by a democratic cultural politics but that aesthetic experience has been redefined – a redefinition of the aesthetic that is very much in keeping with the various manifestations of a new aesthetic sensibility analyzed first by Susan Sontag.[27] Although Cultural Studies has never really discussed their own aesthetic premises, they currently come close to a kind of aesthetics that tries to overcome the separation of life and art in order to provide the aesthetic dimension with an immediate function as cultural practice.

In retrospect, Cultural Studies can be said to have started out not as an attempt to reject the aesthetic but to take it out of the hands of the high cultural critics and to claim that, contrary to their critique of mass culture, there was a neglected potential for resistance in popular cultural forms and in the experience of everyday life. In the first chapter of *The Long Revolution*, Raymond Williams, without acknowledging it, draws on an argument John Dewey had first developed in his seminal study *Art as Experience*, published in 1932, namely that everyday life is inherently creative and hence potentially 'aesthetic'.[28] With this claim, resistance is taken back into 'life'. Almost all work on popular culture in the British Cultural Studies tradition has continued this line of argument and has tried to demonstrate that popular cultural forms and everyday practices have an aesthetic dimension of their own that would be able to resist the iron-cage logic of instrumental reason.

Thus, it is not altogether surprising that in the subsequent development of this argument and its radical rejection by cultural radicalism, the aesthetic has come back through the back door and has become the crucial hope for cultural change once again. This return of the aesthetic should by no means be considered an inconsistency. On the contrary, as I have tried to show, its re-emergence clearly follows a paradoxical logic of its own and must be

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[21] Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994) 28.

[22] Stuart Hall, "Subjects in History: Making Diasporic Identities," *The House That Race Built*, ed. Wahneema Lubiano (New York: Vintage, 1998) 292.

[23] Hall, "Subjects in History" 292.

[24] Cornel West, "The New Cultural Politics of Difference," *Out There. Marginalization and Contemporary Cultures*, eds. Russell Ferguson, Martha Gever, Trinh T. Trinh-ha and Cornel West (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1990) 19-36.

[25] Cornel West, *Race Matters* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994).

[26] Cornel West, "Introduction," *The Cornel West Reader* (New York: Basic Civitas Books, 1999) xvi.

[27] See Susan Sontag's seminal essay "One Culture and the New Sensibility," *Against Interpretation and Other Essays* (New York: Dell, 1969) 294-304.

[28] This point is developed in more detail in Winfried Fluck "Aesthetics and Cultural Studies," *Aesthetics in a Multicultural Age*, eds. Emory Elliott, Louis Freitas Caton and Jeffrey Rhyne (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2002) 79-103.

seen as a consequence of Cultural Studies' ever more radical attempt to search for resources of resistance that would be able to provide an oppositional perspective to the relentless forces of modernity. The elimination of various possible sources of resistance that resulted from this radicalization, including high culture, subjectivity, and interiority, leaves us only with experiences of non-identity, that is, an aesthetic mode, as a last resort. And if the aesthetic mode is confirmed, though inadvertently, even by cultural radicalism as the last hope for resistance, then it can also be identified as the major force of cultural change. Despite its own self-perception, Cultural Studies are still constituted by the promise first formulated in the 19th century that the aesthetic mode is our best hope in resisting or transforming the conditions of modernity.

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Edited by
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