Critical Multiculturalism

Chicago Cultural Studies Group

Perhaps because it is so empty as a description, the phrase "cultural studies" has proven to be a capacious vehicle for utopian thinking. It is invested with desires that range from the relatively petty—solving the crisis of English departments, for example—to the relatively great, such as linking the cultural criticism of subaltern movements in the West with that

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of postcolonial and postauthoritarian movements around the world.[1] Given the different registers of these desires, it is easy to see why they are often in conflict, or at best remain unclarified and unreconciled. It is equally easy to see that these desires to bring critical knowledge to bear in, on, and beyond the academy are jeopardized by the pressure to fix cultural criticism: to make it a "studies," a method, a content, a reproducible knowledge, a canon, a discipline, a politics, or a curriculum. Cultural studies will only lose its utopian import—will become merely utopian, in other words—if its imagination of value is controlled either by the disciplines of knowledge in the Western academy or by the rhetoric of generalism against which academic disciplines are usually contrasted.

"Multiculturalism" has produced if anything an even greater rush for utopian thinking than "cultural studies." For its adherents, multiculturalism increasingly stands for a desire to rethink canons in the humanities—to rethink both their boundaries and their function. It also stands for a desire to find the cultural and political norms appropriate to more heterogeneous societies within and across nations, including norms for the production and transmission of knowledges. Under the banner of multiculturalism fall phenomena as disparate as the permeability of any locale in the age of a global economy, imperial networks of knowledge, environmental crisis, the end of the cold war, European integration, and the growth of the Pacific rim. Both multiculturalism and cultural studies have been in part a response both to these new world conditions and to the Bush-era rhetoric of the "New World Order," which is designed to stabilize them.

Under the weight of such a seemingly endless diversity of empirical concerns, multiculturalism as a social movement gets its critical purchase because it intrinsically challenges established norms, and can link together identity struggles with a common rhetoric of difference and resistance. In distinction, cultural studies as an academic movement proposes to reorder the world of expert knowledge, recasting method and pedagogy as elements of public culture. When newspapers and magazines amalgamate multiculturalism and cultural studies as a two-pronged drive to install political correctness, these utopian projects are the sprawling troublemakers the media describe.

But nonacademic corporate and administrative agencies have been working equally hard to adapt a "multicultural" logic to their own purposes, and the concept has begun to appear frequently in mass culture. It is far from clear whether a multicultural emphasis in education will result in a more democratically critical society or rather in one with more subtle

1. The meetings on cultural studies and multiculturalism leading to this document resulted from several years of collective discussion of readings in literary and cultural theory, not all of which are listed here in notes. See the final section of the essay, "Works Consulted," which indicates the most immediate stimuli to our exchanges.

international administrative abilities. Multiculturalism may therefore prove a poor slogan. Those who use it as a slogan seem to think that it intrinsically challenges established cultural norms. But multiculturalism is proving to be fluid enough to describe very different styles of cultural relations, and corporate multiculturalism is proving that the concept need not have any critical content. We could call this the Benetton effect.

Multicultural studies is vulnerable at this juncture not only because of the reactionary attack on it in the popular press, but because of weaknesses in its own rhetoric: an overreliance on the efficacy of theory; a false voluntarism about political engagement; an unrecognized assumption of civil-society conditions; a tendency to limit grounds of critique to a standard brace of minoritized identities (for example, race, class, and gender); and a forgetfulness about how its terms circulate in "Third-World" contexts, which are often expected to provide raw material for integration in Western visions of multicultural pluralism. The temptation in the face of such problems is to resort to heroic fantasies about intellectual work. And certainly the multiculturalist conception of cultural studies implies an important (even world-historical) task for intellectuals. But in a culture where the derision of academics is a small industry, there are reasons to be skeptical about the imagined substitution of *engagé* intellectual for *dégagé* academic. It is also too easy to suppose that mere academics can rise to become activist intellectuals simply by force of moral will, or fail to do so by failure of will—rather than through the mediation of publics, media, institutions, roles, discourses, and other conditions. If cultural studies is the expression of, among other things, a desire for a broader intellectual role, what conditions will be needed to bring it about?

When our group began its discussions, we thought those conditions already existed. We thought that by bringing together different disciplines and different marginal voices—of nationality, gender, sexuality, and race—an alliance would emerge. But that alliance does not come about through common histories of marginalization, or intellectual good faith, or theory. The discursive space of multicultural critique cannot be presupposed. Different kinds of criticism occur in different contexts, different spaces of criticism. As our group's experience of our own national, disciplinary, and institutional diversity showed us, nothing guarantees that the different impulses toward or interpretations of multiculturalism will always be consonant with each other.

We would like to open some questions here about the institutional and cultural conditions of anything that might be called cultural studies or multiculturalism. By introducing cultural studies and multiculturalism many intellectuals aim at a more democratic culture. We share this aim. In this essay, however, we would like to argue that the projects of cultural studies and multiculturalism require: (a) a more international model of cultural studies than the dominant Anglo-American versions; (b) renewed attention to the institutional environments of cultural studies; and (c) a

questioning of the relation between multiculturalism and identity politics. We seek less to "fix" these problems than to provide a critical analysis of the languages, the methods of criticism, and the assumptions about identity, culture, and politics that present the problems to us. Because the thickets entangling what our group calls cultural studies are so deeply rooted in Western academia, which to a large degree constitutes our own group, the counterexample of cultural criticism in other contexts can be more than usually instructive. We begin by considering the position of cultural studies in China, since our group includes a number of Chinese intellectuals, on whose experience the following section is largely based.

1. "Cultural Craze" or "Cultural Studies" in China

In China during the protest movement of 1989 both academic and nonacademic intellectuals, particularly those in the tradition of the May Fourth movement, proved spectacularly capable of critical intervention, though with what results no one needs to be reminded. It might therefore be expected that cultural studies would find an enthusiastic if hazardous reception among Chinese academics. But cultural studies of the Western type has a slight presence in the academy; where it exists at all, it tends to be read mostly by younger scholars and dismissed even by them whenever "real" questions of power arise. Whereas cultural studies is often perceived by Western academics as a style of engagement, it could hardly have that appeal in China, where the boundary between "academic" and socially engaged intellectuals has little or no force. From the perspective of most Chinese intellectuals, attempts by even activist Western scholars such as Raymond Williams to "mediate" the academic theory/social praxis divide are still far too theoretical. Insofar as cultural studies is becoming institutionalized in Chinese academia, therefore, it seems to be a catchall for miscellaneous objects of inquiry, easily marginalized in the face of "real" questions about state power and who will exercise it.

Chinese intellectuals outside the academy do have, however, a different kind of cultural studies—one with a different object and function from those of its Western counterpart—roughly translatable as "cultural craze" or "cultural frenzy" [*wenhua re*]. Cultural craze has been a movement predominantly among Chinese writers outside academia, where analysis of culture has been the domain of traditional Marxist "ideology studies." These mostly younger writers have treated "culture" in conscious opposition to "politics" and "ideology." They have tried to provide an interpretation of the essence of Chinese culture, sometimes in order to emulate what is seen as the developmental progress of a monolithic Western society, sometimes to challenge the totalitarian state as a betrayal of Chinese tradition. One extreme of cultural craze was the television miniseries "River Elegy," shown to large audiences in 1988; it created for the

first time at the national level a relatively open discussion of culture and politics, but its chauvinistic fervor also helped to reinvigorate the rhetoric of Mao-style Party discourse.

The suppression of cultural craze following 1989 can be seen as a sign of its threat to state discourse. In retrospect, it can be seen as having evoked the "anti-political politics" articulated by Vaclav Havel: that is, it sought to delineate a realm of civil society that would be "depoliticized" in the sense of being removed from the power/knowledge monopoly of the Chinese state.[2] On its face, of course, this is an agenda exactly opposed to that of cultural studies in the United States, which seeks to politicize the realm of civil society designated as "nonpolitical" by traditional liberalism.

The contrast with China shows how much the rhetoric of cultural studies has relied on the context of a civil-society tradition in which, among other things, "political" would mean "contested." The assumptions of that tradition include the autonomy of criticism as a field and its separation from sponsorship and control by the state. Together with other realms of discourse that belong to civil society in this sense, criticism helps to establish the self-definition of the liberal public sphere as an unconstrained space. The various discourses of Chinese cultural criticism would therefore seem anomalous if one is looking for Western-style civil society. But China, Eastern Europe, and other postcolonial or unstably authoritarian states are different contexts for deciding what will count as criticism. If a critical politics is to be elaborated (or even coordinated) across such different contexts we will have to attend carefully to the context-specific inflections of categories like "politics" and "autonomy." A major limitation on the relevance of Western left cultural theory to non-Western countries is the presupposition of a liberal-public discursive space in (and for) which domestic cultural theory has been formulated.

When Western academic intellectuals announce a plan to intervene politically that desire is enabled by a civil-society matrix, which is not often reflected in the plan. In this matrix the autonomy of the academy is guaranteed by its separation from the state and public discourse, but many Western intellectuals risk doing without that separation, in effect asking that we not be too subtle to point out that we want to change the world again, that we not be afraid to speak in broad terms about basic things that we will have to do in order to mediate different civil society and state contexts. But should "to intervene" mean to politicize directly the public sphere and the arena of critical discourse? One might suspect that if every academic were really a politician in the United States and were really subject to the political interactions of the nation-state, academics would be more vulnerable to state control and ideological orthodoxy. If politicization erases the boundary between the academy and public discourse, the result will not be a gain in relevance but the loss of the very ideal sought by

2. Vaclav Havel, "Politics and Conscience," *Open Letters* (New York, 1981), p. 269.

politicization: the ideal of multiple cultural spaces all protected from invasion by each other or by the state.

The context of civil society is so thoroughly assumed in the structure of academic discourse that it tends to go unacknowledged and unthematized. The results are, on one hand, an enormous difficulty in recontextualizing Western theory in places like China, where those assumptions interfere; and on the other hand, a weakness within the cultural politics of Western nations, where academics are put at a disadvantage by their reliance on unstated conditions and norms. In the U.S., Britain, and some other nations, recent crises of censorship and right-wing (largely homophobic) campaigns against funding for the arts have driven home the realization that "politicization" is not a panacea; the boundary drawn in the civil-society tradition between the state and the realm of the arts is one that must be preserved in some form, and one that is under aggressive assault from the right. The "politicizing" called for in cultural studies, then, should not be allowed to obscure the basic autonomy of cultural production from regulation by the state. Because critics often have not taken these conditions into account, the resulting confusion of cultural politics and state politics has been the source of disarray and vulnerability for the left.

The Chinese (and perhaps more generally non-Western) intellectual's very different relationship to cultural and national politics has other consequences for cultural studies as well: whereas American cultural theorists have tended rather easily to assume an alliance between domestic subaltern identity movements and the cultural politics of non-Western nations (generally conceiving of the latter in terms of the former), many non-Western-trained intellectuals implicitly or explicitly reject such an alliance—seeing little in common between their own political agendas and those of, for example, the American feminist and gay movements. Both the prospect of alliance and the very category of identity politics therefore demand ample and continuous specification.

Recently some types of new social movements have begun appearing all over Southeast Asia—quite often coming out of the middle class, and often with nationalist tones. But intellectuals and the academy in Southeast Asia and East Asia do not have the same conditions for articulating a larger public consciousness in which these issues could be placed. In the U.S. and Western Europe, intellectual critique, in order to assert public relevance, has to be multileveled and multifaceted, because it must coordinate contexts that are otherwise separated and sufficiently self-reproducing as to be relatively autonomous. For example, academic feminism has tried to be a coordinating ground for clarifying the position of women in contexts that would otherwise seldom if ever intersect, one of which is the context of academic feminism itself. This is what allows universities (and theory) to be a special site for political engagement. In China the university does not respond to civil-society/state diremptions in the same way; it responds to state saturation of society. Academics therefore

must engage the issues of cultural movements in a different way, since the coordinating role is claimed by the state.

We have suggested that because the posture and effect of criticism varies so widely from one cultural context to another, we should be wary of thinking that there is a politics of intellectual work in general. Stanley Fish has argued against this political fantasy as it appears in New Historicism in literary studies; whatever its claims to "politicize" literature, Fish argues, New Historicism should not hope to effect real political change beyond the institution of literary studies itself. In saying this he has been one of the few people in literary studies to call attention to the institutional conditions of discourse that govern what will count as political. He reminds us of the boundary between civil society—including academia—and the state, a boundary that has been one of the defining conditions of literary criticism in Western culture. Fish concludes that it would be futile to challenge that boundary from within the language of literary criticism.[3]

Yet even if his conclusion were adequate for the context of the United States, it would have to be altered substantially in a different academic-institutional context, such as English studies in China, where a New Critical ideology of literary "autonomy" has been carefully preserved as an enclave against the Maoist state. In state-saturated societies, depoliticizing can be an important political strategy. If Fish seems to take for granted the position of intellectual work in the current conditions of civil society, treating that position as a more or less just limitation on change, a corresponding criticism might be made against American critics at the opposite pole—those who argue in favor of a broad "politicization" without considering the extent to which the civil society tradition would thereby be abandoned.

There is also a tendency for some postmodern thinkers to think that they have created a new basis for politics and alliance—through such notions as difference, popular culture, and fragmented subjectivity—that could be spread to other areas and applied across different dimensions.[4] Critical intellectual work, however, cannot simply be exported from one context to another; the contribution of Euro-American critical theory to contemporary Chinese cultural criticism, for example, has been neither predictable nor foundationally transformative. Because of the power of institutional settings and international relations, the uneven circulation of critical theories and cultures is as much a global phenomenon as is so-called global culture. Western theorists might think that Chinese critics would be emancipated by Western critical theory, but the usefulness of

3. See Stanley Fish, "Commentary : The Young and the Restless," in *The New Historicism,* ed. H. Aram Veeser (New York, 1989), pp. 303–16.

4. See, for example, Aijaz Ahmad's critique of Fredric Jameson, "Jameson's Rhetoric of Otherness and the 'National Allegory,'" *Social Text* 17 (Fall 1987): 3–25.

any critical theory depends on the national and institutional sites that constitute the horizons of practice. Even within Western academic discourse any multicultural linkage of criticism requires comparative contextualization. Comparative contextualization in this sense cannot be generated by mere comparison of objects; it requires sources in multiple cultural contexts so that the critical tools used as a wedge into understanding the production of norms would themselves become objects of scrutiny.

The concept of "difference," for example, is a mastertrope across many contexts of cultural criticism. Its function has been to convert a liberal politics of tolerance, which advocates empathy for minorities on the basis of a common humanity, into a potential network of local alliances no longer predicated on such universals. But this insurgent way of valuing difference still presupposes the coordination of difference and in this respect is insufficiently distinguished from a pluralist tolerance, with its minoritizing effects. It might therefore invite (re)assimilation to a reactionary cultural politics. Witness the statement by the National Association of Scholars, a reactionary organization, which recently placed advertisements in a number of intellectual journals in order to argue against multiculturalism. NAS argues that cultural difference makes no valuable sense without the liberal norm of tolerance, itself of Western origins. In one respect NAS has a point. The mistake of NAS is to think that tolerance is the only solution.

If nothing therefore guarantees the progressive force of multiculturalism—neither theory, nor good will, nor "inclusiveness"—can there be any sense at all in speaking of a critical multiculturalism? What distinguishes it from a generally rigorous "critical inquiry"? Neither content nor method nor intention can suffice to give force to the word *critical* here. Nor can they be relied on to make multicultural theory exportable or even coherent. The self-articulation of "difference," for example, has become a norm for subaltern critical politics; yet while this gesture might be appropriate in some contexts, such as India, in others (for example, China) it might be ineffective or reactionary. But whatever their differences might be, postcolonial situations and identity movements in the U.S. and various other cultural movements have one thing in common: they are critical of a dominant Western liberal discourse and are understood within that dominant discourse as threatening. The NAS statement neatly illustrates that sense of threat to Western liberal discourse arising from Indian subaltern theory to British feminism to African-American studies. In all these different contexts a challenge has arisen to that now-global discourse (and a discourse now globally congratulating itself on its global triumph). At the same time, because one of the key rallying cries across these different settings has been to insist on recognizing cultural differences and to invest them with critical force, it would be fitting to think about the differences involved in this alignment of contexts of criticism. A kind of common enemy, a common point of

departure, and a norm of critical difference—these conditions give multiculturalism its intelligibility.

Given that Western and non-Western intellectuals are meeting more often in contexts staged by Western academia, what are the prerequisites for a noncolonial encounter in these new spaces? We need to remember that different cultures might have quite different uses for the same theory—or the same history. The problem has been that theory believes quite often that it creates its own linkages. The goal is not transposition of theory but rather juxtapositions or alliances of differently contextualized critique. The creation of a space where a relatively noncolonial comparative contextualization could take place is the first necessity. The spaces that are ready to hand for Western intellectuals are the academic disciplines. Can they be used as the basis for a different contextualization?

2. *Disciplines, Knowledges, and Forms of Critique*

Given the context-dependence of what will count as cultural criticism, what would have to change so that a cultural studies based in the academic disciplines of the West could clarify or even comprehend cultural criticism in other contexts? How many of our most elementary concepts—not just widely challenged ones like "presence" and "authority," but potently talismanic ones like "politics" and "difference"—stand in a too-indicative relation to the civil-society foundations of Western academic knowledges? Disciplinary contexts as well as national-cultural ones constrain criticism, and the terms that are axiomatic to a discipline cannot be generalized predictably. Indeed, might not *culture* itself be such a term? Much of the appeal of "difference" comes from anthropology's tradition of demonstrating the irreducible differences of human cultures; yet that ability has been predicated historically on assumptions that many in cultural studies are now hasty to disavow.

Traditional cultural models of modernist anthropology stressed the organic unity, boundedness, and self-sufficiency of the object culture; in contrast, newer styles of postmodern anthropology emphasize (and indeed celebrate) the openness or permeability of cultural boundaries, the impurity of cultural poetics always already infected by other cultures, and the multiply constituted nature of subjectivity. This new postmodern celebration of cultural impurity and interpermeability, however, runs the risk of effacing real difference and losing the subject into a global matrix of symbolic exchange. Traditionally, difference has acquired a certain solidity by its linking with culture; but the idea of culture can also dilute the critical force of the notion of difference when culture is understood as a site of shared or common significance. The critical potential of postmodern anthropology still lies in the fact that anthropological categories of cultural difference, though articulated from within a Western tradition, nevertheless make available perspectives of otherness. These catego-

ries, therefore, could function as tools for a radical critique of our own cultural formations and situations. But pointing out incommensurability and difference need not involve insisting on the totality of incommensurability and the boundedness either of Western culture or of the things that are incommensurate with the West.

As anthropologists have become more attentive to the political relations between cultural groups, they have become less willing to think of themselves as disinterested analysts of a unified object. But it is not yet clear what disciplinary matrix will emerge, nor is it clear how cultural studies would differ from anthropology in this respect.

It is certainly not to be expected that styles of cultural studies derived from literary or film criticism will solve these dilemmas. Literary studies in general assume a notion of "the text" as a given or fixed entity, which can then have multiple or contested interpretations, even when the text is nominally a mass-cultural phenomenon or "practice." Yet this is a highly problematic assumption for anthropology and subaltern studies, where the fixity of the object text is often precisely what is at stake. In the Indian context, for example, "subaltern consciousness" may look radically different depending on which discourses are taken as the text, while much recent work in anthropology has been to fix various cultural practices as texts to be interpreted. Academic disciplines define themselves in large part by styles of constructing objects for knowledge, and cultural studies cannot escape the fact that there are different, sometimes incompatible ways of doing this.

Many anthropologists seeking a "native" perspective for the purposes of critiquing Western capitalist individualism tend to employ a notion of a "fusion," of "face-to-face"; that is, some notion of a local community based on face-to-face interaction becomes the epistemological starting point for all critique. But one of the problems is the mediation and alienation that constitute the very nature of the community, of the "local" that these people continuously invoke. Does the authenticity of the local become a trope to escape the problem of mediation and alienation? Both "culture" and "the local" have been useful concepts in recent critical thinking. But the drift of these considerations is that the acts by which they are constituted as objects of knowledge also block from view some of the political conditions (mediations) of their existence—and especially the Western or postcolonial critic's relation to them. The whole idea of a presentness, of a collapse between the object level and the metalevel (the native's point of view and the interpreter's) seems to indicate an effort to avoid the issue of mediation.

The same problems have been encountered in the disciplines of literary studies. Cultural studies there has generally involved a challenge to the autonomy of literary texts from politics, a challenge now bitterly repudiated by cultural conservatives. But several problems follow from the strategy of asserting that the aesthetic is thoroughly political. Because this strategy often seems to entail the radical relativizing of all aesthetic norms

and standards, it gives rise to a disciplinary gap, within cultural studies, between critics who follow the politicizing strategy and intellectuals based in the social sciences, where politics and relativism have a different relation. There is some tension, for example, between the critic's assertion that there can be no aesthetic standards independent of cultural-historical context and, on the other hand, a linguistic anthropologist's task of observing regularities across cultural contexts. There is a tendency in cultural studies to assume that cross-cultural comparisons are universalizing and imperialist in their covert cultural and institutional horizons. And therefore cultural studies has sometimes been thought to be the domain of the humanities as opposed to the social sciences. But those who assume this only ignore the critical work being done in the social sciences, but also abandon the cross-contextualizing moment of comparison, often heading instead for the metanarrative of the "global" and avoiding the specific intercultural patterns already in place. Cultural studies cannot presuppose that such differences in a disciplinary matrix will prove irrelevant.

In part the disciplinary difference is one between the search for observable regularities and the search for normative regularities. Structural analysis might elucidate the former among different cultures, but these regularities may never be sufficient to generate norms for aesthetic or cultural judgment. A strong sense of local relativism may therefore be compatible with a certain form of universalism, though not a universalism that would lead to normative judgments. In anthropology one must start from local critiques and then derive a larger picture of what critique would mean when articulated from different positions. But this is a very different standpoint from the universalism in the version of the Enlightenment defended by Jürgen Habermas, who derives the effectiveness of critique from a transcendental standpoint and then tries to apply it.[5] One could say that universals only emerge out of comparisons and cannot be grounded except through radical comparisons; and while this comparison may resemble the effort to coordinate local perspectives from a transcendent standpoint, the difference is that radical comparison cannot presuppose that it will finally produce any universals. It may just produce a set of linkages.

There is also no reason to suppose that a translation from one local culture to another is symmetric and transitive. The common assumption is that one can translate from A to B to C to D, and A is translatable into D. Comparative work can be guided by a postulate of universality only if this set of translations is possible. But they might not be, and radical comparison cannot assume that they will be. If it is to critique international liberal discourse, comparative work must resist the normative "universals" and the flattening effect typical of corporate multiculturalism; but it may also have to reject the faith in the unlimited critical power of relativism.

5. See Jürgen Habermas, *Theory of Communicative Action,* trans. Thomas McCarthy, 2 vols. (Boston, 1984, 1987).

3. "Identity" in Intellectual Work

Much of the utopian project of multiculturalism lies in the notion that it will allow intellectual work to be the expression and medium of identity. This is to some extent true whether the "identity" in question is that of postcolonial subjects or of national minorities. In either case, multiculturalism seems to offer the prospect of using intellectual discourse no longer as a means of dominant acculturation or international administration, but rather as the articulation of alternative points of view represented in the persons of the intellectuals themselves. It can do this only if it is a field for alliances, for different identity struggles to come into a comparative relation under the heading of multiculturalism. This is a powerful utopian project indeed, but it has some problems.

First, there is a tendency to obscure the enormous gulf between different styles of identity politics, where in most cases only a few intellectuals are willing to see any potential alliance at all (for example, between the Chinese student movement and the American gay movement). Even within Western identity politics, where so much of cultural studies has been based, there is a tension between separatist and alliance logics, and this tension makes even more problematic the notion of multicultural translation from one context to another.

Much commentary in subaltern studies has been devoted to these problems. The description of identity has been signally contested in the public discursive arena created by political insurgents collaborating with revisionist academics doing radical historiographies of India. The effects of this contest will be felt both in universities and in national life, but the effects in these two realms will be different, and the tasks of representing and transforming identities in a political context will be played against one another. Gayatri Spivak's work on subaltern studies argues that intellectuals can never make themselves adequate to the standard of representing the subaltern point of view, of simply giving it speech. Nor can they entirely do without that standard. The anthropologist or subaltern analyst (or more generally "the intellectual") finds him or herself in a necessary tragic position: inserted into a social field of heterogeneous, often contradictory voices, and at the same time representing (or at least addressing) a different field of voices, this individual may be in a position of inescapably bad faith—yet one that is nevertheless indispensable.[6]

Vinay Dharwadker, however, has suggested that a serious shortcoming of the Subaltern Studies group is its failure to include within its corpus any work by the "subalterns" in question—an omission that implicated the group's own project in a kind of academic neocolonialism.[7] Of the nearly

6. See Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography," in *Selected Subaltern Studies*, ed. Ranajit Guha and Spivak (New York, 1988), pp. 3–32.

7. See Vinay Dharwadker, "The Future of the Past: Modernity, Modern Poetry, and

fifty essays produced to date by the group, only a handful focus primarily on documents in languages other than English—even though English is an unlikely language in which the "subaltern consciousness" might express itself. An example would be the six million Dalit speakers of Marathi, one of the most thoroughly marginalized social groups in the Indian caste system, who have nevertheless produced an independent body of self-analytic discourse in their native language. None of it finds any place in the writing of the Subaltern Studies group. The Subaltern Studies group has found itself drawn much more into Western European and American academic discourse, into a Western language game.

Intellectual work on subalterns necessarily opens itself to this charge. The example of Chinese cultural politics again shows that the question of the native voice has to be contextualized. In China there are intellectuals who, as in the Dalit example, are not interested in being heard by the West. But they tend to be aligned with a conservative, xenophobic ideology that supports the current regime. The Chinese government has itself employed a nativist and separationist rhetoric in defending the June crackdown, and the Bush administration has very obligingly picked this up.

The critical potential of a subaltern consciousness, in other words, might itself be dependent on context, in its "coarticulation" with other elements. And the character or value of intellectual intervention, for example in "speaking for" a subaltern group, might vary from case to case. In India, where cultural politics have largely divided along linguistically defined lines, acts of translation and deference of public podia can have a different meaning than they have elsewhere. In China, intellectuals are themselves products of the authoritarian political structure, and they are in no way innocent of this political reality. They might be enthusiastically groping for ways to break away from it, but there is always a dead end in the point of view that derives by negation from this authoritarian system. Many assume a "repressive hypothesis": "I am always the spokesman for Truth—so long as I utter something, it's always on the side of Justice and Truth"; or, "I am categorically divided from the government; everything I say is against the government." China is, in Vaclav Havel's term, a "post-authoritarian" society, in which the dichotomy between oppressor and oppressed is not categorical.[8]

Cultural criticism runs two opposing dangers with respect to identity politics: on one hand, an overconfidence in the ability of theory to master and translate different points of view, resulting in criticism that confirms the elasticity of dominant discourse rather than providing a point of access

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the Transformation of Two Indian Traditions," 2 vols. (Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 1989), 2:278–97.

8. Vaclav Havel, "Politics and Conscience," p. 269.

for marginal groups; on the other hand, a romance of authenticity in which the intellectuals begin to consider any intervention or mediation—including that of the intellectuals themselves—a betrayal of the subaltern consciousness or voice. Where a subaltern group is defined by race or language, the boundedness of the group makes it easier to think of those subjects as preconstituted and defined, and therefore to imagine that they need only be represented transparently. In other cases, such a notion of authenticity is more difficult to sustain because the subaltern group is more dispersed and differently colonized; in feminist scholarship, in gay and African-American studies, among other places, the inside/outside boundary cannot be drawn in the same way, and the problem of intellectuals and their mediating roles becomes necessarily more prominent. The "authentic native voice" can only be a highly problematic category in any case, insofar as any instance of the subaltern voice speaking to or in the West would entail some kind of intermediary role such as that played by intellectuals or the news media.

Part of the problem lies in assuming that the category of subaltern is or should be transposable. Is it so easy to identify "the Indian subaltern" or "the Chinese subaltern"? The notion of the subaltern was generated to describe a specific colonial relation of power. The concept, however, like that of culture, has been appealing for its critical purchase in the way it makes a social difference available as a basis for criticism. Spivak argues that the project of "recovering" a subaltern consciousness is impossible as a project of authenticity; it necessarily encounters that consciousness as a reified object, thus effacing its dynamism and political agency. The kind of "subjectivity" constituted in any comparative analysis—in anthropology or comparative subaltern studies or elsewhere—can never simply be equivalent to native subjectivity. Spivak rightly points out that the process of intellectual knowledge production introduces a significant departure, not always reflected on in intellectual work, from the contexts it describes.[9] But no amount of reflection can close the gap between the context of subaltern consciousness and the context of intellectual comparison, as many postmodern critics seem to wish. What do subalterns have in common except that somehow they are dominated?—a statement so general as to be nearly useless.

Academic multiculturalism transposes one subaltern formation into another in part because of the way academic disciplines construct an object of knowledge as the source of their legitimacy. For cultural studies, the notion of the subaltern tends to play this role, serving as the object of which cultural studies tries to have adequate, even superior knowledge. But that way of legitimating the knowledge of cultural studies threatens to falsify its subject. Something that is not a socially objective fact—subalternity—has been taken up as though it has to be described systemat-

9. See Spivak, "Subaltern Studies."

ically from the outside. We find ourselves struggling to transpose a subaltern position into generalizable descriptive terms, thus eliding precisely the moment of antagonism that makes it possible to describe them as subalterns in the first place. One impulse is to efface the need for the intellectual's intervention in the name of authentic and immediate speech; another and opposite impulse, equally bound to fail, would be a call for a general description of a social position in the mode of theory.

Invocations of Gramscian Marxism or Derridean deconstruction (or nativist authenticity) could be appropriate and effective in certain contexts, but they have to be seen as strategic invocations, rhetorical gestures, and not absolute or universalizing claims (so that several such invocations could coexist without necessarily contradicting each other). Any discourse about a subaltern group is already part of their transformation and, one hopes, will become part of their self-clarification—but of course "self" is the very thing that's at stake here. The consciousness and interests of subaltern subjects, far from being predefined by an objective structure or simply immanent to their own consciousness, are created through rhetoric and struggle, in which intellectuals' work is one intervention among others.

Dharwadker's critique is a reminder that the separatist and alliance logics of identity politics remain in tension, whether in Indian subaltern movements or in Western identity movements. One need in such movements is to have a language in which to develop a self-understanding and an autonomous point of view; another need is to have a language that links such groups comparatively. These needs often conflict. And since neither can be pursued independently, and since neither can easily be separated from the dominant discourse, we might expect conflicts over such strategies to be renewed continually. Multiculturalism is not a post-conflictual state.

4. Criticism and Its Publics

Partly because multiculturalism aspires to develop and sustain political and cultural criticism outside the academy, in the United States the trend toward cultural studies has opened academics to a sharp reaction in the realms of politics and journalism. Not just the self-identified conservative press, but also a wide range of publications have led a reaction against cultural studies: the *Atlantic Monthly,* the *New York Times, The New Republic, The New York Review of Books, Time, Newsweek,* and many newspapers' op-ed pages have all followed the lead of *New Criterion* and *The American Scholar.* In one attack after another on "political correctness," an alliance of conservative academics and liberal journalists have worked to reenforce an ideal of boundaries between academic and political spheres. In this climate of reaction, state restriction, and journalistic ridicule, it has become

more important than ever to think through the strategies by which academic intellectuals have tried to link their work to nonacademic publics.

Left cultural critics work from a significant disadvantage in this struggle. Their counterparts on the right are ideologically committed to a vision of a homogenous and universally normative culture; conservative academics such as Allan Bloom are therefore comfortable with the idea of addressing a popular imaginary, of making their criticism continuous with the language and conceptual frameworks of journalism. Left cultural critics, generally more committed to a society in principle diversified into different publics and languages, consider conservatives such as Bloom to be writing unrigorously or hysterically, while conservatives see their counterparts on the left as speaking a jargon to be condemned in principle because it is not the language of a common public. Since multiculturalism also aspires to a broad public, this conflict over style and its social implications remains a difficult but productive problem.

Cultural studies based in the academic disciplines of the humanities seems therefore to have little purchase on middle-brow and mass publics. The problems are somewhat different among the social sciences. Social-scientific discourse when it appears in a larger public context remains a phenomenon of "expert" culture. Its knowledge can be invoked as expertise, but not as a style of criticism to be adopted by a public. Expertise in humanistic discourse has retained closer links to public discourse, especially when its task has been to disseminate a potentially universalizable "sensibility."

The problems are also different in other countries. In South Africa, the closure of certain disciplines around texts and around an idea of professionalism has been disturbed by the emergence of different cultural organizations and trade unions. People are saying, "We want academics to be cultural workers," meaning workers on the trade-union model—a confusion of terms and theories, to say the least. This demand for "cultural work" has infused South African cultural studies with a populist energy absent in the United States; yet at the same time the notion has played havoc with the traditional regimes of academic cultural knowledge.

In the United States and Britain, mass-cultural studies is attractive because it seems to offer a link between academic and public discourses. This is an aspiration of cultural studies in general, but at the moment mass culture seems specially capable of opening professional discourse because it has never been considered an archive or object of the kind that allows disciplinary closure. Current academic celebrations of "popular culture" —especially where a distinction between "mass" and "popular" has eroded—remain problematic: nostalgic, self-deluded, and possibly reactionary. Yet even at their worst they raise the possibility of a decredentialized knowledge, a possibility on which the academy looks with both longing and horror.

One might also say that cultural studies in general is a response to the

way mass culture tries to empty out any space in which one might perform as a political agent. That is, mass culture tries to treat all conflicts as happening only in the very delocalized space of mass media. One of the continually renewed but continually frustrated impulses in cultural studies has been to enact or clarify conflicts and regenerate local contexts or publics that are responding to the evacuation of a mass public.

In the Western nations, that most often means identity politics. The attempt to focus criticism on race, gender, and sexuality has in part been a way of resisting the kind of nonlocation created by the mass media. In national contexts without liberal public spheres, delineating the specific features of a multiple identity might be problematic, as might the word *identity* itself. The idea of identity-formation as a pedagogical project, for instance, would be virtually impossible in China given the political and ideological constraints and the absence of a concept of "the private" on which so much feminist discourse relies (if only by opposition). To the extent that cultural studies has taken shape as a critical response to the mass public, appealing to the locatedness of identity politics in an attempt to reshape public discourse, to that extent it will encounter static in contexts where the mass-cultural public is not the primary political object of critical response, and where the matrix of identity politics is not an available or appropriate alternative.

Within the Western academic context, identity politics opens intellectual work to the demands of nonacademic publics. There is immense pressure on academic feminists, for example, to speak with a kind of pragmatic impulse that would connect any feminist theory in the academy with feminist practice in other contexts. Many women, including nontheoretical feminists in the academy, perceive academic feminism's theoretical language as a barrier, and characterize their sense of exile as a kind of violence to them. In the late sixties and seventies, some feminists found little of use in post-structuralist models of fragmented subjectivity or utopian accounts of a radically other "feminine identity." Eventually, however, movements within academic feminist theory began to take the different self-understandings of women as its descriptive challenge and its political responsibility. In the early seventies certain Hispanic, African-American, and lesbian feminists—for example, Barbara Smith, Cherríe Moràga, and Gloria Anzaldúa—were already locating their particular embodiments between categories of identity. Concepts of the body as a concrete site of oppression and resistance, derived in part from subaltern and gay studies, have also helped to recast productively the stress among feminist discourses. So feminists' uses of "the body" have served a double function: as a standpoint for critique of theoretical discourses, and as a point that allows identity politics, centered around categories of the body, to engage instances of identification and its failure or crisis. To coordinate these movements within specific academic environments remains a problem.

Feminism, in short, already has an elaborate discourse about the problem of publics and discursive politics; cultural studies doesn't yet. Following the lead of racial and sexual minority movements, academic feminism has come around to an analysis of "women" and "woman" that is increasingly more complex and subtle in its enunciation of who constitutes the audience for the broadest range of feminist concerns. The multiple publics of feminism continue to pressure academic feminists not to become too invested in professional rhetorics of expertise, too limited by the norms of academic rational discourse, too constrained by values about what constitutes arguments and evidence, too focused on the pseudo-meritocracy of ideas that academia promises.

Cultural studies has the same impulse toward multiple engagements, but because most of its practitioners teach, public discussion has focused on the classroom. Advocates of cultural studies see the classroom as a place both for developing socially critical thought and for articulating identity politics. The right protests both of these as ways of soliciting students to a partisan cause. The danger is seen by the right as especially acute in English and history departments, which have come to be defined as sites of identity-formation where citizens and well-rounded persons are born. This characterization of the classroom as a civic space has traditionally been bolstered by an ideology of humanistic universality. Critics of cultural studies worry that the "values" that mesh societies are being replaced with an analytics of power that split them apart at their many seams.

Clearly this violence is not an aim of multicultural studies, whose practioners try to make the classroom a safe space for experimental thinking, involving encounters with the Other, with "difference," and with theory. There is nonetheless a danger in seeing a new set of contents as itself liberating and affirmative. There is also a danger in assuming that the "new" knowledges have no authoritarian potential, in practice or in theory, just because professors are explicitly committed to producing the experience and the imagination of more fully democratic cultures. Thus cultural studies has tended to conjoin transformations in the norms of cultural literacy with more explicit attention to the conditions of knowledge, and competence, and critique. But there are limits to what a classroom can do. To begin with, the conventional logic of the classroom is such that the introduction of multiculturalism can be seen as an opportunity to recultivate pluralist consensus, while concern for critical thinking can be reduced to a fitness program in competence for future citizens. The classroom, moreover, is neither a typical public nor a place ideally capable of furnishing a heightened self-reflection that other public arenas lack. Both the criticisms of the right and the aspirations of the left overestimate the transposability of criticism from the classroom to other contexts. And both underestimate the intelligence and independence of the students whose identities are at stake. Nonetheless, the current media controversy

is an opportunity for teachers not just to transmit knowledge but to transform what counts as knowledge in the culture at large. In this way cultural studies as an academic movement expresses a strong aim of multiculturalism.

5. *Affiliated Knowledge*

One of the primary ways of bracketing off politics is to deny that knowledge has any worldly affiliation. This becomes especially dangerous as corporate America designs itself for the next ten years around global markets, trying to retrain workers and corporate executives through a program of "multicultural studies" that gets its funding from universities. Cultural studies needs a notion of affiliation such that it would be extremely difficult for students and academics in a classroom context to think of themselves as engaged in a humanistic discourse unconnected to other organizations. Otherwise a cultural studies pedagogy might simply revert to an abstract exercise in the "critical faculties," which would be indistinguishable from classical humanism.

Affiliation describes the possibility of thematizing one's position and turning it into a site of conflict. It does not imply the voluntarism and the wish for pure autonomy that characterize modernist notions of politics. You are born partly into a set of affiliations you didn't choose; so the affiliation of your knowledge is less the product of a free choice than something to negotiate. Affiliations are relations you are already in, although they include affiliations you make, and part of the question is how you deploy the ones you're in. That is how identity politics may be fruitfully understood now: as sites of struggle, rather than as sites of "identity."

One reason why a certain postmodern, self-reflexive anthropology has gained popularity in the humanities is that it seems to aspire toward such a self-affiliation.[10] But neither in identity politics nor in an academic discourse such as anthropology can the affiliations of knowledge be reduced to the self-reflexive affiliations of its individual producers. "Postmodern" ethnographies often imply that the grounding point of their knowledge is a simple embodiment, a relationship of a writer to a text. But to locate a text self-reflexively, it is not enough to romanticize the field encounter, as many anthropologists are doing. The whole process of engagement in the fieldwork and the academic formations that make it possible would pinpoint the affiliation more clearly. Even a much more "complete" self-location would not necessarily be politically adequate. Gestures of self-location, however nuanced or elaborate, can be totally undone by the larger rhetoric of one's writing, or by the political

10. See *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography,* ed. James Clifford and George E. Marcus (Berkeley, 1986).

inflection of one's approach to the object culture; and the self-congratulatory tone of much postmodern ethnography only makes these errors more likely.

The subjectivity of knowledge is not located simply in an author. Location must be a matter not only of the "dialogic encounters," but also of the history, media, and institutional destinations of knowledge produced by any confrontation. Postmodern ethnographers typically represent the dialogic encounter of the ethnographer as if it were the real locus of interaction, as if forms of cultural engagement could be reduced to a depoliticized "dialogue." Postmodern ethnographers' interest in the ethnographic dialogue, after all, itself reflects the construction of the "authentic," the cultural, the native, through a figure of "face-to-face" relations.

If the affiliations laid out in an autobiographical gesture could therefore only be inadequate, a more productive though more challenging form would be to indicate the goal of one's knowledge production. To do so seriously would partly disrupt one's claim to academic authority and authorial self-mastery. It is no surprise, after all, that knowledge originates from individuals who "really" have (private) interests of their own; the challenge is to think of knowledge as being openly produced not so much for a private interest as for the transformation of a problem such that one's interest in the outcome could only partly be described. Affiliation in this sense requires thinking about the metaproblem of the history of normativity in any particular field of knowledge. It would also include foregrounding one's own pedagogical authority as the present arbiter of normativity.

No amount of self-dramatization otherwise could challenge the "view from nowhere" that governs the American social sciences as well as much of the humanities. A substantial challenge to that theomorphic view has been mounted within several disciplines of the humanities, but the result tends to be an essentializing of pluralism (for example, Bakhtinian "dialogism" and "polyphony"), which offers no better standpoint for substantive critique. Such pluralism is in fact quite compatible with—and even a product of—the "view from nowhere" itself.

Authoritative voices in the academy will appeal to the "view from nowhere" to justify their own nonlocation; one of the things we need to understand better is how this is accomplished. One way, for example, is by invoking a natural science methodology, or, in the humanities, by relying on "the canon." But both these moves have the same effect: by appearing to neutralize particular locations or affiliations they perform expertise that turns out to orient all other distinctions. What these "voices from nowhere" always seem to do is to create a margin for what are understood to be nonneutral parties, special interests, or constraining conditions; and one of the interesting things about the margins that have been created is that now they are being resistant. In the classroom and elsewhere that

marginalization is being contested. But what hasn't really been worked out is how to develop a critique from the margins without reconfirming as reality the very rhetoric of center and margin. What seems to happen is that the centralized voices borrow from their experience with many different marginal positions. Their effective rhetoric against a single marginal position comes from their neutralization and creation of many marginal positions, each in evident relation only to the center rather than to the other margins. So it becomes very difficult for a single marginal position to gain a leverage of critique.

The operation by which expertise is constructed raises empirical questions; it needs to be addressed as a matter of research as well as pedagogy. One thing that differentiates anthropology from humanistic studies is the idea of writing an accurate account of something that is going on, an empirical project to be engaged in. Cultural studies is going to need that kind of empirical support because "views from nowhere" often use a certain set of empirical arguments against situated humanistic positions.

An effective critique of positivism would not situate positivistic knowledge within a more totalizing account, as Habermas does, but would instead challenge the disembodied, "view from nowhere" mode of knowledge-production itself. That mode of producing knowledge has at this point been embedded in the internal history of every discipline, so that it is difficult for anybody to get a purchase on and difficult to combat systematically.

An equally formidable problem is the global transmission of knowledge. The Western classroom is not the sole space for the production and dissemination of knowledges; in many ways the final destination of these knowledges is frequently the "Third World," as research programs and curricula there are often modeled after those of prestigious and dominant Western institutions. The history of normativity in knowledge is also a history of the dissemination of evidence, with its own specific institutional and geographical terrain. For the social sciences especially, normativity is built into notions of evidence, and it is the ideological norms of positivism that make social-scientific knowledges so readily exportable.

6. *Corporate Multiculturalism*

The problem of the transportation of knowledge is one of the most serious problems facing a critical multiculturalism in an age of corporate multiculturalism, and a great danger lies in thinking that multiculturalism could be exported multiculturally. In anthropology, where a politics of identity-formation is less effective institutionally than it is in the humanities, a more crucial axis of critique might involve confrontation with international relations programs, insofar as the latter impinge directly on academic restructuring outside of the U.S. In all disciplines, as we have

suggested earlier, we still lack the conditions that would allow multiculturalism to make good on its claims: forums, media, publics, and linkages with scholars of other cultural affiliations.

On an even more cautionary note, we should remember that the "view from nowhere" problematic extends much further than a particular academic/institutional mode of knowledge production. The disembodied character of the centralized knowledges is what allows them to embody a certain stance, which is the stance of the modern nation-state in the last couple hundred years. Many who might oppose the "views from nowhere" would nevertheless find it hard to give up the stance of inclusive notions of equality and citizenship. Those nation-state ideologies are the hidden buttress behind the "views from nowhere" and are implicitly being appealed to without explicitly being brought into focus.

When a "view from nowhere" becomes the dominant view, "cultures" become pluralizing views that differentiate out from the central nowhere set up by modern science. Cultures become the self-same, the local, the particular, where the national/international frame of their relation does not. That frame is the *system* in Habermas's terms,[11] that is, the central organizing principle for what modern nation-states are all about, indeed for what the whole world order is about. It is not "culture," in this ideology's terms, but economics, politics, law, international relations.

It might seem that anthropologists would resist such an ideology, because the strength of the discipline seems to lie in showing that all is cultural. But anthropologists formed their discipline by studying little societies that have a certain kind of culture, where a model of sameness tended to dominate, where a single, homogeneous, transmitted knowledge and way of life organized the community. When anthropologists went to places like the United States, they found little communities and neighborhoods that could be analyzed in the same way because that was what they were looking for. So the anthropological concept of culture got put into the position of being not the central organizing principle for something like modern nation-states, but for differentiation against the backdrop of the modern nation-state (and its anthropological knowledge), which was itself held together by different principles.[12]

This anthropological practice precipitates an ideology of what sociability is all about in the nation-state. It has been a very powerful ideology, building on a history that dates from Locke and Rousseau and is embedded in notions of human rights and equality under the law. The basic problem with the ideology is that it produces interchangeability—of cultures as well as persons. It is the Habermasian "system-world" as opposed to these "life worlds," which are culture. The project that anthropology

11. See Habermas, *Theory of Communicative Action.*

12. This argument has been developed by Greg Urban, "Two Faces of Culture," University of Texas, Austin, typescript.

might have now would be analogous to the Boasian project; that is to theorize the problem of culture not as a single-level small-scale society based on homogeneity, but as involving imbricated levels of similarity and difference; and to see how one could attack an ideology of interchangeability by considering its own cultural and deculturing moments. It may be, of course, that the discipline of anthropology is itself too thoroughly implicated in the American nation-state ideology (by way of positivism and the "view from nowhere") to develop such a critique.

By this account any argument for "cultural relativism" runs the risk of simply feeding into nation-state ideology. An overly simple relativism—the flattened, homogenized model of culture in anthropology, but also the essentialized notion of "difference" common to many deconstructive critiques—loses its critical purchase. "Difference" in contemporary nation-state formations is complexly mediated, multiple and overlapping, and mediated partly by a national perspective designed to recognize difference precisely so as to construct the locales it superinvests or coordinates. Without this insight such critiques cannot effectively counter the dominant, positivist ideology of knowledge production, which actively seeks to subsume real difference through an abstract-statistical homogenization.

Coda

This essay will not be true forever. Not because it will be false, but because it describes what we see as a still-developing crisis in the relation between academic knowledge and cultural politics. The terms of this crisis—*culture, politics, identity*—are both contested and ambiguous. The conditions we describe here are also changing rapidly enough to outstrip our own attempt to encapsulate them. When we began our discussions, for example, it seemed that the public campaign against cultural studies in the U.S. was designed mainly to conserve a liberal tradition: the principle that expertise should be autonomous from politics, credentialized as knowledge by its distance from influence or interests. This linked up with conservatives' critique of the multiculturalists as those soiling learned culture with mere "politics," undermining objectivity, reason, neutral pluralism, or human values. But these are no longer the main lines of battle. Now the vanguard of reaction in the popular press, notably Dinesh D'Souza and Roger Kimball, have begun to call more or less overtly for the politicization of academic knowledge by the right, in the name of "the mainstream" or of "Western civilization." This often self-acknowledged strategy lies behind the attack on "political correctness," the "defunding" initiatives of the National Endowments for the Arts and Humanities, and post-Gulf consensualism in general. Suddenly it is the Anglo-American multiculturalists who have to scramble to defend the autonomy of scholars and artists from state regulation and majority coercion. The liberal separation of

state and civil society seems newly threatened, and more valuable than ever. At the same time it is more imperative than ever to resist the inclination of all parties to claim their own ethically pure marginality in the face of some insidious authoritarian Other.

We have tried to clarify this crisis, for example, by elaborating a variety of meanings for the idea of multiculture: the corporate multiculturalism of global capital; the interdisciplinary cultural criticism that conjoins different publics around discourse, identities, and difference; the international comparativism that crosses boundaries to produce new knowledge and new challenges to the means of knowledge; as well as countless local impulses that appear to derive from pluralism, nationalism, or insurgent subcultural formations and alliances. In America we have suggested reemphasizing a distinction between the "politics" of contested aspects of culture and the "politics" of the state apparatus, so that we can engage the one while rejecting the other as it currently exists. We have tried both to exemplify and to advocate a cultural criticism that minds its proximity to the historical present and its different obligations to the variety of publics in which it circulates. Thus we have found ourselves struggling to keep up with the temporality of politics and journalism, from within academic institutions and media oriented to a very different temporality.

The resulting lag is not the only constraint that we have encountered in our effort to address the public crisis of cultural criticism. The attempt to bring academic discourse into interaction with politics and journalism has posed a threat to conventions of voicing, originality, authority, evidence, and expertise. We have authorized ourselves as this speaking "we," even where the group had significant disagreements, and even in a document expressly critical of disembodied knowledge; we have incorporated into this document the speeches of people who were summarizing work that in very important ways was "theirs," whether as professional position-taking or as personal expression; we have addressed problems so close at hand that our estimate of them cannot be fully authorized by scholarship or research; and we have freely exerted ourselves in fields of knowledge unanticipated in our credentials. That we have severally felt uneasy about these things may be taken as an index of the crisis facing us—"us" as critical theorists, as national subjects, as political agents, and as specific persons who have come together to discuss a problem in common. One of our central contentions has been that a genuinely critical multiculturalism cannot be brought about by good will or by theory, but requires institutions, genres, and media that do not yet exist. Another is that, as critical multiculturalism redescribes the various public orders that are now undergoing change, it can help to realign what is now understood as simply insurgent or simply reactionary, simply dominant or simply marginal. The reaction it elicits from the guardians of dominant policies, canons, lexicons, and media suggests that the "rational" discourse of critical multi-

culturalism might indeed inhabit new worlds of *dis*order advancing changes dangerous and important.

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