

Subject To Debate: (Mis)Reading Cultural Studies

Looking at the range of recent public commentary on the shape and state of cultural studies in the US, it would be very easy to believe that the field is dead—or perhaps even that someone needs to kill it off before it can do any more damage. For instance, according to Alan Sokal (1996) and his various sympathizers (on both the Left and the Right), cultural studies lacks the basic standards of intellectual rigor and quality control that would allow it to distinguish outlandish, jargon-riddled parody from legitimate critical scholarship. According to Todd Gitlin (1997), cultural studies' claim to being a politically progressive enterprise is so far-fetched that the field would be better off if it abandoned politics completely so as to clear the terrain for the real political work that needs to be done.¹ According to *The Village Voice*, cultural studies is an unwitting(?) pawn of multinational capitalism (Frank 1995)² and an elaborate fraud (Christgau 1997).³ According to *Lingua Franca*, cultural studies is a market-driven, sensationalistic form of sloppy, "tabloid" scholarship that merely masquerades as serious intellectual work (Boynton 1995; Zalewski 1996; Schudson 1997). According to *Harper's*, cultural studies avoids rigorous and disciplined critical analysis of the mass media in favor of a mindless celebration of popular culture (Edmundson 1997).⁴ According to *New York* magazine (Mead 1994), cultural studies' primary appeal stems from its fetishization of style over substance and its brash and unwarranted disrespect for traditional approaches to scholarship.⁵ And so on and so forth. Add it all up and the picture one gets of US cultural studies in the late 1990s is that of a fad-happy, rag-tag assemblage of so-called (Sokalled?) scholars who've been all too quick—and all too eager—to sell their moral, intellectual, and political souls in exchange for sexy book covers, a lexicon of mystifying jargon, and the fleeting glory of academic hipness.

At the heart of this ever-expanding discourse on "the failure of cultural studies"—regardless of how that failure may be understood and described by different critics—are two pivotal questions: a definitional question ("what is cultural studies?") and a prescriptive question ("what should cultural studies be?"). Generally speaking, the various explanations for how and why cultural studies has failed inevitably boil down to how much the answers to these two questions differ from one another: i.e., cultural studies is X when it really should be Y, with the gap between "what it is" and "what it should be" being too wide for the field to overcome in the foreseeable future. What I want to argue here, however, is that the reports of cultural studies' demise—or even its decline—have been greatly exaggerated. This is not to say that cultural studies currently enjoys an entirely clean bill of health (it doesn't) or that there is no legitimate cause for concern about its future (there is), but that the real gap revealed by the current discourse around "the failure of cultural studies" is the one between cultural studies as it is and cultural studies as its critics misconceive of it. Where those critics who have attempted to explain cultural studies' shortcomings have stumbled the most consistently is *not* over the speculative (and thorny) question of where the field should go from here, but over the relatively straightforward factual matter of what this thing called "cultural studies" actually is, and perhaps the most disturbing characteristic of the discourse in question is the astounding ignorance it displays of the field's history, its intellectual investments, its political goals, its objects of study, and the like.

To be sure, "relatively" is the crucial qualifier in that last sentence: cultural studies has never been a monolithic project with clearly demarcated boundaries, and this open-endedness has always made it difficult to define the field with any rigorous finality. As Larry Grossberg puts it:

Cultural studies has always been changing. This is part of what makes it so attractive: Cultural studies is always remaking itself as it responds to a world that is always being remade. This is possible, even necessary, precisely because it matters to cultural studies itself that the field remain open, with competing questions, projects, and positions. (1993, 1)

While this flexibility has long been one of cultural studies' greatest strengths (at the very least, it's made it possible for the field to travel productively across both international and disciplinary boundaries), it has also been one of the field's most troublesome and persistent weaknesses (insofar as cultural studies' constant reshaping of itself has left it vulnerable to a broad range of misreadings). To a certain extent, then, this definitional problem is one that cultural studies has made for itself.

But only to a certain extent. The fact that the "cultural studies" label has been associated with a diverse and ever-shifting range of projects over the years has never meant that the field was so amorphous as to be com-

pletely undefined. In fact, one of the necessary and inevitable byproducts of cultural studies' perpetual reinvention of itself is a substantial body of writing explicitly devoted to (re)mapping the shape of the field.⁶ What's surprising—and distressing—about the recent discourse around “the failure of cultural studies” is how much of it shows a complete lack of familiarity with this definitional literature. One would think (or at least hope) that any self-respecting critic would make a token effort to acquaint themselves with the primary object of their analysis before setting pen to paper (or fingers to keyboard) to comment on it—especially if, in the final analysis, that commentary is a condemnation.⁷ When it comes to criticizing cultural studies, however, this sort of basic foundational research is exceedingly rare.

In the face of such a massive wave of willful (or at least easily correctable) ignorance about cultural studies, it's tempting to respond by trying to explain, in as detailed and straightforward a way as possible, what cultural studies really is and why it's not the problem child of academia that it's been made out to be. On the other hand, there's no good reason to believe that, having already ignored four decades of efforts to define and explain cultural studies, the field's critics will suddenly pay attention to (much less be persuaded by) another few thousand words on the subject. Thus, instead of presenting yet another definitional treatise on the field, I want to take a somewhat different tack and critique three of the more common ways that critics continue to misread cultural studies—ways that, for ease of discussion, I will refer to here as misappropriations, misinterpretations, and distortions—before concluding with a discussion of some of the actual problems currently facing the field.

Strictly speaking, *misappropriations* of cultural studies take place less often at the level of meta-commentary about the field than they do at the level of people and institutions who hijack the “cultural studies” label and use it in ways that have no apparent connection to any of the work that has traveled under that banner in the past. But while these misappropriations may originate with would-be cultural studies practitioners, they still play a crucial role in the ways that cultural studies' critics have misread the field: cultural studies hijackers may not pass as “the real thing” to people working within the field, but they can easily fool outside observers. Reading some of the recent commentaries on “the problem of cultural studies,” I get the impression that many of the critics in question have drawn their ideas about the field, not from reading the work of scholars like Larry Grossberg, Stuart Hall, or Meaghan Morris, but from skimming the spines of the books on what purport to be the “cultural studies” shelves at their local Borders or Barnes & Noble.⁸

The most common misappropriations of cultural studies are typically the result of people taking the field's name too literally: i.e., assuming that “cultural studies” refers to nothing more specific than “the study of cul-

ture.” While this sort of hyper-literalness would never pass muster if applied to other fields—not all studies of women, after all, are deemed to be examples of women's studies, nor do all studies of America or Americans count as examples of American studies—it has become a shadow that cultural studies seems unable to shake. At times, this too-simple reading of the field is quite explicit (e.g., the idea that cultural studies belongs wholly within the disciplinary boundaries of anthropology because anthropologists are the people who study culture (Dominguez 1996), or the claim that the field's main problem is that it ignores major figures (e.g., Emile Durkheim, Victor Turner, Max Weber) in the study of culture (Sherwood, Smith, and Alexander 1993), etc.), but more often it's simply taken for granted. For example, it is presumably only by equating “cultural studies” with “studying culture” that Robert H. Knight can get away with calling himself “Director of Cultural Studies” for the Family Research Council (an affiliate of the Heritage Foundation think tank), as there's no obvious way to reconcile his group's ultra-conservative agenda with the unmistakably leftist traditions that have characterized cultural studies ever since the foundational work of Richard Hoggart and Raymond Williams in the UK in the 1950s.⁹ A less politically pernicious—but no less intellectually troubling—example of this sort of literal reading of the field comes from a conference I attended in 1995, where I witnessed a panel on “Cultural Studies Approaches to the Basic Writing Course.” During the question and answer session, two out of the three panelists (both of whom presented papers on the pros and cons of adding writings by women and people of color to their syllabi) admitted that they had no familiarity at all with cultural studies as a field, but thought the term described what they did pretty well anyway because they were asking their students to study texts from different cultures.

Part of what these examples demonstrate is that “studies of culture” encompasses far too broad a territory to serve as a meaningful or productive basic for defining a scholarly field. After all, given the range of common meanings for the term “culture,” anyone in the humanities, almost anyone in the social sciences, and a fair number of natural scientists can reasonably be said to be “studying culture” in one form or another. If this is all there is to the field, then most scholars have been doing cultural studies all along, and the term is effectively meaningless.

But while I want to reject the notion that “cultural studies” is a free-floating signifier that can mean almost anything, I'm also *not* interested in arguing for some rigidly orthodox vision of cultural studies from which future scholars dare not stray, as I want to hold on to the notion that the field needs to continue to change with the world around it if it hopes to remain a source of valuable intellectual, cultural, and political work. The problem with misappropriations is not that they move cultural studies onto terrain where it's never been before, but that they make such moves with-

out any apparent recognition that cultural studies has forty years of history and tradition behind it that can't—or at least shouldn't—be sloughed off as if the field were only invented last week. To paraphrase Cary Nelson, far too many critics feel qualified to make sweeping claims about the success and/or failure of cultural studies who have no knowledge whatsoever that “the Birmingham school,” for instance, ever existed (much less what sort of research went on there)—and that when they learn of it, they're surprised to find out that “such interesting work had gone on in Alabama” (1991, 24).

Misinterpretations of cultural studies are typically less ignorant of the field's history than misappropriations, but the violence they do to the field's public image is no less severe. Misinterpretations recognize that “cultural studies” refers to *something* more specific than the hopelessly expansive territory that is “studies of culture,” but they still tend to make reductionistic equations between cultural studies and some overly broad branch of academia, with the usual suspects being the study of popular culture, critical theory, area studies, and leftist scholarship. To be sure, none of these are completely alien to cultural studies, but none is entirely coterminous with the field either. What I'm referring to as misinterpretations, then, typically depend on a flawed logic of equivalencies: e.g., (1) some examples of cultural studies are studies of popular culture, (2) some studies of popular culture are examples of cultural studies, therefore (3) cultural studies is the study of popular culture.

For example, the aforementioned claim by Todd Gitlin that cultural studies should “divest itself of its political pretensions” (1997, 82) comes at the tail end of an essay based on the premise that the field's sole *raison d'être* is the study of popular culture. To be fair, Gitlin's larger argument isn't completely without merit: his critique of cultural studies' overstated case for the political resistance to be found in people's varied uses of popular culture, for instance, has much to recommend it, at least insofar as there is a sizable body of cultural studies work that falls into this trap. At the same time, however, not all (or even most) cultural studies research is about popular culture, and given that Gitlin's article makes it clear that he knows that “the Birmingham school” was located in England (and not Alabama), one would expect him to know of enough major cultural studies work that isn't primarily about popular culture (e.g., *The Long Revolution* (Williams 1961), *Marxism and Literature* (Williams 1977), *Policing the Crisis* (Hall et al. 1978), *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack* (Gilroy 1987), etc.) to avoid the facile equation of cultural studies with popular culture studies.¹⁰ Moreover, not all (or even most) cultural studies work that deals with the popular is guilty of the sin of romanticizing resistance: Simon Frith, Lawrence Grossberg, and Meaghan Morris—to name only three of the more prominent examples—have all written extensively on popular culture from a cultural studies perspective

without ever falling prey to the “consumption-is-resistance” school of thought.

Perhaps most damaging to Gitlin's argument, however, is that he frames it with thinly veiled accusations about how cultural studies has failed to be sufficiently self-reflexive to recognize the flaws that he sees in it.¹¹ when his most accurate assessments of the field have actually been part of the field's own literature for more than a decade now: Judith Williamson railed against celebrating popular consumption as a form of progressive politics as far back as 1986, and (perhaps more famously) Meaghan Morris did much the same in “Banality in Cultural Studies” in 1990.¹² If there's anyone in this argument who's failing to be sufficiently self-reflexive, then, it would be Gitlin and his highly idiosyncratic reading of cultural studies' history: at best, his critique is valid for merely a fraction of the field (rather than the whole thing); at worst, the way that he selectively skips over any and all examples of cultural studies work that don't support his basic argument serves only to undermine his own credibility as a reliable and informed commentator on the field.

A similarly troublesome misinterpretation of cultural studies can be found in a recent *Radical History Review* article by Michael Denning (1992). While Denning seems to be more sympathetic to the field than Gitlin, he still manages to misrepresent cultural studies as “the name...for the academic left's intellectual agenda” (1992, 40) and to improperly characterize a diverse list of cultural-studies-friendly journals as “not scholarly” and unrefereed (1992, 36). To be sure, cultural studies *has* historically been a leftist project (though the specific shape its politics have taken has never been guaranteed in advance), which makes Denning's logical fallacy only half as sloppy as Gitlin's: while not all cultural studies is about popular culture, cultural studies' politics, for all their variance over time and across space, have always been leftist in some manner, shape, or form. Nevertheless, not all left-leaning scholarship is cultural studies, nor is cultural studies merely the intellectual complement to what is presumably (from Denning's framing of it, anyway) a non-intellectual Left. Similarly, to claim that most of the journals on Denning's list are “not scholarly” suggests that Denning hasn't examined the text between their covers very closely; and while at least one of the titles he mentions (*Social Text*) is not a refereed journal, several other titles on his list (e.g., *Camera Obscura*, *Cultural Studies*, *differences*, *Discourse*, *Public Culture*) do, in fact, use peer review to make decisions about which essays they publish. Undoubtedly, part of Denning's confusion stems from the fact that the only source that he cites in support of his argument about the current state of the field is Roger Kimball (of *Tenured Radicals* (1990) fame): a commentator whose status as a knowledgeable and trustworthy authority on cultural studies is surpassed only by William F. Buckley's reputation as a champion of affirmative action and multiculturalism.¹³

While misinterpretations involve the conflation of cultural studies with bodies of work that it overlaps (e.g., popular culture studies) or that encompass it (e.g., leftist scholarship), *distortions* of cultural studies make the mistake of assuming that specific examples of the field can safely be taken to represent the whole thing. To be sure, such logic would not work very well for most scholarly fields—there's no one figure or program, for instance, that could truly be said to be representative of the entire discipline of communication—but it's particularly ill-suited to an endeavor such as cultural studies, which has always refused to be defined by any single methodology, body of theory, object of study, or political agenda. "Cultural studies," as Stuart Hall has noted, "is not one thing; it has never been one thing" (1990, 11), and this multiplicity makes it impossible to take any "one thing"—be it a book, a scholar, a conference, or a department—and legitimately claim that it exemplifies all of cultural studies.

The most prominent distortion of cultural studies in recent years is undoubtedly the one arising from what has come to be known as "the Sokal affair." A great deal of ink has already been spilled debating the ethics (or lack thereof) of Alan Sokal's hoax and the intellectual standards (or lack thereof) of *Social Text*, and I'm not interested in adding more prose to that particular argument here. What I am interested in, however, is the way that Sokal's stunt came to be widely understood as an indictment of (or, depending on which side one took, an attack on) cultural studies as a whole.¹⁴ For example, in the essay where he revealed his prank for what it was, Sokal interpreted *Social Text*'s willingness to publish his parody, not as proof that the journal's editorial policies were flawed, but as evidence that it is "now dogma in cultural studies that there exists no external world" (1996, 62). Similarly, the first *New York Times* article on the incident (Scott 1996) presented Sokal's prank as a clever (and long overdue) deflating of "the trendy, sometimes baffling field of cultural studies"; the article also stated that *Social Text* had helped to invent cultural studies in the first place: a patently false claim, but one that certainly made it much easier for the *Times* to shift the stigma of the journal's sins onto the field as a whole. Very rapidly, then, the controversy around Sokal's hoax moved from debates about the specific incident at hand (e.g., what did (or didn't) the journal's editors do wrong?) to a meta-discourse about the field's integrity as a professional and intellectual enterprise (e.g., what's the problem with cultural studies?). It was as if *Social Text*'s mistakes could not possibly be understood as anything other than evidence of a deep intellectual rot that pervaded all of cultural studies. Such a misbegotten leap of logic would be almost unthinkable for other fields: for instance, had Sokal's hoax been published in a major quantum physics journal instead of *Social Text*, it's possible that the reputations of both Sokal and the journal would have suffered, but it's highly unlikely that *The New York Times* would have seen fit to publish op/ed pieces condemning the entire

discipline of physics (or even the subfield of quantum physics) as a result.¹⁵ In the end, then, the most outlandish example of faulty reasoning in the whole affair is to be found, not in Sokal's satire, but in the dubious logic that takes the specific example of *Social Text*'s error—regardless of whether one sees it as an honest mistake or an inexcusable travesty—and concludes that the entire corner of the scholarly terrain known as "cultural studies" is bereft of intellectual standards.

What I want to suggest by way of conclusion, then, is that the real problems facing cultural studies today are not those laid out in the various misreadings of the field described above as much as they are problems of *articulation*, in both senses of the term described by Stuart Hall (1986): that cultural studies needs to (1) do a better job of communicating itself to a broader audience, and (2) work harder to forge and maintain productive alliances with other political projects. Given my argument to this point, the first half of this claim is perhaps the most obvious: cultural studies, to put it simply, has a major public relations problem and needs to do a better job of explaining what it is and what its goals are to the general public. While I'm not so naïve to think that those of us who do cultural studies can prevent the sort of misreadings discussed above simply by taking more time to educate people about cultural studies, the fact remains that public discourse about the field has, to this point anyway, been thoroughly dominated by critics from outside of it: while Alan Sokal's take on cultural studies (for example) has made the pages of *Newsweek* and *The New York Times*, actual cultural studies scholars have generally been content to keep their discussions of the field within the ivory tower.

And this needs to change. If cultural studies is going to be the politically progressive force that it wants—and needs—to be, it must do more than simply change the ways that intellectuals and universities go about their business (though this *is* a task that it needs to accomplish along the way): it must also learn to speak meaningfully and persuasively to audiences who don't read scholarly journals or attend academic conferences. To be sure, taking cultural studies to a broader public will indirectly lead to further misreadings of the field: after all, as new and different audiences pick up on cultural studies, they will inevitably do things to and with it that will offend purists. A "pure" and unsullied cultural studies that speaks only to itself, however, is more of a dead end than any of the misreadings of the field discussed above: at best, it's a careerist trap that enables cultural studies graduate students to get jobs and cultural studies faculty to get tenure. And, in the end, those are pretty pathetic goals to put at the center of cultural studies, especially given that, ever since its inception, the field has been motivated, not by the abstract intellectual goal of widening the scope of human knowledge, but by the concrete political desire to make the larger world around us a better place. While "going public" (e.g., writing a column for an alternative newspaper, participating in local pub-

lic policy debates, etc.) will not stuff all those misreadings of cultural studies back into Pandora's box, it will prevent cultural studies' critics from monopolizing the public discourse on the field and, potentially, help to expose their misrepresentations of the field for what they are.

The goal of making the world a better place leads directly into the second sense of articulation where cultural studies needs to improve: the need to forge productive alliances between the field and other political projects. In contrast to Gitlin's argument that cultural studies needs to back further away from politics, I want to suggest here that the field needs to make its political agenda(s) more explicit. In particular, I think that we need to re-articulate the "cultural studies" label to the various forms of political work that we engage in *outside* the academy. It's still relatively rare, after all, to hear US cultural studies scholars describe their non-academic projects as examples of what cultural studies is all about. Our research, our writing, even our teaching: we're typically more than happy to point to these things and say "this is cultural studies." But when we go off campus—away from the library, away from the classroom, away from our computers—even when we acknowledge that our research informs our activism (or our community involvement, or whatever political work we may do), we tend not to describe that work as "cultural studies." Even as we bemoan the gap that exists between academic work and "real" politics, we are complicit in maintaining that gap by applying the "cultural studies" label only to the traditional range of tangible scholarly products (e.g., books, essays, journals, etc.). If we're truly serious about cultural studies as a political project, then we need to stop insisting—implicitly or explicitly—that cultural studies is something that stops at the edges of our campuses.

Lest I be misunderstood, I should emphasize that I have no interest in creating a simple equation between cultural studies and political action: being a good activist (for example) does not automatically make one into a practitioner of cultural studies, nor should the question of what counts as cultural studies simply be reduced to inquiring after the political activities of the relevant parties. And while I recognize that the project of re-articulating cultural studies to political work raises a far more complicated set of questions than I can address fully in the space remaining here, I think we also need to recognize that, too often, the politics of cultural studies have been overshadowed (if not erased) by its status as an academic endeavor (i.e., cultural studies is typically not recognized as an intellectual form of political work as much as it's seen to be a (politicized) form of intellectual work) and that this problem is not one that we can adequately solve simply by insisting (once again) that the field is driven by political concerns. If we want to keep cultural studies from becoming just another entry in university course catalogs, then we need to do more than

just work on putting the politics back into cultural studies: we also need to work on putting cultural studies back into politics.

Admittedly, what I'm suggesting here does little—if anything—to make our scholarly work simpler: after all, there's nothing remotely easy about articulating cultural studies to a broader public and to one's political work—all while still doing the teaching and research and writing that helps to put roofs over our heads and bread in our bellies. But that's also not the point. Doing cultural studies is not supposed to be simple, and the ultimate goal here is not to make our jobs as scholars and teachers easier: it's to make the work we do as cultural critics and public intellectuals better, in the hopes that we can then help to make the larger world—and not just our own privileged little corner of it—a more just and equitable place to live.

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NOTES

Many thanks to Liz Bird, Larry Grossberg, and (most especially) Linda Detman for their helpful comments on an earlier draft of this essay.

1 "Is there a chance of a modest redemption? Perhaps, if we imagine a harder headed, less wishful cultural studies, free of the burden of imagining itself to be a political practice. A chastened, realistic cultural studies would divest itself of political pretensions. It would not claim to be politics.... If we wish to do politics, let us organize groups, coalitions, demonstrations, lobbies, whatever: let us do politics. Let us not pretend that our academic work is already that" (Gitlin 1997, 82).

2 "Cultural Studies... is a legitimization narrative for Time Warner, Disney, Viacom, Murdoch, Geffen, and the rest of the Culture Trust" (Frank 1995, 28).

3 "If life is unfair, cultural studies is a Ponzi scheme," writes Robert Christgau (1997, 55)—and given that he notes that "life is unfair" in the previous sentence, it seems safe to assume that his syllogism is intended to stand as an indictment of the field.

4 "One sometimes wonders if cultural studies hasn't prospered because, under the guise of serious intellectual analysis, it gives the customers what they most want—easy pleasure, more TV. Cultural studies becomes nothing better than what its detractors claim it is—Madonna studies—when students kick loose from the critical perspective and groove to the product, and that, in my experience teaching film and pop culture, happens plenty" (Edmundson 1997, 48).

5 "Unsurprisingly, cultural studies is widely loathed by traditionalists and classicists. Also unsurprisingly, it is tremendously popular with students: far easier to do than deconstruction, the rage of the eighties, plus you get credit for watching *All in the Family*" (Mead 1994, 50).

6 A partial list of the major essays of this sort from just the past decade or so includes Bérubé (1992); Clarke (1991, 1-19); Franklin, Lury, and Stacey (1991); Frow and Morris (1993b); Gray (1996); Grossberg (1988, 8-22; 1989a; 1989b; 1993; 1995; 1996; 1997); Hall (1990; 1992); R. Johnson (1986/87); Morris (1990);

1997); Nelson (1991; 1994); Nelson and Gaonkar (1996a); and Nelson, Treichler, and Grossberg (1992).

7 Of course, as the Sokal affair helps to demonstrate, this argument goes both ways. Without wanting to suggest that *Social Text* was completely innocent of the charges against it, however, I would argue that Sokal's stance here was not nearly as principled as it should have been, given that his ignorance of cultural studies was at least as great as (and quite possibly greater than) the *Social Text* editors' ignorance of quantum physics.

8 To be fair, the precise nature of these sections seems to vary from city to city—and even from store to store within a given metropolitan area. Where I live (Tampa, FL), for instance, one Borders outlet has no cultural studies section at all, while another uses the term as a blanket label for its various area studies sections. The cultural studies shelf (and it really was just a single shelf in a larger unit) at the Barnes & Noble store closest to me used to be something of a bleedover space for stray titles in “military affairs” and “Asian-American studies” (the categories on either side of the section). Things there have recently improved, though not by much: “cultural studies” now has three whole shelves of its own—where half the books are either by or about Baudrillard, and the rest are mostly popular culture titles that don't seem to fit in other sections of the store (e.g., film, television, music, etc.).

9 For more on Knight and his particular take on cultural studies, see his page on the Family Research Council website: <http://www.heritage.org/frc/whois/knight.html>.

10 Even barring detailed knowledge of the work done at the CCCS (the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at the University of Birmingham), any half-hearted survey of recent anthologies in the field (e.g., Baker, Diawara, and Lindeborg 1996; During 1993; Frow and Morris 1993a; Grossberg et al. 1992; McRobbie 1997; Morley and Chen 1996; Nelson and Gaonkar 1996b; Storey 1996) or of the tables of contents of the past decade or so of *Cultural Studies* (the Routledge journal) would make it clear that there's much more to the field than the study of television, film, popular music, and the like.

11 Gitlin's opening paragraph concludes with the thought that “proponents of cultural studies should not be taken aback by the view that cultural studies itself can be analyzed as an object of cultural study” (1997, 77)—as if no one working within cultural studies for the past four decades had ever thought to turn a critical eye back on the field itself.

12 In that essay, Morris wrote, “I get the feeling that somewhere in some English publisher's vault there is a master disk from which thousands of versions of the same article about pleasure, resistance, and the politics of consumption are being run off under different names with minor variations” (1990, 21). Ironically, Morris' sharp and insightful critique seems to have suffered the same fate, in that, nearly a decade later, there is now an endless stream of articles (of which Gitlin's is but one example) being churned out that rehash her criticism of cultural studies for its tendency to find more resistance than it should in popular culture.

13 Ironically, Denning claims that the various “postmodern magazines” he mentions are “where they publish stuff written the way you shouldn't write for *Dissent*” (1992, 36). Given that *Dissent* is where Gitlin's egregious misinterpretation of cultural studies first found its way into print, I can only take Denning's comment as an unwitting recommendation for the journals in question.

14 To be sure, a significant portion of the Sokal debates were framed as discussion on the state of science studies, rather than cultural studies. Either way, however, the same general pattern—i.e., mistaking what happened between *Social*

Text and Sokal as proof that a much larger body of scholarship is inherently flawed—held true.

15 In fact, quite the opposite is probably true: barely two weeks after running its first news story on the Sokal affair, the *Times* published an article on research done by quantum physicists at the National Institute of Standards and Technology that suggested (without ever once referring to the Sokal brouhaha) that the “unsubstantiated” arguments in Sokal's hoax about the indeterminate and relativistic nature of reality might actually be true. Whereas Sokal's satirical essay argued (facetiously) that, “in quantum gravity...the space-time manifold ceases to exist as an objective physical reality...and the foundational categories of prior science—among them, existence itself—become problematized and relativized” (quoted in Scott 1996, 11), the second *Times* article reports that the NIST experiments with isolated electrons indicate that “according to one interpretation of quantum theory, the universe splits into two universes—one in which the electron [under observation] is turning clockwise, the other counter-clockwise. In each is a physicist observing a different outcome” (G. Johnson 1996). Evidently, the *Times*, like the electrons in the NIST studies, spins both ways at once, insofar as they can simultaneously portray the idea of indeterminate reality as both patently absurd (when published in *Social Text*) and perfectly plausible (when announced by NIST).

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