

The Making of Americans, the Teaching of English, and the Future of Culture Studies

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I

I WAS INTERESTED to find that, although “Constitutional Convention,” “constitutional monarchy,” and “Constitution of the United States” were three items listed under “What literate Americans know” in Professor E. D. Hirsch’s provocative book *Cultural Literacy*, the Constitution was not an index entry. In other words, constitutional matters did not form part of Hirsch’s own thinking in the making of his argument. There is nothing in his index between “Conservatism” and “Constructive Hypothesis.”¹ It is my opinion that, if one is going to speak for or plan for that complicated thing called an “American,” one must think of his or her relationship to the Constitution. In this part of my paper, I consider the argument of the brilliant reinterpretation of the Constitution in Professor Bruce Ackerman’s forthcoming book *Discover the Constitution*.²

Ackerman’s understanding of the Constitution is dualist and exceptionalist. The dualism is between *normal* everyday politics where We the People are not *much* involved, and the great exceptional moments in political practice—*constitutional* politics—where We the People are mobilized and involved in the process of change through higher lawmaking.

These involvements of We the People in the law are also managements of crisis. Although We the People were mobilized at the time of Reconstruction, it was the crisis of a possible impeachment of the president that brought the Constitutional Amendments. Similarly, in spite of the electoral mobilization of We the People, it was the crisis of a possible court-packing that brought in the activist welfare state of the New Deal. And the changes, from a federalist division of powers, through a nationalist separation of powers, to the consolidation of presidential power, were all the time being reclaimed into the continuation of *normal* political practice, where We the People are not much involved. In the modern context at

least, the electoral mobilization of We the People provides an alibi for crisis management among the powers by allowing the party to claim "A People's Mandate," while the citizen's political everyday life operates without the necessity of her/his participation.

Thus, for trouble-free normal politics, there must be the *gradual* constitution (small "c"), normalization, regularization of something called the People (capital "P") as a collective subject (We), called up in times of trouble, in the interest of crisis management. The Constitution presupposes a citizenry, and engages in the process of popular training of the liberal citizen. And, if you will forgive a slightly tendentious phrase, "the ideological state apparatus" does work to this end.

Here, for example, is the making of a collective We the People in the high school classroom:

Mr. Bower's American Government class has been studying the U.S. Constitution. He has designed a rich multiple-ability groupwork task to help his students understand the relationship among the three branches of the federal government. To reach his objectives, he wants to challenge the students to think metaphorically and to produce insights that allow students to use their critical thinking skills. . . . The task will require many different abilities. Some students will have to be good conceptual thinkers; some will need to be good artists; at least one person will have to be able to quickly find the relevant passages in the Constitution; and someone will need to have strong presentation skills. . . . [This] example . . . demonstrate[s] the advantage of groupwork that may be gained with the proper preparation and structure necessary for success.³

In fact, if not in intent, Mr. Bower is preparing a General Will where the word "People," seemingly a referent, is being charged with a more and more distanced signification, as actual agency passes from the popularly elected House of Commons model to today's electoral securing of the noun implicit in the adjective "Popular" in "Popular Mandate." If this is to give America back to the people in the American way in the high school social sciences class, and if the American way is divided into the *normal* and the constitutional, and the high school humanities class is restructuring itself by the way of books such as *Cultural Literacy*, humanities teachers on the tertiary level ought perhaps to ask what the cultural politics of the production of the "American Way" might be.⁴ I dare to say this because an unexamined view of the academic's social task in preparing a General Will (that would in fact be dormant and uncritical in the everyday) is currently laying waste the field of humanistic

education—the proper field of the production of something called a “People.”

If we move from the techniques of knowledge production to the techniques of the electoral securing of the People’s Mandate, this becomes even clearer. Editorials in all major newspapers have commented extensively on the fact that, under media management, candidates at all levels are becoming detached from local or popular constituencies. Jean Baudrillard has called this the electronic production of the “hyper-real,” which agencies of power simulate as the way things really are. “Simulation” here means declaring the existence of something that does not exist. Attention to the details of meaning-making might describe the gradual reconstitution of the relationship between the People and the Constitution as a spectacular and seamless exercise in simulation.⁵

Ackerman correctly states that the American origin was not simply “an escape from old Feudalism” (de Tocqueville), but a new start. Is it banal to remind ourselves that this new start or origin could be secured because the colonists encountered a sparsely populated, thoroughly precapitalist social formation that could be managed by prepolitical maneuvers? Robin Blackburn’s recent compendious book *The Overthrow of Colonial Slavery* has argued that the manipulation of chattel slavery as an item of political economy was also effective in securing a seemingly uninscribed slate in a space *effectively* cleared of *political* significance in the indigenous population.⁶

Since I am an Indian citizen, let me offer you a counternarrative of what, in Professor Ackerman’s vocabulary, may be called a “failed originary moment.” “After much hesitation . . . Elizabeth [I] . . . granted a charter of incorporation on December 31st 1600” to the East India Company. As is well known, there was increasing conflict between the British Government and the Company until, by Pitt’s India Act of 1784, “the control of the Company was brought under the House of Commons.”⁷ Of course it is absurd to offer a fable as fact, or attempt to rewrite history counterfactually. But let me remind you that in the eighteenth century, such great political economists as Adam Smith *and* the British popular press were greatly exercised by the failed parallel between the American and Indian examples.⁸ Let me therefore ask you to imagine that, because the East India Company was incorporated, and because India was not a sparsely populated, thoroughly precapitalist social formation easily handled through prepolitical maneuvers and the manipulation of chattel slavery, in other words because it was not possible to establish a settlement colony there, no apparent origin could be secured and

no Founding Fathers could establish the United States of India, no "Indian Revolution" against Britain could be organized by foreign settlers.

I admire the United States greatly, so much so that I have made it my second home, lived and worked here over half my life. Speaking as a not-quite-not-citizen, then, I would submit to you that Euramerican origins and foundations are *also* secured by the sites where an "origin" is violently instituted. In the current conjuncture, when so much of the identity of the American nation-state is secured by global economic and political manipulation, and when the imminent prospect of large-scale fence-mending beckons and recedes, it is not disrespectful of the energy of We the American People to insist that domestic accounts that emphasize America as a self-made giant illegally wrenching the origin of freedom from merely a moribund Europe and thus displacing the custodians of Western culture have their own political agenda.

In this section of my paper, then, I have made three points: (1) The history of higher law-making, the reality of normal politics, and changes in electoral mechanics show us that the connection between "We the People" and a General Will is constantly negotiable; (2) a making of Americans that would be faithful to American origins is not just a transaction with Europe; (3) as teachers in the humanities, our role in training citizens should not ignore this.

II

Like E. D. Hirsch, Jr., I am a teacher of English. I must take into account that English is in the world, not just in Britain and the United States. Yet, English is the medium and the message through which, in education, Americans are most intimately made.

I entered a department of English as a junior in 1957 in another world, in Presidency College at the University of Calcutta. Yet, such is the power of epochs or eras that I did not come to the slow thinking of *other* worlds choreographing the march of English until about fifteen years ago, when I had already been teaching in the United States for about a decade. Thus here too my perspective is of the not-quite-not-citizen.

As such, I must speak from within the debate over the teaching of the canon.

There can be no general theory of canons. Canons are the condition of institutions and the effect of institutions. Canons secure institutions as institutions secure canons. The canon as such—those books of the Bible accepted as authentic by the Church—provides

a clear-cut example. It is within this constraint, then, that some of us in the profession are trying to expand the canon.

Since it is indubitably the case that there is no expansion without contraction, we *must* remove the single author courses from the English major curriculum. We must make room for the coordinated teaching of the new entries into the canon. When I bring this up, I hear stories of how undergraduates have told their teachers that a whole semester of Shakespeare, or Milton, or Chaucer, changed their lives. I do not doubt these stories, but we have to do a quality/quantity shift if we are going to canonize the new entries. I have given something like a general rationale for this expansion in the first part of my paper. And, to be consistent with this resolve, even the feminist approaches to Shakespeare, the Marxist approaches to Milton, and the anti-imperialist approaches to Chaucer (are there those?) will have to relinquish the full semester allowed on the coattails of the Old Masters of the Canon. The undergraduates will have their lives changed perhaps by a sense of the diversity of the new canon and the unacknowledged power play involved in securing the old. The world has changed too much. The least we can do to accept it is to make the small move to push the single author courses up into the terminal M.A.

The matter of the literary canon is in fact a political matter: securing authority. In order to secure authority we sometimes have to engage in some scrupulous versions of “doctrinaire gesture politics.”⁹ But, in the double-take that the daily administering of that authority entails comes the sense “*that there can be no ‘knowledge’ in political practice. . . . Political practice involves the calculation of effect, of the possibilities and results of political action, and that calculation rests on political relations [in this case within the institutional network of United States tertiary education] which condition the degrees of certainty of calculation and the range of the calculable.*”¹⁰

A well-known paragraph in *Capital*, III, stages this double-take impressively. First the tremendous gestures toward the Realm of Freedom and the Realm of Necessity, the entire span of the human being in Nature and in social action; finally, the brief concluding sentence of the range of the calculable: “The reduction of the working day is the founding condition [*Grundbedingung*].”¹¹ A model for emulation: a lot of gesture politics, talk of other worlds. But the reduction of the space and time spent on the old canon is the founding condition.

What comes to fill the released space and time? Even the most cursory look at the publishers’ catalogues that cross our desks, and

the ever-proliferating journals concerned with the matter of the countercanon convinces us that there is no shortage of material. What I will say will seem to leave out many subtleties of approach. But please bear with me, for that is the hazard of all overviews. Let me then tabulate the "others," at least keeping in mind that the lines cross, under and over one item to another: Women; women of color; gays, lesbians; Afro-America; immigrant literature; literature of ethnicity; working-class literature; working-class women; non-Western literature; and, in peculiar companionship, something called "theory."¹²

I am not the only feminist who thinks that the situation of women's literature as such is rather particular here. Some women had made it into the general canon. "A gentleman's library," wrote H. P. Marquand, a thoroughly sexist genteel American novelist writing in 1958 in his particularly sexist novel *Women and Thomas Harrow*, "as the [small-town, New England, nineteenth century] Judge very well understood, comprised the British poets, the works of Bulwer Lytton, the Waverley Novels, Dickens and Thackeray, Austen and the Brontë sisters and Trollope."¹³ We can update this list by at least Virginia Woolf and perhaps Edith Wharton.

With regard to these writers, even more than with the old masters, it is a question of restoration to a feminist perspective. But outside of this sphere, there were all the certainly-as-good-as-the-men women writers who did not get into the canon, as critics like Jane Tompkins and Elaine Showalter have shown and inspired other scholars and critics to work at showing, because the larger grid of social production would not let them in.¹⁴ (I am naming recent critics, but of course there are hundreds of people to name. The choice is dictated by range, time, the limits of my knowledge, and the circle of my friends.)

In this broad sweep, and speaking only from the angle of bursting into the canon, how can the institution be obliged to calculate the literature of gender-differentiated homosexuality? Only with the assumption that, since sexuality-and-sexual-difference is one of the main themes and motors of literary production, this literature, in its historical determinations, continues to complicate and supplement that network, not only by giving us the diverse scoring of "the uses of pleasure," but also by showing us how, by the divisive logic of normalizing the production of reproductive heterosexuality, we work at the continued securing of even the enlarged canon.¹⁵

Two such different scholars and critics as Gloria Watkins/Bell Hooks and Hazel Carby have shown that the moment the color black is injected into these calculations, the structures of exclusion

that have to be encountered appear much less accessible, much more durable.¹⁶ We need an approach here that is more than an awareness of the contemporary culture of white supremacy, of the fetishization of the black body, of the histories of black heroism in the nineteenth century that complete the list. The work on slave narratives done by women like Mary Helen Washington and others begins to give us a sense of what has been called “*the reverse side*” of the mere “trac[ing] back from images to . . . structure,” a tracing that constituted the self-representation of the American literary canon since its inception.¹⁷ By comparison, the restoration and insertion of the white-majority feminist canon is a matter of correcting and altering the established image-structure line of representation as if it restrained the garment of the body politic. With the able editorship of Henry Louis Gates, Jr., and others, explosive quantities of material for study are being made available. Gates’s own work, tracing figurations of Africa, takes us out of the strictly English canon into the area of culture studies.¹⁸

This literature, the literature of slavery, struggle, freedom, social production, is different from the narratives of migrant ethnicity inscribed on the body of something called “America.” There cannot be a general concept of the other that can produce and secure both. In the interest of solidarity and gesture politics, we must forget these differences. For the painstaking task of training students and teachers within the institutional obligation to certify a canon, however, we must remember them.

It seems right that the literature of the working class should form a part of disciplinary preparation. Yet in this parade of abstract figures on the grid of canonical calculation—woman, gay, lesbian, black, ethnic—the class-subject is aggressively more abstract as a concept. And on that level of abstraction, there may be a contradiction between embattled class consciousness and the American Dream. Perhaps in Britain the situation is different; both because of its *earlier* entry into the organized left and its *later* entry into something resembling the American Dream, through Thatcher’s brilliant maneuvers.¹⁹ One cannot not commend the study of the writing of the exploited in struggle. Yet is there something particularly disqualifying about “working-class” becoming a canonical descriptive rather than an oppositional transformative? Certainly the basic argument of Jonathan’s Rée’s *Proletarian Philosophers* would seem to suggest so.²⁰

This could in fact be the problem with all noncanonical teaching in the humanities, an implicit confusion between *descriptive* canonical practices within an institution and *transformative* practices relating

to some "real" world. It is this area of confusion that can be depolemized and made productive, through deconstructive strategies of teaching. With this in mind, I will soon touch upon the need for deconstructive, power/knowledge-based, generally post-structuralist, preparation for our *faculty*. My cautions about the *undergraduate* teaching of poststructuralism relates to the breeding of recuperative analogies or preprogrammed hostility toward post-structuralism within the institutional calculus.

Let us, for the moment, avoid this problem and go back to our English major, strung tight with the excitement of learning to read the diversity of the new canon: a bit of the old masters in new perspectives, women's literature, black women's literature, a glimpse of Afro-America, the literature of gendered homosexuality, of migrant ethnicity, of the exploited in struggle.

We are taking good teaching for granted, a teaching that can make the student grasp that this *is* a canon, that this *is* the proper object of study of the new English major. Teaching is a different matter from our list of ingredients.²¹ The proof of the pudding is in the classroom. And, as I will say again, pedagogy talk is different from conference talk. Let us then return to our well-taught undergraduate and look at the last two items on our list: theory, and the literature of the rest of the world.

Theory in the United States institution of the profession of English is often shorthand for the general critique of humanism undertaken in France in the wake of the Second World War and then, in a double-take, further radicalized in the mid-sixties in the work of the so-called poststructuralists. I believe this material has no claim to a *separate* enclave in our undergraduate major.²²

(This remark is not as dire as it sounds. It is because I am confident of the *practical* possibilities of the critique of humanism that I am cautious about using it too soon as more than a pedagogic method, or as a pervasive and foregrounded structural topic of discussion. I am *not* discouraging theoretical teaching, or even an integration of theory into the general approach, on the undergraduate level.)

The critique of humanism in France was related to the perceived failure of the European ethical subject after the war. The second wave in the mid-sixties, coming in the wake of the Algerian revolution, sharpened this in terms of disciplinary practice in the humanities and social sciences because, as historians, philosophers, sociologists, and psychologists, the participants felt that their practice was not merely a disinterested pursuit of knowledge, but productive in the making of human beings. It was because of this that they

did not accept unexamined human experience as the source of meaning and the making of meaning as an unproblematic thing. And each one of them offered a method that would challenge the outlines of a discipline: archaeology, genealogy, power/knowledge reading, schizo-analysis, rhizo-analysis, nonsubjective psychoanalysis, affirmative deconstruction, paralogic legitimation. At the end of the Second World War, the self-representation of the United States, on the other hand, was that of a savior, both militarily and, as the architect of the Marshall Plan, in the economic and therefore sociocultural sphere. In fact, given the nature of United States society, the phrase “failure of the ethical subject felt by humanist intellectuals” has almost no meaning. And, given the ego-based pragmatism in the fields of history, philosophy, sociology, psychology and, indeed, literary criticism in the United States, the majority of United States teachers in the humanities saw and see the relevant French intellectuals as merely being *antihumanists* who believe that there is no human subject and no truth. As Pierre Bourdieu makes clear in his *Homo Academicus*, these intellectuals did not have an impact on the protocols of institutional pedagogy in France either.²³ I think therefore it is absurd to expect our undergraduate majors to clue into this package called “theory” as part of the canon. There is often a required History of Criticism course for them. I suppose the impact of “theory” in literary criticism can find a corner there.²⁴ If they can understand Plato against the poets, or Coleridge on the Imagination, and Freud on Hoffmann, they can understand Barbara Johnson on Poe. And the critique of the subject that they *can* learn from the countercanonical new material is that the old canon conspired often unwittingly to make the straight white Christian man of property the ethical universal.

Because the use of what is called “theory” is in “educating the educators,” it is the doctoral student—the future teacher—who can be carefully inserted into it. And although I see no harm in introductory courses in theory on this level, I feel its real arena is an elected sequence, where interested students are prepared to resonate with something so much outside their own thoroughly pragmatic national tradition. By “preparation” I do not mean just chunks of Marx, Nietzsche, Freud, Heidegger. I mean practice in analyzing critical prose. I have no experience in long-term teaching at elite institutions. In my experience doctoral students in English are generally encouraged to judge without preparation. This is lethal in the critique of the canon, and doubly so in the study of so-called “theory,” for the practitioners there are writers of historical, sociological, philosophical, psychological prose who rely on rhetoric to

help them. These students must also take seriously their foreign language requirement, which is generally a scandal. The intellectual-historical difference between Western Europe and the Anglo-United States in the post-War and Cold War years and indeed the difference in the fate of liberal humanism in these spaces is such that the most conscientious translators have often destroyed and indeed trivialized the delicacy as well as the power of the critique, not knowing what to preserve.

These students must learn that it is possible to be “wrong” on a certain restrictive level and take that as an incentive for further inquiry. I know the bumper sticker says “Kids need praise everyday,” but doctoral students, who are going to reproduce cognitive authority soon, might be encouraged to recognize that acknowledgement of error before texts from another tradition need not be disabling or paralyzing. I emphasize this because here we are attempting not merely to enlarge the canon with a countercanon but to dethrone canonical *method*: not only in literary criticism but in social production; the axiom that something called concrete experience is the last instance. The canon is, after all, not merely the authentic books of the Bible, it is also, the *OED* tells us, “a fundamental principle . . . or axiom governing the systematic or scientific treatment of a subject.” Why is it necessary to gut the canon in this way? I hope to touch upon it in my last section. But I also hope that those students in the doctoral stream who choose to follow this counter-intuitive route will acquire some notion of its usefulness.

I have kept the rest of the world till the end. I think a cursory acquaintance with world literature outside of Euramerica should be part of the general undergraduate requirement. On the level of the English major, especially if we keep the single-author courses, a survey course is an insult to world literature. I would propose a one-semester senior seminar, shared with the terminal M.A., utilizing the resources of the Asian, Latin American, Pacific, and African studies, in conjunction with the creative writing programs, where the student is made to share the difficulties and triumphs of translation. There is nothing that would fill out an English major better than a sense of the limits of this exquisite and supple language.

The division between substantive expansion of the canon and a critique of canonical method is most rigorously to be kept in mind in world literature studies on the graduate level: colonial and post-colonial discourse, studies in a critique of imperialism. As long as this line of work is critical of the canon it can remain conscientiously researched straight English: Laura Brown’s work with Swift and Gauri Viswanathan’s on T. S. Eliot come to mind. One can think

of the role of the navy in Jane Austen's *Persuasion*, or of Christianity in *Othello*, and so on. But as soon as it becomes a substantive insertion into the canon, we should call a halt.

There has been a recent spate of jobs opening up in the anglophone literature of the Third World. This is to be applauded. But the doctoral study of colonial and postcolonial discourse and the critique of imperialism as a substantive undertaking cannot be contained within English. In my thinking, this study should yoke itself with other disciplines, including the social sciences, so that we have degrees in English and history, English and Asian studies, English and anthropology, English and African studies, where the English half of it will allow the student to read critically the production of knowledge in the other discipline, as well as her own all-too-easy conclusions. *Mutatis mutandis*, metropolitan national literature departments can also serve as bases.

I think this specialty should carry a rigorous language requirement in at least one colonized vernacular. What I am describing is the core of a transnational study of culture, a revision of the old vision of Comparative Literature. Otherwise:

Colonial and postcolonial discourse studies can, at worst, allow the indigenous elite from other countries to claim marginality without any developed doctoral-level sense of the problematic of decolonized space and without any method of proper verification within the discipline.

If this study is contained within English (or other metropolitan literatures), without expansion into fully developed transnational culture studies, colonial and postcolonial discourse studies can also construct a canon of "Third World Literature (in translation)" that may lead to a "new orientalism." I have written about this phenomenon at length elsewhere.²⁵ It can fix Eurocentric paradigms, taking "magical realism" to be the trademark of Third World literary production, for example. It can begin to define "the rest of the world" simply by checking out if it is feeling sufficiently "marginal" with regard to the West or not.

We cannot fight imperialism by perpetrating a "new orientalism." My argument is not a guilt and shame trip. It is a warning. Indeed, the institutional imperatives for breaching the very *imperium* of English, even with its revised canon, cannot be developed from within English departments, for in its highly sophisticated vocabulary for cultural descriptions, the knowledge of English can sometimes sanction a kind of global ignorance.

Here is a rationalist empiricist historian's warning, sounded nearly a decade ago, against what we might be doing now: "Any serious

theoretical explanation of the historical field outside of feudal Europe will have to supersede traditional and generic contrasts with it, and proceed to a concrete and accurate typology of social formations and State systems in their own right, which respects their very great differences of structure and development. It is merely in the night of our ignorance [and we sanction this ignorance by canonizing it within English] that all alien shapes take on the same hue."²⁶

III

Arrived here, it seems to me that institutes and curricula for the transnational study of culture have become an item on the agenda. They can help us undo disciplinary boundaries and clear a space for study in a constructive way. They can provide the field for the new approach.

The point is to negotiate between the national, the global, and the historical as well as the contemporary diasporic. We must both anthropologize the West, and study the various cultural systems of Africa, Asia, Asia-Pacific, and the Americas as if peopled by historical agents. Only then can we begin to put together the story of the development of a cosmopolitanism that is global, gendered, and dynamic. In our telematic or microelectronic world, such work can get quite technical: consideration of the broader strategies of information control, productive of satisfactory and efficient cultural explanations; consideration of the systems of representation for the generated explanations; mapping out the techniques of their validation and deployment. This can disclose an inexhaustible field of connections. A discipline must constrain the inexhaustible. Yet the awareness of the potential inexhaustibility works against the conviction of cultural supremacy, a poor starting point for new research and teaching.

This last paragraph is grant proposal talk. How does that type of prose translate to teaching talk? Let us move from high tech to humanism. Let us learn and teach how to distinguish between "*internal* colonization"—the patterns of exploitation and domination of disenfranchised groups *within* the United States—and the various different heritages or operations of colonization in the rest of the world.²⁷ The United States is certainly a multiracial culture, but its parochial multicultural debates, however animated, are not a picture of globality. Thus we must negotiate between nationalism (uni- or multicultural) and globality.

Let us take seriously the idea that systems of representation come

to hand when we secure our own culture—our own cultural explanations. Think upon the following set:

(1) The making of an American must be defined by at least a desire to enter the “We the People” of the Constitution. There is no way that the “radical” or the “ethnicist” can take a position against civil rights, the Equal Rights Amendment, or great transformative opinions such as *Roe v. Wade*. One way or another, we cannot not want to inhabit this great rational abstraction.

(2) Traditionally, this desire for the abstract American “we” has been recoded by the fabrication of ethnic enclaves, artificial and affectively supportive subsocieties that, claiming to preserve the ethnos or culture of origin, move further and further away from the vicissitudes and transformations of the nation or group of origin. If a constitution establishes at least the legal possibility of an abstract collectivity, these enclaves provide a countercollectivity that seems reassuringly “concrete.”

(3) *Our* inclination to obliterate the difference between United States internal colonization and the dynamics of decolonized space makes use of this already established American ethnocultural agenda. At worst, it secures the “they” of development or aggression against the constitutional “we.” At best, it suits our institutional convenience and brings the rest of the world home. A certain double standard, a certain sanctioned ignorance, can now begin to operate in the areas of the study of central and so-called marginal cultures.

There is a lot of name-calling on both sides of the West-and-the-rest debate in the United States. In my estimation, although the politics of the only-the-West supporters is generally worth questioning, in effect the two sides legitimize each other. In a Foucauldian language, one could call them an opposition within the same discursive formation. The new culture studies must displace this opposition by keeping nation and globe distinct, and by taking a moratorium on cultural supremacy as an unquestioned springboard.

I am not speaking against the tendency to conflate ethnos of origin and the historical space left behind, within the astonishing construction of a multicultural and multiracial identity for the United States. What I am suggesting is that if, as academics in the humanities, we take this as the founding principle for a study of globality, then we are off base. In the most practical terms, we are allowing a parochial decanonization debate to stand in for a study of the world.

A slightly different point needs to be made here. I am not arguing for an unexamined nativism as an alibi for culture studies. To keep the rest of the world obliged to remain confined within a mere ethnic pride and an acting out of a basically static ethnicity is to

confuse political gestures with an awareness of history. That confinement was rather astutely practiced by the traditionally defined disciplinary subdivision of labor within history, anthropology, and comparative literature. Culture studies must set up an active give-and-take with them so that it gains in substance what it provides in method. And, the educators must educate themselves in effective interdisciplinary (postdisciplinary?) teaching. As a practical academic, one must be thinking about released time for faculty and curricular development in the newly instituted programs. These endeavors must ask: How can models of reasoning be taken as culture-free? How can help and explanation be both culture specific and “objective?” If there are answers to these questions, how can they remain relevant across disciplines?

IV

In conclusion, I will try to indicate how deconstruction, feminism, and Marxism might make a change in the teaching of transnational culture studies.

Deconstruction: Postcoloniality—the heritage of imperialism in the rest of the globe—is a deconstructive case. As follows: Those of us from formerly colonized countries are able to communicate with each other and with the metropolis, to exchange and to establish sociality and transnationality, because we have had access to the culture of imperialism. Shall we then assign to that culture, in the words of the ethical philosopher Bernard Williams, a measure of “moral luck?”²⁸ I think there can be no doubt that the answer is “no.” This impossible “no” to a structure, which one critiques, yet inhabits intimately, is the deconstructive philosophical position, and the everyday here and now of “postcoloniality” is a case of it. Further, the political claims that are most urgent in decolonized space are tacitly recognized as coded within the legacy of imperialism: nationhood, constitutionality, citizenship, democracy, socialism, even culturalism. Within the historical frame of exploration, colonization, and decolonization, what is being *effectively* reclaimed is a series of regulative political concepts, the supposedly authoritative narrative of whose production was written elsewhere, in the social formations of Western Europe. They are thus being reclaimed, indeed claimed, as concept metaphors for which no *historically* adequate referent may be advanced from postcolonial space. That does not make the claims less urgent. A concept metaphor without an adequate referent may be called a catachresis by the definitions of classical rhetoric. These

claims to catachreses as foundations also make postcoloniality a deconstructive case. Deconstruction, paradoxically, is the most useful position in the study of a globality not confused with ethnicity.

Feminism: In a provocative sentence in “The Laugh of the Medusa,” Hélène Cixous writes, “as subject *for* history, woman always occurs simultaneously in several places.”²⁹ This gendered subject makes visible what, in the old figurations of the pluralized woman (as mother, wife, sister, daughter, widow, female chattel, whore, exceptional stateswoman, or public woman with femininity recoded, and so on), was excluded as historical narratives were shored up, in many different ways, with the representative *man* as their subject. At the same time, however, it cannot be denied that the best and the worst in the history of the feminist movement also entails the presentation of *woman* as unified representative subject. In this divided terrain, as woman is normalized into the definition of “We the People,” through the operation of both the guaranteed instruments, *both*, that is to say, “transformative opinions” and “constitutional amendments,” both *Roe v. Wade* and the ERA, how are we to deal with this defining of ourselves into part of a general will by way of articles of “foreign”—that is to say, gender-alienated—manufacture? United States women, if they are attentive to the importance of frame narratives, are in a unique and privileged position to continue a *persistent* critique of mere apologists for the Constitution, even as they use its instruments to secure entry into its liberating purview. Persistently to critique a structure that one cannot not (wish to) inhabit is the deconstructive stance.³⁰

Such a strong autocritique, will, I hope, be able to take a clear look, once again, at the relationship between nationalism and globality in this sphere. It is through the route of feminism that economic theories of social choice and philosophical theories of ethical preference can be complicated by real cultural material.

Marxism: By Marx’s own estimation, the most original thing that he stumbled upon was that the human being produced not objects but a “contentless and simple” thing which got coded as soon as produced.³¹ This contentless thing, misleading and conveniently called “value,” is not pure form, but just a general description of being human that subsumes “consciousness” and “materiality.” The coding of value makes all exchange possible. In the European nineteenth century and for Marx, the most important arena of value-coding for study and action was economic. But if one considers one of Marx’s most important premises, one can see that this idea of value-producing/value-coding/code-exchanging as being-human has many areas of operation. To “name” a few: affective value,

cognitive value, indeed “cultural” value. To see this allows us to negotiate escapes from fairly static notions of cultural identity ready to be investigated and reported on. It allows us to use and transform some of the best suggestions of poststructuralism and feminism. It allows us to transform what is most fragile in Marx—and indeed crumbling daily at the moment—the predictive Eurocentric scenario, buttressed only by a spectacular *scaffolding* of crisis theory and the theory of a world market far in the future.

Marx’s fully developed economic analysis is situated within this more inclusive approach. It would be out of place—and time—here to present a full-dress account of the responsible displacement of the “economic in the last instance” to the “economic as the most abstract instance” in the complex network of value codings. Let me rather end with a heavily coded sentence: As the apparatuses of higher education in the humanities incessantly recode, through fully developed techniques of knowledge, the web woven by the rational (dynamic) abstractions of the constitutionality of the world’s nation states on the one hand and the electronic (mathematical) abstractions of the economic as such on the other, a responsible study of culture can help us chart the production of versions of reality.

Such heavily coded sentences are properly unpacked in books, practically reassembled in teaching. Indeed, the hoped-for future of everything written in the name of culture studies today must, I think, be the classroom staged as intervention, too painfully aware of its limits to dream only of integration.

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NOTES

1 E. D. Hirsch, Jr., *Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know* (Boston, 1987), p. 164.

2 I am most grateful to Professor Ackerman for permission to refer to unpublished material. A longer treatment of constitutional matters is to be found in my “Constitutions and Culture Studies,” *Yale Journal of Law and the Humanities*, 2, No. 1 (Winter 1990), 133–47.

3 Elizabeth G. Cohen and Joan Benton, “Making Groupwork Work,” *American Educator*, 12, No. 3 (Fall 1988), 11–12.

4 For a discussion of such questions as they apply to more elementary levels, see Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak et al., “Who Needs the Great Works?: A Debate on the Canon, Core Curricula, and Culture,” *Harper’s*, 279 (Sept. 1989), 1672.

5 Jean Baudrillard, “The Precession of Simulacra” in *Simulations*, tr. Paul Foss et al. (New York, 1983).

6 Robin Blackburn, *The Overthrow of Colonial Slavery 1776–1848*, 2nd ed. (London, 1937), p. 1.

- 7 Arthur Berridale Keith, *A Constitutional History of India: 1600–1935*, 2nd ed. (London, 1937), p. 1.
- 8 Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (Chicago, 1976), II, 150–51; Ranajit Guha, *A Rule of Property for Bengal: An Essay on the Idea of Permanent Settlement*, 2nd ed. (New Delhi, 1981), p. 62, nn. 2, 45, 75, 76.
- 9 Barry Hindess and Paul Q. Hirst, *An Auto-Critique of Pre-Capitalist Modes of Production* (Atlantic Highlands, N.J., 1977), p. 58.
- 10 Hindess and Hirst, p. 59. I should add that my practical conclusions from the position shared with these two authors are very different from those drawn by them.
- 11 Karl Marx, *Capital*, tr. David Fernbach (New York, 1981), III, 959. For a sense of how important the calculation is, see David R. Roediger and Philip S. Foner, *Our Own Time: A History of American Labor and the Working Day* (London, 1989).
- 12 This is a somewhat parochial United States list. Any consideration of global postcoloniality will have to include diasporas.
- 13 H. P. Marquand, *Women and Thomas Harrow* (New York, 1960), p. 92.
- 14 Elaine Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Brontë to Lessing* (Princeton, 1976); Jane P. Tompkins, *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction, 1790–1860* (New York, 1985).
- 15 In order to appreciate the significance of the quoted phrase, see Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure: History of Sexuality*, II, tr. Robert Hurley (New York, 1985).
- 16 Bell Hooks, *Ain't I a Woman? Black Women and Feminism* (Boston, 1984), and *Talking Black: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black* (Boston, 1989); Hazel V. Carby, *Reconstructing Womanhood: The Emergence of the Afro-American Novelist* (New York, 1987).
- 17 Mary Helen Washington, *Black-Eyed Susans—Midnight Birds* (Garden City, N.Y., 1989). The quoted passage is from Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, tr. Robert Hurley et al. (Minneapolis, 1983), pp. 308–9.
- 18 Henry Louis Gates, Jr., *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of Afro-American Literary Criticism* (New York, 1988); as ed., *Black Literature and Literary Theory* (London, 1984) and *The Schomburg Library of Nineteenth-Century Black Women Writers* (New York, 1988).
- 19 Stuart Hall, *The Hard Road to Renewal: Thatcherism and the Crisis of the Left* (London, 1988).
- 20 Jonathan Rée, *Proletarian Philosophers: Problems in Socialist Culture in Britain, 1900–1940* (Oxford, 1984).
- 21 Nancy Fraser's important article, "Solidarity or Singularity? Richard Rorty Between Romanticism and Technocracy," *Praxis International*, 8, No. 3 (Oct. 1988), 256–83, still remains a list of ingredients, not, as it claims to be, a "recipe."
- 22 Edward Said makes this point in a general way in "Traveling Theory," in his *The World, the Text, and the Critic* (Cambridge, Mass., 1983), pp. 226–47. I would extend "theory" to include general instruction in the great European watershed theorists like Marx and Freud outside of the context of intellectual history.
- 23 Pierre Bourdieu, *Homo Academicus*, tr. Peter Collier (Oxford, 1988).
- 24 For the relationship between "theory" and literary criticism, see the introductory chapter of Rodolphe Gasché, *The Tain of the Mirror: Derrida and the Philosophy of Reflection* (Cambridge, Mass., 1986).
- 25 Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Poststructuralism, Postcoloniality, Marginality, and Value," in *Literary Theory Today*, ed. Peter Collier and Helga Geyer-Ryan (Cambridge, forthcoming).
- 26 Perry Anderson, *Lineages of the Absolutist State* (London, 1974), p. 549.
- 27 Samir Amin, *Unequal Development: An Essay on the Social Formations of Peripheral Capitalism*, tr. Brian Pearce (New York, 1976), p. 369.

28 Bernard Williams, "Moral Luck," in his *Moral Luck: Philosophical Papers 1973–1980* (Cambridge, 1981).

29 Hélène Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa," in *New French Feminisms*, ed. Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron (Amherst, Mass., 1980), p. 252.

30 This argument is discussed in much greater detail in my "Constitutions and Cultural Studies."

31 Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, tr. Ben Fowkes (New York, 1977), I, 90.