

genealogies of cultural phenomena, for these phenomena do not lend themselves to hierarchization or comparison.

Reflection on contemporary cultural studies aims not to consolidate it around certain privileged objects but to locate it in relation to existent disciplinary structures. This reflection requires an understanding of the historical determinants on the emergence of culture as a distinct sphere and on its subsequent conceptualization in anthropology, sociology, and cultural studies itself. Further, the present determinants on cultural studies need to be more fully articulated, especially the peculiar shifting of its terrain, which comprises macroscopic transnational movements and the micropolitical conjunctions along subnational circuits. In this sense, cultural studies fulfills as well as transforms the project of the literary.

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It has become something of a commonplace to observe that critical theory has problematized “the literary.” Though there seems to be a theoretical consensus that the literary is a socially determined category shaped by dominant disciplinary formations, in practice many critics still associate the concept with fiction. As a result, fictional texts are favored objects of investigations in a number of critical approaches practiced in the United States academy. For instance, recent scholarship in postcolonial studies is often concerned with elaborating how literary texts (like novels) disseminated in various ideological state apparatuses, such as the education system, created a bourgeois subject in the colonial period and how growing bodies of fiction produced in former colonies chart the emergence of a national bourgeois subject. This shift toward the interrogating of individual subjectivity and away from the concerns of some of the foundational texts in the field, like Frantz Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth*, which were more engaged in theorizing repressive colonial practices and resistance to them, has meant that postcolonial studies today discloses more about the psychological manipulations of colonialism than about the mechanisms through which it affects the quotidian lives of those under its rule. As postcolonial and cultural studies have become institutionalized in the United States, the critiques of repressive state practices that they launched have been blunted.

Perhaps it is time to turn our critical skills to the cultural artifacts, such as print media, television, and advertising, that are the principal modes through which various narratives of self, other, nation, and the world circulate in the United States. This is not to argue for the retirement of literary analysis: the strategies of reading developed in

literary studies have much to offer cultural criticism. Indeed, an examination of the literary aspects of a cultural artifact, whether produced by an individual or a corporate entity, can initiate an investigation into how representations are embedded in a matrix of economic, geopolitical, and social relations. Attention to narrative devices and structures can help to historicize, for example, women’s fashion advertising in which invocations of “the Third World” draw on late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century texts of colonial exploration.

Yet in order to perform the kind of cultural analysis that links representation to the material conditions of life in the late twentieth century, literary analysis should be supplemented with attention to three critical categories—and to the relations between them—often absent from cultural studies: geopolitics, transnationalism, and formations of state violence. By “geopolitics,” I mean the ways in which political and economic geography shapes domestic policies within states and the relations among states, particularly when national security is involved. My use of “transnationalism” draws on Masao Miyoshi’s definition of “transnational corporations” as “giant companies that not only import and export raw and manufactured goods but also transfer capital, factories, and sales outlets across national borders” (“A Borderless World: From Colonialism to Transnationalism and the Decline of the Nation-State,” *Critical Inquiry* 19 [1993]: 734). And I use “formations of state violence” to signify how concerns about domestic security can lead nation-states into violations against the bodily integrity or property of individuals who reside within their borders, both citizens and persons without legal status conferred on them by the state. Such violations include the states’ sanctioning or carrying out of the destruction of homes and businesses, detention, imprisonment, torture, and murder.

A focus on the interplay among representation, formations of state violence, geopolitics, and transnationalism marks the limits of literary methods in the reading of culture, for this focus helps to disclose the archives of historical trauma that often underwrite narratives. The task of criticism should be to uncover trauma—bodily injury caused by an external agent—in all its modalities in commodity culture by asking the following questions. What are the conditions that allow for the articulation of an image or a narrative at a particular moment? What kind of national ethos does the representation of a commodity evoke and to what extent does the representation acknowledge or occlude the struggles of those who are resisting the state’s authority? In what ways do the interests of transnational corporations and the state converge? Are workers, consumers, or the natural environment harmed in the production and use of a commodity? Be-

cause representations and commodities do not always explicitly refer to these aspects of trauma in their formal structures, it is necessary to contextualize our readings of them by invoking our extraliterary knowledge of history, politics, and economics. The most politically useful practice of cultural studies, and the most humanitarian, to my mind, engages these questions in order to expose the tyranny of states and transnational corporations.

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“Too many people simply rename what they were already doing to take advantage of the cultural studies boom. . . . [A] scholarly discipline, like literature, cannot begin to do cultural studies simply by expanding its dominion to encompass specific cultural forms (western novels, say, or TV sitcoms, or rock and roll), social groups (working class youth, for example, or communities ‘on the margins,’ or women’s rugby teams), practices (wilding, quilting, hacking), or periods (contemporary culture, for example, as opposed to historical work). Cultural studies involves how and why such work is done, not just its content” (10–11).

The urge to ask when or which literary scholars have been content with “just . . . content” underlines the unease about current relations between literary and cultural studies that is evident in this passage from Cary Nelson, Paula A. Treichler, and Lawrence Grossberg’s editorial introduction to *Cultural Studies* ([New York: Routledge, 1992] 1–16). The editors’ claim that “textual analysis in literary studies carries a history of convictions that texts are properly understood as wholly self-determined and independent objects as well as a bias about which kinds of texts are worthy of analysis” (2) also seems grossly unfair to all the literary scholars who long ago started a thorough questioning of such traditional attitudes and who have even concluded that new “ways of contextualizing literature in the expanded field of discourse, culture, ideology, race, and gender are so different from the old models of literary study according to authors, nations, periods, and genres that the term ‘literature’ may no longer adequately describe our object of study” (“The Bernheimer Report,” *Comparative Literature in the Age of Multiculturalism*, ed. Charles Bernheimer [Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1995] 42).

There is not and never was any one “object of study” in literary studies, although *the literary* refers to a conceptual context relevant for critical work. The notion that literary analysis is not a strong method for cultural interpretation seems ridiculous in the light of Bakhtin, Benjamin, Barthes, and other prominent (literary?) scholars

who are among the progenitors of cultural studies as we know it.

The parameters of the literary involve an appreciation of texts and of their aesthetic qualities, an awareness of a literary tradition and institution that circumscribe the experience of reading, and a dialogic performance of culture where literature is an experiential and experimental scene of language. A narrow rhetorical analysis of texts, a weakened social presence of the institution of literature, and the need to think of literacy in broad cultural terms may contribute to a turning away from the literary in the “cultural studies boom.” However, the three interrelated parameters of the literary, considered with their historical and social implications, reconfirm the cultural role of the literary. The practice of reading and an aesthetic appreciation of texts are instrumental for much cultural criticism. The literary provides an eminent access to traditions, because literature, the art of language, is steeped in the historicity of language, which includes the ways in which cultural legacies are named and reprocessed.

The national legacy, for better or worse, is a crucial factor—although often obliquely so. For someone who comes from a society where literature and language have been the main sources of cultural values and national historicity, it seems impossible to disengage literary and linguistic inquiry from cultural studies. One of the traps of cultural studies may be that it takes language for granted, just as literary criticism has sometimes focused on language too narrowly. Language and the problem of translation are most likely to be underestimated in countries where English is the national medium. A society that speaks a lingua franca risks becoming inattentive to the ways in which cultural borders intersect with and differ from national ones and in which both kinds of boundary influence views of class, race, sex, and gender. Charged with the imaginary together with the quotidian, literary language is an important forum for the politics of place. Encompassing various cultural practices, a literary work can flesh out visions of individual and social sites, whether deeply rooted habitus, exile, or some form of the boundary existence increasingly characteristic of contemporary life.

Such arguments do not diminish the benefits that literary scholarship can draw from developments in cultural studies. If the literary is now increasingly viewed as a more open category than it has been at any time since the latter half of the eighteenth century, this is in part due to the challenge of cultural studies. You can certainly “do cultural studies” without renaming what you do. Literary scholars might want to pay more attention to the ways in which literary works constitute fields of cultural knowledge, critically mapping the acts and sites of culture.