

AN INTERVIEW WITH LAWRENCE GROSSBERG.
PERSONAL REFLECTIONS ON THE POLITICS AND PRACTICE OF
CULTURAL STUDIES

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LAWRENCE GROSSBERG, one of the leading exponents of the cultural studies project today, is Morris Davis Distinguished Professor of Communication Studies and Adjunct Distinguished Professor of American Studies, Anthropology and Geography at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Apart from over one hundred already published articles and essays, he is also the author and editor of numerous books, including *It's a Sin: Essays on Postmodernism, Politics and Culture* (1988), *We Gotta Get Out Of This Place: Popular Conservatism and Postmodern Culture* (1992), *Dancing in Spite of Myself: Essays in Popular Culture* (1997); *Caught in the Crossfire: Kids, Politics and America's Future* (2005), as well as the forthcoming, *Cultural Studies in the Future Tense* (2010). Professor Grossberg is also co-editor (with Della Pollock) of the journal *Cultural Studies*, which is one of the longest-running and most respected academic journals in its field, and one of the founders of the influential and thriving world Association for Cultural Studies (ACS).

1) *Professor, by way of introduction and/or presentation, I have picked an item from your life history that, I believe, may be fairly incomprehensible to newcomers trying to situate you and your work within the field of cultural studies. How is it that an American undergraduate in Philosophy and History should end up studying at Birmingham University at the end of the sixties?*

LG: An interesting question. It is perhaps not as strange as it might appear on first glance. As it turns out, Richard Hoggart, the founder of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, had spent a year visiting at my university, before I was there, and had become friends with some of my professors, so they were among the very few academics in the U.S. who knew anything about the CCCS. And you have to remember when I graduated: 1968. These were, shall we say, tumultuous times and because of my political activities and the realities of the military draft, it seemed reasonable for me to leave the country. Fortunately, I had won a Wilson Fellowship to pay for my graduate education. My professors suggested that I use it to go to the Centre where, they assured me, my interests would be deepened and my politics supported, while being able to keep a low profile.

2) *In intellectual and cultural histories of the field, the origins of your considerable contribution to the project of cultural studies are usually traced back to the political, methodological, theoretical training you received at the Birmingham school, but your days*

as a graduate student at the Center for Contemporary Cultural Studies were really quite short-lived weren't they? What happened?

LG: I did not keep a low profile! I got involved in a student strike at Birmingham, which brought my presence there—I was described as an outside agitator—to the attention of various authorities. And, simultaneously, I met a very politicized and countercultural theatre group who invited me to go with them to the continent. I remember a wonderful evening with Richard Hoggart, sharing a bottle of whiskey, where he helped me to decide to stand up to my fears and go with the group. So it seemed at the moment that the wisest course of action was to leave the country rather quickly.

3) *When on tour, did this theatre group ever come over and perform in Spain? If so, what were your impressions of, and experiences in, Franco-ist Spain?*

LG: The group traveled all around Europe in 1969 and 1970, and we tried to go to Spain. We even had some performances booked if I remember correctly, but when we got to the border, there was no way the border guards were going to let in these two van loads of hippie communist anarchists ... , so no, I never did get to Spain.

4) *Looking back, which would you say was the most important of your undergraduate experiences in shaping your decision, and henceforth your intellectual trajectory and professional career: your university training in History and Philosophy, your studies at the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies or your theatre venture?*

LG: You ask what were the most important determining factors in shaping my intellectual trajectory and professional career. And I would have to answer, all of them. I am a great believer in complexity and overdetermination. I think my undergraduate education shaped my love of philosophy and defined my interest—partly through my participation in the counterculture—in the relation of culture and politics. My time at Birmingham defined the project—a particular way of being an intellectual and doing political intellectual work—that has driven my entire career. And my experience in the theatre company taught me how to perform and helped me develop my own style.

5) *Once 'settled' as Professor of Communication Studies at Chapel Hill, North Carolina, did your cultural studies' 'streak' ever become a matter of controversy or prove to be a challenge for you professionally?*

LG: My first teaching job, which only lasted for a year, was at Purdue University in Indiana. I did not like it, and they had no interest, really, in any of my work. So I took a job in Speech Communication back at Illinois. Now perhaps I should back up. When I got to Birmingham, one of the things you had to do was define an individual research project, and I decided to continue the work I had begun as an undergraduate on popular music. Let me be clear—what I was interested in was not popular music, but the counterculture and politics, and I was convinced that, somehow, music was one of the keys one needed to unpack and understand the politics of the counterculture. So, at Illinois I continued my interests. I was defined, and presented myself as having three fields: philosophy (and I was one of the people who created as it were something that is still called the philosophy of communication); cultural studies (although almost no one

outside of Illinois had ever heard of it); and popular music (rock and roll, and again, I suppose, I was one of the people who helped eventually to establish the idea of popular music studies as a legitimate field, although again, I was never interested in the study of popular music for its own sake). Now the truth is that just about all of my professors—with the exception of Jim Carey—thought I was crazy and constantly tried to discourage me. There would be no jobs, they said. None of these fields had any legitimacy or even recognizability at the time. And, for the most part, what I encountered from the university in general, and in the discipline of communication studies, was largely hostility—hostility to the political and interdisciplinary project of cultural studies, hostility to theory per se, and, certainly, hostility to the idea of taking popular culture—and especially rock and roll—seriously.

But I was fortunate to win a few allies—not always people who were doing or wanted to do anything similar, but who recognized that the very strength of communication studies was its openness to multiple questions and perspectives. Now, I think, all three of my foci have become legitimate and even powerful forces in the academy. Having said that, there has always been, and no doubt will continue to be, hostility to each of them—although I think that both theory and popular culture have established themselves, although I do not always like the ways they have done so. Cultural studies is a different story—it has become successful—in some places and some disciplines, but at the same time, there are always forces standing up against it, and I sometimes wonder what the price of success has been, since I simply do not recognize much of what passes for cultural studies in the United States. I often do not know what people mean when they say cultural studies, whether as its champions or its enemies. And today, there is certainly both a disciplinary backlash against the interdisciplinary project of cultural studies, and an administrative, ‘neo-liberal’ effort to reconstitute the university in ways that would leave little or no space for critical projects like cultural studies.

You may know this, but when I was hired at North Carolina, it was partly to help create a formal program in cultural studies, which has been very successful for almost fifteen years, and had garnered a good reputation internationally. But now, that program has been closed down by an administrative who is opposed, in my opinion, not only to interdisciplinarity in general but to cultural studies in particular. And since the times are bad economically, he can use that as a cover from which there is no appeal.

6) *Cultural Studies has always been recognized as a particularly diverse (and often highly contested) field of intellectual debate. Given how central your work has been to the establishment of Cultural studies in the States, could you tell us a little about your opinions and/or position respecting those, at times, disparaging accounts of the ‘Americanization’ of cultural studies?*

LG: Let me begin by saying something, which I have said many times, about the diverse nature of cultural studies. I have always believed in Raymond Williams’s distinction between the project and its formations. I do believe that there is a common project in cultural studies—that is what I learnt at Birmingham. But just because a part of that project involves a commitment to contextuality, cultural studies must take different shapes—theoretically, methodologically, politically—as it tries to make sense of, and

respond to, different contexts and different questions. And even within any context, there are probably many possible formations that can be constructed to respond to different questions, different ways into the contexts. So one has to be careful about trying to define the content of cultural studies, which often ends up re-inscribing what my friend John Clarke calls “the diversity that won”.

On the other hand, I do think it matters what cultural studies is in any context, that it cannot be just anything. Now three different things have happened in the United States. First, cultural studies has largely become an almost generic term for any critical or political investigation of culture or even, more broadly, for anyone studying culture (and so some people even use it for an aspect of area studies or for intercultural studies). Second, cultural studies has been caught up in the politics of disciplines in the U.S. academy. One has to remember how large the system of higher education is (and how much money is involved, including textbooks). Some disciplines—such as ‘literature’ and anthropology—are very large and powerful; others like communication are relatively small and weak. So literary scholars often claim cultural studies as something they discovered or invented, and many of them, even those who claim to do cultural studies, are likely to be unfamiliar with my work or much of the material that I would cite in the U.S. Often, in such places, cultural studies means ‘high theory’, or perhaps ethno-graphic methods (especially around questions of audiences), or, sometimes, the study of popular culture itself—as if doing studies of some aspect of popular culture or everyday life as if it were a text with its politics inscribed in it were sufficient for doing cultural studies. I do not mean to deny that there are people in literary studies in the U.S. academy doing cultural studies as I use it, but more often the politics of cultural studies in literary studies is almost entirely textual—whether discursive or ideological.

The third development often seen as the ‘Americanization’ of cultural studies involves the emergence of a form of cultural populism, associated most directly with the work of John Fiske, a British scholar who spent a long time in Australia before coming to the U.S. (and, more currently, Henry Jenkins, etc.). The notion of *populism* here is usually used to describe analysts who tended to celebrate consumption and/or popular culture as resistance, and who denigrated the elitism of particular forms of culture and cultural criticism. Often, such arguments were mounted against conservative leftists, who failed to recognize the consequences of changing social and cultural relations for political tactics. Fiske’s work, and much of that which he inspired, took this position to an extreme, but one can see in it the fully appropriate argument that people do make do with the resources they are given in order to live the best life they can, that they are not merely the puppets or pawns of ruling blocs or capitalist commodities, as if politics were always knowable before any investigation. But, in the end, Fiske himself fell into the same trap, always assuming that the grounds for optimism were present and active.

Now it is easy to be critical of such work because it went too far and because it seemed to undermine its own claim to being contextually relevant. I would want to argue that, at a certain moment in certain contexts, the argument of populism is absolutely necessary, not as a conclusion but as the ground for the possibility of further political work, but only in certain contexts, under certain conditions.

But I also think it is a measure of the resistance to cultural studies (as well as how far the left intelligentsia has fallen, so that work is increasingly done only on the destruction of any other potential collaborator or ally), that its critics—those who criticize the Americanization of cultural studies—take these examples as somehow representative. I am always surprised by the number of people who attack cultural studies and then, almost as an aside, say: “of course, I am not talking about people like Stuart Hall, or John Clarke, or sometimes Larry Grossberg, etc., whose work remains political, or who take economics seriously, or who do not succumb to the seductions of high theory, etc.” I think that if you want to attack a position, you choose the best exemplars, not the worst. I think that probably most of what is produced in any field, in any discipline, in any paradigm, can be easily criticized. The real challenge is to take the best of such work, and enter into a conversation with it.

So, do I think cultural studies in the United States is a disappointment, or in trouble? Well, I think much of what goes on under its name has little to do with the project of cultural studies, and that there is a lot of important work taking place that should be acknowledged, although it is not always visible, not always done by the academic stars, and not always done in those disciplines that are highly visible, for whatever reasons.

7) *As you can imagine, for anyone setting out to discover what this buzz-word cultural studies is all about, the fact of coming up against a whirlpool of different trends, versions, movements and revisions often proves somewhat off-putting - not to say downright demoralizing! On this basis, I was wondering if you would/could prescribe a short, attractive 'way in' to cultural studies in the form of a few fundamentals about what it takes to be a cultural studies practitioner and what prerequisites are necessary for doing this kind of work.*

LG: This is probably the hardest question you will ask me, precisely because I have answered it so many times, in so much of my work! Still, let me try. When I went to the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies in 1968, I found something I was not looking for. I found people—and a project—who, whether self-consciously or not—were trying to find a different way of being an academic, a different way of bringing politics, theory and empirical research together to produce useful knowledge, and a different form of intellectual practice. I found an odd assortment of people, with an even odder range of interests, who clearly knew that in some sense they did not belong in the university and yet, in another sense, that the university was exactly where they had to be. They were not trying to create a new universal model, but simply a way to answer the particular sorts of questions that drove them into the academy in the first place, questions that for them anchored their existence as academics in their everyday lives and struggles.

The academy organizes knowledge—its objects and the questions that can be addressed to them—into disciplines, constructed by boundaries that, as any academic knows, make it difficult if not impossible to mix objects and questions. Cultural studies committed itself to interdisciplinarity—not just to bringing together disciplines, but operating in the space between disciplines. Questions should be determined by the world in which we live, after all, and not by disciplines.

Moreover, the folks at the Centre also understood that the questions the world poses for us are not about specific objects but about how they exist and function within the larger contexts of everyday life and history. Something very important follows from this: while disciplines construct artificial objects by segregating elements of the social world and cutting them off from all relationships, the 'object' that concerns cultural studies is the context of social life itself, a context that can only be understood as a set of interwoven relationships. We have to find theories of relationality!

Second, the academy (especially at the time) de-values culture, putting it on a pedestal as art, or rendering it completely utilitarian as language skills, sending it off to the humanities. The project of cultural studies recognized, however under-theorized, the ubiquity and power of culture across the entire social field. And, in the contemporary world, culture seemed to have taken on the role of a primary agent of social transformation. This is precisely what we needed to understand!

Third, the academic norms of the university define the production of knowledge as an act of simplification; that is why the disciplines are necessary. In that sense, the typical forms of knowledge enact a kind of reductionism, by which the complexity of the real world is reduced in the service of disciplinary norms of explanation. Cultural studies chooses to embrace the complexity, to argue that you cannot understand the human world except by mapping the multiplicity of relations that constitute any context, and any event within it. So, rather than looking for *the* answer, rather than thinking dis-junctively (it is either *a* or *b*), cultural studies thinks conjunctively (it is *a* and *b* and ...).

Fourth, the university demands that knowledge be divorced from questions of power and politics. The young intellectuals at the Centre understood, before they had read Foucault, that this was not only impossible but, in some ways, undesirable. If ideas matter, if knowledge is a vital part of any effort to change the world, then it is the task of the intellectual, as Gramsci put it, to know more than the other side, to tell better stories about the present so that people can envision other futures, and formulate more effective strategies to realize those futures. Even more problematically, the norms of the academy demand a radical separation of passion and knowledge, but how can anyone who cares about the world, and about the role of knowledge in shaping that world, simply put aside their passion?

Fifth, the university seems to champion a destructive and competitive vision of knowledge production. So the truth and value of one's ideas can only be established by demolishing, in a continuous insatiable critique, everyone else's work. Rather than seeing intellectual work as a conversation and collaboration, as a shared project, the academy makes it into a career in which everyone competes with everyone else. And, as a result, you have to think of your own work in terms of impossible goals, because you have to protect yourself from everyone else who will attack you—so you must produce work that cannot be criticized, that is perfect and complete. Cultural studies at the Centre attempted to read everyone into the conversation, to recognize that it was building on and entering into an ongoing conversation, and that cultural studies work was inherently collaborative. Hence, intellectual work should always be viewed with a humility that seemed misplaced in the academy.

Finally, the academy operates with a simple epistemology in which something is either true—universally true—or false. But the people at the Centre seemed to already

understand that this was where the deepest problems with the norms of knowledge lie, that this was the root of European modernity, which had enabled it to pervert the ideals of humanism into the realities of coloniality, ecological disaster, etc. It is the claim to universality that cultural studies contests, but it does so without embracing that which the dominant norms pose as its contradiction—relativism or particularism.

Instead, Cultural studies argues for a radical contextualism. There are better and worse knowledges, but they depend upon the context. Cultural studies argues that the choice between the universal and the particular is a choice in support of academic laziness: one can rest assured that one's theory and/or politics can provide the answers, without the real labor of bringing theory and politics into dialogue with the world. So cultural studies refuses to have *a* theory that it carries with it. It seeks theories that provide the best answers to the questions posed by the world; we cannot assume that Marx, or Gramsci or Foucault, or ... are universally useful; they define tools that may or may not work in specific problem spaces, to use David Scott's phrase. Similarly, cultural studies asserts that it cannot know in advance what the political forces, struggles or stakes are. We cannot know before we do the work that the 'truth' of what we are studying, whatever context or set of relations it may be, is always about capitalism, or race, or ... even identity. In fact, no context is ever all about *one* thing, no struggle is ever definable by some singular bottom line, which can be known, as it were, before the work of investigation. It is opposed to any assumption that one can know, in advance of the labor, the answers. But that is just the laziness that the academic norms have produced.

That's the project I found during my time at the Centre; it is the project I have been proselytizing for decades now, and perhaps now you can see why cultural studies is always going to be resisted within the academy.

Let me add one other thing—because I think it is important, as Raymond Williams suggested, to distinguish the project and its formations. There are in fact many ways to do cultural studies, and it does matter, in any particular context, what cultural studies is. Cultural studies, in the effort to respond in the best ways possible to the questions or demands of a context—and there are of course many different forms and scales of contexts—always has to reinvent or reconstruct itself so as to make use of the most appropriate theoretical and methodological tools. You cannot simply assume that a particular model of cultural studies—for example, subcultural studies, or encoding-decoding, or the analysis of Thatcherism as a hegemonic struggle, or even the theories of race and ethnicity developed by people like Stuart Hall and Paul Gilroy—provides a template that can easily move from one context to another. These models—certainly the most famous examples of cultural studies from Britain—were themselves contextual articulations of cultural studies, in response to their own contextual problematics.

8) *But I see a tension here: how, in what way(s) can the interests, methods and intellectual politics of cultural studies be squeezed into, or reconciled with, disciplinary organizations of knowledge in universities?*

LG: I think this is one of the great questions facing not only cultural studies but also the academy in general. The modern system of disciplines was invented in the late 19th

century, at least in the States. It is clear that it no longer works, that all the important and interesting questions demand interdisciplinary (or at least multi-disciplinary) work. But how do you 'do' interdisciplinarity? I do not think one can simply get rid of the disciplines, but I also do not think you can take anything from the disciplines without subjecting it to the serious criticisms that come from the recognition of contextuality and relationality, on the one hand, and of discursivity, on the other. But we also have to take disciplinary knowledge seriously. I think one of the great failures of much of the intellectual work of the academic left results from the fact that we talk endlessly about matters of economics but we actually know very little about them, because we read only those things that we know we already agree with, and we do not know, really, what the alternatives might be, what we are not taking up. So I do not know the answer. I know that we have to find a way to have interdisciplinarity, and I can only conceptualize that for the moment as a conversation within and across disciplines or better, as a conversation in the spaces *between* disciplines. I myself exist by having one foot in the discipline (in my case, communication studies) and one foot in the interdisciplinary project of cultural studies. That worked well when I was writing about popular music and youth culture, but it is less satisfying as my work has turned more explicitly toward economics. But that is another story.

9) *You talk about interdisciplinary conversations. But how does this conviction/commitment 'translate' in the very practical terms of the classroom? In other words, how do you get your students to develop culturally-sensitive styles of thought (and forms of engagement) that transcend the set/fixed principles and methods of inquiry of particular disciplines?*

LG: I suppose I should start by being both honest and pessimistic—that is to say, I don't think I succeed as much as I might hope. I do not know if that is the reality of teaching or of my teaching, although I do think that we do, too often, assume that intentions (whether pedagogical or political) somehow guarantee outcomes, and I can assure you, after thirty-five years of teaching, that it doesn't work that way. I would hate to try to measure the gap between what I am trying to teach and what my students take away from my classes. Of course, every class has its successes and its failures, whether those are thought of in terms of specific students or specific arguments.

Having said that, it is important to separate out the two forms of teaching I am engaged in: in the terms of the U.S. academy, undergraduate and graduate education. I think I have to talk about these separately, although they probably do have one thing in common. In both, my pedagogical strategy is to get students to understand what it means to think contextually—about contexts, in response to contexts, and with contexts as it were. That for me is the pedagogical key, because if people are actually struggling to work on contexts, then they have to see complexity: they have to join into an interdisciplinary conversation, and not simply an additive one, in which each discipline contributes its bits, because it is all mashed together in the context. If they understand that there are different ways of walking through the context—and that different people are enabled and disabled from following certain paths (although never completely determined)—then there has to be an conversation that crosses the boundaries that regulate common sense, and forces them into what I have described as a conversation of multiple cultures and disciplines. And then, they have to see that those pathways are themselves shaped by forces that do

not begin and end at the borders of whatever the particular context may be ... and so they have to enter into a global conversation. That is, at least, the abstract pedagogical strategy I have found most effective.

I should perhaps say another word about my general pedagogical choices, which are often very 'politically incorrect' in the U.S. Whether because I like to talk (more than write) or because I do not believe that education and knowledge production are 'democratic', I do believe that there are certain tools (theories, concepts, choices) that one must understand before launching into creative work. I do not think everything that can be said is equally insightful, so I often lecture a lot in my classes, even in my graduate classes, although as students get more comfortable and adept with these tools, I relish the conversations that are possible.

I teach graduate classes in cultural studies in two stages. The first part tries to introduce students to contextual work by a careful reading of the British tradition—the tradition that shaped my own work to a large extent and which I know best. But it is also a body of work which is responding to contexts close enough to what many of the students know. So it does not take too much work to get them to see how contextual it actually is. I try to present enough of a sense of the changing historical contexts and to explain the interventions—of encoding/decoding, of subcultural theory, of hegemony theory, of the interventions into race and ethnicity—not as generalizable theories that can simply be taken up wherever and whenever one chooses, but as empirical and theoretical interventions into *specific* political problem-spaces, as efforts not to describe something that is going on apart from any description, but as an effort to reconstruct the very context, to open it to transformations, in the process of re-describing it.

The second semester of my graduate cultural studies class changes over time, in response to my own interests and those of the students in the program. Sometimes it focuses on emergent work. For example, in Spring 2010, I taught a seminar that looked at the turn in some cultural studies to questions of affect and ontology, and how these may be seen as a response to—and how they may help us to better study—increasingly important questions of globalization and postcoloniality.

But perhaps the more interesting pedagogy is in my undergraduate classes. When I first started to teach undergraduates, I realized, in a very concrete way, an important lesson: Stuart Hall used to say that if you wanted to move or change people, you had to start where they already were. And so I began—and continued for twenty years—to teach classes on the 'history' of youth culture and popular music, because I thought that was what mattered to them, that was in a sense where their hearts were, in the music and in the cultures that surrounded the music and informed their choices and their 'mattering maps'. My history was of course cultural studies. I tried to weave the music, the films, television, styles—of dance, fashion, talk—into a broader fabric of cultural, social, political and economic change, and to understand how the music and cultural changes could be understood as responses to, as forms of agency constituted in complex relations to, as ways of living in and navigating through, changing contexts of youth and the United States. That is, I tried to teach them to think contextually by thinking about the changing cultures within which they themselves were invested and implicated.

However, when I moved to North Carolina, I stopped teaching it. The reasons were complex. I was getting older and, whenever I taught these classes, I had to always begin

by proving to the students that I was not trying to simply 'academicize' the things that mattered to them, that the music and culture mattered to me as well, and that I was trying to get them to reflect on their own choices and tastes, to understand something about how and where they fit into the world around them. But the gap between generations was growing too wide and, as I later realized, the context of our lives had changed so much that much of the analysis I had been developing, much of the theoretical and historical foundations I had built, no longer seemed to work. And that is when I began writing *Caught in the Crossfire*, because I began to discover that both the experience of being young in the U.S. and the configuration of youth culture had changed so much that I would have had to start over again.

I am going back to teaching undergraduates, partly because I miss it a lot, and partly because I miss the reservoir of knowledge that they bring and which I need to understand what is going on in the world today. So I have been teaching, in Spring this year, a class on countercultures. It was an experiment: half of the semester was spent offering a cultural studies account of the 1960s counterculture, and the second half was organized around the question of whether there is a contemporary counterculture. Students were sent out, with lots of support, to do research, to do cultural studies as it were, about what is going on in the world around them. My hypothesis—because I see this quite literally as a research-in-progress class—is that there is something of a counterculture in the world today but that most of the students are not aware of it. Why? Because it does not have the same sorts of visibilities as the 60s counterculture did. Again, why? Part of the answer is the changing role of the media, but, more importantly, because I think that the very forms of *counterculture* effective today are not able, apparently, to produce the sorts of articulations—of unity and visibility—that were a crucial art of the 60s.

Finally, I want to say something about politics in the classroom, because I think that this has become a real problem among some people who think they do cultural studies. I do not think it is my function as a teacher to make my students better people, to instill my morality or even my political values in them. It is my job to help them gain the tools that will enable them to understand what is going on in the world around them, to understand that the world—or some part of it—was made to be the way it is, that it could have been made differently, and therefore that its future is not guaranteed, that the world *can* be changed. That is, the only ethical lesson I want to teach is one about agency—that people do influence what the world becomes, and that they have a responsibility to and for whatever the world is to be.

10) *I understand you have also played a key role in the ACS foundation (Association for Cultural Studies). What are your intentions and hopes for ACS?*

LG: I wanted it to do two things. First, I wanted it to create something like a community of cultural studies workers, to provide the kind of support—both institutional and sometimes personal—that anyone needs at times when they are trying to do something that is not only outside the normative possibilities of the academy, but that challenges many of the normative practices and habits of the dominant conceptions of intellectual work. Second, I wanted it to begin to serve as a gigantic think tank. This is not merely a matter of finding out who is working on what; it is much more. Because I think that the

lines of force and struggle that are making the contemporary world (and in different ways, in conjunction with other more local forces, give shape to specific overlapping conjunctures) do not begin and end at national boundaries, we have to begin to think about conjunctures in something other than national terms. It is too easy to say that we have to think globally, because that already throws us into the opposition between the local and the global, and that is just what I want to get away from. A think tank involves conversation, collaboration and cooperation. A think tank involves learning that different conjunctures pose different answers, but different questions as well.

11) *Given your, by now, extensive knowledge of the implementation and functioning of cultural studies in different nations around the world, how would you rate the situation of cultural studies in Spain in comparison with other countries?*

LG: Cultural studies has been received differently in different disciplines, and in different national spaces. It has a real presence and vitality in Latin America and is gaining visibility in Asia. Even if we consider Europe, there are enormous differences among the countries. Besides Britain, Italy and some of the Nordic countries have had serious work in cultural studies for some time. In Germany and Austria, cultural studies is a smaller but growing force. There is some work being done in Belgium and the Netherlands, but I do not know how much. It is even emerging in some of the eastern European (ex-Soviet) countries.

Interestingly, the three European countries where cultural studies seems to have met the most resistance are France, Portugal and Spain. Yet, my sense is that, despite serious cultural and institutional resistance, there is visible and vital work being done, and there are courageous and innovative proponents of cultural studies operating within universities.

Since I believe in contextuality, I try not to speak too categorically about contexts I do not know much about, but I at least have some familiarity with work in Spain because I have seen some of the *Culture and Power* publications and I even had the very real pleasure of attending two conferences (the last in Ciudad Real this year.) I was impressed with the range of work covered, and the theoretical and its methodological sophistication. I noticed a number of particular apparent strengths: work that links cultural studies with questions of literary and textual cultures, and, more uniquely, some real concerns with education, and with the links between culture and economics (in at least one issue) that I admire very much. And the most recent issue I have seen, on *Culture and Society in the Age of Globalization* is wonderful; it can proudly hold its own against work from anywhere.

What I cannot speak to—and what I am most interested in—is the way in which this work is a result of its unique articulation to and out of the specificity of Iberian history, especially over the past forty years or so. In the same manner, I am a bit surprised—but again, I am looking at this through a very small window—by the lack of dialogue between Spanish cultural studies and the vital traditions of cultural studies that have emerged in Spain's former colonial empire, and I wonder if there is some way I can help that develop more. But that is a different discussion.

In short, I suppose that what I am saying is that, based on what I have seen, Spanish (or Iberian) cultural studies has accomplished a great deal with little institutional support.

It deserves to have more visibility in the international community, and it certainly must continue to fight for its place in the intellectual and institutional fields of Spanish universities. This is, to come back to another question, what I hope ACS can do.

12) *The number of books you have published is impressive (17 is it? without counting translations into different languages). This huge body of work testifies to the scope and depth of your influence in the field of cultural studies. Indeed, over the past thirty years you have addressed issues of the most varied nature that range from 'hard-core' theory and theoretical debates to the study of communication, history, politics, economics, globalization, music, youth culture...the list could go on. A simple, straightforward question: Which book would you say has been your favorite to write?*

LG: I wish the answer could be that simple, that straightforward. First of all, I have to tell you that I find writing painful and troubling. It is not what I like to do—what I like to do is to talk, to teach, to have conversations—most of what I write comes out of those contexts—so I give lectures, or teach, etc., and the notes I produce and constantly amend become the basis for much of my writing. I used to dream that I could get away without writing—that my students would publish my lecture notes (like the great U.S. sociologist, George Herbert Mead). But alas...

Your question is difficult to answer because different books mean different things to me and they embody different efforts, different desires and different failures. The two collections of essays—well, they mark out the trajectories of my career, and the development of my ideas. *We Gotta Get Out of This Place: Popular Conservatism and Postmodern Culture* (1992) has the best claim to be my favorite, because in writing it, I realized in concrete ways what I had been arguing in abstract ways—that theory follows the demands—the problem spaces—of the conjuncture. Conjunctural analysis involves not only the labor of analysis but also of continuing to theorize, to find the tools that can produce a better if not the best story. My labors in *We Gotta Get Out of This Place*, then, defined the theoretical trajectory of my project as well—bringing together my own (idiosyncratic, certainly contestable) readings of Gramsci, Foucault, and Deleuze and Guattari. In many ways, I still think that its analysis is correct, but I also think I failed to integrate the theory and the analysis adequately.

But *Caught in the Crossfire: Kids, Politics and America's Future* (2005), while continuing the same project—to tell a better story about the contemporary U.S.—was my first (and perhaps only) effort to do something that I believe in passionately, as a cultural studies scholar and a left intellectual, that there has to be a conversation between professional intellectuals and broader audiences, or, as Gramsci put it, intellectuals have to share their knowledge with people who might do something with it (although I am suspicious of the continuing vanguardist image there). *Caught in the Crossfire* was written for a broader audience, which unfortunately it never found. But I do think it succeeded in that the story I am able to tell is getting better, and I think I was relatively successful in finding ways to talk that largely submerged the explicit theoretical discourses I draw upon.

And finally, I think my new book is perhaps the most important one I have written, although also the grumpiest. And there are other books I care about. Obviously, I think my first two co-edited volumes had a profound impact in bringing

cultural studies to a broader audience. *Without Guarantees. In Honor of Stuart Hall* (2000) is important to me because of my respect and love for Stuart Hall, but also for Paul and Angela, my co-editors. And I would say the same about *New Keywords*. Working with two of my closest friends and intellectuals I admire most, Meaghan Morris and Tony Bennett, was a joy, even if the process of editing a book is never joyous. I could go on but I think you understand.

13) *As a last question, could you tell us a little more about your latest book, Cultural Studies in the Future Tense, due out in October this year?*

LG: I just described this as my grumpiest book, because it tries to consider why so much of cultural studies (but also of much intellectual work) has become so f***** boring and useless; why we have so little to say that seems to help us stop the movement of most of the world (and certainly my own country) in directions that built upon values and visions that we oppose. It is also my most optimistic book, because I still believe that ideas do matter in efforts to change the world, and that cultural studies has a real contribution to make.

I had at one time intended to write an introduction to cultural studies, but I realized that the very nature of the project makes the traditional notion of an introduction misguided. This book can be seen as a 'counter-introduction', for it introduces not what cultural studies has been but what it must become. It is an introduction to the 'coming cultural studies'.

The book argues that the reason the stories progressive intellectuals have been telling for decades do not seem to work can be traced back to the habits of labor and thought—whether embodied in theoretical, political or methodological assumptions—that too often predetermine our understanding of what's going on, so that we basically tell the same stories over and over or simply claim that everything is new. How must we change the practices and institutions of the production of knowledge? What kinds of knowledges do we need to produce, and what kinds of labor will it take, if we want to do a better job of opening up the possibilities of changing the contemporary world. These are some of the important questions I try to raise, if not answer.

I argue that the contemporary conjuncture—which for me is in the United States but cannot be enclosed by its boundaries—can be re-constructed as a series of struggles against a certain condensation of what it means to be modern, and over the possibilities of other ways of being modern. But, precisely, many of the concepts that ground the empirics of conjunctural analysis and found cultural studies—including modernity, economy, culture, and politics—are strongly bound up with the particular notion of modernity that has become the very site of contestation, both nationally and globally. What I try to do in this book is to offer a contextual and interdisciplinary interrogation of these categories, creating what I call a *conjunctural ontology* that enables me to explore the specificity and generality of such concepts. I investigate the interdisciplinary work necessary to integrate economic matters into conjunctural stories, the theoretical work it would take to understand the historical specificity of culture, and the cartographic work that would enable us to think of the political in all of its complexity.

I try to offer a vision of contemporary cultural studies as the collaborative possibility of knowledge production in the service of social transformation, built on the complexity and relationality of social realities. This sounds like an ad for my book, doesn't it? I suppose I cannot help but write it that way at the moment. I am sorry!

I certainly look forward to reading the book! Meanwhile, let us hope that this (over)short interview will prove to be an interesting and helpful mind-opener for both cultural studies practitioners and those more skeptical about cultural studies as a form of knowledge.

Many thanks Professor Grossberg.

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Received 6 July 2010

Accepted 30 July 2010

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