

Popes, Kings & Cultural Studies
Placing the commitment to non-disciplinarity in historical context

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... the first time as tragedy, the second as farce

Karl Marx *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*

Farce is but tragedy turned upside-down.

Introduction

This paper is prompted by apparent paradoxes in the intellectual and institutional positions of British cultural studies in higher education.^[1] Ask a number of academics or consult examples of the voluminous literature on cultural studies and one soon finds two basic pictures emerging of its current position. One is a story of success. Cultural studies is, educationally speaking, big business, with journals, professional associations, conferences and textbooks proliferating.^[2] There is now, for example, an *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, a *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, as well as *Cultural Studies*. The British-based Media, Communication and Cultural Studies Association had its first annual conference in January 2000; five months later a proposal to establish an International Association for Cultural Studies was accepted at a biannual conference (Crossroads in Cultural Studies) of nearly one thousand delegates. Where a decade ago one struggled to find cultural studies texts amid Literary Criticism, Sociology, Criminology and other sections of bookshops, cultural studies now has large sections of its own, often dwarfing its past classificatory homes. Courses in cultural studies are often viewed as a formula for guaranteeing student numbers - every higher education institution has to have one. Even the British Government appears to have caught on to its chic: what was a Department of National Heritage is now rebranded the Department of Culture, Media and Sport. Institutionally, the signs seem to indicate, to some at least, that cultural studies is in bloom.

Intellectually, such adjectives as 'energetic', 'vibrant', 'fresh' and 'original' abound; cultural studies appears to be an exciting area of intellectual activity, generating new substantive foci and theories at astonishing speed. Everyone seems to want a piece of the action; geographers, historians, sociologists, psychologists, amongst others, have

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adopted 'cultural' as a prefix to describe their work. Further, cultural studies is often described as cutting-edge, radical and progressive, a site for critical theory and practice, at the forefront of movements for cultural, social and political change. Regular attacks by the media and self-styled guardians of the cultural heritage are held up as badges of honour, testament to its crackling political energy. From one angle, then, the stock of cultural studies is riding high.

The second picture, however, is somewhat less triumphant. Institutionally, cultural studies has a marginal and limited presence within British higher education (Maton 1996, 2000a). For all its apparent popularity, the actual number of courses, departments, students and staff *named* as 'cultural studies' remains relatively small. If it has found a place in the sun, this has largely been as an adjunct or adjective to other disciplines (e.g. 'English and cultural studies', 'cultural geography'), rather than as a distinct entity. Where cultural studies has managed to carve out an institutional home of its own, this has been consistently in lower status institutional positions: adult education, schools, technical colleges, art colleges, polytechnics and distance learning.^[3] Further, this existence is typically precarious: the famous Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at Birmingham University had very limited resources and staffing, minimal institutional support and was threatened with closure at least twice; the first full degree course in 'cultural studies' (Portsmouth Polytechnic, 1975) was closed down in the late 1990s despite healthy student numbers; until recently professional subject associations have been ad hoc and short-lived. The institutional position of cultural studies has, it appears, been marginal and insecure.

Intellectually, one finds the field characterised as in disarray, in decline, inchoate, fragmented, exhausted, beset by internecine strife and otherwise on the wane. If the first picture was of letting a hundred flowers bloom, this picture is less rosy - an unkempt and overgrown garden. Cultural studies has been depicted as frivolous and undermining academic standards, more an indulgence of whimsy or hobby-horse of political grievance than rigorous intellectual activity. The huge size and kaleidoscopic nature of the Crossroads conference signals from this perspective not health but unmanaged and unmanageable gargantuanism, the outward expression of an amorphous and directionless collection of interests, easily swayed by fads and fashions. If the subject had a founding project, it has, such characterisations maintain, fallen into parody, a spent force politically, its purpose little more than providing a punchbag for media and intellectual élites in search of signs of cultural decline:

It would seem we are forging a gullible generation of media-soaked

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teenagers, narcotically duped into fashionable but vacuous quasi-disciplines, by careerist culture junkies high on their own incestuous theorising.

(Golding 2000)

From this angle, the stock of cultural studies is in terminal decline.

Cultural studies it would seem is everywhere but nowhere, vibrant and in disarray. Moreover, these two faces of cultural studies are intermingled in accounts. It is not unusual to find cultural studies described as both intellectually blossoming and institutionally marginal, or intellectually exhausted but institutionally booming. (Indeed, these are the typical accounts of its most vociferous protagonists and opponents, respectively). Moreover, this janus-faced character is not simply another example of academics always having two hands ('But on the other hand...') - both have a basis in reality (Maton 1996, 2000a). This raises the questions I address in this article: how has cultural studies come to be in such a curious position and why?

Conventional accounts

The development of cultural studies is a dangerous and confused topic in which authors have often lost their sense of direction. One can, however, identify at least two broad approaches to these questions. The first focuses on intention and commitment, typically either making a virtue of necessity, claiming that the position of cultural studies is just as intended, or calling for more vigilance and effort in the face of threats to its original project(s). Debate over institutionalisation is often couched in these terms, perceived as a 'moment of profound danger', in Hall's oft-quoted phrase, or a moment of profound opportunity.^[4] Both positions, however, focus on commitment and agency. A second approach looks beyond cultural studies, focusing on the impact of social relations of power, such as the relations of class, race and gender to curricula and pedagogy or the role of social change in shaping the disciplinary map. What both approaches have in common is that whilst they highlight the couplet power/knowledge, they tend to reduce knowledge to power, whether located in subjective agency or external social structures. In other words, they highlight relations *to* cultural studies but neglect relations *within* cultural studies - an (albeit tacit) externalist and reductive sociology of knowledge which lacks an analysis of knowledge itself (Bernstein 1990: 165-180, Maton 2000a, Moore 2000). In contrast to this, I here address a relatively neglected dimension of academic subjects, namely the question of whether there is something *intrinsic* to cultural studies, something internal to the way it is structured as a knowledge formation, which enables this curious position in higher education.^[5] Specifically, I focus on how

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cultural studies has been legitimated by its proponents.

It is tempting to view claims made by actors on behalf of their academic subjects, practices and thus themselves as little more than bombast to be dismissed or ideological camouflage whose social basis in power relations needs to be revealed. The dominance of a sociologically reductive approach to knowledge - which one can summarise as 'You would say that, wouldn't you?' - encourages an attitude of uncompromising scepticism towards the claims of actors. Although we often make such proclamations about our own practices in good faith, to take seriously those of others, even as an object of study, is to be 'taken in'. Approaches such as Pierre Bourdieu's 'field theory' (e.g. 1988, 1991, 1993) highlight that such claims are based in struggles over status and resources, they are *interested* and thus to conceive them as anything but reflecting power struggles represents a failure to rise above the doxic 'bad faith' of the intellectual field. The aim is to reveal the situated character of knowledge claims and any mismatch between rhetoric and reality. There is, of course, much of value in such an approach (Maton 1999, Swartz 1997), but when taken alone it tends to result in knowledge becoming little more than an epiphenomenon of power. I have elsewhere detailed how conceiving knowledge in terms of *legitimation* enables the synthesis of the insights of such sociological approaches with philosophical accounts which highlight the potentially legitimate nature of knowledge claims (Maton 2000a). Suffice to say here that the ways in which actors legitimate their knowledge claims represent, first, a proclaimed ruler of participation within the subject area and criteria by which achievement should be measured, and, secondly, the basis of claims to status and material resources and so are crucial in carving out intellectual and institutional spaces within higher education. In other words, how the way actors portray themselves, however distanced from empirical reality, has effects.

Specifically, I will suggest that the way cultural studies is legitimated shapes its intellectual and institutional development and so sheds light on its paradoxical position in higher education. Cultural studies is often discussed without historical perspective (Maton & Moore 2000). So, I begin by embarking on a whistle-stop tour of the history of legitimation in Western thought, to both bring its present condition into sharper relief and open up for analysis such oft-stated but little analysed claims as a radical break with disciplinarity. My aim, above all, is to provide food for thought by opening up questions and suggesting possible answers.

The legitimation of knowledge: a very brief historical account

Any review of the ways in which knowledge has been legitimated in Western thought must of necessity be selective and partial. Moreover, my aim here is to illustrate a suggestive (rather than historically comprehensive) account of two fundamental ways of conceiving the legitimate basis of legitimate knowledge. These, which I have termed knowledge and knower modes of legitimation (Maton 2000a), have dominated thinking at different times, though they are ever-present and competing (I return to this in due course).

The ancien régime: Popes and Kings

Prior to roughly the seventeenth century, official knowledge in the West was much more circumscribed in quantity compared to today and much slower to change, but also much more certain (Gellner 1974b, 1978). As contemporary debate over the nature of society illustrates, the enormous growth of knowledge characterising modernity has also raised more uncertainty; every answer, as Popper (1972) points out, leads in turn to more questions. In contrast, prior to this explosion of understanding and uncertainty, the relative stability and certainty of knowledge was ostensibly based primarily on the authority of the Crown and the Papacy. Official knowledge, that is to say, was held to be legitimated by the personal authority of the King / Queen or Pope and, ultimately, via notions of the divine right of kings and the Petrine primacy, on the authority of the ultimate knower, God (Bloch 1962, Critchley 1978, Shapin 1994). Like Platonic notions (see below), this held a monist conception of knowledge - the truths proclaimed by monarchs or Popes were immutable and universal - but one based on the characteristics of a single knower rather than a specific method.

Taking England as an example, the King's authority was legitimated according to divine right, delegation from the King of Kings (e.g. Morton 1643, Burrell 1683). What the King decreed as the truth was right because s/he was the King.^[6] Thus, James I, King of England, told Parliament in 1614:

Monarchy is the greatest thing on earth. Kings are rightly called gods since just like God they have power of life and death over all their subjects in all things. They are accountable to God only ... so it is a crime for anyone to argue about what a king can do.

Similarly, King Charles I was called 'the little God' and, after losing the English Civil War of 1642-9, many argued that he could not be tried by his peers as he had none (Norbrook 1999). At his trial in January 1649, Charles refused to answer the court,

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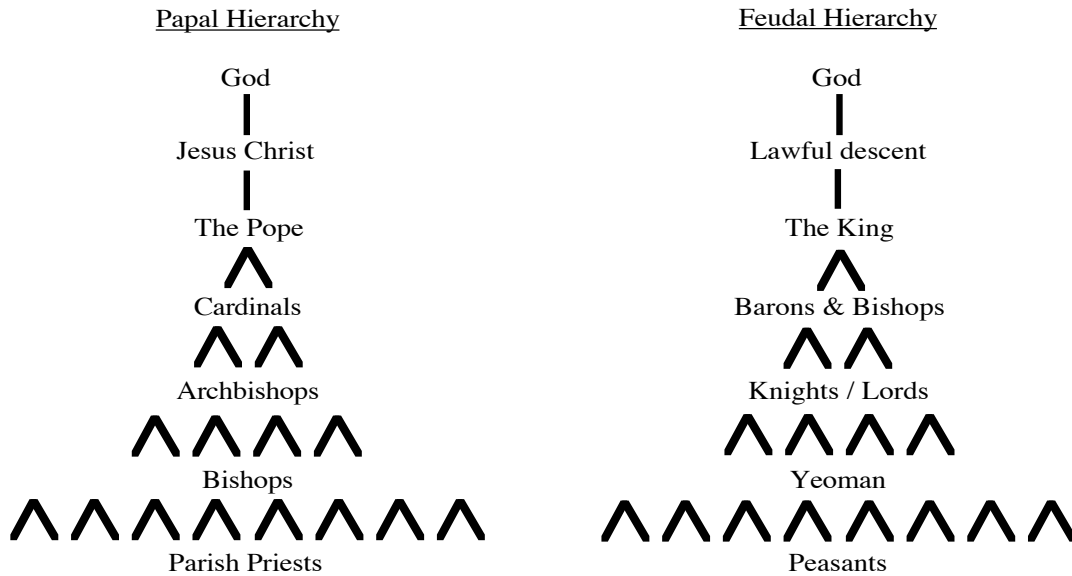
claiming they had no lawful, God-given authority:

I demand to know by what authority, I mean lawful authority I am called here. Remember, I am your King, your lawful King. And what sins you bring upon your heads, and the judgement of God upon this land, think well upon it, before you go from one sin to a greater one. I have a trust committed to me by God, by lawful inheritance. I will not betray it to answer to a new and unlawful authority.

The feudal arrangements underlying this legitimation of knowledge represented a pyramidal structure of authority descending from God, via lawful descent, to the King and then down through Barons, Knights, Yeoman to the peasant majority (see Figure 1).^[7]

The other principal source for legitimacy of knowledge was the Church, with a similar structure of divine delegation. According to the Roman Catholic Church, Jesus Christ, God's representative on Earth, conferred primacy of jurisdiction upon Saint Peter as prince of the apostles and visible head of the Church. His authority to pronounce infallibly was to pass down in perpetuity to his papal successors. This Petrine primacy, a monopoly of legitimacy, was affirmed by the Council of Florence in 1439, but evident even earlier.^[8] Cyprian of Carthage, writing about 256, asked 'Would the heretics dare to come to the very seat of Peter whence apostolic faith is derived and whither no errors can come?'; and Pope Sixtus III, for example, declared in 433 that 'all know that to assent to [the Pope's] decision is to assent to St. Peter, who lives in his successors and whose faith fails not.' Underneath the Pope was a hierarchy of positions, from Cardinals, Archbishops, Bishops, down to Parish Priests. Both bases for legitimate knowledge thus represented a hierarchical system of divine delegation, from one at the top to many at the bottom, where the higher up the hierarchy one was, the nearer to God, the supreme and all-knowing knower, and the more legitimacy one could draw upon in making knowledge claims.

**Figure 1:
Simplified Schematic of Feudal & Papal Hierarchies**



The central point here is not their proclaimed basis in religion but the *form* taken by claims to legitimate knowledge, namely that the King or Pope was right because of *who* they were. Although specific popes have been chosen by election since 1179 by the Sacred College of Cardinals, once elected they assume this status as privileged knower and repository of legitimacy. Similarly, once established on the throne, the basis of monarchs' claims to legitimacy regarding knowledge focused on their status as a divinely privileged knower, regardless of how they reached the throne. Thus the basis of legitimacy resided in attributes of the claimant, the privileged knower; there were strong boundaries around and strong control over *who* can make truth claims, and attempts to do so could meet extreme and violent censure. (A famous example of this clash between knowers saw the Pope's representative in England, Thomas Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury, murdered in 1170 on the orders of King Henry II). In contrast, *what* the privileged knower could claim knowledge about and *how* they arrived at it were much less restricted - *weak* boundaries and control regarding subject matter and procedures. Thus knowledge itself also resembled a pyramid, with all phenomena brought under the infallible gaze of a single knower.

The reign of reason: science

Moving forward in time, the Renaissance, Reformation and Enlightenment all served to undermine these authorities: the King was killed and God had at least one foot in

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the grave. At the same time, knowledge became increasingly subject to unprecedented and sustained growth, hugely accelerated change and less certainty. This raised the question of how, in the absence of a divinely delegated knower and in the face of increased uncertainty, knowledge could be legitimated - *the* central problem for philosophy since Descartes.

One highly influential answer was to focus on the methods by which knowledge could be achieved. First, it should be noted that though knowledge became subject to accelerated change, this did not necessarily diminish belief in the *possibility* of absolute and universal truth which would hold for all people at all times and in all places; a monist conception of knowledge was not inimical to recognition of its instability and fallibility (preconditions for its progress). It was widely believed that for each question there was, waiting to be discovered, a single answer: truth rather than truths. What was radical was that the key to these monist truths lay not so much with the individual as with the method (Biagoli 1993, Shapin 1994).

This notion revived a Classical, Platonic view of knowledge, one which held ‘that there are certain axiomatic truths, adamant, unbreakable, from which it is possible by severe logic to deduce certain absolutely infallible conclusions’ (Berlin 1999: 2). Crucial in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was the widely perceived burgeoning success and imitability of the natural sciences. The model of mathematics and, later, mechanics dominated conceptions of the means of placing knowledge - not only of nature but also of society, man (as was), values, morals, and politics - on a sure foundation. As under the *ancien régime*, knowledge formed a pyramid, with the linking together of diverse phenomena under as few laws as possible (cf. Bernstein 1996, 1999). What was different, however, was an emphasis above all else on the ‘what’ and the ‘how’, objects of study and procedures, and in particular observation and experiment:

As the science of man is the only solid foundation for the other sciences, so, the only solid foundation we can give to this science itself must be laid on experience and observation.

(Hume, 1739).

The royal road to wisdom, then, lay with procedure; knowledge itself, its organisation and procedures, would guarantee knowledge. For thinkers as diverse as Bacon, Spinoza, Helvétius, Saint-Simon, Comte, Bentham, Hobbes and many others, certainty of knowledge could be achieved through certainty of method. In an anti-humanist move, the infallible knower was thereby replaced by the infallible method -

a transition from a warm world of bodies to a cold world of bodies of knowledge (cf. Gellner 1974a). The realm of the sacred shifted from a single Knower to the procedural means to a singular knowledge, a Copernican revolution of legitimation. Although the privileged procedure varied across thinkers - the application of universal reason, scientific method, introspection and doubt - all shared a belief in the universal nature of this method. Anyone, it was claimed, could attain knowledge, provided they submit to the special method (Ward 1997); differences of spatial and temporal location among knowers were of less importance than the means by which they sought knowledge (Shapin 1988, Daston 1992). In this way specialised procedures offered a means of controlling the instability of knowledge - *who* is speaking makes no difference to whether or not what is being said is true, and though the speaker may change, the procedures remained stable and certain. This represented a fundamental shift of emphasis in the legitimation of knowledge: from strong boundaries and control over *who* can claim knowledge to strong boundaries and control over *what* can be claimed knowledge and *how* - a move from knower to knowledge.

The Romantic revolution

These notions of the proper basis of knowledge were not uncontested. In what Berlin describes as ‘the greatest shift in the consciousness of the West that has occurred’ (1999: 1), the ‘romantic revolution’ of the late eighteenth century saw a sustained critique of Enlightenment beliefs and a fundamental change in the legitimation of knowledge. Romanticism, howsoever defined, was less concerned with truth than with *belief*. It mattered less whether one’s truth claims were ‘scientific’ or practically adequate or represented an advance in the state of knowledge than whether one believed in them wholeheartedly. Science, method, ideas, knowledge were thus secondary to the state of the mind of the knower; what was admired was integrity, sincerity, dedication to an ideal, *whatever* the ideal (Berlin 1999). It mattered little what one claimed knowledge of or how, so long as one truly believed. In other words, intention was more important than effect, commitment more important than consequence. This influential shift in legitimation thus focused more on the character of the knower than on the content of knowledge. Universal and singular truths, discovered and legitimated by public criteria, were displaced by private turmoil and inner truths created by individuals as the key to insight. A new emphasis on the pluralist nature of knowledge took hold based on a sense of difference, emphasising dissimilarities rather than similarities, a celebration of the particularity and uniqueness of knowers and thus knowledge. Arising from this knower form of legitimation are a host of attributes typically associated with Romanticism (and which

are worth comparing to cultural studies), including: confused, teeming fullness and richness of life, multiplicity; the strange, exotic, mysterious, irrational; uniqueness, revolutionary change, pursuit of novelty, concern with the fleeting present, living in the now, rejection of knowledge past and future; exile and alienation; minorities rather than majorities ... among many others (see Berlin 1999).

Summary

Taking this very brief and heuristic account as a whole, I have highlighted two principal ways in which knowledge has typically been legitimated. As shown in Table 1, the model for the ‘ancien régime’ was of monist and stable knowledge and that of the ‘reign of reason’ monist and stable method, while that of Romanticism emphasised its instability and plurality. In the case of the ‘ancien régime’ and Romanticism, the emphasis falls on *who* you are, the character, nature or dispositions of the actor; whereas Enlightenment ideas emphasise *what* the actor is claiming knowledge of and *how* they reach that knowledge. One foregrounds people, the other procedures: knower or knowledge modes of legitimation.

Table 1: Summary of dominant modes of legitimation

	Stability of knowledge	Variety of ‘truth(s)’	Forms of legitimation
The ancien régime	stable	monist	Knower
The Enlightenment	managed instability	monist	knowledge
Romanticism	unstable	pluralist	knowers

Though this schematic account may appear as a pendulum swinging from one to another mode of legitimation, both are always and everywhere co-present. They are, so to speak, two sides of the same coin - one face may predominate at any one time, but the other face is still there. Thus I am not suggesting abrupt and total transformations, as associated with Foucauldian notions of changes in episteme. The reader, should they wish, may find countless examples of, say, knowledge modes in Romanticism or knower modes in Enlightenment thought (Shapin 1994). What I am highlighting, however, are two forms of legitimation which have dominated at different times - the key difference is where *emphasis* is placed: knowledge or knower - and which have been realised under different social and intellectual conditions. Moreover, these are *self*-characterisations, espoused rather than enacted practices.^[9]

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The legitimation of cultural studies

I now turn to consider how cultural studies today might fit into this heuristic schema. I can consider how cultural studies is legitimated only cursorily here (see Maton 2000a, 2000b), but wish to argue that in recent years there have been marked emphases on weak boundaries around and control over *what* and *how* legitimate cultural studies knowledge can be produced, and conversely strong boundaries and control over *who* can claim to be doing so.^[10]

What and how - knowledge

Perhaps the central theme of legitimation in cultural studies is non-disciplinarity. It has been described as ‘multi-’, ‘inter-’, ‘post-’, ‘cross-’, ‘trans-’, ‘anti-’, anything but ‘disciplinary’. This follows a wider commitment to weakening academic hierarchies and boundaries, between disciplines, official knowledge and everyday life, the teacher and the taught, high and low culture, and so forth. As ‘undisciplined’, cultural studies is proclaimed as freeing knowledge from the suffocating grip of specific procedures specialised to a delimited object of study. Methodological and ontological pluralism, with both ‘culture’ and ‘studies’ left undefined, free for redefinition or totalising (as in ‘a whole of life’), are declared legitimating attributes of the subject area. Indeed, commitment and sincerity often appear more important than purely ‘intellectual’ criteria - praise and critique focus on political intent, where the heart is rather than the contents of the head. Alongside this sits an anti-canonical position, valorising cultural studies as not only free from the restrictions of a canonic tradition but also actively undermining established canons, including any nascent traditions of its own. Thus one finds a propensity to recurrent rupture and renewal, with regular announcements of radical ‘breaks’ and the subject’s rebirth which decentre past work and proclaim the originality and freshness of current ideas. Instead of cumulative development, the necessity and vitality of cultural studies is measured by the arrival of new ‘voices’ or ‘post-’ theories and a rapid turnover of ‘hot’ topics, themselves typically focused on the new and the now or, in Raymond Williams’s terms, the ‘emergent’ rather than ‘residual’ aspects of culture and society.

Who - knowers

In contrast to ‘what’ and ‘how’, questions of who can claim knowledge have typically been more strongly and explicitly defined. Cultural studies has been legitimated in terms of a radical educational and political project, associated with democratic and participatory forms of education, and portrayed as offering an oppositional pedagogy capable of giving voice to the experiences of marginalised social groups. In contrast to the ‘simplistic’ generalisations of theory and the detached observer, the importance

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of primary experience and the 'view from below' have been central to claims made for the subject area. This emphasis on 'giving voice to' dominated social groups underpins standard intellectual histories, which typically trace a movement from the experiences of working-class men through a feminist emphasis on the silenced voice of women to later interventions in terms of race and sexuality. Common to these is a critique of existing 'voices' for failing to represent a new 'voice', underpinned by (often tacit) notions of standpoint epistemology, where truth resides in the intersubjective social characteristics of the knower. Alongside the embracing of anti-foundationalist ideas, these positions celebrate difference, the irreducible particularity of experience, and the multiplicity of subjectivity, identity and truths. Central to the proclaimed *raison d'être* of cultural studies is thus its possession by what Blake called the 'holiness of the minute particular' and belief that knowledge resides in the unique knower.

Summary

This is, of course, an abbreviated caricature (as self-characterisations themselves often are), but sufficient to give a flavour for comparative purposes of how cultural studies is typically legitimated by many of its current proponents. According to this, cultural studies is not a static knowledge formation (like the *ancien régime*), but (unlike Enlightenment ideas) change is found less in the sustained growth of knowledge than in a rapid turnover and ongoing instability of approaches and voices. The form taken by its legitimation (like the *ancien régime*) stresses strong boundaries around and control over *who* can legitimately claim knowledge, and (like romanticism) emphasises commitment and the unique particular. In opposition to Enlightenment legitimation, cultural studies leaves disciplinary boundaries, objects of study and procedures open and fluid - weak boundaries and control on what can be studied and how. In other words, the legitimation of cultural studies currently emphasises people rather than procedures - a knower mode of legitimation.

A thought experiment: Some implications of knower legitimation

What implications might this mode of legitimation have for the position of British cultural studies in higher education? To begin to shed some light on this question I shall now run what scientists call a 'thought experiment' by taking one isolated feature of cultural studies - the knower mode of legitimation - and 'running' it by itself to see how it works and what implications it might have for cultural studies.^[11] It cannot be overemphasised that this is not intended as a history or account of cultural studies; the aim is to show how the form taken by the legitimation of cultural

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studies may help shape the intellectual and institutional development of the subject area. To this extent, one might say that any resemblances to academic subjects, living or dead, are purely coincidental or, at least, interestingly contingent. It is thus worth bearing in mind here the contradictory pictures of cultural studies with which this article began.

The proliferation and fragmentation process

For the sake of this experiment we begin with a situation where the dominant form of legitimation is that exemplified by Enlightenment conceptions of knowledge, something approximating to a positivist model. Using a knower-based form of legitimation, I critique this dominant notion of knowledge as silencing the voice of people such as myself. Until now, I claim, the production of knowledge has been monopolised by people with different inter-subjective characteristics to myself. These knowers, I argue, can know only from their own social and temporal location; their knowledge is true enough for them, but says little about, for or to knowers of my ilk.

Happily (for me), on the basis of this knower critique I carve out a space for myself within the intellectual field and higher education - my voice begins to be heard. Less happily, perhaps, I am now in the most vulnerable position to a similar form of critique. My position is underpinned by knower legitimation, a claim to privileged insight based on my subjective attributes, where 'truth' is defined as whatever is proclaimed by my 'voice', rather than on my knowledge of specialised procedures - a socialised rather than trained gaze. This knower category, however, could be said to itself conceal difference, silencing the voices of others. However low in the academic pecking order the position I managed to acquire, I am still now part of that order and susceptible to this critique and it is difficult to maintain a knower mode whilst denying to new voices that which I claim is denied to my own. It is, therefore, highly likely that, sooner or later, I will be subject to critique by a new knower, who would in turn themselves be subjected to knower critique by a new knower. If these critiques were successful, then as each new voice is brought into the academic choir, the privileged 'knower' would become smaller; as more and more social categories are introduced, each new knower would be increasingly precisely defined.

So, for example, if I began by legitimating my practice and ideas on the basis of being a member of, or giving voice to the (previously excluded) working class, then as new voices emerge (based, for example, on categories of gender, race and sexuality) which critique my ability to speak on their behalf, the basis of my knower claims may

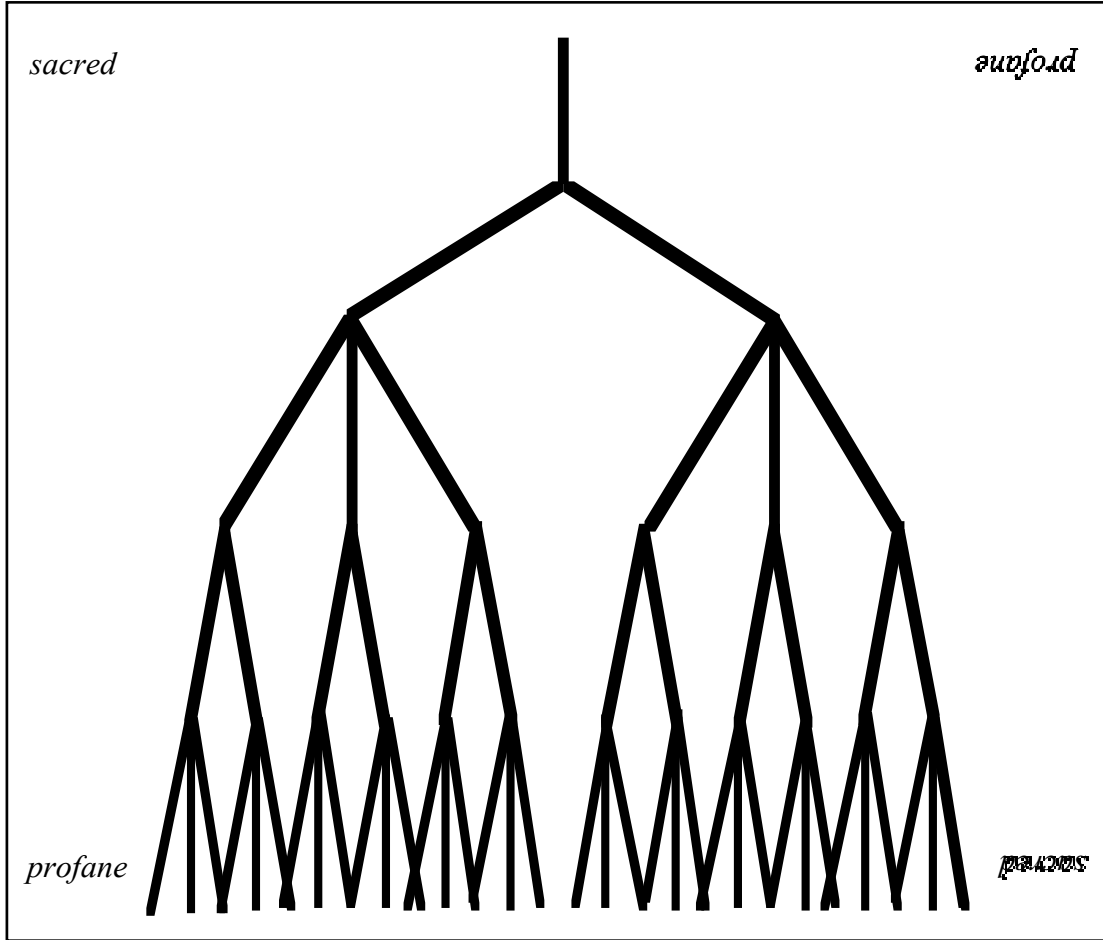
increasingly hyphenate: from 'the working class' to working-class-men, white-working-class-men, white-heterosexual-working-class-men and so forth. The multiplicities of subjectivity and identity mean that the potential categories for this process could be endless. Thus, my knower claims may become based on speaking for or giving voice to, say, Oxbridge-educated, white, heterosexual men of working-class origin currently seeking employment in higher education. Eventually one reaches simply me - 'I know because I am Karl Maton'. (Indeed, at this point one could introduce notions of the fragmentation of the self and talk of 'we'). It is easy to demonstrate (and to argue) that all categories conceal substantive difference to some degree. Once one knower category is made the basis of legitimation, then the likelihood is that this category will fragment, producing a proliferation of evermore hyphenated, smaller and smaller categories, each strongly differentiated from one another and each with its own representative or sponsor. Unlike notions of a neutral language to which everyone may stand in equal alienation, this form of legitimation argues for some and not others; it is exclusive (for each knower proclaims its own unique insight) rather than inclusive (cf. Moore & Muller 1999).

It is worth at this point returning to the structure of another form of knower legitimation, that of the ancien régime (see Figure 2), to which the process of proliferation and fragmentation exhibits rotational symmetry. Figure 2.1 shows the structure of papal and feudal hierarchies, where the authority to speak (and legitimacy of authorship) diminishes as one moves from the one to the many, from the single, divinely delegated knower at the top to the multitude at the bottom - from the sacred to the profane. Compare this to the process of proliferation and fragmentation over time I have been describing, which can be represented as Figure 2.2. So, to take cultural studies as an example, it might begin with the 'three kings' of Hoggart, Williams and Thompson and the category of the working class, before dividing according to gender under the impact of feminist interventions in the 1970s, then dividing again according to race and later sexuality and so forth - a process of proliferation and fragmentation of knowers.

Figure 2: The Rotational Symmetry of the ‘Tree Diagram’

Figure 2.1

Simplified schematic of feudal and papal hierarchies



Proliferation and fragmentation of privileged knowers over time

Figure 2.2

Hierarchy of authority of privileged knowers - the hyphenation effect

Figure 2.3

[The titles are blurred:

Figure 2.2: Proliferation and fragmentation of privileged knowers over time

Figure 2.3: Hierarchy of authority of privileged knowers - the hyphenation effect]

In the example I have been outlining, the hierarchy of legitimacy within this knowledge formation might look something like Figure 2.3, where the more hyphens one’s knower category embraces, the more authoritative or authentic one’s knowledge is claimed to be. Here the profane is the past and characterised by relatively less plurality. The development of a knower mode over time thereby comes to resemble, to adopt a slogan of the English Civil War, ‘the old world turned upside

Maton, K. (2002) Popes, Kings and cultural studies: Placing the commitment to non-disciplinarity in historical context, in Herbrechter, S. (Ed.) *Cultural Studies: Interdisciplinarity and translation*. Amsterdam, Rodopi, 31-53

down'. To this extent, it could be argued that this characteristic of cultural studies is not opposed to an ancien régime, but rather represents an inverted form of pre-Enlightenment ideas; Popes, Kings and cultural studies (in terms of legitimation) share more in common than one might have thought. Where legitimation is based on the valorisation of *dominated* knowers, then it would also represent the social world turned upside down; the hierarchy of legitimacy or relative status of knowledge claims within the academic subject inverts the hierarchy of social power found in wider society. Thus, in the case above, whilst my working-class credentials would (at first) be relatively valorised, later adjectives (white, heterosexual, Oxbridge-educated, etc.) would be of comparatively lower status. A subject area experiencing this process would thereby come to resemble a procession of the excluded.

Intellectual impacts

How might this process affect the intellectual and institutional positions of a subject area characterised by knower legitimation? In terms of intellectual development, two potential implications of this process are the fragmentation of objects of study and historical amnesia.

Towards narcissism

With proliferation and fragmentation of knowers, the focus of knowledge claims tends to get smaller as the social world is broken down into the incommensurable experiences of evermore specialised knowers. Thus, attempts at capturing social or cultural totalities would give way to thicker and thicker descriptions of smaller and smaller phenomena, fragmenting 'culture' into increasingly localised cultures. This itself generates pressures toward methodological individualism; approaches which claim to provide insight into these fragmenting categories might thereby come to assume increasing prominence. So, for example, one could witness a tendency to move from sociology towards social psychology, then psychology, and finally psychoanalysis. At this point, dialogue and translation become (in theory) impossible and there is little option but to retreat into autobiographical reflection, what Gellner (1992: 26) calls 'narcissism-hermeneuticism' - the search for certainty slips into solipsism. (Indeed, there would in fact be little point in writing at all, unless writing for an audience of one). Although each knower claim would highlight the claimants relation to a wider social group, any attempts at connecting with such groups or movements would thereby become increasingly problematic - the gap between espoused and enacted political impact would widen, whilst vulnerability to accusations of self-obsession and social redundancy would increase.

Historical amnesia

A second implication for the intellectual development of the subject area is historical amnesia (Maton & Moore 2000). I have mentioned that as proliferation and fragmentation takes place the past becomes the profane, a past of the dominant Other(s). This past tends to be dismissed with the emergence of the new knower. When it is the knower rather than the knowledge which is emphasised in claiming authority, then the focus becomes less critique of the message than shooting the messenger; it is not *what* has been said before that matters, it is *who* has said it. One sees this in the examples of Kings. Charles I, for example, faced the ultimate *ad hominem* argument in January 1649: his head was chopped off! Even then, the form taken by legitimation remained in place. In this case, Oliver Cromwell was first offered the Crown, then became *de facto* King, declaring in 1656: 'I could not refuse the power God put in my hands'. (Between 1327 and 1485 seven reigning monarchs of England were deposed. Each time a rival claimant took over and the knower mode remain unquestioned). Although today the pen has replaced the sword, the principle remains the same: the past knower is deposed in favour of a new knower.

As this occurs, the intellectual past of the subject area is likely to become detached from its present and future. If knowledge is reducible to knowers, then new knowers brings new knowledge which existing voices are incapable of articulating. Existing knowledge cannot be integrated within the new discourse and must be displaced by the knowledge specialised to the new knower; as Bernstein puts it:

Theories are less to be examined and explored at conceptual and empirical levels, but are to be assessed in terms of their underlying models of man and of society ... The danger of "approach paradigms" [and knower modes] are that they may tend to witch-hunting and heresy-spotting; at the same time, they do provide a social basis for the creation of new - or the invigorating of old - sociological identities.

(1977: 157, 158)

One would then witness a subject area perennially declaring radical breaks with the past. With each new knower, past work would be ostensibly abandoned, but then also reproduced from scratch - new messenger, same old message. If those disciplines which forget the past are likely to repeat it, then this might 'lead to a setting up of artificial obsolescence and rotation of fashion, characteristic of the consumer goods industry' (Gellner 1992: 46). In other words, the subject area would generate much sound and fury, but very little real 'news'. Intellectually, knower legitimation may thus lead to an energetic and vibrant knowledge formation, but one riven by fragmentation and exhibiting little discernible progress, a situation where, as Yeats

put it,

Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world ...
The best lack conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity
(Yeats 1919 'The second coming' 1.1-8).

Though the aim may be to bring as many voices into the choir as possible, the result may become a babble. If music is but organised noise, then the knower mode offers no common hymn sheet or conductor, no rules of method by which to achieve harmony for its range of voices, for each may sing what and how they wish.

Institutional impact: invisibility

In terms of institutional positions, the proliferation and fragmentation process leaves subject areas vulnerable and makes attempts to carve out sustained and discrete spaces within higher education problematic. Knower legitimation emphasises difference from rather than similarity with other knowers, encouraging struggles between different knowers and within specific knower categories. Questions arise, for example, as to whose is the *genuine* voice of the working class, which knower is the *real* working-class knower, leading to 'prolier than thou' legitimation struggles. Such struggles undermine the social bases for collective political action (such as through professional associations), including defence of the subject area from competing claims to status and resources. Moreover, knower modes are particularly vulnerable to utilitarian funding policies and attacks from without higher education questioning their purpose. One means of legitimating a discipline is to assert the significance of its object of study, but knower forms of legitimation focus instead on a subject of study, the previously silenced knower. The 'previously' is key here, for this strategy depends on the voice being silenced and even proclaiming this is open to counter-claims of being heard, undermining its force, and to further knower critique by a new voice.

Lacking an explicit strongly defined notion of what can and cannot be studied also leaves the subject area vulnerable to indiscriminate poaching of its actors and ideas. Instead of creating, for example, a named cultural studies department or course, one can add a module or staff member to existing institutional arrangements or adopt 'cultural' as a prefix without altering one's intellectual practices. Indeed, the fragmentation of knower modes makes them ideally suited to the marketisation and pick'n'mix modularisation of higher education. Such subject areas may thus, as Bernstein (1996: 177-8) puts it, 'reveal a suicidal tendency', resulting in a loss of

original identity:

Here, paradoxically, the [academic] subject shines with an invisible light in other knowledge structures when it may itself be dying.

Conclusion

What ramifications would this process of proliferation and fragmentation have for the position of cultural studies? On the one hand, it would leave cultural studies in an extremely precarious institutional and intellectual position, vulnerable to poaching by other forms of knowledge and possibly losing a cohesive sense of direction - the disciplinary map may swallow it whole without digesting its project. On the other hand, one could argue that cultural studies would thereby plant seeds in other disciplines, that culture is now being taken seriously by academia and 'a rose by any other name smells just as sweet'. One could additionally argue that a knower mode of legitimation represents a pragmatic and temporary strategy for carving out an initial space within higher education, regardless of its implications. This may be true enough, but history teaches us that it is always difficult to decide when such strategies are redundant; they are habit-forming and, as illustrated above, the knower mode has a tendency to bite back.

These are the kinds of questions which have come to vex cultural studies. What I have done is to isolate *one* internal feature of cultural studies to show its potential implications for the subject's position in higher education. As I have emphasised, this is *not* the whole story, but it does show that any account of cultural studies - past, present or future - needs to address not only issues of agency or social structure but also the *internal* features of cultural studies as a knowledge formation. All too often, commitment and sincerity have been considered, at least tacitly, sufficient and questions of consequences and effects neglected. Where cultural studies has developed in directions not to one's liking, the temptation is to explain these in terms of external hindrance or lack of effort. Both may indeed be true, but I am asking: what if the consequences of the stances we take lead to effects at odds with the ends we seek?

Although I have, somewhat provocatively, compared one aspect of cultural studies with papal infallibility and the divine right of kings, it is worth emphasising their differences. The most obvious is that whilst the knower mode of my thought experiment exhibits proliferation and fragmentation, the position of monarchs and

Popes as privileged knowers have remained stable over relatively long periods of time. This highlights that the process is in no way inevitable. It is, rather, a power, tendency or disposition of knower modes of legitimation. Whether that tendency is realised depends on the empirical context. In practice, tendencies may be unexercised (because of a lack of enabling conditions), exercised unrealized (due to countervailing pressures), or realized unperceived (see Bhaskar 1975, 1979). In the case of ‘popes and kings’, the conditions for evoking this process are either absent or countered by other forces, such as social power and control in the form of the monopoly of violent coercion or the means of manufacturing consent. The structure of legitimacy was held in place at least partly by force; open questioning was largely forbidden and punishable in some cases by death. Thus, the tendency to proliferate and fragment is evident in feudal hierarchies when this countervailing pressure diminishes, such as when kingdoms break down into rivalrous fiefdoms under weak monarchs.

It is thus not the case that proliferation and fragmentation *must* result from adopting a knower mode of legitimation. The next task is to analyse the determinate conditions under which this tendency is either evoked and enabled or countered. This is to highlight the significance of social conditions and relations of power and the possibilities of agency in determining the ways in which specific academic subjects might develop. Knowing this tendency of the knower mode does not predict practices, but it does provide the basis for a slow reach again for control, as Williams put it, over their development - knowledge as power, instead of a reduction of knowledge to power.

The future direction of cultural studies and its ability to change the disciplinary map thus depends not simply on commitment and effort, but also on understanding how the ways we describe ourselves have very real impacts on our own institutional and intellectual positions and thus what we are able to achieve. In effect, then, and *in this context*, I am reversing Karl Marx’s eleventh thesis on Feuerbach to argue that

Thus far we’ve tried to *change* the world (or higher education or the disciplinary map) in various ways. The point, however, is to *understand* it, in order that we might know not only on behalf of whom, but *what* and *how* change may be effected.

This requires the modesty to accept that perhaps good intentions are not always enough and the intellectual honesty to consider analyses which may not always say what we would like to hear: a culture of consequence alongside one of commitment.

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Endnotes

[1] This paper was originally presented at *Cultural Studies & Interdisciplinarity: Difference, otherness, dialogue, translation*, University of Leeds, April 2000. To retain the flavour of its original form, footnotes, references and conceptual discussion have been kept to a minimum. A more formally defined conceptual framework and numerous references may be found in Maton (2000a, 2000b) and Moore & Maton (2000).

[2] I should emphasise that this brief sketch is of *British cultural studies* within *British* higher education. Subject areas typically regarded as related to cultural studies, such as media and communication studies, have divergent emphases, and the development of cultural studies in other national contexts have differed (see, for example, Blundell *et al* 1993).

[3] See Maton (2000a) for more detail of this institutional trajectory. In the course of ongoing research into the institutionalisation of cultural studies within higher education, I have constructed a database of every course, option and module in cultural, media and communication studies (and variants thereof) offered in British institutions of higher education since the early 1960s. Analysis of this database, as well as unpublished archival course materials and student data, will be made available in future publications.

[4] Compare, for example, Johnson (1983), Hall (1992), Miller (1994) and Bennett (1996) with various articles in Nelson & Gaonkar (1996) and Striphas (1998).

[5] It cannot be overemphasised that I am not suggesting that externalist issues are unimportant in the development of intellectual fields; as I argue elsewhere, *both* are essential to a non-reductive account of knowledge (Maton 2000a). My focus here is to highlight the significance of the neglected dimension of knowledge itself.

[6] I use 'King' here only to avoid any confusion with the present.

[7] Feudal relations in England varied over time, but the overall pyramid shape remained relatively constant. Thus, for example, the structure in England under William after 1066 was: God - King - approximately 200-300 Barons and Bishops (or Tenants-in-Chief) - 1,000-2,000 Knights / Lords (or Under-Tenants) - 1-1.5 million peasants. Similarly, the structure in England in 1500 was: God - King - Nobles (about 50 families) - Knights or gentry and gentlemen (10,000 families) - Yeoman (100,000 families) - Tenant farmers and the poor (400,000 families).

[8] Papal Infallibility was more famously defined as a matter of faith by the First Vatican Council in 1870, but (as illustrated) the legitimacy of knowledge based on the Pope as a privileged knower was already well established. That the Pope may claim infallibility only when speaking on specific issues and in a particular way was only declared in 1870, prior to which it was far less restricted. (Thus the Vatican's explanation for why the behaviour of so-called 'bad popes' does not undermine papal infallibility: they had overstepped their remit).

[9] Pulling tight a thread which weaves through the garment of history is dangerous, both for the author and the reader. The temptation is to scan critically for omissions and so read such an argument as if it aimed at comprehensiveness. The account offered here is not an intellectual history, but rather a theorisation of the *dominant* modes of belief regarding the basis of knowledge, illustrated schematically by historical examples. It is thus primarily heuristic, a starting point. Two further possible misreadings are, first, to elide modes of thinking about thought with the modes of thinking themselves; whether these self-characterisations accurately reflect actors' practices is not my concern here. Secondly, one may elide a focus on dominant patterns of thinking about the basis of knowledge with the marginalisation

or devaluation of other beliefs and ideas. My aim here is not the recovery of forgotten or dominated modes of thought, but the analysis of those forms which are widely perceived as having been highly influential at various moments in time.

[10] Again, I should emphasise that the following summarises *self-characterisations* of cultural studies; enacted practices may be entirely different.

[11] The following analysis draws upon sections of Maton (2000a, 2000b), which elaborate the intrinsic dynamic of knower modes.