10 British Cultural Studies, Film History, and Forgotten Horizons of Cultural Analysis

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Abstract

This chapter traces the deep connections between British cultural studies and film studies, reminding us how central the teaching and analysis of popular film was to the formation of cultural studies. Of comparable importance to British cultural studies was the History Workshop at Oxford University, which advanced politically engaged forms of "people's history," amplifying the historical impact of women, workers, and colonial subjects. In the 1970s and 1980s, the events and publications of the History Workshop were a point of intersection between the new theoretical frames of cultural analysis and the traditions of radical history. Consequently, and generally underappreciated today, just as poststructuralist continental theory secured its purchase on film scholarship and cultural studies, new methods and materials of historical research were being explored and expanded to situate "popular arts," including film, within cultural history.

Keywords: British cultural studies, Stuart Hall, History Workshop

Cinema, no different from any cultural activity and experience, materializes in practices and forms. A study of moving image media—a history of film and media—requires a study of those practices and forms, what they are, what they have been, and what they were imagined to be. Such a historical enterprise includes attention to the situations, occasions, infrastructures, economies, and institutions in which moving images were produced, circulated, and encountered. And this materiality involves criticism and debate, inventories of information, publishing, conversation, merchandising, and

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ephemera, if you will, the thingness of film and media ideas. The practices and forms are not static. There are no universals; cultural practices have varying geographies and are differently taken up by different populations; some such practices have receded from use and memory while others retain an influential residual impact. And new configurations of activity and affect are always evolving.

A fundamental point I want to make in this chapter is that the ordinariness of the way we have lived with movies directs us to an expansive realm of non-filmic texts and activities. At first blush, it may appear idiosyncratic or simply unconventional, but some of the best paths to the heart of filmic life are not through cinema at all, but through publishing, vernacular inventories, mass readership newspapers, magazines, websites, streaming apps, home video, and television. The historian and critic might best stand several paces away from the cinema, that too easily privileged and presumptive home of the cinephilic imaginary, or even from motion pictures themselves. As someone who has been elated and energized by the promise of the world of movies ever since it hit me that the names of actors and directors were important to remember, I understand deeply the impulse to valorize one's constellation of cinema superstars and rituals. But for so many, film practices had more to do with television than the cinematheque, more to do with rambunctious audiences than contemplative aesthetes, and more to do with lower genres than international prestige or personal films, leaving the majority far removed from the orbit of the tasteful cinephile. It would to be a gross disregard for the importance and ordinariness of culture, for people's immediate and passionate commitments, to ignore this or to see those media engagements as substandard expressions of cultural life. Framing our media historical ambitions, one must gear up for a deliberate effort to both think about and rattle cultural hierarchies, an endeavour that must recognize and act on the fact that cultural life is not medium specific, and is a product of different conditions, communities, and experiences. Media are in constant flux, and their borders are porous and only ever so fleetingly stable, regardless of whatever inherent properties, biases, and affordances are supposedly in play. Indeed, a medium is never truly singular and is always a set of characteristics that cohere in relation to some other medium, meaning all static ahistorical outlines of medium specificity are inventions of the theorist. As Janet Staiger put it, signalling the contribution of cultural studies that I wish to discuss below, "scholars need to stop thinking of film history as *film* history and start thinking more about *media* history."[1]

1 Janet Staiger, "The Future of the Past," *Cinema Journal* 44, no. 1 (2004): 127.

Staiger's call is no longer as controversial as it once was; the venue in which it appeared is no longer called *Cinema Journal* but the *Journal of Cinema and Media Studies*. But for every public nod of assent and outward gloss of disciplinary expansion, there remain remarkably tenacious strains that keep traditional analytical modes and priorities centred on that sprawling literary-inflected film studies. My specific premise here is, in many ways, an impression as an insider-outsider, a scholar trained in communication, cultural, and media studies who has contributed to the scholarship of film culture. The impression is that even as many have expanded their sites of analysis, or made gestures toward other media materials, the full weight of the debates that emerged from cultural studies is often consigned by film scholars to omnibus footnote status. This ill-formed consideration is especially evident in film historical work. When I write this, I do not mean it as a simple matter of credit where credit is due; a profound contribution is being lost that instead should invigorate the work we do. In so much of the film historical work I read today, I see a wilful ignorance about cultural theory in what seems to be an unproblematic equivalence between history of film culture and exhibition history. I see it in research projects that are less arguments than assemblages of excruciatingly minute detail, which can make one's eyes feel like they have been laminated. And we can see the diminished grasp of British cultural studies in the way it has been lampooned in the people-draining versions of media archaeology.

Allow me to walk this back before you opt to skip ahead to the next chapter. The very best of the so-called "new cinema history" has effectively shifted research priorities internationally such that there is now a prominent place for a sociology of film, one in which contextual matters are paramount. This work has produced a resounding counterblast against the universalist film theory in favour of a grounded materialist approach.[2] Moreover, historical precision has benefitted from the "archival turn" of the digital era that has seen a spike in access to previously inaccessible materials, particularly those pertaining to generally devalued popular realms.[3] And the best of media archaeology advances an engagement with the complexities of cultural

2 A representative survey of this strain of historical research is found in Richard Maltby, Daniel Biltereyst, and Philippe Meers, eds., *Explorations in New Cinema History: Approaches and Case Studies* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), and Daniel Biltereyst, Richard Maltby, and Philippe Meers, eds., *The Routledge Companion to New Cinema History* (New York: Routledge, 2019).

3 For instance, Charles R. Acland and Eric Hoyt, eds., *The Arclight Guidebook to Media History and the Digital Humanities* (Sussex: REFRAME Books, in association with Project Arclight, 2016).

forces, not the simplicity of technological certitude.[4] Nevertheless, rare is the appearance of the decades-long impactful efforts from British cultural studies scholars to write about culture as a site of struggle and as an arena for the organization of power, people, and ideas.

There have been those that have appropriately and usefully worked to chart the flow of influence between film and cultural studies. Graeme Turner has been a steadfast contributor to the "film as social practice" mode of analysis, and has surmised that cultural theory and film studies developed more closely in relation to one another in the UK whereas the US saw a more exclusive vision of film study develop that kept other formations at bay.[5] Jane Gaines' contribution to *Reinventing Film Studies*, "Dream/Factory," saw a productive bridge between film and cultural studies in the centrality of movie culture's historical relationship with consumer culture.[6] British cultural studies offers non-totalizing models for understanding ideology, institutions, and mass culture. Social and cultural totalities only ever emerge from provisional forces that must be continually re-articulated, re-assured, and re-produced. As Gaines pointed out, many key conceptual contributions built on this uncertainty, this incompleteness, by offering glimmers of progressive possibility. Provisionality—the contingency of interpretation, meaning, uses, and impact—has been taken up by audience- and reader-centred media research. Here, Staiger and Barbara Klinger have had foundational impacts, making apparent that re-centring the film experience in history is a primary contribution of cultural studies to film.[7]

In what follows, I supplement these accounts by offering a sketch of the intersection of film, cultural history, and cultural studies. I begin by asking: where was film in British cultural studies? After all the second part of Raymond Williams' seminal book *The Long Revolution* (1961) did *not* include a history of the development of the institution of cinema. The historical sweeps of the second part of that book deal with the press,

4 The vitality of media archaeological work is best exemplified by Erkki Huhtamo and Jussi Parikka, eds., *Media Archaeology: Approaches, Applications, and Implications* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), and Thomas Elsaesser, *Film History as Media Archaeology: Tracking Digital Cinema* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2017).

5 Graeme Turner, "Film and Cultural Studies," in *The SAGE Handbook of Film Studies*, ed. James Donald and Michael Renov (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2008), 271.

6 Jane M. Gaines, "Dream/Factory," in *Reinventing Film Studies*, ed. Christine Gledhill and Linda Williams (London: Arnold, 2000), 100–13.

7 Janet Staiger, "Film, Reception, and Cultural Studies," *The Centennial Review* 36, no. 1 (1992): 89–104; Janet Staiger, *Perverse Spectators: The Practices of Film Reception* (New York: NYU Press, 2000); Barbara Klinger, "Film History/Terminable and Interminable: Recovering the Past in Reception Studies," *Screen* 38, no. 2 (1997): 107–28.

education, drama, and literature from the nineteenth century onward. The third part is "Britain in the 1960s."[8] Both sections might have encompassed film in British life. They do not. On this point, Stuart Laing noted that Williams' book *Communication* (1962) was primarily about print media and advertising, with very little on moving image media, whether film or television.[9]

Yet film had been front and centre in Williams' intellectual development, and it provided one of his early breaks with the Leavisite tradition of literary criticism. Where F. R. Leavis—a defining figure for literary studies in the mid-twentieth century—saw no place for film in the curriculum, Williams was incorporating film in Workers' Educational Association extensions classes from the 1940s onward. Moreover, in his early book *Preface to Film*, co-authored with Michel Orrom, he placed cinema as continuous with a dramatic tradition, and introduced one of his most influential concepts, "structures of feeling." The very idea of "structures of feeling," which is among the most enduring, if unstable, concepts of British cultural studies, rests on a contextual understanding of representational conventions; or, as he put it, they are "the means of expression which find tacit consent."[10] "Structures of feeling" implicates a historical mode of analysis of lived cultural experience, and here, at its point of introduction, film is formative for thinking about that experience.

Raymond Williams, three decades after *Preface to Film*, directly challenged us in a way that deserves repeated hearing. He wrote, "What is the history of film? In considering this question, we are likely to pass lightly over 'history' and put a defining emphasis on 'film.'"[11] He noted the limitations of work in which "film and cinema are treated as unitary subjects, which are then made to disclose their historical stages of development."[12] Instead, he showed that film history results in "indefinite and multiple reproducibility," rather than unified or linear historical development.[13] To do so, he discussed four tracks, or bearings, on which to run our historical analysis, ones that strike me as still relevant today: technology and its material uses, and film's relation to popular culture, established culture, and modernist

8 Raymond Williams, *The Long Revolution* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1961).

9 Stuart Laing, "Raymond Williams and the Cultural Analysis of Television," *Media, Culture & Society* 13, no. 2 (1991): 155.

10 Raymond Williams and Michel Orrom, *Preface to Film* (London: Film Drama, 1954), 21–23.

11 Raymond Williams, "British Film History: New Perspectives," in *British Cinema History*, ed. James Curran and Vincent Porter (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1983), 9.

12 Ibid.

13 Ibid., 22.

culture.[14] With these bearings, attention is drawn to infrastructural features and operations of cultural hierarchies, in this way making apparent the role of film culture in the organization of unequal power distribution. A truly important reappraisal of film in British cultural studies is found in Dana Polan's essay "Raymond Williams on Film," which unearths Williams' foundational engagements with film as a pedagogical advantage for adult education, a test for new concepts about culture and society, and a vehicle for understanding the potential for social progress.[15] Polan effectively parses Williams' position in the 1970s poststructuralist challenges to realism, where Williams argues for the possibility of a Brechtian socialist realism that does not revert to a flat photographic naturalism or a cryptic avant-garde.

Other scholars have observed a parallel path to popular cultural critique for the prolific Williams. Laing noted Williams' *Television: Technology and Cultural Form* (1974) had been largely ignored by literary scholars and considered a minor part of his oeuvre, including his concept of "flow," which shortly after would be indispensably featured in television studies. Laing commented that in literary studies, Williams' cultural materialist approach tended to be gestured toward but was only rarely engaged with. In general, though, attention to television in British cultural studies developed only later in the 1970s and 1980s, and was slower to emerge as a major engagement, especially in comparison to a more consistent engagement with film. On this point, Williams wrote a monthly commentary for *The Listener* on television from 1968 to 1972, which Laing suggested was a platform on which to rehearse ideas about viewing "experience," which would fill the conceptual gap between broadcasting institutions and contexts, ultimately setting the stage for Williams' more fulsome scholarly contribution, *Television*.[16]

Williams, who powerfully shaped and guided the emergence of British cultural studies, was but one of a generation of scholars who wrestled with the politics of cultural analysis and who placed special stock in the popular. Stuart Hall and Paddy Whannel wrote *The Popular Arts* (1964), a guide to help teachers make sense of mass popular culture and its impact on students and classrooms, drawing from their experience teaching in secondary schools and in the Workers' Educational Association.[17] You can see the central place of film in their thinking, starting with the frontispiece—a still from John Ford's film *My Darling Clementine* (1946). In fact, of the book's sixteen pages

14 Ibid., 12.

15 Dana Polan, "Raymond Williams on Film," *Cinema Journal* 52, no. 3 (2013): 1–18.

16 Laing, "Raymond Williams and the Cultural Analysis of Television."

17 Stuart Hall and Paddy Whannel, *The Popular Arts* (London: Hutchison Educational, 1964).

of images, four are from magazine advertisements and the other twelve are from movies. And there are about as many references in the book to movies, cinema, and film as there are to television, radio, magazines, and books combined. Paddy Whannel's influence here deserves special note. Peter Wollen and Laura Mulvey have referred to Whannel's founding of the Education Department at the British Film Institute—servicing extensions programmes and secondary teachers, where he was head from 1957 to 1971—as key to disciplinary development in the UK. Wollen specifically described the importance of *The Popular Arts* for British cultural studies as follows: "[I]t was the first book to use what you might call a theoretical approach to a subject that had no academic standing."[18] *The Popular Arts* moved away from blanket critical assessments of popular forms, opting instead for more context-based critiques. In the US, Roger Brown's contemporaneous review of *The Popular Arts* posed it as a refreshingly humanist approach to popular culture, rather than what had become the rigid methods of social science in American communication studies departments. Hall and Whannel asked questions of the quality of experience and social conditions.[19] They wanted to talk about "majority art," "majority taste," and "majority audiences," not tiny niches of experimental micro-cultures. And while they expose the phoniness of class stereotypes—like representations of working-class "mateyness"—they also sought to work with what was there, actual, present, and accessible in cultural life, in order to best identify the ways people live in the shadow of a system that disadvantaged so many.

In the 2018 edition of *The Popular Arts*, an introductory essay by Richard Dyer observes that Hall and Whannel's book was invested with Leavisite questions of discrimination and judgement, which may have been strategically used in order to ease acceptance of the then radical proposal that the popular would be considered with such seriousness.[20] The attention to the popular, as Dyer reminds us, made the book of a piece with anti-imperial, anti-authoritarian, New Left projects.[21] To show this, he cites Stuart Hall's editorial in the first issue of *New Left Review*: "The purpose of discussing the cinema or teen-age culture in *NLR* is not to show that,

18 Peter Wollen and Laura Mulvey, with Lee Grieveson, "From Cinephilia to Film Studies," in *Inventing Film Studies*, ed. Lee Grieveson and Haidee Wasson (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 218.

19 Roger Brown, "Review: *The Popular Arts* by Stuart Hall and Paddy Whannel," *AV Communication Review* 13, no. 4 (Winter 1965): 429–35.

20 Richard Dyer, "Introduction to the 2018 Edition," in *The Popular Arts*, Stuart Hall and Paddy Whannel (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018), vii–xii.

21 Ibid., xii.

in some modish way, we are keeping up with the times. These are directly relevant to the imaginative resistances of people who have to live within capitalism—the growing points of social discontent, the projections of deeply-felt needs."[22] Critical engagement with all modes of and platforms for popular language was settling in as one of the distinctive concerns of this formation of cultural analysis. An engagement with the ordinary and the popular in action provided a point of continuity between *The Popular Arts* and subsequent developments in cultural studies, despite remnants of analysis that would soon mostly be left behind in favour of more discursive and poststructuralist critical schemas.

Realized in *The Popular Arts* were a number of themes that prefigure the shape cultural studies took: an exploration of ordinary, everyday, cultural texts and practices; an understanding of ideological formations as indeterminate, incomplete, and sites of struggle; and a commitment to work through popular culture to advance democratic and egalitarian potential. There is perhaps no more resounding statement about those critical priorities than Stuart Hall's essay "Notes on Deconstructing the 'Popular,'" in which we find a full rendition of the argument about the "double-stake" of popular culture, its dialectical pull toward resistance and containment.[23] For our purposes, know that Hall's essay elaborates its case as a critique of standardized forms of historical periodization and as a response to historical work that imagines there are true popular traditions awaiting discovery, to be unearthed and celebrated for their authenticity. Instead, Hall argued cultural struggle is the proper object of inquiry—not a gated notion of medium singularity or authentic experience—to be examined "dynamically: as a historical process."[24] To do this, he advanced an approach that was heavily indebted to Antonio Gramsci, where culture is an arena in which meanings, communities, and alliances are made, rather than predetermined and inscribed with absolute certainty on popular texts and forms. The ideational and semiotic elasticity of popular culture Hall described meant that "Not only is there no intrinsic guarantee within the cultural sign or form itself. There is no guarantee that, because at one time it was linked with a pertinent struggle, that it will always be the living expression of a class: so that every time you give it an airing it will 'speak the language of socialism.'"[25] The

22 Stuart Hall, "Editorial," *New Left Review* 1, no. 1 (1960): 1.

23 Stuart Hall, "Notes on Deconstructing 'the Popular,'" in *People's History and Socialist Theory*, ed. Raphael Samuel (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981), 227–40.

24 Ibid., 236.

25 Ibid., 238.

ethical and political drive in this argument had general implications for forms of cultural analysis. It pointed to intermedial and intertextual forms of analysis; it placed historicity, context, and contingency at the heart of cultural critique; it embraced the popular and the cultural materials that spoke to people; it had a strong current of humanism in that the actual experience and understandings of people mattered; and it valued critique, intellectual engagement, and cultural production as forms of work that helped to ameliorate the world we share. "Notes on Deconstructing the 'Popular,'" titled as it is to suggest modesty or incompleteness, is anything but. There isn't much deconstruction, either, though the poststructuralist influence surfaces with its attention to significatory indeterminacy. Titular red herrings aside, the essay is a powerfully confident argument for the conjunctural historical analysis of popular media.

This classic work first appeared in 1981 as a chapter in Raphael Samuel's edited collection *People's History and Socialist Theory*.[26] A British historian of working-class movements, Samuel was a major influence on Hall. He led the History Workshop at Ruskin College at Oxford University, which featured a high-profile series of annual conferences of socialist historians running from 1967 until 1994. The Workshop began as a pedagogical effort in 1966 to develop historical research skills, using primary materials, among adult students. And the work was explicitly intended to add an experiential working-class voice to historical narratives. As Samuel wrote, "the Workshop was concerned to create a space for the discussion of themes which had remained 'hidden from history' not because there was no documentation available to study them but because they were at odds with the dominant modes of historical publication and research."[27] Bill Schwarz summarized the History Workshop's contribution "as an effective alternative historical apparatus. It countered the intellectual and political conservatism of the dominant historical profession, setting up an alternative means for producing historical knowledge which had roots deep in the subordinate groups of British society."[28] Its work of running conferences and courses, building networks, and encouraging research from people typically marginalized from scholarly knowledge production was responsible for expanding and

26 Raphael Samuel, ed., *People's History and Socialist Theory* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981).

27 Raphael Samuel, "History Workshop, 1966–1980," in *People's History and Socialist Theory*, ed. Raphael Samuel (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981), 411.

28 Bill Schwarz, "History on the Move: Reflections on History Workshop," *Radical History Review* 57 (1993): 203.

informing "history from below," women's, workers', and popular history in the UK.

This particular volume—*People's History and Socialist Theory*—consists of the proceedings of History Workshop 13 that ran in 1979, under the same name. The book was part of a series of thirteen books that originated in similar events and were published between 1975 and 1991.[29] Surveying the works in this series, one does not find very much about film culture; worker's theatre movements, popular fiction, and the press all figure prominently, but the movies did not receive special attention. One exception is Raphael Samuel, who wrote on the re-articulation of the writings of Charles Dickens in film in his essay "Docklands Dickens," a great title if there ever was one.[30] *People's History and Socialist Theory*—the workshop and the book—ran the gamut of new historical orientations for scholarship, with work on the culture of fascism, the history of feminist movements, and the operations of colonialism. The workshop held sessions dedicated to labour history, peasant studies, religion, Ireland, and imperialism. Discussion about the state of cultural studies was prominent. The session on cultural studies promised to include noted historians Peter Burke and Carlo Ginzburg on early modern European popular culture, Hannah Mitchell and Peter Larsen on art history and Marxism, and David Laing and Alun Howkins on popular music. Stuart Hall joined Peter Burke and Hannah Mitchell for a plenary panel on "Problems in Cultural Studies," where Hall presented what would become his "Notes on Deconstructing the 'Popular'" essay. With an expanded focus on the British working class such as was encouraged by the History Workshop, *People's History and Socialist Theory* gestured toward an international scope with essays on Africa, Continental Europe, and the US. The registration form for the workshop reveals some historical particularities for such intellectual events. Organizers offered child-care to attendees; the event cost £3 (about £14 in 2023); the attendance was capped at 500; and position papers circulated in advance for £2.

Today, the table of contents for the book that followed the workshop is a bit like a meeting of scholarly stars when they were young(er). Included in the sizable collection of fifty-two essays is work by Jacques Rancière, Barbara Taylor, Michael Ignatieff, Perry Anderson, and Catherine Hall. It would be

29 Details about the History Workshop that follow benefited from historical material posted on the History Workshop website, in particular Anna Davin and Luke Parks, "An Introduction & Index to the Material," in *History of History Workshop*, November 5, 2012, http://www.historyworkshop.org.uk/the-history-workshop-archives-an-introduction/.

30 Raphael Samuel, "Docklands Dickens," in *Patriotism: The Making and Unmaking of British National Identity, Vol. III: National Fictions*, ed. Raphael Samuel (London: Routledge, 1989), 275–85.

misleading to only focus on the participants who we can now see were part of an emerging intellectual vanguard. Many of the events and publications were generated via collective labour and much of the organization relied on and integrated students and their research. The History Workshop was in many ways continuous with other extensions and adult education efforts, designed as they were to bring non-traditional, and especially working-class, student populations into scholarly and intellectual currents. That said, there was considerable complaint that saw History Workshop 13 as a turn toward an exclusionary mode of academic analysis, using a critical vocabulary that alienated the traditional non-academic participants. This dissension led to further consideration by the Workshop, at subsequent events, about the commitments to accessibility versus the intellectual's prerogative to explore abstraction productively. At least at the level of the paratext, the book locates itself in a recognizable tradition of social realist aesthetics. Each section begins with a woodcut from renowned American artist Lynd Ward, noted for his depictions of working people and populist storytelling using only images that were precursors to and inspirations for today's graphic novels. Even the book's font has a DIY feel to it; this part of the paratext signals the people's media format of mimeograph pamphlet rather than the fact that it is included in a major book series imprint from international publisher Routledge.

The workshop event of 1979 and the subsequent publication in 1981 were notable points of intersection for an emerging conversation and debate between various versions of the new cultural history and the burgeoning British cultural studies. On this aspect, History Workshop 13 was the staging ground for one of the more legendary battles of cultural theory. As Anna Davin remembered, this gathering "was in part meant to bring different intellectual and political tendencies on the left into constructive debate, though unfortunately explosions and still deeper rifts resulted instead."[31] At a plenary session broadly titled "History and Theory," on a Saturday evening, Stuart Hall and Richard Johnson, chaired by Stephen Yeo, responded to E. P. Thompson's passionate critique of the rise of poststructuralist theory among left intellectuals in the UK, *The Poverty of Theory*, which had appeared the year before. Jane Caplan and Hans Medick were also scheduled to present.[32]

31 Anna Davin, "The Only Problem Was Time," *History Workshop Journal* 50 (Autumn, 2000): 242–43.

32 The exigencies of an ever-changing line-up of speakers such as they are, a notice published shortly before the event appeared in *History Workshop Journal* and did not include Stuart Hall as part of the *Poverty of Theory* plenary. He must have been a later addition. "History Workshop Notices," *History Workshop Journal* 8, no. 1 (Autumn 1979): 218.

Thompson, whose influential book *The Making of the English Working Class* was a classic in left cultural history, himself took to the stage to respond to his critics.[33] In the later book version, the section titled "Culturalism" reproduced this debate, with Samuel providing introductory context. He pointed out that the session responded additionally to Richard Johnson's essay on cultural studies and British Marxist historiography in *History Workshop Journal*, which critiqued key works by E. P. Thompson and Eugene Genovese in relation to Althusser's structuralist Marxism.[34] Samuel noted, too, that the debate continued reverberations of the fractures in the New Left that had existed from the 1960s onward. Hovering above it all was the election of Margaret Thatcher as prime minister earlier in 1979, which amplified the urgency of left intellectual engagement and accounts for some of the evident tensions. Schwarz remembered that the whole workshop "was, in the truest sense of the word, an event. A mass of people attended. At a moment when it seemed as if all these issues that mattered were taking place within the discipline of history, the conference arguably represented the peak of History Workshop's influence in national intellectual life. Yet its climax proved a disaster."[35] The climax was the Hall/Johnson/Thompson plenary.

At the risk of not doing justice to any of the positions, Thompson had, a year earlier, written an acerbic attack on what he saw as the rise of anti-humanist theoreticism in poststructuralism that was being newly embraced by Anglophone scholars. He went so far as to say that this anti-humanism was tantamount to Stalinism. In his original work, a long essay titled "The Poverty of Theory, or an Orrery of Errors," Thompson constructed a detailed challenge to Louis Althusser, beginning by noting Althusser's especially worrisome attack on historicism.[36] Others in the UK—more Althusser than Althusser—had pushed the logic to the extreme, and Thompson cited poststructuralists Barry Hindess and Paul Hirst as examples. How could Thompson, indeed anyone who had even the most glancing stake in historical materialism, not respond to this dimension of Althusserianism? But Thompson swung wide and took down, along the way, various other conceptual tracks, including those that sought to move beyond latent

33 E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1963).

34 Raphael Samuel, "Editorial Note," in *People's History and Socialist Theory*, ed. Raphael Samuel (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981), 376–78; Richard Johnson, "Edward Thompson, Eugene Genovese and Socialist-Humanist History," *History Workshop Journal* 6, no. 1 (Autumn 1978): 79–100.

35 Schwarz, "History on the Move," 212.

36 E. P. Thompson, *The Poverty of Theory* (London: Merlin, 1978).

automatic authenticity in the analysis of cultural life. Richard Johnson explained the debate as an encounter between "The Moment of Culture" and "The Moment of Theory," not by any stretch of the imagination dismissing the former as Thompson claimed.[37] And Stuart Hall actually seconded many of Thompson's critiques but found that Thompson still nestled into an unproblematic historical truth, where historical experience was relatively transparent and able to speak for itself. For Hall, this was as much a debate about readings and applications of Gramscian critique as it was about Althusser. Hall reserved special scolding for the polemical and absolutist approach of Thompson's condemnation, arguing that it did little to advance intellectual debate.[38]

Take note of what else was happening in media history contemporaneously. Thompson's initial volley—the publication of *The Poverty of Theory*—was the same year as the International Federation of Film Archives (FIAF) conference in Brighton in 1978. There, so the story goes, under the conference theme "Cinema 1900–1906," film studies experienced its own historical turn, reconsidering films that had previously been dismissed as "primitive" and embracing both a technological and social historical formation for film history. This historical turn began with the revaluing of the devalued, and a methodological refocusing upon archives as an essential site of film history. Thompson was noticing something else, more general, concerning British historical research: a turn away from history. The Brighton moment for film study was launched with a narrowly periodized "early cinema" and had all the enthusiastic hallmarks of having unearthed neglected texts and practices; there were lots of screenings of lost and neglected works. It showcased a revelatory re-discovery, and it generated research for decades to come.

In the collection *People's History and Socialist Theory*, E. P. Thompson was alarmed about a different set of forces: "For a full decade a theoreticist and structuralist campaign had been directed at our positions, for their supposed "empiricism," "humanism," "moralism," "historicism," theoretical vacuity, etc. This campaign had almost overwhelmed the older Marxist tradition in Sociology, rooted itself deeply in criticisms of film, art, and literature, and massing on the borders of history."[39] Note the reference to film; for him,

37 Richard Johnson, "Against Absolutism," in *People's History and Socialist Theory*, ed. Raphael Samuel (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981), 386–96.

38 Stuart Hall, "In Defence of Theory," in *People's History and Socialist Theory*, ed. Raphael Samuel (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981), 378–85.

39 E. P. Thompson, "The Politics of Theory," in *People's History and Socialist Theory*, ed. Raphael Samuel (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981), 401.

the historical turn emerging from the FIAF conference in Brighton was not happening; or, more accurately, he worried specifically about a campaign of anti-empiricism setting up its fortifications. Thompson didn't even like the professional mode of academic critique and was brutally dismissive of new Marxist scholars as the bourgeois *lumpen-intelligensia* involved in "imaginary" and "harmless revolutionary psycho-drama." Though we are now forty years later, it's hard not to have the face of a colleague or two pop up in your mind's eye when you read that. Returning to what's left of the Thompson ruckus, it's not entirely apparent what was so irreconcilable to Thompson. His critique does not seem "anti-theory," but a principled conceptual and political rejection of the dangerous enthusiasm for the theological dimensions of Althusserian ahistoricism. Thompson was not alone, and others called such structuralist ahistoricism neo-Stalinist.[40] After all, this battle was apparent throughout the 1970s, importantly on the pages of the journal *Screen*. And one cannot—or should not—read Williams' magnificent and theoretically sophisticated work *Marxism and Literature* without understanding that it was in part an attack on the anti-empiricism of Althusser.[41] Thompson was just meaner about it.

For British cultural studies, this debate about the politics of cultural historiography left us with the terminology of "culturalism" and "structuralism" as foundational strains in cultural scholarship. The former were the humanists who over-valued experience and the latter pushed toward ahistorical writing if unchecked. James Carey worried that the poststructuralist wave had been so vast that it had overwhelmed the initial culturalist critique of economism. As he put it, "When the oft-mentioned structuralist-culturalist crossroads was reached, the less travelled road, the culturalist one, was not taken." He continued, "I was appalled at the extreme polemics of *The Poverty of Theory* but I do think that E. P. Thompson (1978) pretty much got it right."[42] But it was never either/or; there was productive potential in this encounter. Stuart Hall's now-standard rendition of the epistemological footing of cultural studies, the 1980 essay "Cultural Studies: Two Paradigms," was a contemporaneous effort to seal some sort of rapprochement between the culturalists and the structuralists, doing so via Antonio Gramsci's dynamic model of cultural politics, and with the *Poverty of Theory* attacks

40 James Green, "*People's History and Socialist Theory*: A Review Essay," *Radical History Review*, no. 28–30 (1984): 173.

41 Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977).

42 James W. Carey, "Abolishing the Old Spirit World," *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 12, no. 1 (March 1995): 83.

and responses clearly still fresh.[43] The title of History Workshop 13 and the subsequent book even suggested this rapprochement; it's people's history *and* socialist theory, not people's history *versus* socialist theory.

People's History and Socialist Theory was not the only moment in which we see radical history intersect with cultural studies. Laura Mulvey and Peter Wollen, for instance, both had earlier presented at History Workshop 6 in 1972. And though the fractiousness of History Workshop 13 may be the most well remembered for many, Samuel's initiative continued as a platform for competing approaches to history, cultural analysis, and political engagement. No doubt still warmed by the heat of the previous year's flames, History Workshop 14, titled "Language and History," took place in Brighton in 1980 (a mere two years following the FIAF gathering there). Demonstrating intensified involvement with cultural studies, the participants included Dick Hebdige, Valerie Walkerdine, Cora Kaplan, Gill Frith, Jacqueline Rose, Angela McRobbie, Chris Weedon, and Colin MacCabe. The plenary speakers were Raymond Williams, Stuart Hall, Raphael Samuel, and Gareth Stedman Jones. An editorial in *History Workshop Journal* published just prior to the fourteenth workshop outlined the valuable directions opened by structuralism and its denaturalizing of language, with reference to *Screen* and the work in film studies was well as the feminist journal *M/F*.[44] For many in film, media, and cultural studies, the historical turn was equally a linguistic turn, one in which discourse, semiotics, and poststructuralism advanced an analysis of historical location and conjuncture. This mutual reckoning was to some—those surely siding with materialist historical experience without the new French structuralism—an implausible theoretical partnership. Nonetheless, the following year, also in Brighton, History Workshop 15 featured a closing plenary from E. P. Thompson, "The Politics of Peace Now," who by that time was reasserting his leadership in the British anti-nuclear peace movement. As theories of cultural struggle show us, there are no once-and-for-all-time victories or defeats. Even in the realm of scholarly critique, a battle over the terms of historical, political, and cultural analysis continued with the grounded work on marginal experience and class formation responding to conceptual interventions from contemporary theory and philosophy on the nature of meaning and language.

What are we to take away from my effort here to make visible this slice of our intellectual history? I intend, at root, to remind us of the legacy of the

43 Stuart Hall, "Cultural Studies: Two Paradigms," *Media, Culture and Society* 2, no. 1 (1980): 57–72.

44 "Editorial: Language and History," *History Workshop Journal* 10, no. 1 (Autumn 1980): 1–5.

traffic between cultural and film studies in the Anglophone scholarly world, and of the influential debates about historical method and cultural theory. But moreover, we can see that there is a shared moment in historiographic revitalization, if differently historicized in respective research domains. The FIAF conference in Brighton was not an isolated occasion of historical surprise, but an event that transpired in the context of a wider debate about radical history projects, forgotten and neglected practices, and cultural theory. Today, is film history and film theory interested in continuing to embrace these forces in the development of cultural historiography as part of its own formation? If yes, then we have to have the conviction to say that when we ask questions of history, we pursue practices that may not conform to legitimated and valorized taste formations, but instead those resonant with historical or contemporary populations. Such historical pursuits need to include unexpected, marginalized, and subalterned pockets of practices and forms. History is the study of dynamic forces that produced social relations. The attention to what cultural studies scholars called "practical consciousness" is that such study helps us conceptualize, activate, and "constitute classes and individuals as a popular force."[45] Think what it does to our histories of film and moving image studies if we foreground that, like cultural studies, film history and study also came from workers', adult, and extensions teaching situations, and emerged to help us decide how best to improve the lives of the disenfranchised or marginally enfranchised. By acknowledging this, we can begin to assure that our historical work exploits the full potential of cultural critique that is there for the taking.

That's the link, that's the leap: film history as part of a tradition of radical cultural history, including its efforts to develop new and inclusive modes of historiography, its exploration of neglected historical materials and narratives, and its ongoing struggle to develop appropriate theoretical engagements. You do not have to be an organic intellectual to take this on. Many a limelight starved scholar has mistakenly assumed that our job, our true calling, our anxious relevance, is found in combat fatigues, megaphones, and op eds. But we should orient our work such that we might produce an organic intellectual, armed with the analytical skills—about the immediate world and the historical elements that produced it—necessary to act effectively to build popular, democratic, and egalitarian blocs. Otherwise, as Hall ends his "Notes on Deconstructing the 'Popular,'" we really shouldn't give a damn about it.

45 Hall, "Notes on Deconstructing 'the Popular,'" 239.

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