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CULTURAL STUDIES AND THE POLITICS OF THE EVERYDAY

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Prompting this paper is a meditation about the relationship of feminism to cultural studies, especially the ways we define and think about those terms—and just who that “we” might be. Feminism seems a good model for keeping the great promise of multiculturalism from being codified into something more mainstream, more familiar, more reassuring, that sometimes gets called cultural studies. It is a good model precisely because it has not been so successful itself: feminism too (as an entity some people claim in the singular) threatens to become a homogenized whole. In this paper, I want to ask, In what ways do different practices assume—perhaps as a goal, even a utopia—a certain ideal of consensus? How does discomfort with real conflict—radical disagreement unbridgeable by compromise—oblige critics unwittingly to close off dilemmas they cannot solve, to pretend instead (and at a price, usually to others) that they can? In thinking about the use of the term “the everyday” in cultural studies, the goals projected by its construction, and the politics forged through it, I am wondering too about ways to reimagine the grounds of feminist politics and ways to deconstruct feminist utopias.

“The everyday” is a foundational category in cultural studies, a category so important to that field, and so taken for granted by it, that it is almost never defined. Yet the everyday as a conceptual category has a history: one source is in the work of Continental thinkers such as the historian Henri Lefebvre, whose work is currently being rediscovered and translated perhaps because of cultural studies’ renewed attention to the everyday [see LeFevre, Critique of Everyday Life]. Despite that interest, much recent work in cultural studies sees itself as growing more directly out of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at the University of Birmingham in England; the work of Raymond Williams and E. P. Thompson, among others, has been cited as a heritage for it by such critics as Stuart Hall, one director of the Centre, and Richard Johnson, essays that have influenced the work of such critics as Patrick Brantlinger. And all of this work depends upon, but leaves unexamined, the category of the everyday.

Categories such as the everyday and utopia come, of course, out of the theory of the left on whom the influence of Marx makes such terms crucial. The influence of Marx is clear in the work of Continental theorists of the
everyday, such as Lefebvre or Fernand Braudel, and remains strong in those who came after them, such as Michel de Certeau. The Birmingham Centre also locates itself firmly within this tradition, and Stuart Hall writes that cultural studies as a whole is a field which "essentially... is determined by the reception, development and transformation of Marxist theory" ["Survey" 6]. Catherine Gallagher cites the complication of the Frankfurt School’s suggestions about utopia as especially influential on "the generation of cultural critics that came of age in the 1960s," and argues that such critics saw their role as uncovering the hidden social contradictions that, to them, differentiated a fragmented bourgeois culture (that attempted to pass as whole) from the real (but still utopic) social totality—a utopia whose promise was encoded in the very desire for wholeness that organized the everyday [39]. Lefebvre’s and British cultural studies’ location of the traces of that utopic social totality in everyday life merely continues this tradition.

A survey of the left’s role in defining cultural studies also suggests that the ideal of totality, of consensus, of a shared and common goal, which grounds such approaches, also works in spite of itself to annul difference. One source of such a critique might be the deconstruction of closure and consistency distinguishing Continental poststructural theory that, as British cultural studies is well aware, begins to make the discussion of the category of the everyday even by a structuralist critic like Lefebvre different from its own. As a number of feminist essays (for instance, those by Gayatri Spivak or Meaghan Morris, both also influenced by the left) suggest, the abrogation of difference remains a specter in any attempt to constitute culture as a field. These feminist essays help us revise the category of the everyday from a seemingly unproblematic ground supporting shared experience, theoretical consistency, and ultimate social harmony to a site of irresolvable difference, of conflict whose resolution is not simply delayed, but theoretically impossible.

The idea of difference—of and within gender, race, even class—perhaps by necessity cannot be reassuringly embraced under any single system: examining modes of production cannot completely account for gender oppression and emphasizing gender oppression will not take care of racism. Seen in these terms, the new left, whatever its important contributions, is not so new; it retains a heritage of teleology and closure, a nostalgia for a once and future harmony and fullness, that poststructuralism puts into question. Yet such questioning is often misinterpreted as attack. As Gayatri Spivak has observed, the poststructuralist critique of cultural studies can be "misread as 'postmodern modesties replac[ing] Marxist certitudes.'... This is the risk that one must run in order to understand how much more complicated it is to realize the responsibility of playing with or working with fire than to pretend that what gives light and warmth does not also destroy" ["Constitutions" 145-46]. In negotiating such impossible distinctions, one avenue of approach might be to investigate the way that cultural studies repeats the very universalizing moves it wishes to put into question, the way that it annuls difference and invokes consensus precisely at those moments it conjures up its talisman of the real, the category of the everyday. Considering cultural studies’ pervasive references to the everyday, then, is one way to consider (if not try to change) its politics. By politics here I mean more than the idea of basic change, often associated with social intervention and collective action. One poststructural revision of this term has been Barbara Johnson’s, who, through a focus on a feminist debate about irreconcilable difference—the undecidable controversy about abortion—associates politics instead with undecidability, the very province the left often derides as apolitical. “There is politics precisely because there is undecidability,” she writes [194]. Perhaps another way to think about politics is to associate it with conflict—not with settling conflict, which usually means domination anyway, but with sustaining it. Politics can also mean contestation, the fight not to nullify but to assert disagreement, the struggle to be heard rather than silenced, to uncover the vision of unity and harmony as what seeks to silence, to show it up as somebody else’s ideal. It is precisely the promise
of this politics that makes the idea of cultural studies exciting and compelling to a critic concerned with race and gender as well as with class, such as bell hooks. She writes, “Usually scholars in the academy resist engagements in dialogues with diverse groups where there may be critical contestation, interrogation, and confrontation. Cultural studies can serve as an intervention, making a space for forms of intellectual discourse to emerge that have not been traditionally welcomed in the academy” [“Culture” 125]. To do so may require undoing the complacencies of commonality; to allow for difference may mean continually destroying the sense of shared goals “we” build up in order to have a sense of “we.” The everyday, a site where cultural studies has traditionally located those commonalties, also refuses them and, in this sense, keeps politics going.

The Everyday

“Culture can no longer be conceived outside the everyday” [“Leftist” 82]. So writes Henri Lefebvre, identifying the study of culture with the study of the everyday. British cultural studies has in a sense paralleled Lefebvre; he certainly fits into the “structuralist” influence that Stuart Hall finds formative in cultural studies, and Edward Ball suggests that an emphasis similar to Lefebvre’s on “la vie quotidienne may be familiar to English readers as the target of critique within the body of ‘Cultural Studies’ that has grown up in Britain since the 1950s” [29]. Lefebvre’s discussion of the everyday, however, doesn’t just inform such work; it also helps us to reflect on and problematize it. Just what is the everyday—or culture for that matter—and what might Lefebvre and cultural studies mean by the relation between them?

Such questions are difficult to answer because their terms seem undefined. And, according to Lefebvre, defining the everyday might not be easy. People meet with a certain opacity, a resistance in comprehending the term the everyday, he suggests, because that opacity is part of its meaning. Lefebvre can only gesture to it: for him, the everyday is “the unrecognized” [“Leftist” 78], what is “practically untellable” [Everyday 24]. Invoking the everyday is an attempt to invoke “lived experience”; “It is lived experience [le vecu] elevated to the status of a concept and to language” [“Leftist” 80]. Yet, in equating the everyday with the “real, empirical, practical” [Everyday 11], Lefebvre also recognizes that “the real” is precisely what cannot be represented. Everyday life eludes metaphor, “evades the grip of forms” [Everyday 182]. “Writing can only show an everyday life inscribed and prescribed” [Everyday 8] because “everyday insignificance can only become meaningful when transformed into something other than everyday life” [Everyday 98]. Although in his Marxism and Totality Martin Jay singles out Lefebvre as one of the Western Marxists to whom the concept of totality is central, in Lefebvre’s discussion of the everyday the possibility of such totality is also put into question.² With the introduction of the everyday, Lefebvre’s structuralism becomes poststructuralism. The opacity of the everyday, then, is crucial. It reflects the poststructural recognition that all anyone can do is gesture to the real; subjects can not experience it unmediated and untransformed by expectation, by representation, or by their own attention to it. In resisting definition, the everyday becomes a category that foregrounds those mediations and, in that sense, becomes a position or marker rather than a stable referent. And as a

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1. For a related critique of the imperialism of cultural studies, see José David Saldívar, “The Limits of Cultural Studies.”

2. This is a contradiction in Lefebvre’s work that Jay attempts to resolve with the (similarly contradictory) idea of an open and indeterminate totality [296–99]. Jay emphasizes Lefebvre’s other work but barely mentions Everyday Life in the Modern World, perhaps because it begins to deconstruct the very structures Lefebvre elsewhere constructs.
shifting marker, it tends to point in many, even opposite, directions. What it marks is precisely the impossibility of its definition. For Lefebvre, it exposes "irreducibles, contradictions and objections that intervene and hinder the closing of the circuit" [Everyday 75]. By making the invisible visible, by giving form and content to an experience so vague and seemingly natural that part of its significance is that its subjects cannot define it, by defining, or theorizing, the everyday, it is transformed into what it is not: "It is not possible to construct a theoretical and practical system such that the details of everyday life will become meaningful in and by this system" [Everyday 98].

Yet attention to the everyday is important because it is there that we can see how society works. Lefebvre argues that "daily life is the screen on which our society projects its light and its shadow, its hollows and its planes, its power and its weaknesses" [Everyday 64–65]. Everyday life is one medium through which capitalism establishes itself: "The pyramidal structure of modern society rests on the broad base of everyday life which is the lowest level" [Everyday 57]. The everyday's contradictions are crucial to Lefebvre, however; the everyday encodes society's power as well as its weaknesses. Attention to the everyday therefore becomes a form of "cultural revolution" [Everyday 204]. To make the everyday into an object of study carries with it "the distinct advantage of orienting oneself toward the future" ["Leftist" 75]. It marks a change that is utopic in the way that "we are all utopians, so soon as we wish for something different" [Everyday 75]. This utopia grows out of an attention to the everyday, a defamiliarization of it, because, for Lefebvre, such defamiliarization is itself what revolutionizes culture: "A revolution takes place when and only when... people can no longer lead their everyday lives" [Everyday 32]. The very attempt to put the everyday into a system, constantly refined by its refusal and deconstruction of that system, becomes a model of representation or theory transformed by the resistant and elusive real that it also transforms, and provides Lefebvre with what he considers an adaptive and creative political practice. He insists that "the limitations of philosophy—truth without reality—always and ever counterbalance the limitations of everyday life—reality without truth" [Everyday 14].

In insisting on a system, Lefebvre still gestures to totality, but his system continually calls its own notion of totality into question. Although his strategy is to "gather together culture's scattered fragments for a transfiguration of everyday life" [Everyday 38], the stylistic twists and turns of Lefebvre's own mercurial prose and his emphasis on contradiction suggest that part of that transfiguration is a stubborn refusal of coherence, an insistence on fragmentation. Emphasizing such "contradictions of lived experience" (as Alice Kaplan and Kristin Ross suggest) is how Lefebvre's work helps us find "the Political, like the purloined letter... hidden in the everyday" [3]. Yet Lefebvre's work is not free of the attempt to resolve such contradictions into coherence. The need for totality asserts itself strikingly in places where a different politics, or a politics of difference, makes Lefebvre recodify and stabilize the political and theoretical model that his gestures to the everyday also open up.

The difference of gender in particular seems to threaten such stability. Considering the everyday, Lefebvre argues, allows him to focus on the collective subject—no less than all of mankind: "Homo sapiens, homo faber and homo ludens end up as homo quotidianus" [Everyday 193]. Despite the contradictions implied by the decentering of the subject, such a collective subject remains for Lefebvre an entity nonetheless: "A class cannot be considered as a philosophical 'subject' any more than can a society; but they possess unity, wholeness, totality, in a word 'system'" [Everyday 41–42]. Yet a curious division goes on within this supposedly unified collective: mankind, perhaps not surprisingly, comes to mean man in particular. Lefebvre admits that everyday life actually "weighs heaviest on women... They are the subjects of everyday life and its victims or objects and substitutes" [Everyday 73]. But in a move long familiar to feminists, Lefebvre also argues that "because of their ambiguous position in everyday life... they are
incapable of understanding it” [73]. According to the old logic that women cannot understand something because they embody it, the contradictions of the everyday, which make it opaque to everyone, make it particularly so to women. Women become responsible for a constraint that afflicts some people more than others, a “they” placed in opposition to some implied “we.” Lefebvre further suggests that mankind’s “conditioning, seeping through the channels of a highly organized everyday life, succeeds mainly on the level of woman or ‘femininity.’ Yet femininity also suggests feminism, rebellion and assertiveness” [67]. For Lefebvre, the feminine indoctrinates mankind into a dominant culture whose terms of everydayness it also teaches these subjects not to contest, even though “femininity” is itself an ambiguous term that carries with it an oppositional force—“feminism”—that might be put to better use. The implication is that because women cannot understand such ambiguity or recognize their contradictory position, they squander that feminism—it turns into mere “assertiveness”; Lefebvre writes of women’s attempts “to escape by the roundabout method of eluding the responsibilities of consciousness, whence their incessant protests and clumsily formulated, directionless claims” [92]. In refuting this (failed) feminism, Lefebvre reasserts notions of teleology with a vengeance; yet the roundabout and directionless protests of women he condemns, rather than eluding responsibility, may be precisely the place to locate feminism’s politics. Part of those politics involves directly asking in what ways politics are tied to the idea of having a direction and the drive to an end—what end? whose utopia? whose politics?

In blaming women for people’s unconscious relation to the everyday, Lefebvre casts women in another too-familiar role: both women and the everyday come to stand for an overwhelming totality. Each comes to represent the very forces that create subjects, both in literally producing them and then normalizing them into culture. This meaning of the everyday helps to explain its collapse with culture (“Culture can no longer be conceived outside the everyday”). Women and the everyday in this sense represent that definition of culture as a medium embracing its subjects, one sustaining and shaping them (people cannot conceive outside it). In this chain of synonyms, the everyday, synonymous with culture, also becomes synonymous with ideology: “Ideologies are made of understanding and interpretation... of the world and knowledge plus a certain amount of illusion, and might bear the name of ‘culture’” [Everyday 31], or, “ideologies, institutions, in one word culture” [198]. Such ideology is not false consciousness but what creates and determines consciousness itself. The everyday becomes the term for the embracing totality that politics needs to seize and change, the term for the forces that tend people, mold them, and make them into subjects.

Lefebvre himself seems to try to elude such a determining force in a roundabout way when he bars women from effective agency and critical consciousness. In making the lack of critical consciousness and agency an issue of gender (of essential, biological lack), Lefebvre repeats the old adage that asserts that man, somehow naturally more complete, might have more power and might more easily escape constraint. But this all-embracing totality is not only the everyday also complicates, if not resists. Rather than posing a dilemma one might settle, an either/or in which some subjects are constrained while others escape (that scapegoats some into constraint in order to provide the illusion of freedom for others), the contradictions of everyday in Lefebvre’s account make it stand instead for a more complex political relation of the subject to culture and ideology. It marks the site not only where people are determined in ways they cannot see, but where they project and imagine utopically how to think outside and elude what determines thought and imagination. Considered in this light, the difficulty of defining the everyday comes to reflect the very impossibility of thinking outside the structures of our thought.

This unraveling of Lefebvre’s discussion suggests that the everyday cultural studies builds upon doesn’t provide a stable ground. It’s not simply that its meaning and value...
change depending on the needs of the system that invokes it, but that the shifts and contradictions in its meaning demonstrate the complications of fixing one simple or stable relationship between culture or ideology and the subjects they create, of encompassing culture and ideology within a single field called politics, theory, or cultural studies. For Lefebvre, the everyday enforces a constraining politics when it keeps people from recognizing it as political. Yet Lefebvre only dances around the understanding that to bring things to consciousness—to put them into a system—does not, however, dispel the political unconscious. Part of the complexity of the everyday is that it represents conflicting registers and assumptions at one and the same time; it charts a fault-line between the conscious and unconscious, between determining powers people can see and those they cannot, between theories that seek change and those that enmesh their subjects in determinism. It marks a site of conflict that makes consensus—about “our” shared sense of lived experience as well as ideas about such everyday experience’s transformative potential in culture—difficult if not impossible. The everyday becomes a crucial category because its consolidations and deconstructions touch directly on the subject’s relation to ideology and culture.

Cultural Studies

The use of the everyday in British cultural studies reflects its Marxist heritage differently but maintains this tension between totality and conflict. Just whose claim best reflects the Marxist totality and whose theory most coherently describes culture’s coherence is the focus of this early debate between Raymond Williams and E. P. Thompson (whom Stuart Hall and Richard Johnson identify as their precursors). To read their work in this way might itself seem to be a theoretical commonplace, a banality: it is accepted now, one might argue, that the illusion of coherence is a repressed part of any theory, a product of the desire to account for everything. The explicit claim for totality and coherence is just an early, insufficiently theorized position of the new left, especially of those like Thompson who were particularly hostile to theory. Yet despite the implicit claims of such an argument, this early position is still an enduring one. The claim to be able to account for everything continues to inform accounts like Hall’s and Johnson’s, which only gesture to a poststructuralism that foregoes totalism. The role of this claim in cultural studies deserves reexamination not merely because it repeats exclusions (as any theory must), but because it repeats the very exclusion of marginalized groups it claims to remedy. Such exclusions result from an emphasis on synthesis. One of the texts most frequently invoked

3. This is a problem especially recognized by Stuart Hall. In his latest history of cultural studies and the Birmingham Centre, “Cultural Studies and its Theoretical Legacies,” even as he argues for “an arbitrary closure” [278], Hall also contends that his notion of cultural studies is open-ended; he points to the arguments and tension within the Centre, emphasizing them as a “politics of contention, of continuous argument, of continuous debate” [291]. (This essay appears in the anthology Cultural Studies, a collection of essays from the 1990 University of Illinois conference “Cultural Studies Now and in the Future,” which was published after my own essay was in press, but which makes explicit some of the competing goals and models of politics in cultural studies that I chart here: as progress to a social collective “in the future,” as open-ended contestation.) He refers to the Centre’s collections Women Take Issue [282] and The Empire Strikes Back [283] as moments in this ongoing quarrel. But, as Andrew Ross points out in the discussion afterward (and Hall acknowledges), despite his disclaimers, Hall’s vision of cultural politics continues to have a “sort of narrative of progress smuggled into it” [289] that points to a familiar vision of utopia. Interestingly, that discussion itself became a moment of contention, interrupted by conference participants who felt marginalized by the hierarchy and exclusion they saw within the structures of the conference.
by this cultural studies as it constructs its genealogy is an early essay of Williams’s, “Culture Is Ordinary,” which unites questions of culture and the everyday as lived practical experience, and directs cultural studies precisely to foregrounding and examining the everyday. Where Lefebvre’s treatment of the everyday emphasizes its fracturing possibilities, Williams’s focuses on the ordinary for its power to unite and integrate. To Williams, the everyday reveals that culture is not just Culture, is not just the special province of the arts and learning, but “a whole way of life” (“Ordinary” 4). Like Lefebvre, Williams suggests that the role of the critic is to bring recognition of the everyday to critical consciousness, but this recognition means a recognition specifically of synthesis: people need to see that culture is ordinary “so that the whole actual life, that we cannot know in advance, that we can only know in part even while it is being lived, may be brought to consciousness and meaning” (“Ordinary” 9).

But such totality once again precludes difference, especially the difference of gender. Although Williams acknowledges that the understanding of the “whole actual life” can only be partial, such failure to understand it does not devalue the whole itself; the achievement of that total knowledge become a promise, a historical process in which individuals and society are always engaged. The influence of Marx on Williams here is clear. The sense of “culture as a process,” culture as “the cultivation of something,” a kind of “long revolution . . . [a] sense of a movement through a very long period” (Politics 154–55), which Williams later emphasizes in his more complicated definition of the term in Keywords, is already implicit in this early essay. In “Culture Is Ordinary,” Williams especially identifies the ongoing process of ordinary culture with the very process of genealogy itself: he locates culture in generations of descent, with a specific patrilinear inheritance that moves from his grandfather to his father to himself:

Culture is ordinary: that is where we must start. . . . To grow up in [my] family was to see the shaping of minds. . . . My grandfather, a big hard labourer, wept while he spoke, finely and excitedly, at the parish meeting, of being turned out of his cottage. My father, not long before he died, spoke quietly and happily of when he started a trade-union branch and a Labour Party group in the village, and, without bitterness, of the ‘kept men’ of the new politics. I speak a different idiom, but I think of these same things. (“Ordinary” 4)

Although Williams gestures to a few women in this essay, they are denied this pattern of relation and connection. The inheritors of the whole way of life, shaped by the everyday but also shaping it, are men. They forge its history and bring it to critical consciousness. 4. Yet Williams’s oedipal narrative actually puts into question his idea of ordinary culture as a whole way of life. Williams’s most famous critic, E. P. Thompson, questions

4. This view of culture as an active process played out by men is actually very similar to Lefebvre’s; Lefebvre also constructs culture as a process, a narrative in which men are heroes. To him, it evokes an image of Sleeping Beauty. She does not doze on flowers and on fragrant grass but on a thick mattress of texts, quotations, musical scores—and under a vast canopy of books, sociological, semiological, historical, and philosophical theses. Then one day the Prince comes; he awakens her and everything around the forest comes to life along with her—poets poetizing, musicians musicking, cooks cooking, lovers loving, and so on. . . . culture is not merely a static palimpsest of texts; it is lived, active, which is what the fable of the wakened princess suggests to me. (“Leftist” 81–82)

Like Williams, Lefebvre here gives culture a tradition (“the vast canopy of books”), and suggests how that tradition, through the intervention of the cultural critic (who else is the prince?), comes alive, is seen to be lived, active, everyday.
this allegory of the everyday. Thompson is bothered particularly by Williams’s sense of a shared tradition built on relation and commonalty. For way of “life” he wants to substitute way of “conflict” or way of “struggle,” and by so doing, Thompson argues, focus on “activity and agency” [“Long” 33] rather than on the impersonal continuity of life implied by generational progression. Yet, in seeming to disagree with Williams, Thompson winds up sounding a lot like him.

In using gender to clinch his own argument, Thompson simply continues the oedipal progression Williams charts, restoring its repressed subtext. In Thompson’s recasting, once again woman stands for a culture she embodies but does not share, specifically the male Tradition of (high) Culture itself (Burke, Carlyle, Mill, Arnold, and Eliot), the reverence for which Thompson feels occludes conflict in Williams’s account. He writes:

At times, in Culture and Society, I felt that I was being offered a procession of disembodied voices—Burke, Carlyle, Mill, Arnold—. . . the whole transmitted through a disinterested spiritual medium. I sometimes imagine this medium . . . as an elderly gentlewoman and near relative of Mr. Eliot, so distinguished as to have become an institution: The Tradition. There she sits, with that white starched affair on her head, knitting definitions without thought of recognition or reward . . . and in her presence how one must watch one’s LANGUAGE! The first brash word, the least suspicion of laughter or polemic in her presence, and The Tradition might drop a stitch and have to start knitting all those definitions over again. [“Long” 24–25]

A derided tradition becomes an elderly gentlewoman, whose near relation to Eliot (another kept man?) points up its effeminacy—and, through him, the effeminacy and the passivity of the rest of the tradition. The burlesque of this passage wrests the fate of history out of the hands of this harmless Clotho (a monitory figure only to those still scared by women). A polemic so brash that she would drop her yarn completely, Thompson implies, is the very antidote to the outdated and elitist malaise of history this figure represents. And, through her unattractiveness, Thompson rides the oedipal line of history of the need for a (contested) woman altogether. Williams’s allegory for ordinary culture still implies some woman (wife, mother) as a vehicle through which the generations of men must pass. By personifying high culture as a maidenly old woman (by suggesting that the tradition’s writers are themselves somehow old-maidenly), in dispelling the need for high culture, Thompson gets rid of the need for woman, too.

Woman is a scapegoat that allows Thompson to conjure and dispel Williams’s Leavisite reliance on the great tradition and to assert instead a culture that really is ordinary. In attacking the great tradition, he admonishes Williams for the homogenizing tendency implied in it: “He must resist the temptation to take his readers and himself into the collective ‘we’ of an established culture, even when he uses this device to challenge assumptions which ‘we’ are supposed to hold (and yet which have been under challenge from a minority for over 100 years)” [“Long” 26]. He asserts that the picture Williams gives of the 1840s is very different from his own and that the principles Williams sees ordering the social totality of the time are “an arbitrary selection” [28]. Yet such ambiguities and uncertainties do not, for Thompson, point to any underlying problems in the writing of history, especially in conceiving of it as a totality. On the contrary, if Williams “has not yet succeeded in developing an adequate general theory of culture,” it is simply because his understanding of it is not Thompson’s own—or, rather, not really Marx’s [28]. For Thompson, an adequate tradition does exist, “notably that tradition which originates in Marx” [30], especially in Thompson’s own kind of Marxist history. Any other “synthesizing discipline will very soon make imperialist claims. . . . Now if Williams by ‘the whole way of life’ really means the whole way of life he is making a
claim, not for cultural history, but for history” [31]. Such history somehow elides the problems of imperialism implicit in synthesis because it focuses on the ordinary, the everyday: “the working people’s daily ‘way of conflict’” [“Long—II” 38]. Although Thompson pays lip service to such problems of imperializing, he repeats them anyway. He suggests that “unless we insist upon the role of minorities and of conflict in the process of making [the whole way of life] we might get an unpleasantly conformist answer” about what that culture looks like [“Long—II” 36]. Yet the role of minorities and conflict drops out of his own account as well. Criticizing a fragment of Williams’s language (“a society which had changed its economy, which under pressure was changing its institutions, but which, at the centres of power, was refusing to change its ways of thinking”), he suggests that “certain difficulties in Mr. Williams’ style . . . arise from his determination to de-personalise social forces. . . . If Dame Society was changing all these garments, who or what bewhiskered agent was standing outside the boudoir and forcing her to this exercise?” [“Long” 26]. By gendering society as female, Thompson places himself outside of it and becomes the bewhiskered agent of male potency. For Thompson too wants to effect some changes in society; the thrust of his argument is that his kind of Marxist synthesizing will allow such agency, while Williams’s will not. In Thompson’s version too, woman is excluded from a role in the making of the whole way of life—she just passively embodies it, and is acted upon. This is indeed unpleasant, but what of the other “minorities” so excluded as not even to figure in this drama? Can any synthesis keep from being imperialist? If the need to take “into account the culture of Congo exploiters” (which Thompson says Williams has not done) to bring things into a properly whole view “demand[s] the taking of sides,” will the culture of those exploited come to embody and underwrite such ordinary dramas of white male agency in the way that woman does here? [“Addendum” 70].

Williams himself and his inheritors, such as Hall and Johnson, can see these dangers. Williams’s later work takes Thompson’s criticism into account, especially in the attempt to theorize the role of conflict and difference within a common culture:

5. See his direct response to this critique in Politics and Letters, 134–36.
fast to that” [“Ordinary” 6], he holds fast to an identification of the everyday with some ultimate totality.

Although clearly outlining what he calls the “totalizing movement” in Williams and Thompson, Hall himself repeats it in his own definition of cultural studies. In “Cultural Studies: Two Paradigms,” an essay that cites Williams’s “Culture Is Ordinary” [59] and is itself often cited by others in defining cultural studies (see Johnson and Brantlinger), Hall’s stated purpose is to find out “around what space [are culture’s] concerns and concepts unified?” [59]. In this essay, he charts how the divergent strands of what he calls Williams’s and Thompson’s “culturalism” and a “structuralism” he associates with Levi-Strauss and Althusser are actually “integrated” into one another [59]. Hall is interested in structuralism, which he associates elsewhere with the everyday; the early Barthes and Levi-Strauss are useful, he argues, because they bring “the term ‘culture’ down from its abstract heights to the level of the ‘anthropological,’ the everyday” (“The Centre” 30). He is interested in structuralism because it “has the conceptual ability to think of a unity which is constructed through the differences between, rather than the homology of, practices”;

but when structuralism shades over into poststructuralism he balks: “of course, the stress on difference can—and has—led the structuralisms into a fundamental conceptual heterogeneity, in which all sense of structure and totality is lost” [“Two Paradigms” 68]. Like Marx, he wishes instead “to think of the ‘unity’ of a social formation as constructed, not out of identity but out of difference” [68]. Crucial to Hall is retaining the model of unity, which he recasts as “unity-in-difference,” “complex unity,” a way of incorporating differences “without losing . . . grip on the ensemble which they constitute” [68–69]. He refers elsewhere to “the contradictions of everyday life” [“Media Studies” 121]—a particular emphasis of feminism, he suggests. Although they might seem to emphasize difference rather than coherence, these contradictions get resolved again at those abstract heights in which culture is somehow made whole again, as it has been in the early “culturalism” that Hall repeats rather than modifies.

Hall’s colleague Richard Johnson also attempts to synthesize away the troubling heterogeneity of difference while still paying it lip service. In his essay “What Is Cultural Studies Anyway?” Johnson works to give “an account of the whole” [73]. Attempting to preserve the idea of unity or coherence, he observes that “a lot hangs . . . on the kind of unity or coherence we seek” [38] and argues for a coherence that would somehow connect yet preserve fragmentation. He would do this, it seems, simply by a substitution of terms: “We need ways of viewing a vigorous but fragmented field of study, if not as a unity at least as a whole” [41]. For Johnson, cultural studies provides this kind of wholeness: no “one discipline or problematic [can] grasp the objects of culture as a whole,” but cultural studies, encompassing all disciplines, can [41]. Within cultural studies, conflicting approaches and readings of culture harmonize—all [become] true”; “theoretical and disciplinary fragmentations” join together [45–46] (in a diagram Johnson maps cultural studies as a connecting circle). Like Thompson, who argues that a focus on synthesis will allow “the New Left . . . to gain in intellectual coherence” [“Long—II” 37], for Johnson a theoretical valorization of wholeness somehow upholds his theory’s own completeness.

The challenge of integrating the complexity of everyday life into this circle provides cultural studies with its focus. Johnson argues that cultural studies began when its practitioners “turned [their] assessments from literature to everyday life” [38]. It is precisely because everyday life seems so ambiguous that it needs to be embraced within cultural studies: “In everyday life, textual materials are complex, multiple, overlapping,
co-existent, juxta-posed, in a word, inter-textual” [67]. He writes, “cultural studies is a
heightened, differentiated form of everyday activities and living. Collective activities of
this kind, attempting to understand not just ‘common’ experiences but real diversities and
antagonisms, are especially important, if they can be managed, and subject to the caveats
that follow” [79n51]. Johnson’s caveats, however, manage the threat of antagonism right
back into commonality. Johnson admits that attempts by ethnographers to map the
intertextuality of everyday life into a coherent pattern has seemed to annul differences
within the everyday; such ethnographies fit “the Other” into their own patterns, thereby
“pathologising subordinated cultures” [70]. But Johnson argues that such problems are
simply temporary: in their understandable enthusiasm for the social totality, such
ethnographies have forgotten that “fundamental social relations have not [yet] been
transformed” [70]. And Johnson himself synthesizes the differences of various critical
others into his own approach, downplaying the way feminism and critiques of racism have
directly criticized the ethnographic mode, for which he becomes an apologist, and
recasting feminism as a handmaiden to cultural studies: “Feminism has influenced
everyday ways of working and brought a greater recognition of the way that productive
results depend on supportive relationships” [40]. For Johnson, feminism and critiques of
race become supportive (not at odds with him, or within themselves), and what they
especially support is the idea of synthesis that they supposedly act out in everyday
practice. In this way, “feminism and anti-racism” are important not so much in themselves
but because they “have kept the new left new” [40]. Any differences from Johnson’s
position are simply incorporated within it.

It is precisely this process of unification through incorporation that Patrick Brantlinger
highlights in his summary of the work of the Birmingham Centre: “One of the disabling
aspects of academic work cultural studies aimed to overcome was the alienation of the
disciplines from each other: knowledge should be made whole again” [62]. Like Hall and
Johnson, Brantlinger knows enough about the critique of transcendent unity to qualify his
insistence on synthesis (he writes that cultural studies is “a coalescing movement, a sort
of magnet gathering the various theories that now go under the label ‘theory’ into a
problematic and perhaps impossible synthesis” [10]), but he takes that synthesis as his
goal nonetheless, and it is not long before he acts as though he has achieved it. In fact,
the subtext of his book is to defend the version of cultural studies that comes from the
Birmingham Centre against the fragmenting influence of poststructuralism.7 To Brantlinger,
despite poststructural attacks on “the (supposedly) failed Enlightenment project,” “some
version of history and of the social totality is necessary for there to be any form of social
criticism”; it is in Marxism that one can find an “effective concept of social totality that
would unify the cognitive field in a rigorous manner” [72].

7. Yet Brantlinger is worried that even Stuart Hall has fallen prey to this influence; he writes
of one essay in which “Hall himself offers a history of British cultural studies as a sort of French
dependency. This is undoubtedly the weakest version of the story” [63]. Just what is wrong with
poststructuralism is actually quite shifting and contradictory in Brantlinger’s account. On the one
hand, even though he is in favor of his own version of totalism, he criticizes deconstruction for being
too totalistic; of Derrida’s account he writes, “there is ‘nothing outside the text’ or beyond our field
of representation. As with totalistic versions of ideology, representation conceived as conscious-
ness as such makes critique difficult or impossible: starting from Derrida’s position, there seems
to be no way to distinguish more or less accurate representations from misrepresentations, truth
from falsehood, reality from fiction” [104]. On the other hand, what is dangerous about
deconstruction is that it is fragmenting; he writes elsewhere of “the deconstructionist ‘abyss’ of
completely indeterminate ‘difference’” [116]. Although deconstruction itself might be able to play
effectively with such contradictory and opposed drifts within it, given Brantlinger’s (supposed)
emphasis on logic, closure, and unity, such contradictory assertions become problems in his
argument and unsettle his claims.
Just what happens when you work toward "some version of... unification" [73] is perhaps clearest in his own treatment of those groups considered other, exactly those groups he feels cultural studies can empower. Despite his own clear recognition of the problems of the assimilation model underlying the early construction of American studies, the route Brantlinger suggests to empower those others actually works through their assimilation into the dominant culture. Brantlinger’s reading of marginalized groups concludes that not only are the “Crusoes... ourselves; so are the Fridays” [11]. Implicitly opening up Marx’s reading of Robinson Crusoe to include Friday, Brantlinger is in a sense too inclusive: Friday becomes simply another projection and part of dominant culture. The statement that Friday is “ourselves” (who is this “we”?) seems precisely the appropriation of other races and cultures that programs such as African-American and women’s studies have worked to overcome—by uncovering how the other (black people or women) might have its own many voices, in sharp discord with dominant culture.

It is explicitly as the site on which to incorporate such other approaches into cultural studies’ own unifying discourse that Brantlinger values the everyday:

Class, gender, and race are central topics for cultural studies... These categories signify the major forms of division and difference between people. Understanding their historical, social construction, their complex interconnections, and their effects on ‘everyday life’... is the chief aim of oppositional criticism. The role of cultural studies... may be precisely to prod the traditional disciplines into recognizing... that their subject-matter is or ought to be what divides and unifies us as human beings, in the larger workings of society and culture, but also in ‘the practice of everyday life.’ [147-48]

Class, gender, and race shift from “the major forms of division and difference between people” through “complex interconnections” to “what divides and unites us as human beings, in the larger workings of society and culture”; once gender and race are juxtaposed with class in this account, their divisions begin to turn into connections and unities as well (perhaps because Brantlinger feels they are properly comprised within society’s larger, economic workings).

Brantlinger uses the undefined practice of the everyday as a benchmark to evaluate and reject approaches that might otherwise be divisive, especially feminism. Associating the everyday with women and feminism, he refers directly to Lefebvre’s association of women and the everyday [138] and quotes Michele Barrett’s contention that “feminism has politicized everyday life—culture in the anthropological sense of the lived practices of a society” [136]. An identification of women and the everyday as lived experience is crucial because, when feminism strays from such experience, it ceases for Brantlinger, as for Lefebvre, to function as feminism. Only an attention to the everyday, Brantlinger argues, can rescue feminism from poststructuralism: he quotes Catherine Stimpson to blame the breakdown of feminist solidarity on deconstruction’s fragmenting of “consensus” [130].

To Brantlinger, it is poststructuralism’s arrogance about matters of the everyday that makes it apolitical; he writes that Derrida is actually trapped in the metaphysics he wishes

8. Brantlinger criticizes “the American rhetoric of unifying the plural and harmonizing differences,” and the attempt by American studies to reconcile different disciplines and create social harmony [27]: a “balance or a unity that minimizes conflict” [28] is the liberal goal of American studies, according to Brantlinger. He never differentiates just how his own form of “oppositional” criticism [32] is different from this model, especially given its own continued assumption of social totality, which (magically) no longer appears to annul difference. Once again, it seems simply a question of whose version of the social totality should prevail.
to deconstruct, “a metaphysics which (as Derrida recognizes) tries to look over the heads of most people and to transcend everyday language use, and therefore overlooks the fact that ‘culture is ordinary’” [41]. Poststructuralism increases the “distance between theorist and ‘the masses’—real people, ‘lived experience,’ ‘the practice of everyday life’” [170]. Not only does such supposedly elitist theorizing weaken feminism’s consensus, but it is just such fragmentation that makes feminism politically neutral enough to succeed where Marxism fails (for Brantlinger, a very back-handed compliment). According to him, the very lack of unity within feminism, by blunting its political effect, has been the means to its acceptance within the (conservative) academy [136–37]. What’s especially interesting about this claim is not whether it is wrong or how much it oversimplifies, but that Brantlinger makes it in the midst of his own attempt to establish cultural studies within the academy too. He implicitly discredits feminism—because, he asserts, it has already been successful—in the attempt to be successful himself. The everyday in this account, rather than preserving difference, becomes the means to annul other theories of culture or to reconstruct them in Brantlinger’s own image. The heritage of British cultural studies becomes a kind of closed family circle, a patriarchal inheritance, invoked in the name of the everyday.

**Feminism**

It is precisely to open the hermetic and insular field that has come to be called cultural studies that feminists such as Gayatri Spivak and Meaghan Morris redefine the category of the everyday. In her feminist critique, Gayatri Spivak, putting American borrowings of British cultural studies in their own cultural context, suggests that the particularly American dependence on the idea of a united “we” helps explain the recent attraction here of this version of cultural studies. In her reading, this valorization of unity links American cultural critics with the very powers they oppose—as does their manipulation of the category of the everyday. Just as those dominant politically offer the illusion of something called “We the People,” promising through this consensus an agency supposedly not available to the electorate in their everyday lives, cultural studies itself is involved in the production of a managed and controlled category of the “we.” (Spivak writes, “the electoral mobilization of We the People provides an alibi for crisis management among the powers by allowing the party to claim ‘A People’s Mandate,’ while the citizen’s political everyday life operates without the necessity of her/his participation” [“Making” 782].) Part of “the academic’s [unexamined] social task” [“Making” 782], is the same “production of something called a ‘People’” [“Constitutions” 134] (a task that becomes

9. Such crises normalize the everyday and define it in the terms of those in power: “For trouble-free normal politics, there must be the gradual constitution . . . normalization, regularization of something called the People . . . as a collective subject (We), called up in times of trouble, in the interest of crisis-management” [“Making” 782]. That “normal” politics depends on such “crisis management,” and vice versa, begins to break down the opposition between the everyday politics and exceptional ones. In making her argument, Spivak is working from Derrida’s deconstruction of “We the People” as the origin for a political state that is itself actually their origin: Derrida points out that “the good People of these Colonies” in whose name the representatives sign the American Declaration of Independence do not, strictly speaking, exist. As such they do not yet have the name and authority before the Declaration. At the same time, they are required to produce the authority for a Declaration which gives them being ["Constitutions" 142]. Although the tautological and unstable constitution of a collective entity is invoked as the exceptional strategy of crisis-management (here, of revolution), at the same time, Derrida argues that “this outrageous thing [is] quotidian” ["Constitutions" 142] and, as both normal and exceptional, begins to put its own logic into question.
obvious, for example, in the cultural management that goes on in Hirsch’s Cultural Literacy). But, Spivak argues, in participating in this production, cultural studies must ask questions about its own “constitution” (“Constitutions” 144). Critics need consciously to recognize and intervene in their own production of this illusion of consensus, and to recognize especially just how cultural studies’ own formation as a field depends on dangerous assumptions about unity and consensus.

Such consensus needs especially to be called into question because the dominant powers use the consensus they create as a way to define themselves as coherent and unified in the face of unsettling difference. For Spivak, however, the dynamic that unsettles such power already lies “dormant and uncritical in the everyday” (“Making” 782); critics need to bring such contradictions into consciousness, especially through the attempt explicitly to insert women or people of color into the reigning consensus, thereby fracturing it. Such terms cannot easily be introduced into this equation: introducing women, who function in culture as pluralized subjects (“Constitutions” 145) and introducing African-Americans, already represented within the Constitution’s discussion of representation not as complete but as fractional (as slaves, counted as “three fifths of all other persons” (“Constitutions” 136)), both put the notion of completeness and coherence into question. One way to go beyond Spivak’s plain—and perhaps overly optimistic—deconstruction here might be by recognizing that such corporate entities do constitute themselves precisely by writing such fractured subjects into their very Constitutions. Is simply pointing up such contradictions enough? Might those contradictions help form, rather than undermine, the constructions that write them in the first place?

Spivak argues that the everyday as a category is especially useful when attending to the differences excluded from stories of consensus; she in fact redefines the everyday, not as lived experience, or “real” underlying consensus, but as the ongoing deconstruction of that illusion of experience. Spivak argues that such an illusion is still necessary to groups like women or people of color in their selfDefinitions: “It cannot be denied that the best and the worst in the history of the feminist movement… entails the presentation of woman as unified representative subject” (“Making” 795). Yet such unification must be endlessly interrogated—and cannot help but be interrogated by postcolonial subjects caught between cultures—even as it is assumed: “This impossible ‘no’ to a structure, which one critiques, yet inhabits intimately, is the deconstructive philosophical position, and the everyday here and now of ‘postcoloniality’ is a case of it” (“Making” 794). Feminists, in deconstructing the unity appealed to in culture and cultural studies as well as in feminism, need to play upon the tension between the need for their own consensus and the price paid for that (temporary) wresting into a collective. To construct entities like cultural studies and feminism, while useful and effective, “is thus not an unquestioned teleological good but a negotiation with enabling violence” (“Constitutions” 146).

Spivak attempts in this essay to work carefully between deconstruction and construction, to unsettle the foundation of dominant powers while providing some ground for political action (her politics, like Barbara Johnson’s, are characterized by that very unsettling). To recognize the illusion of consensus as an illusion (even while invoking it),

10. For those feminists not defined as third-world or women of color, Spivak writes, “U.S. women… are in a unique and privileged position to continue a persistent critique of mere apologists for their Constitution, even as they use its instruments to secure entry into its liberating purview. Favorite sons and daughters who refuse to sanctify their father’s house have their uses. Persistently to critique a structure that one cannot not (wish to) inhabit is the deconstructive stance” (“Constitutions” 147).

11. The utopia inscribed here within cultural studies becomes its recognition of its interventions as provisional, limited, and incomplete: “Indeed, the hoped-for future of everything written in the name of cultural studies today must, I think, be the classroom staged as intervention, too painfully aware of its limits to dream only of integration” (“Making” 796).
so that the recognition becomes part of everyday life, seems to be the major strategy of these politics. But just what Spivak’s enabling “everyday here and now” is remains to be deconstructed; it is a category Spivak herself cannot help assuming—the very category to which it remains impossible to say no. Though refusing a notion of harmony and coherence, Spivak’s cultural studies is similar to that of the new left in that the everyday remains the locus and grounding of her construction of culture and politics. Paradoxically, the source of deconstruction’s vision of how things might be lies in things as they already are—the everyday as some dormant aporia already invisibly doing the very work we need yet to imagine.

For Meaghan Morris, what different versions of cultural studies share in using the category of the everyday is a tendency to attempt to discredit their opponents with it. In “Banality in Cultural Studies,” she argues that in this regard both the Continental and British, poststructural and humanist, practitioners of supposedly progressivist cultural studies become practically indistinguishable. “It is remarkable,” Morris writes, “given the differences between them . . . that neither . . . leaves much place for an unequivocally pained, unambivalently discontented, or aggressive theorizing subject” [20], the kind of subject Morris locates in feminism or radical left politics: “There is an active process going on in both of discrediting—by direct dismissal . . . or by covert inscription as Other . . . —the voices of grumpy feminists and cranky leftists” [20]. Cultural studies works these exclusions specifically in attempting to define “an appropriate theoretical style for analyzing everyday life” [6]; it begins “to define and restrict what it is possible to do and say in its name” [4]. In critiquing cultural studies’ aim to take everyday banality as its subject, to create through it a restrictive field for itself, Morris puts into question the idea of any “aim” at all: “I’m not sure banality can have a point, any more than cultural studies can properly constitute its theoretical object” [3]. The aim to dismiss or inscribe opposition becomes the attempt to extinguish politics.

Cultural studies’ attempt to create “a collective subject, ‘the people’” [17] records the price of this endeavor in its ethnographies of the everyday; because the ethnographer fails to take into account her or his own investment in and production of this collective, “the people” actually becomes the ethnographer’s mask, circularly “both source of authority for a text and a figure of its own critical activity,” in part a figure for its own coherence and completeness [17]. Morris argues that if critics take seriously the ways the everyday “can reorganize the place from which discourse is produced” (as de Certeau has argued),

12. In writing about her “irritation about two developments in recent cultural studies,” Morris states that one of them is Continental theory, including “Jean Baudrillard’s revival of the term ‘banality’ to frame a theory of media. It is an interesting theory that deals in part with the televisual relationship between everyday life and catastrophic events. Yet why should such a classically dismissive term as ‘banality’ reappear, yet again, as a point of departure for discussing popular culture?” [3]. The other is British cultural studies, “the program of the Birmingham school in England” [5], which she associates especially with the work of Ross Chambers and John Fiske:

The thesis of cultural studies as Fiske and Chambers present it runs perilously close to this kind of formulation: people in modern mediatized societies are complex and contradictory, mass cultural texts are complex and contradictory, therefore people using them produce complex and contradictory culture. To add that this popular culture has critical and resistant elements is tautological—unless one has a concept of culture so rudimentary that it excludes criticism of and resistance from the practice of everyday life.

[19]

Morris wishes to “frame a comparison” [11] between these two groups.

13. Morris suggests, as I have, that British cultural studies “most often proceeds from admitting class, racial, and sexual oppressions to finding the inevitable saving grace” [20].

62
that “means being very careful about our enunciative and story-telling strategies—much more careful than much cultural studies (and feminist writing) has been in its mimesis of a popular—or ‘feminine’—voice” [24]. Morris’s own “our” here shows that it is difficult to be careful enough; it is perhaps impossible to keep from creating a sense of collective endeavor in the very act of critiquing that move.14 But what’s involved for her in making the attempt is a revision of the everyday that “may also come around eventually in a different, and as yet utopian, mode of enunciative practice” [27].

Such an opening up of restrictive conformity to something as yet unspecified is encoded for her in the very history of the word “banal”: “‘Banality’ is one of a group of words—including ‘trivial’ and ‘mundane’—whose modern history inscribes the disintegration of old ideals about the common people, the common place, the common culture” [26]. She emphasizes that, in medieval French, “banal” originally meant “communal,” until that focus on things held in common began to deteriorate into an understanding of such things as unoriginal and trivial [26]. And for Morris, cultural studies risks making itself trivial unless it complicates its notions of commonalty. Morris doesn’t dispense with this notion altogether, but urges cultural studies to go beyond conformity in its definitions to ones that allow for antagonism, complexity, a “range of moods” [23]; otherwise, cultural studies will be “extraordinarily depleted” [26]. Part of Morris’s sense of community turning into conformity comes from the other sense of “banality,” the old English and Germanic bannan (“to summon, or to curse”; “to proclaim under penalty” [27]), a restrictive act of enunciative force (as in banishing or announcing bans). Morris wishes cultural studies, in order to keep from becoming banal in its attention to the everyday, to itself avoid such compulsory platitudinizing: “Minoritarian theorizing subjects in cultural studies have to work quite hard not to become subjects of banality in that old double sense: not to formulate edicts and proclamations, yet to keep theorizing . . . to refuse to subside permanently either into silence or into a posture of reified difference. Through some such effort, pained and disgruntled subjects, who are also joyous and inventive practitioners, can articulate our critique of everyday life” [27]. To keep from being discredited within cultural studies, oppositional “minoritarian” critics—pained and disgruntled feminists, poststructural leftists, people of color—need to resist the easy and exhausted congruences drawn for them within the category of the everyday.

In part, Morris wishes cultural studies to resist recycling the same old things (her epigraph is “What goes around, comes around”); she argues against the “routinized, repetitive, banal” [8] ways of seeing that reduce (popular) culture once again simply to banality, and so implicitly discredit it. And yet, because she has learned from de Certeau’s work that “People have to make do with what they have” [24], she realizes that it is precisely because such banalities “kee[p] on coming back around in our polemics” [26] that we need to look at them, to “engag[e] with the[ir] contradictions” [27]. It is the way “everyday practices . . . alternately exacerbate and disrupt our logics” [23] that Morris would like cultural studies to make explicit—to open itself up to politics which disrupt it, “dilemmas, which . . . no modern critical model can resolve” [7]. The utopian mode Morris gestures to works to keep open the dilemma of the everyday.

The very difficulty of Spivak’s and Morris’s essays, the difficulties of teasing out from them the implications of the everyday, reflects (as it does in Lefebvre’s work) the complications of keeping questions open, of eschewing resolution for an as-yet-undefined alternative—one whose ambiguities seem to its critics a weakness rather than a strength. The very open-endedness of their work seems to me, however, to be its promise. The challenge of following through on such thinking lies in doing so without constructing new destinations, new conclusions, new utopias.

14. That this “our” leaves some people out is pointed up by bell hooks’s explicit criticism of Morris as one poststructural feminist who does not mention writing by women of color [“Postmodern” 24].
Although feminism is not the handmaiden to cultural studies that some critics imagine, cultural studies could do no better than to learn from and acknowledge the lessons of feminism. As feminists now regroup during a period of cultural politics that Judith Butler tells us “some would call ‘postfeminism’” [5], the struggle will be to maintain different feminisms that can also be open-ended. In working to keep a focus on the oppression of woman that also asserts the differences of women, such feminisms will have a lot to teach cultural studies. Perhaps their everyday politics will be to question the everyday in a way that allows the fields we now call feminism and cultural studies to continue to have politics.

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