

Cultural studies as a construct

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ABSTRACT This article discusses cultural studies as a social construct, and especially how it emerged in Finland. The 'discovery' of cultural studies in Finland in the early 1980s was made in a situation within Finnish sociology where some scholars began to adopt an orientation which resembled the Birmingham orientation, but the influences to it stemmed from several sources. It was only then that the Birmingham School was founded, and certain people identified themselves with cultural studies. Yet within the local field of paradigms, Finnish 'cultural studies' was and remains a highly distinctive discursive construct.

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Cultural studies is most typically approached as a 'school' (e.g. Alasuutari 1994; Grossberg 1993; Lehtonen 1994a, 1994b; Nelson et al., 1992). In the spirit of epistemological realism and truth correspondence theory, the school discourse is ordinarily concerned to find out what 'cultural studies' actually consists of, how it emerged, where it is located, who its leading figures are and who may be counted as CS researchers.

In this article, however, I take a different, constructionist angle, approaching the subject from the vantage-point of the sociology of science. The theory behind this approach is that descriptions and definitions of a given object will in themselves serve to transform and shape that object – especially in the case of such an abstract object as 'cultural studies'.

From this viewpoint it is interesting to see how the emergence, expansion and development of cultural studies have been influenced by the different ways in which (and the different reasons for which) the term 'cultural studies' has been adopted in different countries and in different contexts; and how cultural studies has been defined and to what end it has been used as a strategy of science or research policy. Although there certainly are similarities in the meaning of cultural studies across the world, to a certain degree each country forms its own case worthy of a

special empirical analysis. In this article, I specifically focus on the social construction of 'cultural studies' in Finland.

With so many people representing so many different lines of inquiry willing and eager to espouse cultural studies, Finland makes a good case example. During the 1980s cultural studies became popular especially among sociologists, but it has won more and more support in the traditional humanities including literary studies, history, ethnography and folklore. Clearly, researchers seem to feel that they can gain some sort of symbolic capital from describing what they do as cultural studies. The interest in cultural studies is also reflected in the appearance of edited volumes on cultural studies (Kupiainen and Sevänen, 1994; Kylmänen, 1994) as well as in the growing number of seminars, post-graduate training courses and workshops dedicated to cultural studies.

The charisma of cultural studies

Throughout the world, there has always been a very strong positive charisma surrounding cultural studies. It has grown and expanded not simply by people working in different places adopting the concept of the Birmingham School, but rather by people identifying themselves with cultural studies.

One of the reasons for this manner of expansion is that the group of researchers who initially adopted the term at Birmingham had an interdisciplinary or eclectic approach. It has always been stressed in cultural studies that this is an interdisciplinary, even an 'antidisciplinary' project, taking distance from all academic disciplines (Nelson et al., 1992: 2). The implication is that cultural studies is in many ways (among other things through the practical actions of key representatives) closely interwoven with political activity. Cultural studies has been an arena not only for academic research, but also for doing politics. This is why the priority concern in cultural studies has not been with the defence of theoretical orthodoxy, but with developing theories, terms and concepts that make sense and that genuinely help to understand socio-cultural phenomena.

From the very outset the British roots of cultural studies represented at least literary studies, history and sociology; but many other disciplines within the social sciences and the humanities soon began to identify themselves as well. The Birmingham School was just as comfortable in borrowing terms and picking up influences from Lévi-Strauss's structuralism and symbolic interactionism as from the Marxist theorists Althusser and Gramsci.

Concepts and theories were adopted not only from classic works but also from many contemporary analysts. The important point, however, is not that the school was influenced by numerous contemporary writers, but rather that cultural studies has had a contagious effect on the writers



quoted in its texts. Many of these writers have been drawn into cultural studies, and most have readily accepted the label.

With so many links in so many different directions, the loose theoretical orientation known as cultural studies has typically been described as the 'center position' (Grossberg, 1993), highlighting its avoidance of reductionism. Culture is taken seriously and it is granted a certain independence, but at the same time it is stressed that the symbolism and practices of everyday life can only be analysed within the context of power and politics. Defined from this vantage-point, it becomes clear that cultural studies actually has several independent histories; cultural studies has been invented several times, in different places. The researchers at the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies and their 'godfathers' Hoggart, Thompson and Williams were just one group who invented cultural studies among many others, such as Pierre Bourdieu (*Outline of a Theory of Practice*, 1977; *Distinction*, 1984), Clifford Geertz (*The Interpretation of Cultures*, 1973) and Marshall Sahlins (*Culture and Practical Reason*, 1976).

Cultural studies in Finland

General features

How did cultural studies take root in Finland and specifically in Finnish sociology? To repeat the point made earlier about the nature of cultural studies as a phenomenon, this was not a matter of the doctrines of the Birmingham or any other school arriving on the shores of Finland and then being adopted en masse. Rather, it was a matter of a situation unfolding within Finnish sociology where some scholars began to adopt an orientation which resembled the Birmingham orientation. It was there to be 'discovered', and those to whom it appealed identified themselves with cultural studies. Yet within the local field of paradigms, Finnish 'cultural studies' was and remains a highly distinctive discursive construct.¹

Within the field of sociology, cultural studies grew up out of a background of economic and purely theoretical, even philosophical Marxism, or the Scandinavian, especially Danish *Kapitallogiker* school² which (together with the more Soviet-influenced, explicitly political Marxism-Leninism) enjoyed a firm paradigmatic footing especially among the younger generation of sociologists in the 1970s.³ Marxism was a response to 'behavioural science', an American tradition in which the structures of society were virtually ignored except as a background variable for the individual's social class group or socio-economic status. In that sense there is no doubt that Marxism had a beneficial effect in the social sciences. By the late 1970s, however, researchers were beginning to look for 'softer' approaches that took account of people's everyday life.

The solution was to be provided by the concept of way-of-life, adopted from Soviet and East-German Marxist sociology. Many articles by J.P. Roos (see Roos, 1985) were a particularly important influence in this regard.

Although the focus was now shifting to people's everyday life, this did not necessarily lead to the adoption of a '*Verstehende*' approach, or to the subject emerging centre-stage. At least those who had an economistic Marxist, '*Kapitallogiker*' background still wanted to deduce the 'realized way-of-life' from the 'economic form-determinants' of capitalism. This angle to interpreting way-of-life in its socio-economic context was the reason for the huge success in the late 1970s of the strictly economistic theory proposed by the West German scholar Klaus Ottomeyer. Way-of-life research was largely understood as a critique of capitalism, and it was from this vantage-point that J.P. Roos in 1983 read Jürgen Habermas's *Theory of Communicative Action*. In his article 'Change in society and everyday life', according to Roos, the system in capitalism 'colonizes' the Life-world.

However, there were also those who wanted to break away from the deterministic interpretations of the Marxist *Kapitallogiker* school. There was now a growing interest in *Verstehende* sociology and phenomenology, for instance. The change is perhaps most clearly evident in the following inspired by Pierre Bourdieu in the early 1980s. The greatest asset of Bourdieu's 'cultural class theory' (and the main reason why it became so popular in Finland) was that it called into question descriptions of society that were based on people's positions in the sphere of production. Instead, it highlighted the role of education and other means of accumulating 'cultural capital'. The key thing is the change of perspective: the search for structural determinants is replaced by an attempt to explain and understand strategic (albeit preconscious or unconscious) social action. Individuals are no longer approached as objects confined in their actions by given determinants, but as active agents accumulating symbolic and economic capital and aiming to exchange different types of capital for others (for instance, to purchase education by economic wealth). This angle may lead to an entirely different way of describing and conceptualizing social structures. All categorizations and theories can also be seen as part of the classification struggle going on over social positions, values and coalitions. Why, for instance, should positions in production take precedence over gender, race, ethnicity or other distinctions as the foundation for describing the structures of society; why should the subordination of women or racism be explained as an outcome of the 'capitalist economic system' (see Sulkunen, 1984)?

From the very outset then, way-of-life research was drawn between two different perspectives: on the one hand it carried on the Marxist tradition of causal explanation, but on the other hand there was also a growing commitment to *Verstehende* sociology. Ahponen and Järvelä



(1983: 9), for instance, defined way-of-life as 'a process of everyday life complete with all its preconditions and aspirations'. This definition and understanding presented way-of-life research with a formidable challenge indeed: it was both to explain the 'real' structures of society and to make intelligible 'the perspective of individual everyday life' upon those structures. However, the research programme was still firmly anchored to the theoretically 'appropriated' system of describing social structures.

The study *Lähiö* (The Suburb) by Matti Kortteinen (1982) on suburban ways of life in Finland represented a departure in this regard: although he still speaks of 'economic form-determinants', there is no more Marxist deduction from the economy. His empirical work is *Verstehende* sociology: the aim is to uncover the internal logic of people's everyday life, the way in which people try, within the confines of their everyday life, to arrange their life in such a way that it accommodates their hopes and habits as far as possible. The task that Kortteinen sets himself and his model of interpretation comes quite close to those that the Birmingham researchers had arrived at, although again there is no direct or even indirect influence from the British tradition.

It was not until after this work by Kortteinen, or around the same time, that the Birmingham studies began to filter into Finland. The method and theoretical approach in the ethnographic study by Alasuutari and Siltari (1983) on the *Realm of Male Freedom* at the local pub, are firmly grounded in British cultural studies, but they are introduced as a solution to the internal problems of way-of-life research. In a study on youth subcultures Heiskanen and Mitchell (1985) borrowed their model of interpretation from Birmingham studies, but in many respects it was a distinctly Finnish and a highly original project.

It was around about this time that the term cultural studies began to catch on in certain areas of sociological research and theoretical debate in Finland. In 1984 a research unit for contemporary culture was set up at the University of Jyväskylä under Katarina Eskola. At the same time a cultural studies network was created to bring together all those interested.

Two research examples

To give some local colour to the picture of Finnish cultural studies, let me describe two research examples from the early 1980s. The studies, Kortteinen's *Suburb* and Alasuutari and Siltari's *The Realm of Male Freedom*, were some of the first examples of a new qualitative approach, which then came to be known as cultural studies.

Kortteinen's book has been an exceptionally influential study as a marker of a paradigm shift and as a model of qualitative sociological research.⁴ It addresses a big social issue of the time, a rapid structural change whereby the dominant position of agriculture gave way to industry and services, forcing large numbers of rural people to move into

the towns. However, the statistics and figures were of minor interest for Kortteinen, who wanted to find out what it meant for the people, many of whom found their homes in the newly built high-rise suburbs. To study that, he concentrated on a single quarter in a single Helsinki suburb, did participant observation and conducted in-depth interviews among some of the families.

Kortteinen presents the results of his analysis in an interesting way. Basically the analysis is organized into chapters that report case analyses of families with a different background and who apply a different 'coping strategy' to the contradictions of suburban life. Those couples who have migrated from the countryside are shown to differ from blue-collar families, which again are different from the way of life of middle-class families. However, Kortteinen emphasizes that we are not exactly dealing with a classification of the interviewed couples, but rather with 'ideal types' constructed on the basis of them. He claims to present a 'theory' of transformation of people's way of life along with urbanization. Thus, in this theory the three family types also represent three generations, although the interviewed families are of course same generation.

According to this 'local' and 'grounded' (a word he doesn't use) theory, the city-dwellers' first generation's problems stem from contradictions between the values and attitudes they internalized in childhood in a family farm, and the conditions for their private life provided by a suburb and a flat in a high-rise. They long for a community and more space, and dream about moving to a house of their own. A man raised to be a self-employed farmer becomes a wage-labourer, and a farmer's daughter becomes a housewife. He feels unfree, and she is lonely and feels she isn't doing much that her mother would define as 'work'. This one family-breadwinner situation easily leads to an exacerbated patriarchy and a marital crisis, and to solve the inherent tensions families choose different coping strategies. One solution for the wife's problem is to establish a network between the neighbouring housewives. Another strategy is that the wife gets a job of her own as soon as possible. A third strategy is that the family revives their roots in the countryside by for instance buying a cottage where they go during the weekends and whenever it is possible.

Second generation blue-collar families differ from the first generation city-dwellers in that they have practically no contacts with their neighbours. Both spouses have jobs. They are family-centred, and their social networks consist of workmates. Although they are socialized to living in an urban environment, according to Kortteinen the gender division of labour in household chores is still close to that originally formed in the family farms. The paradoxical problem in family life is that, after work, the husband has 'nothing to do', whereas the wife has a hard time working two 'shifts', one at work and another at home. Having



a child sharpens the potential marital tensions related to this. The wife tries to get some help from her husband who, while trying to compensate for his subordinate position in wage labour, interprets it as 'bossing'. As a reaction to quarrels, the husband may assume the habit of going to a bar to drink after work, and trying to show that he is the boss. However, to save the marriage he later swears he will mend his ways and tries to make good such outbursts to his wife. According to Kortteinen, this may lead to a matriarchy; a family structure where the wife is the main decision-maker. Another possibility is that the husband 'softens', assumes a life attitude within which he gets personal meaning and content to his life from household chores and childcare.

For the middle-class families, according to Kortteinen, the facade of their way of life is very important. The husband is the family breadwinner, and the housewife gets the meaning of her life from taking care of and dressing the children, and decorating the home. Their spouses' division of labour is clear, as an engineer husband says in an interview: 'I purchase the walls and you maintain them' (Kortteinen, 1982: 200). The middle-class spouses spend a lot of their spare time dreaming about and planning their future. They will buy a bigger apartment and eventually a house of their own as soon as they have saved the money. Contradictions in this way of life also stem from the gender division of labour. The wife may have feelings of inferiority in her role as a housewife, but the bigger the family income, the more there is to do. In that sense patriarchy relies on the husband's performance. As long as he can earn enough to support the whole family, he thinks that the household chores are not his duty. In these middle-class families, the wife may also take a job outside the family when the children grow older, but it is not essential for the family economy. As a man says: 'I have put it this way: at the stage when I tell you that you'll have to get a job – at that moment I'll go out to beat the carpets' (Kortteinen, 1982: 229).

Kortteinen's study deals with a major structural change in Finnish society, but by looking at it from the perspective of people's everyday life it highlights issues that differ from previous mainstream social research. Instead of conventional politics the study addresses identity politics and especially gender relations.

The same is true of Alasuutari and Siltari's (1983) study, which also addresses the 'great migration' by studying life in a suburb. We reasoned that the concrete consequences of the rapid social change were crystallized in the suburbs, and that the contradictions inherent in them could be seen especially sharply (and even exceptionally) in the local pubs. As we ended up studying a male group of regular darts players in a local tavern, masculinity and gender division of labour in the family turned out to be the central issues.

The study is based on ethnographic research – participant observation, individual qualitative interviews and tape-recorded group discussions –

much influenced by the Birmingham School youth cultural studies, especially by Paul Willis's (1977, 1978) ethnographic studies. Quite like Willis (1978), we first describe the elements of the culture of the informal group, the blue-collar darts players; we then show how they are related to each other, and what socio-symbolic homologies there are between them and their life outside the group. What they regard as important and interesting in their hobby – action, self-discipline, solidarity and independence – are shown to have their homologous counterparts in the 'wider life they live' (Hoggart, 1966: 9). In other words, what the men value, or hate, in spending time and playing darts in the local tavern express and play with the same attitudes and structures of feeling that are central in their attempts to develop a meaningful attitude toward their jobs as skilled workers. In that sense their working-class culture is a resource from which the game of darts derives its meaning, but on the other hand the leisure time environment of the tavern allows for them to further develop those elements of culture, with the attempt to preserve their self-respect and to gain pleasure from their life.

For instance, the players draw parallels between their job and darts, and in doing that present their version of male working-class masculinity, so eloquently analysed by Willis (1977). As Willis puts it, in working-class culture 'manual labour is associated with the superiority of masculinity, and mental labour with the social inferiority of femininity' (1977: 148). However, since these skilled workers are fairly independent in their work, and proud of actually knowing their job better than the foremen, they cannot ridicule mental labour outright. Instead, they emphasize that both at the workplace and in darts one needs accuracy and common sense, but also mental arithmetic:

AKI: After you've thrown you can quickly figure out how much more you've got to go (like in 501 when you count down to zero). It's the same sort of simple arithmetic that I need at work. That's what I really like about darts, the way you can play around with numbers.

The homology between the world of work and the cultural forms of the darts players also extends to the human relations at the workplace, to organizational activities and to politics. Although the darts players acknowledge the importance of trade unions, they feel that the leadership of labour unions is far detached from ordinary workers. They are not particularly interested in taking part in politics, which they regard as a form of careerism. Here, the skilled workers' concept of their way of succeeding in life is compared to the game. Down at the tavern, they show their value in playing darts, in the same way, they show their value at the workplace through their professional skill. Those who have no skills use politics to get ahead.



Although the tavern is for these men also important as a 'realm of male freedom' in contrast with family life, that is not a popular subject of discussion amongst the darts players. Yet the men tend to have a pretty good idea of each other's domestic affairs, which are not always in the best possible condition.

The problems are particularly related to household chores. The darts players' generation is the first to be affected by the rapid increase in female wage employment, which has imposed completely new demands on family life and on the division of labour at home. Men know that, in order to save their marriages, they should have a bigger role in the household and childcare, but this is in contradiction with the cultural tradition that defines household chores as 'women's work', totally unsuited to men. This is not only a normative attitude inherited from older generations. The nature of household chores in the typical suburban home differs in significant respects from that of traditional male jobs, which are characterized by action, clearly identifiable individual performances, and a concrete, visible end-result. Housework, by contrast, is for the most part invisible; the only time it is noticed is when it remains undone.

In this sense, the tavern is a place to 'escape' or to get relief from family duties. One strategy is to interpret a round of darts as a well-deserved evening off, a reward for doing one's share of the household chores. Another useful strategy is to try to find some rationale, an independence in household chores that supports the male identity, so that you can justify doing it to yourself or to the mates. One of the men, for example, told about the interest he has developed in preparing good meat. Another one justified his doing the dishes by stressing how well it makes greasy, black hands white. Once you have learned how to go about it, you also learn to enjoy it.

The tension between male independence and responsibility is, in the husband's mind, focused on the wife. She is seen often as a representative of social coercions and a guardian of proper moral standards. The wives have also ended up assuming part of the responsibility that the husband has for the working life by providing reminders and by controlling their husbands' leisure time and especially their drinking. As it said on the wall of a private pool club, handwritten by one of the club members' wives, 'Boys to be back home by 11'.

Although this cultural organization of gender relations in the family would not seem to leave much space for actual 'male freedom', there is a way it may be reclaimed in a rather paradoxical manner. If all self-control is externalized to outer control, the subject may feel totally free. Of course, in that case the orderliness of the man's everyday life is totally dependent on others. However, such a 'logic of freedom' (Alasuutari, 1992) gets its expression in heavy drinking, which the darts players seldom do. They want to retain their independence, which means that

they want to find ways to balance the tensions between work, family life and tavern-going.

There are several other themes in the *Realm of Male Freedom* that could have been introduced here, but lack of space prevents that.⁵ Besides, the description just given is probably enough to give you an idea of the study. Compared to Kortteinen's book, the approach is more 'textual' or 'semiotic', and it is more emphatically an analysis of a local group, although the results are placed in a broader social and historical perspective.

Finnish cultural studies and microsociology

The two studies introduced in this article should show how, in the early 1980s, part of Finnish social research developed into a direction that came to be known as 'cultural studies'. The issues addressed stemmed from current developments in Finnish society, and many influences came from places other than the Birmingham School. Although other influences were then mixed with the British tradition, from the very outset cultural studies in Finland was to have a much broader meaning. In contrast to the situation in Great Britain and the United States, for example, cultural studies in Finland was seen as the opposite pole to the line of Marxist research which advocated a structural–functional mode of explanation, even though the reaction came partly from within the Scandinavian Marxist tradition or the paradigm influenced by the Frankfurt School.⁶ In the United States, for instance, cultural studies is lumped together into a single (Marxist) bloc with critical theory, whereas in Finland cultural studies is seen as the antitheses to (Marxist) sociology concerned with the structures of society.

Articulations of these kinds of polarizations have an inherent tendency to simplify the views of the other side, the opposite pole. On the other hand it does seem that the departure from structural research has served to underscore the voluntaristic aspects of Finnish cultural studies. Some researchers in Finland have gone so far as to identify the Birmingham School and cultural studies narrowly only with its subculture theory (Hoikkala, 1989; Mäki-Kulmala, 1993), hoping to take distance from its class reductionism. In Finland the body of work associated with cultural studies has come to include some very microsociologically-oriented discourse analyses. In short then, the Finnish case owes its specific features to cultural studies, within the field of sociology, taking up a place as a paradigmatic antithesis to 'structural theories'. Post-Marxist research into the 'structures' of society and economy has now enjoyed a surprisingly long run as a descriptive system with (so it seems) an exclusive right to talk about 'society' and its 'structures'.



Stagnation of the human sciences

Although cultural studies has come to mean somewhat different things in different countries and to different researchers, the names associated or identifying with the concept certainly have much in common. First of all, all CS researchers, while recognizing the importance of a wide range of socio-political phenomena, attach special significance to the concept of meaning. Secondly, cultural studies shares a common interest in phenomena that are typical of present-day social reality: popular culture, ethnicity, gender and other socially significant issues and distinctions.

Cultural studies has found an 'interdisciplinary' slot for itself amongst other disciplines concerned with the phenomena of modern society because these have not always been able to provide adequate analyses of new emerging phenomena. The reason for this, then, appears to lie in the inherent tendency of the university institution to stagnate.

Within both the humanities and the social sciences, disciplines have traditionally been organized around given sets of problems: researchers and citizens have regarded a certain social problem or phenomenon so significant that it has been thought to require the attention of a whole community of scholars. The development of such specific fields of research into independent and universal disciplines can be largely attributed to the organizational and science-policy logic of universities. In order to defend the resources made available to them, the research communities will try to demonstrate that their interest in a certain problem or object of study is not just a passing thing, but that they have in fact discovered a blind spot, an object or cluster of phenomena that no one has tackled before.

It is precisely the identification of a new, virgin object of study that seems to be the key requirement for acquiring an independent status for a discipline; witness the well-worn metaphor of science breaking into virgin territory. The identification of a proper blind spot, a new continent, is surely convincing evidence that a new, specialized discipline needs to be appointed. Once they have their own, exclusive object of study, the research community can also go ahead and call their object of study a discipline. From this it follows (and this is why the status of discipline is so intensely sought-after) that it is easier to defend the resources of an entire discipline within the bureaucratic system of university administration.

With the status of independent discipline also comes a measure of rigidity. The main reason for this is that within the field of science policy, research areas have to defend their existence by proving their qualifications as a genuine scientific project. According to this 'science logic', disciplines have to establish themselves by setting out a clearly defined and more or less permanent object of study for themselves and by constructing a history for the discipline, preferably one that dates back

all the way to Greek philosophers. Within the social sciences and the humanities the object of study may be historical and specific to a certain culture, but it will preferably be so thematized that the hard core of the discipline lies in a more or less universal phenomenon. Take (mass) communication studies. In a historical perspective mass communication is obviously a very young phenomenon, but communication can also be considered a universal phenomenon, indeed as one that comprises virtually all the human sciences. Literary studies is another example. Literature is also a fairly young phenomenon, but its early history can be traced back to the first inscribed words or to the point where humans began to use language. And what about sociology? If sociology is understood as a behavioural science concerned with the social, then its object is at least as old as humankind. If, on the other hand, it is understood more specifically as a discipline concerned with the study of modern society and modernization, then it can still seek to produce universal generalizations as to what modernization is about, wherever it is happening. When a discipline is tied down to a certain object of study, and when students entering the discipline are indoctrinated by introducing them to the research tradition specially constructed for that discipline, it becomes very difficult to break loose, to change, to adopt a new orientation. The discipline may turn in on itself and stagnate. One of the disciplines clearly struggling with this problem in Finland is ethnography concerned with the customs and material culture of Finno-Ugric peoples.

For researchers who have anchored themselves to a given discipline, changes in the outside world may result in interesting phenomena slipping beyond their reach: if those phenomena are no longer covered by their discipline and their object of study, then the work they would do on those objects would no longer qualify as work in that particular discipline. Their studies would not count towards their qualifications. On the other hand, empirical generalizations and theoretical frames of reference constructed on the basis of an old object of study will be of little help in the analysis of new phenomena.

One could in fact argue that cultural studies has grown up precisely out of this stagnation of old disciplines. Take literary studies: comics, films, videos and television are nowadays far more important to ordinary people than literature. Anthropology, for its part, was set up as a discipline concerned with foreign cultures and primitive, remote societies, but time and space have lost much of their meaning in the modern world. The 'Others' have moved in next door, and 'Western' cultural products, television programmes and economic relations have all but engulfed the whole world. Further, the science of sociology was founded to address the question of how modern, industrial society should be understood, but the conceptual tools of established academic sociology have often proved too blunt for incisive analyses of many 'post-industrial'



The human sciences from which cultural studies has taken distance following its independence, have settled down to study the industrial, urbanized Western societies that took shape in the 18th and 19th centuries, or the more 'primitive' societies discovered on the peripheries or even outside their sphere of influence. Cultural studies, in contrast, is focused on the past few decades, which means that the main concern has to be with signs and sign systems. Modern production has changed so dramatically that instead of physical objects, commodities exchanged frequently consist of material-ideal products: computer software, design and image concepts, service packages, etc. Automation has revolutionized the nature of work and significantly reduced the need for human labour. Data communication has given a whole new meaning to space and time and in that sense had a huge impact on urban structures and everyday life. Mass communication has transformed the markets of fiction and cultural products and created a completely new kind of global culture. Immigration and refugeeism from Third World countries to Europe, North America and other affluent countries has given an increased urgency to issues of ethnicity and race. All this has changed and is continuing to change attitudes towards old cultural categories, structures and hierarchies (see e.g. Beck et al., 1994; Giddens, 1990, 1991, 1992).

'Cultural studies' as a science policy strategy

It would be easy to slip back into the discourse where one argues for a correct or best possible diagnosis of cultural studies: what it 'really is'. Let us instead stick to the perspective from which it is seen as a social construct. What has this construct been like and how has it been used as a science policy strategy in search of its own place in the international academic world and in the public sphere? How successful does it seem to be, and how is it conceivably changing?⁷

To defend cultural studies as a new discipline would involve arguing that old disciplines are in the midst of some sort of crisis, that no old discipline is capable of flexibly responding to the research challenge presented by a new phenomenon or problem. On the other hand, as was said, cultural studies scholars often emphasize that CS is 'inter-disciplinary'. I would suggest that the construction of cultural studies shows features of both a 'science discourse' and a strategy of 'inter-disciplinarity'.

The way in which cultural studies has been constructed (by identifying features that it shares in common with various contemporary researchers and theorists) could be compared to the way in which Talcott Parsons in *The Structure of Social Action* (1967 [1937]) constructs sociology as a science. Parsons argued that the social sciences around the turn of the century discovered a common frame of reference. He says that Alfred Marshall, Vilfredo Pareto, Émile Durkheim and Max Weber,

all starting out from different backgrounds, arrived independently of one another at a single theory, the theory of social action (Parsons, 1967: 722). This, in Parsons' interpretation, marked the birth of sociology.

It was pointed out earlier that the identification of an exclusive object of study appears to be crucial to gaining an independent status for a discipline. Cultural studies has been no exception in this regard, either. As well as exploring present-day reality and its various phenomena by employing methods and tools that are best suited to that end, cultural studies has also wanted to construct and label its own object of study. Cultural studies likes to portray itself as concerned with a whole new era, the 'post-modern'. This is the 'science discourse': cultural studies needs to be defined as a discipline that is concerned to study post-modern society and its phenomena.⁸ Hence the object of study for cultural studies, which at once constructs it as a legitimate discipline.

In this regard the construct of cultural studies has much in common with classical sociology: where sociology defined itself as a 'modern' science, cultural studies is devoted to the 'post-modern'; but both are based upon a universalizing philosophy of history which simplifies differences and changes into epochs and their binary oppositions. Classical sociology operates with the contrasts between 'traditional' and 'modern', cultural studies with the contrasts between 'modern' and the 'post-modern'.

'Interdisciplinarity' is another science policy strategy frequently used in constructing cultural studies. It is even more dominant than the science strategy in that CS researchers do not directly say they represent an independent discipline, but underline the multidisciplinary history and nature of cultural studies. In the United States, too, even those who study and teach at dedicated institutions retain dual citizenship, so to speak: even if they specialize in cultural studies, they will continue to represent some old discipline (Rosaldo, 1994).

The human sciences appear to have reached a turning-point of sorts in terms of the development of science policy. The status of disciplines which established themselves by the beginning of the century is hardly called into question, and the influx of ever new disciplines of sciences is (possibly) slowing down. Other strategies are now being used in science policy.

In many countries and at many universities today, it seems that 'interdisciplinarity' is a more effective science policy strategy than 'science'. To demonstrate their cost-effectiveness in the market-place, universities will no longer want to portray themselves as institutions pioneering their way into uncharted terrain; rather, the image they want to convey is of a rapid reaction force that can use the information at its disposal to respond flexibly to emerging new problems. Increasingly, universities and research institutes are now organized around problems and projects. This means that the science discourse is becoming a less



resource allocation will be made on the basis of results (and accordingly on the interest shown by students in the programme), it is tempting to describe the research area as pragmatic, interdisciplinary and concerned with current issues.

However, cultural studies cannot depend entirely on a strategy in which it is defended as an interdisciplinary project, because the construct is made up of several projects (women's studies, ethnicity research, research on sexual orientation, etc.). That makes the features of a science strategy understandable. On the other hand, the reflective and self-reflective nature of cultural studies in itself makes it difficult to defend a serious science strategy. For instance, one of the lines of inquiry within the debate on the post-modern calls into question the concept of the post-modern (or modern) as an epoch, and looks at epoch theories themselves as objects of study. In this light it is not easy to return to the naïve belief in the sciences, each with its own specified areas of research within reality.

All in all, there will probably continue to be contradictory elements in the way cultural studies is constructed and used in the fight for resources at universities throughout the world. In some places it will institutionalize as a separate discipline, while elsewhere it will retain an interdisciplinary status.

Notes

1. Klaus Bruhn Jensen says more or less the same about the situation in Denmark: '[Cultural studies in Denmark] is not synonymous with the configuration of social and psychoanalytic theories that were, to a degree, imported from the European continent, rearticulated in the UK, and later reexported to the American market, as an alternative to mainstream sociology and literary studies' (Eskola and Vainikkala, 1994: 193).
2. As a short introduction, see the Special Issue of the Critique of Political Economy of *Acta Sociologica* (vol. 20(2), 1977): Kosonen, 1977; Noro, 1977; Schanz, 1977; Thomsen, 1977.
3. Matti Alestalo and Teuvo Rätty (1994: 217–43) have nicely captured these years in an article on what they call the crisis of the 1960s and 1970s. The article is based on an analysis of PhD dissertations in sociology.
4. For instance, in a survey conducted in 1983, Finnish sociologists were asked which sociologists have influenced their thinking during their whole career and during the past three years. Kortteinen ranked fifth in the latter category, right after Joachim Hirsch, Jürgen Habermas, Michel Foucault and Émile Durkheim, (Kaukonen, 1984: 130).
5. Moreover, a few years later we published a whole book, *Lähiöravintola*, or *The Local Tavern* (Sulkunen et al., 1985) with more case-studies, including a chapter based on interviews with some of the darts players' wives.
6. Arto Noro (1994: 174–5) has offered a very similar interpretation of the 'Kapitallogiker school' Marxism in Finland. From the late 1960s onwards, he says, *Kapitallogiker* 'ploughed through the self-same stages and the same

set of problems as the Frankfurt School'. *Kapitallogik* and ideology-critical Marxism provided the wedge to divorce 'university Marxism' from traditional political Marxism. The next step was to try and sensitize a theoretical construct developed on the basis of Marx's method for the *Capital* to specific disciplines and to use it for 'real analysis'. The project eventually expanded into a critique of civilization, and the 1980s still saw a turn to the aesthetic, even to the metaphysics of the everyday. 'However, this simulation history did not have the same destination as old Adorno: its "final" turn in the 1980s away from capitalism and towards a cultural-philosophical debate on the modern/post-modern, brought forth a whole range of post-positions that deviated from the tradition of critical theory.'

7. Of course, the problem with this discussion is that now we address the questions at a very elusive and abstract 'international' level, when they should properly be discussed within a particular country or homogenous cultural area.
8. Lehtonen (1994a, 1994b) observes, cultural studies is a critique of the modern.

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