

School of Arts

Research papers from the School of Arts

Roehampton University

Year 2006

McDeconstruction

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*What will the status of these confessions be?
Once I find out the purposes to which my confession is being
deployed – perhaps used against me – I may wish to retract
my confession.*
(McQuillan 2003)

One only loves by declaring that one loves.
(Derrida 1997: 9)

*The only theory worth having is that which you have to fight
off, not that which you speak with profound fluency.*
(Hall 1992: 281)

1. McDeconstruction

When I chose my title, ‘McDeconstruction: or (Trans)Mission Impossible’, I knew of three things that the prefix ‘Mc’ would most likely conjure up here. First, a clear play on the notorious term, ‘McDonaldisation’. Secondly, an obvious play on ‘McQuillan’, with whose inestimable institutional work this panel is concerned. I also knew that ‘Mc’ is a Celtic prefix, meaning ‘son of’. So, tying ‘McQuillan’ to ‘son of deconstruction’ on the one hand, and to so many (largely problematic) allusions set up by ‘McDeconstruction’, on the other (McDonaldisation, Donald Duck, Disney(fication), Duckology, *Deconstructing Disney*), I thought that this would be more than enough to work with – in a consideration of *the production of deconstruction*.

* This paper was specially written for the International Association of Philosophy and Literature (IAPL) Conference in Freiburg, Germany, 5th-10th June 2006, for the ‘Close Encounter’ Special Session on the work of Martin McQuillan, entitled: ‘*Trans(gression/mission/fluence): Martin McQuillan and Para-Theory*’.

McDeconstruction; or: (Trans)Mission Impossible

Page 2 of 22

The *Oxford English Dictionary* has since informed me that it takes the prefix ‘Mc’ to denote, firstly, ‘a person who ... is considered an exemplar or personification’. This seems appropriately complimentary. And I would like to compliment Martin here, whose work I have always admired. Yet, immediately, the question comes: Exemplary of *what*? Of deconstruction? or of McDeconstruction?¹

The second use the *OED* gives for ‘Mc’ is: as a ‘chiefly ... *depreciative*’ prefix ‘to form nouns with the sense of “something that is of mass appeal, a standardized or bland variety of or alternative to”’. (It then cites the colloquial American term ‘McMansion’: ‘a modern house built on a large and imposing scale, but regarded as ostentatious and lacking architectural integrity’.) So, clearly, despite appearances, this ‘Mc’ harbours *doubleness* and *undecidability*;² double movements, movements in contrary directions at the same time.

Just like this very context itself, in fact; designed as it is to mark the institutional ‘departure’ of someone who has really only recently arrived. The time is out of joint in this strange sort of memorial service for the ‘departure’ of someone who is here and has really only just started to make his presence felt; as it were, *born* of deconstruction by *giving birth* to works of deconstruction. So, this alleged ‘end’ is – one must hope and expect – really only the beginning. So this is all really the wrong way around: an inversion of the usual order of things: not an end, but a beginning. Not a closure, but a displacement.

So, Martin is going. But, where from and where to? This might be a similar question to that of the direction of deconstruction ‘itself’ – So: a question that is not ‘one’ about a direction that cannot be ‘one’. Accordingly, it is doubleness, movements in contrary directions, that I want to consider, here, in relation to Martin’s work. At this doubly deconstructive and metonymically canonical institutional moment, I want to nudge (or ‘lever’) his . . . well, his *contrariness*(!) – in a particular direction, from a particular point.

2. Or

In order to begin, I will focus on what I take to be a subordinated aspect of his work: cultural studies. Now, you may not actually associate Martin with cultural studies. You may simply associate him with deconstruction, or ‘Theory’, or ‘Philosophy and Literature’. And, you may think, anyway: ‘*so what*, big deal, who cares? What does it matter what it’s called? What’s in a name?’ Such a reaction would be understandable. Indeed, Martin himself is not freely given to associating himself easily with cultural studies. As he wrote, in 2002: ‘I was for a long time completely unaware that I did cultural studies. Indeed I did not know that I did cultural studies until you (Paul) [i.e., me] told me that I did’. (He wrote this in an essay/interview entitled ‘The Projection of Cultural Studies’, for a book called *Interrogating Cultural Studies*.) I had suggested to him that he did cultural studies in about 1999 or 2000 – not very long after the publication of his book *Deconstructing Disney*. And

McDeconstruction; or: (Trans)Mission Impossible

Page 4 of 22

Deconstructing Disney is a work categorized as ‘cultural studies’. Yet he claims, in 2002: ‘My first response, as you will recall, was “I don’t do Cultural Studies”’ (McQuillan 2003).³

This may seem to be inconsequential, an ‘inconsequentiality’, or a forgivable oversight, signifying nothing. But, to use Martin’s own words: ‘against such seeming inconsequentialities we have been taught to read’ (McQuillan 2003: 303). So, to be clear: my initial point of leverage is merely this: that Martin produces books and journals categorized as cultural studies; he is executive editor of an international cultural studies journal produced by a centre for cultural studies; and that he holds a very important position ‘in Cultural Theory and Analysis’ in that centre for cultural studies. Admittedly, *Deconstructing Disney* came out before he got his job in cultural studies; but, it surely played a notable part in securing that position.

So, my question is: what does his ‘amnesia’ signify? For Derrida: ‘amnesia is never accidental. It signifies something’. It is indicative of a ‘hierarchizing operation’ that ‘organizes [‘even produces’ an] inheritance’ (Derrida 1992: 200). So, again, to be clear: My first simple claim is that Martin is associated with cultural studies. My second, less simple claim is that he is *indebted to* cultural studies. By ‘indebted’ I mean to evoke an argument (one that has also been voiced by Martin himself) about ‘the becoming-cultural-studies of English’ – indeed, what he calls ‘the becoming-cultural-studies of the humanities in general’ – in which cultural studies could be

regarded as something of a ‘sublation’ of the humanities (Mowitt 2003).⁴ In other words, Martin’s ‘amnesia’ could reflect not acknowledging the debt as his own while still drawing interest upon it (See Godzich 1987: 162). So I am going to make a big deal of it.

I do so in full awareness of two possible responses. The first is ‘Yeah? Big deal! So what?’ The second is Martin’s own deconstructive problematisation of his relation to cultural studies.

Of the ‘so what?’ response, what has to be pointed out is that if there is a conflict of the faculties in British universities, then its name and locus is neither ‘Philosophy’ (as it was for Kant) nor ‘Theory’ (as others have suggested), but Cultural Studies. Cultural Studies has attracted a degree and a range of criticism, hostility, and outright attacks that are as fascinating and potentially edifying as they are serious. So, if the question is ‘so, cultural studies, so what?’, the answer is: it’s only ‘so what’ if one does not acknowledge what Stuart Hall calls the ‘stakes’ deriving from its *history and contingent institution*.

Which brings us to Martin’s deconstructive problematisation of his relation to cultural studies. On the one hand, Martin’s problematisation of his relation to cultural studies has taken the form of a version of the ‘What’s in a name?’ response. My answer is, again, in this context – however it is characterised – *everything*. On the other hand, though, and stated plainly, what Martin simply cannot face is, in his words, “coming out” as “doing” cultural

studies'. This is because he suffers from what he calls the 'embarrassment of affiliation with an under theorised and "anoraky" version of cultural studies'. ('Anoraky' means, of course, 'nerdy', 'pathetic'.) Yet, elsewhere, away from all of this mucky, embarrassing cultural studies business, Martin is more than prepared to 'come out' as 'a deconstructionist'. One article he wrote (in a cultural studies journal – indeed, in a themed issue of a cultural studies journal, entitled 'polemics: against cultural studies') – an article that has become the first chapter of his new book – begins with his own version of the gay rights chant, 'we're here, we're queer, get fuckin' used to it!'. Namely, the first words of the article and the book are the proud declaration: 'I am a deconstructionist!'⁵

This is nowhere supplemented/completed with: 'I am a deconstructionist, enabled by cultural studies, get fuckin' used to it!' In fact, there is a *contrary* movement: an *intellectual* movement that virtually *disavows* cultural studies in tandem with (and riding on) an *institutional* movement *into* it. . . . Again: So what?

Derrida once made an ill-advised comment about cultural studies. It was this:

the deconstructive task of the Humanities to come will not let itself be contained within the traditional limits of the departments that today belong, by their very status, to the Humanities. These Humanities to come will cross disciplinary

borders without, all the same, dissolving the specificity of each discipline into what is called, often in a very confused way, interdisciplinarity or into what is lumped with another good-for-everything concept, “cultural studies” (Derrida 2001: 50)

(Reading this, one can almost hear Geoffrey Bennington reassuring Derrida that it would *just fine* to make such an ill-informed, illegitimately generalising ‘self-confident and self-righteous’ statement.⁶ Anyway.) In response to this comment, Martin wrote something of a defense of cultural studies – or rather, something of a critique of the ‘very confused way’ that Derrida sloppily bandies around the terms ‘interdisciplinarity’ and ‘cultural studies’: ‘Perhaps I am being too sensitive here’, wrote Martin, ‘a bit like defending a slightly embarrassing relative simply because s/he happens to “belong” to you, but against such seeming inconsequentialities we have been taught to read’ (McQuillan 2003: 303). And Martin’s point is correct. *Seeming* inconsequentialities are not *necessarily* inconsequential.

This is why I want to read some ‘seeming inconsequentialities’ in Martin’s own work. I will read *against* them, in the name of the ‘mission’ (or the transmission, or the transmission of the mission) of *both* deconstruction *and* cultural studies. In a first sense, I view this as the effort to try, in Derrida’s words, ‘to modify the rules of the dominant discourse, ... to politicize and democratize the university scene’ (Derrida 1995: 410). In a second, supplementary, but crucial sense, however, what this relies on is what the likes of

Derrida, Stuart Hall, Sam Weber, Wlad Godzich, John Mowitt, and many more have called the constitutive character of *institution*. Without what I will call the institutional focus, this mission – the transmission of the mission of deconstruction and cultural studies – becomes impossible.⁷

3. (Trans)Mission

To explain, recall that this panel occurs, in Professor Barker's words, because Martin 'has recently completed a term on the IAPL Executive Committee, and it is time to mark his influence on our cross-disciplinary endeavours'. At this canonical moment, then, it seems appropriate to recall some points made by Derrida, in 'Canons and Metonymies' (Derrida 1992). Here, Derrida argues, first, that there is 'violence marking every procedure of legitimation or canonization' (198). Secondly, that 'deconstruction answers to a greater desire for memory, intelligibility and responsibility in the face of tradition'. Thirdly, that 'a redistribution of canonical values in fact leads, concretely, to difficult choices in the organizing of study and research' (198-199). And fourthly: 'amnesia is never accidental. It signifies something; its phenomenon is not just negative. It is not just a loss of memory. A selective hierarchizing operation organizes the inheritance. It even produces it' (200).

So: what does privileging 'deconstruction' over and at the expense of cultural studies 'do'?⁸ What is the violence of this choice? What

is the redistribution? What amnesia arrives? With what consequences?

Now, although Martin is embarrassed by cultural studies and sometimes inexplicably forgets to mention it, he never *rejects* cultural studies. Indeed, Martin actually expresses an affiliative relationship to it – or rather to something in it greater than itself (a ‘spirit’).⁹ This is because, as he characterises it, cultural studies might be regarded as (I quote) ‘a transformative critique of the institution’; and something that is what it is (I quote again) ‘not because it [...] only read[s] popular forms but because it [...] neither preclude[s] any object of analysis nor retreat[s] from any theoretical limits’. (In saying this, Martin sounds a lot like Stuart Hall.) He continues (and I quote again at length):

the whole point of cultural studies is to open the proper to the scrutiny of the improper. This includes the theoretical limits of cultural studies as well as its object of analysis. Transformative critique must also be auto-critique, which not only asks what is proper to cultural studies but what is proper to the impropriety of questioning the proper. ... [W]ithout theory as a certain spirit of auto-critique, cultural studies is in constant danger of becoming just another disciplinary endeavour – the term ‘Studies’ gives the game away here – with a naff object of analysis. The point would be that one cannot ‘do’ cultural studies simply by borrowing its thematics. Any act of cultural analysis (a term I would now prefer to cultural studies) must be

interventionist and transformative, theoretical and inaugural, performative of the idiom in which it operates, and ‘material’ in its attention to what is resistant (both singular and other) in the object it analyses.

I totally agree with this. Cultural studies was never supposed to be *just* ‘studies’. As Stuart Hall saw it, something is ‘*at stake* in cultural studies’ (Hall 1992: 278), and what that *is* is *consequential ethical and political institutional intervention*. Quite how one measures ‘consequentiality’ may be in question, but Martin, like Stuart Hall, is clear that, as he puts it, one ‘cannot “do” [it] simply by borrowing its thematics’, and ‘the endless articles on Foucault and football are not “doing” cultural studies anymore’ either. Indeed, such work, he states, can be a decidedly ‘conservative force’ – or, so to speak, *McCultural Studies*.

But this very argument – that *cultural studies is not just Studies* – is what makes Martin’s proposed abandonment of the *name* and its replacement with ‘cultural analysis’ doubly troubling. In fact, it opens the door to the abandonment of its entire constitutive problematic: if cultural studies is *not* just meant to be studies, then in what way is renaming it *analysis* a solution? I would suggest that this proposed name change signals a move away from the *institutional problematic* that is constitutive and definitive of cultural studies. Moreover, with this, something uniquely political to do with (at least) the British institutionalisation of ‘deconstruction’ is also lost. This might seem controversial.

However, to reiterate: for the likes of Stuart Hall, this formative problematic is that of working out *how* intellectual work might possibly make a difference that could count in the wider institutional-political field (1992). For Derrida, this takes the form of construing one's effort as '*an institutional practice for which the concept of the institution remains a problem*' (Derrida 2002: 53). As Godzich puts it, *the* 'target' here is *institution* (Godzich 1987: 162). And Mowitt points out that what is most politically valuable about deconstruction is the way that its focus obliges one to 'pose questions that bear on the institutional maintenance of the hermeneutical field as such – questions which quickly center upon the political problems of how institutions are constituted, reproduced, and transformed' (Mowitt 1992: 214-215).

What is clear (both theoretically and empirically/observably) is that such a problematic does not just magically *happen*. Rather it relies entirely on 'teleiopoiesis' or 'the formation of ... a memory [that] is inseparable from historical, and ultimately political, practice' (Mowitt 1992: 2). Substituting 'analysis' for 'studies' will obviously *not* stop academic work from being mere study. If anything, it will *guarantee* it.¹⁰ In Hall's Gramscian words, there is a vast difference between academic work and intellectual intervention. (Or, in our terms, a vast difference between cultural studies and McCultural studies.)

To be fair, though, Martin mainly proposes the switch to 'analysis' to solve the problem of his 'embarrassment of affiliation with [an]

under theorised and “anoraky” version of cultural studies’ (or, what he rightly calls ‘little more than a reversed Leavisitism, [which] construct[s] alternative canons of culture,]and] prais[es] them for the exercise of differing units of value within equally restricted economies’); by which he means work that is nerdy, hobbyist, anthropological, taxonomical, and panoptical. Such un-self-reflexive and ultimately conservative ‘nerdy’ studies is chiefly what provokes his argument that (quote): ‘Where cultural studies is “going”, if I had my way, would be to become departments of Reading or even departments of Reading and Writing, although these “departments” would soon have to evolve into something else’.

Evolve into what? Martin explains (quote):

cultural studies – or perhaps now we ought to speak of the spirit of cultural studies, the ways in which the ghost of cultural studies haunts the academic castle – if it is to continue its work, may need to abandon its name. As long as the work gets done one might as well call it comparative literature, or, reading and writing, or whatever. The same goes for Theory, call it philosophy, call it thinking, such sobriquets can only have ever been strategic. There can be no systematic pronouncements on cultural studies (and/or theory). Cultural studies will – if it is to be true to itself – always be half inside, half outside the academy, crossing borders from exile to exile’.

McDeconstruction; or: (Trans)Mission Impossible

Page 13 of 22

Now, most of this I disagree with. Moreover, since *Spectres of Marx* (Derrida 1994), this sort of thing has become ‘Deconstruction 101’. What is unfortunate about it is that, in this formulaic form, it overlooks the very thing one might expect and want a ‘deconstructionist’ to pay attention to, namely the contingency of the constitutive institutional supplement. That is, it surely makes a *big* difference where and in what way this supposed ‘spirit’ is instituted. Is there some transcendent ‘spirit’ of cultural studies (or deconstruction or Marx) *outside* of its institution? Of course not. Nor does it simply reside ‘in’ its texts. It consists in and as its or their instituted contingency. I rather think that to ‘haunt the academic castle’, and (to quote Martin) to do ‘comparative literature, or, reading and writing, or whatever’ (unquote) is quite different from doing cultural studies too. The name is indeed ‘strategic’. It comes to *matter*.

Of course, I agree that actually-existing cultural studies is often embarrassingly anoraky and, worse, shoddy. But I think that this is true of *most* scholarship. Indeed, I think that the demand – *justify your anorakiness!* – should be generalised to *all* scholarship (Bahti 1992: 72-73): work *should* be supplemented with an account of the *point* of doing it, an explanation of *why* it supposedly matters, to *what*, and, importantly, *how*.¹¹ Until we can answer these questions, we are *all* naff, nerdy and anoraky here We may never cease being nerds. But the ‘force’ proper to both cultural studies and deconstruction relates to the extent to which such difficult questions are inscribed, institutionally, as constitutive.

This brings us back to Derrida's claim to try 'to politicize and democratize the university scene' (Derrida 1995: 410). A strong part of this process is certainly quasi-transcendental deconstructive questioning. Yet we must still be hospitable to the *other* nerds in their anoraks, no matter how embarrassing. (For, nerds are us.) But when *either* 'transcendentalising' or some *other* version of 'train-spotting' or 'stamp-collecting' threatens to lead to the effective disavowal of the contingent constitutive formation which enabled this institutionalisation of deconstruction in the first place, then the claim of some universality of 'rigour' becomes spurious. This move does *not* guarantee the interventional, political, or politicizing impetus: if anything, it gets you 'off the hook'.¹² Worse, it leads to the institution of tightly policed strictures.¹³

For, what is rigour? It is clear that the way Martin conceptualises the 'good reading' that he advocates has (as Slavoj Žižek might put it) been 'hegemonised' by deconstruction. By 'good reading', Martin clearly means deconstruction. Ironically, or paradoxically, however, this 'hegemonising' gesture institutes a problematic relation to *difference*. This can be seen in Martin's claim that there is a need for cultural studies to become 'more study, less culture'. He continues: 'If you really wonder where cultural studies "should" go then I think it needs to redress the imbalance between "culture" and "study" which has marked its formation up till now'. (Unquote.) However, this itself supposes that there is no culture in study, that study is not cultural. His polemical point is against

shabby, shoddy scholarship. And I like it. But the problem lies with the presumption that 'good reading' will *solve* this. My suggestion is that, if anything, the injunction to 'good reading' could lead to the most radically conservative enclaving imposition of propriety in exactly the realms where it should not be: i.e., *reading*. There is no 'one' good reading.

4. Impossible

So, my argument is that the 'classical protocols' evoked by Martin's teleiopoietic gesture of 'evolving' cultural studies into Departments of Reading and Writing does *not* constitute an evolution but rather a *regression from* deconstruction *and* cultural studies. This is because it relies on a *pre-cultural-studies* and *un-deconstructive* conception of political intervention.¹⁴ This can be seen in Martin's declared pedagogical and institutional aim: At Leeds University, he says, their declared departmental aim is 'to produce good readers'.¹⁵ He regards this as 'a modest enough claim', yet one 'from which everything else flows, including [he proposes] all the political and institutional claims made for cultural studies.... What matters [he continues] is that the messy business of education is done and everything else (the victory of the proletariat, if there are any left, or the democracy to come, if it ever gets here) will follow from this'.

Unfortunately, this supposed 'causal relation' (*from* reading *to* revolution) is not one. Rather, it is an *aporia*. *Nothing necessarily*

follows – either in theory or (very evidently) in practice from reading. And ‘critique’, whether good or bad, will not necessarily change a thing, even if you call it ‘transformative critique’. This is important, because Martin bases his whole account of the ‘force’, ‘agency’ or ‘interventionality’ of institutional academia in the most traditional, ‘arboreal’, phonocentric and subject-centred notion of ‘critique’.

This is significant because Martin also invaluablely reminds us that *calls* for change do *not necessarily change anything*; and that it is a mistake to conflate calling for change with *making* an effective intervention *into* anything (McQuillan 2001). Thus, Martin invaluablely cautions us against believing in a kind of ‘Soap Box’ conception of politics (Namely: as if politics consists of one speaker holding forth to one assembled and enthralled audience who are willing and able to react in a predictable and programmatic manner to whatever the preacher preaches or teacher teaches). Martin importantly reminds us that things are not so simple.

This important insight, however, makes his *own* elevation of the value of *critique* particularly problematic. For not only is the belief in the necessary transformative value of critique both phonocentric and subject-centred, it basically *forgets* not only the theory of hegemony but also deconstruction: It overlooks the institutional complexity and heterogeneity of discourse and hegemony. As John Mowitt has observed of this tendency: ‘why should we reconceive the social as discourse’ – or indeed, why should we bother with

deconstruction at all – ‘if, in the final analysis, we are only really interested in the consciousness motivating agents?’ (Mowitt 1992: 17). For, if we do think that ‘transformation’ primarily involves something like speaking (or critiquing) to a public – or if the focus on ‘*contingency*’ is replaced by vague evocations of ‘chance’, as it appears to sometimes in Martin’s work – then *one does not need deconstruction*. In fact, *one abandons deconstruction*.¹⁶

As should be apparent in a contingent context occasioned to mark Martin’s *institutional* achievement (not *simply* the achievement of any ‘critique’): *critique* of the institution is one thing; *transformation* of it is another. So, this ethico-political matter demands attention and interventions other than critique. My suggestion is that the construal of the *work* or *missions* of deconstruction or cultural studies as if merely ‘critique’ is a reduction in purview and remit of both.¹⁷

In his forgotten work of cultural studies, Martin tells us, ‘critique’ has ‘long since lost any power to surprise let alone illuminate’ (Byrne and McQuillan 1999: 1). I think he is right. If, as he rightly says he is, Martin remains ‘keen to retain the spirit of cultural studies as a transformative lever able to enact shifts within the powerfully inertial hierarchies of the institution’, the question is: what institutes a ‘spirit’ as a ‘lever’? Moreover, as Derrida asks: ‘what is technique in this case? Is there a lever? Is there a better lever?’ (Derrida 1992: 205).

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McDeconstruction; or: (Trans)Mission Impossible

Page 19 of 22

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Endnotes

¹ A search for the term 'McDeconstruction' on 10th April 2006 revealed that Google could find only one prior use of the word. I expected to find that the term might have *some* precedent, but I was surprised to discover that the only person who had evidently used the term in an internet-searchable context was me. The fact that I had both *forgotten* that I had previously used it at all at the same time as I simply *anticipated* that it would surely have been used somewhere may justify some comment, in the context of my ensuing use of Martin's essay, which mentions 'projection', and Derrida's 'Canons and Metonymies', which discusses 'amnesia'. . . . Anyway, this is how the term McDeconstruction was first used. I wrote: 'The problem though, is that in so loving it [i.e., 'deconstruction'], I am abusing it, in fetishizing "deconstruction(s)" I am reproducing a convention that I keep avowedly attacking. I am torn. It seems that to love deconstruction I should kill it, in using deconstruction I am abusing it, and adding to the "deluge" of McDeconstruction that is already becoming boring and predictable' (Bowman 2001: 61). To this, a footnote is attached, which reads: 'Whilst the idea of a creeping "deconstructionism" is allegedly anathema to "deconstruction's" "own" statements about "itself", it does seem striking that one can now "explain" what one otherwise "means" by translating things *into* deconstructive terms. A deconstructive orthodoxy? What *should* that look like?' (Bowman 2001: 63, note 93). It appears that this present paper, 'McDeconstruction; or: (Trans)Mission Impossible', is my own attempt to start to answer that question.

² For here we have: either exemplary in the sense of unique, or exemplary in the sense of typical, or indeed *bad*. Moreover: either good or bad son, or simulacrum of a son.

³ So, in 2002, Martin claimed not to have known that he did cultural studies in 2000, even though the cover of *Deconstructing Disney* (published in '98 and '99) announces unequivocally that this is a book of and for cultural studies. This may be a case of publishers saying whatever they think will sell books. But, surely the authors 'signed off' on this designation?

⁴ I myself do not agree with this view. I think rather that whilst the humanities may have come to look like cultural studies, and whilst reciprocally cultural studies may therefore have lost a lot of its apparent uniqueness, what the humanities still lack is what I take to be the defining problematic of cultural studies, a problematic shared with deconstruction, namely, the problem of (the) institution.

⁵ On the problematic character of *beginning* from and with such a demand for recognition, see Arditi and Valentine 1999: vi ff.

⁶ Bennington has revelled in making such ill-informed self-confident and self-righteous claims as that the problem with cultural studies is its 'interminable self-confident and self-righteous political-cum-cultural-studies-speak' (Bennington 1998: 105). For him, cultural studies is nothing more than a pseudo-intellectual, 'clear-conscience' soap-box pontificating kind of "Late-Show" journalism' (Bennington 1998: 105-6) which allegedly lacks the necessary 'theoretical sophistication' and self-awareness 'to understand its own political and cultural situation, let alone set about changing it' (Hall 2002: 66). Much like others who make such nonsensical claims about cultural studies (such as Žižek), Bennington's criticisms perhaps say more about his 'projection' than about 'cultural studies'.

⁷ My argument is that they are both contingently instituted institutional practices, and that there is nothing outside of institution. Accordingly, subordinating, downplaying or overlooking them *qua* particular institutional achievements as if in the name of some (spurious) universal project would be a mistake. So, at this canonical moment, I am seeking to nudge the institutionally important Martin McQuillan, and ask him what he makes of my reading of his own preferences and orientations.

Preferences, decisions and orientations are *institutional*, *instituting*. There is nothing outside of institution. So, to para-cite Derrida: this little point about cultural studies 'joins the great questions of canonization'. It's about the determination of how we 'decide what corpus to study, what research to authorize, what money to distribute, and so on' (Derrida 1992:197, 199). It relates to *teleiopoiesis*, or the fact that, as John Mowitt puts it, 'what we believe to have happened to us bears concretely on what we are prepared to do with ourselves both now and in the future, [and that] the formation of such a memory is inseparable from historical, and ultimately political, practice' (Mowitt 1992: 2).

⁸ Martin never uses such a binary as this (How could 'a deconstructionist?'). Nevertheless, it is clear by the 'good reading' that he advocates that (as Žižek might put it) his understanding of deconstruction 'hegemonizes' his conception of 'good reading'. This 'hegemonising' gesture leads to a problematic relation to *difference*, or as he puts it, the need for cultural studies to become 'more study, less culture': 'If you really wonder where cultural studies "should" go then I think it needs to redress the imbalance between "culture" and "study" which has marked its formation up till now'. However, this supposes that there is no culture in study, that study is not cultural. Martin's polemical point is against shabby, shoddy scholarship. The problem lies with the presumption that 'good reading' will solve this. If anything, the injunction to 'good

reading' will lead to the most radical conservative enclaving imposition of forces of propriety in exactly the realms where it should not be: i.e., reading.

⁹ This is, of course, an eminently problematisable move that to his credit the eminently problematisable Slavoj Žižek has drawn attention to. Žižek criticises Derrida's use of recourse to the spirit to get you off the hook in the face of the failings of every actually existing effort, in *Spectres*. I think that repeating the Derridean gesture in the face of potentially any object or project constitutes a far too facile manoeuvre.

¹⁰ (One need only gesture to the exemplary example of the development of Laclauian discourse analysis to see this. . . Although this example opens a whole other discussion. I have discussed this in Bowman 2004 and Bowman 2002)

¹¹ Gary Hall (2002) would seem to disagree with me, in that he criticises any demand to justify *in advance* what a work will turn out to have achieved. But he does so as an argument against what I would here call the impulse towards 'McPoliticisation' in cultural studies. Namely, his argument is against those who would have cultural studies 'return' to politics 'directly'. So, he argues: 'to move away from theory because it is apparently *not political enough* is to subordinate everything to political ends. It is to imply that things are only worth doing if it can be established *in advance* that they will have a practical, political outcome; an outcome which is itself decided *in advance*' (Hall 2002: 5). His first and last point is that 'it is the theoretical analysis ... which is likely to prove the more "politically" effective, at least to the extent that it will be more self-consciously aware of the politico-institutional factors which affect its operation and development, and therefore less prone to being blindly shaped and controlled by them' (5). This is similar to McQuillan's position, of course. But I think that, given Hall's championing of cultural studies vis-à-vis McQuillan's championing of deconstruction, an examination of the differences of emphasis and the theoretical and practical ramifications that these differences suggest or precipitate could be valuable.

¹² This expression and argument derives from Stuart Hall's argument against Laclauian post-structuralist formalism. Hall's concern is that 'discourse analysis' might all too easily become totally disarticulated either from any sense of economico-political determination (however complexly reconceived) or from a post-Marxist or leftist political position. His concern is that post-Marxist discourse analysis lets us 'off the hook' vis-à-vis political responsibility. Such a disarticulation of discourse analysis from attending to 'historical forces' risks becoming what Hall calls 'a reductionism upward, rather than a reductionism downward, as economism was' (Hall, Morley and Chen 1996: 146). Indeed, according to Daryl Slack, Hall views Laclau's insistently theoretical and philosophical tendency to engage in 'producing the concrete philosophically' rather than through historical analysis to be a tendency that in foregrounding *theory* actually has a reciprocal and negative 'backgrounding effect on the very politics that played such a crucial role in Laclau's work to begin with' (Daryl Slack in Hall, Morley and Chen 1996: 120). Indeed, such a divergence of orientation and interest can arguably be clearly discerned when Laclau argues for instance that once we are aware of the discursive constitution of identities and agencies we therefore *should* 'move from purely sociological and descriptive account[s] of the *concrete* agents involved in hegemonic operations to a *formal* analysis of the logics involved' (Laclau 2000: 53). This is quite a different kind of work to Hall's advocated 'adding, adding, adding, adding, the different levels of determination'. In short, these are two different receptions of the understanding of *what* 'study' is – before we even begin to talk about what 'intervention' or the 'point' is, and how what we do either intervenes or has any other point.

McDeconstruction; or: (Trans)Mission Impossible

Page 22 of 22

¹³ Such a claim really requires demonstration and patient elaboration. But basically it is to reiterate Stuart Hall's observations of Ernesto Laclau's move from theorizing 'politics' to theorizing 'logics'. In that regard, I have discussed the disciplinary and 'interventional' implications of this in Bowman 2001, and have tried to do so more fully in my forthcoming *Post-Marxism versus Cultural Studies*. See also Gilbert 2001, which also discusses issues related to this very well.

¹⁴ The suggestion that the impasses of cultural studies might be overcome by 'evolving' into Departments of Reading and Writing is a gesture which paradoxically repeats – in Martin's words – the flawed 'logic of newness.... [in that] The surest way to ensure that one repeats the errors of the past is to claim to have broken with it'.

¹⁵ Here 'producing good readers' seems to imply that 'good' obviously means 'deconstructive', and that this is somehow therefore free from the denudations of unfortunate forms of institutionalisation (lack of self-reflexivity, 'anorakiness', conservativeness, etc.). As I argue, this is not something 'from which everything else flows, including all the political and institutional claims made for cultural studies'. Of course, auto-critique may be good form. Good reading may be good academic work. But it does not necessarily make any difference. Moreover, it does not even necessarily guarantee ethical or political vigilance. I have heard other deconstructionists (notably Hillis Miller) make the same claim – i.e., that the way to preserve the radical ethical and political work of university English departments is by representing themselves to the institutional powers that be as being merely innocuous producers of 'good readers'. The implication is that this is a loophole by which to avoid being smote from existence for being too partisan or politicized whilst instituting the necessity of radical reading as the norm. I am not convinced by this argument. Or rather, not yet. It is incomplete. This is because there is no good reading, only contingently motivated forms of reading. So, my argument is that McQuillan's suggested legitimating gesture does not 'play and erase' important ethico-political problematics as constitutive. Rather, it threatens to *erase* the problematic of cultural studies to which he and his own work is indebted.

¹⁶ Moreover, this view relies on a very problematic, traditional (albeit quite ego-gratifying) notion of education: namely, 'we teach' the 'others' who 'do'. Again, this undeconstructed theory/practice binary overlooks the *heterogeneity* of micro- and macro-stabilisations of hegemonies and discourses, the *paralogical* micro- and macro-stabilisations of *institutions*. It also reduces politics a numbers game, a recruitment drive: convert as many disciples as possible – and those who will *listen to you will 'do'*.

¹⁷ In fact, it is close to a conflation of deconstruction and cultural studies with *hermeneutics*.