

Cultural Studies as a Question of Stance

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I Looking Back: A Perspective on Positionality

This essay is a reflection on the importance of position in at least two senses. First, after reading, writing about, and discussing approaches to cultural studies intensively for a semester and then rereading those texts from the cultural studies canon as well as my own written responses and notes in preparation for writing this reflection, the question of stance and how to deal with one's own position in social and historical structures reveals itself as the overarching issue grappled with in the field today. Simply put, positionality is the key term of cultural studies. In a second sense, however, this essay is also about my own changing of perspectives and sense of connection with cultural studies.

I study Francophone literatures primarily. My original motivation for engaging with cultural studies was “to extend my Europe-centred knowledge about cultural studies,” as I formulated in an initial statement of interest. Having had only little prior knowledge of the discipline's intellectual history and the issues resulting from the field's transnational scope before taking part in the colloquium, I unconsciously already formulated a sort of presentiment that my access to cultural studies is conditioned by my personal academic background and – to take up Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's terminology – the frame of “geo-political determinations” in which I have been socialized.¹ Apparently, I wondered about my own positionality and, as I learned during the semester, the question of stance regularly reappears when talking about cultural studies' projects, albeit in different contexts. To show how the question of one's own positionality in general and of the intellectual's positionality in particular constitutes an important framework in cultural studies as an area of research, I will now try to tie together some of my discoveries in reading, writing, discussing, and thereby negotiating my own positions towards cultural studies from this point of view.

Particular attention will be paid, first, to the essays “Culture is Ordinary” by Raymond Williams (1958) and the “The Lost Continent” by Roland Barthes (1957)

¹ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, edited by Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 271–272.

in view of their uses and reflections on positionality. The consequences of positionality will then be explored through Paul Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (1993) in dialogue with Ranajit Guha's and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's remarks on the subaltern (1982 and 1988).

II

From Uses to Responsibilities of the Ordinary

When I first read Williams's striking essay "Culture is Ordinary," I did not read it within the framework of the question of his positionality. What impressed me the most initially was actually his rejection of an elitist sense of culture by stating that culture is "a whole way of life."² I understood the designation of culture as "a whole way of life" in the concrete sense of culture as something formed by living and by people's everyday experiences. His disapproval of an exclusive, elitist sense of culture that does not take into consideration the fact that culture develops in "the most ordinary experience" results from this perspective.³ Ever since reading "Culture is Ordinary" for the first time, I have been preoccupied with Williams's point that "[c]ulture is ordinary."⁴ Instead of speaking in favour of a restrictive understanding of culture, which goes along with "the outward and emphatically visible sign of a special kind of people, cultivated people,"⁵ Williams argues that culture can originate from people's everyday life with its everyday social practices. My general impression, after having read Williams's explanations for the first time, has therefore been marked by my appreciation of this accessible definition of culture.

What was not immediately evident to me was Williams's particularly productive way of using his own positionality, which allows him to give numerous examples for his definition of culture as "ordinary." In my understanding, he uses his positionality in two ways: First, he takes a stance on the notion of culture as the son of a British working-class family and, second, as an academic, too. Regarding the first positioning, Williams bases his redefinition of culture on his family history, his education, and his coming of age in the context of post-industrialization in the United Kingdom. By means of an anecdote concerning a bus ride through his home region, Williams creates a surprisingly personal context for his further arguments:

Not far away, my grandfather, and so back through the generations, worked as a farm labourer until he was turned out of his cottage and, in his fifties, became a roadman. His sons went at thirteen or fourteen on to the farms, his

² Raymond Williams, "Culture is Ordinary," in *The Raymond Williams Reader*, edited by John Higgins (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), 11.

³ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 12.

daughters into service. My father, his third son, left the farm at fifteen to be a boy porter on the railway, and later became a signalman, working in a box in this valley until he died.⁶

Williams brings into play his own social background, which then becomes the starting point for his approach to the notion of culture since “[t]o grow up in that family was to see the shaping of minds: the learning of new skills, the shifting of relationships, the emergence of different language and ideas.”⁷ In other words, within the frame of his family history, Williams illustrates the different dimensions of culture such as arts, learning, language, and interpersonal relations. But instead of taking these terms into consideration within the traditional frame of an exclusive and “cultivated” understanding of culture, he strives for a redefinition of the notion by using the reference to the unpretentious context of his own family history, which is the more or less ordinary history of a British working-class family in the (post-) industrial age. Thus, Williams creates a solid experiential basis for his further argumentation that “culture is ordinary.”

As already mentioned, the way in which he uses his positionality goes even beyond this reference to his biography as a working-class child since, due to the mere fact of writing an essay on his notion of culture and taking a position in an intellectual discourse, he further brings his stance as an academic into play. He thereby uses his own positionality as an intellectual to show that not only culture, but academia as well can be ordinary. At this point, it is striking to me that Williams’s reference to his social and familial background does not seem to be made to contrast his position as an academic; he does not refer to his background to tell a tired version of the usual “rags-to-riches” story. His coming of age in a working-class family and his career as an academic are not presented as the opposite poles of his biography but rather are an illustration of different stations within his life which he presents as continuous. Interestingly, the bus ride, which also metaphorically serves as a narrative structure, seems to follow this presentation of life as a continuum, since the bus travels essentially to every location he mentions in the essay (cathedral, farming valleys, university, teashop, etc.).⁸ Furthermore, Williams’s unpretentious and authentic way of argumentation is also manifest in his style, which is insightful, analytical, and intelligent without being pretentious or inaccessible to the reader at any point. He thus creates a counternarrative to the sometimes bloated working-class “rags-to-academic-riches” story and illustrates in a strikingly authentic way that positionality is fluid, constantly developing, and not restricted to an “either/or.”

An equally anecdotal and accessible way of argumentation is to be found in French philosopher Barthes’s essay collection *Mythologies* (1957). Barthes finds

⁶ Ibid., 11–12.

⁷ Ibid., 12.

⁸ “They [the driver and the conductress] had done this journey so often, and seen all its stages. It is a journey, in fact, that in one form or another we have all made” (ibid., 10).

objects of analysis in the worlds of photography (“The Great Family of Man” or “Photography and Electoral Appeal”), magazines (“Novels and Children”), film (“The Lost Continent”), advertising (“Operation Margarine”), and toys (“Toys”) – simply put, in everything around him within everyday life. He analyses these numerous examples with attention to formal, but above all ideological structures in their messaging. By doing so, Barthes demonstrates that everything can become a myth since “[e]very object in the world can pass from a closed, silent existence to an oral state, open to appropriation by society.”⁹ Barthes proves in his own manner that culture is ordinary, since even the most ordinary phenomena can be ideologically abused by the appropriation of their former meanings. In that regard, many of his essays are virtually pervaded by the realization of the importance of one’s own positionality and the responsibility resulting from this fact.

Barthes’s essay “The Lost Continent,” which refers to a documentary film of the same name made by a group of Italian anthropologists in the Malay Archipelago situated between mainland Indochina and Australia, showcases the close connection between positionality and responsibility in his thinking.¹⁰ The documentary film can be taken as an example of the responsibilities connected to social positions since it reveals several moments of the appropriation processes central to *Mythologies*. First of all, Barthes states that the documentary makers “are good fellows” who therefore do not have any bad intentions, but, to take up Barthes’s formulation, “these good people, anthropologists though they are, don’t bother much with historical or sociological problems.”¹¹ For the filmmakers, and probably for the majority of Western people for whom the explorers are representatives, “[p]enetrating the Orient never means more [...] than a little trip in a boat, on an azure sea, in an essentially sunny country.”¹² As a consequence, the Malay Archipelago is deprived of its original meanings by this colourful, flattened, and harmonized presentation and, as a further result, deprived of its history as well. It is, as Barthes writes, “disembodied.”¹³ The ignorance of historical facts is particularly problematic in this context, since it is not only about the historical facts as such, but about the ignorance of “the determining weight of History,” which is a colonial history.¹⁴ Such a “disembodied” presentation of an actually rather complex region, whose structures and problems have largely been influenced by the centuries-long Western colonial presence, therefore has to be reviewed and revised.

By putting the filmmakers’ way of depriving the Archipelago of its actual history at the heart of his observations, Barthes inevitably frames the question through the importance of one’s own positionality. As he shows in “The Lost Continent,” making

⁹ Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, translated by Richard Howard and Annette Lavers (New York: Hill and Wang, 2012), 107.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 94.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 101.

a documentary film about the “Orient” from a Western perspective, itself charged with “the determining weight of History,” while ignoring the former at the same time, can never be a neutral endeavour.¹⁵ “[T]he ‘beautiful pictures’ of *The Lost Continent* cannot be innocent,”¹⁶ he writes, since they always imply the weight of one’s own perspective. In that regard, Barthes’s reflections are clearly concerned with the questions of stance and responsibility. To assume one’s own implication in historical, sociological, and political circumstances means to recognize one’s own positionality and to take up responsibility. By means of the example of the anthropologist group, Barthes provides a specific example which could easily be transferred to more general cases dealing with the question of how to assume responsibility and to deal with one’s own perspective in a postcolonial world. Similarly to Williams’s uses and actions regarding stance in “Culture is Ordinary,” Barthes’s essay goes beyond the question of the possibility of responsible stance-taking in general, since, just by writing and publishing “The Lost Continent” (and many other essays with a comparable thrust), he positions himself as well. By denouncing the anthropologists’ ignorance of history and their own implication in socio-political structures, Barthes takes his explanations to a metalevel from which he then takes a stance as an author and academic. Hence, he brings up the question of the intellectual’s positionality.

III

Positionality and its Consequences: Questions of History

The question of the intellectual’s positionality touches on another issue, which is the question of historiography, intrinsically linked to the former. Gilroy’s striking opening chapter “The Black Atlantic as a Counterculture of Modernity” in *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* takes into consideration the importance of a holistic historiography and should therefore be examined in this context. To start out, Gilroy points to the status quo of how culture is perceived and states that “contemporary black English, like the Anglo-Africans of earlier generations and perhaps, like all blacks in the West, stand between (at least) two great cultural assemblages” where *Black* and *White* are presented as opposites.¹⁷ This creation of division is particularly dangerous since the conventional rhetoric connects this confrontation of skin colour “with a language of nationality and national belonging.”¹⁸ As a consequence, nationality and ethnic identity are seen as cultural patterns. Gilroy denounces the “fatal junction of the concept of nationality

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid., 96.

¹⁷ Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (London: Verso, 1993), 1.

¹⁸ Ibid., 2.

with the concept of culture,” since this conception does not represent the reality which is in fact much more complex.¹⁹ Instead of taking up the widespread idea of an ethnic absolutism, based on skin colour and a supposed national belonging, Gilroy speaks out for “another, more difficult option: the theorisation of creolisation, métissage, mestizaje, and hybridity.”²⁰ By arguing in favour of “doubleness and cultural intermixture,” he creates a counterconception to the conventional, reductionist, nationalist understanding of culture.²¹

Against this backdrop, Gilroy takes into account the role of cultural studies and, by extension, the question of stance. He criticizes that cultural studies appeals to nationalist patterns, which is due to the “ethnohistorical specificity of the discourse of cultural studies itself.”²² Since cultural studies often refers to “England and ideas of Englishness,” it does not take into consideration history in its entirety, which notably affects Black history.²³ Gilroy thus criticizes that cultural studies often refers to a narrow historiography that does not represent all of history and therefore only adopts a restricted perspective, despite the “pressing need to get black expressions, analyses and histories taken seriously in academic circles.”²⁴ He therefore opts for a reassessment of historiography in general and of Black history in particular.

This is where Gilroy brings his conception of the Black Atlantic into play, which he declares to be the most important channel for cultural exchange and communication between the members of the African diaspora.²⁵ The notion of the Black Atlantic takes as its basis the “middle passage” – i.e., the stage of the triangular slave trade which took place on the Atlantic between Africa and America. Here, the slave ship itself can be seen as a both metaphorical and literal “micro-system [...] of linguistic and political hybridity” that moved between different nations.²⁶ Gilroy states that the recognition of the Black Atlantic as a space of “transcultural, international formation” that develops from the middle passage and the further mobilities of Black people, arts, and cultures is the precondition for a new conception of ethnicity and the possibility of hybridity in cultural studies “counterpose[d] against the narrow nationalism of so much English historiography.”²⁷ In this regard, Gilroy is also concerned with the question of how cultural studies can responsibly and correctly write (Black) history. By speaking out for a holistic historiography with the recognition of transcultural spaces within cultural studies, he shifts the importance of the question of stance onto cultural studies as a discipline.

The importance of a reassessment of historiography is also present in Guha’s and Spivak’s reflections on the *subaltern*. Although their positions within the formation

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid., 4.

²² Ibid., 5.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid., 13.

²⁶ Ibid., 4 and 12.

²⁷ Ibid., 12.

of subaltern studies are very different – the historian Guha as an inspiration and founder versus the literary studies scholar Spivak as a principal critic –, both denounce the exclusion of the subaltern by an oppressive and elitist historiography. Therefore, their thoughts can and should be approached together in the consideration of subalternity, positionality, and historiography that follows.²⁸

In his text “On Some Aspects of the Historiography of Colonial India” (1988), Guha criticizes the poverty and perspectival limitation of elitist historiography, which excludes and consequently mutes the subaltern as a social group. According to Guha, there were two dominant strands, both elitist, that constituted the historiography of Indian nationalism for a long time: first, a colonialist elitist historiography, particularly promoted by British colonial rulers in India, and second, a nationalist elitist historiography, which has primarily been an Indian practice promoted by Indian elite personalities. Both can be seen as the “ideological product of the British rule in India” based on the prejudice that the making of the Indian nation is an elite achievement.²⁹ In this regard, he declares that the aim of subaltern studies as a project is to create a counternarrative to the elitist “one-sided and blinkered historiography,” in order to render visible the subaltern within historiography.³⁰ Guha is clearly concerned with the pursuit of a holistic, responsible historiography and raises the question of stance in subaltern studies and, potentially, in the connections and extensions of such work with cultural studies.

Furthermore, Spivak’s much debated essay “Can the Subaltern Speak?” (1988) attempts to explore how the standardized historiography still contributes to the ongoing exclusion of the subaltern as well. Within the general exposition of the historiography of colonial India as a construction of a Western and elite-dominated historical narrative, she is notably concerned with the Western intellectual’s role in that process. Spivak’s critical view on the role of the Western intellectual and on their Eurocentric vision of historical facts, as well as the key terms “positionality” and the “Other,” constitute a conceptual block in her essay which I would like to comment on at greater length.

By giving the example of the French poststructuralist theorists Gilles Deleuze and Michel Foucault, Spivak demonstrates how Western intellectual discourse contributes to the maintenance of epistemic violence instead of overcoming colonial

²⁸ Despite their different positions, Guha’s and Spivak’s achievements for subaltern studies are closely connected. They also co-edited an essay collection: *Selected Subaltern Studies, foreword by Edward W. Said* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988). In his foreword to this volume, Edward W. Said fittingly describes the subaltern project as “an integrative knowledge, for all the gaps, the lapses and ignorances of which it is so conscious” (vii). This description underlines the constructive and holistic aspiration of subaltern historiography which, in turn, becomes manifest in the fact that Guha and Spivak co-edited such a volume.

²⁹ Ranajit Guha, “On Some Aspects of the Historiography of Colonial India,” in *Subaltern Studies I: Writings on South Asian History and Society*, edited by Ranajit Guha (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1982), 1.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 5.

patterns of thinking. As a starting point for her critique of Western poststructuralist theory, she points to the transcript “Intellectuals and Power: A Conversation between Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze” (1972).³¹ In this context, she criticizes the intellectual “desire to conserve the subject of the West,”³² a phenomenon for which the two French poststructuralists can be taken as an example. According to Spivak, this specific intellectual self-conception, which problematically is mostly unconscious, fits into a general worldview in which “the history of Europe as Subject is narrativized by the law, political economy and ideology of the West” but contradictorily “pretends it has ‘no geo-political determinations.’”³³

Spivak thus criticizes both Deleuze and Foucault for ignoring that they are implicated in a concrete geo-political context. At this point in the argument, the question of the intellectual’s positionality arises and Spivak further accuses Deleuze and Foucault of “systematically ignor[ing] the question of ideology and their own implication in intellectual and economic history.”³⁴ She continues by asserting that Western intellectuals’ ignorance of their own positionality reveals a more general ignorance of epistemic violence which cannot be overcome as long as Western intellectuals ignore their own implication in historical, economic, and geopolitical circumstances. As I understand Spivak, the recognition of the intellectual’s positionality as well as the recognition of the “Westernness” and Eurocentrism of poststructuralist theory can be seen as two important critiques she formulates towards the Western intellectual. Just like Barthes, Gilroy, and Guha, Spivak hence raises the issue of a responsible intellectualism. In addition to this general question of intellectual responsibility, Spivak expands her remarks on the concrete problem of the Western intellectual speaking for the oppressed. She shows that it is highly problematic for so-called “First World” intellectuals such as Foucault and Deleuze to claim to act as speakers for oppressed people in what is designated as the “Third World,” since a direct consequence is “an unquestioned valorisation of the oppressed as subject,” which she condemns as presumptuous and ignorant.³⁵ Spivak therefore harshly criticizes the “unrecognized contradiction within a position that valorizes the concrete experience of the oppressed, while being so uncritical about the historical role of the intellectual.”³⁶ The conflation of the intellectual’s ignorance of their own positionality, on the one hand, with the unquestioned dedication for the oppressed, on the other, does not solve the problem of epistemic violence. In fact, just the opposite applies since the non-reflective valorization of the oppressed leads to an appropriation of the “Third World” by the “First World.” As a consequence, “the intellectual is complicit in the persistent constitution of Other as the Self’s shadow” and contributes to an ongoing construction of the colonial subject as

³¹ Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” 271.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 69.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

the “Other.”³⁷ Spivak reproaches “First World” intellectuals for not taking responsibility and for preserving a colonialist narrative.

Interestingly, Spivak’s text itself is emblematic for the difficult relation between the intellectual and the subaltern. As shown above, she criticises (Western) high theory and denounces the lack of an infrastructure for subaltern speaking, while arguably being an intellectual and a representative of high theory herself. Spivak has repeatedly been confronted with this apparent contradiction, also beyond the frame of her text. In an interview with the US journalist Steve Paulson, she is questioned about her own biography since, on the one hand, she teaches high theory at Columbia University and, on the other, literacy and numeracy to illiterate students in rural schools in India, to subaltern students, so to speak. Paulson asks:

Yet when I look at your career, there seems to be a deep paradox. You are teaching PhD students at Columbia, where you’re regarded as the high priestess of literary theory, teaching very theoretical books, like Derrida’s *Of Grammatology*. Yet you’re also an activist involved in these schools for illiterate students, which would seem to have nothing to do with the world of high theory. Is there really a connection between these two worlds?³⁸

In her answers, Spivak is highly aware of this paradox, but at the same time emphasizes that it also illustrates the attempt to “serve democratically at both ends.”³⁹ Thus, she adds in the dimension of the political, of the democratic, to the question of what intellectualism means for her. This underscores that Spivak speaks out for a responsible intellectualism that is critical of the political structures of epistemic violence within traditional (Western) intellectualism and aware of the limits of high theory, which almost seems illegitimate without its activist counterpart.

Another example for her quest for a proper stance within intellectual circles is her translation of Derrida’s *De la Grammatologie* (1967), first published in English as *Of Grammatology* in 1976. The translation of Derrida’s philosophical work inevitably is an examination of high theory. Spivak did not even know Derrida when she translated his foundational text of deconstruction, but both Spivak and Derrida are clearly concerned with the search for a proper stance within intellectualism from a critical outsider’s perspective. Derrida, who was an Algerian Jew and therefore an outsider in the French coterie of high theory, examined the Eurocentrism of Western philosophy. This is a concern which is important and recurrent in Spivak’s work as well. In the aforementioned interview, Spivak describes Derrida and herself as “allies.” She specifies: “You see, one of the things he understood, perhaps more than I did at that point, was the meaning of this Asian girl who really didn’t have much French, launching this book into the world in her own way, so far out of the

³⁷ Ibid., 75.

³⁸ Steve Paulson, “Critical Intimacy: An Interview with Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak,” *Qualitative Research Journal* 18.2 (2018): 92.

³⁹ Ibid.

European coterie of high philosophy.”⁴⁰ The parallels between Spivak and Derrida therefore reflect that, in their case, intellectual work, philosophy, and high theory are embedded in a particular manner of taking a stance, since both formally were outsiders who encountered the set structures of (Western) intellectual thinking by means of taking an inside-view at the phenomena put in question. Hence, Derrida and Spivak have a similar way of approaching Western intellectualism, conditioned by their initial social stance, which allows them to critically examine the limits of high theory.

To sum up Spivak’s case, the apparent contradiction of the critique of intellectualism in “Can the Subaltern Speak?” and the fact of being an intellectual herself precisely shows the Third World intellectual’s difficult relation to (Western) intellectualism, on the one hand, and to the subaltern, on the other. Finally, it has to be noted that even if Spivak proposes to add a political, democratic, and activist dimension to the search for an adequate and responsible intellectual positioning (which is discernible in her attempts to raise literacy in rural schools in India), the mere formulation “Can the Subaltern Speak?” already calls into question the possibilities of subaltern empowerment in general and of subaltern empowerment through intellectualism in particular. Despite the attempts of activism within intellectualism, Spivak thus asks whether the intellectual can act properly at all. Thus, issues of positionality become questions of possibility (or impossibility).

IV Circling Back: My Position on Positionality

The lesson I personally draw from my engagement with thinkers such as Williams, Barthes, Gilroy, Guha, and Spivak is the insight that talking about cultural studies – regardless of whether the formation is more narrowly understood as a British movement of democratic empowerment, in terms of a movement seeking to render subaltern voices audible, or as a framework to deconstruct myths, colonialist narratives, and persistent structures of epistemic violence – always demands a certain sensitivity for one’s own positionality and the limitation of the boundaries of one’s own perspective. Since positionality by definition always keeps in mind the social, political, and historical context in which the various patterns of an identity are created, it is intrinsically linked to further concepts such as the nation (as a powerful

⁴⁰ Karen Archey, “Gayatri Spivak on Derrida, the Subaltern, and her Life and Work.” *E-flux Conversations*, 1 August 2016, n.p., web. Spivak then goes on to say: “He and I would go out to eat — and he was a swarthy man, a Sephardic Jew from Algeria — and people would take him to be Indian, and I’m Indian and my cultural inscription is strong and sometimes I wear a sari, so it was a joke and he would say, ‘Yes, I’m Indian.’ He understood the beauty of the situation of this young person who was neither a French PhD nor a native French speaker or native English speaker for that matter, and she was offering his text, not because she was worshipful toward him, because she hadn’t even known who he was. She was offering his text to the rest of the world and they were picking it up. There was something very attractive for him about that situation.”

and rigid structure of thinking), popular culture, historiography, the role of the intellectual, and responsibility, as I hope to have shown by reference to the reviewed texts. With my choice of the overarching question of stance, I wanted to reflect and comment on my personal process of learning and also group some of the most striking aspects of our readings and discussions around a key term. Moreover, regarding the discussed essays from this point of view does not only raise the issue of positionality in the case of the intellectual, but also raises the question of stance in cultural studies as a discipline. As already mentioned above with regard to Gilroy's, but also Guha's and Spivak's reflections about the possibilities and limits of a holistic historiography, all of the thinkers considered in my essay seem highly concerned with the role of cultural studies (or subaltern studies) as a discipline.

In regard to this final concern, I would like to conclude by pointing to Lawrence Grossberg's, Cary Nelson's, and Paula A. Treichler's remarks in their editors' introduction to *Cultural Studies* (1992), as they deal with the very same question of the disciplinary role in their account of cultural studies history. As they explain, cultural studies as a field of study has always been concerned with the questions of how to position itself with regard to social, cultural, political, and historical issues and of how to act responsibly within the given circumstances. This is due to the fact that it does not have any stable disciplinary base.⁴¹ Cultural studies, therefore, is a multi- or transdisciplinary field that cannot refer to one methodological tradition only and, as a consequence, needs to permanently contextualize and rearticulate its methodologies and aims.⁴² The rearticulation of its methodologies is accompanied by the necessity of taking into account that the historical and economic circumstances to which cultural studies refers are constantly changing as well.⁴³

As has become evident through the essays considered in this text, the necessity of showing consideration for social, political, and historical circumstances is an overarching issue within the work of theorists identified as scholars of or scholars associated with cultural studies. Williams, Barthes, Gilroy, Guha, and Spivak ultimately all focus on the permanent necessity in any analytical and engaged intellectual project to, in the words of Grossberg, Nelson, and Treichler, "respond [...] to the challenges of history" and "to remain open to unexpected, unimagined, even uninvited possibilities" in the future at the same time.⁴⁴ In all the texts mentioned, the open-ended rearticulation and permanent contextualization of sociocultural and political issues thus seem to be the foundation for a responsible way of broaching sensible topics in general and questions of colonial historiography in particular.

⁴¹ Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson, and Paula Treichler, "Cultural Studies: An Introduction," in *Cultural Studies*, edited by Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson, and Paula Treichler (New York: Routledge, 1992), 3.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 6 and 3.