Interview with Lawrence Grossberg, November 14, 2012
Interview conducted by James Hay
Interview edited by James Hay & Lawrence Grossberg

James Hay: The first issue of CC/CS for which I am responsible will represent the "long view" about what has shaped the journal's key words—communication, critique, and cultural studies. You, more than anyone whom I am interviewing for the first issue, can speak about various historical contexts in the US when these terms have mattered, intersected, and diverged in particular ways. So, let's begin discussing what you consider to be three or four critical moments, events, and developments since the 1970s that significantly shaped Cultural Studies in the US, and its relation to Communication/Media Studies.

Lawrence Grossberg: For better or worse, I have a particular historical position in that narrative. Of course I was unaware of certain things that transpired, but I can talk a little about what I remember. When I came back to the US and went to Illinois to work with James Carey in the early 1970s, the work of Birmingham and cultural studies from its British perspective was relatively unknown. Jim was aware of it and was certainly aware of the work of Richard Hoggart and Raymond Williams, and some of Stuart Hall's work. Jim was aware that the Centre [for Contemporary Cultural Studies at Birmingham University in the UK] existed and was doing interesting things, but he was not knowledgeable about the details of its work. There were some people in the US, in Education, who as far as I know were also aware of some of the work at Birmingham and were trying to do critical educational work, sometimes using some of that early ethnography of social class—the re-theorizing of class—that was going on at Birmingham. But Jim's very famous and influential essay

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“A Cultural Approach to Communication” was circulating only in mimeograph form, as far as I remember, in the mid- to late-1970s. It hadn’t been published yet and so had not been widely distributed. His work on [Marshall] McLuhan, [Harold] Innis, and some of his other early work was available, but really Jim was one of the only people talking about culture and criticism, though one would have to mention people like Elihu Katz and George Gerbner, whom I wouldn’t necessarily think of as located within the kinds of paradigms that we are talking about but were certainly on the periphery. Hanno Hordt at Iowa, and some other people at Iowa, such as Bruce Gronbeck, were interested in some of the “rumors” that they were hearing (about “cultural approaches to communication”) and who were doing “critical” work. Hanno was very influential in terms of a Marxist theory of culture and ideology. And there were political economists, you know, part of the history of…

JH: You mean, Marxist or “critical” political economists?

LG: Well they are different. Hanno wasn’t really a political economist in the mold of Dallas Smythe and his followers.

JH: Tom Guback or Herb Schiller?

LG: Yes, that was the incarnation at the University of Illinois when I arrived. But of course Illinois played a key role in creating that history, in creating what they called a “political economy of communication,” a particular reading of Marxist understandings of capitalism and its application to media and communication and culture more broadly. You know, doing “cultural studies” for someone like Jim or eventually me, involved being caught in between a rock and a hard place, since the political economists didn’t really want to talk to us, and of course the mainstream Communication Studies folks didn’t want to talk to us either.

JH: Those would be social scientists and behavioral scientists?

LG: Yeah, the rhetorical critics too. These were the dominant modalities of research in the field. I mean the other person whom I should mention is Horace Newcomb, who was offering a different perspective on how to talk about television and who was introducing that perspective into the field of Communication. Film studies and criticism didn’t really exist in Communication Studies, but connections began to be made with that work through people who were more interested in critical, textual, institutional analyses in the way Horace was.

JH: Well, I would add that Horace and Jim both were engaged with the work of Clifford Gertz, whose interventions in and from anthropology were shaping disciplines beyond anthropology during the 1970s. And Horace also was reading John Cawelti, with whom he studied at the University of Chicago in the late 1960s, and Horace often thought about Jim’s ideas through that lens. I know that Horace
and Jim greatly respected—even admired—each other’s contributions to Communication Studies. So you are absolutely right, and I think that some of the big professional associations such as ICA [the International Communication Association], and maybe to a lesser extent the Speech Communication Association, became the institutional points where they met and connected with one another.

LG: Yes. People like Jim and Horace and Hanno were islands floating in a mass of hostility. They knew of each other and knew that, in a way, they had certain common commitments. Jim’s work brought Innis’s and McLuhan’s ideas into a conversation with certain anthropological traditions. Gertz comes a bit later in the 1970s, but certain other cultural anthropologists and certainly the Chicago School were influential in Jim’s thinking. Hanno was a humanistic Marxist, who came from Eastern Europe to America. Jim and I did talk at times about how isolated he was, in many ways, in the field, and that isolation in many ways shaped and colored some of his relationships to the field.

I was looking back at my publications, and realized that the first time I ever wrote explicitly or even implicitly about cultural studies was in 1979. I published two essays which began to talk about cultural studies, though without foregrounding it. One of the essays was a reading of Raymond Williams’ *Television: Technology and Cultural Form* and situating it within the context of cultural theory and cultural studies. Another one was a survey of cultural theory. It wasn’t until 1983 that really the history of “cultural studies” in the US and in Communication Studies starts. Before that, there were a few scholars who worked with some of the people whom we have mentioned, and some younger people (graduate students) in key places like Annenberg, Iowa, Illinois, and Texas, who were trying to do some kind of critical cultural work. And then there is another group who became important to this story—Richard Lanigan, Joe Pilotta, Stan Deetz, Astrid Kersten, Dick Conville, and others—who were interested in what we called back then the Philosophy of Communication. And they too were very critical of the dominant streams. Their critique of communication theory and research at the time was that it was seriously under-theorized and that the degree of sophistication of its understanding of conceptual work was naive at best. They brought into the field phenomenological and hermeneutic philosophy, and also some structuralism, which connected up with some of the cultural work, because someone like Cliff Christians at Illinois, who was a student with me at the time, was very interested in hermeneutic issues as well.

JH: And he still is.

LG: What I am about to say veers into autobiography, but this ferment in Communication Studies (involving cultural studies and critical, philosophical work) also intersects in 1983 with the “Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture” conference at the University of Illinois.

JH: So can I ask you something before we jump to that part of the story? What ideas and revelations most shaped you at [the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies]
Birmingham University in the short time you were there? When you say that you didn’t really begin to write about cultural studies, what happened during the period between 1969 and 1979, and how did it move you toward an interest in the questions that you were addressing after 1979 and that you mentioned a moment ago?

LG: It may always have been true, but at least when I was a graduate student, and in the years immediately after that, I had three areas of interest. One was philosophy of communication, and a lot of my early published essays were about the philosophy of communication. I tried to introduce typologies of philosophy. I wrote an essay, “The Ideology of Communication,” which was a post-structuralist critique. I wrote an essay about Foucault and Deleuze in 1982, I think. For me that work overlapped with my early conception of cultural studies, which was my second interest. Then a third was popular culture and pop music. I published my first essay about rock and roll in the early 1980s in Social Text. At that time, most people told me that no one was interested in any of those three areas.

JH: And Marxism?

LG: I published an essay on Marxist dialectics in the Quarterly Journal of Speech (!). A lot of those early essays were written under the constraint of people telling me that no one was really interested in any of this stuff unless I could connect it to the mainstream. My essay on Williams, my essay on the crisis of culture and its theorization, were all attempts to sneak cultural studies into a mainstream discourse. I remember the first time I submitted a paper about Marxism and culture to a mainstream Speech Communication journal—an essay that I eventually rewrote as the essay about dialectics. In the review that I received, the editor said basically that no one would be able to understand a single word of it. He gave me a list of, like, 50 words that he said no one in our field would understand. And they included terms like: sign, signification, culture, discourse, ideology. And being an arrogant kid at the time, I wrote back to him and said, “Look, I will be happy to provide a thesaurus of contemporary intellectual work, but I expect to be paid for such work.” He didn’t answer me. So I rewrote the paper as the one about Marxist dialectics, which was my attempt to bring a different kind of Marxism into the field, but I ended up connecting it [to Communications] in a way using rhetorical theory. So I think I had an audience, a small group of us who were interested in philosophy, and who connected up with a group of philosophers. We often went to this organization called the Society of Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy.

JH: Is that the time that you drove up to the conference hotel (a Holiday Inn in St. Louis?), and the hotel’s marquee read, “Welcome Phenomenologists”?

LG: Yes, exactly! And the folks at that conference were also some of the first outside literary criticism [in the US] to take structuralism and post-structuralism seriously as philosophical issues. Their group comprised a space outside of literary studies where
you could argue about [Jacques] Derrida and [Roland] Barthes. So that vein of my work had an audience. But in order to get to my cultural studies interests I had to adapt, speak into the mainstream, which means that when in 1983 I first published something about cultural studies, the essay had to try to open up the field to such a project, rather than saying (as I often have), “this is cultural studies, take it or leave it.”

I think Jim felt much the same way, that one had to enter into conversations with people who didn’t want necessarily to take up your project. The “Marxism and Interpretation of Culture” conference at the University of Illinois (1984), which Cary Nelson and I organized, was not necessarily a significant moment in the discipline [of Communication], but it was a significant moment more broadly because it was the moment that brought to the US not only Stuart Hall but a number of leading figures from England. In a way, it was the first real physical presence of a body of work in the US that could be described as British cultural studies.

**JH:** For readers of this interview who are unfamiliar with this conference, there is an eponymous book that was published of papers and presentations from that conference. However, it’s not as if that conference represented only British cultural studies; it included a variety of philosophical, critical, theoretical work. You are saying that British cultural studies was a prominent piece of that?

**LG:** Yes, I mean, the book is a very good statement of the leading edges of Marxist theory in 1980s, of which British cultural studies was a part. Before the event we staged a three-week course that included Gayatri Spivak, Fred Jameson, Julia Lasage, Stuart Hall, and Perry Anderson, all of whom taught three-week long classes, which were really a series of lectures before the conference. Stuart gave a series of six or eight lectures, and maybe 100 people attended the first class, but by the time he gave the last lecture there were 500–600 people in the room. This was the first time people had an exposure to Stuart’s coherent body of thinking about a series of Marxist issues, theorists, questions of cultural studies, cultural analysis, and cultural politics. I still run into people who say to me, “you won’t remember me, but I was at the Marxism conference, I took Stuart’s class, and it had a profound impact, it brought me into cultural studies.” I think that was the moment when cultural studies began to get visibility in the US.

It was also the moment when a number of us began to negotiate with the formal associations of Communication Studies. We formed a coalition—on one side the philosophers that I mentioned before, and on the other side people who were more interested in cultural studies—people such as Jennifer Slack, Marty Allor, and a few other people, some of them my students, some not. I was the middle person because I belonged to both groups. We went to the National Communication Association (NCA), which then was called the Speech Communication Association (SCA), and we tried to convince them that they needed to give us some space, at their convention and in their publications, for this kind of emergent work. We approached them as an alliance—a reasonably comfortable alliance because cultural studies was arguing at
the time for the importance of sophisticated theoretical work as part of its empirical and political project.

Members of this alliance started to give talks and offer a few sessions at SCA, and we started to see whether they would let us become a proto-division (an “interest group,” as we called it), and they basically said, “No.” I believe that they allowed us to stage a panel or something, but the result of those discussions was not to give us space within the convention. Still, it contributed to the recognition that there was a growing community of people that did not see themselves or their work represented in the SCA journals. And of course the next year SCA announced the new journal, *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, which was supposed to be the space for which we were asking, but they didn’t call it cultural studies. Instead, it was for a different kind of work that was emerging in media studies—to a large extent represented by the group [our group] that had been approaching them for space. They appointed Robert Avery, a wonderful person from the University of Utah, to be the first editor, but we were quite pissed about it, because Bob, as wonderful and smart a person as he is, wasn’t really a figure at all in our effort in that instance. He was great because he opened himself up to the people in the marginalized academic communities, including me, and asked, “What do I need to do, what kinds of things should I be looking for, what kinds of things do I need to publish?” I think that those first couple of years of the journal were quite crucial in creating the beginning of a space.

But when SCA turned us down, we moved to ICA and started negotiating with the people there, and they were more open to our interests. There, we found many unexpected allies—not people doing the kind of work we were interested in, but people who represented a wide range of areas and positions in the field, some of whom surprised me a great deal, others whom I should have predicted; we were glad to have their support. So ICA let us become an interest group, the “Philosophy of Communication.”

JH: And what year was that?

LG: 1985 it began.

JH: Was that the year that the ICA convention was in Hawaii?

LG: Well, that’s the other thing that happened in 1985. It was a good year—in some ways the first of the real touchstone years, although in some ways I think the creation of *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* was also significant. However, 1985 was a real touchstone year in part because the Philosophy of Communication interest group was created, which gave us access to the conventions. Basically the two sides of the division—the philosophers and the cultural studies factions—agreed to divide up the space that we all shared. A couple of our panels overlapped, but that was the first time we were formally given space in this professional communication organization to present work—philosophical work and critical and cultural work. Brenda
Dervin, who had been elected Vice President of ICA, organized the conference in Hawaii in 1985 under the title “Beyond Polemics,” and the theme continued from the previous year which had been something about “paradigm dialogues.” In that context, she spoke to a lot of us younger members of the association, and she invited Stuart Hall and Anthony Giddens (the latter at the time was of more interest to Organizational scholars) to give the plenary addresses in Hawaii.

From my perspective, in my imagination perhaps, Stuart’s invitation and talk were monumental and legendary. He spoke to the entire membership of the association in a gigantic hall, and he was Stuart Hall-at-his-best. I remember that, when he finished his talk about the critical nature of cultural studies and the cultural studies project, he offered a critique of liberalism, and associated liberalism with the scientific paradigm, criticizing the scientific paradigm in Communication Studies, and it was brilliant. I will never forget that when it ended one of my friends in the organization, who was by no means an intellectual ally of mine but an academic friend whom I love dearly, came up to me and said, “You know, if Stuart had at the end of his talk said, ‘Now let us march together and occupy the state building,’ we would have followed him.”

JH: Did Stuart know anything about ICA before he gave that talk?

LG: Mainly what I told him. I don’t think he had ever heard of it, but I could be wrong. He was familiar with communication research (in England, represented in the work of people like Jay Blumler) and some work in the US. I showed him some of the publications, and told him to say whatever he wanted to. And Brenda played a key role, opening up the conference and the organization, and being a big supporter of the Philosophy of Communication Interest group, later to become the Philosophy of Communication Division in ICA. She was quite crucial in helping us navigate some of the politics around that. For a while, that space was the only one that people like us who were doing cultural studies really had—the only alternative in the late 1980s.

There was an attempt to create a different organization, which would be an alliance between academics oriented toward cultural studies and one oriented toward political economy. The relations between those two groups were not very good, and I’m not sure they have improved over the years. There was an attempt to talk about and create some kind of organization that would bring the two groups together, calling itself the Union for Democratic Communication, which still exists and has meetings. A number of the leading figures in cultural studies in the field of Communication Studies participated in it, helped form it, went to the meetings, although I think that over time the people who remain in it from cultural studies (Tom Streeter, for instance) are more interested in the analysis of media institutions, policy, and political economy. After the first few years, many of us decided that it really wasn’t a viable place for us to do our work, that the hostility levels were too high.

The other place that was available was the International Association of Mass Communication Research (IAMCR), which had a Political Economy Division. People working in cultural studies from Communication Studies presented their work for a while through that division. I was never there and didn’t think it worked as well, or
maybe it did and I didn’t know about it. The opening up of the Philosophy of Communication interest group was very important because it provided a professional, institutional site to which to go.

Another event worth mentioning is that John Fiske came to the US around 1985 ...

**JH:** Yes, that’s true, it was 1985. There was a conference at the University of Iowa on Television Studies, and he was on his way to becoming a professor at the University of Wisconsin–Madison.

**LG:** In a sense that itself is a significant event because John was a major figure in international cultural studies, and an important figure through his publications which pedagogically helped popularize cultural studies. He had a significant intellectual presence and just as importantly brought with him [to the US] the journal *Cultural Studies,* which had been the *Australian Journal of Cultural Studies,* run by a collective largely of Australians, although I was the American member of the collective. When John brought the journal to the US, Routledge began to publish it, and it becomes a more formal academic publication. The first volume was published by Routledge in 1987. John started the process of creating the journal and getting the editorial board in place when he came to the US in 1985 or 1986. Significantly, that is the first widely disseminated journal that used the name “Cultural Studies.” It is the first journal that explicitly, in an international fashion, in the academic arena, puts forth cultural studies as an intellectual project.

**JH:** I also remember 1985 because that was the year that I became your colleague at the University of Illinois, at the moment when all of this was happening. In some ways, the department’s agreeing to hire me (to give you a “playmate” within the department) was rationalized and propelled by many of the rapid transformations that you are describing—a wave that was swelling, in part through the University of Illinois. I had no background really in Communication or Speech Communication (and had to orient myself quickly to its disciplinary map), and you somehow recognized in my wildly circuitous and interdisciplinary training an able actor in that context.

**LG:** I did, and you’re right about the opening for hiring you in that context. As I said, James, it was a great year.

The next touchstone for me was the conference at the University of Illinois in 1990, “Cultural Studies Now and in the Future.” That helped legitimate cultural studies and did two things.

It put cultural studies on a much broader agenda and gave it much broader visibility across disciplines. For instance, that really was the beginning of cultural studies’ crossing over into literary studies, and into anthropology and other areas. It was also the beginnings of a backlash in the Communication discipline. I don’t want to attribute motives; we had worked hard and had arrived at a point where suddenly ICA was accommodating panels on cultural studies and critical media studies and was supporting the kinds of theoretical debates that were important to those of us
working in those corners of the field. In the early 1990s, however, there was somewhat of a backlash against that at ICA. The Philosophy of Communication sessions were always well attended, and the division’s membership had become very strong. However, some of these sessions got very heated, and people clearly thought we were either becoming too big for our britches or that we were the right size for our britches because our britches were too big anyway. Terrible metaphor, but you know what I mean.

JH: And I would add that whatever cultural studies was becoming at and from the University of Illinois during that period involved interdepartmental and interdisciplinary “cross-currents”—a small but robust collectivity of professors and a rapidly growing group of grad students who studied across departments. But the “backlash” occurred at Illinois too, particularly in the (former) Speech Communication Department—a story that affected your and my activities directly, as faculty in that department.

LG: You are right. About half of the success of the cultural studies conference was the hostility. Just as Illinois was becoming a prominent center, one of the key centers, of cultural studies in the United States, the hostility built up, and eventually contributed to driving away Jim Carey to some extent, and me to some extent.

Let’s talk a bit more about this interesting relationship between cultural studies and communications studies, which we already have touched on a bit, but first let’s return this history of the migration of cultural studies. Certainly in that history, for me, another significant moment (though not particularly significant with respect to Communication Studies) was in 1996 when the first “Crossroads in Cultural Studies” conference was held in Finland—an event that contributed to a new international space for cultural studies.

Another touchstone moment occurred somewhere around the year 2000, when negotiations began taking place, again as a compromise formation, between some critical rhetoricians and cultural studies people, with some people like Ron Greene in the middle. I was not really part of that alliance and didn’t really play a direct role in it, for any number of reasons. The alliances occurred in part through a younger generation of rhetorical critics and theorists, some of whom saw themselves doing a kind of cultural studies and some of whom saw themselves doing a critical rhetoric informed by some of the same theoretical impulses and sources as cultural studies. They approached NCA, which 15 years earlier had dismissed my generation’s entreaties—wouldn’t give us the time of day—but now, whether because of the presence of the rhetoricians or whether because of the success and visibility of this new work, they created the Division of...

JH: Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies.

And I would add that, in the history that you are describing, the generation of graduate students and junior professors to whom you refer included such people as Kent Ono and John Sloop, Raymie McKeown, and others. You also are correct to
point out that the “wave” began to build over the mid- and late-1990s and by 2000 became a critical mass that was difficult for NCA to ignore. That also was the period when an association representing “speech communication” was re-branding, and perhaps reinventing, itself as the “National Communication Association.”

LG: And out of that decision came the impulse for the journal that you now edit—a journal whose formation in turn produced pressure on ICA, which began to sponsor a journal with similar key words, Communication, Culture, and Critique. Following that was a new proliferation of journals, a trend that gained momentum really at the end of the 1990s. So there is the Journal of Communication Inquiry, a very good journal out of Iowa which started as a local journal and then was taken up by Sage, which, along with Routledge, control most of the communications journals, and many of the key cultural studies journals.

This development leads me to what has to be said, which is that the publishers, especially Routledge, play a significant role in this history. Part of what happens to cultural studies is that it gets taken up, commodified in various way (though I find that word rather empty), as a profit-making tool by publishers like Routledge and later Sage. Having said that, of course, what I mean to say is, “Thank you, Routledge!” Because we would not have successes if they [Routledge] had not supported the journal Cultural Studies, if they had not been willing to invest, if they had not been willing to publish the books. At the time these were books that didn’t quite fit into any category. When I published We Gotta Get Out of This Place, the people at Routledge were a bit befuddled about to whom they should send the book for review, because it didn’t fit any of their disciplinary lines. They were willing at that time to take on an interdisciplinary literature, recognizing the difficulties it posed. At the same time, although their openness to this trend had very positive effects and impacts, it also in my opinion had negative impacts, because if you are interested in making money you don’t really care about defending the project. There is a lot of sh** published under the name of cultural studies, and I don’t understand why a lot of that sh** is called cultural studies [by them or by the authors for that matter], or why it is marketed as cultural studies.

JH: And you are right that a lot of the publishers began to use “cultural studies” as a rubric for categorizing, differentiating, organizing, their products. Some of that tendency springs from their business relationships with professional associations that are organized and administered through distinctions and categories, and some of it springs from the publishers’ organization of their products and workers through divisions, which are evident in their cataloging and marketing apparatus. You are right that, in one sense it legitimatizes a kind of academic work and publishing that can occur under the banner of something called “cultural studies,” but it’s also worth recognizing and historicizing how cultural studies is “born” within the categories that publishers have used to represent work in various fields—how they organize and represent disciplines and interdisciplines.
LG: They contribute to a particular kind of destructive tension. On the one hand, it is to their benefit to make cultural studies, as it becomes more and more successful, a signifier—to make it into anything that can be constructed as slightly interdisciplinary, slightly theoretical or entirely theoretical, anything that can be constructed as having to do with culture and politics. Or, on the other hand, they construct it very narrowly. So, some publishers now place cultural studies under their “Media and Communication” list. Under those narrow constructions, was writing about Thatcherism [e.g., by Stuart Hall] “doing” cultural studies? Those narrow constructions largely reflect the publishers’ need to market the product and to construct textbook lists, and aren’t necessarily to the benefit of cultural studies as an intellectual project. But again, you also have to say that cultural studies would not have succeeded, even in the complex ways it has as a project, without the support of the commercial publishers.

JH: And wouldn’t you say—though I’d have to go back and check on this—that particularly Routledge, but also other publishers who have been invested in cultural studies, often paired it with a “Media Studies”? The connection between cultural studies and media studies (or even critical communications studies) was reinforced through the way that cultural studies became a currency that was marketed through the catalogues of the big professional associations like ICA and NCA, where the publishers always had a very conspicuous presence.

LG: When Fred Jameson wrote his review of the book from the cultural studies conference at Illinois, he reduced “cultural studies” to the place where media and popular culture meets identity politics. So lots of publishers’ catalogues paired cultural studies and media studies, or with popular culture, or with identity politics.

That takes us back to the question of the complex relationship between communication as a discipline and cultural studies. I think there are lots of people who in one way or another think that cultural studies is an area or paradigm within Communications Studies, which it isn’t. On the other hand there are lots of people outside of Communication Studies who don’t even know that cultural studies in the US, and to some extent in England, began through the study of communication and media, and began by trying to negotiate, navigate, and grapple with the complexities of cultural transformation that the media introduced into post-World War II societies. Some people (anyone working in cultural studies after 1990 in the US) may wrongly think that the Illinois conference in 1990 was the first time cultural studies came to America, and that literature departments were its original point of entry and natural home.

JH: There are a couple of other developments that bear on the relation between cultural studies and communication studies in the US. One is that the formation of the “Crossroads in Cultural Studies” initiative was a global or at least international initiative and not really a communication-oriented version of cultural studies. A second is that Crossroads occurred roughly at the time that some of the journals are
beginning to represent the internationalism of cultural studies, i.e., that cultural studies (as practice or market) is not located only in the US (where it had developed through Communication Studies) or only in English-speaking parts of the world. Part of this latter trend involves the birth of journals such as the International Journal of Cultural Studies and the European Journal of Cultural Studies.

LG: Both of those journals emerged out of the Crossroads project, right? The International Journal of Cultural Studies, John Hartly’s journal, doesn’t emerge exactly out of it, they both emerge after it. The European Journal of Cultural Studies very much starts as a kind of Crossroads project. The latter journal’s first editors (Pertti Alasuutari, Ann Gray, Joke Hermes) were very much involved in organizing Crossroads. They were among the key organizers of the first couple of conferences, along with Mikko Lehtonen, Juha Koivisto, and some other Finns. But I think that you’re right that all of these developments were about a moment in the globalization of cultural studies. We tried to make the Illinois conference international, but admittedly we didn’t do a very good job, partly because we should have tried harder, though I’m not sure how one would have done it then. But that conference was reasonably internationalized, compared to other conferences at the time. We did invite some people from the non-English-speaking world—we even included some people from the non-European world.

The journals which were around at the time—Cultural Studies was a key one, Social Text had begun about the same time, coming out of a sociological tradition, and Public Culture began at the same time, coming out of a more anthropological tradition. Those were really the places one went to. Then the two journals you mention, as well a growing number of national and regional journals (including Journal of Latin American Cultural Studies and Interasia Cultural Studies, and many more were to follow). There were other more disciplined defined journals, like Theory Culture and Society, Discourse, and Cultural Critique. And there were small, independent journals, often driven by literary theory and cultural politics. Lots of small little journals.

JH: I think of the Journal of Communication Inquiry, a small journal supported by the University of Iowa, with “public” money—a journal that worked sometimes at the intersection of cultural studies and critical media studies during the 1980s (e.g., your interview with Stuart Hall published there) and that was still alive during the 1990s, in the context that you are describing now.

LG: Yes, it was one of those small journals that didn’t have a commercial publisher or very high visibility, locally produced, like Strategies, Oxford Literary Review, and Semiotexte. They were sort of the fanzines of the academic world and were quite important. Actually, a significant proportion of my early essays, which were not acceptable to the mainstream academic journals, got published in places like that.
JH: So, a point to emphasize here is that cultural studies was produced as much by a “minor” publishing apparatus (which may have been supported by universities and which was not comprised of big revenue-producing enterprises) as by the major publishers such as Routledge that we discussed earlier. Your earlier reference to the journal Cultural Studies having been a smaller, quasi-academic journal that subsequently was “picked up” by Routledge also seems salient to this point.

LG: Right. Mark Hayward and Ted Strifhas have a really interesting essay coming out soon in New Formations, another important more recent journal, where they talk about what they call the “grey literature” of cultural studies. It is an important history, and not only with respect to the formation of Cultural Studies. These often were self-produced in-house journals, such as the journal of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies in the 1970s, Working Papers in Cultural Studies. And even before and alongside that, the CCCS was responsible for the publication of occasional papers, mimeographs, pamphlets, that were distributed on a small scale. As I mentioned, Jim Carey’s “A Cultural Approach to Communication” was not published until his book, Communication as Culture. But it circulated. I mean, intellectual disputes and intellectual ideas circulated through less formal modes of distribution and publication, and some small independent journals—all not known well, and you had to go looking for them. Occasionally I used to have to write to these people and say, “I hear there’s a new copy out, can you send it to me? How do I get it, you know, I’ll send you a check, tell me what to do”—because you couldn’t find it in bookstores or catalogues, and until they got a little successful you couldn’t subscribe to them.

JH: Well I’ll be interested to see how Ted and Mark reconstruct that history, but it’s also clear to me as you and I talk about this trend that Web-based journals are filling the niche of what we’ve described as “grey” or “minor” journals that were not revenue-producing journals. The proliferation of Web-based publications is complicated and lies beyond the scope of our interview. However, it’s important because it involves a new (at least changing) relation between amateur and professional production—and what counts as “authoritative” and “credentialized” knowledge, since academic journals have played a role in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries of authorizing and credentializing “scholarship.” And of course journal publishers, as well as universities which rely on journals to assess “excellence,” are in flux (some describe it as a “crisis”) because of their rapidly increasing implication in Web-publishing, where the old distinctions (between expert and initiate) break down.

LG: In some ways Web journals and online journals are filling that role, but in a very different set of conditions of possibilities that change them entirely. In the periods we’re talking about, the 1970s and the 1980s, the publication of critical studies and cultural studies were marked by a scarcity of discourse—by what Foucault termed, in describing “discursive formations,” the paucity of discursive statement’s appearances. Whereas today the problem—well I don’t know if it’s a problem—but the conditions
of these kinds of journals is not one of scarcity, but one of over-abundance. It’s a very interesting transformation, and I don’t know what to make of it yet. There was a time when one could tell a graduate student that if they wanted to write about X, then they had to read everything available on X, published in let’s say English, but that is no longer possible. I don’t mean to be nostalgic for that moment, or to say it was better or worse or anything, but I think the conditions of academic production and knowledge production have changed significantly amidst the online venues. The proliferation of journals, even of mainstream journals, is significant. Whereas once there were maybe half a dozen places where one could publish, now there are 20 or more places where you can publish. That significantly changes the nature of the discursive apparatus. I’m not someone who studies it, and as you know, and despite what people think, I do believe in empirical work. I’m not going to draw conclusions about it, but it is obvious that the apparatus of what you are describing as “minor” academic literatures has changed. And that poses new problems—if we do not like the current dominant systems of “credentialization” (double-blind peer reviewing, unpaid labor, etc.), we still have to find ways of making qualitative and commensurating judgments, unless we want to sink into relativism, abandon any sense that intellectual work matters.

JH: Let’s discuss a few more implications of the relation between cultural studies and media studies, or cultural studies and communication studies. I said earlier that I wanted to return to that topic, but we drifted off into a discussion about publishing. You have argued or pointed out many times that since the 1980s, cultural studies lands in the US through Communications departments...

LG: ...and Education departments...

JH: And Education departments—Henry Giroux and Mike Apple for instance...

LG: A whole set of critical educational theorists during the 1970s who were reading Paul Willis and Stuart Hall and others. But yes, go on with your question.

JH: One thing that is complicated about the history of how cultural studies gained traction in communication and media studies is the relative acceptance of certain media over others as worthy of study in certain disciplines. This was true when English departments were willing to offer courses in certain kinds of film but not TV. Even Communications has had its preferences and thresholds of acceptability. Complicating the matter further is that cultural studies in Britain developed out of efforts by well-known academic intellectuals, such as Williams, Hall, Paddy Whannel, and Hoggart, who participated energetically in debates in Britain during the 1960s about the need to introduce the study of popular media and popular culture into the teaching of “culture” in secondary and higher education. We can return in just a moment to the precarious place of popular music studies in higher education, about which I know that you have thoughts. But to the extent that your work on popular
culture and popular media—and particularly popular music—is inseparable from your interest in cultural studies during the 1980s, would you comment on why and how the intersection of those two interests mattered to you, particularly politically? You began your book, We Gotta Get Out of this Place, by discussing then-chairman of the Republican national committee, Lee Atwater, whose guitar-playing and performances at Republican events became your pathway into an account of how popular music mattered politically during the “Reagan Revolution”—how Atwater was a useful point of reference for thinking about the historical contradictions of political formation in the US during the 1980s.

LG: To answer your question, let’s start with what people will probably most hate to hear me talk about once again: What I learned from my brief experience at the CCCS at Birmingham. I took two things from it that mattered to me and that have always shaped my understanding of Cultural Studies: context (relationality) and complexity. I am unabashedly willing to say that there was something specific there that shaped my understanding of cultural studies, and that became what I wanted to bring into the American academy, and became a reason that I co-organized both the “Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture” conference, and the “Cultural Studies Now and in the Future” conference, a reason why I have edited the journal Cultural Studies, and has been what I’ve committed to doing for 40-something years. It is a vision of an intellectual and political project/practice that I glimpsed and began to learn in Birmingham, and by reading people such as Williams, Hall, Gramsci, Foucault, Meaghan Morris, John Clarke, et al. It was a different way of doing academic work, a different way of being an intellectual, and a different way of studying the relationship between culture and its context.

It shaped the way that I began to write about rock and roll, and the debates with people, Simon Frith and others who were writing about popular music, and with people who formed the International Association for the Study of Popular Music. I would always say, look, I’m not really interested in creating organizations for the study of popular music or the study of television or the study of the Internet. It’s alright along the way to legitimate these kinds of study, but I’m more interested in understanding the context in which we live. For me, cultural studies is not about the text, it’s about contexts. There was a not-very-positive review of Cultural Studies in the Future Tense recently by a very good writer, a wonderful scholar in England, who among other things didn’t like the book’s suggestion that media studies is not a productive formation. He misreads me, because I have no objection to media studies, I have no objection to Internet studies, I have no objection to “digital culture studies,” I just don’t think they’re necessarily cultural studies. There is a way of doing media studies that is Cultural Studies. I agree with Dave Morley’s description of cultural studies as de-centering the media. Cultural studies is not about media, it’s about the context, in which media matter and are productive but not as the only way into understanding the context. You could begin to analyze the context any way, through economic discourses and economic practices, for instance. There are lots of
ways to begin to reconstruct a context, in order to understand what's going on. But it's not really about the media, and in my case it was never about rock and roll.

I started the work that became We Gotta . . . as an undergraduate, in the 1960s. I wanted to figure out why the music was so important, and what its place was, how it helped to constitute a particular political context, and how it helped to give shape to particular practices of resistance that both succeeded and failed. In order to do that, I thought I had to come up with certain kinds of theoretical vocabularies that would let me to talk about popular music. So yes, I wrote about popular music, but the point of my writing about popular music was not, strictly speaking, to explain popular music. In We Gotta . . . I was interested in what we might today call the “virtual” —a potentiality, a politics of rock and roll that was just as easily taken up and articulated to the political Right as it was to the Left. I wasn't advocating a populist politics. Instead I was arguing that one had to look at the complexity of the possibilities of politics, in the context in which it was operating.

By the way, I have no objection to English, to literary scholars who want to study whatever it is they want to study. All disciplines have their strengths and their limits.

JH: The limits are always interesting and telling, disciplining knowledge and reproducing the disciplinarity of a specific knowledge formation. English's, Literary Studies', the Humanities' struggle with popular culture during the twentieth century—with certain kinds of film, and certainly television and popular music—speaks volumes about an institutional propriety, authority, and expertise over particular definitions of “culture” (and implicitly, or as habit, particular ways of performing their conception of “cultural studies”).

LG: But now they've discovered that they can get more students, and can get their books published more easily, if they write about television and about popular films instead of the films that can be justified as art. But they still treat them as works of art—that is, they still treat them formally as texts. Meaghan Morris in her “What to do with Shopping Centers” is very brilliant and explicit about this. She points out that cultural studies may look at a shopping mall as text, but that it is more interested in looking at the mall as a point of intersection, a crystallization of complex over-determinations, relationships, whatever you want to call them, you know, “becomings” if you wanted to be a Deleuzean, in order to construct the context and understand the organizations of power and the possibilities of changing and transforming that context, in order to change and transform the relations of power. Writing about the politics of television programs and reading a politics or ideology off of texts is fine. I think it is a very limited way of understanding politics, and I want to ask, first, what do you know about the context through such work, and second, why should that be called “cultural studies.”

There's lots of good research in the world that isn't cultural studies. I have never advocated and never will that everyone should be doing cultural studies, or that cultural studies is the only interesting political approach to the world—or that it's even the best. Cultural studies gives us a certain kind of knowledge that is politically
and intellectually and academically useful. Cultural studies may involve the study of media. But cultural studies is the refusal to construct a disciplinary object, and when people construct a new disciplinary object called “culture” to be studied by cultural studies, then it seems to me they’re not doing cultural studies anymore.

JH: The practice of separating objects of study goes back a long way; it’s a Modern, Enlightenment tendency, as Foucault pointed out. The Enlightenment virtue of categorization and differentiation—of disciplinarity—underpins the Modern Western university. But the practice also has a more specific and recent history with respect to “media studies”, which developed during the mid-twentieth century, in part through Marshall McLuhan’s proposals about the “medium as the message” (about each “medium” having its own singularity and particular capacities). I don’t blame McLuhan for this, because although his Understanding Media underscored the distinctiveness of each “medium” (with Understanding Media devoting individual chapters to cinema, radio, TV, etc.), Understanding Media also included single chapters about roads, clocks, motorcars, airplanes, and other technologies that people who did media studies never wrote about. His was both a very Modern and a counter-Modern way of thinking about “media.” Frankly there are lessons to be learned still, in Media Studies and Cultural Studies, from rethinking the “media” that way.

LG: There should be. The problem, however, is that the American academy is not suited to do that. I have one foot inside a discipline of Communication Studies because the discipline gave me a home when probably no one else would have, and has allowed me to do the work I want—work that, at the time, other disciplines were not necessarily supportive of. However, I have another foot outside that discipline. Cultural studies is not inside Communication; it is outside of Communication. I struggle with my metaphors sometimes, but it’s somewhat like overlapping circles. If you want to teach people to be interdisciplinary, you can’t teach them to be interdisciplinary by teaching them to think inside two or three disciplines. But that’s all the academy can do. The academy is organized to think that if you’re interdisciplinary, then you understand two or more disciplines, usually two—because it imagines that anyone is unlikely to succeed in more than two disciplines. But that’s not cultural studies’ interdisciplinarity. Cultural studies interdisciplinarity is opposed to the construction of disciplinary objects.

You’re right that “media” is a construct of a set of discourses that have its own political effects, and its own social and intellectual and discursive conditions and effects. When I put on my communication or media studies hat, I have to pretend that I like those effects. But more and more, I don’t want to put on that hat. I want to pursue the work that I want to do—work that matters in the current context—and that work can’t occur under that hat. I refuse to construct that object, and I’m more interested in asking why air conditioning is less a “medium” than radio. I mean, air conditioning has had as profound an impact on the United States as has radio. Air conditioning helped create the New South. It’s a condition of possibility of the New South. Why would we not think that air conditioning is worth studying? However, if
you do want to study air-conditioning that way, what is your discipline? If you can't study that object, or any object, in your discipline, then you might as well give up the discipline. And I'd be very happy if people gave up the notion that the universe is organized by disciplines. Because, in the end, for me, it's all about context. Stuart [Hall] now makes that point [about cultural studies as a project about understanding contexts], though he used to be reluctant to make it explicitly. Cultural studies has always been about understanding context. Subcultural work was not simply about understanding Mod style, it was about understanding the context of post-war Britain, and it attempted to begin that effort by starting with the relation of fashion, music, magazines, etc., and youth. The point of it, however, wasn't to understand the style; it was to understand the style as part of a larger context of social transformation and political struggle. That's the "object" of the study. That's why Stuart can say that if you really want to understand culture, study everything that is not culture.

JH: It strikes me, though I always have felt this way working with you, that coming to "cultural studies" through a discussion of visual media—television, cinema—led me to different questions (rightly or wrongly) than the ones that you asked because your point of reference teaching and writing was primarily popular music. Both TV and popular music may have been considered equally unworthy objects of study during the 1980s in higher education, albeit objects of study that could be articulated to Communications more than could air-conditioners and refrigerators, but they also provided different ways into thinking about contexts, as you have described the project just now.

LG: I think it's certainly true that I do like taking up topics that are not on the agenda—"not on the agenda" in both an academic and political sense. Since the "explosion" of media and popular culture in the 1950s, most of the academic and intellectual work about popular culture focused on a visual culture. That work ignored what was at least as important in shaping the context of American everyday life and power—namely the role of popular music. I also enjoyed the fact that there weren't a lot of theories of popular music, and really nothing that would enable you to talk about the affectivities of music.

The question that you are asking me now also pertains to two other matters. One has to do with "popular pedagogy." When I first started teaching courses on popular culture at the University of Illinois in 1972 or 1973, there was almost nothing to give the students to read on popular music. But even when I tried to use a film or TV program as an example, I could not guarantee that all of the students had seen them. And back then we didn't have the technology—a DVD or YouTube video—to show them what you were talking about. However, I could predict that they all knew much of the music. Suddenly I said to myself, "Well this is great!" I was writing about popular music but had repressed that when I entered the classroom, because I couldn't really find much to assign them to read. But I quickly realized that music was the only thing that they shared as a generation (unlike today, although I am reluctant to speculate on this). So there was a kind of popular pedagogy about it,
and I think that was also partly what drove Stuart and Paddy Whannel to write *The Popular Arts*. One narrative (perhaps a bit of a legend) is that as cultural studies grew up through adult education, Raymond Williams offered an anecdote about how he walked into classrooms of working-class men and women, expecting to teach them about literature, because that was his training, and how his students didn't really want to talk about literature but wanted instead to talk about all the new-fangled popular culture that they were consuming and enjoying. That experience drove him to write a book about how to teach film.

The other thing that enters into an answer to your question is my intuition. When you try to formulate a question to research, and to formulate a question that addresses a particular context, you then have to ask yourself how to get into that context, and where to begin to unravel the pieces so that you can put them together in a way that enables you to see things that you had not been able to see before. And you make guesses, sometimes the wrong guesses—ones that are not particularly enlightening.

Unfortunately today, a lot of that gets published anyway. This is why I'm a great believer that if what you're discovering is what you already knew, then you shouldn't bother. If you discover that the American film industry is racist, so what? I mean, we do need to remind ourselves of that; racism is important to recognize. But if you spend five years to discover what you already knew before you even began to look at it, and if you're not saying anything surprising, then you probably took a wrong way in. It's not that I want to fetishize the new, quite the contrary; often what surprises you is the discovery of the old. My point is that the world is always more complex than we describe it, and that opens all sorts of questions we should be asking. Even as an undergraduate, when people were writing about the "counter culture," and the anti-war movement, and all the events during the 1960s, those accounts weren't understanding the ways that music was articulated to youth culture and to politics in those formations, and that seemed an interesting way to try to unpack and reconstruct the context—and to see political possibilities.

**JH:** Some of this affirms my impression of your work as "provocation"—as an effort to provoke thought and get readers to consider questions that have been marginalized through disciplinary training and thinking, but also to avoid rehearsing the same questions over and over, or to avoid applying them too casually to new contexts, because the context is always changing and is over-determined—meaning that there are many pathways into diagnosing a context, many elements that temporarily come together to produce its political formations, or a "structure of feeling," or whatever the project is about.

**LG:** I write about the things I love: rock and roll. I also write about things I hate: certain kinds of political developments in the country, and in the world, that have occurred over the past 40 years. But I write about them because they matter to me, because I feel passionate about them. And I feel passionate about them because I believe writing about them matters. But I also have learned from Stuart and Jim the
importance of pragmatism, and that knowledge production is an ongoing conversation. What you call provocation is my failure at being a good conversationalist. I wish I could be a better conversationalist, but sometimes I provoke because I enter into conversations too passionately, because these things matter to me.

**JH:** Well, I do know you to be a good conversationalist. The term “provocation” may overstate—just a bit.

**LG:** At one point when I became an ICA Fellow, one of my friends who supported me, said in his letter of recommendation something to the effect that Grossberg is an important figure in our field because, although what he says may not ever be right, he provokes conversations that need to be taking place in our field. And you know, that's fine with me. I don't care if I'm right or wrong, I'm not deeply invested in my conclusions. I'm deeply invested in my questions, I'm deeply invested in whether Left intellectuals are screwing up, because we're sometimes not willing to do the work that it takes to understand what's going on in the world. We think we understand it so well—either because our theory tells us, or because our politics tells us. Despite Obama's victory, we're not necessarily winning. The country and the world are moving in certain directions that we should not be happy about. I think this matters. And yet, we keep telling the same stories (whether rediscovering the old again, or fetishizing the new) despite the fact that, in some pragmatic sense, they just don’t work anymore, if they ever did.

I am concerned that many academics have given up on the idea that intellectual work matters. Edward Said and Jim Carey used to say (in different ways) that intellectual work matters because it operates at a different temporality than political or economic change. If you want to see immediate results when you write your book, you probably shouldn’t be an academic. But an intellectual (or academic intellectual) needs to recognize that ideas have effectivities over time, and that they can matter over time. Provocation is, I suppose, my way of trying to get people into conversations that change the nature of academic practice. Again, I’m not saying everyone has to be this kind of academic.

One of my best friends is a Shakespeare scholar who writes many books about Shakespeare. He thinks that Shakespeare matters, of course, because Shakespeare is, he thinks, the greatest writer of the English language of all time. But he would not share my sense that his books change the world or that he cares about it. He has different senses of the ways in which knowledge production matters and I respect him for it. But for me, this is what matters, this is what cultural studies is about.

**JH:** Well, to amplify a bit one facet of our prior discussion about air-conditioning as media (and about disciplining objects of study), I want to steer the interview toward a question that you have been asking persistently since at least 2000 and that some people might find particularly provocative: “What would cultural studies involve if it were not about the study of culture?” As we have discussed, and as you have pointed out in a lot of your writing during the 1990s, there are ways (particularly following
the work of Williams and Carey) that "culture" was yoked with "communication," and therefore that the meaning of "culture" became wedded to mid-twentieth-century theories of representation, meaning-making, and signification. For at least the last 20 years, you have tried to demonstrate that cultural studies needn't be tied too directly and consistently (in every context) to the study of "culture." In part this seems to grow out of your longstanding interest in avoiding linking culture and representation too tightly, and in turning cultural studies away from a representational politics and "identity politics." You made this point in an essay from around 2000 when you proposed an "alternative logic of mediation" for cultural studies, and in "Does Cultural Studies Have Futures?" you propose imagining a cultural studies that isn't necessarily about culture, and wherein culture isn't necessarily the primary way into the context, the conjuncture. Your very compelling chapter on economics and economy in your most recent book, Cultural Studies in the Future Tense (2011) also makes this point.

To some readers, particularly ones who have not followed this argument closely, a cultural studies that is not primarily about the study of culture may seem an oxymoron, and even absurd.

LG: I think you're right that I'm less and less comfortable with the concept of culture as communication. So let me respond by first separating those two terms—

JH: You mean that you're less comfortable with both of them as an explanation of the project of Cultural Studies?

LG: Yes, but these terms need separating. We've known, from the beginning of cultural studies, that the word "culture" was a deeply fractured and ambiguous term covering a wide range of notions of what you might call "discourse" and its complex effects, notions of "everyday life" and its complex effects, notions of "the whole way of life," notions of normativity, both ethical and aesthetic. We've known that complexity. And increasingly, it seems to me that we have more sophisticated theoretical discourses that allow us to disentangle some of that fractured ambiguity, and allow us to speak more carefully about the complexity of articulations within what we used to call, or what we can still call, if you will, culture. So that's the first thing I want to say.

Now, about communication. Communication is one of these terms that suffers from two contradictory dilemmas simultaneously. On the one hand, it suffers from what I have called "the hubris of small disciplines," though that hubris is not unique to Communication, and Rhetoric suffers it perhaps even more than people in Media Studies do. Within these disciplines of Communication, *everything* becomes communication or everything is rhetoric, and "rhetoric" means anything. So, you end up saying nothing. In one sense it's blatantly true [that everything is communication], but in another sense the very status of its truthfulness means that it's a particularly unhelpful intellectual concept. The opposite dilemma that it creates, is that all sorts of people pick up the concept and use it without any sense of
its disciplinary complexity. I remember someone once saying to Stuart, after he gave a lecture on Thatcherism, that the lecture was the most brilliant "rhetorical analysis" that person had ever heard, and Stuart replied something to the effect of, "Well if that's the case, then it [Rhetoric] is a very interesting intellectual practice because it can be accomplished without ever having actually read anything about it, or having thought about it." Suddenly, anything becomes rhetorical, everything becomes communicative, everything becomes cultural, everything becomes signifying—I think those are problematic notions.

On the other hand, I don't want to give them up entirely, for two reasons (reasons that are partly what Cultural Studies in the Future Tense is about). One is, to go back to something that I said before, the project of cultural studies is to deconstruct and reconstruct, articulate and disarticulate disciplinary objects. It's not to construct a new disciplinary object, it is to recognize that disciplinary object's interfere with, make difficult, the kind of work that cultural studies wants to do. There's a story that I tell in the book, that when I was at Birmingham, the head of the Sociology Department wrote a letter to the student newspaper that said, we hear rumors that there are these people over there, in this Quonset hut on the edge of campus, who are teaching sociology and reading sociology and maybe even thinking they do sociology, and we want them to understand that they're not allowed to do this because they don't have credentials as sociologists. And decades later, when Stuart wrote his essay about the crisis of English and the emergence of cultural studies, he answered that by stating that he and the others were not trying to do sociology as sociologists did it, but that he and the others were trying to reinvent sociology as it should have been done all along. He was more interested in a sociology that did not construct a disciplinary object called society, which is somehow not in part discursively constructed, and not constituted relationally through its determinations in economic and political and cultural regimes. So cultural studies is a project that, as I've said, thinks contextually rather than objectively in that disciplinary sense.

Cultural studies is constantly in danger of creating a new disciplinary object, however. That becomes particularly problematic if you think, as I do, that cultural studies is not only about context, but is about finding the theoretical, conceptual, and analytical tools and strategies that are capable of illuminating the particular context which you are interrogating. And this is partly why I think cultural studies has an inclination toward Marxism, it doesn't have to be Marxist but it operates on some of that ground, because Marx I think understood the importance of constructing the context, and finding or making the concepts that enable you to be historically specific; thus, what works in one context may not work in another.

My generation, the generations of the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, lived for and were defined by media culture and popular culture—music, television, film, all of that. And our culture was largely shaped by those cultural forces, those discursive articulations. Those were primary points of discursive articulation, and I'm not sure they are any more. I suggest in Cultural Studies in the Future Tense that the economy increasingly serves a role as the popular discourse of our society. Other people have suggested, and are partly right, that increasingly technology serves that purpose for
younger generations. So when I ask my students the desert island question, “if you could bring 10 records, 10 books, 10 films to a desert island, what would they be?”, they increasingly ask me (and slyly), “Well, can I bring my Kindle? My iPod? My laptop?” They don’t want to choose the culture that speaks to them, they choose the technology that gives them almost infinite access to the cultural universe. That seems to be a shift. I don’t exactly understand it, but I say in that book that we need to find the tools to understand that the concept of culture itself may be changing, and to understand how it’s changing. And part of that change involves the logics and apparatuses of valuation, commensuration, and choice, when confronting the multiplicities of cultural options. After all, Raymond Williams’ concept of culture as an invention of European modernity at a certain moment in time in response to certain conditions that had been around for 250 years, was itself articulated through his own location in mid-twentieth-century England. Maybe the conditions have changed enough that the concept of culture as it functions in everyday discourse, but also as a possible analytic and conceptual tool, has changed or needs to change with the changing context as well.

The other thing that complicates the point that you raise about “a cultural studies that is not primarily about culture” and about a cultural study of the new ways that economy and economics matter is the debate between political economy and cultural studies, which I have been involved in too many times…

JH: … at least since the issue of Critical Studies in Mass Communication in 1995 when James Carey and you were paired in a debate with Nicholas Garnham and Graham Murdock, and your essay-response was titled, “Cultural Studies vs. Political Economy: Is Anybody Else Bored with this Debate?”

LG: I argued then and still believe that they [critical or Marxist political economic accounts of communication] misrepresent the debate, or the difference between the two approaches. It was not that cultural studies didn’t think economics was important, or that it ignored economics. On the contrary, it was a matter of how you take economies and economics seriously. So I’ve said, over and over again, I don’t like the way that a lot of critical political economists ask questions about economies, Moreover, if you read the critiques that some political economists (including Bob McChesney and Thomas Frank) make about cultural studies—and we should remember that there are lots of other political economists who do not take such an attitude to cultural studies—they often end up having to say, “Well of course I’m not talking about people like Stuart Hall, who does talk about economics, or Larry Grossberg, who does talk about economics, or John Clarke, or Angela McRobbie, or Meaghan Morris, or ….” And by the end, what they are saying is that the good work in the field does consider economies, but that they want to talk about all the less interesting work in the field that doesn’t. That’s not a very good way of carrying on a conversation.

My first works on the rise of the New Right, work that began with We Gotta Get Out of This Place and continued in Caught in the Crossfire, didn’t actually or
adequately address the question of how cultural studies should deal with the economic. How should it incorporate economic matters, practices, transformations, struggles, discourses, into its conjunctural analysis? How should it understand the complexities of economics? I realized that I didn’t know the answer to these questions. Because I believe that there is “better” and “worse” knowledge, and because I believe that knowledge and ideas matter and therefore that we should be committed to producing the best knowledge we can, not the knowledge we would like to be true but the knowledge that our best tools lead us to think might be true, it suddenly struck me that I had to take into account economics as a realm of life that is part of the articulated context, but also that I needed to grapple with it more seriously as a set of intellectual and academic discourses. And just as Birmingham had read sociology, critiqued it, and taken something from it, we have to begin to have conversations with the disciplines that have, to a large extent, avoided that kind of conversation, especially economics, without accepting all of it or assuming that economics are everything and everywhere. We need to find more and better tools. It became more and more obvious to me that we have to enter into or even initiate conversations about how we do and should understand the place that economies and economic discourses occupy in contemporary life and politics, to figure out how to bring economics into our conjunctural analysis. This project has very serious consequences for our ability to understand what’s been happening in the world over the past 40 years.

JH: Some, maybe you, might argue that following the financial crisis there is considerable relevance, even an urgency, in thinking about the role of Economics—the professional, institutionalized discourses but also the popular representations about “economic” matters.

LG: Your point brings to mind my friend and another person whose work I admire greatly, David Ruccio. He is a Marxist economist at Notre Dame, and one of the founding editors of Rethinking Marxism, another journal we should have mentioned earlier because it has been a major force for the past 30 years or so. David’s book, Economic Representations, makes the point (a point similar to the one that he makes in an essay which he published recently in Cultural Studies) that of all the material written about the economy over past 20 or 30 years, a lot of it is written by non-economists, by humanists—people in literary studies, or communication studies, or cultural studies, or whatever. And he then points out that a lot of it is just terrible! Being someone who can read a text does not necessarily make you qualified to understand the financial crisis, any more than being someone who can read Shakespeare, as my son did when he was 12, doesn’t make you qualified to offer insight about Shakespeare. It’s not that what he has to say isn’t an opening to a conversation, but to think that it is necessarily worth publishing, or putting forth as a political analysis of what’s going on in the world, seems to me strikingly ant-intellectual. I don’t know how we justify what we do for the world, especially when we’re under attack, by producing such work. If you want to understand the financial
crisis, you are beholden to actually do the work of understanding finance economies, and understanding how to critique finance economics. That involves more than just reading a couple of people whose work you like, whether it’s Paul Krugman, David Harvey, or Rick Wolf—all whose work I admire. Just because I admire their work largely on political grounds, however, does not mean that it is sufficient reason for me to assume that they are right. And I think we’ve given up our responsibility, precisely as we’ve become more and more convinced, and I think correctly, that we cannot tell the conjunctural story without a more serious consideration of economies. I think we’ve given up the responsibility that we have to produce the best work we can as academics and as intellectuals. We have an extraordinarily privileged position as academics, and with that, not to quote Spiderman’s uncle, comes great responsibility. To a large extent we have not met that responsibility. If you want to talk about economics, do it seriously, take it on. Understand neo-classical economics, but understand the heterodox economics as well, understand finance economics, and understand the critiques that exist within the discourses, and then understand the limits of those discourses, because precisely too many of them don’t understand that economies are discursively constructed objects, and don’t understand that economies are relationally constructed objects. When you begin to do that work, you begin to get a different understanding of the context. Again it’s about temporality. If you want to turn out a book about the financial crisis within three months or a year, you can’t do it—or can’t do it well. Someone who’s been working on it for five years can say, oh my god, how fortunate, I’ve been studying finance economy for the past five years, and here’s the great recession, I can write my book. And that’s good. There are many good books about the financial crisis, and there are many stupid ones. And there are many ones that just say the same thing over and over again. Analyzing the discourse of finance, and of the crisis, is useful. It’s a piece of the puzzle. But you can’t leap from a piece of the puzzle to the whole. It is not our job. Remember that show, “Name That Tune,” where they play for a contestant the first three notes of a song, and the contestant had to name the tune? That’s not our job, as academics, to play that game. Our job is to listen to the whole thing, take it apart, put it together, see its relations and articulations between the political, the cultural, the economic, the social, in all of its complexity, and then to try to describe it to—as I say in the book—tell a better story. I just think we’ve become too satisfied with our politics and our theories, and unfortunately the other side is perhaps not so self-satisfied.

Let me make one more point. David Ruccio poses another, very interesting question which I’m just beginning to think through, and it’s very interesting that Marxist economists were the ones to raise it to cultural studies. David points out that a lot of critical and cultural studies in the humanities and social sciences want, as a political project, to critique the universalization of economies in our society, even as the use of “economy” as a metaphor for everything in cultural theory that has exploded over the past 20 to 30 years, and maybe longer. As he points out, there is an abundance of phrases that have developed a critical currency: “economies of meaning,” “economies of culture,” “economies of affect.” Everything has become an economy, and he’s right! There is a certain irony that, on one hand, we say our
society is characterized by, and that we should be critical of, discourses of the universalizations of economy, while at the same time we take the metaphor of economy to be an increasingly universalizable metaphor. At the moment, my wonderful colleague Chris Lundberg and I are designing a course to study the use of the trope of “economy” in critical discourse, and the use of tropes in economic discourse.

**JH:** There is another facet to your rationale for practicing a cultural studies, or better a conjunctural analysis of the present, that doesn’t focus always or primarily on culture, and that facet is your turn (in some ways, your return) to the significance of affect. I say “return” because *We Gotta Get Outta This Place* puts affect at the center of your diagnosis of the ascent of Reagan-era political conservatism. However, it has seemed to me that your interest in affect was (and maybe still is) bound up with your entry into conjunctural analysis through popular music, rather than through visual media. I’ve mentioned to you many times that, as a young professor coming to the University of Illinois in the mid-1980s with a training (albeit a quirky and interdisciplinary one) in visual media, you challenged me to consider questions that were not being raised through studies of visual media and visual culture. You reminded me that all sorts of questions posed about visual media didn’t transfer easily to music—particularly that every question about popular culture and power could not be answered simply by looking at the construction of a (visual) reality or at how meaning is made. These were part of a disposition that had taken root at the intersection of visual media criticism and early cultural studies, and that disposition was predicated on the ease with which semiotics and structuralism (harnessed to ideological criticism) was applied to literature and then to visual forms and systems of representation—cinema (as Christian Metz had argued) operating as a language or sign-system. You reminded me that music is not simply about meaning-making, it often is about making ones feet move—about movements, in the embodied and political sense.

That was a powerful argument to make for and about cultural studies in those years—a provocation. Am I right that you now are winding back to an interest in affect? Are you once again interested in the term in order to intervene in the “wall of sound” recently about the importance of affect in critical and cultural studies? Or is there something that is happening differently in the present that makes affect worth revisiting or thinking about in new ways?

**LG:** There are several important questions that need to be separated. One concerns what a “cultural studies without culture” looks like? My answer is that it’s not that I’m proposing a cultural studies without culture, but a cultural studies without the disciplinary object of culture. I do think that there is something happening that is useful to refer to as “economic culture.” Partly, I am referring to the discourses of Economics, as a discipline and as popular discourses, and partly I am referring to economic practices as discursive. I’m not trained as an economist, or to study institutions or the exchange of monetary funds, but I am trained somewhat—perhaps not very well—to look at the ways in which discourses are articulated and in which
they articulate other relations. So, in that sense, I want to disperse culture, and say not that everything is culture, but that everything is partly articulated through and with discursive practices. That’s my starting point. So when I talk about economies in the contemporary conjuncture, I’m talking about economic culture and political culture. When I started to look at Economics some years ago, I read Economics and Political Science textbooks, and I cite them in my most recent book in the chapters on economy and politics. I particularly looked at the way these textbooks explained culture. And of course both kinds of books were dismissive. Although political science textbooks acknowledge that there is something that might be termed “political culture,” none of them really take it seriously or think it really matters. Well, I am interested precisely in what they have dismissed. What they consider unimportant, I think matters crucially. Political culture, and the economic culture that economists ignore, are precisely where I enter into an analysis of the conjuncture. And what’s so interesting is of course that economic culture, in that sense, has become incredibly popular. Meaghan Morris pointed this out when she wrote, about economic discourse, that everyone suddenly now knows who the head of the Federal Reserve is. Growing up, I did not know who the head of the Federal Reserve was. We have these heroes now, such as Paul Volcker, who are part of the popular knowledge about economy. The prevalence of stock market prices running in banners at the bottom of the TV screen is another example. The cultural presence of economy, what I would call economic culture, has changed significantly and become part of our popular culture in ways that I think it never used to be. That’s what I want to study, so it’s not “cultural studies without culture.” It’s cultural studies increasingly becoming self-conscious of the dangers of letting culture become a disciplinary object.

JH: Well put, though earlier I did want to qualify your perspective that way.

LG: Now to your question about affect. You are right that I turned to affect because, as you say, the models of understanding, of hermeneutics, of interpretation, of cultural analysis that existed when I was a graduate student were largely defined in terms of literary or visual texts, and those forms of cultural analysis emphasized questions of the production of meaning and systems of representation—ideologies. As I worked more and more on the problem of meaning, I began to think that it didn’t describe the way that music mattered to people and the way that music worked. It was fortunate that early on I discovered Foucault and particularly Gilles Deleuze, who allowed me to realize that there easily could be and were a multiplicity of effects that one could articulate around discourse—and that signification, subjectification and ideology or representation were not the only effects that discourse had or could produce. And so I tried to begin to think about how one would talk about them. Affect was my broad name for a whole set of things like moods, and what I termed “mattering maps,” and emotions, all sorts of things that were, to use a term Nigel Thrift has popularized, “non-representational,” although I think affect is not just non-representational, it’s non-signifying and
non-subjectifying. This realization served me well when I started to write *We Gotta Get Out of This Place*, which, you will recall, James, was originally going to be titled "Another Boring Day in Paradise," after an Elvis Costello quote, when he once came to the US and said, "You're all living in paradise and you're bored." The book took so long to write that we saw the rise of the Right, Reagan's election, Lee Atwater's role in the RNC, and I suddenly realized that I had to find a way to take my understanding of what I was calling the affectivity of popular music and to place it into this context of political struggle between the Right and the liberal-Left. Roughly 25 years before most of the current discourse about affect, I was arguing that politics in the United States was becoming increasingly affective and I was trying to describe what that might mean, though I had a very limited vocabulary, and my theorizations were too vulgar and inadequate to the task that I was trying to put them to. So, yes, I still think that affect is a crucial problematic both politically and theoretically. I suppose that I've returned to it in part because it's a crucial dimension of understanding the current context and of telling a better story, so that we understand the complexities of political appeal, organization, struggle, not simply in terms of subjectification and ideology and representation. But the current discussion about affect also is a sort of an irritant to me. I suppose that I'm a grumpy old man now.

JH: [laughing] Certainly not affectless!

LG: No, certainly not affectless. Obviously affect has in the past 10 years become a kind of sexy term. I first published something about affect in 1983, and very soon after that, I began to read Deleuze and Félix Guattari, trying to figure out their theory of multiplicity and immanence, because it seemed to me they provided a philosophical ground on which I could locate my own arguments about the complexities of discursive articulations and effects. Interestingly, I wasn't reading Deleuze and Guattari for their theory of affect. Since then, three things have happened that really have troubled me (and perhaps "trouble" is better than "irritate" because while they do irritate me, it's probably irrelevant that they do). They trouble me, intellectually. One is that affect has been taken up in a return to textuality. Just as we had to argue, in and beyond cultural studies, that one couldn't read the ideology of a text off the text, that ideology is a complex series of relationships not only between texts and audiences but with the larger intertextual and contextual articulations, after all of that, it seems to me that we now have returned to a large extent, under the banner of political motivation, to the notion that not only can we read ideology off a text again, but that we can read affects off texts. I find that disheartening because I would have thought that affect is the lens through which it becomes quite obvious that you can't do that. That troubles me because the *multiplicity* of affects and articulations of the sorts of texts we're interested in are so overwhelmingly obvious.

Second, affect has become a kind of key signifier by which all sorts of things that, if they weren't organized around and legitimated by a kind of sexy signifier, might be more obviously problematic. Affect, as the new trend, becomes the new
postmodernism. The claim that I made 25 years ago, that politics is becoming increasingly affective, which wasn’t a claim about some kind of rupture, because politics has always been somewhat affective, becomes the supposedly new notion that the fundamental nature of politics has changed, whether it’s that ideology has become irrelevant, or that all politics is virtual. These authors often subscribe to a preemptive politics, where power now enters into the future or the virtual in order to produce the present—and the present is a rupture in history. I’ve never liked those arguments. I don’t think those arguments are consistent with cultural studies’ ideas about articulation, relationality, and complexity.

I also think they are politically problematic as well. I think every generation likes to think that the power it is confronting is the dragon, the ultimate power, and that it faces a challenge unique in history, and that its defeat will be profound or its victory will be glorious. But that’s not the case. Power is always there, and some battles are harder than others, but we’re not completely in a new world. Yes there are new things about it. As Gramsci said, the first problem of conjunctural analysis is to decide what’s old and what’s new—and what’s rearticulated. A lot of work around affect has become an excuse for a return to an image of history as postmodern rupture.

Third, and connected to the second point, is the extraordinary preponderance or the extraordinary ease with which a body of intellectual work is willing to leap from ontological claims to empirical claims without doing any of the necessary mediating theoretical and empirical work. A Deleuzian theory of affect, which I find very interesting and important, is a theory about everything as affective—everything in the ontological realm, in the virtual, is affective, almost by definition as it were. Affect is the capacity to change and to be changed, to produce effects and to be effected. However, it is problematic to then think that this term is somehow always empirically useful, as a description, or to think that the concept, the philosophical and ontological concepts that Deleuze and Guattari or others mobilize, are somehow the equivalent of the actual concrete work of conjunctural analysis, or can substitute for/ as cultural studies. Again, I like all sorts of work and I like reading some of the work that comes out of such post-Deleuzian and often, postmodern, theorizing, but I think we must be very careful about how it can be taken up by and contribute to cultural studies as conjunctural analysis. There is a place for ontological theorizing in cultural studies, and that kind of work may be crucial. Deleuze and Guattari are important because they offered us the possibility of an ontology which is capable of critiquing the ontological and epistemological ground of European modernisms and European modernities. Their work is absolutely vital in that sense. But theirs was not a critique of American society, or American power, or an analysis of the particularities of Reaganism, or the particularities of the New Right. I think the retreat into ontology is just the kind of dilemma that the American academy has put cultural studies into. It becomes too easy to think that you can read Deleuze and Guattari and then read a couple of essays about whatever—the terrorist system, securitization, or financial crisis—and think that you can now write about it as if you were describing the conjuncture. So in a sense, my return to affect is on one hand an attempt to continue my conjunctural work, and on the other hand an attempt to
figure out what different conceptual tools enable you to perform new analyses, without assuming that, because a conceptual tool is powerful in one domain or in answering certain kinds of questions, it therefore becomes a universal tool for answering all your questions before the work even begins.

My work on affect assumed the ontology of affect—which entails for me both contingency and the actual machinic processes of the production of the actual. However, I was interested in the relationship between two sites of the actualization of what I wanted to call affect: the body as the site of the habit, and production of various discursive (non-representational) effects through the work of various discursive apparatuses. The theoretical challenge is to study the actual contextual articulations among and across these three “appearances” of affect.

JH: One of the things that I’ve most taken away from the ways that you think about cultural studies is your emphasis on not letting your theory or politics get too far out in front of your effort to figure out what is going on. And I think that anyone who has described you as a theorist, a theory wonk, has missed that part of the way that you explain cultural studies and have for a long time. But in listening to you describe cultural studies (and your own work now) as conjuncturalist, I wonder whether that is a more recent development in your thinking or whether you’ve always thought about the aims and practice of cultural studies that way. Would you explain your use of that term, and to what extent your use develops from Gramsci, Stuart Hall, and/or someone else? Second, with respect to the present conjuncture in the US, even with respect to the recent election in the US or other events or crises, what are the questions that need to be addressed and/or that cultural studies might not be asking?

LG: I love you, James, but you ask impossible questions.

In one way, I’d like to think that I am a better Foucauldian and Deleuzean than some people who universalize their concepts, using them like positivists use their statistic hammers, finding them everywhere. (Some in fact go so far as to return to a celebration of science, mistaking Foucault’s critique of science’s politics of the claim to knowledge, with the kind of knowledge that it claims to produce.) With Foucault and Deleuze, I believe that theory is a toolbox. You find a tool that works for the question and use it, and then you put it down and ask what might work well or better for the next one. I have used Deleuze, as I have said, to open the possibility of a critique of and an alternative to the ontology and epistemology of Euro-modernities. Beyond that, I’ve used Foucault’s and Deleuze’s concepts as tools; insofar as they are useful, I will use them. Beyond that, however, I have little or no commitment to them. The same is true of Gramsci, and the pragmatists. I’m not particularly worried about a completely coherent philosophy as much as I am about trying to be consistently a radical contextualist. My description of cultural studies as conjunctural analysis is not a distinctly new development, though you’re right that, over the last five to ten years, I’ve put more and more emphasis on the conjuncture rather than context. I talk about my work and about cultural studies as embodying a “radical contextualist”
project, but there are other approaches that are attempting to be radically contextual. Cultural studies has many allies and many relations with other projects. But I increasingly argue, not knowing exactly how far I'd push the point, that the form of the contextualist practice of cultural studies is conjuncturalist. Or at least, the kind of cultural studies that I'm most interested in reading and doing is conjuncturalist.

Conjuncturalism is a term that moves from Lenin to Gramsci to Althusser to Laclau and Hall. They all use it somewhat differently, and as you know, better than do I, Gramsci's writing practice ("notebooks" that he wrote from prison) produced more ambiguities than definitions. So, when a student asks where in Gramsci's writing does he define hegemony or conjuncture, I smile and say, "Don't you wish that were so?" I have been involved in a conversation recently with Stuart and a few other people about the meaning of "conjuncture." We agree on one element, and disagree on others. We agree that a conjuncture refers to a particular context in which there is not merely complexity, because any context has complexity, but in which the context itself is constituted by an articulation of the contradictions that make up that complexity. There are different forms of complexity, and one is that there can be many contradictions, many struggles, many tensions within a particular context. Conjunctures are those contexts, those moments, comprised of multiple contradictions, multiple struggles, and multiple tensions, which are articulated together to create a kind of formation, a unique kind of formation, defined to a large extent by an "organic" crisis. Or, one also could think of conjuncture as a way of looking at the articulations and points of complexity in those contexts and moments. Conjunctures exist as what David Scott calls a problem space; such a problem space is, simultaneously, political and epistemological (and maybe even ontological). I'll leave that question open. The analysis demands unique tools. Stuart, John Clarke, Jeremy Gilbert, et al., probably all agree on that.

We agree less about the spatio-temporal horizons of the conjuncture. Analyzing social life and social existence involves recognizing at least three such horizons. One is what you might call the epochal—for instance, the emergence of European modernity in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. That is an epoch of 250 years in which certain organic forces define the terrain, albeit articulated in specific ways differently at different moments, described by the other horizons. At the other end, the second spatio-temporality is more specific and local, such as what we might talk about as the "post-financial crisis era"—let's say, 2007 to the present, a period largely shaped by that. Here the complexities and articulations are observed in fine detail. That's how Stuart uses "conjuncture," when he describes Thatcherism as a conjuncture, Blairism as a conjuncture, and now the Cameron-coalition as a conjuncture.

But both Stuart and I agree that there is yet another horizon, another way of understanding and breaking up the history of transformations. This is a middle term horizon, which might be used to talk about the relations among Thatcherism, Blairism, and the current coalition, all as interrelated in some way through the project of neo-liberalism (again, not a term I like to use, but one Stuart has decided he has to use). In Cultural Studies in the Future Tense, I propose that the conjuncture we are living in began in the 1950s or 1960s, when what had become the taken-for-granted
understanding of American liberal modernity—the New Deal care-for-the-people democracy, an expand-the-vote liberal democracy—a definition of being modern as Americans, which was solidified only after the Second World War, immediately came under attack. In my reading, a “conjunctural” analysis of the US involves an ongoing struggle over the meaning of being modern, and hence, a constant struggle to dismantle one definition of American modernity (of American exceptionalism) and the rearticulation of a new one. That liberal modernity followed the deconstruction, catastrophically announced in the Civil War, of an older American modernity built upon a particular set of settlements and accommodations, attempting to resolve a set of contradictions between capitalism and religion, between freedom and democracy on the one hand, and slavery on the other. (By the way, DuBois’ Black Reconstruction is a crucial analysis of this moment, and it may be the first example of a US cultural studies.) That liberal way of being American and modern was the result of a whole series of struggles, victories, and losses, from the 1870s till the 1950s, producing its own settlements culminating in a certain moment of stability by the 1940s, and into the 1950s, when those settlements begin to come under attack and are deconstructed from both the Left and the Right. The conjuncture that we live in takes shape from the 1950s to the present, after that settlement has collapsed. We are then living through a set of struggles, and we have been since the 1960s, over the possibilities of another American modernity. My vocabulary is different from Stuart’s, because I don’t describe Thatcherism as a conjuncture but as a temporary settlement of a conjunctural crisis. Blairism was a different attempt to find the settlement of the conjunctural crisis, and Cameron is a different attempt. They each have momentary stability, but none of them have yet accomplished enough stability for them to claim or imagine having won.

Stuart wants to call the conjuncture the smallest bit. I call the conjuncture the medium bit. We all agree that all three spatio-temporalities are important in conjunctural analysis. Stuart, for instance, would point out that you can’t understand Cameron’s coalition and their approach to what Stuart has recently called neoliberalism without understanding what’s been happening for the past 50 years, or without understanding a long history of colonialism, capitalism, liberalism, etc. I would assert that you cannot understand the US over the past 40 years apart from the specific, changing struggles and formations that have enacted and embodied the efforts to find a stable settlement to the conjunctural crisis.

In the United States, we’re still looking for a stable conception and embodiment of American modernity. But then I have the problem of what to call the decade of Reaganism or of Clintonism or of Obamaism? I am interested in “settlements” of struggles, but that’s not necessarily an accurate term. Perhaps it might be better to emphasize what’s at play in the notion of the conjuncture. What questions need to be raised in the contemporary conjuncture, you know? Lots, too many, because I don’t think we really have a very good understanding of it.

JH: Speaking of too many questions, perhaps we should stop here. However, your explanation of a conjunctural analysis, at the end of an interview that will belong to a
Interview with Lawrence Grossberg  91

special Issue of interviews with interviewees from your generation, and older, leads me to ask one final question, about the legacy of “your generation” in the current conjuncture. We’ve discussed your early interest in popular music as a way into cultural studies and conjunctural analysis. Just now, you referred to the legacy of the 1960s in crises that unsettled a prior conjuncture. Having heard you give a talk at the University of Illinois earlier this year (February 2012), it is clear that you currently are interested in returning to an analysis of how music mattered politically during the 1960s, in order to think about political activism and political formation in the US in the twenty-first century. That might be a useful way to punctuate the interview. It imparts a certain symmetry, since I want to begin my tenure as the journal’s editor by providing an intellectual genealogy that has shaped the kinds of questions that are asked from “critical/cultural studies” in 2013.

LG: It’s fair to say that there is more political activism on “the Left” (however problematic the terms may be) now (in the twenty-first century) than there has been, at least since the 1960s, if not longer—there are many people involved in trying to transform the world in progressive ways, more groups involved, more discourse being produced. The activism is incredibly diverse, visible in lots of places, and invisible in others. Overall, it is largely invisible. To compare the present to the 1960s that way may shock most people, who think that we live in this society with rampant apathy and where the Left is a profound minority. However, the political struggle is largely invisible, not only with respect to the public realm but also to itself. Many of the people who are themselves struggling, whether it’s for environmental causes, for poor people, for education, or even for broader causes, feel isolated, and typically don’t recognize that there is a large, multiplicity of struggles of which they are part. That’s an interesting problem, politically and analytically. Why is it invisible to the public realm, and invisible to itself?

That question has led me back to the question of music, and it’s the basis for an essay or chapter that I want to write that will be titled, “Without a Song,” about the role of music in constituting the sense of unity and the visibility of the “counter-culture” in the 1960s. The counter-culture involved extraordinarily diverse groups, identities, practices, and ideologies, but nevertheless had a sense of itself, and a visibility, as a kind of unity which was provided by the affective power of the music. The Left has always been divided, and always has attacked itself at least as passionately as it attacks the other side; the Popular Front was the exception that proves the rule. However, the Left is largely divided by a kind of question of state politics versus anarchist politics—the politics of organization versus the politics of multiplicity. “Occupy!” was a politics of “occupy everything demand nothing,” a politics of participatory democracy in which there cannot be structure. Oversimplifying the complexities, on the one hand, we have what is often portrayed as a more traditional Marxist or socialist state politics, willing to ally itself with and often compromise with more centrist apparatuses and more focused social movements. On one hand, there is an interesting assemblage (a term that many on this side of the line would themselves use) of a variety of anarchist, post-Marxist, libertarian, postmodern,
and anti-systemic struggles. Interestingly, many of these groups, with varying degrees of sophistication, espouse a philosophy that can be described (whether such is its true origin) as post-Deleuzean and postmodern—politics of the virtual, of affect, of pre-emption, of bio-capital, of cognitive capitalism, etc., invoking not only the texts of Deleuze and Guattari and sometimes Foucault, but also the work of Massumi, Clough, Hardt and Negri, Badiou, Ranciere, et al. These two sides comprise a struggle over the question of the relationship, in Deleuzian terms, between the virtual and the actual, or between the multiplicity and the organization.

However, there’s a related issue, which [Baruch] Spinoza might describe as this problem’s “discursive expression.” I increasingly have encountered an intellectual and pedagogical problem, which is that there are too many discourses, too many diagnoses of the world, too many theoretical discourses. I now can pick up 10 books about the same thing, each starting with its own grain of sand, from which it then offers a diagnosis of the world (usually in rather epochal terms), and then, naturally, quite seamlessly so it seems, its own theory of the totality. Everyone has their own theoretical/political discourse to describe pick-your-phenomenon. Everyone has their own theoretical position. People think that to get a book published today—I suppose in contemporary terms we might say to brand oneself, you have to have a new theory of “X” where X somehow holds the key to larger mysteries. My problem is that most of them seem to be saying pretty much the same thing, but the analyses are far from richly contextual, far from being simultaneously empirical and theoretical. Sometimes I think that they’re all partly right, and I don’t know what to do with that. I don’t know how to teach it, I don’t know how to put them together in an attempt to tell a coherent story about what’s going on in the world. That comprises a crisis of what I call the concept of multiplicity, and the relationship between multiplicity and organization. There is a political and analytic expression of our failure to address the philosophical problem of multiplicity, a question posed philosophically by Spinoza, Bergson, and Deleuze.

Some (including many Deleuzans) have avoided the problem—both theoretically and politically—and taken the easy way out by constructing this as a new binarism between a good form of power/thinking—multiplicity—and a bad form—structure (the latter dominant in Euro-modernity). So now we have a binary opposition between participatory democracy and the state, between structure and anarchy, and I want to provoke a conversation about how to think about multiplicity and organization together. That is leading me into complexity theory, network theory, organizational theory—into a lot of theories where I otherwise would not want to go. It is leading me back into the history of philosophy and forward into a variety of empirical sites where this problem is enacted. Too often, what’s said about multiplicity and organization seems to assume that since Deleuze described three modes—the rhizome, the radicle, and the root—that’s all there is. And since roots are bad and radicle are just roots in absentia, all that’s left is the rhizome. But those people don’t read the next sentence, which says that the rhizome doesn’t exist as actuality. Actuality is a much more complicated system of organizations, and there is no actuality without organization. I think we have avoided pursuing the implications
of Deleuze and Guattari's work, especially Deleuze's reading of Foucault, where Deleuze begins to think [of] actuality and organization in a sophisticated way. This is crucial to thinking about and understanding the current political crisis, and to intervening in recent explanations of it.

And it's not just about a political problem. I have already hinted at this. The problem of multiplicity and organization seems to define increasingly the situation of our intellectual and pedagogical work, but also, the context of our cultural lives. Something similar can be said—has been said by [J.K.] Gibson-Graham—about the economic. You cannot reduce the economy to a single capitalism, and then talk about the economy in these singular terms. The economy isn't singular, and isn't even simply fractured into industrial and finance capital. Economy is a multiplicity of economies. And yet, they are somehow organized by (this avoids all the interesting questions) capitalism in the current conjuncture (and possibly epoch). That is, I think, the point that Gibson-Graham missed. Maybe 50 years ago we could get away with talking about "economy" in simplistic terms, but that doesn't mean that it was actually simple. But now we have to talk about the multiplicities of the economies. For example, so much of the world involves "informal economies," which makes it absurd to talk in terms of a "capitalist world" or global "capitalist economy." If you think the global economy is the capitalist world, you're just ignoring an extraordinarily large part of the world population, which is working outside the capitalist networks now. So the challenge is how to talk about complex multiplicities that are nevertheless structured. The world is not chaos because there are always forms of social, political, and economic organization being articulated.

The problem is, what do you do then? What's the empirical utility of that starting point, and what's the political possibility that it enables? In a way, this is a problem that cultural studies, and other positions, had with certain versions of poststructuralism and postmodernism, which is that it had no theory of articulation. I want to think about multiplicity within the theory and analysis of articulation. But that requires me or anyone to think of articulation as a theoretical problem, which I don't think we've done much of. It takes us back to how we think about complexity in terms of relationality and contextuality.

JH: But your emphasis on the theoretical or philosophical way of understanding the political fact of multiplicities, or of multiplicity's relation to organization, makes me wonder, without putting too fine a punctuation mark on the interview, the extent that posing the situation—and multiplicities—this way accounts for historical and conjunctural transformations of "communication"? Does political formation now occur through a media economy and culture that lack the earlier centrality—in most parts of the world, the Statism—of production and organization, of cinema, television, or even music? Does your account of the current inability of most people to recognize the multiplicity of political struggle have anything to do with a history of communication media since the 1960s that has moved from a "mass" economy and culture (of broadcasting as "mass communication," for instance) to an economy and culture of "mass customization" and an "interactive" activism that mobilizes and acts
through blogging, social networking, etc.? Wouldn't you say that conceiving that historical transformation in terms of a binary opposition between (a current) multiplicity and (a former) organization does not grapple enough with the question of articulation in both the past and the present?

LG: I think that one could characterize the universe of media practices today as a multiplicity, and I think you are right that multiplicity is itself articulated to and articulates other multiplicities. My work, as you already pointed out, and we've sort of acknowledged here, has moved away from a discussion about media multiplicities. But to be honest, if you like moments of brutal honesty in interviews, it's partly because I'm older. Leonard Cohen says, "I'm old and the mirrors don't lie." I can't and don't find great enjoyment in the multiplicities of media these days. I don't watch much TV anymore, and I don't watch film as much as I used to. I don't "participate" that way. I do listen to music, but even then, not as much and not with the same affective investment. I am somewhat overwhelmed by how much great music there is out there these days—there is that multiplicity again—but I am struggling with being unable to organize, and figure out how to select what music to listen to. Because the structures of organization and mediation that used to be there are not there, so I am myself struggling to cope with the multiplicities of music production today.

It's not to say that there weren't multiplicities 50 years ago, and maybe I just don't know where the mediations are anymore because I'm no longer an active, targeted participant in that culture. I no longer feel interpolated, no longer feel pulled into, no longer feel seduced into, these media. My students tell me about all of the Web programs and remind me that I can watch a TV program on the Web. I just have no great interest in doing that. As I said earlier, you write about the things you love and hate. I don't hate the new mediascape, and I don't hate the media culture as it's being transformed. I'm not condemning it and certainly not saying it's destroying minds or is somehow worse than it used to be. It's just not one that I'm pulled into anymore, so I'm not compelled to write about it.

But I agree that accounts of media in the current context remain stuck in tendencies that you, James, have been describing and arguing against for years, and that I was trying to argue against in that chapter in my book about culture and media. To create an object of study—like Internet studies, or digital studies, or new technology studies, or television studies—doesn't make any sense any more. But it may never have made any sense, as we've discussed earlier in the interview. In fact, I think it is really important to avoid thinking about the past as somehow (more) centered, (more) organized, simpler, simply mass-oriented, etc. and the present as, therefore, decentered, fractured, fragmented, multiple, niche-customized, etc. As our friend John Clarke always says, if the past was never as—fill in what X you want—then the present is not as anti-whatever as we assume. I don't think the problem is simply multiplication or proliferation, or even the recognition of or failure to recognize such multiplicities; of course, there is more available today. But there was too much—at least, too much music, even in the 1960s. You couldn't listen to it all; you certainly couldn't like it all.
I think the problem results from the disappearance, or collapse, or active struggles against and deconstruction of—I'm not entirely sure how this came about or how to describe it—the mediating, organizing, commensurating, filtering logics and apparatuses of the past. These articulating machines were no doubt implicated with particular relations and regimes of power. They were no doubt articulated to particular formations of media and culture, of technology, of economics, of social differentiations, etc., and maybe their demise is a good thing, but it leaves us in something of a vacuum. The political problem is finding new and better ways to organize the multiplicities. Even if you take the multiplicities of cultural production (a body of it that you call the multiplicities of media practices), we don't know how to organize it anymore. So what we do is force it into subdisciplinary programs. I just can't help but recall Raymond Williams' point about how we get so caught up in legitimating the work we're doing by finding names for it—film studies, media studies, community studies—that in the end we end up losing the project of cultural studies. I want to think about the problematic of multiplicity not because it's new or because it has quantitatively increased. That seems to me to force the issue. As I've explained, I'm interested in the problematic as a way into conjunctural analysis as an analysis of articulations. Cultural studies has always said, but I'll phrase it in Stuart's classic terms, that it's not that there are no relations or that relations are guaranteed, but that there are relations being made and unmade. We need to get beyond that preliminary statement to be able to figure out, in a particular context, what is involved in the making and unmaking of relations, and the possibilities of different forms and formations of relations, and of different apparatuses of relation formation. We need a more nuanced and historically appropriate way of talking about relationality and organization to confront the multiplicities.

Let me make one more point here, returning to the common hubris of disciplines. I have to admit that I was never much taken with some of the epochal and deterministic overtones that can be read in the sorts of Canadian medium theory that Jim Carey championed. (I was taken with Innis' alternative political economy, however, as was Jim.) I do not believe that changes in communication, media, or technology are directly or uniquely responsible for social and political change. Contrary to the way Williams spoke sometimes, I do not think that the world is an expression of the structures of communication. Are changes in communication part of the complex equation? Certainly. Are they the determining or expressive core? I don't think so. They are one of the places where changes happen and are articulated to other changes. There is an arrogance in much of the academy in which we need to think that what we study is somehow the key, somehow, really, more important. Is that one of the unintended consequences of disciplinarity?

Let me end with this. I think the bigger question for our conversation is twofold. One part of the question is how we are going to transform the apparatuses of knowledge production to better enable us to produce the knowledge necessary to understand the contemporary world and to educate our students so that they are even better at it than we are. The other part of the question is how we invent new forms of communication that will enable us to recognize and to embody the fact that
understanding the world is not an individual project, nor is it a completely fragmented project. This can only be accomplished by creating forms of communication and conversation that cross all the boundaries: disciplinary boundaries, institutional boundaries, geographic boundaries, boundaries of identity and difference, boundaries of politics. To move the world in the direction where there are possibilities of hope requires resources for collective conversation.

When I was doing the research for We Gotta Get Out of This Place, I remember coming across an interview with a Right-wing pundit from a place like the Heritage Foundation, who said, “Our greatest fear is that the Left is going to realize it has the largest think-tank in the world at its disposal,” by which he meant the university system. But in fact, the Right didn’t need to worry about that because we [in that university system] don’t talk to each other! We don’t really want to as far as I can tell. We only produce endless differences. It doesn’t matter that basically what I’m saying is exactly what you said, I’m going to find the little chink in the way you said it that enables me to differentiate myself and offer what I now claim to be a new theory or a new analysis. Or we write within our own narrow circle of acolytes, never having to consider more modest ways of asserting a contribution to a larger set of projects. Rather than having a conversation in which originality and difference are not what’s at stake, shouldn’t we strive for a better collaborative effort to produce the kinds of knowledge we need, including knowledge about our own practices, and about our own educational practices? That seems to me the big challenge.

I have to say that I am not very optimistic even though there is lots of great political-intellectual work being done, both inside and outside the university. This is an extraordinary moment—in many ways, but also for intellectuals and universities. It is a moment when we should have the courage to fight not only for the right to say what we need to, to transform our own practices. And that means we will have to transform the institutional structures that enable or hinder the imagination and emergence of new forms of intellectual labor, of collectivities and conversations. As in many other fields, it is too easy to defend what we have been doing all along. Instead of re-imagining the university, and re-inventing intellectual projects—this is what I think cultural studies is trying to do—we want the world to believe that what we do is so valuable that they should just leave us alone. And that is an unlikely scenario for a successful political struggle, in my opinion.

JH: More than once during this interview you have explicitly or implicitly suggested the importance of the conversation, in part (to put it maybe too simply) because no one can do or say it alone. I take that to be a facet of your interest in the problematic of the multiplicity and the organization. But there’s another point worth making. Anyone who has constructed an image of you as too big for his britches (an infelicitous remark, I recognize, about someone who acknowledges his age) does not know you, as I have, as an intellectual whose work is driven by the aspiration toward ongoing conversation—toward a fierce awareness of the provisionality and contingencies of any “settlement.” I also thank you for introducing the term and idea of “conversation” into our interview because, as I will explain in the Introduction to
this issue (the introductory issue to my tenure as Editor), I want to build mechanisms for conversation into the journal's design and use. Hence, there is a series of interviews for this first issue, followed in the second issue by contributions and interventions from a younger generation about the current context. The first two issues, in that sense, will represent perspectives (some lines of conversation) across generations. Some of the contributors to the next issue of the journal are your former students. So you don't need to be too worried about not being adequately interpolated into the current mediascape. They will explain it for you—in your blissful absence. Many thanks for your help in this project, Larry.