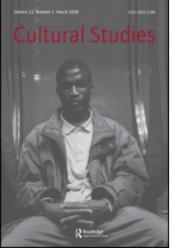
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Jonathan Sterne

JAMES CAREY AND RESISTANCE TO CULTURAL STUDIES IN NORTH AMERICA

Today, even established scholars sometimes take the opportunity to do cultural studies for granted. This essay attempts to reconstruct some of the difficulties that practitioners of cultural studies faced in the 1970s and examines James Carey's work in terms of the opportunities he opened up for other scholars, both because of his institutional position and because of the character of his work.

For scholars of my generation, it has become possible to take the existence and legitimacy of cultural studies for granted. This is certainly a great privilege when we look back on the careers of generations that went before us. Many (though certainly not all) of us no longer have to fight for the legitimacy of our work. We have journals in which to publish, conferences to attend, book series to read, academic positions to hold, and even canons to debate. A certain amount of historical forgetting can be liberating, especially if the hope is to conduct business-as-usual in the academic realm. But forgetting is also unfortunate, because in so far as people take cultural studies for granted, they will lose sight of both the opportunities and responsibilities that it affords. Cultural studies was never meant to just be about publications, syllabi, tenure and promotion. It was meant to be outward-looking. Whether or not one shares his influences or agrees with his propositions, James Carey's work – and the impact his work had on other scholars – serves as an exemplar and reminder of the fundamentals of the field.

To my knowledge, no formal study has traced the role of Carey as an 'epistemic individual' – to use Pierre Bourdieu's term (see Bourdieu 1988) – in the fields he professed: cultural studies, communication studies, journalism. Such a study would have to track the circulation of his ideas, the appearance of his work in bibliographies and syllabi, the positions of his students in the field and the positions he himself took in relationship to his interlocutors in order to better specify the importance and nature of his contribution. But in the absence of such work, we can turn to some more off-hand and autobiographical statements for hints as to what Carey accomplished:

I said to myself 'I have to find a name for these irregular historians, sociologists and then try to convince the Marxists to join with us.' I had



read, over the course of that summer (1963) The Logic of the Cultural Sciences by Max Weber. This was my first introduction to the hermeneutical, verstehen tradition, if you will, in its European form. I liked 'cultural science' as a name, but I did not want to use the word 'science.' [...] So I started to think of this assorted group of scholars under the umbrella name of cultural studies. Cultural studies was then little more than a term to describe the perceived commonalities in the work of Joe Gusfield, Jay Jensen, Erving Goffman, Thomas Kuhn, symbolic interactionism and the Chicago School of sociology, Kenneth Burke, Leslie Fielder and a small group of literary critics, and, of course, Marshall McLuhan and Harold Innis, along with those Marxists willing to associate with a group largely affiliated in opposition to positivism and positive science. This was a strange group to patch together, against their will if they knew about it [...] I did not realize at the time that others were using the same title elsewhere to describe their work (Carey & Grossberg 2006, pp. 20-21).

So goes James Carey's account of how he came to the term 'cultural studies' in 1963. The account may seem strange to contemporary eyes (and international audiences): Carey poses cultural studies as a response to the dominance of positivism in American communication research, whereas the history of cultural studies is often still told in terms of the humanities. This historical trajectory also suggests why many of the names on Carey's list do not appear to have made it into the disputed canon of cultural studies. Indeed, as with C. Wright Mills' (1959) use of the term – or examples from even earlier in the century – 'cultural studies' appears as a phrase of convenience in Carey's account, rather than carrying the substance or connotation we would expect to attend the term today. Other aspects of his account ought to seem more familiar: a willful eclecticism, a commitment to some notion of public or political engagement, and a Marxism free of its scientistic and doxic pretenses.

Yet if Carey originally cast 'cultural studies' as nothing more than a term of convenience or a strategy, it soon blossomed into a full project for him. To begin with, he wrote as though he was part of something bigger. At the time that Carey started using the term, he had already read Raymond Williams' *Culture and Society* (1958), and in his paradigmatic essays from the 1970s and 1980s, Carey stitches together an 'American' tradition of cultural studies, one that existed in dialogue with Hoggart, Williams and Hall, but that also took up the traditions of pragmatism that he himself championed. Carey's originality was in actually making the connections, in seeing the sympathies among diverse culturalist traditions, sympathies that allowed them to be brought together – always in a contingent and strategic fashion. It is easy to forget, especially with all the re-readings of American intellectual history these days, that when Carey first undertook this project in the 1960s and 1970s, he was quite atypical. In fact, as we read into acknowledgments, we see how novel this approach really was in the 1960s. Consider Lawrence Grossberg's story: 'after having studied at the Centre [...], and returned to the United States, I asked Stuart Hall where to continue my graduate career in cultural studies in the United States. The only answer he could give me was to go to the University of Illinois and to work with Jim Carey' (Grossberg 1997, p. 400, n7).

Carey was certainly not the only person thinking about culture at the time; but he was a remarkably synthetic thinker, and he was in an institutional position to promote cultural studies in the way others were not. Carey was able to take on doctoral students (key to Grossberg's story); he was also able to nurture others' work by virtue of his position. For instance, in the beginning of Media and the American Mind, Daniel Czitrom acknowledges Carey as a key source of 'inspiration': 'James W. Carey made a strong impression on me when I first heard him speak in Madison in 1974. In subsequent conversations and correspondence, Jim offered much-needed advice and encouragement during the amorphous early stages of defining my subject' (1982, pp. xiii-xiv). Media history was not really a field when Czitrom undertook his study, and it certainly was not considered an important area of intellectual history. Though Media and the American Mind (1982) might not be the first book that comes to mind as an example of cultural studies work, Czitrom's acknowledgment shows the degree to which Carey helped make it possible for scholars struggling in their own fields to pull together diverse objects, to combine inquiry into culture and media, and to mix theoretical and historical description.

Indeed, Carey was also busy carving out space for himself. Some of Carey's now-classic essays appeared outside traditional academic outlets, both because he believed it was the job of intellectuals to reach beyond their own limited milieux, but also because there simply were not readily available outlets to publish cultural studies work in the 1970s. His classic co-authored essay 'The Mythos of the Electronic Revolution,' for instance, originally appeared in The American Scholar, the official organ of Phi Beta Kappa (Carey 1988, p. xii). As Grossberg writes, it is often forgotten that in North America cultural studies showed up in education and communication programs long before it appeared in literature, anthropology or American Studies (1997, pp. 276-281). But even in these fields it remained a minority practice for a long time. Still in 1983, Carey called cultural studies 'one corner of the field of communication studies' (1983, p. 311) and his descriptively-titled 'Overcoming Resistance to Cultural Studies' first appeared in 1986 (Carey 1989). Carey's notions of culture ran against those prevalent in Communication Studies: traditionally, culture was understood as an 'environment' or a 'backdrop' upon which effects occurred, but it was not itself a vital, living site of activity (indeed, this limited notion of culture remains a mainstay of some

American communication studies programs). Again and again in his essays on cultural studies, Carey emphasizes the need to import a more expansive vision of culture derived or synthesized from pragmatism, philosophy, anthropology, literature and Marxism. The repetition was important, because, as we know, academic practice changes only slowly.

Though it would take many more pages to chronicle the struggle for the opportunity to do cultural studies in North America, Carey's work and biography should remind us of just how much work it took for us to be in a position today where it would even be conceivable to take the opportunity to do cultural studies for granted. Carey's oeuvre consistently shows marks of his own institutional struggles, and his writings on cultural studies remind us that it is a field that at its best reacts to and overcomes the more conservative tendencies of academe. To uphold Carey's vision of cultural studies today does not mean we must keep alive old bibliographies (though it is always good to revisit old books), nor does it mean that we must adhere to or fill out available paradigms, pragmatist or otherwise. Rather, to honor Carey's work today means that we must strive to see connections across periods and disciplines that others have not made; we must do our best to support progressive work that otherwise would not get done; and we must do all this with an eye toward both our academic and social responsibilities as intellectuals.

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