Copernican revolution

The metaphoric moment when it was realised that the earth moved around the sun, and not vice versa.

The so-called Copernican revolution of the fifteenth century destroyed the belief that the earth was the centre of the universe. An obvious problem with this idea as a revolution is that it took a very long time for the ideas of Copernicus to permeate the general culture, somewhat the opposite of a revolution. Similarly, the theoretical events that have been compared to the Copernican revolution are perhaps exaggerated when being described as momentous events that shocked the world.

It is, for example, often claimed that Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure decentred language and destroyed the 'metaphysics of presence' that had dominated western philosophy since the beginning of time. The revolution was such that his work was almost entirely ignored for 50 years before being brought to light by the structuralists of the 1950s and 1960s. It is an interesting fact of recent intellectual history that there are constant claims that all **knowledge** that precedes the paradigmatic shift of the postmodern period is seen to be tainted and inadequate, whether it be from the 'metaphysics of presence' or the allusion of **subjectivity** as the author. The **metaphor** of revolution, and of the Copernican revolution, must be the single most overused term in the entire history of western thought.

Counterculture

A new anti-establishment form of culture.

This term was coined to describe the new wave of largely middle-class protest movements, for example, the hippies, who

were protesting against the cultural values of the establishment. Although the hippies' main target was originally the Vietnam War, the counterculture also railed against the values and goals of **capitalism**, the work ethic, the patriarchy and society's dependence on technology. An anti-capitalist message was central to the counterculture.

As it is used now the term refers to any minority group opposing a dominant culture as long as it is doing so in an articulate manner. It is similar to **subculture**, but the latter is largely a working-class phenomenon. The current anti-world trade demonstrations are the continuation of this counterculture.
See also Subculture.

Critical theory

Interdisciplinary approach to social and cultural analysis.

Critical theorists use social science research methods as a force for political and social engagement. Developed first by Max Horkheimer and adopted by the Frankfurt School of intellectuals in post-World War II Europe, critical theory rapidly spread throughout Europe and America and became the intellectual basis of the New Left. Students and radicals in the 1960s and 1970s found in critical theory the catalyst they had been seeking to turn Marxist theory into effective social and political action. Critical theory is characterised by its emancipatory and reflective approach and, since the 1980s, has found its way into textual analysis in the work of structuralists and postmodernists such as Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida. Jürgen Habermas is today's most notable critical theorist.

Cult

Small esoteric group often founded on religious belief or shared ideas.

It is interesting to note just how often this term is used in cultural analysis and **popular culture** today, in expressions ranging from cult movies right through to the sinister and dangerous activities of religious cults that are indicative of deeply anomic social groups hostile to society. The popular cultural use of the term denotes little more than an enthusiasm for a particular popular film or pop-group, what might have been called a film buff or a fan in an earlier period. A cult following suggests a new kind of fan, however, someone who is committed to the esoteric minutiae of a film or a pop group or even a football team.

At this level of obsessive interest we can see where the problems of **identity** overlap with dominant cultural structures. In a fragmented world, identifying with a specific group solves many of the problems of **anomie**. This problem of identification was touched on by Sigmund Freud in his theories of how group identification works in society, and how groups can be a way for individuals to lose themselves by dissolving into the group. Cults provide an organised form of social behaviour which absolves the individual of decision making, a process that the Frankfurt School identified in their analysis of what they called the 'authoritarian personality'. This kind of personality wants to find an external authority, like the father, to direct it in an alienated world, and therefore easily falls prey to charismatic leadership and social control. The Frankfurt School were particularly talking about the rise of fascism in Germany and the way in which the Fuhrer, the 'Father', led a movement in which total obedience was required.

Western liberalism elevates the individual as the locus of rationality and reason, but in reality the individual, and the

individual ego, are under threat in present-day culture, and the group provides a form of security against an alien world. Identification is an important and complex process in **culture** and the decline of the family leads individuals to find identity in cults and group patterns. Cults from Scientology to the Aum group develop anomie to extreme lengths, and elevate the eccentric law of the father to a quasi-religious status. The weakness of the ego in modern society and the dominance of electronic media that are predicated on creating viewer identification with the presenter produce electronic cults organised around soap-operas and cult programs.

Psychological manipulation is one of the key organisational principles of postmodern consumer society, and it is therefore no surprise that groups which reject **society** form cults that mirror that kind of psychological manipulation, as L. Ron Hubbard made apparent when he invented Scientology and its methods of indoctrination and incorporation. More recently, in America, however, it has been right-wing fundamentalist and white-supremacist cults that have been the real danger, and they have been responsible for hundreds of deaths. It is interesting to note that the cult of 'whiteness' is difficult to combat because it articulates dominant ideologies that are normally hidden and suppressed.

Cultural capital

The transmission of privileges from one generation to the next.

This is an important term that was developed by the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, and he uses it in a way that draws on the notion of capital itself, or economic power. Just as capital is central to the reproduction of the class system at the economic level, so cultural capital is important in reproducing social and cultural relations. Cultural capital operates in a similar way

to economic power in that access to the dominant **power** system dictates how successful individuals are within the educational system, how much cultural capital they control. The term is used to refer to cultural knowledge, behaviour, taste and acceptable opinions and consumption—in other words, a pattern of social distinction and cultural consumption that fits in with the dominant culture.

Ruling-class culture is reproduced in complicated and subtle ways, and learning the appropriate patterns of behaviour is a lifelong process. In Britain this transmission of cultural capital can be seen quite clearly in the system of (private) public schools and the Oxford–Cambridge axis, in which family and history still play a very important role. While great play is made of the democratisation of cultural life in the advanced capitalist countries, there is much evidence that cultural capital is still an important mechanism in delimiting access to symbolic capital. The legal system in Britain is a historically moulded concretisation of cultural capital in which judges are secretly elected as being of the 'right stuff'; not surprisingly, 95 per cent of all top judges are from the upper middle classes and went to the top schools. The number of working-class students going to the elite universities has fallen over the last 20 years, and private schools and colleges have expanded. Bourdieu also makes the point that the idea of cultural capital is equally applicable in the communist societies of the East, where the elite can make sure that their children enjoy the benefits of their privilege and patronage, despite a lack of private property.

Bourdieu's argument that cultural domination is exercised through cultural capital is similar to Antonio Gramsci's theory of **hegemony**, which concerns the way the dominant classes exercise their cultural power through consensus rather than coercion. In cultural terms this can be seen in the way that repressed cultures often copy and replicate the modes and mores of the dominant culture. The classic teddy boys of the 1950s

affected a style of dress that was directly copied from the upper-class Edwardian dandies, just as much of today's fashion apes the style and mores of the rich and famous.

Family and education are still the main transmitters of cultural capital, of accumulated cultural knowledge or behaviour, and while the media claim a democratic culture, there are clear patterns of audience differentiation which reproduce ideologies of distinction.

Cultural populism

An approach to popular culture that celebrates its diversity and anti-establishment politics.

In **cultural studies** in the last decade there has arisen an approach to **popular culture** that sees it not as the degraded mass culture of earlier analysis, but as an affirmative experience which is inherently critical and political. This cultural populism overlaps with postmodern approaches that celebrate the radical and carnivalesque nature of all popular culture.

The work of John Fiske, Paul Willis and John Docker has been highly influential in this area. In essence their approach highlights the creative and critical elements of popular culture and downplays the commercialised and standardised parts of it. What Fiske argues is that while popular texts appear to reinforce the status quo, to reproduce dominant cultural ideas, in fact many people respond creatively to the works of popular culture that they encounter, often reworking the meanings of these texts.

Fiske introduces interesting arguments about the way in which people encounter the texts of popular culture, by which we mean television programmes, films, videos, magazines, newspaper articles, etc. In an original approach, Fiske argues that rather than just absorbing the ideological messages they carry, people react

to the texts of popular culture initially by evading the ideological message, then by creating offensive forms of reaction to that message. This can certainly be seen at football matches, where fans compete to recreate dominant messages in abusive forms of group chanting. Fiske then goes on to argue that acts of evasion are followed by a process of oppositional **decoding** that he calls productivity. In this phase, Fiske appears to be arguing, the meanings of the text are reconstituted at either the literal or imaginative level so as to be rendered wholly different. Drawing on Bakhtin's arguments about the nature of the carnivalesque, Fiske claims that popular texts display a kind of primitive anti-elitism, a comic disrobing of the pretensions of the elite, which is equivalent to the evasion and rejection he analyses.

This kind of metaphoric theory is interesting in the way it draws parallels across different historical eras, but it is also reductionist when it fails to differentiate between early medieval society and the mass consumer society we live in today. As a result of this kind of theoretical blurring of real situations in favour of sweeping generalisations about **culture**, Fiske is able to argue that the populist rhetoric of much popular culture is the same thing as political resistance. The problem with this argument is that it allows Ronald Reagan's populist rhetoric—a version of extreme right-wing individualism concocted out of westerns and *Reader's Digest* philosophy—to be identified as 'evasive' and 'productive'. There are power relations in all cultural production and **consumption**, and dismissing these in favour of analysing merely the surface of cultural artefacts seems theoretically innocent, to put it at its most favourable.

There are those who argue that cultural populism is the theoretical partner of free-market ideologies which argue that whatever people want, they should have, and that it is elitist to criticise the people's cultural choice. This position simply begs the question of who controls cultural production and consumption, and to what end.

Cultural reproduction

The way in which culture is transmitted through generations.

Cultures are transmitted over time and are reproduced through family, socialisation and education. Analysing the way in which **culture** is transmitted or reproduced is an important mechanism for understanding a particular culture. Tradition is a central mode by which culture is reproduced, and it has a deep psychological structure which gives it a quasi-religious status. There has been much recent work in **cultural studies** on the invention of tradition and its relationship to political change and development. Nations are formed on the basis of cultural myths of origin and national character, and one of the functions of cultural reproduction is to develop and sustain those national ideologies. At the micro-level, individuals and class cultures are reproduced in the family, and some feminists have argued that the family was the key site of the reproduction of patriarchy. Culture, like capital, is accumulated, and cultural practice and cultural reproduction exercise a powerful defining force in shaping society.

The term is used particularly in the work of innovatory French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu. He argues that the educational system effectively functions simply to reproduce the dominant culture by reproducing the distribution of **cultural capital** through the kind of cultural leadership that Antonio Gramsci described as hegemonic. What Bourdieu means by this claim is that the hierarchical systems within education ensure that those social groups with the greatest understanding of the forms in which that exclusion is exercised naturally secure the best results from the system. This is how cultural reproduction operates as a seemingly natural process of selection, and only the right sorts of people are selected. In cultural studies this is sometimes described as being a domination of the processes of signification, or control of what

sorts of cultural meaning are generated in society and also what kinds of cultural practice are accorded status.

It is clear from the history of cultural studies as a discipline that for a long time working-class culture, or mass culture, was seen as intrinsically inferior to traditional culture, and this alone should alert us to the fact that we are faced with forms of cultural reproduction that reflect dominant **power** structures. Cultural judgements, like aesthetic judgements, are made from a particular point of view and reflect the group or class interests upon which they are based. It is to the credit of **postmodernism** as a theory that it has demonstrated the point that almost all cultural viewpoints can be equally valid and defensible in their own right. Cultural judgements reflect power structures and while popular culture often criticises elitest assumptions, those established ideas and practices carry a very significant psychological and ideological weight that is reinforced through cultural reproduction. What Bourdieu is getting at is the complicated process whereby there operates a psychosocial reproduction of culture and class.

Cultural studies

A mega-term that encompasses most of what used to be called the humanities.

In the beginning there was literary studies, and then there was a sociology of literature which began to include what was called 'mass' or 'popular' literature. This then developed into the study of **culture** in general and, more radically, into the study of **popular culture**, which had previously not been thought a subject worthy of attention. Cultural studies has always sought to locate the study of culture within the broader socioeconomic context, and in this it has always been a radical project, initially influenced by Marxism and later by feminist and structuralist ideas.

Under the influence of the New Left in the 1960s and 1970s, cultural studies also took a turn towards continental Marxism and its structuralist and semiotic offshoots. The work of Louis Althusser was a central influence in this shift and led to a reworking of the field which in turn led to an interest in **semiology**, the work of Roland Barthes and a more theoretically orientated analysis, rather than a concentration on the empirical discussion of working-class culture. In the 1980s, feminist criticism of the male-orientated gaze of the objects of study led to new directions in cultural studies, as did the assertion of the ethnocentric nature of cultural studies, and the field began to fragment further.

What constitutes cultural studies as a discipline or a mode of inquiry today is much debated, but it can be characterised as an interdisciplinary mode of analysis of all forms of culture which pays attention to the location of culture within wider socioeconomic frameworks. The dominance of the electronic media, and the power of consumer orientated culture, means that **identity** and politics in postmodern society are constructed in the circuits of culture that now constitute the global society; and cultural studies has become the study of global culture.

Cultural studies encompasses literary studies, media studies, **feminism**, Marxism, film studies, cultural anthropology, the study of popular culture, **subcultures**, cultural industries, questions of **race** and **ethnicity**, **psychoanalysis**, post-colonial studies, **poststructuralism** and **postmodernism**. It is worth listing the scope in this fashion merely to demonstrate the hybrid nature of the discipline, and to pose the question of whether cultural studies is now in fact the central discipline in the humanities. This opens up the question of whether cultural studies is in fact a 'cultural politics', committed to a **deconstruction** of the dominant culture, or whether it has become the institutionalised framework of general studies within a mass, postmodern, higher education marketplace.

Culturalism

An approach in cultural studies that emphasises the autonomy of culture.

An early approach within **cultural studies**, culturalism emphasised the autonomy of **culture** and its importance in reflecting the political and communal struggles of different classes. Culturalism originated both in the English critic F.R. Leavis's emphasis on the crucial shaping role of culture within **society**—what he called the civilising value—and the early work of Richard Hoggart and Raymond Williams, who sought to expand that position to working-class culture. What they were arguing was that, through an examination of the communal culture of a class—the lived experiences and cultural products—the attitudes and values of a community could be understood within their own terms, not in terms imposed from a 'high culture' perspective.

This was only radical in any sense because prior to their intervention, working-class culture was taken to be inferior and irrelevant, whereas they were arguing that it could be seen as complex, communal and as intrinsically interesting as any other culture. This was a critical step in the development of cultural studies since it brought **popular culture** within a proper intellectual framework for the first time. Williams and his colleagues also argued that popular culture should not be understood as a degraded form of entertainment that distracted the masses while acting as a conveyor belt for dominant ideology, but as a complex phenomenon whose messages were polysemous. Culturalism elevates human agency and cultural choice over a notion of culture imposed from above and, as such, is politically progressive and anti-structuralist.

In highlighting human experience—the lived—and valorising this experience, structuralists argued that culturalists fell into the

trap of individualism and of ignoring the determinate structures of language and **ideology** which, for them, defined the social formation and the possible categories through which experience could be lived. The second phase of cultural studies, during which structuralist approaches became dominant, overshadowed this earlier culturalist phase and replaced the idea of lived community with that of language, structure and **discourse**.

Culture

The forms of thinking and acting in a given society.

Culture is a megaword in current **cultural studies** because so much of our understanding of social habits in contemporary society is bound up with analysing what cultural changes have occurred and why. We live in a period of human history in which change is so rapid that one generation may constitute the lifetime of a particular culture, and in which technology reinvents itself every five years, and this rate of change is accelerating. If we used a timescale of 1:1000 million years to compare the history of all human cultures to the life of the planet, we would find that human activity had existed for about one week, the industrial revolution for about one minute and postmodern culture for about 0.1 of a second, at a very generous estimate. Yet this technologically driven, global culture is what we accept as normal. We see it as a 'thick culture', one that we are part of and deeply implicated in and which is taken for granted. This tells us two very contradictory things about culture: one, that it changes very rapidly under the pressure of economic and social development; and two, that we always take it for granted as though it is natural. Culture, like religion, is society worshipping itself, and mobile phones have become the rosary beads of postmodern culture in the last five years.

The strangest fact about culture is that a very similar human species has produced the most astonishingly varied patterns and forms of culture over the centuries, cultures that have opposed one another and indulged in incredible bloodshed to validate the truth of one culture over another. Culture, we may say, seeks to explain life, but the infinite variety of cultures suggests that explanations may not always accord with either the facts or the potentiality of life to exceed the facts. Understanding culture is, then, one of the key tasks that faces most of the humanities and social sciences; defining it is almost as difficult. Thus it is that cultural studies has effectively become a discipline in its own right, centred on the many different ways that culture can be analysed. All culture is socially constructed but always seems to seek to create the illusion of a natural past, which suggests that there is a deep psychological residue to all cultural forms.

Culture is an important megaword, then, because of its flex-ibility and its wide use in many disciplines but, it would be fair to say, there is little agreement about its meaning. Raymond Williams famously said that it is 'one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language', and that undoubt-edly relates to the fact that culture is a developing reality which changes more and more rapidly. The most straightforward example of these changes can be found in the fact that Williams has an entry in his *Keywords* for 'popular' but not for **popular culture**, a term which is today almost a disciplinary object in its own right.

Along with many other terms, 'culture' has been problematised by the structuralist and poststructuralist revolutions in thought, which have criticised many of the basic assumptions that under-pinned the socialist–humanist framework within which Williams operated. In some ways the idea of culture as an expression of the better forms of human creativity underlies Williams' approach, and that assumption, too, has been regularly attacked as a histor-ical illusion in the last two decades. Historically, culture has

almost always been associated with elites and their domination of cultural practices, and it is this fundamentally political question that reappears in present-day rejections of traditional cultures. However, before deconstructing culture as an illusion, it would be worthwhile to look at the different positions that have been adopted over the definition of culture this century.

As Williams observed, the historical roots of the term go back to the idea of culturing something in the sense of growing or tending it, and this basic notion of a natural process has persisted until recently, when notions of culture as 'natural' have been overturned. At the most general level there are two broad definitions which take up the different uses of the term. First, there is culture as the artistic, linguistic and literary forms of **civilisation**; the intellectual and spiritual expressions of thought, art and literature. Second, there is culture as the much broader idea of 'way of life', the description of all of the symbolic and material aspects of human life, language and behaviour, including attitudes, artefacts, beliefs, sciences, customs and habits. In other words the complex whole of non-biological activity. This definition relates culture to material production.

Both of these definitions are very broad, and can endlessly be broken down into smaller subdivisions—such as popular culture, high culture and class culture—but they represent the fundamental axis along which the debate is carried on. An even broader definition would be to say that culture is the organised forms of the social production and reproduction of meaning, knowledge and values; the totality of forms of activity that differentiate human societies from others. Put like this there doesn't seem to be much difference between culture and **society**, whereas of course there is a considerable difference, which is why the definitions that accentuate the 'meaning/signifying' aspects of culture are probably the most important.

One of the central difficulties about culture is that it seems natural to the individual, whereas culture is in fact a man-made

artefact which has always been subjected to change and development. The more established a culture is, the more natural it feels and the less its socially constructed nature is apparent. Understanding culture then becomes difficult because culture is always bound up with education, **power** and forms of class consciousness and **ideology**. It is probably the case that it is easier to analyse culture in its more specific manifestations, like popular culture or punk culture, and that overarching theories of culture, like **structuralism**, posit such grand generalisations that they fail to conceptualise the 'lived-ness' of culture. Williams always emphasised the experiential, lived-in quality of culture and its contradictory political nature, which contrasts fairly sharply with many structuralist definitions of culture which define it as a monolithic concept. The definition of 'high' and 'popular' (or low) culture is a useful way of historically separating out the different approaches to understanding culture, since it highlights the implied historical sense of culture as 'cultivated' or superior.

Raymond Williams (1981) defined culture as consisting of three related elements: a 'lived' element, a 'documentary' element and an 'ideal' element. There is a more anthropological feel to Williams' approach to culture, and this is positive in that anthropology had always had a neutral and non-evaluative approach to the complexities of culture. Cultural studies took up this more anthropological approach and began to consider all cultures as intrinsically interesting, rather than comparing an ennobling high culture to a debased low culture. Williams' definition also incorporates the interconnectedness of different forms of culture, an approach which echoes that of Antonio Gramsci, who first looked at the ways in which elite, mass and traditional cultures were dynamically interrelated and always being contested.

By the lived element of culture, Williams is referring to 'whole ways of life': the patterns, forms and structures of everyday life that form a coherent whole and which cultural studies examines

in looking at youth culture, ethnic groups, **subcultures**, audiences and new social movements. The 'documentary' aspects of culture relate to the way in which meaning and culture are framed and communicated in society, particularly in the media, entertainment, film, literature and any other systems of communication that record and transmit cultural meanings. The 'ideal' element of culture refers to what was traditionally seen as the proper study of criticism and analysis: the art, literature and elite creative work of the dominant culture.

The question in literary and cultural studies became one of estimating the value of these kinds of cultural artefacts: did they have status because of their intrinsic qualities, or because they were the officially sanctioned culture of elite groups? The answer to this question is rather more complicated than sometimes seems the case, since dismissing, as many Marxists did, all **bourgeois** art and literature for ideological reasons means throwing out the Shakespeare with the monarchist poet laureate. Cultural studies brought to the fore all of these questions of how to evaluate different kinds of culture, and has persistently stressed the socially constructed dimensions of culture, and the difficulties of analysing cultural formations that are in a constant state of flux.

Cyberpunk

A politico-aesthetic movement that utilises technology and music to create new forms.

This is a very recent term that obviously derives from **cyberspace** and also from the rebellious punk movement of the 1970s and 1980s. Cyberpunk is difficult to define because, rather like punk itself, it is as much an attitude as a set of ideas. It can best be described as the coming together of the world of high technology and the low world of underground music and rock

rebellion. Cyberpunk is an urban postmodern reaction to the uniformity of technological order, as well as being a transgression of the **binary oppositions** of nature and science, organic and inorganic, male and female, human and machine.

Like the figure of the **cyborg**, the cyberpunk claims an indeterminate identity and a free-floating space in which to operate. Cyberpunk recycles the objects and ideas of the dominant culture in a blasphemous remix of subcultural memories and a technological subversion of control. Cyberpunk includes 'hackers' as well as 'neurotechnology', the street as the site of recycling and the technosphere as the possibility of global regeneration. In all, cyberpunk is an anarchic expression of the destruction of all boundaries, and a self-mutilating freedom that subverts and rejects the **body**.

Cyberspace

The virtual world made possible by new digital and telecommunications technologies, especially the Internet and interactive communication.

This is a term that has a very recent history and yet has already so entered everyday usage that its meaning is taken for granted. Cyberspace is a potential or virtual space where humans interact through computers, creating a new dimension of communication, interaction and new forms of **knowledge**. The Internet is seen as being the primary region of cyberspace, although cyberspace also has other spatial and aesthetic dimensions. Quite fittingly, the term was coined by William Gibson who saw cyberspace as a kind of hallucinatory new dimension where information, **virtual reality** and public communication blended in a new form. Gibson apparently said later that the term was a 'cut-up word', an invention to describe a new mode of communication. The term is already used without qualification or

criticism, itself an indication of how fast the communication cultural revolution is occurring.

According to the most optimistic proponents of cyberspace, it is producing a new kind of global mind and giving rise to the most revolutionary change in socio-cultural life since the invention of the printing press. In the form of the Internet, cyberspace is clearly revolutionising the way that society operates, particularly in terms of commerce, although whether it is another dimension of **culture** remains to be seen.

Critics of ideas about cyberspace point out that it is used as a term within a cultural **ecology** of new technology: this means that while there are discussions about how people use the Internet, there is little concrete discussion of the actual technologies and their historical development. Technology is immersed in mysticism, a charge that was often levelled against Marshall McLuhan's optimistic analysis of the 'global village' in his seminal work *The Medium Is the Massage* (1967). The question 'What is a virtual community?' brings home this new strain of positivism: the term 'virtual community' is constantly used in a self-congratulatory fashion without any clarification. **Virtual reality** may be a metaphor for a new cultural dimension, but computer industries are tightly organised forms of economic and social power, and the relationship between the two is still being theorised.

Cyborg

A creature (cybernetic organism) of the post-gender world.

This term was originally coined by the defence and science industries to refer to hybrid systems that incorporated organic and technological elements. Donna Haraway gave the term a feminist inflection in her ground-breaking 1985 article 'A manifesto for cyborgs: science, technology, and socialist feminism in

the 1980s'. Haraway argues that the cyborg is a figure that represents a way to think past the naturalised categories of **race**, **class** and **gender** and to rethink the impact of technology on social relations and, in particular, gender relations. This is to say, the cyborg can be seen as prefigurative reality in which the possibilites of a utopian technological future can be imagined.

The cyborg has entered **popular culture** through science fiction and film, and has already inspired many myths about the development and dissolution of human/science boundaries. Haraway uses the idea of the cyborg to posit a new form of hybrid **subjectivity** that is outside the constraints of existing social realities, the potentiality of which occupies a space she calls 'cyberfeminism'. Instead of the organic, whole and natural female self, she argues that women should seize the possibilities inherent in new technology, in networks, to become a 'post-modern collective and personal self'. The cyborg is meant to be representative of a post-gender world.

There are those who view this optimism about technological possibility as being misplaced, seeing in technology the threat of controlling women's bodies as much as the promise of liberating them. The body is everywhere changing, however, and the prefigurative form of the cyborg suggests ways of moving beyond the naturalism that dominates much of our thinking.

Deconstruction

The practice of exposing metaphysics as historical illusion; taking apart hierarchical oppositions of western metaphysics.

The idea of deconstruction and its application is seminal to all **cultural studies** over the last 20 years, both because of its attack

on **structuralism** but also because of its magpie-like attitude to all theoretical discourses, its chameleon-like ability to change its nature as it develops and its passage from obscure theory to acceptance in **popular culture**. Like **postmodernism**, the term 'deconstruct' has entered the lexicon of popular cultural journalism that now espouses theory as a kind of lifestyle. Its indeterminacy is its strength, and its playfulness fits perfectly with the insouciance of postmodern paradigms. According to Jacques Derrida, it is not a question of abandoning philosophy but of borrowing from the traditions of philosophy the means to deconstruct that tradition. One is therefore outside of, but working within, philosophy in order to prove its endless delusion of absolute meaning.

Deconstruction is the dominant trend in **poststructuralism**. It is also a philosophical method, a mode of literary analysis and, according to some, a nihilistic end point of self-indulgent literary theory. Derrida coined the term in his 1967 key text *Of Grammatology* and has been developing it ever since. Before Derrida, people read texts to understand their point of view; now, after Derrida (AD) we 'deconstruct' texts in order to show that all texts meet the same fate, which is that of self-contradiction. At its most simple level, deconstruction is an approach which claims that it is fundamentally wrong to assume that a text has a fixed meaning which can be recovered through a straightforward reading. It is in literary theory that this approach has had the most influence, particularly in the United States, although it has also filtered into the work and writing of many other disciplines. There are always two basic moves in deconstruction: firstly, the critique and reversal of **binary oppositions** that hierarchically structure the object of critique, Derrida's example of 'speech' over 'writing' being the most infamous. This move demonstrates the **logocentrism** which guarantees these hierachical binary oppositions through the idea of presence, or

centre. The second move is to look at the dispersal of meaning along the lines of what Derrida calls **difference**, or the instability of meaning.

Derrida's first step in grammatology (which means 'theory of writing') is to analyse the way in which he sees great philosophers as forever denouncing writing as being inferior to speech, which is favoured as being more redolent of human meaning. Philosophers may give precedence to speech, although that is debatable, but Derrida's own view is certainly not clear. His is more a theory of metaphysics than a theory of writing. Philosophers' concern with writing—the dead, dispersed permanent record of metaphysical illusion—is proof of their delusions and their desire to indulge in the metaphysics of certainty. This 'myth-of-presence' (what Derrida also calls **logocentrism**) is there for Derrida in the deadness of language, in the inert traces of writing as opposed to speech.

Deconstruction is about exposing the falsity of metaphysics, of the idea of fixed, centred meaning and of the mythical presences that purport to give sanction to the illusion of meaning. Since meaning is seen as being guaranteed by the illusion of an external presence—whether it be God, the author, myths of origin or whatever—then it is similarly the case that writing, or texts, carry a similar illusion as to the making of meaning. The elision from logocentrism to textual criticism is difficult to justify since an author may well be presenting not an absolutist claim of knowledge but a specific textual rendition of the undecidability of specific meaning. In fact, many novels are precisely about that undecidability, and may even have a deconstructive aim themselves. Forcing such texts through the deconstructive mill appears to replace the illusion of the author with the disillusion of the critic.

Deconstruction historically developed out of structuralism, and its basis in linguistic theory is obvious at every turn, hence its description as a philosophy of **poststructuralism**. If we see

deconstruction as a reaction to the limitations of structuralist oppositions and the inflexible patterns of analysis that structuralism led to, it makes more sense. Where structuralists saw meaning as fixed in the position of the sign, Derrida sees this only as a displacement, a deferment. At the level of language, Derrida wants to escape from the system that imprisons the process of representation, but his debt to that system is always there, which is one of the many conundrums of deconstruction. Deconstruction has, however, one form of escape from the system, which is the claim that meaning can never be fixed, is always deferred, just as a deconstructive analysis of a text will never arrive at a final definition.

As if to counter this undecidability and endless transformation of potentiality, deconstruction advocates a close reading of the text, a painstaking shifting of its flaws, and attempts to create meaning, to kick over the traces of its own complicity in illusion. Such reading inevitably finds the contradiction in the text's attempts to pass itself off as coherent, and the marginalised, repressed elements of the text's hierarchy of oppositions is brought into play. The constant movement within deconstruction between levels of meaning and discourse, emphasising the marginalised and the repressed, and the open-endedness of the text have led one critic to remark that deconstruction is no more than 'a careful teasing out of warring forces of signification within the text'. This is a position that it is difficult not to agree with, although critics are more sceptical about deconstruction's claims to rewriting the entire history of philosophy and thought. However, even when deconstructive analysis of a literary text is considered, it rapidly becomes apparent that the endless play of signification and the 'warring forces' are always everywhere remarkably similar. Like old-fashioned Marxist readings of classical texts, one starts with a complex narrative and ends with the same old story: a fishy bit of **ideology** dangling from the deconstructive hook.

Desire

Naughty, but nice.

Although Sigmund Freud developed the psychological concept of desire, physical desire had long been accepted as a phenomenon. Freud assumed that because women did not have penises, they would automatically desire them (penis envy) and, if they could not have them, they would castrate the men who did (castration complex). In Freudian thought desire resides in the subconscious, which often influences our actions.

In postmodern thought 'desire' has come to represent all levels of libidinal drive and such drives are seen to subvert the rational mind. Michel Foucault argued that acceptable sexual desire in society had been limited to heterosexuality within the sanctity of marriage. Throughout the late twentieth century, much political activism targeted desire, for example, the women's liberation movement and the gay rights lobby.

Determinism

Reducing events to their basic causes.

Determinism reduces events in the world to a few causal factors and disregards the effect of individual autonomous actions and of complex causal chains. For example, biological determinism argues that physical characteristics, together with population patterns, are solely responsible for shaping society.

Diaspora

A term that refers to a relational network; the connections of dispersal.

This historical term was originally used to describe the experience of the Jewish people after they were scattered following

the Roman domination of Palestine in the first century AD. The term refers to their common experience and connection after being forced into exile. This experience of ethnic or cultural groups being dispersed or scattered has been repeated throughout history, particularly during the periods of **colonialism** and **imperialism**. Thus the term has come to be used in studies of **race** and **ethnicity** to describe and discuss this experience of dislocation and the ways in which cultural affinities are maintained when groups are dispersed, as in slavery.

Diaspora does not just mean dispersal but also alludes to the fact that violence and threat have historically been constitutive of the experience of the dispersed. The identity that is shared in the experience of the diaspora is, then, not just a community of interests but a dynamic of suffering and deprivation which is a powerful political force that insists on memory as a means of dealing with the present. This kind of experience has been shared by many ethnic groups, including Irish, African, Caribbean, Chinese and Filipino, among others. The fact of dispersal, of discontinuity, tends to produce a symbolism that exaggerates belonging and creates an idealised illusion of homeland, a sense of essential **identity** which is also displaced. Rather than a settled 'national' identity, the diasporic experience is one of change, threat, hope and nostalgia, reflecting an unsettled community that has to constantly rebuild itself—the very model for society today.

The black diaspora, or what Paul Gilroy (1993) has called the Black Atlantic diaspora, created through slavery, and the Jewish diaspora, reinforced through the holocaust, have been the most extreme examples of social and cultural dislocation in the last two centuries. Their experience has been somewhat mirrored, however, by the post-World War II exodus of the Palestinians.

Difference

A Saussurian term expressing the belief that language is created solely through the use of comparison and contrast between word and concept.

Difference reigns supreme in critical thought at the present time, so much so that it has taken on a quasi-religious status in much cultural thought. Difference is a megaword with a difference, since at its simplest level it merely refers to the fact that things are different, or are experienced differently, or are not identical. This simple definition has given rise to an astonishing array of variegated meanings.

Uses of the term spread through **cultural studies** from its original meaning in structural linguistics, in the work of Ferdinand de Saussure, through **feminism**, literary and media studies to poststructuralist and deconstructionist philosophies, acquiring more and more complex layers of meaning as it unfolded. Difference, specifically sexual difference, has also been a keyword in feminist theory over the last two decades.

Difference is expressed most obviously in **binary oppositions** to the thing that the subject is not, like light/dark, dead/alive, sane/insane, etc. Saussure argues that binary oppositions are essential to the production of meaning and that difference is therefore an important element in understanding language and culture. This may not seem immediately obvious, but what Saussure is saying is that within language—or, more properly, the structural relations which make up the system of language— the production of meaning is made up by presences and absences: the sign is what it is because it is not the other elements that could be used from the system. For example, to say 'dog' is not to say 'cat' or, to put it another way, 'dog' means 'not-cat' rather than positively 'dog'. Thus for Saussure 'there are only differences without positive terms' in language. So difference is

somehow an absolutely fundamental principle of all language and since the structuralists compare culture to language then difference is a central principle in **culture**.

Awareness of difference was taken up at the textual level, at the ideological level and at the level of **gender** and culture. This led on to the question of **identity** and difference, which has also become a central argument in recent cultural studies, and to the centrality of difference in feminist studies. In literary and cultural studies the pursuit of difference looked at the structure of oppositions within a text, the relationships between the kinds of binary structures that gave meaning to a literary work: the opposition between the country and the city, the goodie and the baddie in westerns, or the mother and the whore, etc.

It has regularly been claimed, however, that there is an imbalance between the opposing terms of binary oppositions, and that there is always a dominant term. So literary texts began to be examined in terms not only of difference but also of what was suppressed: the not-said of oppositions that give rise to dominant readings and cultural interpretations. However, structuralist readings of texts were dominated by the concern with difference, which elevated the dualistic nature of all thinking to a universal principle, an approach which was heavily criticised by Jacques Derrida and the deconstructionists.

Difference, as used by Derrida, combines the general sense of difference and of deferment: it is the way in which meaning is permanently deferred, is unstable and potential. In this it is the opposite of the fixed meaning of metaphysics, the **logo-centrism** that maintains the fiction of absolute meaning. This deferment, displacement, delay, postponement, impossibility of meaning that Derrida endlessly rehearses at one level seems exactly like the binary opposite of the absolute meaning that he denounces, thus seemingly imprisoning him in the very system he is always attempting to escape. He has fairly regularly reworked this concept of difference, which seems logical enough

given his commitment to the falsity of fixed meaning, but this can make writing about it unproductive. The obvious question would seem to be whether or not there is some position on meaning which is somewhere between total indeterminacy and absolute meaning.

In all fields of study difference is counterposed to **identity**, or essentialism or foundationalism, so that it is taken for granted that difference is a productive term. Stressing difference and plurality is all very well but there then comes a time, we may say in the last instance, when some communal identity or sameness might be politically useful in constructing community or social movements. Posing essentialist identities or fixed meanings as the enemy against which difference elevates itself sometimes seems no more than the endless poststructuralist insistence on deferral and fragmentation; men and women are different but they seem to use exactly the same language of difference. Furthermore, conceptualising all social realities as difference seems to elide the questions of **class**, economic power and **cultural capital** that still seem to determine much of what passes for social reality.

Discourse

A body of ideas, an ensemble of social practices.

This is a term that led a long and uneventful life with a generally accepted meaning until French philosopher Michel Foucault turned it on its head in the 1960s and made it into a central idea in his analysis of history and ideas. Unlike many concepts in the humanities, this idea emerged in its Foucauldian form almost without predecessors, which is to say that it was a radical switch of attention from theories of **ideology**, of **agency**, of **class** and of **gender** struggle. In its traditional, historical sense, a discourse was simply a speech or writing on a particular

subject. There are many historical examples of a 'discourse on morals, manners', etc. but, after Foucault's appropriation of the term, 'discourse' was to become a central concept in cultural and gender studies. Discourse is similar to ideology in that it refers to the ways in which people make sense of the social world and their place in it, but Foucault argues that it is a radically different way of thinking about how the social functions. Discourse is 'the complex of signs and practices which organises social existence and social reproduction'.

The meaning of a particular kind of speech in discourse was taken over by Foucault as he was very interested in the way that language was used, and how its usage affected both the speaker and the listener. Many disciplines, from sociology to literary and cultural studies, were at the same time developing an interest in the way that language was used, because it was increasingly felt that communication was the key to understanding how **culture** and **society** worked. At its most basic, the notion of 'discourse' simply refers to a unit of speech that is greater than a sentence or a simple utterance: it is more a whole way of speech. For Foucault, it is also a historically situated material practice that produces power relations, and this is where it differs from traditional notions of ideology.

Foucault dispenses with what earlier thinkers like Louis Althusser would have called ideology, or a set of ideas and presumptions about a particular field, like medicine, and replaces it with the notion of a discourse. For Foucault, a discourse is a 'large body of statements' governed by an internal set of rules which limit and define how those statements are used in society. The discourse of medicine might, in an earlier epoch, have been called the 'medical discipline', implying both the whole body of knowledge and the way that it is used in the medical field. What Foucault is arguing is that all of the 'strategic possibilities' of the way that discourse operates, or in other words all of the hidden assumptions and practices that

make up the conscious and unconscious patterns of operating within a discipline, are best characterised by thinking of it as discourse, rather than a discipline. Foucault also talks about what he calls a 'discursive formation', which seems to be much the same thing as a discourse but perhaps with a stronger institutional or theoretical base. The law, or the legal system, is a fairly obvious discursive formation, with its own language, rules, conventions, modes of behaviour, history, aims and objectives (Foucault, 1971; 1972).

Foucault wrote about the discourses of sexuality and madness, and of the ways that ideas are represented and reproduced in a discourse, governing who says what about the nature of illness, its conventions and regularities. Discourse is **power** for Foucault, and the modes of saying are always constitutive of power relations at the local level. Society, Foucault argues, has particular procedures for the production and organisation of discourses, and for the regulation of their transmission, selection and redistribution. Understanding these discursive practices is what cultural and historical study should pay attention to.

So for Foucault, discourse is this 'group of statements in so far as they belong to a discursive formation', (Foucault, 1972) but this keeps hedging around the question of whether discourse is all there is: that is to say, whether discourse constitutes the world. Elsewhere Foucault says that discourse mediates between the ideal and the material world, that it is a set of relations, of regularities, which produce social relations.

Division of labour

Who gets to do what.

The division of labour is an apparently neutral term, but it has come to represent the unequal allocation of tasks within

societies. Certain groups in **society** are seen to be more at risk of exploitation than others, for example, women, children and people from racial minorities.

Industrial societies have complex divisions of labour because of the variety of commodities produced and services provided, requiring a range of skills. The roles people perform greatly affect their share of **power**, wealth, and status.

Dominant/Residual/Emergent

The factions within cultures that are always in a state of conflict.

This is a related set of terms that was used by Raymond Williams in discussing the formations of **culture**, and which incorporated Antonio Gramsci's ideas about **hegemony** and cultural struggle. What Williams was talking about was the fact that representing culture as a fixed, static set of relations, as **structuralism** did, was to ignore the reality that culture and **society** are in a constant state of flux. Williams was also criticising the **Frankfurt School**'s approach to culture in which it was seen as being a one-dimensional industry which dominated everything within society. There is a dominant cultural order, Williams argues, but within it there exist both elements of traditional culture and elements of new oppositional cultures—all of which can be in conflict with the dominant order.

It is perhaps interesting that Williams was writing within the confines of British culture, a culture that carries deep traditional imagery which often conflicts with the commercial realities of **popular culture**, as well as with the radical cultures like punk. The cultural theory of **postmodernism**, that all such culture becomes part of the hyperreal, of endless signification, seems to iron out the contradictions and oppositions of living

culture just as much as the reductionism of many Marxist approaches. Emergent cultures, like new social movements, similarly pose powerful oppositions to the dominant culture, and conflict with it.

Doxa

A broader term than ideology, meaning something close to common-sense or everyday assumptions.

Pierre Bourdieu's sociology of everyday life, and of how **culture** functions in **society**, is a complex and specific analysis of empirical reality that takes a stand against the over-generalising tendencies of **postmodernism**, and of its claim that reality has simply become the simulacrum of itself. His notion of the doxa is an attempt to describe in specific terms how the habits and characteristics of everyday life are built up in socialisation and remain with the individual throughout their life-career, albeit subject to change and development.

Doxa refers to the taken for granted, naturalised patterns of behaviour and assumptions that operate in a given field of practice. Bourdieu argues that these patterns of behaviour are akin to common sense, but they are not simply **ideology**, or even unconscious, as Louis Althusser would have it, but patterns of behaviour embedded in the practice itself, even in the body. The concept is similar to Antonio Gramsci's notion of 'common sense' in that it refers to an encrusted form of thinking which carries the residues of popular ideas, the stone-age patterns of everyday **appropriation** of the world and a measure of experience that is both viable and anachronistic. Rather like peasant culture, the doxa is both deeply traditional, effectively reproduced and reactionary in its presentation of men and women.

Ecology

An extraordinarily complicated term that refers to the whole of the planet and its environment.

Ecology and the related term 'environmentalism' refer to a recent concern and understanding of the relationship between humans and the physical environment in which they live. The Greek origins of the term refer to 'the whole house' or the combination of science and nature and it is to this holistic vision that the term returns in order to overcome the **culture/nature** split that is so endemic in modern **society**.

Concern with the environment is clear in the anti-industrialism of the Romantic reaction in the nineteenth century, but it only became a political force in the post-nuclear age, developing out of the radical student movements of the 1960s. Based on a concern for the environment and drawing on holistic concepts of man's place in nature, the ecology movement has created a new form of politics, a 'green' rereading of political activism and social aims. The ecological approach argues for a 'humans-in-nature' understanding of social development, rather than an approach which separates out politics, industrialism or economics.

The ecology movement is extremely broad and encompasses eastern philosophies, eco-feminism, indigenous movements, post-colonial critics of western globalisation, anti-capitalist anarchists and new age theorists. There is a theoretical approach known as 'deep ecology' which posits a powerful natural balance and force in the world which, when disturbed, leads to inevitable environmental catastrophe. There is an idea of nature within these formulations that, as in eastern philosophies, posits nature as female, as the 'mother-earth'. Whatever the difficulties of these positions, it is clear that the ecological critique of unlimited economic growth is beginning to be

widely accepted, and that alternative methods of production and economic management are urgently needed.

Economic rationalism *see* Neo-liberalism, Thatcherism

Ecriture feminine

A form of women's writing; a potential mode of writing.

This is a term which has its roots in French **feminism**, but also in the history of radical feminist theory, which has always seen the female body as the site of a different mode of thinking, always repressed by the phallocentric order. There has been a tradition of criticism which has claimed that the **power** of forms of male thought, as expressed in language itself, has consistently suppressed the reality of the modes of thinking of the feminine, and écriture feminine is the term used for that suppressed women-centred thinking and writing. It is most associated with the French thinker Hélène Cixous, and she has clearly said that écriture feminine is as much a possibility as a clearly defined reality, but that it marked the space where a feminist practice of writing would develop. It denotes a type of writing, a style, a feeling and form of discourse different to modes of male writing—it is not intimately related to biology, but to both the mother and the mother–child relationship. This rather complex idea comes out of conceptions of the formation of the gendered subject, the role of language in that formation and the way that language inscribes masculinity and femininity. Referring to the mother–child relationship is to draw attention to the point of development before the child acquires 'conventional language' and thereby **culture**, and in which pre-intonational communication lays down a deeper bond than that of communicative language. The

term is mostly used in literary and feminist criticism, but it has a wider sociological sense in relation to an understanding of the representations of masculinity/femininity in modern culture.

Ecriture feminine claims to go beyond the **binary oppositions** of patriarchal logic, to create in the space of writing a **deconstruction** of the established oppositions of theoretical and literary discourses and to replace them with an experimental form of femininity. The materiality of language is emphasised and often a lyrical, utopian strain is found in the expression of feminine **difference** and the articulation of **desire**. The question in literary studies, of course, is whether an écriture feminine exists, or whether it is either an essentialist fallacy or a utopian collapsing of style, body and **discourse** into a type of writing that reproduces marginality.

Empiricism

The idea that knowledge is based on experience.

This is an idea that has a long history in philosophy, and relates to the empirical study of things that are observed from first-hand experience. Since the rise of **structuralism**, **semiotics** and, latterly, **postmodernism**, the idea that reality can be experienced first hand has been mostly abandoned in favour of the view that reality is constructed through language and **culture**. 'Experience' is the key category of empiricism and the notion has been heavily criticised as an untheorised imaginary relation to the real. Empircists argue that **knowledge** is based on observation and only theoretical knowledge which can be verified against empirical observation is valid. Theory must be deduced from empirical observation. It is claimed that theoretical principles can be separated from empirical observations and that therefore complete objectivity can be built up. This approach claims that observing the world 'as it is' is a straightforward,

uncomplicated matter and that one simply has to report the facts.

Theorists from Marx onwards have challenged this approach, pointing out that most views of the world carry a **bias**—whether conscious or unconscious—which distorts what is seen. Feminism has been very critical of empiricist approaches since, it is argued, they are often inherently masculine in their assumed neutrality. For a long time empiricist scientists claimed that women were unable to compete in sport, that black people were genetically inferior, that men were naturally highly sexed and women passive, and so on. The point is that what was observed was what was already believed and the 'facts' were constructions of those theoretical positions. It is not possible to separate the observable world from the position of the person observing it, nor to report on the world without already having a position about how it functions. Empiricism has an important ideological function, it is, for example an important defence in the claims of the media to be neutral, since they claim merely to report the world as it is.

Encoding/Decoding

The process by which meaning is constructed and understood in messages.

This definition goes back to a moment in cultural studies during the 1970s when **semiotics** was beginning to have an impact and a one-dimensional view of **culture** was being rejected in favour of a more complex, polysemous, view of the media. In Stuart Hall's article on encoding/decoding, which was very influential in this period, he argues that the process of communication has to be considered as both the construction and **deconstruction** of messages, not as a way-one flow. Encoding refers to the way in which media messages are constructed and produced, whereas decoding refers to the way in which they are received and

understood, a process that can involve negotiated meanings and even oppositional readings.

Hall is making the fairly obvious point that whatever the intended message of a media communication, audiences can interpret it in very different ways depending on their age, **class**, **gender**, cultural background, etc. To put it another way, we can say that the media have to work at winning over, defining and dominating the process of cultural communication, and that oppositional ideas and viewpoints always exist outside the defining framework of the media. This is not to deny that the media are powerful institutions in society and almost universally act in ways supportive of the dominant ideology, but simply to reinforce the point that most media messages are polysemous.

End of philosophy

The idea that traditional philosophy no longer has any relevance or validity.

Radical postmodern theories claim that the traditional modes of philosophy, particularly analytic and scientific philosophy, are irrelevant as they no longer have anything to say about the construction of reality. Based on the critical relativism of theories deriving from Friedrich Nietzsche, Michel Foucault and Martin Heidegger, end of philosophy approaches deconstruct the delusions of western metaphysics. These approaches are still very contentious.

Enlightenment

A historical period when rationality, reason and equality were seen as important ideas.

The Enlightenment refers to a period in the seventeenth and eigtheenth centuries during which the foundations of modern

science and technology, together with rational and liberal ideologies of progress and development, were laid down. Beginning with a critique of the divine right of kings and of religion itself, Enlightenment thinkers developed a critique of **society** and a theory of a rational, ordered world. Many link the rise of Enlightenment reason with the work of René Descartes, who proposed rationality as the basic credo of all humanities and individualism as its central motif, however Enlightenment thought was fundamentally social in character rather than philosophical. It was a Europe-wide movement that drew on many sources and encompassed philosophy, political theory, literature and the beginnings of sociological thought.

Enlightenment thinking has to be seen in the context of the mythical and reactionary religious thought that preceded it, and the feudal social structures to which it was opposed, not in the light of postmodern concerns with millennial relativism. The French and American revolutions owed a great deal to the liberating and critical thought of the Enlightenment and, in particular, the political ideas of equality and freedom before the law for all individuals, whatever their social origin. In fact to believe in the innate possibility of reason and goodness in all men, and women, was itself a somewhat revolutionary idea at the time, especially as women were not universally seen as being equal to men. Internationally, thinkers like Thomas Paine, author of *The Rights of Man*, John Locke, David Hume, François Voltaire and Denis Diderot, were central to the movement.

In France there was a large and significant group of thinkers who came to represent the ideal of the Enlightenment. Known as the the Encyclopaedists, they set out to lay down the totality of all human knowledge at the time, based on rational principles, and to examine its practical application, particularly for social theory. This was to be the greatest encyclopaedia of all time and the forerunner to the Age of Reason but, as we know, this

was a slightly over-optimistic view of the development of history. The great German thinker and poet Johann Goethe saw both the possibility of 'reason' as the future of mankind and the delusions of grandeur that it might entail, and in the figure of Faust he gives us one of the **iconic** emblems of that period. Reason, secularism, universalism, science and empirical thought were the intellectual tools with which the Enlightenment was driven forward, and the social and political thought it produced can only be seen as progressive in its historical context. If we now deconstruct the Enlightenment to rewrite it as another history, this merely tells us about our reconstruction of the past as documentary present.

Some thinkers have argued that the development of rationality, of Enlightenment reason, has turned into what is called 'instrumental reason' or rationalisation, and that this has led to a repressive form of society. This seems to confuse the belief in reason and freedom that the Enlightenment stood for with the outcome of the development of modernity and bureaucratic capitalist society. Whether the two are connected seems a very open question. This kind of anti-Enlightenment argument has been taken up by postmodernists, who rail against the repressive hypothesis of reason and elevate fragmentation, the 'local' and the micro-political. Jürgen Habermas, on the other hand, argues that the Enlightenment was more a critical frame of mind than a rigid set of doctrines and that therefore it does not make sense to be anti-Enlightenment.

Enonce/enonciation

The distinction between speaking and the effects of that act.

It is argued in linguistic theory that this distinction is an important one that refers to the act of speaking, or enunciation, and

its results. Roland Barthes and Umberto Eco use this distinction in fairly similar ways, which basically refer to the difference between the act of speaking and the consequences of that speech, but it was French linguist Emile Beneviste who theorised the difference between the enonce (a statement free of context) and the enonciation (a statement tied to context).

Umberto Eco renders these terms as 'sentence' and 'utterance', which helps to distinguish the thing said from the act of saying it, but does not necessarily illuminate its importance. The accepted interpretation is that the actual, time-bound act of making the statement can be very different from the result of that statement, a result which flies off out of the control of the subject making it. In a world in which language is seen as a totalising, independent reality, this distinction draws attention to how a statement can be addressed to another subject, or rather abstractly be aimed at the universe of meaning in which words communicate.

Episteme

The dominant mode of organising thought at a given historical time.

This is another term that comes out of the work of the philosopher/historian Michel Foucault and which really needs to be read in the context of his whole theoretical approach. At its most basic, Foucault uses it to mean the generally accepted mode of getting and organising **knowledge** in a particular era, such as the medieval, classic or modern eras. An episteme acts as the overarching organising principle of the era, uniting the different discourses within it. Thus science, law, medicine, history, etc. are seen as being united through an underlying structure of assumptions about how knowledge is produced and used. This generalised structure

of knowledge is the framework in which the different discourses operate, thus giving an overall coherence to the formations of knowledge.

Foucault's work historicises different epistemes and seems to suggest that the functioning of the episteme is the dominant factor in the order of things, this being a somewhat idealist notion of determination and a direct reversal of the Marxist approach which claims that the economic **base** determines the **superstructure**. At the same time, this model of epistemic coherence is clearly structuralist in its insistence on abstract laws, and de-historicising in its retrospective reduction of all forms of knowledge to one pattern. In *The Order of Things* (1970), Foucault says that the episteme is:

> The total set of relations that unite, at a given period, the discursive practices that give rise to epistemological figures, sciences and possibly formalized systems . . . it is the totality of relations that can be discovered for a given period, between the sciences when one analyses them at the level of discursive regularities.

Foucault's notion of the episteme is useful in bringing into the open the fact that at different periods different ideas are accepted as universals, but the gains thus made are somewhat dissipated by the structuralist insistence on regularities and coherence. In discussing the modern order, Foucault argues that it is based on the humanist assumptions centred on 'man' the individual, and this informs psychology, sociology, literature, history, myth and so on in this period. This 'modern' period, however, is often described by others as being dominated by abstract science, industrialisation and the emergence of the masses, both theoretically and politically, so the question of how this episteme of the humanities is dominant is rather an open one. There is also the question of what relationship an episteme

has to either **ideology** or to what Raymond Williams called a 'structure of feeling'.

At one level Foucault claims that an episteme governs what is knowledge or truth in a particular era, but it is not clear whether this function is simply a reflection of dominant trends or an epistemological fact. The term has gained considerable currency within certain academic discourses, however, possibly because it adds a certain scientificity to the humanities discourses which are so mired in conflict and uncertainty.

Epistemology

A theory of knowledge, of how we know, perceive, feel and understand.

Theories of how we come to acquire or develop **knowledge** about the world underpin most cultural theory, whether covertly or explicitly. For example, scientific approaches claim that we can have objective knowledge of the world, whereas many postmodern theories reject that epistemology altogether, claiming that the world is a constructed relativity. The sense of **self** and of subjective knowledge are also important areas of debate in epistemology. **Empiricism**, or the belief that all knowledge is based on experience, on observation, is an epistemology. All theoretical approaches to understanding the world are based on an epistemological standpoint.

Essentialism

The belief that people, groups or objects have fixed, innate characteristics.

This is a term that, like **reductionism**, carries an overtone of accusation. To take an overtly essentialist position on a topic in

cultural studies today is tantamount to declaring oneself a believer in unicorns, or witches. This is not to deny that most essentialist arguments are, however, fundamentally flawed, if not illusory. The idea that men are inherently more rational than women, for example, is an essentialist belief that was firmly held for many centuries. An essentialist belief, then, is one that posits a universal essence, an attribute that is unchanging, to people or cultural groups, or cultural forms.

The problem with essentialism in **cultural studies** is that many ideas in **popular culture**, or common-sense ideologies in everyday life, assume certain essential characteristics in many areas like the male/female divide, racial or ethnic characteristics. In discussing **identity** many writers assume certain essential shared characteristics, particularly feminist writers, some of whom posit an essential feminine, or feminine writing. Of course if there is an essential feminine, there must be an essential masculine, which might suggest that political progress was improbable, if not impossible. One woman's essentialism cannot be another man's **relativism**, and this is the central problem of all essentialist approaches: they argue for fixed elements which give a credibility to the argument but then lock it into that position.

The attraction of an essentialist argument is that the basics of the position are assumed to be self-evident, so they do not need to be discussed. **Ideology** often operates through essentialist statements, as does the particular ideological approach of the New Right and economic rationalist models. An appeal to an essentialist truth, like the operation of free markets, has a deep appeal to many people because it offers an answer in a world of confusion and subjective disarray, and this appeal operates at all levels of human appropriation of reality. Despite all the arguments of cultural studies, feminist and **queer** theory, essentialist positions about masculinity and femininity remain very powerful in popular culture and thought.