HISPANIC URBAN STUDIES

BENJAMIN FRASER

TOWARD AN URBAN CULTURAL STUDIES

Henri Lefebvre and the Humanities

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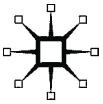

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Introduction

The goal of *Toward an Urban Cultural Studies* is to provide a model for integrating two distinct strains of cultural inquiry—urban studies and cultural studies—as a concertedly interdisciplinary way of approaching the culture(s) of cities. Mobilizing the thought of French spatial theorist and urban philosopher Henri Lefebvre (1901–1991), it explores the ground common to both of these areas and, moreover, articulates in general terms a method for urban cultural studies research.

Both the advantages and the potential disadvantages of using Lefebvre's thought for this project stem from the very same core qualities of his oeuvre. His work was extensive (60–70 books), his books covered a wide range of subject matter, and this varied subject matter was examined in a compelling but often meandering style. In the end, he never shied away from grappling with the fundamental theoretical and philosophical problems of modern urban life under capitalism. While those who have often drawn from his work have certainly found it to be incomplete in certain respects, they have also shown that his core insights endure in the twenty-first century.[1] Moreover, the increasing interest in his work (recent re-editions, anthologies, new translations)—as well as the vast academic terrain to which it is being seen as relevant—testifies not merely to its relevance within and across disciplines but also to its versatility.[2] While it is significant that Lefebvre is arguably the twentieth century's most prolific urban thinker, it is perhaps just as important, given the task at hand, that his approach yields a loosely organized but cohesive framework for understanding urban culture. This approach is ultimately applicable to work by scholars bridging the humanities/social science divide, no matter what their city of interest. This introduction and the chapters that follow cull from Lefebvre's extensive work a relatively coherent set of questions surrounding the relationship of urban

environments to cultural production in order to outline concerns central to the burgeoning, interdisciplinary area of urban cultural studies.

It is important to understand that the idea for this book developed organically out of two simultaneous circumstances. The first was shaped by the publication and reception of my earlier book *Henri Lefebvre and the Spanish Urban Experience: Reading the Mobile City* (Bucknell UP, 2011). A Hispanist by training, I had set out to compose a book that explored Lefebvre's substantial oeuvre more extensively, going beyond *The Production of Space* (English translation by Donald Nicholson-Smith, 1991)—the one book that single-handedly seemed to have captivated literary scholars from a range of language and area traditions—in order to dialogue with as many of his texts as possible.[3] My intention therein had been to use Lefebvre's thoughts on urban philosophy, urban modernity, and contemporary urban culture to explore representations of Spanish cities (namely Madrid and Barcelona) in select cultural products from nineteenth-century literature to the twenty-first-century videogame. My aim here, however, is notably different: I want to produce a text of potential interest to urban cultural studies scholars no matter what their area of expertise. Although I may refer in passing, during the second half of this book, to cultural products from my home discipline of Hispanic Studies, these references are intended to be representative of much broader trends throughout humanities fields, and I assume no knowledge of the disciplinary aspects of that field on the reader's part.

The second circumstance that has shaped this book is my concomitant commitment to the formulation of an urban cultural studies method. What I realized while writing that earlier book bridging Lefebvre's ideas with close-readings of Spanish cultural products was that, while literary scholars across many disciplines were increasingly dealing with topics germane to urban studies—the representation of cities in cultural texts or even the creation of the city itself as a cultural text (and sometimes both at once)—there seemed to be a reluctance among many of those scholars to fully digest social science research on those very same topics. There also seemed to be a reticence on the part of social scientists to engage questions of aesthetics from a humanities-centered perspective.

For a number of reasons discussed subsequently in the chapters comprising the first major section of this book, I came to believe that the work of Henri Lefebvre could potentially provide this burgeoning subfield of urban humanities research with a framework for understanding urban culture in general terms and, moreover, as a way of forging a more fruitful dialogue with social science fields where a growing number of scholars are also, of course, actively interested in investigating the culture(s)

of cities. More important, I came to see that exploration of Lefebvre's urban thought might evince an urban cultural studies method. Such a method would not only be capable of providing a common ground for the work humanities scholars have already been producing over a number of years, it would also outline some central propositions around which to galvanize future scholarly conversations concerning the directions of this interdisciplinary and necessarily variegated field.

There are always limitations to this kind of work, of course. For example, it may thus be argued by some humanities scholars that the explicitly Marxian tenor and theoretical scope of the early chapters of this book, in particular, are distractions from the more pressing questions of the ins-and-outs of literary scholarship. Conversely, some Marxian scholars may complain that this book dialogues only insufficiently and indirectly with Marx's work itself, and that chapters 4, 5, and 6—which enter more fully into discourses that structure humanities scholarship (on literature, film, and popular music)—are themselves an unwanted digression. Chapter 7, on the topic of digital spaces, in general, and Digital Humanities work, in particular, may be received as a polemic by some scholars. This follows logically from the way in which public discussion of Digital Humanities is routinely accompanied by a globalizing discourse that touts its emancipatory potential to bring people together—one that has all too infrequently been left underanalyzed.

As many will understand, there are still other risks of publishing this kind of interdisciplinary work. Lefebvre scholars will necessarily find this book incomplete in many respects, and literary scholars may find the argument for Lefebvre's relevance unconvincing. It will undoubtedly be seen by some as not philosophical enough, not materialist enough, not literary enough, not geographical enough, and so on; it may be alleged that, taken separately, its humanities-centered insights and its presentation of Lefebvre lack novelty. To a certain extent, this is unavoidable if we are to begin a new kind of conversation about urban scholarship—which is to say that this book's flaws follow naturally from its basic premise and intended goal. This goal is precisely to fuse humanities (textual) criticism and Lefebvrian method—to point to their existing similarities and potential, interdisciplinary points of convergence—and not necessarily to provide insights that might change each discipline on its own terms. I must insist, however, that through forcing literary and cultural studies to think the city geographically and forcing geography to think the city artistically (in textual terms, defined from the perspective of the humanities), a new discourse may be forged whose sum is greater than its parts.

It is not hard to image that potential readers from sociology, geography, and other disciplines may find the very question of textual analysis—whether that text is a novel, poetry, music, film, videogames, or even a city itself—somewhat pointless. To wit: a prominent academic geographer (who shall remain nameless) based in a prestigious American university and directly inspired by Lefebvre's work—one who focuses explicitly on the notions of urban culture and urban struggles, in fact—once wrote me declaring that he saw nothing at all of value in the study of (cultural/literary) texts. As the chapters of *Toward an Urban Cultural Studies* progressively make clear, this attitude—certainly not one advocated by Lefebvre, and in fact directly contradicted by his work—itself reveals the very alienating structures that make a humanities-centered urban cultural studies method so necessary and so timely. This book's challenge and its potential, thus, stem from the fact that it is not solely about the humanities, nor solely about art, nor economics, politics, society, alienation, capital, criticism—it is, in the end, a text that attempts to take on the urban problem. And as an urban-centered work of interdisciplinary scholarship, it strives to find a way to force a confrontation between each of these areas. My fear is that it will not succeed in convincing specialists from a great number of disciplinary areas. But then again, given Lefebvre's own well-grounded suspicion of specialization, a Lefebvrian method *is not a method for specialists*. Instead, as we will see, it is a method for returning intellectual specializations to the totality from which they have been extracted by a certain conception of knowledge, one that arises—in his view—along with urban shifts particular to the nineteenth century.

Finally—in tribute to the philosophical dimensions of Lefebvre's own work and the purposely open spirit of his loosely defined method—another warning is necessary. The reader should be aware that this book does not explain, step by step, *how* to read literature and other cultural products from an urban cultural studies perspective, it merely explains *why* it is important to do so (note that later chapters provide brief and specific examples of possible ways of developing urban readings of film and popular music, for example). Instead of striving for a checked-box vision of cultural method, I have instead opted to underscore what general concerns we might take from Lefebvre's work in order to flesh out what this *how* may potentially involve in specific circumstances—whatever those may be. This is not merely a way of remaining open to potential future developments and aware of the vast and perhaps continually evolving set of varied "cultural texts." At the same time, this is a move to begin a conversation that is accessible to the widest range of

researchers possible. If I have left anything out of the equation—and this is unavoidably the case—let this serve as an invitation to others working across the humanities–social science divide to join in the conversation. The newly created *Journal of Urban Cultural Studies* is one such venue for bringing such conversations the attention they deserve. There, or elsewhere, I invite further discussion.

Because I intend this book to span an interdisciplinary readership crossing both the humanities and the social sciences—and because I admittedly focus on the thought of Lefebvre in particular rather than taking a much more comprehensive approach—there are two fundamental topics that must be addressed, albeit briefly. The first is the notion of disciplinary friction in general, which boasts its own historical legacy and whose nuances will undoubtedly affect the reception of this book. The second is the wider cultural studies context within which this book's arguments are made. A full consideration of each of these topics would be out of place here; but, on the other hand, to ignore that some readers may not be familiar with them would be irresponsible. Accordingly, the remainder of this introduction turns, first, to an academic feud of sorts that goes by the name of the Snow–Leavis Controversy—which unfolded over 50 years ago as a way of broaching the general tensions surrounding interdisciplinary pursuits. Second, I concisely summarize the legacy and current state of cultural studies research in general terms and comment in particular on the place reserved in this context for discussion of the urban question. This is the question whose interrogation in truth constitutes the core of this book's subsequent chapters.

The Two Cultures: The Snow–Leavis Controversy

Because the Snow–Leavis controversy involved two high-profile personalities whose conflict raised the question of the distinction so often made between the sciences and the humanities, it can be of use in understanding those more contemporary interdisciplinary conflicts at the heart of urban cultural studies. Born in 1905, Charles Percy Snow is best remembered today as an advocate for disciplinary reconciliation—even if that legacy is not without its problems. While still young, he attended a school whose "strength was in science rather than in the traditionally more prestigious classics and humanities," completed the Intermediate Examination in Science in 1923, earned degrees in Chemistry in 1927 and 1928, and, after meritorious research in infrared spectroscopy, was elected Fellow of Christ's College, Cambridge, in 1930 (Collini 1993, xix–xx). Snow's scientific career, however, suffered a major setback in

1932 when his claim of having made an important scientific discovery was publicly proved faulty (Collini 1993, xx).[4] It was around that time that he published a detective novel (*Death Under Sail*), and two years later a second novel (*The Search*)—"These early efforts had been favorably reviewed, encouraging him to think of himself as a serious writer" (Collini 1993, xx). Over the next 30 years, Snow would write a series of 11 interlinked novels that "sold widely and were translated into several languages" (Collini 1993, xxi); the year 1945 thus marks the date of his separation from Cambridge, and by 1959 he had given up his transitional, part-time posts "to begin his third career as public figure, controversial lecturer, and pundit" (Collini 1993, xxi).

The Rede lecture—which Snow delivered on May 7, 1959, at the Senate House in Cambridge—marked the beginning of his "third career" and in many ways followed logically from his experiences. The title he chose for the lecture—"The Two Cultures"—centered on a concept he had introduced at least three years earlier and drew further public attention to the distance between what he referred to as "literary intellectuals" and "natural scientists" (Collini 1993, xxv).[5] Significantly, Snow (called Sir Charles, and later Lord Snow) thought of himself as straddling this divide—"By training I was a scientist: by vocation I was a writer," he would remark in the first paragraph of the lecture (Snow 1993, 1). Snow continued, stating his belief that "the intellectual life of the whole of western society is increasingly being split into two polar groups" and that this manifests itself also in "practical life" ("because I should be the last person to suggest that the two can at the deepest level be distinguished") (1993, 3–4). His goal of disciplinary reconciliation is, in this general formulation at the very least, laudable, and perhaps more so given the connection he makes between academic and nonacademic contexts.

In basic terms, Snow's argument has it that literary intellectuals and scientists persist in a state of mutual incomprehension. Nevertheless, Snow's lecture also reveals his clear personal identification with science over and against literature despite the seeming neutrality of his stated goal of reconciling the two cultures. This is evident even in his initial formulation of the question,[6] but more clearly, perhaps, in the elaboration of his position throughout the lecture. The first two arguments Snow makes, in fact, are that literary intellectuals should see the value of scientific optimism (1993, 6–7) and that the scientific opinion that equates literary authors with antisocial feelings should be upheld (1993, 8). More fundamentally, Snow defends scientism, stressing that "the scientific culture really is a culture, not only in an intellectual but also in an anthropological sense" (1993, 9) while, on the other hand,

remaining suspicious of literary intellectuals and even coming to credit them with nurturing the "unscientific flavor" of the "whole 'traditional' culture"—a flavor that is "on the point of turning anti-scientific" (1993, 11). The division between these two cultures is particularly significant given that, as Snow adds, "It is the traditional culture, to an extent remarkably little diminished by the emergence of the scientific one, which manages the western world" (1993, 11).

The fact that Snow sided with science against literature—perhaps despite his reconciliatory intention—has already been acknowledged by critics who point to his disdain for "literary intellectuals" and their "snobbist and nostalgic social attitudes" (Collini 1993, xxiii). Admittedly, Snow regards scientists as out of touch with the literary/traditional culture—and admonishes them for their lack of familiarity with, say, Dickens or Rilke, as well as their lack of "imaginative understanding" (1993, 11–14)—but, in the end, if scientists are "self-impoverished," then literary intellectuals "are impoverished too—perhaps more seriously, because they are vainer about it" (1993, 14). Significantly, this asymmetricality of his argument drew much fire from those who were presumed to pertain to the culture of literary intellectuals.

It is thus not surprising that one of the most outspoken of Snow's critics was F. R. Leavis (1895–1978), professor of English at Downing College, Cambridge. Leavis himself was a forward-thinking intellectual who is most often remembered for having insisted—against disciplinary convention of the time—on the significance of newer writers such as James Joyce, D. H. Lawrence, Ezra Pound, and in particular T. S. Eliot. The year 1932 was a banner year for Leavis—whereas by contrast it was bittersweet for Snow—as it was then that he began his work as editor of the noted journal *Scrutiny*. By 1962, when F. R. Leavis was invited to give the Richmond lecture at Downing College, he was in many ways a larger-than-life figure, having arguably influenced in no small way the direction of twentieth-century literary study in Britain. Leavis used the occasion of the lecture, which he provocatively titled "Two Cultures? The Significance of C. P. Snow," as an opportunity to voice a strong response to Snow's perspective—one that has even been characterized as a "ferocious attack" (Collini 1993, xxix). Leavis certainly lambastes Snow in the Richmond lecture, calling into question both his identification as a literary intellectual and the quality of his novels (Leavis 1972, 44–45).[7] The intensity of Leavis's indictment—which surely seemed to have a personal tone—has frequently been taken as evidence of Snow's basic premise. That is, for many, it merely confirms first that these two cultures exist, and second that they are at the very least distant if not

also antithetical or even inimical to each another. And yet, although there may be some truth to the claim that Leavis confirms the existence of the two cultures (as had Snow, of course, from his own side of the debate), it is shortsighted to think that his response to Snow's scientific bias is unwarranted or, worse still, to ignore that Leavis himself has his own reconciliatory goal in mind.

It is important to recognize that the heated nature of the Snow–Leavis controversy, nonetheless, overshadows many subtle points that are more worthy of our consideration. In his 1959 lecture, Snow takes humanists to task, likening lack of knowledge of the Second Law of Thermodynamics to never having read a work of Shakespeare (Snow 1993, 14–15). Leavis's later response insists that "There *is* no scientific equivalent of that question; equations between orders so disparate are meaningless" (original emphasis; 1972, 61). While it is tempting to see this as proof that Leavis will entertain no collaboration between the humanities and the sciences, we might read the comment not solely as a reflection on the current state of disciplinary isolation but, moreover, as a defense of the humanities that in fact complements what is, in essence, Snow's defense of the sciences. A more subtle position on "literariness" suggests that Leavis fears (rightly, in my own opinion) Snow's reduction of literature to a scientific worldview, but not that he is against science itself. In fact, as we shall soon see, he is not. This subtle position that I attribute to Leavis—which is insufficiently understood if it is taken to be merely "literary"—begins by recognizing the relative autonomy of aesthetic questions in the first pass before then moving to reconcile them with extraliterary discourse in the second—a progression that Snow's argument certainly cannot replicate.

In fact, from a certain perspective, Leavis's perspective is the more reconciliatory of the two in that it seeks to establish the importance of literary study on its own terms before bridging the distance between the humanities and the sciences. As implicit in Leavis's statement (above), disciplines—although we need to work across them—are not interchangeable, not easily subjected to an identical logic or comparison. In this vein, it will just not do, Leavis implies, to hold literary study to scientific standards. We perhaps walk a fine line between accepting Leavis's denunciation of Snow as a literary interloper or impostor, on the one hand, and admitting Snow's point that Leavis speaks with an authority or a cultural capital that is perhaps all too easily associated with literary isolationism, on the other. It is important here, however, to distinguish between Leavis's authority and his intention. That is, although some critics have seen him as a literary isolationist, Leavis has

gone out of his way to separate himself from that misperception, both in his legacy of a scholarship that sees literature not as a separate realm but as imbricated in "extraliterary" experience and also in comments where he deliberately rejects what he calls the "charge of literarism" that has been unfairly leveed upon him.[8]

With this in mind, it is easier to see the following: Leavis's assertion that there are not, in fact, two cultures has been misunderstood as an affirmation of the literary culture over and against the scientific culture. Yes, he insists vehemently that "there is only *one* culture; to talk of *two* in your way is to use an essential term with obviously disqualifying irresponsibility . . . It is obviously absurd to posit a 'culture' that the scientist has *qua* scientist" (original emphasis; Leavis 1972, 88, also 89), but we do well in recognizing that this is not a simple attack against scientific culture but a more global attack on the notion of isolated cultures in general. It is the distinction of two cultures that is his target, not the scientific culture per se: as evidenced in his subsequent statement that "We have no other; there is only one, and there can be no substitute. Those who talk of two and of joining them would present us impressively with the sum of two nothings" (Leavis 1972, 93). Given the way in which his views were commonly misinterpreted as a matter of course in a very public feud, he was later forced to definitely clarify that by one culture he did *not* mean a literary culture only (Leavis 1972, 158).[9]

In accordance with Henri Lefebvre's own thinking, to which we shall shortly return, the one culture with which Leavis is concerned is not the literary culture but a more complex culture enfolding the total human experience. When Leavis's remarks are considered within his critique of the disciplinary character of university structure, they gain further force and ultimately point toward the need to go beyond specialization. "Unlike Snow," Leavis writes "I am concerned to make it really a university, something (that is) more than a collocation of specialist departments—to make it a centre of human consciousness: perception, knowledge, judgment and responsibility" (1972, 63; also 98). It is possible to read the ire Leavis directs against the sciences as a complement to Lewis Mumford's own critique of the quantifiable logic of mechanization and industrialization (chapter 2, this book). Both thinkers clearly insist upon the irreducible, nonquantifiable character of the human (Leavis 1972, 151). But despite the contentious claims made by Snow that literary intellectuals in general (and quite plausibly Leavis in particular) are "natural Luddites" (1993, 22), Leavis still reserves a role for science in the future culture of creative collaboration he advocates.[10] He emphasizes, for example, that "A very strong, persistent and resourceful

creative effort, then is desperately needed—a collaborative creativity to complement that which has produced the sciences" (Leavis 1972, 157). It must not be lost on the reader that this call for a "full human creativity" is of course, in essence, a call for reconciliation between the humanities and the sciences[11]—even if Leavis envisions this as a specific correction of the imbalance that gives greater priority to the latter. From this perspective, it is not that either Snow or Leavis is "correct" on his own, but rather that each launches a complementary call for reform—Snow (perhaps despite himself) from the side of the sciences, Leavis (uncompromisingly) from the side of the humanities.

Admitting the complementary aspects of Snow's and Leavis's views, we then move quite easily from Leavis's fears about the future of education to Henri Lefebvre's own critique of university and disciplinary structures. Leavis had written with a skeptical tone about the way in which computers were likely to affect instruction—responding to a specific article included in the *Times Literary Supplement* and asking, "What 'structured tasks,' for instance, are involved—could be, or should be—in the study of English literature?" (1972, 146–147). Leavis's commitment to humanism is evident here just as is his suspicion of mechanization and industrialization more generally. Implicit in his statement is his belief that a computerized education is likely to affirm a problematic and instrumentalized notion of knowledge and, likewise, that the study of literature in particular (just as the humanities more generally) cannot be so reduced (Leavis 1972, 147).

Of course, Leavis's skepticism of the very notion of "structured tasks" above resonates also with the perspective of critical pedagogues such as Gloria Watkins (bell hooks) and Paolo Freire, who denounce as "banking education" the notion of knowledge as a static deposit made directly into the mind of the passive student. Education, Freire writes, cannot be seen as "a set of things, pieces of knowledge, that can be superimposed on or juxtaposed to the conscious body of the learners" (1970, 72; also 1998; hooks 1994). These views on what hooks calls "education as the practice of freedom" (this phrase in the subtitle of her book is a clear homage to Freire's work) are—just like Lefebvre's—explicitly tied to the function of universities under a capitalist mode of production. Importantly, Lefebvre believed that a university was not a "warehouse" of knowledge (1969, 156). In *The Explosion*—the book he wrote in the aftermath of the events of 1968—Lefebvre states the insufficiency of this view in no uncertain terms when he writes, "What has to be abolished or transcended is primarily a view of learning as commodity and exchange–value, characteristic of the world of commerce

and commodities—it views learning as a product that can be packaged and sold" (1969, 141; see also 2003a, 53–55).

There is no question that—for Lefebvre as well as for the present perspective—disciplinary structures affirm capitalist logic to the degree that they affirm knowledge as a product. The university, of course, as it became excruciatingly clear over the past three or four decades, does not exist outside of market relations—a fact whose consequences are legion.[12] What is worth reemphasizing here, of course, is that there is an immaterial, ideological complement to the material, economic forces that increasingly structure university life, a disciplinary specialization that accomplishes through the fragmentation and division of knowledge what the division of labor accomplishes in socioeconomic terms (Lefebvre 2003a, 60). The modern university, writes Lefebvre, "institutionalizes the social division of labor, helping to organize, nurture, and accommodate it. Isn't this the function assigned to the university today? To adapt itself to the social division of productive labor, that is, to the increasingly stringent requirements of the market, the technical division of intellectual labor and knowledge?" (2003a, 60). If it was at all possible to see this perspective as cynical in the 1970s, it is certainly less possible to do so today given the increasing market pressures affecting the nature of a university-level education.

Disciplinary reconciliation—if and when it is accompanied by a wider appeal—can be one strategy among many disalienating us from other alienating propositions inherent to capitalist modernity. When coupled with Lefebvre's specifically urban approach—his assertion that urban alienation trumps all other forms of alienation (explored in chapter 2)—interdisciplinarity goes beyond conceptions of knowledge as a "collection of objects—economy, sociology, history, demography" to grasp how urban thinking inflects all production and re-production (Lefebvre 2003a, 57). A Lefebvrian perspective on the Snow–Leavis controversy ultimately suggests that Leavis was right, there *is* only one culture, not two as Snow suggested. Moreover, as we will have chance to consider throughout the chapters that follow, Lefebvre's work suggests that this one culture that envelops all others is, significantly, an urban culture. It is to this question the remainder of this introduction now turns.

Cultural Studies and the Question of Urban Culture

It should be noted that this is hardly the place to reproduce, for the reader, either an extensive history of what goes by the name "cultural studies" itself or a summary of its general spirit. The former can be

found in a large number of relatively recent volumes published over the course of the previous two decades (e.g., Turner 1990, 2012; Grossberg et al. 1992; Baker et al. 1996; Ferguson and Golding 1997; Morley and Robins 2001; Hall and Birchall 2006; Gibson 2007; Rojek 2007; Barker 2008; Grossberg 2010b). The latter is made particularly clear, I believe, in two privileged places—in a 1986 speech delivered by Raymond Williams (and included in the anthology *Politics of Modernism*) and in an essay by Henri Lefebvre himself, translated for the 1988 publication of *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (edited by Lawrence Grossberg and Cary Nelson). What is clear to anyone working in the humanities at the start of the twenty-first century is that what cultural studies was, what it is—what it has become and what it may still be—are topics that have been extensively chronicled and debated in publications stretching back over many decades indeed. These topics may have even enjoyed attention for over a half of a century, in fact. Even this amount of time will seem insufficient if we include in our historical perspective the "precursors" of cultural studies in the 1930s, identified as such by Williams—that is, "all the people who first read what you could now quite fairly call 'Cultural Studies' . . . —from Richards, from Leavis, from *Scrutiny*—who were studying popular culture, popular fiction, advertising, newspapers, and making fruitful analyses of it" (2007, 55). Reasons are aplenty to consider that cultural studies—to the extent that it may be considered a disciplinary formation—has been engaged so thoroughly and by way of perspectives so diverse that it is better to no longer speak of it as a single, coherent, and internally homogenous approach. This is to admit that we now inhabit a curious moment of the history of cultural studies.

This current moment is clearly indebted to all of the rigorous work that has come before, critical directions that are far from obsolete, and whose influences endure in the present continuation of the cultural studies project. Any proper history of cultural studies would certainly include detailed explorations of the formation and legacy of Richard Hoggart and the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, the work of Stuart Hall (including the canonical anthologies *Policing the Crisis* [1978] and *Resistance through Rituals* [1993]), the development of Black British Cultural Studies in the 1990s and beyond (Manthia Diawara, Kobena Mercer, Paul Gilroy, Isaac Julien, and others), and the progressive fusion of cultural studies method with critical approaches to race, gender, sexuality, and disability studies, to name a few important directions. And yet, as Graeme Turner's perspective suggests in his recent *What's Become of Cultural Studies* (2012), it is possible in the current

moment to see "cultural studies as a conjectural practice that is intrinsically interdisciplinary; while it is grounded in the body of theory that has developed as a result of the project of cultural studies and in particular the early work from Birmingham and the traditions flowing from it, it is also genuinely engaged in working across disciplinary and transnational territories which were not necessarily part of that history" (2012, 6).

As I see it, something has undoubtedly changed in the decade spanning 1990–2000. These years are noteworthy because they constitute the period of time separating the "Cultural Studies Now and in the Future" conference organized at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign in April 1990 (which led to the 1992 volume edited by Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson, and Paula A. Treichler) from the third international "Crossroads of Cultural Studies" conference "hosted at the legendary point of origin, Birmingham's Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, in 2000 [where] the Anglo-American expansion of cultural studies was probably at its peak" (Turner 2012, 1). It is just as clear that—now 15 years into the twenty-first century—further changes continue to unfold, changes affecting the way in which we engage cultural studies, the way in which we grapple with notions of disciplinarity and interdisciplinarity. These shifts permit scholars writing today to avoid unnecessary entanglements with a disciplinary history that is too complex, too broad, and too diverse to be reduced to a meaningful contextualization. Like Turner's volume, this book is not meant to be a comprehensive history of cultural studies, nor is it motivated by the need to engage the "rolling definition of what counts as cultural studies and what does not" (Turner 2012, 1), a need that clearly has become less pressing today and that Turner himself bypasses with good reason. I must acknowledge that there are clearly those who continue to regard cultural studies as a discipline despite its intrinsic attack on disciplinarity (see Turner 2012, 6–8). I insist, however, that while this matter may be itself worthy of exploration by disciplinary historians, it is not my concern here. I must echo Lawrence Grossberg, who suggests in the introduction to his *Cultural Studies in the Future Tense* (2010) that writing an "Introduction to Cultural Studies" is today a project of questionable value (1–3). I personally have no desire—neither here nor elsewhere—to engage cultural studies as a disciplinary formation. This does not mean that I have no interest in disciplinarity—far from it, in fact—only that what piques my interest is a specific and interdisciplinary urban question that has been seldom explored directly in any depth.

I want to acknowledge from the outset that the question of intersections between the humanities and the social sciences has certainly

been driving much cultural studies research over the years. In many cases, the urban has figured into these discussions implicitly and, at times, even explicitly. I am aware that there have long been humanities scholars interested in the urban as a theme. In my home field of Hispanic Studies, for example, a conference held on the heels of the publication of Marshall Berman's *All that Is Solid Melts into Air*—in 1983—demonstrates this quite clearly.[13] Similarly, I am quite aware that cultural geographers, in particular, have been engaging humanities approaches more and more—with film being seen as increasingly important both at the curricular level and in published research. The full list of social science books that engage the city from a pointedly cultural perspective is too vast to mention here, of course, but the reader should be aware that significant work has been published in book form in recent decades, for example, by scholars Rob Shields (*Spatial Questions* [2013]) and Ben Highmore (*Cityscapes: Cultural Readings in the Material and Symbolic City* [2005]), who focus on Lefebvre, as well as such highly innovative books as those by Ash Amin and Nigel Thrift (including *Cities: Reimagining the Urban* [2002]), Rodolphe El-Khoury and Edward Robbins (*Shaping the City: Studies in History, Theory and Urban Design* [2003]), and Christoph Lindner (*Globalization, Violence, and the Visual Culture of Cities* [2009]). And despite the implicit and explicit relevance to cultural studies of the urban in these and numerous other works, I continue to assert there is still a disconnect between how humanities scholars engage the urban and how social scientists view cultural products. I say this as someone who has published in peer-reviewed venues from both the humanities and the social sciences. I must also make clear that it is this disciplinary distance that has motivated my creation of the peer-reviewed *Journal of Urban Cultural Studies*, whose first print/online volume (2014: 1.1, 1.2, 1.3) boasts a two-part Lefebvre-inspired inaugural editorial.

I am suggesting that the disciplinary disconnect structuring interdisciplinary work on cities persists even in the growing trend to bring humanities and social sciences work on urban topics together in what some see as the new field of Metropolitan Studies. Such programs at New York University, at University of California, Berkeley, and at the Center for Metropolitan Studies in the Technical University of Berlin, for example,[14] are potentially path-breaking. I am informed that culture in these programs is defined not only in terms of policy, urban design, cultural industries and economies, events, and institutions, but also in artistic terms. These programs may indeed boast a number of courses on music and literature, new media, and film—courses that

are undoubtedly inspired by cultural studies methods—but my experience with what happens to the humanities in interdisciplinary contexts (cultural studies among them) has taught me a number of lessons. Chief among these lessons are the following: that a social science appropriation of the humanities is not in itself a triumph, that a mere willingness on the part of social scientists to look at the cultural products that have traditionally been at the core of the humanities is insufficient in itself. It is, rather, *the way in which cultural products are read* that is important. Often, cultural texts are turned into a message, they are reduced to content alone, without a full appreciation of how artistic form and structure in fact influence our understanding of content. Simply put, this is something that has traditionally been the domain of humanities scholars, and not necessarily social scientists.

It is not that social scientists are unable to grapple with aesthetics, but rather that their notion of aesthetics is at times—and I would say that this is particularly true for the vast majority of urban planners and urban geographers on top of the fact that it is still relevant for a range of cultural geographers, anthropologists, and sociologists—quite far from approaching what humanists talk about when they talk about aesthetics. Despite numerous exceptions to this, which may or may not be classified as "urban" in focus, and despite the fact that this reconciliation has been, in principle, a key part of its disciplinary method, in many cases cultural studies has been just as likely as social science fields to ignore *textual* artistic production for a larger-scale view of cultural production. In other words, I have written this book not to explore cultural studies in general, nor to prompt social scientists to engage the notion of culture (they are already doing so), but rather to correct for the fact that a humanities-inspired understanding of culture is absent in much of the interdisciplinary work on urban culture. This corrective is what I am calling urban cultural studies.

The chapters that follow chart out the common ground that can bring social scientists and humanists together in seeking to understand urban culture by focusing on the textual dimensions that so often seem peripheral to the field of urban studies proper. From where I sit, the way in which these "two cultures" of research—to appropriate Snow's term—are brought together in an analysis of the urban phenomenon is very important. When we look at cultural studies in general, there has been a tendency to devalue a possible equilibrium between humanities and social science approaches. Most often, individual scholars line up on one side or the other of the divide, recapitulating—to a certain degree—the schism between Snow and Leavis described above. That is,

to mention one striking example, in the preface to Marjorie Ferguson and Peter Golding's *Cultural Studies in Question*, the editors frame their volume as a defense of social science–based cultural studies against the increasing reach of the humanities (1997, x). As a scholar from a humanities PhD program who was trained also in both cultural studies and geographical approaches, I hear in the editors' concerns modified echoes of the passions that flared during the Snow–Leavis controversy. But as an interdisciplinary scholar, I must admit that there is also, indeed, an element of truth in what Ferguson and Golding have to say.

That truth has to do with the power that "disciplinary" formations possess to inhibit the production of border-crossing intellectual work. There is some evidence of this in the humanities, where—on the whole, it is true—scholars may engage social science disciplines hesitantly, reductively, or else not at all, just as there is some evidence of it in the social sciences, where the humanities are viewed with suspicion, reduced to content, or else neglected entirely. These are the risks of any interdisciplinary scholarship as a whole that does not adopt a capacious view on the interconnection between what appear to be isolated and self-enclosed autonomous areas of human life.

What has motivated my writing of *Toward an Urban Cultural Studies* has been the need to carve out a particular kind of space for a humanities–social science collaboration in understanding the urban phenomenon. As the work of urban philosopher, spatial theorist, and cultural studies pioneer Henri Lefebvre is particularly well-suited for this endeavor, this book is simultaneously an exploration of his own particular brand of interdisciplinarity. Lefebvre's thought is relevant to interrogations of culture in the broad sense and to art in general, as is explored in the first section of the book that follows (titled "Theoretical Ground," which includes chapters 1–3), and also to discussions of literature, film, popular music, and digital forms of culture in particular—themes that are developed in this book's second section (titled "Textual Variations," which includes chapters 4–7). Because I feel it may be necessary to do so, I will end this introduction merely by stating unequivocally that this book has been written specifically with humanities scholars in mind, although it is my hope that social scientists will also find it valuable.

On then, toward an urban cultural studies.

PART I

Theoretical Ground