



Looking for fun in Cultural Science Alan McKee

Abstract

There has been a tension in Cultural Studies between those authors who see fun as important; and those who see it as a distraction. This tension has been played out around the concepts of amusement, distraction, pleasure, celebration, playfulness and desire. I think that fun is important. As we move from Cultural Studies to Cultural Science, I want to retain a focus on fun.

Looking for fun in Cultural Science

It is an important and popular fact that things are not always what they seem. For instance, on the planet Earth, man had always assumed that he was more intelligent than dolphins because he had achieved so much – the wheel, New York, wars and so on – whilst all the dolphins had ever done was muck about in the water having a good time. But conversely, the dolphins had always believed that they were far more intelligent than man – for precisely the same reasons (Adams, 1992: 113)

Douglas Adams – one of the most popular English-language philosophers of the twentieth century – uses a thought experiment in order to suggest that the dominant strands of Western philosophy and political theory have got it wrong. He imagines a science fictional universe where dolphins are more intelligent than human beings – and the proof of this situation is the fact that they behave exactly as dolphins do in our world. In many traditions of Western philosophy and cultural theory, fun is imagined as a distraction from the real point of life – self-reflection and awareness, the development of citizenship and engagement with large scale political issues. But what if, Adams suggests, the opposite is true. What if, in fact, the point of life is to have fun? And self-reflection and engagement with large scale political issues are vitally important only to the extent that they ensure that all human beings have equal access to the right to ‘muck about in the water having a good time’?

Starting a new journal called *Cultural Science* offers an important opportunity. Raymond Williams claims that ‘cultural studies is English for “cultural science”’ (Williams, 1974: 18). If the terms are indeed synonymous then rebooting Cultural Studies and rebranding it as Cultural Science allows a moment to take stock of the achievements of cultural studies, and to think about its future trajectory. In addressing that trajectory I want to make one plea: let’s keep fun in Cultural Science. Traditionally the sciences – and in particular the social sciences – have not been very good at recognising the importance of fun (McKee, 2008). Cultural Studies has been better than most disciplines in this respect. But the battle for importance of fun has by no means been won – and in this reboot I want to keep fun fully in the foreground.

Fun, guns and frocks

Fun is amusement, entertainment, pleasure for pleasure’s sake. It is trivial, it is not significant, not meaningful. It is not reflective. Fun is drunkenness, raucous laughter, karaoke, roller coaster rides, mucking about in the water, casual sex. What has been its place in Cultural Studies?

Gareth Roberts, another popular philosopher working in the realm of science fiction, has divided *Doctor Who* fans into two categories – ‘guns’ and ‘frocks’ (Orman, in McKee, 2005: 134). ‘Guns’ is the category for those fans who like *Doctor Who* stories that take themselves seriously – humourless stories where the Doctor wins by using violence. By contrast ‘Frocks’ covers those fans who like the hero to win by being funny, clever and letting ‘the villains fall into their own traps’ (Cornell, in Bottomley, 1995: np):

what's missing in popular culture is a hero that uses his wits, his intelligence to show that violence, degradation, genocide are simply silly, and part of what camp is saying is that the everyday things of life, making a cup of tea, hanging out with your friends and being nice to each other are infinitely more great and noble than the big gunnish, macho dreams envisaged by all the fascists in this world (np)

The history of Cultural Studies can similarly be written in terms of the tension between guns and frocks – between those who want a revolution and those who think that violence is ultimately ‘silly’; between those who want to put the enemy up against the wall, and those who think that ‘frocks are the purpose of life’ (Orman, 1996: 250); between those who believe in fighting, and those who believe in fun.

The broken-backed approach to fun in Cultural Studies

In most histories of Cultural Studies, the British culturalist tradition - exemplified by Richard Hoggart, E P Thompson and Raymond Williams - is given a central and germinal place (During, 2007: 5, Walton, 2008). As an originary place for Cultural Studies, Hoggart's writing about *The Uses of Literacy*, and British working class life in the 1950s, is interestingly ambivalent about fun. As he puts it: ‘the book is broken-backed’ in its attempts to bring together two distinct cultural traditions (the literary and the anthropological) – and ‘there's very little attempt specifically to bring them together’ (Hoggart, 1998 [1957]: 272).

And so on the one hand, he writes approvingly about traditional working class culture, including its emphasis on fun: ‘[t]he “real” things are the human and companionable things – home and family affection, friendship and being able to “enjoy y'self”’ (Hoggart, 1998 [1957]: 56). He notes in working class culture ‘the elevation of a sense of humour into a primary virtue’ (Hoggart, 1998 [1957]: 96), and that in working class axiology, ‘smoking and drinking ... is given a similarly high priority. Pleasures are a central part of life, not something perhaps to be allowed after a great number of other commitments have been met’ (Hoggart, 1998 [1957]: 98). He notes that ‘the working classes ... love the men who are ... full of cock-eyed fun, and the women who are uninhibitedly and irrepressibly vulgar’ (Hoggart, 1998 [1957]: 99). He tells of a cleaning woman in his childhood who:

had a fuller life than some of those for whom she worked. Thus if she had a day off, she thought nothing of moving with all available members of the family to the nearest seaside resort, which wasn't far, for a noisily enjoyable day, ending with fish and chips for all ... their [working class] ability not to permit themselves to be altered, but to take or not to take as they will and in their own way; their energy in insisting on a place for, and in enjoying, their traditional kinds of amusements and recreation (Hoggart, 1998 [1957]: 104).

In all these descriptions, Hoggart is warm towards the fun that he is describing. But later parts of this key Cultural Studies text, those dealing with an imposed mass culture rather than what Hoggart sees an organic working class life, are more dismissive of fun. Here he worries about the stultifying effects of a ‘regular, increasing and almost unvaried diet of sensation without commitment’ (a good definition of fun) (Hoggart, 1998 [1957]: 188). It will, he worries, ‘render its consumers less capable of responding openly and responsibly to life’ (188). His key illustration of this tendency is the ‘juke-box boys’ who hang around ‘milk bars’. Of these young working class men he says:

Most of them have jobs which require no personal outgoing, which are not intrinsically interesting ... The job is to be done day by day, and after that the rest is amusement, is pleasure; there is time to spare and some money in the pocket ... they are open to the entertainers and their efficient mass-equipment ... [T]he commercial people ensure, by the inevitable processes of development in commercial entertainment, that their peculiar grip is retained and strengthened. The responsibilities of marriage may gradually change them. Meanwhile they have no responsibilities, and little sense of responsibilities, to themselves or others. They are in one dreadful sense the new workers ... the directionless and tamed helots of a machine-minding class ... The hedonistic but passive barbarian ... is a portent (Hoggart, 1998 [1957]: 190-191)

We see in this originary text, then, both frocks and guns. Fun is important, a vital element of a good life; and it is a distraction, stopping consumers from dealing with what should be their responsibilities.

The tension between guns and frocks continues through the history of Cultural Studies.

Fun is a medicinal bath (amusement and distraction as fun)

Beyond a general agreement on the centrality of this British triumvirate, there is less agreement about what constitutes Cultural Studies in histories of the field. Such accounts commonly map out a number of distinct theoretical traditions. There is no absolute agreement about the divisions between the traditions, their composition, or their impact on Cultural Studies, but there are common tendencies. Most historians of the traditions in the field point towards some combination of German critical theory; the British ‘culturalist’ tradition mentioned above; structuralist and post-structuralist philosophy; a moment of ‘audience studies’ including an attention to pleasure; a number of identity-based political movements; and a move to cultural policy work (see Lewis, 2002; Milner and Browitt, 2002; During, 2007; Rojek, 2007; Walton, 2008). But beyond this there is a surprising amount of disagreement about exactly *how* the traditions mentioned above relate to Cultural Studies. And in the different histories that are written, and the different emphases given, we can see whether writers are guns or frocks.

The Frankfurt School provides one key faultline in the history of Cultural Studies’ approach to fun. The work particularly of Adorno and Horkheimer is of interest in understanding the sniping between the guns and frocks over the place of fun in Cultural Studies. In their work on ‘the culture industries’, Adorno and Horkheimer attack fun as dangerous distraction. ‘Fun is a medicinal bath’, they say (1972[1944]: 140) as they explain why entertainment is undesirable. ‘Amusement under late capitalism ... is sought after as an escape from the mechanized work process and to recruit strength in order to be able to cope with it again’ (131). Why is this bad? ‘The problem is that the culture industry makes things easy to consume and understand’ (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1944: 142-3), it does not call for ‘mental effort’ (131) or ‘sustained thought’ (127).

And why, one might ask, is that a bad thing? One element of Adorno and Horkheimer’s position is that a good life involves ‘resistance’ to ‘the [capitalist] system’ (141). Anything that makes people happy is, by definition, bad, because it is ‘denial’ (141). It distracts from the reality of how bad things really are. When people are happy they are not fighting against what is wrong in the world. ‘Pleasure promotes ... resignation’ (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1944: 142). ‘Pleasure always means not to think about anything, to forget suffering even where it is shown. Basically it is helplessness. It is flight ... from the last remaining thought of resistance’ (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1944: 144). And what is the chain of logic here? Because if something is easy to understand, then we do not think about it, or (therefore, it is claimed – although no explanation is given for the necessity of the connection) about how we make sense of the world more widely. But if something is difficult to understand, and we have to struggle to make sense of it, then we must engage our brains. Those who consume easy culture live lives without thinking. So the argument goes.

And this position feeds into, and becomes part of, a more general ‘monastic’ position (141). Pain is good – because it reminds us of how bad the world is. Pleasure is bad – it distracts us from the same truth: ‘In the culture industry, jovial denial takes the place of the pain found in ecstasy and in asceticism’ (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1944:141). But ‘great artists’ are those who dealt with ‘suffering’, presenting ‘negative truth’ (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1944: 130). Fun is ‘barbaric... Delight is austere’ (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1944: 141).

The guns list Adorno as an ‘influential’ early model of cultural studies and insist that Adorno’s critical theory provides ‘an approach which has been of great interest to Cultural Studies’ (Walton, 2008: 11, 13), and write him into a foundational position for the field (Milner and Browitt, 2002: 18). Some ‘Readers’ include Adorno and Horkheimer in their collection of ‘seminal and/or representative essays in cultural studies’ (During, 2007: 1; Durham and Kellner, 2006).

By contrast, the frocks claim that Adorno does not belong in Cultural Studies. They begin their histories by insisting that Cultural Studies’ political project fundamentally disagrees with that of the Frankfurt School:

Cultural Studies examines culture as inherently political. It does so, among other reasons, to rebut the notion that humans are docile, plastic creatures ... shaped by the culture industry ... [the Cultural Industries’] power in framing meaning has been used to argue that the culture industry dominates popular culture. Against this,

Cultural Studies insists upon investigating culture as a perpetual mix of both force and resistance (Rojek, 2007: 29-30).

Some mention Adorno only in passing, later in their accounts (Hartley, 2002: 90-91).

The tension between guns and frocks in this area has become more explicit recently, with a number of gunny publications decrying the frocks' lack of attention to Adorno. In *Adorno: a critical reader* (Gibson and Rubin, 2002), Andreas Huyssen bemoans the fact that American cultural studies in particular has been so anti-Adorno that: 'an attack on the German philosopher routinely accompanied celebrations of the radical aspirations of the new cultural studies approach (Huyssen, 2002: 52). The authors collected in *Rethinking the Frankfurt School* – including Douglas Kellner and Fredric Jameson – argue that Cultural Studies has wrongly dismissed Adorno and his colleagues, and it's time to return to them and take them seriously (Nealon, and Irr, eds, 2002).

The mention of Jameson points us towards a number of writers, influential in Cultural Studies, who clearly draw on the work of the Frankfurt School. Jürgen Habermas's work on the public sphere has been influential in Cultural Studies, and is explicitly influenced by Adorno's theorising on culture (Milner and Browitt, 2002: 77). And Jameson himself is an important part of this tradition. As 'a key figure in contemporary cultural theory' (Milner and Browitt, 2002: 184), his work has 'set the terms of subsequent debate' (Anderson, quoted in Milner and Browitt, 2002: 184). Although he is commonly named as 'postmodern' theorist, that is slightly misleading. His work is not itself 'postmodern'. He rather employs critical theory in order to attack postmodernism: 'the German theorists, especially Lukász, Adorno and Brecht, came to occupy an increasingly prominent place in his [Jameson's] thinking' (Milner and Browitt, 2002: 185):

Jameson's rhetorical and theoretical strategy is clearly reminiscent of the Frankfurt School ... Like Adorno's, Jameson's critical theory functions by way of a great refusal ... intransigent resistance to the lures of commodity culture' (Milner and Browitt, 2002: 189).

As Milner and Browitt put it:

there was ... an almost inescapable logic in Jameson's resort to Adorno and Horkheimer 'to restore the sense of something grim and impending within the polluted sunshine of the shopping mall' (Milner and Browitt, 2002: 193, quoting Jameson).

There is in Cultural Studies, then, a gunny tendency to reject fun, 'the polluted sunshine of the shopping mall', condemning the distraction it offers from political contestation against capitalism. Jameson's notion of 'pastiche' attacks the popular culture of late capitalism, claiming that it is a 'neutral practice of ... mimicry, without any of parody's ulterior motives, amputated of satiric impulse, devoid of ... any conviction' (Jameson, 1991: 17). The work of Debord on spectacle (1977) – and perhaps even (although ambivalently) Baudrillard's writing about the simulacrum (1983) - seem to me to similarly draw on this approach to culture. While the frocks may insist that Adorno, Jameson, Habermas et al are not part of the Cultural Studies tradition, the guns insist on their importance.

Fun with Fiske (pleasure and celebration as fun)

A second key faultline where we can trace the tension between guns and frocks in Cultural Studies comes with a turn to 'popular consumption and media audiences' (Lewis, 2002: 273), and debates about pleasure and resistance. It is commonly agreed that a number of writers – Ien Ang, Janice Radway and particularly John Fiske are commonly cited (O'Connor and Klaus, 2000: 369) – brought an attention to the audience into Cultural Studies. A theoretical prehistory for their work is traced, through De Certeau, Bakhtin and Barthes (Lewis, 2002: 273; Rojek, 2007: 17). The theoretical import of the moment is commonly recounted as an argument about pleasure, and resistance to capitalism. De Certeau, Bakhtin and Barthes have all provided theoretical work which it is possible to interpret as suggesting that pleasure: 'may constitute a resistance to the dominant ideology ... of rationalized, patriarchal capitalism' (Lewis, 2002: 139). The question then becomes: to what extent do the consumption practices of audiences – the pleasures they take from mass texts - constitute a genuine challenge to capitalism?

But the ways in which this story is told depends on whether a gun or a frock is writing.

As noted above, for Chris Rojek - in a very frocky way – it is foundational for Cultural Studies that the field wants to: ‘rebut the notion that humans are docile, plastic creatures ... shaped by the culture industry’; ‘Cultural Studies insists upon investigating culture as a perpetual mix of both force and resistance’ (Rojek, 2007: 29-30). But a strong contradictory discourse exists: that these writers – and particularly Fiske – went too far in celebrating pleasure. They were caught up by fun, and forgot about the necessity of violence (politics).

Fiske ... takes cultural studies a step further towards the surrender of its political credentials. In celebrating the liberatory potential of popular texts he is moving well outside the borders of the Marxist critical heritage ... Fiske seems to sacrifice the seriousness of Barthes’ intent in order to emphasize playfulness and humour (Lewis, 2002: 139)

For guns, there is nothing worse than playfulness and humour. Here we see another battle over the place of fun in Cultural Studies. The keyword here is ‘pleasure’, the disagreement is whether pleasure is: ‘liberating ... resistive ... subversive’? (O’Connor and Klaus, 2000: 377) Does it have: ‘an essentially radical status’? (Mercer, 1986: 60).

Another key term that has emerged in relation to this debate is ‘celebration’. This is a favoured term by guns to denounce the work of frocks. Celebrating might seem like fun – let’s have a party! - and indeed, perhaps that is why it is so offensive. Jim McGuigan’s work on *Cultural Populism* (1992) has provided a commonly cited source for writers who are worried that the frocks are ‘celebrating’ popular culture and the pleasures that audiences take from it. As Jeff Lewis puts it, McGuigan attacks writers like John Fiske for their ‘excessive celebration of popular culture and the transgressive potential of pleasure’ (Lewis, 2002: 289). O’Connor and Klaus worry about ‘a celebratory approach’ to pleasure:

Here one can detect a tendency to posit pleasure as exclusively positive in response to the trivialization and marginalization of ‘female genres’ in both popular and elite culture. The different sources of pleasure are then reinterpreted as progressive ... potentially liberating ... resistive ... subversive ... [or] feminist (O’Connor and Klaus, 2000: 377)

For the anti-celebration writers, pleasure is itself a problem – tied up to liberal and utilitarian politics (Lewis, 2002: 113). Cultural Studies, the guns claim, is anti-utilitarian. Utilitarianism, and the liberalism it underlies, propose ‘a plurality of discrete, separate, rational individuals, each of whom is motivated, to all intents and purposes exclusively, by the pursuit of pleasure’ (Milner and Browitt, 2002: 15). Cultural Studies rejects this model: it is essentially ‘non-utilitarian’ (Milner and Browitt, 2002: 18). Cultural Studies, for the guns, rejects pleasure as the end point of politics.

Deconstructing fun (playfulness and desire as fun)

A third place where we find contestation over fun in the history of Cultural Studies is in poststructuralism and the idea of playfulness. As noted above, many ‘postmodern’ theorists are not themselves postmodern – they tend to apply critical theories to attempt explanations of postmodern culture (Jameson, Debord). But there are distinctly poststructural philosophers like Derrida who perform in their own writing a playful approach to language. Meaning is set loose from certainty, produced in the play of words (Derrida, 1978). Desire also takes its place, a central concern of Deleuze and Guattari, who want to see human beings as ‘desiring machines’ (Deleuze and Guattari, 1983). Many writers in Cultural Studies draw on the theoretical work of Derrida, Deleuze and Guattari. Fun finds a place in the field through playfulness and desire. But for guns, once again, this tendency must be cast out:

the theoretical danger of postmodernism is twofold ... It threatens to collapse into an irreversible relativism ... little more than a form of indulgent and relativist hedonism ... [and] it threatens to present its politics as a grounded and privileged theory of utility ... one in which pleasure ... become[s] the ‘essence’ of a generalized politics of liberation (Lewis, 2002: 292)

Jameson attacks postmodern intellectual culture for being ‘peculiarly hedonistic. The hedonism arises very directly from out [sic] of the commodity cultures of affluence’ (Milner and Browitt, 2002: 190). As Milner and Browitt formulate their concern:

At its best, as in Foucault or in Derrida at his least playful poststructuralism can be much more than this [‘the philosophical game’]; at its worst, as in the silly word games about even sillier television programs that sometimes seem to fill cultural studies journals, it can be very much worse (Milner and Browitt, 2002: 127).

The best Cultural Studies writing is that which is ‘least playful’; silliness must be avoided at all costs. We hear the retort of the guns.

Fun for fun’s sake

If there is a twentieth century English language philosopher more popular than Douglas Adams, it is J R R Tolkien – who also has something to say about the relative importance of wars and fun. In *The Two Towers*, talking about the necessity for fighting, the warrior Faramir says: ‘I do not love the bright sword for its sharpness, nor the arrow for its swiftness, nor the warrior for his glory. I love only that which they defend’ (Tolkien, 1965, 355). Kate Orman glosses ‘that which they defend’: ‘In Hobbiton, they dance, they eat too much, and they drink too much ... They’re having a lovely time’ (Orman, in McKee, 2005: 135).

It isn’t possible to characterise the place of fun in Cultural Studies simply. The field has important traditions of writers who insist on the importance of fun, and those who denounce it. There are those who think that amusement and distraction are dangerous, and those who think that pleasure can be politically progressive. There are those who condemn celebration, and those who celebrate the potential of playfulness. However, it seems to me that there is a common thread running through the positions of both guns and frocks. I suspect that in these debates about fun in Cultural Studies, most writers have valued the bright sword for its sharpness. Debates about fun are not about the value of fun for fun’s sake. Rather, they are about the possible political outcomes of fun. Is fun a distraction from political action? Or is fun, in itself, a form of resistance to political domination?

But what about this proposition: it doesn’t matter. The fun itself is the important thing. It doesn’t matter if, by having fun, you are resisting capitalism. Having fun is the valuable end in itself. Politics is important only to the extent to which it enables more people to have more fun, more often.

I am not the first person to make this point – but there are surprisingly few who have taken this stand. Richard Dyer has made a similar point - that cultural criticism has traditionally looked at entertainment in terms of ‘something else’:

Time and again we are told not why Westerns are exciting, why horror films horrify, why weepies make us cry, but instead are told that, while they are exciting, horrifying or tearjerking, the films also deal with history, society, psychology, gender roles, indeed, the meaning of life ... The model of showing how the text makes profound statements *despite* also being entertaining ... remains strong (Dyer, 1992: 3, emphasis added)

Dyer is also one of the few writers to say explicitly: ‘I am glad that things that are entertainment are available in our societies and happy that we avail ourselves of them’ (Dyer, 1992: ix). John Hartley is another. Hartley’s work is unique in tracing a history of democratic thought and practice which allows a place for fun - ‘comfort’ - as an important political end. Comfort means ‘plenty to eat, enough to drink, good clothes, pleasant homes, a thorough education and sufficient leisure for all’ (Disraeli, quoted in Hartley, 1996: 99). And the political drive of modernity has been towards ‘liberty, comfort and democratic equivalence’ (Hartley, 1996: 242). Hartley is also one of the few Cultural Studies writers to stand up for the foundational importance of ‘frocks’ (Hartley, 1996: 177). Dyer and Hartley are important and influential writers. Many of their ideas have been taken up by other Cultural Studies authors and have become important in the field. But it’s difficult to find a tradition of writers celebrating entertainment as important on its own terms; who see comfort as its own good; who celebrate fun for fun’s sake.

Chris Rojek has recently argued that Cultural Studies needs to think about the ends of cultural change as well as the ‘means’ (Rojek, 2007: 159), on the idea that ‘culture can be *better* as well as different’ (159). I think he is right – and I think that, in a better world, more people would be having more fun, more often.

Good fun

Two points before I leave this argument.

Firstly, I want to insist on the importance of politics, and the centrality of politics to Cultural Studies. It is vitally important to understand and intervene in the relationships of culture with both large scale politics of the state and the economy and micro politics of interpersonal and institutional interactions. This is the bright sword. Such work is vital for Cultural Studies. But it is not valuable for itself. It is valuable only for its ability to protect what is truly important – that is, fun. There is not enough fun in the world, and what there is is distributed unequally. Politics must address this.

Secondly, in analysing the way in which fun has been written about in Cultural Studies I’ve been bothered by the way that some guns have portrayed fun – and particularly pleasure – as a selfish pursuit. As I noted above, a number of writers have attacked fun (or cognate terms) as being ‘hedonistic’ – which they understand as being ‘individualistic’, and thus selfish (Lewis, 2002: 292; Jameson in Milner and Browitt, 2002: 190). But I would suggest that this is a failing in the imagination of the guns – not a necessary element of fun. If I could take a, perhaps unexpected, diversion into the world of sexual depravity, we can find some philosophers who have been cited very little in Cultural Studies but who can suggest quite a different way of thinking about fun. In the world of casual sex, we have an emerging tradition of philosophers who argue for fun as the centre of an ethical and other-centred praxis. In the tradition of polyamory, fun and casual sex become the ways in which care is practised, ethics expressed, and communities built. *The Ethical Slut* is a guide to ‘infinite sexual possibilities’ and ‘Having Fun’ (Easton and Liszt, 1997: 227):

As proud sluts we believe that sex and sexual love are fundamental forces for good- activities with the potential to strengthen intimate bonds, enhance lives, create spiritual awareness, even change the world. And furthermore, we believe that all consensual sexual choices have these potentials ... A slut shares his¹ sexuality the way a philanthropist shares his money – because they have a lot to share, because it makes them happy to share it, and because sharing makes the world a better place. Sluts often find that the more sex and love they give away, the more they have (Easton and Liszt, 1997: 4)

This is very clearly not an individualist or selfish philosophy:

Ethical slutdom is a challenging path ... being a slut doesn’t mean simply doing whatever you want, whenever you want, with whomever you want ... First and foremost, ethical sluts value consent ... ‘an active collaboration for the benefit, well-being and pleasure of all persons concerned’ (Easton and Liszt, 1997: 21-22)

And it is not simplistic in its thinking about its interpersonal nature:

Most of our criteria for ethics are quite pragmatic. Is anyone being harmed? Is there any way to avoid causing that harm? Are there any risks? Is everybody involved aware of those risks and doing what can be done to minimise them? And, on the positive side: How much fun is it? What is everybody learning from it? Is it helping someone to grow? Is it helping make the world a better place? (Easton and Liszt, 1997: 21)

This is quite explicitly a philosophy of fun:

Releasing tension, relieving menstrual symptoms, maintaining mental health, preventing prostrate problems, making babies, cementing relationships and so on are all admirable goals, and wonderful side benefits of sex. But they are not what sex is *for*. Sex is for pleasure, a complete and worthwhile goal in itself (Easton and Liszt, 1997: 20)

In celebrating fun, then, I’m not celebrating selfishness, or individualism. These are not necessary elements of fun. Fun is, I suggested above, amusement, entertainment, pleasure for pleasure’s sake. It is trivial, it is

not significant, not meaningful. It is not reflective. Fun is drunkenness, raucous laughter, karaoke, roller coaster rides, mucking about in the water, casual sex. It is not necessarily selfish.

Cultural Science offers an opportunity to reboot Cultural Studies. In doing so, I hope that it doesn't embrace the worst elements of other Sciences, which have proven to be extremely poor at seeing the importance of fun. I hope that Cultural Science continues those tendencies of Cultural Studies which have seen the importance of entertainment, amusement, pleasure and frocks. This does not necessarily have to be written into a foundational constitution. But our attitude towards fun will inform the kinds of projects that are undertaken, what is counted, and how it is valued. It will inform study axiologically. With Cultural Science we can take the opportunity to embrace fun as a valuable part of the culture being addressed. In our counting, let's not count amusement as a dangerous distraction from what is really worthwhile or celebration as unimportant. We can say that we are glad that things that are entertainment are available in our societies and happy that we avail ourselves of them. We can look for signs of increasing comfort and celebrate these as a good thing. We can embrace mucking about in the water having a good time as a key element of a good life, something to which politics must necessarily be subjected, and in whose promulgation we can measure the value of politics.

This is what I hope for from Cultural Science.

Was it fun for you?

And so as we draw to a close, lighting a post coital cigarette and taking a sip of our Bacardi Breezers, one final question. Not so much, Do you love me? but rather: has this whole project been a massive exercise in hypocrisy? To write a 6000 word academic article, in formal English, drawing on a tradition of intellectual writing, and modes of rational argument, to argue for the importance of karaoke, roller coasters, casual sex, drunkenness and entertainment?

I hope not. This article represents one form of culture, used to argue for the importance of others. As a translator, my dream would be to make the importance of fun apparent within an area of culture that sometimes just hasn't seen the point. It seems to me that one of the problems with cultural theory has been too static and homogenous a model of identity, one that lacks a temporal element – either you are *this* kind of person, or *that* kind of person. Queer theory has reintroduced a temporal element – you can engage in one kind of practice at one moment; another kind of practice at another.

I have spent considerable time researching and writing this article. Here it is, complete, ready to be submitted to the journal of *Cultural Science*.

Great.

Now, if you'll excuse me, I'm off to have some fun.

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¹ Easton and Liszt, both female, systematically alternate between 'her' and 'his' throughout their book.