we gotta get out of this place

popular
conservatism
and postmodern
culture

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ARTICULATION AND CULTURE

The questions I want to pose involve the relationship between popular culture—the popular culture people are offered, the popular culture they care about and the popular culture they reject—and politics. How does each inform and shape the other? How can critics make sense of current political changes (e.g., the increasing disinvestment from political activity conjoined with a growing conservatism) in the light of cultural habits, and vice versa? These questions go to the very heart of the significance of culture and of that part of people's lives which seems most personal: tastes, pleasures, commitments. But such domains are not outside of the social and political arenas. Nor are their meanings and relationships transparently available to critics. How then are critics to make sense of cultural practices, trends or events? How can they describe their political and social significance? How can they gain some insight into what possibilities they offer, and what possibilities are taken up?

CULTURAL STUDIES, POPULAR CULTURE AND COMMUNICATION

The quantitative explosion of popular culture in the twentieth century was no doubt enabled by the appropriation of the mass media as a system for the distribution of popular culture. This has often led critics to assume that popular culture and mass communication are

identical. But there was nothing inherent in the mass media that guaranteed that their most important function would be the transmission of popular culture (rather than, for example, education, information or propaganda). They were used in this way largely for two economic purposes: to maximize the profits of the emergent cultural industries (many of the companies were already involved in the production of both the technology and the programming); and to help create an economy based on mass consumption and ever-expanding demand.

This "massification" of popular culture, however, was not responsible for the commodification or industrialization of cultural production and distribution; these processes had begun much earlier. But it did reorganize the processes of cultural consumption by bringing the majority of the population into the cultural arena on a national (and eventually international) level. This expanded market provided important motivation for the increasing capitalization and regulation of culture. Moreover, the new media of distribution had important consequences for the ways in which popular culture was placed into the daily routines, spaces and times of social life. They also made it difficult for someone to avoid exposure to the new forms of popular culture which were being created for the media and designed for the new mass audience. But however dense and complex the relations between the mass media and popular culture, the two were not and are not the same.

The identification of popular culture as an instance of a more general process of communication needs to be challenged, for it has had important consequences. In particular, two assumptions have, I believe, hindered cultural studies' attempts to analyze popular culture. The first is structural: the model of communication assumes a relationship between two discrete and independently existing entities: whether between individuals, or between audiences and texts, or between signifieds and signifiers. The result is that any cultural relation takes on the form of an unspecified and unspecifiable exchange—a mediation—between encoding and decoding.[1] It makes little difference which term in the model is given priority as long as the distance or gap between them remains. Whether the text or

the audience (since different people can interpret the same text in disconcertingly different ways) has the power to determine the meaning of a specific communicative event, communication is the process by which that gap is overcome, the unknown becomes known, the strange becomes familiar. The model remains the same even if one hypothesizes a process of negotiation in which each is granted some power. The distance between them remains sacrosanct.

Even contemporary poststructuralist theories of "difference"[2] fail to challenge the structural gap which is the essence of communication in this model; rather, they fetishize it. Such theories do challenge the assumption that the terms within the model (text, meaning, experience, audience, subject) describe singular, consistent and self-identical entities that exist prior to their entrance into the relationship (the gap or difference) of communication. With that assumption—that every instance (e.g., of text) has a unified identity which corresponds or relates in necessary ways to another equally unified term (e.g., of meaning or audience)—the whole game (especially the outcome) is guaranteed in advance. Here is a text, unique and complete unto itself. Here is the meaning that corresponds to that text, that is necessarily produced by it. Here is an audience which also has its own proper identity guaranteed to it in advance. And here is the experience of that audience, necessarily resulting from its particular social position or its unique cultural history.

The concept of difference entails a sustained critique of any assumption of such guaranteed and necessary relationships. Just as structuralism argued that the identity and meaning of any sign depends upon its place within a system of differences, poststructuralist theories of difference argue that no element within the cultural field has an identity of its own which is intrinsic to it and thus guaranteed in advance. A text can never be said to have a singular meaning, or even a circumscribed set of meanings. Perhaps texts cannot be treated singularly and in isolation: the meaning of a text may depend upon its formal and historical relations to other texts (its "intertextuality"). An audience can never be said to have a singular identity, or even a finite set of identities. Each is replete with multiple and unrelated differences, each is potentially infinitely

fragmentable. Theories of difference emphasize the multiplicity and disconnectedness within and between texts and audiences. By erasing the identity of the terms of the relationship, the relationship itself becomes impossible or at least necessarily absent. Communication itself is an illusion which it is the critic's job to deconstruct.

While structuralism assumes that the fields of difference (e.g., of signs, meanings, subjects) are pregiven and stable, poststructuralism argues that the terms of the communicative relationship—the very existence of texts, meanings and audiences—are themselves the result of the continuous production of the difference, the gap, between them. Culture is the process by which the difference is produced and it is only within that process that texts and audiences can be said to exist, and even then only for a fleeting moment. For the process of producing the difference continues, making it impossible to ever capture a stable and coherent moment of the process. Post-structuralism does not reject the assumption that communication involves the relations between texts and audiences, mediated through the production of meaning. But it argues that meaning exists only within the process of the production of difference; furthermore, it argues that the terms of the relationship—text and audience—are themselves the product of the constant production of difference, of the constant deferral, gap or absence inherent within meaning itself. Culture merely involves a constant sliding from one difference into another.

Such theories of difference have not abandoned the structure of the communication model. The critic can only join into the endless and seemingly random movement of fragments, deconstructing any and every claim for stability, unity and necessity, but he or she can never succeed. In the end, "difference" not only negates the possibility of any guarantee, it reestablishes its own guarantees: first, that all such relations and identities are illusions; second, that the name of the game and the form of its outcome, however illusory they may be, are known in advance (in the ever to be deconstructed model of communication); and third, that the game never stops.

Changing historical conditions, including the changing spatial and temporal complexity of the field of popular culture, have dis-

solved the traditional confidence with which critics and consumers divide the terrain of culture into texts, genre and media, and the terrain of cultural subjects into audiences and communities. No one can escape the constant exposure to an enormous range of presentations of and references to various popular culture practices. They have infiltrated every aspect and institution of our existence. Everyone is constantly exposed to a variety of media and forms, and participates in a range of events and activities. How does one describe the constantly changing kaleidoscope of cultural practices and daily life? How does one construct the appropriate intertextual links? The cultural critic confronts a world in which intertextuality has gone mad, a world in which he or she no longer has the luxury of studying identifiable, stable practices and relations. Even if one could construct the intertextuality of popular culture, considering the relations among the various forms and media, (music, film, books, fashion, magazines, comics, etc.), one would also have to consider the complex relations between exposure and choices. How does the analyst stabilize the mobile and shifting alliances of audiences and subjectivities, of relations to and investments in various sites, events and activities of popular culture? How does he or she know the appeal of specific events—ranging from those presumably targeted to particular audiences to those apparently addressing the broad mythic American viewer?

In the modern world, the potential audience for popular culture (and the real audience for many if not most of its texts) is often so large and diverse that it is difficult to talk about it in any coherent way. Critics have had to seek ways to identify specific audience fractions. Such fractions can be defined and located in one of two ways: either by shared taste or by a shared identity which, in some way, determines people's relations to particular texts. In both cases, the audience exists outside of a particular interaction with the media, and they come to that interaction with their own resources, competencies and needs. In the former, however, its unity as an audience is only defined by its relation to the text; in the latter, it is defined entirely independently of the text. Neither view recognizes the way texts construct their own appropriate audiences.[1]

In what way does shared taste allow any access to popular culture? Taste reveals nothing about how people connect into the texts, and the fact that a group of people share a taste for some texts does not in fact guarantee that their common taste describes a common relationship. Taste merely describes people's different abilities to find pleasure in a particular body of texts rather than others. But it does not take us any further. A student recently told me that he could not understand how people could stand to be so blatantly emotionally manipulated by the likes of *The Sound of Music*, but he seemed untroubled by his own pleasure in being manipulated by horror films. Taste does not offer any explanation which justifies the construction of the imaginary unity of an audience fraction.

On the other hand, if an audience fraction is defined externally, by a common set of interests and experiences related in some way to its social position, how can such simple identifications deal with the complexity of an individual's social identity? Since any individual occupies a number of different social positions (white, middle-class, educated, Jewish, leftist, male, etc.), how can one possibly know which social position is most relevant in constructing a specific audience and in understanding their relation to a specific text? Or need the critic take all of the identities into account? One can never know in advance which social identities are pertinent to the construction of a particular cultural audience, any more than one can know what is pertinent in any specific text. How far does one carry such analyses, for certainly they can be carried all the way back to the unique biographical history of any individual?

In fact, it appears increasingly unreasonable to isolate the communicative relation between texts and audiences from the broader field of social existence. The critic cannot separate the consumption of popular culture from the range of leisure activities which fill in the spaces of our daily lives: jogging, shopping, mall-walking, games, exercise, dancing, etc. The critic cannot separate it from the contrary and often boring demands of work (both paid and unpaid, both domestic and nondomestic), education, politics, taxes, home life, illness, etc. One cannot ignore the relations between the changing cultural terrain and the changing forms, practices, discourses and

sites of labor. Not only are the places and meanings of both leisure and labor constructed in terms of gender, race, age and class relations, they are also inflected by the growing importance of service and leisure employment in the current economy (and its limited success), by the acceptance and exploitation of more flexible arrangements of productive time and space, and by the increasing reality of an enforced leisure time (through unemployment, cutbacks in school hours and daycare facilities, etc.). Further, for some people, consumption is actually a form of labor, and for others it is simply unavailable.

The second assumption implicit in the identification of culture with communication (and which has hampered cultural studies) is substantive: it involves the reduction of culture to texts and of human reality to the plane of meaning. The analysis of culture then involves the interpretation of cognitive, semantic or narrative content which lies hidden within the text. This reduction of both culture and lived reality starts with the important insight that human beings live in a meaningful world, a world in which they respond to, and are shaped by, the meanings which have been linked to their social and material realities. But it goes overboard, moving from a theory of the determining power of the plane of meaning in human life, to a theory in which social and material realities disappear into the plane of meaning. Meaning becomes the totality of human existence because it mediates an otherwise inaccessible and unknowable reality.

The view of culture as mediation places cultural studies within the modernist or, more accurately, the Kantian tradition,[4] which replaces ontology with epistemology. Kant argued that human beings are condemned to always confront, not a real world, but the phenomenal world of their own creation. This phenomenal reality was the product of transcendental categories (e.g., space and time) which served as the conditions of possibility of any perceptual relation to the world, and hence of any knowledge. Through a series of permutations, this mediating realm was transformed into the cultural forms through which meanings are produced, and the categories became structures or maps of meaning. These semantic or cognitive mediations, laid over the world as it were, enable us to interpret

events by locating them within specific maps. Here, between the objectivities of cultural texts and social realities, human existence is transformed into a world of experiences.

This model of mediation flattens the possibilities of cultural relations and effects. At the very least, the notion of meaning as semantic content has to be made more complex and contradictory. Meaning itself is not a simple category and there are different forms of meaning (narrative, connotative, evaluative, reflective, etc.). But this does not go far enough, for the same text not only can be interpreted differently, it can have different uses for different people in different contexts. The same text can be a source of narrative romance, emotional support, sexual fantasy, aesthetic pleasure, language acquisition, noise (to drown out other demands), identity formation or rebellion against various powers.

The active engagement with texts is rarely determined exclusively by the interpretive content of meaning production. People's choice of texts, and of the ways they use, appropriate and even interpret them, often depend upon a variety of other sorts of relations—for example, the pleasures they are able to derive. But pleasure, like meaning, is itself a complex notion. Sometimes pleasure may be the result of specific interpretations and meanings which reinforce one's sense of identity, or which provide guidelines for action. At other times, pleasure may result from the activity itself, from the exertion or lack of exertion, from escaping other demands or concerns. Pleasure may be the result of fantasies which either answer real needs and desires or express possibilities that might otherwise never be manifested (and would certainly never be actually lived). The fact that people often find pleasure, in a variety of ways, through texts, is often the determinant of their relations to culture.

Besides introducing the plane of desire (and that of pleasure),[5] cultural studies increasingly distinguishes between meaning and ideology.[6] The latter describes those maps of meaning which are, in some way, actually attached to the world; they not only provide a possible interpretation of the world, they provide a representation of reality. Under certain conditions, people take up or invest in the

map of meaning that a text offers in such a way that it is stitched onto the field of social and historical practices. This meaning then becomes *the* meaning, the truth, of the field of real practices. Take *Rambo*, for example. It is certainly possible for some people to interpret Rambo as the isolated and betrayed hero; such a reading is certainly imaginable within our common cultural context and resources. Whether it is taken up, by whom, and under what conditions determines how people are located in specific relationships to the maps of meaning, and the realities they represent. But cultural critics have failed to recognize that maps of meaning and ideological positions are never passively occupied. They are taken up, lived, in different ways, to different degrees, with differing investments and intensities. Understanding any instance of effective ideology demands a "psychology" which accounts for the ways individuals selectively relate to ideological practices.[7]

If not every meaning is a representation, and not every text has representational effects, it may also be true that texts may have effects other than meaning-effects, and meanings, interpretations, uses and pleasures may themselves have additional effects. Particular cultural texts may also have other sorts of effects (whether one calls them meaning-effects is not as important as recognizing that they cannot be reduced to the level of cognitive and narrative systems). Cultural texts are always at least potentially multifunctional.

CULTURAL STUDIES, THE REAL AND ARTICULATION

I want to propose a theory for cultural studies which does not identify culture with communication, and which can describe the complexity of effects and relations circulating through and around culture. Such a theory will be, on the surface, paradoxical, for it will not offer readings of either texts or audiences' responses (even though texts are what audiences "care" about). Rather, it will be concerned with particular configurations of practices, how they produce effects and how such effects are organized and deployed. I will

describe two commitments—alternatives to the assumptions of a model of communication—of a revised cultural studies: a return to the real via a materialist theory of effectivity; and a principle of contextuality understood as and through the practice of articulation. In fact, these two commitments are mutually constitutive, as Foucault recognizes:

> Is it inevitable that we should know of no other function for speech than that of commentary? *Commentary* questions discourse as to what it says and intended to say; it tries to uncover the deeper meaning of speech . . . in other words, in stating what has been said, one has to re-state what has never been said. In this activity known as commentary which tries to transmit an old, unyielding discourse seemingly silent to itself, into another, more prolix discourse that is both more archaic and more contemporary—is concealed a strange attitude towards language: to comment is to admit by definition an excess of the signified over the signifier; a necessary, unformulated remainder of thought that language has left in the shade—a remainder that is the very essence of that thought, driven outside its secret—but to comment also presupposes that this unspoken element slumbers within speech, and that, by a superabundance proper to the signifier, one may, in questioning it, give voice to a content that was not explicitly signified. By opening up the possibility of commentary, this double plethora dooms us to an endless task that nothing can limit: there is always a certain amount of signified remaining that must be allowed to speak, while the signifier is always offered to us in an abundance that questions us, in spite of ourselves, as to what it "means." Signifier and signified thus assume a substantial autonomy that accords the treasure of a virtual signification to each of them separately; one may even exist without the other, and begin to speak of itself: commentary resides in that supposed space.[8]

Foucault is arguing here that it is the structural assumption of the gap between the signifier and the signified (reproduced in the structural gap between text and audience) that opens up the space of meaning and interpretation. Nevertheless, I shall treat each of these assumptions somewhat independently, beginning with the question of the reduction of culture and even human existence to the realm of meaning.

Materialism and Effectivity: The Real

Placing cultural studies within the sphere of the poststructuralist (neo-Kantian) claim that all of reality is textuality[9] misreads the materialist foundations of cultural studies. As Stuart Hall writes,

> My own view is that events, relations, structures do have conditions of existence and real effects, outside the sphere of the discursive; but that it is only within the discursive, and subject to its specific conditions, limits and modalities, [that] they have [been] or can [. . .] be constructed within meaning. Thus, while not wanting to expand the territorial claim of the discursive infinitely, how things are represented and the "machineries" and regimes of representation in a culture do play a *constitutive*, and not merely a reflexive, after-the-event, role.[10]

But Hall's view does seem to bracket questions about the effects of the materialities which exist "outside the sphere of the discursive." In some instances, this silence is simply a matter of cultural studies' field of interest: to place questions of meaning and representation onto the agenda of Left analyses of contemporary society. This is an important project whenever questions of ideology are either ignored or oversimplified. However, today ideological analysis dominates much of the writing about contemporary society. While such researches into the field of ideology and ideological struggles in contemporary society need to be carried forward, they are no longer sufficient.

Often, the erasure of "the real" is not merely a strategic choice, but an epistemological assumption built upon the Kantian prohibition of metaphysics: since we can only describe the phenomenal world—the world of human experience constituted through the mediation of cultural forms—reality must remain forever beyond our analyses. It is ironic that so much of contemporary critical work accepts a premise which Georg Lukacs, over fifty years ago, identified as a fundamental "antinomy" of "bourgeois" or modern thought: "Modern philosophy . . . refuses to accept the world as something that has arisen . . . independently of the knowing subject."[11]

✗   I believe it is necessary to bring "the real" back onto the agenda of cultural studies, recognizing that we have no simple or innocent access to it outside of the systems of signification and representation. But the fact that it is a difficult—and even impossible in the terms of modern philosophy's definitions of objectivity and the empirical— does not mean that we cannot talk about a "new empiricism"—a "wild realism"—which aims to describe the determining effects of the real. As Guattari puts it:

> Everything that's written in refusing the connection with the refer-ent, with reality, implies a politics of individuation, of the subject and of the object, of a turning of writing on itself, and by that puts itself into the service of all hierarchies, of all centralized systems of power, of what Gilles Deleuze and I call all "arborescences," the regime of unifiable multiplicities. The second axis (according to which everything that is written is linked to a political position), in opposition to arborescence, is that of the "rhizome," the regime of pure multiplicities . . . the pattern of breaks in reality, in the social field, and in the field of economic, cosmic and other flows. . . . An arrangement in its multiplicity forcibly works both on semiotic flows, material flows and social flows. There is no longer a tripartition between a field of reality, the world, a field of repre-sentation, the book, and a field of subjectivity, the author. But an arrangement places in connection certain multiplicities taken from each of these orders. . . . The book is an arrangement with the outside, opposed to the book image of the world: a book-rhizome.[12]

What is crucial here is the rejection of the model of culture defined by the need to construct a correspondence between two parallel, nonintersecting planes—language and reality. Such a correspon-dence opens the project of interpretation: language interprets or represents reality, and criticism comments on that interpretation. It is also a rejection of a model of reality as a transcendental whole existing outside of history and practices. Reality here is a structure of effects, marked by a multiplicity of planes of effects and the ways they intersect, transverse and disrupt each other. This is strikingly similar to Foucault's attempt to move beyond an understanding of language as commentary:

> I do not question the discourses for their silent meanings but on the fact and the conditions of their manifest appearance: not on the contents which they may conceal, but on the transformations which they have effectuated; not on the meaning which is main-tained in them like a perpetual origin, but on the field where they coexist, remain and disappear. It is a question of an analysis of the discourses in their exterior dimensions.[11]

Similarly, Foucault distinguishes his project from that of structural analysis:

> The question posed by language analysis of some discursive fact or other is always: according to what rules has a particular state-ment been made, and consequently according to what rules could other similar statements be made? The description of the events of discourse poses a quite different question: how is it that one particular statement appeared rather than another?"[14]

Foucault's project, marked by his use of "discourse" in contradistinc-tion to a language of signs and structures, is "a pure description of discursive events" in their "dispersion as events."[15] But to speak of discursive *events* is not to reduce everything to a new singular plane, comparable to that of meaning or representation:

> It is not a question of putting everything on a certain plane, that of the event, but of seeing clearly that there exists a whole series of levels of different types of events, which do not have the same range, nor the same chronological breadth, nor the same capacity to produce effects. The problem is to both distinguish the events, differentiate the networks and levels to which they belong, and to reconstitute the threads which connect them and make them give rise to one another.[16]

These events have to be taken literally, in the facticity of their singular existence, rather than as texts to be interpreted. They have to be treated in their positivity, rather than in relation to the laws of signification. Thus, Deleuze and Guattari refuse to think of desire in terms of its relations to what they refer to as the "three errors" of lack, law and signifier:

> It is one and the same error, an idealism that forms a pious conception of the unconscious. . . . From the moment lack is reintroduced into desire, all of desiring production is crushed, reduced to being no more than the production of fantasy; but the sign does not produce fantasies, it is a production of the real and

a position of desire within reality. From the moment desire is wedded again to the law . . . the eternal operation of eternal repression recommences, the operation that closes around the unconscious the circle of prohibition and transgression, white mass and black mass; but the sign of desire is never a sign of the law, it is a sign of strength. And who would dare use the term "law" for the fact that desire situates and develops its strength, and that wherever it is, it causes flows to move and substances to be intersected. . . .? From the moment desire is made to depend on the signifier, it is put back under the yoke of a despotism whose effect is castration, there where one recognizes the stroke of the signifier itself; but the sign of desire is never signifying, it exists in the thousands of productive break-flows that never allow themselves to be signified within the unary stroke of castration. It is always a point-sign of many dimensions.[17]

There is no lack behind desire, no signifier structuring it, no law controlling it. Desire is a plenitude of production, producing a multiplicity of connections between particular point-signs or "assemblages" that are as likely to be subindividual or social aggregates. Desire transverses the social and the individual, the fragment and the whole.

We can take this treatment of desire as exemplary insofar as it demands that desire be treated in its positivity or productivity. For both Foucault, and Deleuze and Guattari, the strategy of analysis involves drawing lines or connections which are the productive links between points, events or practices (Foucault seems to use these interchangeably) within a multidimensional and multidirectional field. These lines map out reality in terms of the productive relations between events. Productivity is here synonymous with effects or, more accurately, effectivities. This notion describes an event's place in a complex network of effects—its effects elsewhere on other events, as well as their effects on it; it describes the possibilities of the practice for effectuating changes or differences in the world. Such a description then asks how something comes to exist in its singularity (what Foucault calls its "rarity"[18]) and how it functions. But the description cannot be confined to a particular plane or domain of effects, such as the signifying or the representational. Effectivity points to the multidimensionality of effects, to the connections that exist between disparate points as they traverse different planes or realms of effects:

> Although the points determine paths, they are strictly subordinated to the paths they determine . . . every point is a relay and exists only as a relay. A path is always between two points, but the in-between has taken on all the consistency and enjoys both an autonomy and a direction of its own.[19]

Cultural studies, then, begins by describing events within human reality in their singularity and their positivity; events are both themselves practices and the results of practices. A practice is a mode by which effects are produced and reality transformed. Its origin, whether biographical (in the intentions of the actor) or social (in the economic relations of its existence) is, to a large extent, irrelevant. Thus, what is important in history is what practices are available, how they are deployed or taken up and how they transform the world. It is not merely a question of what, in any instance, people do in fact do, but of the possibilities available to them: of the means available for transforming reality, as well as those actually taken up.[20] Such practices, including discursive practices, have real effects which are neither guaranteed by, nor limited to, the effects of their textual representations or to their own signifying and representational effects. Rather than making reality linguistic, I propose to make language real (while not all of reality). Or in other words, the fact that culture cannot be reduced to ideology, that there is a gap between them, opens up a space for the multiplicity of cultural effects and, as we shall see, of political articulations.[21]

The connection between a particular cultural practice and its actual effects may be quite complex. Effects are always intereffective, on the way from and to other effects. A cultural practice (or text) may, in many contexts, have meaning effects, but it may also have others (e.g., television is rearranging the physical space and temporal organization of many of the activities and places of daily life, including the household; laws against drugs give shape to the commodity structure of that market; lower speed limits contradict the design practices of many of the highways built in the 1950s and '60s).

Cultural practices may have economic effects (on the accumulation of capital and money), just as economic practices can have other than economic effects. They can have libidinal effects (on the structure of our desires), political effects (as in presidential debates), material effects (on our physical environment), aesthetic effects (defining the "look" of things) and emotional effects. Nor are such "secondary effects" necessarily always secondary. They may often be accomplished through the mediation of the production of meaning (so that the meaning produces the other effects and exists only "on the way" to something else). But it is also possible that cultural practices may, in some circumstances, not operate through the production of meaning. For example, music often bypasses meaning altogether to act directly on the body of the listener. Sometimes the production of meaning may be little more than a distraction.

Articulation

The second question that faces cultural studies involves the structure of the relationships within which cultural practices and effects have to be located. If one rejects the communication model which guarantees that cultural events always involve relations between audiences and texts, between signifieds and signifiers, one must also question a more basic assumption: a principle of interiority or essentialism which locates any practice in a structure of necessity and guarantees its effects even before it has been enacted. In such a structure, any event—e.g., a particular political activity, an economic relation, a social identity or even a cultural text—is assumed to already contain its own identity, and its place in a history of transformation can only involve spinning out the associations, relations and correspondences already inherent within that identity. This statement has—intrinsic to it—that meaning. This political activity has—intrinsic to it—that political position. That economic relation has—intrinsic to it—that set of experiences. This story corresponds to this meaning; that is what it is, its essential identity. The commodity corresponds to alienation; that is what it is, its essential identity. The working class corresponds to a set of experiences and political

interests; that is what it is, its essential identity. Everything seems to be sewn up, stitched into place, guaranteed in advance. If you tell this story, if you engage in this political activity, if you produce commodities, if you occupy a particular social experience, you are already locked into its necessary consequences, consequences defined by virtue of it being what it already is. History itself appears to be guaranteed in advance—the inevitable march of events spinning out their inevitable consequences.

An alternative structure would have to be anti-essentialist.[22] It would have to start with the principle that nothing is guaranteed, that no correspondences are necessary, that no identity is intrinsic. If there is nothing essential about any practice, then it is only defined by its effects; it is in the production of its effects that the identity of a practice is given. To say that a practice is defined by its effects is to locate the practice in its connections to its exterior, to that which is other to it. If theories of meaning—including poststructuralism— exclude the other from the dialectic of identity and difference, for Foucault, Deleuze and Guattari, there is only others, the real. In this usage, the other is not the different, for it is defined by its own positivity and exteriority rather than always being located within a purely negative economy of the same and the different. A particular site is defined by "the exteriority of its [neighborhoods]."[23] A practice is a "point without a surface, but a point that can be located in planes of division and in specific forms of groupings.[24] Paradoxically, a practice is not where it is (enacted, for example) but at all of those sites where its existence makes a difference in the world, at the sites of its effects. The ability of a practice to produce specific effects, to produce this effect rather than that, is precisely what has to be constantly made and remade. Although the connections or identities are never intrinsic or guaranteed, they are always—at least temporarily—real and effective. There are no necessary correspondences in history, but history is always the production of such connections or correspondences.

It is here that the philosophies of Foucault, Deleuze and Guattari intersect with developments in the field of cultural studies, particularly the elaboration of Gramsci's concept of articulation in the work

of Stuart Hall and Ernesto Laclau.[25] Perhaps "intersect" is too neutral a term; rather, let me say that the latter is a necessary supplement to the former. Neither Deleuze and Guattari nor Foucault has an adequate description of either the complex multidimensionality of structure, or of the active process by which such structures are constantly constructed, deconstructed and reconstructed in history. On the other hand, their theories (e.g., of micropolitics and rhizomatics) do not preclude such questions (e.g., of macropolitical structures such as the state or political movements and historical struggles). The concept of articulation provides a useful starting point for describing the process of forging connections between practices and effects, as well as of enabling practices to have different, often unpredicted effects. Articulation is the production of identity on top of difference, of unities out of fragments, of structures across practices. Articulation links this practice to that effect, this text to that meaning, this meaning to that reality, this experience to those politics. And these links are themselves articulated into larger structures, etc.

Articulation is the construction of one set of relations out of another; it often involves delinking or disarticulating connections in order to link or rearticulate others. Articulation is a continuous struggle to reposition practices within a shifting field of forces, to redefine the possibilities of life by redefining the field of relations—the context—within which a practice is located. For the effects of any practice are always the product of its position within a context. The significance or effects of an event or practice cannot be gleaned from its origin nor guaranteed by the structure of its surfaces. Articulation is both the practice of history and its critical reconstruction, displacement and renewal.

Analyzing an event then involves (re)constructing or, in Foucault's terms, fabricating[26] the network of relationships into which and within which it is articulated, as well as the possibilities for different articulations. In other words, the practice of articulation reworks the context into which practices are inserted. It involves real historical individuals and groups, sometimes consciously, sometimes unconsciously or unintentionally, sometimes by their activity, some-

times by their inactivity, sometimes victoriously, sometimes with disastrous consequences, and sometimes with no visible results.

The notion of articulation prevents us from postulating either too simple a beginning or too neat an end to our story. The beginning point of one story, which we might take as self-evident, is the end of another story which has yet to be told. What we take for granted, what we use as the resources of our storytelling, is often what is most in need of having its own story told. There is no single structure or dimension of human life which stitches everything into place so that its patterns are indelibly sewn into the fabric of history. We cannot assume that, somehow, economic relations have already defined the outcome, nor that they will somehow resolve all the contradictions in the end. Nor can we assume that it is our maps of meaning or the ways we interpret the world that constitute the essence of our "reality." Such reductions make the story easy to tell, for they tell us where to lay the blame and reassure us of the truth of our story and the sincerity of our politics.

Articulation offers a theory of contexts. It dictates that one can only deal with, and from within, specific contexts, for it is only there that practices have specific effects, that identities and relations exist. Understanding a practice involves theoretically and historically (re)constructing its context. This cannot be a matter of merely acknowledging the context, e.g., of interpreting a text and taking its context "into account." Too much of contemporary theory treats contexts as the beginning of analysis, as a background which exists independently of the practice being studied and which can therefore be taken for granted. But the practice of articulation does not separate the focus from the background; instead, it is the background that actually articulates the focus. At the same time, such a view refuses to fetishize the context as "the local," as if it were an atomized fragment which could be isolated from its own taken-for-granted background. The context is never a stable object of study. It is only available at the end of the analysis; it is precisely the goal and product of analytic and political work. It is the most difficult "thing" to get hold of, and the task is made even more difficult when the analyst is located in the context which he or she is fabricating. Articulation becomes a

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constant practice of replacing oneself, in specific ways into the contexts that are available for rearticulation.

Moreover, any context entails a complex set of relations. One has not adequately constructed a context merely by bringing the pieces together and noting that they are connected. The specific form of every linkage is at stake as well. Pointing out that two practices are articulated together, that the pieces "fit" together, is not the same as defining the mode of that articulation, the nature of that fit. (For example, what is the connection which brought together American punks and skateboard culture? Or heavy metal fans and certain sorts of comic books?) Nor is arguing that a particular articulation is taken up the same as describing the way it is taken up. Without this dimension, the analyst's stories can only be stories of our historical losses. They can only tell how a context has already been articulated. They cannot identify the form of that articulation or, in more social terms, the investment that has been made in it. Without understanding the form or power of a particular line or connection, how can one imagine the possibility of its being broken? In that

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sense, articulation can be understood as a more active version of the concept of determination; unlike notions of interaction or symbiosis, determination describes specific cause-and-effect relations. But, unlike notions of causality and simple notions of determination, articulation is always complex: not only does the cause have effects, but the effects themselves affect the cause, and both are themselves determined by a host of other relations. Articulations are never simple and singular; they cannot be extracted out of the interlocking context in which they are possible.

While it is common to read both Foucault and Deleuze and Guattari as denying that structure has any role in their analyses (other than perhaps as the always negatively weighted form of power), the notion of articulation emphasizes the importance of structure in their critical practices. In fact, the practice of articulation involves the constructing, dismantling and reconstructing of structures which have real effects. There are a number of different ways in which structures operate in this theory of contexts: as relations among effects; as planes of effects; as "rhizomes" or "assemblages"; and as

levels of abstraction. First, the different effects of a practice are themselves articulated into particular relations, rendering some more powerful than others, constructing both sympathetic reinforcements and antagonistic contradictions. The structure of effects (across different planes) which articulates a practice is never guaranteed; it too is always determined by the articulations of the practice into and within its context. But if different practices may, in specific conditions, have effects on more than one plane, there are no necessary relations between domains of practices and planes of effects. While we cannot reduce the reality of a context to a single plane of effects, contexts do offer us various ways in which these planes can themselves be structured together. The most common involve traditional notions of domains of social life (politics, culture, economics, psyche, etc.) which assume a necessary correspondence between specific practices and planes of effects (as if one could identify ahead of time the consequence of a practice).

Second, the different planes of effects are always structured, not intrinsically, but as a result of historical articulations. They are not random and shapeless fields or forces (e.g., as in the common images of libidinal forces exploding through and deconstructing the structured maps of meaning and ideology). The different planes of effects manifest their own structures, producing their own maps of reality. In the end, lived reality can only be understood as the concrete contexts within which these different maps of reality are articulated and which they articulate. Third, practices are themselves organized into a variety of active structures, creating different kinds of organization which cut across domains and planes. Such organizations define interacting systems or condensations of practices and social relations, each operating on different material, producing specific sorts of transformations and values. At any moment, such organizations are complex, contradictory and structured; within them, certain forms of practice are dominant, others are tolerated, still others are excluded if not rendered radically unimaginable.

Deleuze and Guattari offer a general theory of such organizations, which they refer to as assemblages of rhizomes.[27] Rhizomes are constructed in a struggle between two sorts of lines of effectivity:

lines of articulation—their use of the term differs only slightly from mine—produce hierarchies, locate centers, create master structures purporting to define and control the entire assemblage. They draw boundaries between particular planes of effects and exclude the external as they produce identity within difference. Lines of flight, on the other hand, disarticulate, open the assemblage to its exterior, cutting across and dismantling unity, identity, centers and hierarchies. They deterritorialize the territories that have been articulated, not by fragmenting the assemblage (a practice of difference which remains within the interior of the assemblage) but by subtracting the lines of articulation, the structures of unity and hierarchy. One note of caution: lines of articulation and flight cannot be too quickly identified with power and resistance respectively. Such effects must themselves be articulated.

Finally, structure operates as well in distinguishing the level at which particular structures, contexts and organizations function. It is in this sense that we have to distinguish between the particular and the concrete, and between the concrete and the abstract.[28] A particular event or practice, empirically given, has to be made concrete by constructing its context, by describing the complex systems of articulation which make it what it is. Our analysis becomes more concrete as we add more of the articulations, not only in terms of additional domains of practices and planes of effects, but also articulations into different levels of abstraction. What distinguishes an analysis built upon a principle of articulation is that its structures are "real" precisely because they are effective. But one has to specify the level at which they are effective. At any other level, they appear to be little more than an abstraction. What appears at one level as a fairly simple practice may, at another level, operate as a complex and contradictory structure. If the analysis ignores the appropriate level of abstraction for a particular structure, it is likely to become dysfunctional. In other words, every context is a piece of other contexts and vice versa; contexts exist within each other.

Structures have to be located within concrete contexts, both in terms of their own social and historical determination, and in terms of the ways their effects are articulated. They are real, but their

reality is defined by their articulations at specific levels of abstraction or concreteness. Although structures are real, before we can begin to understand the effectiveness of any specific structure, we must know at what level of abstraction it functions. If we stay at that level, its effects, however complex and contradictory, will seem simple and even direct. But as we move to another level, its effects are increasingly delayed, deferred, detoured, decreased, etc. Different structures, just like different practices, will have different capacities to produce effects, different reaches across time and space. We cannot assume that we already know where, when or how strongly particular historical tendencies are operating. Hence, however real a structure may be, we cannot assume its effectiveness or its effects without taking into account the articulations between specific structures operating at different levels of abstraction.

This is markedly different from essentialist analyses which take for granted the reality and even the necessity and universality of certain structures. And it is markedly different from analyses which assume that no structures are real. Consider Marx's description of the commodity as one of the determining structures of capitalism:[29] we live in a capitalist economy; ergo, the commodity is determining. But this argument ignores the level at which Marx's description was offered in *Das Kapital*. The level at which the commodity is a real and effective structure is the entire history of capitalism, stretching back into the sixteenth century and ahead to who knows where, encompassing many diverse societies and political systems. Surely, Marx was not saying that to understand any specific capitalist society, it is sufficient to point to the commodity structure. An appeal to the abstract concept of the commodity neither describes nor explains capitalism in the modern world. But the commodity—as an abstraction—cannot be ignored. Rather, the task is to see how the "commodity" is articulated into less and less abstract—more and more concrete—contexts, by adding the determinations, drawing the lines of articulation.

Similarly, Marx described the fundamental structures of capitalism: the contradiction between capital and labor; and the contradiction between the forces and the relations of production. This seems

true of any capitalist society. But Marx assumed that the two contradictions were, in the end, identical. It is perhaps truer to argue that, in a specific social formation (nineteenth-century Western Europe, with its peculiar history and conditions), the two contradictions were articulated together. They were, temporarily and concretely, identical. But it may be the case that this articulation is no longer particularly effective. The apparent unity needs to be prised apart, disarticulated, challenged by looking at how the articulation was itself accomplished. In the United States, with its different history and its very different conditions, both contradictions continue to have their effects, but they have been rearticulated and the two structures may even contradict each other. Any description of contemporary capitalism would have to acknowledge and describe its extraordinary ability to negotiate its own contradictions and to survive very real national and international crises. Capitalism has changed as it has been rearticulated from a national to an international scene: multinational corporations do not operate in national interests. They go wherever capital is made comfortable, wherever they are made to feel at home. A similar argument can be made about the determining power of certain basic psychoanalytic processes, or of patriarchal structures.[30]

A context, then, can be seen as a structured field, a configuration of practices; each practice is located in a specific place as a set of relations, close to some practices, more distant from others. Its effects will be determined by those relations and distances. They will appear at different places and in different ways across the field. One can conceive of such articulations as lines or vectors, projecting their effects across the field. Each vector has its own quality (effectivity), quantity and directionality. Because practices are differentially distributed across the field, the field itself is marked by different structures and densities. Moreover, any practice exists in multiple contexts across the space of a particular moment, articulated into different, sometimes competing and sometimes contradictory sets of relations. Articulations may have different vectors, different forces and different spatial reaches in different contexts. And they may also have different

temporal reaches, cutting across the boundaries of our attempts at historical periodization.

Analysis, then, involves producing maps of the interrelated vectors, each with its own trajectory and strength which define its ability to penetrate into and affect reality. The greater that purchase, the more abstract the description of the articulation must be if it is to traverse adequately the various contexts in which it is effective. And the more abstract the description, the less it tells about the concrete articulations and their effects, about any specific context. In this way, analysis can acknowledge that articulations can have effects—create structures—which transcend any local context, although they exist only in their local articulations. There are always different levels of structures that have to be taken into account, where levels are defined by the effective spatial, temporal and social reach of different articulations across contexts. The practice of cultural analysis then involves the attempt to construct the specificity of an articulated context, the appropriateness of which is only given by the intellectual and political project at hand.

The Practice of Cultural Studies

Wild realism and articulation have important implications, not only for cultural studies, but also for my own project of telling a different story of contemporary conservatism. If the status of any event, as well as its description, are never guaranteed, analysis cannot take for granted what is being taken up, how it is articulated, and what sort of effects it produces. The analyst cannot assume what he or she knows when he or she know something; that is, one cannot assume the place of some interpretation or fact in the story. It too can only be contextually articulated. One has to know where on the map it belongs, how it occupies that space and at what level of abstraction. Obviously, a critic can give a close and careful reading of a text; he or she can even try to connect it to the contexts of its production, and to broader contexts of its possible intertextual articulations. But he or she cannot know how this knowledge is to

be used, what role it is to play in the larger story. Similarly, an ethnographer can describe how active audiences appropriate, use and interpret texts. These are real articulations, real effects; but the status of these articulations is no less problematic than that of the "texts" themselves. Meanings, representations, interpretations, uses, pleasures—all of these are effects which have, in turn, their own effects. To put it another way, uses have effects and effects have uses. They provide more "facts" that we can use to piece together the story, but they define the beginning, the resources of our story, not the story's conclusion. They are as much in need of being located in their context as any other statement or practice. They only do work in the analysis when placed into a particular position, assigned a particular role. I am not saying that texts or people's experiences are irrelevant or in any sense mistaken. I am saying that this cannot be the whole story; not only may the text have other effects but those experiences themselves have their own effects and their own determinations. Similarly, one cannot assume ahead of time that the analytic task involves seeking the "proper" meaning of a text, whatever the measure of its propriety. If one starts by assuming the questions—how texts impose their meanings or how audiences interpret texts—one will miss the actual possibilities of living that are opened up and closed off by such practices. So analysis must construct the concrete totalities within which such experiences can be located, their determining structures and effects identified.

Thus, the project of reconstructing historical contexts or organizations of practices, despite superficial similarities, is not a search for the underlying codes governing and determining human behavior. Nor is it the same as, for example, Williams' project of describing a "structure of feeling."[31] It is not a description of experience, of what it felt like to live at a particular time and place. It is not a phenomenologically motivated attempt to capture a context of experience or, as Foucault puts it, to grasp "a 'whole society' in its 'living reality.'"[32] The position I have presented here is not concerned with how people experience daily reality but with how they live and act in ways over which they may have no control and about which they may be unaware, experientially as well as consciously.

In this project, experiences are not privileged; they are to be treated as facts among other facts.

This model of cultural analysis, with its picture of myriads of structures, practices and effects circulating around and determining each other, offers the possibility of different stories about culture (and power). It is not merely a matter of questioning the relationship between meaning, representation and fantasy, or of the ability to distinguish reality from fiction. Cultural practices are the sites of many different activities and effects. They can be enacted or practiced in many different ways, at different tempos, constructing different contexts. Hence, the analyst's story will have to be constructed from the range of maps, not only of meaning and representation, but also of affectivity, libido, economics, etc. Its critical practice will be inappropriate to the rhythms, forces and densities of lived reality if it assumes that all cultural events are taken up, lived, practiced, effective, in just the same way, and to just the same degree. The question facing cultural analysts is how cultural practices rearticulate or reshape the contexts of people's lives and of history. How do specific cultural practices work, through what modes of functioning, to produce what concrete effects?

This analytic project might be described as a cartography of daily life[33] which attempts to (re)construct at least a part of the complex texture of a certain terrain. That terrain may have many strata and pathways crossing each other; how it is mapped depends on the paths noticed, followed, the strata focused on. Some attempts will, at least for the moment, be dead ends. Others will open rich possibilities, but their possibilities will never be obvious from the start. Something is discovered here, but its resonances, its significance for the larger map, remain unclear. One continues to follow the path, still uncertain where it will lead, intrigued by other paths that cut across the way, by other landmarks that offer different possibilities. Somewhere else, another discovery offers new possibilities, resolutions and questions. Each new discovery not only changes the maps that have already been drawn, but forces one into new directions, to search for new sorts of evidence. The analyst always starts by taking evidence literally—at its face value—and then attempts to reconstruct the

threads that connect the pieces, the forces that hold them together and the structures that organize them. In this, the practice of reassembling and mapping historical contexts is somewhat analogous to constructing a jigsaw puzzle without knowing how many pieces are needed, if they are all present (and if the only ones present are necessary), or what the puzzle is a picture of. What one finds on the surface of any piece is all there is to go on, yet there is no guarantee that the lines inscribed on the surface correspond to the lines of the puzzle. The identity of any piece remains a mystery until the puzzle begins to give up its image.

Such an analysis describes how practices, effects and vectors are woven together, where the boundaries are located and where the fault lines lie. This structured assemblage is a force-field encompassing different forms of objects, facts, practices, events, whatever can be found along the way. On this model, cultural studies attempts to construct a contour map measuring the effects of underlying processes over time. The map describes a configuration of practices which is constantly working on itself, deconstructing and reconstructing, reproducing and changing, extending and drawing back. Its history will not be coherent and linear but will follow the discontinuous and often serendipitous histories and relations of a number of contiguous maps. The "truth" of the result is not hidden below the surface of the real, but rather obscured by its very visibility on the surface; cultural analysis seeks to discern a pattern dispersed on the surfaces that have to be traversed. The maps of cultural studies fabricate the real in an attempt, not to represent or mimic it, but to strategically open up its possibilities, to intervene into its present in order to remake its future.

Thus, the cultural analyst is directly implicated and involved in his or her story, for the storyteller cannot help but be as much a character in the story as any other socially defined subject. The stories told, the knowledge produced, are never innocent or neutral. Descriptions, stories and explanations are important parts of how people come to organize their daily lives and social relations. Cultural analysts do not have the luxury of assuming that their stories have no impact upon the world they attempt to describe. Neutrality

is not an objective stance but a privilege available to certain positions of power, and a value defined within the cultural habits of particular social groups. On the other hand, there are no guarantees what the effects of any story will be. It may have quite unintended and unexpected consequences. People can and do of course seek to have some control over them, but they are not always successful. Thus, it is not merely a matter of declaring one's political allegiance and assuming that the politics of one's story is now guaranteed. The demand that one declare one's allegiances is often politically important, but it is also rather simplistic—as if there were only two sides, good and bad, powerful and powerless.

The cultural analyst must recognize his or her own paradoxical situation, always implicated in the structures of power he or she is trying to dismantle or change. Declaring oneself to be on the side of the oppressed too often serves as a way of avoiding the more difficult task of locating the points at which one already identifies and is identified with those who hold power in society. The analyst is not the vanguard of an already imagined revolution, but a member of a particular fraction of the masses attempting to influence its own march through history. He or she is another social actor standing in a specific (and, admittedly, in some ways "privileged") social position. No story can claim to speak for the masses, as if it were the story they would tell. For there is no singular "they"; we would all tell different stories, depending upon the position from which we survey the scene and the resources that we have available to us. The "elitist" assumes that the masses are necessarily silent, passive, political and cultural dopes who are incapable of struggling against their own subordination. But it is simply that they (we?) do not always speak when intellectuals want them to, and when they do speak, they do not often say what intellectuals want them to say. The cultural analyst cannot assume that people are so totally colonized that they are incapable of actively engaging in the processes by which a contingent and changing history is constantly being made, unmade and remade. He or she must be able to identify those sites, those moments, when people do struggle to win a bit of space for themselves in the world. But at the same time, the analyst must

also be able to acknowledge those sites, those moments, when people do seem unable to participate in the historical struggles, when they are manipulated and duped into positions they might not otherwise have taken up.

Analysts are not always capable of seeing what the masses never can, nor are they necessarily any less susceptible to being manipulated. Thus, the analyst must consciously reposition him- or herself in the maps he or she is constructing. But this is not the same as constantly problematizing his or her relations to the map, as forcing her or himself into an endless self-reflexive denial of the authority of the map. The cultural analyst moves through the complexity of social positions and social identities, allowing him- or herself to travel through and be mobilely situated in the fluidly structured field of forces. He or she moves with and within the field of popular culture and daily life, mapping as best he or she can the configuration of practices, the lines of articulation and flight. While such wandering is never random or capricious, its paths can never be guaranteed in advance (for example, by the lines which divide the terrain within our own critical standards or popular tastes between proper or improper, good or bad, authentic or inauthentic), nor can such wandering ever complete its itinerary through the field. There are always paths to follow, other paths one could have taken, and the choices made reflect as much the strategic intentions of the analyst as they do the historical determinations of the critical act. If one is never in control of such wanderings, one is also never merely blown about by the winds of popular and intellectual judgment. In the final analysis, analysts as storytellers are reshaped by the story they are telling.

The story I want to tell seeks to follow one set of trajectories across the field of popular culture and contemporary power. By gaining a better sense of the state of play on the field of forces in popular culture and daily life, perhaps we can see more clearly where struggles are possible and, in some cases, even actual. Then we can try to find ways to oppose them, or to help articulate them, to nurture and support them and perhaps, to bring them into visible relations with other struggles. Opposition, like all of history, must be fought over

and articulated. As critics and cultural analysts, we have to look at how both domination and subordination are lived, organized and resisted; we have to understand the possibilities of subordination that are opened and allowed within the structures of domination, and perhaps point beyond them. We have to understand the ways in which resistance itself can become a strategy for rearticulating the structures of domination.

My project, then, begins with a particular situation; it begins to tell the story of the articulation of hegemony and postmodernity as the new context within which we might understand one not insignificant line of contemporary politics. In the light of this project, I propose to offer three intersecting maps of the cultural field: The first (Chapter 2 and Part II) describes the articulation of historically specific cultural discourses (rock and the formation of postwar popular culture); the second (Chapter 3 and Part III) describes how such formations are articulated into and transformed by the contexts of power (the articulation of the rock formation into an apparatus of the regulation of space and time in daily life); the third (Chapter 4 and Part IV) describes the strategic place of this apparatus by locating it in a structure of historical agency, as the site of real historical struggles in a particular field of forces. These three maps may be seen as intersecting descriptions of a region of the cultural field: in the terms of my own study, of the ways in which the rock formation is deployed into particular apparatuses and struggles of power. Taken together, the three maps attempt to describe only one part of the dynamic and multidimensional relationship between popular culture and power in the current conjuncture.