Categories of Experience, Logics of Inquiry and the Work of Analytic Concepts in the Discourses of Critical Communication Studies

Malcolm K. Cecil

A Thesis

In

The Department

Of

Communication Studies

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy at
Concordia University
Montreal, Quebec, Canada

August 2002

ABSTRACT

Categories of Experience, Logics of Inquiry and the Work of Analytic Concepts in the Discourses of Critical Communication Studies

Malcolm K. Cecil, Ph.D.
Concordia University, 2002

As critical communication and cultural studies have taken a more sociological turn, it is increasingly recognized that the theoretical assumptions of critical perspectives create tensions within projects of empirically informed social analysis. This dissertation explores the epistemological commitments and liabilities of a set of analytic concepts that address the domain of "lived experience" and interprets how and why they displace the very phenomena that they claim to study.

Drawing on Foucauldean discourse analysis, I develop a critical perspective that is grounded in the analysis of "discursive operators," the analytic concepts that work to legitimate claims to knowledge within different traditions of research. My research maps out the work of these operators across a range of positions and projects, and diagnoses the relations of power that structure these particular discursive régimes.

I focus on four key discursive formations in critical communication and cultural studies and their objects of study: emotion and symbolic interactionism; the structure of feeling and literary humanism; subcultural and media ethnography; agency, identity and discursive conceptions of power. In the course of my analysis, I find a consistent regularity, a logic of deferral and displacement, in which the complexity and limit-less character of actual contexts of research are displaced in favor of powerful discursive operators such as intersubjectivity, the popular, resistance, and various conceptualizations

of domination. Their influence contributes to the reproduction of theoretical orthodoxies and the marginalization of theoretical and practical innovation in these disciplinary fields.

After isolating the problem, I describe a number of strategies that attempt to contend with the determinations of powerful discursive operators, especially a form of conjuncturalist analysis developed in cultural studies.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This wasn't an easy thesis to write, for a variety of reasons, and I owe thanks to many people who listened to my ideas and helped me over the years.

I would like to thank Marty Allor for the brilliance, tact and verve with which he acted as my faculty advisor on this project. I've learned something about how one nurtures an intellectual project, as well as how one sets about doing one, through our collaboration. I would also like to thank Kim Sawchuk, director of the *Programme de Doctorat Conjoint en Communication* during much of my stay at Concordia, for her unfailing *disponibilité* as administrator and interlocutor. Thanks also to Charles Levin of the Graduate Program in Communications at Mc Gill University, whose combination of insight and irreverence continues to be an inspiration. Sheelah O'Neill and Sharon Fitch were wonderfully helpful with cutting through the bureaucracy involved in studying and teaching, and always a pleasure to talk to. I would also like to acknowledge the support of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada for awarding me a doctoral fellowship.

Thanks also to my friends and family who encouraged me, and especially to my intellectual friends Mazel Bidaoui and Petra Mueller, who shared gossip, gripes and some of the questions broached in this dissertation over many lunches. The poet Steven Gray read an early draft, and convinced me of its relevance beyond the confines of the ivory tower, which was very important to me. Finally, to Farinaz, who took me from Tehran to San Francisco, and many more moving places within; thank you for giving me this opportunity, and for continuing to share it all with me.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

Over the last decade or so, questions about "lived experience" are increasingly raised in critical communication and cultural studies. This rather vague topic generally suggests a form of inquiry into the consequences and meanings of social and cultural change for actual persons, whose activities are empirically observed and analyzed, and whose understandings of their own conditions are accounted for. The concern for lived experience is evident in the current popularity of the ethnographic method, for example, or the construction of experiential objects of inquiry such as emotion, and the renovation of literary modes of interpretation oriented towards feeling, "value" and "the lived." Questions of this nature are often framed as a return to an earlier set of concerns, or an emergence from a protracted period of theoretical reflection in which problems of representation have dominated critical and epistemological inquiry. They issue from an intellectual conjuncture that is still largely pre-occupied with working through the contributions of the structuralist and deconstructionist intellectual movements in the critical sub-disciplines. While "lived experience" seems to me no more than a provisional orienting thematic, some of the concepts and modes of inquiry that it consistently calls up are of great interest to me. They resonate with a set of questions of my own, about the conceptual resources available to comparable projects of research in our current disciplinary conjuncture. These questions are the primary point of departure for the discursive analyses that I undertake in this dissertation.

A second point of departure is my own intellectual trajectory. Traces of certain questions that motivate my current research turned up in an earlier project on simulation.[1] That concept, while notoriously linked to postmodernist assaults on referentiality, is very

much a product of the structuralist conjuncture and its aftermath. It elaborates on the preeminent structuralist figure of the *symbolique*, exploring various régimes of systematicity associated with cultural forms and with social representation more generally.[2] As such, it is part of the broad discursive formation concerned with establishing the specificity of an alternative domain of cultural experience, exemplified but certainly not exhausted by language. My involvement with this formation shifts somewhat in this dissertation, to pose the question, more directly, of the discursive systematicities or regularities that operate within our own practices of theorization and research. To push this relation between simulation and my present project somewhat further, I find in Baudrillard's antithetical conception of symbolic exchange the traces of contemporary impulses to theorize figures of mediation and to construct levels of analysis (such as the affective) that are explicitly below or beyond the semiotic.[3] These projects explore the limits of the *symbolique* in contemporary social and cultural theory, and a number of them are discussed in the analyses that follow. Finally, some of my epistemological questions have been sharpened by a growing ambivalence towards simulation as a critical standpoint. It seems to me we can do better at linking the specificity of the local with more general levels of analysis if we stage the engagement between our theoretical tools and the empirical moments of our research more carefully.

My project in this thesis is to question the work of a number of theoretical tools, concepts and images that are currently influential in critical communication and cultural studies. I begin with the assumption that research is a discursive activity: Rather than reveal the truth about a given object or set of social relations, the concepts and imagery deployed in research enable us to produce knowledge. Analytical concepts further the

development of the various discursive régimes that make up the critical sub-disciplines. My research focuses on the gains and liabilities of the use of these concepts in projects of theory construction and in the formation of objects of research. I focus on the relations between empirical phenomena and disciplinary objects of inquiry; and the relations between objects of inquiry and the epistemological régimes in which they are made intelligible.

The purpose of my project is one of epistemological analysis and critique. I do this in the belief that we must question our analytical concepts and theoretical tools for the work that they do in producing knowledge. My purpose is not simply to point out the gains and liabilities of individual concepts, but to map out how they operate across a range of positions and projects. My goal is to derive from this mapping a diagnostic interpretation of the broad regularities revealed in the operations of these concepts. Rather than interpret the intentions behind developments in theorization and research, as do the more sociological approaches to the history of science or method, I seek to account for broader determinations within the domain of conceptual activity itself. What I seek to diagnose, then, is the work of concepts themselves in shaping the development of theory and research, and through them, to broader relations of power within the field. My purpose is not only to critique our current epistemological resources, but also to suggest a modest way forward. I propose that reorienting research around an analytic model of multiple levels of mediation can help to mitigate some of the liabilities revealed in my analyses.

My practice follows from this project and these theoretical assumptions. In each chapter I isolate a trajectory of development in theorization and research around a key

concept. I describe the work of the concept within representative examples of research. I relate the work of the concept to the particular projects and commitments of the different traditions in the field, and to adjacent disciplines from which they often issue, particularly literary criticism, sociology and anthropology. Thus each chapter reconstructs a particular domain of research in critical communication and cultural studies in terms of the relations between analytic frames, objects of study, and the traditions of research in which they are understood or explained. While I am interested in the possibilities of description and explanation enabled by each concept, I am particularly interested in the contradictions and condensations that these concepts embody. The regularities that are traced out in these specific analyses are the basis for a more general interpretation of the stakes attached to different analytical concepts and perspectives.

It is my hope that this thesis will be useful to others both as an evaluation of some currently influential analytic concepts and their attendant research practices; and also as an alternative model of how one might assess the state of a field of disciplinary discourse to identify the most profitable sites for intervention and theoretical reconstruction. The dissertation should help others to identify structuring concepts and problems in the methods of critical research, and suggest a way to contend with them.

The critical perspective that organizes my research is drawn from a formation of French discourse that includes figures such as Bachelard, Canguilhem, Althusser and Foucault.[4] One project common to the formation is the analysis of the work of concepts and theoretical imagery in securing the legitimacy of knowledge claims, which develops in Foucault into the problematic of enunciation. From the early figures I draw analytical concepts, such as "epistemological image" and a practice of historical and conceptual

description and analysis. My more basic methodological choices are inspired by Foucault's practice of genealogical analysis, and by J. M. Berthelot's adaptation of the Foucauldean program to the analysis and critique of the discourse of the social sciences.

The methodological program that I draw from these sources suggests a way of assembling a corpus and a practice of reading it. From Foucault's practice of genealogical analysis, I take the notion that research ought to begin from problems and questions that are specific to a conjuncture.[5] In such a form of discourse analysis, the questions associated with a particular conjuncture and its problems motivate the choice of literatures. The literature assembled for this dissertation ranges over a rather heterogeneous set of disciplines and projects, as I discuss below, but real commonalities have emerged in the course of the analyses. A corpus, or what Foucault called an archive, is not constructed around typical methodological conceptions of an object domain (Foucault *Archaeology* 126-131). I didn't read everything written on the topic of performativity, for instance, in order to pursue the question of why the concept should achieve such influence, despite its evident liabilities. I read until I had an understanding of the kinds of mediations the concept performs in projects of analysis, and was able to understand its place in the projects of feminist political philosophy. I then extended the corpus along this trajectory, to encompass other texts and projects that share a commonality of conceptual imagery and practice with the notion of the performative. Throughout this process of analysis, my questions motivated the assembly of a corpus as the strategic construction of a number of trajectories that slice through the theoretical discourses of the critical sub-disciplines.

Discourse analysis also entails a practice of reading. It is not deconstructive, in that it does not dwell on the surface of language, analyzing the rhetorical techniques and figures that create the effects of knowledge or truth. Nor is it a hermeneutic practice, in which one reads for the true meaning of the concept, or the intention of its users. The practice requires reading at a certain depth, to trace out a system of regularities in the appearance of statements. I ground my analysis in very close reading of key concepts, attempting to demonstrate their specific functions. Only when a strategic density of texts that is sufficient to indicate the presence of a formation is built do I try to make sense of them in terms of a wider set of regularities. The goal of the practice is to make a diagnostic mapping of how particular concepts work and produce regularities across a range of positions. Discursive analysis works at the level of the entire formation, and so while I discuss passages of particular texts in great detail, it is with the interest of locating the significant statements that traverse the literature and point to a systematic function.

In an assimilation of Foucauldean conceptions of discourse to a methodological critique of the social sciences, Jean Michel Berthelot points to the doubled determinations that condition our analytical concepts. On the one hand they are conjunctural. Concepts circulate in general discourse, and draw authority from lay assumptions about, for example, the immediacy of experiential knowledge or the reality of resistance. At another level of mediation, our analytical concepts are always implicated in discursive relations, and thus subject to another set of determinations. Berthelot terms the concept, in this dual role, a "discursive operator" (12). Despite their evident referentiality, discursive operators allow certain theoretical operations to occur, problems to be solved, and theoretical abstractions to be validated. Their operations occur within a "discursive régime," which

refers to the particular logic of inquiry in which empirical phenomena are framed, and which determines the necessary role of the discursive operator. Berthelot's perspective is useful to analyze the work and identity of a set of discursive operators across contexts, both conjunctural and epistemological.

In a philosophical register, I have found Deleuze and Guattari's notion of conceptual personae and *personnages* to be helpful in visualizing the work of concepts and their relations to other figures of thought and expression. Prior to concepts, there are conceptual personae, the figures of philosophical writing that suggest a problem or lay out a "plane of immanence" and inspire the creation of concepts to populate it (Deleuze and Guattari 81). As such, conceptual personae are the first determinations of how a question is formulated and they provide the imagery in which an "answer" to the question may be contemplated. Conceptual personae operate between the intuitive grasp of an area and its formal expression or schematization in concepts, its *personnages*. *Personnages* populate different theoretical planes, and exist within different relations. *Personnages antipathiques* are pairs of concepts that provide productive oppositions for the privileged operators of a particular theoretical plane. I have found the concept useful to describe the dichotomous organization of analytical concepts through which the structuring oppositions of social theory are often named, *personnages antipathiques* such as structure and agency, theory and method, or oppression and resistance. In a general sense, the operators of persona and *personnage* provide terms to describe the underlying determinations of a system of concepts, rather like Althusser's notion of the problematic.

In more specific terms then, my argument is that rather than serving a purely referential function, giving us the truth about a given state of affairs or an object of study,

our discursive operators further the elaboration of epistemological régimes. They secure power for a discourse as they make knowledge. Even as they provide the tools to transform the phenomenal actualities of research into objects of study, they also function at other levels, solving theoretical problems, performing the operations required by particular logics of inquiry and legitimating our claims to knowledge. As such they are indispensable, but the dual role of our operators can lead to tensions and problematic condensations. We must analyze the work of our operators to understand their effectivity in particular projects, and more generally as a level of mediation in their own right.

In accord with the methodological program that I have just outlined, my analysis begins with a set of questions and moves outward along a number of vectors or trajectories that together comprise a corpus. I limited the scope of the corpus somewhat with the requirement that the literature have a certain currency, and that the operators to be analyzed have enunciative authority, a demonstrable power to produce possible positions in discourse. I wanted to assemble a corpus that reflected some of the important tensions of the current conjuncture. As Deleuze and Guattari argue, concepts are material entities; they change application and meaning as they are reactivated in contemporary problems (*What Is* 28). These literatures allow me to make a number of "cuts" through the theory and politics of the conjuncture and to engage with some of the key questions of the conjuncture.

How do we deal with the categories of experience, after the problem of presence surfaces in post-structuralist theory? Whatever else the critique of logocentrism has accomplished, it has made us skeptical about interpreting interiority. Debates on the ethnographic method and critical hermeneutics reflect this tension. For example, it is

often argued that ethnographies fit people's experiences too neatly into their pre-supposed political or theoretical frameworks (Morris *Banality* 23). Can we continue to interpret experience, and subjective meaning, for that matter, if it appears to be simply a pretext to justify privileged critical assumptions? On the other hand, the deconstructionist solutions to the problems of the subject seem inadequate. They wind up missing something about the specificity of human being. Despite the liabilities that plague the use of concepts such as emotion, feeling, affect, the categories of experience are nonetheless necessary because they work to figure irreducible aspects of human specificity.

How do we go beyond the limits of social constructionism, and more generally of the linguistic models of mediation that structure our theory and research? In an important debate with Fornas, Grossberg has proposed that we discard the problematic of mediation as a means to frame inquiries into cultural processes, on the grounds that it depicts every cultural relation as a relation of meaning or signification. Grossberg's critique resonates strongly with my initial concerns about the overriding concern for the semiotic in cultural theory. This leads me to analyze the operator of the "structure of feeling" and related concepts. On the basis of my analysis of this and other discursive sites, I argue against Grossberg that rather than discard the notion of mediation as an orienting concept for research, we need to extend the concept beyond its current limits.

How do we focus on the specificity of cultural practices, and yet retain the ability to situate them within broader critical assessments? This concern follows on the heels of a theoretical turn in postmodern discourse, even as it denounced the totalization of earlier "grand narratives." The proliferation of autobiography and micro-analyses attest to a counter force within contemporary criticism, a wish to retain the specificity of cultural

practices within our accounts. Yet these forms of research have been criticized for failing to link their specific analyses with a broader consideration of social forces. The question of how this might be done moves to the center of discussion in the final chapter of the dissertation.

These are some of the key questions of the conjuncture. They motivate the trajectories that I construct through contemporary literatures, and inevitably they will be further specified along the way. They suggest a problem space more than a single problem, a set of issues arising from the difficulties of addressing certain phenomena within the discursive limits of current critical orthodoxies. I initially wanted to challenge the *personnages* of the subject set forth in structuralist work by setting them the task of accounting for the categories of experience. I felt that their inherent limits would be pushed to the breaking point by this project. Perhaps inevitably, the target of my critique changed as I came to realize that the imposition of theoretical orthodoxies and the domination of research by powerful discursive operators are more pressing problems than the exclusion of certain traits of human character and sociality. The specification and adjustment of orienting questions is an important aspect of the interpretive method. Foucault himself did not start his research where his research narratives began.

In the course of constructing the various trajectories, I found that the literatures came back, time and again, to the problem of what matters most to people. The texts cited here rarely approach the question directly, tending instead to construct objects and levels of analysis that bring the problem of mattering into visibility tangentially. However, in the midst of an argument or while extending the limits of a constricting theoretical orthodoxy, an appeal was regularly made to a deeper level of meaning, an inviolable

center of individual concern or feeling, beyond the reach of material determinations or ideological overdetermination; which is an appeal to what matters most to people. The recurrent theme is an unexpected commonality that emerged during the analysis and provides another principle of unity in the corpus.

If I were to summarize in one sentence the objective of this dissertation, it is to describe the commitments and liabilities of a set of discursive operators that address the issue of how people live and what matters most; to show how and why these operators overpower and displace the very phenomena that they claim to study; and to draw from current research some suggestions for how to contend with the effects of discursive operators and go on.

To foreshadow the results of my analysis somewhat, I find a consistent pattern of displacement and deferral that appears in attempts to analyze the dimension of "mattering" that is not a sectorial problem confined to a certain perspective, but rather is a regularity in all of the formations that are analyzed. Seeking to locate themselves "in the true" of the discipline, researchers tend to re-frame these specific phenomena in terms of abstract *personnages antipathiques* or powerful discursive operators. Our analytic concepts become liabilities when they lead us to reproduce general theoretical positions rather than helping us to construct analyses of specific practices and social relations. The more abstract the level of analysis chosen, the more the theoretical imagery tends to overdetermine the results of the research. If not managed with care, discursive operators can work against the necessary process of elaboration and specification that help us to engage with contexts of research with more precision and analytical acuity.

The dissertation is organized around a series of conceptual and conjunctural analyses that serve as the basis of a diagnostic interpretation of a discursive field. In the first chapter I look at how the operator of emotion works within a perspective that condenses elements of symbolic interactionism and phenomenology. The latter influence surfaces in response to the question of mattering. Emotion is argued to "reveal the inner meaning of actions to the person as they are felt and interpreted at the deep, ontological level" (Denzin *On Understanding* 265). I undertake the detailed analysis of the operations of a single discursive operator here, uncovering a number of significant condensations. The operators borrowed from interactionist theory are shown to assume control of Denzin's research, displacing his interest in emotion into a reiteration of interactionist assumptions about the nature of social conduct. When Denzin's conceptual framework is tested, a series of self-referential displacements among the abstract operators is revealed. The answers to his most fundamental questions about emotional experience are shown to be generated internally, from the conceptual persona of interactionism. I treat these aporia as discursive regularities, traces of more general discursive principles of exclusion and inclusion that I will continue to construct across the positions analyzed in subsequent chapters.

In the second chapter I trace out variations in the concept of the structure of feeling, and relate them to successive formations in the field of cultural studies that struggle with the problem of value, or "feeling." The questions raised include how to read what matters most to people, and how to reconcile individual concerns with collective sensibilities. The emphasis in this chapter is more on conjunctural change, as the operator is followed from its origin in Williams's literary humanism to its radical reconstruction in

Grossberg's postmodern conjuncturalism, ending in the later Barthes's idiosyncratic bridging of phenomenology and structuralism. The concept is analyzed here as the trace of changing practices of research, intersecting a number of events in the theoretical and political conjuncture that are partial determinations of its continual reconstruction. My choice of Barthes might surprise some, since the trajectory otherwise follows a well-known line of influence from early cultural studies at the Center for Contemporary Cultural Studies in Birmingham to a later exponent like Grossberg. My analysis does not interpret the activity of a "school" of research, or some other sociological designation, but rather the logics of conceptual development, the development of discursive formations. Barthes's attempt to forge a dialectical synthesis across established discursive limits represents a further elaboration in this particular trajectory that has been influential in the wider domain of criticism. The continuing use of the concept of the structure of feeling in its original (humanist) form attests to the fragmentary space-time of the discursive field, emphasizing that there is no singular movement in which the concept is discarded when a later epistemological régime assumes dominance, as Kuhnian models of paradigmatic change would suggest.

In the third chapter I look at the claims made for ethnography in critical research into reception and subcultural activity. Ethnography has become the method of choice in cultural studies over the last decade, and has made inroads into qualitative research in communication studies. In the trajectory that I trace out, I find that despite the strong claims to realism that are made on behalf of the method, there is a consistent displacement of the ethnographic perspective by a powerful discursive operator, resistance, or "the everyday." The various members of subcultures and audiences that

populate these accounts are assimilated to a *personnage* of the agent, actively resisting domination and oppression. Resistance is so powerful a discursive operator that it works as a principle of exclusion, evacuating contradictory evidence and overdetermining the goals of research, producing a series of accounts that celebrate audience activity. The potential of ethnography to confront us with the limit-less contexts of research made accessible in moments of empirical research is deferred, if not completely disabled by the work of powerful operators.

In the fourth chapter, I look at the analytic concept of discursive practice in the context of feminist and post-colonial theorizations of identity, agency and power. I was drawn to this site in order to question the adequacy of discourse and practice-based theories of social life to account for specific forms of human sociality. I found much to criticize, however I also found a more analytically trenchant framework with which to approach problems of agency and power than the binary opposition of domination and resistance uncovered in the previous chapter. Critical researchers tend to produce identity as an object of knowledge within a problematic that articulates identity and agency to produce accounts of social action. An anti-essentialist formation in feminist theory has effectively critiqued this condensation and elaborated an alternative. With their more complex model of positive and capillary forms of power, it is possible to pose the question of whether, and how, identity might be articulated with other determinations of social change in particular circumstances. Identities no longer guarantee the effects of practices taken in their name. I explore the work of this model in a number of examples drawn from post-colonial and post-modernist social theory. However, my initial misgivings about discursive practice as an analytic concept are specified and elaborated

in my engagement with the corpus. For reasons that I discuss at further length, discursive practice may not be the best way to conceptualize and describe more complex forms of sociality.

In the concluding chapter, I discuss a number of regularities that have appeared across the sites of discursive analysis. I offer an interpretation of the relations of power/knowledge that operate though the mediations of these discursive operators. Briefly, my interpretation is that our discursive operators constitute a key level of mediation, acting as principles of exclusion and inclusion that regulate the phenomena that are inducted into epistemological régimes. To the extent that they support theoretical abstractions in lieu of more specific engagements with events in the context, these regularities are liabilities for our research. I argue that they are traces of a structuring problem at the core of the critical sub-disciplines, a problem that derives from the tension between divergent impulses of social analysis and social evaluation in the critical project. My interpretation raises the final question of how we might avoid stepping so naively into our discursive operators. Drawing a countervailing set of regularities from the corpus, I describe a number of strategies that attempt to contend with the determinations of powerful operators. In response to a postmodern conjuncturalist formation in cultural studies that advocates a break with the concept of mediation, I recommend an analytical model based on multiple levels of mediation.

These are the assumptions, commitments and principles of organization on which the dissertation is based. Before embarking on the analysis, I should emphasize that it is not my intention to formulate a methodology in any ordinary sense; nor do I propose a theory of "mattering" and its *personnages* that would allow their inclusion within a given

epistemological régime. There are certainly arguments and examples in the dissertation that would be helpful to these projects, but they are not the project that I propose here. I must also insist that I make no claim to the exhaustiveness of my analyses. I have attempted to map out a number of what I consider to be the most revealing trajectories through current literatures but, as always, they must exclude far more than they can ever include. My corpus is a strategic one, selected for the purposes of this particular project of analysis and interpretation. My interpretations are based on very close readings of contemporary literatures and operators, but another reader might easily come to different conclusions.

ENDNOTES

[1] See Cecil.

[2] See Deleuze "A quoi reconnait-on le structuralisme?

[3] See Baudrillard, ch. 3.

[4] The concept is drawn from Bachelard; the practice of analysis is inspired by Canguilhem's essay "What is Psychology." For a concise account of the social and intellectual affiliations in the formation, and their relation to Foucault, see Gutting.

[5] The conception of genealogical analysis used here is inspired by Foucault's practice rather than drawn from any explicit methodological sources in his work. Certain analytical concepts that appear in The Archaeology of Knowledge will be used. For a general theoretical account of discourse, see L'Ordre du Discours. For a rare discussion of methodology grounded in contemporary concerns, see the interview with Foucault in "Réponse à une question."

CHAPTER 1: COMMUNICATION, SOCIAL INTERACTION AND EMOTION

In this chapter I analyze how an influential formation in the discipline of communication studies constructs a relatively novel object of study, emotion. I enter the area through the work of social theorist, methodologist and ethnographer Norman Denzin. He is one of the rare communication scholars who takes an interest in emotion.[1] His theoretical work draws on discourses associated with symbolic interactionism and Schutzian phenomenology. These are generally considered to eschew abstract theoretical issues and functionalist modes of explanation for more detailed, situationally specific approaches. I shall be obliged to qualify this general characterization, to the extent that I will be discussing the quite abstract theoretical assumptions that inform interactionist research. To this end, both Denzin's theoretical and ethnographic work will be considered.

The goal of my analysis is to describe a system of regularities that order and provide the principles of inclusion and exclusion that determine what it is about emotion that is captured or pulled into the discursive formation of symbolic interactionism. I center my analysis around the work of discursive operators that perform the necessary functions of interactionism as an epistemological régime. An obvious example, operating at the level of the disciplinary formation, is the distinction created by the notion of *symbolic* interactionism. In the discursive field that encompasses the qualitative sociological approaches, the domain of human practice is frequently partitioned into the symbolic and the non-symbolic as a means to limit and define the scope of properly "social" inquiry by separating the meaningful from the merely behavioral. On the basis of the partition, emotion may be relegated either to the non-symbolic exterior as a biological

or physiological phenomenon, or foregrounded as part of the interior, a meaningful aspect of social life and part of the object domain of qualitative sociology. Since the concern of this formation is often described as "how men and women attribute meaning to things in their lives," that which is considered exterior to the domain of social meaning is excluded from the discipline's object domain by definition.

We might say that the inclusion of emotion in the régime of qualitative sociology occurs through the selective exclusion of the non-symbolic. What the qualitative sociologist invariably finds in emotion is a social process in which emotions and selves take on meanings within social interaction, meaning that defines the role of the self in relation to the role played by the other, as communicated in the display of emotion within consensually defined situations. This holds equally true for the discourse of symbolic interactionism as for the many forms of social constructionism that have begun to permeate considerations of emotion in the discipline of psychology.[2]

There is clearly an epistemological problem posed by the way that discursive régimes construct their objects of inquiry and thus tend to project and confirm the validity of their basic assumptions in their research. The problems of hermeneutic circularity have not been addressed with equal success (if at all) across the qualitative perspectives. There is also an undeniably political dimension hidden within the operations of conceptualization and problematization where the discursive selection and elimination occurs. My ultimate goal is to begin to analyze the questions of power and knowledge that operate through that system itself. Emotion, as reconstructed within symbolic interactionism, shows an epistemological régime to us, and it allows us to trace out some

of its boundaries, and to point to characteristic regularities in the work of discursive operators.

Emotion as an object of interpretation

The best place to look at the utility of an analytical concept is in its application, not in its formal specification. Although Denzin wrote a monograph on the topic of emotion, our way into his work is through his ethnography of alcoholism and recovery movements, The Alcoholic Society. It is primarily interactionist, and methodologically it is committed to participant observation. The analytical approach works towards an "ideal typical" and yet "processual" account of "alcoholic experience, seeking to find the universal or generic structures of recovery" (Denzin *Alcoholic* 11). Emotion is an important analytic category in Denzin's discussion of alcoholism.

Emotion is used in a number of ways in this work. The most straightforward use of the concept appears in naïve moments of ethnographic interpretation. Denzin observes evidence of *ressentiment*, pride, anger, fear, and emotional violence in interactions among alcoholics and their "others," and presents them as generic features of alcoholic experience. Inevitably, pre-theoretical assumptions about the nature of emotion and emotional experience are at work whenever a common-sense observation is made.[3] Alcoholics are seen "in the grip of" emotion; alcoholic experience is characterized by a dysfunction of "normal emotionality" (Denzin *Alcoholic* 5). These common-sense understandings of emotion form a partial and intractable set of determinations that condition the specialized conceptualizations of emotion that Denzin builds in this and other works. The arguments that he develops about emotion and its social effects never stray too far from "lay theories" of emotion and the nature of human being.

As a research tradition with a distinctive way of organizing its research questions and findings, symbolic interactionism supplies another set of assumptions that condition the possible roles that emotion might play. These are more explicitly the contribution of the social theorist, although they have resonances with common-sense notions of emotion. The theoretical imagery is familiar from symbolic interactionism: In the domain of emotional experience, interacting individuals try to make sense of the unfolding situation in terms of emotional states that they attribute to themselves and to each other. Denzin construes the fundamental problem of alcoholism not as an addiction at the level of organism, but as a problem of existential identity and a crisis of definition of the various selves involved in the alcoholic person's experience (*Alcoholic* 15-48).

In constructing a set of concepts through which to approach the domain of emotional experience, Denzin reconstructs common-sense images and ideas about emotion or appropriates and adapts concepts that already operate within symbolic interactionism to serve his interpretive aims.

These concepts are the *personnages* through which a conceptual persona does its work and finds expression. Their construction necessarily changes the meaning of emotion in subtle ways. I shall focus on three concepts and their interrelated operation: emotionality, emotional intersubjectivity, and emotional understanding.

Emotionality

In Denzin's consideration of emotion, his first step is to construct and define a powerful concept with which to address a range of emotional experiences and common-sense notions of emotion. He develops the concept of emotionality, which is discussed by way of analogy with Mead's "principle of sociality." Sociality is a central operator in

symbolic interactionism that describes the communicational process through which situational meanings are shared and social reality is constituted. Sociality, as Denzin argues, "lies at the base of the intersubjectively constituted situation [...]. Applied to emotionality, the principle of emotional sociality suggests that the self as an emotional social object enters the field of experience on the same basis of emotionality as does the other person's self" (Denzin *On Understanding* 132). Clearly, Denzin models his concept of emotion on that of a central concept in the epistemological régime in which he intends to work. This inaugural act of creating a concept inevitably entails an abstraction and a reduction of the complexity of any social phenomenon. From a vast range of experiences and ideas about emotion, a limited set of possibilities will be established in the formation of the concept. This constitutes a small but inevitable displacement of the phenomenon or the general discourse with an analytic concept, a discursive operator. What many methodologists still appear to ignore is that this displacement is both constitutive of our objects of study, and necessarily partial, in the sense that it always serves disciplinary interests. What then are the conditions and functions of emotionality?

As principles that operate prior to the empirical moment of research, emotionality and sociality reconstruct the common-sense boundary between the self and the other by transmuting qualities commonly associated with the subjective interior into entities that are both exterior to and constitutive of selves. Interactionism reverses the humanist image of a social world constituted by the subject, arguing instead that the subject as social self is constituted in interaction. The interactionist inversion is significant because it is a solution, based on pragmatist principles, to the epistemological problem of how we may know the thoughts of others. Pragmatism promotes an approach to other minds that

denies them a distinct status from the rest of the natural world. Understanding could therefore be considered no more difficult in principle than the observation of other natural phenomena. The appropriation of pragmatism within early symbolic interactionism led to the denial of the reality of mind separate from social interaction. Through the social process, common understandings emerge that constitute selves, projects, and actions. The concept of the self is tailored to the description of social process. Symbolic interactionism validates its claim to knowledge of the self through the idea that meaning is grounded in sociality that can be shared by any participant.

Through emotionality, Denzin inverts similar imagery that locates the origin of emotion in subjective experience, prior to the effects of the social. Instead, emotionality is a social object that is incorporated in the constitutive processes of defining the situation and the selves that populate it:

> The principle of emotional sociality makes emotionality a processual social object that is drawn to and into the feeling selves of the interactional participants. Like other social objects in the situation, emotionality takes on new and different meanings as the interactants adjust and redefine their respective lines of action toward each other (*On Understanding* 133).

Emotionality provides a convenient "solution" to the problem of other minds by making emotion a meaningful artifact of interaction that is always already shared.

As a discursive operator, emotionality objectifies what is commonly considered the subjective, transforming internal emotional states into social objects in interpretation; and it subjectifies the objective, theorizing the incorporation of the social object into the ongoing process of interpretation. Emotionality allows the displacement of emotion with

a discursive operator that is presented as fundamentally intersubjective and social by virtue of its exteriority to the individual, thus solving an epistemological problem and validating the incorporation of emotion as an object within a sociological perspective at the same time.

Interactionism is thus vindicated in assuming the inevitable mediation of experience by social or cultural frameworks of meaning. Individual practitioners such as Denzin sustain this assumption even when dealing with apparently pre-cognitive forms such as emotion. Redefined as emotionality, emotion becomes the object of the symbolic activity of definition and redefinition that is the constitutive operation of social life for symbolic interactionists. The interactionist régime displaces emotion as a diffuse and multivalent phenomenon of interpersonal relations and limits inquiry to the social forms of interpretation that permit the understanding of situations as emotional, or as being populated by persons with emotional selves. Emotion *per se* is not considered as a productive aspect of interpersonal relations. Any further consideration of emotion as an aspect of interpersonal relations is thus displaced by a discussion of emotion as an emergent form of sociality.

Emotional intersubjectivity

Denzin's further conceptualization of emotion draws on another discourse that is somewhat at odds with the interactionist imagery embodied in the concept of emotionality. In the course of emotional interaction, as Denzin theorizes it,

> [...] a past set of experiences is shared, even if they have been unique to the two individuals in question. By drawing on that common but unique past, they are able to form a new shareable field of experience. In so doing

> they appropriate the other's perspective and apply it to their own situation. A merger of shared emotional feelings is thus produced. In the emotional field the selves of the two interactants are lodged. A merger of biographies, of common pasts and a discourse in a common language that draws upon that shared past, emerges (Denzin *Alcoholic* 250).

It is not difficult to find within this formulation the outline of the powerful discursive operator of "intersubjectivity" in a radically hermeneutic incarnation. The operator pushes Denzin's conceptualization of emotion far beyond the limits of conventional symbolic interactionist discourse.

Intersubjectivity has a long history in phenomenology and phenomenological social theory. It was a central problem in Husserl's attempt to rethink knowledge from a basis in subjective experience. At least since Schutz, however, it has been common to distinguish "concrete" intersubjectivity from earlier transcendentalist and idealist formulations. Concrete intersubjectivity refers to those meaningful and shared structures of the lifeworld that pre-exist individuals and inform their acts and interpretations. This is the discourse of intersubjectivity that Denzin initially appears to draw on:

> My concern here is not with proving the existence of an alter ego intersubjectively. Rather, my appropriation of the term in connection with emotionality is intended to refer to (1) what two parties know about each other's emotionality (2) how they gain that knowledge, and (3) how they act on it so as to (4) bring themselves into a shared or not shared field of emotional experience (*On Understanding* 131).

However, the evident facticity of emotional intersubjectivity may well be misleading. Intersubjectivity is not a blank slate waiting to be filled with meanings that derive from a pristine contact between the sociologist and emotionality. It brings with it links to numerous other, authoritative discourses. The epistemological régime has an investment in intersubjectivity as a discursive operator. Intersubjectivity solves epistemological problems, such as the way that sociologists may access the contents of other minds. Intersubjectivity also links rather mundane instances of interaction into more powerful conceptualizations of the social. Intersubjectivity is not simply about the emotions that transpire between two people, it is about coordinating action, creating social reality, motivating an interpretation, or some such function that has been validated by the discipline. The notion that intersubjectivity could be "concrete" is deceptive, for even in this guise it is still an a-priori assumption whose meaning and function are determined on a conceptual plane before it is concretized in an interpretation. As a discursive operator, it is a figure of mediation made necessary by the epistemological imagery of symbolic interactionism.

The concept of intersubjectivity has been discussed by a number of critics working in the area of the philosophy of communication. Intersubjectivity appears to respond to a fundamental question implied by the problematic of communication: How do isolated individuals transcend their individuality? Grossberg argues that intersubjective imagery always involves the mediation of individual differences by an external agency that cannot be accounted for in terms of the individual (Grossberg *Does Communication*). In Denzin's phenomenological theory of emotion, that logical requirement is satisfied by the image of a "field of shared and shareable experience" that

must be produced between interacting individuals if true "emotional understanding" is to occur. Rather than explain how individuality is transcended, this defers the question by providing a preemptive solution, suggesting a series of similar concepts that stand in for intersubjectivity. Chang argues that the deferral is based on a "fundamental analogism, a principle of substitution between intersubjectivity and mediation" (Chang 64) in which figures of mediation "materialize" intersubjectivity without ever explaining it or testing it. In Denzin's discourse, the interplay between abstract model and concrete representation is made that much more transparent because he refers to both as "intersubjectivity." The two modes of existence of the concept permit a sleight of hand whereby the two levels validate each other and obviate the need for further demonstration. As a discursive operator, emotion is thus recruited into the service of legitimating an epistemological régime that is founded on the assumption of intersubjectivity. Emotional intersubjectivity is the *personnage* of the central conceptual persona of phenomenological social theory.

The legitimation of any view of intersubjectivity will likely require the theorist to make the abstract model of intersubjectivity appear in the imagery of situated interaction. In order for a concept to operate in this way, it must come to occupy a place reserved for "the concrete" in the discourse, whether it be the material, the social or the experienced world. The interactionist "situation" can be grounded in all three of these realities. That which appears in the situation is necessarily concrete. Common experience is proof enough of its existence:

> The world of daily emotional life, though not wholly private, is not entirely public, yet individuals do enter into and interpret their own and

> others' subjective emotional experience [...]. Individuals do share feelings, imitate the feelings of others, infect others with their feelings, and enter into common emotional bonds and relationships with others (*On Understanding* 134-135).

Denzin's "do" is clearly an assertion of the reality of intersubjectivity that appeals to everyday experience. We have already noted that this formation appeals to common sense when necessary to introduce into discourse its abstract postulates. More so than other sociological discourses, interactionism validates its findings through the familiarity of the imagery of its exposition. As a discursive operator, emotion is able to perform this enunciative function due to its evident facticity.

The assumption that emotion is a medium of intersubjectivity is already deeply entrenched in our romantic culture. Indeed, emotion could be considered part of a lay theory of intersubjectivity, as the paradigmatic situation in which the barriers imposed by individuality are erased in a moment of mutual transparency. Because of this, emotion is able to function as an implicit tool of validation. The logical operation of intersubjectivity is obscured behind the evident facticity of emotion in everyday life. Denzin's phenomenological discourse mobilizes the facticity of emotion to make present the abstract model of intersubjectivity in the concrete scene of interaction.

As he goes about his theoretical exposition, Denzin briefly problematizes intersubjectivity, confronting the fact with the philosophical problem:

> Because intersubjectivity is an interactional process, two related problems are raised. The first concerns the question 'How do individuals 'know' and 'understand' the emotional experiences, utterances, and actions of another?

> [and] How are individuals interactionally affected by what they know about or observe of another's emotionality? (*On Understanding* 134)

In attempting to respond, he engages in a characteristic deferral of the first question by multiplying figures of mediation around the second. At no point is the abstract assumption of intersubjectivity questioned. Instead it is re-presented in mediating concepts that are suggested by the particularities of emotion as a conceptual persona. The results tend to support or defend the abstract model of intersubjectivity from destabilizing critique. Through the description of familiar images of mediation, Denzin emphasizes the relative immediacy of emotional intersubjectivity, how the other's body is interpreted as a "surface of expression" that "calls out" reciprocal emotions in the self, and how the slightest perception of emotion is reflectively incorporated into the definition of a self and a situation. These examples of "immediate" mediation are convincingly specific to emotion, yet rather than explain intersubjectivity (as promised) I would argue that they simply illustrate the theoretical premise.

Even more figures of mediation are produced in response to the second question, when a series of forms of emotional intersubjectivity are offered in place of an explanation of how mutual affection is possible. The forms are described in hierarchical order, ranging from the plenitude of emotional understanding through its lesser forms (mediated by language or knowledge without feeling) down to the debased instance of emotional infection (feeling without the mediation of knowledge) and the failure of intersubjectivity, "spurious emotionality" (*On Understanding* 146-156). The value placed on an individualistic notion of intersubjectivity is readily apparent in this hierarchy, which gives pride of place to the form that mediates both meaning and feeling between

knowing (isolated) subjects. But perhaps the most significant form from a discursive point of view is the null case of "spurious emotionality." This operator works to legitimate the rest of the hierarchy by conceptualizing what is perhaps most common in social experience - the misinterpretation of what the other feels - while nonetheless defining it as a form of intersubjectivity! Whether the strategy that legitimates intersubjectivity recruits the concrete reality of familiar mediations and embarrassing miscues, or the logical precision of an orderly hierarchy of forms, it never actually demonstrates intersubjectivity in action.

All attempts at demonstration are deferred into further discursive operations. For Denzin, the principal condition of intersubjectivity is the existence of a "shared and shareable field of experience." That is no help; the intersubjective medium is intersubjective simply by definition. Denzin is not consistent in his characterizations of what a field of experience might be, even in relation to basic categories like time and space. At times shareable experience refers to the socially codified events of a life narrative, at other times to the lived *durée* of on-going interaction. Sharing itself has different meanings. No attempt is made to clarify what constitutes an adequate degree of identity of experience either. The argument is prone to the regress that threatens every model of intersubjectivity by analogical transfer. How for example can the middle-aged straight white academic truly understand the gay homeless subjects of his research? How much commonality is sufficient to promote emotional understanding? It may not be possible to answer these questions without appealing to an ontological principle.

Denzin is obliged to make emotional intersubjectivity present in the concrete situation, as ontologized within interactionism. Ultimately, however, they are difficult to

integrate, for the empirical evidence cannot provide adequate support for the extensive conceptual role given intersubjectivity by Denzin.

Emotional understanding

At the other end of the continuum of form from spurious emotionality is emotional understanding. The qualitative formation is generally said to pursue understanding; yet the actual meaning of understanding remains to be defined. As Denzin conceptualizes it, emotional understanding

> is an intersubjective process requiring that one person enter into the field of experience of another and experience for herself the same or similar experiences experienced by another [...]. Shared and sharable emotionality lie at the core of what it means to understand and meaningfully enter into the emotional experiences of another (*On Understanding* 137).

>From the numerous pages of elaboration that follow this passage, two ideas about understanding can be isolated. The first is that emotional understanding as a specific form is distinguished by a sense of "authenticity and realness" derived from grasping the other's emotionality. The second idea, which encompasses the first, is that emotional understanding is the product of, if not identical with, the fully realized form of emotional intersubjectivity. The least we can say is that the concepts lack a clearly differentiated field of reference, for emotionality, emotional intersubjectivity and emotional understanding all seem to refer back to the master model of intersubjectivity. They all seem to support one another and are often invoked when clarification of a fellow concept is necessary. In Denzin's presentation of the theory, the conceptual plane is given a semblance of order by arranging the concepts in a hierarchy of relations, but it soon

becomes evident that the implied relations of determination, or simply precedence, are compromised by the fluidity of the concepts. Emotionality is by definition intersubjective, but it is also the basic object of interpretation that results in understanding and it is also the product of understanding, which is also defined as intersubjective (*On Understanding* 146-156). It is difficult to keep a firm grasp of what is being discussed, since the *personnages* of intersubjectivity circulate in so many other positions.

Emotion is pulled up into an authoritative discourse on the social life of individuals which claims great explanatory scope. When redefined as emotionality, emotion is revealed as the ontological ground of the social as conceived within symbolic interactionism and social psychology more generally. As Denzin presents it,

> Emotionality lies at the basis of social organization, for emotionality is the basis of understanding. Social organization is nothing if it is not routinized, taken-for-granted understandings. Because social organizations and social relationships are the arenas for the generation of common fields of experience, emotionality is grounded in the very conditions that promote social structures. As recurring fields of common interactional experience, organizations provide the contexts for the preperforming, coperforming, and reperforming of those social acts that underlie all emotional understanding. Accordingly, the analysis of emotional intersubjectivity should lead to new views on the phenomenological theory of social structure [...] (Denzin *On Understanding* 146).

A dizzying array of concepts associated with a Schutzian, constructionist model of social reality are linked with emotionality. It seems at home on this conceptual plane because it

is basically a conceptual *personnage* for the persona of intersubjectivity. Yet this sweeping regrounding of understanding in emotionality, and emotionality in experience, suggests nothing more specific than that emotionality is the ontological ground of being. It ontologizes emotion and borrows a place for it in a powerful theory of social being, but it suggests nothing specific about emotion and its role in interpersonal relations, which remain a matter of cognitively defining the situation and the self.

Intersubjectivity is a key discursive operator for the epistemological régime of phenomenological sociology, and as such it cannot be questioned within the terms of that discourse without undermining its status. As a whole, the formation defers questions that threaten the stability of its fundamental assumptions. Seriously drawing intersubjectivity into question would be a profoundly subversive project. Instead, the formation works to multiply figures of mediation in order to reiterate the truth of the conceptual persona of intersubjectivity. Research often involves finding new ways to legitimate prior (and a-priori) conceptualizations. An informal interpretation at this stage in the analysis might be that we, as researchers, protect certain privileged operators and *personnages* in order to organize disciplinary activity and to normalize privileged theoretical discourses.

Figuring a general theoretical position in situated activity

Perhaps a better understanding of the work of conceptual personae can be had from an analysis of Denzin's theory in its application in ethnographic research. In the most significant use of the concept of emotional understanding in The Alcoholic Society Denzin relays a field report of an incident in which emotional understanding emerges. The field report is a rather dry example of ethnographic description which is rendered as a script. It presents a situation, three persons- M, J and D (the passive informant) - and

assumes they have a generic capacity to understand one another, cognitively and emotionally. The operator of emotional understanding appears as a lay interpretation when M, a struggling alcoholic, says to J at a pivotal moment: "you're the first person I've talked to who understands what the hell I'm going through" (*Alcoholic* 248-249). Significantly, M's comments neatly illustrate the general theoretical conception of emotional understanding that the passage seeks to demonstrate and concretize.

Denzin's own interpretation of the scene seems to parallel M's: As Denzin interprets the scene, M is moved to take action by an instance of mutual emotional understanding, grounded in J and M's shared experience of alcoholism and made possible by J's correct interpretation of M's emotionality. M's allusion to past misunderstandings and *ressentiment* make the achievement of emotional understanding that much more important.

The status of the report is more complex than an initial reading would suggest. Although ethnography as a methodology must certainly be grouped on the side of phenomenalists and empiricists in their on-going struggle against the speculative and rationalist tendencies in social science, ethnography is not devoid of a-priori assumptions. No ethnography can relay empirical reality without the imposition of some structure. The ethnographic data is selected to illuminate emotional understanding as a facet of the social world. Denzin's work is generally organized around the definition and elaboration of forms or other abstract categories of social action and experience. Passages of ethnographic evidence support the conceptual elaboration; they do not lead the research unguided, as it were. They are part of a rhetorical strategy that presents the activities of the interactionist's *personnages* as the phenomena of lived experience. As Rock describes

it, interactionism " brings people into being; endows them with a lay version of sociological competence; reports their activities as the phenomena of situated experience; and explains them by that self-same competence" (Rock 161). "Men and their moments" remain illustrations, if not entirely fabricated then certainly relayed for a purpose.

On the next page of The Alcoholic Society, the same skeletal field report is reinterpreted to demonstrate the working of all of the major abstract forms of emotional intersubjectivity in this particular concrete situation. It reads as a plausible emotional subtext to the scripted interaction of the field conversation. It also establishes a theoretical context for the concept of emotional understanding. If the condition of understanding is intersubjectivity, the enumeration of forms of emotional intersubjectivity at work in the situation would appear to confirm the presence of emotional understanding without actually having to explain it.

If it is inescapable that some aspect of the forestructure will be confirmed in the research, the argument here is that conceptual structure over-determines the findings of research to the extent that it furnishes the form or process that serves as a problem and also the conditions of its solution. Thus the mystery of Verstehen can be turned into a focused inquiry once the persona of intersubjectivity appears behind it and points the way to the situated experience of emotionality as a mediating form. There is a circularity to this form of reasoning that derives from the discursive functioning of the conceptual persona informing both problem and its solution. Despite its empiricist pretensions, ethnography does not immunize sociological discourse from the determinations of its conceptual forestructure. When the investment in a conceptual persona is determining,

even empirical research can be simply another means to legitimate a general theoretical perspective by confirming the presence of its *personnages* in "objective reality."

The displacement of the interactionist frame by phenomenology

Only certain aspects of the *personnage* of emotion lend themselves to the operation of concretizing the persona of intersubjectivity. The conceptual persona determines, to a great extent, the range of logical operations that can be figured by its *personnages*. These are also tied to conjunctural determinations, so that the specification of emotionality cannot stray too far from more general notions of emotion. If readily evoked meanings contradict the logical operation, emotion may pose resistances rather than lend itself to supporting its conceptual persona. The range of common-sense meanings of emotion must be discursively restricted to avoid evoking incompatible imagery. The focus must be maintained on social emotions and emotional expressions that are intelligible within the interactionist frame. Emotionality may respond to abstract logical requirements to make social and make exterior, however in doing so it must not violate commonsense beliefs about emotion; if not, resistances begin to proliferate.

It may also be the case that resistance comes from the internal inconsistency or incoherence of the logical premise encapsulated in the *personnage* of intersubjectivity. It may be poorly thought out or subjected to pragmatic constraints that impose an inconsistent form upon it. It may condense contradictory theoretical commitments. Grossberg points to a contradiction that is rarely acknowledged within symbolic interactionism and other dialogical theories of communication: While the formation conceptualizes meaningful objects as the emergent products of interaction, it also regularly falls back to the position that meaning resides in the individual prior to

interaction. Indeed, this position is required to account for the failure of intersubjectivity and to account for change wrought by individual impulse or will (Grossberg *Does* 181-182).

Both sorts of resistance trouble the discursive régime under analysis. They enter the field through Denzin's theorization of emotion as a source of "deep meaning." He frames the discussion in terms of the pragmatist theory of meaning from which symbolic interactionism draws its ultimate epistemological warrant for its interpretations. Denzin develops his theory through analogy, arguing that with

> [...] slight variation, the pragmatic theory of meaning can be altered to read as the pragmatic-emotional theory of meaning. Since the self or the interpretive subject is at the center of the process that confers meaning on social objects, and since the subject is a feeling subject, self-feelings lie at the core of the meanings conferred on objects. Meaning has a dual location: in the interaction process and in the feelings and thoughts of the interpretive subject [...] (Denzin *On Understanding* 265).

Here, emotion is presented as a more authentic level of meaning, prior to the negotiated definitions of interactionism. This has the effect of reinstating the dualism that the systemic model of meaning and intersubjectivity was designed to work against.

> The meanings expressed in and through emotionality... reveal the inner meaning of actions to the person as they are felt and interpreted at the deep, ontological level. These expressions break through the natural attitudes that constrain the expression of deep emotionality and meaning... Inquiry must display the underlying emotional meanings that are hidden,

> perhaps disembodied, masked, and even distorted by the constraints of convention and the contingencies of practical concern. The laying bare of these inner meanings will reveal not just the pragmatic but also the emotional meanings held by the person. It is these meanings that interpretive inquiry seeks to reveal, illuminate, interpret and understand (*On Understanding* 265).

The operation in which emotion is implicated is the attribution of truth and authenticity to another level' of meaning. The effect is to reconstruct the interior as a locus of individual meaning that exists apart from the constitutive processes of sociality.

The rhetorical effect of positing a deeper level of meaning is to displace and perhaps to debase the orthodox interactionist epistemological justification that has come before, making emotionality a kind of social performance now opposed to "the underlying structures of the self." To Denzin, interaction rituals are more likely to produce surface displays of conventional emotion, blinding subjects and observers to the nature of their true feelings: "To the degree that they adhere to the public ritual order, they fail to reveal their deeper meanings to themselves" (Denzin *On Understanding* 159). Recovery discourse encourages the exercising of emotion that is "distinctly NOT dramaturgical" (Denzin *Alcoholic* 189). In this Denzin reproduces one of the more enduring cultural oppositions that structures our ideas about emotional experience. The public surface is the polite, conventional screen, aptly theorized through the metaphor of the "looking glass self." In contrast, the private depths of the individual are associated with the spontaneous and the informal, the authentic core of the subject. Denzin puts enormous stock in individual meaning and emotion, to the extent that he risks

undermining the integrity and credibility of the interactionist framework that he built with emotionality.

The persona endowed with deep meaning threatens to upset the interactionist practice of interpretation by disarticulating it from the meta-theoretical warrant provided by pragmatism. Praxis makes available to experience all that is required to know the reflective actor. It follows, however, that deep meaning is beyond the knowledge of the interactionist *personnage*. In contrast, to understand the depth *personnage* put forth by Denzin surely requires a speculative form of knowledge that transcends the limitations of praxis. The concept of the self must be extended to encompass intimate areas of subjectivity that were expressly excluded from interpretation by the classical interactionists. By way of a detour through emotionality, this perspective brings us back to the subject as the locus of meaning and originary emotion prior to interaction.

Another conceptual persona appears in this account. It shapes Denzin's pre-theoretical notion of understanding and the place of emotion within it. It gives rise to a theoretical image of intersubjectivity that might be drawn from Husserlian phenomenology rather than symbolic interactionism. The image here is not of reflecting selves as they are constituted within interaction, but of an individual's experience somehow becoming identical with that of the other. The imagery of intersubjectivity is shifted from the concrete to the transcendental. It is as though the conceptual persona is exhibiting force on the choice of conceptual models of intersubjectivity, evoking transcendental imagery by the power of its meanings. With the displacement of emotion by emotionality and the slide of the dominant theoretical model towards a transcendentalist image of intersubjectivity, interactionism's orthodox pragmatism is

displaced by a transcendentalist phenomenology; understanding as the observation of public forms of social coordination is displaced by the depth interpretation of an other's experience. The approach becomes, by extension of its scope into the banished realm of subjective experience, a hermeneutic rather than a pseudo-behavioral endeavor.

The displacement in the ontological underpinnings of the interactionist project produces tensions within the different levels on which the operator of intersubjectivity works. Denzin's concession to the concrete fact that intersubjectivity fails so often that misunderstanding is a "constitutive form of the life-world" severely undermines the work that intersubjectivity does on the more abstract level of conceptual imagery. Without the kind of guarantees that can only be made in theoretical terms, intersubjectivity no longer solves the problem of solipsism or the philosophical problem of accessing other minds. There is no longer any assurance that the appropriation of the other's perspective, the assignment of roles, the definition of situations and many other important "process categories" in the interactionist canon are actually going to happen. The inherent heterogeneity of the "concrete," its variability and specificity, undermines the theoretical work of the "abstract" operator.

This discursive functioning identifies a fault line running through the unity that is symbolic interactionism, pointing to the uneasy coexistence of two formations, a classical interactionist formation and a phenomenological formation that is itself quite heterogeneous, both occupying the field defined by symbolic interactionism. As a discursive operator, emotion appears to further the elaboration of the phenomenological formation and to inspire a renewed interest in some transcendental themes long

suppressed within the social constructionist, phenomenological mainstream of social psychology, which still pays ritual homage to the early Interactionists.

We must note critically, however, that although Denzin is a radical exponent of the phenomenological formation, he uses the legitimacy of the interactionist heritage to frame his work for the discipline. Strategically, the classical categories are appropriated for their authority and stretched far beyond their original uses to legitimate a phenomenological conceptualization of emotional understanding that is ontologically alien to the classical interactionist position. The epistemological implications of Denzin's interpretive approach, the hint of idealism that derives from his unadorned use of intersubjectivity as a warrant for interpretation, and the apparent subjectivism of the hermeneutic method when compared to the more positivist approaches to interpretation advocated in other disciplinary formations, place Denzin's discourse in a relatively marginal position of authority within current sociology.

In view of this, the major source of resistance to this theory of emotion may turn around objections on matters of epistemology. Emotional understanding is a self-ratifying category, which is perfectly valid when the concept is treated as an element of lay interpretation. It is another matter when it is used as a warrant for scholarly interpretation. Here the more positivist element in the discipline would want some demonstration that the interpretation based on intersubjective knowledge is faithful. However, the hermeneutic interpretation is only as good as the intersubjective relation on which it is based, and unfortunately no external criteria exist to evaluate the quality of an intersubjective relation.

Conclusion

Symbolic interactionism, as much as any other formation engaged in social theory, begins from certain axiomatic assumptions that in themselves select objects and problems for disciplinary consideration. Although as a sociology it eschews structural analysis and the vision of society as a totality in favor of process and flux, and it pretends to reject abstract or speculative reasoning, it nonetheless imposes its particular metaphors and categories on analysis. Symbolic interactionism is continually "uncovering" processes that are susceptible to its methods and can be "faithfully" rendered in the concepts already developed within interactionist theory. There is inevitably a degree of conceptual overdetermination. Interactionism projects its image of a negotiation between reflective actors onto the complex phenomena of interpersonal relations and finds there only the symbolic problems and processes that can be plausibly accounted for by interactionist imagery and operators. The more abstract the level of analysis chosen, the more the theoretical imagery tends to displace actual events, and ultimately to overdetermine the results of the research.

The analysis of the conceptual maneuvers required to reconstruct emotion in the interactionist epistemological régime has revealed a number of different moments of displacement. First there is the moment of definition, when the common-sense notion of emotion is displaced by emotionality, a slightly specified *personnage* of one of the most powerful discursive operators in the interactionist pantheon, sociality. This pulls emotion up into an epistemological régime that works on an exclusively symbolic level of analysis. The limits placed on definition by the régime are all the more obvious because emotion is generally understood to surpass the cognitive and cultural dimensions of

meaning to include other levels of mediation. Strictly speaking, interactionism makes it possible to discuss what the reflective actor knows and says about the emotions that arise between herself and others, and little more. The operator produced here appears to be a reduction of the full range of meanings associated with emotion.

Another form of displacement occurs when emotional intersubjectivity is placed under pressure in Denzin's theoretical framework. Questions of a highly abstract nature, such as "how is emotional intersubjectivity possible?" invite answers that are internally produced by a conceptual persona. It becomes apparent that emotionality, emotional intersubjectivity and emotional understanding are mutually dependent discursive operators. They function as a conceptual network, each one being called on to define and explain the others. Working at a high level of abstraction, they obviate the need for this form of interactionism to ground its claims in observable practices.

The issue of what matters most to people is raised, in this context, as a challenge to a typically interactionist way of dealing with problems of social deviancy (such as alcoholism) as problems of social definition. The inherent cognitivism of sociality or emotionality eventually prove too constraining to deal with a problem that is considered, on the basis of common sense and a psycho-therapeutic discourse of emotional disturbance, to be located at a "deep ontological level" (*Alcoholic* 265). Chafing against the limitations of the interactionist framework, Denzin and others extend the limits of interactionism to reclaim some of the interiority associated with the transcendental ego of phenomenology. The break with the assumptions of classical interactionism creates a tension in the foundations of the epistemological régime: It negates much of the theoretical framework designed to legitimate interactionist interpretation. In place of the

personnage of the reflective actor, it returns a rather less defensible ontological figure of the emotional human being to the center of analysis.

ENDNOTES

[1] For other research on emotion in the communications literature, see Buck and Planalp. Since they work in quite different epistemological régimes than the one analyzed here, they do not form part of my corpus.

[2] Psychologists of emotion often talk of the constructionist approaches to emotion as a "paradigm shift" in academic psychology. The best known contributions are from Harré and Armon-Jones.

[3] Common sense is not an objective domain somehow devoid of theory, it is, as Geertz theorizes, that "network of practical and moral conceptions woven around those supposedly most rooted of root realities [...]" (Geertz 81).

CHAPTER 2: CRITICAL PRACTICES AND THE STRUCTURE OF FEELING

My goal in this chapter is to consider a trajectory in communication and cultural theory that constructs as its object something like a "structure of feeling." The theorists and perspectives that are part of this trajectory include Raymond Williams, who developed the concept; Lawrence Grossberg, whose work on "affect" builds on and revises the structure of feeling in a different epistemological régime; and Roland Barthes, whose final book Camera Lucida developed a theory of the photographic image that was especially concerned with the sensuous relation of image to observer.

While the trajectory could be framed in sociological terms as the work of a "school" of thought, organized around the project of British cultural studies or through the network of social affiliations that link these theorists, my corpus is constructed to follow a discursive operator. I have become intrigued by the structure of feeling, which in its peculiar articulation of the structural and the phenomenological suggests that one might bridge or work across one of the major divides in cultural and social theory. I also share a certain dissatisfaction with the semiotic orthodoxy in cultural criticism that the structure of feeling works to displace, or at least to extend beyond its customary limits.

Beyond the common object of inquiry, the theorists represented here share a general project. They seek to interpret certain cultural texts or themes as a reflection of social conditions or social meanings. For most of them, this requires them to "place" a text in its historical and social contexts in order to interpret its significance. This, at least, is the common practice of textual criticism that is either enacted or contended with in their work.

The structure of feeling as an analytic concept, while remaining identifiable, appears as a *personnage* within a number of different régimes of epistemological discourse. Each of these régimes favors different epistemological positions and assumptions that condition the appearance of the operator. In each régime the operator becomes bound up within a set of varying relations with other discourses and their operators. Part of the challenge here is to figure these changing contexts as they work to condition the concept without losing track of its coherence.

I am of course interested in how the discursive operator contributes to the enunciative or rhetorical effects of these discourses. How does the structure of feeling further the project of writing a social history through the analysis of its culture? Does feeling tap into a well of cultural assumptions about the immediacy of lived experience? I am also interested in the liabilities that these operators incur, even as they do the positive work that allows interpretations to be made or structural analysis to continue. I am particularly concerned with the way that these operators regulate the engagement between the theoretical discourses in which they work and the objects of inquiry that they construct. What phenomena or discourses are drawn up into the epistemological régime by these operators, and what kind of relations does it build between these "objects" and its own logic of intelligibility? What room do these operators allow for the contingencies of actual circumstances within their models of reception or social action?

Literary foundations of the structure of feeling

The concept of experience played a crucial role in the disengagement of British literary criticism from the strong economic determinism that characterized earlier Marxist critiques of culture. For a formation of culturalist critics now identified with Raymond

Williams, this meant developing a mode of cultural analysis based on a model of a heterogeneous and partially determined social totality, or a "whole way of life." A place for art could be found that didn't reduce literature to a general form of production, or treat writing as the simple emanation of the material relations structuring social life. A notion of lived experience served as a kind of synthetic holding ground out of which new relations and determinations could be developed for analysis. In this way, the prevailing economistic orthodoxy could be dissolved in a broader conception of totality seized within experience. Perhaps the most important analytical concept that was developed out of this concern for experience was the "structure of feeling." Williams describes the concept this way:

> In the study of a period, we may be able to reconstruct, with more or less accuracy, the material life, the social organization, and, to a large extent, the dominant ideas. It is not necessary to discuss here which, if any, of these aspects is, in the whole complex, determining [...]. To relate a work of art to any part of the totality may, in varying degrees, be useful, but it is a common experience, in analysis, to realize that when one has measured the work against the separable parts, there yet remains some element for which there is no external counterpart. It is this, in the first instance, that I mean by the structure of feeling. It is as firm and definite as "structure" suggests, yet it is based in the deepest and often least tangible elements of our experience. It is a way of responding to a particular world which in practice is not felt as one way among others – a conscious "way" – but is, in experience, the only way possible. Its means, its elements, are not

> propositions or techniques; they are embodied, related feelings. In the same sense, it is accessible to others – not by formal argument or by professional skills, on their own, but by direct experience – a form and a meaning, a feeling and a rhythm – in the work of art, the play, as a whole. (Williams, *Drama* 17-18).

This emerging sensibility, barely articulated yet on the way to becoming the dominant mode of perceiving the material conditions of life, is what Williams called a structure of feeling. Over the three decades of the concept's existence it has evidently played many roles, but has generally worked at naming the moment at which experience is given symbolic literary form. It has made possible some of the most convincing evocations of collective feeling in response to a wide array of social and intellectual conditions, from the social rupture and aesthetic rapture of the modern experience of city life, to the dread and desire of the Marxist critic confronted by postmodern art (Pfeil) to the pathos of the cultural critic who finds solace and home on the left (Rutherford).

Conceptual determinations

The structure of feeling is a concept conditioned by a doubled set of determinations: it is shaped both by general discourses in the conjuncture and more specific régimes of literary criticism. Above all, it is conditioned by common-sense notions of social mood and sensibility. The concept derives a certain legitimacy from the belief that our common experiences of material circumstances and social relations cultivate common feeling. In an editorial following the destruction of the World Trade Center, subtitled "A Generation of Liberal Skeptics Now Knows the Deep Emotions of Patriotism," something like a structure of feeling is evoked:

> Among the things destroyed with the twin towers was the notion [...] that to be stirred by national identity [...] ought to be a source of embarrassment. The force of the blows woke us up to the fact that we are part of a national community. This heightened awareness could be the disaster's greatest legacy, one that liberals should not fear but learn to use (Packer 15).

The notion of a profound and collective change in sensibility, an ontological shift in relatedness to the world as a response to historical events, clearly still has a purchase in popular discourse.

In its immediate and intuitive facticity, the structure of feeling seems to be a likely object of inquiry, particularly for a discipline concerned with intervening in ways and things that matter to ordinary people. Nonetheless, the structure of feeling is a discursive operator; it is also conditioned by epistemological régimes. It works to ground claims about the feelings and experiences of both authors and readers in a hermeneutic logic of critical inquiry. In critical applications, the concept grounds interpretations about the potential for political change and its possible direction based on textual conventions and contents.

Initially, the work of the concept is to displace informal notions of collective feeling with a formal object of study.[1] The structure of feeling works to objectify "feeling" through the operator "structure." This is clear in Williams's opening rhetorical move, in which feeling is made "as firm and definite" as a structure, which is in a sense a guarantee of its objectivity. The concept of a structure of feeling encourages us to think of feeling as a generalized social experience rather than an intimate and idiosyncratic one,

and thus makes it suitable for socio-historical analysis. Beyond this rhetorical work of object construction and legitimation, the concept of structure brings to critical practice an attendant set of rules governing structuralist interpretation. These regulate the abstraction of a structure from textual phenomena through an interpretive strategy. A structural object assumes and thus projects the generalized existence of its phenomenal expressions as its alibi. Structuralist epistemological régimes also authorize the use of expressivist modeling to relate these different levels in a relation of structural homology.

It is often observed that the structure of feeling is an oxymoron; it articulates two concepts that appear to be at odds with one another. As a conceptual tool, the structure of feeling is positioned at a juncture between two epistemological régimes that are generally assumed to be incompatible. In its very composition, the concept appears to be attempting a synthesis among epistemological formations. Feeling, as a concept that appears congenial to a phenomenological formation, is somewhat alien to the structuralist formation, which contains an explicit rejection of phenomenological assumptions. Their articulation produces a concept that may in any particular application be drawing on one or both epistemological régimes.

Structures of feeling

I'd like to elaborate on these initial observations and detail the operations of the structure of feeling with an example drawn from a recent essay entitled "Postmodernism as a Structure of Feeling" (Pfeil). Here the concept is implicated in a number of characteristic operations: it uncovers regularities in textual form and relates them to an "underlying pattern" through the notion of structure, it relates textual regularities with

regularities in social experience; and finally it supports an interpretation of the political position of these works, as aligned with or resistant to social institutions and power.

These operations work in conjunction with more general rules in the general discursive régime of literary criticism. This régime legitimates a number of characteristic discursive operations. Particularly, the conceptual and affective meaning of the work is interpreted on behalf of an audience constituted by the text. This works to remove the issue of textual meaning from empirical inquiry. The experiences of "actual audiences" need never be considered. In the hermeneutic method of "close reading" the critic interprets a deep experiential structure that informs both the conception and the reception of the text. As a part of this régime of literary criticism, the structure of feeling works to displace all other possible experiences of the text (for other readers) with the critic's experience of the text. This approach assumes an identity between the moments of enunciation and reception. On a more general view, it assumes an identity of experience among authors and readers, as well as between critics and the audiences that they speak for.

Organizing his research around the interpretation of a genre, Pfeil first asks the question of what defines postmodernist art. He finds a pattern of common features across literature and popular music: The postmodern text foregrounds the lack of an authorial presence organizing the work. Musicians like Laurie Anderson and David Byrne avoid typically expressive lyrics, sing in a disaffected manner, and appear to problematize self-identity in their performances. The popularity of these texts and others like them suggests that audiences find in postmodern work something both pleasurable and recognizably relevant to their experience. Furthermore, as Pfeil writes,

> each of these three postmodernist "pleasures of the text" contains a countervailing anxiety. Indeed, the experience of this newly constituted mass audience for postmodernist work is most fundamentally this very unstable play between a primal delight and a primal fear, between two simultaneous versions of the primary aggressive impulse, that which seeks to incorporate the world into itself and that which struggles to prevent its own engulfment. This dialectic is the postmodern "structure of feeling" (Pfeil 386).

A close reading of postmodern texts suggests that their particular appeal to their audience, their popularity, is reflected in the theme of de-centered subjectivity. Typically, Pfeil conceptualizes the structure of feeling in terms of aesthetic value, emotion, pleasure, and drives. The suggestion of affective ambivalence in the opposition of dread and desire also imparts a dialectical form to the structure of feeling, which here (as elsewhere) seems to be formulated in such a manner as to contain its own contradiction. This rather primordialist presentation suggests that these textual features are endowed with an excess of meaning that warrants critical interest, establishing their structure of feeling as the ground from which further interpretation proceeds.

The operator then works to relate these textual pleasures to regularities in social experience. Social experience in the postmodern era has the same general character as the experience of postmodern texts. Pfeil demonstrates this point by describing

> [...] the torments of the bureaucratic soul in a world from which the visible presence of Power and Authority are gone – torments whose resemblance to both the darkly negative, anxious side of the postmodernist

> structure of feeling and the Lacanian description of the schizophrenic are far from incidental (389).

The resemblance discovered between postmodern popular culture and contemporary social experience is not incidental. It is, in fact, the product of the theoretical imagery that underlies this particular régime of criticism. It is assumed that the experience of the text is necessarily related to social experience. This allows the cultural critic to use textual evidence to legitimate interpretations of social conditions and power. Both are theorized to be expressions of the dominant structure of feeling, which is linked to social position. The relation between the cultural and the social can be constructed across any number of levels, as Pfeil demonstrates:

> Moreover we have failed to mention a third level of description and analysis through which our subject, the mass audience for postmodernist work and the structure of feeling that connects the two, may be investigated: the level of primary socialization [...] (391).

The expressivist modeling allows the interpretation to range across levels of social organization that can be readily assimilated to the argument, because they all express the same structure of feeling.

The structure of feeling ultimately operates to establish a series of homologies between cultural texts, which are interpreted as organizations of meaning, and the experience of social reality, which is also constituted in meaning. The operator guarantees their relation by situating behind each of them, at a deeper level of meaning, a generative structure. The homology of textual and social experience is staged through parallel interpretations that are related to the same structural figure. A rhetorical structure

of legitimation is established in which the interpretation of one domain is corroborated through the interpretation of another. Their demonstrable identity, although assumed from the start, nonetheless works to confirm the existence and influence of the structure of feeling. As a whole, the operation legitimates the use of textual evidence to support claims about social experience and power, which is the basic problematic of this practice of critical cultural study.

For such an important operator, the structure of feeling is curiously inert in Pfeil's account. The active *personnage* that relates different domains and levels of analysis is the trope of "decentered subjectivity," not the deep structure of "dread and desire." It is perhaps symptomatic that the operator is unstable, its range of reference oscillating between the textual tropes of subjectivity and the abstract affective oppositions of psychoanalytic drive theory. As a structural object, it is necessarily abstract and open to semiotic processes of substitution and displacement.

If the ostensible object of analysis is prone to displacement, there is always the possibility that it will be displaced by other concepts privileged in the epistemological régime. As Morris has argued, wherever critical interpretation is made on behalf of an absent audience, there is the risk of "theoretical ventriloquism" (Morris, *Banality* 23). In this case, we might question the selection of the particular "pleasures of the text" that are assumed to engage their audience. It is clearly more than coincidence that the textual features that serve as the evidence of the structure of feeling are also active *personnages* in postmodern critical and social theory. The concept of the decentered subject is a figure circulating in both popular culture and in a number of critical discourses. Its presence suggests that an implicit connection is being drawn between the experience attributed to

the audience and a particular theory of subjectivity that will be mobilized later in the argument.

As an object of analysis, then, the structure of feeling condenses a number of levels of analysis and assumes correspondences between quite different domains of social and cultural experience, on the basis of a theorized relation of homology. As the generative element in the model, the structure of feeling exercises a determining influence over all of the interpretive moments of the analysis, permitting somewhat arbitrary and broadly generalized interpretations. The instability and abstraction of the concept, and its grounding in phenomenological interpretations of audience experience invite further displacements.

Having established the presence of a structure of feeling operating behind both postmodern texts and postmodern society, Pfeil moves on to the critical question of its politics, arguing that

> [...] the fate of such work turns in part on another question, that of the social origins and destiny of the desire and fear, the structure of feeling, called up by this work for its audience (386).

In the bulk of his essay, Pfeil considers the political significance of this postmodern sensibility by situating its textual expressions within a number of critical perspectives. Considered from a post-structuralist perspective, postmodern subjectivity promises the liberation of the subject from the repressive régime of semiotic identity. In another régime, the Jamesonian Marxist sees the complicity of the structure of feeling with the final stages of commoditization in late capitalist mass society. Pfeil dismisses these

interpretations and constructs an account of the social formation based instead on feminist materialism:

> If the structure of feeling expressed in postmodernist work and its reception is most accurately described in psychoanalytic terms as a pre-Oedipal relationship with the world, if the discourse of class analysis has become infused with (or invaded by) the discourse of psychoanalysis, we must look for an explanation in the de-Oedipalized middle-class home (391).

On the basis of this theoretical imperative, Pfeil argues that postmodern texts reflect and participate in the "de-oedipalization" of the subject. The prognosis for political change is delivered in relation to a privileged theoretical model of the social totality, allowing Pfeil to offer an ultimately "dialectical, even ambiguous judgment" of the politics of these postmodern texts (397). Yet it is an interpretation that appears to be determined in advance by an affinity with a privileged epistemological régime.

Pfeil asks in effect, which of these competing social ontologies will support the most congenial argument on the political ramifications of postmodernism. The *personnage* of decentered subjectivity can work credibly within a post-structuralist, Neo-Marxist or Feminist-materialist discursive régime. The meaning of the earlier choice of textual evidence for the structure of feeling becomes clear. Rather than engaging with the social experience of the audience, which is deferred from the outset, Pfeil has been preparing the ground for the presentation and defense of a particular de-centered, de-Oedipalized model of the subject that appears at this later stage of the argument. The articulation of the *personnage* and the discourse within which it is made intelligible is the

determining moment of the analysis. It is a moment that appears to be conditioned principally by the tastes of the critic rather than the those of the audience, or on an appreciation of the more specific conditions in which the texts have their effects.

There has been a gradual displacement of the object of inquiry (the effectivity of postmodern art) from the empirical to the theoretical. The initial question of "what pleasures it makes possible for what social groups" (385) has been displaced to ask "does the de-Oedipalization of contemporary middle-class culture really contain any utopian dimension or revolutionary potential?" (395). This is the determining question. A question about the assumed audience's experience of the text has been displaced by a question about the politics of theoretical discourses.

Ontologizing reading

The structure of feeling goes beyond the typical displacements of literary criticism to ontologize the relation between text and reader. As a radical form of hermeneutic criticism, it falls prey to the assumptions of "presence" and becomes, at the limit, a form of hermeneutic mysticism. It thus tends to legitimate more or less arbitrary interpretations and to lend itself to displacement by other *personnages* of critical régimes.

The structure of feeling is a *personnage* of experience. As Williams argues: "The peculiar location of the structure of feeling is the endless comparison that must occur in the process of consciousness between the articulated and the lived. The lived is only another word, if you will, for experience: but we have to find a word for that level" (Williams, *Politics* 168). Experience lends an aura of "the concrete" to warrant the interpretation of the structure of feeling. As a concept, the structure of feeling operates at

an ontological level. It thus denotes something authentic, a level of experience prior to official doctrine or ideology.

The imagery creates the rhetorical effect of an identity between the author and his contemporaries, on the one hand, and between the author and the critic on the other, that transcends textual mediation in both cases. One key moment in the rhetorical construction of this immediate relation can be explicitly identified: "when one has measured the work against the separable parts, there yet remains some element for which there is no external counterpart" (Williams, *Politics* 159). This passage works to attribute an interiority to the text by a simple opposition. The "material life, social organization" and "dominant ideas" are figured as the outside of an interiority, the true meaning of the text that speaks the authentic experience of the author. The text itself disappears, as the writing that is the ostensible object of analysis is treated as speech, immediate evidence of subjective experience. The text becomes the medium through which the author's experience joins with the critic's, in an immediate relation that is legitimated by an appeal to presence.

This image of intersubjectivity is framed by a wider image of social communication, in which authors and readers share the same social experience that must be symbolized to become available to consciousness in the literary articulation of the structure of feeling. In this image, readers are *personnages* engaged in a circuit of communication, in which they receive objectified representations of experience in the form of literature, evaluate them in comparison with their own experience, and introduce new work into the culture that is a more accurate representation of their authentic experience. As Williams argues,

> There are cases where the structure of feeling which is tangible in a particular set of works is undoubtedly the articulation of an area of experience which lies beyond them. This is especially evident at those specific and historically definable moments when very new work produces a sudden shock of recognition. What must be happening on these occasions is than an experience which is really very wide suddenly finds a semantic figure which articulates it (Williams *Politics* 164).

The structure of feeling thus supposes an ontological moment, figured in the "shock of recognition," when the reading self recognizes its authentic historical experience within the literary text. It is, as Probyn has said of a similar image in hermeneutic literary criticism "an ontological moment" in which an essential identity is asserted among the community of subjects in communication (Probyn 111). A series of powerful conceptual ellipses are enabled by this image of mediation; the critic stands in for the entire reading public, while a generation of authors stands in for an entire class or culture, and the whole is framed by a model of symbolic communication that tends to efface real differences in meaning and feeling among readers.

All of this contributes to a certain facility with which the structure of feeling can be turned into a *personnage* of other critical concepts. As an operator in a hermeneutic logic of inquiry, its referent is always the experience of an other, which raises all of the problems of intersubjectivity confronted in the last chapter. In critical practice, the other can never be made available for verification since figures of readers and audiences are themselves abstract totalities.

There is no explicit methodology that governs how this process of interpretation and abstraction is managed. It is presumably handled intuitively by the critic. The interpretation is ultimately warranted with regard to the critic's experience. That form of evidence, as Joan Scott has forcefully argued, is beyond reasoned refutation (28).

The formulation of the structure of feeling is frequently abstract, conceptualized in terms of a psychological or psychoanalytic function, which is itself an abstract universal. Making the assimilation of diverse textual phenomena even easier, the structure of feeling is often formulated in terms of a dialectical opposition that contains its own contradiction. The concept operates more like a metaphor, a model to which other objects are assimilated by an assumed or implied similarity. Since it lacks specificity, many structures of feeling can be interpreted from similar or identical textual evidence. Conversely, many textual and social events can be pointed to as expressions of one master structure of feeling. The actual "content" attributed to the structure of feeling may be so vague as to facilitate its displacement. Conceptual oppositions such as "dread and desire" are not particularly precise and are easily displaced. Over all, the operator is too abstract and gives rise to interpretations that are difficult to warrant, confirm or refute.

However, there is a certain fascination with the "intuitive empiricism" that is the peculiar epistemological standpoint of the structure of feeling. Communication theorists should not dismiss other specifically human ways of knowing because they don't conform to current linguistic models of mediation. Evocations of "the lived wholeness" of a context through imagery or sensuous forms of evidence provide other ways into the context, without obviating the need for the evidence provided by texts or discourses. The epistemology of the structure of feeling suggests that all knowledge need not be

conveyed in propositional form to be useful. There are limited opportunities for more performative forms of demonstration. Once displaced from its role as a warrant for unsupported interpretation, the evidence of experience might provide an important starting point for analysis, provided it is no more than a starting point. As Williams argued, "experience becomes a forbidden word, whereas what we ought to say about it is that it is a limited word..." (168).

Competing epistemological régimes

At least some of the excessive claims made on behalf of experience can be accounted for by a consideration of the theoretical conjuncture in which Williams worked. The privileging of feeling over thought, experience over deductive knowledge, authentic communication over ideology, demonstrate not just a preference but a discursive regularity that might be interpreted as a response to a competing régime of power/knowledge. As leftist literary criticism was working through the legacies of Lukacs and Sartre, trying to win some autonomy for culture within an economistic model of social relations, the British tradition was also encountering a new formation of Marxist thought from France. The incursion of Althusserian Marxism into the discursive field is met with hostility, even revulsion:

> [...] I see a kind of appalling parody of it beyond me - the claim that all experience is ideology, that the subject is a wholly ideological illusion, which is the last stage of formalism - and I even start to pull back a bit (Williams, *Politics* 172).

This "subjective recoil" is symptomatic of an "anti-pathetic" relation among the concepts that populate the theoretical plane. Williams recoils from the suggestion that the

experiencing subject is not the ground of knowledge but a product of socially determined knowledge. The humanist *personnage* encounters its nemesis in the anti-humanist conception of the subject put forth by Althusser.

The *personnage* presupposed within this imagery is like an empty position within the ordinary tableaux we create of social action. It may be conceptualized in terms of "subject positions" or "discursive practices," depending on where in the trajectory of development of the anti-humanist *personnage* we choose to look. Without exception, however, the *personnage* has no interiority, no existence outside of the generalized process of signification that is the post-structuralist model of the social. It is bereft of features that might make it a mediator of social reality in its own right. For example, a late version of this *personnage* in the work of Henriques et al. describes a critical strategy that displaces both sociological and structuralist *personnages* of "woman":

> The category "woman" would itself be open to a questioning in terms of the different norms which circumscribe so-called women's "roles" in different practices. The approach which expects multiple positionings corresponding to a multiplicity of subjectivities – as mothers, wives, consumers, workers of one kind or another, etc. – must refer to the specificities of the different practices in order to describe the different subject positions and the different power relations played out in them (117).

We have in these two figures – Williams's author and Althusser's subject – two *personnages* that advance divergent points of view in critical discourse, two runners that perform the theoretical actions implied in divergent statements. The division occurs in a

necessarily abstract area of debate established by Althusser's dichotomization of the field of social knowledge in terms of total illusion and scientific knowledge. For Althusser, experience is the most pernicious effect of ideology, the conviction that the subjective response to material conditions yields knowledge of the Real. There is no space between ideology and the Althusserian subject for an individuated subject to engage in reasoned consideration of the issues. And since the theory of ideology is part of a wide-spread semiotization of Marxism's object domain that is particularly effective in reducing "consciousness" to the determined structures of the *symbolique*, Williams has no choice but to locate a capacity for individuality in a materialist notion of embodied experience.

Perhaps in response to Structural Marxism's categorical dismissal of the subject, the structure of feeling as an analytic concept is inflated to a theoretical a-priori, where it tries to account for every moment of critical practice, every movement of critical thought. The empiricist characterization of the humanist *personnage* is pushed beyond the limits of empirical utility and ordinary credibility as it is used to fend off the totalizing structuralist attack. In Williams's case, the abstract opposition of theoreticism to empiricism leads him to make methodological claims that are inconsistent with his practice, and would be epistemologically crippling were his proposition that experience ground all knowledge of cultural history enacted. As Williams is forced to concede, knowledge derived from experience is limited, however necessary it is to complement theoretical speculation.

This theoretical skirmish is informative, because it demonstrates how a local conflict can be displaced into the terms of an enduring discursive "strategy" to legitimate a particular theoretical choice. In Williams's account, Althusser is cast as a rationalist in

the Cartesian tradition, and ideology as the limit position of "formalism." In contrast, experiential knowledge is beyond ideological control; its Anglo-culturalist champions are cast as empiricists in the great Scottish tradition. Each theoretical position is inserted into an existing strategy, with its attendant power/knowledge effects.

At our remove, we may wonder about the validity of these oppositions. Strengthening an abstract dichotomy is hardly a good way to promote nuanced epistemology or fully developed analysis.

Liabilities of the structure of feeling

The pattern of displacement that we have encountered generally favors the privileged terms and rhetorical forms of influential régimes of critical social theory. These régimes are themselves embedded in disciplinary relations of power/knowledge. Mid-level analytic abstractions like the structure of feeling are often *personnages* that are dependent (in the Foucauldean sense) on high-level abstractions, such as experience. My brief excursus on the theoretical politics of structuralist and empiricist *personnages* suggests that theoretical choices are often conditioned by such high-level oppositions. The displacement substitutes the central abstraction of a régime of social theory for the structure of feeling.

Such displacement need not be direct, as a final example will demonstrate. Henderson finds in the production and reception of the program "Storyline" a dominant structure of feeling that she calls the "multicultural middlebrow." Posing the question, "what [...] are the conditions of practical consciousness in the making of "Storyline," and what are the cultural qualities and impulses (in other words, what is the structure of

feeling) of the discourses thus produced?" (332) she quickly specifies her research to focus on the production (or repression) of one particular discourse. As she writes:

> Producers were slow to identify "Storyline" in feminist terms, and especially cautious about articulating gender and other forms of difference as a condition of power. Thus while I would argue that feminist potential was everywhere present in and around "Storyline" [...] it remained an awkward and implicit frame, virtually never named (except by me) as a point of reference [...] (Henderson 335).

The multicultural middlebrow is precisely that cultural sensibility which works to exclude interpretations of social life or literature that identify race and gender as key determinants in relations of power. There is clearly an indirect form of displacement operating here, in which the dominant structure of feeling represses an emergent other, the structure of feeling named as feminist potential. The central abstraction privileged within one régime of radical socialist feminism, the social experience of oppression based on gender and class, is introduced into analysis as the repressed half of a pair of *personnages antipathiques.*

The original question concerning the social relations within which programs and producers are embedded and the cultural mediations performed by the programs that they produce is displaced. Even the difference of actual social experiences that circulate in the context of research are displaced into the terms of an oppositional model of dominant and repressed structures of feeling. Of course there is more than a hint of theoretical ventriloquism in this example. The experiential content of the repressed structure of feeling is virtually identical with the central assumptions of Henderson's feminist

standpoint; that power is articulated along the lines of class and gender. No matter that the ethnographic research and interviews turned up scant evidence of the privileged structure of feeling. The analysis of this inarticulate yet theoretically privileged abstraction comes to overdetermine the rather poorly specified goals of the analysis.

As in Pfeil's use of the concept, the political significance of the structure of feeling is thus determined by the régime of critical discourse within which it is made intelligible, rather than its consequences for actual instances of enacted social relations.

Despite these considerable liabilities, the concept of the structure of feeling continues to exert a particular fascination and to inspire critics to reactivate it for use in current problems, and as we shall see, to create related concepts that respond to new problems in changing theoretical conjunctures. The formation of humanistic literary criticism that is often presented as one of the outmoded "origins" of cultural studies has left its legacy in the concept of the structure of feeling and its *personnages*. Williams's mystical notion of cultural texts as the bearers of "the lived," or Hoggart's notion of the text as the carrier of "a field of values," are key moments in a trajectory of attempts to capture an aspect of human specificity that seems to escape critical attempts to objectify it. At least at this early juncture, these objects most closely associated with notions of authentic meaning, the felt quality of life, or simply "value," seem constantly prone to displacement, even as they provoke theorists to explore them.

Functionalism, meaning, and popular culture

The next stop in the trajectory that I am constructing marks a change in geo-political context. James Carey's influential Communication as Culture introduced the work of British Cultural Studies to North America, advocating a literary and interpretivist

approach to popular culture. Carey seeks to shift the focus of inquiry away from the media effects tradition in American communication scholarship, which has long been concerned with the conditions in which texts elicited psychological and behavioral effects. What is called for if culture is to be freed from the role of mechanical stimulus, writes Carey, is "a theory of meaning, semantics, or semiotics." Methodologically,

> [...] the task remains the same: to seize upon the interpretations people place on existence and to systematize them so they are more available to us. This is a process of making large claims from small matters: studying particular rituals, poems, plays, conversations, songs, dances, theories, and myths and gingerly reaching out to the full relations within a culture or a total way of life (Carey 64).

Inspired by Williams and particularly by Clifford Geertz, Carey thus takes on the commitments and many of the epistemological liabilities of the hermeneutic approach. Williams's holistic notion of culture shares with Geertz's intertextual model of culture an assumption of totality. In analysis, any part will lead back, more or less informatively, to the whole. This authorizes similar tendencies to make tenuous generalizations from the formal characteristics of particular practices. Once again, the critic takes up the role of reading the text on behalf of an entire culture, displacing different or perhaps discordant readings with his own interpretation of the "deep play" of a culture.

Of course this assumes that what we are all up to is reading, interpreting, and communicating within an intersubjective surround of stable and objective cultural meanings, which is a rather limiting assumption. There is only cursory attention to what might lie beyond the limits of meaning and the interpretive logic of this epistemological

régime. It is a perspective that is committed to a cognitivist and rationalistic notion of culture, as Carey demonstrates in some remarks about popular culture:

> The immediate significance of popular art has little to do with effects or functions. Popular art is, first, an experience, in Robert Warshow's (1964) terms, an "immediate experience" - that must be apprehended in something like its own terms. However long or intensively one lives in the world of popular art, it is only one of several cultural worlds, by no means consistent or congruent, in which people live. In general, there is little or no relation among these worlds except when people, in answering social science questionnaires, must produce a merger between their entertainment and other regions of life. At most what one finds within popular art is the creation of particular moods - sadness, joy, depression - feelings that descend and lift like fogs, and particular motives - erotic, aggressive - that have vectorial qualities (Geertz 1973: 97). But whether these moods or motives ever reach beyond the domain in which they exist - for example, theaters and concert halls - into laboratories, street corners, and churches, where other dramas are being enacted and other melodies played, is radically problematic. Usually they do not (Carey 66-67).

Although he ultimately leaves open the question, Carey seems to assume that there is a necessary disjuncture between the cultural and the social, between the emotional world of popular culture and the social world of politics. Carey's theory of culture as a set of systems of meaning is implicitly functionalist (as was Geertz's). Each general domain of social existence has its own system of meanings, and its own reality. This everyday

relativism establishes necessary boundaries between domains that tends to limit inquiry. It is not so much that the evident examples of interchange between the cultural and other domains of social activity cannot be accounted for, although one wonders why Carey is compelled to dismiss the possibility, but rather the more subtle forms of relation that might exist cannot be theorized in this hermeneutic approach to the social. A rather more sophisticated model of the relations between popular culture and politics is proposed by Grossberg.

Affect as a conjuncturalist re-articulation of the structure of feeling

In a series of essays Lawrence Grossberg has continued and developed on a trajectory of work concerned with the problem of "feeling" and its articulation in the practices and texts of popular culture. Grossberg shares a similar project with the theorists of the structure of feeling, questioning the social significance of cultural texts and practices. In contrast with Williams's literary humanism or Carey's appropriation of Geertzian interpretivism however, Grossberg distances himself from the hermeneutic logics of inquiry. Pursuing a more "sociological" form of cultural study, Grossberg seeks to formulate a project of cultural analysis that is not necessarily limited to, or by, the interpretation of texts and their meanings, but also engages with other practices construed to be outside of the domain of cultural meaning. This leads him, in a series of projects, to develop a terminology to address feeling and related problems through the concept of affect.

The occasion for Grossberg's return to the problem space of feeling is a discursive event, the appearance of a set of catch-phrases in popular culture that are characterized by a disturbing attitude of cynicism and irony, a skeptical affective stance

towards cultural values in discourse. The attitude conveyed in these statements suggests a postmodern sensibility, something like a structure of feeling. As Grossberg argues:

> [...] much of what is talked about as "the postmodern" is predicated on the perception that something feels different not only about particular aesthetic practices, but about a wide variety of life experiences and historical events. Yet it is not clear what the status of this "feeling" or experience is, in what planes of our existence it is anchored. Moreover [...] what are the effects that we are trying to describe as an emergent historical "feeling," what conditions does it make possible? My [...] argument is that we should not too quickly recuperate it into either a phenomenological transcendentalism or into a deconstructive theory of the ideological production of experience (Grossberg *All Dressed Up* 150).

In problematizing the specificity of this feeling, Grossberg tries to avoid the assimilation of the phenomenon to the terms of opposing epistemological régimes, the *personnages antipathiques* of experience and structure that were so troublesome in the structure of feeling. He attempts to avoid the condensations and displacements associated with both hermeneutic and expressivist forms of structural analysis.

Grossberg asks questions that appear to issue from the earlier cultural studies project, in a new language of conditions, effects and contexts: "What is the effectivity of these postmodern statements? What is it that we hear in them as we place them in the context of everyday life?" (*All Dressed Up* 150). To answer this question, the route taken through theory will be considerably different from the literary critics of the "structure of feeling," for as Grossberg argues, "if we are to understand their real effects and

significance, we have to locate [postmodern statements] within the changing historical relations in the social field of forces" (*All Dressed Up* 161). This announces a conjuncturalist approach.

Before looking at the work of discursive operators in Grossberg's theory, I want to draw three contrasts between the textual hermeneutics of Williams or Carey, and the commitments of what has been defined as a conjuncturalist formation in cultural studies (Grossberg, *Formations* 222-228). The conjuncturalist formation is characterized by the wish to engage with the specificity of different cultural practices. It breaks with the orthodoxy that the interpretation of texts, either written texts or social texts, should be the focus of cultural study. Its logic of inquiry does not look to texts as reflections of social conditions mediated through social experiences; it seeks to analyze social contexts and the events that transpire within them outside of the mediation of texts. The object of interpretation is therefore an entire socio-cultural domain, sometimes referred to as "the popular." The epistemology of contextualism is not founded in a phenomenology of experience but in a form of realism that acknowledges the effects of social meanings without effacing the productivity of material conditions.

Secondly, conjuncturalist analysis, while continuing to assume the ubiquity of asymmetrical power relations, now figures culture as a terrain of "struggle" for domination on a range of levels. The notion of agency in this formation is drawn from the theory of "articulation" developed by a dispersed group of thinkers including Ernesto Laclau, Stuart Hall, Grossberg, and Jennifer Daryl Slack. The goal of accounting for "all of the relations among all of the elements" is revised and elaborated in this model of articulated relations. The social formation is theorized as the emergent production of a

network of articulated practices and constituencies. Following Althusser, this model of the social totality "is conceived of as made up of a relationship among levels, constituted in relations of correspondence as well as of contradiction, rather than of relations reducible to a single essential one-to-one correspondence" (Slack 117). The problematic of cultural studies is somewhat different in this formation. The critic is interested in how practices are located in a network of other practices, as a point of entry to the analysis of particular social relations in particular historical circumstances. Contextual analysis attempts to "map the context – not in the sense of situating a phenomenon in a context, but in mapping a context, mapping the very identity that brings the context into focus [...]" (Slack 125).

Thus, rather than interpreting the meaning of the postmodern texts as the expression of a social experience, Grossberg is interested in mapping the effectivity of the slogans as statements; describing their conditions of possibility, and what they themselves make possible. The formation moves away from the "placing" of texts or practices with reference to abstract social theory and works instead to situate them within various contextual mappings. Interpretation is based on a "real effort to map out some of the complex and contradictory vectors operating in the social formation" (Grossberg, *All Dressed Up* 152).

Finally, this formation shows a new respect for the specificity of different cultural practices. Of vital importance is the conjuncturalist adherence to the assumption that, as Grossberg puts it, there are "no necessary correspondences" in any conjuncture (*Formations* 220). Neither formal characteristics nor the social position of authors or readers can guarantee the political significance of a particular text or practice, which must

always be evaluated as a part of its context. Conjuncturalism assumes that researchers don't already know what the specificity of the conjuncture is until the context has been mapped. It is not known what agencies are at work or on what planes their effects might most profitably be evaluated. To assume that the text and the social are necessarily related through the mediation of a particular structure of feeling in the form of a structural homology, makes guarantees that are no longer made in the conjuncturalist formation. The liabilities of the structure of feeling, its many condensations which make it more or less effective in particular projects, could be subsumed within the critique that it posits too many necessary correspondences. Conjuncturalism attempts to defer the moment of interpretive abstraction and assimilation to an epistemological régime with this strategy of suspending assumptions, and through a strategy of conceptualization described below.

Constructions of affect

An interesting aspect of affect as a discursive operator is that it is explicitly constructed as both an object of study and as an analytical frame within which the object can be given more definite features. Affect is defined in relation to other theorizations, but it is differentiated from them. While affect is related to Nietzsche's "Will to Power," it is "always contextually specific," and therefore not prone to the universalism of this philosophical operator. Similarly, while affect is akin to Freud's notion of cathexis, it is insisted that affect is "not a homogeneous category" (*All Dressed Up* 159). No predefined concept will be allowed to displace the concept; and that is part of the epistemological commitment of the practice. Concepts are designed for the particular problem at hand,

and constructed to avoid taking on the commitments that always come with appropriations from other discourses or disciplines.

Affect is also conceptualized as "plane of effects," one of a set of mutually determining communicative economies in a conjuncturalist model of the social totality. It is in this regard that the theory is most clearly part of a model of differentiated levels of mediation. There are, as Grossberg writes,

> [...] no guarantees concerning what levels, or even how many, are active in what ways, at any moment. Any level (e.g. the political, the ideological, the economic), to the extent that it is a useful concept, must be seen as both internally and externally articulated, full of differences and contradictions (Grossberg *Formations* 222).

Affect thus operates as a "communicative economy" in a model of the social totality as multi-leveled and contextually variable, a model, in this contextually specific version, of "the complexities and contradictions between and within the historically specific formations and economies of affect, libido, semiosis and value" (Grossberg, *All Dressed Up* 161). The economy of affect is one level of description and analysis within which the particular "effectivity" of the postmodern slogans can be situated and described. It is also an alternative to the almost exclusively semiotic forms of analysis used in cultural criticism, a dominant formation in theoretical discourse that Grossberg has contested in much of his work.

There is an immediate theoretical gain in constructing a concept and an economy of affect. The practice controls the initial displacements of the object by specifying the abstract operators into terms appropriate for the analysis. The practice that is enacted in

the essay "All Dressed Up..." is very much one of conceptual construction, concerned to foreground the specificity of the problem that is presented in the conjuncture. The construction is undertaken with the awareness that it is a determinant moment. The analyst is careful not to build assumptions into the concept that would fix its discursive limits prematurely.

The actual interpretation is somewhat less successful, and reproduces some of the liabilities of earlier hermeneutic analyses. Grossberg relates different structures in the specified economy, as well as the relations between analytically distinct economies. The crisis of the postmodern can therefore be read as a dissociation of articulated economies.

> [It] involves an increasingly problematic relation between affect and ideology, in our very ability to invest in the meanings and meaningfulness of the world, to locate any meaning as a possible and appropriate source for an impassioned commitment [...]. We could describe this as the dissolution of what Foucault called the "epistemological doublet." It is an increasing inability to live on the border of subjectivity and objectivity (*All Dressed Up* 161).

Given that Grossberg is interested in describing the apparent absence of passion, he specifies affect in terms of a qualitative continuum that spans from boredom to terror, and a quantitative measure of absence and presence. This allows him to argue,

> [...] if we consider contemporary experience, we can suggest that the affective poles of boredom and terror are organized in a non-linear way around the possibilities of absence (in pure objectivity) and uncontrollable excess (in pure subjectivity) of affectivity (*All Dressed Up* 161).

The problem of political disinterest, then, will be interpreted as a general disarticulation of economies. Uprooted from its anchor in the ideological plane, affect becomes "free floating," disarticulated from politics by traditional means and open to conservative appropriations. As Grossberg argues, in the postmodern conjuncture it is not what matters that is important, it is simply that anything at all matters enough to inspire commitment that has become significant.

No doubt because the actual interpretation is one that is made at a high level of abstraction, at the level of disarticulated economies, the interpretation is vastly overextended. Contrary to Grossberg's claim, we might ask if their integration is "problematic," why has there continued to be a passion for ideological projects among broad sectors of the population? Such broad critical assertions make use of abstract structural figures to legitimate the essentially metaphoric assimilation of critical observations to an argument based on simple structuralist imagery. Without contextual evidence to back it up, the best point that can be made is that despite the nihilistic overtones of the postmodern statements that are the object of study, their political significance depends entirely on how the "affective empowerment" that they make possible can be articulated to particular struggles.

The use of these operators is more successful in Grossberg's later work on the articulations of popular culture and American politics, where he is able to undertake a set of contextual mappings to support his rather more nuanced interpretations of the implication of affect in the politics of the everyday.

Affect and the problem of the popular

In We Gotta Get Out of This Place Grossberg undertakes a conjunctural analysis that focuses on the articulations of popular culture, particularly the practices associated with rock music, and the American political landscape of the late nineteen-eighties. Grossberg chooses to "locate the sensibilities of popular formations primarily on the plane of affect" (*We Gotta* 79). The concept of affect is one of the conditions that makes possible a useful reconceptualization of "the popular" for cultural studies. Problems of definition have plagued researchers of popular culture for some time, as Grossberg argues:

> Popular culture appears to describe the structures of taste or degrees of consumption that are not legitimated by the critical or commercial systems of discrimination. But can we approach it more directly, in its positivity: popular culture points to an assemblage of formations, to other sensibilities and to another plane of effects. I want to start with the fact that people spend time with popular culture and that it matters to them, that it is often an important site of people's passion. This is often treated as if it were trivial compared to the "meaning-fullness" of specific texts. But in fact, its "mattering" may have its own impact on history and daily life (*We Gotta* 78).

There is more than the issue of delineating an object of study at stake here. The popular is an important, yet problematic concept in cultural studies. It refers both to the expansive domain of study defined by culturalism and conjuncturalism, including both pop culture texts and their contexts; and it refers also to the *personnages* that are the subjects of cultural studies research and political advocacy. It refers to what is still called popular

culture, and to what used to be called the popular classes, the working class, or "the people" (Hall *Deconstructing* 234).

Without much difficulty, it is possible to locate in the figure of the popular the same tendency towards condensation that was disabling in the conceptualization of the structure of feeling. It appears when the figure of the popular as a set of cultural practices and texts is confused with the popular as the necessary site of socialist potential. We might say that it produces an ontological *personnage*, a figure of the agent of history as cultural subject. The condensation is kept in place because it conveniently articulates the domain of popular culture with the political assumptions of the critical project. However, its effects are just as disabling as similar condensations that were performed by the structure of feeling.

The assumption of the necessarily emancipatory character of the popular was given fullest expression in the work of John Fiske in the late 1980's:

> Popular culture is made by subordinated peoples in their own interests out of resources that also, contradictorily, serve the economic interests of the dominant. Popular culture is made from within and below, not imposed from without or above as mass culture theorists would have it. There is always an element of popular culture that lies outside social control, that escapes or opposes hegemonic forces. Popular culture is always a culture of conflict, it always involves the struggle to make social meanings that are in the interests of the subordinate and that are not those preferred by the dominant ideology. The victories, however fleeting or limited, in this

> struggle produce popular pleasure, for popular pleasure is always social and political (Fiske *Reading* 2).

In fact, Fiske condenses two distinct positions on the question of the popular, the culturalist assumption that popular culture always resists the dominant culture, and the postmodern assumption that pleasure is always transgressive. The debate between advocates of popular practices and those who continue to find them oppressive pits one ontological figure against another. These debates essentialize the popular, equating it either with forms of economic or symbolic oppression, or resistance to these abstract forces.

The problem appears in a more pressing manner when the implications of the condensation are considered. If it is assumed that the popular is the site of resistance, then it is assumed that popular culture is necessarily politically progressive. This leads to generalizations that are unsupportable. As other critics have pointed out, popular culture is often complicit, in more or less direct ways, with commercial and sexual exploitation (Modleski 170). The consumption of pornography, while popular, is not necessarily politically progressive.

As a concept composed of such condensations, the popular is clearly a liability. Hall recognized that the popular must be reconceptualized in the influential essay "Deconstructing the Popular," arguing that there is "no intrinsic guarantee within the cultural sign or form itself [of its political significance]. There is no guarantee that, because at one time it was linked with a pertinent struggle, that it will always be the living expression of a class" (238). The anti-essentialist strategy advocated by Hall is

further extended in Grossberg's reconceptualization of the popular as an affective relation.

Grossberg responds to the problem by producing the popular as an object of knowledge in a different way:

> [...] it is important to avoid locating the popular as if it were, somehow, always the other of a dominant (e.g. elite or central) culture, always the source of oppositional impulses. The dominant culture has its own forms of popularity, as do all class formations. The popular is historically articulated [...] (Grossberg *Formations* 233).

Grossberg makes use of affect to reconceptualize the popular as the non-essential effect of affective investments. The popular is assumed to be an articulation of affect and cultural practices. In this strategy, there is no longer an ontological *personnage* of the popular, there is simply the condition of popularity. The effect of this reconceptualization is that the popular is shorn of all "necessary relations" with types of cultural practice or text; with positions of decoding meaning or ideology; or with social categories such as race or class.

This perspective obviates the need for locating the popular in a specific social group that assumes the persona of the "agent" in critical accounts. The popular is no longer the locus and resource of an oppressed class. Even the dominant culture is now considered to have a popularity of its own. What matters to people is no longer accounted for by the texts that they consume or by the social class they are assumed to belong to. For Grossberg, popularity is best conceptualized as an affective relation. Different things matter to different people in different ways. They invest in cultural practices and thereby

produce them as influential, as something people care about and will act for – as popular. Grossberg constructs the operator of an "affective alliance" to describe the historically variable articulations of persons, practices and texts that are organized by their affective investments, their "mattering maps."

This revised notion of the popular figures the stakes of cultural activity as the struggle to secure popularity for different practices and cultures. Popularity is empowering, but it is not necessarily resistant. Opposition through cultural practice (style, pleasure, transgression, unruly practice) is frequently possible, but agency does not necessarily derive from opposition. Its political significance depends on how popularity (an affective relation) is articulated into other strategies. The conjuncturalist notion of affect

> [...] does not answer the question of the politics of such affective economies: it is open to struggle and articulation. Affect defines, then, a condition of possibility for any political intervention; it is, however, ideologically, economically and libidinally neutral except as it is articulated into these systems under specific historical conditions (*All Dressed Up* 161).

This realizes the possibility inherent in the conjuncturalist mode of analysis, introducing a heightened respect for the historical contingency of all of the figures of analysis. Critics don't know in advance of the analysis who the empowered and the disempowered will be. In this setting, affect works against the a-priori privileging of differences (such as gender difference, for instance) that tend to determine the agencies and stakes of struggle before analysis begins. It doesn't necessarily matter who acts, or from what standpoint;

and it is always possible that their commitments and their activities may be complicit with certain forms of domination (as first wave feminism is often held to be complicit with racism and classism, argued by hooks among many others). In this perspective, agency is not the property of a social position, but the outcome of a network of articulations. Ultimately this is a more specific model of cultural practices and their political significance, that does not attempt to decide in advance which differences will be relevant in any particular situation. If no differences are privileged, one can scarcely decide on the effectivity of a practice or its significance for specific social relations before undertaking a contextualist analysis.

It is worth pointing out that theoretical elaboration, in this case, has come about not as a direct consequence of an empirical anomaly, as the Kuhnian model of paradigmatic change suggests, but rather as a condition of the emergence of a strategy of conjuncturalist conceptualization and analysis and a renewed commitment to analyzing cultural practices in their specificity. The modeling language of articulation can, in certain applications, encourage the specification of condensed *personnages* into their constituent concepts and functions. As the next section demonstrates, this is the case for the *personnage* of the "subject" as well.

Affect and value in conjuncturalist theory

In his later work on affect and the popular, Grossberg revises the model of affective economies, which was based on an Althusserian model of a "fractured totality," and resituates the concept of affect in a model loosely related to Foucauldean conceptions of the *dispositif.* The concept of affect has an expanded role to play in this framework:

> Affect actually points to a complex set of effects which circulate around notions of investment and anchoring; it circumscribes the entire set of relations that are referred to with such terms as "volition," "investment," "commitment" and "passion." Affective relations always involve a quantitatively variable level of energy (activation, enervation) that binds an articulation or that binds an individual to a particular practice. Affect identifies the strength of the investment which anchors people in particular experiences, practices, identities, meanings and pleasures[...]. In this quantitative dimension, affect privileges passion and volition over meaning [...] (Grossberg *We Gotta* 82).

It is my argument that in this anti-humanist conception of social agency and history, the concept of affect is used to regulate the appearance of the subject as agent, both to displace the figure of the "integral subject" and to figure those subject functions that are still required by the project, notably the preconceptual notions of investment and volition, which might otherwise be excluded from the régime. I also argue that the theoretical imagery is based on a structuralist model of relations that privileges one element, "la *case vide*," that is the conceptual persona which gives to the concept of "affect" its function and specificity in the theory. It is at this point that the empirical component of the project is displaced in favor of an abstract discursive operator.

The regulation of the subject is conditioned by the generally "anti-humanist" commitments of the conjuncturalist formation. Within the model of articulated relations that is the theoretical basis of Grossberg's analyses, there is really very little place for specifically human sociality. Persons enter the account, at this basic theoretical level,

through their articulation to practices. Practices bind persons into wider chains of articulated relations. This imagery is given some experiential density and the suggestion of facticity with the idea that we "invest" in practices. Persons make affective investments in particular relations, binding themselves to practices and implicating them in the constant reproduction of practices and their effects. To the question, why are popular cultural practices reproduced, and why are they important despite their apparent frivolity, Grossberg can answer that persons are passionate about them. Yet the aridity of the structuralist modeling language disperses human sociality as soon as it is invoked; their passions are articulations with effects that are always dispersed throughout the context.

There is an interesting tension at the heart of Grossberg's project, that re-constructs a pre-conceptual notion of human feeling within a structuralist modeling language. It makes available some of the traits more proper to the subject of phenomenological discourse, to projects of analysis situated within an opposing régime. This is a theoretical advantage. At the same time, however, it tends to obscure the actual function of its operators by their very familiarity. "Volition," "investment," "commitment" and "passion" are operators that work to establish the concrete, everyday reality of the human traits and activities that they represent. Everyone knows that things matter to us, and we demonstrate the fact that we care by our enthusiastic participation in the practices of popular culture. As a simple notion of the things that we do, nothing could be more obvious than practice. Yet despite its apparent facticity, practice is actually a *personnage* of a Foucauldean concept of the statement, the elementary unit of the archaeological analysis of knowledge. Although Grossberg's analytical approach stakes

its claim to "concreteness" through its grasp of practices, the operator actually works to project a model of power relations. Paradoxically, practices only "exist" in their effects: "[...] 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" (Grossberg *We Gotta* 53). The concept disperses every practice into its effects, which is theoretically useful for a contextualist practice of analysis. The engagement between theory and the descriptive aspect of Grossberg's project is certainly not straightforward, however. Despite their apparent meanings, concepts such as practice, or affect, are specialized discursive operators.

It is this image of effects dispersed throughout the context, significantly theorized as a "circulation," that is an essential theoretical support to Grossberg's project of thinking through the relations of popular culture to politics. Popular culture has "the ability to place other practices affectively" (*We Gotta* 80). The "mattering maps" articulated within cultural formations "also involve the lines that connect the different sites of investment; they define the possibilities for moving from one investment to another [...]" (84). This conceptualization facilitates the analytical reconstruction of relations between the cultural formations of popular culture and other domains. It allows Grossberg, in his work on the cultural formation of popular music in the United States, to map out the changing relations between rock and its moments of opposition to, and assimilation within, a changing conservative political sensibility. We could see this approach, then, as a reply to Carey's assumption that there is a necessary non-correspondence between the emotions elicited in popular culture and politics. Where Carey's implicit functionalism assumed fixed boundaries among domains, a contextualist

theory of articulation allows the construction of more diffuse relations among practices and dispersed effects and sensibilities (dominant articulations of practice). In the light of recent political events, Grossberg's argument is all the more convincing, for it seems obvious that affective investments can

> [...] position people in ways which make them particularly vulnerable to certain kinds of appeals, and, it is most frightening, they can easily be articulated into repressive and even totalitarian forms of social demands and relations (*We Gotta* 87).

The possibilities of political empowerment and disempowerment, then, are figured in a metonymic displacement from one site of investment (in an identity, position of authority, or ideology) to another site, in different social domains or on different planes of effects. The stakes in this structural game of power are based on securing persons to these sites, and thereby articulating them into constantly shifting but already existing articulations. Experience remain abstract; whatever sense of empowerment that persons may feel is not agency.

If the model figures the popular as a context of infinitely relatable and semi-autonomous structures that are constantly in motion, it requires a principle that can "fix" certain relations, not only to explain the enduring reality of certain articulations, but to justify the sense of urgency that fuels critical responses to emerging articulations. After all, if social life were nothing more than constant circulation, there would be no structured relations to worry about. The theory requires an operator that arrests the circulation of effects, and affect is designated to play that role:

> Affective investments are crucial to this circulation, for they are always implicated in the practices by which such places are constructed. Affective investments are the mechanism by which the circulation is stopped, fixed and articulated (*We Gotta* 107).

At this level of operation, perhaps its most abstract and theoretical, affect must be seen as a structural element or force. At this point, we are no longer in the realm of "human" or social mattering. The proposition that what is "realized" out of the flux of "circulation" is what matters to persons is a marvelously radical phenomenological assertion, but that is not quite Grossberg's point. Rather, he argues,

> Affect is contentless; on the contrary, it is precisely aimed at constituting not only the possibility of difference, but the terms within which such differences are possible in a particular affective economy (*All Dressed Up* 159).

At an ontological level, affect is an operator that "overdetermines" difference which is, of course, one of the fundamental operators of economic and semiotic theories of structure and identity. Difference is displaced from its fundamental role in structuralist discourse when affect is positioned as a prior determination of "the differences that matter."

The greater significance of this theoretical move is that it gives "affect" the role of a conceptual persona that operates in structuralist models of relations, the "*case vide*." As Deleuze describes its function, the *case vide* (or the "objet=x") is the element in any structural model that is both lacking in self-identity and yet has the function of ordering all the other elements: "Distribuant les différences dans toute la structure, faisant varier les rapports différentiels avec ses déplacements, l'objet=x constitue le différenciant de la

différence elle même" (Deleuze *A Quoi* 318). The *case vide* locates the necessary site in structuralist modeling where the cyclical system of exchange is opened to the determinations of external forces; perhaps another system, or perhaps an historical event, depending on one's theoretical alliances. It is clear that in Grossberg's theoretical system, affect is a *personnage* of the *case vide*.

As Deleuze describes it, the *case vide* is the site of a question, of what puts the structure into motion, or brings it temporarily to rest; of why some of its potential is actualized and not the rest. It is the *case vide* that determines the relative position of all the relations, and especially the "valeur variable des rapports" (321) the relative value of relations among relations and other structures.

> Il est évident que la case vide d'une structure économique [...] consiste en <quelque chose> qui ne se réduit ni aux termes de l'échange, ni au rapport d'échange lui-même, mais qui forme un tiers éminemment symbolique en perpétuel déplacement, et en fonction duquel vont se définir les variations de rapports. Telle est la valeur comme expression d'un <travail en général>, au delà de toute qualité empiriquement observable, lieu de la question qui traverse ou parcourt l'économie comme structure (Deleuze *A Quoi* 321-322).

Affect assumes the role of the difference that makes a difference. This is confirmed in some of Grossberg's descriptions of the concept: "If affect cannot be 'found' in the text or read off its surfaces (any more than meaning can), it is also the case that affect is not simply something that individuals put into it. Affect is itself articulated in the relations between practices" (83). Affect is thus akin to value, the investment or force that exceeds

our ability to observe and to represent it, yet determines the relations of all the other relations. Once considered to originate in the specifically human activity of labor, it is displaced with the destabilization of the modernist episteme, cut loose from the figure of the human subject. Now, affect operates as a principle of actualization.

It is apparent that affect plays a dual role, as both a descriptive concept and one that is significant in terms of the politics of structuralist and post-structuralist theory. This double function is typical of a discursive operator. Affect has a number of *personnages* that work to describe particular affective investments (e.g. mattering maps), and formations defined in relation to affect (sensibilities). The more abstract theoretical functions of affect are clearly significant both for Grossberg's project of constructing models of extra-semiotic "affective economies" and for attacking the dominance of theories of ideology in cultural criticism. One of the implications of the *case vide* is that no single economy can be privileged over any other; there is no economy that is determining "in the final instance."

I want to argue that affect ultimately regulates the appearance of the *personnage* of the agent in this theoretical discourse. It displaces the figure of the subject as the agent of history, while fragmenting and assigning its functions to various *personnages*, such as mattering maps or sensibilities. These all turn out to be surprisingly impersonal *personnages*. In the structuralist discursive formation, the *case vide* is never occupied by "the subject," for if it were then structuralism would lapse back into simple humanism, in which specifically human labour, as the origin of value, determines the position of all other structures. The figure of the subject is subordinated to the *case vide*:

> Le sujet est précisément l'instance qui suit la place vide: comme dit Lacan, il est moins sujet qu'assujetti – assujetti à la case vide. [...] Le structuralisme n'est pas du tout une pensée qui supprime le sujet, mais une pensée qui l'émiette et le distribu systématiquement, qui conteste l'identité du sujet, qui le dissipe et le fait passer de place en place, sujet toujours nomade, fait d'individuations, mais impersonelles, ou de singularités, mais préindividuelles (Deleuze *A Quoi* 325).

Where Grossberg's project (and cultural studies itself) requires a more detailed framework for the analysis of the conditions of agency and determination in particular conjunctures, especially the implication of extra-semiotic levels of mediation, this articulation of the operator affect takes the concept into ever more abstract realms of structuralist meta-theory. Where conjuncturalist analysis needs better tools to trace the limits and possibilities of personal intervention in particular contexts, affect risks being reduced to one more impersonal force of the kind encountered so often in post-structuralist theory – difference, desire, discourse, power. Just when we think that operators such as "volition, will" etc. will be developed for conjuncturalist analysis, they are displaced with an abstract principle of actualization.

Affect and human specificity

In its more concrete applications, affect brings something specifically human back into the analytic representations of the conjuncturalist régime. Affect locates what people, or rather their tastes, preferences and passions, may add to relations. This is clearly not a return to the humanist notion of agency; the stability of articulations does not depend directly on what people care about but is instead an effect of power, and it is always the

product of multiple determinations. Within the models Grossberg (and others) construct however, no other determination works to "bind" articulations in quite the paradoxical way that affect does. Affect is what keeps articulations together because people care and want it that way. That caring cannot be reduced to material interest or biological need, and it cannot be analytically displaced by other planes of effects, or levels of determination. Affect nonetheless does no more than point to another articulated identity. In an epistemological régime that is still marked by structuralist anti-humanism, affect is an excess that invests certain relations, and produces certain effects without ever being entirely autonomous (Grossberg *We Gotta* 86). One cannot contemplate a general theory of affect, for instance, since affect is by definition without content and inherently dependent on historical conditions and other levels of determination to lend it an identity.

Affect makes important analytical distinctions available to us with a set of operators including "affective investments" and "mattering maps." However, I question the analytical value of some of the abstract theoretical operations of affect. It makes little difference to projects of social analysis whether difference is founded in structuralist terms, Derridean terms, or as the effect of affect. What matters to projects of social analysis is primarily the set of differences laid out by researchers as they go about constructing *personnages* and frameworks of analysis. That function should not be abdicated to theoreticist notions of affect as constitutive of difference.

On the other hand, affect can stage a useful displacement of essentialist *personnages*. Affect could be considered one of the conditions for a reconceptualization of the popular that breaks with the orthodoxy that is its key liability, the condensation of figures of social position with figures of contestation or social agency. Affect is important

in reconceptualizing the role of the cultural formation and the structured relations that it figures. In this new imagery, there is no opposition of dominant to subordinate, center to margin, or elite culture to mass culture to structure the way that particular assemblages of cultural practices and power are represented. These oppositions are recognized as positing necessary relations where they are not empirically warranted. Affect works within theoretical imagery that does not privilege an oppositional structure, figuring the politics of cultural formations as inherently unstable and open to articulation. It is here, perhaps, that affect as a principle of actualization can make a contribution to cultural research and analysis, by suggesting that the conditions of popularity are conjuncturally determined and historically variant, yet inextricably tied to the affective dimension of existence, that invests one site after another with that particular form of significance that inspires real people to take up positions and to strive for what matters most to them.

Critical syntheses of structuralism and phenomenology

>From its origins in literary criticism, the structure of feeling has figured a reconciliation of sorts between structuralist and phenomenological perspectives. Grossberg's conjuncturalist reworking of the operator shifts its emphasis away from a hermeneutic logic of inquiry while resisting the anti-humanist reductionism of Althusserian structuralism. In the conjuncturalist régime, the reality and effectivity of experience are acknowledged as integral determinations, without allowing the operator to establish the limits of knowledge. As an operator, affect manages a bridging of the *personnages antipathiques* of phenomenology and structuralism that are generally assumed to be mutually incompatible. Roland Barthes attempts something similar in Camera Lucida, which has emerged as an important statement in a field that is

increasingly preoccupied with the specificity of cultural practices and the personal as a point of departure for cultural criticism. Ostensibly about looking at photographs, Barthes's essay is a canny exercise in theoretical deconstruction and re-articulation. I consider it here as a final point in an ongoing trajectory of thought that constructs as its object something like a structure of feeling.

Many lines can be traced between Barthes and the preceding perspectives. Like Grossberg, Barthes seeks to extend the object of critical analysis beyond the limits established by semiotic approaches. The operator "affect" makes a brief return, but a more significant regularity that links Barthes's approach to Grossberg's is the use of the *personnage* of the *sujet toujours nomade* of structuralist theory. Like Williams, Barthes takes on the very difficult hermeneutic project of accounting for the imaginative reception of cultural texts. And like Williams, this leads him to read a deeper level of meaning from cultural texts, searching for the essence of the photographic object and returning, via a different route than that taken by the literary humanists, to the pursuit of the constantly mutable object of value. Here the origin of value is not social experience, but the unique and singular experience of the individual. The pursuit of this "partial object" will take Barthes beyond the discursive limits of social analysis.

Partial objects and passionate subjects

In order to locate and explore these limits, Barthes constructs two sets of concepts that he will contrast with one another. They correspond to the two opposing epistemological régimes that interest us, structuralism and phenomenology. The concepts consist of two photographic "objects," the studium and the punctum, and related pairs of operators that figure the critic and the enunciative positions that one might take up in

critical discourse. The opposed *personnages* offer two enunciative positions. The *personnage* of the Socius is characterized as "the voice of banality (to say what everyone sees and knows)..." and is opposed to the Body, which offers the "voice of singularity (to replenish such banality with all the élan of an emotion which belonged only to myself)" (Barthes 76).

This dichotomous organization is continued in the construction of objects of analysis, the studium and the punctum. The studium is an aspect of the photograph identified with social communication, "a kind of education (knowledge and civility, 'politeness')" (28). The studium is rather like the sign, a conventional marker of social meaning. It is readily assimilated to a set of conventions or a domain of social knowledge. Its meaning is clear and it neither disturbs nor arouses.

If the studium is the medium of mundane communication, the punctum is the site of singular meanings, truth, and passionate involvement. The punctum is that detail of the photograph that "pricks" the critic's interest and evokes an emotional response. It inspires fascination, desire, "the opening of a wound." The punctum is not implicated in social communication; it is the accidental detail in the photograph that is a "partial object," co-present with the encoded meaning of the photograph, but outside of it, "a supplement that is at once inevitable and delightful" (47). The punctum's presence is assured by the "pure contingency" that is the specificity of the photographic image. Unlike the text, the image captures a moment and a context, a "field" of partial objects that is considered to be beyond textual representation.

The punctum is a partial object in a phenomenological sense too, not wholly separate from the intentional awareness of Barthes. As a figure of the critic's investment

in the image, the punctum magically effaces itself as a signifier and becomes the object itself. In the texture of a dirt road, Barthes finds that

> I perceive the referent (here, the photograph really transcends itself: is this not the sole proof of its art? To annihilate itself as medium, to be no longer a sign but the thing itself?), I recognize, with my whole body, the straggling villages I passed through on my long ago travels [...] (45).

The punctum is projected into the image by the "thinking eye" that adds an ineffable quality to the image. What defines the punctum, ultimately, is that Barthes seizes on it, and is seized by it, in a way that is partially determined by his particular biography and relationships with other persons. The punctum enacts the de-polarization of subject and object often associated with phenomenology and positions a radically individuated *personnage* as the subject of knowledge, one that is no longer self-identical: "[...] to give examples of the punctum is, in a certain fashion, to give myself up" (43).

The critic's body

"What does my body know of photography?" Barthes asks, inaugurating the analysis of the punctum (Barthes 9). "My Body" is defined negatively, as neither subjective nor symbolic, existing as the center of feeling and impulse, but not social knowledge. Rather, the Body remembers and desires. It knows objects immediately, naively disregarding the mediations of culture and technology to leap to a kind of conviction about a state of things, an intention.

Assuming the *personnage* of the Body, Barthes can construct an informal phenomenology of the photograph. The Body provides him with an ontological (universal, constitutive and essential) object of inquiry:

> My phenomenology agreed to compromise with a power, affect; affect was what I didn't want to reduce; being irreducible, it was thereby what I wanted, what I ought to reduce the Photograph to; but could I retain an affective intentionality, a view of the object which was immediately steeped in desire, repulsion, nostalgia, euphoria?[...] I wanted to explore [photography] not as a question (a theme) but as a wound: I see, I feel, hence I notice, I observe, I think (21).

In Barthes's paraphrase of the famous Cartesian dictum, affect again moves into the position of determining the differences that matter. Through the first half of the analysis, affect plays an important role, guiding his choice of corpus (he follows his affective responses) providing the essential distinction between studium and punctum, and helping to make genre distinctions, such as the difference between the erotic and the pornographic photograph.

The Body is the key *personnage* in a discourse of materiality that runs throughout Camera Lucida. Not only is the Subject often addressed in terms of materiality, as a sensuous and emotional being fused with its object in opposition to the subject constituted in ideology. The essence of photography is also interpreted as a materiality, based on the chemical registering of light and guaranteeing the past "presence" of the photographed object. This discourse of materiality claims, for all of its objects, a more immediate connection with the real.

> According to a paradoxical order – since usually we verify things before declaring them "true" – under the effect of a new experience, I had induced the truth of the image, the reality of its origin; I had identified

> truth and reality in a unique emotion, in which I henceforth placed the nature – the genius – of photography [...] (77).

Barthes develops what we might call an epistemology of the body, which is really an assertion of the deeper, intuitive knowledge that derives from an affective contact with the photograph. The Body is a *personnage* of the subject of knowledge, or rather of its intuitive and sensuous capacity, split off and conceptualized as a function that is somehow autonomous from signification. As a *personnage* of the Subject, the Body is called on to act beyond the limits of conventional meaning, effectively displacing the locus of knowledge to a new *personnage*. Truth and objectivity are handled somewhat differently in Barthes's existentialist moments, based on an "experiential order of proof " (79). Barthes assumes the privilege of asserting the truth of his own readings as more than readings, as reality seized "without method" (80).

The Body legitimates strong claims to facticity simply by being the irrefutably concrete instantiation of the subject, its immutable material basis. The enunciative function of the Body is to secure authority for the analysis made in its name. It claims considerably more authenticity for the interpretation that is said to derive from the Body, than for an interpretation made by the Socius. The facticity of the Body, combined with the immediacy of the relation between subject and punctum, seem to suggest that the Body is endowed with an unmediated contact with the real.

The Body is always the site of an extra-semiotic investment or a sensuous epiphany. Like the literary interpreter of "lived experience," when Barthes's body turns to an image, it immediately knows more than the manifest content or the intentional meanings of the photograph. Of the punctum Barthes writes, "I feel that its mere presence

changes my reading, that I am looking at a new photograph with a higher value..." (42). He sees directly through the object to "an erotic or lacerating value buried within myself" (16).

The Critic's "I"

I would like to argue that Barthes's "exploration" of "parts of the self" suggests the impossibility of returning to a posture of naïve exploration when it comes to the interrogation of subjectivity. The formulations of punctum and studium must be read as conditioned by their relation to the high-level opposition between structuralist interpretive strategies and an off-the-cuff phenomenology. Barthes's descriptions of the experience of photography may best be read as the performance of a variety of enunciative positions. We might add that the air of authenticity that derives from his use of the first-person voice ought to be considered the deployment of an enunciative position, rather than a naïve return to presence, as Gratton has convincingly argued (216).

The punctum, or the partial-object, is too singular an object for social analysis. Since it has no existence independent of the critic's subjective engagement with the text, it is impossible to conceive of a debate or a lasting analytical distinction predicated on the punctum. Any feature could be interpreted as the punctum, any sensibility could be thematized as the essence of photography, based on these subjective criteria. In a closely related way, it is hard to see what the social stakes of such a singular notion of meaning might be, if we were to extend the model of interpretation to others. Cultural studies practitioners are generally interested in "struggle" over social representations, while the punctum is a decisively idiosyncratic object.

What the punctum actually aims for is the reading of a field of value from the photograph: "The punctum fantastically 'brings out' the Victorian nature (what else can one call it?) of the photograph, and endows it with a blind field" (57). The blind field refers finally to the imaginative and intentional awareness that Barthes as a phenomenological observer brings to the photograph, and ultimately leads back to his unique personal preoccupations. Rather than attempting to "read" a field of social value, then, the approach ultimately reads a radically individuated field of the critic's values: As he avows, "I am the reference of every photograph" (84). Any relation of this field to its context is ruled out by Barthes's insistent anti-conventionalism.

The difficulties that this approach poses for a social analysis are multiplied when the epistemology of the Body is considered. It's common to call Barthes's ontology a kind of "magical realism;" but it seems difficult to warrant this framework outside of certain limited critical applications. It is a practice that locates "truth and reality" in subjective emotion, and eschews method. This poses difficulties for a discipline still regulated by the dual commitments to the elaboration of sociological discourse through debate about common objects, and the assumption of a degree of factuality in our claims to truth. Barthes's subjectivism raises the same sort of problems encountered wherever experience is given epistemological privilege.

Barthes's turn to the personal locates an important set of limits in critical discourse, even as his position carries him over and beyond them. Critical interpretation as it is practiced by Williams or Carey, for instance, assumes that meaning is an essentially collective and convention-bound thing, and makes the claim that the critic reads on behalf of an audience, class or generation. The decoding of the critic displaces

the decodings of the absent reader without distortion, since critics and readers are considered to be subject to the same norms of social meaning.

Barthes's *personnage* of the Socius not only legitimates such readings by serving as a figure of a universal receiver; it also reasserts, in its particular epistemological régime, a limit which is all the more important for its apparent necessity and ubiquity. A feature of almost every attempt to interpret social life through meaning is the assumption that meaning is fundamentally collective in character. In the structuralist régime to which Barthes is opposed, the collective is explained as the conventional, a position that is pushed to the extreme in deconstructionist assertions that reference is entirely arbitrary. It is that extreme position that sends Barthes looking for the extra-semiotic essence of the object in the punctum. His personal meditation on meaning and the image, despite all of its duplicity, forcefully demonstrates that the limits imposed by semiotic and purely constructionist theories of meaning tend to exclude all of the singularity of individual interpretation and subjectivity that might challenge sociologistic claims to "understanding."

Barthes works effectively to locate and to subvert these limits. Through the use of the punctum and the *personnage* of the Body, he elaborates on the non-conventional and contingent mediations of personal history or individual preference in photographic interpretation. If there are times at which the rejection of semiotic conventionalism borders on the reactionary, Barthes's stubborn subjectivism nonetheless directs attention to the limit point at which interpretation can no longer be warranted with respect to social convention. Barthes is not alone in taking this turn; one thinks of Baudrillard's similar if

somewhat more spectacular parting of ways with sociological generalization and his quantum leap into a dissimulated subjectivism after Symbolic Exchange and Death.

The logic of this discursive development arrives at a particular limit position in critical interpretation, that of radical interpretive relativism. The critic no longer reads on behalf of a society or culture, but on behalf of an individual subjectivity. The punctum, "cannot in any way constitute the visible object of a science; it cannot establish an objectivity, in the positive sense of the term" (73). Barthes has tried to re-create "the impossible science of the unique being" (70). This form of experiential account terminates in a kind of theoretical solipsism, where the critic constructs a singular point of view which, as intriguing as it is, can contribute no more than an invitation to "do as I do" and provide a set of themes for others to elaborate or inflict on experiences of their own.

This is a profoundly anti-sociologistic approach. At the very least, it points to the difficulties of dealing with the heterogeneity of the "lived" or imaginative engagement with cultural texts from within the assumptions of any sociological formation. The strategy that is authorized by Barthes might be an interesting exercise in speculative criticism if its ontological claims are relativized. It is not an effective strategy for the kind of social analysis that is currently being advocated in cultural studies, however.

Nonetheless, Barthes inspires us to take up the personal as a position of enunciation as well as a point of departure for research. The current advocacy of figures characterized by fragmentation, mobility or contingency avoids positing a transcendental subject, but it doesn't help us in the concrete task of research, which inevitably requires the assumption of *personnages* and positions as we read, observe and write. The

disarticulation of the position of enunciation from the self is useful in suggesting that one might assume a number of *personnages* in writing.

Integrating personnages antipathiques

With this series of concepts, Barthes works across the central division of structuralism and phenomenology that has structured the three theoretical conjunctures under analysis in this chapter. As we have seen, the poles offered by structuralism and phenomenology tend to draw the pre-conceptual objects of common-sense into their constellation and structure subsequent development of theory and interpretation. Barthes manages to trouble the overdetermination of these twin orthodoxies by merging their vocabularies, and drawing selectively on their practices, while ignoring their professed ontological differences. For example, the "docile interests" that are qualitatively evoked by the studium, are categorized in terms of generative grammar: "The Photograph is unary when it emphatically transforms "reality" without doubling it, without making it vacillate..." (41). Thus a distinction drawn by way of a formal analogy with language is used to clarify an experiential distinction. The question is, does this make a difference? Is it a productive synthesis, or discursive hopscotch?

On some occasions there is the suggestion that a dialectical move is possible, as in Barthes's discussion of the important photograph that captures the essence of his mother:

> When I confronted the Winter Garden Photograph, I gave myself up to the Image, to the Image-Repertoire. Thus I could understand my generality; but having understood it, invincibly I escaped from it. In the Mother, there was a radiant, irreducible core: my mother (75).

An integration is possible, to the extent that the social sign seems to contain (at least in these privileged instances) the essential core of the partial object, its value, without reducing it or overwhelming it. However this dialectical potential at the level of ontology cannot be made available to other projects of analysis. Barthes cannot attempt an integration beyond the bounds of his individuality: The punctum, "cannot in any way constitute the visible object of a science; it cannot establish an objectivity, in the positive sense of the term; at most it would interest your studium... but in it, for you, no wound" (73). If this is the case, if this knowledge cannot be shared with others, then what is the purpose of basing analytic distinctions on it? How will others follow the distinction of the erotic or the pornographic, for example, if they can never share the sensibility of the critic that is its basis?

The dialectical synthesis that Barthes was perhaps attempting to orchestrate remains, in my opinion, an opposition; and my final view is that whatever specificities of photography as a cultural practice might be involved (including, in this case, the subjectivity produced in the reading), they are displaced into the theoretical opposition that is figured in the two régimes of discourse. As Barthes argues in the closing lines of Camera Lucida: "Such are the two ways of the Photograph. The choice is mine: to subject its spectacle to the civilized code of perfect illusions, or to confront in it the wakening of intractable reality" (119).

Conclusion

Barthes brings a temporary halt to the trajectory, although the operator around which it is constructed continues to generate problems and *personnages*. In the analysis of the trajectory, I noted the gains and liabilities associated with each perspective, and

located certain regularities in their operations. Each of these approaches make characteristic assumptions about how cultural texts relate to the social world. Because of the way that they conceptualize the object of study and integrate it into their models of social activity, they displace it, more or less problematically.

The issues that have concerned me here concern the way the engagement between the theoretical frames and the empirical moment of research is grounded in specific features of texts or cultural practices, and the degree of abstraction undertaken in the interpretation. The structure of feeling takes as its object the experience of authors and readers who are necessarily absent, and it formulates highly abstract interpretations that tend to assimilate a broad range of phenomena. Perhaps all operators are metaphors, in some way, but the structure of feeling is more liable to metaphoric totalization than other operators. Affect, as an operator in a model of articulations, should produce more controlled displacements. However, the advantage of a mid-level descriptive *personnage* such as "mattering maps" is lost when a high-level interpretation is made. Interpreting the postmodern crisis as one of disarticulated planes of affect and ideology, for instance, is as over generalized as the interpretation of generational sensibilities with the structure of feeling.

A useful strategy to control the initial displacements of conceptualization is the construction of categories and levels of analysis. This has the advantage of making explicit their epistemological commitments, although it cannot liberate concepts from their discursive determinations. There can be no "sabbatical from knowledge" as one recent critic advocates. Conceptual construction in and of itself is not enough, as Camera Lucida demonstrates. The engagement of concepts and empirical moments of research

cannot be staged as an entirely contingent or singular "event," if we want to leave the opportunity to others to take up our operators where we have left off. Unless of course criticism is an essentially singular operation that teaches by example, and only social "scientists" pretend to use concepts as the currency of debate.

I have also been concerned with the displacements associated with discursive operations, that is, within régimes of epistemological discourse themselves. It is simply inevitable that a concept that engages with a state of affairs in a useful way also pulls the object of inquiry up into its network of discursive relations. Affect, which provides a set of analytic distinctions that may prove useful in empirical research, nonetheless also denotes a theorized force in the "productivity of power relations." Discursive operations are generally strategic; they advance epistemological régimes by reiterating their particular knowledges or by displacing concepts with their principal *personnages*. The metaphoric abstraction of the structure of feeling leaves it particularly open to displacement by these *personnages*, such as "feminist potential" or the "de-oedipalized subject."

The displacement may bring objects of inquiry within the orbit of a constellation of "*personnages antipathiques*," the opposed pairs of concepts that populate sociological theory. For instance, the concept of "the popular" pulls practices into a binary logic of domination and resistance; the project becomes the demonstration of the capacities of an ontological *personnage*, an active agent that is always necessarily "resistant." A reconstructed operator can offer alternatives that work outside of these limits. Affect, as a means of redefining the popular as an affective quality of "popularity" returns the issue of

resistance to the status of a question that can be asked rather than an assumption that must be demonstrated.

Another case in point: Barthes's operators, the studium and punctum, become the *personnages* in an attempted dialectical reconciliation of structuralism and phenomenology, the most important *personnages antipathiques* encountered in this formation. These *personnages* also appear in the opposition of semiotic theories of ideology to experiential alternatives. There is a tendency to take advantage of this opposition for rhetorical effect, and to claim a "deeper" level of interpretation for the phenomenological alternative. Barthes is adept at linking the enunciative position of the Body and cultural assumptions about the singularity of personal experience, to establish his argument at an ontological level. The liability of an ontological operator is its tendency to efface contextual differences. At best, the ontological move is simply irrelevant to projects of analysis, as in Grossberg's regrounding of "difference" in affect. It can be rather more destructive when an ontological *personnage* such as the popular condenses important analytical differences.

In one way or another, all of these projects encounter the *personnage* of value as they explicitly turn away from the analysis of representations. Looking beneath or within the networks of relations to what really matters - to the authentic experience, the deeper level of meaning, the difference that makes a difference - brings these three approaches to an apparently naïve encounter with value. Williams locates it in the responsiveness and the autonomy of the "lived," Barthes in the inevitable and delightful "supplement" to intentional meaning, and Grossberg locates value in the force that "fixes" the structured mobility of the social. In the attempt to empirically ground assessments of value,

however, they find that it is always displaced and never "in its place." For the hermeneutic critics, value is somewhere midway between subject and object, neither observed nor projected. Its divination requires an almost mystical practice of "close reading" or an intensive practice of introspection. Similarly, for the analyst of discursive practice, affect is "articulated in the relations between practices" and practices themselves are "never where they are found." At best, value forms an elusive and unstable object of inquiry that is perhaps impossible to objectify or ground empirically.

More generally, from the consideration of this trajectory, it seems clear that we ought to favor models and terminologies that are flexible enough to cut into condensed figures (the popular; the ontological reader) and to make available more of their specific features to empirically based research.

ENDNOTES

[1] The concept is elaborated within a régime of literary and socio-historical criticism that is visibly marked by the rules of formation of objects of research and rules that order the procession of statements that constitute a literary "analysis." At one point in its development, the discipline moved to exclude statements on the psychology of historical agents and authors in favor of formalized procedures of economic and textual analysis. Feeling is clearly a supplement that cannot be accounted for within these limits.

CHAPTER 3: ETHNOGRAPHY AS A DISCURSIVE OPERATOR

As a method of research, Ethnography is increasingly advocated in cultural and communication studies, as these disciplinary formations elaborate more sociological approaches to the study of popular culture. The rationale for "doing" ethnography is frequently accompanied by strong epistemological claims to realism; and when properly designed, ethnographic research doubtlessly encourages researchers to engage with more of the specificity and heterogeneity of actual contexts of research. However, taking the claims made on behalf of ethnography in the study of television audiences and in related researches to the consumption of communication technologies and popular culture, I find that the ethnographic perspective is consistently co-opted by powerful *personnages* that undermine its epistemological potential. In the early research into subcultures by the Center for Contemporary Cultural Studies, exemplified in the volume Resistance Through Rituals, or in research into the "active" audience undertaken in the discipline of communication studies, especially in the work of John Fiske, ethnography becomes a means to produce knowledge about the privileged *personnages* of critical social theory.

In this chapter I argue that ethnographic research can be overdetermined by the general theoretical positions articulated in discursive operators. These positions can also be arranged as *personnages antipathiques* that reproduce the structuring oppositions of social theory and epistemology, as is the case when the opposition between empiricism and theoreticism is mobilized to legitimate claims to the superiority of ethnographic knowledge in contrast to speculative criticism. Dominant *personnages* like the "active audience" are introduced to implicitly support the ontological assumptions of social

agency condensed into concepts such as "everyday life". These *personnages* are often adopted without reflection or problematization in many projects of critical ethnography.

Ethnography does not warrant the realist claims that are often made for it; it uses *personnages* (of persons and their activities, of social agents and social forms) to legitimate claims to facticity for the knowledge produced within particular epistemological régimes. Realism perpetuates the use of discursive operators to implicitly further the purposes, values and relevances of critical research projects. Obviating the need to make these choices explicit, realism allows critical interpretations to be presented as the only description or explanation of phenomena that is possible. However, research is always undertaken from a particular position in epistemological discourses and disciplinary politics.

I shall first describe the assumptions of a pair of well-known ethnographic projects in cultural studies and establish the work of discursive operators and *personnages antipathiques* in their functioning. In the latter half of the chapter, I consider how various reconstructions of ethnography might be more appropriate for the purposes of social research into the relations of media reception and use.

Ethnography and enunciation

Ethnography is increasingly advocated in communication and cultural studies. After structuralism's emphasis on expressivist and formalist logics of interpretation, and postmodernism's highly theoretical attack on the grand narratives of social theory, methodological tastes have swung back to an empiricist interest in the local and the particular, showing a concern for the minor differences and mundane activities that make up everyday life. A veritable "boom" in small scale ethnographic studies has been noted

and critiqued by commentators in cultural studies (Morris *Banality*) and communication studies (Lull).

Despite its renewed popularity among critics, ethnography seems to be a rather disorderly method, lacking in internal coherence and consistent application. It originates in anthropology, and its status as the pre-eminent method for cultural research in that discipline has perhaps inspired a rather naïve appropriation of the method in the critical subdisciplines. Our brand of ethnography has another precursor in interactionist sociology, where a long tradition of participant observation has often been advocated against functionalism. Once appropriated within our own disciplines, ethnography enters an alternative field of practice determined by subcultural and audience research. Here, what researchers mean when they claim to do ethnography is difficult to pin down. It is research conducted "in the field", but what passes as ethnographic practice in media studies is highly variable, ranging from a single interview to total immersion within a fan culture. While a few media ethnographies involve extensive periods of participant observation, what is called ethnography in media studies often has little to do with ethnography as it is generally understood. Seiter et al. confess:

> Television audience studies, even when they use ethnography or qualitative methods, have not satisfied the requirements of ethnography proper, and our own study is no exception. While ethnographies are based on long-term and in-depth field work, most television audience studies have involved only brief periods of contact, in some cases less than one hour, with the informants. Also, while ethnographic methods have traditionally been used to study culture as a whole, television researchers

> study only one aspect of a culture when using this method and attempt to relate it to social identity (Seiter et al. 227).

In addition, the trend toward extremely particularized studies of one group, family or individual established by work such as Radway's research on a single network of romance readers or Walkerdine's analysis of a single child's interpretation of a video has brought others to criticize the lack of representativity of these analyses. As Lull argues "what is passing as ethnography in cultural studies fails to achieve the fundamental requirements for data collection and reporting typical of most anthropological and sociological ethnographic research. 'Ethnography' has become an abused buzz-word in our field" (Lull 242).

Since it clearly doesn't refer to a stable set of practices, which is the minimum we might ask of a method, I prefer to think of ethnography as a "perspective," more a way of envisioning and constructing objects in their specificity than a formal method. I also want to suggest that ethnography is a discursive operator in its own right, taking on a surplus value that is distinct from its epistemological worth, which varies radically across contexts. If ethnography performs a discursive function in our field, what are its conditions of possibility – what conditions its appearance and influence in our epistemological field, and what conditions does it make possible?

A number of enunciative effects make ethnography a useful way to legitimate particular epistemological positions. Ethnographic knowledge is validated by the evident facticity of experience, and it is the object of realist claims that are particularly credible when opposed to the knowledge offered in theoretical and quantitative perspectives.

The statement that ethnography is somehow closer to social reality, able to "dig deeper" or to "lift the veils" obscuring the truth of social interaction is often reiterated, despite obvious differences in practices and quality of evidence. As one research group argues, "all ethnographies require, in large measure, the reinventing of the wheel. This is because, of their very nature, ethnographies are grounded in the realities of other people's lives [...]" (Silverstone, Hirsch and Morley 207). The strongest claims to realism are made in contrast with other epistemological régimes, more quantitative in their approach, or more theoretical in their aims. In the field of audience studies, researchers advocate ethnography over quantitative audience measurement on the one hand, and psychoanalytic theories of reception on the other. The identity of ethnographic practice is never more secure than when its difference with other perspectives is foregrounded. In a renewed application of his early work on youth cultures, Willis expresses his faith in the superiority of ethnography over theoretical approaches, by denigrating the "arm-chair critics" who never engage in "direct fieldwork", but instead

> merely extend this language, this "discourse", out from texts in a gloss and appearance of social connectedness without adding anything real to our knowledge of how symbols and forms are actually used in living cultures. In this sense popular cultural criticism and armchair semiotics have become secondhand vehicles [...] (Willis et al. 6).

Such realist polemics generally proceed at a high level of abstraction, and fail to suggest, beyond indistinct images of the field, what they might mean when they invoke ethnography. It is not difficult to see within these polemics the *personnages*

antipathiques of theoreticism and empiricism that made an appearance in the preceding chapter.

Ethnography is also often claimed to offer more penetrating insights into "social" reality, since it claims as its objects the meanings others make out of their experience. The object of ethnography is, ostensibly, not the social practices or material conditions of a people, but their understanding of what they do. Most modes of ethnographic research elicit the speech of participants as direct evidence of their experiences of texts and events, or their knowing participation in a system of meanings. The ethnographic perspective articulates an empirical form of research with a hermeneutic logic of interpretation that is consistent with the view that social reality is an intersubjective social construction. Claims to this sort of realism derive from a naïve notion of empirical observation as a kind of immediate contact with the other, and ethnographic interpretation as the direct translation of one system of meaning into the terms of another. The contradictions that develop from the cohabitation of these realisms are well known. The particularism of the social constructionist view must not be turned on the system of meaning that is the ethnographic method, or researchers will be forced to contend with the idea that ethnographic truth is but one among many. I do not wish to pursue this theoretical debate here however, but would rather leave open the question of how much factuality we can attain in ethnographic research to an analysis of particular projects and methods.

This is not to say that ethnography does not produce objects of study that are valid and compelling in their particularity. For some researchers, ethnography helps "get to grips with the fine grain of the relations [...]" (Silverstone, Hirsch and Morley 206). While it does not allow immediate access to the real, ethnography has the potential to

promote the specification of objects of study. This is not all: Ethnography can bring researchers "face to face" with the radical heterogeneity of a set of contexts of research that have not been definitively categorized and invested by epistemological limits. Anyone may sense this deterritorialization by taking their current situation as an object of study. How many ways can we think of how to frame our particular present; which ones will we privilege and why? These choices and their impact on analysis and interpretation are rarely accounted for in the construction of objects of study. While I don't want to idealize the ethnographic encounter with the real, the seldom realized potential of ethnography is that in confronting researchers with the limitless contexts that appear within ethnographic research, the method invites researchers to make the assumptions and choices of their theoretical frameworks explicit.

When one considers the domains of application that are analyzed in the rest of this chapter, it becomes apparent that ethnography rarely realizes this potential. In the following sections I will demonstrate that ethnography is consistently co-opted by powerful *personnages* that undermine its epistemological potential. The analysis of three discursive sites will support this argument. In the early research into subcultures by the CCCS exemplified in the volume Resistance Through Rituals, ethnography is drawn into the service of the *personnage* of "resistance". A decade later, in the discipline of communication studies, ethnography becomes a means to produce knowledge about the "active" audience and the guaranteed political effectivity of practices in "everyday life". Finally, I will trace feminist uses of ethnography, which also tend to figure the practices constructed in ethnographic accounts of reception as resistant or "combative."

Culturalism and the ethnographic perspective

Resistance Through Rituals: Youth Subcultures in Post-war Britain is a significant text in the culturalist formation of cultural studies. It displays the typical articulation of the descriptive and the political goals of the project, as well as the tension between its empiricist and theoretical imperatives. The strategies established in the project are fundamental to later attempts to theorize media reception and social representation more generally.

Resistance Through Rituals is a collective project that juxtaposes social and cultural theorization with ethnographic research and methodological discussion. The ethnographies focus on the particular and often mundane practices specific to subcultures like the teddy boys, mods, hippies or punks. Subcultural dress codes, rituals of leisure, and their orientation to other cultures (including the culture of work and working class family life) are the initial objects of inquiry. The three aspects of the project are unevenly integrated. The ethnographic case studies do not benefit from any reflexive engagement with the methodological discussions, and there are widely varying inflections of ethnographic practice in the individual case studies. What's more significant is the way that the (critical) theoretical element of the project is articulated with the empirical descriptions and interpretations of ethnography.

What is the perspective that underlies the collective research? It combines a critical project organized around the concept of hegemony with an ethnographic project of detailed cultural description. Various forms of interpretive practice are subsumed under the notion of ethnography, and coupled with a commitment to engagement and intervention in current social controversies and in the representation of disempowered

social groups. Hebdige's analysis of the mods is one of the most fully elaborated versions of this project, and offers a good example. Hebdige is particularly interested in the meanings of style and their articulation to broader social hierarchies of taste. Melding structuralist conceptions of consumption as a systematic discourse with closely observed subcultural practices, he argues that agency derives from the appropriation and rearticulation of cultural signifiers:

> Thus the scooter, a formerly ultra-conservative means of transport was appropriated and converted into a weapon of solidarity. Thus pills, medically diagnosed for the treatment of neurosis, were appropriated and used as an end in themselves [...] (93).

In Hebdige's semiotic inflection of the project, appropriation has a formal character; it involves not just a deviation from preferred meanings, but their inversion. Ethnography is required to identify the specific practices that are conceptualized as appropriations, since they are often so mundane as to have been entirely ignored within other critical perspectives. Appropriations and style take on much more importance in the Hebdige's semiotic perspective, which remains within the expressivist logic of the culturalist formation:

> This pattern, which amounted to the semantic rearrangement of those components of the objective world which the mod style required, was repeated at every level of the mod experience and served to preserve a part at least of the mod's private dimension against the passive consumer role it seemed in its later phases ready to adopt... (Hebdige 93).

The project thus relates ethnographic accounts of the ordinary practices of identity construction to the theoretical problematic centered on the concept of hegemony. At issue in the concept of hegemony is the relation of meaning and social identity to power. Theories of hegemony and ideology hold that identity is generally constructed in the interests of the powerful. Domination is achieved not through force but through the consent of "the people" to meanings of self and social relations that perpetuate their subordination. The question made possible by the concept of hegemony is, does the subculture contribute to its own domination when it adopts a practice that ordinarily serves institutional power? The argument put forward in Resistance Through Rituals is that social actors might construct alternative identities from the meanings supplied within an ideological régime, and thus resist the pull of hegemony by subverting the effects of ideology. The model of power that organizes this approach is one that opposes incorporation within the dominant ideology to an active resistance to it.

> Negotiation, resistance, struggle: the relations between a subordinate and a dominant culture, wherever they fall within this spectrum, are always intensely active, always oppositional, in a structural sense [...]. The subordinate class brings to this "theatre of struggle" a repertoire of strategies and responses – ways of coping as well as of resistance. Each strategy in the repertoire mobilizes certain real material and social elements: it constructs these into the supports for the different ways the class lives and resists its continuous subordination (Clarke et al. 44).

This framing introduces the powerful *personnage* of resistance to the trajectory, establishing an alternative to the rather more pessimistic predictions of Marxist critical

theory, that assumed the subject's automatic incorporation within the dominant ideology or culture of consumption. This recurring opposition is the first of a number of discursive regularities that characterize the appearance and use of ethnography in the field of cultural studies and media research. It is arranged as an antagonism between two *personnages antipathiques* that are among the many dichotomies through which social theory structures its discourses and perpetuates certain régimes of debate and theory construction. These *personnages* work well enough in the theorization of hegemony and the social formation, but they also intrude problematically on the more specific ethnographic analyses.

The culturalist critics working in Resistance Through Rituals produce and take up a position of advocacy vis a vis the marginalized subject, a resisting subject that is the *personnage* of the theory of hegemony. The stakes of "struggle" against hegemony involve the making of meaning; subcultural agents respond to material conditions with symbolic means. There is an extremely limited analytical perspective being advanced here in the service of a populist politics. There is only one level of mediation constructed in the analysis – the semiotic - and only one possible meaning for the subculture's activity; it is necessarily resistant. This theoretical image is a liability for ethnographic research because it leaves no room open for contradictory findings. Is there never a moment when subcultural agents acquiesce to the dominant cultural formation? Is there never a moment when their actions are complicit with the dominant ideology? And what is the status of these figures of "dominant" social institutions? To frame subcultural activity as always already resistant is to impose limits on what can be observed and said about it that are at odds with the ethnographic perspective. A number of unwarranted

theoretical assumptions are condensed in the *personnages* that frame the ethnographic data, as resistance, activity and the imaginary resolution of real contradictions. They work to overdetermine the research turning it, in effect, into an exercise in legitimating a particular *personnage* of the subcultural agent

Ultimately, the ethnographic research is used to confirm a theoretical argument concerning the political significance of subcultures. Following Cohen, subcultural activity is theorized as the imaginary solution to the real material contradictions lived by the subcultural subject. This theory is not a hypothesis, but rather an a-priori and structuring discourse that is given priority over the case studies. Ethnography serves simply to illustrate the argument with concrete examples, which are *personnages* of the theoretical postulate. As the editors claim about Hebdige's study of the mods: "This analysis gives empirical substance to the argument that sub-cultures live their relation to their real situation as an 'imaginary' relation" (87). Theory appears to determine the selection and description of particular practices rather too neatly when Hebdige offers a general interpretation of the mod's resistance:

> The mod triumphed with symbolic victories and was master of the theatrical but ultimately enigmatic gesture [...]. The mod's cry of triumph, quoted above, was for a romantic victory, a victory of the imagination; ultimately for an imagined victory (Hebdige 93).

This ethnographic data fits all too neatly into the theoretical imagery established at the outset of the research: In situating the analysis entirely within the semiotics of consumption, this perspective not only ignores the material effects of subcultural practices, it also makes the assumption that subcultural agency is bound to be an

ineffectual struggle in the imaginary, a mere diversion from the Real conditions of domination.

Conceptualizing activity in terms of resistance/incorporation introduces a strongly formalist element into a supposedly "empiricist" method. No matter what the specific content uncovered in the empirical moment of research, no matter what the actual "strategy in the repertoire" of subcultural response may be, it is displaced by the powerful discursive operator of resistance. The specificity of subcultural practice is effaced when it is framed in the highly abstract terms dictated by the critical theoretical component of the analysis. This is the principle liability of the formation, resulting from a clumsy approach to the engagement of theoretical imagery and powerful discursive operators with the empirical contexts of analysis.

Active audiences and everyday life

Only a few years later, and in a similar theoretical conjuncture, researchers affiliated with cultural studies turned to the project of researching television reception. The ethnographic component of the research continued to be framed in a broader model of the social formation as the product of hegemonic consensus.

David Morley's research on the Nationwide audience is one of the first reception studies in this formation to claim an ethnographic orientation. As Morley writes, the study is "committed to a position that insists on the necessity of the 'empirical dialogue,' rather than the attempt to deduce audience positions or decodings from the text in an a priori fashion" (Morley *Nationwide* 22). Morley takes Hall's "encoding-decoding" model of reception as a framework within which to organize the research. In his articulation of the developing theory of hegemony with the problematic of reception, Hall proposes a

tripartite typology of interpretive positions that theorizes the possibility of preferred, negotiated or oppositional readings of a given text. Morley turns the encoding-decoding model into the basis of an empirical research project that couples a critical semiotic reading of an episode of Nationwide, the national news, with subsequent interviews of small groups of viewers who describe their experience of the program. The participants are categorized with regard to a relatively complex model of social position, taking account of professional status, gender and racial variables. Excerpts of interviews about the program form the basis of an analysis of decoding that seeks to correlate interpretive preferences with the social position of the viewer.

An important epistemological issue arises when we consider the work of the analytic framework that Morley borrows from Hall. By framing the ethnographic "data" in its terms, Morley constructs his findings in a way that allows the theoretical imagery associated with hegemony to organize the research. The problematic of hegemony already determines the type of questions that can be asked, the relevance of particular statements, and the interpretations that can be made. For instance, the concept of an oppositional reading makes possible interpretations that were simply regarded as erroneous in earlier models of the ideological determination of meaning. A powerful discursive operator appears here behind the *personnage* of "oppositional" reading; it is, of course, resistance, now sought in the relations of viewers to texts. The problematic of hegemony, in its practical application in the culturalist form of audience research, limits the questions that can be asked and constructs its accounts of reception around the same opposition of ideological incorporation and resistance. Although only the preferred readings are deduced "in an a-priori fashion" in practice, the analytical framework

structures the entire research, impinging upon the selection and interpretation of empirical findings.

Ultimately, ethnography furthers the aims of this formation by grounding the theory of hegemony in the talk of actual social subjects. The image of "the audience" as a set of real persons negotiating with or opposing hegemonic meanings is an early instance of the *personnage* of the active audience.

Nearly a decade after Morley's research, the active audience briefly becomes the dominant *personnage* of critical communication research and cultural studies of reception. As Morris argues, there is a "boom" in ethnographic studies of the ways in which audiences produce their own meanings and "pleasures" from popular culture. It is part of a postmodern, populist trend in research that, as Morris suggests, seeks to "derive its values from materials and conditions already available to people" (Morris *Banality* 23). Fiske situates this formation as part of "a general academic shift in interest away from the 'grand narrative' toward the particular [...]" entailing a shift in methodological perspective:

> As our understanding of these totalizing structures has become more sophisticated and more satisfying, so the realization is growing that this knowledge tells us only half the story, and of itself can only induce a pessimistic elitism. It requires an often contradictory, sometimes complementary, knowledge of the everyday practices by which subordinated groups negotiate these structures, oppose and challenge them, evade their control, exploit their weaknesses, trick them, turn them against themselves and their producers [...]. In this approach the shift of

> emphasis from structures to practices has resulted in the move from structural anthropology to cultural ethnography (Fiske *Reading* 33).

In Fiske's work we once again encounter the discursive operator of resistance, now operating in a rather more simplistic theorization of reception that emphasizes audience activity. The postmodern phase of the culturalist project continues to conceptualize the act of reception as the interpretation of a text by a socially positioned audience, although the notion of pleasure now supplements that of semiotic decoding. The critic is confronted with the problem of theorizing an alternative to automatic hegemonic incorporation. Against the determinations of text and social position, Fiske argues on behalf of the relative autonomy of the active audience to produce its own meanings.

> Cultural-ethnographic studies of television are increasingly showing that viewers make their own socially pertinent meanings out of the discursive resources of television, not in the structureless equality beloved of liberal pluralism, but always in a relationship of domination-subjugation, of power and resistance, of power from above and power from below (Fiske *Reading* 176).

The options are even more abstract than the ideal types theorized by Hall; the audience is now either passive in its incorporation or active in its resistance. If anything, the approach is more formalist than the earlier culturalism of Resistance Through Rituals. Accounts of audience activity take on meaning in relation to the opposing assumptions of audience passivity in critical theory.

In this critical conjuncture, activity and passivity operate as *personnages antipathiques*. The active audience is a *personnage* opposed (it is argued) to the passive

spectator theorized in Screen Theory and related researches into the textual and ideological construction of the spectator. An important epistemological issue is raised when the conceptual terrain covered by the opposition is collapsed, and one *personnage* of the pair becomes dominant. Fiske's work becomes a celebration of the activity, indeed the agency of the subject of popular culture, with no more than a cursory acknowledgement of its passivity within any form of social constraint. The *personnages* anti-pathiques reproduce the most debilitating dualism of agency/structure that much of contemporary social theory has sought to deconstruct or transcend. While he is certainly not alone in this tendency to plead on behalf of a particular *personnage*, Fiske takes the assumption of the "active" audience to a limit position within the culturalist theory of hegemony by declaring, in effect, the audience's independence in the cultural struggle over meaning.

> Television is not quite a do-it yourself meaning kit but neither is it a box of ready-made meanings for sale. Although it works within cultural determinations, it also offers freedoms and the power to evade, modify or challenge these limitations and controls (*Moments* 57).

At the point that he begins to dismiss the constraining "controls" of cultural determinations, Fiske comes close to breaking with the problematic of hegemony and moving towards total semiotic agency. At this limit position, resistance would no longer be an appropriate operator, since there would in principle be no source of semiotic domination to resist. Of course Fiske never quite goes so far as to step outside of the *personnages antipathiques* that legitimate his critical perspective. And his lead has been followed by many other critics and researchers. Activity/passivity remains one of the

most pervasive of the *personnages antipathiques* that structures research into reception although a number of critics have found fault with the figure of the active audience (see, for example, Budd et al., Morley *Active*, Cobley).

As Fiske's comments make clear, the active audience is often linked to the ethnographic perspective. What is its function in this discourse? Once again, ethnography works to ground the claims of the research in the facticity and particularity of the talk produced by actual participants. Such evidence can only be gathered within the ethnographic perspective. But in Fiske's account, there is the suggestion that ethnography *necessarily* uncovers resistant practices. There is a dubious condensation of the level of analysis preferred within ethnography and the political assumptions of populist audience theory. All of these oppositions tend to be condensed so that ethnography is assumed to be the privileged method of study for the elucidation of audience activity that necessarily has a political significance, as resistant or oppositional. Moores suggests something of the same when he endorses ethnography as "giving voice to everyday interpretations from below" (Moores 4). Ethnography itself, through its opposition to more "structural" and theoretical critical approaches, takes on a certain value.

Perhaps the greatest liability of the approach is the overweening privilege that is accorded to the *personnage* of the active audience, to the extent that the empirical moment of the analysis is subordinated to the figure of resistant activity. The investment of certain critical discourses in this *personnage* is such that it skews the structuring relevances and values of the ethnographic project towards the demonstration of audience activity. In Fiske's discussion of work by Lewis and Dahlgren, there comes a moment when the ethnographic evidence of multiple interpretations of a news item is not then

linked, as Fiske would have it, to the *personnage* of the active audience. He then argues that "we must beware of allowing the ethnographic perspective on a single moment to evacuate this moment from the larger perspective of the experience of, and possible resistance to, social power of which it is necessarily a part" (*Television* 305). It seems that the ethnographic perspective so ardently endorsed is easily abandoned when it fails to confirm the assumptions of the *personnage* of an active audience. Clearly, Fiske's priorities lie with the assertion of his general theoretical position rather than with the specificities uncovered in ethnography.

In Fiske's later work we encounter another powerful *personnage* that is frequently linked with ethnography; "the everyday" as it is articulated in the concepts of everyday practices or everyday life. The everyday would appear to reference the concrete contexts of reception with which ethnography is supposed to engage. Yet while connoting the quotidian and the concrete, the everyday is also a discursive operator with a specific role to play in the discourses of cultural studies. Fiske describes everyday life in terms that are consistent with his view of the active audience:

> Everyday life is constituted by the practices of popular culture, and is characterized by the creativity of the weak in using the resources provided by a disempowering system while refusing to submit to that power. The culture of everyday life is best described through metaphors of struggle or antagonism [...]. These antagonisms, these clashes of social interests [...] are motivated primarily by pleasure: the pleasure of producing one's own meanings of social experience and the pleasure of avoiding the social discipline of the power bloc (Fiske *Understanding* 47).

Far from a simple designation of the concrete, the everyday is equated with a series of operators condensed in the *personnage* of the popular. As I argued in the previous chapter, the popular as an observable set of cultural practices and texts is often condensed with the popular as the theorized locus of resistance to various forms of hegemonic domination. In Fiske's perspective the everyday is involved in a similar condensation that works to displace the term as it designates a context of activity for ethnographic research, and instead assimilates it to a general theoretical position on semiotic agency. This particular condensation has consequences for research that are similar to its predecessors. It subordinates ethnography to the reproduction of a general theoretical position that is so abstract that it supports broad generalizations in complete disregard for the variability of everyday practices. While they may at times be cunning or challenging, everyday practices are certainly not necessarily resistant.

When Fiske and other critics refer to the everyday, they are often invoking a formation of social theory established by Lefebvre and elaborated most influentially by de Certeau. In The Practice of Everyday Life de Certeau draws the distinction between two sorts of practices, "strategies" and "tactics" that together compose everyday life. Strategies tend to reproduce existing relations of power, serving institutional interests. On the other hand, the tactic is a practice of appropriating the resources at hand: "Lacking its own place, lacking a view of the whole, limited by the blindness (which may lead to perspicacity) resulting from combat at close quarters, limited by the possibilities of the moment, a tactic is organized by the absence of power [...]" (de Certeau 38). The concept of tactic seems to try to capture, once again, the resistant activity of the *personnage* that appropriates the resources of mass culture or ideology to make its own meanings. The

opposition of strategy to tactic replicates the opposition of incorporation and resistance that is one of the structuring *personnage antipathiques* of cultural studies. Little wonder that de Certeau's *personnages* have been highly influential in this discipline. The everyday as the site of tactical practices has been widely applied, for instance, to interpret the appropriative activity of fans that not only consume television programs but also produce their own narratives using characters or ideas "poached" from the series. Jenkins's work on Star Trek fans makes obvious use of this concept. De Certeau, Jenkins writes,

> perceives popular reading as a series of "advances and retreats, tactics and games played with the text", as a type of cultural bricolage through which readers fragment texts and reassemble the broken shards according to their own blueprints, salvaging bits and pieces of the found material in making sense of their own social experience. Like the poachers of old, fans operate from a position of cultural marginality and weakness. Like other popular readers, fans lack direct access to the means of commercial production. [...] Fans must beg the networks to keep their favorite shows on the air, must lobby producers to provide desired plot developments or to protect the integrity of favorite characters (Jenkins 27).

In focusing on the observable practices of fans, Jenkins makes an even stronger claim for audience activity than Fiske's stance on interpretation. The shift in focus extends the object of study outside the limits established by the model of reception as a semiotic relation between text and reader. The practices designated as tactics would only come to critical attention in the ethnographic perspective. Yet like the evidence of audience

activity, tactics are overdetermined by a general theoretical position on the empowerment of the subordinate actor. There is a typical slippage from everyday life as the site of mundane, concrete practices that are the object of ethnographic study, and the everyday as the dialectical interplay of strategies and tactics. This results in the same sort of condensation of the popular and the *personnage* of resistance, whereby ethnography simply confirms the a-priori assumption of audience activity. The liability of this approach is, of course, that when researchers conceptualize a practice as a tactic they are already using an operator to project a politics for that practice, without consideration for its actual consequences.

It seems ill-advised to establish a single pair of operators to frame every object of analysis, before engaging with the specific context of the research to see what relations are worth studying. When reception, or the everyday, are framed as the site of struggle between competing social interests, whatever else might be going on there recedes into the background while the *personnages* of incorporation and resistance do combat. The abstraction of the operators consistently evacuates the specific phenomena that appear within the ethnography. Nor does it seem advisable to assume that a method such as ethnography will always necessarily produce a particular figure of audience, such as the active audience, since this tends to turn the goals of the research into the demonstration of the validity of that *personnage*.

Feminist reading and resistance

Most of the examples reviewed above operate in a theoretical régime that conceptualizes power relations from an essentially Marxist perspective. Of course different critical research formations have treated different forms of power. Ethnography

has been a vital part of the feminist strategy in researching "women's genres," of popular literature and television. Feminist critics have been concerned to interpret audience activity within a theory of patriarchal power, and here again, ethnography has been pulled into the orbit of powerful discursive operators.

Janice Radway's Reading the Romance is a significant text in a formation of "reader-response" research that emerged, much as the cultural studies research did, as an alternative to literary forms of criticism. It uses ethnography to investigate some of the social relations implicated in the consumption of romance novels, observing and interviewing a network of readers organized by Dot, a sales clerk and authority on romance novels, who is an important mediator of the women's tastes and practices. Radway takes a feminist stance in her interpretation of the social and political significance of reading romance that implicitly valorizes the genre and the pleasures of its audience as forms of resistance:

> Ethnographic investigation, for instance, has led to the discovery that Dot and her customers see the act of reading as combative and compensatory. It is combative in the sense that it enables them to refuse the other-directed social role prescribed for them by their position within the institution of marriage (Radway 211).

Radway's notion of combative and compensatory reading frames the practice in terms *personnages antipathiques* of resistance and incorporation. Radway's argument is that reading romance offers compensation for a social experience of marriage that is invested in an ideology of romantic love, but that in reality fails to fulfill its promise. Women readers compensate for the disappointment and drudgery of their actual existence

by reading idealized fictions based in the same ideology that contributes to their oppression. Although patriarchal power is the basis of women's social position in marriage, Radway refuses to condemn the practice of romance reading as complicit with women's oppression in a direct way. On the contrary, she finds that reading romances provides women with an activity of their own and an opportunity to combat the demands of their social role and of cultural hierarchies of taste that dismiss the romance. In a move characteristic of cultural studies in its "anti-elitist" strategy, Radway's interpretation raises the possibility of incorporation, but rejects that interpretation in favor of a figure of resistance.

Although her account thus avoids the most dismissive tendencies of critical evaluation, it nonetheless totalizes a category of women's experience that belies the "possibility for perceiving conflict and contradiction" that is claimed on behalf of ethnographic research (Radway 211). Although ethnography typically makes weak claims to generalizability from empirical data, Radway's critical frame is based on a much broader theory of structural and institutional oppression of women that is obviously general in its scope and implications. The general theoretical position displaces the more specific reports of practices and experiences that are produced in the empirical moment of the research.

The way that this displacement operates, in this case, is through the mediation of a psychologistic model of reading and responding to texts that is ultimately determined by social conditions. Radway warns us early on that her ethnographic account of the meaning of reading to her particular research subjects

> does not stop with a simple reiteration of their folk theories for such behavior. Beginning first from an anthropological perspective that assumes that cultural rituals also carry covert or tacit meanings in addition to those that are explicitly recognized, I have attempted to infer from the women's conscious statements and observable activities other unacknowledged significances and functions that make romance reading into a highly desirable and useful action in the context of these women's lives (Radway 9).

A psychologistic notion of meaning and emotional need is called on to legitimate the claims of the analysis when ethnographic interpretation passes from description to explanation, as when Radway argues that "the act of reading fulfills certain basic psychological needs for women that have been induced by the culture and its social structures [...]" (112). Yet doesn't this risk discarding the primary objective of ethnographic research, to uncover the reader's meanings, substituting in their place an evaluative notion of social experience as determined by social position? Interpreting unacknowledged experience allows the interpreter to assert almost anything, regardless of the subject's reported experience. It is an invitation to project critical assumptions into the void left by interiority. A hermeneutic logic is taken to its limits in the interpretation of "unacknowledged" experience, at which point it is displaced by quite a different level of analysis when the "function" of reading is interpreted.

When Radway's method shifts to a functionalist explanation of reading romance (which in some ways appears to return to the generalities of the "uses and gratifications" perspective) she begins to argue on behalf of an ontological figure of the reader. The

personnage of the "woman reader" explains the popularity of the romance by condensing psychological assumptions about unmet emotional needs with political assumptions about the social experience of all women in the social conditions fostered by the institution of marriage. Since the needs that Radway thematizes are simply a reflection of the social position of women in the institution of marriage, explanation is based largely on theoretical assumptions, not on the particular practices of reading turned up in the ethnographic research. First the method constructs a level of analysis that encompasses the unconscious, and then it fills this blank space with the assumptions of a general theory of women's oppression. The *personnage* displaces the actual practices of ethnographically observed readers with the "combative" reading practices of an ontological figure of the woman reader. The specificity of actual practices are effaced when they are framed as resistance to dominant cultural meanings and identities.

Another work of ethnographic research that mobilizes this powerful set of discursive operators is Mary Ellen Brown's Soap Opera and Women's Talk. Brown theorizes both an "active" pleasure for women in the soap opera genre, when soaps reinforce or confirm the knowledge of a "women's culture"; and a "resistive" pleasure when women recognize the costs of taking up the dominant reading offered by the text and act against it, forming alternative interpretations. Through the construction of mutual interpretations in conversation, interpretations that may be as simple as sharing derisive laughter, women use texts for their own pleasures and purposes, including the rejection of dominant cultural representations that are assumed to be encoded within the programs. Brown argues that rather than contribute to women's subordination, soap operas support social networks in which speech becomes a form of "resistive pleasure".

Brown advocates ethnography for the study of audience response and activity in constructing a "spoken text" of their own interpretations. Like the creative activity of Jenkins's Star Trek fans, the concept of the spoken text extends the object of study beyond the model of reception suggested in the imagery of the text-reader relation. It draws attention to the fact that important constructions of meaning occur in conversations long after the theorized moment of reception. No form of textual analysis could predict this activity. Ethnography is thus naturalized as the only possible method to discover the meanings and identities that are constructed in the spoken text, after the initial moment of reception. Yet if the method is legitimated by the particularity of the research object, the method itself works to legitimate a more general theoretical position on the audience's activity and its resistance to hegemonic incorporation. As Brown argues:

> Resistive pleasure theorizes audiences as being powerful in themselves and requires that the methodology of research allow such theorization. Much of the debate about audiences in cultural studies and communication studies in general has to do with the concept of active rather than passive audiences. Obviously these critics doing ethnographic work conceptualize the audience as active. The ethnographer, to some degree, shapes the way that audiences are perceived to speak; however, ethnographers also allow audiences to talk back to the critic (Brown 175).

Brown's statement reiterates the condensation of the methodological perspective and the political assumptions of the formation. There is a notable regularity, in which a relation of dependence, or an articulation, is established between the ethnographic perspective and the essential truth of the audience or subculture in its resistance to ideological

domination. Ethnography, it is argued, always delivers evidence of appropriation, tactical activity and resistance. Consequently, Brown's position constructs something like a general category of discourse that is automatically "within the true" of the critical perspective: Women literally talk themselves out of the dominant ideology. Women's speech is assumed to be inherently counter-ideological and always resistant. Once again the ethnographic perspective is subordinated to the powerful discursive operator of resistance.

The liability for projects of social analysis is that the articulation is both unwarranted by fact and epistemologically disabling. Research becomes the elaborate reiteration of ontological assumptions. Rather than engaging with the heterogeneity of actual contexts of research, which inevitably produce partial contradictions of such abstract theoretical assumptions, the formation celebrates the activity of an ontological figure of agency that is legitimated by ethnography.

Discursive regularities in audience and subcultural ethnography

The trajectory that I have constructed here demonstrates a consistent pattern, involving the displacement of the ethnographic perspective by a powerful discursive operator and its attendant theoretical imagery. When cultural practices are framed within critical theories of everyday life or the popular as an anti-hegemonic formation, they are assimilated to a pair of *personnages antipathiques*. Practices are displaced by operators such as strategies or tactics, and figured more generally as instances of incorporation or resistance, figuring an inherent capacity for agency in the face of social or discursive determinations. The various *personnages* of readers, audiences and subcultural subjects

that populate these accounts are assimilated to the persona of the agent, actively resisting various forms of domination and oppression.

We should not forget that each discursive formation is a régime of power/knowledge, mobilized in disciplinary politics in which researchers stake out a new terrain of study and legitimate their activities. Brunsdon has argued that the construction of the feminist critic "necessitated the construction of a non-feminist other" making research on soap opera audiences the "primary site for the constitution of the key personae of feminist television research: the feminist and her other, the housewife" (Brunsdon *Feminist* 87). Constructing such ontological *personnages* gives critics the opportunity to secure for themselves the enunciative authority that accrues to critical perspectives that are increasingly based in differences of identity rather than class. Critics have a vested interest in particular discursive operators and *personnages*, for whom they often come to function as advocates. The notion of resistance provides an optimistic rallying point that promises an easy way out of the dour assessment of popular cultural practices in critical theory. If earlier critical perspectives tended to universalize the determined nature of the subject, regardless of what the particular source of determination was, the populist formation of media critics invests the other pole, that of agency, in equally universalizing terms.

These critical assessments are based on a polarized model of determination and agency that operates at a high level of abstraction, and displaces the actual practices of reception in favor of one or the other of a pair of *personnages antipathiques*. Each formation tends to establish a single determination, or a single level of mediation, as the only level of relevance. Given an identical strip of activity, such as the mundane decision

of what television program to watch, the incorporation pole might frame the practice in terms of consumption and figure the subject as a passive consumer, while the resistance pole frames the same practice as a communicative relation and figures the subject as an active decoder of messages. Each perspective operates in isolation of the other, universalizing a particular operator or level of analysis, with the consequence that their evident contradictions need never be recognized, much less reconciled. The net result is that the relations of agency and determination are approached in a manner that obviates the need to account for actual practices. Apparently objective questions about what audiences do with texts, or what subcultures do with music, clothes, scooters and drugs, are displaced into the entrenched poles of *personnages antipathiques*, and the answer to any question that might be asked seems determined in advance by the critical sympathies and disciplinary affiliation of the researcher.

The potential of ethnography to confront us with the limit-less contexts of research made accessible in moments of empirical research is deferred, if not completely disabled. There are hints of this potential in the trajectory, as when Fiske and Brown extend the orthodox imagery of reception to encompass "secondary speech," the processes of interpretation and social rearticulation that follow the theorized moment of reception. Such revisions of theoretical imagery are of the utmost importance in extending our knowledge and breaking with the epistemological images that constrain research. However, any advantage procured by breaking with orthodoxy is compromised by the use of the new concepts to further the same old populist agenda. Speech is treated as an inherently oppositional medium, the locus of "semiotic democracy" that is denied by the formal communicational qualities of the mass media. It is the best evidence

(indeed, the only evidence offered) of the true meanings of the program for the individuals interviewed, meanings that invariably demonstrate a departure from the theorized normative rules of decoding and media use. This use of speech condenses an a-priori political significance into what was already a problematic operator, compromised by the strong assumptions of presence inherent in the interpretation of speech as the direct evidence of the other's experience. The uncritical use of speech to confirm general theoretical positions is one of the continuing liabilities of ethnography.

This trajectory allows us to identify a significant regularity in critical practice, when the displacements of discursive operators are made visible. It is at the moment that the speech or practices of ethnographically observed individuals are "placed" within the more general accounts of social life required to make critical evaluations, that the specificity of this "local knowledge" is displaced. Each formation of critical research enacts a displacement in terms of the discursive operators of social domination that it privileges. "Patriarchal power" or a "hegemonic taste formation" are the ontological figures of critical discourses against which *personnages* of resistance are constructed. The operator of resistance only takes on meaning in relation to one of these social ontologies. One or both of these *personnages antipathiques* are then brought into the ethnographic research account to appraise specific events for their political significance. The problem is, these abstract theoretical concepts tend to displace what they are supposed to analyze. For instance, in Radway's ethnography of romance readers, there is a slippage between the ethnographically described meanings of the "act of reading" and the evaluations condensed in Radway's critical conception of the social institution of marriage. A functionalist logic of explanation displaces the ethnographic perspective in

order to assert the primacy of "patriarchal power" and the agency uncovered in women's resistance. This is the moment at which an epistemological régime comes to displace the actual situations observed in ethnographic research and over-writes them with its proprietary limits and operators.

Rather than realizing its epistemological potential, ethnography more often works as a discursive operator itself, legitimating claims to knowledge about marginalized subcultures and audiences. The authority wielded by ethnography is based on its realistic narrative conventions and its assumed proximity to the lived experience of research subjects and researcher alike. It shares many of the liabilities of other hermeneutic approaches to social analysis – abstraction, subjectivism, lack of evidence, a vulnerability to rhetorical manipulation and theoretical ventriloquism – but these faults are overshadowed by the "value" of "being there," the promise of immediacy secured by the presence of the researcher in the field. At the same time, the operator gains enunciative authority through an opposition with theoreticist approaches. Cultural researchers constantly play ethnography off a supposedly more "abstract" semiotic approach, in order to legitimate their projects and findings. The naïve realism that underlies both of these enunciative strategies is the general condition of the work of ethnography as a discursive operator. Ethnography is able to produce the terms and figures of critical theories of social agency in the "concrete," capitalizing on the evident facticity of ethnographic experience.

The capacity of the ethnographic perspective to contradict and destabilize theoretical orthodoxies is unfortunately evacuated by the populist critical impulse to construct *personnages* of the agent, and to celebrate the activities of this marginalized

personnage. If we are to utilize the potential of the ethnographic perspective, we must find a way to step out of these discursive operators. What have later reconstructions of ethnography done to work around these liabilities?

Reconstructing theoretical concepts for ethnographic research

One tendency that we might point to is the reconstruction of discursive operators from other epistemological régimes to work more effectively in ethnographic projects of research. Researchers appropriating objects of study from other formations work to undermine the oppositions that sustain discursive divisions and sectorial politics, but care must be taken to reconstruct operators appropriate to particular methods and projects. Jackie Stacey, for example, elaborates an ethnographic approach to cinematic identifications (among other practices), working across a central division in research into spectatorship that has generally opposed a more empirically oriented cultural studies to a formalist film studies.

While the ethnographic research into television reception was being developed in cultural studies, a highly influential formation in feminist film theory elaborated something like a general theory of cinematic spectatorship based on structuralist and psychoanalytic models drawn from Freud and Lacan. The formation holds that both cinematic representations of women and the identifications offered by the medium have what amounts to an ideological function. As Stacey remarks of this formation: "Identification itself has been seen as a cultural process complicit with the reproduction of dominant culture by reinforcing patriarchal forms of identity" (132). This formation in film theory constructs a very broad domain of discourse that is simply presented as outside of the true, as ideological and automatically oppressive. The interpretation is

based on what amounts to a formal definition of ideology that is always operating in the film text. It would appear that just about any film could be subjected to a such a critique, made in similar terms; the generality of the theory invites researchers to pass over the specificity of particular films, as well as the actual practices that viewers bring to them.

Stacey is interested in doing ethnographic research into the cinematic identifications of a group of women viewers. Her project invites the use of the operator "identification," but she finds a number of limitations in film theory conceptions of identification for her own project. As she writes in response to some of these theoretical formulations, "[...] identification is conceptualized here as a singular and rigid process which fixes the spectator as the subject of the filmic discourse" (133). Stacey is obliged to modify the operator, to make it accessible to interview-based ethnographic inquiry and to detach it from the universalist and a-historical discourse of film theory. Identification must be reconstructed: It can no longer be theorized as an unconscious process, analogous with psychoanalytic theories of infantile identifications, since it must be understood and revealed within the speech of participating women, who offer their recollections of film stars. Modifying the operator of identification also entails changing the figure of the person who identifies with the film. Stacey displaces the structuralist *personnage* of the spectator with another *personnage* whose traits are more suited to the kind of historically specific analysis that she wants to undertake, a *personnage* reminiscent of the social subject of cultural studies.[1] Nor can identification continue to be thought of as a singular process. When Stacey begins to analyze the evidence of speech uncovered in her ethnographic research, she is confronted with a much broader range of practices of identification, far more varied than those theorized in film theory. She

constructs more specific categories of analysis such as "identificatory practices", "extra-cinematic identifications" and various forms of "intimacy between femininities" (171-172).

In making these modifications, Stacey is led to specify the operator so that it offers the kind of analytical distinctions that she can use in describing the historically specific experiences of her research subjects. Instead of constructing an alternative general theory about a historical or class-determined *personnage* rather than a psychically determined one, she works to capture the specificity of her respondents' identifications. She specifies an analytic framework that is more effective at linking reports to the broader, historically specific contexts in which the social determinations that surround the film text might be accounted for. Unlike the film theorists, her engagement with filmic spectatorship does not seek to ratify a general theoretical principle. She does not simply confirm a foregone critical and political conclusion by reference to textual features. The empirical research and the consequent theoretical specification that she performs allows her to formulate an extended typology of cinematic identifications that is conceptually and historically more specific than her initial perspective could account for. These categories of experience need not stand as ideal types, but rather could form the basis of further elaborations in future research, much as Stacey herself has done.

The displacement of speech

Stacey has significantly extended the limits established around a particular operator. Nonetheless, her work remains squarely within the limits of mainstream ethnographic practice that takes speech as its primary form of evidence. Another strategy

displaces this emphasis on speech with a focus on discourse, suggesting how the ethnographic perspective (if not necessarily the practice of field work) might be articulated with interpretive models more attuned to discursive mediations. Brunsdon displaces speech and extends the limits of the ethnographic perspective along another vector by analyzing practices and their insertion within régimes of social discourse, allowing her to "move away from a concentration on the verbal" (189).

Brunsdon's project extends the trajectory established by Resistance Through Rituals, focusing on local controversies and their relation to broader social hierarchies of taste. The research is organized around a public controversy concerning the installation of satellite dish antennae in Britain in 1989. The approach focuses on a practice, but it remains interpretive. As Brunsdon argues, acquiring a satellite dish can "legitimately [be] read as an act which signals a desire, a connection with something that these dishes are understood to mean, or connote or promise" (193). The controversy provides a surface from which to interpret the politics of the conjuncture by asking what the practice of dish erection means, in terms of broader formations of taste and power. Brunsdon remarks that earlier culturalist work in this tradition "has, despite appearances, a strongly formalist element, a certain insouciance about 'content'" (Brunsdon 190) that needs to be rectified. Brunsdon demonstrates that we might do a better job of making sense of particular local events, while at the same time linking the specificity of analysis to broader relations of power in a given conjuncture, by articulating the ethnographic perspective with a mapping of the discursive positions that construct the controversy. As she writes:

> How individuals position themselves in relation to these differentially available circulating discourses at particular times and in particular

> contexts cannot be deduced, and can only be investigated through particular ethnographies [...]. However researchers cannot do anything with these particular local knowledges unless there is an attempt to apprehend a wider discursive field [which] requires some mapping or constitution of these contexts (199).

Brunsdon's strategy is complementary to ethnography, which remains necessary to engage with the 'event' of actual individuals taking up discursive practices; and it offers a strategy for relating the local knowledges turned up in ethnography to broader contextual determinations through the mapping of discursive positions. The combination of methods that Brunsdon proposes does a better job of relating the specificity of localized practices to the more general hierarchies of taste circulating in the conjuncture.

This strategy allows Brunsdon to step out of the operations associated with speech, which is the site of a number of crippling condensations, and to establish a complementary analytical practice that contends with some of the liabilities of ethnography itself.

Curtailing the uses of speech is probably a good thing. As Fiske's use of it makes clear, reported speech can be rhetorically constructed to support theoretical arguments at a high level of abstraction. The culturalist ethnographies tend to conflate speech with experience and discount their own role in reconstructing speech as evidence, using the "presence" of speech to rhetorical advantage. More drastically, speech is condensed with the popular in Fiske and Brown's use of ethnography. Reported speech comes with a guarantee of its political status: It always attests to resistance. Speech is severely compromised, then, by assumptions of presence and of its necessary political

significance. Theoretical steps to bypass speech offer potential gains for empirical research.

Brunsdon proposes instead to pursue the aims of empirical critical analysis through the study of practices and their implication in discursively constructed contexts. Her strategy promises to improve critical practice at the moment when specific events are appraised for their political significance, which I have argued is the moment when discursive operators tend to displace the local practices and voices uncovered in ethnography. The "placing" of practices or texts by literary critics and critical ethnographers always involves the reconstruction of a context in which the object can be situated and its political significance assessed. All too often, the context is poorly specified and presented as objective fact, when it is motivated by theoretical imagery. The institutional context of marriage that Radway uses to frame women's romance reading or the context of the hegemonic taste formation that frames subcultural practices are clearly images drawn from normative social theory. The kind of assessments that they support are a-historical and abstract; the context is easily reduced to the source of constraint and determination against which the individual agent engages in resistance.

Following a wider conjuncturalist formation in cultural studies, Brunsdon proposes that the political significance of a text or practice cannot be deduced from such a-priori critical assumptions, but must instead be assessed with respect to the actual conditions of the conjuncture. Of course people resist; precisely what they are resisting and to what effect must now be explored in its complexity. In order to understand the wider stakes and the very specific positions of the controversy that arose around satellite dishes, Brunsdon argues that the field of discourses which construct the controversy must

be mapped. These discursive positions provide Brunsdon with the key articulations between practices and a contextual interpretation of a hegemonic taste formation specific to this particular controversy.

This form of conjunctural analysis is useful to emphasize the embeddedness of action in social contexts that both produce and constrain agency. There is a significant theoretical gain in turning to the conjuncture, because it invites critical researchers to make explicit the models of context on which they base their assessments; these models are generally more specific and less prone to overdetermination by abstract discursive operators. The perspective does not support the creation of *personnages* that guarantee their agency. The mapping of contexts becomes the basis of "placing" the object of study, the operation that makes possible an interpretation of its political significance.

The conjuncturalist strategy promises to do a better job of relating the local knowledge acquired through the ethnographic perspective with the more general dimensions of determination and agency addressed by the critical disciplines. Brunsdon's strategy suggests that ethnography might profitably be combined with other methods to provide a more nuanced rendering of contexts and the activities of individuals within them. Researchers in cultural studies have increasingly turned to contextual analysis as a means of combining methods and levels of analysis, as well as stepping out of the orthodox assumptions of reception research.

A multi-method approach to contextual research

The joint research project into domestic technologies headed by Morley and Silverstone uses a multi-method approach that includes an ethnographic component. For Morley: "Ethnography recommends itself not for a privileged contact with the real or

with a privileged perspective on the necessarily oppositional activities of the popular, but because it can [...] provide a substantive base for understanding the complexity of the issues" (Morley *Television* 195). Rather than conduct research through a single method, taking on all of the liabilities of a hermeneutic practice of ethnography, for instance, the team assembles a "methodological raft" specific to their project. Their research is based on a set of descriptions that are considerably thickened by the interplay of survey, interview and observational data that can be used to internally test and to validate findings.

The questions posed by the research team are framed in terms of relationships, which works against the premature closure that comes from naming a powerful operator as an object of study. They seek to understand

> [...] the relationship of families, media and technology as systems, both intrinsically – that is with regard to the internal structure of family life – and extrinsically – that is with regard to the relations between families and the wider society expressed through neighbourhood, work, networks of kin and friendship, and of course media and information use. [...] We were interested in the role these technologies had in sustaining – what we have come to see as crucial – the family's integrity: its own security in time and space (Silverstone, Morley and Hirsch 208).

Rather than taking a more abstract operator of reception or consumption as the basis for problematization and interpretation, their approach asks a series of more specific questions and names a number of more specific objects and contextual frames within which to conduct the analysis.

The central theoretical tool is the analytical model of the "moral economy" of the household. It allows the researchers to situate the practices of consumption that are observed or reported within a nested set of contexts.

> These practices have to be seen as situated within the facilitating and constraining micro-social environments of family and household interaction. These, in turn, must be seen as being situated in, but not necessarily determined by, those of neighbourhood, economy and culture, in which acts of consumption (of both texts and technologies) provide the articulating dimension (Morley195).

By suspending the usual analytical limits that are placed on the context of research, this perspective inspires researchers to ground their analyses in specific practices and to build outwards to consider their articulation of and within different levels of mediation. No particular level is assumed to be determinant. Instead, the relations among levels are of particular interest. Morley and Silverstone might ask how different "gendered" practices of media reception are articulated within households of varying economic means, for instance. The multi-leveled model works against the tendency of critical perspectives to universalize a single level of mediation as the only level of relevance before research even begins.

The model of the household and its moral economy - the varied relations it maintains with its intrinsic and extrinsic determinations - is a useful analytic concept because it is distinct from other discursive operators that name the relations between the people and the media (the popular, the masses, the everyday, the audience) and capable of being specified in the particular projects that have issued from the research. There is

nonetheless a danger in establishing a new discursive operator as an ontological horizon for research, in the *personnage* of the family. This tends to occur when teleological assumptions about "social processes" are brought into analysis through the assumptions that accompany the analytical model: "Through it we are attempting to address the ways in which families and households create and sustain their security, integrity and identity with the resources that are available to them [...] (Silverstone, Hirsch and Morley 225).

In an individually authored book on television and everyday life published concurrently with the joint project, Silverstone expands on the role envisioned for television (as perhaps the key domestic technology) in contributing to the "security, integrity and identity" of the subject in everyday life. Silverstone would like to provide an integrating framework for the heterogeneous analyses of audience produced in reception studies (and one presumes, in the multi-leveled descriptive work of the joint project with Hirsch and Morley). He situates television as technology and text within a phenomenological theory of social life drawn from Anthony Giddens and the psychoanalytic theory of D.W. Winnicott. Giddens views one of the motives that binds the subject into various processes of structuration as the fundamental need for "ontological security," the sense of a stable, reliable, trustable "world." The familiarity of the everyday contributes to the sustenance of the basic trust that is the precondition of social life, a disposition that is established in infancy by the care of parents and is gradually extended to other individuals and abstract systems in the course of development (Giddens 92-99). An important concept in the psychoanalytic theory of development employed by Giddens is Winnicott's "transitional object," initially a toy or a similar object that allows the child to remain secure in the absence of the caregivers. Winnicott

sees in this symbolic relation to the object the basis of "cultural experience" in later life, as a kind of soothing symbolic realm in which the ontological status and the origin of symbolic content is never questioned. Following Winnicott and Giddens, Silverstone argues that television is a transitional object that sustains a sense of ontological security through its ubiquitous and familiar presence in the everyday.

There are liabilities associated with establishing analysis on an ontological level that are clearly apparent here. Silverstone asks:

> How is it that such a technology and medium has found its way so profoundly and intimately into the fabric of our lives? How is it that it stays there? I believe that the answer to these two questions must rely to a significant extent on the way in which one comes to understand the nature of everyday life; and that an understanding of everyday life must in turn be premised on an understanding, however imperfect, of the conditions of its own possibility: that is, on an account of the preconditions for the possibility of social life as a whole (Silverstone 574).

This is clearly not a well constructed problem. The kind of question posed by Silverstone can only be answered with respect to an ontology of human being that evacuates the specificity of social relations. This entails a double liability for projects of social analysis. First, the question is posed at such an abstract level that it evacuates the actual practices of viewers from their rightful place in determining the answer. An interest in practice as the starting point of analysis is once again displaced, not by a theory of resistance, but by the *personnage* of the human being in need of ontological security. Yet this frame is too abstract to be of much analytical use; it fails to cut into

situated practice in a useful way. There is little difference between watching television and doing the dishes, for example, since they both function to promote ontological security. The second liability, then, is that this perspective returns to the habit of universalizing a simple model of determination, establishing an ontological horizon that makes every practice of reception into the satisfaction of a psychic need.

Questions posed on an ontological level invite theoretical answers. Silverstone is actually quite forthright in declaring that the answer to his question is found only in the "understanding of everyday life" that is chosen to explain the role of television in sustaining ontological security, rather than in the interpretation of practices. It is a claim that can only be validated by more theory. When he attempts to integrate the level of practice into his account by discussing the actual activities of viewers, the contradictions become clear:

> These economies [of programming and viewing choices] can of course themselves be understood as a response to the deeply felt needs of audiences and viewers for continuity, needs that are in turn made more pressing by virtue of the increasingly stressful or threatening world in which we live, a world which is, of course, for most of us only seen on television. So those needs are being massaged or reinforced by the programmes themselves which, in almost every case, are involved in the creation and mediation of anxiety and in its resolution (Silverstone 588).

It is an obvious confusion of levels to use instances of particular practices, of program content and choice, to argue on behalf of an ontological need for security. The statement tells us little of interest about program choice or reception, or about television

itself. As *personnages* of the abstract operator, the "transitional object," all practices tend to share the same ontological status. They all function to produce continuity in social life and provide the viewer with a sense of ontological security. But television content surely does not always assuage anxieties, and the level of practice cannot be integrated so simply into a social ontology and vice versa.

Because it works directly on an ontological level, this approach is not very useful for constructing specific objects of study that tell us something interesting about the social relations that can be traced around media use. As my consideration of Barthes's punctum demonstrated, a transitional object (or a "partial object" in Barthes's terminology) makes a poor object of analysis because it tends to obscure the specificity of the practices that are subsumed within its scope. The concept does not help us to draw the relevant distinctions that cut into social activity in an interesting way. If Silverstone's contribution is a faithful elaboration of the social ontology that underlies the analytical model of the "moral economy" of the household, one can only hope that this framework will be considerably specified or abandoned in the interpretation of the empirical research materials. Silverstone and Morley's project is an otherwise promising program of research that takes significant measures to contend with the liabilities of discursive operators. It would be a shame to handicap the project with an overly abstract analytic framework that reproduces the errors of the early culturalist and populist ethnographies.

Conclusion

These three trajectories in recent research locate and bypass the limits and limitations of the earlier models of ethnography in different ways. They suggest strategies

of theoretical reconstruction that already exist for contending with powerful discursive operators.

The principal source of displacement in the earlier trajectory of ethnography is the powerful operator of resistance. As a figure of social agency, practically a universal feature of this influential formation in critical social research, resistance figures a wide range of practices as politicized interventions whose political meanings are already guaranteed. The operator works at such a high level of abstraction that it tends to efface the specificity of actual practices and displaces them with various *personnages* of resistance.

The reconstructive trajectory favors operators that work at more local levels of abstraction. In her specification of the *personnage* of identification, Stacey offers the best evidence of this strategy. Film theory's notion of identification is based on psychoanalytic concepts that act as universals in a general theory of the psyche. A tendency towards abstraction is an inherent aspect of their logic. Stacey's strategy of specifying the operator in relation to the results of the ethnographic research counters this tendency towards abstraction. Her reconstruction of identification allows her to step out of the political assumptions condensed in the operator. In film theory, identification functions as a figure of mediation that guarantees its political effects – the production of "patriarchal forms of identity." Rather than developing an opposing figure of agency that might counter this perspective, Stacey avoids the *personnages antipathiques* of incorporation/resistance and reorients the operator towards detailing the various forms of identification suggested by the persons that she researched. She moves away from

general theories of determination or agency, to formulate a typology of more specific forms of identification.

These intermediate abstractions are useful to extend our knowledge of affective relations between spectators and stars beyond the limits of ideological critique, as Stacey does, and they might also be considered as one of the necessary conditions of more localized critical research into the effectivity of these particular relations in historically specific contexts. Building on Stacey's example, future researchers might ask questions about the effects of various forms of identification without knowing in advance which operators will be necessary to describe them, or which particular practices will emerge as having political significance and why. One may contend with the tendency of discursive operators to overdetermine the results of research by specifying them in the course of analysis, displacing the orthodox operators of abstract theoretical positions.

Brunsdon's strategy accomplishes much the same thing by dispersing the object of study into the context. She assumes that a new technology has no essential identity, no necessary political significance. Rather, the object is constituted within "the debates and discursive figures, encrusting/constituting a new object [...]" (197) and the various ways that persons position themselves within or against these discourses. This anti-essentialist approach helps her move away from the a-priori assumptions of much critical theory.

The reconstructive trajectory also displaces speech from its place at the very center of ethnographic research, resituating it as somewhat tangential to the contemporary projects of the trajectory. Speech no longer appears to provide adequate evidence for the claims that were once made on behalf of social experience. Morley and Silverstone continue to use ethnographic interviews to elicit speech from their subjects, but they also

use a wide range of alternative methodological tools, and they rather optimistically intend to build interpretations from several triangulated sources at once. In different ways, Radway and Brunsdon also run up against the limits posed by speech as the primary object of study, Radway stepping deeper into a functionalist logic of explanation while Brunsdon turns more suggestively to the interpretation of practices and discourse as a complement to ethnography (192).

The reconstructive trajectory disarticulates speech and resistance. Speech is no longer the necessary site of political resistance. Nor is speech treated in a hermeneutic manner, as transparent evidence of the subject's experience. Stacey establishes limits that exclude reference to the unconscious as an "expressive" principle, always operating outside of the discursive and beyond the possibility of demonstration or refutation. By resisting this appeal to a structural principle and grounding interpretation in practices (of spectatorship, of speaking about films, of erecting satellite dishes) interpretation becomes somewhat more rigorous. Practices pose a certain resistance to the overdetermination of discursive operators, and it becomes more difficult to project assumptions into the *personnages* of reader, audiences and marginalized subjects.

The reconstructive trajectory suggests that a contextualist formation is gaining influence in these domains of critical research. Contextualist perspectives work against the limits produced by abstract, universal discursive operators – resistance, identification, consumption – at the same time that they work against ontological *personnages*, such as active or needful audiences. In place of universals, they build analytical concepts and objects of inquiry that are specific to particular contexts. Rather than celebrating the agency of the active consumer of domestic technology, for instance, Morley and

Silverstone ground their research in models of contexts, or "facilitating and constraining micro-social environments," that allow them to reconstruct both agencies and determinations on a set of planes integrated into one model. They avoid the pitfalls of universalizing a single level of mediation and produce more nuanced accounts of domestic technologies and users.

Contextual strategies appear to be effective at contending with the displacements that typically occur when phenomena are "placed" or evaluated for their political significance. In the earlier trajectory of ethnography placing a practice, for instance, or a structure of feeling, generally means situating it in opposition to a privileged figure of oppression or hegemony–taste, prestige, patriarchy, capital, power. The object of study then becomes a *personnage* of the key operator. Its specific qualities become somewhat incidental, compared to its role in furthering the epistemological régime.

What placing a practice currently entails is locating the practice in a reconstructed context. By spelling out the context, these abstract universal operators are specified or displaced by more specific terms drawn from the conjuncture. They are more appropriate to the kinds of analyses that are advocated in an increasingly sociologistic formation of critical communication research.

The reconstructive strategies remain dissatisfying in some respects, particularly since they appear to privilege the cognitive aspects of social relations more than others. Speech, social discourse or economies of taste or consumption are tacitly assumed to be the relevant objects and levels of analysis. This assumption establishes limits that tend to exclude other levels of mediation from consideration. Yet surely the involvement of fans in their movie stars and dish erectors in their satellite antennae indicates that these things

matter to them in very particular ways. Attempts to deal with such levels in the earlier trajectory of ethnography, as in Radway's interpretation of "unacknowledged significances," most often introduce ontological *personnages* of readers and active audiences into research accounts. These *personnages* provide a site for the condensation of key critical assumptions about agency or social experience and the "real people" encountered in ethnographies, who often appear to simply exemplify general theoretical positions. These *personnages* lack the specificity required to help us make more useful distinctions. Silverstone's integrative *personnage* of the subject in need of ontological security is an unfortunate return to this type of figure in the reconstructive trajectory, but its limitations and liabilities make it unlikely to alter ethnographic practice. What is still lacking is an analytically useful way to deal with the specificity of extra-semiotic levels of mediation - of what matters to particular people in particular situations - and a framework to assess what its effects on other social relations might be. This blind spot persists, despite the profusion of interpretations of experience and the hermeneutic tendencies of recent ethnographies.

Finally, the effect that we should continue to work to produce through the use of ethnography, is to confront discursive operators and *personnages antipathiques* of high theory with the heterogeneous materiality of actual contexts of research. On this reading, the greatest contribution of ethnography is to upset the theoretical orthodoxies and confront field workers with limitless contexts of research, so that they may explicitly construct tools and levels of analysis adapted to the specificity of actual conditions. In this way ethnography can function as more than a discursive operator, more than simply a means to confirm theoretical assumptions.

ENDNOTES

[1] These personages have been an integral part of the legitimation of audience research. Cultural studies has traditionally been interested in class experience and the reception of popular culture. It has figured the audience as stratified by class before it is engaged in reception. The Nationwide studies developed the figure of the "actual" audience that went unexamined in textualist criticism. Brunsdon called this personage the social subject: "I would like to make a distinction between the subject positions that a text constructs, and the social subject who may or may not take these positions up. We can usefully analyze the "you" or "yous" that the text as discourse constructs, but we cannot assume that any individual audience member will necessarily occupy these positions" (Brunsdon *Crossroads: Notes* 13). The social subject has an experience that is determined by class, and later by gendered experience. It derives from a model of the social formation as always segmented by the these same distinctions. Viewing preference or "decoding" is always ultimately determined by social position. This personage is often contrasted with the "spectator" figured in theories of cinematic reception. Here the viewer is theorized as the subject that is inscribed in the cinematic text by the apparatus of representation and the psychic machinery of identification. The spectator as "personage" is no more than a set of "subject positions" that are determined by the text. The experience of the spectator is of course a moot point; it is outside the limits set by the structuralist model of textual relations and subject positions. Cultural studies theorists often complain that this personage offers no resources for resisting the constitutive power of ideology.

CHAPTER 4: IDENTITY, AND THE "PERSONNAGE" OF THE AGENT IN CULTURAL STUDIES

In this chapter I analyze the conceptual work of a model of mediation based on the operator "discursive practice." This model has gained theoretical purchase in feminist political philosophy and queer theory, and has also been used in cultural studies and post-colonial theory.

More specifically, I want to look at the gains and liabilities of the model as it functions in anti-essentialist conceptions of identity and social agency for projects of social analysis. My argument is that criticism dedicated to political intervention produces figures of identity as the agents or agencies of social change. We produce identity as an object of knowledge within a problematic that articulates identity and agency to produce accounts of social action. These narratives derive from competing régimes of critical theory that condition the meanings given to identity and the specific conceptual work that it is required to perform.

Critical analyses of social and political activity are conditioned by these régimes, as well as by more general discourses and political practices. Various conjunctural developments have both reinforced the importance of identity and drawn various political conceptions of identity into question. An anti-essentialist formation in feminist theory has rejected notions of agency grounded in consciousness or common identity altogether; other *personnages* based on semiotic and discursive tropes come to ground analysis. The model put forth in post-structuralist feminist political theory displaces the earlier conceptions of the social agent and sociality with the operator "discursive practice."

We are at a point at which identity and subjectivity have largely been abandoned as positive determinations in analytic accounts of the social formation. Is the meaning of anti-essentialism that theoretical gains accrue from the evacuation of the subject from social theory? I would rather argue that it encourages the displacement of a conception of the subject as agent, opening up the possibility of more specific analyses of the interplay of identities and power by unseating the orthodox linkage of agency and identity in the problematic. The anti-humanism inherent in the strategies of certain anti-essentialist theorists is a liability, in as much as it limits our ability to engage with the specificity of human sociality.

Figures of identity and agency

In this section I want to discuss the structuring assumptions in the principle formations from which varying conceptions of identity and agency issue; and I want to describe some of the direct challenges to orthodox conceptions of identity that issue from the anti-essentialist formation.

Social theorists produce figures of identity within epistemological régimes that condition the formation of objects of research, and determine how they will work in logics of inquiry. Feminist political philosophy is conditioned by the epistemological régimes that traverse it. Some of the specific oppositions can be discerned in the designation of disciplinary subfields such as feminist materialism, and post-structuralist feminism. This domain is also conditioned by the activity of pairs of conceptual *personnages antipathiques*. These include some of the general oppositions that have conditioned other domains analyzed in this thesis, such as empiricism/theoreticism and of course structure/agency.

In addition, feminist debates are framed by more specific oppositions, notably oppression/resistance and essentialism/anti-essentialism. While the latter opposition is primarily a distinction in theoretical politics, the binary of oppression/resistance is ever present in the generalist discourses of feminist and subaltern politics. These are concepts that are implicated in political projects that vary from first wave "consciousness raising" to utopian projects of textual insurrection that advocate subaltern vocabularies. No doubt this opposition also captures something of the experience of power relations. The pair of *personnages antipathiques* thus claims a place in epistemological discourse due to its importance in theorizing the grounds of resistance and the type of interventions that can be made.

There is a central division in current theorizations of identity based on the distinction between essentialist and anti-essentialist preferences. The opposition is at once a theoretical distinction and a major *clivage* in the discursive field. Anti-essentialism is defined by its critiques of orthodox conceptions of identity, particularly its rejection of the "origin" of identity and the *personnage* of the integral subject. But it is also a discursive formation that is defined by the politics of theory, the relative power and credibility of régimes of knowledge.

The two models have different ways of construing the relation of identity to agency and subjectivity. In the first model it is assumed that there is some ontological basis of identity, an "essence" derived from a common experience. The *personnage* of the Social Subject encountered in previous chapters is one such conception. It locates the source of the reader's identity prior to the encounter with social or mediated texts. In early feminist research, identity organizes and validates critical accounts of women's

oppression and political action. Radical feminism, for example, posited an ontological difference between men and women and suggested that opposition to patriarchal oppression might take the form of the validation of an ontological women's difference.

Identity is both defined by others, as a social identity; and lived by the self as the experience of that identity. Essentialist models of identity therefore often extend into the subjective domain. Identity works as a psycho-social marker that designates both the subjective and the objective dimensions of social relations. The concept of identity in this formation extends unproblematically to consciousness and other aspects of interiority, including structures of feeling, for example.

The anti-essentialist formation rejects the notion that there is any intrinsic basis of identity in social being. It emphasizes that identity is produced in its representation, and that any unity implied by the concept covers a conflicted and contradictory field of what must be considered a political activity in its own right – the discursive constitution of identities. The régime constitutes its objects differently. From identity as the psycho-social source of agency, the focus shifts to identity as a discursive category that delimits social and cultural positions of agency. The régime takes on different problems, particularly the issue of how identities may empower or disempower the persons who are marked by them. Debate around this opposition is typically reflexive; anti-essentialists are concerned with the way that their categories produce figures of identity that have their own effects.

In this context, gender becomes a key concept of debate and contestation; it undermines essentialist notions of women's identity by theorizing a representational system that produces gendered difference. Anti-essentialist notions of political action are

also different; they often involve interventions into discursive practice rather than more familiar images of collective action.

The anti-essentialist intervention is all the more relevant in a political conjuncture in which identity politics makes the issue of where one is situated in a field of social differences more important to critical social theory. Anti-essentialism has its own conjunctural determinations that spur the development of theory. As identity politics develop, cultural studies and feminist political philosophy, as well as emerging formations like queer theory, require theorizations that can accommodate the many forms of difference within the field of social identity.

Rather than accepting a simple notion of a homogeneous category of "women," anti-essentialist theorists construct models that can account for the differences within identities. The *personnage* of fragmentation often appears in their models of identity as a way of accommodating such distinctions. As Donna Haraway enthuses about the *personnage* of the cyborg, "there are also great riches for feminists in explicitly embracing the breakdown of clean distinctions between organism and machine and similar distinctions structuring the Western self." (174) The *personnage* of fragmentation allows anti-essentialists to consider the relations and contradictions between different identities at the same time. For example, some attempts to account for the specificity of lesbian identities suggest that sex and sexual preference be considered as distinct from gender; Monique Wittig then argues for the existence of a third gender that is neither male nor female. The source of women's oppression is the binary representation of sexual difference itself (Butler 144-148). In other work, the category of 'women' may be further fragmented along various dimensions of difference, not just straight or gay, but also

black, white, chicana, mestiza and so on. The least we can say is that the notion of an integral, gendered identity as the condition of women's agency is placed under pressure by these *personnages* of fragmentation.

Identity is also placed under pressure in recent reconceptualizations of ideology as the source of women's oppression. In structuralist formations drawing on the work of Althusser, the identity of the Spectator is fully constituted in relation to the text. There is no possible distance that can be taken from ideology, no space for interiority or consciousness that might serve as a basis for a subject that transcends its constitution within representation. In reconstructions of this totalizing perspective, the *personnage* of the outside of representation is utilized to refer to an indeterminate zone that remains unstructured and invisible within ideological régimes. Teresa de Lauretis uses the metaphor of the 'space-off' to suggest this possible dimension of agency:

> To assert that the social representation of gender affects its subjective construction and that, vice versa, the subjective representation of gender -- or self-representation – affects its social construction, leaves open a possibility of agency and self-determination at the subjective and even individual level of micropolitical and everyday practices which Althusser himself would clearly disclaim (De Lauretis 9).

De Lauretis's strategy is to bring the possibility of agency into the activities of the Spectator. By circulating among identities (or subject positions), and exploiting the contradictions and gaps of the discourses that as an ensemble produce identities, this *personnage* can achieve a measure of autonomy. It is characteristic that agency is located in the 'cracks and fissures' of the systems of determination that are left to social theory

by structuralism. Variation, if not autonomy, is accounted for in some versions by the inherent instability of an identity offered in the ever-changing subject positions produced in texts and cultural activities.

Certain anti-essentialists may go so far as to celebrate the annihilation of identity discourses and the failure of identity formation as moments of liberation. The enthusiasm for mobility and non-identity is embodied in the *personnage* of the nomadic subject. The feminist as nomad

> [...] is a figuration for the kind of subject who has relinquished all idea, desire or nostalgia for fixity. This figuration expresses the desire for an identity made of transitions [...] against an essential unity (Braidotti 22).

Taken as a formation, these anti-essentialist figures work to radically destabilize the figure of women's identity.

A key orthodoxy of the field: the articulation of identity and agency

One of the key orthodoxies that orients research and theory in this domain is the assumed relation between social identity and social agency. The theoretical imagery that relates identity to agency is deeply embedded in various critical projects of analysis. It is the problematic that underlies and determines most critical applications of identity as a research concept. Even political theory that treats identity as a process often assumes the necessity of the articulation, as bell hooks does in her renovation of the concept of Sisterhood:

> To develop political solidarity between women, feminist activists cannot bond on the terms set by the dominant ideology of the culture. We must define our own terms. Rather than bond on the basis of shared

> victimization or in response to a false sense of a common enemy, we can bond on the basis of our political commitment to a feminist movement that aims to end sexist oppression [...] Working together to expose, examine and eliminate sexist socialization within ourselves, women would strengthen and affirm one another and build a solid foundation for developing political solidarity (hooks 488).

This assumption has numerous consequences for the way that cultural studies constitutes its objects of research. Part of the project of cultural studies is to validate the activities of oppressed formations. The assumed relation of identity and agency guarantees the politics of practices articulated to a particular identity. If action is undertaken from the position of a marginalized identity, it is assumed to be politically significant. For example, the work of feminist or post-colonial writers is often assumed to be necessarily resistant or progressive, by virtue of the social location from which their work issues. Despite the problematization of identity in contemporary cultural and feminist theory, this articulation is sustained in certain anti-essentialist models that remain conditioned by the project of producing figures of political opposition. Both régimes tend to produce figures of "active" identities.

Which is to say that the *personnage* of identity is very often specified by the discursive régime in which figures of political opposition are determined. Many régimes of critical discourse have at their center a single abstract *personnage* of domination. If the origin of oppression is named as patriarchy, as it is in radical feminsim, or capitalism as it is Marxist feminism, the possible forms of resistance are predetermined in the régime of

critical discourse. The abstract figure of identity prescribed in the problematic is filled in by the underlying discourse.

More often, anti-essentialism troubles the articulation of agency and identity by placing the latter category under pressure. The assumption of a strong form of social constructionism that penetrates even to the constitution of the self, and the total rejection of interiority as a source of self-determination, have worked to displace identity as a positive category of determination in analyses of the social formation. There is no longer a stable *personnage* to situate at the origin of action. The operator of identity no longer guarantees the presence of a social subject that will make meaning or take action from a stable, predictable position.[1]

This development can be viewed as both positive and negative. Both the essentialist and the anti-essentialist formations have a tendency to articulate abstract figures of identity. The *personnages* of anti-essentialist political theory like Haraway's 'cyborg' operate in alternative models of political action that are formulated at a level of abstraction comparable to the humanist (or essentialist) narratives that they displace. There is a characteristic liability here. These figures may impede the work of conceptual specification and elaboration that allows analysts to engage more incisively with particular situations and specific aspects of social relations.

The point is not that real political change can never issue from the strivings of identity factions; nor that agency can only be achieved through representational means. None of these figures tell the truth about agency. Rather, the de-coupling is useful, because it invites researchers to specify what was simply assumed before in the articulation of agency and identity.

To put it somewhat differently, with the destabilization of the concept of identity, anti-essentialist social theory traverses the limits of a discursive régime framing the object of social agency as the necessary articulation of identity and agency, opening the way for alternative conceptualizations.

Identity need no longer be opposed to oppression in order to speak of agency. The model of resistance in opposition to oppression can be historicized and refined. This event ultimately directs social analysis to the conjuncture to ask what are the conditions and forms of change that interest us in specific situations. Rather than make assumptions of who is acting and how, based on particular epistemological régimes, theorists are obliged to choose levels on which to construct the 'effects' of agency.

The dis-articulation of agency and identity has far-reaching effects on the two concepts. When agency is thought of as contextually contingent, a *personnage* no longer guarantees the effects of its practices. This opens up the very real possibility that the practices of privileged identity groups are actually complicit with whatever form or force of oppression that they are assumed to be resisting.

Projects of social analysis need to account for the identities that matter in particular fields of social activity and particular situations. Identity, to be useful in these more limited analyses, should be more specific. These are not necessarily the identities that are privileged in critical analyses. While there are liabilities to conceptualizing identity uniquely as a discursive construct, as I discuss below, there are theoretical gains to be made in considering how significant (and effective) identities are constructed in particular situations.

Power and discursive practice at the limits of anti-essentialism

Having established the currency of theoretical imagery that condenses agency and identity, and the troubling of that articulation by recent anti-essentialist conceptualizations of identity, I would like to discuss the gains and liabilities of an epistemological formation that has worked at the limits of the problematic of social agency by elaborating a model of discursive practice.

This formation is sympathetic to the reconceptualization of power that has been undertaken in post-modernist social theory. Through a reading of Foucault, it is argued that power is not essentially repressive or prohibitive, but rather "capillary," enabling as much as constraining. This notion of power emphasizes the productivity of power relations. Capillary power circulates through the social body and exerts its determinations in complex and often contradictory ways. It does not emanate from a particular institutional configuration but rather infuses all of the 'micro practices' that are the basis of social activity. For feminists, this régime rejects the notion that patriarchy or capitalism are at the origin of a unified, top down force of domination.

Adding its effects to the destabilizing of identity, this model of dispersed power works to displace the *personnages antipathiques* of oppression/resistance that tend to overdetermine other régimes of critical discourse. Not only are there no essential identities on which one might base theories of political resistance, but there are no absolute dispositions of power with which a critic might legitimate claims to the status of a particular identity as marginal, subordinate or oppressed. These only take shape against a source of unilateral domination that is explicitly denied within this formation.

This conception of power informs the more complex models of mediation and determination that are produced within this formation. The displacement of an essentially dialectical model of power with an open ended multiplicity also confronts these critics with more of the contingency and complexity of actual conditions of agency. Perhaps as a result, most of the examples reviewed here do not assume to know what the dynamics of power are before the analysis of a particular conjuncture. Since the operator 'practice' imparts very little structure to the analysis, more of the critic's work in constructing the terms and levels of analysis must be made explicit. This works against the subtle overdetermination of empirical analyses by the assumptions inherent in conceptual imagery.

In what follows, I will describe the operations of the model as it appears in Judith Butler's theory of performativity, Anna Marie Smith's conjunctural analysis of homosexual identities in Thatcherite Britain, and Achille Mbembe's multi-leveled model of the postcolony. Although each one has its liabilities, together they suggest some of the directions that social analysis can take through the elaboration of this model.

Performativity as discursive practice

Judith Butler's theory of gender identity as performative was initially articulated against a radical feminist notion of women's agency as being essentially grounded in embodied sexual difference. It thus explicitly rejects any simple articulation of identity to agency. In Butler's view this conception of identity is problematic; it necessarily excludes from critical legitimation those practices that do not originate in the commonality of a figure of 'women' or demonstrate the potential to call-up a collective political agent.

Consequently, Butler's concept of performativity seeks to de-stabilize the notion of women's identity. As an object of analysis, gender is treated in a way quite consistent with the anti-essentialist régime of identity theory. Gender is a 'constitutive absence' that projects the essence of woman, the 'natural' identity that is the 'presence' behind the social performance. Gender is not a feature of the natural world, but rather a social discourse; dress, posture, and self-presentation are practices that compose a performance. As Butler writes:

> Such acts, gestures, enactments, generally construed, are performative in the sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are fabrications manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means. That the gendered body is performative suggests that it has no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute its reality (Butler *Gender* 173).

In this theoretical imagery, identity is something produced in practice, "an incessant and repeated action" that is never fully achieved. The concept of discursive practice generally works to produce a temporality that figures social life as an on-going discursive production. Identity is always a matter of 'becoming' something, rather than 'being' something already defined. The political import of performativity is that the practices that constitute gender identity are part of a régime of social power that is always at risk; it must be reproduced in each performance of heterosexual or feminine identity.

'Discursive practice' merges the notion of discourse as a set of normative forces in social life with a constructivist ontology of social order as built up from the repetition of a multiplicity of concrete practices. The model emphasizes that normative effects

emerge in the most ordinary activities and thoughts of everyday life, which are always discursively regulated. Practice extends the ability to constitute objects of critical analysis into new domains, as demonstrated by Butler's paradigm case of drag. The condition of this extension is the model of capillary power and the notion of micropolitics that it supports. Since normativity is inherent in discourse, a wide range of counter-normative activity becomes relevant to critics that seek to valorize the transgressive aspect of already existing practices. Taking practice as a starting point helps to specify the analysis of particular social relations by linking the construction of analytical concepts more directly with empirically available contexts. Discursive practice works against the tendency of models of power that name a source of oppression, such as patriarchy or capitalism, to displace specific conflicts with their own central abstraction. Micropolitics need not be about the abstractions of traditional critical theory, nor does it necessarily lead to the prescription of traditional forms of intervention.

In this formation, Agency is generally understood to be the power to make significant and socially determinant distinctions. Identity, now firmly established as a politically potent category, is one such distinction. As Butler writes:

> Indeed to understand identity as a practice, and as a signifying practice, is to understand culturally intelligible subjects as the resulting effects of a rule-bound discourse that inserts itself in the pervasive and mundane signifying aspects of linguistic life [...]. As a process, signification harbors within itself what the epistemological discourse refers to as 'agency' [...]. The subject is not determined by the rules through which it is generated because signification is not a founding act, but rather a regulated process

> of repetition that both conceals itself and enforces its rules precisely through the production of substantializing effects. In effect, all signification takes place within the orbit of the compulsion to repeat; 'agency' then is to be located within the possibility of variation on that repetition (Butler 184).

When essentialist notions of identity are displaced by the concept of identity as the effect of discursive practice, the locus of agency is also displaced. It shifts from the *personnage* of the agent to the system of discourse in which the subject is constituted. The subject cannot act to determine its own identity; indeed the subject is merely the effect of discourse. Women and other marginalized groups cannot work effectively to produce their own identity, argue Butler and her followers.[2] Change is wrought only in the gaps and contradictions inherent in the regulative discourses themselves.

The orthodox opposition of resistance/oppression is upset when agency is displaced into the workings of discourse. The notion of 'resistance' that operated only in a binary relation to 'oppression' is largely displaced by the concept of 'transgression'. As a model of social agency, transgression assumes that the failure of social categories to be stabilized is a source for political change. The failure of gender identity to stabilize in the form of a binary opposition is made evident in the practice of drag. The drag queen does not resist the discourses of gender identity so much as redirect the power that they articulate by parodying them. Transgression is thus the subversion of a norm and the inversion of a line of force. This draws on a Foucauldean model of power as dynamic, multi-valent and ever-present. As Butler argues:

> Power can be neither withdrawn nor refused, but only redeployed. Indeed, in my view, the normative focus for gay and lesbian practice ought to be on the subversive and parodic redeployment of power rather than on the impossible fantasy of its full-scale transcendence (Butler 158).

An important liability of Butler's notion of performativity is that it is both too specific to be useful to a general program of social analysis for cultural studies, and too abstract to inform the analysis of specifically human determinations, particularly those forms of sociality that operate in the contexts of interpersonal activity. The key liability here is the specificity of the operator transgression.

Those practices marked as transgressive are doubly conditioned by the epistemological model of discursive practice and general notions of what are socially significant acts of transgression. There is normativity in all practice, but all practices are not equal. Some transgressions matter more than others. Without a theoretical means to establish the relative importance of practice, social theorists tend to fall back on general notions of political value. Where an analytic focus on discursive practices extends the object domain of critical analysis, the notion of transgression tends to constrain it to instances of 'unruly' or morally provocative practice.

In terms of its political assumptions, the concept of 'transgression' also inclines analysis to privilege practices that are already intelligible within the terms of a critique of current discursive régimes. The possibility of political agency that is not anticipated within critique already, or agency that derives from somewhere outside of normative structures of power (such as from 'the space off') eludes this conceptualization. Butler

tends to assume that current critical discourse somehow transcends power/knowledge to locate transgression that is guaranteed to be politically effective.

Conjunctural models of discourse

Anna Marie Smith offers a model that is less concerned with ontological issues of identity, and perhaps more useful to projects of social analysis. Her approach develops on discursive conceptions of power relations to theorize categories of 'official discourse' and 'resistance discourse' in an analysis of figures of homosexual identity produced in government and mass media discourse in Thatcherite England.

In Smith's analysis, homosexual identity is differentiated and circulated in a strategy that seeks to incorporate a figure of the 'responsible' homosexual into the broader constituency claimed by the conservative government. At the same time, a more exclusionary and hostile discourse is developed around the figure of the 'dangerous homosexual' that circulates in a general atmosphere of panic over AIDS and liberalizing sexual mores. Smith's argument is that by dividing a categorized identity and incorporating one figure of the homosexual into its discourse, the government promotes itself as centrist while continuing to marginalize other gays. In this analysis, the imagery of power moves away from a binary model of oppression and resistance to a more spatial conception of a struggle for the 'middle ground' through the deployment and use of discursive figures of identity.

Further confounding binary models of social action, Smith argues that the 'responsible homosexual' is also an identity that appeals to some gays: "The implications of this production of difference are complex, but two consequences stand out. First, this

differentiation works with, rather than against, discourses in our own lesbian and gay communities" (Smith 205).

There is not a uniform domination within discourse then, but one that divides and recruits particular categories in an identity group. There is no guaranteed relation between identity and resistance; some identities are complicit with hegemonic sources of power that attack only one kind of gayness. Non-targeted identities can thus be complicit with the attack on 'dangerous' homosexuals. Smith draws normative political conclusions at the end of her analysis:

> The responsible homosexual therefore functions as the 'contra' force within the community; his or her presence allows right-wing politicians to speak in our name as the representatives of the true homosexuals [...]. Queer activism rightly stands against this incitement of self-surveillance, self discipline and assimilation [...]. Queer Activism therefore subverts the differentiating logic of official discourse by inviting all lesbians and gays to identify with the dangerous gay position (Smith 206).

Although there is no explicit theoretical discussion, the model of identity used here is one constituted in discursive practice. There are both advantages and liabilities to this approach. The analysis makes very clear the political stakes of the differentiation and circulation of identities in the realm of public discourse. The ability to analyze the deployment of figures of identity in a common field of social discourse drawn on by all actors is very useful. Identities don't 'belong' to anyone, they circulate and can be used to further the strategies of different institutions and strategies. The model does not reproduce the orthodoxy of oppression/resistance to project a simple oppositional

dynamic of power relations. Some marginal identities can be shown to be complicit with institutional power. Nor does it sustain a simple articulation of identity and agency. Subjects are implicated in disciplinary régimes and incited to police themselves. The analysis works instead to question the effects of discursive practices that trade in figures of identity.

This analysis is certainly given clarity and precision by the assumption that identity is nothing more than a position within discourse that has its own effectivity, its own ability to align bodies. Yet the argument goes beyond the mere discursive interplay of identities to suggest that people actually take up these identities. This is somewhat less defensible since it assumes, with no more evidence than common sense, that the normative discourses of government and media actually become inscribed in the meaningful experiences of people, ordering and aligning them with power. Although I would not go so far as to dispute that common sense, the processes through which this might happen remain unexplained and uninvestigated empirically.

Discursive practice and the dispositif as a model of mediation

It is interesting to find this model working in domains as far removed from queer theory and feminist philosophy as Achille Mbembe's afro-centric post-colonial theory and criticism. A more extensive use of concepts drawn and specified from theories of discursive practice can be found in Mbembe's analysis of the 'aesthetics of vulgarity' in the postcolony. His work articulates two of the operators that interest us, discursive practice and affect, without naming them specifically. His research is concerned with vulgar rearticulations of official discourse, with the practices of the body cultivated by the powerful and their imitators, and with their implication in the dynamic relation of

power in the postcolony. This complex of discursive and bodily practices is neither wholly complicit with power nor entirely resistant. Rather, the model specifically rejects the binarism of domination and resistance. As he writes:

> To account for both the mind-set and the effectiveness of post-colonial relations of power, we need to go beyond the binary categories used in standard interpretations of domination... In the postcolony, the *commandement* seeks to institutionalize itself, to achieve legitimation and hegemony (recherche hégémonique), in the form of a fetish. The signs, vocabulary, and narratives that the *commandement* produces are meant not merely to be symbols; they are officially invested with a surplus of meanings that are not negotiable and that one is officially forbidden to depart from or challenge. To ensure that no such challenge takes place, the champions of state power invent entire constellations of ideas; they adopt a distinct set of cultural repertoires and powerfully evocative concepts; but they also resort, if necessary, to the systematic application of pain. The basic goal is not just to bring a specific political consciousness into being, but to make it effective (Mbembe 103).

Attempting to work outside of the structuring abstractions of social theory, Mbembe creates a different set of operators for his analysis. The *commandement* is the régime of governmental discourse and practice that is created as a means to dominate the population. The 'fetish' describes the articulation of this régime with power, authority and value in both a normative and empirical sense. The *commandement* is meant to create a total ideological medium, an official consciousness that is enforced by violence. Yet the

empirical circumstances of its enactment analyzed by Mbembe suggest a deeper and far more ambiguous implication of the *commandement* in the lives of its subjects. The concept of the fetish figures both the brutally enforced centrality of the *commandement* and its affective appeal. The empirical analysis will dwell on the failure of the *commandement* to achieve its intended effects, even as the practices that it articulates are shown to be willingly enacted and reproduced by its subjects.

Mbembe's discursive operators are explicitly created to displace the highly abstract *personnages antipathiques* of oppression and resistance. They are middle level abstractions that are themselves the specification of terms from a Foucauldean model of mediation. The *commandement* is the specification of the concept of a discursive régime. It encompasses all that a semiotic notion of ideology might make visible, such as the codes and narratives circulated by a government in its attempt to establish a hegemonic political consciousness. It goes beyond this textual concern in its analysis of the discursive practices that implicate affect and the body in rituals of sexual subjection and domination, gustatory excess, and in violent reprisals when the *commandement* is overtly violated. [3] The analysis does not assume that these discursive practices are ideological, in the sense that it does not treat them as the productions of a dominant class that are internalized by the subordinate population. Rather, the *commandement* designates a field of discourses that circulate without institutional origin and appear in the situated practices of all the actors. All of the *personnages* that figure in the analysis are subordinate to a shared field of discourse.

The central construct of the 'postcolony' appears to be specified from the model of the *dispositif*. The *dispositif* can be considered as a model of mediation that is particularly open and multi-dimensional. As Deleuze describes it,

> Les dispositifs ont donc pour composantes des lignes de visibilité, d'énonciation, des lignes de forces, des lignes de subjectivation, des lignes de fêlure, de fissure, de fracture, qui toutes s'entrecroisent et s'emmêlent [...]. Aussi chaque dispositif est-il une multiplicité, dans laquelle opèrent de tel processus en devenir, distincts de ceux qui opèrent dans un autre (Deleuze *Dispositif* 188).

One of the particularities of the *dispositif* is the absence of the typical transcendent categories (e.g. the subject, the social) that tend to structure other conceptual models of social life. It provides a highly abstract modeling language in which any 'event' can be decomposed analytically into component 'lines' and their relations. The model figures various dimensions of effects, including those associated with meaning/discourse, the author/subject, and what might be termed the complex 'dynamics' of power itself, in the imagery of fissures and cracks. This model helps Mbembe to theorize around the limits of some of the enduring conceptual oppositions that tend to structure other accounts.

In allowing the analysis to range over "the types of institutions, the knowledges, norms and practices structuring this new 'common sense'" as well as the use of imagery and narrative, the model allows the creation of more complex mappings of the interplay of discursive mediations, social institutions and individuated subjectivities than competing perspectives. The model draws out transversal relations that are difficult to treat in other terms. As Mbembe describes it "the postcolony is made up not of one public

space but of several, each having its own logic yet liable to be entangled with other logics when operating in certain contexts [...]" (Mbembe 104). This permits the analytical articulation of different levels of mediation. For example, ritual displays of privilege and discourses of the social and political body are analyzed together as ambivalent mediators of institutional power. The fetish, the obscene and the grotesque are equally implicated at other levels of mediation associated with affect, value and meaning. As a consequence of its lack of specificity, the model posits no more than an entanglement of these diverse analytic dimensions, the details of which must then be drawn out of the context during the analysis.

The model also works to install the temporality peculiar to practice-grounded conceptions of the social. As in Butler's theorization of gender, the central abstraction of the epistemological régime is constructed here in processual and relational terms, as a becoming rather than a being. This is particularly evident in Mbembe's conception of the "emerging time" of the postcolony that is elaborated against modernist notions of history. The time of the post-colony is non-linear, given to disturbances and oscillations, "not irreversible" but rather a "multiplicity of times" (16). This leads Mbembe to focus more on the collapse of historical "possibles" and the reversals and cancellations of power than on the narratives of progress or regression that often guide critical accounts. It is the temporal dimension that is figured as fragmentary here.

There is a respect for contingency and complexity in the formulations that are derived from the *dispositif* as an open system model of multiple determinations. Such formulations often work to displace a critical practice of theoretical speculation and tend to direct analysis out towards empirical circumstances.

This same general strategy conditions the use of the affective *personnages* of obscenity and vulgarity as objects of interpretation. In contrast with the Bakhtinian concept of the carnivalesque as a formal inversion of social hierarchies, Mbembe's model helps him to describe the articulations of affect and power without assuming that affective practices conform to a hierarchical structure or belong to a particular social position. Where simpler models of mediation might figure affect as the guaranteed resource of resistance, the very opposite of power, it can now be shown to be a particular level of mediation implicated in the production and operations of power. It is the concept of 'conviviality' that works to impose this very useful safeguard against the tendency of critical concepts to colonize and overdetermine the analysis. Conviviality suggests that social relations are mediated with respect to a limited field of discursive resources that may be articulated in the productivity of power regardless of "who speaks." The spectacular excesses of the appetites and the control of other bodies are 'shared references' that are equally fetishized by all (109).

Clearly this model draws on Foucault's notion of power as both productive and multivalent. In the *commandement*, official discourse is not countered by a popular, resistant discourse. Instead the official discourse is reiterated, but rearticulated in such a way as to neutralize its effects.

> What gives rise to conflict (with the dominant vector of the *commandement*) is not the frequent references to the genital organs of those in power, but rather the way individuals, by their laughter, kidnap power and force it, as if by accident, to examine its own vulgarity. In other words, in the postcolony the search for majesty and prestige contains

> within it elements of crudeness and the bizarre that the official order tries hard to hide, but that ordinary people bring to its attention often unwittingly (Mbembe 109).

The model thus makes visible the foldings of power in the *commandement*, its tendency to reversal and negation even as everyone conforms to its normative discursive practices. There are no uniform vectors of power, no clear instances of total domination or absolute resistance initiated by collective actors. Rather like the notion of performativity, power cannot be abolished or escaped, but only rearticulated. The *commandement* strives for total domination, but its own normativity makes it prone to parody and ironic subversion. Once again, it is in the cracks and fissures of the discursive régime, the *commandement*, that agency actually resides.

The model furthers the disarticulation of agency and identity by demonstrating that the subject never occupies one position in a binary distribution of roles. The subject mimics and ridicules, finding multiple identities in the folding of strategies in the *commandement* that attempt to put him in his place. The subject is in play, and

> that makes him homo ludens par excellence. It is this practice that enables subjects to splinter their identities and to represent themselves as always changing their persona; they are constantly undergoing mitosis, whether in 'official' space or not. Hence it would seem wrong to interpret postcolonial relationships in terms of resistance or absolute domination [...] (Mbembe 104).

So when the moment of theoretical totalization comes in this analysis, as it does here, it comes on behalf of a conception of power and identity that is unstable and mobile, demanding an empirical investigation into its actual conditions and effects.

Limits and limitations of discursive practice

In presenting a formation defined by the use of discursive practice, I have emphasized that the formation displaces conceptions of agency grounded in identity, works to produce a different temporality in its models of social practice, works against the dualism of subjectivity and objectivity in its insistence that discourse constitutes and therefore invests the interiority of subjects, and draws on a more diffuse model of power in social relations that subverts the orthodox opposition of oppression and resistance that conditions much critical research. There are clearly many theoretical gains to be derived from the use of this operator.

However, it is part of the character of the current theoretical moment that these developments have come to fix a particularly reduced and schematic *personnage* in critical theory that risks becoming a liability. It is a figure defined in terms of surface and signification, bereft of an interior dimension. It is conditioned by an overly general and highly abstract critique of the humanist subject. The strategy that appears with disheartening regularity to legitimate the figures of anti-essentialist theory equates interiority with essence, as the discourse of performativity demonstrates:

> In other words, acts and gestures, articulated and enacted desires, create the illusion of an interior and organizing gender core, an illusion discursively maintained for the purposes of the regulation of sexuality within the obligatory frame of reproductive sexuality. If the cause of the

> desire, gesture, and act can be localized within the 'self' of the actor, then the political regulations and disciplinary practices which produce that ostensibly coherent gender are effectively displaced from view. This displacement of a political and discursive origin of gender identity onto a psychological 'core' precludes an analysis of the political constitution of the gendered subject and its fabricated notions about the ineffable interiority of its sex or of its true identity (Butler 173-174).

This epistemological strategy appears in critical discourses too numerous to account for here. The *personnage* of the 'illusory interior' and the discourse that sustains it are new orthodoxies within areas of cultural studies that are influenced by post-structuralism. Of course, this strategic position has no greater claim to the truth about the subject than any other. The *personnages* that it cultivates (the Spectator, the cyborg, etc.) are perhaps more precisely drawn and operate more effectively in the social constructionist imagery of the social, but in their reductions they tend to do away with some of the specificity of the human.

An important problem, then, is how to recuperate aspects of this specificity without returning the *personnage* of the humanist subject to the stage of social theory. Increasingly, it seems, theorists are availing themselves of the opportunities inherent in the notion of discursive practice to work beyond the limits of hard-line anti-essentialism. Sara Ahmed interrogates the role that emotions play in the constitution of individual and collective identities. She uses instances of hate speech, xenophobic political rhetoric, and fictionalized accounts of the experience of racism as points of departure for a theorization

of the emotional logic through which bodies are recognized and related affectively. As she argues,

> [...] individual and collective bodies (including the imagined bodies of nations and globality) surface in relationship to each other, a surfacing that takes place through affective encounters, such as alignment (bringing into line with another), identification (assuming the image of another), and appropriation (taking the place of another). I will focus on the surfacing of individual, national and global bodies through the mediation of affect, with specific reference to the role of pain and hate. One important implication of my argument will be that differences are not characteristics of bodies – they do not reside positively in bodies - but that they are an effect of inter-corporeal encounters between others (Ahmed 11).

Ahmed is clearly working within the true of the formation that interests us here. The model is radically constructivist, following the tendencies of anti-essentialist feminist philosophy by asserting that cultural identities and differences are not given; they must be continually materialized within practices, or what she calls affective encounters. This concept works to shift the ground of the constructivist position from a semiotic notion of identity constituted in difference to a less orthodox affective foundation. As Ahmed argues, "intensifications of feeling create the very effect of the distinction between inside and outside, or between the individual and the Social" (12).

What might be termed the constitution of the subject in hatred is the effect of an "affective economy." It is encouraging that Ahmed chooses to construct her analysis across a range of levels of mediation. The important insight here is that relational models

of social identity need not necessarily be modeled on semiotic relations; persons need not be equated with signifiers. Other sorts of human relations offer other models that nonetheless eschew the attribution of "essences." This allows Ahmed to integrate some of the functions of operators that work in other conceptions of sociality quite foreign to her formation.

Ahmed's argument thus goes beyond the limits of the anti-essentialist régime. As a discursive operator, Emotion works across the central division in theory that excludes discourses of the subject as essentialist, and allows an interplay between the analysis of practices and the description of interior experiences. The overlap of the two discursive régimes is apparent here:

> Furthermore, to be touched a certain way, or to be moved a certain way by an encounter with an other, may involve a reading, not only of the encounter, but of the other that is encountered as having certain characteristics. If we feel another hurts us, then we may project that reading onto the other, such that it becomes hurtful, or is read as the impression of the negative. In other words, the 'it hurts' becomes, 'you hurt me', which might become, 'you are hurtful'. These affective responses are readings that not only create the borders between selves and others, but also 'give' others meaning and value in the very of apparent separation (sic), a giving which temporarily fixes an other, through the movement engendered by the emotional response itself. Such emotional responses are clearly mediated: materialisation takes place through the

> 'mediation' or reading of affect, which may function in this way as readings of the bodies of others (Ahmed 13).

This description and the function that it attributes to emotion could be drawn from Sartrian existentialism, in which emotional projection precedes and invests the world with meaning. It describes a process in which a self-feeling is transformed into an other-identity, in the practical context of the affective encounter. Crucially, this allows Ahmed to engage with the level (or problem) of value in a framework that situates its analysis on another level. Within a general conception of the affective constitution of identity through a form of subject-less differentiation, the analysis also accommodates the possibility that subjective experience is, on occasion, implicated. This allows a limited role for semiotic and hermeneutic interpretation within the framework, while denying them the constitutive function that they enjoy in their originary discourses.[4] A 'reading' is not the only way that bodies materialize, not even the main way; it is simply one more way that bodies are differentiated and identities are constituted. Ahmed thus makes a place for experience, but refuses to make experience the mediator of all reality.

One of the principle liabilities of Ahmed's work is that the re-grounding of privileged theoretical operators such as identity and difference, while interesting in itself, does not necessarily result in more useful formulations for projects of social analysis. Her theoretical project involves an elaborate displacement and substitution of one ontological figure for another that is analytically inconsequential. Whether the origin of difference is located in a figure of *Différance* or Emotion is of little consequence for many projects of social analysis. What should interest her more is how contextually significant differences (regardless of origin) are used to articulate changes in power and practices.

Conclusion

My reading of the theoretical conjuncture suggests that the problematization of identity and the adoption of complex notions of power, events emerging principally from the feminist elaboration of post-structuralist theory, have been the conditions of possibility for a break with one of the key orthodoxies of critical theory, the assumed articulation of identity and agency. This presents a real theoretical gain for the critical disciplines.

It is an opportunity to reorient critical communication and cultural theory towards more specific engagements with empirical circumstances. Rather than reproducing figures of identity that are the projections of theorized régimes of social domination, research is oriented to the practices that are articulated to particular identities, and their conjunctural effects. With a more sophisticated model of capillary power, it is possible to pose the question of whether, and how, identity may be articulated with social change in particular circumstances. Identities no longer guarantee the effects of practices taken in their name.

The operator of discursive practice and the model of agency that it proposes also promise theoretical gains. Discursive practice displaces simple notions of opposition or resistance with the assumption of the productivity of power relations, and an appreciation of the unstable, fragmented and partial forms that this productivity can take.

Anna Marie Smith demonstrates the utility of an analytic approach that reduces identity to a discursive object that can be fragmented and rearticulated in the interests of both dominant and subordinate power. Yet her analysis remains abstract because it cannot address how identities are taken up in actual circumstances. Discursive practice

goes beyond this limitation by focusing on concrete practices. Analysts using the concept can now draw on a potentially limitless range of objects, from social identity to psychic identifications, which can all be interpreted as the effects of power relations. Since power and the effectivity of practices are inherently unstable, objects of analysis need no longer be constructed as institutional in origin or stable beyond the limits of the context in which particular analyses are undertaken. The *personnage* of fragmentation is doubly productive when articulated to productive power in this way.

The general logic of practice-grounded interpretation can also be extended to address other effects of productive power relations, such as feelings, emotions, and their particular way of constituting identities. As Ahmed demonstrates, this allows for some bridging across régimes of discourse that are firmly anchored in the *personnages antipathiques* of critical social theory, such as the opposition of essentialism and anti-essentialism.

The operator of discursive practice thus solves conceptual problems and fills in gaps left within other epistemological régimes. It also entails certain liabilities. Once articulated to practice, the concept of discourse loses some of its specificity. With the related dissolution of boundaries between the subject and discourse, and between the domains of the social and the cultural, discursive practices appear to be everywhere and to affect everything. It becomes difficult to distinguish between discourse and other analytical domains. Unspecified, discursive practice appears to serve a subtle form of theoretical totalization.

Discursive practice is also not the direct route to the 'concrete' that its enthusiasts suggest. Practice is a relatively minor abstraction compared to some of the *personnages*

of critical theory; but it is nonetheless an abstraction. Practice is an anonymous 'way of doing' specific to no individual person. A more serious moment of abstraction involves the reorientation of analysis to remove the subject from the theoretical picture. Without the figure of the person, practices and discourses tend to dominate analysis while the social activity of persons is neglected, as Allor has argued (215).

Finally, practice may not be the most effective way to describe the social activities of persons, particularly if we want to account for their own accounts of subjectivity and agency. Presumably, dressing in drag procures more for practitioners than 'transgression' can figure – enjoyment and distinction, perhaps. Again, unspecified, discursive practice may not be the best way to conceptualize and describe these more complex forms of emotionality and sociality.

ENDNOTES

[1] Steven Slemon cautions against the assumption of the articulation of identity, agency and practice when he writes: "When the idea of anti-colonial resistance becomes synonymous with third and fourth world literary writing, two forms of displacement happen. First, all literary writing which emerges from these cultural locations will be understood as carrying a radical and contestatory content – and this gives away the rather important point that subjected peoples are sometimes capable of producing reactionary literary documents. And secondly, the idea will be discarded that important anti-colonialist writing can take place outside the ambit of third and fourth world literary writing [...]." See Slemon 106.

[2] For another analysis that make this point, see Harper 94-108.

[3] For a related analysis of political violence in Chile, see Cobb 131-154.

[4] There are, of course, resistances to this merging of discourses. For Ahmed, the tension can only be resolved by the reassertion of her anti-essentialist credentials in a footnote: "My argument that the subject's perception and reading of objects and others is crucial does not necessarily exercise a radical form of subjectivism; it does not posit the subject's consciousness as that which makes the world. The subject both materializes as an effect of intensification and has, in some sense, already materialized given such histories of attachment. The almost subject is also another other for other almost subjects; a sociality premised not on the mutuality of being with others, as I will show, but on the process of differentiation, whereby one is with some others differently than other others" (Ahmed 21). In order to maintain the primacy of her ontology, Ahmed must introduce a difficult

double temporality in which the subject is never present until constituted, but is in some sense always there already. This calls for further elaboration.

CONCLUSION: STRATEGIES OF CONTAINMENT

In conclusion, I would like to outline some regularities in the operation of the discursive operators and conceptual *personnages* encountered in previous chapters. In doing so, I want to point to the liabilities that they incur within the research programs of critical communication studies and cultural studies that they serve. My aim has been not simply to point out the displacements that inevitably occur in conceptualization, but to make a diagnostic mapping of how a set of concepts operate, across a range of positions. The tensions that I uncover in the actual operations of these *personnages* point to a structuring problem at the core of the project of the critical disciplines.

I also want to consolidate two arguments that were begun in earlier chapters. First, I want to argue that the deconstructive solutions to the problems raised in the critical project wind up missing something important about the specificity of the human. Despite the liabilities that plague the use of concepts such as emotion, feeling, affect, they are nonetheless necessary because they work to figure irreducible aspects of human specificity. My second argument is more specifically addressed to the formation in cultural studies that advocates a break with mediation and its *personnages* altogether. Here I argue against Grossberg that rather than rejecting mediation as an analytic category, we would be better served if we extended the concept of mediation beyond its current limits. Having traced out some of the principle liabilities of our discursive operators, I want to go beyond a posture of critique, and to suggest a modest course of action based on my diagnosis. I briefly consider the utility of a model of nested levels of mediation to consider how it could help us go beyond some of the limits of current orthodoxies.

This responds to the issue raised by the preceding analyses. How might we organize the engagement of theoretical tools with the empirical component of our research, so as to avoid stepping naively into discursive operations that displace the questions we want to pose with others more conducive to epistemological régimes of conceptualization and explanation? Alternately, this suggests the question of how we might avoid reframing our research in terms of high-level abstractions, the *personnages antipathiques* of social theory. The adoption of a model of multiple levels of mediation, while not resolving all of the problems encountered in this thesis, offers an interesting strategy to contend with many of them.

At certain points, Deleuze and Guattari's remarks on the construction of philosophical concepts and problems are used to frame some of my reflections in more general terms. Although their comments are not directed specifically to the method or philosophy of the social sciences, they are nonetheless relevant to our problems, particularly since my argument will imply that much of our "empirical" research is covertly speculative.

Personnages and their liabilities

The principle regularity uncovered in the preceding analyses is that they all involve the displacement of phenomenal actualities or the objects of general discourse by the operators of a given epistemological régime. For example, in Denzin's work emotion is first displaced by emotionality, and then by more abstract discursive operators -- emotional intersubjectivity and emotional understanding. These analytical concepts are slight variations on two of the canonical "social forms" that have been developed in symbolic interactionism and now constitute part of the theoretical imagery that organizes

research. It is hard to imagine two operators more central to interactionist theory than understanding and intersubjectivity. These concepts perform necessary functions in a discourse that makes claims to the 'understanding' of the other's point of view. The former describes the project of the qualitative social sciences as a whole; the latter is the ontological human trait through which society is assumed to be constituted and on which the practice of sociological interpretation is predicated in theory. They are important, but they are also theoretical and highly abstract. Their "effects" can neither be adequately demonstrated nor denied through the empirical data of social research. They are theoretical assumptions.

What does displacement procure? Displacement may be naïve but it is never innocent. It supports the epistemological régime to which new objects are assimilated, by demonstrating the continuing interest of the régime as a tool for research, and by reiterating its truths in the process of interpretation. The displacement of common sense notions of emotion with these *personnages* not only makes emotion intelligible within the terms of symbolic interactionism, reiterating its discourse, it also secures authority for emotion as an object of knowledge by relating it to the central theoretical abstraction of the régime. There is a double function of legitimation then, confirming the continuing salience of the epistemological régime and the importance of the object/operator at the same time. The researcher constructs her object within the true of the discipline, while legitimating her choice of object. Meanwhile, at the disciplinary level, the discourse served by the displacement sustains the coherence and organization of research projects and disciplinary identities.

Displacement is a necessary function in constituting an object of knowledge, and in maintaining a disciplined orientation to social phenomena, but displacement can also impede effective analysis. Analytic concepts have the power to select and make visible certain aspects of phenomena and to hide others. Discursive operators are orchestrators of gaps and silences in discourse. The perspective that they present is necessarily partial. If conceptualization assimilates empirical objects to overly abstract theoretical concepts, analysts will not have at their disposal the tools to make useful distinctions.

A second regularity encountered in numerous instances of displacement is that the abstract theoretical concepts privileged in these operations are structured as dichotomous oppositions. These *personnages antipathiques* provide the theoretical tools of sociological research, such as object and subject, theory and method, structure and agency. Critical formations construct their own *personnages antipathiques*, such as the passive/active audience dichotomy, or the opposition of oppression to resistance so familiar from feminist and culturalist research.

In a condemnation of disciplinary orthodoxies and the role of "theoretical antinomies" in sustaining them, Bourdieu argues that such oppositions "construct the instruments of construction of reality" and continues:

> They define the visible and the invisible, the thinkable and the unthinkable; and like all social categories, they hide as much as they reveal and can reveal only by hiding. In addition, these antinomies are at once descriptive and evaluative, one side always being considered as "the good one," because their use is ultimately rooted in the opposition between "us and them" (Bourdieu 778).

While they provide important theoretical concepts that can be elaborated in research, these *couples ennemis* can also act to sustain the orthodoxies of social theory and thus become liabilities. *Personnages antipathiques* are particularly entrenched when conceptual oppositions are tied, as they frequently are, to institutional power. Factional conflicts tend to reinforce the differences of theoretical and methodological position, and to inflate their importance. In my analysis of the structure of feeling, I pointed out that the opposition of theoreticism to empiricism (thematized in cultural studies as the "two paradigms" of structure and experience) leads Williams to greatly exaggerate the importance of experiential knowledge in opposition to Althusserian notions of the ideological constitution of the subject. Williams comes to plead on behalf of one general epistemological position, despite the obvious insufficiency of that position. At such moments the rhetorical and polemical work of the operators comes to outweigh their utility in projects of social analysis.

While they offer important conceptual tools, these *personnages antipathiques* tend to overdetermine the goals of our research when they become fixed and institutionalized. The assumptions encapsulated in these *personnages* are projected into empirical research, structuring the selection, organization and interpretation of "data." They may go so far as to supply the actual content of particular analytic concepts: such is the case with the concepts of emotional understanding and emotional intersubjectivity, which are only slight specifications of their abstract theoretical counterparts. More often they suggest the limits of the social ontology that underlies the analysis. This is particularly obvious in conceptualizations of power and agency. The *personnages antipathiques* of oppression/resistance sustain mutually constitutive assumptions about

the universal nature and dynamics of power. They tend to construct all relations of power on the model of a simple binary opposition and produce figures of the subject such as the active audience or the passive Spectator.

Particularly when they contribute to the condensation of distinct levels of analysis, these *personnages antipathiques* engage in powerful displacements. Sometimes the formal relation of *personnages antipathiques* inspires the condensation of an entire range of operators and *personnages*. When Moores credits ethnography with "giving voice to everyday interpretations from below" (4) his argument draws on a condensed series of oppositions common to "populist" formations in cultural studies. They include (among others) the social opposition of low and high, the epistemological opposition of micro-sociological perspectives to macro-sociological perspectives; the opposition of popular culture to elite culture; and the opposition of authentic experience to received knowledge or ideology. We have already encountered some of these oppositions around the figure of "the popular," and here ethnography is added to the condensed series of operators that align themselves with the marginal and the resistant. While such condensations can create powerfully persuasive positions, they also tend to overdetermine the goals of research, which becomes (in the work of certain enthusiasts) the celebration of the activity of an ontological *personnage*, the active audience or the resisting subject.

A third regularity, rather less evident but vitally important, concerns the way that research questions are displaced and deferred within the very terms that they are posed. It is possible to distinguish two typical scenarios in the displacement of questions. In the first, the research question is posed in terms of an abstract discursive operator and the

answer to the question is supplied by a *personnage*, a figure of the subject endowed with the traits designated by the operator. The question simply invites the validation of the *personnage*. So, for example, a question about the various mediations that might be sketched around texts and their readers, is displaced by the question of how the "active audience" resists its ideological domination. The controlling operator is generally so abstract that a wide variety of phenomena can be presented as pertinent evidence. It becomes a metaphor that inexorably assimilates a range of other objects to its operations. The use of the structure of feeling typically follows the same scenario. Confronted by the popularity of an emerging cultural formation, Pfeil asks what social mediations might be implied by postmodern texts and textualism, and promptly displaces the question into a question about the political significance of "de-oedipalization" in materialist feminist theory, indefinitely deferring an answer to his initial question.

The second scenario involves rather more complex conceptual manipulations. In this scenario, the metaphorical relations between a concept and its *personnages* allow the research question to be answered by its more specific *personnages*. The scenario resembles Chang's discussion of the problematic of communication (35-49). This logic often appears when the ontological supports of epistemological régimes are questioned, but it can also be discerned in researches that make claims to empiricist knowledge. There is a displacement within a set of related operators that allows the controlling discursive operator to nominate one or more of its *personnages* as answers to the research question. A positivistic notion of problem formation and resolution obscures the degree to which the positions of question and answer are interrelated. As Deleuze and Guattari argue:

> If the concept is a solution, the conditions of the philosophical problem are found on the plane of immanence presupposed by the concept [...] and the unknowns of the problem are found in the conceptual personae it calls up (what persona, exactly?). A concept like knowledge has meaning only in relation to an image of thought to which it refers and to a conceptual persona that it needs: a different image and a different persona call for other concepts (Deleuze and Guattari 80-81).

Every question requires concepts so that we may state it, of course. Posing a question also requires imagery of the basic components and underlying processes that are being queried. From these basic and inescapable postulates a plane of immanence is activated, determining the form that questions can take and the terms in which answers can be given. If a discursive operator is particularly empowering as a solution to recognized problems, there is a force exerted on our common sense queries that leads to their reconstruction as "intelligible" research questions.

For example, symbolic interactionism postulates social life as the meaning-making activity of individuals confronted with problems that are necessarily symbolic. Subjects must overcome the isolation that is their essential attribute, to understand one another through and in their emotional states. Within the terms laid out by this "conceptual persona," Denzin poses his central question: "'How do individuals 'know' and 'understand' the emotional experiences, utterances, and actions of another? (Denzin *Understanding* 134). Clearly this question is conditioned by the interactionist régime and invites a response couched in terms of its privileged operators.

The integrity of claims to empirical knowledge is compromised when rather than taking the question to the context of research, an answer is generated by the conceptual persona, in an a-priori fashion. The concept thus generated displaces our research question by providing a ready-made, context-independent answer. Denzin answers the question of how individuals know each other's emotional experiences by appealing to our innate capacity for intersubjectivity. In defense of the argument he provides strips of situated speech that attest to the experience of intersubjective emotional understanding, as well as an extensive typology of the "forms" of intersubjectivity. These *personnages* of the concept work to legitimate it, but they never explain or challenge intersubjectivity, which after all is an a-priori theoretical assumption. His evidence simply serves to legitimate an abstract discursive operator by naturalizing it

This is similar to Chang's analysis of the conceptual operations that sustain the definition of communication. The problematic of communication is based on a conceptual image of overcoming subjective solipsism through intersubjectivity. The question of questions is "how is individuality overcome?" Communication is explained with reference to the concept of mediation, the overcoming of differences and the sharing of meaning. Mediation is a *personnage* of intersubjectivity. So the problematic (the underlying organization of a conceptual field) produces a self-ratifying chain of concepts. The question of how intersubjectivity is achieved is answered by a *personnage* of intersubjectivity. This does not provide an explanatory answer, but rather defers the answer to a metaphysical assumption of Intersubjectivity. This assumption can never be empirically confirmed. The appearance of intersubjectivity in the argument "forecloses the question set up by the problematic" as Chang argues (62) and ultimately displaces the

research question into a circular, theoretical justification of its own terms. A similar thing happens in Denzin's use and definition of the concept of emotional intersubjectivity. When the terms themselves are analyzed, we find that they are implicated in a metaphorical displacement in which one abstract operator is used to qualify another, while never actually grounding the régime of abstract concepts. The discursive operators work, ultimately, to defer the question as it is originally posed. The "deep" emotionality theorized by Denzin is made possible by, and makes possible, Intersubjectivity.

This uncovers a disturbing regularity about the way that we pose questions and answer them in disciplined discourse. We uphold certain privileged abstractions to provide order and coherence to our theoretical reflections and choices of object and explanatory frames. This is the role of the problematic, as conceptualized by Althusser.[1] Yet the problematic tends to establish and perpetuate theoretical orthodoxies based on powerful discursive operators. Unchallenged by the contingencies of actual circumstances, these operators come to overdetermine the goals of research. If the research question is framed in highly abstract terms, as in Denzin's case, the problem is exacerbated; there is little in the actual context of research that can add to or disrupt the internal functioning of the problematic. Questions are preemptively answered by powerful discursive operators. Research and theory construction are limited by somewhat arbitrary constraints imposed by the problematic.

There are conflicting imperatives at work here. Researchers tend to re-frame empirical phenomena in terms of high-level abstractions in order to pose questions that have critical relevance, yet this too often displaces the intended object of study in favor of a powerful discursive operator. The more abstract the level of analysis chosen, the more

the theoretical imagery tends to overdetermine the results of the research, either by reframing phenomena in terms of high level theoretical abstractions (the *personnages* and *personnages antipathiques* of social theory); or by displacing research questions into the conceptual logic established within the problematic governing a particular discursive régime. When research questions are posed within a conceptual framework that tends towards self-referentiality because of its generality, these central abstractions and their analogues will circulate without explanatory power.

A structuring problem

The regularity of displacements involving powerful discursive operators points to a problem at the core of the project of a critical communication and cultural studies. The problem surfaces most often in the tension between the goals of social analysis and social criticism that are encompassed in the critical project. There are two divergent strategies at work: One is analytical, and in its most abstract form it is concerned with the determinations on and possible futures of the social totality. This strategy is on a theoretical trajectory that is increasingly constructivist, thus aligning it with some of the limit positions in sociological theory. Increasingly, analysts seek to recognize the complexity and contradictions of determinations "without guarantees." As Grossberg argues from a conjuncturalist position, "interventions depend not upon judgments critics bring from their own social position, but upon a real effort to map out some of the complex and contradictory vectors [...]" or determinations in the social formation (*Postmodernity* 152).

The other strategy pursues the project of rendering critical judgments, which requires (at the very least) explicit and often normative conceptions of social relations

against which events can be evaluated and interventions can be contemplated. One of the epistemological tendencies here has always been an interest in experience, evident in the ethnographic, hermeneutic and auto-biographical tendencies in current research. If the critic is to "meet people where they are – where they are touched, bitten, moved, frustrated, nauseated [...]" the project has to address social experience at the level of the popular (Hall in Grossberg *Postmodernity* 152). There are clearly divergent projects and divergent epistemological positions involved.

This is the condition of possibility for both the constant displacements of concrete objects of study by the more abstract discursive operators that work within critical epistemological régimes. It also suggests one of the determinations on the elaboration (some would say the incursion) of the analytic tendency into the critical project, to establish a more productive encounter between the constructs of critical theory and the empirical situations a sociologically oriented communication and cultural studies still seek to address. The formations that have taken up this theoretical challenge often tend to use *personnages* that are 'mobile' or 'fragmented', lacking in essence. Grossberg's suggestion that the 'site' of the popular be defined through the shifting articulations of affect, for example, works across the structured divide (Grossberg *Wandering* 308).

Mediation and human specificity

In a recent essay on the state of cultural studies, Grossberg argues that cultural studies should develop a "non-mediational theory of culture." He argues that the basic assumption that reality is necessarily mediated by cognition, culture and communication, an assumption shared by all "social constructionist" epistemologies, must be rejected. For Grossberg, mediation

> not only makes culture the 'essence' of human existence; it also ends up equating culture with communication. Thus the dialectic of culture not only erases the real but predefines every possibility of production (or articulation) as a particular kind of – a semantic – social construction. By identifying mediation with communication, all cultural practices necessarily involve the production of meanings and representations, of subjectivities and identities [...]. This notion of culture as a plane of cognitive meanings makes every practice an instance of the communicational relationship between text and audience [...] (74).

This break with mediation is a development on Grossberg's earlier critical work. As was apparent in the chapter on cultural criticism, there are good reasons to displace the notion of social experience from its role in the hermeneutic problematic, as the necessary mediator of both textual and social meanings. The imagery enabled a number of displacements that made possible the elision of important analytical differences. Despite its liabilities, Grossberg's reconceptualization of the structure of feeling as affect demonstrated a useful strategy of conjuncturalist analysis, responding to the problems of theoretical overdetermination and breaking with the orthodox treatment of cultural texts as objects that must be 'read' as social experiences. However, I cannot follow Grossberg in his argument that we break with conceptualizations of mediation altogether.

With the generalization inherent in his proposal to dispense with mediational theories of culture, Grossberg rejects a useful analytical concept along with the epistemological régime that he wishes to displace. In other words, he throws the baby out with the bathwater. Grossberg's suggestion that we do away with 'mediation' is based on

an equation of the concept of mediation with its *personnage* in social constructionist epistemology. Mediation has a much wider range of meanings and practical applications in the disciplines of communication and cultural studies.

The concept is also essential to define the specificity of the field of communication. A recent textbook in communication studies credits it with providing "the unity of the concept of media" and links it to a definition of a medium as "something intermediate [...] a middle state [...] an intervening thing through which a force acts or an effect is produced" (Grossberg, Wartella and Whitney 14). As Chang has pointed out, the concept is active at a fundamental level in theoretical imagery that defines instances of communication as mediation. Mediation underlies and overdetermines the problematic of communication (47). The discipline has an investment in mediation as a concept that organizes both theoretical elaboration and the formulation of research questions. It is a *personnage* we are obliged to use, but also one that must be continually contended with if our research is not to be subsumed within its logic. While I certainly agree with Grossberg's criticism that the imagery of mediation tends to displace phenomena into semiotic and meaningful terms, the problem is not inherent in the concept itself, rather in the way that it has been articulated in communication and social constructionist cultural theory.

Mediation need not necessarily be conceptualized solely within an economy of communication or localized in the experience of a receiving subject. Other images of mediation might be articulated to displace the social constructionist orthodoxy. It would be preferable to extend our current notion of mediation beyond these limits, to include the extra-semiotic levels and determinations developed by Grossberg and other theorists of

affect, and to avail ourselves of the opportunity to destabilize the constructionist orthodoxy that limits notions of mediation. To be truly useful, an extension of the term would have to extend the limits inherent in the social constructionist conception of mediation without attempting to break with them altogether. The site of the "effects" of mediation would no longer be assumed to be social experience, but would be constructed through the specification of a multi-leveled model of social determinations and social reality. Such a conception offers communication and cultural theorists, who must contend with the operations of mediation, another option for theoretical specification and reconstruction. The way forward doesn't require a theoretical revolution, but a more modest negotiation of the conceptual imagery around mediation, to move beyond the limits of social constructionist discourses and philosophical conceptions of difference and identity.

One such model is suggested by the notion of a radically contextualist cultural studies, again championed by Grossberg. However in this anti-mediational variant, conjuncturalism seems to have disengaged with human specificity. As Grossberg proposes,

> [...] the analysis of culture would involve the broader exploration of the way in which discursive practices construct and participate in the machinery by which such behavior (including modalities of affiliation, and belonging, agency and mobility) are produced and controlled [...]. Rather than asking what texts mean or what people do with texts, culture studies should be concerned with what discursive practices do in the world [...].

> Discourses are now active agents, not even merely performances, in the material world of power (Grossberg *Cultural Studies Crossroads* 75).

Grossberg's proposal would limit social analysis to the analysis of discursive practices and the effects of power. Surely a cultural theory whose central *personnage* is discourse and whose metaphors of social order and activity are 'machinery', 'behavior' and 'control' risks missing something of the specificity of the human. As we saw in its actual operations, discursive practice tends to be used to ground the claim of normativity on behalf of a particular discourse, or resistance on behalf of a particular practice, but many of the more mundane practices and specific social relations of everyday contexts fail to register on the mapping of discursive practice. So if, as Grossberg has argued elsewhere, it "does matter who is acting and from where; it does matter that the subject is both an articulated site and a site of ongoing articulation within its own history," why are the practices and the specifically social relations in which persons live so far removed from these analyses? (Grossberg *Wandering* 314).

We can explore an alternative by looking at another example here. Stivale has developed a useful analytical model in his discussion of Cajun dance and its shifting implication in the politics of cultural identities, by specifying a number of Deleuze and Guattari's concepts. His discussion ranges over numerous levels of analysis that together might be considered to model Cajun dance as something like a *dispositif* (Deleuze). Stivale poses the questions that orient his research in terms of intersections:

> I am interested in considering several intersections of Cajun music/dance forms: how particular music/dance arenas invite and in some ways construct gatherings of particular assemblages of musicians and

> dancers/spectators; how the artistic expression enhances these forms within different venues; how these forms place participants, musicians, and dancers/fans alike into active, performative dialogue; and how these forms and expressions thereby create a unique 'structure of feeling', a space of affect that may vary as event from one venue to another, but is no less important, even vital, for the appreciation by all participants. (Stivale 164-165)

Stivale's approach works by specifying levels of analysis and an object of inquiry in an analytical model of "nested frames" (183). The basic objects of analysis conceptualized by Stivale are 'spaces of affect.' This refers both to "the forms characterizing diverse modes of collective assemblage, and the 'feelings' evoked through these various forms" (Stivale 164). Note the purposeful condensation of the popular cultural form, the social group and its affects. Stivale's analysis is specific to the 'dance arena' of live Cajun music, taking the particular practices and emotional forms that occur there as the basis for interpretation. Nested within these specific contexts, Stivale constructs a number of levels of mediation. One of them derives quite simply from the limitations imposed by the material context of the dance arena, which cannot accommodate all practices of Cajun dance at once. Dancing bodies are obliged to accommodate one another, and certain limits on dance forms must be respected or imposed. These same practices figure in another level of mediation more familiar to sociological analysis, that of the economy of distinction in which particular practices signify social position or social identity. In the dance arena, the economy is organized around an opposition of traditionalist and innovationist sensibilities in Cajun dance. Another recognizable level of mediation is the

"dialogic" interaction of musicians and dancer/spectators that Stivale considers the primary determination of the selection and development of music and dance practice. The actors in this model of performance are endowed not with intersubjectivity, but with the ability to "affect and be affected" in their mutual mediation of the 'event' of the space of affect. These three analytical levels, constructed specifically for the dance arena through the specification of familiar models of mediation, are nested within the space of affect, the "all encompassing articulation" that individuates and describes the specificity of the event at the level of the collective assemblage and its 'structure of feeling'.

At a yet more encompassing level of mediation, these spaces of affect are "implicated in the ever-present 'instability of the frontiers' determined by complex conditions of the surrounding socio-political (hegemonic) formation." (Stivale 165, original citation from Laclau and Mouffe, 136) At this level Stivale is interested in the shifting articulations of Cajun cultural identities and popular representations and music/dance practices. The model that serves the more abstract goals of the critical project is therefore conjunctural. The dialogic mediations of musicians and dancer/spectators that work to create effects in the local space of the dance arena, are also intersected by the global economy of the music industry. The more general organizations of taste and demand to which these artists are also oriented partially determines the voluntary choices of Cajun musicians in elaborating their art, and through their mediation come to intervene in the local context of the dance arena and in the production of Cajun identities. The dialogical mediations linking musicians and dancers are shown to be embedded within and conditioned by forces outside of the dance arena. In this way, the

analysis moves through many "intersections" of music/dance practices and other mediations, emphasizing their interrelation.

Stivale's approach works by constructing multiple, articulated levels of analysis that are explicitly developed for the object of study (83). Each level of analysis is specified for the occasion from a model of mediation. The epistemological resources for the models come from Bourdieu, who contributes the economy of distinction; Laclau, with the notion of the global context as a hegemonic articulation; and of course Grossberg, with various conceptions of affective economy and affective investments (practices). Around the level of affect, Stivale also constructs a number of concepts drawn from the toolkit of Deleuze and Guattari, using *heccéité* to describe the zone of mutual affectivity of dancers and musicians, and *ritournelles* to describe the structures of movement, sound and sensation that characterize the event of the space of affect. Stivale's model allows us to engage with multiple sites and forms of mediation in a conjuncture, while stepping out of the social constructionist orthodoxy associated with the operator "mediation."

Contrary to Grossberg's argument, all forms of mediation represented in the model are not *personnages* of 'reading' or psychological interpretations. Mediations that work on extra-semiotic levels appear when, for example, Stivale describes the "steps and movements through which the dancers' propulsion enables them to engage in dialogue with each other as well as with the musicians" (175). The distinctions offered by the analytic concept of the "ritournelle" are extraordinarily specific, and they allow Stivale to relate dance practices to the affective form of the event with admirable precision. Since they are intrinsic to the production of the space of affect, its singular "structure of

feeling," these extra-semiotic levels of mediation have a definite analytic importance. The model also extends to more "macroscopic" levels, encompassing the economic mediations of the entertainment business. Stivale's approach does a credible job of integrating the determinations of the global pop music economy into an analysis that is situated in the multiple localities of the dance arena. He thus sidesteps the problems typically raised by the integration of the disciplinary *personnages antipathiques* of political economy and cultural studies.

Behind this practice of constructing research questions and levels of analysis, there is an implicit shift in the meaning of mediation, one that moves it away from the imagery of a plane of cultural meaning or cognitive experience interposed between the subject and reality, to the notion of the event itself as expressive. In a perspective much influenced by Deleuze and Guattari, mediations don't exclusively produce culture and cognition; they have their effects on multiple levels, as Grossberg recounts:

> They argue that reality itself is expressive at the various levels of its articulation as productivity or meaningfulness, and hence that such expressivity is neither distinctly human nor mediating. The world itself does not exist outside of its expressions (Grossberg *Experience* 76).

Stivale's ecumenical perspective actually follows the conjuncturalist prescription advocated by Grossberg, that "cultural practices always operate on multiple planes, producing multiple effects that cannot be entirely analyzed in the terms of any theory of communication, ideology, consciousness or semiotic" (75). I would argue that the specificity of the dance arena could not be captured adequately within a perspective that automatically excludes all forms of mediation from its analytic framework. The levels

constructed by Stivale clearly yield highly specific distinctions that are relevant to the goals of his analysis. We can ask for no more from our operators than that. Furthermore, while the mediational theories that Grossberg rejects surely must be displaced from their current position of dominance in our interpretive practices, there is no need to assume that they are automatically irrelevant. Meaning or experience may on occasion be useful points of departure for constructing more specific research questions and analytic frames. A perspective based on multiple levels of mediation leaves the question open, to be decided in relation to actual contexts of research.

The displacement of mediation evidently helps us out of some of the liabilities associated with hermeneutic operators. First of all, Stivale's approach is not hermeneutic. It departs from the hermeneutic logic that would have us interrogate the "experience" of dance to discover its true meaning for participants. There are no strips of speech reproduced as evidence of such an experience, for example. Consequently, the discourse does not produce the usual displacement of the object into terms of semiosis. The approach allows the researcher to engage more extensively with the materiality of cultural practices. Stivale takes the opportunity to develop the affective basis of practices particular to the dance arena. Unlike the early subcultural research in cultural studies, different practices are not so readily displaced by an operator like "resistance".

As an object of analysis, the dance arena is not an object of social cognition, but is instead an unambiguously theoretical construction. Its application is rather less subject to the conceptual determinations of common-sense, and perhaps easier to specify and control. The dance arena is conceptualized as a singular articulation, rather like a *dispositif*, composed of practices, agencies and determinations that intersect one another

(Deleuze). As for the "space of affect", it is a novel condensation of feeling and cultural form, presented in spatial terms, as an articulated object that is independent of the experience of those who participate in it.

This perspective sidesteps the epistemological dualism of self and other that compromises ethnography. Although Stivale doesn't study the experiences of other dancers, a selection of experiential vignettes opens his essay, situating his own perspective as a participant/fan and perhaps explaining why he is so concerned to account for the heccéité, the "thisness" of the event of affect. The relation between critic and object is thus more proximate than ethnographies generally allow, since he describes practices directly, without interposing the *personnages* of the experiencing Cajuns. Stivale takes a certain distance from this perspective, however, "to see experience as a source of both real knowledge and social mystification" (165). In describing the basic affects of the ritournelles, the rhythms and sensations of the music and the dance, he is constructing a level of analysis that might otherwise be designated as "the lived" without working within the subjectivist assumptions of ethnography. In seeking to analyze these practices in relation to their "objective social locations" Stivale is better placed than the typical ethnographer to address the material articulations and implications of these practices.

Here, Stivale's project begins to resemble that of conjuncturalist analysis more generally. This entails certain gains over the hermeneutic focus on experience. The hermeneutics of literary humanism or ethnographic realism only accede to the contextual stakes of research through certain a-priori assumptions about the determination of social experience, and the role of social experience in agency. The structure of feeling, for

instance, relies on homology to relate cultural texts and social experience. In a multi-leveled conjuncturalist analysis, experience is recognized, but it is no longer the ultimate frame that constitutes social reality, as phenomenology holds. Experience becomes an interesting but accessory fact, not the basis of the Real.

Finally, an open-ended model of articulations tends to evacuate the specificity of unidimensional models of social process. As Stivale demonstrates, complex analytical models tend to emphasize the "inherently equivocal articulations" in which practices are inserted. Since the model is open-ended, it obliges researchers to be more explicit about the objects that they construct and the models of mediation with which they frame them. Hermeneutic approaches tend to hide the partiality of the research by implying that the critical perspective offered is the only one, due to its correspondence with the social experience being researched. A conjuncturalist model that makes explicit the stakes and the limitations of its own perspective is preferable.

Since the constraints on problematization are (apparently) loosened, a model of multiple levels of mediation emphasizes that there is more than one question to be posed of any conjuncture. Such a model invites us to recognize the inherently partial aspect of research, its selectivity and its conjunctural embeddedness. We can no longer obscure the work of discursive operators behind the fiction that "the object" determines its conceptualization, that patterns spring immediately from empirical observation, or that questions suggest themselves in isolation from the determinations of the problematic, the discipline and the conjuncture. Rather, the conjuncturalist approach invites us to account for our choices: Why frame these particular practices with this particular frame? How do our practices work to create knowledge?

Stivale's analysis is not without its inevitable lacunae; that is to be expected since any perspective is necessarily a partial perspective. One can always argue with the choice of relevances: How might this analysis have read if other social relations had been framed? What of the gendered or sexual relations among dance partners, to take a likely concern. The analysis is extraordinarily sensitive to practices, but it is relatively weak on the network of social relations that surround them. The advantage of the multi-leveled model is that these other levels of analysis could have been constructed without working against a set of limits imposed by methodological orthodoxy. It is left to the discretion of the researcher to determine the relevant levels of analysis. However, it would have been preferable that Stivale be more explicit about his choice of practices and analytical frames, given the freedom afforded by the model.

Strategies of containment

This returns us to the more general question of how we might organize the engagement of theoretical tools with the empirical component of our research, so as to avoid naively adopting discursive operators. If we must remain within the problematics of the critical subdisciplines, how can we contend with the liabilities posed by our operators, while still making use of them?

As an alternative to the reiteration of the *personnages antipathiques* of social research, we might point to a useful strategy to construct concepts for specific circumstances of research. As Deleuze and Guattari write:

> Concepts must have irregular contours molded on their living material. What is naturally uninteresting? Flimsy concepts, what Nietzsche called the 'formless fluid dabs of concepts' – or, on the contrary, concepts that

> are too regular, petrified and reduced to a framework. In this respect, the most universal concepts, those presented as eternal forms or values, are the most skeletal and least interesting (Deleuze and Guattari 83).

What is needed to contend with the many forms of displacement encountered in various domains of cultural and critical communication studies is the use of more specific operators to map the "irregular contours" of actual circumstances of research. This applies both to the objects of inquiry that we construct and to the more general theoretical frames that we use to situate and explain them. The more specific our operators are, in general, the more they help resist the displacements inspired by the *personnages* of abstract social theory, allowing us to establish the specificity of the practices particular to the domain in lieu of reiterating the truths of abstract social theory.

A key moment of overdetermination in the process of social research occurs in the initial constitution of an object of study. It is here that powerful discursive operators invest our practices, establishing integral lines of force between the problematics of social theory and the *personnages* in which researchers "write up" events. It is a problem that demands a strategy to mitigate the displacements and deferrals that are often legitimated by disciplinary wisdom or common sense. An appropriate response is the construction of a more localized abstraction, such as the dance arena (Stivale) or the moral economy of the household (Silverstone and Morley). This allows the construction of objects of inquiry and levels of analysis that displace those universal problems and indistinct objects suggested by common knowledge and disciplinary orthodoxy. Such bounded concepts specify a field of inquiry, a problem space, grounded in closely observed practices and relations that work to displace the more abstract discourses

centered around the typical abstractions of communicational inquiry, such as consumption, resistance or the audience.

Perhaps the most explicit project of construction of objects of inquiry and levels of mediation is Grossberg's theorization of affect. The operator works to make important aspects of human sensibility available to projects of conjuncturalist analysis, which is no small achievement. The construction is undertaken with an implicit regard for the problems of displacement. Confronted with the informal evidence of a changing structure of feeling, Grossberg proceeds with characteristic caution, arguing that "we should not too quickly recuperate it into either a phenomenology of logical transcendentalism or into a deconstructive theory of the ideological production of experience" (*All Dressed Up* 159).

Such a practice begins to satisfy the need for strategies to contend with the *personnages antipathiques* of social theory, strategies that explicitly avoid the reframing of objects of research in terms of oppositions such as agency and structure, theoreticisim and empiricism, or oppression and resistance. In identifying the problem of "false antinomies" in social theory, Bourdieu argues that "such paired concepts are so deeply ingrained in both lay and scientific common sense that only by an extraordinary and constant effort of epistemological vigilance can the sociologist hope to escape these false alternatives" (780). Bourdieu suggests a general strategy for theoretical reconstruction that displaces the *personnages* of agent and structure by grounding a theory of social agency in terms of a relation. Bourdieu's concepts of field and habitus are meant to dissolve these dualisms by working across polar oppositions, condensing what might otherwise be considered the objectivist and subjectivist perspectives into a single model

in which they stand in a dialectial relationship: "The field, as a structured space, tends to structure the habitus, while the habitus tends to structure the perception of the field" (784). The benefit of this conceptualization is that the distinction of field and habitus can be relocated and specified in particular domains of research. It can relate practices to the formation of institutions without recourse to a conditioning theoretical narrative that names determinations and agencies before the analysis begins. It works against the tendency of orthodox approaches to reproduce general figures of the agent, and to confine analysis to a corresponding level of mediation. The increasingly influential strategy that Bourdieu's position exemplifies is one that displaces or dissolves dichotomous structures of theorization.

We have encountered a number of related strategies in our analyses. Barthes's attempted integration of structuralist and phenomenological *personnages* in his account of photography is one rather eclectic example. While the importance of a project that extends the limits of semiotic and social psychological perspectives on reception is undeniable, Barthes's use of the strategy is more appropriate to the practices of a literary critic than a sociologist. An approach grounded in the singular subjectivity of the observer is difficult to reconcile with entrenched disciplinary norms of knowledge production in the social sciences. Ahmed's bridging of the same discursive divide in her processual account of the "surfacing" of identities in affective encounters seems rather more promising. Although she focuses too narrowly on hate and the differentiation of marginal identities, the approach could be opened up to accommodate other relations, through the analysis of other practices. Her work is situated in a wider feminist strategy that collapses dichotomous structures of conceptualization in order to think through

structured relations that are more complex than the simple binarisms suggested by *personnages antipathiques*, as feminist political philosophy has succeeded in doing by stepping out of the dichotomoy of oppression and resistance in their use of models of capillary power.

Another variation on the strategy is figured in the *personnage* of the nomadic critic, elaborated in cultural studies. As exemplified by Morris in her essay "At Henry Parks Motel," the nomadic critic works to deconstruct the binary oppositions of critical theoretical perspectives in the course of the analysis. The practice enacts a critical strategy that valorizes mobility, working across established trajectories and re-articulating or discarding theoretical premises. It is a practice that allows only temporary moments of closure when perspectives are allowed to stand or an end-point in a particular trajectory is reached. Rather than proposing a more acceptable ontological figure of the "subject of knowledge", the nomadic critic assumes a multiplicity of perspectives in an exhaustive (and often exhausting) attempt to suggest the specificity of the object of study and the need for theoretical specification in terms of a particular situation.

The conclusion that I draw from this set of strategies is that rather than reproducing one general theoretical position or another in our research, we can contend with the discursive effects of *personnages antipathiques* by deconstructing the oppositions on which they rest. We can displace the *personnages* of abstract theoretical positions by using concepts that are more specific to the actual circumstances of our research.

Another strategy is needed to contend with the liability of discursive operators in the posing of questions, often associated with a set of *personnages antipathiques*, that

tend to displace inquiry into the entrenched problems of social theory. To see the importance of this issue, we must recognize that the terms in which a question is posed determine, at least partially, the logics of intelligibility and the explanatory concepts that can furnish an answer to that question. Rather than maintaining the realist position that our questions are somehow distinct from our observations and explanations, we had best think of research as an on-going construction of problems, contexts of research, and potential answers, which occurs simultaneously.

The posing of a question always invokes a problematic that may nominate solutions and place limits on potential answers. If questions are framed in abstract terms, there is always the possibility that an answer will be generated in the problematic itself, rather than in the empirical context of research. In some ways, my point reiterates the epistemological truism that we must avoid teleology and tautology in formulating questions for research. For example, to ask how emotional intersubjectivity is realized without attending to its evident failure not only accords the concept an inordinate privilege. It falls into the teleological operations of the *personnage* of intersubjectivity, establishing the facticity of the operation in the very formulation of the question. The question of how a theoretical abstraction is realized in situated activity assumes too much about the facticity of its discursive operators. In offering an explanation by way of a series of conceptual displacements, Denzin comes perilously close to tautology. Rather like the "dormitive principle" with which the sage explained sleep, emotional intersubjectivity finally explains itself, through the mediation of its *personnages*, emotional understanding and emotionality. The answer to the question is generated in the problematic. Of course, without some skepticism towards the integrity of abstract

discursive operators, the metaphorical slippage of these terms would probably pass unnoticed.

The attendant circularity is always a problem, but it can be mitigated if the design of the research calls for the reformulation of abstract questions in terms specified in the empirical moments of analysis. Stacey's reconstruction of the concept of identification is exemplary in this regard. Appropriating an operator traditionally associated with the theoreticist régime of film studies, she modifies the concept to make it relevant to interview-based sociological inquiry. One of the principal goals of her research is to formulate an extended typology of identifications that is conceptually and historically more specific than her initial perspective could account for. She succeeds admirably in specifying her research questions and her analytic concepts to engage with a particular form of social context.

The problem of how and what questions should be asked is also made explicit in the conjuncturalist formations. As Grossberg writes, "[...] if one starts by assuming the questions – how texts impose their meaning or how audiences interpret texts - one will miss the actual possibilities of living that are opened up and closed off by such practices" (Grossberg 62). However, it might be argued that the question of what question to ask is not opened up adequately, and that the conjuncturalist régime forecloses the elaboration of more interesting questions with its commitment to the analysis of the operations of "power," at the expense of the problematic of mediation. By posing his research questions to illuminate the conjuncture as a series of "intersections" Stivale accomplishes much of what the explicitly conjuncturalist work attempts, without a reactionary break with mediation. Stivale's formulation of research questions in such open-ended terms

actually invites the specification of questions as the analysis of the conjuncture proceeds. This is surely a more productive strategy, since it invites researchers to make explicit the construction of the problem space and the specification of more precise research questions at the same time.

Rather than pose questions in terms of abstract discursive operators, and step into all of the assumptions and difficulties that their *personnages* present, we would do better to pose questions that are more closely grounded in the heterogeneous practices that make up specific contexts. If we assimilate practices to *personnages* right away, they are generally displaced, creating "false problems" (Deleuze *Bergsonism* 15-20). If we begin with the assumption that practices are different in different contexts, we may no longer satisfy ourselves with reproducing a general theoretical position. Conceptually, it helps to establish a bounded domain to create a space for the construction of mid-level abstractions, and work within theoretical frameworks that lend themselves to contextual rearticulation and specification. One such framework is offered by a model of nested levels of mediation. The open-ended model requires us to specify the "economies" or levels on which determinations and agencies can be described, and to specify the particular social relations that are of interest to the project. This strategy seems better suited to the kinds of small scale project that are currently favored in critical communication research.

Perhaps what is ultimately necessary, beyond any general prescriptions, is a commitment to the reflexive critique of our own operators and a commitment to conceptual elaboration that is situationally specific. We might ask of Denzin's material, what is it that we are drawn to conceptualize as intersubjectivity in particular situations?

How else might it be described, to specify intersubjectivity and to emphasize the singular characteristics of the phenomenon? What are the conjunctural resources, the discursive practices, available to describe it? How might the limits that they impose be extended to produce a discourse of some facticity, but of greater specificity and ultimately more freedom from the determinations of operators and discursive régimes? These are the questions we must regularly ask of our objects as we construct them. If research is to produce statements that have a greater claim to facticity, we must question the discourses within which our claims to truth are enunciated and legitimated.

I hope to have dispelled the pessimistic notion that we are caught in an inescapable hermeneutic circle. There clearly are strategies to improve our practices. But we must also be honest about the work of our operators, otherwise our epistemological claims will be compromised. Confronted with a powerful operator, we must find a way of working within the plane that it lays out, and yet contending with its structuring force. If we don't try to contend with the centripetal pull of our operators, we are likely to walk into the same operations and incur the same liabilities time and again, even as we claim to take up new perspectives on new objects.

ENDNOTES

[1] For a discussion of the concept of the problematic, see Althusser, For Marx, pps. 66-67; and Althusser and Etienne Balibar, Reading Capital, p. 25

WORKS CITED

Ahmed, Sara. "Communities That Feel: Intensity, Difference and Attachment." Conference Proceedings for Affective Encounters: Rethinking Embodiment in Feminist Media Studies. Ed. Anu Koivunen and Susanna Paasonen. 4 January 2001. <http://www.nidlink.com/~aryanvic/index-E.html>

Allor, Martin. "The Politics of Producing Audiences." Ed. James Hay, Lawrence Grossberg, Ellen Wartella. The Audience and Its Landscape. Boulder: Westview, 1996.

Althusser, Louis. For Marx. Trans Ben Brewster. London: Verso, 1979.

Althusser, Louis and Etienne Balibar. Reading Capital. Trans. Ben Brewster. London: New Left Books, 1970.

Armon-Jones, Claire. 'The Social Functions of Emotion.' The Social Construction of the Emotions. Ed. Rom Harré. London: Oxford UP, 1986.

Barthes, Roland. Camera Lucida. Trans. Richard Howard. New York: Hill, 1981.

Baudrillard, Jean. Symbolic Exchange and Death. Trans. Iain Hamilton Grant. London: Sage, 1993.

Berthelot, Jean Michel. "Le Corps Comme Opérateur Discursif ou les Apories d'une Sociologie du Corps." Sociologies et Sociétés, 24 (1992): 12-18.

Bourdieu, Pierre. "Vive la Crise! For Heterodoxy in Social Sciences.." Theory and Society, 17 (5) 1988-89: 773-787.

Braidotti, Rosi. Nomadic Subjects : Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory. New York: Columbia UP, 1994.

Brown, Mary Ellen. Soap Opera and Women's Talk: The Pleasure of Resistance. London: Sage, 1994.

Brunsdon, Charlotte. "Crossroads: Notes on Soap Opera." Screen Tastes. New York: Routledge, 1997.

---. The Feminist, the Housewife and the Soap Opera. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000.

Buck, Ross. The Communication of Emotion. New York: Guilford, 1984.

Budd, Mike and Robert N. Entman and Clay Steinman. "The Affirmative Character of U.S. Cultural Studies." Critical Studies in Mass Communication. 7 (1990) 169-184

Butler, Judith. Gender Trouble. 1990. New York: Routledge, 1999.

Canguilhem, Georges. "What is Psychology?" I & C 7: 37-50.

Carey, James. Communication as Culture. Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989.

Cecil, Malcolm K. "Simulation and the Digital Refiguring of Culture." M.A. Thesis. McGill U, 1996.

Chang, Briankle. Deconstructing Communication: Representation, Subject, and Economies of Exchange. Minneapolis: UMP, 1996.

Cobb, Sara. "Violence Invaginated: the Semiotics of Mass Arrest in Chile." Law and Critique 4 (2) 1993: 131-154

Cobley, Paul. "Throwing Out the Baby: Populism and Active Audience Theory." Media Culture and Society 16, 1994: 677-687.

Culler, Jonathan. On Deconstruction. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1982.

Deleuze, Gilles. "A Quoi Reconnait-On le Structuralisme?" La Philosophie au XXe Siecle. Ed. Francois Chatelet. Marabout, Belgique, 1979.

---. Bergsonism. Trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barabra Habberjam. New York: Zone, 1988.

---. "Qu'est ce qu'un *Dispositif*?" Michel Foucault Philosophe. Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1988.

Deleuze, Gilles and Felix Guattari. What Is Philosophy? Trans. Graham Burchill and Hugh Tomlinson. London: Verso, 1994.

Denzin, Norman K. On Understanding Emotion. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1984.

---. The Alcoholic Society : Addiction and Recovery of the Self. New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction, 1993.

De Lauretis, Teresa. Technologies Of Gender: Essays on Theory, Film, and Fiction. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1987.

Fiske, John. Television Culture. New York: Methuen, 1987.

---. Reading the Popular. Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989.

---. Understanding Popular Culture. Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989.

---. "Moments of Television: Neither the Text nor the Audience." In Remote Control: Television, Audiences and Cultural Power. Eds. Ellen Seiter, Hans Borchers, Gabriele Kreutzner, and Eva-Maria Warth. London: Routledge, 1989.

Foucault, Michel. "Réponse à une Question." 1968. Michel Foucault Dits et Ecrits 1954-1988 1. Paris: Galimard, 1994.

---. The Archaeology of Knowledge. Trans. A. Sheridan Smith. New York: Pantheon, 1972.

---. L'Ordre du Discours. Paris: Galimard, 1971.

Fornas, Johan. "The Essential In-Between." European Journal of Cultural Studies 3 (2000): 45-65.

Geertz, Clifford. "Common Sense as a Cultural System." Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Anthropological Knowledge. New York: Basic, 1983.

Giddens, Anthony. The Consequences of Modernity. Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 1990.

Goffman, Erving. Interaction Ritual. Essays on Face to Face Behavior. Toronto: Pantheon, 1967.

Gratton, Johnnie. "The Subject of Enunciation in Roland Barthes's Camera Lucida." Critical Essays on Roland Barthes. Ed. Diana Knight. New York: G.K. Hall, 2000.

Grossberg, Lawrence. "Experience, Signification, and Reality: The Boundaries Of Cultural Semiotics." Bringing it All Back Home: Essays on Cultural Studies. 1982. Durham: Duke UP, 1997.

---."Does Communication Theory Need Intersubjectivity? Toward an Immanent Philosophy of Interpersonal Relations." Communication Yearbook 6. Ed. Michael Burgoon. London: Sage, 1982.

--- "Formation(s) of Cultural Studies: An American in Birmingham." 1988. Bringing it All Back Home: Essays on Cultural Studies. Durham: Duke UP, 1997.

---. "Postmodernity and Affect: All Dressed Up With No Place to Go." Dancing in Spite of Myself. Durham: Duke UP, 1997.

---. "Strategies of Marxist Interpretation." 1984. Bringing it All Back Home: Essays on Cultural Studies. Durham: Duke UP, 1997.

---. "Wandering Audiences, Nomadic Critics." 1988. Bringing it All Back Home: Essays on Cultural Studies. Durham: Duke UP, 1997.

---. We Gotta Get Out of This Place: Popular Conservatism and Postmodern Culture. New York: Routledge, 1992.

---. "Cultural Studies Crossroads Blues." European Journal of Communication Studies 1 (1998): 65-82.

Grossberg, Lawrence and Ellen Wartella, D. Charles Whitney. Mediamaking: Mass Media in a Popular Culture. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1998.

Gutting, Gary. Michel Foucault's Archaeology of Scientific Reason. Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge UP, 1989.

Hall, Stuart. "Notes on Deconstructing the Popular." People's History and Socialist Theory. Ed. R. Samuel. London: Routledge, Kegan and Paul, 1978.

---. "Encoding/decoding." In Culture, Media, Language. Ed Stuart Hall et al. London: Hutchinson, 1980.

Hall, Stuart and Tony Jefferson. Resistance Through Rituals: Youth Subcultures in Post-War Britain. New York: Holmes and Meier, 1976.

Harré, Rom. The Social Construction of the Emotions. London: Oxford UP, 1986.

Hammersley, Martyn. What's Wrong With Ethnography? Methodological Explorations. London: Routledge, 1992.

Haraway, Donna J. Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature. New York: Routledge, 1991.

Harper, Philip Brian. "The Subversive Edge: Paris Is Burning, Social Critique and The Limits of Subjective Agency." Diacritics 24 (2/3) 1994: 94-108

Hebdige, Dick. "The Meaning of Mod." In Resistance Through Rituals. Eds. Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson. New York: Holmes and Meier, 1976.

Henderson, Lisa. "'Storyline' and the Multicultural Middlebrow: Reading Women's Culture on National Public Radio." Critical Studies in Mass Communication 16 (1999): 329-349.

hooks, bell. "Sisterhood: Political Solidarity Between Women." Feminist Social Thought: A Reader. Ed Diana Tietjens Meyers. New York: Routledge, 1997.

Jenkins, Henry. Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture. New York: Routledge, 1992.

Lull, James. World Families Watch Television. London: Sage, 1988.

Mbembe, Achille. On the Postcolony. Berkeley: UCP, 2001.

Moores, Shawn. Interpreting Audiences: The Ethnography of Audience Reception. London: Sage, 1993.

Morley, David. The Nationwide Audience. London: BFI, 1980.

---. Television, Audiences and Cultural Studies. London: Routledge, 1992.

Morris, Meaghan. "At Henry Parks Motel." Cultural Studies 2, 1 (1988).

---. "Banality in Cultural Studies." In Logics of Television. Ed. Patricia Mellencamp. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1990.

Packer, George. "9.30.01: The Way We Live Now: Recapturing the Flag." New York Times 30 Sept. 2001, sec. 6: 15-16.

Pfeil, Fred. "Postmodernism as a Structure of Feeling." Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture. Ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988.

Planalp, Sally. Communicating Emotion: Social, Moral, and Cultural Processes. Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge UP, 1999.

Radway, Janice. Reading the Romance. Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 1984.

Rock, Paul Elliott. The Making of Symbolic Interactionism. London: Macmillan, 1979.

Rutherford, Jonathan. "A Place Called Home." Identity: Community, Culture, Difference. Ed. Jonathan Rutherford. London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990.

Schiller, Dan. Theorizing Communication : A History. New York: Oxford UP, 1996.

Schudson, Michael. "The New Validation of Popular Culture: Sense and Sentimentality in Academia." Critical Studies in Mass Communication. 4 (1987): 51-68

Scott, Joan. "Evidence of Experience." Feminist Approaches to Theory and Methodology: An Interdisciplinary Reader. Ed. Sharlene Hesse-Biber, Christina Gilmartin and Robin Lydenberg. New York: Oxford UP, 1999.

Seiter, Ellen et al. "'Don't Treat Us Like We're So Stupid and Naïve': Towards an Ethnography of Soap Opera Viewers." In Remote Control: Television, Audiences and Cultural Power. Eds. Ellen Seiter, Hans Borchers, Gabriele Kreutzner, and Eva-Maria Warth. London: Routledge, 1989.

Silverstone, Roger. "Television, Ontological Security and the Transitional Object." Media Culture and Society 15 (1993): 573-598.

Silverstone, Roger and Eric Hirsch and David Morley. "Listening to a Long Conversation: An Ethnographic Approach to the Study of Information and Communication Technologies in the Home." Cultural Studies, 5, 2 (1991): 204-227.

Slack, Jennifer Daryl. "The Theory and Method Of Articulation in Cultural Studies." In Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies. Eds. David Morley and Kuan-Hsing Chen. London: Routledge, 1996.

Slemon, Steven. "Resistance Theory for the Second World." World Literature Written in English 30 (2) 1990

Smith, Anna Marie. "The Centering Of Right-Wing Extremism Through the Construction of an 'Inclusionary' Homophobia and Racism." Playing with Fire : Queer Politics, Queer Theories. Ed. Shane Phelan. New York: Routledge, 1997.

Stacey, Jackie. Star Gazing. New York: Routledge, 1994.

Stivale, Charles J. "Of Heccéités and Ritournelles:'Spaces of Affect' and the Cajun Dance Arena." In The Two Fold Thought of Deleuze and Guattari: Intersections and Animations. New York: Guilford Press, 1998.

Walkerdine, Valerie. "Video Replay: Families, Films and Fantasy." Formations of Fantasy. Ed. V. Burgin, J. Donald and C. Kaplan. London: Methuen, 1986.

Williams, Raymond. Politics and Letters: Interviews with New Left Review. London: NLB, 1979.

---. Drama from Ibsen to Brecht. London: Chatto and Windus, 1968.

Willis, Paul and Simon Jones, Joyce Canaan, Geoff Hurd. Common Culture. Symbolic Work at Play in the Everyday Cultures of the Young. Boulder: Westview, 1990.