Postmodern Cultural Studies: A Critique

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Cultural Studies and the Academy

Cultural studies in the academies of the advanced capitalist countries has transformed the object of studies in the humanities. In particular, in English departments, cultural studies has challenged the predominance of the governing categories of literary studies (the "canon," the homogeneous "period," the formal properties of genre, the literary object as autonomous and self-contained) in the interest of producing "readings" of all texts of culture and inquiring into the reproduction of subjectivities. To this end, pressure has been placed on disciplinary boundaries, the methods which police these boundaries, and modes of interpretation and critique have been developed which bring, for example, "economics" and "politics" to bear on the formal properties of texts. In addition, the lines between "high culture" and "mass culture" have been relativized, making it possible to address texts in terms of their social effectivity rather than their "inherent" literary, philosophical or other values.

The two most significant categories which have supported these institutional changes have been "ideology" and "theory." Althusserian and post-althusserian understandings of ideology, which defined ideology not in terms of a system of ideas or "world view" but in terms of the production of subjects who recognize the existing social world as the only possible and "reasonable" one, made possible the reading of texts in terms of the ways in which the workings of ideology determined their structure and uses. Marxist and post-structuralist theories, meanwhile, focused critical attention on the conditions of possibility of discourses, and upon the exclusions and inclusions which enable their articulation. In both cases, critique becomes possible insofar as reading is directed at uncovering the "invisible" possibilities of understanding which are suppressed as a condition of the text's intelligibility.

I support these efforts to transform the humanities into a site of cultural critique. I will argue that what is at stake in these changes is the uses of pedagogical institutions and practices in late capitalist society. If pedagogy is understood, as I would argue it should be, as the intervention into the reproduction of subjectivities, then the outcome of struggles over "culture" and "cultural studies" will determine whether or not the Humanities will become a site at which the production of oppositional subjectivities is made possible. Historically, the Humanities has been a site at which the contradictions of the subjectivities required by late capitalist culture have been addressed and "managed." For example, the central concepts of post-World War Two literary criticism, such as "irony," have the function of reducing contradictions to the "complexity" and "irrationality" of "reality," thereby reconciling subjects to those contradictions.

However, these recent changes in the academy have been very partial and contradictory. They have been partial in the sense that much of the older or "traditional" modes of literary studies have remained untouched by these developments, or have only made some slight "accommodations" to them. They have also been contradictory in the sense that cultural studies has accommodated itself to existing practices, by producing new modes of fetishizing texts and preserving conservative modes of subjectivity. In this way, cultural studies continues to advance the ideological function of the modern Humanities in a changed social environment.

The right wing attacks these changes, charging--as in the ongoing "PC" scare--that the Humanities are abandoning their commitment to objectivity and the universal values of Western culture. My argument is that these commitments and values have been undermined by social developments which have socialized subjects in new ways while concentrating global socio-economic power within an ever-shrinking number of transnational corporations. The intellectual and political tendencies coordinated by cultural studies, then, are responding to these transformations by allowing academic business to go on as usual, and providing updated and therefore more useful modes of legitimation for capitalist society.

The contradictions of these changes in the mode of knowledge production need to be understood within the framework of the needs of the late capitalist social order. The emergence of "theory" and (post)Althusserian understandings of ideology reflected and contributed strongly to the undermining of liberal humanism (in both its "classical" and social-democratic versions) as the legitimating ideology of capitalism. The discrediting of liberal humanism, first under the pressures of anti-colonialist revolts and then as a result of the anti-hegemonic struggles in the advanced capitalist "heartlands," revealed a deep crisis in authority and hegemony in late capitalist society. This discrediting also revealed the need for new ideologies of legitimation, free from what could now be seen as the "naivete" of liberal humanist universalism, now widely viewed as a cover for racist, sexist and anti-democratic institutions.

The institutional tendencies which have produced the constellation of practices which can be termed "cultural studies" have, then, participated both in the attack on liberal understandings and in the development of new discourses of legitimation. The liberal

humanism predominant in the academy has increasingly been seen as illegitimate because it depends upon an outmoded notion of private individuality-that is, the modern notion of the immediacy with which the privileged text is apprehended by the knowing subject. In this understanding, literature is understood in opposition to science and technology, as a site where what is essential to our "human nature" can be preserved or recovered in the face of a social reality where this "human essence" ("freedom") is perpetually at risk. However, the more "scientific" methods (like semiology) which have undermined the hegemony of "new criticism" in the American academy, largely through the use of modes of analysis borrowed from structuralist anthropology and linguistics, have themselves been discredited by postmodern theories as largely conservative discourses interested in resecuring disciplinary boundaries (for example, through the classification of genres) and protecting an empiricist notion of textuality.

Cultural studies, then, is the result of the combination of the introduction of "theory" and the "politicization" of theory enabled by these social and institutional changes. However, the postmodern assault on "master narratives" ("theory") has responded to the discrediting of both structuralism and Marxism in a conservative political environment by redefining "politics" to mean the resistance of the individual subject to modes of domination located in the discursive and disciplinary forms which constitute the subject. This has opened up the possibility of a new line of development for cultural studies: one in which the local supplants the global as the framework of analysis and description or "redescription" replaces explanation as the purpose of theoretical investigations. I will argue that the set of discourses which have "congealed" into what I will call "postmodern cultural studies" represents the definitive subordination of cultural studies to this line of development. That is, the ideological struggles carried out throughout the 1970s in such sites as the Birmingham School for Cultural Studies in England and the French Journal *Tel Quel* have now been stabilized into a different type of project: the full scale reconstruction of liberalism on terms appropriate to late capitalist social relations.

The Problematic of Cultural Studies

These opposing tendencies--on the one hand, cultural studies understood as the explanation of the conditions of possibility for the production and reproduction of subjectivities; on the other hand, cultural studies understood as the description of "experience"--have been inscribed in its logic from the start. Stuart Hall, in his "Cultural Studies: Two Paradigms," distinguishes between a "culturalist" paradigm, which he associates with the work of Raymond Williams and E.P. Thompson, and a "structuralist" paradigm, which he associates with the work of structuralists like Claude Levi-Strauss and the Marxism of Louis Althusser. The significance of the "culturalist" paradigm, according to Hall, is that it insists on an understanding of culture not as a set of privileged texts, but rather as the systems of meanings embodied in all social practices. The strength of the "structuralist" paradigm, meanwhile, is that it critiques the humanism and experientialism of the "culturalist" paradigm: the structuralist paradigm decenters experience by showing it to be an effect of social structures which cannot be reduced to the "materials" of

experience: "The great strength of the structuralisms is their stress on 'determinate conditions'"(67).

What is at stake in the distinction between "culturalism" and "structuralism" is the significance of theory. What the "structuralist" paradigm defends, in contradistinction to the "culturalist" one, is the necessity of providing explanations of social and cultural phenomena in relation to the determinations which produce those phenomena. Theory, that is, requires some notion of totality which can enable the understanding of the specificity of social phenomena as effects of that totality; in this case, experience does not contain within itself the conditions of its own intelligibility. Experience, rather, is what needs to be explained. The "culturalist" paradigm, meanwhile, undermines the possibility of establishing a hierarchy between determinations by taking as its starting point the activity of subjects in which social conditions and social consciousness are "mixed" in an indeterminate way. At the same time, Hall argues that culturalism's strength corresponds to the weakness of structuralism. That is, structuralism is unable to account for precisely those phenomena which culturalism privileges: "It has insisted, correctly, on the affirmative moment of the development of conscious struggle and organization as a necessary element in the analysis of history, ideology and consciousness: against its persistent down-grading in the structuralist paradigm" (69).

Hall's discussion of these contesting paradigms is part of a historical narrative of the emergence and development of cultural studies. According to Hall, cultural studies emerged as a distinct problematic through the interventions in literary studies of, especially, Richard Hoggart and Raymond Williams. The structuralist intervention, meanwhile, constituted a powerful challenge to this paradigm, making work along similar lines impossible. Hall is then attempting to chart a course for the future of cultural studies, one which would appropriate the "strengths" and avoid the "weaknesses" of each approach, which would go beyond both paradigms in "trying to think both the specificity of different practices and the forms of the articulated unity they constitute" (72).

Insofar as cultural studies is constituted by opposing theoretical discourses which, taken separately, are both necessary but limited, clearly some kind of conceptual transformation or "epistemological break" is necessary. That is, if, as I suggested above, the problem facing cultural studies is that of theorizing determination, the resolution of this difficulty cannot be a question of "combining" the strengths and weaknesses of two incompatible theories, but of starting from one set of premises and developing a new theoretical paradigm "by way of criticism" (Marx and Engels 105). The attempt to combine the results of incompatible premises is in practice a capitulation to the "culturalist" paradigm, the problems and contradictions of which Hall has already noted. This is the case because the consequence of such an attempt would be a theoretical eclecticism, unable to comprehend social phenomena as an effect of more abstract determinations in a consistent way. This means, finally,that the categories privileged by the "structuralist" paradigm--"theory," different levels of abstraction, "conditions of possibility," and so on--must be the starting point if cultural studies is to be adequate to the tasks Hall sets for it in this essay.

Hall's response to this "crisis" in cultural studies--merely adumbrated in "Cultural Studies: Two Paradigms," but more fully developed in *The Hard Road to Renewal*, and elsewhere--was to turn to Gramsci, and in particular, his notion of "hegemony." The usefulness of Gramsci is, according to Hall, twofold: first, in his understanding of the "conjuncture" as a specific combination of a variety of determinations; second, in his critique of a kind of "economic reductionism" which sees cultural and ideological phenomena as direct expressions of some class position while still connecting these phenomena to social struggles between contesting groups. That is, the category of "hegemony" enables us to see political domination both as contested and uncertain, and as encompassing the whole domain of social and cultural life (as opposed to being restricted to struggles articulated in relation to the state).

However, Hall's use of the categories of hegemony and "articulation" does not in and of itself solve the problem of determination, or even provide the elements of such a solution. It still leaves the two sides of the equation--class domination, on the one hand, and the reproduction of the conditions of that domination, on the other--unarticulated. If the dominant ideology and culture are instrumental in securing class domination in however indirect or mediated a manner, then the analysis and critique of ideology and culture must proceed from a theoretical understanding of the needs, capacities, and problems faced by the ruling class in some specific relation to other classes with opposing and/or aligned interests. In this case, the significance or content of ideological struggles, or struggles over representations and meanings, cannot be "in" those struggles themselves but in the contradiction between the forces and relations of production and the class struggles they determine. In other words, one is still working within the framework of determination by the economic (but not necessarily an economic "reductionism").

If, however, ideological struggles cannot be "read back" (i.e., subordinated) to class interests and class struggles, but are actually the site of the construction of these interests and struggles, then one is left with another, "discursive" kind of reductionism: that is, social positions are the results of positions constructed through discursive articulations and ideological struggles (in which case, of course, the problem of who is struggling, and over what, becomes highly problematic). Even though Hall, in the essays I am discussing, explicitly rejects this kind of position, which he associates with poststructuralist and especially Lacanian and Foucauldian approaches, he is left with what is ultimately an eclectic position: on the one hand, a specific form of social domination from which nothing necessarily follows; on the other hand, struggles over meaning and representations whose outcome or significance cannot be determined by structures external to the struggles themselves.

An example of how this tension determines Hall's work can be seen in his discussion of the kinds of questions a Gramscian approach poses for the left in Thatcherite England. Hall argues as follows in *The Hard Road to Renewal*:

> Gramsci always insisted that hegemony is not exclusively an ideological phenomenon. There can be no hegemony without "the decisive nucleus of the economic." On the other hand, do not fall into the trap of the old

> mechanical economism and believe that if you can only get hold of the economy, you can move the rest of life. The nature of power in the modern world is that it is also constructed in relation to political, moral, intellectual, cultural, ideological, and sexual questions. The question of hegemony is always the question of a new cultural order. The question which faced Gramsci in relation to Italy faces us now in relation to Britain: what is the nature of this new civilization? Hegemony is not a state of grace which is installed forever. It's not a formation which incorporates everybody. The notion of a "historical bloc" is precisely different from that of a pacified, homogeneous, ruling class. It entails a quite different conception of how social forces and movements, in their diversity, can be articulated into strategic alliances. To construct a new cultural order, you need not to reflect an already-formed collective will, but to fashion a new one, to inaugurate a new historical project. (170)

Both the "economic" and the "cultural-ideological" aspects of social domination are recognized here, but in a way that separates them in an absolute way and makes it impossible to theorize the relations between them. The two possible courses of action posited by this passage are either to reflect an already existing collective will which is to be found in the "economy," or to fashion a new collective will. The very notion of the "economy" as something that one could "get a hold on" presupposes the economic reductionism that Hall is presumably contesting: that is, it accepts the notion of the "economic" as something self-contained and independent. In this case, as soon as the contending classes step outside of the "economy," they are no longer "classes" in any meaningful sense, but rather positions struggling for power in relation to political, moral, intellectual, cultural, ideological, and sexual questions. This rigid antinomy is reproduced in the "choice" between reflecting an already formed collective will and fashioning a new one. The possibility of constructing a new collective will out of the contradictions situated in the economic structure, contradictions which are articulated in relation to other cultural structures where the elements of such a will are emerging as a result of differentiated arenas of struggle, is excluded here. Instead, the collective will can be "fashioned" through a synthesis of positions immanent in these specific struggles themselves.

This becomes more evident in Hall's concluding chapters to *The Hard Road to Renewal*. There he argues that

> [e]lectoral politics--in fact, every kind of politics--depends on political identities and identifications. People make identifications symbolically: through social imagery, in their political imaginations. They "see themselves" as one sort of person or another. They "imagine their future" within this scenario or that. They don't just think about voting in terms of how much they have, their so-called "material interests." Material interests matter profoundly. But they are always ideologically defined. (261)

Once again, there is a reference to the importance of material, ultimately class interests, and Hall also mentions that people have conflicting "interests" as well as conflicting

"identities." However, the claim that both the economic and the ideological are "important"--by itself, a commonplace observation--can lead in one of two fundamentally opposed directions. One possibility is to theorize the material interests of social classes and engage in ideological struggle for the purpose of clarifying the contradictions which structure the ideologies and "identities" of oppressed groups, thereby making the production of oppositional class consciousness possible. The other possibility is to construct "images" and "identities" that are immediately accessible and intelligible within the framework of those contradictions, thereby resecuring subordinated subjects' "consent" for the social order which produces them. This latter possibility becomes the unavoidable consequence insofar as politics is defined as "'a struggle for popular identities'" (282). In addition, this possibility is also inevitable given Hall's reductive understanding of "material interests" as little more than "income levels" ("how much they have"), rather than in terms of the reproduction of all of the social and institutional conditions of the production of "effective" subjects.

The way in which these contradictions have been resolved in contemporary cultural studies can be seen in John Fiske's *Understanding Popular Culture*. Fiske is critical of radical understandings of culture which focus on the way in which capitalist culture functions to reproduce ruling class domination, at the expense of trying to understand the multifarious ways in which subordinated groups appropriate the resources available within the dominant culture in order to gain more power relative to their oppressors. Fiske distinguishes between the "radical" and the "progressive," and claims that critics of culture who measure cultural practices according to the standard of "radicality" (systemic transformation) are unable to comprehend or support the wide variety of oppositional practices which undermine or limit the power of dominant groups without necessarily challenging their dominance. Such critics therefore lose the opportunity--at this historical moment, for Fiske, the only opportunity which actually exists--for intervening in progressive articulations of the "popular," in order to enable them to take on more radical forms in the future. At the same time, Fiske acknowledges that the "popular" is only potentially progressive, not necessarily so. In addition, there are many practices of the "popular" which have both a progressive and a reactionary dimension. He also recognizes that the relation between progressive popular articulations and radical politics are often distant, difficult to produce or analyze, or non-existent. However, the problems these reservations point to can be put even more strongly. If the popular is defined in terms of a kind of "guerrilla warfare" or "poaching" of the texts of the dominant culture which increases the power of the subordinated subject in relation to a specific articulation of power relations, then not only is it impossible to theorize the connections between progressivity and radicality, but the entire distinction between "progressive" and "reactionary" loses its meaning. This is because one cannot move, either conceptually or politically, from reversals in local power relations to systemic transformations. If one takes such reversals as a starting point, it will be impossible to account for their structural consequences: that is, they could have the effect either of strengthening or of weakening power relations elsewhere, and there is no way of theorizing this from the interior of the local reversal. Thus, when Fiske associates the "progressive" with the popular, and understands it as at least a potential "stage" in the movement towards radicalization, his notion of "progressiveness" is necessarily external to his theoretical position. In other

words, it is "borrowed" either from the cultural commonsense, or from those "radical" theories which Fiske critiques, and which would themselves arrive at a substantially different assessment of the practices Fiske includes in his notion of the "popular." (For example, radical theories would argue that it precisely by conceding local power reversals that global domination is maintained.)

Graeme Turner, in his *British Cultural Studies*, specifically refers to Fiske's work as an example of the way in which the increasingly powerful tendency within cultural studies (influenced by de Certeau) to focus on popular, "bottom-up" resistance to domination may have gone "too far." With the now prevalent use of the category of "pleasure" to refer to a space outside of ideological domination, Turner argues that cultural studies is in danger of celebrating rather than critiquing the dominant ideology and culture. Turner claims that "it is important to acknowledge

> that the pleasure of popular culture cannot lie outside hegemonic ideological formations; pleasure must be implicated in the ways in which hegemony is secured and maintained. (221)

However, Turner's own account of the positive effects of "The Turn to Gramsci" in cultural studies support the same theoretical incoherencies that lead to Fiske's conclusions. Turner argues that

> [h]egemony offers a more subtle and flexible explanation than previous formulations because it aims to account for domination as something that is won, not automatically delivered by way of the class structure. Where Althusser's assessment of ideology could be accused of a rigidity that discounted any possibility of change, Gramsci's version is able to concentrate precisely on explaining the process of change. It is consequently a much more optimistic theory, implying a gradual historical alignment of bourgeois hegemony with working class interests. (212)

Leaving aside the question of why an alignment of bourgeois hegemony with working class interests provides an "optimistic" outlook, this more "optimistic theory" is possible because, like Hall, Turner establishes a rigid and caricatured dichotomy between domination as "automatically delivered" and domination as "won." However, with what "weapons" is domination "won"? If it is "won" by the ruling class or hegemonic bloc as a result of the advantageous position their control over the means of production grants them, then we are still left with the problem of theorizing the perpetuation of domination as a result of processes determined by the class structure, as domination which is "won" from the dominant positions already occupied. In this case, it is possible to understand "popular culture as the field upon which political power is negotiated and legitimated" (Turner 213), as long as it is clear which agents are engaging in the "negotiations" and under what conditions. However, once the theory of popular culture "dispos[es] of a class essentialism that linked all cultural expression to a class basis" (213), then one can only understand the "winning" of domination as a victory on an indeterminate terrain which is constituted in such a way that the contestants cannot be identified in advance, nor can the conditions for

any particular outcome be specified. In other words, it is impossible to maintain a notion of systemic domination without an understanding of determination which sees cultural practices as effects of the general system of domination, rather than as inherently indeterminate and reversible entities.

The turn to Gramsci in contemporary cultural studies, then, is a turn away from Marxism and any other theory which abstracts from the specific and sees the specific as an effect of more general structures. This assessment is confirmed in a more recent text of Stuart Hall's, "Cultural Studies and its Theoretical Legacies," his contribution to Cultural Studies, where he argues that the importance of Gramsci to cultural studies is that he "radically displaced" (281, emphasis in original) the entire Marxist problematic. This turn from theory is also the significance of Turner's "optimistic" representation of the progress made since the replacement of Althusser's more "rigid" and "deterministic" one by Gramsci's more "flexible" and "subtle" one. Turner argues that the emphasis on the "creative power of the popular" has led to a "pendulum swing" from "containment to resistance... leading to a retreat from the category and effectivity of ideology altogether" (224), and he is mildly critical of this. However, this "swing" is a necessary consequence of the evacuation of the category of domination of any content, so that in Turner's discourse as well it (like Fiske's notion of "progressiveness") is little more than an untheorized "background" to an understanding of "indeterminate" ideological struggles which would otherwise appear (as Turner fears) completely apologetic.

The (Post)Discipline of Postmodern Cultural Studies

It is this "resolution" of the contradictions constitutive of cultural studies which has enabled the articulation of cultural studies within a post-marxist, postmodern problematic. This is not to say that postmodern cultural studies is a completely homogeneous field of ideology production. It is precisely through its tensions and antagonisms that it is constituted. These tensions and antagonisms may be over the articulation of postmodern categories, or even over the viability or usefulness of the notion of postmodernism itself. However, this does not mean that the field of postmodern cultural studies is therefore inherently plural and non-totalizable. The struggles and conflicts within the mainstream of the postmodern humanities today are over the relative force of competing claims to possess legitimate knowledge; legitimate, that is, in terms of the institutional resources a given project can attract. These struggles and conflicts are therefore necessary to the circulation and validation of ideological discourses; in global terms, then, it is possible to speak of a unified field of ideological production in which the differences are only apparent.

So, for example, Angela McRobbie, in her narrative of the development of cultural studies, celebrates the flexibility of the new tendency in cultural studies, which seeks to distance itself from "fixed" theoretical models:

> [t]here is a greater degree of openness in most of the contributions [i.e., to the volume *Cultural Studies* to which McRobbie' s essay is a "Conclusion"] than would have been the case some years ago, when the pressure to bring the chosen object of study firmly into the conceptual landmarks, provided first by Althusser and then by Gramsci, imposed on cultural studies a degree of rigidity. (McRobbie 724)

However, McRobbie's celebration of this new "openness" is an ambivalent one. Earlier in the same essay she expresses concern that "what has now gone, with Marxism, and partly in response to the political bewilderment and disempowerment of the left, is that sense of urgency [which had characterized culture studies at an earlier historical moment]" (720). However, McRobbie does not theorize the relations between the new "openness" and this loss of "urgency." Rather, she sees the changes she is describing as an "undecidable" mixture of "benefits" and "dangers": "This new discursiveness allows or permits a speculative 'writerly' approach, the dangers of which I have already outlined, but the advantages of which can be seen in the broader, reflective and insightful mode which the absence of the tyranny of theory, as it was once understood, makes possible" (724).

At the same time, the "bewilderment" and "disempowerment" of the left, which figured into McRobbie's explanation of the "disappearance" of Marxism, itself disappears in her assessment of the new "openness" in culture studies. This she attributes to the replacement of one discourse by another: Ernesto Laclau's displacement of the unified class subject by an understanding of "identities" as contingent and inherently plural. This, apparently, has nothing to do with the weakness of the left. On the contrary, McRobbie argues that the "collapse of Marxism need not be construed as signaling the end of socialist politics; indeed the beginning of a new era, where the opportunities for a pluralist democracy are strengthened rather than weakened, is now within reach" (724).

The strength of Laclau's discourse, then, is, according to McRobbie, simply an effect of its greater insight into social mechanisms than Marxism: she cites with approval Laclau's claim to be going "beyond" Marxism. By thus positing the greater explanatory power of Laclau's discourse, McRobbie is able not only to equate "socialism" with "pluralist democracy," but to affirm the ultimately beneficial effects of the new openness in culture studies: that is, if "pluralism" is equivalent to progress towards "socialism," then this must also hold true for the greater pluralism within cultural studies.

There is still, for McRobbie, not only the problem of the loss of political urgency in contemporary cultural studies, but also the problem of some "obfuscation" in Laclau's own account of subject formation. In particular, Laclau is not able to account for the "actual processes of acquiring identity." In fact, it "is his commitment to the historically specific which allows Laclau to not be specific. He cannot spell out the practices of, or the mechanics of, identity formation, for the very reason that they are, like their subjects, produced within particular social and historical conditions. This permits a consistently high level of abstraction in his political philosophy. But the work of transformation which is implicit in his analysis is exactly concurrent with the kind of critical work found in the contributions on race in this volume" (725).

In other words the problem with Laclau's discourse is its level of "abstraction." The solution to this problem, for McRobbie, is to produce "concrete" and "specific" analyses, which will be "concurrent" with Laclau's claims. She clarifies this claim at the end of her essay, which calls for more detailed ethnographic studies of "everyday life." "This, then, is where I want to end, with a plea for identity ethnography in cultural studies, with a plea for carrying out interactive research on groups and individuals who are more than just audiences for texts" (730). Although McRobbie does not say so explicitly, it would follow from her argument that such "concrete," "detailed" studies would also resist the decline in political effectivity of cultural studies, since they would then be more directly connected with the "actual processes" of "identity formation" which take place in the "fleeting, fluid, and volatile formations" (730) of everyday life (and, therefore, cannot, presumably, be grasped with an "abstract" theoretical discourse).

In the context of McRobbie's absolute privileging of Laclau's discourse, and her acceptance of his claim that we now live in a post-Marxist universe, it is impossible to take seriously her rhetoric regarding the "openness" of contemporary cultural studies. Instead, what she is describing is the replacement of one set of limits by another: the "sense" of openness is simply the privileging of the new set of limits by those who benefit from it, whose relative power is supported and increased by this set of limits. That is, McRobbie's assessment of the "strengths" and "weaknesses" of contemporary discourses in cultural studies reflects a transformation in the political economy of discourses, and is carried out from the standpoint of the most "valued" discourse within that political economy.

It is the problem of the legitimation of these "valuable" discourses which explains the "panic" which, according to McRobbie, she was "gripped by" on her first reading of the papers in the volume. She began "to lose a sense of why the object of study is constituted as the object of study in the first place. Why do it? What is the point? Who is it for?" (721). This anxiety over the loss of the object, I am arguing, is a professionalist anxiety over the impossibility of maintaining both the institutional legitimation of cultural studies as a (non)field of study, and its radical character (which constitutes the only legitimation of its existence as a critique of dominant forms of knowledge).

In this sense, the narrative McRobbie constructs, like the volume *Cultural Studies* itself, has the purpose of producing an "identity" out of the various kinds of work being done in cultural studies. It is this need for identification which accounts for the uncritical valorization of pluralism (as opposed to contestation and critique). An instance of this is that, despite McRobbie's broad criticism and apparently deep "anxiety" over the present state of cultural studies, she can find no particular contribution to the volume which she considers deserving of criticism. In fact, she takes great pains to assure us that the general criticism she makes regarding the effects of the introduction of deconstruction into cultural studies is not applicable to any of the specific texts in the volume (or elsewhere) that actually make use of deconstruction: she explicitly exempts, for example, Gayatri Spivak and Homi Bhabha from the "formalism" to which deconstruction tends. This, of course, undermines her apparent criticism of deconstruction as an ideological discourse,

because the problem would therefore be not with its political effects, but with its misuses by individuals.

Contrary to McRobbie's claims about "openness," then, the purpose of her "criticism" of deconstruction, like her participation in the removal of Marxism from the theoretical and political landscape, is to establish a set of inclusions and exclusions which will support the current constitution of the political economy of institutional values. Not too much "formalism," not too much "abstraction," no "Marxism," and so on. However, as opposed to the "tyrannical" regime of "theory" that McRobbie is glad to be rid of, these inclusions and exclusions are measured not against determinations of political effectivity which are rigorously theorized, but rather against an untheorized notion of their "proximity" to the "actual processes of identity formation." Anyone who is presently excluded from the pluralist institution of cultural studies could then at some point be included, not on the condition that they account for their project by proposing some critical rearticulation of the general project of cultural studies, but rather by moving a bit "closer" to the details of everyday life, by uncovering some previously neglected aspect of the processes of identity formation.

I would therefore refer to McRobbie's discourse as an "appreciative" one in the sense that it attempts to assess the relative values represented by discourses within a political economy of discourses which remains itself unquestioned. To "appreciative" discourses I would oppose "critical" ones, which are interested in the way in which discourses function to reproduce that political economy of discourses, that is, to maintain the existing system of values. Appreciative discourses, such as the ones presently dominant in the field of cultural studies, are appreciative both in the sense that they are assessments of the various objects which they account for (the details of everyday life) and also self-reflexively so: that is, they are interested less in the theoretical and political effectivity of their own discourse than their institutional value. Of course, one type of appreciation supports the other: the most valuable institutional discourse will be the one with the "investment" in some field of inquiry which can yield the highest "return": as I suggested before, this will take the form of the "discovery" of some "interesting" object, or tradition of texts, which had previously been neglected or undervalued. These operations preserve the "newness" and importance of the field, and therefore "legitimate" it according to current academic standards. Likewise, discourses which are too "formalistic" are "embarrassing" because they are too much like traditional literary studies, while "Marxism" is problematic because it excludes too much and therefore disenables the constitution of a unified political economy of discourses by threatening the coherence of the field and its acceptability within liberal academic discourse. Finally, this eclectic pluralism requires a re-understanding of political effectivity as intervention in local processes of "identity formation," such as that provided by Laclau, since without some claim to be doing "urgent" work, culture studies will appear too close to traditional humanistic studies (too "formalist") and therefore irrelevant.

It is the category of "culture," as it is understood in contemporary discourses, and the displacement of the category of "ideology," which has enabled the reconstitution of cultural studies on the terms McRobbie describes. In Marxist understandings, "ideology"

refers to those discourses which contribute to the reproduction of capitalist social relations by "educating" individuals in the inevitability or desirability of those relations; that is, ideology works by producing the subjects required by capitalist social relations. This assumes a relation of determination between production relations and class rule, and the mechanisms which guarantee or reproduce those relations and that rule.

The advocates of a postmodern cultural studies, meanwhile, privilege the category of "culture" precisely because it undermines this relation of determination. As Michael Ryan argues in *Politics and Culture*,

> [a]nother name for that boundary between reason and materiality that I have described as form might be culture, since culture is generally applied to everything that falls on the social and historical side of materiality, and it can also be a name for everything that falls on the rhetorical and representational side of reason. Culture includes the domains of rhetoric and representation, as well as the domains of lived experience, of institutions, and of social life patterns. (8)

For Ryan, the usefulness of the category of culture is that it breaks down boundaries between ideality and materiality, between "rhetoric" and "reality," between "culture" and "extra-cultural" (like social) relations. It then becomes impossible to critique any cultural process for its role in reproducing existing relations of exploitation: "The point, therefore, of emphasizing the culturality or rhetoricity of such things as trade and dwelling is to underscore both their role in the elaboration of political power and their plasticity as social forms that can change shape and acquire new contents" (17). In this case, any particular cultural form can be equally important in supporting some power relation and therefore as a site of intervention: at the same time, any cultural form is equally open to being filled with some new content. So, for example, the existing state could just as easily become a instrument in emancipating oppressed classes as it is now one for oppressing them.

Ryan arrives at his "poststructuralist approach to culture" in part through a critique of the Birmingham School's model of hegemony, which "still implies that the primary agent of cultural activity is the ruling class" (18). By contrast, the "poststructuralist approach to culture thus places a much more positive emphasis on popular forces and on the potential of popular struggles. And it can be extended to the cultural sphere. Rather than being understood simply as an instrument of hegemony, cultural forms can be read as sites of political difference, where domination and resistance, the resistance to the positive power of the dispossessed that is domination and the counter-power, the threat of reversed domination, that is the potential force of the dispossessed, meet" (19). In other words, any form of domination contains within it some mode of potentially effective resistance. In fact, the domination is itself nothing more than the resistance to that resistance. Since, according to this argument, domination is not domination for some purpose, or in defense of some interest, no priority can be established between one mode of resistance and another, nor can the consequences of any mode of resistance be accounted for.

According to appreciative cultural studies, the meanings of identities and struggles over them are immanent to those identities themselves. In this case, as McRobbie argues,

> [w]hen contingency is combined with equivalence and when no social group is granted a privileged place as an emancipatory agent, then a form of relational hegemony can extend the sequence of democratic antagonisms through a series of social displacements (724).

If no group or practice can be privileged over any other, then the problem of the site and effectivity of critique must be raised: that is, critique in the name of what? In order to address this question it is necessary to take sides, to enter into conflicts over the construction of emancipatory agency. However, if emancipatory politics amounts to nothing more than ad hoc arrangements between "popular forces" which emerge contingently, then the moment of critique and contestation can be evaded. That is, any practice that one might be engaged in is potentially as important and useful as that of anyone else, or at least there would be no grounds for denying this. In this case, if various practices are "combined," there is always the possibility that they will "add up" to emancipatory results. Or not. At any rate, there are no grounds for critique as a central element of political struggle.

It is in this context that the indeterminacy of cultural studies itself can be valorized. As Grossberg, Nelson, and Treichler write, "Cultural studies needs to remain open to unexpected, unimagined, even uninvited possibilities. No one can hope to control these developments" (Grossberg, et al. 2). "Its methodology, ambiguous from the beginning, could best be seen as bricolage" (2). They then go on to define cultural studies as follows:

> cultural studies is an interdisciplinary, transdisciplinary and sometimes counter-disciplinary field that operates in the tension between its tendencies to embrace both a broad, anthropological and more narrowly humanistic conception of culture. Unlike traditional anthropology, however, it has grown out of analyses of modern industrial societies. It is typically interpretative and evaluative in its methodologies, but unlike traditional humanism it rejects the exclusive equation of culture with high culture and argues that all forms of cultural production need to be studied in relation to other cultural practices and to social and historical structures. Cultural studies is thus committed to the study of the entire range of a society's arts, beliefs, institutions, and communicative practices. (4)

By establishing cultural studies as operating in the tensions between incompatible understandings ("broad, anthropological," which is to say structural and historical, and "more narrowly humanistic," that is, experiential), Grossberg et al. interpret the eclecticism of contemporary cultural studies as a form of diversity abstracted from rigorous contestations over the meaning of "culture" or "culture studies." Furthermore, they agree with Raymond Williams that the word "culture" "simultaneously invokes symbolic and material domains and that the study of culture involves not privileging one over the other but interrogating the relation between the two" (4). Therefore, the

indeterminacy of culture studies merely reflects the indeterminacy of culture itself: in both cases, one is only able to produce specific "articulations" with no necessary relation to a broader field of economic and political relations. As with McRobbie, investigators in the field of culture studies are free to explore their own specific area of knowledge, in other words to accumulate intellectual capital in the various disciplines and the interstices between them, without the "productive tensions" between different knowledges ever taking the form of contestation, or being directed at the transformation of the disciplines, much less the entire structure of disciplinary knowledge.

Postmodern philosophical and theoretical categories and presuppositions have been essential to the constitution of what I will call "mainstream" or "appreciative" cultural studies. I understand postmodernism as consisting of all those discourses and practices governed by the assumption that reality is constituted by an unbounded plurality of heterogeneous forms. As with cultural studies, though, I do not limit the field of postmodernism to those discourses which openly support this assumption, or refer to themselves as "postmodernist." Rather, I understand postmodernism as constituted by a political economy of competing positions which function to reproduce the legitimacy of those areas of knowledge and practice governed by the presupposition and privileging of heterogeneity. I would include within the category of "postmodernism," then, discourses which consider themselves indifferent to or even hostile to postmodernism. For example, Jurgen Habermas' attacks on postmodernism, based on his understanding of communicative rationality and the project of modernity, by situating these attacks within the framework of how one adjudicates between different forms of established knowledge and discourse, simply reproduces the terms of the debate as constituted by postmodernism: a debate, that is, which is actually a struggle over the terms of a new mode of liberalism adequate for a late capitalist global order in crisis (and over who will "possess" those terms). Habermas' discourses fulfill this function by understanding the conditions of possibility of communication as immanent to specific and autonomous communicative situations and forms themselves. In fact the legitimation and hegemony of postmodern culture studies within the arena of culture critique depends upon the existence of a range of competing positions which, as in the logic of the market as studied by Marx, "average out" in "the long run."

38. The discourses of postmodern cultural studies are unable to theorize in a rigorous way the politics of the institutions in which they are situated. Therefore, the incoherencies and contradictions of these discourses are most evident in relation to the question of devising a politics of resistance to these institutions, in particular the academy. So, for example, Grossberg et al. acknowledge from the start of their "Introduction" that the volume they are presenting emerges at the height of a "cultural studies boom" (1) of international dimensions. Later, they argue that "it is the future of cultural studies in the United States that seems to us to present the greatest need for reflection and debate" (10). This is understandable, because, as they argued earlier, it is in the U.S. that the "boom is especially strong," and has "created significant investment opportunities" (1).

However, they go on to argue, the "threat is not from institutionalization per se, for cultural studies has always had its institutionalized forms within and outside the academy"

(10). Rather, the "issue for U.S. practitioners is what kind of work will be identified with cultural studies and what social effects it will have... Too many people simply rename what they were already doing to take advantage of the cultural studies boom" (10-11). That is, it is not the institutional situation--with its limits and possibilities--which is at stake, but policing the intellectual property and copyright of the new (non)discipline. The "multi," "non," and even "anti," disciplinary character of cultural studies, on this account, enables the formation of a site of accumulation of institutional capital whose "unfixity" also frees it from accountability to critiques of its institutional positioning. As far as its "social effects" goes, we have already seen that these are wholly contingent and therefore can also not be theorized or critiqued in any systematic way.

What Grossberg, et al. do not consider is the possible uses to the institution of the "free floating," unfixed character of culture studies. In other words, they do not see that the "post" disciplinary location of culture studies that they celebrate in fact allows the academy to provide a space for "radical" discourses without any pressure to transform the existing disciplinary structure. The question that needs to be raised here is not, of course, in regard to the legitimacy and necessity of working within late capitalist institutions (like the university). Rather, what is at stake is the identification of "institutionalization" with "institutionality" in postmodern cultural studies, along with the institutional and ideological forms which naturalize this conflation. In other words, there is a difference between working within and against dominant institutions and becoming an integral part of the functioning of those institutions. Working against dominant institutions from within requires the contestation of the various institutional forms which reproduce institutional power and more generally ruling class domination while becoming "institutionalized" entails fulfilling the need of the institution for new modes of reproducing that domination. The relation between cultural studies and the existing disciplines proposed by Grossberg, et al. is inadequate in this respect because of its ultimately "laissez-faire" approach to institutional forms and their uses. In contrast, I would argue that it is necessary to occupy positions within the disciplines, to exploit the contradiction between their claims to universality and their specialist partiality in order to challenge their very separateness and legitimacy.

These contemporary discourses of the local and specific find their theoretical and ideological support in the theories of the "founding" texts of postmodernism: in particular, those of Jean Baudrillard, Gilles Delueze and Felix Guattari, Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Jacques Lacan and Jean-Francois Lyotard. Despite the local differences among their texts, all of these theorists develop justifications for the privileging of the local and specific, of whatever is irreducible or incommensurable to global structures and processes. For example, in Derrida's notion of the "bricoleur," according to Grossberg, et al. a prototype of the practitioner of cultural studies, practice is understood as the piecing together into new combinations of elements which have been left unarticulated by dominant institutions and knowledges. There are two aspects of this conception which are most urgent for my discussion here: first, the resistance to totalizing abstraction, which can identify the structure of dominant institutions and their mode of operation; and, second, the privileging of the immanence of local constructs and "unique" combinations of heterogeneous elements which could not have been anticipated or the result of a plan.

The Critique of Universalism and the Politics of Identity

These discourses provide the necessary legitimation for the "extra-disciplinary" spaces and institutional interstices privileged by postmodern cultural studies. In other words, the categories of "heterogeneity" and "difference" operate in postmodern cultural studies in the interest of institutional reformism and establishing a political economy of institutional values capable of legitimating and protecting the work already being done. The effectivity of these categories as an oppositional and anti-hegemonic force in relation to the discourses that previously prevailed in the humanities has been the critique of liberal humanism they provided. This critique, in fact, has been the source of their apparent radicality--and, hence, the resistance to them--and their current legitimation. This critique has amounted to an undermining of the claims of universality made by and on behalf of liberal humanism. For example, postmodern theorists have pointed to the ways in which liberal humanist understanding of subjectivity have evaded its discursive and institutional construction, while feminists have pointed to the implicit masculinity of this supposed "universal" mode of subjectivity.

At the same time, postmodernism has assimilated Marxism to this critique of liberalism, thereby enabling the elimination of Marxism as a governing discourse in cultural studies. Baudrillard, for example, has argued that the Marxist category of labor, understood, ahistorically, as the basis for social relations, simply reproduces the abstract liberal subject, who only needs to be "liberated" from external restraints (in this case, the rule of capital) in order to realize "his" true nature and desire. In addition, postmodern culture studies, following the analyses of Laclau and Mouffe, have argued that the understanding of "the" proletariat as a unified subject "for-itself" is not only unable to deal with the actual heterogeneity of the proletariat (which calls into question the validity of the category itself) but encourages a "vanguardist" politics based upon the real, objective interests and "putative" class consciousness of the working class.

The extension of the critique of liberalism to Marxism has enabled postmodern cultural studies to establish a theoretical space in which it can make a claim to have "superseded" existing discourses on society and culture, and therefore legitimate its institutional "independence." (Angela McRobbie, for example, notes with relief that the "debate about the future of Marxism in cultural studies has not yet taken place. Instead, the great debate around modernity and postmodernity has quite conveniently leapt in and filled that space" [719].) However, the very "inflexibility" of the anti-Marxism insisted upon by cultural studies provides the clearest possible proof that it is not at all "beyond left and right" but has become a force of the liberal center, developing new ways to suppress revolutionary knowledges. Contrary to the claims of Baudrillard, Laclau and Mouffe, the category of labor in Marxism does not project an "identity" but rather accounts for the basis of the capitalist social order and thereby explains what subjects--however they "identify" themselves--are struggling over and why. The supposedly "anti-authoritarian" opposition to vanguardist politics is therefore really advanced in the interest of preventing such knowledges from being publicized and thereby making social transformation possible.

For example, the argument in support of working class unity, and therefore of a specific kind of "homogenization" of working class revolutionary practices should be understood not as an a priori claim or a moral imperative, but as the theorization of the conditions of possibility of combined and transformative practices under historically determinate and transient conditions. Such an understanding does not "deny" the heterogeneity of the working class, or the "remainder" that exceeds any particular combined practice. Rather, it takes this heterogeneity and excess as a site of critique of the historical limitations of any practice. Furthermore, Marxist understandings are interested in inquiring into their own institutional conditions of possibility: in other words, what is at stake is not primarily a defense of Marxism as a "better" discourse or theory than postmodernism. Rather, what is at stake is the use of Marxism in relation to the totality of political and social forces. Marxism as a mode of critique is therefore not interested simply in "proving" that it is "still" one viable position among many others available in the academy or elsewhere, but rather in entering into contestation with other positions by pointing out their complicity with global capitalist interests and institutions. The truth of Marxism is therefore in its explanation of all social phenomena as effects of the global political economy and, therefore, its struggle against all practices which support existing social relations by obscuring the class antagonism underlying them.

For example, postmodern critiques of the "universal" liberal humanist subject formulate this critique in terms of a "de-stabilization" of the discursive categories--like essentialized forms of identity, or self-present consciousness--upon which that subjectivity depends. In this way, these discourses take "credit" for this "destabilization," and are able to evade their complicity with the attempts of late capitalist crisis management to develop modes of subjectivity appropriate for changed historical conditions. I would argue that it is the emergence of collective modes of practice and public mechanisms for reproducing labor power which have produced a crisis in the liberal humanist subject. In other words, the target and "model" of cultural categories under late capitalism is no longer the individual property owner presupposed by "classical" liberalism, but the subject charged with circulating within and managing late capitalist institutions involving extensive divisions of labor and therefore an objectification of tasks and subjective capacities. The "valued" subject under such conditions is no longer the autonomous individual capable of tending to "his" own property, which presumably bears his own personal imprint, but one able to situate him/herself into a wide variety of essentially interchangeable collective practices which are indifferent to the personal qualities of the individual except insofar as "individual differences" correspond to some classification determined by the needs of the institutions and the stability of the system.

47. In this case, the "de-stabilization" of the liberal subject is one aspect of a process which also involves the "re-stabilization" of the private individual on the terms set by the collectivized structures of late capitalism. The category of the "bricoleur," for example, enables the privileging of individualist modes of "free" activity which take into account the institutional limitations of late capitalism. That is why this category is so useful for legitimating the creation of "islands" of extradisciplinary practice for the subject of postmodern cultural studies, that is, the petit-bourgeois intellectual attempting to make use of his/her monopoly on the production and legitimation of valued knowledges to position

him/herself advantageously within late capitalist institutions. Within this framework, it is also possible to see that the "differences" or pluralized "identities" privileged by postmodern cultural studies aid in the segmentation of "heterogeneous" sections of the global workforce; heterogeneous, that is, in relation to the varied needs of a global capitalist order. Thus, I would argue that postmodernism's "universalizing" critique of "universals" simply takes one historical form of universality as absolute in the interest of resisting the possibilities of producing new modes of universality on the basis of a conscious realization of the collectivization of social relations.

48. The logical consequence of the prevailing tendency in cultural studies is therefore the replacement of classes by "identities" as the agents of social transformation. However, rather than a transcendence of class politics, "identity," as the product of an identification produced by affiliations grounded in common conditions and struggles, marks the site of a contradiction. The social identities most often evoked in postmodern cultural studies, in particular those articulated around the categories of race, gender and sexuality, are the products of the representation of new forms of collective labor power which take shape in late capitalism. With the entrance of previously excluded groups or classes into the economic and cultural institutions of the capitalist order, and the more favorable conditions of struggle this provides, categories such as "women" and "black" cease to be merely the signs marking the subordination of groups designated as "inferior" or "external" to the social order. Rather, these categories take on a new meaning, representing the demand that outmoded forms of authority be eliminated in the interest of democratizing all social relations. However, this transformation in the significance of terms, if it is not resituated within a global analysis, tends to reproduce those very categories which these struggles have problematized, and to do so in abstraction from the overall development of the relations and forces of production.

In other words, cultural studies is constituted by, the very contradiction that is articulated by its privileged categories of "experience" and "identity." That is, cultural studies and related political and intellectual tendencies articulate the contradictory situation of subordinated classes, intellectual work, and emancipatory politics under the conditions established by the regime of private property as it becomes dependent upon the publicly organized reproduction of labor power. Cultural studies has never superseded this contradiction, which is why, as is evident in Stuart Hall's narratives of cultural studies, each new "identity" or "problem" that confronted cultural studies (feminism, race, the linguistic turn, etc.) has induced a "crisis" which brings this contradiction to the fore (see, for example, the discussion in "Cultural Studies and its Theoretical Legacies"). Furthermore, each such "crisis, instead of enabling a sustained critique of the basic assumptions of cultural studies, instead reinforces the hegemony of the culturalist or experiential pole of cultural studies. Thus, McRobbie's celebration of a cultural studies which is in the process of becoming an ethnography of "identities," with which the investigator identifies in an appreciative way, in a sense returns cultural studies to the practices initiated by Richard Hoggart in *The Uses of Literacy and Speaking to Each Other*, in which a working class individual "destabilizes" academic discourse by analyzing the working class culture with which he identifies from a distance.

But categories like "instability" (the basis for the formation and consolidation of "identities" according to postmodern cultural studies) only take on meaning insofar as they are measured against some standard of "stability," i.e., against the subordination of the term to meanings required by the ruling class. That is, it only takes on significance in relation to global class struggles. To take "de-stabilization" as a necessarily "progressive" move is to misrecognize its significance, since the ruling class itself requires such "de-stabilizations" in order to reform and up-date its modes of reproducing the relations of exploitation upon which its existence depends. All the notion of "destabilization" enables one to do is assert that "more" ("identities," "antagonisms") is "better."

Thus, the very possibility of establishing criteria according to which one kind of social change could be considered more "desirable" than some other kind is undermined as a result of the replacement of "class" by "identity." Furthermore, contrary to the economistic understandings of class which writers like Hall "accept" in order to dismiss, Marxism understands classes not only as a position within an economic system but in relation to the antagonistic possibilities regarding the arrangement of the entire social, political and cultural order which follow from the class struggle. The primacy of working class power in Marxist theory and practice, as I argued earlier, is not a result of the exceptional degree of suffering experienced by the working class, or any moral virtues they possess, but the fact that the proletariat "organized as the ruling class" represents the potential for exploiting the socialization of the forces of production created by capitalism in the interests of freer, more democratic and egalitarian social relations. However, this criterion regarding the possibilities represented by any struggle or agent is excluded from the category of identity, which can only reverse the criteria or values contained in the dominant system. This idealizes those agents in the form in which the dominant culture has produced them, leading to a utopian or moralizing politics. "De-stabilization," which opens the possibility of local reversals and revaluations in the interest of a more favorable insertion within the existing order, becomes the limit of oppositional politics. This does not mean that the social identities imposed upon subjects due to their imbrication within a culture based on exploitation do not have a (secondary) role in political struggles: their significance is in the necessity to indicate, analyze, and oppose the reproduction of reactionary forms of authority in myriad ways within all practices, including oppositional ones.

The replacement of "class" by "identity" and "ideology" by "culture" furthermore requires an attack on conceptual abstraction. Postmodernism takes abstraction to be an instance of domination insofar as it attempts, first, to establish a critical position outside of the object under investigation and, second, insofar as it attempts to reduce the intrinsic heterogeneity of the object to a single aspect or category taken to be the principal one. Politically, this is understood as an imposition of a rigid grid of interpretation upon the irreducibility of the experience of the oppressed, and a violation of that experience through an exclusion or devaluation of the self-representations produced by oppressed groups themselves.

However, abstraction does not imply a suppression of difference or heterogeneity. Rather, it provides a reading of heterogeneity in terms of a hierarchy of contradictions.

This in turn enables a politics based upon critique and contestation, through the identification and analysis of social possibilities which take shape in uneven and combined opposition to other possibilities: what postmodernism takes to be the variety of self-representations, none of which can make a claim to "correctness," can then be shown to be the effect of the subordination of one social possibility to another which nevertheless registers its effects: for example, the subordination of more radical feminisms to a hegemonic liberal one, which must nevertheless respond to the pressure of the former by "decentering" its own authority. The significance of conceptual abstraction therefore lies in the necessity to comprehend the possibilities of global transformation which are concealed within an apparently "self-evident" local "self-representation."

Postmodern Cultural Studies and the Return of Liberalism

Postmodernism, then, is ultimately hostile to structural transformation, aided by totalizing forms of knowledge. Postmodernism therefore is able to recognize the power relations which, as Foucault has argued, are internal to subject and identity formation. However, it is unable to comprehend the socio-economic relations determining the relations between the pluralized identities and subjectivities which a postmodern politics seeks to construct. This is because it reads "representations" as "particular equivalents," which can only be exchanged against one another. It therefore cannot comprehend the processes of transformation by which a "particular" or an exchange of "particulars" becomes an instance in the reproduction of the "general."

It therefore supports a kind of pluralist politics based upon the self-referentiality of any specific political practice and the contingency of articulations which connect one kind of practice to another. At the same time, though, it supports an understanding of pedagogy which accounts for its usefulness to the late capitalist academy. Postmodernism creates a liberal pedagogy capable of containing the dangers implicit in the critique of liberal understandings of knowledge developed by the anti-establishment struggles of the 1960s. These struggles exposed the complicity of claims to neutrality and universality made by the representatives of official or mainstream knowledges within the academy with the practices of racism, sexism, and militaristic capitalism. In response to this danger, postmodernism has developed a pedagogy of inclusion based upon the proliferation of identities, as opposed to a pedagogy of critique based upon an inquiry into the implication of subjects in existing social relations through their respective and incompatible "identities," or subjectivities.

As I suggested earlier, then, postmodernism is a critique of specific, historically determinate forms (classical and social democratic) of liberalism which are no longer useful strategies of legitimation for late capitalist crisis management. What this means is that the postmodern critique of the universal subject of classical liberal theory and the universal subject of social rights of social democracy in fact reinscribes the internal homogeneity of the subject in the space of representation: as opposed to the right to liberty granted the classical liberal subject, or the right to need satisfaction granted the social

democratic subject, the postmodern liberal subject is granted the right to the formation of identities and representations with a determinate social value: to put it another way, the "right to recognition." The deconstruction of identities and representations avoids the crude biological and humanistic essentialism of previous liberalisms by not attributing to any particular subject any single fixed identity. However, by keeping the category of "identity" intact as the "unstable" ground of politics, it simply allows for greater flexibility by supporting a mode of politics which enables the discarding and appropriation of identities in accord with global fluctuations and changing articulations of "private individuality" and collective or public modes of subjectivity. The subject, for postmodernism, is always already implicated in a set of discourses and relations, is always situated (unlike the abstract classical liberal subject). However, this situation is itself abstracted from the globalization of capitalist relations, and involves the immediate appropriation of the materials of experience (the securing of identities) through local articulations of "identity."

Late capitalism, based upon the publicly organized reproduction of collective labor powers, requires new modes of liberalism in order to combat and reverse the crisis in hegemony reflected in the anti-hegemonic struggles of the post-war era. More specifically, it is the delegitimation of social democratic liberal modes of crisis-management under the pressure, first, of anti-colonial movements and the "social movements" of the 1960s and, then, of the neo-conservative offensive and global capitalist restructuring of the 1980s, which has produced the need for a renovated postmodern liberalism. The shift to postmodern conceptions of democracy (based on the immediacy and irreducibility of representations) advanced by Laclau and Mouffe and adopted by postmodern culture studies is a product of the following effects of the contradiction between the forces and relations of production: the institutionalization of knowledges in accord with the collective modes of reproducing labor power in late capitalism; the consequent monopoly of oppositional knowledges by the petit-bourgeoisie situated within late capitalist institutions; the defeat of the radical goals of the oppositional movements of the 1960s and the exhaustion of the material resources for a renewal of the radical project at this point in time; and the consequent institutionalization of the "identities" produced by this project. Under these conditions, capitalism requires a liberalism which argues that the conditions of liberation are not in the struggle to abolish and transform dominant institutions and knowledges, but rather in specific articulations which establish "liberated zones" in the spaces made available by those institutions and knowledges.

This new postmodern liberalism requires theories of postmodernity as a new logic of the social governed by the incommensurability of different language games and postmodern theories of the public sphere (as the articulation of differences) which abstract from the contradiction between the forces and relations of production and class struggle and situate "politics" as the arena in which "identities" and "experiences" are constructed and negotiated. Postmodern cultural studies, in other words, connects post-marxist understandings of the social order and "communicative" theories of "democracy" in order to ground an amorphous "progressive" politics which can evade the centrality of conflict between contending social forces as the ground of social transformation.

In sum, postmodern mainstream or appreciative cultural studies is an "emergent" institutional and cultural form which facilitates the required (post)liberal modifications of pedagogical and other institutions. Its "postdisciplinarity" corresponds to the postmodern liberal politics of identity, which requires modes of knowledge "flexible" enough to manage the contradictions of post-welfare state capitalism. This argument, however, should not be read as supporting the existing disciplines, which is to say the existing intellectual division of labor and segmentation of knowledges. Rather, it is a critique of the privatization of theory and the de-politicization of pedagogy, a critique which is associated with a collective project of knowledge production directed at advancing a theorized and therefore contestable purpose. If explanation or theory only extends to the point at which identities are affirmed unproblematically, thereby allowing the category of "experience" to be introduced, then it becomes possible to produce flexible institutional sites which can reconcile "opposition" with the needs of dominant institutions in a populist manner, leading to merely local changes (and changes, moreover, which enable the institution to develop more up-to-date forms of authority).

The project of a critical cultural studies interested in the production of oppositional subjectivities must therefore involve a sustained critique of contemporary attempts to rearrange the disciplines in order to manage the crisis. In this case, it is necessary to occupy positions within the disciplines, in relation to the contradiction between the subordination of knowledge to capitalist exploitation and the claims of institutionalized knowledges to serve the cause of emancipation. Finally, this argument presupposes the transdisciplinary character of cultural studies (or any emancipatory knowledge), since theorizing the relations between economics, politics and culture provides the resources for contesting the reification of specialized knowledges. The purpose of such knowledges, finally, is to foreground the global social contradictions which determine any local "articulation," in the interest of producing revolutionary class consciousness.

The shift in cultural studies (which is also a continuation of existing tendencies) towards "appreciative" discourses has been an effect of the impact of the process of privatization upon all social institutions. A critical, oppositional culture studies would be interested in critiquing and contesting the (re)privatization of the categories of "gender," "race," "sexuality," and others through their articulation by the categories of "identity," "difference," and "experience." The class basis of this re-privatization is the new petit-bourgeoisie, which needs to represent collective labor forces but on terms acceptable to dominant institutions, which, in turn, require a postliberal, "multiculturalist" remaking of institutions in order to integrate oppressed groups while excluding the radical possibilities opened up by this "integration," and to produce more "complex" types of labor power in the form of individuals capable of managing contradictions by representing them as "diversity."

A historical materialist, critical cultural studies would be interested in critiquing and transforming--first of all by clarifying--the contradiction between (private) individuality and (collective) subjectivities which reflects the crisis of hegemony in late capitalism. In this case, the category of "culture" would no longer be a site (as it is in postmodern cultural studies) where the indeterminacy of the material and the ideal undergoes

successive articulations which reflect fluctuations in "power relations" (understood as an independent dynamic or logic of the social). Rather, the category of "culture" would enable a theorization of the ways in which capitalist exploitation is reproduced and contested throughout existing social institutions and discourses. This is an urgent move toward a pedagogy aimed at enabling the conceptualization of the modes of obfuscation which represent the interests of the ruling, capitalist class as the "general interest": and which is in turn a necessary condition of possibility for the production of proletarian class consciousness.

Note

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