cultural studies,

identity and politics

between the modern

and the postmodern

media Culture

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Chapter 1

Theory wars and cultural studies

We live in a time of dramatic change and upheaval. Since the 1960s, there have been a series of spectacular changes in culture and society throughout the world. The 1960s was an era of protracted social tumult with new social movements mushrooming to challenge established forms of society and culture and to produce new countercultures and alternative forms of everyday life. The 1960s generated an era of intense "cultural wars" between liberals, conservatives, and radicals to reconstruct culture and society according to their own agendas, wars that still rage in the present moment. During the 1970s, worldwide economic recession fueled the push of post-World-War-II affluence and talk of a "post-scarcity society" was replaced by discourses calling for scaling down of expectations, limits to growth, and the need for reorganization of the economy and state. Such reorganization took place in most parts of the capitalist world during the 1980s under the rule of conservative governments which cut back on social welfare programs, while expanding the military sector and increasing federal deficits, with massive debts that are still unpaid.

The past five years have also seen the collapse of Soviet communism and the end of the Cold War. After World War II, capitalist and communist countries began this nightmarish epoch to an end. The result, however, has not been the creation of a new era of peace and stability. Instead, forces in both blocs promoted cold and hot wars, resulting in heavy militarization and covert and overt wars between the surrogates of the superpowers. Monstrous military establishments on both sides and weapons of total destruction created a tense, fearful epoch, where demagogues and cynical bureaucrats could frighten populations into accepting social policies that mainly benefited the greedy and powerful, while postponing much needed social reform and the creation of a more just and equitable social order.

The tearing down of the Berlin Wall, the collapse of the Soviet Communist empire, and the eventual dissolution of the Soviet Union itself seemed to bring this nightmarish epoch to an end. The result, however, has not been the creation of a new era of peace and stability. Instead, nationalist and religious wars have exploded, bringing about a new era of fear and instability, with no political forces able to offer an attractive way out of the current morass of economic recession, political instability, and cultural confusion. Within the United States, culture wars

have also intensified with rightist assaults on "political correctness" functioning as a weapon for attacks on progressive forces and ideas.

New technologies have also emerged in the past decade which have changed the patterns of everyday life and powerfully restructured work and leisure. New computer technologies have replaced many jobs and created new ones, providing new forms of accessing information, communicating with other people, and plugging into the joys of a new computer-mediated public sphere. The new media and computer technologies, however, are ambiguous and can have contradictory effects. On one hand, novel media technologies provide more diversity of choice, more possibility of autonomy over culture, and more openings for the interventions of alternative culture and ideas. Yet the new computer technologies also provide new forms of surveillance and control, with electronic eyes and systems in the workplace providing a contemporary incarnation of Big Brother. The new media technologies also provide powerful forms of social control through more efficient, subtly concealed techniques of indoctrination and manipulation. Indeed, their very existence might sap political energies and keep people safely ensconced within the confines of their home entertainment centers, far from the madding crowds and sites of mass political action.

As a historical phenomenon, media culture is relatively recent. While the new forms of culture industries described by Horkheimer and Adorno (1972) in the 1940s of film, radio, magazines, comics, advertising, and the press began to colonize leisure and stand at the center of the system of culture and communication in the United States and other capitalist democracies, it was not until the advent of television in the post-World War II period that media culture became a dominant force within culture, socialization, politics, and social life (Kellner 1990a). Since then, cable and satellite television, video recorders and other multimedia home entertainment technologies, and more recently home computers have all accelerated the dissemination and increased the power of media culture.

Media culture in the United States and most capitalist countries is a largely commercial form of culture, produced for profit, and disseminated in the form of commodities. The commercialization and commodification of culture has many important consequences. First of all, production for profit means that the executives of the culture industries attempt to produce artifacts that will be popular, that will sell or, in the case of radio and television, that will attract mass audiences. In many cases, this means production of lowest common denominator artifacts that will not offend mass audiences and that will attract a maximum of customers. But precisely the need to sell their artifacts means that the products of the culture industries must resonate to social experience, must attract large audiences, and must thus offer attractive products, which may shock, break with conventions, contain social critique, or articulate current ideas that may be the product of progressive social movements.

Thus, while media culture largely advances the interests of the class that owns and controls the large media conglomerates, its products are also involved in social conflict between competing groups and articulate conflicting positions, sometimes

advancing forces of resistance and progress. Consequently, media culture cannot be simply dismissed as a banal instrument of the dominant ideology but must be differentially interpreted and contextualized within the matrix of the competing social discourses and forces which constitute it – as I attempt to do in this book.

Yet, in a certain sense, media culture *is* the dominant culture today; it has replaced the forms of high culture as the center of cultural attention and impact for large numbers of people. Furthermore, visual and oral forms of media culture are supplanting forms of book culture, requiring new types of media literacy to decode these new cultural forms. Moreover, media culture has become a dominant force of socialization, with media images and celebrities replacing families, schools, and churches as arbiters of taste, value, and thought, producing new models of identification and resonant images of style, fashion, and behaviour.

With the advent of media culture, individuals are subjected to an unprecedented flow of sights and sounds into one's own home, and new virtual worlds of entertainment, information, sex, and politics are reordering perceptions of space and time, erasing distinctions between reality and media image, while producing new modes of experience and subjectivity. These far-reaching political, social, and cultural changes have been accompanied by a spectacular proliferation of new theories and methods to help make sense of contemporary culture and society. Already in the 1950s, social theorists were proclaiming the advent of new postindustrial societies in which knowledge and information would be the "axial principle" around which society was organized (Bell 1960, 1973 and 1976). During the 1970s, arguments began appearing that modernity was over and that we were now in a new postmodern era (Baudrillard 1976 and Lyotard 1984) – arguments that generated an explosion of discourses of the postmodern in the 1970s and 1980s (surveyed in Best and Kellner 1991).

Some postmodern theorists argue that contemporary societies with their new technologies, new forms of culture, and new experiences of the present era constitute a decisive rupture with modern forms of life.[1] For these theorists, the couch potato channel-surfing through endless waves of TV programs and the computer jockey jacking into cyberspace and new worlds of information and entertainment constitute a startling evolutionary development, a decisive novelty in the human adventure. The media junkies and technofreaks of the present age are seen as the hunters and gathers of information and entertainment, challenged to survive an "infotainment" overload and to process a stunning array of images and ideas. Like the mutant portrayed by David Bowie in *The Man Who Fell to Earth*, the new postmodern subjects, so it is claimed, will have to learn to live with and process an immense fragmentation and proliferation of new images, information, and technologies.

During the same era, political economists began arguing that we are entering a new "post-Fordist" society in which the regime of accumulation marked by mass production and consumption, state regulation of the economy, and a homogeneous mass culture is being replaced by "more flexible" regimes of accumulation (Harvey 1989). These are marked by transnational corporations replacing the nation-state

as arbitrators of production in a new era of global production that erases previous boundaries of space and time. Other social theorists speak of "disorganized capitalism," or new forms of organization, and new legitimation crises, risks, ecological problems, the breakdown of community, growing rifts between rich and poor, deadly new diseases such as AIDS, and a myriad of other new phenomena and problems.[2]

These dramatic changes require new theoretical and political responses to interpret our current social situation and to illuminate our contemporary problems, conflicts, challenges, and possibilities. In the conjuncture in which we find ourselves, cultural studies can play an important role in elucidating the significant changes which have taken place in our culture and society. We are indeed surrounded by new technologies, new modes of cultural production, and new forms of social and political life. Moreover, culture is playing an ever more significant role in every realm of contemporary society, with multifarious functions in arenas from the economic to the social. In the economy, seductive cultural forms shape consumer demand, produce needs, and mold a commodity self with consumerist values. In the political sphere, media images have produced a new sort of sound-bite politics which places the media at the center of political life. In our social interactions, mass-produced images guide our presentation of the self in everyday life, our ways of relating to others, and the creation of our social values and goals. As work declines in importance, leisure and culture become more and more the focus of everyday life and the locus of value. Of course, one must work to earn the benefits of the consumer society (or inherit sufficient wealth), but work is supposedly declining in importance in an era in which individuals allegedly gain primary gratification from consuming goods and leisure activities, rather than from their labor activity.[3]

Thus, contemporary society and culture is in a state of ferment and change as competing theories strive to make sense of these new developments. The contested terrain of theory is accompanied by culture wars between conservatives, liberals, and progressives, with conservatives attempting to roll back the advances of the 1960s and impose more traditional values and forms of culture. Throughout the Western world, conservatives have been attempting to gain hegemony by seizing political power and using it to carry through their economic, political, social, and cultural agendas. They have been using their political and economic power to carry through an agenda of cultural transformation, attempting to turn back the clock to an earlier era of conservative rule.

In the United States, intense culture wars have been raging ever since movements of the 1960s launched the first direct assaults on conservative values and institutions. Richard Nixon temporarily established a shaky conservative hegemony in the early 1970s, but his demise in the Watergate scandal triggered a new round of culture wars. The conservative counterrevolution became hegemonic in the U.S. with the election of Ronald Reagan in 1980 and ascent of the New Right which supported his triumph over the Democrats, liberals, and those radicals who preserved their 1960s politics and values. The previous ascendancy of rightists like

Margaret Thatcher in the U.K., Brian Mulroney in Canada, and the Kohl government in Germany spawned a period of conservative hegemony throughout the Western capitalist world. During this era, conservatives attacked the welfare state, abortion rights, civil liberties, freedoms in the arts, the liberalization of education, and attempted to impose a rightist and traditionalist agenda on the public. Yet this offensive of the right never really triumphed in the realm of culture, and culture itself has been a fiercely contested terrain for the past decades.[4]

As we move into the 1990s, conservatives in the United States continue fiercely to contest the liberals who now hold state power after the election of Bill Clinton in 1992. When Clinton attempts to push through a partially liberal agenda, his proposals are fought tooth and nail by conservatives, unlike those of Reagan, who was able to readily implement his economic agenda (probably because it was supported by the big media and business, which exert tremendous control over politicians of both major parties). On the other hand, Clinton has been increasingly pushing a conservative agenda himself and, in a sense, "Reaganism" retains its position as "political common sense" and the dominant discourse of the era. Moreover, both television and radio in the United States continue to be dominated by conservative voices, with the same old right-wing think tanks and publications providing the pundits who pontificate on the state of the nation, while new reactionary brutes like Rush Limbaugh also gain media and cultural power.[5] Hollywood films regularly attack women and feminism and celebrate the most grotesque forms of unrestrained male power and machismo.[6] "White male paranoia" is evident in all cultural milieu from stand-up comics to radio talk shows, and the conservative cultural offensive rages on unabated.

Similar cultural wars rage throughout Europe. In the U.K., the conservative hegemony of the Thatcher and Major regimes has been under attack and conservative power has been eroded, yet the media and culture still evidence strong conservative trends. In France, the socialist government of Mitterand was decisively defeated in 1993 by conservative forces, and social democratic governments in Holland, Denmark, and Sweden have also suffered rate defeats in recent years. Attempts to unify Europe politically and economically are countered by new nationalist surges from Scandinavia to Eastern Europe and the pro- and anti-Europe forces appear evenly divided. In the Arab world, militant fundamentalism is on the march against secular and Westernized regimes, while in the former communist world, struggles between national, ethnic, religious, and political forces have exploded into ugly wars. Misery and oppression continue to grow apace in the more underdeveloped regions of the world and the wretched of the earth appear more wretched than ever.

Yet there are also countervailing trends. The progressive social movements of the 1960s and 1970s are still alive and well and struggles for human rights, the civil liberties of oppressed people, peace and justice, ecology, and a more humane organization of society are everywhere visible. Indeed, the very instability, flux, and uncertainty of the present moment creates openings for more positive futures and possibilities for the creation of a better world out of current nightmares. On the

other hand, the penchant for micropolitics and/or identity politics fragments the progressive movements and renders many blind to the necessary linkages and interconnections with others in opposition or in counterhegemonic struggles.
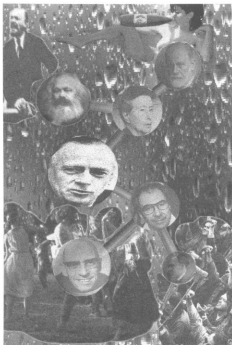
Within this context, it is therefore of vital importance to understand the role of culture in a wide range of current social struggles, trends, and developments. It is the conviction of the studies in this book that our current local, national, and global situations are articulated through the texts of media culture, which is itself a contested terrain, one which competing social groups attempt to use to promote their agendas and ideologies, and which itself reproduces conflicting political discourses, often in a contradictory manner. Not just news and information, but entertainment and fiction articulate the conflicts, fears, hopes, and dreams of individuals and groups confronting a turbulent and uncertain world. The concrete struggles of each society are played out in the texts of media culture, especially in the commercial media of the culture industries which produce texts that must resonate with people's concerns if they are to be popular and profitable. Culture has never been more important and never before have we had such a need for serious scrutiny of contemporary culture.

Consequently, to understand what is going on in our society and our everyday life, we need theoretical perspectives on media culture and social theories that will help us make sense of the changes and conflicts of the present age. Throughout this book, I will thus delineate theoretical perspectives that I find useful in grasping the vicissitudes of contemporary society and culture.[1] But the fortunes of theory are related to the historical matrices which shape and structure them and which they in turn attempt to illuminate. Therefore, in the following study, I will sketch the emergence and effects of some contemporary theories which I will make use of in this work.

THEORY WARS

The past decades of intense cultural, social, and political struggle since the 1960s also saw the rise of many new theories and approaches to culture and society. It is as if the tumultuous struggles of the era sought expression and replication in the realm of theory. The political passions and energies seemed to be sublimated into the discourse of theory and new theories were appropriated with the intensity that marked the assimilation and dissemination of radical political ideas and practices in the 1960s. The proliferation of new theoretical discourses first took the form of theory fever, in which each new, or newly discovered, theoretical discourse produced feverish excitement, as if a new theory virus totally took over and possessed its host. Then the proliferating theory fever took on the form of theory wars between the competing theoretical discourses, often reducing theory to the domain of fashion.

Theory fever emerged in the 1960s in France with the proliferation of new discourses emanating from the post-structuralist turn in theory. Rejecting the totalizing, universalizing, and scientistic theories of structuralism, semiotics,

psychoanalysis, Marxism, and other "master discourses" which produced the theory fevers and wars of an earlier era, the post-structuralist revolution saw the proliferation of new theories of language, the subject, politics, and culture. Yet, drawing on the very theories whose more extravagant claims they rejected, the post-structuralist movement provided new syntheses of Marxism, psychoanalysis, semiotics, and feminism, exploding in a wealth of theoretical discourses, which circulated throughout the world.

In the United States, where forms of what Herbert Marcuse called "one-dimensional thought" reigned in the 1950s and early 1960s, Marxism and feminism were the first forms of theory fever to circulate. Experiences of the Vietnam war in the 1960s drove many in the New Left and antiwar movement to Marxist theory, tabooed during the Cold War and driven underground.[4] Marxist discourse proliferated and a stunning variety of neo-Marxist theories from Europe and the Third World were imported to the United States, producing a wide range of new radical theories.

Feminism quickly became part of the new theoretical discourses throughout the world. In the late 1960s, women began to revolt against what they considered oppressive practices of both contemporary patriarchal societies and their male comrades in the radical movements. First-wave 1960s feminism discovered classics like Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*, a rich woman's history, and the importance of women's experience and culture for the radical project.[5] Many, often unhappy, marriages between Marxism and feminism took place, while other varieties of feminist theory found important tools in psychoanalysis to analyze women's oppression and experiences, and to provide for the reconstruction of more nurturing, feeling, and loving subjects. Thus, in with Marxism, a tremendous range of feminist theories emerged, which often warred with each other, as well as with male discourses.

Previously marginalized groups sought their own voices and in the United States new African-American, Native American, Mexican-American, Asian-American, and other minority discourses and studies emerged. Gay and lesbian studies problematized sexuality and provided new perspectives on gender, sexuality, culture, and society. Theorists whose national origin was frequently colonized countries generated new subaltern studies, attacking Western colonization, while studies of the "postcolonial subject" and voices from newly emerged nations produced some exciting theoretical innovations and greatly expanded the terrain of critical discourses. Cumulatively, these discourses have contributed to some of the most exciting social theory and cultural criticism of recent years and in the following studies I draw on these new oppositional discourses.

Although the tumult of the 1960s passed into the more quiescent 1970s, the explosion of theories continued and theory wars intensified.[6] A new globalization of theory erupted with the new theoretical discourses being rapidly disseminated across borders and national cultures. Theorists in the Third World and the United States appropriated European discourses and, the resulting new critical theories were circulated in turn throughout Europe. Discourses of race, class, ethnicity,

sexual preference, and nationality challenged theoretical discourses to take account of phenomena previously ignored or underplayed. Wars broke out (and persist) between those that privileged class and those that privileged such things as race and gender. Finally, a truce prevailed which agreed that all of these determinants of social identity and structuring social categories were of fundamental importance to social life, cultural analysis, and individual subjectivity.

By the 1980s, the new global discourses of theory provided languages for communication across borders, but they also disseminated the globalization of theory fever and wars. Theory fevers continued to proliferate and from Berkeley to Bombay, from Austin to London, new syntheses of Marxism, feminism, psychoanalysis, post-structuralism, and postmodern theories emerged, while claims were being made for a new discourse of theory which drew on the new critical theories, producing ever-spiralling and complexified theoretical discourses and syntheses. Theory wars intensified between discourses seeking hegemony and dominance. Each new theory was proclaimed by its advocates as the superfizory, as the key to culture, society and the subject. Discoveries of thinkers like Roland Barthes, Jacques Lacan, Michel Foucault, Louis Althusser, Jean Baudrillard, Jean-François Lyotard, Jacques Derrida, and the other stars of "new French Theory" were enthusiastically taken up by followers who took each new theory as the finally discovered oeuvre that would lead the way to theoretical and political salvation.

During the 1980s, various strains of French post-structuralist theory mutated into postmodern theory (see the genealogy in Best and Kellner 1991 and the discussion on p. 40). In a sense, postmodern theory exhibits the passions of the 1960s sublimated into theoretical discourse. The break or rupture desired in the 1960s, a break then described in the discourse of revolution, is projected onto history itself, or more limited domains of society and culture. Yet, the apocalyptic breaks and ruptures postulated in the 1960s as the goal of political struggle are now being described in some postmodern theory as breaks occurring as the result of new technologies, without the effort of revolutionary struggle, thus replicating, in effect, the old discourses of technological determinism.

Moreover, some of the discourses of the postmodern also bear the marks of defeat in the aftermath of the 1960s. Postmodern claims concerning the fragmentation of the subject and doubts concerning the efficacy of political practice are in part effects of the experiences of the fragmentation of the political "movement" of the era and disintegration of revolutionary politics and subjects. Postmodern nihilism enunciates the experience of defeat, of disappointment, of despair, over the failures of the 1960s movements to more radically transform social and cultural life. Yet there is a more positive version of postmodern theory that translates some of the progressive tendencies and gains of the 1960s into theoretical discourse and cultural practice. What Hal Foster (1983) has termed the "postmodernism of resistance" attempts to develop oppositional theoretical and cultural practices within the present moment, against the more oppressive features and practices of contemporary culture and society.

By the 1990s, many of the new theoretical discourses positioned themselves

under the rubric of "multiculturalism." This way of seeing affirmed otherness and difference, and the importance of attending to marginalized, minority, and oppositional groups and voices previously excluded from the cultural dialogue. Multiculturalism elicited new cultural wars as conservatives defended Western culture, with its canons of great (mostly) European males against the multicultural offensive. Against multiculturalism, conservatives thus (re)affirmed monoculturalism leading to a new round of intense theory and culture wars that are still raging.

As noted, each new product of the theory fever was presented as the solution to the current dilemmas of theory and politics and extravagant claims for the revolutionary nature of each theoretical discourse were endlessly recycled. At this juncture, however, it seems highly questionable to seek a new theoretical Holy Grail that will yield the secrets of Being, culture, or society. Rather, with Foucault, it is perhaps better to conceive of theories as instruments, as providing tools in a toolkit, or, to use an earlier metaphor, as weapons used to attack specific targets.[15] "Theories" are, among other things, ways of seeing, optics; they are perspectives which illuminate specific phenomena and that also have certain blindspots and limitations which restrict their focus. The term "theory" derives from the Greek root *theoria* that privileges seeing, and thus one function of theory is to help individuals see and interpret phenomena and events. Theories are thus ways of seeing that provide understanding and modes of interpretation which focus attention on specific phenomena, linkages, or the social system as a whole.

Post-structuralist theory has made us aware that theories are constructs, products of specific social discourses, practices, and institutions, and thus do not transcend their social fields. Traditional theories that claim to provide a foundation of truth, or universal knowledge transcendent of social conditions, or a metatheory that provides truth which transcends the interests of particular theories, have been widely rejected, as have positivist theories which claim that science provides a privileged mode of truth to which all theory should aspire. Against positivism, it is generally agreed that there is no such thing as an immaculate perception, that seeing, interpreting, explaining, and so on are all mediated by theoretical discourses and embedded in theoretical assumptions.

Thus, on this more modest conception of theory, theories are seen as tools that help us see, operate, and get around specific social fields, pointing to salient phenomena, making connections, interpreting and criticizing, and perhaps explaining and predicting specific states of affairs. Theories provide resources to talk about common experiences, discourses, practices, institutions, and social relations. They also point to conflicts and problems and provide resources to discuss them and to search for solutions.

Theories thus illuminate social realities and help individuals to make sense of their world. Theories use concepts, images, symbols, arguments, and narratives to do their work. Contemporary metatheory (i.e. theory about theory) frequently notes that theories have literary components; they tell stories, utilize rhetoric and symbols, and like literary texts help make sense of our life.[16] Yet theories also have cognitive components that abstract in theoretical concepts common features of their

domain, in which critical social theories analyze the structures of capitalism, patriarchy, or social class. Social theories provide maps of societal fields that orient individuals to perceive how their societies are constructed. The categories of social theory conceptualize the structures, relations, and institutions that provide the terrain for social and everyday life.

Social theories are thus heuristic devices to interpret and make sense of social life. They illuminate the context of social action and guide people in their everyday social interactions. Social theories often provide the big picture that allows individuals to contextualize their experience within the broader field of social relations and institutions. Social theories can also illuminate specific events and artefacts by analyzing their constituents, relations, and effects. Dialectical social theory makes connections between isolated parts of society, showing, for instance, how the economy enters into the processes of media culture and structures what kind of texts are produced in the culture industries. Or it shows how listening to music is mediated by specific technologies, cultural spaces, and institutions (Bettland in Grossberg, *et al.* 1992). Dialectics is the art of making connections and relating parts to each other and to the system as a whole. Thus, a critical theory of society contains mappings of how society as a whole is organized, delineating its fundamental structures, institutions, practices, and discourses, and how they fit together into a social system.

Critical social theory can utilize the concept of articulation to denote how various societal components are organized into the production of, say, conservative hegemony, or in the popularity of a Madonna. The concept of articulation was introduced by British cultural studies and has become central to its practice (see Hall, 1986b; Grossberg, 1992; and the East genealogy of the concept in Jameson 1994). Cultural studies delineates how cultural artefacts articulate social ideologies, values, and representations of gender, race, and class, and how these phenomena are related to each other. Situating cultural texts in their social context thus involves tracing the articulations through which societies produce culture and how culture in turn shapes society through its influence on individuals and groups.

Critical social theories conceptualize the structures of domination and resistance. They point to forms of oppression and domination contrasted to forces of resistance that can serve as instruments of change. They illuminate the possibilities of social transformation and progress, as well as the dangers of intensified social domination. Critical social theory thus devolves around social practice and can aid in the construction of better societies by showing what needs to be transformed, what agencies might carry out the transformation, and what strategies and tactics might be successful in promoting progressive social change.

Thus, critical social theories are weapons of critique and instruments of practice, as well as cognitive maps. Critical theory points to aspects of society and culture that should be challenged and changed, and thus attempts to inform and inspire political practice. Practice-oriented theory also posits certain goals and values that are to be realized and sketches ways to transform society to make it better, to increase human freedom and happiness. They provide vocabularies that help

mobilize responses to social problems and issues, and thus aim at intervention in the public sphere.

As I have noted, the present situation is characterized by a bewildering multiplicity of competing theoretical paradigms. Different theories can be used for varying purposes in disparate situations. The usefulness or uselessness of specific theories depends on the task at hand and whether the theory in question is appropriate for that task. Theory, as the following studies hope to demonstrate, can be useful, but it is a grave mistake to believe that there is a supertheory or master narrative that will provide the interpretive or explanatory keys to all of our intellectual and political problems. Consequently, instead or arguing for a new supertheory, or privileging a grand synthesis of previous theories, I will draw upon a number of critical theories, offering some examples of what I call a multiperspectival social theory and media cultural studies.[3]

Contemporary societies require constant mappings and remappings because of the intensity of change and speed of current social transformations. We are living through an epoch of intense change, and many of the current theories of society describe aspects of this change, and are thus relevant in various specific contexts. No one theory, however, tells the whole story, and all contemporary theories have their limitations and blind spots, as well as their contributions. Consequently, I propose combining various contemporary social theories to provide some ways of illuminating and talking about phenomena and developments within the present age.[4] The mappings of each specific theory provide some novel insights, but usually are limited in specific ways. Some theories are thus useful for some tasks (i.e. Marxist ideology as a critique for analyzing class and hegemony), while other theories are useful for other tasks (i.e. feminism for interrogating gender, or queer studies for discussing the construction of sexuality and sexual preferences, and so on). No one theory could possibly address all topics or illuminate all features of social life. Thus, one must choose which theories one deploys, according to the specific tasks at hand.

For the purposes of this study, I shall therefore adopt a pragmatic contextualist approach to theory, using some critical theorists for certain specific tasks and others for different ones. A multiperspectival approach holds that the more theories one has at one's disposal, the more tasks one can perform and the more specific objects and themes one can address. Further, the more perspectives that one brings to bear on a phenomenon, the better one's potential grasp or understanding of it could be. To be sure, a powerful and innovative single perspective (like psychoanalysis or feminism) might be more useful in illuminating or explaining certain phenomena than an eclectic combination of multiple perspectives, but combining powerful approaches like Marxism, feminism, post-structuralism, and other contemporary theoretical optics might yield more insightful and useful analyses than those produced by one perspective alone. Moreover, a Marxism informed by feminism and psychoanalysis is different and more useful than a theory innocent of such perspectives.

As I attempt to show in this collection, different topics and issues require varying

methods and approaches. Indeed, throughout this book I attempt to flesh out my theoretical position, which is only suggested here, and believe that only through concrete studies can theories be developed and tested, and their hermeneutical and critical effectiveness validated. And the political efficacy of a theory can only be developed and tested through examination of its effects in practice. If a theory illuminates a phenomenon like MTV and produces altered reception of it (or perhaps rejection), or inspires the production of oppositional media practices, then the theory turns out to be valuable both in its theoretical and political effects.

The test of a theory is thus its use, its deployment, and its effects. From this perspective, theories are seen to be either useful or deficient through their application and effects. Contextual pragmatist and multiperspectival approaches thus work together to open up theoretical inquiry to a multiplicity of discourses and methods. Theories and discourses are more or less useful depending on the issue under question, the specific application of the theory in the theorist's hands, and the goals intended. In the next sections, I shall note which particular theories I and others engaged in the analysis of the interaction of culture, society, and politics that is cultural studies have found most useful. Yet I do not intend to provide a history or genealogy of the trajectories of cultural studies. I will not provide a summary of works of various traditions of cultural studies, but wish instead to intervene in contemporary debates, staking out my own positions within the field of current problematics. Accordingly, in the following discussion, I cite only positions that I feel are productive for a media cultural studies, or indicate positions from which I am distancing myself.[15]

APPROACHES TO CULTURAL STUDIES

The metatheory for and models of social theory and cultural criticism that I am proposing here have been especially influenced by the Frankfurt School, British cultural studies, and postmodern/post-structuralist theory. As I indicate below, the Frankfurt School inaugurated critical studies of mass communication and culture and developed an early model of cultural studies. There are indeed many traditions and models of cultural studies, ranging from neo-Marxist models developed by Lukács, Gramsci, Bloch, and the Frankfurt School in the 1930s to feminist and psychoanalytic cultural studies. In Britain and the United States, there is a long tradition of cultural studies that preceded the Birmingham school.[16] The major traditions of cultural studies combine – at their best – social theory, cultural analysis, history, philosophy, and specific political interventions, thus overcoming the standard academic division of labor by surmounting specialization which bifurcates the field of study of the media, culture, and communications. Cultural studies thus operates with a transdisciplinary conception that draws on social theory, economics, politics, history, communication studies, literary and cultural theory, philosophy, and other theoretical discourses.

Transdisciplinary approaches to culture and society transgress borders between various academic disciplines. In particular, they argue that one should not stop at

the border of a text, but should use how it fits into systems of textual production, and how various texts are thus part of systems of genres or types of production and have an intertextual construction. *Rambo* is a film, for instance, that fits into the genre of war films and a specific cycle of return-to-Vietnam films (see the analysis in Chapter 2). One should not, however, stop at the borders of intertextuality, but should move from the text to its context, to the culture and society that constitutes the text and in which it should be read and interpreted. For *Rambo* also replicates the right-wing discourses concerning POWs left in Vietnam and the need to overcome the Vietnam syndrome (i.e. shame concerning the loss of the war and overcoming the reluctance to again use U.S. military power). Interpreting the cinematic text of *Rambo* thus involves the use of film theory, social history, political analysis and ideology critique, and other modes of cultural criticism, as I will illustrate in the next chapter.

Transdisciplinary approaches thus involve border crossings across disciplines from text to context, and thus from texts to culture and society.[17] Crossing borders inevitably pushes one to the boundaries of class, gender, race, sexuality, ethnicity, and the other characteristics that differentiate individuals from each other and through which people construct their identities. Thus, most forms of cultural studies, and most critical social theories, have engaged feminism and the various multicultural theories, enriching their projects with theoretical and political substance derived from the new critical and multicultural discourses that have emerged since the 1960s.

Transdisciplinary cultural studies thus draws on a disparate range of fields to theorize the complexity and contradictions of the multiple effects of a vast range of forms of media/culture/communications in our lives and demonstrate how these artifacts serve as instruments of domination, but also offer resources for resistance and change. In the following sketch, I first indicate how the Frankfurt School developed an early approach to media studies still worth attending to, though I also identify some of its limitations. I next discuss British cultural studies which currently rivals postmodern theory in popularity and attention as a critical approach to the study of culture and society, indicating its contributions, but also some of its restrictions. Then, I discuss the postmodern turn in social and cultural theory and also explicate some of the attempts to develop a postmodern cultural studies. In the following discussions, I will focus primarily on aspects of these traditions that I believe are useful today for cultural studies while noting some limitations that I think have vitiated certain forms of contemporary cultural studies.

THE FRANKFURT SCHOOL

The Frankfurt School inaugurated critical communications studies in the 1930s and combined political economy of the media, cultural analysis of texts, and audience reception studies of the social and ideological effects of mass culture and communications.[18] Its proponents coined the term "culture industries" to signify the process of the industrialization of mass-produced culture and the commercial imperatives

which drove the system. The critical theorists analyzed all mass-mediated cultural artifacts within the context of industrial production, in which the artifacts of the culture industries exhibited the same features as other products of mass production: commodification, standardization, and massification. The products of the culture industries had the specific function, however, of providing ideological legitimation of the existing capitalist societies and of integrating individuals into the framework of mass culture and society.

Adorno's analyses of popular music, Lowenthal's studies of popular literature and magazines, Herzog's studies of radio soap operas, and the perspectives and critiques of mass culture developed in Horkheimer and Adorno's famous study of the culture industries (1972) provided many examples of the usefulness of the Frankfurt School approach. Moreover, in their theories of the culture industries and critiques of mass culture, they were the first to systematically analyze and criticize mass-mediated culture and communications within critical social theory. In particular, they were the first to see the importance of what they called the "culture industries" in the reproduction of contemporary societies, in which so-called mass culture and communications stand in the center of leisure activity, are important agents of socialization, mediators of political reality, and should thus be seen as major institutions of contemporary societies with a variety of economic, political, cultural and social effects.[19]

Yet there are serious flaws in the original program of critical theory which requires a radical reconstruction of the classical model of the culture industries (Kellner 1989a). Overcoming the limitations of the classical model would include: more concrete analysis of the political economy of the media and the processes of the production of culture; more empirical and historical research into the construction of media industries and their interaction with other social institutions; more studies of audience reception and media effects; and the incorporation of new cultural theories and methods into a reconstructed critical theory of culture and the media. Cumulatively, such a reconstruction of the classical Frankfurt School project would update the critical theory of society and its activity of cultural criticism by incorporating contemporary developments in social and cultural theory into the enterprise of critical theory.

In addition, the Frankfurt School dichotomy between high culture and low culture is problematic and should be superseded by a model that takes culture as a spectrum and applies similar critical methods to all cultural artifacts ranging from opera to popular music, from modernist literature to soap operas. In particular, the Frankfurt School model of a monolithic mass culture contrasted with an ideal of "authentic art," which limits critical, subversive, and emancipatory moments to certain privileged artifacts of high culture, is highly problematic. The Frankfurt School position that all mass culture is ideological and debased, having the effects of duping a passive mass of consumers, is also objectionable. Instead, one should see critical and ideological moments in the full range of culture, and not limit critical moments to high culture and identify all of low culture as ideological. One should also allow for the possibility that critical and subversive moments could be found

in the artifacts of the culture industries, as well as the canonized classics of high modernist culture that the Frankfurt School seemed to privilege as the site of artistic opposition and emancipation.[26] In addition one should distinguish between the encoding and decoding of media artifacts, and recognize that an active audience often produces its own meanings and uses for products of the culture industries.

Yet precisely the critical focus on media culture from the perspectives of commodification, reification, ideology, and domination provides a framework useful as a corrective to more populist and uncritical approaches to media culture which tend to surrender critical standpoints. Although the Frankfurt School approach is partial and one-sided it does provide tools to criticize the ideological and debased forms of media culture and the ways that it reinforces ideologies which legitimate forms of oppression. As I argue in Chapter 2 and throughout the book, ideology critique is a fundamental constituent of cultural studies and the Frankfurt School is valuable for inaugurating systematic and sustained critiques of ideology within the culture industries.

Moreover, on the level of methodology, the Frankfurt School work preceded the bifurcation of the field of media studies into specialized subareas with competing models and methods. This bifurcation is documented in the 1983 *Journal of Communications* issue on "Ferment in the field" (Vol. 33, No. 3 [Summer 1983]), where some of the participants in this discussion on the state of the art of media communications studies noted a bifurcation of the field between a culturalist approach that focuses primarily on texts contrasted with more empirical approaches in the study of mass-mediated communications. The culturalist approach at the time was largely textual, centered on the analysis and criticism of all forms of communication as cultural artifacts, using methods primarily derived from the humanities. The methods of communications research, by contrast, employed more empirical methodologies, ranging from straight quantitative research, ethnographic studies of specific cases or domains, to specialized historical research. Topics in this area included analysis of the political economy of the media, audience reception and study of media effects, media history, the interaction of media institutions with other domains of society and the like.

Some contributors to the 1983 *JOC* symposium suggested a liberal tolerance of different approaches, or ways in which the various approaches complemented each other or could be integrated. In overcoming the divide between cultural and communications studies, I would suggest that the Frankfurt School approach is valuable because it provides an integral model that transcends contemporary divisions in the study of media, culture, and communications.[27] Their studies dissected the interconnection of culture and communication in artifacts that reproduced the existing society, positively presenting social norms and practices, and legitimating the state capitalist organization of society. The Frankfurt School carried out analysis within the framework of critical social theory, thus integrating communication and cultural studies within the context of study of capitalist society and the ways that communications and culture were produced within this order and the roles and functions that they assumed. The Frankfurt School also made apparent

the inappropriate nature of quantitative methods for qualitative relations and produced methods to analyze the complex relations between texts, audiences, and contexts, as well as the relationships between the media industries, state, and capitalist economies. Thus the study of communication and culture was integrated within critical social theory and became an important part of a theory of contemporary society, in which culture and communication were playing ever more significant roles.[22]

BRITISH CULTURAL STUDIES AND ITS LEGACY

The Frankfurt School developed their model of the culture industry in the decades from the 1930s through the 1950s, and then did not develop any significantly new or innovative approaches to media culture. British cultural studies emerged in the 1960s as a project of approaching culture from critical and multidisciplinary perspectives which was initiated in England by the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies and others.[23] British cultural studies culture within a theory of social production and reproduction, specifying the ways that cultural forms served either to further social domination, or to enable people to resist and struggle against domination. Society is conceived as a hierarchical and antagonistic set of social relations characterized by the oppression of subordinate class, gender, race, ethnic, and national strata. Building on Gramsci's model of hegemony and counterhegemony, cultural studies analyse "hegemonic," or ruling, social and cultural forms of domination, and seek "counterhegemonic" forces of resistance and struggle.[24]

For Gramsci, societies maintained their stability through a combination of force and hegemony, with some institutions and groups violently exerting power to maintain social boundaries (i.e. the police, military, vigilante groups, etc.), while other institutions (like religion, schooling, or the media) serve to induce consent to the dominant order through establishing the hegemony, or ideological dominance, of a specific type of social order (i.e. liberal capitalism, fascism, white supremacy, democratic socialism, communism, or whatever).

Hegemony theory involved both analysis of current systems of domination and the ways that specific political groups achieved hegemonic power (i.e. Thatcherism or Reaganism) and the delineation of counterhegemonic forces, groups, and ideas that could contest and overturn the existing hegemony. British cultural studies was thus connected with a political project of social transformation in which location of forms of domination and resistance would aid the process of political struggle.

Richard Johnson, in discussions at a 1990 University of Texas conference on cultural studies, stressed that a distinction should be made between the postmodern concept of "difference" and the Birmingham notion of "antagonism," in which the first concept often refers to a liberal conception of recognizing and tolerating differences, while the notion of antagonism refers to structural forces of domination, in which asymmetrical relations of power exist in sites of conflict. There is indeed an important difference between mere oppositions and differences (such as

up/down, day/night, 0/1) through which linguistic systems are formed and in which opposing terms are opposite and equal, as opposed to relations of antagonism (workers/bosses, men/women, whites/blacks) in which the terms of difference are of unequal power and exist in relations of inequality and antagonism. Whyte nails relations, oppressed individuals struggle to overcome structures of domination in a variety of arenas.

The key point here is that it is struggles against domination, against subordination, which are the ones focused on by a critical cultural studies. Not just any struggle and resistance, but those against domination, against structural relations of inequality and oppression are the ones highlighted by the critical cultural studies that I am concerned to develop.

Cultural studies thus situates culture within a socio-historical context in which culture promotes domination or resistance, and criticizes forms of culture that foster subordination. In this way, cultural studies can be distinguished from idealist, textualist, and extreme discourse theories which only recognize linguistic forms as constitutive of culture and subjectivity. Cultural studies by contrast is materialist in that it focuses on the material origins and effects of culture and the ways that culture is imbricated in process of domination or resistance.

Cultural studies thus requires a social theory that analyzes the system and structure of domination and forces of resistance. Since capital and economic relations have played a key role in structuring contemporary societies (often referred to as "capitalist" or "democratic capitalist" societies), Marxism has played an important role from the beginning of cultural studies, though there have been fierce battles concerning which forms of Marxist theory and more recently there have been sharp rejections of Marxist perspectives (see Bennett 1992 and Fiske 1993).[20] Classically, however, cultural studies has seen society as a system of domination in which institutions like the family, schooling, church, workplace, media, and the state control individuals and provide structures of domination against which individuals striving for more freedom and power must struggle.

Cultural studies, therefore, like the critical theory of the Frankfurt School, develops theoretical models of the relationship between the economy, state, society, culture, and everyday life, and thus depends on the problematics of contemporary social theory. Yet cultural studies also draws significantly on theories of culture. Crucially, cultural studies subverts the high and low culture distinction — like postmodern theory and unlike the Frankfurt School — and thus valorizes cultural forms like film, television, and popular music dismissed by previous approaches to culture which tended to utilize literary theory to analyze cultural forms, or to focus primarily, or even solely, on the artifacts of high culture.

Yet, as Aronowitz has argued (1993: 127ff.), British cultural studies has tended to ignore high culture, erasing it, with few exceptions, from their field of inquiry. They might be contrasted in this regard with the Frankfurt School, which celebrated the oppositional qualities of certain sorts of high culture, especially critical modernism, and with postmodernism, an aesthetic reaction against high modernism that mixed features of so-called high and low culture. British cultural studies, however,

have generally failed to engage modernism, or other forms of high culture, and thus overlook the potentials for opposition and subversion, as well as ideology, in the works which some of its practitioners dismiss as elitist high culture. This is curious since a group of theorists around the magazine *Screen*, which was of signal importance in developing cultural theory in Britain and elsewhere during the 1970s, celebrated the oppositional quality of modernism against forms of realism and media culture, thus explicating the Frankfurt split. In retrospect, it seems better to consider the conservative and oppositional force and effects of all forms of culture. Though one should also reject the rigid high/low culture split that vitiated the Frankfurt School and *Screen* theory, which reserved emancipatory effects solely for the products of oppositional modernism while dismissing all forms of popular or mass culture as mere ideology.

A question of terminology

The innovation of British cultural studies, then, was to see the importance of media culture and how it is involved in processes of domination and resistance. Yet there is some debate concerning the proper terminology to describe the objects of those forms of culture that permeate everyday life in the familiar form of such things as radio or television. Raymond Williams and the members of the Birmingham school were responsible for the rejection of the term "mass culture," which they argue, properly I believe, tends to be elitist, erecting a binary opposition between high and low, that is contemptuous of "the masses" and its culture. The concept of "mass culture" is also monolithic and homogeneous, and thus neutralizes cultural contradictions and dissolves oppositional practices and groups into a neutral concept of "mass."

I would also, however, reject the term "popular culture" which John Fiske (1989a and 1989b) and other contemporary practitioners of cultural studies have unproblematically adopted (i.e. Grossberg 1989 and 1992). The term "popular" suggests that media culture arises from the people. The term also covers over the fact that it is a top-down form of culture which often reduces the audience to a passive receiver of predigested meanings. As used by Fiske, Grossberg, and others, "popular culture" collapses the distinction between culture produced by the people, or "popular classes," contrasted to mass-produced media culture, thus reveling in a "cultural populism" (McGuigan 1992) that often uncritically celebrates media and consumer culture.

Initially, the term "popular" was used by two of the founders of British cultural studies to refer to a relatively autonomous working-class culture that was "of the people."[3b] The discourse of the "popular" has also long been utilized in Latin America and elsewhere to describe art produced by and for the people themselves as an oppositional sphere to mainstream or hegemonic culture, which is often a colonial culture, imposed from above. Thus, in Latin America and elsewhere, "popular forces" describe groups struggling against domination and oppression, while "popular culture" describes culture of, by, and for the people, in which they

produce and participate in cultural practices that articulate their experience and aspirations. Calling mass-mediated commercial products of the culture industries "popular culture" thus collapses a distinction between two very different sorts of culture.

The concept of "popular culture" also presents a celebratory gloss associated with the Popular Culture Association, which often engages in uncritical affirmations of all that is "popular." Since this term is associated in the U.S. with individuals and groups that often eschew critical, theoretically informed, and political approaches to culture, it is risky to use the term "popular culture," though Fiske has tried to provide it with an inflection consistent with the left-populist and socially critical approach of cultural studies. In a 1991 interview, Fiske defines the "popular" as that which audiences make of and do with the commodities of the culture industries (see also Fiske 1989a and 1989b). He argues that progressives should appropriate the term "popular," wresting it from conservatives and liberals, using it as part of an arsenal of concepts in a cultural politics of opposition and resistance (discussion in Austin, September 1990).

Consequently, even the vocabulary of cultural studies is contested, with no agreement on the basic terms used to describe its field. Indeed, in recent years, new schools of cultural studies have emerged in Australia, Canada, the United States and elsewhere, utilizing different methods, concepts, strategies, and approaches. There is thus a plurality of cultural studies and a series of debates over its methods, focuses, politics, whether it should or should not be institutionalized, and so forth.

Moreover, there are problems with some of the basic vocabulary of many contemporary versions of cultural studies and thus the key concepts are unstable, constantly being challenged and revised. In view of the contest over terminology, each intervention in the field of cultural studies needs to lay out and explicate its critical language, distinguish itself from other discourses, and clarify its own specific use of the vocabulary. In my view, more debate is needed as to whether using the term "popular culture" in any form risks blunting the critical edge of cultural studies, and whether it is thus simply better to avoid ideologically loaded terms like "mass culture" and "popular culture." A possible move within cultural studies would therefore simply be to take culture itself as the field of one's studies without divisions into the high and the low, the popular and the elite — though, of course, these distinctions can be strategically deployed in certain contexts. Thus, I believe that instead of using ideological labels like "mass" and "popular," one could simply talk of culture and communication and develop a "cultural studies" cutting across the full range of media and culture.

In this book, I am adopting the concept of "media culture" to delineate the subject matter of my investigations. The term "media culture" has the advantage of signifying both the nature and form of the artifacts of the culture industries (i.e. culture) and their mode of production and distribution (i.e. media technologies and industries). It avoids ideological terms like "mass culture" and "popular culture" and calls attention to the circuit of production, distribution, and reception through which media culture is produced, distributed, and consumed. The term breaks down

artificial barriers between the fields of cultural, media, and communications studies and calls attention to the interconnection of culture and communications media in the constitution of media culture, thus breaking down reified distinctions between "culture" and "communication."[97]

In fact, the distinction between "culture" and "communications" is arbitrary and rigid, and should be deconstructed. Whether one takes "culture" as the artifacts of high culture, the ways in which people live their lives, the content of human behavior, or whatever, it is intimately bound up with communication. All culture, to become a social artifact, and thus properly "culture," is both a mediator of and mediated by communication, and is thus communicational by nature. Yet "communication," in turn, is mediated by culture, it is a mode through which culture is disseminated and rendered actual and effective. There is no communication without culture and no culture without communication, so drawing a rigid distinction between them, and claiming that one side is a legitimate object of a disciplinary study, while the other term is relegated to a different discipline is an excellent example of the myopia and futility of arbitrary academic divisions of labor.[98]

In any case, British cultural studies presents an approach that allows us to avoid cutting up the field of media/culture/communications into high and low, popular vs. elite, and to see all forms of media culture and communication as worthy of scrutiny and criticism. It allows approaches to culture and communication that force us to appraise their politics and to make political discriminations between different types of artifacts that have different political effects. Like other multicultural approaches, it brings the study of race, gender, and class into the forefront of the study of media culture and communication.[99] It also adopts a critical approach that, like that of the Frankfurt School, but without some of its flaws, interprets culture within society and situates the study of culture within the field of contemporary social theory and oppositional politics.

The term "media culture" also has the advantage of signifying that our culture is a media culture, that the media have colonized culture, that they are the primary vehicle for the distribution and dissemination of culture, that the mass media of communications have supplanted previous modes of culture like the book or spoken word, that we live in a world in which media dominate leisure and culture. Media culture is thus the dominant form and site of culture in contemporary societies.

A question of politics

Media culture is also the site where battles are fought for the control of society. Feminists and antifeminists, liberals and conservatives, radicals and defenders of the status quo, struggle for cultural power not only in the medium of news and information, but also in the domain of entertainment, as I shall demonstrate throughout this book. The media are intimately connected with power and open the study of culture to the vicissitudes of politics and the slaughterhouse of history. They help shape our view of the world, public opinion, values and behavior, and are thus an important forum of social power and struggle.

From the beginning, the work of the Birmingham group was oriented toward the crucial political problems of their age and milieu and focused intently on the politics of culture. Some of the first work which defined British cultural studies, such as Richard Hoggart's *The Uses of Literacy* (1958), indicated how individuals created their identities and lives through their cultural resources. The first half of Hoggart's book details how working-class communities in Britain traditionally created oppositional cultures to the mainstream, and then describes how they were being eroded by the development of a national culture and processes of cultural homogenization directed by the state, schooling, and the media. This was also a theme of such major early influences on British cultural studies as Raymond Williams (1958 and 1962) and E.P. Thompson (1963).

From the 1960s, British cultural studies began to indicate how media culture was producing identities and ways of seeing and acting that integrated individuals into the mainstream culture (Hall and Whannel 1964). The Birmingham group's early focus on class and ideology thus derived from their acute sense of the oppressive and systemic effects of class in British society and the struggles of the 1960s against class inequality and oppression. Studies of subcultures in Britain sought to search for new agents of social change when it appeared that sectors of the working class were being integrated into the existing system and conservative ideologies and parties. Their attempts to reconstruct Marxism were influenced as well by 1960s struggles and political movements. The turn toward feminism, often conflicted, was directly influenced by the feminist movement, while the turn toward race as a significant factor of study was fuelled by the antiracist struggles of the day. The move in British cultural studies toward focus on education and pedagogy was related to political concern with the continuing bourgeois hegemony despite the struggles of the 1960s. The right turn in British politics with Thatcher's victory led in the late 1970s to concern with understanding the authoritarian populism of the new conservative hegemony.

In other words, the focus of British cultural studies at any given moment was mediated by the struggles in the present political conjuncture and their major work was thus conceived as political intervention. Their studies of ideology, domination and resistance, and the politics of culture, directed cultural studies toward analyzing cultural artifacts, practices, and institutions within existing networks of power and of showing how culture both provided tools and forces of domination and resources for resistance and struggle. This political focus thus intensified emphasis on the effects of culture and audience use of cultural artifacts, which provided an extremely productive focus on audiences and reception, topics that had been neglected in most previous text-based approaches to culture.[4]

Yet, especially as it has developed in the United States, many current configurations of cultural studies are too one-sided, producing new bifurcations of the field and, in part, occluding the field of communications proper by focusing too intently on cultural texts and audience reception. In his study of Madonna, for instance, John Fiske writes:

A cultural analysis, then, will reveal both the way the dominant ideology is structured into the text and into the reading subject, and those textual features that enable negotiated, resisting, or oppositional readings to be made. Cultural analysis reaches a satisfactory conclusion when the ethnographic studies of the historically and socially located meanings that are made are related to the semiotic analysis of the text.

(Fiske 1989a: 98)

This focus on textltaudience, however, leaves out many methods that should be part of cultural studies, including analyses of how texts are produced within the context of the political economy and system of production of culture, as well as how audiences and their subjectivities are produced by a variety of social institutions, practices, and ideologies. Consequently, in the following studies, I introduce the term "media cultural studies" to describe the project of analyzing the complex relations between texts, audiences, media industries, politics, and the socio-historical context in specific conjunctures. In the studies in this book, for instance, I focus on some dominant forms of culture within U.S. society from the early 1980s to the present.

I argue that focusing on texts and audiences to the exclusion of analysis of the social relations and institutions in which texts are produced and consumed truncates cultural studies, as does analysis of reception that fails to indicate how audiences are produced through their social relations and how to some extent culture itself helps produce audiences and their reception of texts. Indeed, there is the danger of the fetishism of the audience in the recent emphasis on the importance of reception and audience construction of meanings. Thus, there has been a large-scale shift in emphasis from focus on text and the context of its production to emphasis on the audience and reception, in some cases producing a new dogmatism whereby the audience, or reader, alone produces meaning. The texts, society, and system of production and reception disappear in the solipsistic ecstasy of the textual producer, in which there is no text outside of reading – resulting in a parody of Derrida's bon mot that there is nothing outside of the text.

Furthermore, there has been a fetishism of resistance in some versions of cultural studies. Within the tradition of cultural studies reception research, there has been a call to distinguish between dominant, negotiated, and oppositional readings (Hall 1980b: taken up in Fiske's work). This schema distinguishes between "dominant" readings, whereby audiences appropriate texts in line with the interests of the dominant culture and the ideological intentions of a text, as when audiences feel pleasure in the restoration of male power, law and order, and social stability at the end of a film like *Die Hard*, after the hero and representatives of authority eliminate the terrorists who had taken over a highrise corporate headquarters. An oppositional reading, by contrast, celebrates the resistance to this reading in audience appropriation of a text, as when Fiske (1993: 3ff.) observes resistance to dominant readings when, during repeated viewings of a videotape of the film in a shelter for the

homeless, the inhabitants obtained the destruction of police and authority figures in the scenes in which the villains take over the building.

There is a tendency in cultural studies to celebrate resistance *per se* without distinguishing between types and forms of resistance (a similar problem resides with indiscriminate celebration of audience pleasure in certain reception studies). Thus, resistance to social authority by the homeless evidenced in their viewing of *Die Hard* could serve to strengthen brutal masculinist behavior and encourage manifestations of physical violence to solve social problems. Violence, however, as Sartre, Fanon, and Marcuse, among others, have argued, can be either emancipatory, directed at forces of oppression, or reactionary, directed at popular forces struggling against oppression, or arbitrarily exploding in any direction. Many feminists, in turn, are all violence as forms of brute masculist behavior and many people involved in peace studies see it as a failed form of conflict resolution.[12]

Indeed, the resistance that Fiske valorizes in his *Die Hard* analysis is not resistance at all but a very conventional replication of pleasure in violence that eliminates those who one positions as "bad." Audiences are taught to get pleasure out of seeing "bad guys" violently eliminated and Fiske's homeless men are simply reacting to the codes and conventions of Hollywood entertainment. To be sure, they are reacting with pleasure to the violent actions of those coded by the film as "villains" against those coded as "good guys" or innocent victims, so there is a reversal of the usual "good" and "bad" conventions, but the audience reaction valorized by Fiske as "resistance" is simply a visceral response to preconditioned Hollywood mechanisms that produce pleasure in the violent elimination of those deemed to be "bad" and deserving to be targets of violence.

In fact, Fiske's celebration of *Die Hard* fails to contextualize it within the cycle of male rampage films analyzed by Susan Jeffords in *Hard Bodies* (1994). *Die Hard* was one of a cycle of compensatory male fantasies that responded to the emergence of feminism and the conservative male response which refused to share power with women and that resisted feminist initiatives. Such examples of male ideological extravaganzas starring such ultra-macho men as Sylvester Stallone, Arnold Schwarzenegger, and Bruce Willis featured male superheroes as the necessary solution to society's problems, thus promoting an ideology of male supremacy. As the "white male paranoia" and conservative response to feminism intensified, these masculist fantasies became ever more brutal with films like *Die Hard II*, *Young Guns II*, and the like doubling or even tripling the acts of redemptive male violence (see Gerbner 1992).

Moreover, unqualified valorization of audience resistance to preferred meanings as good *per se* can lead to uncritical populist celebrations of the text and audience pleasure in use of cultural artifacts. This approach, taken to an extreme, would lose its critical perspective and would lead to a populist positive gloss on audience experience of whatever is being studied. Such studies also might lose sight of the manipulative and conservative effects of certain types of media culture, and thus serve the interests of the culture industries as they are presently constituted and

those groups who use the culture industries to promote their own interests and agendas.

Accompanying the definition of resistance is the fetishism of struggle. Fiske, for instance, makes "the popular" a terrain of struggle where audiences resist domination, struggle to produce their own meanings and pleasures, and evade social control and manipulation (1989a and 1989b). Political struggle is thus displaced into "struggle" for meanings and pleasure, while "resistance" is equated with the evasion of social responsibility, as in Fiske's examples of youth in video arcades, hanging out on the beach, surfing, or loitering in malls. Modes of domination are occluded, and resistance and struggle are depoliticized and rendered harmless, thus providing an ideology of "popular culture" perfectly congruent with the interests of the powers that be. Such "resistance" does not really challenge the existing structures of power, nor does it alter the material conditions or ameliorate the structures of oppression of those "resisting" by producing meanings and pleasures in the domain of "popular culture."

I am also put off by what I take to be a fetishism of audience pleasure in some current versions of cultural studies. Reacting against a somewhat ascetic attitude toward certain types of culture in the older radical theory, arguments have been made that attention should be paid to people's pleasure in popular film, television, or other forms of culture, and that this pleasure should be positively appraised and appropriated. While this was a useful move in many ways, it has led, I fear, to valorizing certain forms of culture precisely because they are popular and produce pleasure. Such a sweeping and uncritical approach disdains distinguishing between types of pleasure and the ways that pleasure can bind individuals to conservative, sexist or racist positions, as when the *Rambo*, *Die Hard* or the *Terminator* films mobilize pleasure around extremely masculist and violent behavior.

Pleasure itself is neither natural nor innocent. Pleasure is learned and is thus intimately bound up with power and knowledge. Since Foucault, it has become a commonplace that power and knowledge are intimately intertwined and that pleasure is bound up with both. We learn what to enjoy and what we should avoid. We learn when to laugh and when to cheer (and laugh tracks on TV sitcoms and entertainment use in us case we don't get it ourselves). A system of power and privilege thus conditions our pleasures so that we seek certain socially sanctioned pleasures and avoid others. Some people learn to laugh at racist jokes and others learn to feel pleasure at the brutal use of violence.

Pleasures are often, therefore, a conditioned response to certain stimuli and should thus be problematized, along with other forms of experience and behavior, and interrogated as to whether they contribute to the production of a better life and society, or help trap us into modes of everyday life that ultimately oppress and degrade us. Resistance and pleasure cannot therefore be valorized *per se* as progressive elements of the appropriation of cultural texts, rather one needs to describe the specific conditions that give rise to the resistance or pleasure at stake and their specific effects. If one wishes to maintain a critical perspective, one must also make difficult normative discriminations as to whether the resistance, opposi-

tional reading, or pleasure in a given experience or artifact is progressive or reactionary, emancipatory or destructive. Critical practice must seek norms of critique and make critical discriminations in appraising the nature and effects of cultural artifacts and practices – a task that I undertake in different contexts in the following studies.

Earlier cultural studies wanted to balance the ideological and the resistant, the hegemonic/dominant and the oppositional. This balancing act is evident in Hall's articles (1980b and 1981) "Encoding/Decoding" and "Deconstructing the Popular," which acknowledge the power of the mass media to shape and enforce ideological hegemony, the power of the people to resist ideology, and the contradictory moments and effects of media culture. This form of cultural studies thus attempts to negotiate the split between manipulation theory, which sees mass culture and society in general as dominating individuals, and populist resistance theory which emphasizes the power of individuals to oppose, resist, and struggle against the dominant culture. Such a dual optic is also evident in the work of E.P. Thompson (1963) which stresses both workers' abilities to resist capitalist domination and forms of cooptation, and Dick Hebdige's *Subculture* (1979) which presents rock music styles and youth culture both as forms of refusal and as commercial modes of incorporation of subcultural resistance into the dominant consumer culture.

Thus one should attempt to avoid the one-sided approaches of manipulation and resistance theory in favor of combining these perspectives in one's analyses. In a way, certain tendencies of the Frankfurt School can correct some of the limitations of cultural studies, just as British cultural studies can help overcome some of the limitations of the Frankfurt School.[3] The Frankfurt School social theory always situated its objects of analysis within the framework of the development of contemporary capitalism. While this sometimes led to reduction of all culture to commodities, ideology, and instruments of ruling class domination, it also elucidated the origins of all mass-produced cultural artifacts within the capitalist production and accumulation process, and thus forced attention to the economic origins and ideological nature of many of the artifacts of media culture. Likewise, the Frankfurt School emphasis on manipulation called attention to the power and seductiveness of the artifacts of the cultural industries and the ways that these could be manipulated to serve specific interests. The emphasis too on how the cultural industries produce "something for everyone, so that none may escape," suggests how difference and plurality are utilized to integrate individuals into the existing society.

Difference sells. Capitalism must constantly multiply markets, styles, fads, and artifacts to keep absorbing consumers into its practices and lifestyles. The mere valorization of "difference" as a mark of opposition can simply help market new styles and artifacts if the difference in question and its effects are not adequately appraised. It can also promote a form of identity politics in which each group affirms its own specificity and limits politics to the group's own interests, thus overlooking common forces of oppression. Such difference or identity politics aids "divide and conquer" strategies which ultimately serve the interests of the powers that be.[3]

The Frankfurt School emphasis on cooptation – even of seemingly radical and subversive impulses – raises the question of the nature and effects of "resistant readings," beloved by some cultural theorists. It suggests that even production of alternative meanings and resistance to "preferred meanings" may serve as effective ways of absorbing individuals into the established society. Producing meanings can create pleasures that integrate individuals into consumer practices which above all profit media industries. This possibility forces those who valorize resistance to emphasize *what sort of resistance*, what effects, and what difference does the resistance make?

The Frankfurt School was excellent at tracing the lines of domination within media culture, but was less adept at ferreting out moments of resistance and opposition. Yet it always placed its analysis of media and audience within existing relations of production and domination, whereas many studies of the audience and reception often fail to situate the reception of culture in the context of social relations of power and domination. Furthermore, there remain text-centered approaches within cultural studies which engage in theoretically informed readings of texts without considering their production, reception, or anchorage in an institutional organization of culture that takes varying specific forms in different countries, or regions, at different times in history – which is to say that textualist approaches often avoid study of the production and political economy of culture and even the historical context of culture.

While emphasis on the audience and reception was an excellent corrective to the one-sidedness of purely textual analysis, I believe that in recent years cultural studies has overemphasized reception and textual analysis, while underemphasizing the production of culture and its political economy.[19] While earlier, the Birmingham group regularly focused attention on media institutions and practices, and the relations between media forms and broader social forms and ideologies, this emphasis has waned in recent years, to the detriment of much current work in cultural studies, I would argue. For instance, in his classical programmatic article, "Encoding/Decoding," Stuart Hall began his analysis by using Marx's *Grundrisse* as a model to trace the articulations of "a continuous circuit," encompassing–production–distribution–consumption–production" (1980b: 128ff.). He concretizes this model with focus on how media institutions produce messages, how they circulate, and how audiences use or decode the messages to produce meaning. Hall claimed that:

> The abstraction of texts from the social practices which produced them and the institutional sites where they were elaborated was a fetishization. . . This obscured how a particular ordering of culture came to be produced and sustained: the circumstances and conditions of cultural reproduction which the operations of the 'selective tradition' rendered natural, 'taken for granted.' But the process of ordering (arrangement, regulation) is always the result of concrete sets of practices and relations.

(Hall 1980a: 27)

Against the erasure of the system of cultural production, distribution, and reception, Hall called for problematizing culture and "making visible" the processes through which certain forms of culture became dominant (ibid.).[19] Raymond Williams, one of the formative influences on British cultural studies, called for a "cultural materialism ... the analysis of all forms of signification ... within the actual means and conditions of their production" (1981: 64–5), focusing attention on the need to situate cultural analysis within its socio-economic relations. Moreover, in a 1983 lecture published in 1985/6, Richard Johnson provided a model of cultural studies, similar to Hall's earlier model, based on a model of the circuits of production, textuality, and reception, parallel to the circuits of capital stressed by Marx, illustrated by a diagram that stressed the importance of production and distribution. Although Johnson emphasized the importance of analysis of production in cultural studies and criticized *Screen* for abandoning this perspective in favor of more idealist and textualist approaches (pp. 63ff.), much work in cultural studies has replicated this neglect. One could indeed argue that most recent cultural studies have tended to neglect analyses of the circuits of political economy and production in favor of text- and audience-based analyses.

Furthermore, there is a danger that cultural studies in various parts of the world might lose the critical and political edge of earlier forms of British cultural studies. Cultural studies could easily degenerate into a sort of eclectic populism of the sort evident in some of the work of the Popular Culture Association which is largely celebratory and uncritical of the textual artifacts that it deals with. Neglecting political economy, celebrating the audience and the pleasures of the popular, neglecting social class and ideology, and failing to analyze or criticize the politics of cultural texts will make cultural studies merely another academic subdivision, harmless and ultimately of benefit primarily to the culture industries themselves. Avoiding such a conservative development of cultural studies, I submit, requires a multiperspectival approach that pays attention to the production of culture, to the texts themselves, and to their reception by the audience. This requires a variety of disciplinary and critical perspectives linking cultural studies, ultimately, to critical social theory and radical democratic politics.

The position that I take on media and culture throughout these studies could also be denoted a form of cultural materialism, a key term that I intend in two senses. With Raymond Williams, I see cultural materialism as "the analysis of all forms of signification ... within the actual means and conditions of production" (Williams 1981: 64–5). This dictum suggests that to adequately analyze media culture one must situate the objects of analysis within the system of production, and I would add distribution and consumption, within which they are produced and received. A cultural materialist approach thus stresses the importance of the political economy of culture, of the system of cultures of which texts are produced, that provides limits and possibilities for cultural production.

Media production is thus intimately imbricated in relations of power and serves to reproduce the interests of social forces, promoting either domination or empowering resistance and struggle. But a cultural materialism

also focuses on the material effects of media culture, insisting that its images, spectacles, discourses, and signs have material effects on audiences. For a cultural materialism, media texts seduce, fascinate, move, position, and influence their audiences. Media culture has its material effects, its effectivity, and it is one of the goals of cultural studies to analyze how specific texts and types of media culture affect audiences, what sort of actual effects the artifacts of media culture exercise, and what sort of potential counterhegemonic effects and possibilities for resistance and struggle are also found in the works of media culture.

I shall flesh out this approach and provide examples throughout the book. First, however, I want to engage a recent move within the field of cultural studies.

A POSTMODERN CULTURAL STUDIES?

Arguments have emerged in recent years for a postmodern cultural studies. Some theorists like Denzin (1991) and Grossberg (1992) aggressively link cultural studies to the postmodern turn, while many others simply assume that the terrain of cultural studies is an allegedly postmodern culture and society, without really defining the terms, noting what is at stake, or making an argument concerning why their method or subject matter is indeed "postmodern."[26] In fact, the term "postmodern" is perhaps one of the most abused and confusing terms in the lexicon of contemporary critical theory. The terms "modern" and "postmodern" are used to cover a bewildering diversity of cultural artifacts, social phenomena, and theoretical discourses, and the concept of the postmodern requires constant scrutiny, clarification, and criticism.

During a spring 1993 trip to England, for example, I discovered a newspaper article in the *Guardian* titled "The postmodern politician" and found that the topic was just another boring old conservative with no discernable claims to be "postmodern." Upon returning to the United States, I picked up a copy of the *Washington Post Weekly* and noted a headline describing the Clinton administration's Dee Dee Myers as "the postmodern press secretary" and a reading of the article suggested that she was allegedly "postmodern" because she arched her eyebrow and was ironic in her speech. And, *Newsweek* published an article on Bill Clinton, "The postmodern president," without any analysis of what made him postmodern, in which the term is simply used as a buzzword to catch attention (January 10, 1994).

But the prize caption is awarded to the *New York Times* (May 12, 1993) for a headline: "Forget the bologna on white, here comes the post-modern sandwich." Scrutiny of this article indicated that modern sandwiches featured fat chunks of meat while "post-modern constructions . . . rely more on roasted or marinated vegetables than meat and that stylishly recycle leftovers like grilled vegetables, lamb, chicken, or fish" (p. B1). One may want to eschew both cooking and reading usages of the discourse, but things are often not much clearer when we turn to the theoretical discourses of academic books or presentations. Frequently, academic commentators simply assume that we are in a postmodern age without any specific analysis. Often usage of the term "postmodern" points to phenomena that are

arguably modern and the discourse is merely used as a synonym for the contemporary moment in which we live, or contemporary novelties, without substantive analysis. My favorite example concerns a sociology professor who in being asked to describe more clearly what he meant by the term "postmodern" answered that the best description of "our postmodern society" was found in the passage in "The Communist Manifesto" in which Marx and Engels describe a state "where all that is solid melts into air." Of course, as Marshall Berman has shown (1982), the "Manifesto" is a virtual hymn to modernity and is a key text of modern theory.

For other examples of unmotivated uses of the term "postmodern" as a synonym for our contemporary society, one might look at the Introduction to the anthology of collected papers from a 1990 University of Illinois conference on cultural studies written by the editors (see Grossberg *et al.* 1992). There are references to "our postmodern age" without any argument or clarification concerning what makes it "postmodern," what constitutes the break with modernity, and what are its new features (ibid., 2, 6). Moreover, in a long footnote near the end of the Introduction, the editors describe the grounding and trajectory of cultural studies as a response to modernity, modernization, and modernism (ibid., 15–16).[32] Yet the editors fail to note the paradox concerning the relevance of cultural studies in a postmodern era if it is a product of and expression of the modern era (which much postmodern theory claims is over, thus requiring new approaches to culture and society, new politics, new modes of thought, etc.). Various authors in the collection *Cultural Studies* use the discourse of the postmodern, but usually fail to provide a sustained discussion and use the term in a variety of conflicting ways. It is therefore not clear what imprecise and muddled use of the term contributes, and one suspects that ultimately the discourse of the postmodern has produced more confusion than clarity, more muddle than illumination.[33]

Many theorists of the postmodern, or those who systematically deploy the term, often merely list a set of arbitrary characteristics which are said to be "postmodern," illustrated by questionable examples. Many of these lists and examples also cite key modern characteristics or artifacts as examples of the "postmodern,"[34] and thus fail to adequately theorize the phenomena. Some who argue for a postmodern turn in cultural studies, like Denzin (1991) arguably overdefine the term, while others underdefine it. For Denzin, everything that occurs in post-World-War-II U.S. society is "postmodern" and he provides list after list of its defining features, many of which could easily be assimilated to lists characterizing modern phenomena.

One of the more interesting attempts to link cultural studies with postmodern theory is found in Dick Hebdige's *Hiding in the Light* (1988). Hebdige wishes "to explore the genuinely life-enhancing and positive dimensions" opened up by the various debates of the "post" and to assimilate its insights into a revitalized cultural studies. After a long list of some of the things described as "postmodern," Hebdige notes that the very multiplicity of phenomena designated as postmodern suggests that "we are in the presence of a buzzword." Yet rather than simply concluding that the term is meaningless, Hebdige prefers to believe, with Raymond Williams,

that the more complexly and contradictorily nuanced a word is the more likely it is to have formed the focus for historically significant debates, to have occupied a semantic ground in which something precious and important was felt to be embodied. I take, then as my (possibly ingenuous) starting point, that the degree of semantic comp'-xity and overload surrounding the term 'postmodernism' at the moment signals that a significant number of people with conflicting interests and opinions feel that there is something sufficiently important at stake here to be worth struggling and arguing over.

<div style="text-align: right">(Williams 1988: 182)</div>

After delineating some of the key positions of postmodern theory, Hebdige proposes the yoking of some new postmodern perspectives to the older neo-Gramscian program of linking cultural studies to the project of promoting radical social and cultural change, to advance new solidarities, new struggles, new movements to promote the cause of progressive social transformation. But, as he points out, this is a different program, a different version of Marxism, than the older more orthodox socialist revolutionary programs of, say, an Althusser, which ultimately replicated old-fashioned Marxist party politics. The neo-Gramscian program by contrast has no guarantees, no teleologies, no grand narrative of emancipation, no totalizing or reductive discourses or politics, no privileging of a class or social group, no home or solid basis from which to struggle, but still holds out the hope that new solidarities, new forms of struggles, will emerge and sees the need to foster hope, to promote radicalism, to hold out the possibility of more radical change, to bring the light of radical critique and politics to the blinding light of the media, to revitalize radical theory and politics, however modestly and tenuously.

I too am attracted to such neo-Gramscian perspectives and share Hebdige's desire to produce new syntheses of cultural studies with other major theoretical discourses of the present. I am also sympathetic to Hebdige's sense that "it is only by grounding our analyses in the study of *particular* images and objects" that we can overcome the limitations of the highly theoretical discourses of the past decades and "the vertigo of postmodernism" (1988: back cover). But in his concluding appendixes, Hebdige moves back and forth from affirming and distancing himself from postmodern positions and thus ultimately is unclear how he positions himself toward the discourse of the postmodern.

In the studies that follow, I shall carefully interrogate various uses of the discourse of the postmodern to see if the term clarifies or confuses understanding of the phenomenon under question. Although the discourse of the "postmodern" often muddies more than it illuminates, it has a certain symptomatic value. Superficial and sloppy usage of the term points to phenomena or topics that need to be theorized and thus the term is often a sign that something is under- or poorly theorized. Negatively, the term is often an empty signifier and sign that more concrete theorization is being avoided and is needed. Such empty use of the discourse is a sign of lazy theorizing, the avoidance of difficult thinking and analysis, and the replacing of theoretical analysis with a popular buzzword. But,

positively, it is a sign that something is new and needs to be comprehended and theorized. Thus, the term "postmodern" is often a placeholder, or semiotic marker, that indicates that there are new phenomena that require mapping and theorizing. Use of the term may also be a sign that something is bothering us, that new confusing phenomena are appearing that we cannot adequately categorize or get a grip on.

Such under- or poorly theorized discourse reduces the "postmodern" to the status of a piece of jargon, an often confused attempt to distinguish oneself from the commitments of modern theory, or to appear hip and cool. Another problem arises in that more articulated and compelling discourses of the postmodern are themselves often in conflict with each other (see the discussion of different versions of postmodern theory in Best and Kellner 1991). Thus, there is no shared, or agreed upon, discourse of the postmodern, but rather a series of competing paradigms and discourses. Moreover, new phenomena are constantly emerging which are claimed to be "postmodern." Thus, whether one is attending to the more rarified theoretical discourses of the present, or often laughable popularizations of the postmodern, such as the "postmodern sandwich" that I referred to above, the phenomena and discourses of the postmodern are constantly changing, becoming more complex, requiring new mappings and analyses to chart their trajectories.[4]

In order, therefore, for the discourse of the postmodern to have any cognitive content, certain distinctions need to be made and the family of terms of the postmodern must be distinguished from the discourses of the modern. In previous texts, I distinguished between modernity and postmodernity, as two different historical eras; between modernism and postmodernism, as two different aesthetic and cultural styles; and between modern and postmodern theory as two different theoretical discourses (see Kellner 1988, 1989, and Best and Kellner 1991). Building on these analyses and historical genealogy, I wish to offer some further conceptual clarifications to try to illuminate the complex field of discourse of the modern and postmodern.

To begin, the contemporary discourse of the postmodern first emerged in the fields of culture and in the present epoch the postmodern fever also began in this domain. In the 1960s, a "new sensibility" appeared that defined itself against the abstraction and elitism of modernist art and modern forms of literary criticism. This new sensibility celebrated emergent cultural practices which were characterized by, among other things, breaking down the distinction between high and low art, by incorporating within aesthetic forms a panoply of icons and images of media culture, and by challenging conventional barriers between artist and spectator. These new aesthetic forms – such as the paintings of Andy Warhol or the novels of John Barth and Thomas Pynchon – eventually became known as examples of "postmodernism," as part of new cultural configurations which rejected features of classical modernism.

It is within architecture that the term postmodern first gained widespread currency. Several theorists and architects contrasted new forms of postmodern architecture that rejected the sterile glass and steel buildings associated with the

high modernist functionalism of Mies van der Rohe and the international style that championed the same forms everywhere. Building on Robert Venturi's *Learning from Las Vegas* (1972), postmodern architecture appropriated traditional forms, deployed decoration and color eschewed by high modernist architecture, and attempted to adapt architecture to local conditions.

Articulating differences between modernism and postmodernism in literature, cinema, dance, theater, and other arts has proven more difficult, though. The overlaps and continuities here are more striking, and it is difficult to point to specific features of postmodern literature and art that have not been anticipated by modernist forms. Yet while there is not the break or rupture evident in architecture, theorists like Jameson (1991) and Hutcheon (1989) have described constellations of culture that exhibit sufficient shared features for the concept of postmodernism within the arts to have analytic substance, as I shall show in the following studies.[41]

Postmodernism in the arts, however, was often discussed as an element of a new "postmodern culture," "postmodern scene," or "postmodern condition" and broader conceptions of a new era of *postmodernity*, a break with modernity, began emerging in the 1970s in the theories of Baudrillard, Lyotard, and others.[42] In the 1980s, there was a proliferation of discourses on various forms of postmodern culture and society, with Baudrillard claiming that we have entered a new postmodern historical era, a "postmodernity." It also became popular to label a wide range of thinkers from Foucault to Derrida to Baudrillard as "postmodern," leaving broken decisively with the assumptions of modern theory, and a variety of types of postmodern theory emerged. There is indeed no one postmodern theory, or one definition of postmodernity as a historical epoch, or of postmodernism in the arts. Instead, these discourses are themselves contested and conflictual with different theorists imposing their own definitions on these concepts.

Thus, the discourse of the postmodern is a cultural and theoretical construct, not a thing or state of affairs. That is, there are no phenomena that are intrinsically "postmodern" which the theorist can then describe. The concepts are generated as theoretical constructs used to interpret a family of phenomena, artifacts, or practices. Thus, the discourses of the postmodern produce their objects, whether a historical epoch of postmodernity, or postmodernism in the arts. Obviously, there are social and historical phenomena from which theorists derive concepts like postmodernity, or practices, artifacts, and artists in the field of culture from whom one derives the term "postmodernism." Yet which phenomena, practices, artifacts, and so on are seen as "postmodern" are themselves a function of the theoretical discourse which denominates some things as "postmodern" and others not.

Consequently, the family of concepts of the postmodern are merely conceptual constructs meant to perform certain interpretive or explanatory tasks and are not transparent terms that merely reflect established states of affairs.[43] Thus, when we are dealing with the discourse of the postmodern, we are operating on the level of theory and discourse and need to make clarifications and distinctions on this level (unless, of course, we are merely using the term as a buzzword, as in the journalistic and theoretical discourses cited above). As Mike Featherstone reminds us (1991:

1ff.), journalists, cultural entrepreneurs, and theorists invent and circulate discourses like the postmodern in order to accrue cultural capital, to distinguish themselves, to promote specific artifacts or practices as being on the cutting-edge, and to circulate new meanings and ideas. The discourse of the postmodern especially attracts younger people on the make, or those who wish to distinguish themselves as avant-garde, although it has also attracted many who wish to revive flagging careers or libidos with sexy new discourse.

Indeed, the emergence of the postmodern has much to do with battles for cultural capital in the present age. One way of contesting previous theories, canons, and models is to declare their obsolescence, or to radically negate their claims to truth, excellence, ability, or whatever. One accrues cultural capital by distinguishing one's work and positions from others, from attaching oneself to popular phenomena, and by joining new theoretical and cultural movements that enable one to identify oneself as hip, cool, with it, and up to date. Joining the postmodern carnival can be fun, allowing one to engage in often promiscuous excursions in which the normal rules and conventions of the proper are put aside, as one seeks new rules or conventions or to escape rule and convention altogether.

But it would be a mistake to merely dismiss the discourse of the postmodern out of hand as a mere fad or ephemeral fashion. For as I write, the discourse has elicited intense attention and controversy for the past decade (1983-93) and there is no end in sight. Although many predicted that the phenomenon was over,[*] there continue to be waves of books, articles, conferences, and discussions of the many modalities of the postmodern. People continue to feel passionately about the postmodern and the discourse obviously speaks to important changes in our culture and society and by now has acquired a certain weight. Postmodern theory has penetrated almost all academic disciplines, producing critiques of modern theory and alternative postmodern theoretical practices in philosophy, social theory, politics, economics, anthropology, geography, and just about every academic field. Groups and individuals marginalized in the society, culture, and university have taken the term as their own and use it to oppose the established order of things. Since many of these individuals are younger, one expects that the discourse will continue to be used for some time to come.

It will be one of the purposes of the following studies to interrogate some dominant discourses of the postmodern to demonstrate confusion, sloppiness, and laziness in many symptomatic uses of the discourse. I will interrogate whether the discourse is useful or not in interpreting specific phenomena in our contemporary culture. Whether or not a discourse or theory is useful can be determined by whether it does or does not illuminate specific phenomena, and helps or hinders particular tasks. One of the aims of these studies is to illuminate and map our contemporary society and culture, so determining the usefulness or uselessness of the discourse of the postmodern will be one of the tasks of the following studies, especially those collected in Part II.

Although it is prudent to be skeptical of extreme postmodern claims that would render obsolescent the assumptions, values, categories, culture, and politics of the

modern era, it must be admitted that significant changes are taking place and that many of the old modern theories and categories can no longer adequately describe our contemporary culture, politics, and society. And yet the extreme claims for a postmodern break and rupture do violence to our sense of enduring continuities with the past and the fact that many ideas and phenomena which are claimed to be "postmodern" have their origins or analogues precisely in the modern era. Consequently, I would suggest that we are living between a now aging modern era and a new postmodern era that remains to be adequately conceptualized, charted, and mapped. Historical epochs do not rise and fall in neat patterns or at precise chronological moments. Change between one era and another is always protracted, contradictory, and usually painful. The sense of "betweenness," or transition, requires that one grasp the continuities with the past as well as the novelties of the present and future. Living in a borderland between the old and the new creates tension, insecurity, and even panic, thus producing a troubling and uncertain cultural and social environment.

The following studies attempt to capture some of the tension in living in a situation whose contours are not yet apparent and in which intense conflict is occurring between those conservative forces who wish to maintain the established social order and those who wish to transform it. These cultural wars are replicated in what we might call theory wars between those competing voices who wish to map and guide the construction of the present and future. In the studies that follow, I intervene in this contest and propose the development of cultural studies within the framework of critical social theory and radical democratic politics. Indeed, I believe that one cannot do cultural studies without a social theory and that one of the valuable effects of cultural studies is that it can in turn contribute to developing a critical social theory and politics for the present age. This is, of course, parallel to the Frankfurt School claim that a theory of society is needed to illuminate social, political, and cultural phenomena and development, while intensive research into the latter areas can in turn contribute to developing critical social theory. Consequently, I interpret media culture in the context of critical social theory and in turn use media culture to illuminate social phenomena and conditions. Thus, I ultimately intend my media cultural studies as an attempt to situate cultural artifacts within the broader economic, social, and political contexts from which they emerge and in which they have their effects.

NOTES

1 As I argue below, it is Baudrillard and his followers who posit the most extreme rupture between modern and postmodern societies. For discussions of his and other postmodern theories, see Kellner 1989b and 1989c, Best and Kellner 1991, and Kellner 1994a.

2 On "post-Fordism," see Harvey, 1989. On "disorganized capitalism," see Offe 1985 and Lash and Urry 1987. On the "risk society," see Beck 1992.

3 This picture of the leisure and consumer society may be ideological. Recent studies show that the amount of hours devoted to work in the United States is at an all-time high; see Schorr's study of *The Overworked American* (1992). Yet there are also technological

trends that might lead to domination of the length of the workday. See Gorz 1982 and 1985 and an article in the *New York Times* (November 24, 1993: A1) which indicated that there was a serious movement abroad in Europe to limit work to four days a week.

4 See Kellner and Ryan 1988 for a study of the context of representations between the mid-1960s and mid-1980s in Hollywood film, and Kellner 1990a for a study of the contested terrain of U.S. television. On the "right turn" in the United States, see Ferguson and Rogers 1986. On the triumph of Thatcherism in England, see Hall and Jacques 1983 and Hall 1990.

5 See Altermann 1992 and the *Newsweek* issue of March 29, 1993 on "White male paranoia" for evidence of the role of conservative think tanks and pundits in shaping public opinion and the continuing conservative offensive on talk radio, television, and other cultural domains.

6 Jeffords (1994) argues that U.S. culture and politics manifested trends toward a "remasculinization of America" after U.S. military defeat in Vietnam, and Faludi (1991) interprets the new masculine culture as a "backlash" against feminism.

7 Convinced against those who argue "against theory" (i.e. Rorty *et al.*) that theories are of use in illuminating our social world, throughout this book I shall reflect on the nature and function of social theories, for it is not at all agreed upon, or evident, what social theories are, what they do, and what are their value and limitations. The theoretical perspectives that I will sketch out are perhaps most influenced by the critical theory of the Frankfurt School (see Kellner 1989a and Bronner and Kellner 1989) and postmodern theory (see Kellner 1989b, 1989c, and Best and Kellner 1991), though I also draw heavily on feminism and multicultural theory, and attempt to develop some new theoretical perspectives to illuminate our present moment.

8 See Howard and Klare 1972. In Europe, by contrast, Marxism was part of the standard intellectual discourse, though it tended to be monopolized by the Marxist parties. On the impact of Marxism on a diverse range of academic fields in the United States, see Ollman and Vernoff, 1982. For Britain, see Anderson 1980 and Davies forthcoming.

9 On the successive waves of feminism that appeared beginning in the United States during the 1960s, see the account in Willis 1984; on feminism in the U.S. in the 1960s, see Faludi 1991 and Brenner 1993. On the unhappy marriage between Marxism and feminism, see Hartman 1981. For an example of psychoanalytic feminism, see Mitchell 1974. For feminism in Britain, see Barrett 1980.

10 John Fiske curiously ascribes the importation and popularity of European theories in the United States and elsewhere to a Reaganism that exposed the falsity of the liberal consensus and the reality of class divisions and inequalities, which supposedly then rendered pragmatic American incapable to European theories that stressed conflict, inequalities, and struggle (1993: 40). But, in fact, as my narrative argues, the importation of European theories began in the 1960s and intensified in the 1970s and 1980s, well before Reaganism exposed the lies of the liberal consensus.

11 Metaphors are often highly revealing and the shift from conceiving of theories as "weapons of criticism" to "tools in a toolkit" marks a shift from revolutionary theory to milder forms of pragmatism and constructivism. Blending these perspectives, I would argue that theories can be tools or weapons, depending on the context, intentions, and use — a contestation theory, in harmony with radical intent.

12 See Ricoeur 1970, Simons 1990, and Lepenies 1988.

13 The notion of a multiperspectival social theory and cultural studies is sketched out in Kellner 1991; Best and Kellner 1991; and is elaborated throughout this book. Jameson (1981) and Harvey (1989) combine Marxist theory with postmodern theory to provide novel perspectives on contemporary society, while other theorists take more univocal Marxian, Weberian, feminist, or other classical positions on contemporary society, or develop some new theoretical perspectives; for an overview of contemporary perspectives in social theory, see Ritzer 1990.

15 Many studies exist on the history and genealogy of cultural studies; see Hall 1980a; Johnson 1985/6; Fiske 1986a; O'Connor 1989; Turner 1990; Grossberg 1989; Brantlinger 1990; Agger 1991; During 1993; and Aronowitz 1993. See also the articles in Grossberg *et al.* 1992 and During 1993.

16 On earlier traditions of cultural studies in the U.S., see Carey 1989, and Aronowitz 1993 and for Britain, see Davies forthcoming.

17 Raymond Williams was especially important for cultural studies because of his stress on borders and border crossings. Like the Frankfurt School, he always saw the interconnection between culture and communication, and their connections with the society in which they are produced, distributed, and consumed. Williams also saw how texts embodied the political conflicts and discourses within which they were embedded and reproduced.

18 On the Frankfurt School theory of the culture industries, see Horkheimer and Adorno 1972; the anthology edited by Rosenberg and White 1957; the reader edited by Bronner and Kellner 1989; and the Frankfurt School approach in Kellner 1989a.

19 I have analyzed some of these effects from a reconstructed critical theory perspective in analyses of Hollywood film with Michael Ryan (1988), two books on American television (Kellner 1990a and 1992b), and a series of media cultural studies, some of which are collected here.

20 There were, to be sure, some exceptions and qualifications to this "classical" model: Adorno would occasionally note a critical or utopian moment within mass culture and the possibility of audience reception against the grain; see the examples in Kellner 1989a. But although one can find moments that put in question the more bifurcated division between high and low culture and the model of mass culture as consisting of nothing except ideology and modes of manipulation which incorporate individuals into the existing society and culture, generally, the Frankfurt School model is overly reductive and monolithic, and thus needs theoretical reconstruction -- which I have attempted to do in work over the past two decades.

21 The field of communications was initially bifurcated into a division, described by Lazarsfeld (1941) in an issue edited by the Frankfurt School on mass communications, between the critical school associated with the Institute for Social Research contrasted with administrative research, which Lazarsfeld defined as research carried out within the parameters of established media and social institutions and that would provide material that was of use to these institutions -- research with which Lazarsfeld himself would be identified. Hence, it was the Frankfurt School that inaugurated critical communications research and I am suggesting that a return to a reconstructed version of the original model would be useful for media and cultural studies today.

22 In the 1930s model of critical theory, theory was supposed to be an instrument of political practice. Yet the bifurcation of the theory in the Institute's work from radical political practice (see Kellner 1989a) was an early form of the academic separation of theory and practice that has become all too prevalent within critical cultural studies, especially in its current configuration. Some of the most interesting critical theory today is openly political and helps illuminate political struggles of the present age and how culture is imbricated within cultural politics. For the uses of British cultural studies during the Thatcher years in the 1980s, see the material in Grossberg *et al.* 1992.

23 I have been immersed in the problematic of British cultural studies since 1975, when I was involved in a study group in Austin, Texas and wrote Stuart Hall of the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies. He responded with a long letter describing the history of the Centre and sent me a set of their stenciled papers which our group carefully studied. Over the next years we read all of their studies, journal articles, and books, and thus the first U.S. cultural studies group emerged in Austin, Texas. See my review of the earlier stages of the Birmingham project in *Theory, Culture, and Society*, Vol. I, No. 1 (1980).

24 Gramsci 1971 and 1992 and Hall 1986a. I further elucidate and illustrate the concept of hegemony in the following chapters.

25 Many of Stuart Hall's programmatic pieces discuss the appropriation of Marxism in British cultural studies, and especially the Marxism of Gramsci and Althusser (see Hall 1980a, 1986a, 1986b; and 1992).

26 See Huggart 1958 and Williams 1958, and the discussions of the "popular" in Hall 1980a, McGuigan 1992, and Aronowitz 1993.

27 On the need of combining these approaches and overcoming the current division in the field between the approaches of "cultural studies" and "communication studies," see Kellner forthcoming.

28 Although he works in a department of communications, Lawrence Grossberg (1992) begins his metatheoretical presentation of cultural studies by attacking the concept of communication and effectively removing it from the conceptual field (ibid., 37ff.), drawing upon an earlier attempt to deconstruct the concept of communication (Grossberg 1982). I would prefer, however, to dissolve binary oppositions between culture and communication, to refuse privileging one over the other, and to show how contemporary media culture and communications are interconnected in the products of the cultural industries. I would also argue that methods drawn from the humanities to study "culture" and methods from the social sciences that investigate "communication" are both valuable for cultural studies. Finally, it is also curious that some departments and disciplines use the term "communication" to describe the object of their study, while other departments and individuals use the phrase "communications." There are obviously different types and levels of communications in our culture, thus the plural has its uses and validity, though the singular also serves to note that the many varieties are all forms of communication; consequently, I will use both terms in different contexts to denote plurality or singularity.

29 The early focus in Birmingham studies was on class and subcultures, but the influence of feminism forced a focus on gender and sexuality, and the influence of people of color within the Centre forced focus on race and ethnicity (see the narrative in Hall 1986a and Gilroy 1991). In any case, by the 1980s cultural studies everywhere had a multicultural agenda, though the earlier focus on class has been downplayed in recent versions, a neglect that I shall attempt to avoid in my studies.

30 Textualism was especially one-sided in North American "new criticism" and other literary approaches which for some decades in the post-World-War-II conjuncture defined the dominant approach to cultural artifacts in the United States. The poststructuralist approaches that developed in France in the 1970s and quickly disseminated throughout the world were also highly textualist. The British cultural studies focus on audience and reception, however, was anticipated by the Frankfurt School: Walter Benjamin focused on the importance of reception studies as early as the 1930s, while Adorno, Lowenthal, and others in the Frankfurt School carried out reception studies in the same era. See the discussion in Kellner 1989a: 121ff. Except for some exceptions, however, the Frankfurt School tended to conceive of the audience as primarily passive, thus the Birmingham emphasis on the active audience is a genuine advance, though, as I argue below, there have been some exaggerations on this issue and qualifications to the notion of the active audience are now needed.

31 In fact, Fiske's other oft-repeated example of resistance by homeless men is their smuggling in copies of Hustler which they insert within Life magazine (1993: 18, 22, 25). Although such behavior does exhibit resistance to middle-class norms, it is highly questionable from a feminist perspective. The problem is that Fiske has no way to distinguish progressive from reactionary, emancipatory from destructive, resistance and celebrates all resistance as positive, thus failing to discriminate and evaluate different modes and types of resistance. Such a failure could have the effect of depoliticizing this most important aspect and field.

32 See Kellner 1989a, Chapters 5–8.

33 I discuss identity politics in more detail below in analysis of the films of Spike Lee (Chapter 4) and the Madonna phenomenon (Chapter 7).

34 Most North American cultural studies and other varieties of cultural studies which have been influenced by postmodern theory likewise neglect production and political economy. I am not sure whether this is the influence of Baudrillard's pronouncements on "the end of political economy" (1976), or just laziness and ignorance of the domain of political economy, or a certain softness in practitioners of cultural studies that are uncomfortable with the "hard" domain of political economy.

35 Yet in another article from the same period, Hall (1986 [1980]), rejected the political economy paradigm as reductionist and abstract (46–7). But note that he is rejecting the more economistic base/superstructure "logic of capital" model and not the importance of political economy per se ("This approach, too, has insights which are well worth following through"). Yet from the late 1970s through the present the dimension of political economy has receded in importance throughout the field of cultural studies and I would argue for reinserting its importance – a position that McGuigan (1992) also takes in a critique of the "cultural populism" of British cultural studies and its American and other cousins.

36 Stuart Hall once stressed the significance of breaks within a problematic,

where old lines of thought are disrupted, older constellations displaced, and elements, old and new, are regrouped around a different set of premises and themes. Changes in a problematic do significantly transform the nature of the questions asked, the forms in which they are proposed and the manner in which they can be adequately answered. Such shifts in perspective reflect, not only the results of an internal intellectual labour, but the manner in which real historical developments and transformations are appropriated in thought, and provide Thought, not with its guarantee of 'correctness' but with its fundamental orientations, its conditions of existence.

(Hall 1986: 33)

I would argue that a postmodern turn is such a significant shift, though its significance hasn't been fully registered within the tradition of British cultural studies – or at least many aligning themselves with the earlier tradition simply refer to a new "postmodern" culture and society without theorizing the significance of the shift, or in the case of Grossberg (1992), carry out a rather striking post-structuralist and postmodern transformation of cultural studies without signalling or theorizing the break with the earlier tradition.

37 I would agree with this latter argument, but the editors offer a highly questionable explication of these terms, defining modernity, for instance, as "a structure of experience and identity," rather than as a socio-historical formation, as an epoch in history, which is how modernity is defined in classical social theory (see Antonio and Kellner 1994 and forthcoming). Modernization is defined by the editors in terms of experience, rather than a range of phenomena usually associated with modernity, rather than as a process in which the forces of modernity impinge on individuals, producing a highly complex and contested process of modernization and Western-ization. Modernism is defined as "the whole complex of responses to the changing historical landscape of the modern," rather than as the avant-garde artist, such as Baudelaire, and art movements that articulated certain modern impulses and that revolted against established forms of culture, attempting to produce innovations in art (and sometimes in life).

38 This tendency to assume that the terrain of cultural studies is "postmodern" culture or society without defining the term, or providing any arguments, is widespread. The editors of a 1993 collection of mostly Canadian papers on cultural studies also simply declare that "Modernity has passed into postmodernity" (Blundell et al. 1993: 8) and

refer to contemporary societies as "postmodern" (ibid., 10). There is no argumentation and a highly complex and contested term is thus taken as a synonym for contemporary society. Likewise, Aronowitz (1993) has a chapter on "Cultural studies in postmodern America" (1678f.), without defining the term or making any argument – indeed, earlier in his book, he stated that for the purposes of his book, it mattered little whether modernity was not exhausted or whether "we pronounce the arrival of a postmodern condition with its renunciation of all universals" (ibid., 14).

39 Almost everyone who uses the term "postmodern" has different definitions, sometimes engaging in overkill where everything contemporary is "postmodern," while sometimes merely offering an arbitrary list of characteristics, many of which are arguably modern. Others undertheorize the term, privileging one or two characteristics as marks of the postmodern without establishing a really important or distinctive break from the modern.

40 In recent years, I myself have been trying to chart the vicissitudes of the postmodern and to appraise the insights and regressions of the discourses; see my book on Baudrillard (1989b), my edited volume on Jameson (1989c), my book on postmodern theory with Steve Best (1991), and my Baudrillard reader (1994a).

41 Jameson argued in the first published draft of his theory of postmodernism in the arts that:

radical breaks between periods do not generally involve complete changes of content but rather the restructuration of a certain number of elements already given: features that in an earlier period or system were subordinate now become dominant, and features that had been dominant again become secondary.

(Jameson 1983: 123)

42 Such theories of postmodernity were anticipated by historians such as Toynbee and social theorists such as C. Wright Mills (see the genealogical discussion in Best and Kellner 1991).

43 This is an obvious point, but one often neglected: most theorists of the postmodern, or those who use the word without theorizing it, assume that there is something out there which is called "postmodernism" which is merely waiting to be discovered or described. Rather, terms of this sort produce their objects, enabling some objects to be labelled "postmodern" and others not to be so labelled.

44 From the beginning, there were many individuals in every discipline who maintained that the postmodern turn was a mere fad that could easily be ignored, but the debates roared on without the participation of those who ignored the phenomenon. Some publishers have claimed that interest is waning in postmodern controversies, as has a bookstore owner; see Rosenthal 1992. And yet the game goes on . . .

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