

ESTUDOS CULTURAIS

Textos e notas de apoio

Lawrence Grossberg

“Cultural Studies: What’s in a Name?”, in *Bringing It All Back Home: Essays on Cultural Studies*, Durham and London, Duke University Press, 1997

Cultural studies is interventionist in the sense that it attempts to use the best intellectual resources available to gain a better understanding of the relations of power (as the state of play or balance in a field of forces) in a particular context, believing that such knowledge will better enable people to change the context and hence the relations of power. Consequently its project is always political, always partisan, but its politics are always contextually defined. Moreover it seeks to understand not only the organizations of power but the possibilities of struggle, resistance and change. It takes contestation for granted not as a reality in every instance, but as an assumption necessary for the existence of critical work and political opposition. (p. 253)

It attempts to produce the best possible knowledge using the most sophisticated intellectual tools. (p. 254)

[T]he practice of cultural studies is radically contextualist, and cultural studies might be described as a discipline of contextuality. (p. 254)

The context of a particular research is not empirically given beforehand; it has to be defined by the project, by the political question that is at stake. The context can be as narrow as a neighbourhood at a particular moment, or an urban region, or perhaps even some local high school that is having race problems, or it can be as broad as global capitalism after the cold war. To put it succinctly, for cultural studies context is everything and everything is contextual. (p. 255)

Cultural studies is always interested in how power infiltrates, contaminates, limits, and empowers the possibilities that people have to live their lives in dignified and secure ways. For if one wants to change the relations of power, if one wants to move people, even a little bit, one must begin from where people are, from where and how they actually live their lives.

(...) Cultural studies is concerned with the role of cultural practices in the construction of the contexts of human life as milieus of power. In other words, it is concerned with how relations of force (effectivity) are organized into relations of power by the discursive practices that constitute the lived world as human. (p. 257)

For cultural studies, articulation is a model—not only of the social formations of power, but also of its own practice or method. Articulation is the methodological face of a radically contextualist theory. It describes a nonlinear expansive practice of drawing lines, of mapping connections. Of course, different connections will have differing forces in particular contexts and these must be measured; not all connections are equal or equally important. (p. 260)

[Cultural studies] is about the possibilities for remaking the context where context is always understood as a

structure of power. But the very structure of the context is precisely where one must go to locate the power that is operating, since contexts do not exist independently of power.

Articulation calls for both deconstruction and reconstruction; it places the analyst-critic into the ongoing war of positions fought out through the various apparatuses and practices of articulation. (...)

If a context can be understood as the relationships that have been made by the operation of power, in the interests of certain positions of power, the struggle to change the context involves the struggle to understand those relations, to locate those relations that can be disarticulated and to then struggle to rearticulate them. To use the most simple and in some sense the most powerful example, the civil rights movement's attempt to say that black is not evil, that black is beautiful, was an attempt to redefine a relationship, to rearticulate it into a different relationship. (p. 261)

Cultural studies is always theoretical. It is absolutely committed to the necessity of theoretical work, to what Karl Marx called the detour through theory. It does not assume that the context it is studying (and constituting) is available in some directly empirical way. Theory is necessary to gain an understanding of the context because the context itself has in part already been constructed by theory, or at least by cultural practices and alliances, which it is not to say that the context is in any way reducible to those theoretical or cultural constructions. But its theory is always context-specific in two distinct ways. First, theory is always a response to specific questions and specific contexts; it is measured, its truth and validity judged, by its ability to give a better understanding of the context, to open up new, at least imagined, possibilities for changing that context. Cultural

studies refuses to hold to one theory defined in advance. (...) Cultural studies treats theories as hypotheses and resources, to be fitted to, articulated with, its particular project. (p. 262)

The second way in which theory is contextual is that cultural studies is never driven by—its agenda is not dictated by—theory or by a particular theoretical position. It does not take its questions from theory or even from particular academic disciplines. It uses theories to “keep on theorizing,” rigorously rearticulating them, strategically constructing theoretical formations in response to its particular projects and alternative formations. Cultural studies operates with a particular relationship between its theoretical work and the historical context in which it is working. (p. 263)

It is obvious from everything I have said that cultural studies is politically driven, that it is committed to producing knowledge that both helps people understand that the world is changeable and that offers some direction for how to change it. But here too cultural studies is radically contextual in its vision of politics and political struggle. Cultural studies believes that politics is contextually specific. The sites, goals, and forms of struggle must be understood contextually. One cannot simply assume that because a certain kind of political struggle made sense in the 1980s, it will make sense in the 1990s. One cannot assume that because a certain kind of political struggle made sense in England, it will make sense in America. (p. 264)