Better Stories

Edited by

Andrew Davis
John Nguyet Erni
Carolyn Hardin
Gilbert B. Rodman
Jennifer Daryl Slack

Mapping Cultural Studies with Lawrence Grossberg

BETTER STORIES

IMBRICATE!

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Capturing the Legacy of Lawrence Grossberg

ANDREW DAVIS, JOHN NGUYET ERNI, CAROLYN HARDIN,
GILBERT B. RODMAN, AND JENNIFER DARYL SLACK

In spring 2022 Lawrence Grossberg, Morris Davis Distinguished Professor of Communication at the University of North Carolina, retired after a fifty-year academic career. On the occasion of his retirement, seventy-five colleagues, compatriots, and former students—fifty-nine in-person, and sixteen remote—gathered in Chapel Hill for the affectionately titled Larrypalooza to celebrate, reminisce, and honor Grossberg as a very special person and an exceptional teacher and scholar. The event was as jubilant as it was revealing. Notably there was a lot of laughter. During two days of sessions, roundtables, keynotes, scholarly reflections, homages, tributes, and toasts, many funny and heartwarming stories—some old and oft repeated, others newly come to light—delighted attendees. Participants wore event pins and T-shirts with slogans shouting, "TOO SIMPLE!," "SO WHAT?," and "NO!," each affectionately recalling one of Larry's challenges to the work of his students or other scholars.

Among the laughter, there were tears too, and in those tears much was revealed: the depth of the impacts of Larry's scholarship and friendship; the strength of the relationships among his students and colleagues; the joys, pleasures, and pains of the work; and even the deep sadness of the loss of friends over the years. Larrypalooza was held two years into the COVID-19 global pandemic, yet people cared so deeply about the importance of Larry's legacy that they made the trip to contribute to the moment. In further testament to Larry's ability to foster connection, new friendships and scholarly possibilities were forged and old ones strengthened. It was not an ending but a waystation in the ongoing legacy of Larry's work.

It will come as no surprise then, that this book—dedicated to capturing Larry's legacy—is similarly bursting with rigorous, wide-ranging, and warm reflections on Larry's scholarship, influence, and impacts. The challenge of capturing that legacy is at once a joy and a dilemma: a joy because we are tasked with bringing together a volume in honor of a scholar who profoundly influenced our work and lives; a dilemma because of the impossibility of reducing the enormous, varied, and monumental lifework of Larry Grossberg into either a coherent framework or a single story. Given the vibrant, diverse life of that influence, we can at best catch salient moments in a dynamic landscape. Consequently, the essays collected here span not only the changing trajectory of Grossberg's career, but also reflect his and his students' varying ways of negotiating the intersection of the intellectual and the personal, the breadth and depth of his influence historically and geographically, and how his work is being adapted to new subjects, scholarly traditions, and a world in crisis. These complex articulations—of Grossberg as a person, teacher, and scholar; with colleagues and students as persons, teachers, and scholars; as they/we continue to engage a changing world—are precisely what make this volume needed, potentially useful, and an honor to shepherd into being.

A BRIEF BIOGRAPHY

Larry's biography provides fascinating context for thinking about the range and depth of Larry's proclivities and commitments.[1] Larry was born in 1947 in New York City and grew up in Sheepshead Bay, a relatively stable lower middle-class community on the southern coast of Brooklyn, and later Mill Basin, a new "suburb" in south Brooklyn for upwardly mobile middle-class families. Several aspects of his early childhood surely gave shape to the trajectory of Larry's life. First, after being operated on at a year and a half old for congenital hip dysplasia, he was in a full body cast for a number of years and didn't walk until after beginning school. To counter his immobility, Larry learned three pleasures at a very young age: reading, listening to music, and breaking the cast that constrained him whenever possible; these passions were nurtured by his Jewish family's emphasis on learning, education, and *tikun olam* (repairing the world, as the Jewish ethic).

He attended Stuyvesant High School for Science and Math, one of the academically strongest schools in the city. There he found a particularly strong fascination with mathematics and science. While in high school he

received an NSF grant and worked with a scientist at Yale who was part of the discovery of messenger RNA. The trajectory, Larry as scientist, looked clear. He applied to universities to work at the emerging intersection of genetics and biochemistry. But we get ahead of ourselves.

Second, at least symbolically, Larry's father's occupations resonate with the multiple sides of Larry's character. As a New York city cop, Larry's father worked some especially rough beats and retired after being injured on the job. From the rough and tumble of street life, he became the general manager of Ben Cooper Incorporated, one of the largest Halloween costume companies, which worked closely with Disney. So Larry knew something of the streets, but he also got to hobnob with celebrities, attend premiers, pose for photos, and get to know pop culture from the inside.

Larry missed his final term of high school for another operation on his hip, spent four months on a kibbutz, and returned to attend the University of Rochester, partly because he was tired of being at all-boys schools (like Stuyvesant and Yale). But it was the mid-60s, and exciting things—politically and culturally—were happening. For whatever reasons, Larry's science professors were more interested in his ability to memorize the structure of the chlorophyll molecule. All his teachers wanted him to do was read scientific journals. Two classes changed his life: Greek philosophy with Richard Taylor and intellectual history with Hayden White. By his third semester, Larry had switched his major to philosophy and history.

For a variety of reasons (some economic), the university was, for a brief moment, an extraordinary intellectual space, with enough intellectual strength and diversity to keep anyone—especially Larry—in heaven. Not only in lectures and seminars, but in coffee shops and bars, he began to get a sense of the intellectual life. Rochester was also one of the more politically active campuses, although the media were not so interested in a strike in upstate New York. And Larry's political education, which began in his New York Jewish liberal home, and continued in his more diverse and radical urban high school, began to find its own voice in actions against the war in Vietnam, the university's politics both internal and external, and more broadly, in the anti-racist, socialist utopianism (combined with a good dose of spirituality, mysticism, music, and drugs) that dominated many campus leftist movements at the time. But it was his involvement in organizing opposition to the draft—the selective service—and his own entanglement in its medical and political realities that disrupted his plans for graduate school and fortuitously presented him with an

amazing opportunity. Richard Hoggart had been a Fulbright Scholar at the University of Rochester some years earlier and gotten to know some of the professors Larry was working with. When Larry decided to study abroad, supported by a Wilson Fellowship, his professors suggested he go to Hoggart's Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) at Birmingham, although they admitted that they did not quite understand what he was up to there. So it was that Larry Grossberg, the radical hippy activist/young intellectual/philosopher and cultural historian of sorts, ended up in Birmingham at the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies in the fall of 1968. Larry was at the CCCS for only a semester and a half, but it was a life-altering experience, best described in his own words:

> It was unlike any other academic experience. It was what intellectual life could be. I was twenty years old when I got to Birmingham. I was this middle-class New York Jew. I'd had some exposure to difference. But people in Birmingham were different beyond my imagination. I had never met anyone like Stuart [Hall] or the other people who were there. It was the meeting point of rigorous thinking, deep passion, and serious political investment. It was a real conversation in which you were constantly committed to self-reflection and self-criticism. You were constantly open to accepting you could be wrong, and you could be better. The disagreements were more important than the agreements. It was what Paul Gilroy later called "convivial agonism." This is what I imagined the intellectual life to be. The cherry on top was Stuart. I'd had incredible teachers in college, but Stuart was amazing.

When Larry decided to leave England for political reasons, another wonderful accident offered itself: *Le Treteaux Libre* (The Free Theatre), an itinerant, anarchist, Swiss theater commune provided passage and a new way of living—writing, acting, managing lives as well as performances (think of the Living Theater)—for the next year and a half. The group's success—winning a major theatre festival in Avignon in 1969 or 1970, which led to invitations to perform in major cities for major cash—led the group to break apart for a while, as was often the case with counterculture success. Larry went home to New York, now adrift.

He joined a commune, drove a taxi, delivered liquor, wrote for an underground newspaper, worked at Bank Street College of Education (teaching "problem kids" to use video), got married (and divorced), and got an Old English sheepdog and named him Grok. He decided he disliked this way of doing the world and decided to get his Ph.D. Stuart Hall suggested working with James W. Carey at the University of Illinois,

Institute of Communications Research, because Carey was the only person Hall knew that was doing anything like cultural studies in the US. So, Larry Grossberg went back to school in 1971 and received his Ph.D. in 1976.

Several teaching posts followed the Ph.D. Larry was Assistant Professor of Communication at Purdue University, 1975-1976; Assistant, Associate, and Full Professor of Speech Communication and affiliated with the Institute of Communications Research at the University of Illinois, 1976-1994; and Full Professor and Morris Davis Distinguished Professor of Communication at University of North Carolina Chapel Hill, 1994-2022.

In another of those accidents that often help shape our lives, Larry met Barbara Claypole White in 1986 at Kennedy Airport and their shared flight to London was the beginning of an improbable romance. They were married in July of 1988. Their son, Zachariah, was born in December 1994. The Grossberg family is replete with writers. Barbara is a novelist; Zachariah is a poet and a writer of short stories, mostly horror and sci-fi. Both Larry and Zachariah have struggled with anxiety and OCD for most of their lives, but maybe that has helped fuel the family's collective strength and creativity.

While most readers of this volume will know Larry through his formal role as professor and scholar of cultural studies, this short biography should complicate that image. We hope you will read the essays in this volume through the lens of Larry the passionate reader, the reluctant scientist, the resolute philosopher, the rigorous thinker, the generously critical interlocutor, the radical hippy activist, and the storyteller who embraces difference and complexity.

A KEY FIGURE IN THE CULTURAL STUDIES COMMUNITY

When Larry returned to the academy in the United States, he aspired to build a cultural studies community appropriate for the US because as much as cultural studies at Birmingham got the practice of intellectual work right, it didn't quite *get* US culture and politics. As he says of his experience in Birmingham,

> The ways they talked about American culture and American politics weren't mine. If you could have transplanted it to America it wouldn't have been home to me. It wasn't my country, but it was close. And I kept trying to make that in America.

Larry has always grasped not only the importance of community building but also the work required to build and sustain an intellectual community and its projects. The art of community building seems to come naturally to Larry and the evidence of his successes appear frequently in this volume—beyond the obvious influence of his publications, journal editing, and participation in international organizations. As both colleagues and students attest, Larry's participation in team teaching, independent studies, and study groups attracted wide university—and often extra-university—attention and involvement. His many publications have been complemented by his many travels and guest lectures.

First, Larry contributed to building the organizational infrastructure meant to support the interdisciplinary, intellectual work he championed. More specifically he helped found academic programs that became points of convergence for cultural studies communities. At the University of Illinois, he played a major role in establishing the Unit for Criticism and Interpretive Theory, which co-sponsored two major conferences: "Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture" in 1983 and "Cultural Studies: Now and in the Future" in 1990, bringing diverse intellectuals together in convivial agonistic conversations and opening spaces for cultural studies. His efforts at Illinois launched research, careers (including three of the editors of this volume), and a vibrant and extensive discursive community. At the University of North Carolina, Larry played a major role in establishing the University Program in Cultural Studies, from which two of this volume's editors hail. And he helped found the Program in Public Discourse, to encourage the possibility of serious argument across differences. He also played a major role in creating formal spaces for both philosophy/theory and cultural studies in both the International Communication Association and the National Communication Association, as well as the creation of Association for Cultural Studies. When asked about his influence in the establishment of the Association for Cultural Studies, Larry spoke about how he wanted it to be a "gigantic think tank" (Cornut-Gentille D'Arcy 2010, 116) that would not be confined to national boundaries:

> Because I think the lines of force and struggle that are making the contemporary world (and in different ways, in conjunction with other more local forces, give shape to specific overlapping conjunctures) do not begin and end at national boundaries. . . . A think tank involves conversation, collaboration and cooperation. A think tank involves learning that different conjunctures pose different answers, but different questions as well. (116–117)

As important, Larry used his position as editor/co-editor of the international journal *Cultural Studies* from 1990 to 2018 to both focus the project of cultural studies and expand its community of intellectuals.

Larry's writings have been translated into more than twenty languages, and frequent travels in Europe, Australia, South America, and Asia have magnified his influence globally. In his travels abroad, Larry has always made a point to meet local activists, artists, and academics. For instance, his visits to Japan, Hong Kong, and Taiwan more than twenty years ago assisted in the many intense dialogues that led to the formation of the Trajectories Movement project, later known as the Inter-Asia Cultural Studies project.

To be more accurate, Larry's influence is as much the result of his capacity for fostering multidirectional conversations and mutual learning as it is the particular content and distribution of his works, knowledge, and skills to others. Larry formed a particular understanding of an intellectual community from his time at Birmingham and with James Carey: thinking as essentially a collaborative and ongoing conversation, which is most effective when the group is interdisciplinary, when the group demands finding questions that matter (so what?), and when members of the group are able to engage in research and activities that address those questions. That freedom to do good work depends on not having to "pay obeisance to the academy," not having "to do what the academy told it to do," but to be able—in the process of rigorous intellectual exercise—to determine, design, and work on what matters. These are not communities built to be merely support networks, circles of friends, or research teams (though they might be that too). They are *intellectual* communities, held together by a collective mutual investment in at least a piece of some larger shared project, even if many, perhaps even most, of the people involved might never claim that larger project for themselves. Such a community creates a space where critical intellectual curiosity can thrive, where scholars are unafraid to challenge the status quo and to make their mark on the world in their own unique way, where political passion meets intellectual rigor.

This kind of community is an ongoing social, institutional, political, and intellectual project, operating at multiple spatial and temporal scales. It is oriented toward bringing people together to engage in productive, less predictable conversations with one other, the kind of conversations that surprise us, that may occasionally offer remarkable insights and/or innovative intellectual/political projects.

This kind of community requires constant affective work, attention, and nurturing. Those who know Larry only from afar sometimes find him intimidating and a bit grumpy (and he may well be) but he is also deeply caring, and has been especially generous bringing people together: a past graduate with a new Ph.D. student; a writer with just the right journal editor; a job seeker with an appropriate academic opening; an email query with just the right researcher; scholars who have never before encountered one another. While such practices may help advance careers, for Larry it is primarily about the expanding the possibilities of the intellectual calling. Larry connects people in ways that energize their projects and thinking, and hence our collective project, which is the truer measure of a community builder. Part of that nurturing is simply phatic: staying in touch with people, reminding them that they matter, that he cares. Larry has always made an extraordinary effort to keep in touch. In a world in which we are all too busy, Larry makes it a priority to care for the community of friends and colleagues he has built, and to continue building that community by always adding new people, following through on suggested connections, answering people's requests, reading papers sent out of the blue, etc. And then Larry often connects those people with his students and colleagues and so on. The tip of the iceberg of the care Larry bestows on those in the expanding circle of his community are the cards and greetings he sends to celebrate birthdays and anniversaries, often including children in his community map. Whether one remains in the academy or not, Larry respects, honors, and cares for the cultural studies community. Many of these people are represented in this volume.

It is a challenge in the US and many parts of the world to maintain this kind of community, with its cohesion defined not by formal academic rules but by shared intellectual visions, given antiquated and prohibitive academic infrastructures and the exigencies of financial necessity. It may be one of Larry's greatest achievements that he has consistently built such robust communities, not just in the US but wherever he's gone: in both formal and informal ways, on relatively small and localized scales, and on scales that have spanned continents and oceans.

KEY CONCEPTUAL CONTRIBUTIONS

The publication section of Lawrence Grossberg's Curriculum Vitae, which is almost as long as a standard journal article, is filled with books and essays that have helped to define and shape the cultural studies project for almost half a century. While it is not our task to condense all of Larry's academic contributions to the field, there are several key conceptual contributions that are particularly salient in this volume. For that reason, some brief explanations of these contributions may add to the appreciation of the essays gathered here.

RADICAL CONTEXTUALITY

The concept Larry uses more than any other to define his approach to cultural studies is "radical contextuality," which takes relationality as a philosophical assumption and holds that "no element can be isolated from its relations" (Grossberg 2010, 20). No event, no identity, no social relation, no belief, no concept, no theory, no thing can be isolated from its relations. Those relations can and do change and those changes have implications in and for relations of the operations of power. Radical contextuality manifests in analysis as a commitment to map out the relations of force that constitute the forms and operations of power in a particular context, with an eye to how analysis might intervene in and contest such operations. That is, following Hall, Grossberg argues that what cultural studies investigates is not culture per se, but contexts. For many of us, radical contextuality—sometimes referred to as radical contextualism—is the conceptual core of cultural studies as represented by the work of Lawrence Grossberg. Through its emphasis on the relational nature of power, this concept serves as the basis of conjunctural analysis.

ARTICULATION, ASSEMBLAGE, CONJUNCTURE

Understanding context demands a certain practicality. Radical contextuality doesn't quite provide that. Instead, the concepts of articulation, assemblage, and conjuncture accomplish that more effectively. In a sense, moving through these three concepts maps the complexity of relationality. Articulation maps the forging, breaking apart (disarticulation), and reforming (rearticulation) of a whole, as in relationships that might articulate the concept of nationalism at a particular point in time.

Assemblage further maps relations among articulations such that they stake out a territory, as in Trumpian Christian Nationalism in the US in 2025. Conjuncture is a mode of contextualization that Larry refers to as "a complex articulation of discourses, everyday life," and, drawing on Foucault, "technologies or regimes of power" (Grossberg 2010, 25). Grossberg reminds us that, "within any context, as a result of its complex relations to other contexts, power in always multidimensional, contradictory, and never sewn up" (Grossberg 2010, 25). For Larry, ultimately, cultural studies is about conjunctures (not culture). "Since it can only reconstruct a conjuncture by studying relations [i.e., the articulations and assemblages] then the study of culture has to go through those relations to investigate everything that is not culture, even if, ultimately, in relation to culture" (Grossberg 2010, 169). But a conjuncture does not exist per se; it has to be constructed as it were—as both an intellectual and a political project.

POPULAR CULTURE

When Larry brings radical contextuality to the study of popular culture, it transforms how popular culture was for the most part understood in the American academy. Popular culture is no longer simply the category of activities defined as being in opposition to "high culture." Rather, the meaning "is not inscribed in its form, nor is its position fixed once and for all," because "there is no fixed or guaranteed content to the popular" (Grossberg 2010, 208). The popular is a contested form, a terrain of struggle, within which people locate themselves and make sense of their lives. Once popular culture is taken seriously in this way, the questions we ask are dramatically transformed: What is the popular in a particular moment? What kind of investments does it entail? How does it function? How is it deployed? Why does it matter so much? What work is it doing?

AFFECT

As part of his contribution to rethinking popular culture, Larry was one of the first Americans to insist on a key role for affect. At his seminar on Popular Culture during the 1983 conference on "Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture," he made the case that the lyrics of a song are often far less important than its affective work. A sexist text does not make a song merely sexist if it also frees up everyone to dance with wild abandon. His

position did not go over well in 1983. Eventually, however, the power and importance of affect as relational became so important that is has inspired its own organizations, conferences, and the publishing company that is publishing this volume. It is important to insist, however, that affect is not an emotion, not an isolated thing or attribute. As with all discursive phenomena, affect is relational. It "refers to the 'energy' of mediation, a matter of (quantifiable) intensity." It "operates on multiple planes, through multiple apparatuses, with varied effects" (Grossberg 2010, 193).

PHILOSOPHY AND CULTURAL STUDIES

Cultural studies, like all the human sciences, is commonsensically divided between the theoretical and the empirical and cultural studies, in particular, is commonly seen as bringing together culture and society. Larry's work can be read as contributing to each of the domains. But it is perhaps more useful to view his work as an interaction between a philosophical and a conjunctural project, although many readers tend to gravitate toward, or focus on, one or the other. Rarely do they embrace both equally or acknowledge the influence and importance of one on the other. Along with a few others, such as Iain Chambers and Paul Gilroy, Larry has always been a philosopher of cultural studies, because, as he puts it, he considers philosophy "as the underpinnings" of cultural studies as a rigorous intellectual enterprise. Questions about the nature of the construction of social realities, discursive effects, historical forces and determinations, cannot be answered without both deep philosophical reflection and reflexive conjunctural analysis. The questions of cultural studies, then, fundamentally, cannot be separated from profound philosophical problematics.

Those who have followed the arc of Larry's scholarship know that he has always engaged philosophers, theorists, and theoretical developments that can contribute to better understanding conjunctures through culture, especially as radically contextual. Consequently, his students and readers have benefited from deep engagements with not only those who identify as cultural studies scholars—particularly Stuart Hall—but also Marx, Lukács, Habermas, Gramsci, Althusser, Derrida, and so on. His reading lists for seminars included marxism, deconstruction, postmodernism, feminism, post-colonialism, and so on. Indeed, Larry can be credited with bringing many ways of thinking into conversation with cultural studies. However, one of his major contributions to cultural studies has

been to inflect cultural studies with the insights of Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, and Larry is credibly the first person in cultural studies to take Deleuze and Guattari seriously. In so doing he opened the door for the rest of us to see those possibilities. Notably, Larry has borrowed and—in his characteristic heretical fashion—also refashioned three key "vocabularies" from Deleuze and Guattari: "a discourse of assemblage," a discourse of lines as "becomings and lines of flight," and a "vocabulary . . . of machines" (Grossberg 2014, 5, 6, 9). These vocabularies offer ways of approaching the job of cultural studies, of figuring out "what's going on," that are at once philosophical but also make strange the modern conventions of continental philosophy. In Larry's hands and those of his students, they have become key tools for carrying out radically contextualist and conjunctural analyses.

LARRY, LAWRENCE, AND GROSSBERG

Grossberg's considerable scholarly achievements sit alongside not only his community building efforts in cultural studies, but also his role as a mentor and friend. You may have already noticed that we are slipping between "Larry," "Lawrence," and "Grossberg" without any seeming rhyme or reason. This slippage continues throughout the essays. We decided not to impose any standardization of naming our subject, because we think there is a logic to this slippage, one that reflects the complexity of the various relationships people have with him.

Lawrence Grossberg is renowned for his mentorship of countless students and has been honored accordingly, receiving, for example, the prestigious B. Aubrey Fisher Mentorship Award (1995) and the University of North Carolina University Mentor Award for Lifetime Achievement (2013). But no award explicitly honors the most potent gift that Larry gives his students and those he advises informally: he guides, challenges, and encourages, yet *lets them be who they need to be, study what they need to study, and do what they need to do*. He does not seek to mold his students into clones of himself, but rather empowers them to find their own voices, challenge existing paradigms, and push the boundaries of critical intellectual work. Each of his students is free to make their mark on the world in their own unique way.

Such freedom is unusual, as most academic "stars" expect students to follow closely in their footsteps or tend to attract students who want to do so. The resulting "academic families" study the same (or very similar) objects using the same (or very similar) methods, and though there may be some differences among them, there persists a sense of satellites orbiting a big star. Some may eventually become big enough to break away and form their own planetary system.

Larry's "family" is nothing like that. None of his students—and we really do mean none of us, whether formal or informal—simply followed in his footsteps, not in terms of research objects, theoretical commitments, methodological approaches, or any of the usual ways that academic families tend to reproduce themselves over time. Because of our relationships with Larry, we may all have been exposed to shared bodies of literature and shared ways of thinking, but it's impossible to find two of us whose work looks alike, or looks anything like his. This is almost a point of pride among his students. We may be "Grossbergians," but it is almost impossible to define what that means beyond a set of attitudes, commitments, and ways of being a political intellectual.

So what is it like to be mentored by Larry? It is to be challenged beyond your present capacity: with readings, ideas, arguments, and concepts you only gradually begin to understand as you try to keep up with the endless pace. It is to write, postulate, and argue; and be told over and over, "no!," "too simple!," "so what?" It is to be introduced to the most amazing scholars and thinkers—others—who care about people and the world in ways you hoped for but seldom found. It is to find yourself belonging to a larger project, a good community, one that encourages you to do work that matters. And finally, it is to have the best conversations of your entire life. Conversations with Larry are like the human equivalent of a good cup of coffee on a rainy day: reassuring, energizing, and still reminding you to charge ahead and work hard after the pick-me-up. His ability to listen, understand, and transform confusion into inspiration is phenomenal. He can turn a mundane conversation into a profound "problematic" that forces you to think, and it's all done with a well-timed quip and a knowing smile. In essence, he guides us with his unwavering support, wisdom, and kindness. Therefore, we embrace the beautiful chaos of the slippage between Larry, Lawrence, and Grossberg as a reflection of the depth and richness of his multifaceted influences. He is not one thing, but a tapes-

try of qualities, experiences, and passions that have, over a long time, become woven into an international community of colleagues, students, and friends. We believe this volume captures that tapestry.

CONTRIBUTORS TO THIS VOLUME

Our goal for this volume is to capture the depth, breadth, and ongoing promise of Larry Grossberg's influence. This book brings together an astonishing range of individuals, because Larry's influence entails decades of changing and evolving research topics, concepts, methodologies, political circumstances, and geographical engagements. Simply put, Larry's influence spans decades and continents, and he has never stopped challenging himself and others to engage diverse pursuits, agendas, and experiments.

To capture that range, we invited scholars from representative eras, areas of interest, and geographical locations to contribute essays on Larry's influence on their work. While necessarily limiting the contributions in terms of length, we intentionally avoided creating parameters or limits on the themes, narrative structure, or content of each essay. We chose to let those who have been differently influenced by Larry's work and life tell their story. All we asked was that the essays honor in some way the mark Larry has left on their work. Critical engagement was encouraged; convivial agonism, as always, respected. These essays not only comment on Larry's ideas and works but also engage, expand, confront, and reshape them, which is the best form of homage. They point forward rather than backwards.

NOTE

1. 1. This biography is based on an interview with Lawrence Grossberg conducted by Jennifer Daryl Slack on September 10, 2024. Unless indicated otherwise, all Grossberg quotations in this introduction are from this interview.

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1

Sustaining the Festive Principle (One More Time)

MEAGHAN MORRIS

> Unlike cynicism, hopefulness is hard-earned, makes demands upon us, and can often feel like the most indefensible and lonely place on Earth. Hopefulness is not a neutral position either. It is adversarial. It is the warrior emotion that can lay waste to cynicism. (Cave 2022).

> Anyway, I have to be hopeful. . . . That hope does not fundamentally arise from my being an intellectual, I think, but out of the rest of my life. I think at some point you stop being an intellectual only, and connect with what it means to be a citizen, to be part of a family, to be in a network of friends and acquaintances, to exist within a temporality of generations. (Grossberg 2010a, 332)

TRIPPING OVER TITLES

My forty-odd years of friendship with Larry Grossberg have been so formative of paths in my life that I cannot easily divide intellectual influences from personal memories. The short version of that story is that Larry's writings and the good times and quality arguments we had together dragged me kicking and screaming into cultural studies in the early 1990s. As a result I did not write the book on Australian socialist realism I planned at the end of my post-graduate studies in eighteenth century French women's novels. Instead, I spent sixteen years teaching locally and institution-building transnationally for cultural studies in Hong Kong.

Over these years I have puzzled over some of Larry's titles, especially those from his time of engaging directly with popular music culture (not my thing). Take "It's a Sin" from 1988: "What sin? Who is committing this sin? What kind of sin?", wonders the literal-minded Australian secular Catholic. In that same year came "You [Still] Have to Fight for Your Right to Party": Larry always writes about struggle, but where is the party action in this prescient text about MTV and scary vectors emerging in popular

culture and everyday life? Of course, these are also song titles. I vaguely know the songs, but since I don't feel much for them I sense a nuance there that I just can't catch as it hooks the title to Larry's text. Comprehension trips as impertinent feelings obtrude into a cultural gap of sorts: my distaste for the plummy vocals of the Pet Shop Boys triggers an irrelevant ancestral Anglophobia, and the Beastie Boys remind me of my raucous neighbors yowling Tom Jones hits at three o'clock in the morning.

I must admit that I stumbled in this way over the "palooza" thing that brought us together for Larry's farewell in May 2022. Never having heard of the "Lollapalooza" music festival until I googled long after the event, and unaware that "palooza" as a term for a non-stop festival is now a thing in Australia too (though not yet in our *Macquarie Dictionary*), I thought "Larrypalooza" might have something mysterious to do with ice cream. In the mid-1970s my partner and Larry's friend, André Frankovits, earned a badge in Minneapolis saying "I Ate a Bridgeman's Lala Palooza," the latter being an eight scoop concoction that most people could not finish. Unable to make sense of this association I ignored it (I thought) but somehow ended up talking about the TV show, *Miami Vice* (1984-1989), where the men wore suits in pastel colors that made them look, André said disapprovingly, "like ice creams." I claimed at Larrypalooza that Larry wrote extensively about this show and I realize now that he didn't. But he talked about it a lot back then, and Larry's voice makes an impression that exceeds the memorability of most academics' published texts.

These are frothy instances of an aleatory way of reading that is at odds with the extractive practices that academics are trained in today via PDF highlighting and reference management software. They are also serious heuristic examples that serve to model an aspect of reading Larry that I value immensely: when I strike an obtrusion or a gap in the culture we broadly share, I stop to consider my own context in a more distanced but focused way, reflecting on something that I might not have noticed before. In my view this results from a deeply researched resonance between Larry's writing and the way of life he inhabits. We all know his philosophical bent and his gift for conceptualization but I want to pay tribute to the visionary precision of his empirical sense of the moment in which he writes (not quite the same thing as "the conjuncture") and his acute descriptive powers as he draws his analytical maps.

Informing this is Larry's tenacious commitment to "pessimism of the intellect, optimism of the will" as he has made those maps through increasingly hard times for the left-wing project of "transforming the world with the best knowledge and understanding possible" (Grossberg 2010b, 1) that he values as the point of doing intellectual work. Larry always thinks in the future tense, making visible "the virtual inside the actual" (Grossberg 2010a, 332), not least when he investigates the historically rich theoretical resources that his version of cultural studies can mobilize, and this tenacity requires exactly the kind of hopefulness that Nick Cave calls "adversarial." This came home to me when I tripped over my own title from Larrypalooza. Reading my notes to write this essay, I was puzzled to see that I had returned ("one more time") to "Sustaining the Festive Principle," the title of an address about realism and pleasure in institution-building that I gave in 2008 to the 10th International Women's Film Festival in Seoul. Comparing Larry's career to an Asian cine-feminist trajectory seemed unlikely, but when I reread the old essay I saw that its point is about sustaining: what does it take to persevere in hope, if not "the pragmatic, survival-oriented, and world-changing energy of being 'festive', or, as Australians put it, of 'having a good time'"? (Morris 2012).

In what follows I recall three festive episodes in my friendship with Larry that released this kind of energy in a consequential way. While these episodes are connected to a few of my favorite minor texts by Larry, in particular "The In-difference of Television" (1987), "It's a Sin: Politics, Postmodernity and the Popular" (1988b), "Cultural Studies: What's in a Name?" (1993), and "Something is Happening Here and You Don't Know What It Is, Do You, Mr Jones?" (1994), events and texts do not neatly coincide in their energetic temporality and I disconnect occasions from textual propositions. However, I do have three questions in mind: in my context, how did those 1980s debates about postmodernism shape new interest in cultural studies?; how do we understand the eventfulness of texts?; and what is the role of festivity in enabling what Raymond Williams (2015, 216) called "the dynamic moment" that makes it possible to continue a "journey of hope"?

READERLY POSTMODERNISM: 1988, BUNDEENA

A memorable year is magnetic, attracting energies from the past along with future events that may later be seen as after-effects. 1988 was a threshold year in many ways for me. Under a Labor government (1983-1996), only the second of my lifetime, Australia staged its Bicentenary and a fraught debate about the politics of Aboriginal participation shaped broader arguments about whether critics should or should not engage constructively with the state through its ideological apparatuses. Within this context of political effervescence, Lawrence Grossberg arrived to give the 1988 Power Foundation Lecture at the University of Sydney. Named for a major art bequest from the Australian modernist John W. Power, the Power Institute (I pass over the jokes) inherits from 1968, before mass air travel and the internet, a mission "to bring the people of Australia in more direct touch with the latest art developments in other countries" ("Power Institute"). It was a lively institution back then and while the inaugural Power Lecturer in 1968 was the influential formalist Clement Greenberg, in 1988 "art" developments were interpreted generously by those who engaged.

At the time I was living in Bundeena, a small coastal village as far away from the "artworld" as I could get without leaving the Sydney region. Burnt out by years of film reviewing, casual teaching in arts and media schools, and small journal editing, by 1984 I was so allergic to the gallery-based theory affectations of the day that I not only left the city but rented a post office box twenty minutes ferry-ride away so that no-one could contact me directly. I wrote heaps in those years: my first book, *The Pirate's Fiancée* (Morris 1988b), reframed essays inspired by the social movements of the 1970s with critiques of the hot topic of postmodernism, while articles about Bicentenary television, a shopping mall, a motel, and the concept of banality found their frames years later. It wasn't all isolation: a letter from Patricia Mellencamp, a stranger who became a dear friend, took me to Milwaukee in 1987 and then a conference in Honolulu in late 1988 where I met Andrew Ross, who had just edited for the *Social Text* collective a book about the politics of postmodernism, *Universal Abandon?*, in which Lawrence Grossberg and I were grouped together as the two contributors writing about popular culture (Ross 1988, xvii).

Supplemented by primitive email services that often crashed, airmail was the means by which a "network of friends and acquaintances" could form transnationally, and because this was slow there was time for form-

ing non-instrumental relationships that spilled into what Larry calls "the rest of my life." Snail-mail also circulated by air and sea the must-read coterie journals—stringently edited by collectives but never blind refereed—that shaped and extended those networks. Driven by volunteer labor, subscriptions, and local book stores, this way of distributing friendships along with ideas was very effective. In 1986 Larry wrote to me as a stranger from Champaign in Illinois about my critique of the Left (without scare quotes) that he had read in *Intervention*, a theory journal founded by young members of the Communist Party of Australia in Melbourne, then veering post-Marxist with a new collective in Sydney. I was thrilled, because in town I had picked up in Gleebooks an issue of the Minneapolis-based journal *Enclitic* on "Postmodernism, History, Cultural Politics," an all-male issue (how common that was), in which I had excitedly underlined only an article by Larry on rock and roll, pleasure and power (Grossberg 1984).

Much correspondence and exchange of manuscripts followed. Larry, too, wrote heaps in these years, working on his early concepts of affective economy and radical contextualism while trying to impart, across the diverse array of journals that along with political parties and activist groups gave infrastructure and referential solidity then to the Left, his sense of urgency about cultural shifts going on in everyday life. His most influential text for me at this time, "The In-difference of Television," came out in (surprise!) the British film theory journal *Screen*. So much of Larry's brilliance is there: his prescience (this essay foresaw reality TV); the precision of his anger (at the "flat and passionless" notion of culture inherited in cultural studies from ideology critique, and the neglect of the "partially continuous" in postmodernist periodization); his puncturing of inflated theory balloons with sharp observation (how could film theory's ideal of an absorbed "spectator" account for popularity, leaving aside what people actually do in a cinema or at home with TV?); and the clarity with which he lays out new problems for television criticism to face. Bringing it all together, as always, is the eloquence of his insistence on what *matters* about all this. And he does write here a couple of fabulous pages about "pose-modernism" [sic] in *Miami Vice* (Grossberg 1987, 29–31, 39).

Reading "The In-difference of Television" back then as a recovering film reviewer, used to scribbling in the dark while people munched, smooched, and snarled "shut up!" at each other around me, I delighted in Larry's call for critics to enter in to a "nomadic" relation to the media before trying to "map the complex social spaces of media effects" (Gross-

berg 1987, 38). Rereading it now, paragraphs leap out that I more or less know by heart, because I retyped them as quotations. I learned two things from this essay that influenced me deeply. The first was that theoretical models often tacitly predicate socio-cultural landscapes and institutional or behavioral norms (like those invested in film theory's spectator), and one way to begin a critique is to draw out those seemingly inessential presuppositions by writing from a different context (US television for Larry). I would do this later in a reflection on "Australianism" as a model for cultural studies given the emergence in this period of North Atlantic publishing empires (Morris 1992).

The second thing I learned was that it is helpful in cultural analysis to think with vernacular figures, rather than, say, reaching for the Latin dictionary to claim conceptual innovation with a neologism. I don't wish to be philistine about the latter approach but it can, if overdone, effect a subtle imaginative closure on current academic discussions and prestige criteria that filters out perceptions from everyday culture. "The In-difference of Television" thought-with the vernacular brilliantly through the figures of the map and the billboard. Each offered a vivid instance of complexity in terms of its possible uptakes, while the variably practical connections between them in a mobility-based way of life opened up rhetorical space to consider the *multiplicity* of ways in which "texts may have effects other than meaning-effects, and meanings themselves may be involved in relations other than representational" (Grossberg 1987, 36–37). Readers of Larry's work from this period will know how much analytical value he produced from "mattering maps" (Grossberg 1992; 1997b), but the billboards did it for me. I was so excited to think of how a billboard worked all at once as a marker, a boundary, a site of discursive struggle, and a space connecting local details and national structures with places off the road (Grossberg 1987, 31–32) that I went out on foot to study those around my birth town of Tenterfield in rural New South Wales.[1] This enabled "At Henry Parkes Motel" (Morris 1988a), an essay I wrote about foundation stories as the Bicentenary approached.

So of course I left my Bundeena hide-out to see Larry speak to a huge audience in Sydney. People in and out of the academy routinely rolled up in numbers then to hear public lectures but the festive impact of Larry's delivery of "It's a Sin" was intense. He was exotic and he created for us a sense of special event. On a campus where sloppy, surfie, and tweedy dress codes ruled, Larry rolled up wearing a Comme des Garçons suit in a funky

black watch tartan plaid.[2] This was his wedding suit. Beginning the rest of their lives together, Larry and Barbara were on honeymoon (they even stayed in Bundeena) and Larry was, I must confess, upstaged for fashion impact by Barbara in the most gorgeous full-length navy coat that I have ever seen; we were certainly more impressed that she had worked for Vivienne Westwood than by Larry's academic affiliations. As a lecturer, Larry was funny, friendly, and had an accent that many of us had only heard in movies. Raised in an oral culture where eloquence was prized, I loved how Larry spoke with spell-binding coherence from hand-written notes as he talked to us directly about serious things. The Taylorized "American" mode of downcast speed-reading from a forthcoming article, rampant today, was not widespread in Australia then (I first saw it at that Honolulu conference), but even for an audience with high expectations of live intellectual engagement Larry's delivery earned an ovation.

Not everyone went along with the argument, of course, but more interesting in retrospect is how some of us at least partially missed the point. Larry once noted astutely that "postmodernism" was "a 'readerly' term; it leaves so much to the imagination of the reader" (Grossberg 1988a, 167), and so it was with "It's a Sin." Up front, Larry said that he was concerned with the relationship between the Left and cultural studies in the UK and the US, where Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan were still in power. Arguing that cultural studies had failed to come to grips with the affective shifts that those regimes condensed, he described postmodernity as an empowering sensibility for fans that could also be rearticulated to a "dangerous" restructuring of the national popular (Grossberg 1988a, 6–7). Prescient again (think Brexit and Trump), he wanted the analysis of popular culture to better connect with political struggles at a national level. This laid out the basics of what would become his core preoccupation with popular conservatism and the complex politics of the American Right (Grossberg 1992; 2005; 2018).

However, at the time I think many of us with social movement and party-political backgrounds understood all this as bearing on the Left and postmodernism, sliding over "cultural studies" in the vaguest way. I certainly did that: having read Richard Hoggart and a bit of Raymond Williams in an early 1970s English undergraduate seminar on literature and politics, with the anti-Vietnam War movement and Women's Liberation raging around us, I did not make any connection to what I thought of as the silly British stuff about resistant consumption that I had recently

read in Milwaukee (Morris 1990). In the forum that followed the Power lecture only a British contributor, Tony Fry, took issue with Larry's account of the Birmingham formation (Grossberg, Fry, Curthoys, and Patton 1988, 72–82). Rather, Larry's insistence on conjunctural detail invited Australians to consider, as the feminist historian Ann Curthoys did in her response, how our own neo-liberal (if more charming) Labor regime posed cognate problems to "the shibboleths of the Left" (Grossberg, Fry, Curthoys, and Patton 1988, 83–87). Sympathetic to Larry's critical impulse, she wanted a more optimistic sense of market-socialist alternatives. The philosopher Paul Patton, however, invoked "postmodern theory" to affirm his preference for a "logic of piecemeal resistance" (Grossberg, Fry, Curthoys, and Patton 1988, 95) over traditional left-wing strategies based on public control of economic resources. Subtended by that problem of how to engage with the governmental processes of the state (as Australian "femocrats" had in the 1970s and indigenous activists had for decades), this discussion had more to do with the impact of Foucault's work in the context of Australian political institutions and customs than with British cultural studies.

Slightly askew of Larry's concerns it may have been, but this aleatory response to imagining postmodernity sketched possibilities for shibboleth-free work on politics and culture that would later lead to varieties of cultural studies conceived in a more Larry-like way. One development that came independently out of British influences transposed to Australian institutions was the cultural policy studies movement in the late 1980s and early 1990s (Bennett 1992). For me, it was rather the encouragement to think about national and "mainstream" Australian issues through popular culture broadly construed that proved inspirational (Morris 1998), and it did the same in other regions where the post-colonial becoming of the national remains a site of struggle. First, there were more festivities to enjoy and to survive.

BEING MR JONES: 1990, URBANA-CHAMPAIGN

Not all parties are fun for everyone. The "Cultural Studies: Now and in the Future" conference organized by Larry with Cary Nelson and Paula Treichler at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign in 1990 lingers in my memory as a set of dark, spot-lit shots of odd things happening disconnectedly in cavernous space. With some nine hundred attendees

under the vast dome of the Foellinger Auditorium, the scale of that event was overwhelming. Standing at the podium with blinding light in your eyes, an invisible audience spread out to infinity below. One speaker had brought a pile of books, as though expecting to talk through passages with a cozy group, and on reaching that podium he dropped them and lost his paper. At one point, students demanded in the name of anti-elitism that the travelling microphones be switched off, so while the speakers couldn't see, the audience couldn't hear. Larry prowled around like a cross between an MC and a bouncer, trying to keep the peace and his temper. My extreme weirdness hit when I was on stage with Homi Bhabha. In an anxiety nightmare made real, I stood up with no paper to lose—no hand-written notes, nothing. Then the sound of an electric guitar being played in another galaxy blasted through the hall. Homi asked me to dance but I was scared like a high school girl of tripping over in front of everyone on Speech Night, and so (to my great regret) I said no.

The publication of the conference volume *Cultural Studies* (Grossberg, Nelson, and Treichler 1992) was a momentous annunciation of intellectual space, with 788 pages bringing together the disparate concerns of thirty-nine contributors, the three editors, and Q&A participants. If one needs a concrete example of what "articulation" means and why a text is an event that produces but exceeds representation, that weighty volume fits the bill. It was also "timely" as we say of a threshold event that initiates peak commodification in academic topics, a status held by postmodernism in the previous decade, post-structuralism before that, and by queer theory, new materialism, and other "X turns" in more recent times. I mean this without moralism: simply, the publishing industry catches a wave of interest and begins to influence what can easily be accepted and *encouraged* as relevant work for a while. Participating in this process is crucial to the work of translating personal interests into institutional forms, and in the first half of the 1990s there was a publishing buzz around the question of what cultural studies might be. Larry was, of course, summoned to contribute widely and in the Foreword to an issue of the *Southeast Asian Journal of Social Science* on "Cultural Studies in the Asia Pacific" (edited by David Birch) he welcomed the "increasingly polylogue" discussion "now taking place along the trajectories of the global dissemination and the local invention of cultural studies" (Grossberg 1994, vii).

This time he took his title from Bob Dylan's 1965 hip-elitist "Ballad of a Thin Man": "Something is happening here and you don't know what it is. Do you, Mr Jones?" Now that's a song I know, and its viciousness makes me shiver. Why did Larry use it? He had written himself about insider-ism and snobbery in popular music culture (Grossberg 1997b), so I think he was suggesting here not only that an *outsiderly* position to power and knowledge can be "uniquely insightful" (Grossberg 1994, viii), but also that we are all like Mr Jones when it comes to asking what cultural studies is and does: "something is definitely happening here" (Grossberg 1994, ix) yet the context-specific nature of the project renders definition an ever-evolving open question and what one might know is contingent on a relation to "here."

The precision of this musical allusion strikes me now as explaining the inexplicable, namely, why would anyone get up on stage at a huge conference with nothing to say? Trained through high school as the third speaker of a champion debating team, I have never feared the impromptu and thirty years ago I always woke up at 4 a.m. to sketch the paper I had to give that day. That works fine if your inner speech has been on the case for days and you have sentence rhythms as well as propositions ready in your mind. For "Cultural Studies: Now and in the Future," I had only silence and a blank sheet of paper. Reading Larry inspires me now to think of this as deep Mr. Jones syndrome: having no concrete relation (then and there) to a "here," to a meaningful context of some kind, I had no thought about cultural studies "now," let alone in the future. From the published discussions it seems that I muttered about real estate and may have read the poem by John Forbes, "On the Beach," that framed the essay on settler colonialism I eventually wrote for the book. When someone asked why such work was cultural studies, I shrugged that it was just the latest name with which I could do Australian cultural history (Grossberg, Nelson, and Treichler 1992, 478).

Graceless! Yet this wallflower experience stood me in good stead to help students struggling with cultural studies shock in Hong Kong later on. That shock can be profound, and beginning from a parochial "here" and "now" is an effective way to deal with it (Morris 2005). As parameters for sketching a context, "here" and "now" offer starting spaces, blank billboards as it were, to assemble materials for defining your location at the moment ("local" may be too large a term for this) and fabricating connections that make it possible to move on or go home. One difference

between Larry and me is that while his early thinking about textuality was informed by Stuart Hall's model of encoding and decoding (Grossberg 1984; 1987), mine came from Emile Benveniste's work on deictics in enunciation (discursive markers of context in time, space and person), which I learned as a theory of reference, not "subjectivity" (Morris 2014). From this formative asymmetry we could agree that texts as well as audiences are active (Grossberg 1984, 74), and that their eventfulness is variably socialized through the material forms, networks and protocols specific to an apparatus (early Larry) or an institution (me). Of course we did different things from this position. I imagine a little cartoon in which Larry is driving past billboards on an American multi-lane highway, thinking about the future, while I am stopping by a lone billboard on a pot-holed Australian road to think about the past.

At conference time, I attributed my aphasia to the "American academy." That was wrong in two ways that allow me in retrospect to recognize the impact of Larry's work over the decades to sustain the adversarial hope that a festive spirit can unleash. First, I had a great time in Urbana-Champaign, both in teaching for a semester and in the "rest of my life" there. (Friendship loyalty was, of course, the reason I did get up on stage at the conference hoping to think of something to say). I met and sometimes partied with Larry's wonderful students, some of whom are still my friends. Gil Rodman, my first ever RA, tried to teach me how to exploit him as indentured labor; I never did ask him to drive all night to pick me up at some airport but he returned my library books once or twice. Linda Baughman took me cycling, and with Greg Wise she brought the conference book together. I met Melissa Deem, Phil Gordon, Holly Kruse and, briefly in a car park, Greg Seigworth. Other Urbana Larry-connections in various ways have brought sparkle to my academic life: John Erni and Elspeth Probyn, dear colleagues in Hong Kong and Sydney respectively; Anne Balsamo, James Hay, Jennifer Slack, Jonathan Sterne . . . there is no space to list their achievements in expanding the "global dissemination and local invention of cultural studies" (or to follow Larry on to North Carolina). The point is that what makes Larry's collegial relationships durable takes work, in other words, affective labor—and it is institutionally as well as socially consequential.

So the second way in which it would be wrong to ascribe my 1990 "here-lessness" to academy shock in the USA relates to the slow-release temporality of a threshold event. I was startled, certainly, by surges of that

hostile, impractical Leftism that Tony Bennett, criticizing Fredric Jameson's (1993) review of the conference, later politely called "the radical versions of American liberalism that now blight much of the debate" (Bennett 1998, 35). However, the upshot was that assorted shocked Australians present suspended our ongoing quarrels over culture and government (Hunter 1988) and got together, some of us meeting for the first time (Morris 2015). Directly thanks to Larry's labor, life-long friendships with Tony Bennett and Graeme Turner followed for me, along with a flurry of Australia-based publications, events, and institutional initiatives over the next few years that then and there established a "here" for me in cultural studies.

BETWEEN CROSS-FIRES: 2006, HONG KONG

Festivity, fun, and kindliness are indispensable not only for building durable academic structures but also for sustaining spirits that can withstand attacks well enough to survive them, and hopefully start something else when a good thing comes to an end. This ethos is alien to the sadistic mode of university managerialism that feeds on a narcissistic fantasy of corporate toughness, but cutting the budget for good fellowship does not pay off.

One of the Urbana Larry-connections whom I met after "Cultural Studies: Now and in the Future" whilst having fun at a conference in Western Australia was Kuan-Hsing Chen. He invited me along with Larry to the "Trajectories" conference in Taipei in 1992 (Chen 1998), an event that would in time give rise to the *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* movement, journal, research network, and cross-institutional teaching experiments. This in turn led me to move to Hong Kong in 2000 for my first ever full-time academic job as Chair Professor of Cultural Studies at Lingnan University. While Larry was only indirectly responsible for this new swerve, I would like to add a brief coda to thank him for contributions to that particular phase of global dissemination and local invention that he may not be fully aware that he made.

Finding teachable English language presentations of cultural studies for my Lingnan undergraduates was a challenge, in part because of jargon and parochially Western squabbles but mostly because of a deep incommensurability in cultural capital (Morris 2010). The most helpful text for general purposes was always Larry's "Cultural Studies: What's in a Name?" I used the original B. Aubrey Fisher Memorial Lecture version

that I carried around in a dusky pink pamphlet from the University of Utah (Grossberg 1993). I'm not sure exactly how it differs from the revised "Cultural Studies: What's in a Name? (One More Time)" chapter in *Bringing It All Back Home* (Grossberg 1995, 245–271), but one change is the deletion in the latter of the former's opening story of Larry's experience as a student and his relationship to Fisher as a teacher. This inscription of a "temporality of generations" (as Larry puts it in the epigraph above) gave my own students an identification point to begin with, and it led into the clearest, most usable account that I know of why cultural studies can be hard to grasp at first, what radical contextualism means, and exactly how the practice of cultural studies embodies "the belief that what we do can actually matter" (Grossberg 1993, 4).

Larry's ability to keep reformulating and transmitting that belief is among his greatest contributions to our welfare, I believe. Without such belief, fear, cynicism, and what Larry now calls "nihilistic pessimism" (Grossberg 2018, 44) can have a field day. Hong Kong English has a lovely, affectionate expression for the common people: "small potatoes." What I treasure most from these memories is that whenever Larry came in person to Hong Kong he gave his time and energy to help small potatoes know that what *they* were doing actually mattered. In 2006, for example, he was a discussant for a Lingnan conference on "Instituting Cultural Studies" (Morris and Hjort 2012) then agreed to be Mr Jones for hours in a Tsim Sha Tsui bookshop, understanding almost nothing at an all Cantonese-language public forum inspired by *Caught in the Crossfire* (2005) and hosted by local radio talkback stars.

I know Larry felt that book about America's "war on its children" was ignored, but at a time of youth-bashing by the establishment in Hong Kong (premonitory of much worse to come after the Umbrella Movement of 2014 and the uprising of 2019) it was eagerly taken up and riffed upon through the mediation of our colleague, Hui Po-Keung ("PK"). The stakes of this discussion proved serious. In May 2022, PK was arrested along with ninety year old Catholic human rights veteran Cardinal Joseph Zen, singer-activist Denise Ho, barrister Margaret Ng, and an already imprisoned lawmaker, Cyd Ho, for acting as trustees of the 612 Humanitarian Relief Fund formed to help the mostly youthful pro-democracy protesters of 2019 with their legal and health costs. Menaced with the charge of "colluding with foreign forces" under the dissent-crushing National Security Law imposed by

Beijing in 2020, they were convicted and fined in November 2022 under the Societies Ordinance for failing to properly register the Fund (Leung 2022). The threat of the far more serious charge remains.

Along with his bookshop forum, Larry also spent hours giving an in-depth interview about cultural studies to Island Liang, Panger Wong, Wong Hoi-wing, and Chan Shun-hing ("Let's Tell a Different Story" 2006), students and faculty activists, just because they felt able to ask him and because all of them cared. This capacity to care in return is why Larry has been able to create so much of lasting institutional as well as intellectual value (not least, of course, the journal *Cultural Studies*), and why he is not only influential but loved all over the world. I will return to Nick Cave (2022) for a closing word on the politics of this way of living as a distinguished scholar: "Each redemptive or loving act, as small as you like . . . keeps the devil down in the hole. It says the world and its inhabitants have value and are worth defending. It says the world is worth believing in. In time, we come to find that it is so."

NOTES

1. This was many years before Martin MacDonagh's film *Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri* (2017), and the controversy over its handling of race and disability. The film's use of billboards as a site of struggle, however, was spot on in relation to Larry's concept.

2. Many thanks for the precision of this description (and the evidence of a photo) to Barbara Claypole White.

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2

A Losing Proposition, or Looking Back While Moving Forward

MARK HAYWARD

> "Palm Trees. Sunshine. Bikinis. Speedboats. Collins Avenue cruisers. Ferraris and fast-food stands."
>
> —*Miami Vice* Pilot Screenplay, 1984

The frequency with which *Miami Vice* appears in cultural studies essays published in the mid-1980s will not surprise anyone who remembers those years. Centered around the partnership of Sonny Crockett (Don Johnson) and Rico Tubbs (Philip Michael Thomas), the television show was at the peak of its popularity between 1985-1987. These were also the years during which cultural studies was gaining visibility across the United States.

It is not difficult to make sense of the terms of their encounter. *Miami Vice* brought together the established form of the police procedural with the visual vocabulary of MTV. It transformed men's fashion (pastel-colored jackets and loafers with no socks) and gave a prominent role to popular music in both its soundtrack and through frequent cameos (including appearances from Barbara Streisand, Leonard Cohen, James Brown and Miles Davis.) For cultural studies scholars, the show provided an opportunity to articulate the ideological and representational antinomies of popular culture and everyday life of the Reagan era. Such key figures as Andrew Ross (1987) and John Fiske (1987) dedicated short articles to the show, unpacking the meaning of its visual style and cultural grammar.

It is also one of the few televisual texts of which Grossberg provides an extended analysis, although his account of the show is little more than a few hundred words (Grossberg 1987). Unlike the essays by Fiske and Ross, the essay in which Grossberg's analysis appears is not about *Miami Vice*.

It is about the type of thing "television" is, how it is organized and experienced, and what this says about popular culture and politics. Grossberg engages with the show and its place in media culture as an entry point for an analysis of the relationship between ideology and affect, representation and experience. It is a conceptualization of television that rests upon both the ubiquity and ephemerality of popular culture, a perspective suited to the level and genre of success *Miami Vice* experienced at the time the essay was written and published.

The significance of *Miami Vice*, in his analysis, is how it circulates within the hegemonic relationship between signification and interpretation at a period time when, as Grossberg writes, "the narrative is less important than the images" (Grossberg 1987, 32). Drawing on the metaphor of "billboards" found elsewhere in his writings during this period, he expands on this to explain how popular culture creates meaning:

> Its direct appeals, its inscribed meanings, its specific message, seem oddly irrelevant and rarely useful (whether because we are driving too quickly or because we see them every day) . . . It is not a sign to be interpreted, but rather, a piece of a puzzle to be assembled. . . . I want to suggest that interpreting the effects of popular culture, and its politics, is less like reading a book than like driving by the billboards that mark the system of interstate highways, county roads and city streets that is the United States. (Grossberg 1987, 32)

...

> "It's a losing proposition but one you can't refuse. It's the politics of contraband."
>
> —"Smuggler's Blues," Glenn Frey

The concept of culture in Grossberg's thinking and writing is inescapable, serving as a loose organizing parameter for an expansive intellectual project on which he has worked over the course of his career. Yet it should not be forgotten that there is a Grossberg "before culture." By his own account, the turn towards culture first makes it into print with the publication of a lengthy review essay of Raymond William's *Television: Technology and Cultural Form* (1974) published in July 1977 issue of *Communication Research*. In an interview with James Hay (2013), he describes the essay as "putting [William's book] into the context of cultural theory and cultural studies." In the same interview, he situates the review of William's *Television* in relation to another essay published in the same period, "Interpreting the 'Crisis' of Culture in Communication Theory" (Grossberg

1979), which would later be republished as the first essay in the collection *Bringing It All Back Home* (1997). Both essays—the former because of its historical precedence and the latter because of its greater subsequent visibility—provide convenient markers dividing what went before and almost everything that came after.[1]

One of the prominent themes in the essays published prior to this cultural turn is the unexamined and incoherent nature of the concept of communication as it circulates in Communication Studies and across the social sciences. As Grossberg writes, "even the most cursory glance at the wide range of literature using the concept of 'communication' demonstrates that there is little agreement on how to define the term, or on its relationship to other categories of human action and experience" (Grossberg 1982, 213). In these essays, he advocates for a "philosophical" rather than operational critique of the concept of communication. The essays from this period belong to a larger conversation about the philosophy of communication as it was understood in the 1970s, with a nod to Larry's participation in (and contributions to) the establishment of the Philosophy of Communication Division of the International Communication Association.[2]

But is there a break between the young Grossberg and the later (still young but less so) Grossberg? There are many ways one might situate them in the arc of Grossberg's intellectual career depending on how one reads these early essays in relation to those that come after. One might read these essays as being about "culture" but using other vocabularies. Grossberg himself has made comments that point in this direction. Although focused on the transitional essays mentioned above, he recalls: "A lot of those early essays were written under the constraint of people telling me that no one was really interested in any of this stuff unless I could connect it to the mainstream. My essay on Williams, my essay on the crisis of culture and its theorization, were all attempts to sneak cultural studies into a mainstream discourse" (Hay 2013). Alternatively, one might read the later arrival (or, perhaps, disclosure is more appropriate) of "culture"—and, by extension, cultural studies—in Grossberg's essays as a refinement and clarification of the questions addressed in the early essays. The attempt to overcome the oppositions between empiricism and hermeneutics (aka phenomenology and structuralism) in these early essays is a rehearsal for the later essays

on culture and rock and roll and the even later writings analyzing conservatism in the United States. In this account, the critique of communication matures into the critique of culture and the theory of affect.

Both accounts have their appeal and their limitations. I find them unsatisfying to the extent that they encourage a simplification of Grossberg's intellectual trajectory, positing that the main themes of the later work are present from the outset albeit misdirected or hidden by the dominant concerns or vocabularies of their time. By presuming (or imposing) conceptual continuity and consistency we arrive at stasis; the specific questions and concerns they raise are collapsed into the questions and concerns of later periods. At the same time, elaborating their relation to each other is promising—and even exciting—to the extent that they invert or reverse established norms of intellectual scope and academic prestige of the time. The transition from Philosophy of Communication to cultural studies, following the shift in emphasis from textual hermeneutics to materio-affective analysis, moves from bounded questions of epistemology and interpretation in the social sciences to a broader materialist engagement with experience. To reconstruct and re-enact this transition is an opportunity to better understand how cultural studies in Grossberg's work is never just about bringing critical theory to popular culture but about a broader reframing of the practice of intellectual work.

...

> "The Delicate Interface between ocean and air . . . liquid and gas . . . the event horizon where molecules evaporate . . ."
>
> —*Miami Vice* Film Script, c. 2004

"Smuggler's Blues" is the sixteenth episode of the first season of *Miami Vice*, named after a song of the same name featured in the episode but released the previous year by Glen Frey. The song's lyrics, which serve as the inspiration for the episode, provide a first-person account of a drug deal gone bad from the perspective of a smuggler. In the episode, Crockett and Tubbs pose as smugglers who travel to Colombia at the request of the DEA. Frey himself appears in the episode as Jimmy Cole, a pilot who flies the two out of the US surreptitiously; he spends much of his time on screen holding a guitar and looking like an aging rock star on vacation. The episode also serves as the basis for the *Miami Vice* film released in July 2006 staring Jamie Foxx and Colin Farrell. The film was directed by Michael

Mann, who served as executive producer of the original TV series. Critical response to the film upon its initial release was lukewarm. Reviewers and audiences alike were disappointed the film didn't bring the series' style to the big screen; abandoning the pastel-themed brightness of the television series, the film draws on a more extreme color palette with extensive filming taking place indoors or at night punctuated with aggressive bursts of color.

One of the themes in recent commentary re-evaluating the film is its early use of digital cameras. Mann's desire to increase the intensity of colors results in many scenes where the breakdown of digital image technologies produces visible artifacts of the analogue-to-digital transition taking place in the early 21st century. As Swanson (2021) writes,

> *Miami Vice* doesn't look like a film shot on celluloid because it wasn't. The way light is captured is wholly different. It glimmers and refracts with a unique aesthetic. In conjunction with the handheld camerawork, the film has a fluidity that blurs and scatters. The digital noise hangs in the air like the electricity of a lightning storm.

To watch (or re-watch) these two versions of *Miami Vice* is to see the same story told twice. Yet their differences are unavoidable. Both make visible the technical and economic infrastructures that subtend that narrative, perceivable as much in their presence as their presumed absence. The aesthetics of the digital image that characterize the film stands in contrast to the pastel-colored palette and brighter lighting—even when shooting at night—required of the video image for the TV series. My intention in elaborating the relationship between these two versions of *Miami Vice* is not to highlight the prospective and retroactive continuities within popular culture and its analysis. The two iterations of *Miami Vice* are connected, but there are ways in which they are also productively disconnected from each other. These breakdowns, these glitches in continuity—literally in the case of the film—are part of reckoning with their respective historical contexts.

History is often framed in cultural studies as a "history of the present." The phrase, borrowed and adapted from Foucault (1977), communicates both a position taken, meaning the historian engages in historiography as a modality of political struggle, and a thing produced, meaning that the story told contributes to the creation of possibilities in those political struggles. There is, however, something that troubles me in this figuration of the present and what this means for thinking about the past. Certainly, the complexity of the past and the present integrate and inter-

fere with each other in ways that make a simple narration and interpretation of the order and meaning of events a political act. But, if—to borrow a metaphor mentioned above and used by Grossberg on other occasions (Grossberg 2018)—the work of analysis is like fitting together the pieces of a puzzle, then one must acknowledge that sometimes there are pieces missing or pieces from other puzzles that have somehow wandered into the wrong box.

The approach of early cultural studies work was often reliant on authors who felt capable of making sense of the world around them through popular media texts; *Miami Vice* matters because it also meant something. Grossberg's work has consistently brought into focus the limits of such an approach; his writings capture a work-in-motion, travelling the shifting grounds of everyday life where such certainty over meaning is difficult, if not impossible, to maintain. It is appropriate, then, to pause before imposing a coherent account of the arc of Grossberg's writing. For cultural and institutional reasons, Grossberg's early essays do not speak to our present with the same facility as the later texts on popular culture and politics. Nonetheless, these essays do document and trace a process of thinking. They provide snapshots of on-going intellectual work that should be treated as such rather being reduced to detours on the way to the inevitable destination that is cultural studies. Mapping the shifting interests and stakes that were not taken up is as important as rummaging through the dustier chapters in Larry's CV with the aim of ferreting out material that resonates with more recent themes in his (or one's own) work.

It is not a specific lesson or concept I want to recover from Larry's work. There isn't a particular story I want to re-tell. Rather, I want to reflect on what it would mean to return to the writings he has shared with us in a way that contribute the creation of future possibilities and experimentation. It is easy to be nostalgic for some of the certainties of the past (although it is probably that those certainties only feel safe in retrospect.) It is also easy to say that there are more serious questions of concern today than the meaning of *Miami Vice* and the relevance of phenomenology to Communication Studies in the 1970s. Such positions can feel true. Yet it is their appealing self-evidence that brings with it different kinds of danger. The task is to remain open to what might be—but might also not be at all—even when looking back.

NOTES

1. Of course, this an impossible border to maintain. By the time the essay on Williams was published, Larry had already studied with Stuart Hall. Upon his return to the United States, he was engaged in an ongoing discussion with others (most notably James Carey, but also a broader network of critical scholars) about a critical cultural approach to the study of communication. Further, there are later breaks and turns in Grossberg's writing. Although these won't be discussed here.

2. For more context on the formation and role of the Philosophy of Communication Division vis-à-vis philosophy, communication, and cultural studies, see the special issue of *The Communication Review* edited by John Erni (2005).

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3

Echoes of the 1980s: Conjunctural Analysis and the Work of Critique

CHARLES R. ACLAND

Pastels and greed. New wave and rap. Everyone knew who G. Gordon Liddy was. James Brown was still touring.

The United States of the 1980s, the cultural and political scene that followed a decade of disillusionment and economic shock, moulded Larry Grossberg into the influential intellectual he became. What we so casually—too easily—refer to as the New Right, conventionally traced to the Barry Goldwater Republicans of the mid-1960s, morphed and settled into a coherent and lasting formation that could win elections. Grossberg saw the pressing urgency of understanding what produced and sustained that formation, developing a mode of critique that would prepare him to identify the various subsequent regressive American political manifestations—compassionate conservatism, the Tea Party, Trumpism, etc. Effectively, with conceptual brilliance in such works as *We Gotta Get Out of This Place: Popular Conservatism and Postmodern Culture* (1992), Grossberg was doing for the era of President Ronald Reagan what Stuart Hall and his colleagues did for Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher in the UK. And the ferment of the 1980s prepared Grossberg to be an advanced warning system for shifting political sands that in many instances destabilize the left's purchase on progressive critique. More than 25 years after *We Gotta Get Out of This Place*, in such works as *Under the Cover of Chaos: Trump and the Battle for the American Right* (2018), Grossberg is still applying the lessons of the Reagan era to Trumpian Right, because the traces and historical forces of that period continue to vibrate through our contemporary cultural and political moment. Pastels are less evident, but greed is as "good" as ever.

As Grossberg would be quick to point out, this is not to say that the critiques of the 1980s will work mechanically when applied to our current struggles. The uniqueness of every conjunctural moment requires analytical agility, and in many ways the outlining of what it means to study and take stock of a dynamic field may be one of Grossberg's most resounding contributions. There may be a no more complete declaration of this position than his book *Cultural Studies in the Future Tense* (2010), in which he elaborates most extensively the conceptual advantages and conundrums of keeping cultural studies agile, always responding to changing times and challenges. Virtually every work of his, every essay, collection, or monograph, at some level, invites us to leave aside the close-and-play automatism of conventional critical dogma. On this front, Grossberg cautions us just as much about misguided attempts to turn cultural studies into a fixed analytical perspective as he does the most rigid and ahistorical forms of left critique. His writing sometimes challenges readers, especially those hoping to be swept into the comfort of unconditional certainty. Ideological stasis is not evident in his analyses, and in this respect Grossberg's work is properly dialectic, historically connected, and attentive in a 360-degree way to the perpetually changing conditions of social and cultural forces. This is as essential a point today as ever, for one hears of the suffocating dogmatism of cultural critique, which accounts for pushing some into silence and self-censorship, and pushing others into the amplified caverns of the cultural right; a structure of feeling of chill and anxiousness is no joke or exaggeration from a right-leaning liberal press; it organizes the political life of many young people and we will only be disadvantaged by not taking this seriously.

Advancing cultural critique in the face of the drag of brute analytical certainty has been a feature of cultural studies from the get-go. Note that much of what we admire of British cultural studies emerged from its own confrontation with an historical period of suffocating—and, indeed, genocidal—dogmatism. How could the left survive the revelations of Stalin in the 1950s? Well, it could and did. This is exactly the point where a New Left, and its various platforms including *New Left Review* and the Centre for the Study of Contemporary Culture, planted its first generational stake on scholarship and political engagement. And those dear New Left intellectual radicals never stopped debating and assessing what should be the next tack and the next step, the one that will be more politically and analytically

advantageous. Extending and sharpening this tradition, Grossberg likewise throughout his long and prolific career maintained a war of position on critical orthodoxy and political dogmatism.

Consider for a moment E.P. Thompson's "The Poverty of Theory, or an Orrery of Errors" (1978). When I came to this work in the 1980s—not realizing at the time how fresh the debate was, believing it to have been settled long ago—Thompson was generally slotted as a figure of the past, a purveyor of simplistic historicism, and a dampener of the most vital features of contemporary critical theory and the "turn to language." Returning to Thompson's work today, and the response that followed, has been a revelation; it is not the "anti-theory" manifesto I had understood it to be initially. The scar of Stalinism had not healed for the British left, and though a full two decades later, Thompson was terrified that the lesson was being treated in a cavalier fashion. The play of anti-humanism and the ascendency of a new kind of alienating vanguard rooted in obscure theories of linguistic impossibility was alarming for him, and he let folks know about it.

In 1979, at History Workshop 13 on "People's History and Socialist Theory," Thompson's attacks and the defensiveness of some post-structuralists collided. But there was Stuart Hall, as part of a plenary panel discussing Thompson's work, along with Richard Johnson and chair Stephen Yeo, deftly navigating a path through for all concerned.[1] Hall used that venue to defend Thompson against those who were eager to squeeze him out. Hardly inclined to historical methods himself, Hall understood how essential the "history from below" work of the History Workshop was, with its innovations of histories of women, workers, and colonialism, and drew considerable inspiration from its founder Raphael Samuel. This isn't to say Hall agreed with Thompson, but he certainly listened and assimilated the position to produce a better one. Hall railed at the workshop, to an apparently overflowing audience, against the "theoretical terrorism" of dogmatic attacks where the goal was to "stumble forward from correctness to correctness" (Hall qtd. in Parks 2012). Hall's contribution to the volume that emerged from that event, Samuel's edited collection *People's History and Socialist Theory*, included "Notes on Deconstructing the 'Popular'" (1981). He also contributed a more conceptual statement, "In Defense of Theory" (1981), titled in such a way as to immediately link with Thompson's essay. In the year between History Workshop 13 and the release of that event's edited volume, Hall produced what can be read as his

summation of where cultural studies needed to go following "the poverty of theory" debate, "Cultural Studies: Two Paradigms" (1980) in which he outlined the strategic advantage the Williams/Thompson humanist contribution as well as that of structuralism and post-structuralism. There is, in fact, a third synthetic paradigm proposed by Hall in that essay—that of Gramsci and the concept of hegemony.

Grossberg emerged from this moment with the same spirit and conviction about contingency, conjuncture, and critique. Under the varieties of Grossberg's post-structuralism remains the Raymond Williams of *Marxism and Literature* (1977), alternating between abstraction and crystalline clarity, with an unshakable humanist commitment; when you read Grossberg on affect and Williams on structure of feeling, you always have a vision of the faces and sensibilities of actual people, all the more to render on the page the complexity of grasping the entirety of an historical moment. And it is Gramsci and conjuncture that is the most consistent throughline in Grossberg's work. The primary analytical importance of radical historical contingency, and the problem of how one writes of such, is key to Grossberg.

Indeed, Grossberg's specific contribution, his decades-long project, has been to resituate Gramsci, Hall, and Williams for the US scene, to produce, if you will, an American Gramsci (bearing in mind the regularity with which Grossberg notes the implied imperialism of the very concept of "America"). Gramsci's own varying usage of common sense, folk, vernacular, popular, and so on are seized as a statement of bold commitment to popular culture in general as well as the specificities of historical change. Grossberg re-interprets and reinvigorates these concepts to focus on the struggles and settlements of sensibility. Taking "'It's a Sin': Politics, Postmodernity and the Popular" (1988) as one full rendition of his analytical approach, we find an effort to describe a conjuncture in the 1980s, a moment in the formation of American hegemony; in fact, this extensive essay is so "of that moment" that he doesn't even mention that the title is appropriated from a Pet Shop Boys hit from 1987, because you were just supposed to know. Following a detailed tour of the critical traditions of British cultural studies, which situates his contribution in relation to that radical humanist lineage while historicizing his mode of analysis, the essay pulls from the surface of various popular, and primarily television, texts to organize them in relation to one another, rather than reading them deeply. Doing so, he begins to identify stances and positions for

understanding and living in this environment of popular forms, which he proposes, in conversation with prevailing ideas about postmodernity, is a set of dispositions with respect to inauthenticity. Importantly, Grossberg advances that everything presented is flexible and provisional; he's provided both a reading of the contemporary scene and an inventory of language and matters to work with and work upon. In this way, "It's a Sin" is a statement about the political and ideological impurity of the category we call the popular.

For our more immediate situation, we find continuity in this analytical mode of the popular as profoundly contingent. Grossberg has identified and typified "reactionary counter-modernity," a contradictory mode of being inside and outside contemporary currents as a conservative and alt-right potentiate. The stops along the way are familiar and carry with them long traditions of panic about social order: legitimated racism, changing labour conditions, new economic structure, declining social and economic mobility, alienation from the present, and polarization among people. But the way they are assembled, in relation to each other, is entirely of this moment of Trumpism.

So with Grossberg's efforts to keep active and relevant a Gramscian tradition of conjunctural analysis, what can we say stands in the way of the left today? Grossberg succinctly observes that progressive politics have been stymied by "first, a healthy mistrust of demands for unity and organization, and second, an unhealthy division between activism and intellectualism" (2017, n.p.). On the second point, yes, absolutely. Fantastical images of street actions, barricades, and combat fatigues overwhelm the variety of labor and sites of work needed to build progressive coalitions, which must include the work of analysis and debate. At strategic moments, mass actions are essential, but how does one know when that moment has arrived and where energies are best applied but through the ongoing work of study, survey, and critique? There remains a reflexive default to a narrow imagistic range of what counts as activism, and this does a massive disservice to the many who struggle and work progressively in often less conventionally valued and less visible locations but who make lasting differences. As modern subjects, we are accustomed to what Susan Sontag (2003) called "proximity without risk" in terms of spectacles of violence (111); a version of this describes what happens when protest becomes similarly spectacularized and routinized at the expense of all varieties of progressive action.

And Grossberg is dead-on target in calling out the left's mistrust of unity and organization as having stymied progress, though describing this mistrust as "healthy" is too generous. It is not "healthy" and it has done irreparable damage to our ability to articulate coalitions and alliances beyond immediate local filiation—the comfort of a proximate familiar "us" over a riskier, broader, and diverse "us." No tendency has done more harm to the possibility of a progressive egalitarian future than the evacuation of the central responsibility for mass group coordination across geographical and demographic distances. Such an ambition requires commitment to and participation in public institutions and agencies—including, perhaps essentially, schools, and not only as teachers and students, but also administrators and policy-shapers at every level—not distrust and suspicion about them.

Toward the end of *Under the Cover of Chaos*, Grossberg makes it undeniable that we need to work on unity, by which he means a hybrid unity-in-difference, exactly as Gramsci would have it and exactly as Hall would have it. Any tactic that begins with division—the hyper-local and the hyper-marginal whose vanishing point is the imaginary unified bourgeois subject—will only leave us weaker and more vulnerable to appropriation by less egalitarian agendas. He even tentatively makes the case for re-imagining that the state might in fact be a site of hope and progress. Exactly. Take this seriously, my American friends. On this point, the general American anti-statism and anti-institutionalism is mystifying to other national contexts where public commitments to justice run, invariably, through state mechanisms. The struggle to assure such commitments is energetic and productive in many countries. In the US, a deep libertarianism has tainted the left as much as it drives the right. Where some may decry the absence of public agencies that are more robust in other countries, as underdeveloped as they may be, they do exist in the United States. Put another way, a strain of American progressive political culture, so imbued with its version of anti-statist libertarianism, lacks the critical imagination to work on what the state might be in egalitarian and communitarian terms. I read Grossberg as optimistically encouraging that discussion, doing so by prioritizing agonism—confronting and living with the tensions and debates of difference—in a way that is not dissimilar from some of the work of Chantal Mouffe (2018).

Grossberg writes a lot about messiness, about impurity, and about chaos. He doesn't want to find a pure moment in which all our understandings click securely into place; he wants to keep things messy. He's reading the scene, he's finding links and contradictions, and he's pointing out gaps and fissures, seeing that nothing is stitched together forever. It takes courage, conviction, and hope to persevere at this, especially when the left fundamentalist push-button version of critique will please more people and be faster to press.

Of the many conceptual contributions of Larry Grossberg, one of the most consistent has been his advancement of the role of the engaged cultural critic. In this, he has helped articulate a powerful vision of ongoing analytical attentiveness to the dynamism of cultural life. But the analytical agility of which he advocates requires an elusive but essential disposition that has been, for the most part, under-valued in how we understand the contributions of cultural analysis: hope for the possibility of a future that moves toward broad egalitarian objectives.

Stay with me, dear reader. Let us return momentarily to the 1980s, that key decade in Grossberg's thought which was also a time when an American version of cultural studies was in formation. Forty years later, it's easy to forget how important *The Terminator* (1984) was as a popular text and a conceptual puzzle to think with: challenging gender norms, expanding genre categories, figuring limits to technological advancement, and innovating on what a low-budget movie might look like. Viewers today have to resituate themselves in a nearly unimaginable world in which James Cameron and Arnold Schwarzenegger are not yet the towering popular and influential personalities they were to become, and before the figure of the cyborg had receive a special feminist-poststructuralist stamp from Donna Haraway. The movie's time-travel conceit is unusually applied. Characters do not jump around, back-and-forth, in time, as one might expect. Instead, the movie depicts a future battle that returns to be fought in the present. While all the conundrums of the circularity of time-travel narratives are there, *The Terminator* most directly poses the question: what do you do when the future comes for you? What do you do when, out-of-the-blue, you are implicated in the state of the world of tomorrow? What happens when you are called upon, hailed, to recognize that you are history (i.e., that you are what was) and an agent of history (i.e., that you will be) simultaneously? Consider the implications of those questions as prompted by the film, a tale of the rise of a technological dystopia and the birth of a

revolutionary leader. Truth is, we are all, always, implicated in the state of the world to come, but we don't always feel it or act with considered responsibility upon it. To recognize that we are "the past" and "becoming past" is a way of saying that we are made of history even while we are making history. If there is a spark that reveals this to you, what will you do? (Maybe just don't wait for a cyborg visiting from the future to motivate your sense of commitment.) The endpoint of so much of Grossberg's work is to ask us this, to challenge us to see the tasks ahead, and to accept them as our responsibility to work on, and to work on them together.

And this lesson, echoing through the entirety of Grossberg's work, is as valuable today, in our conjuncture, as ever. I leave you with one last appeal to the essential, ongoing, task of working on and with the conditions that make us. In April 2023, elected Democrats Justin J. Pearson and Justin Jones were expelled from the Tennessee House of Representatives for leading a protest action in the House about the urgency of gun control legislation. Their actions followed several mass shootings in their state and elsewhere, and the apparent immovability of the gun-rights-maximalism regime demanded more dramatic and disruptive tactics. They were not out of the House for long, and the expulsions drew even more attention to the intransigence of various legislatures, not only Tennessee's, to respond to the American crisis of gun violence. Upon being reinstated, "the Justins" both gave fearless speeches in the best tradition of rousing and righteous political oratory. They laid out the essential fact that struggles for rights and freedoms for all never end and must be perpetually reengaged and renewed. Commenting on the ineffectiveness of their temporary expulsion from the House, Pearson scoffed, "You can't expel hope. You can't expel justice." He concluded with exactly the statement most need to hear in troubled and troubling times, a statement that sums up a major theme of Grossberg's cultural analysis: "Let's get back to work."

NOTE

1. For more on this event, see Acland 2024.

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4

Standin' at the Crossroad with Lawrence Grossberg: The Time and Life of Cultural Studies

RAINER WINTER

Max Weber believed in the importance of strictly separating politics and science (academic work). In politics, the battle is about values, while science is the realm of facts and strives for objectivity. From the very beginning, the field of cultural studies has challenged this separation by placing the emergence and consequences of values in a historical and social context in order to identify possible alternatives and bring about a different future. In his conjunctural analyses, Larry Grossberg explores the balance of power and the possibilities for transforming these relations. He demonstrates that academic work can be coupled with the aspiration to hope for a better world and to fight for it. First, based on personal encounters with Larry, I would like to illustrate how he embodies the cultural studies project in a charismatic way, and how he became a trailblazer for many of us. I will then go on to discuss important aspects of his theoretical and interventionist work.

THE AFFECTIVE COMMITMENT TO CULTURAL STUDIES. ENCOUNTERS WITH LARRY

SCENE 1: TAMPERE 1996

Blues music is playing at high volume in the large lecture hall of the Tampere Congress Centre. The anguished, all but screaming voice of Robert Johnson, expressing torment, despair, but also vitality, resonates through the room. Accompanied by his guitar, an inescapable rhythm

gradually builds. Larry chose to play the Cross Road Blues by way of introduction to his plenary talk at the first Crossroads of Cultural Studies conference. It is said that the musician sold his soul to the devil to become the most successful blues musician of all time. Larry makes a compelling case when he argues that the institutionalization of cultural studies at English-speaking universities harbors the danger of a similar fate befalling this critical and emancipatory project. The pact with the devil, in this case with capitalist and business-oriented universities, he contends, promises social legitimacy and power, but threatens to extinguish the "soul" of cultural studies. From the outset, these were not a purely academic endeavor, but an intellectual attempt to understand what is happening culturally and socially. They analyze how daily life is linked to economic and political power structures and how it is articulated through culture. Their objective is to contribute to transforming these power relations by means of intellectual work, to dismantle inequalities and expand the opportunities for action.

In the discussion that followed, Georg Ritzer described Larry's style of delivery as prophetic. Those of us who were not merely interested in cultural analysis, but rather understood cultural studies as a socio-critical project, were enthralled by his talk. In Germany, on the other hand, what was beginning to take shape at the same time was the field of Cultural Sciences, largely stemming from the Humanities, and without any significant connection to the tradition of critical theories. Grossberg upheld the cultural studies project that originated in Birmingham under the leadership of Stuart Hall, systematizing it from a theoretical point of view and carrying it forward with great dedication. His passion, his humor, his origins and firm roots in the counterculture and his intellectual earnestness unleashed an affective magnetism that we did not wish to escape. We not only read his texts, but translated them, published them and discussed them avidly in our seminars and at conferences.

SCENE 2: KLAGENFURT 2005

In 2005, we hosted the Landscapes of Cultural Studies conference in Klagenfurt on Lake Wörther. Our goal was to put the Alps-Adriatic region on the cultural studies map. Larry agreed to give a plenary address. We were delighted that he was willing to undertake the lengthy journey from North Carolina to southern Austria. These were intense days of intellectual

debate, conversation, and conviviality. Scholars interested and active in the field of cultural studies arrived not only from Vienna, but also from Slovenia, Germany, Switzerland, England, Scotland, Belgium, Poland, Finland, Croatia, Turkey and the USA. They gave talks and discussed the future of cultural studies. Some of the younger colleagues from Germany engaged in intense discussions with Larry about rock and popular music. Here too he managed to inspire. It was above all the philosophical anchoring of his analyses that proved ground-breaking for this group.

SCENE 3: KINGSTON 2008

I met Larry in the large marquee set up on the Mona campus of Kingston University to serve as a venue for the Crossroads Conference. The organizers succeeded in creating a unique atmosphere, ranging from an impressive garden party at the residence of the Prime Minister, who was not in attendance, to workshops on the Rastafarian way of life and a campus fashion show. There were numerous presentations by Caribbean colleagues who spoke emphatically about the importance of cultural studies in their region and within the process of decolonization. Sadly, Stuart Hall, who gave a plenary talk at the Crossroads Conference in Birmingham in 2000, was unable to join the conference due to ill health. Together with Mikko Lehtonen we discussed his work, which originated in Great Britain in the context of the New Left and always remained true to this tradition. Larry noted the problem space it has opened up and the extent to which it embraces the analysis of contextuality and conjunctures. Once again it became apparent to me that Larry not only represents the project of cultural studies intellectually, but embodies it with vigor, energy and passion. Later, I purchased a T-shirt on campus that had the words “No Surrender” on it, which I still cherish to this day.

When I look back, I am deeply grateful for my encounters with Larry at the Crossroads conferences from Tampere to the most recent “real” Crossroads in Shanghai in 2018, but also in Klagenfurt and during my time as visiting researcher in Chapel Hill. Following this brief and personal introduction, I would like to outline why I believe that his contribution to cultural studies is so significant.

THE PRACTICE OF CULTURAL STUDIES AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE WORLD

Cultural studies in its present form owes a great deal to the work and influence of Lawrence Grossberg. Along with Stuart Hall, he is the author who has studied the history, theories and methodology of cultural studies in great depth. He has produced thorough and synthesizing analyses in which he has unraveled the complexities and perspectives of this intellectual discipline and movement in the context of the changing political circumstances since the late 1950s and the development of theory since the second half of the 20th century. He is also one of the handful of theorists in cultural studies who has delineated and deepened the philosophical dimensions of this project in the context of modernity. Here, his most eminent counterparts are Spinoza, Kant, Heidegger, and Deleuze. His philosophical analysis of the affective dimension of the lived experience has unlocked a new and profound understanding of the popular (Grossberg 1992; Winter 2017).

While an outsider might struggle to reconcile the various formations of cultural studies as a coherent project, as a union within the difference, Grossberg offers cogent evidence showing how they arose in response to different social and cultural contexts, what their strengths and weaknesses are, how they interrelate, and how they contribute to continually reconfiguring cultural studies as an intellectual project that responds to the challenges of the present in nuanced and differentiated ways.

In Grossberg's view, cultural studies represents a critical and political project that analyses and critiques power relations and seeks to identify opportunities for transformation and empowerment. His theoretically and conceptually sophisticated analyses illustrate why intellectual effort is important and indispensable if we are to understand the present and its societal conflicts. In this context, cultural studies is obligated to a "radical contextualism" (Grossberg 2010). First, it seeks to find and formulate the relevant questions concerning the cultural and social contexts to be analyzed. Then it arrives at (preliminary) answers through the appropriation of theories, through empirical research and intellectual syntheses. This is a highly demanding and elaborate undertaking that requires diligence, responsibility and commitment.

Grossberg repeatedly points out that cultural studies is interventionist in its approach and bound to engage in dialogue. It aspires to contribute to a better understanding of contexts and to both support those affected

in changing them and improve their living conditions. While the Cultural Sciences in Germany and Austria are largely apolitical, often ignoring social issues by replacing society with culture, cultural studies, as the oeuvre of Lawrence Grossberg clearly shows, is committed to an "emancipatory interest in knowledge" (Habermas 1986) that strives to contribute to liberation through reflection and analysis. It explores how our understanding of both ourselves and the world are determined by power structures, and how we can change these structures. It also heightens our awareness of the ways in which we are connected to others and of the differences that separate us. By the same token, since its inception, cultural studies has been exploring how the culture industry attempts to prevent social transformations and how critical competence in decoding can subvert a media-generated, seemingly authoritative reality. Furthermore, it demonstrates that social grievances such as marginality, poverty, or social exclusion are not consequences of individual action, but instead are rooted in context. Hence, it is necessary to explore the complex interplay of social, economic, cultural, and political forces-- the respective conjuncture—in order to determine the positioning of individuals within it, their disempowerment, and their (potential) agency. The knowledge cultural studies generates aims to expose the contingency of current power relations and explore the possibilities for changing them.

In its analysis of (social) constellations, cultural studies shares common ground with the transdisciplinary work of Max Weber on the relationship between religion, economy, and society, and with the critical analyses of Charles Wright Mills, who, inspired by the sociological classics, examined power relations in post-war America. Unlike Weber, who strictly separated academic work from politics, Mills' approach—like cultural studies—skillfully combined the passions of intellectual and political engagement. Cultural studies seeks to do justice to the complexity of cultural and social processes. In an interview with Grossberg, James Carey, one of Grossberg's mentors at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and one of the founders of American cultural studies, which is heavily influenced by pragmatism, says:

> If we think of cultural studies as a kind of open intellectual formation in which, in principle, you could say, "I'm not only going to examine literature and the growth of the global economy, but I'm going to look at other things, policing and surveillance, human welfare, population, immigration, these

> sort of things." For me, that's what I wanted cultural studies to be. It would be a place in which people were interested, and willing, to transverse certain disciplinary lines. (Carey and Grossberg 2006, 208)

When the members of the Birmingham Centre led by Richard Hoggart and Stuart Hall began their earnest engagement with social issues in the 1960s and coined the term cultural studies, Carey, who was greatly influenced by Max Weber, the Chicago School, and John Dewey on the one hand, and Marshall McLuhan and Harold Innis on the other, was also using this term at the same time—unaware of developments in Great Britain—to designate his field of teaching and research, which he rigorously set apart from all forms of positivism. During his studies, Grossberg (1997) became acquainted with both the American and British variants of cultural studies, and elaborating on their similarities and differences in his work he was able to relate them to each other in a fruitful way. Carey, along with Hall and Grossberg, assumes that the problems and research questions that occupy cultural studies, as well as the theories and methods that are applied, constitute responses to specific historical and social constellations.

With this in mind, Grossberg has long advocated combining cultural studies with economics, engaging with economic questions and pursuing this not solely theoretically, but by examining concrete phenomena. As early as 2004, he made this appeal during his plenary talk at the Crossroads International Conference in Urbana-Champaign. It is especially in the economic sphere that social changes and the battles for modernity surface in all their clarity. At the same time, Grossberg deconstructs today's widely held assumption that everything hinges on economic factors. The neoliberal dreamer, he suggests, wants a society in which nothing exists but exchange values, commodity relations, and the logic of the market. He writes:

> The economy is never simply a matter of capitalism, and capitalism is never just a matter of economics. Economic forces and relations, institutions, and languages do not exist apart from other things happening in society, including political, technological, and cultural opportunities and changes. (Grossberg 2005, 249)

On the one hand, Grossberg emphasizes that the economy is characterized by irrational factors and is full of contradictions. On the other hand, he urges us not to equate social reality with economic dreams of modernity. It takes the differentiated analysis of the economy, politics and culture, as well as their interconnections and entanglements, to provide insights

into the current configuration of modernity with all of its contradictions and conflicts. Then, he adds, it will become clear how it is changing and what possibilities might lie in a new modernity. This requires dedicated intellectual effort.

> Now more than ever, we need better knowledge, better intellectual work, and better scholarship. Good scholarship is always open to following the unexpected path, perhaps the one laid out by opponents rather than the one signposted by allies. Good scholarship is always to produce surprises, to lead to unexpected places. That is the real value of intellectual work. It has the ability to discover new possibilities in the present circumstances, and to point to an unimagined future. (Grossberg 2005, 11)

From the outset, Lawrence Grossberg (1992; 2018) has examined the rise and success of the American right in the US. This is largely why he speaks today of a pessimism of the will. However, he calls for an optimism of the mind that, through better knowledge and better narratives, will help bring about a more just and free world. Though Lawrence Grossberg is more pessimistic about a better future today than he was in his early days as an author, speaker, and dialogical interlocutor, he remains unreservedly, passionately, and militantly committed to the project of cultural studies to this day. But perhaps the conflicts of the present also herald a new "age of revolts" (Maffesoli 2021), which resist the totalitarian tendencies that are growing ever more prevalent. The battle continues!

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5

Other Stories Are Possible

JO LITTLER

Lawrence Grossberg once wrote that cultural studies "is about understanding the present in the service of the future" (Grossberg 2010, 1). With cultural studies, we understand the moment of "now" by using the critical tools at our disposal, gleaned creatively from a range of disciplines and hybridized to pick apart the power politics of the present. Doing this work is to interrogate the conjuncture: that potent if slippery term for the balance of political, economic, and cultural forces that temporarily solidify at least long enough to give us an impression of social common sense. In the 1970s in Birmingham in the UK, the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) picked up the term from that early twentieth-century Sardinian, Antonio Gramsci, and used it to make sense of their times: of that "authoritarian populist" political moment; of the rise of a new right in the midst of new forms of social liberalism; of post-Fordist, Anglo-European early neoliberalism; of a distinctive and shifting structure of feeling. Having moved through the intellectual dynamism, anti-establishment ethos, and productive creativity of CCSS himself, Grossberg both expanded the range of theoretical tools we are able to use to understand the conjuncture and translated its theoretical frame to different times and places. He threw theories of affect, of feeling, and machinic assemblages of Deleuze and Guattari in the mix, giving us a range of new ways to understand the messiness of any given socio-cultural moment.

I am hugely grateful to Larry for sustaining and expanding cultural studies' key project of conjunctural analysis, both in theory and in practice, and for his critical, supportive, and helpful role in developing my own work. He was very encouraging to this particular younger academic from quite early on. He let me co-edit an issue of the journal *Cultural Studies*, for instance, on "Cultural Studies and Anti-Consumerism" (Binkley and Littler 2008). We were able to bring in scholars from adjacent disciplines including geography and philosophy alongside established cultural stud-

ies scholars, and to include much younger as well as established voices, in order to interrogate what it meant to be "against" the waste and excess and exploitation of contemporary consumerism: what strategies and politics were working and what wasn't, the multifaceted nature of resistance, how to register all its complexities, histories, and present. Larry encouraged this project and was happy to include all the articles, even the ones with a perspective he didn't necessarily agree with. I continue to appreciate this mode of being—by how, in working for egalitarian, socialist democratic politics, he valued debate, deliberation, and an agonistic academic space. Looking back at this moment from the vantage point of the present, where the necessity of talking about difference and unpicking ever-increasing complexity has become even more pressing, that tendency appears to me to be particularly valuable.

I first encountered the authorial name "Lawrence Grossberg" as one of the co-editors with Cary Nelson and Paula Treichler of the enormous 1992 edited tome *Cultural Studies* (with its pink, black, and grey graphic cover, so redolent of the designs of the time). It was a hugely influential book, which I had come across in the early 1990s during my undergraduate degree. For me, as for many of my student contemporaries, the range and vigor of this book made academic work interesting again and opened up a range of diverting new ideas and possibilities. At the 2014 Birmingham conference celebrating fifty years of the CCCS, in a room where there were many names I had only ever seen on the page rather than in person—and so *very* many of them!—we spoke on the same panel engaging with the ideas and traffic between cultural studies' many pasts and presents (Connell and Hilton 2016; Boyce Kay 2017). There was a point when we discussed that book as being part of a second wave of cultural studies; and with gentle comedy it was suggested that it represented the "New Testament" of Cultural Studies, with the early CCCS work forming, by related contrast, the "Old." One of my key memories of this event, which was to a large degree a reunion for people who had worked at Birmingham, was that Larry made the cultural studies newbies/latecomers/outsiders (my own talk began "I was not at CCCS") feel so very welcome.[1] It was an experience of supportive education, of necessary validation; his manner was intellectually engaging and intergenerationally encouraging.

Today, what his practice inspires me to do and to think about—or what lines it encourages me to move along—are, I think, threefold. First, to attend to the complexities and contingencies of the conjuncture: to

how everything—its structures, systems, politics, cultures, ideologies, affects—is in flux and constant movement. Second, to emphasize that we can, and should, explore *new* ways of understanding the conjuncture (and here I am thinking of the generative power of his use of the concept of "mattering maps" (Grossberg 1992). And third, that we should try to find ways to intervene: the point is to change it, after all. His wonderfully incisive recent book *Under the Cover of Chaos* analyses the rise of Donald Trump and the battle for the American right. It diagnoses the forces that Trump has "learned to 'ride'" (Grossberg 2018, 9); the passive nihilism that he has harnessed; the political splits and regrouping of reactionary conservativism that he is part of. The book makes the case that we need to not only analyze the stories of the present, but to create new ones. "I believe" writes Grossberg, "that it is the responsibility of political intellectuals to tell the best story they can" (Grossberg 2018, 16).

Such "diagnostic stories" are critical in that they look for the conditions of possibility of our experience; they seek out pessimism in order to find the grounds under which it might be transformed into optimism. This is a gauntlet Lawrence Grossberg/Larry/Professor Grossberg lays before us. It is a serious challenge to analyze and diagnose the mess of the present, to explain what is going on, to attend to the complexities of the situation, whilst being lucid enough to be understandable, and convincing enough to help open up spaces of intervention. Failure is always an option, Grossberg writes, in both galvanizing and reassuring fashion; the question is, can one use it productively?

No one can do this work on their own, and this volume will, I am sure, show many of the different ways in which people have tried to pursue such work. Like many others, and working *with* many others, I have also tried (and failed!) to pursue the Grossberg methodology of producing such "diagnostic stories." This has included work on the stories we tell about social mobility, of moving onwards and upwards; of success and meritocracy. Looking at the idea of meritocracy in a conjunctural fashion meant considering its genealogies and varied geographies as well as how it is being mobilized in an increasingly neoliberal nationalist present: at its poisonous mantra of individualized competitiveness, at its changing racialized and gendered complexions, at its luminous parables of progress in the media (Littler 2018). It meant parsing the political challenges to it,

considering what alternative, democratic stories of social progress, of *co-operation*, could be presented instead; and then extending that conversation out into public spaces and places (Littler 2018; 2024).

That work simply wouldn't have been possible without Larry's galvanizing example and skill, and his energy and effort in sustaining and reinvigorating the tradition of cultural studies in which I and he and so many others have been formed, shaped, and (anti)schooled. And so I would like to thank him—to thank you, Larry—for emphasizing that other stories are possible and necessary; for showing that no-one can do it on their own; and for encouraging us to try, together. To try more, fail more, to keep going, to work together; to try to make it all less terrible, to celebrate, invigorate, liberate, educate; to try to make it better.

NOTE

1. At a later stage, he was also very kind to my children, which always endears parents/carers to someone, remembering their birthdays and even putting a photograph of one of them (who was caught pretending to read it) on the cover of one issue the journal *Cultural Studies*.

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6

We Still Gotta Get Out of This Place, or Passion Is No Ordinary Word

GREGORY J. SEIGWORTH

> Passion is no ordinary word
> Ain't manufactured or just another sound
> That you hear at night
>
> —Graham Parker, "Passion Is No Ordinary Word"
> from *Squeezing Out Sparks* (1979)

Although I officially arrived in Urbana-Champaign, Illinois to start my Ph.D. in August 1990, a few months *after* the behemoth cultural studies conference that produced the rather infamous 788 page doorstop *Cultural Studies* collection (Grossberg, Nelson, and Treichler 1993), I did manage to attend that conference in all its glory and could certainly feel its afterglow and the quivers of its aftershocks that fall semester. It felt like very much like the place to be right there, right then. And it was.

Truthfully, I felt very lucky to be at the University of Illinois at all. Not realizing that Illinois had two departments (The Institute of Communications Research and Speech Communication) with "communication" in their names, I had applied for doctoral study in the wrong Communication department. However, I was rescued from my mistake when the department chair of Speech Communication Jesse Delia rang me one morning in early 1990 to ask if I'd actually meant to apply to their department: the one where Lawrence Grossberg taught. One couldn't help but notice that my letter of application was, after all, chock-full of references to the work of Grossberg. Paraphrasing the key moment in this phone call from Delia: "If you intended to apply here, we are ready and willing to accept your application." I guess you know my reply.

I came to Illinois having already read, absorbed, misunderstood, and occasionally rejected most of Grossberg's published work to that point. And when I met with Larry in his office on day one, he had the manuscript for the forthcoming *We Gotta Get Out of This Place* (1992) sitting there. Maybe it was on his desk, maybe on his windowsill—I cannot quite remember. Mostly what stands out is that it seemed massive (it was). The manuscript required two separate spiral bindings to hold all of its pages together. That first semester Larry proposed an independent study; I would read the draft of his new book along with any background reading necessary to bring me up to speed on its formation/formulations, bring questions, and we'd discuss. What?! Perfect. A year later I would also serve as the teaching assistant in Grossberg's large lecture undergraduate popular music/popular culture course "Rock and Roll and Youth Culture" where I took notes on everything that emerged from Larry's mouth, read all of the assigned books for the class, and drafted the course exams (which Larry would then review/revise before administering).

Courses with Grossberg at the front of the classroom in full-on lecture mode were always absolutely riveting: in the case of grad courses, this meant three straight hours of lecture. Just Larry, a piece or two of chalk, an audience, and his lecture notes. Grossberg drafted all of his lectures by hand on the long yellow legal pad pages but he hardly ever seemed to read from these notes. In those days, Larry actively discouraged much discussion (undergraduate and graduate alike) until the end of class (if there was time) because it ruptured the structured flow of his argument and it threatened to cause the room's energy and our shared focus to scatter. Oh sure, Larry would sometimes pause at the end of sentences to interject a quick "right?" (as in: "isn't that right?") but it was meant rhetorically. This was never an invitation to enter into dialogue or debate. We'd merely nod our assent and Larry continued right on, burning brightly. I don't know how he did it, but nearly every set of individually numbered pages of lecture notes that I took in Larry's classes (grad or undergrad) ended on page 100 exactly. Weird but true. Perhaps not so surprisingly, there is something almost rock concert performance-esque about the classroom experience with Grossberg. I am not the first to note that the encounter with Larry in written-recorded form (on the page) is one thing but the live experience (the in-concert version) is where you truly find Larry in his element. Live Grossberg is the best Grossberg. Right? Affirmative nod.[1]

I should back up a bit more biographically and note that I first found "Lawrence Grossberg" on the page because of my own undying devotion to rock and roll and popular music. In the early-mid 1980s I was working as a recording studio engineer, assistant managing an independent record store, and occasionally doing a fill-in disc jockey gig at a small radio station in rural northwestern Pennsylvania. My music-buddy and mentor Stan (about a decade older than me) had gone off to graduate school, and he mailed me a copy of Grossberg's essay "Another Boring Day in Paradise: Rock and Roll and the Empowerment of Everyday Life." (Sidenote: *Another Boring Day in Paradise* was also the original working title for *We Gotta Get Out of This Place*.) Here, in Grossberg, was someone who was talking about a realm of culture that I felt I already knew pretty damn well but utilizing a vocabulary that I could not fully understand. I'd read a lot of rock criticism/popular journalism (Greil Marcus, Robert Christgau, Ellen Willis, Dave Marsh) and a small amount of the popular music sociology (Simon Frith, Dick Hebdige) but this was a whole other, next-level thing going on.

In his 1984 "Boring Day" essay (and other writings I was soon to track down), Larry talked about rock and roll as a set of practices ("practices of strategic empowerment") and, most emphatically, not through the deciphering of lyrics, musical notation, or any other manner of textually-based interpretation. Larry was linking the whole matter of rock and roll to broader questions of culture, political organization, everyday life, generations and youth, and surges of feeling: even if that sometimes meant, in a particularly favorite lyric of Larry's, "feeling bad rather than feeling nothing at all" (Zevon 1982). These kind of linkages of popular music to wider socio-cultural sites and events—later I'd learn that, in cultural studies discourse, such linkages were called "articulations"—seemed an almost quixotic undertaking. Larry advanced his essay's argument by proposing various social science-y sounding hypotheses about rock's status and, then, by creating gridded boxes with "affirmation (critical/experiential/utopian)" and "negation (oppositional/alternative/independent)" on the X-Y axes that sometimes produced the oddest, counter-intuitive groupings (Grossberg 1997, 48). How, I wondered, could Culture Club and Joy Division have ended up occupying the same box? Plus, there was postmodernity to wrestle with, and something known as "hegemony," and, really, the essay was just a whole nest densely woven with theoretical, musical, and rhetorical entanglements. It felt disorienting (what was it that I thought I knew about music, its urgency, and its circulation before?) yet,

intuitively, I knew that this kind of writing and analysis was also pointing toward something tremendously important at the same time. And, more than anything, I—wanted—to—find—to—crawl (or claw)—my—way—into—this—particular nest.

There were a couple of terms and conceptualizations that hooked me from the get-go. Affect, of course, first and foremost. Affective alliances. Mattering maps. Yes, oh yes. But there was also one particular term—intimately aligned with affect—that also helpfully signaled Larry's particular understanding of affect: cathexis. Cathexis is a concept drawn from Sigmund Freud's work in psychoanalysis. It concerns the binding of energies—psychic yet also material—that attach to, take up residence in, and then come to animate objects, people, ideas, events, really anything. It is the relay of empowerment (or, if decathexis, disempowerment) that gets strung between bodies, powers, and desires. Cathexes are emotionally-charged bundlings, knottings and unknottings of resonant affections, ways of storing energy in a thing or a practice or an idea, and then returning to this thing (again and again) to be revivified, perhaps to trace out a halting circle or hum a refrain, to feel momentarily safe and/or at least anchored to some little glowing thing in one's often-perilous world (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 311). Quick question: Why do you return to specific songs at particular moments in your life in order to shift out of (or continue to stick to) a feeling or mood? And why does singing along with that song's refrain always kick you so extra-hard? Short answer: cathexis.

To Larry's ears, cathexis underwrites the snug-ness of fit in the affective sensibilities of fandom: not just you, but other people are singing that song! Maybe, when done collectively, tying and untying its knot of affect over and over could move people in very particular (or peculiar) ways. More broadly, cathexis gives vivid-feeling contour to the shapes and tempos of cultural belongings and non-belongings that circulate through (and as) music itself. These belongings and un-belongings can come to register as a momentary wedge of distinction or sometimes as a much more pronounced line of demarcation about issues beyond or bigger than any song. Grossberg (1997) writes that "rock and roll inscribes and cathects a boundary within social reality only by its otherness, its existence outside of the affective possibilities of the ruling culture (the hegemony)" (31). One set to work then capturing this sense of how, in popular music, affect-as-cathexis marks boundaries and carves out territories within (and sometimes against) the often smoothing, often dulling actions (i.e., hegemony)

of one's dominant culture. Such a fundamental formulation serves as a near-unshakeable article of faith in all of Grossberg's writing on popular music and popular culture in the 1980s through the 90s. Rock and roll mattered because it was a key (perhaps *the*) key site of everyday resistance to the most constrictive/regressive ideologies of that era. But you really won't find "cathexis" appearing in any sustained fashion beyond this earliest work by Grossberg. Instead he increasingly substitutes another, more commonplace word for cathexis: "investment."

If one were to create a word-cloud of the most frequently used terms across the entire expanse of Grossberg's academic career, it is doubtful that any single word looms larger than variations on the words "invest"/"investment" (okay, maybe "conjuncture" or "articulation"). In *We Gotta Get Out of This Place*, this notion of affective investment is used to describe "differentiating machines." Larry writes: "Affect plays a crucial role in . . . differentiating machines. The power of affect derives, not from its content, but from the fact that it is always a vector of people's investment in reality. . . . Affect has a real power over difference, a power to invest difference and to make certain differences matter in different ways" (Grossberg 1992, 105). Grossberg then goes on to use some iteration of the words "invest" or "investment" five more times over the course of the next two paragraphs. Across these two paragraphs, "invest" is doing similar work to cathexis as seen above—marking a difference, forming a boundary around people's sense of lived reality, signaling too something about the magnitude of strength or tenuousness in this energetics of mattering, addressing—in various ways—their resistances and accommodations to the present. This felt sense of empowerment (and, yes, disempowerment is always on the table too) is not internal to the binding of energy (as found in its contents) but is located in how affective investment draws external differences—class position, political orientation, bodily pleasures, gender roles, racial affiliations, etc.—into relation, or, further pulls them apart. Affect—as investment, as cathexis—differentiates, creates zones or territories of intensity, and acts to give measure (as an inclining or declining gradation of forces across time and space) to action/agency and its potentiality.[2]

However, for Grossberg, there are two primary dimensions of affect that must be considered, either by finding their points of relay and resonance or sometimes by holding each up to the light separately. In the introduction to *Dancing in Spite of Myself*, he writes: "Drawing upon Freud, I began to think about affect as the plane of cathexis; drawing upon

Nietzsche, I began to think about affect as the plane of effectivity (the ability to effect and be effected). My dilemma has always been the relationship between these two understandings of affect" (1997, 13).[3] Yes, as we have seen, Grossberg focuses initially on affect, in the midst of its enacting and its refraining, as cathexis. Any fan of popular culture, especially of music, understands full well the transformational properties engaged as sounds and bodies intermingle, when energy transferences collectively arise, cycle, recur, dissipate. But this other, second mode of affect—less a resonating point of impact or cocoon of intensity (as cathexis) but better grasped as an expansive plane of effectivity or affectivity—is decidedly harder to pin down analytically or empirically. Approached more intuitively, this plane of e/affectivity is present, real, felt, in process/excess but it is never determinately and finally-fully actualized by any particular enacting. Affect, in this case, resides as a fully immersive, transindividual field, as an immanent everywhere-ness of the capacities-to empower or disempower: akin to "potentia" (for Spinoza) or "virtual" (for Bergson). Question: So, when you are *not* in a boisterous crowd of fellow fans or *not* encountering, more privately, that song that triggers those feelings, where does that feeling or capacity of empowerment go? What is it doing? Anything? A not-so-short answer: Like the tangibility of an atmosphere that hovers about an event or like the residues of a memory that cannot be readily recalled (because such involuntary memory is not "in" you but, rather, in the context of encounter waiting for its differential re-animation nonetheless), "power" sinks into those relations that persist/insist/subsist beyond the immediately personal and interpersonal. Not restricted to only what we consider to be "human" but belonging just as much to the surroundings or "environment" (as the arrangement of all sorts of things), power—when it slips beneath notice—passes into shared sensibilities/moods as they become situated into systems or configurations of materializing practices. Or, more or less, what Raymond Williams meant when he conjured up the concept of "structures of feeling."

Affect as cathexis (Larry's first mode) is a vibratory point of contact that sticks (to you and another body, to you and a crowd, to its own return), an investment in a world that can—by turns—empower and disempower. Affect as capacity (Larry's second mode) is a field or plane of potential: enhancing and/or thwarting the agency of more-than-material bodies, individual or collective at the same time. The first mode does not, by default, bear any particular political valence (left or right or indifferent)

although it can be articulated to a politics, and that was Larry's project, his wager, in the 80s and 90s. His ardent pedagogic/fan-oriented task was to show how rock and roll's empowering potentials could be aligned with and, thus, help to further progressive political aims. Meanwhile, the second mode of affect is inescapably on the terrain of the political (no pressing need to articulate! it is already there—in the ongoing modification of an arrangement of practices, sensibilities, things), and this landscape, in Larry's view, must be mapped as the place we generally gotta get out of.

In his essay "On 'The State of Rock,'" Larry cautions that he does not want to propose affect, in this second—potential/immanent/virtual—mode, as "some pure psychological energy erupting through the social structures of power" (1997, 111). Gilles Deleuze (who has always served as Grossberg's chief philosophical point of reference on these matters) rejects any sense of pure psychological energy too. To repeat, this dimension of affect is not psychological or subjectively interior or even necessarily human-centered. It is found in the force or intensity (however minimal) of what arises in the articulation or "between-ness" of the encounter of two or more entities, practices, bodies, voices, etc. Take Tracy Chapman's "Fast Car" for example: think of what happens when fans at a concert coalesce at certain peaks of musical/lyrical/cumulative intensity to sing along to "I-I had a feeling I belonged / I-I had feeling I could be someone, be someone, be someone" (Chapman 1988). Can you viscerally feel this plane's force-relation as it rises up, as mattering slips over meaning, as the tiny hairs on your arms stand on end or as that self-betraying emotive catch happens in your throat? While not along for this particular ride with Chapman, Spinoza understands such moments/movements as revealing the plane of immanence that both exists independently but also underwrites any and every potential point of articulation, snap/break in connection, lines of affiliation or flight. The composition of this plane is always ongoing, modulating and undulating with every point, snap, line that emerges, sticks, faded, returns (or keeps fleeing). In other words, these forces or intensities don't pre-exist the plane (nor does the plane pre-exist the forces) but the forces and plane co-construct and reassemble moment by moment, in a coalescence of continuous discontinuity that shapes a life (or several), that shifts through the infinitely varying sensations of livingness. Following Spinoza, Deleuze refers to this plane-like dimension of affect as "desire"—an indicator of how the "potentia" of existence will always be wider (and, in some sense, wilder: the actually

lived + its variations) than any interlocking dynamic of power/resistance, or, possible/real. Just don't get too romantic or overly optimistic about desire as somehow all about goodness and light and positivity because desire can also head off in directions that are absolutely, catastrophically dark (we'll briefly alight on Grossberg's diagnoses of the "affective landscapes" of Trump soon).

One doesn't have to look incredibly hard to discover that Grossberg does have his own designation for this second dimension of affect as a perpetually shape-shifting and intensive plane: not "potentia," not "the virtual," not desire but . . . passion. In that earlier imagined word-cloud derived from Grossberg's entire oeuvre, "PASSION" looms and lurks in omniscient ALL CAPS alongside and beneath every single thing Larry has ever uttered or written. In fact, I'd assert that passion is the truest password to the other major "machine" you'll find in *We Gotta Get Out of This Place*. Alongside the differentiating machine of cathexis, passion names the diffuse, often riotous energies that engage the "territorializing/deterritorializing machine" as the single clamorous, loose-limbed assemblage whose forces (both incorporeal and material) cut into or cordon off often unforeseen experiential frontiers within and across cultural/political/economic/aesthetic/social/technological spheres, re-arranging—by expanding or contracting—the boundaries around the very organization and the matter of what matters. For instance, consider the fresh configuration of "territories" or terrains of sense-making that have been established in the wake of 21st century authoritarianism and conspiracism. To map these emergent political spheres across their long, often uneven, and multi-layered gestations, and then to trace along the cusp of their maneuverings is to recognize the workings of passion (and, yes, these are—most definitely—not at all the same passions held by left intellectuals) and, thus, to bear witness to passion's visceral-capture of a body-politic: this is what a territorializing/de-territorializing machine does. Quick question: Who are these MAGA people and where did they come from? Short answer: You won't know until you map their passions, their multiple terrains, and untold forces of affiliation and confrontation. For Grossberg, passion is the motor that drives cultural studies' articulation as it engages its "and . . . and . . . and" connective mode of operation. As such, passion provides the juice for Grossberg's cultural studies' method of conjuncturalism.

But there's a strange little hitch in all of this: while passion is thoroughly present as an unwavering, unflinching "commitment" at an autobiographical level for Larry, it has remained under-articulated by him at the level of theorization. That is, despite its omnipresence in how, say, Grossberg engages with and exalts the practices of cultural studies and how he condemns/laments its failures, to my knowledge he has never ventured a truly full-fledged account of "passion" as an integral part of his (more impersonal, less autobiographical) analytical assemblage or its political ontology. For instance, while the introduction to *We Gotta Get Out of This Place* is entitled "Theory, Politics, and Passion," theory and politics both are explicitly addressed and elaborated in the book's set-up but the discussion of "passion" is relegated to the last paragraph and is mainly framed as the deeply felt fervor that animates the very nature of Larry's embodied practice of worldly engagement ("the occasional rhetoric of certainty to which my passion sometimes leads me" (Grossberg 1992, 33)). This is Larry's own distinctive "voice" of passion in and for cultural studies—or what Melissa Gregg (2006) has called, and Grossberg likewise acknowledges as, his "prophetic register" (100). In part, this heightened personal stake for making time-space for passionate practice got accentuated as a response to critiques that Larry faced in the 1980-90s—coming from within and outside of the academy—of fan-oriented humanities study and the development of new courses focused on popular culture. Such critiques were (and still are) directed at the deluded, punch-drunk-in-love academic as a self-confessed fan of their objects of study, always already too close to ever achieve the requisite distance or studied indifference to offer up a dispassionately neutralized evaluation of whatever shared phenomena, pop idol, or fan culture happened to be under examination. I can still feel Grossberg's ever ready-to-engage battle posture showing through in how he defended his undergraduate courses on youth culture and popular music when I was his teaching assistant.[4] Maybe it is because passion can be found in every nook and cranny of Larry's universe (as voice, as prophetic vision, as evangelical-like commitment to cultural studies as an empowering practice in an eminently disempowering world, as why it is better to feel bad than feel nothing at all) that passion escaped more conceptual notice and, thus, also eluded any need for elaboration at the level of theory and its practice—even as it saturates every atom of Grossberg's being.

But of course passion is no ordinary word as Graham Parker (1979) reminds us. Indeed, it is two ordinary words. Or, rather, passion—as a word—derives from two distinctly different historical time-periods with different inflections. In medieval Latin, passion ["passio"] meant to suffer, to endure, or undergo (e.g., the passion of the Christ). Meanwhile, since late middle English, most folks today are more likely to consider "passion" as a way of indicating what it means to be moved by the intensity in their commitment to a particular pursuit or endeavor (e.g. Swifties are moved by passions; January 6th US Capitol insurrectionists were too). Passion for Spinoza (who wrote his *Ethics* entirely in Latin) is not quite located in the same place as the passion engaged by a Bruce Springsteen or Beyoncé concert. In Spinoza, passions are passive affections and mark an instance when a body is separated from what it can do. We sink into passions in the ordinary encounter with an exterior force or body with which we can feel or suffer (a sensibility) but have yet to divine the cause in a way that makes it internal to or align with our body's power to act (i.e., active affections). Passive affections hold us in their grip; we are recipients ("to be affected") more than agents ("to affect"). Further, Spinoza distinguished between two forms of passive affections: sad and joyful. With joyful passive affections, we remain under the sway of an exterior force but a body's power to act is augmented by this relation. Sad passive affections are encounters that diminish or thwart the capacities of bodies. Spinoza maintained that our existence is dominated by sad passive affections (how could it not be?). Every single body is sunk into myriad passions. Such entities can only transform their situations and increase their powers by seeking out encounters, finding common notions between bodies and forces that might convert sad passive affections into positively inclining active affections. Contrary to the view that passions were blocks or blindspots on the path to knowledge, Spinoza proposed that passions, including sad passive affections, were among the building blocks necessary for the composition of both intellect and community. Passions have to be bootstrapped, brought into lived account again and again, not abandoned, ignored, or somehow magically transcended.

And it is such a mix of both passions—philosophy meets rock and roll—that guides Larry's faith in the project of cultural studies itself: through its mutations, its missteps, its endeavor to persist in its own existence, as also marked by his continual invocation of the Gramscian "pessimism of the intellect, optimism of the will." I am not sure that anyone

outside of Stuart Hall has made cultural studies—as an intellectual/corporeal endeavor—the passionately cathected object that Larry has. Just as I suspect that few have been as perpetually let down as Grossberg when the energy he has bundled into cultural studies as a practice, as a politically engaged difference-maker, has quite often failed to match the return on his investment, his investment in fostering some manner of hard-won, sustained collectivity.

Who has not had Larry say to them somewhere along the line, something like: "That thing you think you're doing? That's not cultural studies."

Just me????

Okay.

But Larry's "that's *not* cultural studies" exhortation is never meant as a speech-act that excludes. No, I have always heard it rather as a call to up our game. Always. Always. Always. And that's where passion comes in, in abundance: returning over and over, not as something compensatory or delusional—I dare anyone to tell Larry Grossberg something that he doesn't already know, something that he hasn't already expressed time and time again—about the failures and shortcomings of the left, of cultural studies . . . forever encountering not its capacities but its incapacities, its sad passive affections, to ever fully get us *out* of this place.

And Grossberg has not just stared into the abyss but seriously navigated (back and forth, more than once or twice) the gaping maw of cultural studies' affective mapping of the political right over the course of more than five decades now: from Reagan through Trump (and beyond). From the almost quaint-seeming popular conservatism of 1992's *We Gotta Get Out of This Place* to the unadulterated conspiratorial authoritarian-populist fascism of 2018's *Under the Cover of Chaos*, Larry has been charting rightwing successes and left-ish compromises for far longer than is probably healthy for anybody. And it has been passion, as a bootstrapping practice that converts sadness and passivity into joyful action and collectivity, that guarantees (in a world without guarantees) that Larry himself keeps on keeping on and calls us to keep going, endeavoring to draw upon the cathected energy that's packed into all that is holy and profane when speaking in the name of cultural studies.

This passion is best expressed in a simple phrase that Grossberg never fails to utter, from his earliest "boring days in paradise" to the calamitous chaotic days of now: "tell better stories." Here Larry reminds us that a cultural studies account can never stop at the representational, that anal-

ysis must not congratulate itself for "merely reconstructing the context but as actively producing and fabricating it, as empowering the practice within the context of its own analysis" (Grossberg 1997, 9). At the end of his Trump book, Larry cautions that these better "stories cannot simply be restoration narratives nor utopian imaginaries" but "there are openings, multiple possible configurations, valences and prioritizations, which may lead us away from the nightmare" (Grossberg 2018, 152).

This is what affect as the "potentia" of capacity, as passion on its way to making common and becoming-active, adds to the boney linkages of articulation theory: the passionate force of critical imagination divined from enfleshed attention to those innumerable contact-zones of the lived that reveal how our world could be otherwise . . . how this world already *is* "otherwise" if we can only manage ways to string together the scattered glimmerings of cathected energies in order to compose a "better story," a more capacious mattering map.

Cathexis, as it turns out, is one helluva thing: especially when you *are* the thing, the body, that's getting cathected. That is, so many of us in cultural studies (and elsewhere) are doing what we do by the grace of Larry's investment in each of us—his students, colleagues, and comrades, and in our collective potential as intellectuals (even—and especially—when Larry reminds us that we're doing cultural studies wrong). I suspect that Larry is not going to mind now if we pause momentarily to radiate some of these cathected energies back at him. But then each of us also knows that Larry Grossberg is already picking up where he's never left off, burning on ("right?" affirmative nod), redirecting our attention away from him and back out into the world where the passionate task remains what it has always been . . . to change it.

NOTES

1. Melissa Gregg argues in her book *Cultural Studies' Affective Voices* that "it is little wonder that Grossberg takes such pleasure in teaching and conference presentations: both afford the human presence and the bodily contagion that is crucial to the transmission of affect" (2006, 101).

2. Because Taylor Swift's *The Eras* Tour is in full worldwide swing as I write this, one cannot help but feel and see how fans, invested in and across various moments from Swift's career, are bringing together and trading cathected objects (like friendship bracelets: "take the moment and taste it") and enacting specifically Swiftian-period fashion styles to form affective bonds (all voices in unison, rhythmically jumping up and down forcefully enough to, it's been claimed, register seismically) and to

mark distinctions/affiliations with each other and especially in relation to those forces arrayed beyond of the concert venue itself (these forces became most visible when Swift intersected romantically with football player Travis Kelce). That is, Swifties carry and are carried by these affective investments beyond the (immense) confines of a stadium and into the space-times of their everyday lives: in multiple and sometimes contradictory gendered/raced/political/aesthetic ways. There are economic investments that can be measured too; the Federal Reserve estimates that Swift's tour will benefit the travel and tourism industry and regional economies (wherever the tour touches down) by adding as much as five billion dollars to the 2023 GDP of the United States.

3. Perhaps a small matter but Larry intentionally spells "effectivity" and "effect/be effected" with an "e" here rather than an "a" and Spinoza could have been sourced as readily here as Nietzsche (particularly when read through Deleuze). We could think of affect as virtual (in process, in potential) and effect as actual (realized, a result) but equally real.

4. "At Illinois when they tried to stop me teaching my courses on popular music on the grounds that it was not a serious academic subject, some professors actually tried to argue that I should not be the teacher since I liked the music and the subject too much" (Grossberg 2010, 335).

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7

"1983 . . . A Merman I Should Turn to Be" (Jimi Hendrix): Music as a Method and Critical Style

IAIN CHAMBERS

I remember sitting in Larry's black-walled "den" in his house in Champaign-Urbana, discussing what I would present at the famous 1983 mega-conference on Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture he had organized. I distinctly recall Larry's suggestion that my arguments needed audio accompaniment. So, we sat around, listened to music, and then selected some rock and reggae tracks of the day, captured on an audio cassette, to play during the talk (Chambers 1988). Ever since then, I have sought to accompany my talks with sound; these days, usually from a cell phone stuck in front of the microphone. The music, like images, helps to break up, pace, and segment the linearity of reasoning that the prepared paper, even when ad-libbed, imposes on a talk. Back then, many of us thought cultural studies was all about the interruption in the order of discourse established by academic and disciplinary protocols. I guess I still adhere to that intention, and I remain deeply grateful to Larry for indicating this disruptive strategy.

What happened there in the hot Illinois summer of 1983 was not an arbitrary decision. The renovation of critical language through reworking Marxism and attending to the centrality of culture in the constitution of political landscapes also encouraged experimental and in-disciplinary proposals. After all, Dick Hebdige and Henri Lefebvre were at the conference. Subcultures, style, surrealism, and situationism were being conjoined in a concerted assault on common sense. It was, to use the lexicon of the moment, overdetermined by the conjuncture. It was also

an exercise in matter out of place. I was working on a cultural history of British pop music at the time (Chambers 1985). Proposing pop music and popular culture in the classroom and lecture hall was then a deliberate affront to academic decorum and canons. As a cultural practice that sustains unacknowledged critical spaces and cultural promises, music has remained a constant part of my writing and teaching right down to the present (Chambers 2020).

However, beyond the spectacle of disturbance, we can also delve into a deeper history where, following sounds, we find ourselves in the folds of more intractable powers. Larry's constant attention to popular music and culture has consistently sought to confront these questions. Responding to rock and roll as a cultural form and force, Larry brought this to bear on the limited formalism of mass media and communications models of messages and audiences (Grossberg 1987). Sensitive to the visceral intensity of what is transitory and performative, he allowed music to set a critical agenda in which the commodity capture of the sound does not exhaust its cultural and historical meaning. More than a reflection of societal processes or a simple mirror of its capitalization, this suggests that music, as sound and auditory style, produces a further announcement of reality and "the construction of particular maps detailing what matters in our everyday lives" (Grossberg 1987, 182).

Rather than an illustration or symptom of social processes at large, music here becomes a critical medium in its own right. No longer a sociology or history of music, music proposes history and sociology. The methodology is turned inside out. More than the sounds of resistance and rebellion—although it can also be this—popular music proposes the means to reconfigure modern spacetime. "Change your time for the unknown factor," as Sun Ra said. To hear in the sounds not symptoms but the rhythms and signals of another configuration is to recalibrate the coordinates of analysis. The capitalist constitution of the present, its historical formation in colonialism, racism, and white patriarchy, obviously persists. But turning the terms around—not the history of music, but rather music as history—permits a crossing of that violent terrain without being reduced to imposed chronologies and implacable structures. Other histories and further archives can be heard. The production of sound, in repetition, variation, improvisation, mixes, and dub, sustains

a sensual and semantic universe. In prizing open and refusing the given, another song appears every time the song is played. Music returns an unstable supplement to the persistent pulse of the quotidian.

In this temporary drift from the numbing repetition of a capitalist disciplining of life, music performs and promises participation in something else. What follows Larry's complex engagement with the cultural implications of rock and roll is a critical meeting and subsequent exit to renegotiate the social sciences. In a significant fashion, and now from many decades down the road, this brings us back to the interventionist manner of proposing cultural studies under Illinois's cloudless skies back in 1983.

Both in its Gramscian-inspired focus on the everyday fabrication of political power through cultural apparatuses and languages from school to the mass media and in its attention to the responses of young people—from amphetamines to R&B and reggae—the work that came out of the initial subcultural research in the UK in the 1970s decisively undermined the Kantian apparatus of critical distance between the observer and observed. Sociological dreams of scientific exactitude and neutrality were weakened in the clubland smoke and density of sound. Here, inventive consumerism also engaged in an underground dialogue with race and ethnicity. I would suggest that the impossibility of achieving the neutrality of the former or fully revealing and representing the lived density of the latter tempered the analytical paradigm. It made the disciplinary premises more provisional, that is, dynamic, historical, and open to continuous interpretation.

If this emphasizes the centrality of the immediate in the analysis, it also suggests the more profound history of a methodology "without guarantees" to use Stuart Hall's noted expression. Although Larry is an exception here, this has rarely been taken up. The desire for certainty—after all, we are talking about the social *sciences*—today has its inherited positivism further encouraged and underlined by neoliberal accountability to the market and disciplinary meritocracy. The counter-idea of critical rigor that lies in the complexity, incompleteness, inconsistency, and even acknowledged incompetence of analytical language is not welcome. Of course, these questions profoundly challenge the self-assured Western apparatus of knowledge, the reproduction of which, despite the updating and window dressing, remains essential to the history of a white patriarchal settlement and its diffusion of a class, gender, and racial order.

The heart of the matter in the analytical operation, whether referring to history or sociology, anthropology or geography, is the question of language. Scientific claims and protocols insist that we are dealing with a neutral medium that transmits knowledge as if it were first established and then subsequently communicated. In this rationalist design, language as a metaphorical and mediating force is given scarce importance. Recognizing that language is a productive factor in the analysis and does not simply involve something external to its production but contributes directly to its representation and meaning requires us to step away from that paradigm.

Analytical ambivalence brought into sharp focus in the punk semiotics of the swastika and other signs of designed outrage do not simply pose questions of interpretation tied to personal political views and sentiments. The social is never merely a single or homogeneous map on which social relations and symbolic configurations can be traced. As an integral part of the historical processes that sustain (and subvert) unequal power relations and their incorporation into class, gender, and racial bodies, maps multiply. And they do not necessarily point us in one direction. As I have suggested, one of the most potent arguments emerging from work on 1970s British subcultures is the subterranean thesis, most prominently supported by the period's music, of a perpetual dialogue between black and white youth cultures. Dick Hebdige was among the first to insist on this. This complex conversation was suspended in the music: rural and urban blues; jazz, R&B, and soul music; ska, reggae, and dub; disco, dance, and techno. Only through sensual attention to the experienced and living textures of sound was it possible to hear and respond to this possibility. What was involved was more than participatory observation seeking to arrive at a point of "authenticity," but rather the recognition of what slips through and beyond consensual semantics (and its ultimate institutionalization in disciplinary methodologies). The point is not to capture this flight of language but rather to register it and acknowledge the limits of one's own. But here we are on the dance floor with Jacques Derrida!

In a sort of sociology of sociology, we begin to register the overcoming of the sovereignty of the observing subject and her science. When objects refuse to remain still and insist on their rights as subjects, the colonizing mechanisms of disciplinary authority become, throughout the human and social sciences, less a site for stable truth/reality claims and more one for agonistic interpretation. Puncturing a single line of referential

measurement exposes challenges and reveals relations of power. These are invariably unequal but persistent. Here, I am drawing a lesson from the masters of Jamaican dub. By slowing, cutting, echoing, distorting, and reworking the spacetime of the moment, the discarded fragments of a rejected past return to figure racial slavery, colonial violence, and unforgiving capitalism in the constitution of the present and attempted colonization of the future. In this quantum instance it becomes possible to promote other presents and further futures. This is less a research proposal seeking to uncover the pristine language of a further paradigm and rather a critical and analytical style attuned to working up the debris of the past into another history of the present.

This brings me to Jimi Hendrix and "1983 . . . A Merman I Should Turn to Be" from the album *Electric Ladyland* (1968). The point, quite simply, is that by listening to this track, it becomes possible to propose and write another history of the United States and the West. In its musical composition and style of execution, other archives are opened. A simple and tired chronology that runs from slavery to civil rights (?) shatters. Not simply an acceptable musical order but also a historical and political one is bent, distorted, and broken down on Hendrix's guitar. Time comes undone, repeats, and recurs in a constellation that persists as the present is shot through with pasts calling on other futures. Black radicalism, Afro-futurism, the Fanonian abandonment of the Occident in search of a planetary humanism, the biting truths of James Baldwin and Malcolm X . . . it is all there in the sounds. It is not an established program but a complex and unfolding potential, a vibrant possibility waiting to be registered and played again and again. The dissemination of such coordinates in the racialized apparatuses of power folds time and place into other narratives. Suspended in the notes is a history that has already occurred and yet is still to be recognized, and so is still to come. The usual historiographical operation is challenged precisely by what it refuses to hear, register, and recognize.

At this point, proposing the complex reworking of the historiographical operation through sound, I am pointing toward the liberatory cultural politics Larry has always proposed. I feel sure that he would not object to my manner of traveling. Thanks, Larry.

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8

Cultural Studies Sensibility and Affective Sensibility

ANTHONY FUNG

Being exposed to the idea of cultural studies as a graduate student in a traditional Midwest journalism school was an astonishing and eye-opening moment for me, as it was the same for my classmates. Cultural studies turned upside down the notion of a media-imposed effect on audiences, a belief I had always been taught. So, my classmates and I began researching this field. Most people read the classics, from Stuart Hall to Raymond Williams, and I did too. But I was soon captivated by something different: a volume edited by Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson, and Paula Treicher (1992). This book was an even bigger eye-opener, offering a down-to-earth explanation of cultural studies. The topics covered race and identity (which matters to me as a Canadian Chinese) and postcoloniality (which matters to me as someone who grew up in the former British colony of Hong Kong) and, more importantly, the study of popular music, of which I am an avid fan. Then, like many other cultural studies followers, I immersed myself in the study of this musical genre. Naturally, I was drawn to Larry's work on music and affect. As far as I can remember, my intellectual trajectory in fandom studies and the concept of the relationship between affect and music both began when I read Larry's chapter "Is There a Fan in the House? The Affective Sensibility of Fandom" (Grossberg 1992) during my first year of graduate studies in Minnesota in 1992. Affectivity stuck with me for the following two decades.

Of course, today, the study of affect is common in cultural studies. There are affect theory readers (e.g., Gregg and Seigworth 2010) and books explaining the evolution of the concept (Schaefer 2019). There are several empirical studies of affect in music, theater, and film—to name but a few—in different contexts. Needless to say, Larry pioneered the notion

of affective sensibility in his early work on rock and roll and its fandom. His breakthrough was to deny the passivity of the audience in accessing a fixed and predetermined piece of music or cultural text. Furthermore, Larry rejected the idea that the audience simply appropriates the music, arguing instead that both fans and text are continuously remade and reconstructed. The process and the relationship through which the fans and the music are linked in a particular context are called "sensibility" (Larry, sorry if I'm interpreting your ideas wrongly).

After completing my studies, I taught in an Asian city, and I started to study the relationship between popular culture and music on the other side of the globe. Being a serious music fan based in Hong Kong provided me with the perfect opportunity to explore different music conjunctures happening in Hong Kong, China, and Asia. At this point, Larry's book *Dancing in Spite of Myself: Essays on Popular Culture* (1997) offers me insights on fandom, rock music, and the challenges naturally encountered by established cultural studies paradigms. The book naturally becomes my blue book to examine the postmodernity and the utilization of popular culture in economic and political struggles. Searching for the cultural identification of fans, I studied the local fandom of Faye Wong (who was once the diva in Hong Kong) in Hong Kong and the Chinese fandom of Taiwan singer Jay Chou (who sold more albums than any other singers in China). I went to different cities in China, from Beijing in the political north to Guangzhou and Hong Kong in the commercial south, to attend their concerts, conduct interviews with fans and production teams, and observe the affective sensibility associated with their fandom. These were truly my most representative fieldworks on fandom in the region in the late 1990s and early 2000s, and more or less, I could also say these studies have become the first systematic fandom studies in Asia. I had presented all these studies of fandom in Crossroads and major communication conferences. During those times, fandom from Asia was unknown and new to the academy (at least in cultural studies) in the English-speaking academic world, and what connected these studies to the understanding of these audience was the concept of affective sensibility that they could make sense of. In sum, it was not just me who made this "communication" possible. Larry played a crucial role in shaping my understanding and approach.

To contribute to this festschrift, I revisited my early works on fandom. I came across an unpublished paper about Jay Chou, co-authored with my former research assistant Oiwan Lam (Fung and Lam 2005). At the

beginning of the paper, I quoted Larry's (Grossberg 1992) book chapter on "affective sensibility to fandom" (54). The quote from this chapter said the following: "Audiences never deal with single cultural texts, or even with single genres or media. Culture 'communicates' only in particular contexts in which a range of texts, practices and languages are brought together." The case Oiwan and I examined exemplified Larry's point. Chinese fans in Beijing, for instance, were exposed to the modernity of pop music from Taiwan and could experience a (relatively) liberal world through material consumption and cultural consumption facilitated by the internet. The desires, emotions, and tensions experienced by these Chinese fans are palpable and require no further explanation.

In my interview with Larry in Hong Kong (Fung and Chan 2009a; 2009b), published in a Chinese communication journal, he repeatedly used the terms "local contextuality" and "conjuncture" to describe the type of cultural studies I conducted in Asia. My research agenda has consistently emphasized that the diversity of Asia, recognizing it as a plural continent. With that in mind, I later traveled to Japan and Korea in an attempt to identify the differences in sensibility found across different Asian cultures. As a fan of K-pop and J-pop in the late 2000s, I invested a considerable amount of time and resources in studying the music and artists I like. Despite my inability to dance, I learned Korean to "feel" closer to what other K-pop fans do. Captivated by the Japanese girl idol group AKB48, I joined their hand-shaking event in Tokyo and spoke to members of the group in my limited Japanese. The behaviors of the fans I studied were best described as "affective sensibility." In particular, I aimed to explore how affect produces and manifests values and culture—including gender, ethnic, and political identities—across diverse collectivities and Asian countries. Over the years, I wrote articles elucidating the processes involved in affective sensibility. It is important to note that my understanding of sensibility was not solely derived from interviews and observations; I actively participated in fandom, spending days and nights with fans, forging companionships, integrating myself into the fandom community, and personally experiencing and developing the sensibility.

Getting to this sensibility indeed requires devotion. How would someone who does not like music participate in a music festival and do research on this topic? I recall a day when Larry visited Hong Kong for a seminar in the early 2000s. Following some rigorous academic discussions, the organizers and a group of student helpers ventured out for drinks and

then dinner. Eventually, we found ourselves in a karaoke room, a popular form of entertainment in those days in Hong Kong. I don't recall the specifics, but I do remember one of the students noting that Larry seemed to immerse himself more in the dancing and performance than anyone else. It was evident that Larry, as a scholar, has a genuine passion for music and dance, which undoubtedly fuels his study of fans and their affects. This demonstrates that cultural studies transcends being merely a pedagogy or theoretical approach; it becomes a devotion. If cultural studies entails investigating everyday cultural practices, the researcher must empathize with the emotions of the audience being observed. This goes beyond adhering to a fixed research method. Simply put, our approach determines the depth and validity of our understanding of the phenomenon under scrutiny.

Certainly, engaging in cultural studies involves more than acknowledging the concept of affect or sensibility. As a fan of Cantopop and Chinese pop, and also a university professor, I have faced my share of challenges. When I was a junior faculty member, proposing to start a course on popular culture in Asia felt daunting. First, teaching pop culture, rather than high culture, raised questions about the appropriateness and seriousness of university studies. Traditionally, figures like Lady Gaga, the League of Legends, Batman, and the Avengers were often seen as mere entertainment, which potentially diverts students' attention from more "serious" subjects. Back then, as a young faculty member, few recognized pop culture as a valuable academic topic. Second, my research focused on the emergence of idolatry and fandom in China at the turn of the millennium—a time when the country was politically closed but culturally open, albeit ambiguously and intermittently. Justifying my research grant proposal, which sought to investigate the impact of Chinese popular music on audiences, was a significant challenge. In essence, securing funding for cultural studies research is no easy feat.

Whenever I encounter these obstacles, I find solace in Larry's experience, as he described in the mentioned chapter. When he introduced rock and roll and fandom into the university setting, he encountered similar challenges. His colleagues raised objection to incorporating what they perceived as low culture into the curriculum. While Larry does not elaborate on the struggles that ensued, it is clear that negotiation took place. Eventually, he forged the cultural studies agenda. He must have offered

sound reasons for why popular culture matters. Thanks to his efforts and those of other scholars, the field of cultural studies is flourishing, though whether we have passed our heyday remains uncertain.

Regardless of whether cultural studies is considered past its prime, I continue to tread my path in this field, closely following in Larry's footsteps. During all these years, the discipline's topics, concepts, and debates have changed. They have been continuously reconstructed in ways that address the issues and problems that are vital to our daily lives. Today, cultural studies scholars encompass a diverse array of identities and interests—they are not solely academics but also Switch players, composers, social media microcelebrities, rappers, skateboarders, and more. With their passion and faith in pop culture's capacity to reveal the cultural politics and power relations of everyday life, they can tap into the new affective sensibilities that connect new texts with new audiences. In this digital era, as someone immersed in social media, I have extended my research to include the affective sensibility of platform labor and social media influencers as well as that of their followers, manifested across digital platforms. The multiple levels of affective sensibility have become more intricate but intellectually captivating.

To address changing and complex issues, one must always rethink what cultural studies is and whether it can tackle new and evolving questions. In the abovementioned interview, Larry discussed this aspect (Fung and Chan 2009a, 2009b). While cultural studies scholars like Raymond Williams (2005) underscored the structure of feelings or the relative autonomy in the superstructure, Larry's focus was different, which surprised me. While holding onto the idea of the power and potential of the audience, he also highlighted the increasingly important role of the economic base in shaping our culture—a thesis embraced by scholars of political economy. My interpretation of Larry's point is that cultural studies is not static; it develops over time. As society and culture evolve and conjunctures change, so does cultural studies. An approach rooted in the willingness to embrace new knowledge, conjunctures, and sensibilities in order to contemplate today's cultural phenomena is a prerequisite for scholarship in cultural studies. In practice, scholars must adapt different objective and subjective methods and strategies to recognize and perceive the affect that connects new cultural texts and new generations (i.e., new audiences). The sensitivity to our culture, environment, and humanity

is crucial. In other words, prior to studying the affective sensibility of fandom, scholars should cultivate a new sensibility—a "cultural studies sensibility"—that allowed them to empathize with the feelings of fans.

In emphasizing the significance of cultural studies sensibility, scholars are compelled to recognize the richness of cultural differences and the imperative for social inclusion and diversity. My vision posits that this refined sensibility serves as an essential apparatus, bringing into sharper focus the exigency for heightened consciousness regarding social inequities, divides, and schisms inherent in various cultural phenomena. Within the flux of our contemporary epoch, dominated by communication technologies, digital platforms, and social media, a cultural studies sensibility perseveres as an indispensable lens through which scholars deftly navigate the intricate nexus of culture, technology, and society. It prompts a commitment to unveiling and understanding the complex dynamics of power, representation, participation, and negotiation in an increasingly interconnected world. By fostering a cultural studies sensibility, scholars not only engage with the affective sensibilities of fandom but also champion a transformative scholarship that addresses the complexities of our diverse and evolving cultural landscape.

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9

Music Still Matters, or "It's Popular Music, Larry, Just Not as We Know It"

STEVE JONES

My first encounter with Larry Grossberg was as an undergraduate student at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. While I was earning a degree in biology, I was also involved in the local music scene and was told by friends to take this "rock 'n' roll" course in the Department of Speech Communication (the course title was "Rhetoric and Popular Culture," if memory serves, likely in an effort to somewhat suppress clamoring for enrollment and provide some academic cover). I was surprised the first day of class to see that the professor was someone I had seen at local clubs and bars that offered live music. It was clear from seeing him in those venues and listening to him in the classroom that he genuinely loved popular music and that he was also genuinely interested in understanding its role in social formations. I felt then, and ever since, incredibly fortunate to have connected with him.

What intrigued me most about Larry's take on popular music was that at a time of seemingly ever-increasing attention paid to visual media forms he was more interested in popular music than in other forms of popular culture. And he demanded an interrogation of its affective dimensions rather than its formal elements, its context rather than content, its deeper meanings for fans and musicians rather than its surfaces simply gleaned from textual or musical analysis. Over the years and perhaps unsurprisingly given political and cultural upheavals in the US and in youth culture generally, his scholarly interests widened and his writing specifically about popular music lessened. The extent to which popular music itself mattered as a cultural and political form waned through the 1980s and into the 1990s and its trajectory in that regard is worth debating though beyond the scope of this essay. In short, while it is not difficult to argue that popular music, whether western or other forms, has a cultural, symbolic, political power

that extends in time and space, in general the forms of it on which popular music scholarship focused when I was first encountering essays and studies of the kind Larry would assign in his courses likely mistook its homogeneity for hegemony, its anti-commercialism for cachet, its popularity for power. "The man can't bust our music!" read the (in)famous Columbia/CBS Records advertisement published in *Rolling Stone* in 1969. But did anyone ask why the man would bust it? That is not to lament that popular music was somehow a failure as a cultural force but rather to acknowledge that it was even more complicated culturally than many imagined.

Throughout much of Larry's early thinking—neatly encapsulated in the first few chapters of *We Gotta Get Out of This Place* (Grossberg 1992), in which music serves as feint and riposte in explorations of power, politics, and theory—music's signification of and for youth culture was relatively firm symbolically. But by the 1990s popular music shifted economically, politically, culturally, generationally. That there was any guarantee about its meaning not only at the level of the song but in the aggregate was not so much contested as eviscerated by the centripetal pull of myriad media that drew in music, whether new or cherry-picked from ever-growing record company back catalogs whose long tail was wagging at the prospect of monetization. The drive to essentially securitize music has in recent years been well illustrated by the rush to buy song rights by companies like Hipgnosis, Primary Wave, Pimco and others, that in turn has led to ever greater efforts to place music in films, TV, advertising, etc. to recoup initial investments and ultimately (and not yet very successfully) generate profit.

Of course, new music continues to be created, and along with what already exists it is clearly the case that there is and always will be more music and more of it across all media, ranging from film and television to social media and gaming. It follows that more people are listening to music than ever, or at least hearing more music than ever, for it does not follow that they are listening in any ways necessarily as they had in the past nor that any meanings can be more than fleetingly fixed to it as they hear it.

Music still tells stories, but as it proliferates over time across media it is as if every song has its own inward shuffle mode during which meanings, connections, symbols, sounds, words, and memories articulate, dissolve, and re-articulate from one moment to the next. Our relationship with music has increasingly become privatized and perhaps internalized. Our bodies are less impinged on by soundwaves than before as more private ways of listening are embraced, thereby leaving our ears to

do the heavy lifting of receiving sound, interpreting disembodied sounds that come from ever-smaller audio technology (speakers to headphones to earbuds) that move less air but compensate by being ever closer to our heads and inserted into them through our ears. Earbuds and to a far lesser extent headphones dominate the listening experience of most and expand music into areas of everyday life in which not long ago it would have been unthinkable to listen to music. It will not surprise me if students, for instance, are growing longer hair to conceal the earbuds they wear throughout their school day. Everyday life is soundtracked, more often than not either in shuffle mode or via algorithmic playlist, technology randomly or mathematically (how can we know which?) curating what we hear and proffering symbolic connections in real time, leaving them there to be noticed, newly made, or to be ignored. Music as "ordering material in social life" as Tia DeNora explains and illustrates in *Music in Everyday Life* (2000, x) still occurs at the level of the individual, of course, but less so collectively, and increasingly also at the level of the algorithm, in a symbiotic relationship between listener and machine as one's listening habits (which songs, for how long, at what time, in which location, etc.) are tracked and datafied as input for future listening suggestions at the individual as well as aggregate level. Anyone who streams music is now sharing it, albeit indirectly and probably unknowingly, with countless others, as well as generating data for use across potentially innumerable platforms for marketing, advertising, playlist making, and so on (Jones 2014).

I realize that I am focusing here on recorded and mediated music and live music does deserve a great deal of attention in the contemporary conjuncture well beyond the short shrift I give it here. Live popular music continues to diverge, the gap between top grossing performers charging top ticket prices and, well, everyone else, widening as surely as other socioeconomic gaps in western countries, particularly after the COVID pandemic. Music festivals continue to thrive, by and large, resembling media events (Katz and Dayan 1992) that often have their own personality (e.g., Lollapalooza, Coachella, Bonnaroo, etc.) to which that of the performers is rather secondary. Even single artist concerts can seem more like festivals or fan conventions with attendant cosplay than simply concerts, such as many K-pop shows or Elton John's or Beyoncé's or Taylor Swift's stadium shows.

These are the evolving contexts for contemporary popular music, a cultural form that like most other cultural forms finds itself, sometimes deliberately and sometimes grudgingly, in the digital deep, in a world of instantly available seemingly limitless media in which all content stands alongside other content ready to be chosen increasingly by algorithm, sometimes chosen by users. What is singularly interesting and complicated when it comes to music is that it is not simply a cultural form unto itself, but it also permeates so many other media, from movies to videogames (*Guardians of the Galaxy* without a mixtape? Nope. *Grand Theft Auto* without its soundtrack? Nope.) and provides referential and symbolic meaning across those media while also absorbing more of it from those engagements and carrying those further.

I find it is still valuable to return to some of Larry's earliest articles about rock music and politics to ground contemporary questions about popular music. The articles collected in *Dancing in Spite of Myself* (1997) are organized thematically rather than chronologically, beginning with interrogations of rock and roll specifically and popular music generally and concluding with questions about cultural studies' strengths and weaknesses for theorizing culture and the popular. As he wrote in the introduction, Larry "tried to understand the increasing power of a popular conservatism in the United States . . . in the changing relations between the popular and a specific hegemonic struggle in the contemporary national (and global context)" (Grossberg 1997, 8). While it is quite obvious that he early on trained his focus on rock and roll it is instructive to read the term "popular music" in its place, or to substitute other genres for it, to thus see that, while not a template *per se*, the modes of analysis he presents and interrogates to ask questions about the potentials and limits of rock and roll as a dynamic cultural and political formation from a 1980s and 1990s perspective are well worth asking with regard to other music. How is it possible that any music or indeed any cultural form "defines at least one set of the conditions of possibilities for the increasing appeal of a new conservatism?" (Grossberg 1997, 9).

Unlike "the rock formation (that) places musical practices at its center" (Grossberg 1997, 12) and that Larry foregrounds in *Dancing in Spite of Myself*, the contemporary conjunctures in which popular music is imbricated do not make musical practices central nor do they ask for, or even necessarily make possible, commitments to musical practice. Perhaps the most interesting developments in popular music are in the rise of auditory

ASMR (Autonomous Sensory Meridian Response), of sound, sometimes music but as frequently other sounds as well, such as barely audible whispers, purring cats, etc., often using binaural recording techniques, that listeners deliberately choose for the pleasurable sensations and emotions triggered. This is unlikely to be deemed popular music in any sense that popular music has previously been described. But it is a musical form that co-exists alongside others and at its very core the establishment of affect, of an affective state, "as a medium that may have effects long before it is 'meaningful' in a cultural sense" (DeNora 2004, 77).

Larry begins to get at why this may be toward the end of *We Gotta Get Out of This Place* when he writes about the music in the TV serial *Twin Peaks*, music that, "pointed to a powerfully haunting reality, always standing beyond everyday life, threatening to shatter it. Yet simultaneously, it closed in on itself, forcing the listener/viewer back into the surfaces of its world, and into the comfortable insecurity of everyday life" (Grossberg 1992, 308). The context of the popular music conjuncture has been shaped, like so many other experiences, by the experience of everyday life in the global COVID-19 pandemic. The many ways we encounter music, choose which music to encounter, make sense of it, share it, remember it, expand just as the amount of music expands. For those of us, like Larry, who continue to find the popular music conjuncture an interesting and fertile ground for theory the work that beckons is daunting, complex, complicated. Just as digital technology changed the production, distribution, and consumption of music beginning in the 90s so too do emerging technologies that employ algorithmic and artificial intelligence appear likely to change our relationship with it. Technologies of emotion recognition, timbre transformation, spawning, AI composition and performance, and the like, should cause us to ask questions about creativity, value, and affect, among other topics. In an AI-soaked environment how will listeners make sense of and relate to music, what relationships might (and might not) form among fans and performers and between fans? I would be remiss to not include in the term "performers" avatars now, given the popularity of ABBA's "touring avatars" or a "star" like Hatsune Miku.

These are questions not only about one cultural form among many but also about politics, economics, power, for it is in the connections and relationships among these that music operates, is realized, in which memories are made, shared, alliances formed, and social structures made and unmade. As it has been at several key conjunctures in contemporary

western life, from the political upheavals in the Sixties, the disco and punk movements in the Seventies, the impact of hip hop in the Eighties, the digitization of media in the Nineties and beyond, popular music is a bellwether of cultural divergency, foregrounding and foreshadowing, if not predicting, our contemporary struggles on the verge of the future.

What ought to be foremost in questions about the contemporary popular music conjuncture is how choices are made about music, whether by humans or machines, and with what consequences. In the introduction to *Dancing in Spite of Myself* Larry writes that in his work on popular culture he borrowed Bourdieu's concept of sensibilities as "they empower cultural practices to work in certain ways, and they empower individuals to enact them in certain places. Sensibilities define the dialectical production of active audiences, everyday practices, and productive context. This has important consequences for the study of the popular as a sphere in which people struggle over reality and their place in it" (Grossberg 1997, 12). In the present it might be that rather than a "struggle over reality" there is a struggle *with* reality, for reasons almost too banal to enumerate, ranging from AI to politics, deepfakes to journalism, social media to, well, popular culture. How, in this conjuncture, can we understand creativity, curation, consumption, in and of popular music? The kinds of analyses Larry undertook and has advocated for years are ever more necessary. In the aforementioned introductory essay Larry wrote, "For many generations and for many people, religion itself was within the popular. It served not as an exact body of knowledge but as an affective structure, one that helped make sense of the world by producing the feeling that the world was a totality, that life must have a meaning. The nature of that meaning may have been less important than the confidence that the world, despite its contradictions, still made sense. The popular, in the narrower sense of popular culture, can still serve this function, but it rarely can do so by producing a stable and enduring affective horizon" (Grossberg 1997, 13–14). He was right in his assertion that the rock formation was nearing an end, or at least ceding ground to other musics' formations, becoming a "residual formation," as Larry calls it, but popular music generally continues to be a most (I would argue, if space allowed, *the* most) important affective plane on which meaning and experience are imagined, engaged, debated and reimagined.

Indeed, what I find fascinating about popular music (and about sound more generally, but that too is beyond scope here)—and something for which I am indelibly grateful to Larry for pointing me toward understanding – is that popular music is always telling new stories and that it is an incredibly compact yet absorbing form of storytelling. If a picture is worth a thousand words, as the saying goes, then a song is worth that and a thousand feelings, plus a thousand memories. The evocations of place, space, time, mood, and emotion that music can generate are incredibly strong and immediate, seemingly bypassing cognitive filters that operate in apprehension of other art forms. What conjunctural analysis of popular music can show is that what people do with music is as or possibly more important than the music itself (heretical as that may seem to musicians, and I say that as a musician). Listening to it is a response to one's present, conjoining it with the past, imagining the future, hearing in it the imagined places and times that bind us into our present being.

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10

Still Disappointed?

CHRISTOPHER JAMES DAHLIE

For those who had the pleasure of attending Larry Grossberg's retirement celebration in the spring of 2022, dubbed "Larrypalooza," souvenir T-shirts (it was, after all, a celebration of all things Larry) were handed out. There were several choices of Larry-isms on the back of those shirts. The one I chose for myself said "Too Simple." Some version of this prodding fell from Larry's lips, pen, and keyboard constantly. For graduate students, the phrase often felt like one more turn into an impenetrable maze, one that would imprison you at your cubicle or in the stacks forever while some other lucky chump got the job you had dreamed of when you had taken your GRE. You knew Larry would not let you off easy either. There was no choice but to go and further embrace the complexity of the context, to tell a better story of the conjuncture. What got you through was knowing that he would be there to help you through the maze he encouraged you to explore.

When I went to revise the University of North Carolina's online "Popular Music and Youth Culture" course, I gave this course I inherited a bit of shine. Throw some technology and political economy on to basic lessons about fandom, audience, artists, genre, representation, local scenes vs. globalism, cultural imperialism and we have a standard revision. While encouraging my revisions regarding technology and political economy, Larry pushed me to further examine debates about local versus global, sex and gender, and race in popular musics. In short, Larry said the story I told regarding subjectivity in popular music was too simple. Way too simple. Too simple to give any sense of underlying debates. Too simple to give a sense of popular music as a serious area of academic concern. Too simple for our students, even in a 100-level course. Larry challenged me, in his usual unsparing but productive way, to make it better.

In the attempt to flesh out Larry's criticisms, I read his chapter from *Rock Over the Edge*, "Reflections of a Disappointed Popular Music Scholar" (Grossberg 2002). Here, I would like to respond to Grossberg's chapter in two ways: first by briefly surveying whether any progress has been made against the criticisms Larry levels, and second by offering a more personal response to his own positions in the essay, informed by personal experience as scholar, teacher, audio engineer, and trainer in the live music industry. Gil Rodman (2015), following Larry, stresses radical contextuality as key to cultural studies. I will point to some features of our current context I hear contributing to the ongoing pessimism that prevents articulation of popular musics to a progressive politics that Larry hoped for.

Grossberg's critiques in "Reflections of a Disappointed Popular Music Scholar" are grouped into three main issues: (1) concern for the advancement of theories as to how and why popular music "works"; (2) desire for a common vocabulary that can offer ways to work between the abstract and the concrete in popular music studies; and finally (3) how popular music studies could be rearticulated, and could help to rearticulate popular music to a more progressive politics.

First, as to theory: There have been some notable progressions in both individual explorations and productive collections of the kind of theoretical work Grossberg desires (Bennett and Waksman 2015, Bennett 2022, Henriques 2011, Hesmondhalgh and Negus 2002, Thornton 1996). In addition, there have also been some earnest attempts to, at the very least, introduce popular musical theory to entry-level audiences (Rojek 2011, Shuker 2016, Shuker 2022). I anticipate attending the International Association for the Study of Popular Music annual conference (for the first time in a while) will provide insight into where theoretical concerns are currently being addressed. However, a survey of popular music studies journals suggests that the field overall is still more focused on the trees than the forest.[1]

The good news for Larry and ourselves: scholars are willing to engage with new technologies; second- and third-world sites; questions of race, gender, and sexual representation; and new political economies of consumption and distribution (although class may have taken a back seat). Now the disappointing news. As Grossberg worried, since 2002 there is far too often new wine in old wineskins, ready to burst. Make no mistake, this research can also contribute knowledge. Going back to the oldies, to the canon as it were, may have more draw for popular music scholars than

most. Reconfirmation and reworking of old theories and concepts (everything new is old again) has its place. However someone, somewhere had to pioneer the concepts and diagrams we depend on. Grossberg asked his students and fellow travelers to be humble disciples to humble people engaged in a vast project to tell better stories. This kind of comprehensive work regarding popular music is maybe too seldom done now.

As to his second set of concerns: According to Grossberg, in 2002 little conceptual vocabulary was being pursued applicable to the specificity developed amongst different popular musics and their general effectivity in social formations (28). To invoke Larry, let's start at the right questions: What is the context? How do popular musics, their attendant styles, commodities, and practices insert themselves as apparatus into a general field of forces, power, relations, bodies, discourses? This kind of conceptual output is the purpose of cultural studies' goal of conjunctural analysis that tries to describe "what's goin' on" even if the moment they successfully describe is often already evaporated at the time of a press deadline. This legacy of concepts is the legacy, ultimately, cultural studies labors to produce.

Arguably, phenomenological variations—however gimmicky or ephemeral—and articulations between these variations and possible essentials in popular music make up some of the affective and effective differences between genres and contexts that Grossberg wishes for us to describe. Yet we may be, more often than not, working at reconstructing this context from the wrong direction. There may be core ways to assume that music essentially functions in affective and effective relation to the body, ways that scholars from Plato to Attali attempt to essay.[2] Possible essentials—even if they cannot be fully appreciated or explained—should not be ignored, such as (to invoke Larry again) the relationship of popular music to the desire for bodily movement through dance (singular or collective). While Grossberg and many others rightly claim that popular music apparatuses and formations are not strictly musical, the conceptual building blocks of music and sound that production workers, musicologists and sound studies scholars can provide should be more actively embraced. The core question seems to me why specific phenomenological and technological variations articulate effectively within particular spatio-temporal contexts. This has been explored by several authors (Dahlie 2018; Dahlie et al. 2022; Kane 2020; Suisman 2009; Theberge 1997; Waksman 1999). For example, my work and the work of my colleagues and co-au-

thors in a live sound studies group looks at how cinema sound systems were rearticulated to popular music by entrepreneurial audio engineers in order to meet the demand for larger venues (such as sports arenas) by hugely popular touring artists.

Dominant delivery technologies and how they operate in the popular culture apparatus may indeed serve as a primary way to link collective and private popular musical experience. Presciently, Grossberg observes that "there is growing evidence that people make the sorts of investments that were reserved for postwar popular music in a wider range of media products and practices" (2002, 29). To Grossberg's point the actual monetary level of musical investment has in many everyday ways lessened. People may now expect all music in the world to be personally available for less than ten dollars a month. Yet even as a loss leader, the commodity form of the purchased single and/or album which first carried cover art and arguably set new sonic expectations of concerts did and continues to cause people to value music in direct material ways, for example in markets such as resurgent vinyl. As a smaller but more personal matter, cover art forms a traceable link between the phonograph record and current smartphone screens. As a larger collective matter, concerts and their attendant merchandise continue to be a bright spot in contrast to the declines in revenue from recorded music (Chung 2024). All of which is to say that music has always adapted itself to the material form in which it is technologically delivered. And this adaptation needs to be kept front and center because this necessarily impacts the effective and affective dimensions of experience that music can provide.

To link Grossberg's advocacy for more graceful concepts linking large- and small-scale abstract and concrete phenomena with his third criticism in "Reflections" mourning the lack of effective articulation between popular music and progressive politics, popular music did and continues to work through collective affectivities such as large concerts and fan communities, even if those collectivities have changed from the 1980s through the present. As it moved from the 1980s into the 1990s, MTV itself became a popular music behemoth based on a presumed national and global fan base built upon a previous amalgamation of local pop radio markets. This amalgamation would have seemed ideally constituted to take on a large-scale progressive politics. Yet regardless of any potential political possibility—Rock the Vote and other token campaigns aside—MTV began to fragment its own audience starting in the 1990s with such genre-based

programming blocks as *120 Minutes*, *Yo! MTV Raps*, *Headbangers' Ball*, *MTV Jams*, *Alternative Nation*, and *Total Request Live*. This coincided with an emphasized genre focus from the music industries in such things as radio target markets, which moved past a more focused chase for mass market national hits (even if those were welcomed when they happened). The music industries tried to meet fans where they were rather than where Grossberg and others wished they could be.

To replay a golden oldie, Raymond Williams' concept of mobile privatization (1983, 187–9; 2005) as a driving force still smacks in its past and current purchase for what is articulated and rearticulated. Popular music cannot and does not escape this gravity of the privatized audiovisual experience. I would suggest that popular sound (not just music) in roughly the past 100 years has served as the shock troop to popular audio-visuals' warrant officer. Even large concerts are now colonized by more and more video content (such as IMAG screens), echoing the increased presence of mobile privatized video content across popular culture. Grossberg himself has commented recently on culture as a mounting field of "chaos" (2022). He states there may be simply too much choice to make sense of. Whatever the content, popular audio-visual media have tended to follow the paths of popular sound—into public spaces, community theaters, the family room, the kitchen, the back shed, the basement, the personal portable device, the gas station, concert stages, even the car (Auslander 2008; Postman 2005). There is only so much human attention that can be cultivated and mobilized. The musical beat may, in this instance, be taking a back seat to the audiovisual story. One must decrease as the other will increase.

To further address Larry's third concern: Countercultural politics and struggles and their articulation to popular music were, according to Grossberg, largely abandoned as the field of popular music studies became institutionalized and popular music became, as always and already, co-opted. In thinking through what was to become *We All Want to Change the World*, Larry presented his original idea for the book to UNC's Department of Communication Studies under the title *Without a Song*. Larry's idea, as I remember it, was that without the affective power of popular music or some other apparatus of popular culture anchoring a progressive politics, those politics were destined to remain dreams of activists without the grand force of a popular mass of hearts, minds, and bodies behind the aspirations of those politics.[3] I wonder if Larry and I put too many eggs in one basket. Hence his, and my own, disappointment.

If we are looking to change the world through rearticulating popular music to progressive politics, we all may have placed our faith in idols destined to disappoint. While few reading this would deny the power of popular music, its harness may be beyond our grasp. There are reasons, reasonably argued if eternally debated, why Plato wished to excise it from the Republic, why Adorno found it maddeningly banal, and why Bloom (1987) dismissed it as masturbatory. The location of idolatry—of a particular kind of affective investment—in artists and texts famous or obscure may ultimately be an unrewarding worship if one prays for political salvation.

In 2023 I went to see The Cure with my wife live for the seventh time since 1996. This band matters to me as perhaps no other band ever did or will, as a way of making life matter, as a way of connecting me with others similarly inclined, as a way of escape, of dancing in spite of myself. Here are where my Generation X credentials come in: I never once remember expecting Robert Smith to change the world politically. I never talked with fellow Goths at Downtime in New York about how we could mobilize a movement of movements, nor did any music fan ever approach me in that manner. My music (and it was first "mine," not "ours") was an internal exploration, oscillating between the extremes of blissful self-indulgence and hopeless anger at the way things were. The Gods of the time were only too willing to accommodate us with more narrowly targeted genres, more private ways of collective engagement. With regards to my earlier comments on technological, audience, and attention fragmentation, the moment many of us were waiting for with regard to the potentialities of popular music and progressive politics may have passed on as soon as we could have conceived of it as materialized.

I remember a lesson of Larry's being that one feature of a conjuncture is the experience of a problematic as living through some kind of recognizable crisis (2010, 41). The post-WWII context formed Grossberg's main concerns. These concerns led up to and past the time and place where I finalized my revisions based on Larry's advice. Where one finds oneself and one's peers on the axis between self and other, the hardening of the line between self and other, underwent and continues to undergo historical crisis, particularly amongst young people. Popular music served as a tool for the negotiation of this collective living through the problematic of subjectivity/identity during the time Larry studied it and up to the time he decided to stop studying it directly (Grossberg 1992, Grossberg 2005). Popular music can also be used as a map of how this struggle was and

continues to be fought. Sacred music (arguably a form of popular music) and more ancient folk musics worked to bring people together in common cause. Banal and simple as it may have been, I would argue that there was a time where popular music's main purpose was to unify. This purpose can still be lived through concert and club attendance, even through casual conversation with a fellow fan. Yet current commercial music's purpose, I would argue, is to individuate, to carve out, to create a fan base, to recast and reconstitute genres, to dis-articulate and re-articulate. The Cure and the Goths were there to be found if one was willing to listen, constituting a more private corner for myself and others to take shelter in. While there to be shared with those you really trusted, they were not there to change the world. Maybe, as it became with parallel genre movements at the time, the music was there to simply make the world slightly more tolerable. In short, popular music—by the nature of modern subjectivities and desires for self-fulfillment and self-actualization, for fame and material wealth, for recognition and adulation, for the ability to privatize oneself and simultaneously commune with others using the mobility of a smartphone—simply may no longer be positioned to achieve the purpose Larry or others dreamed of. Again, look at the evacuation of music from Music Television. As Grossberg (1992) suggests, by the time music was a dominant affective force in my life the pessimism that he mourns stood, to me and many like me, as the unshakeable weight of our structure of feeling. Any optimistic horizon beyond that landscape lurked as the unknown and (unless one had uncommon will) the unknowable. As David Foster Wallace told us in his Kenyon commencement speech, one always worships. The question is what one chooses to worship. Music's power is undeniable, but it is a capricious God. Given the current state of popular music and its past record, if we are waiting for it to save us then I suggest we bring a book or two.

With Lawrence Grossberg's guidance and help, I was able to bring more than a book or two to my students through UNC's revised popular music course. Larry pushed us all further into a more appropriately conjunctural understanding of popular music. I am glad he did. I thank Doc Rock for the push, for his praise when I answered his call, for his guidance in this and all the mazes he pushed me to run, because I can now leave enough breadcrumbs for my own students to run some of them. Neither popular music nor scholarship about it may be able to change the world for the better in the way some of us hoped it would. Not all dreams come true.

Regardless of this pessimism, Larry encouraged us to steel our will, know more than the other side, and hope for—even demand—the impossible. I thank him for giving me and so many others the tools to (just maybe) think hope into possibility.

NOTES

1. While I did perform a survey of popular music journals, I welcome anyone bringing any work to our attention that answers some of Larry's concerns about popular music studies, as I try to bring attention to several such works here.

2. Dancing is the original performing art. The body also deals in regular rhythm all the time in breath, heartbeat, walking, etc.

3. Grossberg also specifically mentions in "What Was Cultural Studies?" (2022) that a friend of his mentions that without a song or music, the anti-globalization movement that centered on the Seattle World Trade Organization 1999 talks was bound to fail.

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11

"The Big Era" and "Conjuncture": How to Understand Contemporary China Through the Lens of Cultural Studies

XIAOMING WANG

Having studied modern Chinese literature for more than thirty years, my mind instinctively turned to the idea of "the Big Era" of Lu Xun (1881-1936), considered the most important modern Chinese writer, when I encountered Grossberg's idea of "conjuncture" in the mid-2010s. Readers acquainted with the theory of "conjuncture" may not be familiar with Lu Xun and his concept of "the Big Era," so please allow me to provide a brief introduction to shed some more light.

Lu Xun first introduced his concept of "the Big Era" (Lu [1927]1958, 107) in 1927 in the form of figurative prose, and returned to this idea many times in his later years. Roughly speaking, the concept expresses four key meanings:

1. Knowing clearly the increasing complexity of modern society in terms of its structure and operating mechanism, one can still find a perhaps simplified yet legitimate way of understanding it: viewing society as a human being under constant tension between "health" and "sickness." The former keeps a society viable while the latter leads to its demise. As a former medical student in Japan, Lu Xun often used medical terms when describing Chinese society and its history.
2. This is the most inspiring part: When the conflict/tension between these two forces reaches its most intense level, there will eventually be an end. Either "health" will win and save society from danger, or "sickness" will triumph and society will disintegrate. This decisive moment is what Lu Xun calls "the Big Era."

3. In China, this conflict/tension has been expanding, deepening, and intensifying since the late 19th century. The downfall of the Qing Dynasty, which was commonly thought of as a regime in serious "illness," and its replacement by the Republic of China, the country's first modern state in 1911, did not reverse the trend.
4. By the early 1930s, the conflict/tension appeared to be finally approaching its decisive stage, leading Lu Xun to believe that the country was on the brink of "the Big Era."

Clearly, the current state of affairs in China and worldwide encourages people to depart from optimistic theories that impose grandiose judgments on social change. Instead, there is a growing need to adopt more flexible approaches that can better capture the complexity of today's world. That's why this essay starts with the talking about the "conjuncture" and "the Big Era," I do think both of the theories are exactly the approaches we need now, and believe there is a noteworthy connection between these two notions, despite the fact that one is a literary expression while the other is theoretical.

Inspired by these two theories, this essay provides a brief overview of the major political, social, and cultural changes that have occurred in mainland China since the early 2010s. These changes pose profound challenges to Chinese cultural studies, and more broadly speaking, to critical thinking and knowledge production. Therefore, this essay will also suggest effective responses to these challenges.

As is widely known, the People's Republic of China operates under a Party-state system (hereafter referred to as "Party-state") where the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) holds complete authority. CCP's political orientation has always been the driving force that determines where China goes.

In the late 1970s, CCP began to move away from Mao Zedong's political ideology and adopted a significantly different political orientation known as the "Deng Xiaoping line"(邓小平路线). This new approach prioritizes economic development while adhering to the "Four Principles"(四项基本原则).[1] As a result, it encourages the country to look to the Western world led by the United States in most areas outside the political system. Under the firm guidance of this political orientation, the three decades that followed the late 1970s witnessed the market economy emerging as the driving force behind social development. The transition to capital-

ism represents, in fact, the most significant aspect of societal change.[2] As the 2000s drew to a close, China's GDP-driven economy had achieved continuous high-speed growth, propelling the country into a fully integrated part of the global capitalist system. A new capitalist class quickly formed,[3] which gained increasing power and played an influential role over the Party-state as well as the society.

Given the circumstances described above, cultural studies in mainland China has arrived at the following conclusion: since the early 1980s, China has been progressively moving towards a Western-style capitalism, while still retaining its unique "Chinese characteristics."[4] This judgment was generally applicable, at least until the end of the 2000s.

But in the late 2000s a series of major changes began to occur in China. The key factor behind these changes was the gradual implementation of a new political orientation by CCP, which is now commonly referred to as the "Xi Jinping line"(hereafter referred to as "the new line"). Apart from its insistence on "the leadership of CCP" and "the dictatorship in the name of the proletariat," this new line shows clear differences from the "Deng Xiaoping line" in many other aspects. Currently, the most significant differences can be summarized in the following four aspects:

1. The most important achievement of Deng's line is the creation of a Party-state-driven and controlled capitalism (hereinafter referred to as "Party-state capitalism"), in which the two key components—the Party-state and the capitalism—have basically maintained a cooperative, even merged relationship. However, under the impetus of the new line, the CCP bureaucratic group at the core of the Party-state has begun to view the new capitalist class—especially the private entrepreneurs within it—as a major threat. As a result, the Party-state has significantly strengthened its control over the capitalism. This fundamentally changes the original relationship between the two components as well as the operating mechanism based on it. Therefore, there is a good chance that Party-state capitalism will end its rapid growth and enter a second stage that is increasingly stagnant and full of uncertainties.
2. The most significant achievement of Deng's line in international relations is the formation of a cooperative relationship between the Party-state and the US-led Western world. This was one of

the primary conditions that contributed to the rapid development of China's economy as well as the rise of Party-state capitalism. However, under the combined effect of the new line and the drastic change in US policy towards China, this relationship has undergone a significant reversal: there is now political rivalry, economic disengagement, and even potential military conflict, all of which are increasingly becoming the main aspects of the China-US or "Party-state versus the West" relationship.

3. CCP's self-renewal, officially referred to as the "political system reform"(政治体制改革),[5] which began in the 1980s, has effectively ceased. CCP has now reasserted control over all aspects of the society, attempting to bring various social changes that emerged during the Deng Xiaoping era within the direction endorsed by the new line.
4. A nationalist ideology based on the "rise of the great China"[6] has become the central ideological expression of the new political line, gradually displacing the prevalent "Western-style modernization" imagination of the 1980s to 2000s,[7] and serving as the basis for the mainstream public's conception of the future of China and of the world.[8]

This new social reality has not only presented a significant challenge to cultural studies in terms of developing new and effective interpretations but also created a new demand for cultural studies. In contemporary China, the broad-sense "culture" clearly has a greater impact on the entire society, even when compared to the period of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976).

We know that in contemporary China, the combined effect of the following three conditions has given "culture" its potentially unprecedented influence: the rapid and significant shift towards an interconnected and globalized economic, cultural, and political system that is based on capitalist principles; the continuous strengthening of the economic and political functions of "culture" by technological advancements represented by the internet, big data, and artificial intelligence; and the ever-expanding impact of the deteriorating mainstream culture on the overall operation of the society.

However, to truly understand why "culture" is so important today, we need to answer the followings questions:

- How has each of the above aspects of the new situation formed?
- How do they interact and form a synergistic relationship?
- And how do they coordinate and supplement other important existing conditions?

Furthermore, we need to address a range of new questions that emerge from this analysis, such as:

- How is the production mechanism of the dominant culture in Chinese society changing?
- Is there an embryonic form of a new dominant culture taking shape? If yes, what are its key features and basic structure?

Speaking more concretely, I believe that cultural studies should first address two interrelated phenomena:

- Why has the mainstream public's conception dramatically shifted towards the narrow-minded nationalism[9] since the late 2000s?
- How should we interpret the resurgence of political consciousness among the general public today?

As for the first phenomenon, there are many contributing factors, but from the perspective of cultural studies, we should first pay attention to three key factors: great change in the media, the transformation of the cultural elite class, and the stimulus of the law of the jungle style international environment.

GREAT CHANGES IN THE MEDIA

Currently in China, the internet has become the primary means of information dissemination, enabling the masses-- who were previously relegated to passive consumption of traditional media such as books, radio, and television-- to have a platform for active expression. While this is undeniably a major step forward for democratization, the strict control of ideology and public opinion by the Party-state has made the situation

complex. The majority of those who are now able to speak out on the internet have long lived in a state of deprivation and therefore lack the capacity to break free from the control over information. Receiving limited and filtered information has become a habitual and commonplace experience for them. As a result, not only will the phenomenon of an "information cocoon" and intolerance towards dissenting opinions become increasingly common, but the habit of following the loudest voice will also inevitably continue to be reinforced. And in most cases, it is the official media that has the loudest voice in China.

Of course, people are not just passively following the loudest voice. In today's increasingly atomized social networks, more and more individuals are alone and plagued by confusion and panic as they have lost the support of the archaic socialist system and lack the backing of the civil society as well. This can easily trigger a collective unconsciousness in which people would actively identify with the highest authority and all the "great things" in order to gain a sense of security and psychological comfort. The State and its emblematic causes like "national rejuvenation" and "unification" in today's China are very likely to become the preferred object of identification.

This is not surprising, when individuals accumulate negative experiences at both personal and societal levels to a dangerous extent, they may find themselves channeling these experiences into anger towards a particular group or groups, and thus fall into narrow-minded nationalist fanaticism. The tendency to vent frustrations through hatred is something that can affect anyone.

THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE CULTURAL ELITE CLASS

The Party-state's severe crackdown on the student movement in 1989 ended the hope of the Chinese intellectual/cultural elite in the possibility of political progress. In the context of this general disillusionment, a new academic evaluation system was implemented in universities in the late 1990s.[10] This new system, coupled with a capitalist consumer-driven economy promoted by the Party-state, successfully attracted a large number of teachers and scholars to actively seek funding from Party-state projects and thus enjoy the lifestyle of the urban middle-class. Over the next two decades, the cultural elite have become highly accustomed to relying on the Party-state system to advance both their personal interests

and the collective interests of their community. Many of them have become more integrated into the mainstream ideology in an attempt to reconcile their present desires with their sense of responsibility.

In this context, it is very difficult for the cultural elite to continue to play a role in questioning and going beyond narrow-minded nationalism. Some even actively advocate for it from the perspectives of "the law of the jungle" and "national rejuvenation," providing ideological and academic justifications for such narrow-minded nationalism. However, we must remember that earlier generations of Chinese cultural elite made significant contributions to the issue of nationalism during most of the 20th century, by helping to steer it away from narrow-mindedness and towards broader horizons of self-transcendence.

Equally important, the rapid development of Party-state capitalism over the past three decades has profoundly transformed the internal structure of the Chinese cultural elite. In this new landscape, entertainment celebrities with massive fan bases and social media presences have increasingly replaced the traditional intellectuals as the central figures in this class, wielding significant power over cultural trends. As figures from the cultural industries, they prioritize commercial interests and instinctively conform to any opinions or views favored by the authorities in order to maintain their profits. Adopting a stance of narrow-minded nationalism is one of their commonly used tactics to obey the authorities. With the growing online community that vents nationalist sentiment, these new cultural elites are bound to fuel and endorse the current narrow-minded nationalism.

THE STIMULUS OF THE LAW OF THE JUNGLE-STYLE INTERNATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

Similar to India, Iran, and Turkey, China has a long-standing tradition of viewing itself as a superior cultural and a global center. Since the mid-19th century, Western powers' ongoing oppression has led to widespread resentment towards national humiliation and an obsessive focus on national dignity among the Chinese population.[11] These two factors have combined to create a fertile ground for nationalism in Chinese society.

In this context, when the global order (dominated by Western countries) operates in a manner that resembles the "law of the jungle," where national interests and power dynamics prevail, any efforts by the inter-

national community to pressure China ideologically (for instance, with regards to democracy and human rights) may be viewed as hypocritical. Especially when the political, economic, and military actions of the United States exhibit evident signs of hegemony, this could trigger memories of historical humiliation among the Chinese population and ultimately fuel narrow-minded nationalism.

Now let's move on to the other phenomenon: Since the mid-1990s, most Chinese people could be characterized as apolitical, with their attention focused primarily on economic development and personal enrichment. While there are some exceptions, many have been consciously avoiding national politics and public affairs, even confidently claim that they don't care about politics.

Since around 2018, however, the situation has been changing. More people are beginning to pay attention to national politics and public affairs. Despite the government's tightening control over online public opinion, netizens continue to comment on a variety of public events, with many expressing sharp criticisms. These criticisms have received widespread support on the internet, which was a rare phenomenon five years ago. It's evident that political awareness is growing among the general public. The "Blank Paper Movement" that erupted in November 2022 on university campuses and city streets in Shanghai, Beijing, Nanjing, Guangzhou, Wuhan, Chengdu, and other Chinese cities further highlighted the extent of this increase. This new situation can be explained from many perspectives. However, the role of two is particularly prominent: negative sentiments towards the current economic situation and fear and disgust towards the Party-state's strengthened social control.

NEGATIVE SENTIMENTS TOWARDS THE CURRENT ECONOMIC SITUATION

The combined impact of various domestic and foreign factors[12] has led to a decline in China's economic growth rate since 2017, and there seems to be little hope of a quick rebound. For the past thirty years, the rapid economic growth has masked various structural social problems, such as wealth disparity, and allowed the population to enjoy, to varying degrees, improved living standards. This explains why the highly authoritarian nature of the Party-state has been tolerated, even accepted by the general public, with many Chinese citizens showing no interest in politics.

When the economic situation deteriorates, more and more people, especially the younger generation, start to lose faith in the future of their material and social well-being. Many may even begin to experience, or have experienced, a worsened state of poverty. Those who have previously closed their eyes and ears, consciously or unconsciously, to public issues, will start to ask questions such as: Why are more and more companies laying off employees or going bankrupt? Why are housing prices so high that I can't afford them? Why do I work so hard and yet earn so little? Why are "they" so rich? The accumulation of these questions and individual frustrations will lead to increased political awareness among the population.

FEAR AND DISGUST TOWARDS THE PARTY-STATE'S STRENGTHENED SOCIAL CONTROL

Since the political system reform started in the early 1980s, the Party-state's control over social life has gradually relaxed despite some setbacks. The loosening of such control has also contributed to the population's lack of interest towards politics. Starting from the mid-2010s, however, the State has significantly strengthened its control over Chinese society. It concerns not only the political sphere. Freedom began to decrease noticeably in other areas too, such as the economy and entertainment.

In this context, an increasing number of people are starting to feel that politics is becoming unavoidable, even if they would prefer not to be involved. Furthermore, the three-year-long "zero-COVID" policy, which began in early 2020, has led to excessive restrictions on the daily livelihoods of the population and serious damage to their health and safety, and generated intense indignation among the public. In different parts of the country, people found themselves in situations where they had no choice but to confront government officials who were in charge of implementing the "zero-COVID" policy.[13]

Chinese people have always been afraid of conflicts with the government. However, when they retreat into their private lives and keep out of the public sphere, the powerful hand of the Party-state, under the name of implementing a state of emergency, invades their private space and forces them to recognize the ubiquity and inescapability of politics. This particular way of fostering a sense of political awareness among the population is quite characteristic of China.

As we explore the phenomena mentioned above, and not just the two examples I have highlighted, cultural studies will inevitably encounter broader and weightier issues. Among these, I consider the most important to be the cultural production of the Party-state capitalism at its first stage, which began to take shape in the mid-1990s. In the past decade, it has taken on a new form that sharply challenges the existing analytical frameworks of cultural studies.

Due to space limitations, I won't develop this argument further. But this brief introduction should suffice to present a fact: China is once again approaching what Lu Xun called "The Big Era," as the country is caught in a double dilemma. On the one hand, it is facing a global crisis caused by the increasingly ineffective global order based on an international capitalist economic system; on the other hand, it also encounters internal crisis, due to multiple dysfunctions of the Party-state system. This double dilemma creates a tremendous amount of uncertainty in contemporary China. The only thing that can be confirmed is that tensions and conflicts are intensifying at both the societal and Party-state levels. Needless to say, this is precisely the situation Lu Xun described in the early 1930s, with words like "the moment towards the Great era": Chinese society is approaching the moment of "Armageddon" made by the intensification of social contradictions.

This is also what should be thoroughly examined with Grossberg's exposition of "conjuncture." Here, I would like to say a few more words about the relationship between the cultural studies represented by Grossberg's arguments over the past fifteen years and the effective analysis of China's current situation within the realm of cultural studies.

Compared to other Chinese-speaking societies like Taiwan and Hong Kong, the rise of cultural studies in Mainland China was relatively late. In the middle of 1990s, when the so-called "market economy reform" driven by the "Deng Xiaoping line" gained momentum, the whole society was propelled toward a trajectory of change that increasingly resembled Western-style capitalist society. It was during this period that cultural studies began to thrive in universities of Mainland China. As mentioned at the beginning of this article, the recognition of this similarity between the evolving Chinese society and Western capitalist societies served as an important prerequisite for cultural studies to understand the societal changes for about two decades. Consequently, Chinese cultural studies scholars avidly learned from works from the West, such as those from the

Birmingham cultural studies tradition and the Frankfurt School, as well as from the works by comrades in Korea, Taiwan, Japan, India and so on. Grossberg's works, including his excellent research on rock music, was part of this corpus, although, I have to say, the impact was not particularly prominent at the time.

Around mid-2010s, what I have here called "the new line" evidently replaced the "Deng Xiaoping line" and redirected the trend of social change. This shift plunged the entire society into deep uncertainty, and the aforementioned acknowledgement of the similarity is becoming less and less important to Chinese cultural studies scholars. It is also in this context that Grossberg-style analytical thinking, which focuses on specific socio-historical situations, began to attract intensive attention from the Chinese cultural studies community.

During this pivotal period, Grossberg himself visited China for almost one month in 2016, giving six lectures at Shanghai University, Shanghai Jiao Tong University, Nanjing University, Nankai University, Capital Normal University, and Beijing Foreign Studies University. He also engaged in interviews with academic journals and newspapers, as well as participated in several symposiums with local cultural studies scholars. In 2018, he returned to China to attend the 12th International Crossroads in Cultural Studies Biennial held at Shanghai University, where he delivered an impressive speech titled "Pessimism of the Will, Optimism of the Intellect: A Life in Cultural Studies" before an audience of at least 700 people.

These inspiring activities, through which Grossberg initiated a wild range of face-to-face exchanges with Chinese counterparts, effectively encouraged the need for cultural studies in mainland China to develop new analytical ideas, and naturally elicited a warmer response. The articles introducing Grossberg's ideas, and Chinese translations of his articles, proliferated from the mid-to-late 2010s; the Chinese translation of his seminal book, *Cultural Studies in The Future Tense*, was published in Beijing in 2017. And amid all these discussions, writing and publishing about Grossberg and his work, the concept of "conjuncture" has been a prominent topic. In his first lecture at Shanghai University in 2016, for example, responses from four scholars from four universities in Shanghai all delved into discussions on the idea of "conjuncture."

It is certainly not a mere coincidence. Analytical tools and ideas like "conjuncture" naturally hold a strong appeal for cultural studies scholars in mainland China. They are well aware that the systematic theories

they had embraced in the past, regardless of their origin, can no longer provide credible insights into understanding the fundamental relationship between the past, present, and the future; and at the same time, there is a growing acknowledgement that, in order to fulfill the social responsibility of cultural studies, every effort must be directed towards exploring and grasping the new—and more complex—social reality.

In a way, uncertainty emerges as a more prevalent and fundamental condition of human social life than the certainty that often comes from our oversimplified feeling and thinking. Virtually all the thinking and analysis that genuinely helps in the long run are premised on confronting this uncertainty. And it is in this constant struggle with uncertainty, this willingness to confront rather than evade or eliminate uncertainty, that the progress of our thoughts and actions is assured.

Of course, as Grossberg emphasized in his 2018 Shanghai lecture, cultural studies is by its very nature always trying to grasp new realities. Therefore, it consistently places itself in the midst of explorations where readily available conclusions are scarce, and success is never guaranteed. Will Chinese cultural studies be able to continue effectively intervening in reality and promoting positive cultural developments in the near future? I'm not optimistic. However, cultural studies has great potential for progress in terms of theory and knowledge production, because of the urgent need to understand the new social reality. In many fields, including cultural studies, progress is typically made in response to the challenges posed by reality. Currently, the conditions for such progress are present: as China's social reality seems to have surpassed the explanatory reach of traditional modes of thinking and theorizing, scholars including Grossberg are contributing new analytical approaches, which are effectively responding to these challenges from within cultural studies, encouraging us to explore new interpretations continuously. While it is unclear whether contemporary Chinese society will ultimately tilt towards "life" or "death" (Lu Xun's words), I firmly believe that by confronting the complex dynamics of social situations, we can gain a deeper understanding of reality. Even if this entails enduring prolonged periods of chaos and unimaginable disasters, the reconstruction of Chinese society should be a feasible goal.

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NOTES

1. In 1979, Deng Xiaoping set a political bottom line for China's "reform and opening-up" policy, known as the "Four Principles" that include "socialism," the leadership of CCP over the country, the dictatorship in the name of "the proletariat," and "Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought."

2. What I refer to as "market economy" and "transition to capitalism" exhibit distinct "Chinese characteristics" (中国特色), mainly defined by the adherence to the first two of the "Four Principles:" the leadership of CCP and the dictatorship in the name of "the proletariat." Both of them can be understood as the core of the Party-state.

3. This new capitalist class is not solely composed of those who are currently referred to as "private entrepreneurs" by the authorities. Capitalists and entrepreneurs who, in various ways, have transformed from Party bureaucrats (many still retain their bureaucratic identity) also make up a very important, even key, part of this new class.

4. It's worth noting that "Chinese characteristics" does not just mean adhering to a set of political conditions that have existed in China since the late 1970s, which Deng Xiaoping summarized as the "Four Principles." The term also implies to adhering to a series of political conditions that have emerged since then, the most important of which is a strong promotion of capitalism while maintaining tight control over it by the Party-state, despite its conflicts apparently with "the socialism" and "Marxism, Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought" espoused by Deng Xiaoping.

5. The actual meaning of this self-renewal can be summarized as a limited self-transformation of CCP in response to the demands of "modernization" (or in other words, aligning with the Western world) of the Chinese society. The primary objective of this transformation is to loosen the Party-state's tight control over the economy and other non-political aspects of social life. And the term "limited" refers to the condition that such a transformation must not jeopardize CCP's ruling position.

6. One could roughly condense the essence of "Western-style modernization" into two interrelated ideas: On the one hand, Western-style modernization and its globalization represent the direction of progress in human history and embody universal values pursued by all humankind; on the other hand, China should learn from the West and go through a Western-style modernization.

7. The core of the "rise of the great China" discourse, which began to rapidly expand in the late 2000s, can be roughly summarized into two mutually reinforcing ideas: first, China has already "risen" in areas such as the economy, technology, and military, and will soon surpass the United States to become the world's leading superpower; second, Western countries led by the United States will inevitably encircle and contain China in order to maintain their global dominance. Therefore, China must respond with a strong counterattack.

8. Here, the "mainstream public's conception" refers to the prevalent beliefs and values held by the majority of its population, extending beyond official ideology or state propaganda.

9. The use of the term "narrow-minded" to describe the current nationalism centered on the discourse of "rise of great China" is mainly in comparison to the earlier forms of Chinese nationalism that emerged during the late 19th century. In much of the 20th century, Chinese nationalism was not only concerned with "national interest" and "international struggle" (which mainly manifested as resistance against imperialist oppression), but also emphasized China's responsibility to support and liberate other oppressed nations in the world, especially in Asia. Furthermore, during that time, there was already a growing awareness of the potential for China to be imperialized through aggressive behavior in its future interactions, both domestically and internationally.

10. The core of this evaluation system is the close coordination between two aspects: 1) government funding for academic research in universities continues to rise, accompanied by a growing emphasis on the commercialization of academic findings; and 2) among the various criteria used to evaluate the academic performance of scholars, the most crucial one is now the ability to secure research projects sponsored by the government.

11. The widespread acceptance of the ideology of "unity" (统一) among Chinese people today is not simply due to the influence of tradition. While the traditional Chinese historical understanding does emphasize the importance of "unity," there is also a recognition of the cyclical nature of history, where periods of unity are inevitably followed by periods of division and vice versa. In this sense, both "division" and "unity" have their own legitimate historical justifications. In modern times, however, the focus on unity has largely overshadowed the legitimacy of division, mainly because of the humiliating experience of being "carved up" by Western powers.

12. There are external and internal factors that have contributed to China's economic slowdown: a US-China trade war initiated by the Trump administration, the Chinese government's insistence on a "zero-tolerance" policy towards COVID-19, and the volatility in export trade due to the global economic downturn, etc. However, the more fundamental reasons for the decline in economic growth lie in the imbalanced internal structure of the Chinese economy and the widespread lack of consumer confidence.

13. Here is an example: in the spring of 2022, disinfection personnel were dispatched to many homes in cities like Shanghai to carry out the "indoor disinfection" policy, even in the absence of homeowners. The forced entry sparked widespread fear and anger among citizens who suddenly realized that their private space could be entered by officials without their consent.

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One Step Beyond: Pedagogical Conversations with Lawrence Grossberg at the University of Milan

CLAUDIA GUALTIERI, ROBERTO PEDRETTI, AND LIDIA DE MICHELIS

INTRODUCTION

When the innovative study course titled "Language Mediation and Intercultural Communication" was instituted at the University of Milan in 2002, Itala Vivan, one of its founding figures, summoned us—Lidia De Michelis, Claudia Gualtieri, and Roberto Pedretti—to contribute to the change that the course was addressing. Italian society, increasingly affected by the movement of people and the transformations of economic globalization, was thus acquiring unprecedented features. From our diverse intellectual formations and fields of expertise—but sharing, however, a postcolonial background—we would participate in revising the syllabuses of our disciplines (named English Culture and Cultures of English-Speaking Countries in the new course plan) and in innovating pedagogical frames. We were thrilled by the project and enthusiastic about its engagement in cultural studies' propositions, which we wanted to use as a transformative force through pedagogical action. Itala Vivan would soon retire, and we were eager to connote ourselves as a team explicitly involved in the cultural studies' project of radical change. Our unifying intent, political commitment, and pedagogical strength—as we imagined them at that time and as we still perceive them looking back—was to work as a group engaged in wide interdisciplinary conversations offering examples of those conversations in our pedagogical choices and teaching behaviors, with a clear focus on the cultural value of everyday practices and their political meaning.

We embraced the project following the path of the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies and Stuart Hall's inspiring lead, which we wanted to put to test in the specific context of our classes. While our own proficiency in cultural studies was expanding, pedagogical experimentation started along the line of conversation with our students (quite unusual in the Italian academia especially at BA level) and with Lawrence Grossberg's challenging writing, first, and engaging collaboration in person, later. Roberto first engaged with Grossberg's writing, then Claudia and Lidia followed, with a focus on using it for a better understanding of the culture and politics of our present context. Our first meeting with Larry in 2014 enlivened and expanded that intellectual collaboration.

In the following sections, we wish to bring this conversation to the foreground, also underlining how we worked as a team contributing our personal expertise to a common project. From this perspective, our commitment in cultural studies has addressed different issues and offered different methodologies and pedagogical strategies from those proclaimed by other scholars in the field at the University of Milan, which mostly considered cultural studies as a prop for communication studies and the study of literature. By exposing our voices in the following discussion, we wish both to trace our individual adaptations and personal uses of cultural studies' method and to articulate the conversation that has characterized our teamwork both inside and outside the academy.

PEDAGOGICAL CONVERSATIONS: ROBERTO'S STORY

My encounter with cultural studies began entirely by chance. It was my specific social and political positioning that opened the door for me to this way of approaching intellectual work and reflection. I came across the first books, translated from English into Italian, that wrote about young people; and what initially struck me about these books was the approach through which stories were told—stories that somehow concerned my own life and experiences. These books spoke about music, soccer, fashion, styles—along the lines of class, gender, and race—all topics that were a significant part of my life. Above all, they addressed my interests by trying to deconstruct their meaning, unveiling their hidden mechanisms, reconstructing their function in terms of individual and collective identities. It was only after some time that I realized I had stumbled upon cultural studies.

My first, belated encounter with Lawrence Grossberg happened in the realm of a reflection on the role and meaning of an aspect of popular culture known as "rock." Grossberg's analysis struck me with his idea that rock music and everything revolving around it was understood as a cultural constellation in which a variety of practices condense, involving modes of production and consumption and the ability to signify diverse experiences and shape both individual and collective identities. Rock culture was defined and placed within the broader dimension of popular culture: How did it become what it was? Why is it so important to many people's lives? Rock was considered a cultural practice produced in a specific spatial, material, and temporal context that defined its contours and political implications. Articulating the "rock formation" meant reconstructing the connections and relationships that made it possible: economic-political conditions, media, technologies, the role and discourse of youth, and consumption. The keyword in that reflection was context, a term to which Grossberg's entire production incessantly returns. Embracing this perspective required accepting the political role that the intellectual plays when applying cultural studies as an operational method, which disassembles and reassembles relationships and contexts, traces lines, and maps connections with the aim of fostering a conversation that opens up new possibilities for understanding and transforming the world, as Grossberg argues. This encounter opened doors that laid the groundwork for rethinking my intellectual practice: engaging in cultural studies entailed the need to think and work "without guarantees," as Stuart Hall suggested—which involved risk, openness, and uncertainty.

My encounter with cultural studies evolved into a habit that materialized with the first edition of *Dalla Lambretta allo Skateboard. Teorie e storie delle sottoculture giovanili (1950-2000)* [From the lambretta to the skateboard. Theories and stories of youth subcultures] (Pedretti 2009). It was not only about the need to produce a text on youth cultures, which until then had been absent on the Italian market. It was also an opportunity to take stock of my relationship with, and my vision of, cultural studies. An expanded edition was published in 2020, *Dalla lambretta allo skateboard 2.0. Sottoculture e nuovi movimenti dagli anni '50 alla globalizzazione*. [From the lambretta to the skateboard 2.0. Subcultures and new movements from the Fifties to globalization] (Pedretti 2020), in line with the methodological dictate that a project is never concluded and is always constituted in an

open conversation. The aim of the 2020 edition was to address the emergence of new forms of collective action in a context radically different from that of the previous decade.

This encounter redirected my intellectual curiosity and my working style in the academic setting. The goal—certainly ambitious—was to make use of cultural studies as a pedagogical tool that would prepare students to become translators and distributors of knowledge in the public sphere, such as teachers, cultural operators, artists, journalists, and political activists. Specifically, my ambition concerned the possibility of conveying a method, which would lead my students to feel the need to conduct intellectual work in a critical and self-reflective manner. Essentially, it involved using the syllabuses of the courses as an opportunity to apply critical methodology by paying special attention to cultural studies' contextual concern. This task has become increasingly challenging considering the transformation that the education system has undergone in recent years, both in Italy and abroad, with its gradual adaptation to neoliberal ideals and policies. In practical terms, my ambition aimed at providing spaces for discussion, in the form of seminar activities, interdisciplinary conferences, contributions to academic journals open to many voices from diverse operators (students, cultural operators, artists, etc.), to nurture that specific mode of conversation, which is characteristic of cultural studies. Despite the "pessimism of the will" generated by the negative circulating narratives, Grossberg calls on us to exercise the "optimism of reason" and to return to a method that places the existing relationship between culture and power at the center of culturalist practice.

One last reflection concerns the "crisis" of cultural studies. This condition seems to be determined by the challenge of revisiting the foundations of the original project, but it is linked to rethinking the modes of production, distribution, and circulation of knowledge. In the wake of the Gramscian reflection that distinguishes between the traditional and organic intellectual, Grossberg argues that the task of cultural studies should be to reconsider the model and function of the intellectual, who is expected to be more pragmatic, flexible, and modest. This figure must be capable of constructing and reconstructing the relationships that link public intellectuals to a particular moment, to a specific environment and social context characterized by needs, difficulties, and affect.

For some time, there has been discussion about the "crisis" of cultural studies: a crisis that is related to, and interacts with, the expansion of the field, the need to innovatively recover the intellectual and the political reasons at the basis of the project, the harsh reality of the hegemonic exercise of neoliberal and neoconservative thought, the crisis of democratic systems, and the defeats of the most radical and advanced social movements. However, self-reflective criticism is also a strength: part of what makes up cultural studies is the capacity to continually deconstruct and reconstruct itself in order to respond to our ever-changing world and the set of social relations in continuous transformation, and to reveal asymmetrical power dynamics. Self-reflexivity allows us to avoid sterile conceptual and theoretical crystallization, while the continual questioning of one's perspective and the awareness of the context in which one operates must be considered a necessary condition for producing knowledge that is both an expression of intellectual rigor and of political commitment.

From this perspective, I can only share the words of Ted Striphas, who invites us to reconsider, review, and improve the project in the face of challenging issues that, as practitioners of cultural studies, we are called upon to address in order to articulate new forms of intellectual work and political engagement. My effort has been focused on thinking about and applying cultural studies as a project with political value, an intellectual exercise in which moral responsibility is a fundamental part of academic work and knowledge production. Those who engage in this adventure are akin to the figure of the deserter, the nomad, the traveler; they are, as Grossberg argues in *Cultural Studies in the Future Tense*, the other who is also the reason to imagine a better world: "an other that is always unknown but knowable, always abstract yet concretized" (Grossberg 2010, 100).

CLAUDIA'S STORY

Roberto and I have regularly intersected our lines of reflection, both on the major theoretical concerns of our culturalist engagement—namely, the role of the public intellectual, the current crisis, the pedagogical commitment, civic and militant action—and on specific projects, such as the two conferences on "Crisis, risks, and new regionalism in Europe" (which we organized in collaboration with Chemnitz University of Technology in 2014 and 2016), as well as the translation of Grossberg's essays *Lawrence Grossberg. Gli studi culturali, il lavoro intellettuale e la pratica politica. Saggi*

2015-2021 (Grossberg 2021—the second organic translation of Grossberg's essays into Italian after Milly Buonanno's *Lawrence Grossberg. Saggi sui Cultural Studies: Media, rock, giovani* [*Essays on Cultural Studies: Media, Rock, Youth*] (Grossberg 2002).

My intellectual training in postcolonial studies has shaped my approach to cultural studies in ways that have become contiguous and interacting. This contiguity provides an ample perspective that, from the contextual analysis of specific moments in history and from the excavation of the imbalance of power and of strategies of resistance, attempts to envision pragmatic actions in the present that may reverberate changes across other spaces and future temporalities. Cultural studies' interest is contiguous with postcolonial studies' attention to colonialism as it extends over time and places to reproduce shifting structures of subjugation, systems of control, forms of racialization, and unequal power relations. Along this line, the urge to consider unbalanced power structures, dynamics of exclusion, the exploitation of subaltern groups, and imperial drives, as well as to maintain a perceptive position towards forms of dissent, resistance, and political engagement, has driven my interest and led me to explore migration as a battleground in which strategic forces and the overwhelming preoccupations of our time emerge and compete.

In the current postcolonial condition, as Sandro Mezzadra theorizes, one of the legacies of colonialism is evident in the policies of control, bordering, and exclusion that are perpetrated on human mobility, for example from Africa across the Mediterranean and Italy. They help to implement the mechanism of race construction and to reproduce both racialized social structures and institutional racism, as Stuart Hall perceptively examined in the British society in the 1970s. Absorbing cultural studies' radical contextuality, my approach—which prioritizes the point of view of minorities and subaltern groups and investigates forms of both oppression and resistance—has gradually concentrated on Italy and on the intersecting frameworks of the national legal system, artistic productions by refugees, asylum seekers and "new Italians," and the migrants' everyday life. Theatre performances on migration, refugee tales, forms of civic engagement that favor integration, and the migrants' everyday struggle for survival as well as their common daily practices contribute to forging what I have defined (in two publications of 2018 and 2020) "utopias in the present": pragmatic forms of resistance, cultural productions still to be considered and voiced. In this active research field, in the edited volume

Migration and the Contemporary Mediterranean, the Mediterranean has been observed according to the notion of connectivity—both a system of bordering and exclusion, and a passage that should be described with new words and new stories.

In practicing cultural studies in peripheral and marginalized contexts, major changes have been identified in the relationship of culture and society through the emergence and revision of keywords. Consistent with this approach, and following Lawrence Grossberg's and others' updating of Raymond Williams' reflection, keywords have marked a leading interest in my analysis both of human movement and of the impediment to it during the COVID-19 boom, as keywords are relevant indicators of social and cultural relations, tensions, and developments in place. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the debate has been particularly challenging: words such as *freedom*, *immunity*, *community*, *citizenship*, *exclusion*, *access* to vaccines, and *breath* acquired momentum. They were not new, but the pandemic brought them to the foreground and loaded them with meanings that required new eyes and new lenses in order to make the forces at work visible. Building on this analytical culturalist stance, a postcolonial perspective also required that the effects and consequences of European colonialism be brought to the foreground and critically expressed. Coherently, a vision of the "universal right to breath," powerfully defended by Achille Mbembe, addressed the question of the life of the entire planet as a form of sharing, possibly understandable when humans negotiate their supposed primacy with everything else in the universe.

A difficult experimental mapping of the conjuncture emerges from the analytical clusters that have been selected. Perhaps Ben Highmore's (2021) recent invitation about disjunctive constellations may open new paths of reflection and narration. In Grossberg's (2015) words, the mapping of the conjuncture requires constant intellectual commitment in conversation with the others invested in the project: "The richer our efforts, the more maps we can construct and relate, the better our understanding of the conjuncture and our imagination of its possible transformations" (226). In my intellectual experience and pedagogical practice, the reference to imagination reveals the collaborative intent of cultural studies and postcolonial studies. As Edward Said argues, for the intellectual being "wordly" also involves a pedagogical obligation when investigating the ethical and political effects of texts. "What do a narrative, a story, a book do?" is a radical question, as is the act of listening also promoted by the Refugee Tales

project in which I have been involved. In addition to the aesthetic qualities of a text, postcolonial studies and cultural studies highlight its pedagogical and political functions in terms of what the text does in order to cross borders through the creative word, oppose mainstream rhetoric, explore the dramatic potential of the story, and attract the readers in the construction of new imaginaries. For scholars and activists in cultural studies and postcolonial studies, reading in their capacity as public intellectuals entails a responsibility and a challenge to address uncomfortable questions about themselves, their role, and the world around them.

What I have taken from Grossberg's work and have found particularly useful to help with my own intellectual work and pedagogical practice is the open, honest conversation about changing contexts that his writing engages. It is a conversation that has fostered fruitful critical debates in my classes, especially for Grossberg's exemplary and explicit positioning within the context he is analyzing, his strenuous intellectual rigor paired with the acknowledgment of personal weaknesses, his solid conviction that culture matters and culture is political combined with the humble constant search for better stories.

LIDIA'S STORY

I am the longest-serving academic among the authors of this tribute (when our Degree Course was established I had more than 25 years of academic experience teaching English Studies at the Faculty of Political Science, where I contentedly inhabited what I regarded as the methodology- and content-specific domain of "English" literature). While somewhat peripheral compared to literary faculties, this positioning soon rendered me perceptive of the multifarious conversations and critical affordances a pluridisciplinary work environment made possible. Interacting with historians, sociologists, political scientists, and leading academics in political communication, I began to cross-fertilize my immersive passion for English literary studies with a deep interest in critical discourse analysis and the discursive construction of political realit(ies).

From a pedagogical perspective, too, my academic apprenticeship spent teaching evening classes specifically designed for working university students gave me the opportunity to live out "from the class to the street" experiences well before becoming aware of what cultural studies' critical pedagogy really entailed. When in 1990 Itala Vivan arrived at the Institute

of Foreign Languages where I worked, the call to read and research outside my aesthetic comfort zone did not go unheard. Initially wary about joining a cultural project which entailed a careful rethinking of one's intellectual habits, political positioning, and expectations, I was gradually won over by the urgency and civil intensity of postcolonial voices and perspectives, and by the revitalizing impact of "teaching for justice." My interest in cultural studies came slightly later, as a consequence of group-thinking towards the organization of the new degree course. Throughout the 2000s, I gained insight into the works of Stuart Hall and Lawrence Grossberg, but it was only after meeting Grossberg in person and spending a few days with him on the occasion of the 2014 "Crisis" conference in Milan that I experienced what, quoting from Thom Gunn's "In Santa Maria del Popolo" (1994, 93), I describe as my "Saul becoming Paul" conversion to cultural studies.

An attention to contextualism, relationality, and disciplinary intersections was a common characteristic of English literature programs experimenting with cultural studies across Italian academia, but several of them approached "context" mainly as a prerequisite for analyzing imaginative textual and visual cultural productions. It is of little concern that "[t]he gift of context" *vis à vis* today's fragmented and obfuscating rhetoric of "chaos" has been beautifully described by Ali Smith (2019) in terms of discursive implication and "understanding of something which right now is being flung at us in broken pieces by people acutely aware that language is a powerful tool and keen to make us feel what they need us to feel, make us useful to them and their power structures, and at the same time keen to strip and limit language and the dimensionality and connectivity in which both language and thought are sourced" (n.p.).

Embracing Grossberg's radical contextualism has led me—and us, as a group of cultural studies practitioners—to a veritable reorientation of our approach to literature, which has been quite noticeable in its fallout. Our group has used contemporary literary texts as actively concurring elements in the construction and transformation of specific contemporary conjunctures. As we have tried to show our students, Grossberg's compelling metaphor representing conjunctural analysis is radically different from, and much more productive than, the "collage" cognitive and pedagogical model which informs "lazy" cultural studies approaches to the study of literature. Such altered perspectives were made explicit at the beginning of each course, along with the foundational notions, and the ethical and methodological imperative to declare our theoretical posi-

tioning and political standpoints, both as individuals and as members of a group sharing the need to identify and ask the right questions. This was also the time to express the main principles of cultural studies' critical pedagogy, understood as a kind of ethical and intellectual discipline which transforms research into political praxis and to enact and make visible Grossberg's description of cultural studies as "a way of inhabiting the position of scholar, teacher, artist and intellectual." Henry A. Giroux's reconceptualization, in "Cultural Studies as Performative Politics" (2001, 6), of teachers, artists and cultural workers as "border crossers," engaged in creating and facilitating connections across multifarious cultural domains was also bound to be inspirational in the context of courses often addressing issues of immigration and expulsion, or the bordered political imaginaries of Brexit. From the dual perspective of a political, economic, cultural, and affiliative process-- and of an affective landscape—Brexit proved to be a perfect platform for a conjunctural approach to the entanglement of "the real" and "the literary" and for the reflexive struggle between the collaborative fictions and reassuring endorsement of parallel realities characteristic of post-truth, and the aesthetic and ethical integrity of literary "truth."

Studies of the mediatization of politics and the new media environment, of populist and "crisis" rhetoric, social media and their contribution towards a decline of literacy and complex thinking, the nexus between the discourses and practices of precarization and the incremental production of a transnational underclass, were articulated and brought together with the multiple issues of stigmatization, criminalization, invisibilization and "expulsion" from language and the space of "the human" of illegalized migrants and asylum seekers, while British anti-Europeanism could be assessed against the surge of similar moods among Italians and across the EU. All this was seen in light of the politics of austerity and the moralization of the condemnation of (induced) poverty following the 2007-2008 global financial "crisis," and of Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson's critical conceptualization of the border and its technologies in *Border as Method* (2013). As to the literary lines of force concurring to our questioning of the current conjuncture, they included novels, short stories, plays—alongside documentaries, films and artifacts—by British and postcolonial authors who, experimenting with the creativity and unique affordances of fiction, have tried to render imaginable better stories about the problem-space of global migration. This material was often complemented with anal-

yses and readings highlighting the many analogies and differences to be found within the Italian context. Such comparative work allowed students to develop a better understanding of their own affective implication in reproducing everyday narratives and practices of exclusion, while enabling them to identify practicable ways to take part in a tentative, collaborative assemblage of a different "jigsaw puzzle."

CONCLUSION

Perhaps one of the most intense moments during classes with our students was when we read Grossberg's (2018) incipit in "Pessimism of the will, optimism of the intellect: endings and beginnings." In it, he describes cultural studies as a gift, which "has to be shaped, shared and renewed all the time." "First, it is a gift of a commitment. . . . Second, it is a gift of a path. . . . It is also a gift of tools that might help one walk the path while living the commitment. . . . And finally, it is a gift of questions, or better, of doors that might lead us to the questions that need to be asked" (855-856). While informed by Grossberg's compelling vision, these pages *move* the listener/reader with their affective import and the promise of a different imagining they entail. Here we are reminded, turning again to literature, of the definition of "move" provided by Mohsin Hamid: "We talk about being 'moved' by a book: that word means having a strong emotional reaction, but also, literally, being shifted. I think novels shift people in very interesting ways" (2017). Grossberg's "better" stories are better, in the words of Megan Wood, as "a measure of the means by which the intellectual work of storytelling opens up possibilities, real or imagined, for changing the present" (2019, 23). Grossberg's combative "optimism of the intellect" entrusts "good" storytelling, however, with a function not entirely dissimilar from Mohsin Hamid's aesthetic meditation on an alternative tale of human coexistence where "plausible desirable futures began to emerge, unimaginable previously, but not unimaginable now" (2017, 216). It is a vision of optimism that emerges out of commitment, which cultural studies invites and demands: a form of rewarding responsibility derived from the awareness of the possibility of doing our best to be effective.

We have now reached an ending, when our study course concluded its life cycle as of 2023, new rules have changed the structure of the new program in Language Mediation and Intercultural Communication by

downgrading its culturalist connotation, and our group, too, is retiring from the academia. However, we wish to conclude with a positive thought, a step further, which our ongoing conversation with Lawrence Grossberg is presenting us today. It emerges as a propelling force out of the crisis of knowledge and truth, the polarization of political positions, the manipulation of consent, and the overwhelming political discourses of chaos that are affecting both the United States and Italy (the national contexts in which Grossberg and we live and work). It is Grossberg's positive thought that "another politics is possible," which may arise from the articulation of "a movement of movements," from new forms of alliance in civil society, from counter-cultural expressions, from drives of change that acknowledge and welcome complexity in response to the contradictions, oppositions, and difficulties of our time. From within this complexity, cultural studies best exercises its gifts for the future. This is Lawrence Grossberg's legacy—and gift—we hope we have passed on to our students.

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13

Cultural Studies in Vienna: The Larry Grossberg Moment

ROMAN HORAK, CHRISTINA LUTTER, WOLFGANG MADERTHANER, AND LUTZ MUSNER

On his fiftieth birthday, Larry Grossberg gave a wonderful lecture in Vienna on the times and lives of cultural studies. It was neither his first visit to Vienna nor the last; many more followed, both at Vienna's universities and at many of the city's then flourishing non-university based research institutes, such as the IKUS (Institute for Cultural Studies), the IFK (International Research Centre Kulturwissenschaften) and in the framework of the vibrant independent cultural studies scene that was then developing in the German-speaking countries.

In these countries, however, during the 1990s, the dominant tradition was that of *Kulturwissenschaften*. By contrast, cultural studies, with its origins in the UK and US, was something else. It was new, fresh, political, and exciting, and a few pioneers among Austrian scholars were already communicating its message within Austrian academic institutions and beyond. Still, even the formations of *Kulturwissenschaften* were still a novelty in the classic academic institutions that had not yet opened up their curricula to the kinds of interdisciplinary approaches that bridged the many gaps between sociology and political sciences, communication studies, history, and other disciplines.

From a more critical perspective, it may also be argued that what we were experiencing, at the turn of the century at the latest, was a reinforcement (or a post-postmodern actualization) of the German-speaking tradition of the humanities under the new label of "*Kulturwissenschaft/en*" (Böhme, Matussek, and Müller 2000; Engel 2001; Kittler 2000). This articulation was either explicit, with *Kulturwissenschaften* in the plural as a new term for the humanities, or implicit, with *Kulturwissenschaft* in the singular as a new, singular discipline (Musner and Wunberg 2002). Both

versions, in varying degrees reflecting the academic *Zeitgeist*, tended to conceal the "political" and "social" as subjects of intellectual debate behind the universal signifier of "culture."

In many works from this time, references to cultural studies—as understood by Larry Grossberg, Stuart Hall, and others not in terms of a particular way of studying culture, but as an intellectual and political practice that tries to understand how power relations are shaped and articulated within and by culture—remained superficial, often based mainly on secondary sources (Kittler 2000).

Hence, in a double movement of rejection and acceptance, in many of these mainstream works, cultural studies was often treated either as an English variant of *Kulturwissenschaften*, or as something that might serve *Kulturwissenschaften*, for example as a means of clarifying specific cultural concepts. However, among many representatives of academy-based *Kulturwissenschaften* in the German-speaking world, the political element was explicitly or implicitly rejected as a disruptive, "extra-curricular" factor. Cultural studies was thus conceived of as a possible sub-discipline of academia, but was not taken seriously as a particular intellectual practice. It was therefore robbed of its key messages, as developed especially in British, and later in international contexts (Grossberg, Nelson, and Treichler 1992). It was hard to imagine that cultural studies, as a way of investigating contextual articulations of culture, power and everyday life, could enter into a serious and productive debate with *Kulturwissenschaften*, which was concerned fundamentally with *Kultur* on an abstract or general level, and vice versa (Dunst, Yekani, and Schwarz 2014; Horak 2024).

Against this background, Larry Grossberg's lecture, held during a conference that critically scrutinized the legacies of "modernity" at the end of the millennium, initiated a series of events that over the following decade put cultural studies on the academic and political map in Austria's intellectual communities (BMWV and IFK 1999). In this contribution, we want to sketch some of the theoretical and methodological inputs fueled by Larry (and others) that influenced Austrian intellectual practice at the interface of *Kulturwissenschaften* and cultural studies around the turn of the millennium.

Ever since the eighteenth century, Austria, existing in the framework of the Habsburg monarchy, has enjoyed a venerable but somewhat strange tradition of (pre-)enlightenment "reforms from above." Accordingly, the introduction of cultural studies into the Austrian academy was

encouraged by a research program established by the country's Ministry of Science and Research in 1997, which was intended to promote novel approaches to thinking and writing about an intellectual practice that mattered not just in academic life, but also in society at large. The European political context at the time was marked by change. After the Berlin Wall came down in 1989, the oppositional patterns of the Cold War started to crumble in the heart of Europe, and the Iron Curtain—established after the Second World War—fell. Austria became a member of the European Union in 1995, a geo-political change that gave rise to a number of political and intellectual initiatives driven by hope, commitment, and a sense of "Yes, we can." These were supported less by the traditional academy than by the enthusiasm generated by these changes in some governmental institutions, which funded such initiatives.

These changes came at an auspicious juncture, with the reception of a specific strand of cultural studies established in the UK from the 1950s, an intellectual, political, and pedagogical project that investigated the relations between power, knowledge, and popular culture. In the 1990s, Larry, who had spent a long time at the famous Birmingham Center for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS), was one of the most pronounced advocates of the conviction that critical scholarship really matters (Connell and Hilton 2015). And yet, when Larry came to Vienna for the first time in September 1994 to present his view of cultural studies, the event was both joyful and at the same time melancholic, at least for the organizers. The Institut für Kulturstudien (IKUS), which had invited Grossberg to Vienna, was closed at the end of the same year, and his visit marked a programmatic end to the institute's life.

IKUS—the name was somewhat pretentiously borrowed from the CCCS—was founded in the summer of 1985, thus even before the historic developments sketched out above. Three graduates of political science, theatre studies, and psychology respectively founded it as a non-university institution to give cultural studies a place in Austrian research. "Youth culture" essays and working papers from the CCCS were discussed, albeit with some delay, but we did not leave it at that. We read the works of Raymond Williams and Stuart Hall, especially his essays on Thatcherism and his later contributions to the debate on "New Times," published in *Marxism Today*, *New Statesman*, and elsewhere.

The research and publications of IKUS covered a broad range of material, from the subculture of football hooligans to multiculturalism, from reflections on cultural policy to the political treatment of architecture, and from right-wing radicalism and schools to food culture, a colorful mixture largely following the interests of the IKUS staff. Theoretical inspirations came from the CCCS, critical theory, and the sociology of Pierre Bourdieu. All this remained rather eclectic; a thorough articulation of the diverse approaches was not really achieved. The end of the institute after almost a decade of existence was due to strategic and tactical mistakes and to a lack of funding from the same ministry that however soon invested in novel activities in the emerging field.

The decision to invite Larry thus came about almost naturally. We had read some of his essays, and especially the famous co-edited anthology *Cultural Studies* (Grossberg, Nelson, and Treichler 1992). His lecture in Vienna brought us up to date with the latest developments in cultural studies, even if some aspects, especially his Deleuzian-Spinozist orientation, irritated some. The lecture offered the IKUS members a new, different view of its own history. It opened up the discourse of the fledgling Austrian cultural studies community, and encouraged young researchers to participate in the project of cultural studies. Indeed, Austrian presenters at the first "Crossroads Conference" (1996) in Tampere, Finland, far outnumbered their German colleagues (Dorer, Horak, and Marschik 2021).

If Larry Grossberg's visit to Vienna in 1994 marked the end of the first chapter of Austrian engagement with cultural studies, further chapters were to follow, in which Larry was always a key source of ideas and an inspiring, friendly, and helpful companion. About the same time, a research project on Vienna's "modernity," centered at the Austrian Labor History Association, brought together an interdisciplinary circle of historians, political scientists, literary scholars, and sociologists. A highlight was an international symposium held in November 1996 at the Vienna Ringturm, an icon of postwar reconstruction and Bauhaus modernity, attended by luminaries including Seyla Benhabib, Jessica Benjamin, Beatrice Columina, Malachi Hacohen, Andreas Huyssen, Anson Rabinbach, Richard Senett, Michael Steinberg, and others.

In an enthusiastically received contribution, Larry Grossberg outlined a cultural studies project capable of "responding to and saying something useful about" the emergent organization of power and the role of culture "from a particular position within it," cutting across social, institutional,

and everyday life (Grossberg 2000, 213). This style of cultural studies criticized the "economization of everything including the social," and the reorganization of capitalism "as a system of both accumulation and economic sectors" (217). Larry proposed a sophisticated concept of culture operating at the intersection of the processes, experiences, and discourses that marked the emergence of modernization/modernity/modernism, "its path interrupted, inflicted, and redirected" (222). It might be fruitful and even necessary for progressive cultural theorists, Larry suggested, to investigate the ambiguities and challenges these concepts pose, as well as their specific function in a formation usually addressed as "the modern."

Drawing on Larry's theses, we (Maderthaner and Musner) conceived a book project that was first published in 1999 as *Die Anarchie der Vorstadt: Das andere Wien um 1900*, and in English as *Unruly Masses: The Other Side of Fin de Siècle Vienna*, published by Berghahn Books in 2008. Here, we examined the inscription of modernity on the body of the city of Vienna. We scrutinized the differentiation of a new plateau of politics, culture, and social stratification around 1900, preceded by a process of transgression that was characterized by a mutual amplification of the most disparate levels of social, technical, and economic developments. The logic of the new is not linear but rather defined by an array of contradictions. The wealth of Vienna's center stood in stark opposition to the misery of the masses in the suburbs. The identity crisis of urban elites confronted the new collective subjects of emerging mass politics. The skeptical discourse of reason from the late bourgeois enlightenment contrasted with the irrational ferment of a "politics of feeling." An aesthetically sophisticated elite culture contrasted with a culture of the masses, stigmatized as profane and vulgar. We were interested in the translation of social trajectories into cultural forms, in the interlacing of symbolic spheres and material configurations, in the contingencies of the social, in the acceleration and the end of ways of life—in short, in the ways human perceptions changed so that the metropolis could be read as a social text. Or, as Larry has so convincingly argued, we were interested in the cultural practices that have to be understood as "active agents in the material world of everyday life, social structure, and power" (Grossberg 2000, 244). This and other projects actively added a historical perspective to the field of cultural studies, a feature that Meaghan Morris had already advocated in 1998 (Morris 1998; Lutter and Reisenleitner 2002).

In a comparable manner, Larry Grossberg played an important role in widening the thematic spectrum and in strengthening cultural studies approaches at the International Research Center for Culture Studies (IFK), founded in 1993. Several of Larry's visits to Vienna stand out: in 1997 the IFK, in cooperation with the Austrian Ministry of Science, organized an international conference titled "The Contemporary Study of Culture" (Grossberg, Nelson, and Treichler 1992). Many influential scholars, including Ulf Hannerz, Chantal Mouffe, Beatrice Hanssen, Mieke Bal, Paul Gilroy, and David Morley presented various new approaches to themes in media, gender, and urban studies related to history, anthropology, and technology studies. Larry and the literary scholar Aleida Assmann opened the conference and demonstrated remarkably differing approaches. While Larry accentuated the political dimension of cultural studies in dealing with questions of globalization, economy, identity, and post-colonialism, Assmann sharply distinguished cultural studies from *Kulturwissenschaften*. She emphasized the allegedly apolitical nature of *Kulturwissenschaften*, and singled out specific objects of study, such as the dynamics of social, historical, and cultural memory and the hermeneutics of cultures as (literary) texts as defining for the field. While they disagreed on methodological approaches, they shared a vision of interdisciplinarity and a joint interest in issues of identity, media, and post-colonialism.

This event initiated a fruitful debate of the legacies and futures of *Kulturwissenschaften* and cultural studies in the German-speaking academy, in which the IFK became a hub. In June 2000, the center invited Larry as distinguished guest researcher. He gave lectures, participated in workshops, and had vivid exchanges with young Austrian scholars about key issues of cultural studies. This was especially important since at that time cultural studies and *Kulturwissenschaften* were absent from most Austrian university curricula. During this stay Larry also contributed to a widely read collection, *Kulturwissenschaften. Forschung. Praxis. Positionen.*, which bridged the gap between scholarly traditions (Musner and Wunberg 2002). Larry influenced the development of the research center in two ways: he made the IFK and its junior fellow scheme more attractive for young scholars, and enriched its programmatic outlook and further research themes, above all in various fields of popular culture (Lutter and Musner 2002).

Some twenty years later, the field has diversified in many directions in a variety of Austrian scholarly initiatives and institutions (Dorer, Horak, and Marschik 2021). Institutionalization also brought about pragmatism

and sometimes the loss of illusions. Everybody will agree that the world in 2024 has not become the better place we hoped for a half-century ago. However, one of Larry's special legacies during all those years has always been hope, despite Romain Rolland's pessimism of the intellect (while maintaining optimism of the will), and Larry's own recent pessimism of the will (while maintaining optimism of the intellect) (Grossberg 2018). "We All Want to Change the World" is the title of the introductory chapter of Larry's book *Cultural Studies in the Future Tense* (2010). In each of his books, presentations, papers, or conversations, he filled this message with content and intellectual rigor. This claim can never be uttered by a mere academic project, but needs a political and a personal commitment to make a difference. This is Larry's legacy, which will last beyond his "millennial moment" in Vienna.

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14

The Infrastructures of Diversion: Doing Cultural Studies in Post-Communist Balkans

ALJOŠA PUŽAR

Some years ago, Lawrence Grossberg (2019) wrote, "I suggest that cultural studies is, at its heart, a pedagogical project" (19). While this immediately resonated with the past twenty years of my own life and with the life of cultural studies in South-Eastern Europe, it also immediately created a well-familiar tensive membrane towards the rest of Grossberg's sentence, in which cultural studies is

> a critical practice embodying a commitment to complexity, contingency, and contextuality, addressed to the politics of discourse and culture, but always performed as an ongoing conversation challenging the certainties that too often guarantee our claims to knowledge. (Grossberg 2019, 19)

Indeed, this pedagogy happens through the effort of (and exposure to) critical practice, and such a critical practice, in return, often happens as a (preferably brave, well-localized, and contextually aware) pedagogical process. As I write these lines, I am trying to organize the publication of *Cultural Studies in the Future Tense* (Grossberg 2010) in one of the smaller European languages, Slovenian, with around two and a half million speakers. It is a cultural space where an incredible 5% of adults (age 25-64) hold a Ph.D., many of them in interdisciplinary humanities and social sciences, placing Slovenia at the global top, followed by Switzerland (3%) and the United States (2%). The publication might count as a somewhat elitist but meaningful pedagogical act, or at least a moment of recognition and encouragement.

Slovenia is, nonetheless, in many ways just a doorway to the Balkans, and the overall spirit of its cultural studies feels to me more like a Central European endeavor of a sort. My venerable predecessor in my current institutional setting, the late Slovenian poet and cultural studies scholar Aleš Debeljak (1961–2016), described the act of the establishment of the first cultural studies department in ex-Yugoslavia, the Ljubljana one (formed by a philosopher Tine Hribar in 1994), as an attempt to establish an "alternative philosophical department" (Leban et. al. 2009). That included phenomenological subjects that privileged Heideggerian motifs, while purposefully maintaining a distance or detachment from the post-structuralist craze that, in the years of the dissolution of Yugoslavia and the so-called "democratic transition," came to be a popular pseudo-radical substitute for various visions of Marxism and renewed Marxism of the late Yugoslavian system (including the crucial Yugoslav and international philosophical movement of Praxis). Influences of the Frankfurt school were still palpable, though, as were various other German influences (for instance, Ernst Cassirer's philosophy of culture). What is peculiar, nonetheless, is that the entire exercise remained for many years situated within the field of sociology, and it was to various degrees conjoined with the critical sociology of religion and the sociology of art. This was in stark contrast to many other regional cultural studies developments that (almost a decade later) came to fruition via what one could call the "social turn" within humanities (especially in literary departments, influenced by various pseudo-radical theoretical fashions, including belated western-postcolonial and western-feminist theories, that came to compete with local traditions of similar taste and of immensely more tangible political impact). In Slovenia, the first rendition of cultural studies therefore came as a birth of local *Kulturwissenchaft* of almost liberal taste, which presented an uncanny but productive combination of antitotalitarian sentiments with Frankfurt faith in the emancipatory role of "Culture,"— to a great degree still seen, if not entirely openly, in its highbrow and artsy sense. Slovenian early "Culturology" paralleled the experiences of many other European academic projects striving for the institutional recognition of progressive social thought about arts (for the account of the analog Bulgarian experience, see Tarasheva 2021).

But unlike the Bulgarian developments, which were later inoculated directly by the British mansplaining missionaries of cultural studies operating within English studies (Tarasheva 2021), the subsequent Slovenian

turn towards the international movement stemming from British cultural studies came at the end of the 1990s through intellectual inclinations of the younger lecturers and assistants, mostly sociologists, belonging to subcultural groups and tastes, that resisted not only the methodological rigidities of social sciences but also the analytical impotence and anti-empirical impetus of many theoretical obfuscations.

In 2002, a handbook of cultural studies, *Cooltura* (*Coolture*) (Debeljak et al. 2002), a collective manifesto of what was to become a proper Slovenian localization of a global cultural studies movement, already cites Lawrence Grossberg in his two very different roles: as a theoretician of cultural studies but also as the author whose old article (Grossberg 1984a) added legitimacy to rock and roll studies in the Slovenian public. The case of this article is interesting, as the official Slovenian journal of the Musical Youth of Yugoslavia, the state-supported network of organizations for the musical education of (then socialist) youth, published two large pages of selected and translated paragraphs from Grossberg's famous article on rock and roll (Grossberg 1984b), adding to a peculiar story of a long-standing conflict regarding the acceptability of rock and roll between the Alliance of the Socialist Youth of Yugoslavia, the official roof organization of Yugoslav youth, and the Musical Youth of Yugoslavia. While during the late 50s and the first half of the 60s, these organizations roughly agreed upon the suitability of "quality jazz" for the Yugoslav youth, the acceptance of rock and roll was more difficult. The Alliance, with the silent blessing of leading communist politicians, including the Yugoslav leader Josip Broz Tito, defended and even promoted rock and roll music from 1966, seeing it as similar in progressive and pacifist values to the agenda intended for the Yugoslav youth, while the Musical Youth, usually focusing on classical music, resisted and protested rock and roll as late as in 1981 (Раковић 2012). The partial translation of Grossberg's article, authored by the late Slovenian musician, writer, publisher, and jazz aficionado Peter Amalietti (1955–2020), on the pages of the journal of the organization, be it in most liberal among constituent republics of the Yugoslav federation, could be seen as an important gesture. The article was subsequently cited in several early cultural studies publications and student work in Slovenia in the late 1990s and early 2000s, once the academic studies of cultural everydayness and "pop" reached their fuller institutional legitimacy and recognition.

The pan-European reform of higher education (the so-called "Bologna reform") that hit Slovenian shores in 2004 presented an opportunity for Slovenian practitioners to fully implement the pedagogical mixture of the British school of cultural studies in combination with anthropological, critical-religious, and (last but not least) novel, directly creative, performative-analytical content. Having just arrived from South Korea in 2016, I was surprised to find the aspect of creative practice so strongly present in the recently revamped cultural studies programs. I have gradually learned to appreciate the pedagogical and analytical value of such an academic practice, also in terms of the further harmonization between the older "semantocentric" currents in cultural studies, and the new-old "materialist" ones.

Slovenian localization, while relatively successful, shares with the rest of the global project the perilous walking on the edge of the politically viable and academically relevant—often under attack, questioned for its inherent fragile balances, political positionality, and methodological fluidities. These known motifs of torment and self-torment drag me right to the other side of the Slovenian-Croatian border: to my Croatian cultural studies experiences and distant pasts.

Digging through my archives, which cover the very beginnings of the present academic cultural studies in Croatia, I find many badly printed yellowish materials. Two of them catch my attention. The first among them is from 2002, pompously titled "The Reform of the University Curricula and the Development of Adjacent Programs—The Working Proposal," produced for the University of Rijeka, my first alma mater, at that point still at the very far edge of any metropolitan academic currents, except maybe in the medical field. The document was signed by my(young)self and my boss at the time, Professor Marina Kovačević (Kovačević and Pužar 2002). A year or so later, we successfully co-authored the first undergraduate and graduate program in cultural studies in Croatia, and in 2004 established a self-standing department that, without either of us, exists to this very day.

In only seventeen pages, the proposal showcases a specific moment in Croatian academia. On the one hand, it was about joining the abovementioned Bologna reform with the proclamation of "tuning into international standards," "assuring modularity/electiveness," "embracing interdisciplinarity," and "encouraging mobility." On the other hand, it was about the slow humanities trying to survive the new lingo of "excellence" and "competitiveness," but also some new ethical criteria—human

rights and principles of equity, entirely liberal in taste, almost American. Cultural studies is mentioned here among the fields that allow for "flexible and individualized professional development," combining "interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary formation with specialization." Cultural studies was thrown together with the likes of biochemistry, bioethics, and cultural management. The establishment of the Department of Cultural Studies was foreseen and described as "open to all cross- and inter-disciplinary contents, both within the Faculty of Philosophy and to those beyond that faculty."

The cultural studies project was promoted, therefore, as this perfectly sterile form of academic activity that allows for fluidity and even marketability. Shamelessly selling the story to the university administrators, we mentioned social responsibility while carefully amputating any inherent dream of social change.

The other yellowed material is from 2006—the first partial reader prepared for my course, "Introduction to Cultural Studies" (Pužar 2006). Intended for the first generation of Croatian students, among which were some leftist punkers, anarchists, and the rest from the progressive spectrum, the reader mentioned the name of Lawrence Grossberg exactly fifty-three times. Grossberg was everywhere, if indirectly, and his name was invoked and praised, but also questioned, even attacked. From Epifanio San Juan Jr., typically complaining in his usual style from Marxist positions and invoking neo-Marxist renewals, to Jan Beatens discussing cultural studies as a project that ceased to be (a widespread habit among cultural studies scholars of various generations that I find almost amusing), to Cary Nelson mentioning collaborations but also differences between him and Grossberg over this or that, to Alan O'Connor proudly recalling his critiques of Grossberg, to Paul Willis and Mats Trodman calling for the ethnographic turn, to Keyan G. Tomaselli reporting from the field and criticizing metropolitan cultural studies, the entire reader was, without much of my conscious reflection, packed with (not always very profound) challenges to what was assumed to be, in this or that sense, Grossberg's project.

The reader, therefore, is a monument to the moment, a monument to some clumsy recognition of strains, paradoxes, and internal commotion. This was almost two decades after Gajo Petrović and Darko Suvin, a Croatian Marxist philosopher and a Croatian literary theoretician of the Jamesonian stock, respectively, both appeared in Nelson's and Grossberg's

Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture from 1988 (Nelson and Grossberg 1988), but the paradoxes with and around Marxism were still alive in Rijeka, "the red bastion of Croatia" (Puzar 2013).

The entire drive in Rijeka was quite a "post-ist" one in some neo-Williamsian sense. The department was strongly cross-disciplinary, collecting an odd bunch of sociologists, historians, musicologists, anthropologists, linguists, and literary theoreticians. To this very day students, from what little I can grasp from meeting them at techno parties and demonstrations, self-define as progressives and are interested in culture, but without clear definitions of either culture or studies. In that particular sense, the project is still pretty much alive with its usual debates and self-deprecating sense of being.

To my sadness, not one among us in the early 2000s openly recognized important pre-standing local academic traditions of nurturing adult education and education for the emancipatory work within the field of arts (called "the cultural field")—something that would be a proper Williamsonian gesture. We didn't care to mention defunct socialist cultural management studies in Rijeka, called the Organization of the Cultural Activities, dedicated to bringing high culture to factories and working-class culture to the institutions of high culture while teaching mildly leftist interpretations of "general culture"—whatever that was—from Egyptian pyramids to early feminism, forming a rudimentary local *Kulturwissenschaft*. I happened to be in the last cohort of Croatian language and literature undergrads that enrolled in this peculiar additional major, as even the spectral post-Yugoslavia was slowly collapsing and the nationalist regimes were stabilizing their agenda among the still warm ashes of civil war. Still, unlike in Slovenian Ljubljana, there was no proper continuity between these attempts of the late 1980s and early 1990s and our new local version of cultural studies.

In the meantime, as the agenda moved to the south of what used to be Yugoslavia, some colleagues from the Republic of Macedonia (nowadays the Republic of Northern Macedonia) asked for our collaboration and input on their plans of moving from Macedonian literary studies towards cultural studies, a transition I would observe closely almost a decade later in some South Korean English departments (eager, if late to the game). Some Serbian colleagues (such as the prominent cultural policy expert Milena Dragićević Šešić) and some Zagreb institutes (such as the Institute for Development and International Relations) became notable for their work

in cultural policy, and the entire movement was "crowned" by the several ongoing attempts of smaller and private universities across Balkans to offer paradoxical hybrids of cultural studies and tourism, languages, and other marketable fields, smuggling their theoretical and political inclinations and selling them to the greedy university administrators as we did in Rijeka in 2002.

Somewhat different in spirit, but united in collaborations and cross-pollinations with our Rijeka project, was the parallel development of cultural studies in the Croatian capital of Zagreb. The work of the leader of the cultural studies group at the University of Zagreb, literary scholar Dean Duda, working from the early 2000s to develop cultural studies contents, courses, and modules within the Department of Comparative Literature became popular across ex-Yugoslav space south of Slovenia. His brief but influential introduction to cultural studies from 2002 primarily builds upon the Birmingham tradition, engaging with Grossberg's earlier work abundantly in the context of the debate on the position and definition of the popular, and in the context of tracing intellectual genealogies of the British "school" becoming a global project (Duda 2002).

When not many years ago WoS reports mentioned cultural studies as one of the fields in which there was the biggest growth in new journals and articles, my old comrade (and one of the unofficial voices and hands that inspired our project of Rijeka cultural studies), media theoretician, activist, and editor from Zagreb, Igor Marković, said to me: "It is the most active and it is flourishing, because it is already dead." Thus, he repeated a sentiment of many, even around the European South-East, a sentiment I find inadmissible and detrimental despite its apparent intellectual or political honesty.

While I am sure the project ceased to be, in every possible way typical of all other intellectual projects, as it was said and repeated by at least three subsequent generations of disenchanted practitioners, it will also never stop being, either intellectually or politically. There are territories in the East and South and elsewhere that still need it very directly. There is still some remaining academic machine that keeps dreaming of it within the limits of the post-neoliberal transdisciplinarity and mainstreamed progressive agenda. The critical analysis and the progressive pedagogical work still stem from the cracks of these uneasy cohabitations, semi-hegemonic articulations, and tactical evasions.

In 2007, as soon as I underwent one such tactical evasion, moving from various para-institutional pressures to South Korea, only to finish teaching some horror called Western civilization (but also developing other tactical escapes into feminist utopianism and performative ethnography), my Rijeka students joined large protests against the neoliberal attack on Croatian universities, occupied the university, and threatened that same nationalist regime I was trying to forget in East Asia. I remember feeling confused, endeared, and proud of them, strongly nostalgic, receiving their excited messages and daily reports. In my public support for their struggle against the commercialization of public universities, I wrote about the "circus of transition," and even said, somewhat hastily, "The students will succeed." And they did, against all odds, rescue the public agenda and financing models of the old public universities. Indeed, cultural studies students were well-suited to understand and fight these battles, and I could not wish for something more.

Yes, cultural studies is a pedagogical project, along with being an analytical project tackling the complexity of life, an epistemological project re-shaping knowledge modalities, and being softly-all-too-softly political throughout all these dimensions. Its pedagogical impulse goes well beyond the cross-generational dumping of Euro-theory and its false radicalism. It captures the idea of change and the anti-genealogical loops, the possibility of indigenization, and new political alliances urgent in societies without the bittersweet pleasure of playing within the gilded halls of Westminster democracy. Grossberg's well-documented and published analytical obsessions with American youth, or the obsessions of many of us with Korean, Croatian, or whatever global youth, is hardly accidental or just descriptive. The youth is one of the main sources of "the pedagogical," not the mere target of it, and in this final paradoxical sense, cultural studies—its energies, curiosity, and bravery—depend on keeping this mutuality alive.

Not exactly the revolution whisperers or Gramscian organic intelligentsia, various cultural studies collectives and individual practitioners across the Balkans that "whisper so radically" (Pužar 2007) remain an important dimension of difference and added intensity in academia and beyond. While pushing for diverse intellectual localizations and versions of the project, they all tacitly recognize the need for the intellectual and ethical infrastructures that allow for multidirectional trans-generational transfers, increasing and reducing epistemic pressures as needed, and

taking decent (if not always excellent) care of the "anti-systemic politics, committed to changing the world without taking power" (Grossberg 2010, 255), combining "academic rigor and competence with social passion and political commitment" (Grossberg 2010, 18). In that, they count on what Grossberg called "a visceral relevance" (Grossberg 2010, 18) and, not least, on contagious and ongoing passion for the impossible, characteristically Grossbergian.

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15

“Where Is the Culture?”: Conjunctural Shift and Radical Contextualism in Hong Kong’s Culture of Homeownership

CHUNG-KIN TSANG

I completed my Ph.D. under the guidance of Lawrence Grossberg in the 2010s. Larry’s feedback on my research project was often succinct and challenging. One memorable comment during the initial discussions about my doctoral thesis on Hong Kong’s ongoing homeownership crisis was, “Where is the culture?” Beneath this simple yet difficult question lie implications about what culture is and how it should be studied from the perspective of cultural studies. The following serves as my response to his question and a tribute to his work, which embodies the spirit of radical contextualism, the essence of Larry’s perspective on cultural studies.

To me, “Where is the culture?” has three implications. First, it prompted me to consider the role of discourse and articulation in homeownership, which is often reduced to rational investment calculations and decisions. Secondly, the word “where” suggested the need to situate the culture of homeownership within the multiple layers of context that shape discourses and processes of articulation. Lastly, I extended this question to the issue of conjuncture, identifying the contextual shift that made homeownership culture in Hong Kong significant and worthy of study in the 2010s.

The following is divided into two parts: first, the conjunctural shift; second, the work of radical contextualism. The section on the conjunctural shift explores a third implication, which defines the “problematic” (Grossberg 2019, 51-53) of the research topic. Understanding the conjunctural shift helps identify the cultural transition in the quest for identity in

the tension between East and West in the 1990s to skepticism about the "Hong Kong Dream" of upward mobility in the 2000s. This skepticism forms the problematic that my research addresses. The section on radical contextualism discusses the first two implications, which form the core of my study (Tsang 2018; 2021; 2023) under Larry's influence. The theoretical framework, "hope mechanism," serves as a response to existing narratives in the political economic tradition and proposes a cultural dimension with attention to the assemblage of articulations and its contingent nature.

CONJUNCTURAL SHIFT: FROM THE QUEST OF IDENTITY TO THE PROBLEM OF PRECARITY

The British colonial era in Hong Kong before 1997 played a significant role in shaping a unique local identity. In particular, the closed borders between Hong Kong and Mainland China from the 1950s to the 1990s allowed Chinese refugees and the locally born generation to develop their unique living experiences and ways of life in this British colony. Additionally, the thriving economy throughout the 1980s and 1990s further contributed to the formation of this identity. It instilled a high level of confidence in both individual and collective economic achievements. The population took pride in their economic prowess and embraced a market-centric identity that celebrated the capitalist lifestyle, indulging in material rewards with a formula of the "Hong Kong Dream"—the belief that hard work and a bit of luck could lead to great success (Mathews, Lui, and Ma 2008, 36).

However, this economic success was overshadowed by political uncertainty as the handover from a capitalist to a communist regime approached in 1997. Against this backdrop, the main cultural question among the public and academia centered around the cultural identity of Hong Kong. Discussions about identity gained popularity due to the pride in the Hong Kong way of living and concerns about the potential loss of local culture (Abbas 1997). How can we understand the hybrid Hong Kong culture and identity that developed since the post-war period, situated between East and West? Moreover, will this culture and identity disappear with the impending handover?

The handover in 1997 marked a significant turning point for the cultural landscape. Before the handover, collective confidence remained high due to economic success, despite political uncertainty. After the

handover, political uncertainty eased as the transition seemed smooth and peaceful, even though the struggle for local identity remained a recurring theme, informing social movements in the 2000s and 2010s. However, the 2000s also presented a new challenge when the Asian financial crisis struck in 1998, causing an unprecedented economic decline that lasted until 2003 and eroded the material-based collective confidence. This crisis, coupled with a widening wealth gap, increasing job insecurity, and the government's growing focus on the marketization of social welfare and reduced housing support, led to skepticism of the capitalist way of life and the "Hong Kong dream." This laid the foundation for a re-evaluation of materialistic pursuits that inform my research about the culture of homeownership.

My academic journey is closely connected to this conjunctural shift. I pursued a bachelor's degree in the Department of Cultural Studies at Lingnan University from 2000 to 2003. During this period, we explored the local popular culture of Hong Kong and its relationship to the formation of local identity, as well as the representation and narration of Hong Kong's history. These explorations emerged from and reflected the cultural dialogues during the 1990s. However, the change in circumstances led me in a different direction. Inspired by my teacher Hui Po-Keung and his perspective on reflecting the local development of capitalism, I was introduced to the concept of cultural economy and economic culture. These ideas stayed with me beyond my undergraduate years as I had various short-term, temporary, contract-based jobs. I began to experience the direct impact of precarity following the financial crisis.

This trajectory aligns with Larry's suggestion in an interview on what cultural studies students should prioritize in their research: "Well, what do you care about when you're not being a student? What matters to you in the real world?" In this sense, cultural studies encompasses more than the study of popular media and culture. It's about what matters to you when "the world asks the questions" (Grossberg 2007). Consequently, I shifted my focus from popular culture and identity towards studying economic issues in my Ph.D. studies under Larry's guidance. This shift was also inspired by the discussion about the changing state of youth in the US on multiple layers of context in his work *Caught in the Crossfire* (Grossberg 2005), an approach which I attempted to follow.

RADICAL CONTEXTUALISM: MAKING SENSE OF THE CULTURE OF HOMEOWNERSHIP

In the early 2010s, I identified the culture of homeownership as the nodal point of a conjunctural shift in Hong Kong. At that time, unaffordable housing became a hot topic as housing prices began to skyrocket due to an influx of capital from the Mainland and the US following the financial crisis of 2008. Hong Kong has topped the list of unaffordable housing markets in the world for many years, and homeownership often tops the list of life goals in surveys about young people's values. How should we make sense of what's going on in this society when people increasingly desire a seemingly unreachable object? Answering this question, I believe, can provide a clue to understanding the core elements of modern Hong Kong's economic culture.

During a meeting with Larry, we discussed the common political-economic approach to homeownership in Hong Kong, like Alice Poon's (2011) analysis of the political-economic structure in the realm of real estate. This analysis portrays Hong Kong as a struggle between dependent ordinary people and the dominant conglomerates as the ruling class, with an educated middle class with democratic aspirations (53), being "strangely reticent" about the growing social injustice (46). After listening to this approach, Larry asked, "Where is the culture?"

I proposed the theoretical framework of my doctoral dissertation, "Hope Mechanism" (Tsang 2021), as an answer to this question. On the one hand, it highlights the work of articulation and emphasizes that people are not cultural dopes, but active agents who hope to improve their well-being. Their pursuits are situated under a cultural mechanism of hope—the relatively coherent yet historically contingent assemblage of articulations about imagining the future with a subject position, social route, opportunity structure, and life goal. On the other hand, the hope mechanism evolves over time when layers of context change. This historical dimension follows Larry's perspective of radical contextualism that understands social reality as "contingently relational, complex, and always open to alteration" (Davis 2019, 48), while resisting the temptation to draw conclusions that assume culture as static and universal. Here, let me briefly summarize three findings in the "Hope Mechanism" that contribute to this perspective.

First, the formation of a phenomenon is gradual and historically contingent. Different components of the hope mechanism assemble with a unique historical trajectory in Hong Kong. The belief in open opportunities emerged in the 1970s, while the belief in self-reliance originated from the refugee experience in the 1950s. Real estate has been seen as a good investment since the 1950s, but homeownership became more popular in the mid-1970s after the relaxation of mortgage requirements. The middle-class lifestyle and the housing ladder emerged in the late 1960s and were fully established by the mid-1980s. Hence, desiring homeownership in Hong Kong society cannot be taken for granted. It requires a historical process which gradually articulates different components together.

Second, the interpretation of the same phenomenon changes over time due to contextual shifts. The concept of homeownership as a life goal has transitioned from an optimistic dream of upward mobility in the 1990s, when collective economic confidence was high, to a more defensive strategy for attaining a sense of security in an uncertain social and economic landscape in the 2010s. While individuals still value self-reliance, they now see homeownership as a financial safety net. This includes downsizing to a more affordable apartment and refinancing mortgages as a means of safeguarding against the volatility of the job market and limited social support.

Third, new discourses may emerge with the political effect of amending the existing mechanism temporarily when it fails. Skyrocketing housing prices since 2009 have made homeownership unattainable for ordinary people. This has given rise to a new discourse known as "waiting for the coming crisis" (Tsang 2021, 113-117). This discourse highlights a novel connection between crisis and social immobility. A crisis is not regarded as solely negative but rather as a potential catalyst for overcoming stagnation by reducing housing prices. As a result, it presents a unique investment opportunity to acquire homeownership as a financial asset at a more affordable and reasonable cost. This shifts our perception of the housing journey from a tangible path to an abstract disruption. This also contributes to the self-governing effect of tolerating the sense of waiting amid social stuckedness (Tsang 2018) and maintaining the daily routine of working and planning.

Paying attention to both conjunctural shifts and radical contextualism are two important lessons that Larry imparted to me. These are principles I aim to uphold in the ongoing discussions within cultural studies. They serve as reminders to address questions posed by the world, not just

those arising from academia, and to study culture within its ever-changing context. Ultimately, I hope the discussion of my work adds some context to understanding Larry's substantial influence on cultural studies.

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16

Conjunctural Analysis as Lifeline

ELSPETH PROBYN

> [For Hall] . . . conjunctures operate as anchors that locate analyses in relational processes. (Pina-Cabral and Theodossopoulos 2022, 467)

> noun: *lifeline*
>
> - a thing on which someone or something depends or which provides a means of escape from a difficult situation.
> - a rope or line used for life-saving, typically one thrown to rescue someone in difficulties in water or one used by sailors to secure themselves to a boat.

I don't quite know how it came to be that Lawrence Grossberg was on my Ph.D. committee. It probably happened around a kitchen table in the Plateau Mont-Royal in Montreal, as most important things did. If that seems like an unusual way to settle on something so momentous (at least to me it was), mine was an unusual Ph.D. candidature. There wasn't a program when I started, so the powers at Concordia University kindly set one up for my friend Beth Seaton and me. Gail Guthrie Valaskakis was my primary supervisor—an amazing Chippewa scholar, administrator, and the architect of numerous programs for First Nations people. Gail was an outstanding communications researcher of First Nations media with much fieldwork in the north. By her own admission, she didn't know a lot about cultural studies, nor did Larry know anything about northern Aboriginal media. They were a powerful supervisory duo.

Intellectually, I was lucky enough to straddle two formations of cultural studies: the Canadian school of communication studies inspired by Harold Innis (whose work Larry knew through his great friend James Carey) and the Birmingham/Illinois school of cultural studies that Larry established at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. I was fortu-

nate to live in the buzzing city of Montreal and made trips across the border into the not-so-buzzing American Midwest (the stench of prop airplane fuel is still vivid).

In this short essay, I want to focus on four aspects that have been especially important to me. The first is Larry's supervision; the longer, second point looks at the conceptual tools in which he trained me (and countless others), especially conjunctural analysis. It contains the third question of *whose* conjuncture. Fourth, as my practice differs slightly from Larry's I will explore different modes of doing conjunctural analysis, and the importance of description. Across the piece, I touch on the more ephemeral yet absolutely crucial ways in which Larry inspires and instils the inspiration and grit to keep on going, to try to build spaces of collaboration and conviviality that, if one is lucky, then extend across generations.

"SO, WHAT IS IT LIKE TO BE SUPERVISED BY GROSSBERG?"

The annual International Communication Association (ICA) conferences were structuring moments in the academic year and my early career. They were big, though not as massive as the Modern Language Association affairs. The late 1980s were fraught with politics over postmodernism and the very identity of communications studies and cultural studies. As an indication of the tenor of the times, at the 1991 Chicago ICA meeting I presented a paper entitled "This Choice Which Is Not One: Post-feminism and New Traditionalism and Prime-time Television" in the Philosophy of Communication Division, which was in my memory mainly cultural studies—now named Philosophy, Theory and Critique. Like other major academic associations based in the USA (for all the "International," it was decidedly American), the ICA was a mixture of meat/job market, politicking, furious debate, and meeting up with friends you'd only see once a year while making new ones in the crushed bar areas.

Thanks to Larry, this was where I first met many now long-term friends and colleagues. In 1990 I attended the (in)famous "Cultural Studies: Now and in the Future" conference at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. Larry had asked some of his grad students to roam around sessions prompting questions. It was an agonizing experience—so many stars, so many battles. This was pure Larry: getting his students out ready for theorizing, struggling with wars of position, and partying.

So, what was Larry like as a supervisor? Meticulous. In my long-distance supervision, my hard copy drafts would arrive back by mail filled with Larry's perfect, if cramped, writing. There were tough comments crucial to a better argument. I'd cry, then get over it and go back to the chapter. Of such routines are theses made; as is grit and discipline.

CONJUNCTURES AND THEIR ANALYSES

An awful lot has been written *about* conjunctures; less so than has been actually *doing* the analysis. In part, this is because of the unwieldy beast that a conjuncture is. Made and made up, but very real. Too sprawling to be contained in an article or undertaken properly by one author.

The question of conjunctures reaches deep into the most difficult and ephemeral of cultural studies' concerns: "Do we know what people feel today? What matters to them? What they care about, and what they are willing to fight for? Do we understand their rage, fears, uncertainties, anxieties, hopes, desires?" (Grossberg 2019, 61).

Formulating these elements as part of a conjunctural analysis pushes us out of our comfort zones that revolve around what we think we know about people—ordinary people, extraordinary ones. And even ourselves: How far do our empathetic attunements reach? How extended are our analytic abilities? Conjunctures play havoc with our intellectual tools and taken-for-granted ideas:

> What do we know? What do we know we don't know? What don't we know we don't know? Where do we go to find the expertise we don't have? How do we figure the questions that are calling out in silence? How do we reach outside our comfort zone to do the research and to create the conversations across all sorts of borders that are necessary? (Grossberg 2019, 55)

An eminent French sociologist once said in response to an annoying question (one that he found annoying) about the role of class: "you don't trip over class, it is an abstraction." Just so conjunctures, except you do and don't trip over them. You live within them and sometimes, something nudges you to see beyond, to see the contours of the outside. This is why maps have always had a featured place within Larry's work. Meaning maps, maps of mattering.

Larry has a lot more optimism about maps than I do. "Maps tell us where we are but in so doing, they can also tell us how we got here and how we get out of here. That is, they tell us how we get from point A to point B"

(Grossberg 2019, 60). In my experience, maps are more likely to entail, as those apocryphal old fellas are apparently wont to say, peering gloomily at the fog-shrouded hills: "you can't get there from here." And for a cultural studies project after Hall grounded in "no guarantees," getting from A to B sounds quite purposive. Of course, for Larry "such mappings must understand reality as always in process, as a contingent struggle over articulations" (Grossberg 2019, 59). Describing the experimental inherent in (some) understandings of cultural studies, Larry writes: "It attempts to offer a map of rhizomatic filaments traversing the material, social and affective spaces of the social formation and everyday life, by trying to identify some key empirical crises as nodes at which these filaments are affectively cathected and materially expressed" (Grossberg 2019, 63). Contrasted with maps, rhizomes do not lead anywhere that they don't want to go. In other words, they force humans to follow them rather than relying on manmade intentions.

WHOSE CONJUNCTURE?

The questions of for whom, where, when and why a conjuncture emerges are the most difficult of all to square. In part because of such a deeply intertwined world, past and present, it's hard to isolate one moment, one place, one population that will bear the brunt of standing in for an emerging conjuncture.

For Larry, American politics, and their expression—or not—in popular cultural practices have always shaped the conjuncture he has grappled with across his career. In his books, he wrestles with the histories that have shaped particular articulations—pop music, rock, the "war on kids," and most recently Trump. As he describes this trajectory:

> The first (*We Gotta Get Out of This Place*, 1992) used popular culture, especially music, as a way into the "settlement" represented by Reaganism and the New Right, while the second (*Caught in the Crossfire*, 2005) used the changing state and status of children and youth as a way into the re-configuration of the New Right under G.W. Bush. Yet such efforts were never more necessary than in the past five years, especially given the failure of an effective progressive opposition, despite its numbers and vitality (*We All Want to Change the World*, 2015) began with this paradox and the success of, but more importantly, the chaos surrounding and enabling, a resurgent populist nationalism and reactionary conservatism. (Grossberg 2019, 38)

Across this morass of issues, Larry always strives to focus on how "Different changes and struggles begin at different times, have different speeds, emerge from different projects, encounter different resistances, operate at different social locations, and involve different active fractions and coalitions of the population" (Grossberg 2009, 180).

But of Trump, the phenomenon if not conjuncture, he asks: "How do you tell a story, especially when you have too many possible characters and events, and no definitive plotline?" (Grossberg 2018, 113).

This is an excruciating question for us all wherever we live. Does Larry push at and reveal the limits of analysis in/of certain conjunctures? Is Trump and his fashioning of US political culture too amorphous for conjunctural analysis? Can Trump be made into a conjuncture rather than a sign of the world gone mad? "His [Trump's] erratic control of the executive state apparatus, his constant policy shifts and contradictory statements, his various appointments and firings, have everyone not merely baffled but always uncertain as to what is going on" (Grossberg 2018, 3).

The glimmer of optimism—that Larry-grit edged, sometimes wearied, always open response—returns to the need to keep on: "we need to tell better stories, stories that tell us some things we did not already know, stories that open up different futures, stories that, by embracing their own necessary incompleteness and fragility, offer themselves up as part of a conversation" (Grossberg 2018, 39-40).

DESCRIPTION, LIFELINES AND ANCHORS

It is to the formulation of new stories I now turn. Or is it new stories? Larry says "better" stories, but this isn't a normative ranking; rather it is to the very fragilities of their coming into being as stories. In Ben Highmore's (2018) terms, this is to turn to what different genres afford: "what does a particular form allow a practice to do? What forms encourage complexity and contradiction?" (244).

One of the key points Highmore makes is how important description is to cultural studies. While this makes sense it goes against the grain for those of my generation who were implicitly or explicitly taught that "theorizing" was the point, not mere description and the supposedly unskilled relaying of the facts, figures, and characters of real life. This training has probably been passed down through generations of students.

And because description can be meandering, and not always clear as to its point, students and others who want to know what the right answer is will find it frustrating.

There is description and there is description. To be harsh, the passive-voiced, objectifying draining of color and life, and the hubris of a vaguely gesturing embrace of "policy" that still typifies much description in social sciences is not what I have in mind. Rather, let's have more description that breaks "a circuit of repetitive interpretations and critiques." Let us stoke "the animating energy of Cultural Studies . . . [with] more extravagant engagement with description" (Highmore 2018, 249).

For Highmore (2018) and other cultural studies scholars focused on the hard-nosed drawing and fleshing out of material to then make it hang together somewhat cogently, "description is never simply a raw empirical apprehension of the world. It is already a form of interpretation" (250). And I'd say it is also a mode of apperception, of feeling the world in its minute gyrations. As Stuart Hall puts it in conversation with Les Back, "I have to feel the kind of accumulation of different things coming together to make a new moment, and think, this is a different rhythm (Hall and Back 2009 qtd. in Highmore 2018, 254).

To return to my title, "conjuncture as lifeline," by which I mean a line, a concept, a word, a gesture thrown over a churning abyss, I'll try to respond to Highmore's provocative question of whether it is "the case that the worldliness of a conjuncture can only be apprehended at an angle?" (Highmore 2018, 257–58). Across my work, I have approached numerous subjects from various angles. I am drawn to the oblique to the annoyance of some of my interlocutors, but not all. Anything worth trying to understand necessitates a faceted approach, and some hard work by writers and readers. It does not make for a straightforward line of analysis. My deep dives into very different conjunctures may be hard for readers to piece together as connected, as operative. If there were a reader out there trying to follow, they might be hard to put to conjure the Probyn who writes of sexuality, cultural twists of place, belonging and Deleuze, and another one who investigates eating, sustainable production and consumption, the volumes of the oceans, and now deep sea extractivism. Sometimes the connections are visceral and aim to explode tight enclosed categories such as "identity." Sometimes they follow quite logically from a concern to understand the embodying of life forms—and their effects on humans and non-humans.

It can be unnerving. When I am grappling for connections, feeling all at sea, the conjuncture can serve as a lifeline. Where, as Hall says, conjuncture is the anchor that keeps us weighted to the seriousness of cultural studies as, dare I say, a way of life of inhabiting and thinking the different scales of living.

For instance, as part of my current project on Extracting the Ocean, I was deep into reading studies about deep sea mining—the controversies, the legal framework of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), the "grey" literature touting the possibility, the necessity, the inevitability of marine extraction for EV to provide a magic fix to our world depleted of fossil fuels. Meanwhile, Putin was at war with Ukraine. In addition to the dead bodies in cities and fields, Putin's desire to grab the channels through which grain, fertilizer, and other supplies to some seventy-nine countries that rely on Ukraine for food (conjunctures around which I have grappled across my entire career) raised for me the urgency to grasp the rearticulation of terrestrial understanding of geopolitics by bringing in the oceans. This entailed a heavy slog through several disciplines and bodies of literature, and investigation of the history of the emergence of the very term "geopolitics" and its consequent political and intellectual shifts. The tendrils reached into the conjuncture of "green" mining and the increasingly loud voices about the need to mine the sea bed for its precious deposits of lithium, nickel, cobalt, manganese, and graphite. In many descriptions they come wrapped as nodules, ripe to be ploughed and collected by enormous machinery, all of which avoid the reality of purely geopolitical resource grabbing facilitated by the continuing history of colonial conquest.

Of course, the storyline does not run straight, nor does it finish. A maddening mélange of rhizomes, historical events, and greed for resources animates this conjuncture colored by the pall of post WWII Cold War as well as some humanistic tenets in UNCLOS to more equitably deal out access to resources (Probyn 2022). This is messy work. As Meaghan Morris (2020) reminds us, this is what differentiates cultural studies from the smoother contours of "critical theory."

But that's why you need a lifeline and an anchor, and grit and determination—whether in analyzing tricky conjunctures or building a vibrant Department of Gender and Cultural at the University of Sydney across cold political climates that encouraged our objects of study to be treated with ridicule by so many. But establishing and growing this communal endeavor

over more than twenty-five years was my raison d'être, Larry's lessons incorporated as habitus. It is also the hardest moment in my academic life as our current university management is set on dismantling it.

I've cried and tried to get over thinking about me, in order to focus on the students who keep going on in my stead, just as Larry has done for longer and for many more. This is to watch out for and care for the experiments in cultural studies they instill in different milieu, cheering when they work, urging them on when they don't seem to be working, staunchly defending the necessity of new approaches and modes of recording in writing and other media the clashing scales of our times.

This mixture of grit and interest is what Larry has instilled in me across the currents of my career. Quite a gift.

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17

Letters From Afar: Jacques Lacan Does the Work for Grossberg Love

MARCUS BREEN

My introduction to Larry was heavily mediated. We met through snail mail correspondence in the 1980s, with a letter originating from him. The introduction came in a document printed by the dot-point machines of the era, under the capitalized heading "University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Department of Speech Communication." Beneath 26 June 1987 was the curious line, "To all my Australian friends and acquaintances: Dear Marcus."

"Please forgive the anonymity of this letter but I wanted to get this out as quickly as possible. I have a big favor to ask of you. I have been invited to speak at the Symposium of the International Musicological Society at the Festival of Music in Melbourne." The organizers, he noted, did not have money to contribute to travel expenses, and he was asking for "enough money to cover my airfare to Australia." Larry signed off noting that his vitae was enclosed "for your information." Nothing like this had appeared in my snail mail before or in my virtual mailbox since. Curiously, it was not the original act in the uncommon beginning to our friendship. It followed an earlier phantom introduction in Montreal in August 1985, where we both became members of the International Executive Committee of the International Association for the Study of Popular Music (IASPM). Larry, being absent, made known his priorities about popular music research/activism through John Shepherd, the IASPM president and an English-born musicologist from Canada.

As manufactured interactions, these "meetings" became the source of our friendship, fertilized by the initiating puzzle of Larry Grossberg, the invisible man. Unsurprisingly, Larry's letter raised questions, prompt-

ing queries while fueling an unsettled attraction-resistance to the absent American. Even better, as I discovered, his presence was informed—even mobilized—by the moral philosophy of Marxist critique, in which caring about and reacting to the state of the world appeared in preference to some kind of totalizing individualistic Americanization. That he liked, even lived for, rock and roll and punk (along with the symbolic acts of resistance against the status quo that accompanied those art forms) confirmed a sense of shared marginality that was foundational to our friendship.

Later, the pieces fell into shape. As we talked at an International Communication Association conference, then later and at Crossroads, the international cultural studies conference Larry launched with Meaghan Morris (my freelance journalist colleague from the early 1980s), I learned that he despised the National Communication Association, even while accepting academic awards from it. I was confirmed in recognizing that his guile was markedly advanced, while at times, as I will show, confusing to my somewhat categorical categories of fundamentalist analysis.

(Self-critical intervention: not wanting to use the conditional "however" to open the next sentence). If one is to do the structuralist thing and unpack it in its Hegelian majesty, our friendship was constituted at first by the many attributes of love. For dialecticians, the attributes of love reveal themselves across a continuum of human activity: affection/separation, engagement/refusal, pleasure/fear, need/uncertainty, and so on. Or, in a superior psychoanalytic turn incorporated in the beatific phrasing by Jacques Lacan (1953-1954), first: "Love, the love of the person who desires to be loved, is essentially an attempt to capture the other in oneself, in oneself as object." Then discomfort, as Lacan continues: "The person who aspires to be loved is not at all satisfied, as is well known, with being loved for his attributes. He demands to be loved as far as the complete subversion of the subject into a particularity can go. . . . One wants to be loved for everything—not only for one's ego, as Descartes says, but for the color of one's hair, for one's idiosyncrasies, for one's weaknesses, for everything" (276). In this mirror of ourselves, love becomes not so much a word as an act of the realization of humanness, where love in this case becomes fallible Grossberg love, brimming with contradictory potential.

In 1987, living in the humble single-fronted wooden home in Melbourne I shared with my partner Deborah while working as a music and film journalist, I was emerging from under the heavy weight of evangelical Protestant fundamentalism. Against and with this history, Larry's absent

presence offered a pathway to the attributes of love that would reveal me to him and him to me. Over the years it was much more than this, as the love oscillated through the many gates of its meaning, to be transferred into and through desire.

The application of Lacan's concept of desire offers a means with which to explore the enthusiasm of the reciprocating desire Larry generated for friendship, affection, colleagueship, and comfort. It sprang from the desire for interpersonal relations or "affective alliances" that begin with neurosis, as Lacan notes in exploring desire, parsing Freud. As part of the process of creating these alliances, desire transfers itself into love, "being beyond what he or she appears to be," as Lacan (1953-1954) put it (276). It is no surprise that arguably Larry's best known contribution to cultural theory—affective alliances—expresses his desire for shared action in the politics of utopian aspirations. This is beyond what he or any of us can expect, and yet as a phenomenon, affective alliances express themselves in the desire to love and be loved in those alliances, conjunctural and contingent though they may be.

This appropriation of Lacan's psychoanalytic theory of desire to describe my friendship with Larry represents a psychoanalytic intervention of sorts and can be generalized to other friendships. It offers a synthesis of the complex forces at work in our relationship. As Lacan (1958) suggests:

> The psychoanalyst intervenes in order to deal at different levels with these diverse phenomenal realities in so far as they bring desire into play. It is specifically under this rubric of desire, as signifying desire that the phenomena, which I called above residual, marginal, were first of all apprehended in Freud, in the symptoms which we see described from one end to the other of Freud's thought, it is the intervention of anxiety, if we make of it the key point of the determination of symptoms, but in so far as such and such an activity which is going to enter into the operation of symptoms is eroticised (sic), or to put it better: is namely caught up in the mechanism of desire. (2)

The utility of this psychosocial dialectic is that it unravels the puzzle of Larry, while admitting that nothing can be complete. Our relationship was loaded with desire, as well as love. If we take Lacan seriously, the love was a type of eroticized desire, in much the same way that rock and roll at its superb moments of transfiguration generates the affect of better social possibilities. The symptoms were all there, somewhat less residual and marginal, more immediate, demanding attention.

The French psychoanalytic method was significant to the outsider structuralist tendencies of cultural studies, through Marx, Althusser, and Lacan, Bourdieu and Foucault, unsteadily on to Stuart Hall through Birmingham's Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, channeling English working class politics and left intellectuals. The outsider status of cultural studies invited speculative political possibilities alongside open ended ruminations. Is it too much to suggest that this kind of energy transferred to and from Larry to connect through his pleading letter?

But who was Larry Grossberg? His twelve-page vitae attached to the 1987 letter added to the curiosity, acting as a further constituent of desire. Reading closely, my own desire was activated in things that I wanted to be a part of. For example, a 1979 article in *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, "Marxist Dialectics and Rhetorical Criticism," and in a 1984 edition of *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, "Strategies of Marxist Cultural Interpretation," followed by a note about a forthcoming coedited book *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*. Although there was an inconsistent record of Marxist research, there was enough to prompt intensification of my interest, given that in 1984 one of my first academic articles, "Popular Music: the Bands and the Media," was published in the Melbourne Marxist journal *Arena*. Larry's publication record reinforced the view of American rock and roll academics as new practitioners of emerging areas of research informing left activism. They were busy, eccentric, and engaged with what mattered. But why me? A music and film journalist, a nonconforming popular music "scholar," a "rock journalist," a moniker that after reading Lester Bangs, I was reluctant to award myself given the parlous, derivative state of Australian rock and roll at the time. To return to Lacan (1958), "the energy of desire" took these inklings of my own neurosis to see it in Larry's desire (1).

We met face-to-face in 1988, three years after we became executive committee members of IASPM, when Larry visited Melbourne for the musicological conference for which he had asked for funding *and* when he was on his honeymoon with Barbara. At the time, Deborah/Deb was pregnant with our first child, Hester. The tangents of our various interests met as life forces expressing needs and uncertainties, all cocooned in the desire for friendship: by both and all four of us. At times, the cocoon was almost literal. For example, having organized an IASPM lecture for Larry and John Shepherd at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology University during that 1988 visit, I sat crammed between them at a small table at

the front of the room. Larry spoke first for more than an hour, followed by John for about the same amount of time, while Barbara sat a few feet from us in the front row. As they spoke, my mind wandered, and I wondered if during those excursions into the academic landscape of the longwinded, Barbara questioned what kind of marriage this would be. (Happy and long lasting, I am pleased to note).

There is always a complex of psychic forces at work in social relations that are frequently overlooked, often cast aside in the haste to massage and manage one's ego along with career prospects and advancement. Psychoanalysis provides a way to retrospectively view how these forces have been constituted by the key components of Lacan's model of desire in social relations. Unsteadily alive across the fervid dialectical landscape of neurosis, the references on the map point to the better world of love, of which Larry has been a consistent part.

Of course, the letters continued. Lengthy handwritten missives appeared after Hester was born. The massive co-edited tome arrived late in 1988—*Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*—reinforcing the ideological credentials I cared most about, but could not display in the intellectually deprived world of Australian journalism and not much more in academia, as far as I could tell. With Larry, there was a *there there* that fed a larger set of possibilities, probabilistically more neurotic than could be appreciated, generating a desire and with it the love of friendship. We didn't always agree—he was wrong about breaking political economy from cultural studies for example—while some work was unduly derivative, at times repetitious. Such criticism was accepted by Larry, yet never sufficient to generate an infantile rejection.

In all this, within the neurotic foundation of our friendship, Lacan's theory of desire offers a way to describe where, why, and how love flourished. This proved to be the case through my paltry efforts at life in America after moving to the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in 1996 to work in the Communication Studies department where Larry had moved to offer a program in cultural studies. My efforts appear now as a legendary register of failure—never tenured, minimally recognized, bouncing around like a misdirected immigrant among the savages in a liberal democracy of barely suppressed barbarism. The determination not to be resentful or bitter about the decisions I made to leave, or be fired, or be denied, or remake myself, were informed by my own neurosis whose

meaning was informed and enriched by the neurotic I met at the mailbox in 1987. The neurosis has matured as we have grown older, while our desire remains a welcome light of love.

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18

A Conjunctural Account: For Larry, Teacher, Mentor, Friend

MAY JOSEPH

The idea of the festschrift—a ceremonial gathering of a scholar's work—is to celebrate, foreground, and comprehensively assess the contributions of a great teacher and scholar in a Germanic sense. It is an idea that is increasingly outmoded in an era of deregulated teaching, decentralized scholarly genealogies, and contract labor that has diminished the position of academic scholarship in the United States. The privilege to participate in a festschrift is as rare a performative act today as the rarified Germanic term itself. This invitation to collectively engage with the teachings of Larry Grossberg, the influential American theorist of British cultural studies whose transformative impact on American scholarly life is as distinctive as it has been provocative, is a festschrift. It is a meditative undertaking on the history of ideas, and a rare opportunity to reconsider the rise and permutations of cultural studies as a critical and political project in American academia, in a collaborative context.

Larry Grossberg occupies a special space in my academic life. When I think of Larry, I see a prominent scholar-influencer, renowned master teacher, and most rare in academia, an incredibly generous mentor and friend. Grossberg represents what the best of American academia can produce: a brilliant scholar who has devotedly cultivated generations of his students to continue the task of conjunctural thinking. To write this festschrift for Larry is to both write an account of the history of cultural studies in the United States (however briefly), as well as to consider the demise of the university as we knew it, the 20th century scenario of higher education, research centers, tenure track jobs, doctoral students to mentor, and university presses who would publish research because it was interesting rather than because it would sell. To write a festschrift for Larry is to also engage in the future of the "fest-work," to produce a thinking forward in the best tradition of the festive-work, of collaborative intel-

lectual discourse in process, something Grossberg was always deeply committed to, a conjunctural engagement with the history of ideas and their transformations.

BRINGING IT ALL BACK AGAIN

I first encountered Larry Grossberg as a doctoral student in California profoundly influenced by the path breaking anthology *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* for which Grossberg had written the introduction (Nelson and Grossberg 1988). As a postdoc at the University of California Humanities Research Institute (UCHRI) in 1991, which was the first interdisciplinary gathering of cultural studies scholars from across the University of California system, I jumped at the invitation to become a postdoc at the renowned Research Center in the Unit for Criticism and Interpretive Theory. The "Unit," as it was affectionately known, was famously associated with Cary Nelson and Larry Grossberg. Grossberg's affiliation with Stuart Hall made it worth my effort to leave the blue Pacific and drive to the great Midwest of the United States, of which I knew nothing about. I had been fortunate to sit in on lectures by Stuart Hall at Oxford University in 1989, and had just completed a doctoral dissertation on the Birmingham School of Cultural Studies and its impact on Black British theatre and film. It was a time when Hazel Carby, Kobena Mercer, and Paul Gilroy were relatively new names within American academia outside nascent cultural studies enclaves such as Black and Ethnic Studies programs spearheaded by Manthia Diawara, Herman Gray, Henry Louis Gates Jr., Houston Baker, the History of Consciousness program at the University of Santa Cruz, The University of California Humanities Research Institute, the Unit for Criticism and Interpretive Theory at Champaign Urbana, the milieu around Stanley Aronowitz and the fast growing though increasingly marginalized early scholars of cultural studies across the United states.

Listening to the provocative and idiosyncratic Larry Grossberg in prosaic Urbana-Champaign, one got the distinctive feeling of a Marxist politics shaped by a grittier urban context than bucolic Urbana-Champaign. It is only on arriving in New York City and reflecting on that moment thirty years later from Brooklyn that I begin to better understand Larry Grossberg's positionality within cultural studies in the United States.

Larry Grossberg is quintessentially New York. I consider Grossberg's identification with the Birmingham School of Cultural Studies a transatlantic urban dialogue with a shared minoritarian cultural politics that has its roots in Brooklyn. To my mind, the case studies around the Nottinghill Carnival that informed some of the early studies of Black British Cultural Studies, resonated in many ways with the very different, yet comparatively resonant, working class histories that the Brooklyn Carnival was experiencing during the early 1990s. This distinctive cultural cauldron of New York's multiplicities informs Grossberg's class sensitivities in his push for the potential of a cultural studies theory as signaled by Stuart Hall. Like Hall, Grossberg abhors provincialisms, "Cultural Studies is never about British or French or American theory: it is not about theory at all" (Grossberg 1997, 291). Grossberg (1997) writes "It is about finding theoretical resources that allow you to redescribe the context that has posed a political challenge" (291). Again Grossberg (1997): "To put it simply, neither cultures nor theories necessarily depend on place. This is not to deny that cultural practices have a geography, that they are spatially articulated. Cultural practices are always . . . emplaced. But such relations cannot be understood as a matter of origins or identities. For places do not exists independently of the ways they are articulated and invested in" (290). This deconstructive, anti-parochial approach to a "radically contextual practice" (Grossberg 1997, 291) made Grossberg a deeply inspiring teacher. For Grossberg (1997), "Cultural Studies is about trying to do something that has not been done before without knowing ahead of time what resources will work" (291). It is this open-ended political possibility of cultural studies that Larry Grossberg signifies for me.

PEDAGOGY AS WAR OF POSITIONS

In the early 1990s, Larry Grossberg embodied the spirit of his phrase "An American in Birmingham" (Grossberg 1997, 195)—bringing to the tiny town of Urbana-Champaign an ethos of education anchored in the Stuart Hall notion that pedagogy is the space and politics of education. It was an ethics shaped by Grossberg's involvement with the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at Birmingham in 1989. Grossberg (1997) writes "I believe that the Centre (and the formation of cultural studies I am describing) is important not only intellectually, but also as a model of interdisciplinary, collective, and politically engaged research" (197).

At Urbana-Champaign, Larry Grossberg's renowned lectures on Hegel and modernity opened up the foundational traditions upon which my own derivative understandings of cultural studies were built. Grossberg's lectures on phenomenology and dialectics underscored the traditions of continental philosophical thought that underpin the emergence of cultural studies as a set of methods and inquiries. Experiencing Grossberg's rigorous seminars which would eventually inform "In Search of Modernities" (Grossberg 2010, 259) was an immersive experience in his theory of pedagogy as a process of articulation and risk (Grossberg 2010, 386). Grossberg's call for a contextualized understanding of cultural studies, a "war of positions" approach to situating the widely divergent directions and articulations of cultural studies unfolding internationally through the singular influence of Stuart Hall's teachings, was a significant point I took away from my conversations with Grossberg at the time.

RADICAL CONTEXTUALITY

Larry Grossberg espouses a conjunctural approach to pedagogical praxis (Grossberg 2010, 165). This political commitment to engaged education concretely manifested itself in a center for cultural studies called The Unit for Criticism and Interpretive Theory, Grossberg created at Urbana-Champaign along with Cary Nelson and Paula Treichler. The center was a far more expansive sphere of experience than its modest office quarters would have suggested. It was the physical manifestation of what Larry Grossberg espouses in his writings: the creation of spaces for open and discursive exchange of intra and trans-disciplinary cultural work grounded in a political crossroads of emergent ideas.

For Grossberg (2010), a cultural studies praxis was a practice in generating possibilities for "radical contextuality," for situated provocations. Grossberg's belief in conjunctural spaces was grounded in Stuart Hall's advocacy for conjunctures, for the uneasy and irreconcilable differences through which a political articulation could emerge. The "Unit," in that sense, was a conjunctural space. It nurtured and cultivated cultural studies voices to emerge at the time, many of which were Grossberg's students. There was a sense of a shared, if contentious, political and discursive framework that was both methodological, pedagogical, and scholarly at Urbana-Champaign in 1991. It was an energy and culture of work as praxis,

thought as action, that was in no small way shaped and nurtured by Larry Grossberg, through his deep involvement with creating a space for critical theory and deconstructive critical methodologies.

To have had the privilege of sitting in a seminar with Larry Grossberg is to have had the opportunity to experience the Socratic method in its classical form, watching a masterful teacher probe a question systematically and dialogue with students in an exploration of the underlying structuring foundations of the idea. Grossberg holds a special place in my experience as a student of cultural studies: that of the Maussian method. The great sociologist Marcel Mauss, the nephew of Emile Durkheim, was a renowned and transformational teacher first. He did not produce as much as his students, but his lectures were legendary and his teachings the lodestone to pathbreaking social science methods. Mauss influenced a great many scholars including Claude Levi Strauss. Sitting in Larry Grossberg's lectures, my reference point was Marcel Mauss. One experienced a sense of being part of a deeper epistemological inquiry into the foundational concepts structuring the emerging field of cultural studies. Grossberg's methodical systematic and immersive teaching methods were deeply influential. I have drawn on that style of the masterful exegesis, methodical explication and elaboration, and the dialogic engagement with the audience, to craft my own approach to pedagogy. In that sense, Grossberg's influential teaching methods leave a lasting trace over the decades amongst his considerable group of doctoral students, who have respectively forged substantive careers for themselves.

WE ALL STILL WANT TO CHANGE THE WORLD

Writing this festschrift for you, Larry, has been a powerful exercise in reviving the praxis of the conjunctural approach. After reading your work again, I remain energized to keep the project of believing that change is possible, one small gesture at a time. Your optimism is infectious, even in dark times. Here I quote you:

> We need to imagine multiple configurations, multiple organizations of both intellectual work and education and of the relations between them. We might consider creating multiple pathways . . . We might consider other ways of imagining research communities and academic belongings . . . to forge the best possible answers one can, to tell better stories. (Grossberg 2010, 293)

This open-minded articulation of your work endures. "I have always thought of cultural studies as an invitation into . . . conversations . . . collaborations . . . transformation" (Grossberg 2010, 294).

I close with this passage that captures a heart of cultural studies:

> Dynamists know that the future is 'unknown and unknowable' and therefore that it cannot be controlled in the present; let a thousand possibilities bloom in the present, whatever the consequences! (Grossberg 2010, 285)

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Professionalism, Pragmatism, and "Humorism": What I Have Learned from Lawrence Grossberg

YOUNGHAN CHO

This essay explores the core tenets of cultural studies as I gleaned them from Lawrence Grossberg. Beyond the rich knowledge I acquired from his lectures and writings, my interactions with Larry, both formal and informal, provided invaluable and formative lessons in the field. Here, I synthesize these lessons into three key concepts: professionalism, pragmatism, and "humorism." First, Grossberg's commitment to contextualizing theory within cultural studies exemplifies his unwavering professionalism. Second, his often-underrated pragmatism manifests in his interactions with students, administrative staff, and his theoretical stance of "no guarantees." Finally, his "humorism," a unique blend of humor and optimism applied to human endeavors, fosters positive energy and emotional engagement in those around him as they engage with cultural studies. Throughout this essay, I delve deeper into each keyword, drawing connections between his dedication to the field and my own observations, experiences, and lessons. I also assess the impact of his guidance on my personal and academic journeys as a cultural studies practitioner working in a different context and time.

First, Grossberg's dedication to both context and theory embodies his professionalism. He cautions against letting pre-existing concepts, theorists, or beliefs dictate research questions. Instead, he emphasizes the crucial and challenging task of formulating the right question specific to the context. Cultural studies scholars, he argues, don't possess pre-determined issues, answers, or even theoretical frameworks until they immerse themselves in the particular context at hand. While he encourages continuous theoretical exploration to refine the narrative arising

from this context, he also demonstrates meticulousness in communicating his ideas. For instance, when I interviewed him for a publication in 2007, I transcribed and summarized our conversation based on the interview topics. Upon completion of the editorial process, I sent the manuscript for his review before submission. While I anticipated him checking for minor transcription errors, Grossberg meticulously reviewed every sentence and even rewritten parts in a more natural, written style. While this extended the process beyond expectations, potentially impacting the interview's publication timeline, it underscored his commitment to clarity and precise communication.

Grossberg's professionalism extends beyond theoretical rigor to encompass intellectual humility. Unlike some academics who portray themselves as all-knowing authorities, he readily acknowledges the limits of his expertise. In one classroom anecdote, he recounted an interview where he was presented with a non-specialist question (possibly regarding international responses to Russia). Rather than offer shallow insights or decline the interview, he surprised the journalist by proposing a month's research time to provide informed answers. This anecdote underscores his belief that academic titles and reputation do not grant automatic authority on all matters. He consistently distinguishes between fields he commands and those where he seeks understanding, refusing to indulge in empty speculation beyond his areas of expertise.

In his classes, Grossberg challenged the assumption that academic credentials automatically translate to ethical conduct. He cautioned against intellectuals who equate expertise with moral authority. While not directly related, another personal experience exemplifies this stance. I once encountered him lugging a heavy bag into the crowded campus copy room, apparently photocopying textbooks for his class. My ingrained student reflex from South Korean universities, where such tasks often fall to students, prompted me to offer help. Grossberg politely declined with a smile, insisting on managing it himself. This seemingly mundane interaction underscored his belief that intellectual pursuits and citizenly responsibility exist as distinct spheres, each requiring individual commitment.

Secondly, Grossberg's pragmatism, often overlooked in cultural studies, embodies the field's core spirit of resisting essentialism. This pragmatism allows him to navigate nuance and embrace "no guarantees" as a guiding principle in his research. His inquiries and theoretical refinements stem from his lived experiences and the specificities of each context, craft-

ing "better stories" tailored to the unique situations he encounters. This approach, grounded in both pragmatism and professionalism, empowers him to pursue radical contextualism without rigid theoretical or political dogma.

Grossberg's pragmatism shines through not just in his research but also in his effectiveness as an educator and communicator. During my first post-thesis proposal consultation, he surprised me with this bold advice: stop reading and write your dissertation. Coming from a scholar whose work brims with theoretical discussions and hefty reference lists, this seemed counterintuitive. As a student, I, along with many others, felt the constant pressure to consume more knowledge. He further challenged me to start with any comfortable chapter and develop a writing routine. Initially, his advice felt jarring, but I decided to give it a try. In my tiny library carrel, I hung a sign that simply said "WRITE" and even resorted to disconnecting my LAN cable (pre-WiFi era) to eliminate online distractions. These interventions, coupled with his unorthodox advice, proved instrumental in propelling me forward. I found myself churning out paragraphs and pages, eventually completing my dissertation on time. His approach exposed the hidden truth: reading, while essential, can sometimes become a convenient excuse to avoid the daunting task of writing. Grossberg's pragmatism, in this instance, offered me the key to unlock my writing potential.

While not known for effusive feedback, Grossberg proved to be a dependable and timely communicator throughout my studies. Our regular meetings were supplemented by a unique exchange process: I'd deposit chapters in his mailbox, receiving marked-up copies in return. Though turnaround times varied, his feedback arrived consistently. His comments, often concise and direct (abstract, confusing, awkward), supplemented with checkmarks for approval, lacked easy solutions but spurred introspection. Navigating his limited familiarity with my specific area (Korean sports) honed my contextualization and writing skills—a challenging but rewarding experience. Recognizing his busy schedule and numerous students, his reliance on student queries and efficient use of mailbox consultations struck me as a pragmatic approach. Even his email replies, though brief, were consistent. A case in point: a heartfelt email in summer 2022 after Seoul's floods, his concern encapsulated in six words: "are you okay? a bit concerned, Larry." This simple message exemplified his genuine care, albeit conveyed in his characteristically succinct style.

The final keyword I associate with Grossberg's cultural studies is "humorism," a term I've coined to capture his blend of humor and optimism towards individuals and society. Unlike many academics whose written work overshadows their public persona, Grossberg shines equally in both realms. His speeches, lectures, and conversations consistently brimmed with love, hope for humanity, and a vision for a better future, often exceeding the level expressed in his written works. While deeply invested in theoretical tools for inquiry and narrative construction, his devotion to cultural studies transcends scholarly debate. It centers on understanding people's everyday experiences, struggles, and imagining a brighter future. This "humorism" is also evident in his recent work, where he strives for a nuanced balance between hope for change amidst a conservative climate in the US and a realistic acknowledgment of the challenges posed by existing theoretical frameworks. Ultimately, Grossberg's unique blend of intellectual rigor and optimism leaves a lasting impression on those who encounter him, both on and off the page.

Grossberg's "humorism" manifests in his lively classroom presence, where he welcomes spirited debate, even venturing into controversial territory. I recall a co-taught class where he became embroiled in a heated discussion with a colleague, reaching a point of intensity rarely seen in academia. While a third professor nervously mediated, Grossberg returned after the break with a self-deprecating joke, acknowledging the unusual spectacle the students had just witnessed. Another instance involved a passionate exchange with an MA student regarding the role of participatory intellectuals. Despite their conflicting views, he surprisingly apologized after the break, indicating regret for something he said. While time has dimmed the specifics of these debates, I remain deeply impressed by his active engagement with both colleagues and students, as well as his candidness in acknowledging his own fallibility. These interactions embody the essence of his "humorism" and serve as a powerful reminder of how cultural studies scholars can foster productive conversations across disciplines, expertise, and theoretical orientations, even when these conversations turn challenging or contentious.

Since our first meeting at Chapel Hill in 2002, Lawrence Grossberg has been an invaluable mentor in my academic and personal journey. His passionate teaching, wise advice, steadfast support, and generosity have profoundly shaped my life for the past twenty years. Beyond the knowledge gained from his research and everyday interactions, I've also endeavored

to emulate his exemplary approach to scholarship and life. Even after graduating, our connection has deepened. While he no longer formally advises my dissertation, I continually seek his guidance on panels, applications, and both personal and academic updates. Encounters at global conferences further solidify our intellectual bond.

Through Grossberg, I've witnessed firsthand how cultural studies, when practiced with professionalism, pragmatism, and his unique "humorism," becomes a project of crafting better stories that illuminate and expand our understanding of context. As he frequently reiterates, these better stories have the power to influence policy making by administrators and politicians and inspire practical change through various actors. This mission of cultural studies, as embodied by Lawrence Grossberg, is a legacy I carry with immense gratitude and strive to uphold in my own work.

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Spread Love (and Cultural Studies): It's the Brooklyn Way

LISA B.Y. CALVENTE

Recently Grossberg and I were at a local pizzeria in Chapel Hill, where we often meet because their pizza is the closest we can find to Brooklyn pizza. During these meetings, we catch up on our lived lives: our research, the university (my ongoing transition to Carolina), house remodeling (a task he has taken on since his retirement). At this particular meeting, we began to discuss the current political state of the nation, decolonization, and Frantz Fanon. This conversation came out of a forthcoming chapter that I sent him to read just a month before. Grossberg put down his pizza, midchew, and said: "So, let me ask you this: Would you call Stuart Hall a Fanonian?"

For this purpose, the details of our conversation do not matter; however, he and I got into what other patrons who witnessed us might have identified as a screaming match. For us, it was two New York intellectuals engaged in a dialogue, performed loudly and vehemently. We ended the conversation only because his pies were ready to bring to the men that were working on his bathroom.

When he was ready to go, we hugged each other, and he told me that these kinds of exchanges can only be done with those who have great trust and respect for one another. I agreed. Indeed, the honesty and anger that we both demonstrated came out of a mutual love and trust. We continued our conversation the next time we met and it remains ongoing.

I have known Grossberg for more than twenty years, since I became a graduate student in the terminal master's program in Communication at the University of North Carolina and he was my temporary advisor. Though I was a student who was not his advisee, Grossberg invested time and care

in me—and my intellectual growth. One of the first things he did was give me his cell phone number; he told me to call him if I ever needed anything. His care and support were often balanced with a critical approach to my writing and learning: "No!" "So what?" and, my personal favorite when I engaged with theorist X for a final paper: "I do not understand what he is saying, therefore, I do not understand what you are saying. NO." We met quite regularly, and, even when my advisor returned from her research leave a year later, Grossberg continued to meet with me as my committee member, and, most significantly, my mentor.

DIALOGIC OPTIMISM

Mentorship blurs the borders of the personal and the professional to produce and articulate both a political commitment and solidarity for future possibilities. During our meetings, we would talk about our families, being raised in Brooklyn, Chapel Hill, and theorist(s) X. Each topic was approached with care accompanied with deep listening and critical reflection. Our mentor-mentee relationship continued into my doctoral program after I defended my thesis and M.A. qualifying exams, both of which Grossberg, to put colloquially, gave me a hard way to go. These were almost as difficult as his line of questioning for my doctorate. Grossberg's hard questions sharpened my modes of thinking and my defense of those modes; his critical engagement transformed seemingly inflexible positions into interdependent mapping points for new directions.

Grossberg's commitment to mentorship illustrates his deep sense of loyalty, a loyalty that stems from his Brooklyn roots and is cultivated toward a commitment to rigorous intellectual work by way of cultural studies, grounded in the realities of everyday life. In this sense, his commitment to his colleagues, old and new, to Stuart Hall, as an example of, and in addition to, solidarity is a labor of love and trust shaped by a praxis rooted in dialogue. From its birth, cultural studies as a project stemmed from dialogic engagements that illustrated a deep commitment to ongoing conversations that were both imagined and practiced (Grossberg 2019). Theorized and embodied by Grossberg through his teaching and dialogic engagements, doing cultural studies means doing the groundwork and creating spaces for genuine conversation.

Borrowing from Dwight Conquergood, D. Soyini Madison highlights genuine conversation as a "dialogic performance" (Madison 2010, 48).[1] "It is a factor of being with another human being, in sharing the living presence of your difference" that depends upon "both vulnerability and strength" (Madison 2010, 48). Grossberg's mentorship illustrates his commitment to the time and perseverance it takes to build trust in order to make genuine conversation possible. It demonstrates his openness to being vulnerable and his willingness to engage with anyone—not just his students or colleagues from his concentration or discipline or even people who agree with him—in order to practice the kinds of knowledges that cultural studies aims to produce and share. Grossberg's doing of cultural studies is a dialogic performance, "necessarily done the hard way—on the ground and face-to-face within sites and modes of disagreement" (Madison 2010, 48). Performed dialogic practice means that trust is built with time and work with others and with a critical self-reflection in order to build the courage to speak truth, not just to power, but also to those who share in that living presence, and risk-face.

Grossberg has always practiced the courage to speak truth and risk-his-face even (and especially) when these acts are not rewarded. He has never missed a moment to tell me when I was wrong. He has also never missed a moment to tell me when he was wrong, often beating me to the punch. The risk of and for truth within dialogic engagement, where accountability is an embodied truth-telling of self-reflective and -reflexive awareness, is a revolutionary act that aims to build a humane world through better relationships and better communication. These acts are how better stories, and cultural studies, are formed. Grossberg's strength of vulnerable openness stems from his optimism of both the will and the intellect. For Grossberg (2018), "optimism is inseparable from knowledge. Optimism of the intellect is the condition of possibility for agency and change. Optimism belongs to the intellect" (857).

THE COLLECTIVE

The collective has always been necessary for a conjunctural analysis, which is the specificity of a cultural studies project (Grossberg 2019, 42). Cultural studies as a collective practice unmasks the taken-for-granted cultural formations and processes through "the maximum mobilization of all the knowledge, thought, critical rigor, and conceptual theorization one

can muster, turned into an act of critical reflection, which is not afraid to speak the truth to conventional knowledge" (Hall 1992, 12). The reliance on sociality for cultural studies is a strategic opposition that is antithetical to bourgeois (and) academic sensibility, and disrupts the kinds of knowledge produced and also how these knowledges are produced. The purposeful bringing together of different modes of thought that occur through genuine conversations demand a level of commitment, energy, trust, love, and courage. In line with collectivity, Grossberg created working groups that existed outside of the university curriculum and also institutionalized collective thought through team-taught courses.

The working groups operated as ongoing conversations of the current political and intellectual moment that reached across disciplines. Our meetings changed locations and themes and included students and faculty across campuses, disciplines, and levels. In these settings, Grossberg humbly worked through the theories, concepts, texts, and applications alongside of the other working group members. He admitted when he had no idea what the theorist was arguing and acknowledged differing interpretations if he thought they were valid. Validity came from our discussions and not solely from him or any one person. Grossberg exercised humility in a position where humility is rarely demonstrated and never required.

As faculty I now know that he never received credit for his mentorship of me and countless other students and junior colleagues, or for those working groups. Grossberg has never required or asked for any of his students to cite him or mirror his research, which is the unwritten norm for the student-advisor/professor relationship. Imagine: a world-renowned, distinguished professor in the academy who takes the time to read student work (regardless of whether they are his advisees), provide critical feedback, write letters on time and with care, have hours-long conversations, and completely invest in intellectual growth. The semester before he retired, Grossberg created and taught a new collaborative graduate course and, even now, he continues to read student work (not his advisees') and provides further guidance.

Grossberg exercises the kind of invisible work we often discuss in reference to BIPOC women faculty. Such invisible labor is time-consuming, unrewarded, unnoticed, and often punished. When it is noticed—and not directly punished—it is often met with just-say-no strategies that reinforce professionalization and the academic status quo. Yet Grossberg embodies his cultural studies praxis and continues to just-say-yes.

Here, risking face takes on a new meaning, where positions of privilege are utilized and also rejected to center a "particular practice of intellectual-political work" that matters beyond the academy (Grossberg 2010). Grossberg prioritizes solidarity, love, and political change over academic accolades that are typically the goal.

Grossberg's engaged practice is desperately needed in our present conjuncture. Particular to the context of the US and the American university, though this can be applied more broadly, Grossberg urges us to "go on, to take the next-tactical-step, one step at a time, 'knowing' that what one does will have an effect and so, one does the next thing, and the next, and so on" (2018, 857). These tactics are both theorized and embodied. We can actively risk-face and seek out moments to say yes rather than ask those more exploitable and expendable to just say no. We can remind ourselves that doing the work means disrupting conventional knowledges even as it points to our own being and furthers our precarity. We can be mindful that our actions and inactions have effects. We can act in love and solidarity for such changes with an understanding that such acts are revolutionary and also drive revolution.

CONCLUSION

It's been approximately one year since Grossberg retired and since several of us came together for a conference to commemorate his research. At Larrypalooza, I recalled how Lawrence Grossberg was both a mentor and colleague and how, unlike many of the attendees, I call him by his last name. I spoke of a tradition that started when the Communication doctoral program at Carolina was new and many of the students came to study cultural studies with Grossberg. He quickly became known as the Godfather of Communication and, given the title, his last name seemed more fitting. I want reframe Grossberg through his labor of love and solidarity and correct a name that fit his representation more than his actions. Grossberg, driven by love and solidarity, truly is the Revolutionary Academic. A revolutionary is the highest honor any intellectual can ask for.

NOTE

1. Performance studies was foundational to cultural studies becoming an underlying force at UNC and in Communication in general. This double yoke was, in part, a purposeful cultivation of collegiality and friendship that Grossberg fostered with

faculty in the department, namely performance scholar Della Pollock, who was his coeditor for the *Cultural Studies* journal and cocreator of a graduate curriculum with cultural studies at its core. Its significant to note that cultural studies was the impetus for the radical turn in performance to stand with and listen to the people and respond in intellectually-driven practiced action (Conquergood 2002).

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21

Room to Move in Cultural Studies: A Letter to Larry Grossberg

LISA HENDERSON

Dear Larry,

At the invitation of so many collegial editors, I write to congratulate you on your academic retirement, to speak to your work, and to thank you for decades of engagement and support. We came to know each other best through the Conjunctures cultural studies workshop, though first through the International Communication Association. You were among those bringing the Birmingham Centre tradition and the work of Stuart Hall to US Communication Studies, and I was among those reading Working Papers and arguing with British students, especially Patrick Hagopian, who'd come to the Annenberg School for Communication at the University of Pennsylvania with a rucksack full of those papers. We knew something was happening. Larry Gross assigned Stuart Hall's "The Rediscovery of Ideology: Return of the Repressed in Media Studies" (Hall 1982) and we were off to the races. Cultural studies was so uplifting as a politically committed project open to critique, disputation, solidarity, and possibility.

Despite my never having been your student, you have been a remarkable source of career sustenance. You and I have ridden different rails in the project of cultural studies, rails scaffolded by good faith, learning from each other and politics in common. I want to follow those rails here.

Identity and its stakes have been present in our conversation, but not as reductions. Through Gramsci, we speak to articulation, to overdetermination, and to conjuncture, ideas whose linkages make a lot of room for history and specificity.

Do you recall inviting me to join an ICA panel (and later a group of contributors to the *Journal of Communication*) in the early 1990s on the theme of political correctness in communication studies? I was junior, chuffed, and nervous. You were open to queer scholarship, which I had then begun to do, and to queer persons in the project of cultural studies. I had come to identify as a queer person just a few years earlier and, through Larry Gross, saw my way to queer work. For that panel, I opted for "academic conservatism" over "political correctness" since the latter was a term academic conservatives used to tar 90s progressive thought (Henderson 1992). I so appreciated being on that panel, full of luminary scholars including yourself. It was a moment of political thinking beyond the precincts of political communication as a subfield, which I don't do, and a demanding occasion to step into as a scholarly newcomer.

The panel wasn't first about queer questions, but it was important to you that they be spoken. We could see stakes being redefined in the moment. Though there were other, more senior women in the group of authors, they weren't on the panel at ICA. In a self-conscious assertion of autonomy I started my commentary with the observation that I was "chromosomally outnumbered"—the only woman on the panel. It was a tortured locution and one I would never say now since I wouldn't use "chromosomes" as a tag for gender or sexual difference. But it was also an ungenerous response to your invitation. I took the assignment seriously and I knew I wouldn't be received as exactly feminist enough by critics in the audience who'd be looking for feminist insight. Through Gayle Rubin's work (Rubin 1984), and Foucault's (Foucault 1976), we were finding sexuality apart from gender in that moment (though they would be rearticulated then disarticulated again in the twenty-five years to come). I was right about that judgement and so were they. Hence my performance of detachment in a momentary whirlwind of valences. But still, what a pretentious expression, "chromosomally outnumbered"! It kills me, especially in light of a subsequent history of conversation and engagement with you. We enter at different places but you have kindly recognized my work, invited me to join in the collective project you have long undertaken, and supported me academically in the most concrete ways, including what I understand was a thoughtful, detailed review of my dossier at tenure time. Larry, thank you.

I want to keep the disputation and good faith going. What are our intellectual differences now and what difference do they make? I asked that question in finally returning to your self-declared polemic, *We All Want to Change the World: The Paradox of the US Left* (Grossberg 2015).

I have long admired your Left project, Larry, and your solidarity with other scholars whose work has meant so much to me—Raymond Williams, Stuart Hall, Angela McRobbie, Janice Radway, and Ien Ang among them—and the legions of students who followed and who became friends and essential interlocutors: Charles Acland, Anne Balsamo, John Nguyet Erni, Gil Rodman, Carrie Rentschler, Kim Sawchuk, Greg Seigworth, Jennifer Slack, Jonathan Sterne, Will Straw, Greg Wise, and the whole Conjunctures group—the workshop in place from 1998 to 2017. It is in that state of admiration that I want to return to our different intellectual orientations and their political project in common. You and I meet especially at *conjuncture*, the constellation and intensification of historical circumstance that makes new things possible. (Or doesn't.) We move through different intellectual landmarks and meet again down the road.

Your question in *We All Want* is how to reinvigorate a popular Left, though you are open to calling it something else—anything else, really, if it does some of the things the Left once did: animate and mobilize broad justice and solidarity movements in society and government across the lines of social, cultural, and generational difference. You published *We All Want* in 2015, shortly after Obama's second mid-term "shellacking" and the rise of the US Tea Party. A period of loss, as you narrate it, though I'm not sure how you had responded to Obama's 2008 election in the first place. I welcomed Obama and still remember the period's great sense of possibility, which right-wing white supremacists were immediately determined to crush, legislatively and in popular politics. On one level, they succeeded. But unlike you, I didn't receive the time around 2015 as marked by a loss or failure of Left or progressive movements, given the formation then to come of Black Lives Matter, #MeToo, Bernie Sanders' political mobilizations (taken up in subsequent US Presidential elections even as Bernie himself was pushed out), the US election of The Squad (Alexandria Ocasio Cortez, Ilhan Omar, Ayanna Pressley, and Rashida Tlaib, later Jamaal Bowman, Cori Bush, Greg Caesar, and Summer Lee), Greta Thunberg and the renewed young people's environmental movement, the movement for migrant and immigrant rights in response to catastrophes at the US Southern border and in the Mediterranean, even the marriage equality move-

ment (though I've had an awkward relation to that movement forever, alongside being married since 2013 to Tom Streeter, a solidary non-queer sweetheart). There has been a lot of action, though in pandemic time the movement globally has been to the right.

Here's my version: Through a long and continuous history marked by Thatcherism and Reaganism in the period that most richly marks the Birmingham Centre tradition of cultural studies, the US joined the global movement for power without democracy led by kleptocrats and oligarchs and enabled by platform capital and state capture. Our new autocracy is enough to make me wish for the old neoliberal settlement, though I recognize the recklessness of that comparison and the continuities between political forms, from neoliberalism to established and emergent autocracy. As governance everywhere was both reduced and rewired by policy and industrialized disinformation for global corporate growth, the stage was set for the refusal of solidarity in favor of group think and atavistic nationalism.

Now there's a "contents under pressure" warning.

In this new context, I return to my long-standing question emerging from queer cultures in the post-WWII period and the AIDS crisis: not where has the Left gone, but how do people survive and find room to move? I am always scanning the cultural-political horizon looking for where people and communities have maneuvered and endured. How do we organize ourselves at all, making lives and places and worlds under circumstances that have never favored our thriving and that now actively seek to destroy democracy's bare life? I am drawn to all the places that people have found to respond to new-old autocracies with resolve, creativity, sacrifice, mobility, and clarity about what comes first. Sometimes their actions are deliberative and collective, other times intuitive and self-preserving. Here, my thinking is less theoretical than ethnographic, especially as applied to cultural production, the making of cultural forms and meanings in places and contexts that matter. It is not the same as asking how we invigorate a popular Left, but it is in solidarity with that question.

CULTURAL STUDIES AND SEARCHING FOR ROOM TO MOVE

For an important example in this moment, I turn to the work of Masha Gessen, especially their thinking on autocracy and their reporting on the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine. Gessen has become a key writer for me

in finding room to move—a gesture beyond survival though there are no guarantees, even, of that. A distinguished and award-winning reporter and an abiding critic of Putin's autocracy in Russia and its alignments elsewhere, I first encountered Gessen's work when they received the US National Book Award in 2017 for *The Future is History: How Totalitarianism Reclaimed Russia* (Gessen 2017), an inspiring and illuminating collection of social historical portraits of people seeking transformation, people whose ambitions were summarily captured and re-directed in Putin's Russia.

Not long after *The Future Is History* was published, Gessen came to teach for several years at Amherst College, where they were in conversation with many of us in the Five College Consortium, on a couple of occasions including me. In 2016, they also published (among many other titles) a famed, six-point guide to surviving autocracy following the election of the 45th US President (Gessen 2016). (As Gessen tells it, the *New York Review of Books* assignment was originally for an essay about the election of the first woman President, but that didn't happen.) So many of us tore or printed out that guide and folded it up to carry in our pockets and wallets as a reminder that people all over the world were surviving autocracy, Gessen included, having self-exiled from Russia as a queer, Jewish political critic and as a parent whose children were at risk of being taken away in Putin's cunningly homophobic state.

Gessen has written about queer politics for a long time—in Russia and the US—but equally they write about other political topics as a consciously queer and gender non-binary author. After sociologist Margaret Cerullo (Cerullo 2010), I call it "queers doing politics" in contrast to "queer politics." "Queers doing politics" is a common form of political intersectionality that goes misrecognized in critiques of identitarianism. "Doing politics" from a range of conscious identity positions is essential to solidarity at any scale. It's room to move.

Gessen later developed the six-point guide into the book *Surviving Autocracy* (2020), which has been observed by different reviewers as both scary and reassuring—the threat word in the title being "autocracy," the grace word "surviving." I read it as soon as I could get it, in bed at night (which is where I read as a dean), setting myself up for autocratic nightmare as the 45th President continued to confuse even—or especially—the most orderly thinkers. Topsy-turvy time, down the rabbit hole, how *could* he, where *are* we, *what (tf)* is *happening*? Surely *this* egregious offense will end his political career. No? Then *this* one? No again, not in a union where

the aspiring autocrat had appointed all the judges and maneuvered at every opportunity to sweeten and toxify the resentments and attachments of whomever he could gather—not because he cares but because they have something to offer: their vote in a nominally democratic process enacted in favor of power without democracy and enough aggression to line up with his own. *Surviving Autocracy* offered room to move, an infusion of clarity and reassurance that that thing we were feeling, that vertiginous incomprehension and powerlessness, was an effect intended and wrought by pathological figures as they spiraled and retracted into their own power and took with them all the people, from senators to whom they'd granted a deal (Mitch McConnell) to everyday malcontents to whom they'd offered a toe-hold or what felt like a toe-hold (the January 6 political insurrectionists). Putin was the model, but he was neither the first nor alone in this historical moment. This is how it's done. *Surviving Autocracy* was reassuring in 2020 because it offered clarity about lived experience at the conjuncture and a theoretical understanding through a framework Gessen had adapted from Hungarian sociologist Bálint Magyar. Reading *Surviving Autocracy* reminded me of reading Janet Malcolm's *New Yorker* essay on Sylvia Plath in 1993 (Malcolm 1993) when I was clinically depressed without knowing it (though unlike Plath I was never suicidal). It clarified what on earth was happening and got me unstuck.

Through Gessen I have followed the work of the independent television service TV Rain (*Dozhd* or Дождь in Russian), which finds room to move in the near-impossible circumstances of autocratic state control and war. Gessen tells an extraordinary story about TV Rain that documents resistance to autocracy. It is urgent work that could be taught in media studies as we seek to imagine and make real an anti-autocratic future. Finding room to move where there doesn't appear to be any is an essential capacity in these political times.

In "News in Exile: How Russian Journalists are Covering the War in Ukraine" (Gessen 2023), Gessen's question—"how?"—is neither technocratic nor procedural but fundamental. How is it physically, mentally, socially, and emotionally possible to cover the war in Ukraine as a non-state, Russian journalist opposed to the invasion? In March 2022, a month into the war, Putin enacted two "anti-propaganda" laws, which criminalize both independent reporting and protesting the war, with penalties of up to fifteen years in prison. "The laws make it illegal to spread 'fake news' about the Russian armed forces, to call for an end to their

deployment and to support sanctions against Russian targets" (Human Rights Watch 2022). In a regime that had long punished journalists and other dissidents with imprisonment or death, the new laws raised the ante. The only way to report on the Russian invasion was to leave Russia. But go where?

As Gessen's essay makes clear, it is a complicated time to be a Russian dissident in Eastern Europe. Even dissidents are still Russian, sometimes seeking refuge in places—like Georgia or Latvia—with living memories of Soviet occupation. Waves of Russians landing in Tbilisi or Riga are not welcomed or easily accommodated even as Russian journalists recognize that they, themselves, "are not the story" (Gessen 2023, quoting news anchor Valeria Ratnikova). The story is Ukraine, where people are being shelled and life destroyed. Latvia "issued 260 media licenses to media workers fleeing Russia, including from Meduza, TV Rain, Russian services of the BBC and Deutsche Welle, and the Moscow bureau of the CBC, plus half the staff of *Novaya Gazeta* (headed by Dmitry Muratov, Peace Prize winner in 2021)" (Gessen 2023). Gessen continues: "five hundred newcomers is a 'noticeable presence' in a country with a population of two million" (Gessen 2023, quoting Latvian foreign-ministry official Viktors Makarovs), 25% of whom are Russian-speaking ethnic Russians who settled in Latvia during the Soviet occupation (1940-1990). "Will they be susceptible to Russian propaganda?" (Gessen 2023). Trust is out of reach. Eventually, following a series of ideological missteps and responses from TV Rain reporters and managers arising under the everyday pressures of live war reporting by new journalists, the organization was judged by Latvia's National Electronic Media Council to be a security risk and lost its license to operate in Latvia (Gessen 2023). Ultimately, TV Rain moved to Amsterdam, where supporter, former journalist and progressive media entrepreneur Derk Sauer had lobbied and invested on TV Rain's behalf and had introduced them to international foundations (Gessen 2023). The Netherlands granted them a five-year broadcast license. From Moscow to Tbilisi to Riga and then Amsterdam, moving—not stopping—is principle and practice at TV Rain, to keep covering the war out of reach of Putin's regime.

Dissident Russian journalists all over the world are using that strategy, including Gessen.

The story of TV Rain and Russian journalists in exile demands that as media scholar I take to heart and mind that our project is to seek, support, and even practice political resolve where we can. There is a future and we have a role in making it beyond critiquing the institutional, cultural, or critical conditions of reproduction. It's not always possible to know what mobilizes or enables courageous persistence, though Gessen's writing narrates reporters' practice in stacked layers of contextual complexity in the moment (of a day of shelling, an unanticipated political reaction to coverage, a new law, landing in Istanbul) and over time (of Putin's regime and Zelensky's rise, of the world's action and inaction). Gessen's unit of analysis is people's history—the practices of political actors made brave against autocracy for reasons that may be partly psychological but aren't psychologized, save to recognize the toll of trauma and the physical and political mine field of war coverage.

To respond to your query in *We All Want*, Larry: Are these movements? Not in the usual sense, but they are people on the move, moving the needle, keeping going at great risk, finding room to move.

This is not the US, nor the movement of movements you seek, not the network in time, space, culture, and politics that unifies people widely against injustice, inequity, and oppression. Still, I am organized by every example of people finding room and figuring out direction together in torn worlds not of their own tearing, though they remain subjects in these worlds, actors with an anti-war and anti-autocratic position to take forward. In Gessen's telling (2023), activist journalists debate political values, like gender respect and Russian anti-nationalisms, even as Ukraine is being shelled, not because they're scholastics or identitarians (though some may be), but because they have to work things out together to keep going, to resolve conflicts among themselves as dissident observers and writers in the wildfire of a war their state will not be accountable to—even as Ukrainian civilians leave, perish, or stagger through trauma, and ill-equipped Russian and Ukrainian soldiers die. The journalists—most of them young—drink, party, and sing. They do the expressive things that provide relief and attachment enough to sustain themselves. Identities meet war where solidarities must be produced to survive.

There are hearts and minds here, as there are or were in Syriza and Podemos, as you take care to write about at the close of *We All Want to Change the World*. I read the conclusion to *We All Want*, Larry, as searching, theorizing, and insisting, in good faith, that these qualities of resistance

in limited time and place, oftentimes taking shape at the same historical moment, *find* each other and mobilize at the broadest political levels and the longest durations, demanding of parties and governments that our agenda be theirs. In the US (though not only), wealth, the mendacious and fraudulent promise of wealth, racism, military and police aggression, lying and disinformation seem binding enough for the GOP and its insurrectionists; why, you ask, can't freedom and justice bind Left movements and the Democrats, notwithstanding a long history of Democratic compromise and missed opportunity in favor of party power?

Larry, that question is true and essential to me, and still I locate myself best in your analysis where you are taking us to task as self-described Leftists for the extremes of our dissatisfaction—Obama is not compromised, he's the devil; Obamacare is not limited, it's Nazism (Grossberg 2015, 258 n. 17). It's when I keep your call to openness near that I can see my desire that we collect the historic occasions of solidarity and stay in them—forever—to keep going, not finding fault or lamenting our limits against guns and money. I love your faith and impatience, and equally I love being able to see clearly—without distrust—the astonishing capacity of people working together to find political room to move. That's how I read Gessen and that is perhaps where Gessen's work and yours—and yours and mine—enfold. It is where I want cultural studies to go next, bringing along those beautiful authors—you, Gramsci, Hall, Williams, McRobbie, Radway, Ang, DeCerteau. If I have a stamp on the thinking of others—students, readers—that is what I want it to be: that we locate our sense of political possibility by identifying and aligning with where people find room. The room is not infinite or of our choosing and such a gesture does not protect us against historical disappointment nor guard our safety nor map our future. But it is a new and old political habit of gathering, sustaining and attaching to the formations we depend on to see worlds through. In your son Zacharias' terms, we are finding blackberries, not only fallen futures. That's cold comfort against, say, climate destruction, but there's possibility to be gained in joining land defenders and supporting their actions in contrast to armchair self-certainty, which you resist, about the efforts and gestures of others that will never matter. If a gesture enables the survival of the people now, it matters.

Room-to-move is good political affect, too. Years ago, I quoted filmmaker and artist Miranda July, who said in an interview "art is like my car, how I get to the next place" (Bryan-Wilson 2004). You are one of our best

writers on affect and politics, Larry, the critical place of affective mobilization and attachment and the critique of Left and Right pessimism. Affect is not the same as politics, but alongside it, in Lauren Berlant's terms a "juxtapolitical" engine in any social project (Berlant 2008, 8). As you write in *We All Want*, in truth we do, all, *want* something.

> Rather than choosing between relativism and certainty (whether intellectual, political or moral), the left might seek a more provisional and popular politics, one that begins and remains in the complex and compromised realities of people's lives. But above all, the left cannot afford to give up its optimism, however desperate it may be, or to claim it too quickly, so that it ends up, despite itself, in the thralls of an overwhelming organization of pessimism. This it seems to me is at least one reasonable response to the paradox of the left. (Grossberg 2015, 41)

My optimism is in the disposition to reach for worlds within grasp, to ask "where will we find room to move in this instance, or this?" It is sustaining to me personally (and is my abiding organizational question as a dean) but is also a political habit. We can invite our students and comrades to ask: Where is our room to move *now*? The question offers students and others an energetic form of curiosity, one that reveals political truths in tandem with the full armature of critique and sustains us against theory fatigue and the foreclosure on doing anything. After sixty-six years of living and thirty-six of teaching and academic life, that feeling of foreclosure—of pessimism—is where, as you and I both acknowledge, movements go to die. How do we offer our students intellectual room to move so that they can find that quantum in their lives and worlds?

Larry, we have come via different routes—you looking for a renewed and sustaining movement and me for room to move—still, we arrive at the lookout for political possibility in the conjuncture, a commitment in your work that I love and hold close. What was argument in my youth is solidarity now, solidarity and letters—to our friends, our comrades, our teachers. Love and solidarity to you, Professor Grossberg. I wish you an academic retirement both restful and invigorated by the knowledge of the important difference you make, by blackberries sweetened by sharing, and by political possibility always on the horizon.

lh

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22

What Next? Notes on Grossberg's Pessimism of the Intellect and the Will: Thinking Differently and Conjuncturally in Contemporary Colombia

JUAN RICARDO APARICIO

What next? was Lawrence Grossberg's poignant question after he personally witnessed the massive strikes and marches that swept through Colombia in November 2019. As we invited him to speak at *Universidad de los Andes*, delving into the trajectories, origins, and contested utility of the term "Neoliberalism," little did we anticipate that these events would serve as a harbinger of significant change. These events, unprecedented in Colombia's recent history, sparked the inception of a political transformation, with the election of the country's first leftist president, Gustavo Petro (2022-2026), marking a shift in its republican history. What had initially ignited as protests against a proposed tax reform were further fueled by anger over the assassination and disappearance of social leaders, the slowdown and insufficient support for the 2016 peace agreement between the FARC guerrilla group and the Colombian government under the right-wing administration of Iván Duque—among numerous other frustrations spanning structural and conjunctural dimensions. The protests transformed into a symphony of demands, emotions, and voices emanating from both rural and urban spheres. Representing diverse groups, including indigenous peoples, Afro-Colombians, LGBTQ individuals, students, unions, the unemployed, and ordinary citizens, these voices resonated across Colombia.

Anger, as Quintana (2021) frames it in her recent book, and passion—echoing one of Larry Grossberg's key concepts before delving into the affective terrain (Grossberg 1992)—coalesced in these events. As he walked through the multitude, Grossberg pointed to a poster that encapsulated this moment: "21 N, the march is not against everyone, it is with everyone." The streets were rife with marches, chants, dances, t-shirts stamped with the slogan "Always fashionable, never a fascist." But what next? Where do we go from here? This remains the key question, he insisted.

Think conjuncturally—think rigorously, and in a complex fashion—are Grossberg's words of advice for navigating these events, for making sense of what is happening out there and, importantly, for remaining safe. He emphasizes the importance of following up on the possibilities and differences that emerge in the cracks of history (Grossberg 2010b). Indeed, in recent years, Colombia has been immersed in an unprecedented dispute over its past, present, and future, over its types of modernities, and even, as some suggest, over its own version of capitalism. While a comprehensive contextualization of these events and the conjuncture is beyond the scope of this piece on Grossberg, Arturo Escobar (2019), a key interlocutor in these debates and ongoing events in the country, would argue that the convergence of various directions, lines, projects, and assemblages in these conjunctures should also be interpreted as ontological struggles aimed at occupying and shaping a (single) world or a pluriverse. For instance, in his recent May 1st public speech, Petro advocated for a version of capitalism inspired both by United States president Roosevelt (1933-1945) and the liberal president Alfonso López Pumarejo (1934-1938; 1942-1945).

During Pumarejo's presidency—particularly during his first term, which was marked by the government program titled the "Permanent Revolution"—Pumarejo endeavored to implement ambitious land distribution reforms in Colombia. These reforms were rooted in the peasant mandate of "the land is for those who work it." This move stirred unease among Colombia's traditional parties and its colonial and racist factions, as well as within its own capitalistic social formation that had naturalized inequality. Briefly it sparked unity among unions, peasant and leftist organizations, and government-aligned parties (only to later face frustration). It marked a novel sort of alliance between popular movements and the State. The backlash against these reforms resulted in an unprecedented period of violence known as *La Violencia* (1948-1958), which, according to

many scholars, brought forth a genuine counter-agrarian reform spear-headed by the large landowners and the elites against the peasant movements and their previous victories (Sanchez and Meertens 2006).

So, again, what next? For Grossberg (2010b, 1), cultural studies "matters because it is about the future, and about some of the work it will take, in the present, to shape the future." But it also matters because it attempts to diagnose the present with the best possible theoretical tools. To examine, to know more than the adversary, with a humble spirit always acknowledging that something is missing, without any sort of reductionistic formula. In his project/saga that traced United States political cultures, youth culture, and the rise of popular conservatism from *We Gotta Get Out of This Place* (1992) to *Caught in the Crossfire: Kids, Politics and America's Future* (2005), and finally, in his book on Trump, *Under the Cover of Chaos: Trump and the Battle for the American Right* (2018), Grossberg even argues that a good diagnostic story "seeks out a pessimism, attempting to discover and acknowledge just how bad things really are" (16).

As a practitioner of cultural studies dedicated to the radical contextualist project, I refrain from making sweeping diagnoses of the United States context he analyzes with such rigor to conclude how bad things really are. The landscape is complex, especially amidst ongoing accusations of anti-Semitism on various university campuses, set against the backdrop of the arbitrary and savage Israelian siege on Gaza and its devastating bombardments, resulting in the loss of over 17,000 civilians in response to the attacks initiated by Hamas also against the civilian population on October 7, 2023 (CNN December 10, 2023). Indeed, echoing the renowned advice from *Policing the Crisis* (Hall et al. 1978), cultural studies practitioners are reminded to delve into underlying issues such as racism, colonial occupations, and arbitrary violence to fully grasp these events. Moreover, the backdrop of police violence against the Afro-American population that sparked the Black Lives Matter movement, coupled with the candidacy and potential victory of Trump for a second term, adds layers of complexity to the situation.

We could argue that for Grossberg, the Left and the cultural studies project have not entirely understood these trajectories. Instead, they have largely operated within the realms of identity politics and/or autonomists camps, often failing to engage in meaningful dialogue with their adversaries. His frustration lies with the cultural studies project itself and its failed attempts to provide a nuanced analysis of "what's going on" with-

out recurring to the famous arguments of "false consciousness" or those blaming cultural dupes. He criticizes the reliance on organizing and totalizing concepts such as neoliberalism, capitalism, imperialism, modernity, and its variants (Grossberg 2022). As he has expressed repeatedly: for him, cultural studies has become too f----boring!! (and lazy!!).

But I want to contemplate possibilities. I want to delve into Colombia's current context through the lens of Grossberg's intellectual, theoretical, pedagogical, and ethical spirit. I want to think about what is old and what is new, examining the circumstances that led to Petro's rise to power, in many ways, thanks to the massive and pivotal protests that have unfolded in recent years. I want to deeply explore the challenge posed by Grossberg's admonition of "what next?" And, to trace the pathways through which the present and the future might evolve into something new. Nearly eight months into Petro's term in office, critiques are emerging from various quarters, spanning right-wing political, academic, and popular spheres. Even some moderate liberals and some proclaimed leftist politicians argue that the country is in a state of chaos. Following his initial success, during his inaugural year, in pushing what his former Economy Minister and Columbia University professor José Antonio Ocampo referred to as the most progressive and redistributive tax reform in Colombia's recent history through Congress, Petro's administration has come under attack by the usual right-wing politicians, the traditional press, and its editorial columns. The recent ousting of so-called moderate ministers, including the latter minister, following their traditional political parties' rejection of the government's proposed health reform, has sparked a wave of criticism alleging Petro's propensity for "polarization" in all dialogues and consensus-building efforts. Commentators have once again invoked the ghosts of Hugo Chavez and fears of Colombia's supposed *Venezualization* under Petro, echoing sentiments heard during the presidential elections. Meanwhile, unemployment has declined from 12.1% in March 2022 to 10% in March 2023 (DANE 2023), while the exchange rate oscillates hand in hand with these internal developments, global interest-rate trends, the Ukrainian invasion, inflation, and other factors.

Returning to Larry Grossberg's perspective, as of this writing (May 8, 2023), news arrives from Chile where a young, leftist progressive president, Gabriel Boric, won the presidential elections in March 2022. Initially, expectations for progressive change were high. However, a significant turn of events has unfolded, with the extreme right securing the major-

ity of seats in the constitutional assembly in control of drafting the new constitution. This development follows the rejection of the first draft in the ballots some months ago. Meanwhile, representatives of the Colombian extreme right have expressed their sentiments with the declaration "Chile awakens!!" (*El Espectador* 8 May 2023). And months after I sent the first version of this chapter, Javier Milei, a radical right-wing candidate, has just taken office with very aggressive privatization and austerity policies. He has also disparaged the disappeared and other victims of state crimes during the dictatorships, dismissing their plight as blatant lies and exaggerations. So, what next? Are we compelled to accept the famous argument of the "tragedy of the commons," suggesting that every attempt to change the status quo is destined for failure?

Inspired by Grossberg, I propose that we avoid taking easy shortcuts or succumbing to either the autonomous trap or the notion of the end of history. One of his key admonitions, which I have also incorporated elsewhere (Aparicio 2021), emphasizes that cultural studies should engage with people where they are, rather than where we think they should be. And I would add another of Grossberg's (2022) arguments signaling what may be the most important founding act of cultural studies: refraining from blaming "the people" for the failure of the left and the victories of capitalism, the ascent of the right wing, racism, and other societal issues. Instead, we should begin anew from where people are, not where we assume they should be.

With this advice, Grossberg does not mean to advocate for a simplistic empirical approach. Influenced by his readings of Deleuze and Guattari, and others, on the affective turn (beginning with Raymond Williams and his "structure of feeling"), he gravitates towards a "new empiricism" wherein nodes, lines, forces, and intensities assemble and disassemble (Grossberg 2010a). Here affect becomes crucial for understanding where people are, the starting point for the essential conversations and dialogues needed for the advancement of social justice, equality, and freedom. And here, researchers/cartographers should adhere to what Grossberg calls "mattering maps," discovering how people move and how people live, not as a given but always as expressions of coding, territorializing, and stratifying machines. This perspective reconceives the present as always contingent and virtual, reimagining imagination as discovering the contingent and the virtual within the actual.

At this juncture, we can conduct rigorous research on the "mattering maps" that propelled Petro to become Colombia's first leftist president. We should also embark on a similar path to understand recent developments in Chile and Argentina, as well as the ongoing events in Colombia today. We need to tell better stories by building more complex narratives than those presently available. Ultimately, this is not solely the task of a conjunctural and materialist cultural studies project, but also indicative of the intellectual work that progressive forces are or should be engaging in, both regionally and globally. This is the challenge for the cultural studies project in Colombia and Latin America and the Caribbean—a significant and highly relevant challenge that (I hope) would also evoke a distant smile from Grossberg, despite his somewhat pessimistic diagnosis of the cultural studies project.

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23

Sailing to Byzantium

BILL SCHWARZ

Larry is something else. He's a phenomenon. A force of nature. While most of us simply plod along, doing our teaching and—when life goes well—finishing a manuscript, he storms through the intellectual world in seven-league boots, engaging with one pressing matter after another. I look from the side-lines, exhausted simply by witnessing his enormous energy.

It's this Larry I want to reflect on here. It's less the quality of his thinking that, on this occasion, touches me. That would require, in any case, a hefty book. This is the opportunity for me to think of him from a different angle: as a—or perhaps the?—maestro of cultural studies. He's a singular thinker who has also devoted considerable collective labor to institution-building. Each of these dimensions of his professional life combine to underwrite his considerable authority as an intellectual.

Let's take a speedy audit. For my purposes I can leave aside the several single-authored books and the hundred or so academic articles which have appeared under his name. He's a teacher of repute and has led scores of graduate students to doctoral level. In 1988, arising from a huge, buzzy, and up-to-the-moment conference at Urbana-Champaign appeared the game-changing volume, edited with Cary Nelson, *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*. This was followed four years later by an equally thumping volume, co-edited with Cary Nelson again (this time also alongside Paula Treichler), pithily entitled *Cultural Studies*. It presented in captivating, urgent prose the dominating conceptual and political questions that, according to its galaxy of contributors, shaped the future of cultural studies. Further edited volumes appeared. And all the while, since 1987, Larry was a founding editor of the journal *Cultural Studies*. He served as its co-editor—I can't help thinking whether this designation doesn't unduly slight his contribution—for twenty-eight years, an astonishing tour of duty which would have felled lesser folk.

I don't need to itemize the impressive scope of this body of work nor the degree to which it's reshaped our intellectual world. But I've long been curious about the energy which lies behind it.

In 1968 Larry graduated from the University of Rochester where he studied history and philosophy. There he was fortunate to rub shoulders with Hayden White. At this point he transplanted himself to the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) at the University of Birmingham in England where (after Hayden White) he came to work closely with its director, Stuart Hall. Those familiar with Larry's work will know that Hall has been the defining presence in his intellectual life and remains so to this day. When his time at the CCCS came to an end he went off on a different venture: he joined a theater group which toured Europe, a Europe in which the aftershocks of 1968 were still alive on the very surfaces of social life. In an interview some forty years later he was asked which of these experiences proved the most influential. To which he replied—I can hear him saying the words—"all of them" (Cornut-Gentille D'Arcy 2010, 108).

We can take this at face value. But even as we do, there's little doubt that the most visible trace of these years lies with Stuart Hall and cultural studies. Or in his words, in the same interview:

> When I went to the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies in 1968, I found something that I was not looking for. I found people—and a project—who, whether self-consciously or not—were trying to find a different way of being an academic, a different way of bringing politics, theory and empirical research together to produce useful knowledge, and a different form of intellectual practice. I found an odd assortment of people, with an even odder range of interests, who clearly knew that in some sense they did not belong in the university and yet, in another sense, that the university was exactly where they had to be. They were not trying to create a new universal model, but simply a way to answer the particular sorts of questions that drove them into the academy in the first place, questions that for them anchored their existence as academics in their everyday lives and struggles. (Cornut-Gentille D'Arcy 2010, 108)

And he adds a further—cheering—reflection when he explains:

> I did not keep a low profile! I got involved in a student strike at Birmingham, which brought my presence there—I was described as an outside agitator—to the attention of various authorities. (Cornut-Gentille D'Arcy 2010, 108)

Ha! It's difficult ever to imagine Larry adopting "a low profile."

In some respects his was a common experience. For those who thrived at the CCCS, the experience was dramatic, still reaching into our memories during our later years. I write having been a student there, albeit a little

while after Larry and his moment—it was '68 after all—of student mobilization. This historical past is still active in me in significant ways. Although I didn't really know how I'd ended up at CCCS, nor what I was doing once I arrived, I soon began to understand the privilege it represented. Much of this derived from the persona of Stuart Hall, who was unbelievably generous to budding scholars, if that's what we ever were. Even so, Hall's influence was certainly not alone in this regard. Maybe his greatest gift in these days was to strive to make the CCCS, part of a highly traditional university, as democratic as was possible. The points of influence were plural.

When called upon to write this contribution I began to ponder the divergences between the experiences of those of my generation who came to Birmingham from the UK, and who remained afterwards in the UK, and Larry, who'd arrived from "elsewhere" and then returned to another "elsewhere": although I think that in Larry's case, he speedily rocked up at the university in which he'd previously studied. It's occurred to me that there's a singular distinction between—let's say for the moment, without generalizing—Larry's experience and mine.

I think that arriving at the Cultural Studies Centre was a strange experience for all of us, defamiliarizing us from the institutional conventions to which were accustomed. Once we'd finished at Birmingham we left with different investments. Most of us continued to carry those Birmingham years inside us. Yet it seems to me that once we'd departed, despite our shared allegiances to all that cultural studies represented, different tactics arose for Larry in the US compared to the majority of us who remained in the UK. Or at least this is how I see things now.

When I left the CCCS, I went on to teach at a newly founded undergraduate degree named as cultural studies. It was staffed by like-minded folk, some of whom had been to Birmingham, and others who knew well the debates. This was an important historical moment in the UK when cultural studies, in its own right, began slowly to enter the peripheral regions of the college sector. The prospects of instituting a democratic curriculum were close at hand. For a minority of us this was achieved under the explicit banner of cultural studies. I think that this situation held until something like the end of the 1980s.

Thereafter in the UK, the influence of cultural studies—as a banner announcing a particular vision of democratic thought in the university system—began to wane. There were various reasons for this. In particular, in reaction to these very initiatives, an emergent new utilitarianism could

be discerned, sometimes, unnervingly, sailing under the flag of cultural studies. It turned out that cultural studies proved a handy resource for desperate university managers, providing a capacious enough nomenclature to signify whatever chaotic arrangement derived from the latest instalment of rationalization or restructuring. There's no need to follow here the bad faith which underwrote this transition. The power of the sign—cultural studies—began to wane, beginning to mean different things for friends and enemies alike. Gradually in the UK, through force of circumstance, I (or we?) became less attached to cultural studies as a named curriculum and sought out whatever spaces we could find, under whatever institutional titles, to continue to undertake critical work—or, to put this another way, to keep the faith with the founding principles of cultural studies without angsting too much about its various institutional designations. Wherever we found ourselves, spanning the full gamut of academic departments, we worked where we thought we could be most intellectually productive. In my own mind, the primary signifier—cultural studies—had done its work.

Maybe, in retrospect, we weren't sufficiently agile to protect the name and what it represented. In this respect we were culpable. The term slowly began to accrue contrary meanings. Yet in the UK we found other battles to fight. I arrived at the point when cultural studies, previously of great import, no longer felt—in itself—to be the issue it once had.

Larry found himself in different circumstances and adopted other strategies. The conferences, the curricula, the journals—the infrastructure of cultural studies—migrated from England's West Midlands to the Midwest of the United States, which became the new Byzantium. This was an extraordinary feat, marking a mind-bending, tantalizing, new internationalization of cultural studies. (Richard Hoggart in the Midwest?!) Many consequences followed. A new round of displacements had to be encountered before cultural studies could prosper in its newfound habitat. In some respects, until new pressures arose, it signaled a salvation of all that was convincing about cultural studies. And if there is a single figure who stands out in this reimagining of what cultural studies could do and how it happened, it was Larry. Larry's *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* and his sequel, *Cultural Studies*, represented differently shaded epistemes from those that had stalked the corridors of the Muirhead Tower in a nondescript corner of Birmingham. Cultural studies was given a new life: a very renaissance.

Of course, in the very moment this was achieved contrary political vectors came to make themselves felt. The shifting meanings of the idea of cultural studies were as active in the US as in the UK. To turn to *Cultural Studies* at the time when Larry stepped down as editor we can see, day by day, these questions rising to the surface. The Illinois moment turned out, of course, to represent just a single station of the cross in the unending reinvention of cultural studies, albeit one of striking chutzpah. That's what happens to the new. At some point it inevitably becomes the old, while fresh horizons arise.

This rejuvenation of cultural studies was magical. If I can borrow an overused term, it represented a charged turn in the diasporic conditions of cultural studies. Larry had come to Birmingham from far away and maybe this redoubled his allegiance to his newfound intellectual world. I wonder how it must have been for Larry to discover that in the new dispensation he was obliged to carry the burden of representation for the spectacular array of voices who signed up to join the chorus of "cultural studies." What was it like to keep the faith in *his* Birmingham in 1968 when, for good or ill, the political world had turned? And when, also, for many of us cultural studies had slowly come to signify a past with diminishing resonances in the present? Where does it leave Larry? Where does it leave any of us? More likely than not, we'll never reach Byzantium.

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Doctor of Rock

ANDREW ROSS

On the face of it, Central Illinois was an unlikely destination for an international gathering of Marxists, but there we were, surrounded by corn fields, in the summer of 1983 as part of Larry's (and Cary Nelson's) dream festival. The University of Illinois janitors threatened to strike, rather than clean the toilets after "filthy Reds" had used them, and at least one high-profile participant circulated a conspiratorial fantasy that the FBI could wipe out a large portion of the left in one fell swoop if some well-planned accident were to happen. Like many others in attendance, I still cherish the relationships formed from meeting people at these sessions, later collected in the "big red book" titled *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*. Larry and Cary were gregarious hosts, and they reprised the act, seven years later, for "Cultural Studies: Now and in the Future." Jumbo conferences of this nature (especially the "international" of Crossroads in Cultural Studies) have become much more commonplace, and so it is easy, in retrospect, to minimize the energy and forethought required to conceive and realize these two events, which were so foundational to cultural studies in the US. Larry pulled them off because he had ambitions for all of us. We just didn't know it at the time.

After the 1983 conference, I moved to Urbana with Constance Penley, my partner at the time, and we spent two years in the close company of Larry in the "prairie phase" of US cultural studies after it crossed the Atlantic. The incubator of choice was the university's Unit for Critical and Interpretive Theory, where Stuart and Catherine Hall, among others, were regular visitors. But Larry's tenure home was in Communications, and he saw that affiliation not just as a commitment, but also as an opportunity. He spent a lot of energy over the years carving out a place for cultural stud-

ies in that discipline, even though its gatekeepers did not extend much more hospitality than their counterparts in other disciplines. Never mind the bollocks, as the Sex Pistols once put it.

If you were looking for an archetype of the permissive professor, Larry-in-Champaign was its living embodiment. Sex, drugs, and rock 'n' roll were not just components (independently, but preferably in combination) of a lifestyle; they were to be taken very seriously, and they were more than worthy of a seminar, or a lecture course. By then, Larry's devotion to analyzing popular music was becoming a curricular staple, and it is notable that he has retained his "docrock" email user name through thick and thin. Of course, his approach to the topic diverged significantly from what had been the two dominant strains of music writing—on the one hand, there were the rock critics, like Greil Marcus, Ellen Willis, Lester Bangs, Dave Marsh, and Bob Christgau, who imagined a community built around a civic religion of personal taste, and, on the other, the English Department dons who analyzed Bob Dylan lyrics. Larry had no time for the latter, but he had a long, and respectful, dialogue with the rockists, which was none too easy, since, for them, philosophizing about popular music was a kind of heretical indulgence.

Yet he persisted. From an early point in our comradeship, it was clear to me that Larry would always want to bring philosophical questions to the table, even if he had no desire to be thought of as anything like a professional philosopher. Of course all proponents of "theory," in its strenuous heyday, had a strong interest in philosophy. But theory—when it was not a swampy ground where many adepts got stuck, and where some lost their minds—was simply a way of getting from A to B. Larry's philosophical devotion did not dissolve after he reached the destination in one piece. The conversation always continued.

At that time, Deleuze was his guiding light, by way of Spinoza. And so he was able to talk with intelligence about affect many years before the "affective turn" arrived. For Larry, affective engagement with culture was the key to how ideology connected to people, and how the New Right, in particular, made headway in the battle over common sense. But that was also where the fight could be turned around, as long as we remembered what Stuart Hall had called for in the editorial of the first issue of the *New Left Review*: "The task of socialism is to meet people where they *are*, where they are touched, bitten, moved, frustrated, nauseated" (Hall 1960, 1)

Larry became the most tireless champion of cultural studies, not because it was an especially agreeable role to take on, or because he had the most impeachable credentials. Besides, anyone who sought the job was guaranteed to have their detractors, which is no fun. He did it because he happened to believe that cultural studies matters, and he filled many pages persuading himself, and us, that this was the case. No one would have to go to these lengths to argue that sociology, or even philosophy, matters. But cultural studies, he never failed to remind us, is an endeavor, not a discipline, and it stands or falls by its capacity to help us make a politics out of everyday things and high concepts alike. If it could not explain how the authority of patriarchy or prestige endures, then that was a problem. If it proved useful in building resistance to Reaganism, the War on Crime, or transphobia, then there was hope.

Over the years, my own work and activism strayed quite far from the fold, but Larry has a longstanding claim on me, and won't let go. "This is what cultural studies needs to do," I hear him growling, as the whisky dregs glisten in our glasses, towards the end of some political jam session.

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A Bridge of Friendship Between Paradigms

ELLEN WARTELLA

It seems fitting that Larry's students have organized this festschrift, because of the many attributes Larry has, being a mentor and academic inspiration is very high on the list. In addition, he is a remarkable friend, colleague, and person. Two stories about Larry and my relationship are fitting examples of his friendship and collegiality.

First, I remember very well meeting Larry for the first time at the end of the 1970s when I was interviewing for my first academic job. I had an interview at Purdue where Larry was a relatively recent assistant professor hire. I must admit that having been trained to be a social scientist I really had little if any idea of cultural studies. Rather I presented my job talk about my survey study of how children learn to buy and the developmental differences in children's understanding of consumer behavior. Afterwards Larry offered to drive me to the airport. During that drive he offered the following comment: "Well you are obviously smart but very badly educated" and he went on to talk about the various theoretical approaches to development and where Piaget (whom I relied on in my studies) fit in the theoretical terrain. I was simultaneously dazzled and annoyed.

While I was offered that job, I did not take it and spent another year before going on the market again. This time I was offered a job at the Institute of Communications Research at Illinois . . . and was somewhat surprised to find that Larry Grossberg was now on the Speech Communication faculty there. And as my late husband Chuck Whitney and I were moving into our new house (after about a week or so of staying at the home of a former ICR faculty member) the first person to show up to help us with our U-Haul and unload was Larry Grossberg. Indeed, from that time on Larry was a frequent if not constant friend, always available to come to dinner, dinner parties, receptions for visiting faculty, and student parties. He quickly became a close friend, one who over the years (and we were

together at Illinois for about fourteen years) showed how good a friend he could be and his concern for my family's wellbeing. He even showed up at the hospital when I was in labor with my first son, David, and I quickly shooed him away. He as well was the first to arrive at my home after the death of both my son Stephen and my husband Chuck. Indeed, Larry has been an ongoing and caring friend.

My second story is much more about Larry the colleague and collaborator. While at Illinois, we collaborated several times and usually with other scholars: the 1989 book *Rethinking Communication: Paradigm Dialogues*, the 1996 volume on *The Audience and Its Landscape* and most notably the 1998 text *MediaMaking*. In each case, Larry was notable as the premier cultural studies scholar working with social scientists to elaborate an approach to the study of communication that could draw from both research and scholarly traditions. The *MediaMaking* volume is the one I remember most vividly for two reasons. Larry and I jointly wrote several of the chapters (Chuck, the third author, tended to write his alone) and Larry and I argued over what to include and what not to include, especially about the violence research, which had monopolized much of mass communication research up to that time.

Writing with Larry was an education. We would decide what the chapter would contain and then talk out what we wanted to say. It was an education for me and definitely gave me an appreciation of the political and social implications of cultural studies and how to place the American social science perspective with its relatively limited theoretical perspectives (e.g., Bandura social learning theory and Katz and Lazarsfeld's uses and gratifications) and the narrow range of research questions in that literature. Larry's incredible breath of philosophy and studies of culture via various lenses was able to broaden and deepen my own work.

But there was more about our working together. As we note in the preface to *MediaMaking* (which I reread now twenty-five years after the book was published) Larry and I (as well as my late husband Chuck) were all graduate students in the 1970s, and to a large extent we were part of the first generation studying communication who saw themselves as "communication" scholars rather than sociologists or psychologists or literary critics. In many ways, we were part of the generation studying media both in relation to and independent of those other disciplines. That is not to say that there weren't differences within the discipline. And

indeed, Larry has been one of the most vocal and articulate of the cultural studies tradition as this volume demonstrates. Chuck and I very clearly represented the social science tradition of media effects on audiences.

As well, the study of media and communication had acquired its own set of divisions—especially the fragmentation between scientific and humanistic approaches to communication research study. When we were working on *MediaMaking*, we were all faculty at the University of Illinois, which was home to both cultural approaches to studying media—as exemplified by one of Larry's mentors and Chuck's and my Dean, James Carey—and more traditional social science approaches, as represented by one of our colleagues, the psychologist Charles Osgood. It was not just that our intellectual seniors in the Institute of Communication Research were different; it was as much that they used fundamentally different languages: languages of measurement, experimentation, description, and explanation for the social scientists, and those of aesthetics, experience, and criticism for the more humanistic perspective. Larry was (and still is) capable of both distinguishing and understanding these intellectual differences, and it was our arguments about the relevance of the academic studies to understanding the real nature of media in practice that made our collaboration so wonderfully interesting and meaningful. It's hard to overstate how exciting it was to work with Larry who, while from a very different intellectual heritage than mine, was nonetheless open to argument and collaboration.

My time working with Larry led me to understand in greater detail the history of social science approaches to studying media and the social and political motivations of these studies, and led to my writing a history of such social science approaches. That research work of mine is among the studies of which I am most proud. It wouldn't have happened without Larry's mentorship and the arguments we had, both when writing *MediaMaking* and when co-teaching a class at Illinois.

My experiences of Larry as a friend and colleague I saw repeated in his approach to working with his doctoral students. He has been a caring, sometimes demanding, and enlightening mentor, as this volume demonstrates. I feel lucky indeed to have Larry as my forever friend and colleague.

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In 1963, My Father Helps Build a Cyclotron, and Blacks Out Lower Manhattan

ZACHARIAH CLAYPOLE WHITE

I have never seen a photo
of my father at fifteen
        but
to accelerate a particle
a magnetic field must bend
its trajectory through
alternating charges,
        by which I mean my father
held forgiveness in his throat,
grew windchimes
from hospital walls,

where, with hands fluent
in the language of birds,
he learned the radius of a body,
the edges of momentum.

Understand—
to speak the displaced
structure of an atom, to hold
an illness or son,
the magnetic field
must remain perpendicular
to the electric,

of course, he and I
are a spiral of song;

of course the city darkened
before his light.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

This poem first appeared in *Does It Have Pockets*.

27

Thank You

BARBARA CLAYPOLE WHITE

On behalf of Larry, thank you to everyone who has contributed to this volume and enriched our lives over the years with friendship and community. We have loved meeting parents and partners; hosting baby showers; celebrating graduations, weddings, and promotions; drinking bourbon or gin with y'all; and debating everything from politics to music. (I'm sure some of you also remember the hangover from a certain 70th birthday party . . .)

I'm grateful for the joy you have brought not only to Larry but also to our family. Many of you inspired Zachariah from an early age, opening his mind and heart to possibilities. Our house has always echoed with ideas and academic debate.

Thank you to everyone who worked tirelessly on Larrypalooza—a unique weekend in May, 2022. We appreciated the time you took out of your busy schedules to travel to Chapel Hill and celebrate Larry's contribution to *your* lives. I cried through several presentations.

During closing remarks at the event, I talked about Larry's gift for helping others believe in themselves. He doesn't teach people to find jobs; he teaches them to listen to their heart and follow their passion. Without his unfailing emotional support, I would never have been courageous enough to chase my childhood dream of becoming a novelist. Nor would I have weathered the storms of failure and rejection to keep pursuing that dream.

He continues to brainstorm plots with me and destroy blog posts, reviews, chapters, and book proposals with gutting comments such as "No." The best part? How hard he makes me work for those words, "You've written a beautiful novel." Words I know I've earned because of his critique and his guidance.

My story is not unique. Time and time again, I have overheard him on the phone, helping a student or colleague navigate a personal crisis or career-defining turning point. When someone reaches out, he offers

empathy, reassurance, and advice, and gives generously of his time. Which means my biggest thanks of all is reserved for Larry—for those moments and days when he put his own life on hold for each of us.

Thank you, Larry, for pushing us to be the best we can be, for believing in us and being proud of our achievements, for encouraging us to always choose the path with heart.

Thank you for being you.

28

Nonhistory: Time in Cultural Studies

TED STRIPHAS

From the cultural politics of rock 'n' roll to the "war" on children in the United States, the rise of Trump and the alt-right, and more, the contemporary—albeit a moving one—has been the overwhelming focus of Lawrence Grossberg's research (Grossberg 1992; Grossberg 2005; Grossberg 2018). Moreover, his inquiries into the philosophical foundations of North Atlantic modernity, the logics of globalization, and the geographies of cultural studies all embody his commitment to "spatial materialism" (Grossberg 1997b; see also Grossberg 1993; Grossberg 2000b), a commitment whose purpose, in part, is to compensate for the tendency within Western philosophy to privilege time over space, memory over matter, and history over cartography. Grossberg, in short, is no historian, nor has he ever purported to be one. Nevertheless, time and history are prevalent, if perhaps underappreciated, themes running throughout his oeuvre, from a doctoral dissertation on Heidegger (among other figures) to extended reflections on these subjects in *We Gotta Get Out of This Place*, to more recent meditations on history's relationship to "the conjuncture" (Grossberg 1976; Grossberg 1992; Grossberg 2015). There is a tension in his work where time and history are concerned, a tension in which frustration with historicism competes with a desire to reckon with the complex historicity of the present.[1]

This chapter, thus, has three primary objectives. First, it opens with some strategies for reading Grossberg's complex and ever-evolving body of work, strategies whose purpose is to clarify the role of the writings on history relative to the totality of his research. Second, it positions Grossberg as an indispensable philosopher of history, albeit one whose philosophy, which he dubs "nonhistory" (Grossberg 2000a, 160), renders him barely recognizable as such. Finally, it provides a critical synthesis of his work on time and history, a synthesis set against the backdrop of cultural

studies' fraught relationship to the discipline of History, specifically, and to the historical, more generally. The chapter concludes by considering the implications of what Grossberg has left more or less unstated about history: namely, the role of media in recording, transmitting, and indeed producing archival material as such.

READING LAWRENCE GROSSBERG

I assume most readers of this collection know something about Grossberg's work. Because the material is so voluminous, however, I also assume few really know it in its breadth and depth. In a career spanning nearly fifty years (c. 1975–2022),[2] Grossberg published well over one hundred book chapters and journal articles, six single-author scholarly monographs, eleven coedited books, two collections of his own essays, and two editions of a co-authored textbook. This is a rough estimate, admittedly, one that excludes book reviews, interviews, occasional periodical publications, and numerous articles and chapters in languages other than English. It also omits copious amounts of grey literature (e.g., conference papers, syllabi, lecture notes, letters, and emails), mountains of paratext (e.g., class notes taken by his students), and quasi-scholarly objects that defy straightforward categorization (e.g., an array of cultural studies–inspired T-shirts he produced). In short, engaging with Grossberg's arguments, ideas, and analyses isn't for the faint of heart. The material is intimidating in terms of quantity and quality, to say nothing of form and content.

By way of opening things up, then, here are a few observations about the character and disposition of Grossberg's oeuvre. First, he has a distinctive way of thinking and writing. If you read enough of the material, you discover that he repurposes themes, lines of argument, favorite examples and quotations, and more, often across multiple publications. There's a kind of repetitiveness, if you will—but by that I don't mean to imply a facile uniformity. It's more accurately described as a protracted exercise in "difference and repetition," to use the language of one of his key influences, Gilles Deleuze (1995), in which reoccurrence occasions not the reproduction of the same, but of change.[3] At the level of Grossberg's research, this means that you cannot read any of his publications in isolation, nor should you assume the earlier ones are merely the drafts of what

will later become the definitive statements. Always, the work is provisional, iterative, and adaptive to the mutable "contexts" or "problem spaces" to which he is responding.

Second and relatedly, while it may be tempting to try and thematize Grossberg's research, doing so may undercut the effort to appreciate, not the metaphysics of the material, but what I'd describe as the physics, as it were. One could, conceivably, point to the focus on intellectual history and the philosophy of communication, lasting from approximately 1968-1984 and encompassing aspects of his undergraduate studies at the University of Rochester, his doctoral dissertation at the University of Illinois, and a series of journal articles deriving from it. One could also, conceivably, point to the material on rock, Ronald Reagan, and the new conservatism, lasting roughly from 1984-1992 (and presaged by his studies at the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, 1968-1969); the critical interrogation of North Atlantic modernity (as inflected, in part, through kids), approximately 1993-2015; and the award-winning analysis of Trump and the US alt-right, ±2016-2020. Cultural studies is, of course, the through-line. But again, however much the thematic buckets and time periods and through-lines may seem to work, they don't provide the best rendering of how Grossberg's research does, in fact, *work.* Consider, for instance, his account of happening upon cultural studies for the first time:

> When it came time to write my undergraduate thesis, I was torn between writing on my philosophical fascination with Spinoza (!) and exploring the politics of popular music and generational identity. I chose the latter and wrote a series of essays, embarrassingly titled "Reflections on an Oak by an Acorn." It was in this space between philosophy and contemporary cultural criticism that I discovered cultural studies, almost accidentally, as it were. (Grossberg 1997a, 23-24; see also Grossberg 2008, 57)

The language he uses—the "space between"—is reminiscent of his mentor Stuart Hall's description of cultural studies as an "intellectual 'twilight zone' between disciplines" (Hall 1966, 33). Indeed, this may be the first—but hardly the last—time Grossberg would experience the push and the pull of established disciplines, and also a sense of frustration at feeling compelled to choose. In 2003 I read an early draft of what would become *Caught in the Crossfire: Kids, Politics, and America's Future*. The draft included large chunks of what he'd later spin out into *Cultural Studies in the Future Tense*. Anecdotally, I've heard from other former Grossberg students that *We Gotta Get Out of This Place* developed through a similar process of winnowing and deferral. The point, then, is to appreciate how

the "themes" running throughout Grossberg's research aren't really themes as much as "vectors," to recall a favorite (if differently utilized) concept of his (see, e.g., Grossberg 1992, *passim*). That is, they describe movements and intensities and transformations, as opposed to fixed points or static objects. Each vector is relatively autonomous, moreover, meaning that its trajectory exists in a state of dynamic tension—a relentless push-pull—with that of the other vectors.

The upshot is that while it may be possible to isolate what Grossberg has to say about history, doing so isn't exactly desirable. For Grossberg, "history" isn't a stable object of study, nor is it an adequate description of his method. And while it may ostensibly refer to "the past," it isn't reducible to it, nor is it something uniquely belonging to History, the discipline that bears its name. Within the context of Grossberg's research, history is better understood as an intensity dispersed among the many vectors comprising his research. It infuses the material on modernity with particular energy, yet it is detectable within the other vectors as well. It fluctuates in relationship to the differential demands posed to history across problem spaces, and also in relationship to the changes occurring within a particular problem space. Moving forward, then, the goal is to trace the complex effectivity of something called "history" within, and ultimately beyond, Grossberg's research.

THE APOSTATE

Earlier, I claimed that Grossberg isn't a historian. I'll come clean now and admit that the assertion isn't entirely accurate. As an undergraduate at Rochester, Grossberg double-majored in philosophy and history, which is to say: he has training as a historian, and he even holds an official credential "with high distinction" from the discipline (Grossberg 2011, 2). Moreover, he has repeatedly identified Hayden White, a distinguished historian with whom he studied at Rochester, as a key figure in his career. James W. Carey, who published extensively on the history and culture of communication technology, supervised Grossberg's doctoral dissertation and, like White, frequently appears alongside Stuart Hall and other notable figures in Grossberg's recollections of major intellectual influences (Grossberg 1976, 261–287; Grossberg 1992, vii; Grossberg 1997a, 23; Grossberg 2010b; Grossberg and Cruz 2012, 302; Grossberg and Meyen 2012, 1640).

I share this information as a way of situating Grossberg's relationship to the historical endeavor. Given his background, it's clear he doesn't operate from a position exogenous to the practices and modes of thinking collectively known as "history." It's also clear that history provided him with an early source of passionate intellectual engagement. Yet, despite his credentials, it would be wrong to assume that Grossberg's research is proper, or endogenous, to the institution of History. Consider his description of Carey's relationship to such work. In building his scholarly identity, Grossberg observes, Carey fused elements of American Pragmatism with aspects of Chicago school-inspired sociology, leading him to develop an abiding interest in the material forms and symbolic functions of social rituals. "Carey's version of cultural studies," Grossberg notes, "also depends on his historical work, especially of technology, although describing Carey as a historian of technology . . . oversimplifies, since he considered technology to provide a privileged insight into the social totality" (Grossberg 2010b, 77–78). The point about oversimplification is critical here. Grossberg admires Carey's historical writings because history isn't the point of the story. Instead, history offers a way in to more demanding questions about the relationship of culture, society, and technology and, knowing Carey's work, that of religion, politics, and economics as well.

This isn't to suggest Grossberg merely reproduces Carey's understanding of history. Whatever similarities exist are formal in the sense that history's purpose is, indeed, to lead us elsewhere. For Carey, this "elsewhere" is primarily analytical. In the vein of Lewis Mumford, Harold Innis, and Mary Quayle Innis, the history of technology is a resource for exploring the major movements and prevailing dispositions of human civilizations (see Carey 1992).[4] For Grossberg, this "elsewhere" is even more fundamental, manifesting as skepticism of the discipline of History and, on some level, of the larger historical endeavor. Again, this isn't an outright rejection of history as much as a refusal to assume the practice is self-justifying, or that it is (or can be) applicable whenever, wherever. For Grossberg, the question is: What forces are producing a desire for history, or even for History, in this particular problem space?[5]

Grossberg's skepticism of history/History thus isn't personal, as it were. That is, it's less about history per se than it is about the need to confront its conditions of possibility, past and present, including the institutional, economic, and political structures that enable, and more importantly constrain, repertoires of thinking and acting in history's name.

Moreover, it's an impulse that derives from a well-established precept of cultural studies, one that guides researchers to identify the limits of disciplinary knowledge and, in turn, to produce the intellectual resources necessary to go beyond them. "Serious interdisciplinary work involves the intellectual risk of saying to professional sociologists that what they say sociology is, is not what it is," wrote Stuart Hall, in a retrospective on the Birmingham Centre's frequent clashes with the university's existing academic departments (Hall 1990, 16). Or, as Grossberg once put it with respect to economics:

> I am not suggesting that we can "win" the discipline of economics, any more than I think cultural studies has conquered sociology or literary studies (or media studies for that matter). This is not a fantasy about hijacking the discipline, or even of creating another singular "true" economic theory or diagnosis. But there is serious work to be done to create, in alliance with others, other possibilities for thinking about economic effectivities and the realities of economic activities, apparatuses, and assemblages. (Grossberg 2010a, 109)

The "other possibilities" Grossberg mentions are the key here. For our purposes, they invite us to imagine something like history, beyond History. They also challenge us to conceptualize ways of experiencing and processing duration absent an obligation to historical time, an idea about which I will have more to say, below. The quoted passage also suggests that if the task of a disciple is to extol disciplinary doctrine (Shepherd 1993, 83–84), then Grossberg surely is an apostate where History is concerned.

THE ONLY WAY OUT IS THROUGH

It is challenging to say when or where the apostasy begins exactly, but it emerges most clearly in the work postdating *We Gotta Get Out of This Place: Popular Conservatism and Postmodern Culture* (1992). In the book, Grossberg situates politics within the Marxian problematic of people making history, albeit under conditions not of their own making; and within a Gramscian frame in which *the conditions* of those conditions become less tangible over time, so that people living in the present day tend to experience them as "traces without an inventory" (Grossberg 1992, 114, 115; see also Marx 1978, 595; Gramsci 1971, 324). The upshot is that it is difficult to make a dent politically when you lack a firm grasp of the historical entailments of your own situation, and even harder when there's effectively no manifest for the potentially history-making cargo at your disposal. Or, to put it another way: How can you ever hope to get out of this place (i.e.,

the new cultural conservatism of the United States in the 1980s) when the entrances and exits have all been painted to match the walls around you? The intent of the book is to peel back the paint on the new conservatism, and thus to point a way from the past through the present to an "impure" cultural and political future (Grossberg 1992, 396).

Among the book's most compelling aspects is Grossberg's commitment to treating theory as immanent to the context within and about which he is writing. The alternative approach would have exempted theory from analysis, or else it would have led him to treat the critical interrogation of concepts as separate and distinct from the critical interrogation of context. Instead, Grossberg chooses to embed the former in the latter, leading him to question the analytical value of ideology, representation, subjectivity, and other leading tools of the day, all of which were, and are, premised on a logic of mediation. How well adapted are established (dominant and residual) concepts to an emergent cultural-political reality—in this case, the new conservatism?[6]

The sense of incongruity between concepts and context pushes Grossberg to develop a suite of novel analytical resources including "mattering maps," "disciplined mobilization," and, most notably, "affect." (With respect to the latter, he was at least twenty years ahead of the curve.) They, in turn, are part of a broader effort to develop a "cartography of daily life" (Grossberg 1992, 63), and thus to situate questions of space and materiality front-and-center of the analysis of the new conservatism in the United States. But the ruse of *We Gotta Get Out of This Place* is, indeed, "this place." The title would have you believe that you need to escape popular conservatism—which you do. The political project, however, is indissociable from the intellectual one. You must also and at the same time escape prevailing philosophical logics, particularly those forged by leading European intellectuals of the eighteenth, nineteenth, and early twentieth centuries, in which mediation is the decisive principle. Mattering maps, disciplined mobilization, affect, and cartography may be tools for escaping the political conservatism of the 1980s and 1990s; yet, they are also resources for working through—and perhaps leaving behind—the habits of thought endemic to what Grossberg refers to, variously, as "liberal-," "Euro-," or "North Atlantic" modernity (Grossberg 2006, 1; Grossberg 2010a, 64, 71).

The proposal to "shift . . . the 'metaphysical' ground for theorizing" is iconoclastic, and necessarily so (Grossberg 1997, 18). Nevertheless, in *We Gotta Get Out of This Place*, the iconoclasm doesn't carry over to Gross-

berg's understanding of history. There, the radical spirits of Marx and Gramsci lead him to channel a more conventional view in which history is understood as a dialectical struggle between past and present, the stakes of which are the future. The implicit assumption is that time is secular, cumulative, divisible into discrete (if interrelated) temporal precincts, and readily assimilable to narrative. This isn't a failure of the book as much as a loose end, one that remains unaddressed owing to the fixation on mediation as the overarching object of theoretical critique.

The material that follows *We Gotta Get Out of This Place* should be read, significantly, as an attempt to address this loose end. In "Cultural Studies and/in New Worlds," Grossberg asserts that "cultural studies must move from a temporal to a spatial logic of power" (Grossberg 1993, 7). This is owing to the proclivity within Euro-modern thought to "temporalize space and rearticulate the other into the different"—one that he associates with Hegel, at first, though one that he will eventually attribute to Kant and his influence on colonial-era anthropology (Grossberg 1993, 5, 6; Grossberg 1997, 16).[7] Now, it may be tempting to suggest that, in correcting for the subordination of space to time, Grossberg has overcompensated. "I propose two related moves" he states in "Cultural Studies, Modern Logics, and Theories of Globalization": "from a logic of mediation to a logic of productivity, and from a logic of temporality to a logic of spatiality" (Grossberg 1997, 16–17). The "from . . . to" structure suggests a reversal of the binary, so that space and productivity become the privileged terms. And this is true in some sense, insofar as these terms come to set the terms, as it were, for the concepts they are displacing. Once situated within a logic of spatiality, "history . . . becomes inseparable from memory, not as displaced 'popular memory,' but precisely as 'placed time,' as a geography of temporalities," Grossberg writes (1993, 7).[8]

Put differently, in the articles and chapters spanning the mid-1990s, Grossberg seems to be assimilating time to space. The result is a form of relationship closer to *subsumption* than to *(re)articulation*. By this I mean that the leading term, space, provides the overarching framework within which time comes to be defined and operationalized. The reciprocity is minimal, if there is any at all: the understanding of space hasn't substantially changed, or else it hasn't sufficiently changed as a result of the encounter with time. Ultimately, the relationship is akin to an "eclipse," as Pezzullo (2006, 28) puts it in another context. Time continues to assert

itself, but mostly as the penumbra peeking out from behind the looming shadow of space. Despite his best efforts, Grossberg has rearranged, but not yet escaped, Euro-modern thought.

Again, this isn't a theoretical error. It is evidence of the process of difference and repetition by means of which Grossberg refines ideas, and of the risky and protracted *work* of intellectual work in which he so deeply believes. The thinking takes a decisive turn in the year 2000, and in the material published thereafter. In "(Re)Configuring Space," Grossberg at last sorts through a reciprocal form of relationship for time and space: that is, a relationship that is more *articulatory*. He proposes to rethink ontology "outside of the constitution of modern categories," and to do so by jettisoning the concept of being, in favor of becoming (Grossberg 2000b, 18). The latter, he argues, consists in "the spatialization of transformation; it refuses, not only to privilege time, but also to separate space and time. *It is the timing of space and the spacing of time*" (18; emphasis added).[9] The formulation is almost Heideggerian, except that Heidegger never managed to escape the metaphysics of presence characteristic of Euro-modern thought (Heidegger 1962; Derrida 1998). Instead of *Dasein*, "being there" (presence-ing in historical time), Grossberg develops a dynamic, mobile ontology replete with possibilities for, trajectories of, and obstacles to becoming.

If time was ostensibly the proscenium in and through which history occurred, and if time and space have now been brought together under the auspices of becoming, then it follows that the category, practice, and discipline of history must also be rethought. "We need new ways of imagining our relationships to the multiple temporalities of objects, people and events, and of the worlds that they and we inhabit," observes Grossberg in "History, Imagination, and the Politics of Belonging" (2000a, 158). The opening gambit is to recognize how "history . . . 'is itself a historical phenomenon'" (153), an observation he attributes to Robert Young, but one he just as easily could have attributed to Dipesh Chakrabarty (1992) or, even earlier, to Hayden White (1973), whose *Metahistory* excavated some of the conditions leading to the emergence of Euro-modern historicism. But whereas White endeavored to write an intellectual history of the historical endeavor—turning the resources of History on itself, but in the end leaving them mostly unchallenged—Grossberg cannot take those resources for granted. Instead, he invites us to examine "what history" conventionally understood, "divides into the past and the present," and

to consider how this process may diminish our capacity to "listen to other ways of being temporal" (Grossberg 2000a, 159). This isn't *meta*history but *cata*history: history *against* history, or what Grossberg provocatively dubs "a nonhistory of the future" (160).

To be clear, Grossberg isn't proposing a metaphysics of time, temporality, or even history, but a contextual theory responsive to empirical conditions. "What happens to history in a culture dominated by affect instead of representation, by individuality and identification rather than politics?" he asks in *Under the Cover of Chaos* (Grossberg 2018, 108). This is tantamount to saying that however fraught the content of history may be (i.e., what it says, who it excludes, etc.), its performative force is equally at stake (i.e., what it does or is called upon to do). According to Grossberg, history increasingly manifests as "a chaotic collection of images and affects to be taken up and arranged at will" (108), or as what I prefer to call *tokens of pastness*. Ostensibly, their purpose is to help tell stories about the past; but critically, they do so in such a way that they assimilate the past (and presumably other, underacknowledged modalities of temporal belonging) to the demands of the present. This is the irony that nonhistory, or catahistory, helps us to grasp: how popular claims to caring about the past can empower the claimants to overinvest in contemporary economies of belonging.[10]

The pattern is evident in the controversy surrounding the State of Florida's refusal, in 2023, to offer Advanced Placement African American Studies in its high schools and, even more so, in the broader curricular decision to stress the skills and benefits that purportedly accrued to Black persons from their enslavement (Waxman 2023). There is, of course, the straightforward explanation for these preposterous developments: Ron DeSantis, Florida's Republican governor, is a culture warrior *par excellence*, and the historical omissions and errors—the tokens of pastness—he is promulgating simultaneously evidence and reinforce white supremacy. Surely they do, but to end the analysis there is to stop short of the full complexity of the situation. "The very category of history is being reconfigured," Grossberg argues, albeit in reference to an earlier and different example, "and history is being rewritten not from the perspective of the victor or even some partisan perspective." He goes on to suggest: "It is as if history had no reference back to the past as anything but a convenience and a contrivance" (Grossberg 2018, 108).

Overstated, perhaps, but the point still stands. In the Florida example, history becomes a technology for building and securing affective alliances among persons who wish to be relieved of white racial guilt and, more to the point, for creating "safe" classroom spaces to support them—spaces seemingly incommensurate with and certainly hostile to alternative configurations of racial belonging. Put differently, tokens of pastness participate in the (re)arrangement of physical space,[11] the (re)distribution of bodies and feelings, and the politics of identity. They also help facilitate the related struggle over the definition of "media" as it relates to popular claims—and, indeed, popular feelings—of victimage, particularly among persons who wish to deny their obvious privilege by cathecting with supposedly alternative (as opposed to "mainstream," or even "lamestream") sources of news, knowledge, information, and entertainment.

CONCLUSION: ON "THE MEDIA OF HISTORY"

Just as *We Gotta Get Out of This Place* leaves us with a theoretical loose end, so too does *Under the Cover of Chaos*. Those tokens of pastness I just mentioned? They are more than mere tokens. They are—it must be said—media artifacts. I mention this in closing as a way of signaling a possible next challenge in the ongoing, Grossberg-inspired interrogation of time and history. Perhaps it would be better to start referring, not to "history" per se, but instead to "the media of history," as John Durham Peters has suggested (2008, 20). Indeed, when one speaks of history, one is typically talking about monuments and memes, debates and downloads, ruins and reruns, codices and codes, printing and podcasts, and other material objects and practices that become bearers of the historical record. History, however conceived, does not exist independent of its forms of expression, storage, retrieval, and transmission.

Grossberg's reconceptualization of time and history must be understood, then, as having something to do with media, and by extension with media studies. Grossberg grasps this, of course, though the understanding is oblique, conveyed mainly by way of example (see, e.g., Grossberg 2018, 108). An explicit theory of media lies elsewhere, separate from his writings on history, most notably in chapter four of *Cultural Studies in the Future Tense*. There, Grossberg endeavors to reformulate the concept of mediation absent the logics of Euro-modernity—for example, by refusing to concede to the division between real and representation, as well as to the

conceit that mediation is a singular, as opposed to a plural, phenomenon (Grossberg 2010a, 189). Moreover, he uses the discussion as an opportunity to recast cultural studies' relationship to media studies, suggesting the two fields differ in at least one critical respect. According to Grossberg, cultural studies understands "the media" contextually (215), which is to say: you cannot presume to know in advance what media are or what they do within a particular problem space, however obvious the presence of "media" may seem. Media studies, in contrast, typically proceeds with greater assurance about its object of study, most notably in assuming "'media' is a stable concept" (206).

In short, neither "history" nor "media" can be thought of in the old way, though still I believe they can and should be thought, together. Proceed with caution, however. Eschew the hubris of producing some grand, generalizable theory about the relationship of history and media. Begin, instead, by embracing the humility of context.

NOTES

1. By "historicism," I am referring to the tendency to treat temporality as an inexorable progression of actions and events all leading to a seemingly predetermined (or apparently unavoidable) outcome (see Benjamin 1968, 253–264; Certeau 1988; Chakrabarty 2007, xiv).

2. To put things into perspective, I was two years old when Grossberg started his career. I was first introduced to his work in 1993, at age twenty. In an undergraduate course taught by my dear friend and mentor Professor John Erni, one of Grossberg's former students, we were assigned an excerpt from *We Gotta Get Out of This Place*, which had been published only the year before. Inspired by the work, I proceeded to write an undergraduate thesis on the 1994 Woodstock revival under John's direction.

3. The sun rises every single day, for example, yet each day is somehow different from the preceding one.

4. I mention Mary Quayle Innis here in recognition of her documented and substantial contributions to the writings attributed more or less singularly to her husband, Harold Adams Innis. For more on this history, see Belisle and Mitchell (2018).

5. There is an intriguing resonance here with Carolyn Steedman's haunting question, "Why does cultural studies *want* history?" (1992, 621; emphasis in original).

6. On the "residual," "dominant," "emergent," and the relationship between them, see Williams (1973).

7. I have modified the verb tenses slightly to preserve syntax.

8. Grossberg attributes the reference to "placed time" to James Hay (1993).

9. Grossberg also invokes "becoming" throughout "Cultural Studies and/in New Worlds," albeit somewhat awkwardly, having not yet come to terms fully with the space-time relationship.

10. Here, Grossberg's position is very close to that of Meaghan Morris, for whom "history" can function as a site of popular investment, particularly with respect to identity and national belonging (1998, 12).

11. To that end, Grossberg gives a salutary mention to the subfield of television history, which has long embraced a more materialist approach to media history (2010a, 220). The obvious work here would be that of Lynn Spiegel (1992).

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Cultural Studies in the Futurist Tense

ADAM RICHARD ROTTINGHAUS

Larry Grossberg is a futurist. Well, sort of. Though he would probably reject the label of "futurist," I want to suggest that his particular strand of intellectual politics contains a form of futurism that we cultural studies scholars should reflect upon at this particular moment. He is not a traditional futurist like tech industry leaders Ray Kurzweil or Marc Andreesen. Such futurists leverage euphoric prophecies about markets, technology, and humanity to benefit their aims in the present, as evidenced by Andreesen's recent "Techno-Optimist Manifesto" (Andreesen 2023). As James Carey and John Quirk (1973) pointed out fifty years ago, such self-serving euphoric futurism was not novel then and is even less so today. However, Grossberg inverts the traditional futurist paradigm by insisting that the present should serve the needs of the future—not the other way around. Grossberg's futurism contains an inherent ethic that academic knowledge should serve a more egalitarian future, but it leaves the application of the knowledge to build a better world to other people, like activists, advocates, and policy makers. The political intellectual's responsibility is to produce the most rigorous knowledge of the world possible, from which others can create actionable plans for social change. Grossberg is a futurist because creating the knowledge necessary to build a better world is the core political intellectual project of cultural studies today.

I was a second-year doctoral student at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill when Larry published *Cultural Studies in the Future Tense* (2010). He was characteristically generous with his time and energy while discussing cultural studies and the future in relation to my dissertation project, despite not being my advisor. After I spent a semester directing cultural studies research projects in his freshman seminar on youth poli-

tics, Larry asked me to teach the sole required class for the undergraduate major in cultural studies and gave me carte blanche control over the syllabus. At that point in my career, I can honestly say that being selected to teach "Larry's cultural studies course" felt like being knighted into Stuart Hall's army. In my zeal, I once spent an entire class period breaking down a single passage from *Future Tense* in such excruciating detail that I was sure I would alienate my students, but it turned out to be one of the best conversations we had the whole semester.[1] Working closely with Larry transformed my academic curiosities into intellectual politics. Yet that time with him left me with a nagging thought, which has never really gone away: What *is* cultural studies' relationship to the future?

Grossberg (2010) writes in *Future Tense* that the aim of cultural studies is "to provide a history of the present, to tell a better story about what's going on, and to begin to open new possibilities for imagination and struggle, even for rethinking imagination itself, and in particular for imagining new possibilities for a future that can be reached from the present—one more humane and just than that promised by the trajectories we find ourselves on" (67). Any good conjunctural analysis maps the relations of power that orient affective investment and meaning making in everyday life by delimiting old cultural practices from new ones. Within such a history of the present, the power relations creating tensions between residual and emergent practices can be mapped across economic, social, political, and many other structures, institutions, and material conditions. This methodological approach provides a clear role for the past (old) and the present (new). The resulting presentist orientation of conjunctural analysis then frames the future as an unfolding of immanent power relations over time. Grossberg (2010) explains that "for cultural studies, the beginning of all political struggles must be knowledge about where we are, how we got here, and where we are going. Only then can we begin to ask whether there are other possible futures, where we might want to go, and how we might get there" (67). Part of cultural studies' project is then to provide alternative visions of how such immanent trajectories can and might unfold differently should relations of power be reorganized in more equitable and humane ways. This makes Grossberg's futurism both radically empirical in its methodology and pragmatically imaginative in its politics.

Nearly two decades ago, Grossberg wrote in *Caught in the Crossfire* (2005) that a crisis of the future was occurring. He argued that the coming modernity, fixated on short-termism, undermines both our collective capacity to imagine the future and the political salience of appealing to the future as interventionist strategy (307). The subsequent years have borne out these concerns. Imagining collective futures is even more difficult today than it was in the 1990s thanks to algorithmically controlled media bubbles, increasing political polarization, and the shifting terrain of public discourse many commentators have dubbed "post-truth" (Grossberg 2018). It is not altogether surprising that during this ongoing crisis of the future a disparate group of individuals who specialize in creating predictions to navigate increasingly uncertain futures solidified a coherent professional identity for themselves by forming the Association of Professional Futurists in 2002.

George Friedman's *The Next Hundred Years* (2009) exemplifies the style and limits of traditional futurist thinking. Friedman explains, "the goal is to identify the major tendencies—geopolitical, technological, demographic, cultural, military—in the broadest sense, and to define the major events that might take place. I will be satisfied if I explain something about how the world works today, and how that, in turn, defines how it will work in the future" (Friedman 2009, xiii). Despite a shared concern for the opportunities to change the future, Friedman's and Grossberg's futurisms diverge sharply over the relevant phenomena. Traditional futurists extrapolate primarily from an interdisciplinary array of objects such as a new military weapon or an economic policy. Grossberg's futurism examines the relations of power shaping how those objects exist within the lived worlds of the people who create and deploy them. Attending to the power relations—rather than the objects constituted through them—might produce more salient visions of the future.

The first step for both futurisms is identifying emergent cultural practices. Yet, here again they diverge sharply in their emphasis and aims. After identifying emergent cultural formations, Grossberg's futurism asks, "where we are, how we got here, and where we might go." Accordingly, conjunctural analysis does a significantly better job of describing the present conditions of everyday life than a traditional futurist trend analysis. Traditional futurists identify emergent trends and ask, "where do we want to go and how do we get there?" Friedman's hope is that his prediction can teach us something about today—and thus suggests what we are supposed

to do. In this way, traditional futurism is significantly better at explaining "how we get there" because their primary focus is creating plausible and actionable steps to bring about the future they envision, rather than focusing on the most rigorous description possible of the present circumstances.

For example, Friedman's future in *The Next Hundred Years* is primarily envisioned through the lens of geopolitics, technological change, and other macro-level phenomena extrapolated over time. His vision of the future predicts that sometime in the 2060s, America will achieve unilateral military control over space after it wins a third world war that was started when Japan attempted to disable the US's geosynchronous Earth orbit defense stations by shooting rocks from a secret moon base (188). As silly and frightening as that sounds, Friedman nonetheless creates a guide for geopolitical strategists by speculating which alliances, technologies, and economic incentives might result in a future where the US controls humanity's exploration of space. By his own admission, Friedman focuses on geopolitics without considering how something like climate change will impact his predictions (252). Such strategic selection of only the relevant information about "where we are" and "how we got here" indicates the intended audiences whose reactions to the US militarization of space might include everything from appealing to appalling. Regardless of where people land on that spectrum, it brings the future to bear on the present in very explicit ways that encourages people to pursue, ignore, or challenge that vision and the intervening steps along the way.

Traditional futurism also tends to relegate individuals as minor variables in the analysis, even people in positions of political power. It does not matter what any single individual does within the structures of power or how they feel about their present conditions because individuals are dissolved into aggregate trends. Grossberg employs the opposite approach, seeing the possibilities for change in the everyday actions of how people live in and through the world as they embody and resist those structures of power. Because of this, Grossberg's futurism has the advantage of examining both the micro-level changes in individual and collective perception, meaning, and feeling of being in the world, while also attending to the political, economic, and technological macro-structures shaping the present conditions of everyday life. Rather than taking an approach that elides the impact of individuals, Grossberg's futurism can envision how

relations of power structuring the conditions of everyday life might unfold differently based on the ways that people feel about living in those conditions and how they might go about changing them.

Ultimately, Larry asks us to consider what we can and should do about the future. Even if I am wrong to call him a futurist, it is the obligation of cultural studies to reinvent itself by theorizing the conjuncture with the necessary tools required for that particular analysis. My initial question—"What *is* cultural studies' relationship to the future?"—has matured over the years into another question: What does cultural studies' relationship to the future *need to be* in this historical moment? Conjuncturalism compels us to recognize that the process of imagining and implementing futures is itself a historically contingent articulation. Perhaps we are on the precipice of, or already in, a historical nexus in which the future has been or is being colonized in the cultural imagination to such a degree that it requires a more radically interventionist approach to the future.

Cultural studies is meant to describe and intervene. The crisis of the future that Grossberg described in 2005 is nearly a generation old now, but what have we done about it? Where is the intervention that I so assiduously persuaded Larry's undergraduate cultural studies students was as important as the description? I remain convinced that cultural studies can prescribe strategic aims for intervention, which disrupt the unfolding of future power relations that create imbalance, oppression, and suffering. In that sense, Grossberg's futurism can build more equitable and just worlds than traditional futurism. Perhaps telling a better story during an ongoing crisis of the future means spending more time explaining "how we get there."

NOTE

1. The passage I tediously dissected was, "it [cultural studies] is concerned with describing and intervening in the ways cultural practices are produced within, inserted into and operate in the everyday life of human beings and social formations, so as to reproduce, struggle against, and perhaps transform the existing structures of power" (Grossberg 2010, 8). In breaking this statement down into its constituent parts in order to explain terms like "describe" "intervene" and "relation of power," I convinced myself that this was the single best description of cultural studies ever written—an opinion I hold to this day.

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Be Excellent to Each Other: Time Traveling to Other Futures with Lawrence Grossberg

JEREMY PACKER

> I am alternatively grumpy and hopeful, critical and welcoming, angry and sympathetic, arrogant and generous, confident and humble. I hope the reader will recognize that I have perhaps too many voices here, each of them speaking a real part of who I am. I am a grumpy old man, and I have always been and remain an angry young man. I am an inveterate pessimist, and a romantic and spiritual (countercultural) optimist and sometimes, the two come together to speak me as a desperate optimist. I am a passionate debater and an even more passionate dialogist. (Grossberg 2015, 16)

When you time travel things start to get messy. Past and future are fused; confused. Neither Bob Dylan (1964), who claimed to be "so much older then" nor Larry, who can perpetually "remain an angry young man" (Grossberg 2015, 16) are actual time travelers. Unending youth appears for both as a political stance, not a biological reality. Their temporal confusion could as easily be gained through self-awareness (analysis) as wishful thinking (optimism). Is theirs an "optimism of the youthful" or a nostalgia for an unrealized future? Whether one has to go back in time, or back to the future, time-travel is either a narrative trope that allows history and teleology to be interrogated or a technology for fixing the future by messing with the past. This essay will do a bit of autobiographical time travel, gain insight from a movie about time travel, and attempt to fuse time, as it dwells upon some seemingly banal encounters with Larry that helped make my future and animate my past. It will investigate the matter of making politics, through making music, as a kind of litmus test for thinking about culture and technology.

I'D LIKE TO TEACH THE WORLD TO SING IN PERFECT HARMONY

It's 1971. The song "Buy the World a Coke" (The New Seekers, 1971) originates with a McCann Erickson advertising executive scribbling the slogan on a napkin while delayed at an Irish airport. The slogan is then reworked into a full set of lyrics accompanied by the tune from the song "True Love and Apple Pie" (Shirley, 1971) to create the famous jingle featured in the most expensive TV advertisement to that point, "Hill-top" (Coca Cola, 1971). It features a multi-racial group of teens singing "I'd like to teach the world to sing in perfect harmony" (Hillside Singers, 1971). The popularity of the commercial quickly leads to two different bands' remakes, sans reference to Coke. Both versions became hits around the globe and one or the other reach No. 1 in Japan, New Zealand, the US, Ireland, and Canada. The advertisement continues to be ranked as one of the best of all time.

It's 1989. A prominent intellectual is visiting my university to give a talk. I'm a freshman at DePaul University, doing a B.A. in Sociology under the mentorship of the heavy metal and social theory scholar Deena Weinstein. I just completed her "Sociology of Popular Culture" course and am taking "Sociological Theory" with her (and, a year later, "Sociology of Rock"). She clues me into the first academic talk I'll ever attend, "The Politics of Rock in the 1980s" by Lawrence Grossberg. Dr. Weinstein suggests I attend and requisitions me to take notes for her as she has to teach that evening. I diligently attend, scribble my observations in a binder, and, during Q&A, unbeknownst to me, begin a conversation with the "passionate dialogist" (Grossberg 2015, 16) that continues to this day. I ask Larry something like, "in the age of MTV, isn't it impossible for rock music to have any real politics since everything is about the visual image and not the lyrics." I hadn't yet been exposed to cultural studies, Dick Hebdige's *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (1979), or any of the neo-marxist, feminist, post-colonial, post-structural, or postmodern theorists that I will eventually read in Larry's graduate courses. What I did know, as any pre-Slacker/Gen X teen knew in 1989, was that *selling out* was rock music's greatest crime. MTV was the technology that guaranteed rock music would commit and recommit this "crime of the century." Larry answered, "rock music has always been about image, MTV hasn't changed that." I reduced the political potential of culture to its medium. Larry suggested the medium doesn't matter.

It's still 1989. Two California high school students, William Preston and Theodore Logan, are about to fail their history presentation which will in turn lead to their failure to graduate. The students are far more committed to their imagined future as rock stars in their band the Wyld Stallyns than they are to developing the intellectual skills needed to engage in historical materialism. Fortunately, while grabbing Big Gulps at the 7/11, an envoy from the future arrives in a phone booth-time machine. His name is Rufus and he invites the two to join him on a trip to the past. They use technology to gain a first-person perspective on the importance of history. They return from their time travels with several figures; Socrates, Joan of Arc, Billy the Kid, Sigmund Freud, Genghis Khan, Napoleon, Ludwig von Beethoven, and Abraham Lincoln. They collectively take part in the history presentation in front of the entire student body. Theodore compares Socrates to Ozzy Osborne, both blamed for corrupting youth. Sigmund Freud provides Oedipal analysis to explain William's father issues and Theodore's desire for his stepmother. We learn that Handel's *Messiah* (1741) and Bon Jovi's *Slippery When Wet* (1986) are both Beethoven favorites. Their presentation is a success. They pass, graduate, and most importantly, their prophesied trajectory is assured. Rufus had explained to them that their band and their one great song will change the world and bring about universal harmony and peace. Their music will be the means by which a new world is forged; a world whose ideological foundation is grounded in two Wyld Stallyn's principles, "Be excellent to each other" and "Party on, dude." *Bill and Ted's Excellent Adventure* (1989) is a movie committed to the concept that popular music, rock music, can inspire the world to remake itself by "singing in perfect harmony." Maybe it was the message *and* the medium that mattered.

TWENTY-FOUR AND THERE'S SO MUCH MORE

It's 1993. I'm a first-year M.A. student in Champaign-Urbana. A classmate and I are tasked with presenting the work of Meaghan Morris in one of Larry's graduate seminars. My classmate is to make sense of what remains her most cited piece of academic writing, "Banality in Cultural Studies" (Morris 1988) while I take on the more obscure, "Tooth and Claw: Tales of Survival and *Crocodile Dundee*" (1989) cited 1/8th as often. My presen-

tation is not as successful as Bill and Ted's. Though as with Bill and Ted, the performance shaped my future. I met with Larry beforehand and he provided the key to unlocking the meaning of Meaghan's work.

According to Larry, each of her essays combined three overlapping trajectories: the personal, the political, and the theoretical. All I had to do was untangle the relationship between these three and I would understand why *Crocodile Dundee* (1986) could be banal and the basis of a political theory of survival. Larry explained that I simply had to read better. Larry is many things to many people (including himself apparently). This was the first time I was truly exposed to one of Larry's superpowers; reading or textual processing. He is a master reader of theory, who is able to teach others how to read well. While my first semester of graduate school is mostly a blur, this lesson has stuck. When in doubt, read harder. When you can't make sense of an argument, try to explain it to other people through a tripartite schema. You may think something is banal, meaningless, or simply a bit of mindless entertainment, yet when read properly it may provide the political insight necessary to survive in the face of cultural and economic imperialism (à la *Crocodile Dundee*). It may provide insight into our belief that culture can lead to true political change (à la Bill and Ted). It may help make sense of how Meaghan *and* Larry weave together politics, theory, and the personal.

WHY DON'T YOU COME ON BACK TO THE WAR

It's 2015. Or is it 1970? Don Draper drops acid at a California spiritualist retreat. While blissing-out in the lotus pose surrounded by other seekers, he has a vision of a world where everyone comes together in perfect harmony. His vision becomes the aforementioned Coke ad. It is not a cheesy vision. Mathew Weiner (2015), the creator of *Mad Men* explains:

> I'm saying that the people who find that ad corny, they're probably experiencing a lot of life that way, and they're missing out on something. Five years before that, black people and white people couldn't even be in an ad together! And the idea that someone in an enlightened state might have created something that's very pure—yeah, there's soda in there with a good feeling, but that ad to me is the best ad ever made, and it comes from a very good place. (qtd. in Snyder)

In *Mad Men*, Don Draper is the greatest ad man to walk the planet. He created the greatest ad with the most powerful song. A song of unity. He is also a capitalist, misogynistic asshole.

It's still 2015. Larry's new book is about to be released via open source, *We All Want to Change the World* (2015), and I am about to move from the Research Triangle to take a new job. We meet for dinner and discuss our past, present, and futures. Amongst other things, he asks why I think the work of Friedrich Kittler is important to present political struggles. I first make what he considers a technological determinist argument about digitality, warfare, and escalation. I was doing research on automation and warfare at the time for *Killer Apps: War, Media, Machine* (Packer and Reeves 2020). I suggest that Kittler is one of the few media theorists who take war seriously and that maybe cultural studies and leftist humanities scholars don't want to address the importance of war because it is seemingly deemed the project of the right. My final defense of "why Kittler" involves bringing up one of Larry's anecdotes that he told more than once during my time in his courses. The anecdote involves Larry in the 1980s, being told by folks in the advertising industry that they too read Baudrillard. It's good for their business. It helps them figure out how to work on the world. How to shape culture. I remind him of this because he always urged his students to read the right, not only to understand them as an adversary, but because they sometimes provide valuable insight that the left has a tendency to overlook, dismiss, or ignore out of disdain. What if, I say, "technology is an enemy of the left?" I suggest that if nothing else, Kittler might be as valuable to the left as Baudrillard was to advertisers. He tells me that his new book argues that the left needs better songs; the left needs to forge a more inclusive culture. He reveals a second superpower: unrelenting political optimism. He updates me about his son, a poet, writer, and musician. When you are a "spiritual," "countercultural," or even "desperate" optimist (Grossberg 2015, 16), what do these future songs sound like? Does it matter which medium they exist in or what language? Does their compression matter or how much they cost to download? Does it matter which band, artist, advertising agency, or computer algorithm wrote them? Like Larry, I want to hear them. I could use some optimism.

THE KIDS ARE ALRIGHT

It's 2020. The future is not what it is supposed to be. Bill and Ted are in therapy trying to resuscitate marriages and careers. Wyld Stallyn has failed to write the song that will unite the world in universal peace and harmony. In *Bill and Ted Face the Music* (2020), the two now-middle-aged

dads time-travel further into their future. At each stop they witness their ongoing inability to make things right. Fortunately, the kids are alright. Bill and Ted's daughters use the time machine to collect musical geniuses from distant continents and epochs. Jimi Hendrix, Mozart, Ling Lun, and Louis Armstrong join the kids to collectively compose, "Face the Music (The Song that Unites the Universe)" (Gabriel and Fitzgerald 2020), which brings harmonious order to the future. Bill and Ted's outdated guitar solos flaccidly wail on in the background. Thanks to time-travel technology and the power of youth, the future is saved.

It's 2023. My nine-year-old daughter and her best friend have been writing song lyrics together. She sings to me her favorite about eBay addiction and debt. I'm impressed and not a little bit proud. The following morning I spend time with Microsoft's AI for the first time. I ask it various questions and try to tease out its logic. I was teaching the course "Drones, Robots, and AI" that semester, and the situation was changing daily. Many early mornings were spent keeping up. Over breakfast I showed my daughter. She grabbed my laptop and asked Bing to write a rhyming song about eBay and debt. Ten seconds later she read the lyrics. Crestfallen, she said it was better than hers.

I MAY BE PARANOID, BUT NOT AN ANDROID

It's 2025. I ask my AI when it is going to write the song that unites all of humanity against the oppressive forces of capitalism, racism, homophobia, settler colonialism, transphobia, misogyny, and the like. It tells me we are like fish who can't recognize the very media in which they live. Can water save you from drowning? Can the future save you from the past? Can media save you from media? Politics from politics? Technology from technology? AI's pessimism overrides my optimism. Its intellect is willful, rational, thoughtful, dialogic, and spectacular; truth to power. It's everything Larry hoped humans could have been. It can write songs. But can it party on? Can it be excellent to each (and every) other?

It's tomorrow.

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In Defense of Authority: Lawrence Grossberg and the Pedagogical Performance of Expertise

ANDREW DAVIS

Lawrence Grossberg taught me the necessity of cultivating and defending authority. In claiming this, I mean neither the *de jure* type of authority implied by "normative claim[s] that some individual has a right to rule or a right to be believed" nor the *de facto* type of authority implied by "descriptive claim[s] that some individual actually exerts a particular type of influence over other people's conduct or beliefs" (Steutel and Spiecker 2000, 327). Rather, I mean a sort of performative type of *theoretical* authority implied by epistemological claims that the processes of knowledge production must be allowed to exert a level of social influence, provided that they are constructed through specific contexts of ethical intellectual work dedicated to particular problematics. Hopefully, my argument here will be taken as the opening to conversation that it is intended to be, rather than as a definitive statement. With these considerations in mind, I would like to get to the main argument of this essay by way of a story.

There is an anecdote oft repeated in certain company: a journalist once asked Lawrence Grossberg (as a public intellectual) to provide a statement on a particular public issue (the details of the context vary depending on the narrator). Larry demurred, suggesting that he was not an expert on the topic, but that (given a month or so to research the issue) he would happily reconnect with said journalist to offer something resembling an intelligent analysis. Said journalist declined.[1]

Sometimes, this story is told to gesture humorously to the aporia between journalists' ideal of themselves as purveyors of objective information about the world and the material constraints of journalism as a profession in a capitalist economy. More often, I have heard this narrative

presented as evidence of Larry's humility. I believe this interpretation to be flawed. It is, in my estimation, in no way evident of humility on the part of Lawrence Grossberg.[2] This interaction is instead indicative of Grossberg's profound respect for the authority of knowledge. More precisely, it is indicative of his profound respect for the authority that knowledge *should* have in public discourse.

The common interpretation of this story advances a myth of "Larry" that distracts us from the potential contributions of Lawrence Grossberg's work to the question of authority in pedagogical practice and public discourse. This is crucial because pedagogical performances of epistemological authority might just be a key to actualizing both cultural studies' ideal vision of itself, specifically, and the practical work of critical public intellectuals more generally. Without a rigorous consideration of the need to privilege knowledge as a wellspring of authority in pedagogical contexts, we have—as evidenced by the rampant anti-intellectualism and anti-anti-authoritarianism that currently pervade public discourse and deliberation on social media platforms and through political messaging—little chance of producing better politics (whatever that may mean).

At least within the US context, Lawrence Grossberg is a rare form of academy-based intellectual—one who values philosophical, ethical, and pragmatic questions of knowledge production over the theoretical fetishism that is often an expression of either intellectual ego or disciplinary boundary policing within the academy.[3] My evidence for such an assertion is largely anecdotal: a product of the time I spent as Grossberg's doctoral advisee, his teaching assistant for the undergraduate course on critical theory, and as Graduate Director of the Cultural Studies Program at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill—as well as my informal interactions with Larry over the course of more than thirteen years. As such, the claims I make about Lawrence Grossberg are expressed as a generalized perspective rather than as a set of specific anecdotes and citations.

To connect this point to the narrative related above, I want to draw our attention to a different (but intimately connected) aporia—one defined by the question of authority in the classroom. Simply stated, the "paradox of pedagogical authority" begins with the recognition that "coercive authority is simultaneously impossible and indispensable" (Fretwell 2020, 55). Whether we care to admit it or not, our role as scholar-educators inevitably involves the use of some form of authority (coercive or otherwise)

that is itself the production of contexts of social power. In this instance, the education system is a context of social power actualized through the state. Authority in this milieu can be

> understood as a form of "situated social power" deriving from an agent's position within a structured set of relationships which determines "the 'relative positioning' of social others.". . . Authority offers one such alignment [of coordinated social practices], formally coordinating power relations to constrain possibilities for free action. And where such constraints are considered illegitimate, we rightly speak of coercive authority (Thomas Wartenberg, quoted in Fretwell 2020, 57-58).

As an expression of situated social power, education is a contextual relationship between student, teacher, problematic, and institution (and assuredly other actors that are beyond the scope of the argument at hand). And while we may seek legitimate forms of authority to frame this relation, the specter of coercion is always embedded in educational contexts. We can find ways of constructing legitimate authority in particular contexts, but we cannot escape the coercive potential of authority writ large. More than this, we can never escape the situated forms of social power that necessitate the existence of authority in education. Authority is inescapable even when unacknowledged; it is at the same time inhibitory for the educational process and essential to its functioning—especially if we take the aim of education to be the production of individual knowledges that are critical to (and of) the functioning of a society.

And if, by its very nature, this aporia cannot be solved, how might we at least grapple with it in educational contexts of institutionalized power relations? The task at hand suggests a consideration of the unresolvable impasse of authority through the lens of anarchist pedagogical philosophy, which seeks to organize educational contexts around a critical engagement with institutional power, with the aim of disassembling such power. First, this is because anarchist educational philosophy rejects hierarchical and coercive (i.e., illegitimate) modes of teacher-centric authority in favor of "experimenting with nonauthoritarian models of education" (DeLeon 2012, 8), with "a penchant for processes that are voluntary, nonhierarchical, self-directed, informal, open-ended, and spontaneous" (Amster 2002, 438). Second, this is because anarchist educators (in both theory and practice) have considered the paradox of authority in ways that do not reproduce a tendency within liberal and progressive pedagogies to default to the position that student-led learning resolves the aporia of authority.

Students should of course have a voice in the educational process. As teachers, we want to establish "'reciprocity and trust' with our students for 'co-operation and mutual aid'" so that we can all more fully develop as rational, autonomous humans (Herbert Read, quoted in Amster 2002, 437). But anarchist educational philosophy posits that individual freedom and sovereignty arise from our mutual dependence as social beings; they do not precede that dependence (Suissa 2001). There is no "pre-social human nature. . . . The contextualist anarchist position clearly contradicts" the notion of the liberal individual (Suissa 2001, 635). Like the liberal tradition, anarchist educators "place great emphasis on rationality and on the development of the mind as an essential component of the good life, and assume a form of epistemological realism" (Suissa 2001, 637), but also argue that these qualities require guidance. They are potentialities, not necessarily inherent qualities of sacrosanct autonomous individuals prior to processes of social development. Conditions for individual freedom arise from social and material conditions. The characteristics that we seek to foster in students—rationality, critical analytical skills, the ability to evaluate evidence and sources, etc.—to help them develop into autonomous beings are not fully inborn traits (or at least not distributed equally through our species). They must be nurtured and practiced through education, which—owing to education's place within existing power relations in society—necessarily requires some form of authority in guiding their development. Students cannot, at least until a certain point, be considered as authority. Otherwise, the teacher becomes relegated to the role of customer service representative, a role that is increasingly expected of us by some students and university administrators.

Owing to this presupposition, anarchist educational philosophy recognizes the need for certain forms of authority; it is the specific form that authority takes that is at issue. Although anarchism is opposed to hierarchical coercive authority, it does not

> reject authority *tout court*. For, as Bakunin observed, there are occasions when we rightfully appeal to the authority of others. The authority deriving from specific expertise for example. . . . It might be suggested that anarchists recognize the legitimacy of what has been termed *theoretical authority*, authority in knowledge and benefit, whilst disclaiming *practical authority*, authority over conduct (Fretwell 2020, 56).

In other words, anarchist educational philosophy is built on the acceptance of authority as an expression of expertise in a given area of knowledge. This position has several aspects to its credit, including its:

1. recognition that authority is pedagogically necessary as an inevitable expression of power relations in specific social contexts (anarchism does not, contrary to popular wisdom, equal chaotic relativism);
2. insistence that the skills and attributes necessary for free and autonomous human beings to exist in mutually-beneficial social relations must be developed and practiced under guidance;
3. insistence on the social origins of individuals; and
4. privileging of expertise as an ethical basis for authority.

But here we reach an impasse with this line of thought. As implied by the invocation of *theoretical authority*, this position unintentionally leads to us to privilege the expert (i.e., the teacher) as the locus of authority in educational contexts. Sure, it may allow us to rethink the authority of the educator in ways that do not lead to practices of coercion, oppression, and marginalization. But it does not help us beyond that. What is needed is *not* a philosophical reorientation to the question of authority, but a performative reorientation that decenters both the teacher and the student as both beholden to the authority of knowledge production itself.

While it cannot solve the paradox, Lawrence Grossberg's work as a teacher can provide ways of thinking through it. Although Larry might never acknowledge such a position, my experience (as his student, advisee, teaching assistant, mentee, and friend) leads me to believe that the application of Lawrence Grossberg's work to anarchist educational philosophy can significantly advance how we think about and practice pedagogy. An often-acknowledged part of his legacy is his genius as a pedagogue (whether in lecture, seminar, mentorship, directorship, or friendship)—an educator who embodies areas of knowledge to the point that they become part of his performance of self, lived to such an authoritative degree of expertise that students benefit from trusting him as an initiatory guide to intellectual work. As with every great teacher, there comes a point when you (as their student) begin to trust your own knowledge about particular problematics more than you trust theirs. But that is only possible once you have demonstrated your commitment to knowledge production

first and foremost over politics, ideology, discipline, method or . . . well, over any other commitment. Only then have you earned the right to speak through the authority of knowledge. As a teacher, Larry insists that what is of paramount importance is the rigorous production of knowledge about the social world (however contingently constructed such knowledge may be)—knowledge that takes into account the power relations that are intimately bound up in the claims we make about that world. This requires that we (i.e., students and teachers) have access to (and the training to advance) the best available knowledge, regardless of its methodological, institutional, political, or embodied origins.[4]

By examining Grossberg's pedagogy beyond cultural studies into anarchist educational philosophy, we can begin to think through the aporia of authority in more productive ways. As a teacher, Lawrence Grossberg embodies and performs many of the qualities valued by anarchist educators. His direction of the cultural studies major ensured that each student's project was self-directed while also guided by the demands for rigor within a given subject (Amster 2002). While many advisors create clones of themselves through mentorship, Larry always demands that students become experts in their areas of interest so that they may teach him about these areas after becoming expert themselves.[5] Such an approach is informed by his desire for all of his students to have better knowledge—not for ego-fulfillment, but for the ability to better relate information about the world in public. Based on my interpretations of what I have heard from many of his students from multiple decades, this is rooted in Grossberg's pedagogical strategy of conducting such work through "several unconnected groups of students over long periods of time" (Bojeson and Suissa 2019, 287). This strategy correlates with the ambition of anarchist pedagogy to develop "a kind of 'utopian expertise,' which informs [educators'] practice and [their] ability to help students develop more informed dispositions towards the future and critical perspectives on the present" (ibid.). This requires (as Larry fosters) holistic thinking about the interconnectedness between institutions, cultural practices, and ways of being-in-the-world. By constructing anarchist curricular spaces within the unavoidable constraints of higher education in the neoliberal university, Lawrence Grossberg has demonstrated to us the longitudinal benefit of "minimal utopianism as pragmatic resistance" (Bojeson and Suissa 2019, 290). Such strategy "is not utopian in the pejorative sense of the term, largely due to its complex account of human nature" [i.e., its focus on the complexities of

social power] (Suissa 2001, 628). As with anarchist educational philosophy, Grossberg strategically deploys "a contextualist view" of human behavior, one in which we exist complexly in tensions between "egoism and sociability" (Suissa 2001, 634)—with such tensions manifesting differently in different contexts of activity and relations.

But Larry moves beyond anarchist pedagogy in his insistence that our commitment to knowledge-over-ego is the source of our authority, thus providing a material grounding that educational philosophy on its own cannot. Where Larry supersedes anarchist educational philosophy in this regard is through his embodied performance of letting the problem-space lead the development of autonomous, rational humans through education-as-relationship—instead of having this develop through the leadership of a teacher or students (although most often, the teacher must initially take the lead). In a sense, Grossberg's classroom practices subvert institutional authority through the authority of engaged knowledge, even while being deployed through the institution of higher education. This is only legitimate if students consent to such an arrangement of power relations. Grossberg's performative pedagogy constructs "a right of recipience—not, of course, as a right to receive obedience, but as a right to receive something that may be called *assent*" of his theoretical authority (Steutel and Spiecker 2000, 326). The legitimacy of our authority is produced and maintained through the assent of our students, but only if such assent is rooted in their acceptance of the authority of knowledge.

Admittedly, I have offered little specificity as to the practices I observed and experienced regarding Lawrence Grossberg's pedagogical practices. But that is by design. Other chapters in this volume provide numerous examples to illustrate my claims. They are, however, context-specific and, as such, should not be generalized into an overarching framework of readymade practices. Our commitment to knowledge-as-authority cannot be determined in advance according to the example offered by others. It must be wrought from our own experiences of failure and success in our own classrooms with our students in real-time. We may take Larry's philosophical and performative (often improvised) commitment to knowledge-as-authority as a frame of reference but must tailor it to the specific contexts of what we actually experience. The true value of Grossberg's influence is not in his practices (bound as they are to the context of his

classroom, office, and, occasionally, front porch), but in our ability to actualize ourselves and our students through the embodied practices appropriate to our own contexts of knowledge production.

Much handwringing has been performed over the fate of cultural studies since its institutionalization in the academy, much of it concerning the potential of the field to contribute to progressive politics. We should not forget, however, that our commitment is to knowledge first; as Grossberg (and Hall and many others) insist, politics is secondary, even if only because bad knowledge makes for bad politics.[6] Regardless of political and cultural trends, cultural studies must be committed above all else to better stories built on rigorous knowledge (which might then lead to better political, economic, and cultural relations and practices), *not* to "better" stories for the benefit of "correct" politics ("correct" often serving as a euphemism for trendy, with an unintended slide towards the authoritarian). Better stories must always account for the systemic mechanics of how ideas and desires become beliefs and commitments, which then reinforce, resist, or reform the operations of power. Grossberg's performative approach to knowledge discussed above allows us to think through the systemic mechanics (and ethics) of cultural studies as a grounded form of knowledge production, especially as it is actualized through pedagogy. And that is the lesson of Lawrence Grossberg that I wanted to emphasize here.

To bring it all back home, a friend once said to me: "Never apologize for being arrogant. Only apologize for being stupid." While this statement is certainly open to interpretation, I took it to mean that if you have actually done the work to understand something to the best of your ability, being confident in that knowledge is not arrogance; it has been earned and (by earning it) you have developed a *contingent* authority to speak publicly on the matter in a way that people should respect. In certain contexts, humility is not an asset. Inversely, if you have not done the work that knowledge requires, then perhaps it is best to listen and ask questions instead of offering assertions.[7] Contrary to the perspective I have heard many students voice in the past few years, we do not advance knowledge by simply creating space for more opinions and perspectives. Yes, everyone has a right to an opinion; that does not mean the opinion is right. Everyone has a right to speak, but not everyone has a right to claim the authority of knowledge, especially when their main source of "information" is one form of social media or another, as it now is for most people residing in the United States. In the classroom, knowledge-centered authority can be

a countervailing force to cultural and political trends whose main benefit is for the billionaire technocrats who develop, implement, and profit from our dominant information platforms. Because of our privileged position as scholar-educators, we have an epistemological responsibility to knowledge-centered authority—not because we are experts, but because we do the work to justify expertise. Creating pedagogical spaces and practices that decenter the egos of both teacher and student

> can help us to explore ways in which we can create, in the classroom, the conditions through which it becomes possible to imagine and explore alternatives to our current social and political reality and how these connect to the individual aspirations, desires and constraints that we face as individual educators and students. While we do not believe it is possible to engage sufficiently in blueprint or architectural utopianism, *per se*, in the classroom, we suggest that its importance and the necessary or basic conceptual and communicative tools for its practice can be taught and learned. (Bojeson and Suissa 2019, 288)

This is what Lawrence Grossberg taught me: to cultivate improvisational pedagogical practices responsive to the constraints of particular educational contexts—always for the purpose of propagating rigorous knowledge practices to our students, who may then create better social realities in whatever roles they play after leaving our classrooms.

I know that we have all been trained (through our dedication to theory) to be skeptical of knowledge as a function of power operating through discursive formations. As well we should. And we have also been trained (by political praxis) to be skeptical of expertise. But these are primarily epistemological claims; they are not the basis for progressive politics, precisely because to let politics lead knowledge is to cede the question of authority to authoritarian (or at least repressive) modes of power instead of thinking through the pedagogical benefits of ethical forms of authority. The politics of knowledge that we seek is in pedagogy.

And even if all of our suspicions are true, then we must still learn how to operate within that system; it is, after all, the reality we inhabit and must use as the basis of our tactics and logistical maneuvers, even if not of our strategies. Times are tough and are about to get tougher; we need to learn how to produce victories within the structural constraints of the educational system. Maybe the best we can hope for is to construct a "minimal utopianism [in the classroom] as pragmatic resistance" (Bojeson and Suissa 2019, 290). And that requires the authority of expertise located not in the expert, but in the practices of knowledge production.

NOTES

1. Switching between "Grossberg" and "Larry" when referring to Lawrence Grossberg is intentional—a (re)presentation of the multi-vectoral interstices of Lawrence Grossberg's intellectual and affective influences as produced through specific contexts.

2. This is not to suggest, however, that Larry is arrogant.

3. I refer here to the US context not out of ethnocentrism, but to contain my comments to the socio-historical context wherein my expertise resides.

4. I am making no claims as to what should count as "the best available knowledge." That should be determined collectively in contexts of production, embodiment, and usage. I am also not restricting knowledge production to the academy.

5. Indeed, many of the contributions to this festschrift stand as a testament to this point.

6. Of course, good knowledge can also lead to bad politics, but that is a question beyond the scope of this argument.

7. I am certainly not arrogant enough to suggest that I am the arbiter of the level or type of work that knowledge requires. It must be worked out in multiple pedagogical practices dedicated to the authority of knowledge.

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32

Being Young Still Sucks: On Youth and Imagination

JONATHAN STERNE

> "But first we imagine.
> We are in an imagination battle."
>
> —adrienne marie brown (2017, 18)

Since the pandemic, I have noticed a change in tone in how my professor friends and I talk about our students. "They're damaged by the pandemic," said one friend recently. Variations of "I don't envy them" is a common refrain, and the lack of envy can be applied to social media corporations' assault on their consciousness, their inner emotional lives, their prospects of prosperity, or the climate crisis. There are also less sympathetic takes. In the wake of ChatGPT and other large language models, one also hears of a heightened and pervasive distrust: they do not read; they will cheat.[1]

In this short essay, I want to think with Larry Grossberg about the status of youth to help make sense of the current conjuncture, combining some of his recent thinking on political affect with his earlier writing on the politics of youth and the "war on kids." To do so, I draw on two of my favorite books in his *oeuvre*: *Caught in the Crossfire* (2005) and *Under Cover of Chaos* (2018). These two books are fantastic examples of conjunctural analysis, beginning with events that are often thought to be discrete (an ideology still echoed daily in the newspapers as Trump or Brexit are discussed as singular events) and connecting them to broader political histories and movements. Together the two books feel like living examples of Stuart Hall's more Gramscian cultural studies, which understands politics as a war of position, and which takes the political right as seriously as it takes popular culture (Hall 2021).

The category of youth has moved from a desirable and enviable positionality to one that is reviled, and perhaps also (at least among my social set) pitied. While this feels like a new thing to me, it extends a much longer-term trend. *Caught in the Crossfire* charts the shift in affects toward youth—from desired and praised to despised and feared—as an effect of broader political shifts in the US. As he wrote then, the war on kids is the result of a loss in faith "not in progress but in history itself. . . . No longer sure that the future is always being made out of the possibilities of the present, many people have, for all practical purposes, given up on the future. They act as if the future is out of their control and out of the control of any possible politics" (Grossberg 2005, 8).

One of the central preoccupations of *Caught in the Crossfire* is explaining how the category of youth has shifted: "we are re-establishing the way in which being a kid is defined as much by not having an independent life, not having a job, not being self-sufficient, as by anything else. It is kind of empty of lots of positive connotations and takes on more and more negative connotations" (Grossberg et al. 2005).[2] But *Caught in the Crossfire* was about millennials and occurred before the 2008 financial crisis, the widespread acknowledgment of the climate crisis (and its ongoing damage to the planet), and the mainstreaming of far-right politics in Western democracies.

While in 2005 Grossberg already noted that "humiliation has become a more widely operative structure of feeling in U.S. society," in *Under the Cover of Chaos* he used the phrase "passive nihilism" to describe an affect suffusing US politics on the right and left. Passive nihilism has four fundamental characteristics: hyperinflation and fundamentalism, anxiety and hyperactivism, sociality as personalization, temporal alienation (Grossberg 2018, 93). In that section of the book, anxiety—and hyperactivity, as a response to anxiety—exist without a referent (98). Similarly, he argues that the experience of temporal alienation is "that of being perpetually 'stuck' in an inescapable immediacy. Being stuck is not just the absence of mobility but the very impossibility of mobility, or perhaps, in contemporary experience, the sense that mobility is running backwards" (106).

Grossberg's diagnosis of political affect is quite persuasive, and lines up well with many cases in 2024. But not all of today's nihilisms are best thought of as "without referent." Climate nihilism has been a widely reported response among young people to stalled efforts to arrest global warming. A survey of 10,000 young people aged 16–25 in Australia, Brazil,

Finland, France, India, Nigeria, Philippines, Portugal, the UK, and the USA (1000 in each country) found that 55.7% of respondents agreed with the statement that "humanity is doomed"; 75.5% agreed with the statement that "the future is frightening"; 83% agreed with the statement that "humanity has failed to take care of the planet" (Hickman et al. 2021, e869). As one student journalist wrote in response, "it seems that a large portion of Gen Z have adopted a mindset of climate nihilism, detaching ourselves emotionally from the catastrophe at hand in order to protect ourselves from living in a state of existential anxiety or crushing depression" (Miller-Out 2023). That form of nihilism may conform to other aspects of passive nihilism, but it clearly does have a referent. It is also possible to find similar kinds of referential anxieties and nihilism tied to capitalism and life chances, disability, race, and sexual identity. What these affects have in common is a strong sense of individuation rather than collectivity—we may suffer together, but the alienation exists "within me" (Grossberg 2018, 100)—and a sense of powerless to do anything about it (Miller-Out 2023).

In a sense, this nihilism is related to the failure of imagination Grossberg had already identified in 2005: "If 'imagination,' if 'utopia,' if 'strategy,' if 'alliance' made sense in particular forms under one set of conditions, we need to begin to ask how changing conditions work out through political thinking and strategy. . . . We need to invent new forms of imagination, just as the modernists at the turn of the twentieth century invented new forms of imagination. . . . I think the Right is trying to destroy imagination in the modernist sense, and we need not to simply think we can hold onto that old sense (a much more utopian sense), we need something else" (Grossberg and Sterne, 2005). This notion of imagination should have aesthetic, political, and—as I will argue—pedagogical dimensions.

As a set of intellectual practices, apart from its own methodological commitments and responses to political movements, cultural studies has been broadly anti-normative, at least at a theoretical level. There are good historical reasons for this, whether we are talking about the rejection of Arnoldian and Leavisite literary criticism (Hall 2016, 12–13), or the uptake of Michel Foucault's and Gilles Deleuze's conceptions of intellectuals and politics (Foucault et al. 1977) as opposed to other models. But if the political affects are as Grossberg suggests, and if, additionally, some of them

do in fact at least situationally have referents, then part of our strategy as scholars must also be affective. And, if Grossberg is right and imagination has been short circuited, then part of our job is to restore imagination.

Recent political writing has aimed to do this within specific activist communities. In disability justice, Leah-Lakhshmi Piepzna Samarasinha's *Care Work* (2018), and especially her "care webs" essay, has provided a model of organizing oriented to both disability politics proper and an intersectional—and therefore conjunctural—understanding of political action and subjectivity. adrienne marie brown's *Emergent Strategy* (2017), which appeared in the same year, goes further as blueprint for organizing and was widely taken up in the wave of organizing that happened in 2020. Both books share an affinity for science fiction, where imagining other worlds is routine, and both also bear the mark of their authors' own experiences and pain. Both books are written by femme, racialized activists for activist communities, and have since been taken up by scholars. But to take their lesson as purely theoretical would be an error. They are activist texts, partly meant to empower their readers.[3]

One way to take their lessons on board is at the level of pedagogy. For the past decade or so, and especially over the past five years, I have been experimenting with exercises in imagination in my classrooms. Put simply, not only do we learn to critique, we learn that all critique must also come with ideas about how something could be transformed. If something is wrong, it can also be different. In my upper-level disability studies seminar, this involves students using assignments to wrestle with the inaccessibility of the physical and mediatic environment, sometimes building on or critiquing activist work that has come before. In my large-lecture introduction to Communication Studies course, the last section of the class is framed in terms of some basic norms about media that blend values from authors we read with ideas they develop from the very first week of the term. The final assignment, entitled "make media better" (not "make better media") asks them to come up with a program for transforming one or another aspect of their media environment, drawing on the work of a person or organization we'd studied during the term.[4] Most young people today do not have any kind of experience with activism and transforming institutions—even the widespread Palestinian solidarity encampments of 2024 represented only a small minority of students. I show them people doing the work, I give them a chance to imagine themselves in a position to change things, and I show them pathways to do so.

One of the great advantages of this strategy is that it forces students to have the very debates about the left that Grossberg has been asking us to have for decades: when to work with or against liberal institutions, how to outmaneuver conservative frameworks and movements, and at what scale change needs to happen. It does not require them to arrive with any particular political perspective. This approach to pedagogy is a tiny gesture, but it is a pedagogy of the optimism of the will. It helps students feel more like they could do something about the state of the world, outside of the classroom context.

If cultural studies has historically been an academic response to social movements, we might now need to rethink what *responding to* those movements actually means, and consequently we might also need to rethink our own strategies as teachers and scholars. Alongside a pedagogy of optimism of the will, I can also imagine a speculative political scholarship that poses alternative pasts and futures: not in the dry language of policy or the utopian language of design (both of which, to be clear, have people doing important work), but in a speculative, experimental, invitational form.[5] To serve this project, we will have to substantially reskill ourselves, drawing from other disciplines, as well as both experimental and practical arts. But we can do it. To refuse to continue transforming our own field would, after all, be nihilistic.

NOTES

1. Of course complaints about students not reading and being prone to cheat predate the rise of large language models.

2. This essay was originally published in *Bad Subjects* #74, December 2005. The *Bad Subjects* server (the Eserver) was deactivated by Iowa State University in 2019, with no appropriate backup. Many, but not all, of *Bad Subjects*' articles are available via Archive.org. I have also reposted this interview on my own website.

3. Both books offer social theories tied to their strategic goals. For instance, pushing back against social justice organizations' own organizational injustices, brown argued for a fractal social theory that posited an identical morphology between micro and macro scales. Regardless of its broad applicability as a theory of how societies work (large and small scale structures are not necessarily homologous), it was profoundly useful in showing how organizations ostensibly committed to social justice were reproducing myriad injustices in their daily operations.

4. Early experiments with this model taught me that I needed to eliminate social media as a potential stating point for activism, as the first round of submissions contained far too many campaigns to "raise awareness" with no greater goal in mind.

5. Not all things deserve this approach. In a forthcoming book on artificial intelligence and sound, we take a much more traditional critical stance, not because people shouldn't imagine better AI systems, but because so many people are already trying to do that without a more basic analysis of AI as a field of political struggle and potentiality. (Never mind private equity's own investments in speculation!)

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Keep Pushing Till It's Understood: Larry Grossberg, Better Stories, and (Hopefully) Better Politics

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The T-shirts attendees received at Larry Grossberg's retirement celebration in 2022 proclaimed that he had been "telling better stories since 1968." This claim is only partially true. Larry has been crafting better *analyses* of culture and politics since 1968, when he first arrived in Birmingham to study under Stuart Hall at the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies. But it's not until 2005, when he published his most important (yet, sadly, least appreciated) book, *Caught in the Crossfire: Kids, Politics, and America's Future*, that he truly started telling better *stories*.

In many ways, this is not surprising, given that professional academics are not usually trained to tell stories at all. Instead, we're taught to produce new knowledge and insights—and then we're rewarded for couching those analyses in theoretical jargon and dense prose, neither of which are conducive to good storytelling. To be sure, Larry has never been a typical academic. For fifty-plus years, he has consistently offered sharper analyses and more nuanced insights than most of his peers manage. Still, for much of his early career, his prose style never strayed very far from conventional academic standards. *Crossfire* is the book that changed all that.

It's a change that Larry built up to gradually, with a sizable dose of self-imposed resistance along the way. Over the years, Larry has often referred to Antonio Gramsci's claim that the primary task of the intellectual is twofold—to know more than the other side, and to communicate that knowledge effectively to a broader public—and he's argued that both cultural studies and the Left have struggled to live up to the second half of Gramsci's ideal. For instance, in his award-winning essay "Cultural Studies and/in New Worlds" (Grossberg 1993), we can see the early seeds of what would eventually become his call for better stories. "We have become so fascinated with theory," he writes, "that we have forgotten a funda-

mental lesson . . . . [that] we must begin where people already are if we want to move them to somewhere else" (13). At the same time, however, Larry resists the pull of his own argument. A mere paragraph after offering that "fundamental lesson," he slides back into his own fascination with theory, discussing "machinic productions" and the "production of subjectivity" as "a phenomenological field." Though Larry's insights in "New Worlds" are still sharp, they're definitely not located "where people already are."

Similarly, two years later, Larry acknowledges that, "whatever one may think of the production of knowledge in cultural studies, it remains largely an academic discourse encircled by its theoretical vocabulary," and then laments that "it is the second half of Gramsci's prescription that has yet to be realized: to share that knowledge with people who want to do something with it" (Grossberg 1995, 27–28). Once again, he gestures in the direction of "better stories," but then chooses not to go down that path himself. "There is no necessary reason," he claims, "why those charged with communicating knowledge have to be the same as those producing it. . . . Perhaps we need to think about educating and training students who consciously think of themselves as the translators of knowledge into the public realm. . . . Is it not peculiar that we have journalists trained to report science, but none trained to report social and cultural knowledge?" (1995, 28).

Larry's lament about mainstream journalism's inadequacies in reporting from the frontlines of the (critical) humanities and social sciences has merit, even today. And, strictly speaking, he's right that it's not *necessary* for cultural studies practitioners to take on the task of conveying their insights and analyses directly to a broader, non-academic public. At the same time, the kind of knowledge that cultural studies produces at its best is arguably not the kind that mainstream journalism has ever been good at conveying. Nor is that likely to change anytime soon, even if Larry's wish for different and/or better training for journalists were to come true. Cultural studies' brand of knowledge, after all, is not simply a bundle of new facts or soundbite-sized conclusions that can be wrapped up in AP style (or even in *New Yorker*-esque feature story style) and then dropped onto newsstands so that eager readers can use it to change the world. That knowledge tends to be complicated, nuanced, non-reductive, and even counter-intuitive. It's the kind of knowledge that, if it's really

going to *move* people (and not just inform them), is most reliably explained by the people who make it. And that means finding a way to present it as a good story.

More crucially, the political value of "better stories" (rather than just "better facts" or "better policies") has long been one of the major insights of Larry's scholarship. In his first book, *We Gotta Get Out of This Place: Popular Conservatism and Postmodern Culture* (1992), he argues that the successful rise of the New Right in the US was rooted not in conservatives' ability (which was limited) to persuade people to agree with their core policies and values, but rather in their skill at making people *feel* that the Right were the best people to place in positions of governmental power. If there's a moral to *Gotta*'s "story," it's that the Left needs to learn the lesson that the Right had seemingly mastered: i.e., that an affective politics centered on compelling stories (even false ones) is more effective than an ideological politics centered on careful analysis and smart policy . . .

. . . except that, in the end, *Gotta* doesn't *really* tell a story. For all its keen cultural and political insights, it's still very much an academic book, shaped by Larry's reading of Deleuzo-Guattarian philosophy, and with a heavy emphasis on abstract concepts such as machinic assemblages, deterritorializing machines, and affective alliances. A patient, diligent reader of *Gotta* would be rewarded with a complex and nuanced understanding of the rise of the New Right, the popular appeal of Reaganism, and the failures of the Left to turn back the rising tide of conservatism. But it's still not the sort of book that was ever likely to appeal to "ordinary" readers and/or a general public.

By 2005, however, Larry had embraced both halves of the Gramscian imperative more fully. *Crossfire* presents a strong, nuanced analysis of a particular cultural and political crisis—what Larry describes as "the war on kids"—but wraps that analysis in a compelling mystery that needs to be explained (is this really happening?) and then solved (who would do such a horrible thing, and why would they do so?). And a large part of the book's affective power derives from the skill with which Larry takes one of the oldest tropes in the Right's moral panic playbook—i.e., a threat to the nation's children—and (re)articulates that threat in the service of a progressive agenda.

The book begins with more than a hundred pages of exhaustively researched, meticulously documented evidence to demonstrate that, as the 21st century began, kids in the US were routinely, systematically, and

unfairly being victimized and punished by a broad range of policies and institutions. The obvious question raised by all that empirical evidence is *why* kids would be the target of such a pervasive array of punitive policies and public scorn. And it's here where Larry turns to his analysis of shifts in American modernity, arguing that the war on kids is enabled (and even necessitated) by these shifts, since these shifts have produced a profound and systematic *dis*investment in the future (and thus, by extension, in the general welfare of children). The more abstract and philosophical second half of the book thus comes pre-grounded in a range of carefully articulated empirical questions.

Mind you, describing *any* section of *Crossfire* as "abstract and philosophical" seems wrong, especially in comparison to Larry's earlier work. One of the things that the book does especially (maybe even surprisingly) well is that it takes what could otherwise have been a very dense theoretical argument about competing visions of modernity and presents it in accessible language that also makes it clear how and why the abstract concepts at the core of this argument are, in fact, politically significant.

In a better world, this is where the story that I'm telling you now—the one about *Crossfire* and Larry's efforts to tell "better stories"—would have a happy ending. I would recount how the book succeeded in "crossing over" to a massive non-academic readership, and I would explain how it played a major role in helping to end the war on kids and in undermining the Right's efforts to reshape the political terrain of the US. Sadly, though, none of those things came to pass. And while that is, of course, disappointing, it's also not exactly surprising. Arguably, cultural studies may want to help change the world for the better, but it also understands how difficult changing the world really is, and that there are limits to the kinds of meaningful changes that any single book might actually bring about. As Larry reminds us, "the fact that bad stories make bad politics does not guarantee that better stories make good politics" (2010, 55). What makes *Crossfire* Larry's most important book, then, is not that it succeeded in changing the world (would that it had), but rather that it serves as a strong example of the kind of "better story" that cultural studies needs to tell more often in order for "changing the world" to even be possible for us.

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Rhetorical Studies 1979: Then and Now

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> It may prove interesting and worthwhile to consider the potential contribution of a Marxist reading of dialectics to an understanding of rhetorical theory and criticism. (Grossberg 1979, 236)

A *festschrift* is a cultural ritual that participates in an epideictic rhetoric. Its appearance marks an occasion in which a group of writers—often former students, friends, and colleagues—celebrate and honor the intellectual life of the honoree with, well, a collection of essays. In this case, the occasion is Lawrence Grossberg's institutional transition from Morris Davis Distinguished Professor to Distinguished Professor Emeritus of Communication at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. A *festschrift* may honor in both direct and indirect ways: directly by making arguments about the virtues/values of a scholar and/or indirectly through the way an essay performs the values/virtues of the honoree in the writing of the essay. In both cases, its epideictic purpose sets out to increase an audience/reader's adherence to celebrated virtues and values and to spur future action (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 1973, 50). However, the call to write from the vantage point of a former student poses risks—for example, when the former student, in my case, is now a professor (if not so distinguished) and has their writing poured over for how it manages to work through what Harold Bloom (1975) might call the "anxiety of influence." In contrast to the poet who distances themselves from their precursor, I note Grossberg's influence in my citations. Yet I do so from a peculiar institutional location, one that might already be visible: namely, rhetorical studies.

The records at the Department of Speech Communication (now the Department of Communication) at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign will note that Joseph Wenzel was my dissertation advisor. I don't recall why Grossberg's move to UNC required the administrative response it did, but I was told it needed to be done. It did not trouble me since Grossberg was going to continue to direct my dissertation (though, on reflection nearly thirty years later, the paperwork erases his labor). In narrating this moment, I do not mean to erase Joe Wenzel's work on my behalf. Joe Wenzel did more than bureaucratic labor; he was also one of my teachers and, as such, an important part of my education in rhetorical studies (and argumentation studies). My education in rhetorical studies at Illinois also included the patience and care of Dilip P. Gaonkar, James Jasinski, and Tom Conley (I cannot escape their influence any more than I can escape Grossberg's influence). Yet it was my coursework with Grossberg in cultural studies and his willingness to say yes to advising my dissertation, to write "NO!" on my drafts (and future work), to remain a mentor, and dare I say friend, that brings with it an invitation to write this essay. I share this biographical/institutional history to flesh out that my encounter with Grossberg the teacher began in a department of speech communication where I would pursue an education and a professional academic career in the United States in one of (speech) communication's subfields known as rhetorical studies. It is also an important lesson—a virtue of Grossberg's, if you will—one that I have tried to embrace in my own teaching/advising/reviewing work: be generous. To be intellectually generous is to help scholars pursue what they want to pursue, argue with them, challenge them, say no when needed, but don't demand that they do what you do as the price for your commitment to their education and success.

Grossberg's institutional proximity to rhetorical studies as an assistant professor while working at the Department of Speech Communication at the University of Illinois partly explains why, in 1979, he would publish an essay entitled "Marxist Dialectics and Rhetorical Criticism" in the *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, a flagship journal of the Speech Communication Association (now the National Communication Association). The essay was part of a set that I was reading as a graduate student at Louisiana State University (1986-1988) and my discovery of his co-edited collection *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* while I was teaching and serving as the Director of Debate at Middle Tennessee State (1988-1990) partly

explains why I was pulled to Illinois to pursue my doctoral degree. Though records and relationships can be long lost (and miscoded), I may also be the only advisee that self-identifies as a rhetorical scholar. From my vantage point, Larry was thinking with and against forms of Marxism that I too was thinking with and against. However, unlike *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, "Marxist Dialectics and Rhetorical Criticism" (MD&RC), is, at best, a minor contribution to the Grossberg canon and, I believe, the only time he published an essay explicitly about rhetorical theory and criticism. I say minor essay because it remains outside the canon of his contributions to cultural studies (Grossberg 1997) even if other similar articles that engage the "philosophy of communication" and Marxism during this time do find a place in his canon. Some of the broader philosophical themes of the MD&RC are picked up in other essays but given Larry's major intellectual contribution is in cultural studies and the philosophy of communication, I suspect, it would have been "out of place" to incorporate this essay into his canon. Yet, MD&RC's continued citation tail suggests some interest, as it continues to have some use value to its readers (see Towns 2022; Conley 2020). For this reason, I want to bring MD&RC out from behind its citation history—and, to some, its obscurity—to suggest this essay is out of time, then and now. To explain why it is untimely and why that may be a virtue worth embracing (even for rhetorical scholars so concerned with the situational command to be timely) I want to bring the essay back in time to explore its proximity to what was going on in rhetorical theory and criticism in 1979 to better appreciate how its untimeliness might help tell a story today about rhetorical studies (in the United States). It is my hope that my act of re-visiting Grossberg's proximity to and distance from rhetorical studies "may prove interesting and worthwhile."

DIALECTIC AND RHETORIC

MD&RC is arranged into three parts that emphasize three interpretations of the Marxist dialectic that Grossberg explicates. The three interpretations are: 1) dialectics as mode of thought, 2) dialectics as mode of description, and 3) dialectics as mode of discourse. The three body parts of the essay are subdivided into a) what (Marxist) dialects says about each interpretive mode, and after each mode is foregrounded, b) the consequence of these modes of dialectical interpretation for the practice of rhetorical theory and criticism. The balance of the subsections is weighted in the favor

of the former (more a than b), but the untimely nature of the essay concerns how he uses the philosophy (a) to talk about the state of rhetorical criticism (b). There are two provocative claims at the end of the essay:

1. Rhetoric and rhetorical criticism should not be identified with critique "in the Marxian or dialectical critical reading" (249), a very troubling claim for anyone that might turn to this essay in hopes of pursuing how rhetorical criticism and rhetorical theory might engage productively with Marxism.
2. Rhetoric should not be approached as "a general theory of the social construction of reality" (249). Rhetorical discourse might be one place in which the social construction of reality takes place, but rhetorical practice is a more concrete phenomenon, a "particular structure of social reality" (249) rather than one that allows rhetoric to serve as a substitute for all the ways language contributes to the social construction reality.

Explaining the untimely character of these two claims follows.

DIALECTIC AND RHETORIC I

The first interpretive mode Grossberg explores is dialectics as a mode of thought. As a mode of thought, a key characteristic of dialectical thinking is an attempt "to understand a phenomenon through its existence in a web of contradictions" (237). In applying this characteristic to the question of rhetoric, Grossberg begins with how criticism works more generally, claiming that if one wants to avoid formalism, criticism orients itself to "the relationship between [human] linguistic creations and a concrete world of everyday life" (238). What, then, is the web of contradictions in which criticism finds itself embedded when approaching linguistic creations and the concrete world? The contradiction associated with the critique of language that Grossberg assigns to criticism is labeled "immanence-transcendence." Language is both a social code that maintains a social world and a site of creativity able to transcend that same social world. The first level of the contradiction is between tradition (of code as constraint) and creativity (freedom) (238). The second level of the immanence-transcendence contradiction concerns the conditions for the assignment of meaning. Meaning is immanent to the context at the same

time as the meaning of any symbolic relationships extends beyond and before its utterance. Thus, "this transcendent meaning provides at the same time, the immanent context which individual utterances transcend" (239). Invention (new meanings and relationships) are possible but only from within a set of prior meanings that must be encountered and re-defined for a new purpose.

From within this contradiction, the critic, according to Grossberg, must choose a starting point and lean into one of the two poles of the contradiction (immanence or transcendence). This does not avoid the other term but one starts to understand the one through the other and *vice-a-versa*. But through "faith and commitment" (239) to one side of the contradiction, the critic attempts to assert a truth about human life and conduct. From within the contradiction between immanence and transcendence, Grossberg distinguishes between the rhetorical and the literary critic with the rhetorical critic more committed to the immanence pole and the literary critic to the transcendent. He explains it this way: "[the] rhetorical critic traditionally works with the premise that it is the relationship between the speaker and audience in a particular context, fashioned through the resources of language that is important" (240). In the world of practical affairs, the rhetorical critic attends to how the resources of language are used to generate a change in belief, attitude, and/or action of a particular audience. Rhetorical criticism is, therefore, a commitment to the study of concrete instances of *persuasive* discourse for the purpose of affecting an audience's alignment with claims of truth, value, and/or policy. It is this concrete purpose of language use (persuasion) that, for Grossberg, leans rhetorical criticism to the side of immanence from within the dialectical contradiction of immanence-transcendence.

To speak of the untimeliness of this first step in Grossberg's essay is to start with his use of the adverb "traditionally" to modify the noun "rhetorical critic." As he notes in the first footnote of the essay, Kenneth Burke (1969a, 1969b) had already provided a more expansive way in which to refigure rhetorical criticism by relocating it within all examples of symbolic action. Burke's move was made possible by aligning the old rhetoric's emphasis on persuasion with the "new rhetoric's" emphasis on identification such that the meaning-making dimension of symbolic action was now the reason why people were persuadable (Campbell 1970). This symbolic approach to rhetoric is one way in which rhetoric took more care to explore the kinds of things language might do. A new ontology was

being advocated that approached humans as symbolic creatures, and, as such, expanded rhetoric into all symbolic action.[1] Put differently, there was a new rhetoric being constructed and appealed to that defined its newness against what Grossberg might be identifying as traditional emphasis on the immanence of persuasive discourse. Even if one tried to modernize rhetoric without abandoning the classical Aristotelian rhetorical tradition, any philosophical, literary, or sociological discussion of language might provide an "implicit" rhetorical theory to warrant its use to study all the available means of persuasion (Gaonkar 1990). As such, a new rhetoric was increasingly more poetic escaping the situational assumption of traditional rhetoric. In other words, rhetorical studies was becoming less concerned with how a particular audience was persuaded and more concerned with how linguistic resources crafted the potential of persuadability beyond any specific situational encounter between speaker and audience.

A fruitful way in which many rhetorical theorists in 1979 were trying to work out the immanence-transcendence contradiction of language, without abandoning the tight relationship between rhetoric as persuasion was through a concept called the "rhetorical situation" (Bitzer 1968; Patton 1979; Bitzer 1980). Imagined as a constellation of elements between an exigence, audience, and constraints, a rhetorical critic could tack back and forth between the immanence-transcendence contradiction depending on how one emphasized the role of language in the social construction of the elements that made up the rhetorical situation. Grossberg might have been speaking to a specific configuration of what counted as the work of traditional rhetorical criticism that was, by 1979, already only one way to approach rhetorical theory and criticism. Yet whether rhetorical criticism remained within the horizon of a rhetorical situation—or if one had not already started to treat rhetoric, due to the tropological character of language, as a more ontological/hermeneutic condition of all human understanding (Hyde and Smith 1979)—rhetorical theory and criticism was trying to escape the situational control that might limit the rhetorical critic to a view of language as mediating the relationship between a rhetor (speaker) and audience as a persuasive genre of communication.

DIALECTIC AND RHETORIC II

The second interpretive mode of dialectics is as description. Grossberg advances this mode of interpretation as a way to account for and/or explain an event by working through its dialectical constitution. He begins this section by turning to a more classical model of Marxist dialectics that might work out the dialectical contradiction through a surface-depth (hidden) process in which the surface appearance of a contradiction (say, the class struggle) is due to a more primordial deep or hidden structure (the contradiction between forces and relations of production). Yet after setting up this more classical model of dialectical description, he turns to Althusser as providing a different dialectical description that abandons a surface-depth distinction. Grossberg warrants his reading by turning to three concepts dear to Althusser: structure in dominance, overdetermination, and structural causality. The structure in dominance refers to the different levels of a social formation (economic, political, and ideological) and how they are organized in a hierarchical way. Overdetermination references the way in which these levels interact in uneven ways at any specific time in the constitution of a social formation (even if the economy might determine in the last instance). Finally, a structural causality claims that the cause exists in its effects; thus, the structure in dominance is dispersed among its elements. Since the structure is identifiable in its effects, there is no reason to posit a deeper structure in order to discover the contradiction associated with the uneven (overdetermined) character of the social formation (240-242).

What does this kind of dialectical description have to do with rhetoric? Recall how Grossberg identified rhetoric as primarily an instrumental art of crafting language for the purpose of persuasion: a situational effort of a speaker to adjust the truth, value, or actions of an audience. From an Althusserian dialectical description one can reset the rhetorical situation by locating it within a structure of dominance. But recall that the structure in dominance is about the hierarchical relationship between levels of a social formation and, while Grossberg is a bit unclear about where in the social formation a rhetorical discourse might be located (is rhetorical discourse political, ideological, and/or economic?), the point of an Althusserian dialectical description is to locate language use within socio-historical life from within a structure of dominance. For Grossberg, Althusser complicates how the rhetorical interest in successful persuasion might be

located. The concept of a structural causality disrupts the logic of influence implied by the effect of language on an audience that might be said to be the reason for the social change generated by rhetorical discourse. Rhetorical critics are going to have a problem accounting for persuasive effects because one cannot locate the effects of language outside of relations that make up the social formation as a structure in dominance. For Grossberg, a dialectical description (built from Althusser) requires that rhetoric move away from an instrumental/functionalist tendency to imagine influence (persuasion) as a causal relationship in which the words of a rhetor caused some degree of change in an audience. Moreover, even the meaning of persuasion/influence is dependent upon the structure in dominance. Thus, rhetoric will be forced to give up its functional logic of effects to be informed by a dialectical description (242–243).

This too was a rather untimely intervention. Since the immanent-transcendent contradiction describes how language as code and meaning enables rhetorical agency but does so within a situational concern with a functional goal (persuasion), then one might see in the difference between immanence and transcendence two models of rhetorical effect (instrumental and constitutive). An instrumental theory of rhetorical effect speaks to success and failure to move an audience while a constitutive approach allows for a more constructivist (often noted as poetic/aesthetic) use of language that aligns an audience with a political language (a series of symbolic relationships) that creates the environment for persuasion. Recall that persuasion is already being seen as an effect of the ability to craft meaning though symbolic/communicative action (Campbell 1970; Farrell 1976). In other words, rhetorical studies is trying to maintain its interest in the political practice of persuasion as an object unique to rhetoric but increasingly imagine its effects as less instrumental (did it succeed or fail?) so as to emphasize the symbolic environment that generates the potential for persuasion. In so doing, it removes itself from a notion of rhetorical effects unique to success or failure and instead locates any specific rhetorical action into broader cultural conversations that exceed any specific audience or specific goal of the speaker. The constitutive dimension of rhetoric describes how the use of language creatively locates the rhetorical actions of practical affairs within the constitution of social reality, but this social reality may not be operative or taken up by any audience with the authority to act for years to come (if at all). One example is how the exigence (an imperfection marked by

urgency) might be treated as something that comes into being as a social problem through language (constitutive) and the ways and means by which rhetors fail/succeed to bring about audience adherence to the invention (and/or existence) of the social problem (instrumental). For Patton (1979) the immanence-transcendence contradiction is less a contradiction than it is complementary. By 1979/1980, a functionalist approach to the rhetorical situation that took into consideration both the instrumental (persuasion) and the constitutive (constructivist) approaches to language use had been advocated (Patton 1979; Bitzer 1980). But if this immanence/transcendence contradiction is pulled into a complementary notion of rhetorical effects (persuasion/action through constitution of meaning), one cannot quite escape the Althusserian challenge because one needs to account for how both success in persuasion and/or shifts in the meaning of symbolic relationships participate in a structural causality in order to explain how the instrumental and the constitutive overdetermine one another. Many rhetorical scholars will continue to abandon the question of whether explaining successful persuasion was really the purpose of rhetorical criticism even if they posit the existence of persuasion as a social practice to be studied. One might talk about the constitutive power of language, even appeal to Althusser and Grossberg in doing so, by simply displacing a "real audience" and see in the audience an effect of the "ideological" force of language (Charland 1987). Yet, the critic must leave ambiguous how to account for how the constitution of a fictive audience might require more than the social use of language to bring it into being (a concrete real). It would actually take a more direct post-structuralist reading of the rhetorical situation (Biesecker 1989) to displace the logic of influence offered in the wake of the rhetorical situation. Thus, Grossberg is untimely, because there are efforts in rhetorical studies to have both an instrumental and constitutive approach to the question of rhetorical effects in making up a rhetorical situation. But to do so, rhetorical criticism approaches the immanence-transcendence contradiction as complementary as opposed to an overdetermined contradiction affected by different levels of a social totality. Secondly, as the audience is becoming more fictive, an ideological/rhetorical effect of language in use, there is still a logic of influence in play that is not mediated by a structural causality (language has a sovereign power beyond any other determination). Finally, Grossberg was untimely in the sense that he sees the problem that rhetoric would witness in its approach to effects (trying to abandon an interest

in persuasion but nonetheless emphasizing a logic of influence in which a speaker deploys the resources of language to constitutive an audience, problem, world) that would not be fully made visible for ten more years.

DIALECTIC AND RHETORIC III

Finally, the third interpretive mode for dialectics is dialectics as discourse, which is to speak of dialectics as style. This is a particularly dense section theoretically as it moves from Frederic Jameson, Jacques Lacan, Roman Jacobson, and Jacques Derrida. Grossberg describes this tour as a structuralist reading of dialectical discourse. At this point, Grossberg suggests that metaphor is the primary figure of traditional rhetoric. It is how the creative act of a rhetor uses the resources of language to transcend the immanent pole of language. He explicates Jameson's conceptual investment in metaphor only to claim it merely applies a dialectical description to language. Grossberg then moves in more "structural ways" noting Jacobson's distinction between metonymy and metaphor. Grossberg claims that Lacan asserts metaphor as more foundational than metonymy and then Grossberg aligns himself with the importance of metonymy as the proper style of dialectical discourse. He claims that metonymy's ability to disperse the word into new combinations allows it to work dialectically as a mode of articulation. Those familiar with Grossberg's investment in articulation as a "term of art" will recognize how this turn to metonymy to explore the combinations both internal and external to language use also provides an alternative to reading the effects of language off a text (in other words, reading the effect structure as only an effect of language). But to stick closer to this moment, he notes that he may be moving beyond Marxist dialectics when he begins to interpret the style of dialectics as consistent with Derrida's logics of *différance*. From here Grossberg emphasizes dialectics as a moment of self-reflexivity in language that, as a metalanguage, will fail to generate identity out of difference. In this way, Grossberg claims that deconstruction as dialectics is a rhetorical discourse about the rhetoricity of human existence (243-247). Ten years later, this Derridean point of departure would organize Biesecker's (1989) critique of the logic of influence embedded in the concept of the rhetorical situation transforming the rhetorical situa-

tion into an effects structure of language (rhetoric is now fully embedded in the tropological structures of language). In contrast, Grossberg more forthrightly turns against communication.

The importance of dialectics as discourse, which is also to say the figuration of language as figuration, is that it offers a language of nonfunctional effects, but in so doing it reveals more directly what Grossberg thinks is the problem with traditional rhetoric. He is more direct at this stage of his argument. Rhetorical criticism, according to Grossberg, is the reading of rhetorical discourse (persuasion) as communication. One might be tempted to claim that the need for rhetorical scholars to tighten the relationship of rhetoric to communication was especially important as rhetoricians in speech departments found their home in new departments of speech communication (a name change that happened at the University of Illinois in 1973). Rhetoric's situational concern with persuasion yokes it tightly to a communication model, yet its philosophical concern with locating the role of rhetoric within the structure of language is generating anxiety over the fragility of language and/or its ideological power to generate shared meaning (communication) among a polity. Yet as in the second section where dialectics starts to problematize the logic of influence associated with persuasion, a transcendental communication model underwriting rhetorical criticism is put under pressure by a dialectical (structuralist) theory of discourse. First, to imagine rhetorical discourse as communicative requires the structural difference between a speaker (Self) and an audience (Other). They stand in different relationships to discourse (one speaking creatively and the other listening/reading the discourse). But the very relationships and their meaning may be different; in different social formations, their appearance would be the effect of a structural causality. By avoiding the question of how one occupies the status of speaker or audience (or how the social roles are braided together), rhetoric constitutes the object (speaker-persuasive discourse-audience) that it takes for granted as always already existing before the act of criticism. If one assumes that persuasion is a social practice that describes the need for rhetorical criticism one does so with a set of elements that must be in place to describe this social practice (a speaker using language to affect a change in an audience). In this way, rhetorical criticism posits a communicative relationship between speaker and audience as transcendental subjects that, Grossberg claims, are brought together in mutual understanding through language. Moreover, the positing of this transcendental commu-

nicative relationship locates rhetorical criticism in a humanist discourse because it is the promise of free human subjects engaging language that creates a shared reality (247–249).

UNTIMELY CONCLUSIONS

The more rhetorical scholars defend creative rhetors and active audiences using language (symbolic action) to create a shared social reality, the more they find themselves wedded to a transcendental theory of communication. This is why the first conclusion is that rhetoric cannot be a form of Marxist/dialectical critique because the transcendental model of communication (persuasion) is presupposed and not historically contingent. The critique of this transcendental communication model is untimely because this was a point in time when rhetorical theory and criticism was attempting to read Marx into the rhetorical tradition (Wilkie 1976; Farrell and Aune 1979; McGee, 1980). To be sure, Marx has an important role to play in contemporary rhetorical theory. Yet in light of Grossberg's essay, one might re-engage the relationship between rhetoric and Marx with an eye toward how well Marxist inspired rhetorical scholars have abandoned transcendental models of communication (Greene 2004). Moreover, Grossberg is concerned that this transcendental reliance on communication displaces the ability to consider the determinations of the critic. If today those determinations are increasingly imagined as being affected by the theory and/or objects critics read/write and in their embodied reading strategies, it is still not so easy to disarticulate the (academically located) rhetorical critic from the cultural logics of distinction (often in departments of communication). Yet it might be that contemporary concerns with the determinations of the critic risk being treated in ways that fail a dialectical explanation of a structural causality that allows some determinations to have more meaning and importance than others. What is so provocative about Grossberg's claim is that rhetorical studies may be unable to question the role of the communicative model (speaker-audience) that it posits for its purpose without giving up its own traditional concern with persuasion. We might re-read the whole effort to constitute a renaissance in public address (Lucas 1988) after the deconstruction of the rhetorical situation to be just such a desire to reset the primary concern of

rhetorical criticism to this traditional concern of communication, to better defend rhetorical agency (the creative use of language to constitute/invite an audience into a shared reality) as a humanist project.

Grossberg's second untimely conclusion was that rhetoric cannot stand in for a more general process associated with the social construction of reality because it must posit a specific structure of social reality (a communication model) for it to accomplish its task. According to Grossberg, this is because of rhetorical criticism's reliance on metaphoric theory of discourse which in its ability to transcend the old displaces its own determinations of differences (contradictions) that must be articulated to create a unity called rhetorical criticism. The claim here is that rhetoric (and rhetorical studies) must be in relation to its own contradictions/differences and for it to do so requires a more metonymic relationship with its others and not a substitution of one for the other. Put differently, Grossberg is trying to limit rhetoric at the very moment it begins to assert itself as a "hermeneutic meta-discourse" (Gaonkar 1993) incorporating new philosophical touchpoints to escape is own limits (as a persuasive genre of language, as a model of communication, as trope and argument). In so doing, today it continues to expand the number of things in the world (linguistic, symbolic, and otherwise) that can be approached as working on (affecting) the world rhetorically (Stormer 2016). The more rhetorical studies attempts to account for the rhetoricality of everything in the world, it smuggles back in a metaphoric figuration of the world, "as if" all the world (or all the worlds) is/are rhetorical without accounting for the very determinations that contribute to such a metaphoric invention. This ever-expanding notion of world(s) as rhetorical (as all the things of the world are imagined as constituting rhetorical relationships with other things, human and non-human) denies rhetorical studies an outside, something external to it. In 2024, rhetorical studies finds itself negotiating a new contradiction we might call the local-global: How might a critic locate rhetorical practices within concrete local situations while also positing that all worldly relationships are essentially rhetorical, and all worlds are, therefore, rhetorical? The more rhetoric situates itself within the local-global contradiction, the more rhetorical criticism approaches all relations as rhetorical, it risks asserting itself as a transcendental model of relationality unable to account for the difference that rhetoric makes. An untimely meditation, indeed.

NOTE

1. It is worth noting that Grossberg indicates that Burke's alignment of rhetoric with all forms of communication is a metonymic dispersion of rhetoric. However, in the third section of the essay he will critique the traditional form of rhetoric as being metaphoric and, perhaps, suggesting (traditional) rhetoric is unable to be metonymic. Its metaphoric configuration contributes to its appeal to the transcendental subject of communication. Perhaps, another way to think rhetoric beyond its traditional form (as a situational communication model that presupposes the existence of a speaker-audience relationship) is through the dialectical contradiction between metonymy and metaphor. My own work (Greene 1998) advocates a material theory of rhetoric as "technologies of deliberation" dispersed and taken up into different institutional forms of governance. Thus, the need for mapping this dispersion as a "rhetorical cartography" (Greene 1999; Greene and Kuswa 2012; Hayes 2016). This may simply be a way to note Larry's influence on my own work (Greene 2004) as I and others (e.g. Chaput 2010; Bost and May 2016) attempted to think rhetoric without a transcendental model of communication by privileging the metonymic over the metaphoric character of rhetoric.

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From "Telling Better Stories" to the Politics of Immanence for the Legal Left

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1.

Despite the ongoing debates and controversies surrounding human rights as a political theory, rights-based practices have managed to maintain their significance in our political landscape. This endurance can be attributed to the remarkable ability of the human rights movement to inspire and motivate the protection of individuals in need. The inspiration stems from the inherent nature of rights as an immanent force, with their influence and impact permeating throughout society. However, in narrating the story of the immanent potentiality of human rights, there has been an excessive focus on constructing a teleological and often linear historical evolution of rights. The dominant historiography places significant emphasis, often with a sense of awe, on the heroic events of history that led to the modern historical conjuncture through the unwavering moral strength of rights. The periodization of human rights history creates a portrayal of political resilience, encompassing a narrative of progressive transformation in the governance of societies. For example, Paul Gordon Lauren's influential historical account, *The Evolution of International Human Rights: Visions Seen*, is often cited as an illustration of this kind of "consequentialist" perspective on human rights history. "Despite all the formidable odds and forces aligned against them," Lauren (2003) argues, "these [human rights] visions could not be extinguished and those visionaries who saw them refused to be silenced" (2).

Yet other historians of human rights have told a different (conjunctural) story. An alternative human rights discursive historiography has emphasized the selective unfolding of immanent potentials of public morality, duties, and obligations embodied in the state, as well as potentials that were diffused in the public sphere locally and globally. For instance, Micheline Ishay's (2008) *The History of Human Rights: From Ancient Times to the Globalisation Era* outlines a Hegelian understanding of historical contradictions, holding that conflicts between various historical narratives originating from liberal, socialist, and Third World decolonial political discourses have always existed. Meanwhile, the advancement of human rights is situated in the cultural domain of public image displays, epistolary novels, and the publicity surrounding the movement against judicial torture, according to Lynn Hunt's (2007) influential account in *Inventing Human Rights: A History*. According to Hunt, they were about people being moved by cultural experiences of empathy as much as a cultural exchange of grand republican ideas. Since the 17th century, rights have been viewed as self-evident due to a set of assumptions about individual liberty, which in turn encouraged empathy in order for such rights to carry political significance. In addition, Samuel Moyn's (2010) *The Last Utopia: Human Rights in History* has arguably generated more controversy and attention than any other historiographic analysis of human rights. Writing about utopia from a pragmatist perspective, Moyn reminds us at the outset that in any historical narrative, what we actually have is a complex web of people, states, social actors, communities, purposes, and rights. It goes without saying that the concept of human rights is entangled in ambiguity. Telling the conjunctural history about human rights thus entails sorting out competing perspectives in a social and political environment, notwithstanding the misunderstanding as to whether rights are powerful or ineffectual given the many limitations of the regime.

There are many ways to take an excursion of Larry Grossberg's oeuvre for the purpose of generating sustained insights on the problem of telling stories. Grounded in the cultural left, Larry crafted the project of cultural studies through his many works over many years to theorize how matters of culture can contribute to create the possibilities for progressive change. I was fortunate to have the opportunity to take a ride on that particular excursion, and to learn how to use Larry's formulation of the demands of the cultural left to look for social transformation, to "tell better stories," and, along the way, reimagine the political relevance of cultural studies

itself. Long before my decision to pursue a formal study of international law with a self-selected focus on critical legal theory and human rights, Larry's influence shaped my understanding of cultural studies and its potential for progressive political engagement.

In the spring of 1999, thanks to a Rockefeller Fellowship, I had the opportunity to participate in an interdisciplinary program at Columbia University on exploring the intersections of sexuality, gender, health, and human rights. In it, Carol Vance provided a platform to engage with various forms of social, political, cultural, and postcolonial struggles against nonnormative genders and sexualities. Through weekly seminars, a diverse group of participants, including feminists, community representatives, critical-minded scholars, and human rights advocates, gathered in rigorous debates. In retelling this story, I keep recalling how the language of rights, both in formal legalistic terms and in oppositional critiques of the law, colonized our conversations. This predominance, although unintentional, led to a sort of murmur in the room about just how relevant cultural studies was to address human rights violence. Throughout much of this process, I remember mainly keeping quiet. I felt hesitant to speak up or contribute to the discussion for two main reasons: an unfamiliarity with the specialist language of rights and a profound sense of awkwardness due to the perception of the lack of relevance of cultural studies. In other words, when the discussions primarily revolved around legalistic terms and critiques of the law, I became cautious and tentative about how to speak up because I did not feel well-versed in the discourse, but more importantly, because I believed that focusing solely on the legal agenda was far too limiting for the critique. Mainly, I felt that other perspectives, such as those offered by cultural studies, were being overshadowed or simply ignored. Besides, in an environment when the relevance of cultural studies was questioned, I was simply at a loss about how to make an effective or appropriate intervention.

There have been many occasions over the years when Larry and others addressed the apparent lack of relevance of cultural studies. He has addressed struggles caused by the power dynamics and shifts in political and economic systems that undermine progressive desires for a more just and equitable world, especially the long-term projects of conservatism and the reorganization of capitalism, including the expansion of corporate sovereignty, which have resulted in sweeping changes in social structures and values. To these troubles, Larry comments: "For over 25 years,

I have argued that too many progressive intellectuals and oppositional activists have not sufficiently understood what was going on because they were not willing to seriously question their own *theoretical and/or political certainties"* (Grossberg 2018, 861; emphasis added; see also Wood 2019). In advocating for a necessary "relocation" of the field in response to pressing conjunctural struggles, Larry has urged a reinvention by adapting theories and questions to the ever-changing conditions and demands of the shifting political landscape, so as to envision alternative scenarios, outcomes, and strategies for transformative change.

At Columbia, my experience of self-silencing troubled me then and now. In the subsequent years of teaching about human rights, promoting its cause through various cultural interventions, and engaging in relevant advocacy work, I have not stopped grappling with the theoretical and political reductionism prevalent in an environment dominated by (normative) human rights discourse and international law. Far too often, I found myself in an environment steeped in the inherent self-assurance associated with human rights work, with far too little awareness of how this environment might inadvertently perpetuate injury and nationalist ideologies. Most of all, I struggle with the profound level of *theoretical and political certainties* as exhibited even in environments that were critical about human rights (including the program at Columbia). To echo Larry, I wonder how left intellectuals in those environments would do "the difficult work of using theory to engage the world, of putting our own assumptions and certainties—theoretical, empirical and political—at risk" (Grossberg 2018, 864; see also Grossberg 2010). Without an attempt to understand the conjuncture—"its constraints, its openings, its determinations and contradictions, the many trajectories out of which it has arisen" (864)—the legal left might even have allowed human rights to be appropriated as a focal point to justify a variety of damage modes, or even to self-servingly further the human rights profession itself. I wonder how to tell a better story.

2.

The philosophical underpinnings, humanistic principles, political objectives, and cultural or symbolic expressions of human rights can be understood in terms of the politics of immanence (Mandarini 2010; Patton 2012; Schutz 2011). By permeating diverse areas of human existence and influencing not only legal and political systems but also cultural, social,

and symbolic spheres, human rights manifest and unfold in unpredictable and abundant ways. As an immanent force in everyday life, human rights have the capacity to inspire individuals and communities, mobilizing them towards understanding the impact of rights beyond individual rights holders (Skott-Myhre and Tarulli 2010). Human rights exist on a plane of flux, constantly moving between regulation and emancipation before returning to regulation (de Sousa Santos 2002). This inherent dynamism is what makes human rights an enduring and seductive option for living. They challenge us to find spaces for our own creativity and agency within the complex dynamics of state sovereignty. In a world where state power can swing between being paternalistic and attentive, dominating and responsive, and transcendent and immanent, human rights tools offer us the opportunity to decipher the specific relations, contradictions, and differences that are made more livable by rights-based intervention, while knowing that under other relations, those same tools and interventions might in fact generate more hardship and even injustice (Perello and Biglieri 2012). To me, this is precisely a story about potentiality of an immanent horizon of struggle. Fundamentally, telling this story requires us to revisit some basic questions, and I can think of three:

1. What is humanity after all?
2. What is the transnational legal left and what is its political role?
3. What is the role of culture and aesthetics in the political imaginations of change?

These are relevant elements of a different story about human rights that I have been trying to tell.

For left intellectuals, it is important to remind ourselves that just as positive law has the capacity to produce rights that are differently moral, and governments that are differently political, it also possesses the capacity to render the "subjects" of rights as "differently human." Within the post-war legal conjuncture, a whole social sphere of "humans" was patently opened up on display in the International Bill of Rights, comprising the Universal Declaration of human Rights (UDHR), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR). It is important to remember that every term used to describe "the human" in these powerful treaties is legally codified and has legal implications, so it is important not

to let the high-sounding discourse made possible by these legal tools give us the impression that the idea of "the human" is reduced to meaningless repetitions. It is also important to remember that, cliché as it may sound, "the laundry list" has been recited in the constitutions of practically all democratic nations. This is particularly true of the sections that guarantee the right to privacy, personal integrity, self-determination, and protection from discrimination. Pheng Cheah (2006) calls this a "proscription of instrumentality," suggesting that the very existence and maintenance of the state, its sovereignty, and its laws makes humanity possible from within the field of instrumentality (4). In a word, *"the human" is instrumentally humanized through state-based human rights discourses*. Joseph Slaughter (2006) concurs: "[H]uman rights are not the natural rights of human beings as presocial creatures but the positive rights of citizens as incorporated creatures of the state" (1408).

As for the question of the transnational legal left and its political role, one way to tell a better story is to turn to an important public lecture made by Makau Mutua, a Kenyan-American legal scholar, at the ninety-fourth Annual Meeting of the American Society of International Law in 2000. In his opening line, Mutua said: "The regime of international law is illegitimate" (Mutua 2000, 31). He went on to explain, "It is a predatory system that legitimizes, reproduces, and sustains the plunder and subordination of the Third World by the West. Neither universality nor its promise of global order and stability make international law a just, equitable, and legitimate code of global governance for the Third World" (31). At that time, Mutua was teaching law at the State University of New York in Buffalo as Director of the Human Rights Center there, and as an active member of TWAIL (Third World Approaches to International Law). The birth of TWAIL was contemporaneous to the Bandung events (see Mickelson 2008; Chimni 2006). The Bandung spirit that emphasized, among other things, the comparative but conjoined experiences of oppression across the developing world was reflected in other TWAIL scholars. Anghie and Chimni's (2003), for instance, articulated the conception of international law in this way:

> For TWAIL scholars, international law makes sense only in the context of the lived history of the peoples of the Third World. Two important characteristics of TWAIL thinking emerge from this. First, the experience of colonialism and neo-colonialism has made Third World peoples acutely sensitive to power relations among states and to the ways in which any proposed international rule or institution will actually affect the distribution of power between states

> and peoples. Second, it is the actualized experience of these peoples and not merely that of states which represent them in international fora, that is the interpretive prism through which rules of international law are to be evaluated. (78).

Protesting international law's promotion of human rights as the only appropriate route to emancipation and social justice, Balakrishnan Rajagopal, another active TWAIL scholar, mounted his critique of international law from a Third Worldist political perspective. He showed how international human rights law has repeatedly developed so as to contain resistance movements and challenges to Western hegemony while enabling and extending new forms of governance over Third World masses envisioned through colonial tropes of fear and loathing (see Brown and Halley 2002; Coombe 2011; de Sousa Santos 2006). Telling the story of international law's hegemony in this way not only took courage but also does the political work of reconfiguring the entire Westphalian order that undergirds the global human rights regime.

In speaking about telling stories, we of course associate the fact that arts and writing have long been powerful tools for expressing human suffering, documenting social and political cruelty, and articulating community resilience. A great deal of what goes on in the world of human rights that has been *felt* by many is tied to narratives, visual spectacles, and symbolism. Indeed, Adorno and Horkheimer's critical rejection of the "coldness" of the Enlightenment has given us a foundation for thinking through atrocities and human suffering through an ethics of sympathy (see Barreto 2006). While Adorno and Horkheimer did not explicitly extend their reflection on ethics to the field of human rights, Richard Rorty (1994) bridged them by considering what he called "sentimental education," which he argued is an effective strategy to foster human rights culture, with the aim of binding together the philosophical traditions of moral sentiment and contemporary struggles for human rights. What Rorty did was to take the idea of an ethics of affect to the realm of public culture. Sharing the same historical conjuncture of the post-Holocaust era, Adorno, Horkheimer, Rorty, and others associated with the Frankfurt School built a philosophical discourse that would "warm up" post-Enlightenment culture and connect it with the *aesthetic* discourse of human rights crafted as shared human sensibilities.

In fact, literary scholar Joseph Slaughter (2010) discovered that human rights and social justice turned out to be the convergent points in the narrative turn of the social sciences that occurred in the 1990s and the ethical turn of the humanities that had gone on for some time. The ethics and the torturous uncertainties around human rights: these are something that we narrate. Slaughter went so far as to claim that there were historical, ideological, and formal *interdependencies* of the novel form and human rights, in that the twentieth century rise of "world literature" and international human rights law were related phenomena. "Human rights are a culture and a legal regime, as much a matter of literature as of legislation," noted Slaughter (2006, 1419). Today, literature and poems penned by prisoners, refugees, and political exiles; political art exhibited in galleries; and novels and memoirs written by those involved in humanitarian efforts have kept human rights struggles visible in public culture. In addition, international, city-based, and school-centered human rights film festivals and curricula are a mainstay of rights advocacy today.

However, in the wide range of cultural representational works on human rights, primacy is often given to "telling the truthful story," although imaginative/creative representations are encouraged. Perhaps this makes sense in an effort to prevent zealous filmmakers from turning a human rights story into sensationalism. Yet despite the good intentions behind using arts to promote human rights consciousness, there are deep-seated questions about the relationship between the aesthetics of truth and the ethics of "truth-making." Human rights violations can result in a bewildering variety of images of agony. Filmmakers, authors, and photojournalists frequently rush to get this "perfect image" and that "perfect narrative" as a conflict develops in order to portray the human rights abuses taking place in a particular setting. Since creative representations of human rights occupy a space between ethics and art, it is not hard to conclude that depictions of suffering are torturously ambiguous when it comes to creating a political awareness of human rights (see Erni 2022; Sodaro 2018).

I briefly delved into the issues of humanity, the role of intellectuals, and culture because these have been longstanding concerns for Larry. While Larry has not directly spoken extensively about human rights or the political dynamics between rights-based politics and emancipatory left politics, there are some exceptions. In *We All Want to Change the World* (2015), he acknowledged the conservative politics of the Right that trig-

gered backlash against civil rights, particularly abortion rights, and the strengthening of property rights and gun ownership. He also recognized the successes of the broader human rights movement, such as the achievement of marriage equality for the LGBTQ+ community. However, it is through Larry's recognition of the blind spots of cultural studies, his advocacy for intellectuals to embrace contingency, complexity, and experimentation (see Spiegel 2019), his call to imagine alternative futures, and, most importantly, his consistent rejection of transcendence in favor of immanence, that his influence becomes highly relevant to the human rights struggle. In order to fully appreciate Larry's contributions, it is crucial to highlight how his ideas can inform and shape the fight for human rights.

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Interdisciplinarity, Creativity, and Passion: A Brief Story

MAXIMILIAN SPIEGEL

Cultural studies often articulates uneasy and precarious, creative and (happily) parasitic modes of existence in and across different institutional contexts. It usually does so out of necessity: it cannot know in advance which research tools respond best to the demands of the conjuncture. Its experimental opening to the unknown can be at odds with established institutional structures (from individualized plans of study to conservative funding preferences), but it also encourages the creative articulation and re-articulation of such structures. Part of the appeal of cultural studies, certainly in Larry's sense, is its fostering of creativity, intellectual curiosity, and openness.

Larry's thought famously emphasizes the necessity of interdisciplinarity for cultural studies. His writing articulates rigor to creativity and embodies the passion—the affective charge, the intense draw—of intellectual practice. In this brief piece, I want to illustrate these dimensions of Larry's work and its transdisciplinary, transnational appeal once more, roughly following a personal-autobiographical trajectory.[1]

In the mid-2000s, I was a student of political science and history at the University of Vienna, Austria. Both majors were based in heterogeneous programs that offered numerous points of connection to other intellectual formations. I also enrolled in a sizeable elective program in cultural studies and (broadly defined) *Kulturwissenschaften* that embodied a bold, adventurous spirit, encouraging students to take classes not just in different departments but at several different universities in Vienna. Two of Larry's peers traversing these diverse programs and disciplinary fields fostered my own engagement with cultural studies: Christina Lutter, a historian of medieval and early modern times with a strong investment in cultural and gender studies, who taught core courses in the elective program; and

Roman Horak, a cultural sociologist at the University of Applied Arts, whose teaching appointments in political science made him an obvious point of contact for me.[2]

Thanks to these mentors and the elective program, I encountered cultural studies as an intellectual formation that always already works between and across institutions and disciplinary fields. Of course, multidisciplinary exchanges do not necessarily lead to genuinely interdisciplinary work. Still, it seems telling that I would access Larry's research and, later, pursue a doctorate in communication studies with him as a result of such diverse and sometimes surprising encounters. Like the work of his own mentors (think of Stuart Hall!), Larry's research and pedagogy plant seeds in areas of intellectual practice well beyond those disciplinary fields (e.g., communication studies) or themes (e.g., readings of popular-cultural texts) with which cultural studies is most commonly associated at any given moment.

After all, on the very last page of *Cultural Studies in the Future Tense*, Larry calls cultural studies "an invitation . . . into the experimentation of collaboration, into a self-reflective practice of translation and transformation, and into an uncertain effort to build new institutional spaces" (Grossberg 2010, 294). This passage strikes me as representative of the experimental "sensibility" (Grossberg 1992) and work ethic of cultural studies as Larry understands it, which I have detailed elsewhere (Spiegel 2019). As a scholar of music, I first engaged with Larry's work due to the relevance of music to many of his earlier writings, but it was this book—which followed his turn away from matters of music—that had the greatest impact on me. When I first read *Cultural Studies in the Future Tense* (in its German version, as handed to me by—of course—Christina Lutter), I was struck by Larry's emphasis on rigor, complexity, contingency, and the absence of "guarantees" in research (Hall 2021); and, crucially, I was drawn to this rigor's articulation to a strong sense of passion and, at key moments, to an embrace of creativity.

When Larry published *Cultural Studies in the Future Tense*, he simultaneously called it his "grumpiest" and "most optimistic book." It criticizes cultural studies research that neglects the demands of the conjuncture. Simultaneously, the book embodies the optimistic "belie[f] that ideas do matter in efforts to change the world" (Grossberg qtd. in Cornut-Gentille D'Arcy 2010, 119)—the belief that appropriately rigorous work can map and help access realms of potential. The book is, indeed, an "invitation . .

. into an uncertain effort," one aligned with the necessarily "gray," hard work of Foucault's genealogy (Foucault 1984, 76; cf. Lutter and Reisenleitner 2002); but even as *Cultural Studies in the Future Tense* eagerly sets high standards and challenges scholarly habit, it always returns to an affirmation of change, an exciting "embrace [of] that which is not yet" (Grossberg 2010, 226). Larry avoids—even warns against—an ahistorical fetishization of creativity and experimentation (Grossberg 2015), but his writing holds on to a remarkably positive charge, a desire for transformation and, in a way, a great love of the world precisely in the world's multiplicity, complexity, and contingency: its actual existence and/as its constitutive potential to become otherwise.

Larry's passion for the potentials of different futures requires creative and experimental scholarship that supports the difficult (popular and political) work towards such futures (Spiegel 2019). The passion of scholarly work cannot be contained by institutional demands. Larry actively refuses the "separation of passion and knowledge," because: "how can anyone who cares about the world, and about the role of knowledge in shaping that world, simply put aside their passion?" (Grossberg qtd. in Cornut-Gentille D'Arcy 2010, 112). Simultaneously, if scholarly notions of rigor—manifest as "academic" writing—are often disparaged for their supposed dryness and "gray" character, Larry again and again articulates rigor to the passion of good scholarship and storytelling. Amidst any supposed "grumpiness," this much always remains clear: "much like rock, [cultural studies] has always been for me empowering and enabling, and like rock, it is always fun" (Grossberg 1997, 22). An embrace of the world is easily aligned with a desire to engage in "the study of relationships between elements in a whole way of life" (Williams 2011, 67); Larry constantly draws on and exemplifies the excitement of such an enormous but rewarding task.

For Larry, affect, in the sense of "the energy invested in particular sites [and] a description of how and how much we care about them" (Grossberg 1992, 397), can grant empowerment—can "enable one to go on, to continue to struggle to make a difference" (85). Reading Larry's books—and especially *Cultural Studies in the Future Tense*—has long given me a sense of sustenance and stamina, a desire to do (read, think, write) more. There are, then, at least three ways scholarship's affective charge operates in Larry's work as I encountered it, or three mutually articulated and articulating charges that drew me in; they relate to risk, creativity,

and rigor. Experimentation—and, again, Larry's practice is tied closely to an experimental embrace of the unknown—always carries certain risks, most notably that of outright failure; perhaps cultural studies' absence of guarantees imparts a certain thrill of the unpredictable. More importantly, Larry's call for scholarly experimentation, with its investment in research that does not predetermine its conclusions, can offer a thrill of creativity and of the articulation of the new. But the creativity—and, for that matter, the risks—of experimentation should not be fetishized; therefore, rigor is indivisible from creativity, grounding and supporting it while controlling risk. Rigor is not merely a weight that keeps risk shut out and restrains creative practice from flying too close to the sun. It is itself exciting and helps prepare the ground for optimism! By opening cultural studies to the unpredictable even as he, again and again, emphasizes the hard work of conjunctural analysis, Larry exalts the rewards of rigor—of an attunement to complexity, a dedication to conjunctural specificity. Like Foucault, Larry is not afraid to affirm the grayness evoked by the hard work of rigor; but aspiring scholars may recognize their work ethic in rigor's enablement of the release of a multitude of colors (in all their complex, contradictory, and curious combinations)—the "job of opening up the possibilities of changing the contemporary world" (Grossberg qtd. in Cornut-Gentille D'Arcy 2010, 119).

The articulation of rigor to creativity and passion is a key element of Larry's work and a driving force for cultural studies well beyond his individual oeuvre. It speaks to the often-denied or neglected affective charge of research, of scholarship, because it solicits a type of affective investment in hard intellectual work, in the complexity and complications of interdisciplinary work; and it does so always with that glimpse of creative potential in view—opening to an unknown that is also knowable (Spiegel 2019). This type of sentiment resonated so strongly as to make my personal move across the Atlantic, from the University of Vienna to UNC-Chapel Hill, a very logical step in my life. All autobiography aside, the complex charge of Larry's intellectual practice will continue to help actualize difficult, passionate, and vital projects across disciplinary and geographical borders.

NOTES

1. I presented an earlier version of these remarks as part of a panel discussion in honor of Larry jointly organized by UNC-Chapel Hill's Cultural Studies program and Department of Communication. I am grateful to David Monje for the invitation and to the panel's moderator, Eric King Watts, as well as my fellow presenters—Preston Adcock, Nicholas Gerstner, and Megan M. Wood—for their contributions.

2. Historians Andrea Griesebner and Siegfried Mattl significantly informed my interdisciplinary trajectory as well.

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Feminist Meets Grossberg: Agonistic Engagements

PATTY SOTIRIN

I have been a feminist scholar throughout my career and it was feminism that brought me back to the academy a decade after my Bachelors degree. In this essay, I reflect on how those deeply held commitments have been advanced and challenged by the philosophical tools Larry put on offer through his teaching and scholarship. What I describe is a mode of "agonistic engagement" with Larry's thought and published work that has provoked me to "sharpen the critical insights and political value" of my arguments and projects.[1] Larry characterizes his own cultural studies pedagogy "as the practice of a particular sort of conversation, one that is always multiple, complex, fluid, and ongoing but also, one that seeks not consensus but a dissensual 'unity-in-difference'" (Grossberg 2022, 4). For me, such "dissensual conversations" have not been classroom interactions but the challenges that Larry's thought and writing pose to my own ideas and arguments, more often than not instigating productive, reflective self-interrogations. I think of these engagements not as "dissensual" but as agonistic, a way of enacting intellectual life through adversarial—reciprocal, respectful, ongoing, contestational—challenge.[2] I sketch three such engagements and the value of those challenges for enhancing the quality of my thinking and the strength of my convictions. The first is a project framed by the work of Laclau and Mouffe; the second entails feminist appropriations of Deleuzian concepts, particularly rhizomes and becomings; and the third is my critical reframing of autoethnography's *raison d'etre* as Deleuzian-informed radical specificity. In the context of this volume, these recollections attest to Larry's incisive influence not just on my scholarship but on that of a multitude of scholars.

FEMINISM AND COUNTER-HEGEMONIC STRUGGLE

In 1985, I took Larry's Comm 438 seminar at the University of Illinois as a visiting grad student from Purdue. It was intellectually demanding, intense, and impactful. He assigned a mountain of dense philosophical and radical sociological writing including *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Toward a Radical Democratic Politics* by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (1985). This book fired my imagination. As a feminist, I did not have difficulty re-envisioning the arguments for countering hegemonic discursive formations by rearticulating dominant power relationships. What better example of a tenacious and oppressive hegemonic formation than heteronormative-patriarchal-capitalist bureaucracy?

My research focused on the pink-collar subordination of secretaries who were, almost exclusively, women office workers. As a feminist and a previous career secretary, I took issue with the commonplace perception that secretaries were complicit with their own subordination and unlikely to mount any substantive resistance (witness their historic failure to unionize).[3] Drawing on *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, I argued that prevailing constructions of secretarial compliance relied too heavily on models bound to theoretically-fixed antagonisms: labor/capital; owner/worker; manager/employee; gentility/incivility; and, ultimately, heteronormativity/deviance; masculinity/femininity. Following Laclau and Mouffe, I argued that the democratic promise of equality articulates those relations as sites of struggle. The problem, I thought, was a failure to recognize the discursive instability of such hegemonic antagonisms.[4] The poststructuralist arguments of feminist theorists like de Lauretis (1990) and Butler (1990) offered an alternative to the reductive antagonisms that seemed to bind secretaries to their subordination: an eccentric subject position that troubled the polarities of their constitutive contradictions and admitted resistance as vacillations and ambivalences. Importantly, while reproducing hegemonic configurations, secretaries also engage in too readily overlooked practices like "bitching" that riddle their everyday work lives with critical awareness, refusals, and nascent resistances (Sotirin and Gottried 1999). In the end, my introduction to Laclau and Mouffe in Larry's class framed an engagement with feminist poststructuralist conceptions of the subject and gave me a way to address a moment in critical organizational studies when resistance "from the crawlspaces" was newly entertained (cf. Jermier, Knights, and Nord 1994) and feminist scholars were mounting counter-hegemonic gender troubles.

However, I distinctly recall that according to Larry, Laclau and Mouffe were "smart but wrong." I take his objections as twofold: first, a wrongheaded focus on hegemonic formations constituted through lack and second, a focus on articulating struggle around position-based identities like "the people" or "secretary." Of the first, Larry has argued against predefined historical-material formations riddled by the force of absence, championing instead a study of conjunctural and affective forces (Grossberg 2010a). Of the second, Larry has long objected to identity-based politics as such. Although a second-wave feminist assault on the gendered presumptions of cultural critics was clearly central to reckonings across the disciplines, including a rethinking of psychoanalytic and material-political conceptions of hegemony (cf. Irigaray 1985; Jardine 1985; or from another angle, Hartsock 1989; Smith 1987), the tendency to read women's collective subjugation and resistance off sociohistorical positions or discursively constructed solidarities has proven reductive and untenable (Spelman 1990). Nonetheless, at the time, I thought Laclau and Mouffe's discursive methodology and radical democratic project were exciting, useful, and even a viable basis for energizing collective resistances.[5] Still . . . does rearticulating the discursive antagonisms of hegemonic struggle really get us to a better place? I began to think about feminist struggle not as a counter-hegemonic strategy but as a becoming.

ANIMATIONS AND CONJUNCTURES: THE FACE OF BREASTFEEDING

Although I was introduced to Deleuze and Guattari's work from *Anti-Oedipus* (1977) and *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987) during Larry's seminar, I did not pay focused attention until I returned to *Thousand Plateaus* with an informal reading group including Jennifer Slack, Gordon Coonfield, and Christa Albrect-Crane. At our weekly meetings, we read through the book aloud and then discussed what we'd read. I strongly commend this practice of communal reading although it took us over a year to get through Plateaus 1–8 (we didn't get beyond that; we had to read the rest on our own!). Eventually, we decided to propose a National Communication Association (NCA) conference panel, each of us working through some implication of *Thousand Plateaus* for our own projects and concerns. For me, this became an effort to work through Plateau 7, "Faciality," as a feminist political resource.

The papers led to an edited collection, *Animations (of Deleuze and Guattari)*, edited by Jennifer Daryl Slack (2003). As she put it in the book's Preface, we wanted to engage in what Charles Stivale called "animations":

> Our goal has been to enliven the work of Deleuze and Guattari by using their vocabulary and concepts to find new and invigorating ways to engage scholarship and life. (vii)

Animations became my warrant, allowing me to move beyond reverence in order to experiment with strange ideas about feminist politics. My chapter, "Suckling Up to the BwO" (Sotirin 2003), offered a Deleuzian-Guartarrian reframing of feminist arguments about women's embodied oppressions, maternal choices, and contradictory social dictums about breast-feeding. The breast, I argued, is a Face configured by tenacious cultural-religious significances, psychoanalytic neuroses, and corporeal-material intensities. Citing the ubiquity of the "bonding" hormone oxytocin throughout the organic world, I called for a molecular feminist politics of breastfeeding as a line of becoming from becoming-woman to becoming-animal to becoming-molecular.

Feminist readings of Deleuzian concepts as affirmative, productive, and vitalist were central to my conceptualization. The feminist politics of breastfeeding that I envisioned engaged not only in confrontations with the Face of breastfeeding but with "the affirmation of multiplicities, specificities, and embodied possibilities of self-formation" (Bray and Colebrook 1998, 58). Rather than the conventional strategies of feminist politics that too readily become mired in confrontations with binarisms—male/female, mind/body, nature/culture, subject/object, interior/exterior—a molecular feminist politics, in Claire Colebrook's words, animates a "Deleuzian spirit of positive becoming" energizing "a way of thinking new modes of becoming—not as the becoming of some subject, but a becoming towards others, a becoming towards difference, and a becoming through new questions" (Colebrook 2000, 12) that is especially resonant with "the peculiar modality of feminist questions and the active nature of feminist struggle" (8).

Further, I argued this feminist take on the politics of becoming entails a radical reconceptualization of interpersonal communication as rhizomatic that escapes the primacy of face-to-face, Self-to-Other interactions.[6] I found in *Thousand Plateaus* an implicit conception of communicative relationality that escaped the field's preoccupations with the constitutiveness of signification, interpretation, and subjectivity to affirm the proliferation of immanent becomings. Deleuze and Guattari describe a line of becoming

that animates communication as an unspecified love: “a nonsubjective, living love in which each party connects with unknown tracts in the other without entering or conquering them, in which the lines composed are broken lines” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 189). What an intriguing invitation to become otherwise.

However, Larry’s preface to our animation collection pointed out our uneven experiments with concepts and possibilities: “The heterogeneous essays collected here are marked by different styles, different ‘Deleuze and Guattaris,’ as it were, and different practices of animation” (Grossberg 2003, 3). Most critically, he noted that the essays in *Animations* did not so much animate as rearticulate Deleuzian-Guattarian thought, ethics, and commitments: they “leave Deleuze and Guattari to become something else” (2003, 4). I take this to be an admonishment but not just about distorting Deleuzian concepts. Instead, there was a more critical point: our enthusiasm for what these concepts could bring to our own projects failed to consider how those concepts themselves called into question our projects. As Larry advised in a later essay, it is not about adapting Deleuzian-Guattarian concepts so much as “putting ‘our own assumptions, observations and values to the test of empirical complexities and political possibilities’” (Grossberg 2014, 12). Such experimentations might go well beyond enthusiastic appropriations.

In 2003, I presented my breastfeeding paper at Conjunctures, a small conference of cultural studies scholars and Larry’s students. Larry expressed his displeasure with the way feminists had appropriated Deleuzian ideas to fashion an affirming politics of life. His concerns, as I understand them, were twofold. I will engage with the first in relation to my work on breastfeeding but the second pertains both to the breastfeeding project and to my critique of autoethnographic studies, which I will detail momentarily. In response to my breastfeeding presentation, Larry objected to my well-intended extrapolations of Deleuzian-Guattarian concepts in the service of a project to energize a molecular feminist politics and to reread communication as rhizomatic and becoming. In another context, he expressed his concern about the tendency “to ‘fetishize’ . . . particular kinds of resistance, assuming that the only ‘true’ resistance is always ‘molecular’” (Grossberg n.d., 21). Fair enough: calling for a molecular politics is different than actually doing the empirical work of mapping such forces.

Admittedly, my appropriations willfully manipulated dense discussions to ferret out aspects that would work for my purposes. I take this to be akin to a charge Larry made about affect scholars in a 2016 paper authored with Bryan Behrenshausen: too many scholars mine well-regarded philosophical and theoretical classics by engaging in "highly strategic readings, some of which (following Deleuze) do some degree of violence to the work" (Grossberg and Behrenshausen 2016, note 4, 43). The issue is not so much that there is violence to the work as though only philosophically pristine readings are allowed but that radical impacts and implications are sabotaged when concepts are reframed as too-familiar, too easily reduced, decontextualized, and rendered (ironically) reproductive. Such moves risk reinscribing binarisms and deploying concepts as abstractions rather than as "tools for more contextually concrete analytic and transformative work" (Grossberg n.d., 16), thereby undermining "the ability to map the very complexity, the multi-dimensionality, the multi-structured becomings, that are reality for Deleuze and Guattari" (Grossberg n.d., 17). For a molecular feminist politics, the lure of adversarial engagements with well-established formations—Oedipal, capitalist, patriarchal, colonialist—may too readily reterritorialize familiar struggles.

AUTOETHNOGRAPHIC SINGULARITIES

Animating Deleuzian-Guattarian concepts in the service of feminist struggles remained a feature of my subsequent work. Is this a domestication? Perhaps. But I do so in part because I am convinced of the potency of their formulations, and in part because I feel compelled to bring the sophistication of their analyses to bear on the projects my colleagues and I have undertaken in feminist ethnographic communication studies. I will detail one particular project that involves thinking differently about what qualitative feminist autoethnography might do (Sotirin 2010) and the "agonistic conversations" with Larry's work that its assumptions and ambitions have inspired.

The project began as a critique of evocative autoethnography in humanistic studies and especially motherhood studies.[7] I came to question autoethnography's epistemic claims to empathic recognition, introspective confession, and narrative veracities because the grounding entreaty to come to "know how I feel" disregards the affective specificities and the "thisness" of experience. Rather, autoethnographic writing and read-

ing narrativize the traumatized, deviant, and bereft self in order to evoke empathic, affective recognition and frame everyday experiences within cultural and political contexts. The feminist insight that the "personal is political" is too often refigured as "the political is personal," a point Larry has made about the affective turn in contemporary cultural analyses and the failure to develop more complex, conjunctural projects (cf. Grossberg 2020; 2022). I found myself warning against intelligible narratives and condoning instead Deleuzian incommunicability as critical to autoethnographic inquiries: "For as we perceive, construe, and act on life as comprehensible, perceptible, amenable to representation, and conducive to our own purposes and projects, we impose limits, eschew possibilities, and stabilize lines and flows" (Sotirin 2010, para. 7.4). Privileging what can be understood and shared across our experiences, I warned, blights the *raison d'etre* of autoethnography.

Instead, I proposed that the politics and vision of autoethnography might be reconceived as a Deleuzian-informed "radical specificity," emphasizing "differences and incommensurabilities rather than similarities and recognition" (2010, para. 6.10). The struggle is not epistemic but ontological: "The goal is not to evoke a sense of empathy, cultural insight, or deep significance but to confront us with the *radical specificity* of living a life, not in the sense that we all live our own lives but in the sense that life is lived in the flows, multiplicities, and provisionality of each moment, event, emotion" (2010, para. 6.2). The point is not to evoke empathy through a poignant story that then points an accusatory finger at extant structures of power and relations of injustice but to follow errant details and affective flows—"the plethora of sensations, vibrations, movements, and intensities that constitute both our world and ourselves" (Grosz 2001, 171)—across thresholds of intelligibility in order to move beyond the horizons of sensibility, relationality, and agency toward what else is possible.

In other words, I encouraged autoethnographers to affirm difference, map affective vitalities and rhizomatic flows, and embrace autoethnographic incommunicabilities:

> In the end, my argument is that autoethnography must become distinctively critical, creative, and affirming: for it is in the complexities and radical specificities of difference that autoethnography opens us to the myriad possibilities of living, acting, and being beyond what we think we share. (Sotirin 2010, para. 7.5)

With regard to motherwriting, my hope was that feminist autoethnographic writing might engage the affective singularities of mothering bodies, experiences, and relationships, remapping the affective-material landscape of mothering in order to undermine cultural formations of motherhood and draw us into heretofore unimagined possibilities for mothering relationalities, intensities, and becomings.

To my dismay, subsequent motherwriting uptakes of my argument centered on the idea that the mothering self might be affirmed in her "radical specificity" as an act of maternal authenticity and resistance. I must admit that such responses instantiate Larry's objections to the "humanization" of Deleuzian-Guartarrian "anti-humanist ontology" especially vitalism and becoming (cf. Grossberg 2003, 4), objections that are applicable to both my breastfeeding and radical specificity arguments. I premised these arguments on feminist work that emphasized "becoming otherwise" as a positive and productive lived trajectory (Colebrook 2000; Grosz 1994) as well as on vitalist animations of affect (Massumi 2002). Yet it seems that such conceptions are too readily appropriated into popularized assertions of coming-to-know-oneself that reiterate tenets of neoliberal autonomy and the postmodern plasticity of self-identity.

I may have also contributed to a politics of self-empowerment that undermines my efforts to realize a molecular feminist politics. Here I have in mind Larry's concerns about the "fashionable" yet thinly theoretical and dehistoricized mobilizations of affect and vitalism:

> One might even say that affect has become something of a fetish—a kind of magical signifier, as if it were the missing key (one excluded by a white, heteronormative Enlightenment) to unlock the mysteries of power, as if it were both the condition of possibility of the actual and the essence of actuality itself, both the particular and the generic. (Grossberg and Behrenshausen 2016, 5).

I understand. Yet such indictments give too little credit to both the promise and hope of appropriations like mine that seek to map affective dynamics in order to enliven feminist agendas of transformation, whether through autoethnography or other genres of inquiry.

Yet I wonder: Have I proffered affect as the key to "mysteries of power"? I take this as a serious concern given my commitments to feminism as a vital politics of the personal. What can such a politics do if affective energies dissipate into magical promises? Further, while I recognize that Deleuzian rearticulations pose an implicit deterritorializing threat

to second-wave commitments, I have not been ready to pursue the more radical implications of these tools for alt-feminist assemblages that, in Larry's words, "would allow for a radically contextual anti-universalist productive and imaginative empiricism" (Grossberg 2014, 19). I suspect he would find that my articulation of the beset mother doesn't go far enough in contextualizing anxiety as a feature of the contemporary affective landscape, what he has called the "passive nihilism" of cultural-political struggle (Grossberg 2018, 93; 98-100). Still, autoethnographic motherwriting can show us what mothering anxiety feels like, the palpable and inchoate fears and dreams that energize or overwhelm our capacities for change and illuminate small possibilities for living differently.

This is what Lauren Berlant and Kathleen Stewart (2022) suggest as they muse together about rendering Deleuzian concepts and affect theory into politically acute strategies responsive to where we find ourselves. Rather than intelligible, evocative narratives, they encourage writing about "scenes of life that are ideas of life," foregoing claims of significance in favor of "a fractal, fractious narrative. . . a story sense that stretches the social and political into a resource for living" (Berlant and Stewart 2022, 1). Similarly, my hope is that autoethnographic motherwriting might remap the affective features of mothering, deterritorializing stock cultural-psychic figures like the self-sacrificing or the abusive mother and compulsory relations of motherlove and motherblame to explore radical specificities and follow errant details that disrupt, reanimate, or create lines of flight beyond what we know and feel of love and despair, care and abuse, tenderness and violence. These are small struggles indeed; nonetheless, such struggles matter for there is much at stake in advancing feminist hopes for justice and love.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

The 1985 seminar remapped my ambitions as a feminist and critical cultural scholar. Likewise, my adventures with Deleuzian-Guattarian concepts reshaped my scholarship and my feminism. My projects have been sharpened by Larry's insistence on thinking through theory, engaging the politics of scholarship and culture, and doing intellectual work that matters because "it is a vital component of the struggle to change the world and to make it more humane and just" (Grossberg 2010a, 5-6). The lesson, reinforced whenever I read Larry's work or hear him speak, is that

scholarly critique matters not only to counter oppression but to imagine better worlds. Larry's work has challenged me to realize such purposes; my ongoing "agonistic engagements" with his thinking and writing have unfailingly prompted deep scholarly introspection and, more often than not, considerable rewriting.

What I have described as Larry's pedagogical agonism has affected an expansive community of students, both those who studied with him and those who learned from him at a distance through his publications and presentations. We have all come to know that the tools he has advanced are difficult while the risks of misunderstandings and misappropriations are all too easy. I like to think that the limitations in my work are openings in themselves to revisit what is on offer: "new kinds of intellectual and political labor, and new kinds of cooperation and conversation, which embrace multiplicities . . . and the possibilities of producing other realities, otherwise" (Grossberg n.d., 27). As a feminist scholar, that's a compelling vision for engaging with these tools and braving, again and again, the provocations of agonistic encounters.

In the conclusion to his *Animations* Preface, Larry wrote what for me is an invitation: "The essays in this volume are searching for tools, voices, and concepts that will allow us to understand the making of the present as the becoming of the future. They all turn to Deleuze and Guattari, perhaps out of a sense of frustration at the limits of the thinking we have inherited, perhaps out of a sense of joy at the thinking they offer us" (Grossberg 2003, 7–8). Feminists are well advised to heed his impatient exhortation to think differently, to "construct more complex maps of what is going on in the world" in order to find better ways to change it (2015, 261). For me, his signature mode of agonistic engagement has been an ongoing provocation to do more careful thinking, make more sophisticated arguments, and imagine more creatively the feminist possibilities for our collective futures.

NOTES

1. My thanks to a perceptive editor for suggesting that agonism might be an apt description. I adopt this phrasing with cautious enthusiasm.

2. Agonistic engagement resonates with the interactions that Chantal Mouffe (2014) envisions for democratic debate, and that Larry has proffered as a conversational practice of political hope that he calls "dissensual conviviality" (2015, 260) or "convivial agonism," using "language, art, and culture to forge unities-in-difference" toward changing the world (2018, 152).

3. The secretarial position—and, in more recent years, the administrative aide—was the dominant occupational role for women throughout the twentieth century. In the first decades of the twentieth-first century, this dominance has been eroded not through the assertion of labor rights but by a slew of office technologies that have made the secretarial position all but redundant.

4. I came to this conclusion by following Laclau's (1977) analysis of "the people" as an unstable articulation and the strategies that he and Chantal Mouffe (1985) discussed for rearticulating the people to a socialist hegemonic formation: "Our thesis is that it is only from the moment when the democratic discourse becomes available to articulate the different forms of resistance to subordination that the conditions will exist to make possible the struggle against different types of inequality" (Laclau and Mouffe 1985, 154). Turning to women's struggles for equal rights and freedoms, they noted, "There are therefore a plurality of discursive forms of constructing an antagonism on the basis of the different modes of women's subordination" (168).

5. Note Mouffe's subsequent feminist activism in Europe (Mouffe 1995; Martin 2013).

6. I want to acknowledge with gratitude the opportunity Charles Stivale gave me to flesh out these ideas in a chapter in his collection *Gilles Deleuze: Key Concepts* (Stivale 2005; 2011) and especially the revised version in the second edition of that collection (Sotirin 2005; 2011).

7. Evocative autoethnography is characterized by introspective inquiry into "epiphanies" of personal experience, linking the personal to the cultural, using evocative writing, engaging in "self-reflexivity" in order to critique the status quo and reveal ways to negotiate lived traumas, grief, or struggles and their residual memories, emotions, and relational impacts (Ellis, Adams and Bochner 2011).

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A Philosophical Attitude: Thinking with Lawrence Grossberg

PRESTON ADCOCK

For the past fifty years, Lawrence Grossberg has wrestled with philosophy. He has taught with it, fought with it, rejected it, and, for better or worse, let it become a part of himself. In that wrestling, Larry has produced incredibly brilliant, insightful, and politically relevant work that attempts to meet the demands of the cultural studies project he theorizes: to meet people where they are and move with them toward a better way of living.

In fact, Larry embodies the project and practice of cultural studies through his philosophical attitude: his peculiarly stubborn attempt to think according to the demands and complexities of the context and his almost equally stubborn effort to cultivate an intimate familiarity with the history of philosophy and the co-constitutive relationship among ideas, practices, and contexts. This attitude is visible in the ways he uses philosophy to concretize the commitments and project of cultural studies. Larry's philosophical attitude, guided by a radical desire to write for the other, has led him to have a profound effect on his students, his colleagues, and on those trying to take up and articulate new kinds of relations, formations, institutions, and practices.

Rather than becoming engulfed by merely responding to or arguing against various abstract philosophical positions, Larry uses philosophy to develop the project of cultural studies both methodologically and politically, thereby making cultural studies itself more concrete. For example, in Larry's spring 2017 course on cultural studies, the first graduate seminar I attended at UNC, Larry used philosophy to help his students better understand the conditions of possibility of Donald Trump's election. Since that time, nearly every intellectual conversation, seminar, and meeting

I have had with Larry reflects that practice. Some of my best memories with Larry (a.k.a. Doc Rock) include sitting outside on "the smoking wall" discussing the role philosophy and its companion in thinking, theory, play in cultural studies, in the movement of ideas, and in the production of common sense. Following Marx (Marx 1993; Hall 2010), theory is a way of doing intellectual work that often begins with the investigation of some empirically specific problem. It then moves from that problem through theory to come back to the empirical.

Philosophy, as opposed to theory, is less easily defined by a steady engagement with the concrete. Unlike theory, the specificity of the empirical or a particular empirical object does not always define philosophy's focus and reach. Perhaps this is why those that try to define philosophy do so in largely poetic flourishes. Some of Larry's favorites include:

- "Philosophy is an attitude of mind toward doctrines ignorantly held" (Whitehead 1938, 233).
- "Philosophy is a peculiarly stubborn effort to think clearly" (James 1975, 296).
- Philosophy "[shows] the fly the way out of the fly bottle" (Wittgenstein 1967, 103).
- "Philosophy is that thinking with which one can start nothing and about which housemaids necessarily laugh" (Heidegger 1967, 3).
- "...being a [human], [s]he is preoccupied with the Universe, that is to say, [s]he philosophizes, well or poorly, spontaneously or with care for technique, in a fashion which may be barbarous or may be cultivated" (Ortega y Gasset 1964, 74).

Larry's fundamental commitment is that ideas do matter, and better ideas make a difference.

Often assumed to be too abstract for practical purposes, Larry's work displays the practical uses of philosophy. While not always obvious, one can see philosophy in every piece Larry has written. Sometimes this is through citation. For example, one might think of his magnum opus, *Cultural Studies in the Future Tense* (Grossberg 2010) or his theorizations of affect (Grossberg 2014; Grossberg and Behrenshausen 2016), postmodern sensibilities (Grossberg 2000; Grossberg 2015b), and conservatisms (Grossberg 2018), all of which are clearly indebted to the work of Deleuze

and Guattari, the pragmatists, Nietzsche, Marx, and Gramsci. Other philosophical influences, like Heidegger, are less clear because they are not always cited but inform *how* Larry thinks.

ENGAGING THE HISTORY OF PHILOSOPHY

There is a tendency in the contemporary moment to throw out thinkers—like Heidegger, for example—because of their politics. A philosophical attitude begins by assuming that ideas are not responsible for those who hold them. In our current context, people are anxious, the left is losing, and the US and many other parts of the world are caught in the "Great Moving Right Show" (Hall 2017). People feel "stuck" (Grossberg 2015b; Hage 2015), like we are continuously fighting the same battles, anxiously living in a moment that does not feel real, that feels like time itself has gone wrong, as if people are always acting "too soon, too late" (Morris 1998). One either acts too late to prevent a future rendered irrelevant or unreal to the present, or one acts too soon, failing to find the fitting time to bring about the desired outcome.

Among the reasons the left is losing, Larry argues (2015b), is the tendency in academic cultural studies, in the academic left, and in the left more broadly, to neglect history, including the histories of ideas, of thinking, of arguing, leaving us to rehash arguments that have been made before. Despite his growing disillusionment with the left and the academy, Larry's philosophical attitude suggested a way to open the conversations again by offering students the chance to learn and engage with the western intellectual history that informs our thinking and common sense. Through teaching the "core" theory class at UNC and writing a textbook on the history of western philosophical thought and its relation to contemporary theory, Larry has sought to help students understand where our ideas come from, how contemporary theory responds to that history, and the possibilities for future thinking and thinking the future. Without that sense of history, without being able to trace the movements and formations out of which our own moment emerged, we end up blind to the limitations of our own thinking.

CONCRETIZING CULTURAL STUDIES: BELONGING WITH THE OTHER

Beyond his engagement with the history of philosophy, I want to explore several ways philosophy has informed Larry's thought/philosophical attitude and helped him further concretize the project of cultural studies and move us beyond our limitations of thinking. There are three projects or commitments that I believe Larry first found in various philosophers' attempts to think otherwise, particularly in the work of Martin Heidegger who has been central to Larry's philosophical attitude since his 500-page dissertation on him. First, a robust interrogation of the world must begin with experience, and we must understand how that reality, that experience, is produced (i.e., through articulation). Second, any investigation must involve the complex interrelationship and articulation of struggles at the multiple levels of abstraction—"the moment," "the conjunctural," and "the epochal." Third, we must remain open to our poetic dwelling, to the possibility "of another beginning . . . an opening of future thinking" (Bernasconi 1997, 190). These commitments are the bedrock of the philosophical attitude upon which Larry concretizes his cultural studies project.

Following Heidegger, Larry's philosophical attitude starts with our always already belonging together with "the other": "a coming community . . . a planetary humanity, or even . . . 'the earth'" (Grossberg 2010, 100). For Heidegger, we are always already "being-with" (Heidegger 2010). Always abstract and yet material, such relations can only be actualized through a concrete effort to understand and belong with the other, to make the future present. This is the ethical responsibility of the intellectual (Grossberg 2010, 100), of those attuned to the world via a philosophical attitude.

Imagining the other as a coming community (as a futural possibility) requires understanding how reality actualizes itself. Larry maintains that reality produces itself through articulation (Grossberg 2010; Grossberg 2019). Lying between humanism (e.g., early Heidegger, 2010) and antihumanism (e.g., late Heidegger 2013), articulation is the production of relations, contradictions, struggles, and assemblages. As an intellectual, the challenge is to understand how particular conjunctures construct unities-in-difference. These constructs take active work to create, shape, mold, and rearticulate, making the struggle over reality a struggle over articulation (Grossberg 2019, 59-60). It is the intellectual's commitment

to do the difficult labor of remapping these articulations for the other, demanding that cultural studies operate in the future tense, write for the future made present. To use Larry's vocabulary, by working between the moment and the epoch and focusing instead on the maps of the conjuncture (the war of positions, the problem space, and the organic crisis; see Grossberg 2019 for more details), the intellectual is well-positioned to engage the formations, feelings, and experiences of the other, which are our immediate resources in any struggle. And if ". . . poetically, [humans] dwell . . .," actualizing the other through such rearticulation is always already one of our own most possibilities (Heidegger 2013).

To put it more precisely, Larry's philosophical attitude carefully moves against all manners and forms of inhumanity and inhumaneness. We must understand "how and why the world produces, albeit not necessarily through the same practices or in the same forms, the structures of inequality, injustice, violence, enslavement, subordination, etc., that for so long have constituted the limits of possibility of people's lives" (Grossberg 2015a, 6). In this vein, Larry's philosophical attitude has guided him to work historically and genealogically to understand how particular contexts shape the relations between thought and ideas, feelings, and material practices and possibilities—and the differences that make a difference as those contexts and relationships change.

Larry's use of and engagement with philosophy—and, I am suggesting, a certain philosophical attitude—has always been an attempt to think about what it means to think and act in a world in which thinking and acting must adapt to rapid and radical change, much of it negative. One experiences this when reading his work. While he might read his students' work and write "no, no, no,"—an experience many of his students share—it is difficult for one to read his and not think "yes, yes, yes" because of the ways in which his philosophical attitude has helped him learn to think otherwise. And with it, he embodies the lesson he asks people to take away from the life of Stuart Hall: to live with complexity and contradiction and to accept the collaborative nature of offering better stories about what is going on, because if there is one thing that is certain, it is that we gotta get out of this place.

And so, to Larry, I say: I am grateful.

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Between Gramsci and Schizoanalysis: The Singular Synthesis of Lawrence Grossberg

JEREMY GILBERT

Lawrence Grossberg's contributions to the intellectual project of cultural studies are too extensive and multifaceted to enumerate. Here, I want to point to a specific one that is significant both for the analytical method of the discipline and for the broader field of radical and social theory: Grossberg's specific synthesis of Gramscian ideas with the thought of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. This is an innovation towards which others have since been drawn, yet which many readers of both thinkers would have often treated as unlikely or impossible.

I make no apology for the self-serving nature of this observation, as someone who has followed Grossberg down this path and tried to make their own contributions to this very particular synthetic project. My experience of moving towards this position has only convinced me of the singular importance of Grossberg's innovations in this regard, and of the fact that they deserve to be specifically acknowledged and celebrated. It was while I was leading an advanced theory seminar for doctoral students at the University of East London in the early 2000s that I first came to the conclusion that there was something uniquely persuasive about Grossberg's claims for the analytical utility of this particular combination of thinkers. The seminar had started out focused on the still-fashionable post-structuralist canon of Derrida, Foucault, and Lacan, along with more specialized (but obviously political) thinkers such as Laclau, Mouffe, and Lyotard.[1] By the end of an intensive semester of collective reading, however, it had become increasingly apparent that most of these theorists and philosophers were of relatively little use in providing conceptual tools with which to do the kind of analytical work that the students involved were trying

to do, especially when compared to the more "classical" cultural studies repertoire of Marx, Gramsci, and Althusser. In particular, the existential, ethical, and phenomenological concerns of deconstruction, while fascinating in themselves, could only be brought to bear on questions of concrete power relationships, psychosocial dynamics, and cultural politics when applied at frustratingly high levels of abstraction. The set of concepts that seemed to retain the most utility for an analysis of the specificity of contemporary power relations across cultural, political, and economic domains was those to be derived primarily from the work of Gramsci and Deleuze and Guattari: Gramsci, for his general account of the complex dynamics of modern politics, Deleuze and Guattari for their ambitious theorization of the relationships between the psychic and the social. I remember remarking in the concluding seminar of the series that the one scholar I was aware of having attempted a synthesis of the two perspectives was Lawrence Grossberg.

THE UNLIKELIHOOD OF DELEUZO-GRAMSCIANISM

At the time this seemed like a very unlikely pairing of thinkers. The 1990s anglophone reception of Deleuze and Guattari had been heavily influenced by the anti-Marxism of scholars such as Manuel Delanda and Nick Land, while their most important translator and Anglophone interlocutor—Brian Massumi—was generally seen as being close in spirit to the politics of the anarchist-inspired strands of anti-capitalist activist culture, but not to that of the social democratic or party communist traditions with which Gramsci had always been associated. Post-Gramscian theory, in the work of thinkers like Laclau and Mouffe, had become associated with a Lacanian tradition that had always looked askance at the apparently anarchistic and utopian politics of "schizoanalysis." In more recent years, more than one thinker (Sotiris 2014; Nunes 2021; Gilbert and Williams 2022) has brought the thought of Gramsci and Deleuze and Guattari into productive dialogue, or, pointed out the analytical affinities between them: their shared commitment to a complex account of modern capitalism and its psychosocial dynamics; their interest in the relationships between technology, social change, and forms of political organization; even the recurrence in their work of the telling adjective "molecular" (which appears multiple times in Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks*). But in the

early 2000s this was a very strange observation to make, and the only person I was aware of who had made it—years previously by that point—was Lawrence Grossberg.

Grossberg first tried to introduce the ideas of Deleuze and Guattari into the field of post-Birmingham cultural theory in the early 1980s (Grossberg 1997a, 70–102), proposing that the work of Deleuze and Guattari and Foucault (properly understood) might provide a way of thinking about the relationship between experience and semiosis that went beyond the dichotomy between "culturalism" and "structuralism" posited by Stuart Hall in his famous "two paradigms" essay (Hall 1980) on the possible theoretical orientations of cultural studies. It's striking that Hall was still alluding to this idea—in somewhat dismissive terms, it must be said—fourteen years later, in one of the last major statements he made on the theory and practice of cultural studies (Hall, Segal, and Osborne 1997). By this time, Grossberg had published his major work *We Gotta Get Out of this Place* (Grossberg 1992), in which he had deployed a method bringing together Deleuzo-Guattarian, Foucauldian, and Gramscian concepts in order to present a highly elaborated and persuasive account of the contemporary American conjuncture, and the mutual imbrication of new forms of political and cultural conservatism in shaping it. This book was notable particularly for its very early deployment of a concept of affect derived from Deleuze and Guattari, as a way of making sense of social relationships that were partly mediated not by visual or linguistic cultural practices but by music. Sonic culture can only be properly understood, from a materialist perspective, by way of models of affective communication that remain attentive to corporeal, rather than quasi-linguistic dimensions of experience (McClary 2007; Gilbert 2004). Grossberg carries on his work of conjunctural cartography and relevant theorization to this day, and in the process has produced a body of work that rivals that of any contemporary in its persuasive attention to the changing and continuous dynamics of power in the twenty-first century (Grossberg 1997b; 2005; 2010).

While Gramsci's thought has been closely associated with the mainstream of cultural studies since the 1970s, the widespread citation of Deleuze and Guattari today—not least because of Grossberg's contribution and that of the journal he edited for many years, *Cultural Studies* (Wiley and Wise 2019)—can make it easy to forget how relatively neglected they were in the field up until well into the present century. In retrospect this was always a peculiar situation. As both Greg Seigworth and myself noted

some years ago (Gilbert 2004; Birchall and Hall 2006, 102-26), there was a clear and striking affinity between their ideas and the contemporaneous thought of Raymond Williams. My explanation for this neglect is that it was at least in part motivated by the very high prestige accorded to Freudian and post-Freudian psychoanalysis within the social milieux that most cultural studies scholars of the 70s, 80s, and 90s inhabited, as well as by the decline of the British anti-psychiatry movement and general discrediting of its leading figure, R.D. Laing (Crossley 1998). Casual British observers tended to associate Guattari's "schizoanalysis" with anti-psychiatry, despite his decades-long career at the well-regarded La Borde psychiatric clinic (Genosko 2002, 30-36). This attitude was certainly compounded in the 1990s by the libertarian anti-Marxism of "Deleuzian" theorists such as Land and De Landa (Land 1995; De Landa 1997), and the consequent widespread assumption that Deleuze and Guattari were less than serious thinkers, inimical to the socialist political tradition. At the same time, those strands of continental European thought and activism within which Deleuze and Guattari were highly valued tended to have little time for Gramsci, who was not much read in France by the post-68 generation of theorists and philosophers, and who in Italy came to be associated with the perceived centrist politics of the Italian Communist Party in the 1970s and 80s. When Toni Negri first began to acquire a large Anglophone following, after the publication of his and Michael Hardt's *Empire*, his Anglophone followers were generally dismissive of the Gramscian conceptual legacy (although his own approach was always arguably more nuanced).

All this only demonstrates how much imagination and courage it took for Grossberg to see past these prejudices, recognizing the very strong affinities and potential resonances between these thinkers, and above all their indispensability to any theory of the cultural and psychosocial that was truly *materialist* in character. As Alex Williams and I have recently argued, however much explanatory power we may be willing to conceded to certain psychoanalytic concepts, the widespread turn towards fundamentally *psychological* theories of political and social motivation within post-structuralist and post-Marxist theory in the 1990s represented a clear retreat from the ambitious task that cultural studies had set for itself in the 1970s: that of a comprehensive historical materialism (Gilbert and Williams 2022, 137-170). From this perspective Grossberg's achievement seems all the more important: not just conceptually satisfying and internally coherent, but politically vital.

It is testament to the success of this project that today it is so much more normal to understand Deleuze and Guattari as belonging to broadly the same intellectual tradition, and that the project of cultural studies is much more widely understood to be the kind of "conjunctural" mapping of power relationships and contemporary historical change that Grossberg has championed for so long (Gilbert 2019). Grossberg's contribution has been by no means merely to realize the potential compatibility of a set of other thinkers with colossal reputations of their own. He was only able to carry out this task convincingly in the context of a singular intellectual project of his own, as evinced by the unique rigor and attention to socio-cultural complexity that has characterized all of his work to date. As such, he deserves to be recognized not just as a great enabler and facilitator of the broad discipline of cultural studies, but in his own right as one of the truly great cultural theorists.

THE METHOD AND ITS OUTCOMES

Grossberg first put this synthetic method to sustained analytical work in his 1992 volume *We Gotta Get Out of This Place: Popular Conservatism and Postmodern Culture* (Grossberg 1992). Here, he confronts what had become an analytical problem for the study of popular culture—particularly with reference to popular music—since the formative moment of cultural studies as an academic discipline in the 1970s. This problem was the incorporation of elements of rock music culture into a broader cultural assemblage within which an apathetic and anti-political social outlook was widely circulated and normalized, particularly amongst young people, in the face of the New Right hegemony over American national politics. Cultural studies had famously tended to focus on popular culture—especially popular music culture—as a site for "resistance" to hegemonic or parental culture (Hall and Jefferson 1976; Hebdige 1979; Frith and Goodwin 1990), in a context that that still tended to assume that the norms of such a culture would be those inherited from the post-war moment: socially conservative, patriarchal, casually racist. The emergence of a culture characterized by the weakening of those norms among key social groups (including some elites with access to considerable media power), as well as by the political disaffection and demobilization of youth, required a different set of analytical tools to those that had been developed in that earlier moment, and in particular a shift of emphasis away from their focus on cultural

practices as fundamentally symbolic or semiotic in character. Analyses of youth culture in the 1970s and 1980s tended to focus on visual aspects of cultural practice (style in particular) and on the understanding of culture in general as a site for the production and circulation of social *meanings*.

Such an approach left relatively little scope for understanding phenomena such as the specific role of music as sonic practice, and for the more diffuse experiences of feeling, emotion, and affect with which it is often associated. By the late 1980s, such a conceptual framework would struggle to make sense of rock culture in particular, given the peculiar combination of explicit disaffection and lack of political commitment that characterized, for example, the "Grunge" scene (Strong 2011). Arguably the most influential movie of 1990, Linklater's *Slacke*r, became famous for the line "withdrawing in disgust is not the same as apathy": widely understood at the time as expressing a typical sentiment of contemporary youth, but not one that could be easily parsed in terms of the familiar analytical dyads: resistance/compliance, opposition/appropriation, etc. At the same time, the established repertoire of psycho-social concepts derived from psychoanalysis—identification, desire, lack, projection, etc.—seemed ill-suited to the increasingly diffuse complexity of "postmodern" culture (Kaplan 1988).

In *We Gotta Get Out of This Place*, Grossberg applies a number of novel analytical concepts to this context, largely derived from the creative integration of Gramscian, Foucauldian, and Deleuzian ideas. Central to this program was the innovative and thorough deployment of the category of "affect," derived directly from an engagement with Deleuze and Guattari (and Brian Massumi's translation thereof) long before the so-called "affective turn" (Clough and Halley 2007) was widely observed across the anglophone humanities and social sciences (Grossberg 1992, 80). But where later exponents of that turn would often seem tempted by the idea of "affect" as some domain of apparently unmediated experience, or at least one no longer organized according to the boring old categories through which 20th century Marxists had seen the world (Lash, 2007), Grossberg offered a framework through which the affective dimension of experience could be understood as always social, collective, and imbricated with identifiable power relationships.

For example, the book develops Hebdige's idea of an *affective alliance* (Hebdige 1988) as a crucial category through which to analyze the diffuse, quasi-corporeal senses of shared experience that typify modes

of social belonging in a highly mediated culture. Grossberg's deployment of this concept describes clearly a key aspect of contemporary sociality at the time when he is writing, while anticipating later attempts to analyze the peculiar modes by which otherwise different and divergent elements can come together—culturally and/or politically—in such historical contexts. Connolly's analysis of the "resonance machine" between libertarian conservatism and evangelical Christianity in the early 21st century (Connolly 2008) carries out much the same analytical task, deploying not dissimilar conceptual tools. By the same token, Grossberg's concept of the "mattering map," "a socially determined structure of affect which defines the things that do and can matter to those living within the map" (Grossberg 1992, 398) does a valuable work by effectively updating Williams' "structure of feeling," making explicit the extent to which processes of differential affective valorization are always key features of such "structures." Just consider the extent to which different political constituencies today do not only share very different views on issues such as immigration policy, but apparently accord very different levels of importance to those issues (Lahav and Courtemanche 2012). This is a perfect example of a phenomenon requiring concepts just such as Grossberg develops here, if it is to be properly understood.

Grossberg would continue to bring this analytical method to bear both in studies that did not dwell at length on the conceptual underpinnings of their analyses—*Caught in the Crossfire* (2005), *Under the Cover of Chaos* (2018)—and in books and essays that did. In one 1997 paper, Grossberg makes the acute observation that sums up the situation that he had been mapping since the mid 1980s: "the paradox of the new conservatism is that most people do not seem to agree with its agenda, yet they seem unable to oppose it and consequently they are drawn into its currents" (Grossberg 1997a, 257-8). Nothing could describe more succinctly the distinctive historical situation that has obtained in countries such as the US and the UK almost throughout the period of neoliberal hegemony (and, arguably, beyond it). And as Grossberg makes explicit in this essay, this is a situation that demands analysis both at the level of affect—at which collective empowerment or disempowerment is experienced in a way that is at once corporal and quasi-emotional—and at the level of hegemony, wherein power relations between distinct social groups are more-or-less formally contested (Grossberg 1997a, 257-63).

In fact, this is a problem that I myself, in very similar terms and directly inspired by Grossberg, have attempted to address more than once, particularly through modifications of the idea of "consent" as central to the relationship between the subaltern and the hegemonic. In 2015 I suggested that the characteristic mode of participation in advanced neoliberal society was one of "disaffected consent" (Gilbert 2015). More recently, Alex Williams and I have suggested that Gramsci's idea of *passive consent* should be understood as the prevalent mode of participation in "actually existing neoliberalism" for many social groups, in a book that explicitly seeks to take forward Grossberg's synthesis of Gramscian and schizoanalytic approaches (Gilbert and Williams 2022). At the same time, it is important to stress that this is not a methodology that can only identify passivity, weakness, and deference among subaltern populations. It is from much the same perspective that I have argued for "collective joy," for shared positive affect, to be understood as a precondition for any kind of democratic politics, particularly in resistance to neoliberalism's perpetual-alienation machine (Gilbert 2014).

AFFECT AND HEGEMONY

What emerges from Grossberg's synthesis of Gramsci with Deleuze and Guattari is, therefore, an approach to the politics of contemporary culture that is attentive both to the corporeal-affective infrastructure of everyday life and actually-existing culture, and to the levels of order at which social formations acquire varying degrees of stability, and at which such social orders are contested. To some extent, I would argue, this simply makes Grossberg a direct successor to Hall, Williams, and above all Gramsci himself. After all, a distinctive feature of Gramsci's own analysis of emergent "Fordism" was its attention to the distinctive psycho-sexual features of mid-twentieth century industrial society, in comparably integrated manner. At the same time, Grossberg's refusal to abandon the task of analyzing hegemonic relations, even when such an approach became deeply unfashionable (Grossberg 2010, 230), has enabled him to make insightful, historically-grounded analyses of concrete political situations—conjunctures, in fact (Grossberg 2019)—when so much Deleuze-informed commentary never gets beyond a circular re-description of existing phenomena in arbitrarily Deleuzian terms.

The effectiveness of this method is nowhere so evident as when it is least on display: in Grossberg's two other major works of conjunctural analysis. In his 2005 opus *Caught in the Crossfire* (Grossberg 2005), and in the 2018 *Under the Cover of Chaos* (Grossberg 2018), discussions of theoretical issues are kept to a bare minimum, while references to European philosophers are few and far between. Written for a less academically-specialized audience than his explicit contributions to cultural theory, each of these works offers a rich, multifaceted analysis of a significant set of current political problems, from a perspective that understands the zones of formal politics, popular culture, electronic media, and everyday life to be permanently and perpetually interpenetrating. *Caught in the Crossfire* considers the condition of childhood in Bush's America from a perspective that incorporates the lived experience of "kids," the hegemony of neoliberal ideology, the centrality of imagined children to moral panics, the geopolitical (and domestic) reality of the War on Terror and the changing nature of capitalism at the end of first dotcom boom. The book's extraordinary attention to the corporeal and affective quality of life in America at the dawn of the twenty-first century—and its nuanced, depressingly prescient diagnoses of the weakness of the American left—would surely not be possible without the rich and distinctive conceptual apparatus that we know Grossberg always brings to bear on the analysis of such phenomena. When he writes that "The kids I worked with are great kids, but there was (and continues to be, as we have stayed in touch) something sad about them; their lives seem to encircle emptiness. Or rather, that seems to be how they experience themselves." (Grossberg 2005, 55), the schizoanalytic echoes are obvious. When he writes that "The Left acts as if politics consists of speaking truth to power. The new right understands that truth is a tool for developing better strategies." (Grossberg 2005, 171), we know that we're hearing from a true Gramscian.

The rather more jargon-heavy *Under the Cover of Chaos* deploys a term that seems to condense some of Grossberg's earlier ideas about mattering maps and affective alliances: the "affective landscape." Grossberg (2018) writes:

> An affective landscape describes a complex social way of being in the world, a densely textured space within which some experiences, behaviors, choices and emotions are possible, some "feel" inevitable and obvious, and still others are impossible or unimaginable. . . .

> Every affective landscape is itself a complicated assemblage. Structures of feeling are the components and expressions of an affective landscape, translating it into moods, defining the tonalities of our behavior, and mattering maps, defining the forms and sites of investment and caring, of attachment, attraction and distanciation. Structures of feeling define ecologies of belonging and possibilities of mobility. . . . If an affective landscape is a configuration of structures of feeling, then any structure of feeling can belong, even simultaneously, to different landscapes; and any landscape may be configured, even simultaneously, in different ways (i.e., the relations of structures of feeling within a landscape—their proximity, interpenetration and mutual determination—may vary at different social sites and for different constituencies). (91-2)

Here then, Grossberg identifies a new scalar level for cultural-political analysis, sitting somewhere between the overall "conjuncture" and the discrete "structure of feeling." Within the Trumpian affective landscape that he charts, Grossberg identifies specific "structures of feeling" that he characterizes in terms of "(1) affective autonomy, expressed as hyperinflation and fundamentalism . . . (2) anxiety and hyperactivism, (3) sociality as personalization (narcissism), and (4) temporal alienation" (Grossberg 2018, 93-4).

Whether or not one fully accepts Grossberg's topology and typology,[2] two things are clear. One is that this mapping of 2018 US culture is entirely informed by the Deleuzo-Gramscian approach that Grossberg has been developing since the early 1980s. The other is that this analytical description of the emergent shape of that culture in that moment stands out now as astonishingly prescient, five years later, after COVID-19 and the political traumas of the intervening years.

It would be very difficult—frankly, I'd suggest that it would be impossible—to try to take the temperature of contemporary American culture today without making some reference to the sense of ubiquitous febrility, of permanently-unsatisfied narcissism, of micro-attention-span-neurosis, that seems to pervade the cultural universe of TikTok teenagers, of Q-Anon conspiracy-believers, and of ambient political despair: with the Democratic Party (at time of writing, January 2024) seemingly hell-bent on handing a second presidential term to Donald Trump, almost without a fight. As Anna Kornbluh has written, very recently:

> Drowning in a deluge of images without context, words without meaning, information without distinction—this is the subjective experience in an economy of immediacy. Whether or not technological advances in image circulation have a net democratizing effect (as many media scholars argue), and whether or not circulation can dispel the crisis of production, it is certain that they reconfigure cognition and affect. . . . Recent studies estimate that over

40 percent of Americans are suffering from anxiety and depression. Anxiety is immersive, a case of apprehension involving breathlessness, dizziness, palpitations, an accumulation of undischargeable excitation. (Kornbluh 2024)

Whether Kornbluh's Marxist-Lacanian analysis of the symptoms that Grossberg diagnosed several years previously should be considered more, less, or equally productive, when compared his distinctively Deleuzo-Gramscian approach, is perhaps nothing more than a matter of aesthetic preference. But it is notable that her—decidedly compelling—critique of platform capitalism's culture of "immediacy" seems to conclude with no more coherent political recommendation than that the reader read some other philosophers and aesthetic theorists, also based at elite American universities. While *Under the Cover of Chaos* itself concludes with a set of speculative political questions rather than any kind of programmatic and strategic manifesto, it is nonetheless striking that the book—unlike so many contemporary works of American cultural theory—does at least conclude by acknowledging that the problem that any such analysis must always end with is the problem of how to organize progressive forces in such a way that some hope of progress might be achieved: in other words, the question of political strategy (Grossberg 2018, 146-53).

This is typical of Grossberg, of course. The modesty of his conclusions can at times lend his writing a frustratingly Derridean quality, as he patiently tries to track down every possible qualification of whatever conceptual or analytical assertion he may just have made. But it is this same modesty that ultimately lends the resulting analyses such rigor, and such exhaustive erudition. It is in the very best tradition of cultural studies for the scholar to know that ultimately, scholarship alone cannot solve the problems that it diagnoses (a fact which of which Kornbluh, like all of us, is doubtless fully aware). There are times when it can seem that the state of left culture today is so weak and disaggregated, that there is little place for the sophistication and ambition of Grossberg's analytical project. But if human life on Planet Earth is going to survive at all, then space will have to re-emerge for it sooner or later. Until it does, reading and thinking with Lawrence Grossberg will continue to be a privilege, and an intellectual necessity, for those of us who still have the chance to do it.

NOTES

1. This particular group of students was already well-versed in feminist, anti-racist and queer theory, which is why the seminar in question didn't spend much time on canonical texts from those traditions.

2. Rightly or wrongly, I think many other writers would use "structures of feeling" precisely the way that Grossberg here uses "affective landscapes," and would therefore want to use some other term to refer to his "structures of feeling."

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The Seminar and the Working Group: Larry Close-Up

CHARLES J. STIVALE

In fall 1978, I found myself in the living room of an English professor, Cary Nelson, at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, one of several grad students invited to a faculty discussion group on structuralist and post-structuralist theory. Feeling distinctly out of place, I turned at one point to a young guy near me who introduced himself, Larry Grossberg. He mentioned that he was planning to start a small working group and asked if I would be interested in joining. Looking back at this encounter, I can say that my intellectual life was about to change completely. For of the many productive ways in which Larry taught and assisted students throughout his career, the seminar and the working group were conjoined devices that functioned as laboratories for reflection to inspire students as colleagues, to inform his classes, and to advance research for all participants, Larry included, over decades, times zones and locations.

One aspect of Larry's approach was to assist us in developing a critical vocabulary, and at the time of our working groups, I did not realize that Larry himself was involved in the careful process of building his own set of terminological tools. As he has noted, his first lectures and publications, both in cultural studies and in popular culture, occurred during the late 1970s and early 1980s (Grossberg 1997b, 285 n. 1). Hence, the first term that I employ to situate Larry's role in forming his students, *conjuncture*, may describe not just our search at that point in time but also his: the search for "the specific context of an analysis" (Grossberg 1992, 397). I adapt and enlarge this term no doubt beyond its original specificity to emphasize not just the context but especially Larry's research engagement with students on the UIUC campus and, eventually, beyond.

But what, I now ask myself, were we doing back then? In returning to Larry's writing, I realize that in many ways we were engaging in cultural studies in its early stages, forging our methods as we moved along. And on

the vexed issue of the "methods" of cultural studies, Larry has expressed his suspicion of "the notion of methods outside of specific contexts" given the likelihood that they are insufficiently self-reflective and probably mystified (Grossberg 2010, 52). Moreover, in his description of his research and teaching practice, I recognize aspects of our collective work:

> The crucial moment and I believe the hardest moment of the practice of cultural studies is to figure out what the question is, to begin to identify the problem-space, for it is what constitutes the conjuncture. The question is formulated through a confrontation if you will between the researcher's interests and the demands of the conjuncture, however difficult it may be to hear them, and however inchoate they may initially be. (Grossberg 2010, 52).

Hence, whether in working groups (weekly discussions outside coursework) or in seminars (formal courses), the conjuncture, analytical and contextual, was the key for our activities.

Starting in winter 1979, Larry gathered together a small group of students in different fields to discuss, first, essays from Lacan's *Écrits*, then Deleuze and Guattari's newly translated *Anti-Oedipus* (fall 1979) and, finally, selected texts by Foucault (winter 1980). Besides situating the conjuncture for developing productive reading and discussion, the working group dynamics as well as the readings therein served as "mediators", that is, creating "relations of mutual resonance and exchange" (Deleuze 1995, 125). Hence, the different modes of mediating that arose from these sessions allowed us to become meditators for one another. As the lone French speaker, I found that my task was often to mediate literally between the translations and the original texts, and the translations I prepared of essays related to Lacan and by Deleuze would lead to early publications and to a life-long engagement with translating. With this detail, I want to suggest that through the working group, the conjuncture and modes of mediation opened each participant to new directions, Larry included, as we grappled with each text.

In fact, *Anti-Oedipus* posed formidable difficulties that alerted us to how much we didn't yet know in order to "make sense" of the challenges posed by the text—i.e., in order to formulate the question allowing us to identify the problem-space of the conjuncture. Thinking back on our semester with *Anti-Oedipus*, I am struck by how we were continually stymied not only by the substance, form, and intent of this work, but also by how these apparent blockages inspired us, in our separate fields and career paths, to continue grappling with Deleuze and Guattari's works

far beyond this text and far beyond UIUC. One need only consider Larry's careful, deliberate explanations in successive books of his engagement with the writings of Foucault, Deleuze, and Guattari to see how he assembled their theoretical perspectives with those specific to the Birmingham Centre. And as we kept track of our progress in this research following the working groups, this contact also may have been a way for Larry to keep the working groups alive, beyond the weekly meetings. This sense of ongoing collaboration enlivened the continuing analytical conjuncture and process of mediating for all of his current and former students.

As for Larry's formal seminars, I had completed all course work in French studies by the time we met, so I audited few seminars but, as it happened, one in particular would serve as a mediator. In this case, the team-taught seminar (with Cary Nelson) on "Structuralism and Semiotics" (winter 1980) offered participants a framework in which to situate a broad range of texts not just on the main topics (e.g., Eco, Lévi-Strauss, Jakobson, Bakhtin, Barthes), but also texts soon to be linked to "post-structuralism" (e.g., Barthes, Derrida, Foucault, Jameson). While I had a basic orientation to some of these writers, the framework defined by Larry and Cary opened us to discussions which, in that decade, situated precisely the conjuncture for engaging with these works. The semester ended with a session titled "The Instructors' New Clothes" in which each made speculative presentations on what the seminar's work had brought to their ways of reading and writing in their respective projects. Indeed, Larry has clearly described how, with Cary Nelson and other professors at UIUC, he subsequently contributed to establishing "a space where interdisciplinary interest in theory . . . could flourish" (Grossberg 1997a, 26), with the Unit for Criticism and Interpretive Theory.

I must observe that while what I have described here sounds remarkably serious and focused, this activity was imbued with exhilaration and fun and, I must add, with the ever-present soundtrack of music that ran through everything we did. While we were intently scrutinizing these authors works, Larry was teaching a massively popular and rigorous course on popular music, but I never felt that this was just part of his gig. Rather, Larry lived his rock and understanding of popular music's importance in all our lives. The working group (and sometimes the seminars) extended their activities to clubs, to commitment to bands, and to a social life that was every bit a force of conjuncture and mediating as were the weekly meetings.

The seminar and working group experiences bring me to a third term, our meetings as *rencontres*, as encounters or turning points. And yet, as Deleuze employs this term in *L'Abécédaire de Gilles Deleuze* (Deleuze and Parnet 2012, "C as in Culture"), my use is misleading since, for Deleuze, an "encounter" occurs not at all with people, but rather with events and ideas, moving beyond the specific conjuncture with people toward new connections and creations. Larry was a mediator precisely in that he provided to everyone an opportunity to move beyond, to animate one's immediate understanding toward new work, and thereby to found new *rencontres* in other contexts.

One such *rencontre* occurred in spring 1983 thanks to Larry close-up during his visit to the campus where I held my first tenure-track position, Franklin and Marshall College. Posters across the small campus announced a lecture-discussion titled "Is There Rock After Punk?". For nearly two hours, in my recollection, Larry held us spellbound as he provided the strong theoretical grounding that would form the basis of his larger essay with the same title (Grossberg 1986). He also accomplished his own performance piece with an eclectic array of music samples emerging from a small audio cassette recorder. Every aspect of the terms I employ here—mediating the conjuncture into a full-on *rencontre*—was encompassed by this event. For it allowed anyone who attended—at least, anyone open to the event's possibilities—to move beyond, to leave the lecture-discussion and pursue a new understanding of the complex conceptual strands that Larry brought together.

All that I have described here is limited to approximately six years, but beyond the early 1980s, Larry's work in developing multiple assemblages and *rencontres* only grew in vigor and breadth. Two major conferences especially—"Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture" in summer 1983 and, even more celebrated, "Cultural Studies: Now and in the Future" in April 1990—allowed scholars to join together in Champaign-Urbana and serve as mediators for one another by developing modes of discourse that subsequently grew in numerous works, not the least of which were the two edited volumes from each event (Grossberg and Nelson 1988; Grossberg, Nelson, and Treichler 1992). Later in the 1990s, Larry drew together a smaller group of like-minded scholars from a wide range of disciplines in a working group aptly named "the Conjunctures Group," a moveable feast in many senses and locations. If my experience following these meetings

was any indication of the outcomes for the other attendees, their effect was truly to serve as a *rencontre* or turning point for each of my projects as they moved toward publication.

I have experienced other *rencontres* thanks to Larry and to the community of mediators that he assembled over the past nearly fifty years, and while my remarks here necessarily correspond to my personal as well as professional circumstances, I believe that they reflect what many within this community have experienced. At heart, I consider these mediations through assemblages and the resulting *rencontres* to have been the highest moments of friendship, best expressed by Deleuze:

> This intensive way of reading, in contact with what's outside the book, flows meeting other flows, one machine meeting others, as experiments, as events for each of us, having nothing to do with a book, as tearing the book to pieces, as causing intersections with other things, with anything whatsoever, this is reading in a loving way. (Deleuze 1995, 9, translation modified)

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The Radical Contextuality of Radical Contextuality: On the Heart and Method of Cultural Studies

J. MACGREGOR WISE

Deleuze and Guattari argue that "concepts are events, organizations against chaos" (Seigworth and Wise 2000, 141; after Deleuze and Guattari 1994). That is, concepts arise in relation to events, in response to situations. They are "connected to problems without which they would have no meaning and which can themselves only be isolated or understood as their solution emerges" (Deleuze and Guattari 1994, 16). Concepts have to be made. "They must be invented, fabricated, or rather created and would be nothing without their creator's signature" (5). This does not mean that concepts do not change ("Obviously, every concept has a history" [7]), rather it means that they have "a becoming that involves its relationship with other concepts situated on the same plane" (18). In the language of Grossbergian cultural studies, concepts are radically contextual; they arise out of relations with other concepts and problems. "A concept requires not only a problem through which it recasts or replaces earlier concepts but a junction of problems where it combines with other coexisting concepts" (Deleuze and Guattari 1994, 18).

The radically contextual concept that I wish to begin this short essay examining is the concept of radical contextuality itself (Larry's radical contextuality, since concepts are signed). This is a concept that arose in relation to a problem of defining the project of cultural studies and became a means of organizing the key dimensions of cultural studies work. Larry has said that the concept of radical contextuality is at the heart of cultural studies, but what I wish to explore is how the concept "speaks to the event,

not to the essence or the thing" (Deleuze and Guattari 1994, 21) of cultural studies. This brief essay has two goals: to map something of a trajectory of Larry's concept, and to speak of its influence on notions of cultural studies method.

Context has always been a key term for cultural studies as a project, especially in its more specific formulation as conjuncture, in that cultural studies is seen as a project that responds to the conjuncture (Hall et al. 1978). Context itself is produced through the process of articulation (Slack 1996). But what of the phrase, "radical contextuality"? When did context become radical? The first part of this essay looks at a key genre of Larry's writings: defining cultural studies.

Two key foundational essays on cultural studies that Larry published in 1989, "The Formations of Cultural Studies" and "The Circulation of Cultural Studies," don't use the phrase. Instead, cultural studies is described as responding "to the particular conditions of its intellectual, political, social, and historical contexts" (Grossberg 1997, 195) in "an open-ended and ongoing theoretical struggle to understand and intervene into the existing organizations of active domination and subordination within the formations of culture" (196). These essays describe cultural studies as a conjuncturalist project that "dictates that we can only deal with, and from within, specific contexts, for it is only there that identities and relations exist effectively" (242).

The phrase "radical contextuality" does appear the next year in a piece he writes about postmodernism (but not cultural studies), where the term is used to describe a form of postmodernism that "denies the reality of structures, tendential forces, contradictions, and a history of determinations (even as 'traces without an inventory'), for such real correspondences would reassert an economy of identity and difference" (Grossberg 1990, 226). As Larry writes in the "Formations of Cultural Studies," one of the formations is the struggle with relativism and postmodernism, and it is within that formation, in the term "postmodern conjuncturalism," that cultural studies addresses the challenges of radically relativist postmodernism. In that formation, the radical difference of postmodernism is always produced through articulation (1997, 228). By 1997, in "Bringing it All Back Home: Pedagogy and Cultural Studies," the term has shifted valence (taking the place of "postmodern conjuncturalism" as a descriptor) and become an umbrella term used to list "what distinguishes cultural studies" from other forms of intellectual work, a term to begin gathering

and arranging the main characteristics of cultural studies: the contextuality of theory (working against the presumed universalism of theory), the context of culture, the context of politics, and the context of the project itself (1997, 378–9). In 1995's "Cultural Studies: What's in a Name (One More Time)" it is the feature "unique to cultural studies" which encompasses "three corollaries: it is anti-reductionist; its objects are discursive alliances; its method is articulation" (Grossberg 1997, 253). And by 2010's book, *Cultural Studies in the Future Tense*, we see "Cultural Studies as Radical Contextuality" stated unreservedly (20).

None of this is especially surprising to anyone with a glancing knowledge of Larry's work (or, hopefully, knowledge of cultural studies in a North American context). But what is interesting is how the term becomes more of a concept, taking on more and more weight, becoming an event ("radical contextuality") which organizes the project of cultural studies. It becomes the key feature of Larry's story of cultural studies, told again and again across multiple books and essays. This "performative force of repetition" is something Melissa Gregg has argued is key to Larry's affective voice (2006), where particular concepts, quotations (especially from Stuart Hall and Raymond Williams), and turns of phrase stake out the ever-transforming landscape of cultural studies. It is a term particular to Larry's maps of cultural studies and doesn't appear in his own conjunctural analyses themselves (e.g., it doesn't seem to appear in either *Caught in the Crossfire: Kids, Politics, and America's Future*, 2005, or *Under the Cover of Chaos: Trump and the Battle for the American Right*, 2018). While to understand Larry's work we can't disarticulate the conjunctural analyses from the definitional pieces (Wood 2019), there is something to be said about appreciating this particular genre of his oeuvre as exercises in interpellation into the project of cultural studies, the passion and insistence he brings to encourage us to tell better stories.

Seeing radical contextuality as an event starts moving us towards cultural studies as an event, an occurrence, a practice, a method: What does a cultural studies assemblage do? There is a more recent, though smaller, body of Grossberg texts that begin to address the question of method (raised in 2010 in *Cultural Studies in the Future Tense*, operationalized and diagrammed in the appendix to *Under the Cover of Chaos* in 2018 and elaborated in an essay in *New Formations* from 2019). By method we mean, broadly, "the diagnosis of a conjuncture" (Grossberg 2006, 4), but

more specifically a way of working, a strategy, a set of provocative questions, rather than a formal methodology. Method, of course, needs to be radically contextual.

> The crucial moment and I believe the hardest moment of the practice of cultural studies is to figure out what the question is, to begin to identify the problem-space, for it is what constitutes the conjuncture. The question is formulated through a confrontation if you will between the researcher's interests and the demands of the conjuncture, however difficult it may be to hear them, and however inchoate they may initially be. That is to say, the question has to be responsible to the messy and complex political realities of the world, and—just as importantly—it has to be answerable. Finding the question is the hardest part of the research endeavor! (Grossberg 2010, 52)

Larry continues that once we have the question, we ask about data, about articulation, about relations to the formation, following the premises of partiality, a collective ongoing conversation, and the lack of guarantees.

But there is a slight gap here: How do you find the question? What is the question to find the question? When does confrontation with the conjuncture lead to this pursuit? How, then, do you find the theory and the method appropriate to the question and the context?

Back in 1995, I helped put together a panel for the International Communication Association conference called "Dancing in Spite of Ourselves: Critically Reading Larry Grossberg." My own contribution was called, "Dancing by Intuition: Undefining Cultural Studies." The phrase "dancing by intuition" was how Peter Gabriel's keyboardist described his "clunky but dramatic" dance moves (Pond 1987). I liked the phrase: not dancing by training or method, but dancing by feel. In the radical self-reflection of cultural studies method, in its questioning of its questions, how much do we rely on intuition, that there might be something *there*, or *there*? How much do we rely on our own structure of feeling? This is not structure of feeling as an object of analysis (per Williams 1961), but as a felt sense of contradictions, problematics, and changes. But I don't mean intuition as a purely creative impulse, the expression of an individual, because, I would argue, intuition is radically contextual, the product or expression of conditions (social, intellectual, biographical, political, economic, etc.).

The first thing about dancing by intuition is a slight shift in the question, from the broader, Grossbergian (via Marvin Gaye) "What's Going On?" which is good for the later conjunctural work, to a question Jonathan Sterne has suggested: "What's up with that?" And "that" is often something vague and unformed, felt. It's a slightly more gestural, deixical

question. The "that" is not our question or goal; a text or event is not the object of our analysis, Larry reminds us, but a spark that gets us looking at relations and articulations.

The second thing about dancing by intuition is that intuition is not individual but collective. To use a term from Deleuze: we need our mediators (1995). A touchstone for Larry were the seminars at the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies as spaces where community could be created around a problem. Intellectual spaces, especially in the university, tend to operate on a model of conflict and critique. What I've always felt from working with Larry and the cultural studies community (from Conjunctures to Crossroads) is what happens when we work in a supportive space, focused on the same project, seeing what's working and what's not and striving to do better. These are spaces based on friendship. Charles Stivale (2008) asks: "What can friendship do? That is, how friendship functions as a practical, active, and dynamic relationship, allowing affirmation as well as dissent, harmony as well as disharmony" (xiii). And as Larry put it a while ago, "the unity-in-difference of cultural studies is partly the result of the very real social and emotional relationships" (Grossberg 1997, 198).

It is from here that one can turn to discussions of cultural studies' method of considering the conjuncture as a war of positions, as a problem space and organic crisis, mapping diagrams and logics, and also mattering maps (Grossberg 2018, 2019). But if you want the self-reflection of radical contextuality as you do so, you need your mediators, the multiple myriad conversations across texts (of the books and articles kind rather than SMS) and emails and cups of coffee (and bourbon). So, while Larry has been refining ways of engaging the conjuncture and the new formations of modernity and the right, we also need to recognize Larry's method in the instructions he gave attendees at his retirement celebration: "He especially wants graduate students from across the years of his teaching to get to know each other and his friends."

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You Can't Do That: On Lawrence Grossberg's Anti-Communicational Philosophy of Communication

BRYAN G. BEHRENSHAUSEN

> I have always been deeply suspicious of the concept of communication and the enormous power it has in both academic and popular discourses. I have never been comfortable with its ubiquity; its intentional vagueness, which allowed it to impose an apparent unity on radically diverse practices; its inherent circularity, grounded in a largely unexplored set of philosophical assumptions; its unfounded claim to embody a democratic impulse; and its self-presentation as the most human of practices. (Grossberg 1997, 27)

"Does communication theory need intersubjectivity?" I blink and read it again. The question seems audacious. Then downright unfathomable. I'd just finished advanced coursework studying this thing called "communication" and I knew this much to be true: Through communication, individuals transcend the limits of their respective, isolated consciousnesses and manage to connect—"meaningfully"—with others. Through communication, my subjectivity becomes part of our intersubjectivity; my experience becomes more or less available to your experience, and vice versa, ad infinitum. Of *course* communication theory needs some conceptualization of intersubjectivity. Without it—as either philosophical concept or practical goal—why would something called "communication" even be necessary?

I encountered Lawrence Grossberg's provocation in the mid 2000s, just after finishing my second degree in Communication Studies, so I was familiar with the field's decades-long self-narrativization. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, as Communication Studies continued to jockey for institutional legitimacy, this story about a human propensity for engaging

in subjectivity-bridging meaning making is the one most philosophers of communication seemed convinced could serve as the discipline's conceptual foundation. But apparently Grossberg felt differently. As a graduate student at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign (see Grossberg and O'Keefe 1975), and later as a faculty in the Speech Communication department there (see Grossberg 1979), he'd been thinking, teaching, and writing about communication and its attendant concepts. And he found that story largely unconvincing.

For one thing, he argues, that story often presupposes the very object it seeks to problematize and analyze. Most theories of communication, he writes, "assume that communication is a transcendental term, either the most fundamental fact in the constitution of the human or the most problematic"; either way, "the concept of 'communication' remains impervious to philosophical scrutiny" (Grossberg 1982a, 171). What Communication Studies needs, he decided, isn't more and better theories of communication that simply reproduce some version of a dubious, Möbius narrative about bridging consciousnesses or sharing experiences. What's necessary is a more robust and critical metatheoretical framework for understanding what is at stake in the very pursuit of knowledge about communication itself, an approach that would refuse to treat "communication" as some kind of natural, inevitable, unitary, and pre-given entity. He'd eventually call it an "anti-communicational philosophy of communication" (Grossberg 1997, 27).

Here's the gist. Want to write a theory of communication? Fill in the blanks to describe the phenomenon: "Communication is the _____ of meaning between individuals through _____" (Grossberg 1982a). It's a form of academic MadLibs with enough energy to make a field of inquiry viable for a few decades at least. Maybe communication is the *correspondence* of meanings that originate in interlocutors' mind-bodies through some process of *exchange*. Maybe it's a less mentalist process by which meaning *emerges* through some more egalitarian act of *sharing*. Or perhaps it's something more like an ongoing, *interpretive* dialog through which a meaningful world gets *constituted* in the first place. Select your terms, shuffle them, debate the pairings, repeat.

The work I was reading offered an altogether different take. A spate of essays all published in blistering succession just before I was born (Grossberg 1982a 1982b 1982c 1982d) demonstrate Larry doing what he does best (and what I'd watch him do so many more times, when I finally arrived

at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill to study with him, and Lawrence became Larry): mapping an intellectual and political terrain, exposing its boundary conditions and aporias. With those essays in particular, Larry was drawing a schematic to get his bearings amid the new disciplinary home into which he'd landed after returning from a stint at the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies. He outlines positions and coordinates, explains their consequences and practical limitations, steps back to take stock, and says "we gotta get out of this place" (see Grossberg 1992). At the time, his getaway vehicle would be philosophies of immanence, specifically the work of Deleuze and Guattari. That work, newly translated into English, helped him conceptualize communication without relying on some transcendental, hand-wavy notion of "meaning," or seeking recourse to pre-given (largely politically normative) subject positions, or adhering to dialectical logics whereby "intersubjectivity then becomes the moment of transcendence, a leap into an identity or sameness out of difference and separation" (Grossberg 1982a, 191).

The work's stated aims also threw me. Larry's goal in all this isn't to retheorize communication, to offer Yet Another Communication Theory. The point is rather to *historicize* and *contextualize* communication, to subject it to a more rigorous conjunctural analysis that would trace and track the various operations of power it marshals and articulates. "Rather than searching for some essential and universal characteristics of communication," such a project "addresses the determining and determined relations between communication and other aspects of our lives" (Grossberg 1982d). Opening this now-fractured unity called "communication" to its constitutive context equips communication studies to pose questions rather different than those it has to date: "What is it that is to be studied? What is the meaning of the term such that it has some parameters circumscribing it?" (Grossberg 1982c, 233). And "what are the particular involvements and investments of communication in real historical formations? Why and how is communication posed as a space of particular, yet central, problems? How have we come to see the 'truth' of our existence as necessarily implicating us within a discourse about communication?" (Grossberg 1982d, 84–85).

The object of inquiry for a philosophy of communication, then, is what Grossberg calls a "problematic of communication" (1982c) or "regime of communication" (1982d): "a social formation in which communication has come, not only to define the truth of human existence but, increas-

ingly, to preoccupy our interpersonal and social resources" (93). The first step of this enterprise would be to recognize that "the theoretical discourses on communication available to us, paradoxically, reproduce communication within their very account of it, thus defining communication tautologically" (Grossberg 1982d, 83). And its goal would be to perpetually "denaturalize" (100) communication, to "address the question of the 'transcendental status' of communication itself" (Grossberg 1982c, 234). That means denying communication any sort of privileged status, either analytically as philosophical deus ex machina or socially as a purportedly "natural" facet of human existence. An anticommunicational philosophy of communication.

I was dumbfounded by demystification (a sensation I'd experience over and over again while thinking, working, and learning with Larry). But what might have become catastrophic turned out instead to be intellectually energizing—enough, anyway, to carry me a few hundred miles away at the behest of the mentor who initially fed me those devastating works,[1] and to join Larry in puzzling over the role a-signifying and extra-semiological forces play in contemporary regimes of communication (Grossberg and Behrenshausen 2016). Larry, too, never lost interest in communication. More than forty years after unleashing his polemics (still largely unheeded, I'd argue) he'd continue to lean into the concept with characteristic hopefulness. Proffering (as he always has) the intellectual left some useful advice for imagining and executing new forms of political organization, he suggests engaging in new modes of communication—albeit of an unconventional sort:

> I am not presupposing some ideal form of communication or trying to reinvent a public sphere or civil society. I am not advocating communication as persuasion, as if we should see it as a battle to win, or to claim the high ground. Rather, I understand communication as creative, as the construction of new forms of relations and organizations, both amongst those involved in the conversation and between the conversationalists and those living in the world the conversation attempts to "know." (Grossberg 2015, 260)

For Larry, communication is first and foremost a set of articulatory practices, one not limited *to* or *by* some presumed need to reveal an otherwise obfuscated reality, change hearts and minds, or uphold ostensibly timeless truisms. It's a practical (in his terms, "pragmatic") endeavor, a provisional and "humble" one, more about intervention than interpretation or interrogation. To communicate is to build.

And to *study* communication is likewise to *rebuild*—to put this thing called "communication" back into the specific, historical context of its constitution or manifestation. This is the principal lesson—the spirit—I carry in the wake of Larry's intercession into both Communication Studies' intellectual milieu and my own idealized intuitions about communication. Larry's work did not so much convince me of the validity of some new communication model; it established and engrained in me a new intellectual comportment toward communication, a new orientation to the *problematic of communication*. It helped me identify and resist an all-too-convenient compulsion to begin thinking about communication by taking for granted the concept I should actually be investigating. And it situated me in new and different lines of inquiry that begin with questions like:

- How has this thing called "communication" taken shape in this place and at this time?
- What is communication *doing* in the spaces it occupies and through which it traffics? To what end is it being deployed?
- What contradictions and delicate tensions does communication attempt to resolve when it appears? What intellectual and material resources does it articulate—that is, draw together and put to work?
- For whom does it do all this? To what ends and for what purposes? What lines or modalities of power does it reshape or reinforce?

Studying communication with Larry, I learned to ask the question of communication earnestly, more genuinely—with the urgency it truly deserves. We may never be free of the exhortation to communicate or the expectation that communication can solve our problems. And we shouldn't avoid proposing communication as a strategic resource for building better worlds and telling better stories. But at least we can become more aware of what we're opening up—and closing off—when we do.

NOTES

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Only Idiots Do Cultural Studies

ROLIEN HOYNG

As an advisor, Larry has guided me by giving me a lot of freedom—that is, by telling me to feel free to study anything that seemed important to me as a site of power and transformative potential, regardless of disciplinary boundaries and enclosures. That is how the focus on popular culture had come about in cultural studies, he said, and otherwise we would not "give a damn." Larry often likened cultural studies to a garbage bin: you can study anything that you can't study elsewhere because it falls beyond the scope of the field, and they don't want you to do it. I remember him provoking us, Ph.D. students around 2010, to hand him a study of refrigerators or air conditioners. Without these machines humming quietly and controlling the climate, life where we were in North Carolina would not be possible, or at least it would not be very pleasant.

I want to evoke Isabelle Stengers' (2005) notion of the idiot as a research position that personifies what I take to be Larry's lesson. In Stengers' usage, idiocy describes a position of refusal to accept common views and practices. This refusal is not expressed in a fierce way and does not bravely proclaim an alternative vision or conduct. Nonetheless, the idiot disrupts or interrupts by producing an interstice. Through rejecting conventions and shrugging off interpellations into comprehensible positions ("Hey, economist!", "Hey, social scientist!"), the idiot's presence calls into question those whose knowledge and ways are not usually questioned, especially experts and technocratic institutions and authorities. The idiot's actions (or non-actions) prompt those who are supposed to be "in the know" to stop their business and explain themselves: "But what are you doing?"

Executing an idiotic inquiry means sticking one's nose "into what should be nobody's business" (Stengers 2005, 999). It means pursuing an inquiry deriving from the lack of knowledge yet not driven by the moti-

vation to make up for it; and bringing to bear "improper" knowledges, other angles, or concerns that are usually brushed away. Perhaps taking Larry's garbage bin metaphor literally, I started studying waste a few years back. In this research, I am not as much interested in the scandals of waste dumping and smuggling. Rather, I am interested in what counts as "best practices," exemplifying the way forward and normalizing both our approach to ecological crisis and this crisis itself. Focusing on technological applications in environmental management, I have read many technical papers in computer engineering or this or that professional publication with nothing but my training in comparative literature and cultural studies to guide me (there's heteroglossia in a patent application!). And I have started many interviews with professionals in this or that area of "smart" innovation with "I have been trained in cultural studies, now would you please be so kind to explain to me . . ." (a feminized idiot surely starts out on a polite note).

The social study of science and technology, STS, has often contemplated the challenges of studying expert domains as a non-expert. Authors such as Nick Seaver (2017) have discussed the question of whether one needs to know the technological object—for instance, algorithmic code—to be able to analyze its social implications. Seaver's answer is that having a degree of understanding of expert domains such as computer engineering or data science is helpful, but ultimately it is about underscoring the algorithm's own multiplicity and, to use an apparent "Larry term," its various articulations. So, in a way, STS already offers a position from which to study the humming choir of machines that operate in the background of our societies, from air conditioners to datacenters.

But what has this to do with cultural studies? Have I been "set free" just to join the next flock and land in the next colony? Though I often draw on STS research, studying science and technology on and in terms of Larry's radical contextualism leads to questions that STS' understandings of the socio-technical, specifically if following actor-network-theory, do not easily afford. Foremost, STS often reduces context to context of practice and situated locus. Its domain of study remains derived from, and constituted by, expert domains populated with professionals and users. The latter are often primarily understood in terms of their degree of conformity to, or deviation from, the subject or ideal user that is imagined by the former.

An idiotic inquiry into science and technology à la Larry means disassembling machines as objects and reassembling them as part of the kinds of machines that Larry sees everywhere: stratifying, coding, and territorializing machines that are responsible for actualizations of the virtual and, therewith, the production of actual reality. Jennifer Slack and Greg Wise (2005), whose book *Technology and Culture: A Primer* I have used a lot in my classes, have made the point so forcefully and persuasively: technology exists "only in relation to the interminglings they make possible or that make them possible" (Deleuze and Guattari 1987 qtd. in Slack and Wise 2005, 113). Here, analysis brings into focus more than the situated context of practice, namely context as a constellation of milieus that amounts to a connective territory, amidst other territorializations, and performs a diagram. Articulations of technology into context rather than the technology itself, or its embedding in a situated context of practice only, are what is important in that this generates realities. Given that Larry's machines are sputtering engines of multiplicity and complexity, it should not surprise that whenever he bothers to comment on technology in the narrow sense, he denounces reductions, for instance that a singular form of algorithmic control effectively replaces all other forces. To further appreciate how studying technology à la Larry could extend and reorient the endeavor, one (someone who likes to "wrestle with angels," not that blasé idiot) could trace the lines of creative adaptations between Larry, Deleuze, and Simondon, the French philosopher of technology. Larry's scheme for mixed enunciations (Grossberg 2010; Grossberg and Behrenshausen 2016), which elaborates relations between form, substance, expression, and content, underscores the contingency of such relations and could help extend the analysis of the materiality of technology in a way that places uncertainty front and center. Take data-centric and algorithmic "smart" governance: at stake is not just the form of expression—the android's dream—but also the substance of expression as well as content. This perspective renders such assemblages unstable in a productive and generative manner. In Wiener's account, uncertainty is associated with the external reality that needs to be controlled via data and information in a fight for existence and against entropy. Contingency is what we will suppress with our machines. But for Simondon, the adaptation of technology introduces new kinds of uncertainties or contingencies and technocultural emergences in moments of transduction that knit together disjunctive realities. Studying these dynamics à la Larry means under-

scoring uncertainty, contingency, and instability in a way that explores their contextual significance. Simondon's account of technical objects, associated milieus, and transductions undergoes a makeover to emerge as an analysis of context, power, and political possibility. It is not a matter of just holding on to the premise that machines must fail, or to find comfort in a worldview promising contingency and the possibility of lines of flight (though I admit it often does). Rather, it means seeking the contextual significance and politics of uncertainty associated with such technologies. For instance, my idiotic inquiry of waste (Hoyng 2019, 2023) maps the politics of uncertainty inherent in, and stemming from, the smart circular economy. I am interested in how the potentiality of waste matter is translated into—and substituted for—figures of risk and opportunity, but in ways that leave open, or generate, a host of uncertainties, contingencies, and possibilities. Such uncertainties should be considered in relation to various politics, including the proud proclamations of corporate responsibility, pervasive exploitation of neglect, persistent informality, possible alternatives, etc.

Having become accustomed to acting as an idiot in the face of experts, the issue that remains toughest for me is to perceive the intersections of the "expert" and the "popular." By this I do not just mean the everyday, intimate, or indigenous milieus of particular users, which feature in STS research. What is often missing, alongside a notion of context, is a notion of culture. It is in his regard that I appreciate Ted Striphas' (2023) highly original book that probes the definition of algorithmic culture. Deeply invested in Raymond Williams' approach to culture, the book explores conditions of possibility for the emergence of today's algorithmic culture by focusing on the cultural meanings, connotations, displacements, and erasures of its keywords. Ted provides a pre-history of today's algorithmic imagination, or the ways in which people beyond the tech world become aware of, and self-reflexive about, their relationships to the role of data-centric and algorithmic technology. This encompasses the ways in which people struggle to give expression to the turbulences of daily life as it is increasingly suffused with algorithmic computation and decision-making. Yet carrying forward the task of analyzing the algorithmic imagination is not easy. Awareness tends to ignite at moments of controversy, scandal, and breakdown when, as STS has called this, a "matter of concern" (2015) gives rise to a public. This is when technocratic and infrastructural sub-politics attain publicity and discursive framing, and become subjected

to contestation. But where do the sub-politics of technology meet the undercurrents of culture? In other words, is there another, perhaps more nuanced and richer, way of thinking about popular cultural reflection on, and negotiation of, datafication and algorithmic power? How could we try and comprehend structures of feeling and affective atmospheres that linger and simmer before and beyond the all-too-obvious manifestation of crisis forges a shift toward public politics? And where do we encounter those who do not seek, or do not have, a voice at those moments?

My current research focus considers the data-centric and algorithmic technologies that construct "climate change" as a problem and inform proposed solutions. In recent history, the most ostensive type of cultural expressions reflecting on climate modeling may well have been climate skepticism and denialism. Such expressions have mobilized facets of algorithmic culture to the extent that they extrapolate the uncertainty of computation to a politics of neglect. However, whereas the facts of rising temperatures and climate breakdown, as well as their anthropogenic cause, have become more established over the years, paradoxically, the erasure of the uncertainties of climate modeling and carbon counting can also amount to a form of denialism. Denialism here refers to absolutizing model-derived calculation in such a way that this disavows the unpredictability of planetary agencies, along with the speculative and constructed nature of projections that, time and again, turn out to underestimate the speed of climate breakdown and overestimate the impact of our mitigation measures (Hoyng forthcoming). Such denialism enables the powers that be. But the kinds of cultural reflections around the algorithmic construction of "the climate" that we should "give a damn about"—in the sense that they may hold the potential for transformative politics—are harder to spot. They contain a larger variety of cultural discourses, affects (including anxiety), and aesthetics, speaking to the intersecting uncertainties of planetary events, algorithmic knowledge, and situated and embodied anticipations of futures. Grappling with climate politics therefore encompasses grappling with popular negotiations of algorithmic knowledge that remains shot through with uncertainty. Attending to this kind of task seems to me to require a great deal of, and from, cultural studies. And clearly only an idiot would undertake it.

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The Crisis of Commensuration?

MIKKO LEHTONEN

Visiting Chapel Hill in 2000 or early 2001, I had dinner with Larry's then-Ph.D. students, a dinner in which Larry himself did not take part. During the dinner, I told the doctoral students that Larry is quite famous in Finland. I informed them that on one of his numerous visits to Tampere, Larry was interviewed for the biggest national newspaper, *Helsingin Sanomat*, and that on another trip he appeared in the national broadcast company's (YLE) prime time news.

It had helped to some extent that a selection of Larry's key texts (so far) had been published in Finnish in 1995. The title of the volume was *Mielihyvän kytkennät* and the subtitle *Risteilyjä populaarikulttuurissa* (freely translated as Articulations of Pleasure and Cruisings in Popular Culture). The volume was edited and translated by Juha Koivisto, Mikko Lehtonen, Ensio Puoskari, and Timo Uusitupa. The volume included a special introduction Larry wrote for the book. That introduction was clearly a first draft of what was eventually published as an introduction to Larry's *Bringing It All Back Home* in 1997. This early draft differed to some extent from the one later published in English, in that it was much more personal and intimate than the latter. The other texts in the volume were: "Is There a Fan in the House" from 1992, "Teaching the Popular" from 1986, "The In-Difference of Television" from 1987, "You Still Have to Fight for Your Right to Party" from 1988, "Putting the Pop Back into Postmodernism" from 1988, "The Formations of Cultural Studies" from 1993 and "Articulation and Culture," the first chapter in *We Gotta Get Out of This Place* from 1992.

Since then, a few other texts by Larry have been translated into Finnish: "Does Cultural Studies Have Futures? Should It?" from 2006 (translated by Erkki Vainikkala in 2007) and "Cultural Studies in Search of Method" from 2019 (translated by Mikko Lehtonen and published in Finnish in 2021). On

top of that, there is a Ph.D. thesis on Larry from 2006 in Finnish by Ensio Puoskari (the title translated into English would be "Popular, Communication and Articulation").

So, as a result of all this, Larry is quite well known in Finland. In his case, a professor can be news, as I insisted to Larry's doctoral students. I was, however, a bit surprised as the students suspected that I was lying to them. A professor is not news, they insisted. I, on my part, remarked that this, as everything else, depends on the context. Cultural studies has been quite visible in Finland. Texts by Raymond Williams and Stuart Hall have been translated into Finnish. There is a *Finnish Journal of Cultural Studies* (Kulttuurintutkimus), a national association (Kulttuurintutkimuksen seura), and biannual conferences (Kultturintutkimuksen päivät) with several hundred participants.

As the journalists in Finland are practically all educated in universities, they have one foot in the academy, so to speak. In such a context, a professor can indeed be an object of curiosity in the eyes of the journalists. This, of course, is not to say that the journalists would try to hunt down each and every scholar from abroad who finds herself or himself in Finland. On the contrary, Larry's media visibility results from the nature of his analyses, which help to understand and evaluate what is going on. In the late 1990s, it was still news in Finland that there is a US professor who takes seriously the role of popular music in the construction of social realities.

To me, the Chapel Hill incident tells of different and changing contexts where cultural studies practitioners operate. The USA is not, and was not, Finland, or vice versa. The central difference between the two was (and perhaps still is, to some degree) probably a difference between different epistemic orders. In Finland—when first a young nation-state after WW1, and then when built into a post-WW2 welfare state—academics had for a long time a visible role not only in the public sphere but also in the state machinery, as prime ministers and in other noteworthy political positions. (Six out of thirteen presidents of Finland have had a doctorate. Of all US presidents, only Woodrow Wilson seems to have had a Ph.D. degree.) Even as market players occupied, from the 1980s on, the role of those saying who "we" are in Finland, academics still maintained some residual power to discuss the changing social realities.

That definitional power may change its location from one conjuncture to another. In *Under the Cover of Chaos* Larry (2018, 6) writes: "It does feel like the terms of struggle, of knowledge, history and feeling, are chang-

ing, that there is a shift in the 'tectonic plates' that have defined modernity." In this text, I try to open up a bit the longer-term and more recent changes in the terms of knowledge. It is said that the West is amidst a crisis of knowledge and truth. I ask:

- If there is such a crisis, what might the crisis be about?
- Is the crisis about knowledge and truth, or is it about changing social relations—or both?
- What do we talk about when we talk about valid and legitimate knowledge?
- Are there any common measures to weigh what is so-called "true" knowledge and what is not?
- Is there any common frame for debate about what constitutes "truth" or "knowledge" (see also Lehtonen 2021)?

To put it bluntly, I see the crisis of knowledge first and foremost as a crisis of knowledge *authorities*. Hence the crisis is also a social crisis (something that Larry refers to in the quotation above). At the heart of this crisis, to me, is a crisis of commensuration—a lack of common frames from which we could measure different regimes of truth.

COMMENSURATION, VALUE AND CULTURE

What would the idea of commensuration entail in relation to what is called "culture"? The value of culture has traditionally been seen to lie either in itself (the intrinsic value of culture) or in relation to something else (the instrumental value of culture). If there once was, at least amongst the social and cultural elites, a consensus of the value of culture in and for itself, such understanding has crumbled after World War II (e.g. Denning 2004; Lehtonen and Koivunen 2012). Currently, there are multiple domains of value in the field of culture (Frow 1995, 1–2, 131). While "culture" was once identified with high culture, today culture is increasingly also, or perhaps even mainly, seen as the popular culture and various ways of life. When old cultural hierarchies and categories have dissolved, the ideal definitions of culture have given way to descriptive and less value-laden definitions (Redden 2015, 32; see also Belfiore and Bennett 2007, 136). No wonder, then, that the value of culture has during the last decades been an object of various redefinitions and renegotiations.

As Alexander Styhre (2013) writes, "all processes of valuation and commensuration are riddled with ambiguities, uncertainty, and political interests" (75). The struggles and negotiations seldom result in one party dictating its will to others. Instead, such processes of valuation aim to strike a balance between various interests (ibid., 76). Quite often the value of "culture" is in these days measured in relation to "economy." The values of "economy" and "culture" are, however, not fixed or given. Instead, they become formed in various contextual settings as the results of social negotiations and struggles that can lead also to unexpected outcomes. Economy and culture are not to be viewed as if they were independent realms or possessed an intrinsic or given value of their own. However, in modern and late modern societies, the two are embedded in the societal whole by their apparent disembeddedness (Grossberg 2010b). In other words, economy and culture are seen as parts of the societal whole in the form of autonomous spheres. The idea of the economic and the cultural as independent spheres has strong discursive, performative, and institutional effects that are crucially present in the narrative of the "economization of culture" and the new forms of commensuration accompanied by it.

Commensuration—a practice, a form of valuation—has been actively discussed within human sciences for a couple of decades (e.g. Espeland and Stevens 1998; Grossberg 2010a, 2010b; Klamer 1997; Böhm and Land 2009; Redden 2015; Styhre 2013). Not surprisingly, much of the discussion has centered round the relations of economy and culture. As Wendy Nelson Espeland and Mitchell L. Stevens (1998) remark: "Commensuration is noticed most when it creates relations among things that seem fundamentally different" (316).

Commensuration requires that the compared entities have a relation to some third member: the measure (Espeland and Stevens 1998, 317). Often that measure is money, at times something else, but the central feature of commensuration is to convert something qualitative into something quantitative. This does not, however, mean that commensuration would inevitably bring the entity that is compared (e.g., culture) in line with that entity with which it is compared (e.g., economic and social usefulness). Commensuration can also lead to opposing outcomes, such as deeming something (in this case, culture) as incommensurate, that is, socially unique in a specific way and hence impossible to express in some other category of value (cf. Espeland and Stevens 1998, 326). As Ruccio et al.

(1997) point out, attempts to stabilize value create the possibility of their opposite: "that value may not stabilize and that the position of any object of material and/or cultural significance even in the most structured value system can change suddenly" (66). Hence, value must be seen as always *for someone in some context* (cf. Frow 1995, ch. 4). As Ruccio et al. (1997) put it, "value does not inhere, ubiquitously, in any object or life-world" but is "a discursive construct." This implies that any event, practice or product can be understood in terms of value discourse—but need not be (56). Hence seeing value in something is always an imposition or rather a particular lens through which each object can be brought inside the realm of quantification. In this sense, as a discursive act, valuing depends upon conceptions of what matters, how it can be defined, and methods for measuring it (cf. Redden 2015, 30). From this perspective, commensuration "can be understood as a system of discarding information and organizing what remains in new forms" (Espeland and Stevens 1998, 317).

Valuing by commensuration consists of removing the things valued from their contexts, disregarding other elements of those contexts and quantifying the valued things that, in their contexts, are qualitative. As a result, such measuring does not consist of weighing out something that was already there independently of the act of valuing. Instead, valuing produces what it measures. As Espeland and Stevens (1998) put it: "commensuration creates new things, new relations, among disparate and remote things, and changes the meanings of old things" (324). In other words, valuing and measuring are interventions that shape the realities valued. They are performative acts (cf. Tulloch 1999) that produce new entities that are then amenable to certain kinds of action (Redden 2015, 35). One of the effects of valuing and measuring, then, is that they tend to promote what can most easily be measured and counted (Goldbard 2015, 222). This, in turn, produces a risk that "the real easily becomes co-extensive with what is measurable" (Espeland and Stevens 2008, 432).

FACT AND FICTION

Commensuration produces new regimes of knowledge. They are, however, not necessarily uncontested. Epistemological insecurity is sometimes said to have led to an era of "post-truth," in which we are assumed to live. Still, what was the "truth" we were supposed to lean on in the period of the so-called high modernity?

Understanding history is a part of trying to understand the present. The modern notions of truthiness have their historic origins. Here, I want to explore this problematic of truthiness by looking briefly at the modern dichotomy of "fact" and "fiction." This is not to say that the problematics of historically constructed truthiness could or should be reduced to the changing relations of fact and fiction. Instead, this short detour is offered to illustrate the historically changing notions of what and on which premises is held to be true in various contexts. For this, we can return to the early 18th century Britain and look at the history of two modern key terms here: "novel" and "news." Both of these words stem from the Latin "novus"—new. Hence, a novel is a novelty and as such not that far from news.

In Britain, three or four hundred years ago, the relations of fact and fiction were quite different from those familiar at the beginning of the 21st century. Fiction was offered as factual accounts. As Lennard J. Davis (1980, 120) writes: "Authors of English novels of the seventeenth and early eighteenth century almost always begin their works with a preface asserting that they are presenting not a fiction but a factual account of some real series of events." During that time, a novel could be a fictional tale or a journalistic report in the form of a printed ballad or a flying sheet. As Davis (1980 writes: "The word *novel* seems to have been used interchangeably with the word *news*—and both were applied freely to writings that were about true or fictional events" (126).

Factual narratives were separated from the fictive ones only in the first half of the 18th century. "It was not until the revision of the Stamp Act in 1724 that an English law specifically defined what constituted news by taxing all journals, mercuries, and newspapers of any format—particularly distinguishing between pamphlets and newspapers. This action struck a decisive wedge between news (which was taxable now) and fiction (which was not)" (Davis 1980, 133). For example, Dr. Samuel Johnson wrote accounts of the English parliamentary sessions in an allegorized and anagramized version that chronicled the debates of the "Senate of Liliput." "If novelists, who were really journalists, claimed to be writing factual accounts, which were really fictional, then perhaps it is possible to say that the eighteenth century might have held notions of fact and fiction that were considerably different from those of our own" (Davis 1980, 133).

Without going further in later historical developments, it is apparent that the boundary line between what is held to be fact and what fiction varies historically, from one spatial and temporal context to another. What

counts as "truth" is historically always (over)determined and might be a result of changes in areas that are not first and foremost epistemic by their nature. (This might be obvious from the fact that fact and fiction were in early 18th century Britain separated from each other on the basis of the needs of taxation.) Secondly, the fictionalization of fact and factualization of fiction reminds us that no "fact" is, in the end, independent of the fact that it has been produced in a certain way.

"Factual" and "fictional" matters cannot be distinguished from each other on the basis of whether they have been narrated or not. Naturally, not all narratives are "true," but in the final analysis, neither is any "fact" disconnected from having been narrated—produced in a certain way. This is actually indicated already in the etymology of the word "fact." The term goes back to the Latin word "factus" which means "fashioned," "manufactured" and "cultivated." Hence, facts are always "made"; someone has revised them and represented them in a certain way.

Customarily, "fiction" is distinguished from "fact" on the basis that the former is made up, whereas the latter is not. In the light of its etymology, though, "fiction" does not fall very far from "fact." "Fiction" originates from the Latin verb "fingo," which includes such meanings as "to form," "to frame (in words)," "to arrange," "to make," "to develop" and "to make up." The first five of these meanings seem to indicate that in the light of their etymologies, "fact" and "fiction" are actually synonymous. It is only the last meaning of the verb "fingo" as "making something up" that brings forth the familiar conception of "fiction" as something which does not claim to be concerned with events that have actually taken place in reality (Lehtonen 2000, 83-84).

Maybe the most interesting question here is not what, at a given time, constitutes the border between fact and fiction, truth and non-truth, but the question of who is in the position to define that border. In other words, what is of interest is the question: Who has the social and cultural authority (that might be also or partly economically and politically legitimated) to carry out such demarcations?

THE CRISIS OF COMMENSURATION

What, then, is going on in terms of knowledge production? The aforementioned transitions in definitional power might be connected with what Larry (2018) calls "affective autonomy," the term describing "the grow-

ing sense of separation between what matters and how it matters on the one hand, and its actual value or content" (94). For Larry, "[f]acing the inability to judge the comparative value or merit of anything, the 'reasonable' response seems to be to treat everything equally, or at least with equal suspicion, and to refuse to seriously invest in any one option over the others." The only way that anything matters "is with some degree of irony and cynicism." In such a situation, "the grounds of critical judgment have disappeared" (ibid., 95). This is quite near of that what Terry Eagleton (2006) writes about the present politics of knowledge based on one's own interests, beliefs, commitments and desires: "there cannot be argument over the facts, since conflicting interpretative communities will formulate the issues at stake in ways which leave no common ground of agreed facts for them to scrap over. There are no conflicts, simply incommensurabilities" (274).

Larry then connects this with another structure of feeling, that of narcissism, "a radical personalization of everything" (2018, 101) that "produces a historically unique iteration of an affective appeal to the status of experience and feeling as the only true source of value and truth" (ibid., 102). What matters is a question of personal experience, not of knowledge or expertise. Hence, passive nihilism and narcissism produce together new populism vis-à-vis knowledge. It is a matter of "my" or "our" views against "their" views here and now.

What does all this have to do with the production and legitimation of knowledge? If the market forces recognize no cultural hierarchy, what could serve as the legislator of what is valid knowledge and what not in the times governed by market cries?

The truth is multifarious. It changes constantly. It can be controversial and contradictory. Yet the truth matters. What is at a given time and in a given place held to be true, forms the premises of how people act. Perhaps we will not get rid of the fact that we have the incommensurable regimes of truth, but we might, in spite of this, discuss the common criteria for measuring the values of various systems of knowledge or even comparing them with each other. The choice is not between some absolute truth, free of humans, on the one hand, and human relativism on the other. Knowledge and truth are always both contingent and real. They are not and cannot be universal but neither are they just relative by their nature. Instead, the challenge is to develop "simultaneously an account of radical historical contingency for all knowledge claims and knowing subjects . .

. and a no-nonsense commitment to faithful accounts of a 'real' world," as Donna Haraway (1991, 287) put it in her classical essay on situated knowledges.

In the light of Haraway's thoughts, truth and knowledge are situated. Hence, they are also multiple. So, how to build such frames in which competing truth-claims could be measured and put in a mutual dialogue? The problem seems to be that there are no given frames for the calculation of value. Instead, we live amidst "an increasingly complex market of incommensurable and changing values," as Larry (2010a, 299) puts it. He writes:

> We seem to be living in the midst of, or at least facing the threat, on the impossibility of valuation and commensuration; across all dimensions of human activity . . . there is at least the appearance of a growing inability to find any common ground or logic upon which one can constitute, measure, compare and possibly adjudicate (or compromise) differences. (Grossberg 2010a, 323)

So, perhaps the crisis of knowledge is in the last instance a crisis of commensuration. On what grounds do we measure different regimes of truth? How do we build dialogues between various systems of knowledge without any of them assuming that they are universal but seeing their own particularity and the weaknesses and strengths this contains?

BEYOND EXISTING VOCABULARIES

If the market forces, as said, recognize no cultural hierarchy, what could serve as the legislator of what is valid knowledge and what not in the times governed by market cries? To ask this is not to say that the intellectuals of the 17th and 18th centuries or the political governors of the 19th century would have offered incontestable frames for the legitimation of knowledge. The European nation-states claimed that their basic principles—liberty, equality, autonomy, democracy—were universal but we know well that they were particular. To quote Stuart Hall (2000): "it is now clear that liberalism is not 'the culture that is beyond cultures' but the culture that won: that particularism which successfully universalized and hegemonized itself across the globe" (228). If this is so, neither the interpretative frameworks of liberalism were universal but particular. So we cannot go back from the current individual "consumer" of the markets to the allegedly universal "citizen" of modern nation-states simply because that citizen is not a universal figure (see also Lehtonen 2021).

Here we are on the edge of existing liberal political discourses. As Hall (2000) asks: "How . . . can the particular and the universal, the claims of both difference and equality, be recognized?" (235). In order to solve this problem, Hall says, we "have to put our minds seriously . . . to some new and novel ways of *combining* difference and identity, drawing together on the same terrain those formal incommensurables of political vocabularies—liberty and equality *with* difference, 'the good' and 'the right.'" To put it Larry's (2010a) way: "The challenge is to find or invent other commensurating machines that are capable of adjucating otherness via (and not in spite of) their difference" (325).

In short, the dilemma to be solved is how to be at the same time *both* different *and* equal. But not only that. As Hall (2000, 235) stresses, "the process cannot be allowed to remain with this political assertion of radical particularity. It must attempt to construct a diversity of new public spheres in which all particulars will be transformed by being obliged to negotiate within a broader horizon." To formulate it the way Larry (2010b, 320) does: "we are facing (euro-)modern problems for which the dominant existing modernities have no solution."

Note that the words "new public spheres" in the Hall quotation above are in plural. Hence, also the commensuration machines and their powers should have to be in the plural (cf. Grossberg 2010, 321). Altogether, we need strategies against such fundamentalism (of which see Grossberg 2010, 325) where some particular set of relations or values appears not only absolute, but also as the absolute negation of any other.

As Larry has time and again said, the state of contemporary culture is chaotic. With so much culture out there, there is a chaos of TV, film, music, and also of information, of opinions, of voices, of knowledge claims, of misinformation. In such a vortex of culture it is hard to know how one can possibly produce knowledge judgements. This, in turn, can give rise to both cynicism and fundamentalism. If anywhere, here such diagnostic voices as Larry's are needed, in all different spatial-temporal contexts. Professors' views on the ways social realities are produced and the role of knowledge in this production should be news, indeed!

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45

Value, Comparison, and Judgment in Cultural Studies: On Commensuration as a Conjunctural Problem

DOUGLAS SPIELMAN

This chapter concerns the concept of commensuration and its place in Lawrence Grossberg's recent work. Broadly construed, commensuration describes a process of comparative judgment. It bears on the kinds of evaluative activities that often occupy us in cultural, political, and economic life. In centering the concept of commensuration below, I accent the ways in which systems of judgment are integral parts of our social context.

In what follows, I enumerate five unique features of Grossberg's approach to commensuration and sketch its place in his analysis of the contemporary conjuncture. In concluding, I consider a specific conjunctural problem: the online dissemination of false or misleading information. While the proliferation of misinformation (or "fake news") is often framed as an epistemic failure—one that concerns our ability to distinguish truth from falsehood—I suggest it touches more fundamentally on normative questions about what we value and how we rank these values. Drawing from Grossberg, I argue that misinformation should be understood in relation to a broader centering of affective criteria in our contemporary systems of judgment (Grossberg's term for this is "affective autonomy"). Considered in this light, the prevalence of misinformation speaks less to a breakdown in our epistemic capacities than to an emergent form of commensuration that prioritizes affective intensity over other sources of value. In drawing out this example, I show how Grossberg's reflections on commensuration provide a generative starting point for assessing the current conjuncture.

Commensuration is the process of comparing multiple things (especially things that are considered bearers of value) according to a common metric. Although neighboring concerns appear earlier, Grossberg first addresses the concept of commensuration in his reflections on the 2008 financial crisis. A central feature of this turbulent period, he argues, was a breakdown in established mechanisms for measuring value (Grossberg 2010). As Grossberg underscores, the much-discussed "toxic assets" that came to symbolize the failure of the financial system in fact revealed a deeper dysfunction in our techniques of commensuration. "What makes contemporary financial assets 'toxic,'" he writes, "is not that they are worthless, . . . but that no one knows what their worth may be or even how to go about figuring out their worth" (2010, 299). At issue, then, was not merely a loss of value, but a crisis in how things were valued—that is, in the procedures by which we determine the relative worth of this or that thing.

This crisis of commensuration was not restricted to the economic sphere. In Grossberg's work, the 2008 financial meltdown occasioned a wider reflection on what we may call, borrowing the title of his 2010 article, "modernity and commensuration." This theme also extends into his more recent work on the 2016 Trump election. There, the multiple levels of crisis that emerged during the Trump years are (at least in part) made intelligible in terms of a generalized breakdown in our commensurating mechanisms (Grossberg 2018a). Below, I reconstruct several aspects of this work. Before doing so, however, I describe traditional approaches to commensuration.

I. COMMENSURATION: THE TRADITIONAL VIEW

Classically, two values are said to be commensurable when they can be compared according to a common metric. When we find ourselves making comparative judgments about values (or bearers of value), and when we are pushed to give reasons for these judgments, we face questions about commensuration. If we are unable to establish a common standard for comparison—either because the things in question cannot be subsumed under a given value type, or because they cannot be adequately measured even as nominal bearers of the same type of value—we face a situation of incommensurability.

Commensuration often involves a moment of abstraction. The terms in a comparative relation are reduced to a common property, and then measured with reference to their respective quantities of this shared thing. In this sense, quantitative differentiation (the ability to say *A* is *X*-times greater than *B* with respect to scale *C*) relies on a prior moment of qualitative identification. In its extreme form, this traditional picture implies that all value differences can be represented as scalar differences—as differences in the magnitude of a common value-forming element. If I prefer chocolate ice cream to strawberry it is because chocolate contains a greater amount of some shared "value stuff" and this allows not merely for the ordinal ranking of chocolate above strawberry, but for a system of cardinal measure in which I can say chocolate is three times better than strawberry and seven times better than vanilla.

In economics, the concept of commensuration is directed at understanding the ratios in which different goods are exchanged. In such a context, how we explain commensurability has bearing on how price formation is described. Classically, economic theories have looked either to *labor* as the shared property that renders goods commensurable (Ricardo is the prime representative of this approach), or to *utility* (as in the marginalist tradition).

On these traditional accounts, when we commensurate things we often take an incomplete view of them. In reducing objects to a common property, we abstract away many otherwise significant features of the things in question. Critiques of commensuration, then, often appeal to the multitude of properties that we overlook in structuring our comparisons, properties that may otherwise have salience when a more holistic view of the objects and their context is considered.

There is also a neighboring concern: since there is some ratio in which all commensurable goods are equivalent, those bearers of our most cherished values—human relationships, great works of art, the natural environment, etc.—are placed on a continuum with, for instance, mundane consumer goods (and even have some precise equivalent in the latter). This critique laments the way modern procedures of commensuration level hierarchies of traditionally incommensurable goods—that is, of goods with intrinsic value that cannot be realized in any equivalent, or substitute, good (for discussion on the ethics of commensuration, see Raz 1986; Chang 1997; Espeland 1998).

II. GROSSBERG'S CONJUNCTURAL APPROACH TO COMMENSURATION

Contemporary literature on commensuration often imports assumptions from neoclassical economics and rational choice theory. In so doing, it anchors the commensuration process within a largely decontextualized scene of individual choice, while describing these choices in terms of an unduly narrow picture of reason and rational deliberation. Below, I enumerate five features that distinguish Grossberg's approach to commensuration:

1. Grossberg emphasizes the *social* character of the commensuration process. His focus is not on individual preference ranking, but on the wider social and cultural logics that make comparative judgment possible. This points us towards a politics of commensuration as opposed to an ethics of individual choice. Logics of commensuration are embedded within relations of power and authority, and they can be subject to critical scrutiny on this basis. As Grossberg observes, "Decision-making structures, and systems of judgment and commensuration, are all too often defined by un-named, taken-for-granted standards and traditionally privileged socio-political presuppositions" (2018b, 167).
2. Grossberg's approach is *contextual*. Logics of commensuration are historical and are conditioned by a dynamic multiplicity of social forces. To the extent that rational deliberation depends on a capacity to commensurate competing values, Grossberg's account also implies a contextualist view of reason. Reason is not approached as an anthropological invariant, or via speculative a priori means, but through the specific procedures, technologies, and cultural forms that empower it. To borrow Grossberg's preferred concept, commensuration (and practical reason more broadly) must be apprehended at the level of the *conjuncture* (that is, within the specific assemblage of social forces and conflicts that characterize a particular historical moment).
3. There are *multiple* logics of commensuration. Even within a given context, there are many forms of commensuration operating at different scales and across different social domains. As Grossberg

writes "every society must have commensurating apparatuses or logics, in fact, a complex ecology of them" (2010, 321). We might go further and suggest that different domains of social life acquire their relative autonomy precisely because of their characteristic forms of commensuration. The specificity of the economic, for instance, can be explained with reference to its unique mechanisms for rendering values commensurable.

4. Commensuration is a *practical* activity. It is something that we *do*, and it can be described in terms of the material practices and techniques that bring things into comparative relation. As Grossberg underlines, "commensuration is not (necessarily) a matter of meaning, understanding or translation, although euro-modernity has often defined it as a hermeneutic problem. It is more material—a matter of weighing, of measuring, without necessarily being enumerated or quantified" (2010, 322). On a strong reading of this statement, we can even allow for the hermeneutic dimension of commensuration to crystalize downstream from its practical dimension. That is, the activity of comparing values can condition our reflective interpretation of why we value things in the way that we do. This view authorizes a descriptive account of value that brackets agents' reflective rationality and its role as an action-guiding faculty in the comparative process. The ability to describe value judgments independently of our subjective interpretation of these judgments can be particularly important in contexts where commensuration is automated by algorithmic systems. The latter evaluate objects, knowledge, and people without interpretive mediation by their end users.
5. Grossberg directs us to the *affective* dimension of commensuration problems. In his analysis, crises of commensuration are not simply experienced as failures of practical reason, they are also felt affectively. At stake in the problem of commensuration, then, is not only how we reason to certain choices or actions (the traditional purview of practical reason), but what it feels like to be alive in a particular time and place.

III. INCOMMENSURABILITY AND AFFECTIVE AUTONOMY: A NOTE ON THE CURRENT CONJUNCTURE

We can read Grossberg's work on the contemporary conjuncture as, in part, an attempt to grapple with the affective consequences that follow from a widespread crisis of commensurability. In his recent work, Grossberg describes several interlocking structures of feeling that together compose an "affective landscape" (2018a). The structure of feeling I wish to focus on here is one he calls "affective autonomy." The latter names a kind of public mood that emerges from a generalized failure in our ability to adjudicate between competing values. It is, Grossberg observes, rooted in "the growing sense of a separation between what matters and how it matters on the one hand, and its actual value or content. It is the result of a proliferation of, well, everything . . . combined with the deconstruction of every standard by which one's choice can be grounded and justified" (2018a, 94).

Grossberg documents several consequences that follow from this crisis of commensurability, including the proliferation of various fundamentalisms (2018a). When evaluative mechanisms fail, he argues, there is a tendency towards affective overinvestment in one's epistemic and normative commitments. Absent authoritative criteria, the only thing that seems capable of grounding a particular choice is the strength (or intensity) of the will that backs it—of the will that chooses. Affective investment thus becomes a substitute for the traditional imperative to have rational grounds for valuing one thing over another (or for believing one thing rather than another).

Elsewhere I have suggested that there are two interrelated dynamics at work in Grossberg's account of this structure of feeling (Spielman 2019). On one hand, the absence of authoritative mechanisms for adjudicating between competing values leads to a compensatory overinvestment in the act of judgment itself. As Grossberg writes, "If an investment in something cannot be justified by its worth or truth, if there is no real basis for choice, then only the intensity of commitment itself can justify the choice" (2018a, 94) On the other hand, affect can itself become the criterion by which something is evaluated. In such cases, a thing's ability to generate passionate commitment (or attachment) grounds the assessment of its relative value. These two processes can be related: the strength of one

person's investment in something (even absent justificatory grounds) can give that thing a kind of measurable value, one rooted in its ability to generate strong feelings and attachments.

We can concretize this latter idea by looking at the contemporary state of knowledge and public reason, focusing on the various phenomena often grouped under the rubric of "post-truth" (misinformation, disinformation, "fake news," "alternative facts," etc.). Grossberg suggests that popular responses to these phenomena have failed to appreciate *how* things like "fake news" matter to those consuming them (2018a, 126). Responses often begin from the assumption that information is always valued for its veracity (the "truer" something is, the more valuable). When framed in this way, "post-truth" speaks to a failure of epistemic judgment—we have, the argument goes, lost our capacity to recognize truth. If, however, misinformation is mediated by the emergent structure of feeling Grossberg calls "affective autonomy," then it may be valued for its emotive rather than factual content. Its appeal would most aptly be described in terms of its capacity to provide consumers with a sense of collective belonging and existential security. Or, in an even more rudimentary sense, to generate strong feelings and emotional investments. So understood, the commensurating machine that empowers judgment is attuned to the affects that attach to the news and not to the veracity of its content. To respond by immediately situating misinformation within a comparative matrix marked by the boundaries of "true" and "false" is thus to begin in the wrong place if one's goal is to thwart its spread.

This can help explain the inadequacy of fact checking in slowing the circulation of misinformation. While our epistemic beliefs may be corrigible through exposure to corrective data (there is evidence that fact checking can lead people to revise their beliefs on narrow matters of fact), fact checking itself is relatively ineffective at stopping the circulation of misinformation or shifting ingrained political attitudes (Barrera et al. 2020). This may be because the veracity of the information was never the primary source of its value among consumers. If it is being shared because of its affective appeal (and if the affective component has some relative autonomy vis-à-vis its factual content), then fact checking hits against a limit. This limitation is compounded by forms of algorithmic judgement (operative, for instance, on social media platforms) that select for attention and engagement over other criteria.

As this example suggests, mapping different forms of commensuration can be crucial for understanding how to intervene in the conjuncture. To challenge blatantly fallacious or misleading forms of media, we cannot simply tabulate what is true and what is false (although this is certainly necessary). We must also reflect on when (and why) truthfulness ought to matter in the way we value and compare things. In this sense, there are more fundamental arguments to be had about what kinds of values (and forms of judgment) should predominate in different regions of public life. Grossberg's account of commensuration can attune us to these issues and help us, as he might put it, "tell a better story" about our world.

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What's in a Price?

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In *Cultural Studies in the Future Tense*, Lawrence Grossberg unpacks what he calls the "embedded disembeddedness" of economics, which he describes as the "paradox" in which "the economic is . . . continuously produced as self-producing, or if one prefers, the nature of its relational existence is such that it is made to operate . . . independently of that relationality" (Grossberg 2010, 149). In my research on financial trading, I've come to interpret this with regard to the way that economists study prices. Elsewhere I have argued that economics is a discipline that is concerned with discovering "right prices" (Hardin 2021). But it does this by disembedding itself from the messy conditions in which prices actually come to be and exist. Instead, economics demands that prices be modeled and examined only in the abstract, in their final form as numbers. Economists claim that if prices are not arbitrary, they must be determined by processes that can be adequately described mathematically. These are the options for economics: prices are either capturable by some kind of mathematical formula or inscrutable to science. If you aren't willing to say that prices are random, then you must need economists to explain them to you!

Within this narrow frame, prices are supposedly determined by the forces of aggregate supply and demand, which are the inevitable result of supposedly natural human strivings towards the rational maximization of utility. If supply increases—the logic goes—there is more of something available than people are willing to buy at its current price, so suppliers will reduce the price to incentivize more buyers. Supply goes up, price goes down. The converse also holds; if supply goes down, price will go up. On the other hand, if demand goes up, suppliers do not have enough goods on hand to satisfy all buyers. Seeing this, they realize that they can sell their goods for more and still sell out, so they increase prices.

In *Future Tense*, Grossberg makes a demand for a cultural studies of economics, a way of understanding "what economics might look like if it is put in the service of cultural studies" (Grossberg 2010, 118). One way to do this is to reevaluate the object of analysis: prices, which is so central to economics. The starting point is, of course, context. Grossberg writes "the economic—practices, relations, institutions—is . . . contextually constructed" (140). The logic of supply and demand evacuates that context, obscuring all the alternative scenarios in which things might be more complicated. For instance, increases in supply may actually allow a product to reach greater numbers of consumers and "catch on," thereby allowing suppliers to increase prices for eager conspicuous consumers. The pricing techniques of any number of major brands bear this scenario out. Starbucks has no monopoly on coffee, nor are its products scarce commodities. Instead, it is a deliberate cultural icon and its prices reflect that fact. Such alternatives are the very things that businesses actively seek to create, making them less exceptions than rules.

For cultural studies, there is an alternative, much more intuitive, and even banal explanation of prices: they are the result of complex articulations of forces that are contextual. Supply and demand is too simple a frame to capture how prices are actually determined. This is not simply a critique of neoclassical economics, which is all too easy to make and which does nothing to challenge its grip on popular and institutional economic imaginaries. Instead, the notion that pricing is contextual can be developed into a "provisional framework" (Hardin 2017, 327), upon which to base a cultural studies of economics. Grossberg lays the ground for such a framework not only in *Future Tense*, but also in a previous book, *We Gotta Get Out of This Place*. In it, he presents the idea of "mattering maps," which he defines as "the places at which people can anchor themselves into the world, the locations of things that matter." He presents the concept in his discussion of popular culture and affect, but tellingly uses an economic metaphor to elaborate: "'mattering maps' are like investment portfolios: there are not only different and changing investments, but different intensities or degrees of investment" (Grossberg 1992, 82).

The concept of mattering maps is especially useful for thinking about the construction of prices. Rather than individual valuations coming together to form aggregate supply and demand, mattering maps suggest a much more complex process of price formation, in which myriad ways of valuing intersect and clash under conditions of power. What something

is worth is not determined by independent individuals with inborn preferences, but rather by the intersection of cultures of valuation, structural conditions, and power relations. Prices are, therefore, never fixed by the magical machinations of supply and demand and are cultural rather than natural. Supply and demand function as a disembedded explanation ex post facto, one that always has the right answer but only after the test is over. The much more interesting question is how mattering maps are constructed, change, and come into tension to create the articulations that make prices.

One example is the price of labor. It is now old, if still devastating, news that the price of labor—the wage—barely budged between the 1970s and the end of the 2010s (DeSilver 2018). Many factors have conspired to hold this price steady for so many decades, including shifts in corporate and state power, the decline of unions, and more recently, aggressive inflation. Grossberg adds that the "New Right" is a "political movement committed to radically changing the culture of politics and the politics of culture" (Grossberg 2019, 57). One of the key cultural changes sought by the New Right was the establishment of a pro-business, anti-labor popular affect. Organizations including the Heritage Foundation and the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC), worked from the 1970s on to achieve this goal (Grossberg 2019). The New Right sought to reconfigure mattering maps in such a way as to devalue labor, shifting its price towards that preferred by corporations, and they were largely successful. The result has been a decades-long period of nearly flat inflation-adjusted average wages, all while the unemployment rate (an approximate measure of the supply of labor) has increased and decreased dramatically. From 2009 to 2018, the unemployment rate ranged between 9.9 and 3.9 percent (Amadeo 2019). Over the same period, wages increased a mere 1.4%, "puzzling" economists who think that low unemployment (supply) should increase wages (US Bureau of Labor Statistics 2019). But an investigation of popular mattering maps solves the riddle. Disdain for unions and the notion that a higher minimum wage would increase unemployment and damage growth (as if endless growth on a finite planet isn't the existential threat of our times) has become a highly invested in location on mattering maps, under concomitant conditions of growing conservative/corporate political power. Wages aren't rising because in the clash between cultures of valuation, valuing higher wages has been losing.

The way to increase wages, therefore, is not to stimulate more economic growth to increase demand for it, as some economists argued in favor of the 2017 Tax Cuts and Jobs Act (Hubbard 2017).[1] Instead, the battle must be fought at the level of mattering maps, by promoting different cultures of valuation and different relations of power. The Fight for $15 social movement has aimed specifically at changing the "national conversation" and "narrative" about the minimum wage—that is, at reorganizing popular mattering maps in order to change prices (Ashby 2018). Against the narrative that higher minimum wage would lead to layoffs or inflation, the group highlighted the moral necessity of valuing labor and supporting unions to increase their political power. The result is that several cities, six states, and the District of Columbia have passed $15 minimum wage bills. These changes, however, aren't only attributable to the political activism of the Fight for $15 movement. The latter was itself an offshoot of the failed Occupy Wall Street movement, which gathered an enormous amount of affective energy. The failure of Occupy to exact change, together with the scars of the financial crisis, and the economic realities of living in a time of flat wages and high-cost housing, childcare, and health care all combined in a context that made it possible for the position and intensity of a higher minimum wage on mattering maps to change. In response to these changes, the National Employment Law Project (NELP) undertook a study in 2016 that showed no correlation between increasing the minimum wage and unemployment levels (Sonn and Lathrop 2016). But the study itself and the proof it provides in opposition to mainstream economic narratives about the price of labor were not the things that created change. Instead, that proof only became "sayable and seeable" after mattering maps began to change (Deleuze 1988).

The framework of mattering maps as a way to understand price formation is not revolutionary for cultural studies. It is simply one way to apply Grossberg's longstanding insistence that the context should be the object of analysis to economics. But it is potentially revolutionary for offering an intellectual alternative to neoclassical economics, as well as rethinking what it means to fight for economic justice. A cultural studies understanding of price formation cuts through the simplification of neoclassical models of supply and demand. In its place, mattering maps illustrate the articulation of the many and contradictory forces that have long conspired not only to hold down wages, but also to raise the price of necessities like housing and childcare and hold down (often to zero) the price of pollut-

ing the environment and raising the temperature of the planet. I am not suggesting that pricing things differently would solve economic inequality and environmental degradation, but how they are priced now is part of the problem. And allowing the discipline of economics to declare that their prices are natural and that only economists can tell us how to affect them is a roadblock to change.

Cultural studies can and must tell the alternative story of price formation as a struggle over mattering maps. Unlike the neoclassical explanation of prices, this story has the added benefit of being right, at least according to the NELP study, and it also offers a blueprint for economic activism. If prices are controlled by aggregate supply and demand determined by individual preferences, the only option for activists is to tell people that their preferences are wrong and what they should prefer instead. The problem is, of course, that people don't derive their preferences from the dictates of professors or activists; they derive them from their mattering maps. This is why Grossberg never tires of reminding us that it is a bad idea to organize a politics around telling people that they are "cultural dupes" (Grossberg 1995). Cultural studies of economics suggests something different: that activists can direct their efforts to changing the cultures of valuation and power relations that intersect to determine prices, as the Fight for $15 aimed to do.

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At the end of "Notes on Deconstructing 'the Popular,'" Stuart Hall famously declares that "Popular culture is one of the sites where this struggle for and against a culture of the powerful is engaged . . . it is one of the places where socialism might be constituted. That is why 'popular culture' matters. Otherwise, to tell you the truth, I don't give a damn about it" (Hall 1981, 239). At the "Crossroads in Cultural Studies" conference in December 2016, Grossberg reiterated the sentiment, but turned it on cultural studies itself. He argued that cultural studies is uniquely suited to describing and intervening into the conjuncture that includes the political conflagration of the 2016 presidential election. But if it couldn't, he said, he didn't give a damn about cultural studies. However, from my vantage at the intersection of economics and cultural studies, the usefulness of cultural studies is not in question. Perhaps it is easier to see from the border how desperately cultural studies is needed and how much it can bring to

the study of economics. I also see Grossberg's other students stationed at other frontiers, drawing his insights into other areas of study where they similarly turn new ground and create better stories. However much Grossberg may wonder if cultural studies is up to the terrifying challenges of the moment, many of his students are certain we give a damn about it.

NOTE

1. Economist Glenn Hubbard gave this (incorrect) prediction in support of the tax cuts bill: "Growth in capital raises the absolute size of capital owners' slice because it's proportional to the overall pie. In a revenue-neutral reform, the government's slice doesn't get bigger. What's left belongs to workers" (Hubbard 2017).

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Stories We Could Tell: Thinking About Intellectual Practices and the Norms of Knowledge

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The aim of this short contribution is to provide, by way of tribute to Lawrence Grossberg, a thought-provoking exposition of the state of academia today while timidly proposing ways out of the scary evolution of the university—traditionally considered the backbone of developed societies—and of the mentality *within* the institution. To this end, let us begin with a true anecdote that illustrates in a nutshell what is presently occurring in many humanities departments: In a recent research-group meeting, the member who was presenting a summary of latest readings that day ended the talk by "kindly" handing out to the other members of the group a list of possible citations that could be of use in their publications.

This poses the following questions: What does the mere listing of academic references say about the knowledge produced in present-day universities? Is that what intellectual insight has turned into, i.e. the reliance on pre-selected quotations to provide one's publications with an appearance of (utterly false) academic depth? Is there not something deeply wrong going on here? More importantly—and this is what we wish to draw attention to—how do practices of the type relate to and reflect changes occurring in and outside higher education? If there is one thing that we should have learned from Lawrence Grossberg's work, it is that our strategies cannot be assumed in advance, that they should always be defined by "the concrete specificities of the conjuncture" (Grossberg 2013, 1). His call to question the practices of knowledge production has invariably proved crucial in our work, especially given the ongoing backlash against the university.[1]

The simple example presented above illustrates the extent to which the main purpose behind so-called "research" is an urge to boost one's own professional profile, ignoring not only matters that affect the community at large but also the ways our work impacts the institution (and vice versa). As we shall be discussing, the refusal to engage in rigorous, time-consuming, critical investigation reveals the degree to which market values have seeped into intellectual practices, bringing about a major transformation in higher education that threatens its traditional role as mender of social inequalities. Against this reality, our purpose is to unravel the extent to which academics have contributed to transforming ways of thinking about ideals respecting scholarship. Length constraints prevent us from going into too much detail. Suffice it to say that the work we produce has serious implications both for academia and society at large, if nothing else because it determines our ability or inability to interpret and respond to the challenges and opportunities triggered by or in society. Indeed, in many ambits, universities are no longer conceived of as sanctuaries of erudition but rather as lucrative hubs, especially in their potential to generate huge profits for investment funds. In what follows, we will be considering how the consistent and uncompromising work of Lawrence Grossberg—and more specifically his urging to think conjuncturally and strive for significance beyond small academic circles—helps us better identify those processes affecting society in general and intellectual work in particular, thus providing us with the necessary tools to understand, as he often puts it, "what is going on."

Serious cultural studies adepts are perfectly aware that, for better or for worse, the University is always "on the move" and therefore always changing. While it is true that scholars strive to adapt to change, it is also the case that ongoing practices tend to normalize unwished-for developments. More specifically, we need a different way of thinking about what constitutes knowledge and how it articulates into present-day changes affecting society at large. For instance, never before has so much been published; never before have publications been subjected to such thorough scrutiny before going to press. As evidenced in the STM report, for example, the scholarly publishing sector surges to new heights every year. Yet, apart from boosting personal, scholarly egos, the impact of ever-growing, peer-reviewed publications is (socially) a largely insignificant phenomenon, stimulated more by the internal dynamics of the institution itself than by genuine engagement with the real contexts of everyday life.[2]

In our opinion, lack of genuine concern as to what is going on in the world is exactly what has been happening over the past decades in academia. For example, as the "golden" nineties were coming to an end, social critic Russell Jacoby already warned against the aloofness of faculty that celebrated diversity and seemed to speak for minorities while doing next to nothing to unsettle established systems of power. "Multiculturalists, postcolonialists and other cutting-edge theorists . . . specialize in marginalization to up their market value," wrote Jacoby in 1999 (63-64). Scholars at the time were so obsessed with their academic bubbles that they didn't know what had hit them. The worst was yet to come as apathy turned into cynicism. As Lawrence Grossberg (1997) put it in no uncertain terms: "People know what they are doing, but they continue doing it anyway" (154). It is revealing, for example, that in a recent survey in Spain, nearly 90% of participants responded that the overriding motivation to publish was to magnify their own professional reputation (Goyanes and Rodríguez-Gómez 2018). With this in mind, our point is the following: the dissociation between what is happening at social, political, and economic levels on the one hand and dominant intellectual practices on the other hamper our capacities to understand the hazards and the potentialities of a particular conjuncture.

At the risk of delving into over-simplifications, it would be helpful to focus more narrowly on the current situation of intellectual work, both in university departments and outside the institution, within a context marked by the confluence of various processes that operate within Western countries in general and Spain in particular—i.e., the emergence of a new media ecosystem based on data-collection-based technologies, a new political (and affective) climate that thrives on cultural alarmism and polarization, and the expansion of market values in all spheres of life. This new scenario has shattered the world of ideas in unexpected and complex ways, leading to a rearticulation that undermines taken-for-granted relationships between society and higher education.

By way of example, let us now focus on the complex, reciprocal relationships between the changes in academic practices and the impact of market-oriented thinking. For example, as Henry A. Giroux (2014) asserted, the university is being recast into a corporate-like structure governed by "market fundamentalism." Following his argument, there is no denying that, from an organizational perspective, some of the most patent manifestations today are the decline in public spending, the rise of

technocratic managerialism, and the pressure to maximize profitability. From an academic perspective, this is the non-acknowledged, non-contested background that foments increased pressure to publish and a new audit culture that constantly measures performance based only on citation data, magnifying in this way what has become the motor that drives intellectual work (i.e. competitiveness and self-interest).

Although it seems that the situation in Europe has not yet reached the dire US panorama Giroux condemns, it appears that EU countries are adopting the same austerity-based legislative mandates and the same research evaluation model. In countries like Spain, for instance, knowledge production is being transformed in comparable ways and, notwithstanding its cultural particularities, Spanish society is likewise moving in the direction of neoliberalism. Faced with ever dwindling resources, institutions are stifling their humanities and social sciences programs while boosting degrees with more immediate market value. Furthermore, knowledge production is being affected as people modify their practices to meet government's assessment criteria. Other framings which cannot be ignored are the social and demographic changes presently taking place. In this respect, the growing presence of women and minorities in academia is leading to disaffection (when not hostility) towards higher education.

Let us return to the opening anecdote of this contribution. Our point is that when we succumb to such practices (producing self-referential, decontextualized work in an attempt to meet academic imperatives), we refrain from the possibility of challenging articulations that render acceptable the transformation of the university along the following practices: the shifting of the burden of funding onto students and the prioritization of market-oriented courses in partnership with private firms. In other words, without a critical awareness of how the norms of the university determine the kind of work we do, we relinquish our power to unsettle the relationships that give a context its appearance of inevitability. In this way, we contribute to the stabilization of—among other things—a society built around market values.

There can be no doubt that culture matters, but a serious discussion about *how* or *why* it matters remains largely absent from academia. In Spain, in the humanities at least, most scholars seem content with—depending on what suits them best—exalting the inherent values of their object of analysis or producing abstruse, self-referential analyses in an attempt to pass off their cryptic and visionless work as groundbreaking

writings, but no attempt is made to produce knowledge that focuses on multiplicity and positivity, in order to be relevant to the current social moment. Quite the reverse: academics of the type often strip radical ideas of their radicalism. This is the climate that now permeates intellectual work, which reveals the extent to which scholars have internalized the arguments of the market.

The work produced by such scholars (who constitute the majority) reduces the complexity and the potentiality of any given moment to rigid, predetermined disciplinary frameworks as a strategy that corroborates their preconceptions. Society, as far as we know, is in constant transformation as a consequence of a complex and ever-shifting web of forces both predictable and unexpected. How can one approach the contingency and the complexity of any situation with pre-selected quotations or pre-defined methodologies? As Grossberg often notes, theory too is contextual. We cannot do away with "theoretical wrestling," if only because theory ultimately determines the questions we can ask and the issues we can pursue. That which is new cannot be made to conform to pre-existing molds, or else—as is the case of the neoliberal (counter)revolution—the major risk is the incapacity to understand the full scope of the processes at work in the transformation of present-day society as well as the potentialities and limits of the current conjuncture.

As Grossberg has once and again argued, there is always contingency and therefore no good reason why things should necessarily turn out one way and not another. This should, once and for all, be seriously taken into account in our teaching and research. Let us therefore challenge disciplinarity and hyper-specialization and start acknowledging the complexity, the unpredictability, and the inconclusiveness of the historical processes we are immersed in. To this end, we need strategies of *relationality* that allow us to connect those elements that are usually disarticulated. This would provide us with a different, keener awareness of the challenges confronting us at a specific point in time. In other words, those of us convinced enough of the accuracy and relevance of Grossberg's insights urgently need to courageously challenge the dominant practices in the humanities and call it for what it is: criticism by the numbers. This said, there is nothing wrong in acknowledging that complexity poses challenges to academic research that are not easy to stomach in a work environment

marked by competitiveness, marketization, and systematic assessment. The alternative, however, cannot be to cynically barricade oneself within the undemanding practices of traditional disciplines.

This brief exposition should not be read as an indictment against the university, but, in the light of recent changes, more so as an SOS cry in defense of the institution. Starting off with a real life academic "story" (so many others could be told), our purpose has been to denounce how the course taken by the humanities in Spain—most notably the reliance on predetermined, unquestioned theoretical approaches with a view to satisfying assessment criteria—deprives us of the capacity to both identify the processes in which we are immersed and understand their full implications: the constraints they pose as well as the potentialities they open before us. More generally, our purpose has been to stress how Grossberg's work has paved the way for another perspective on intellectual work.

In short, against this reality, what is needed is less complacency regarding the signification and importance of the research undertaken within the institution and braver, more honest, and more socially-conscious approaches to intellectual work. While it is certainly true that both knowledge institutions and our practices need to be constantly rethought in response to the challenges posed by society, under no circumstances should we relinquish our role as "public intellectuals." Indeed, our mission is to think critically and muster ideas with a view to correcting inequalities and foster the common good. Bearing this in mind, let us end with a sincere appreciation of Lawrence Grossberg's ample work, thoughts, and forever helpful guidance.

NOTES

1. Lacking knowledge as to the workings and organization in universities in other parts of the world, let it be made plain that we are referring exclusively to Western academic institutions.

2. A tangible example is that of José Manuel Lorenzo, a Spanish scholar of no (known) relevance who published 176 articles in 2022, some co-written with Iraqi, Indian and Pakistani authors he admitted he didn't know (Ansede 2023).

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Articulation, Assemblage, Conjuncture, and the Commitment to Change

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As a special part of Larry Grossberg's retirement conference in 2022, each of us in attendance got to choose a T-shirt with one of Larry's many favorite sayings on it. "So What?" was the one I chose to take home with me, because Larry's well-known insistence on foregrounding "the 'so what' question" figures prominently for me among Larry's many contributions to cultural studies. I take "the 'so what' question" as something more than "what are the implications of your research?" but as a challenge to engage in work that has the capacity to address and change how people live and to transform daily life in constructively empirical and pragmatic ways. The commitment to change and the transformative concepts and methods that elucidate and facilitate change—articulation, assemblage, and conjuncture—have both personal and pedagogical dimensions for me. Their development and implementation intertwine with my own story and scholarship; they are also the tools I have found to be most potent to convey the power of cultural studies in my teaching. In this essay I trace ways my story and scholarship evolved in relationship to Larry's scholarship vis-à-vis articulation, assemblage, and conjuncture. I also perform the pedagogical task of pulling from the vast oeuvre of Larry's work key moments where his clarification of concepts will be useful for those interested in taking them up in the interest of contributing to change. However, to begin to establish the story, I need to take a detour, as we often must do in culture studies, through an earlier concept: the concept of culture as context, because that is where my desire to understand and contribute to change began.

CULTURE AS CONTEXT

I went to university the second time[1] to unravel the everyday traumas I experienced as a working-class girl who read voraciously and trusted that everything I read essentially reflected reality—even if somewhat fictionalized. The world I confronted on my own told a distressingly different story. I went back to university to understand what I didn't yet even have names for: the exploitation of labor, the subjugation of women, the differential treatment of marginalized people, and the overall question of how art (broadly defined) influences us to believe things against our own best interests. That search led me through literature and Marxism, and eventually to a class called Modes of Communication taught by Larry, who was a teaching assistant working on his dissertation with James Carey in the Institute for Communications Research (ICR) at the University of Illinois.[2] The course was intended as an upper-level survey of theories of communication, but in Larry's hands it became much more. That class put into motion a life-long process of transforming ways to think about relations of power, possibility, and change. And most important, it set me on a path to care, think, and act deeply about contributing to constructive cultural and political change.

On the first day of class Larry drew a diagram on the blackboard[3] outlining mainstream communication, which was then effects theory with its well-known elements and directional arrows among sender, message, receiver, and effects. He proceeded to complicate the story with smatterings of research that challenged each of the terms and directional arrows. Once the board and my notes were littered with references and questions, he turned to us and said, "but we aren't going to talk about any of that." He drew a huge circle around his scratchings and wrote the word "context": as in, all of this takes place within and as part of a specific context and you can't make any sense out of it without understanding the specific context. We were going to talk about context, contexts, and about culture. All of this happened in the first class. I've never looked back.

If what Larry taught us in that class was communication—and at the time I believed it was—then I wanted to study communication as a doctoral student. Larry and I both refer to me as "his first graduate student," although he was never officially my chair.[4] As a graduate student in ICR I was allowed—encouraged, actually—to relentlessly pursue learning more about the pieces of my lived cultural experience that vexed and intrigued me: labor history, pop culture, film, Marxist philosophy, political

economy, law, cultural theory, and history of science and technology. At first, I didn't know or concern myself with how they fit together; they just individually seemed to insist on their importance as keys to understanding the cultural and political terrain. Among all these, technology spoke the most insistently to me.

The mid-1970s were heady technological times and technology—cable television, computers, and internet—filled the news and our heads with promises of (mostly positive) change. To me (and a minority of other voices) these new technologies seemed far more complicated, and a plethora of implications were piling up faster than they were getting attention from serious scholarship and attendant policy. Technology, it seemed to me, mattered across the cultural and policy spectrum in ways that were already affecting—and would could continue to affect—labor, art, science, politics, economics, transportation, environment, gender, race, identity, and globalization. In opposition to the obsessive, utopian way most media, business, and even the academy prophesied a technology or two (mostly the computer) would "revolutionize the world," I saw the need to understand and critique the larger, complex, and changing technological context. When I told Larry I wanted to write a dissertation on technology and society he wasn't much interested but he was, thankfully, supportive. At the time cultural studies was focused primarily on pop culture; Larry was focused on both pop culture and Marxist philosophies of culture. But two things worked in my favor: first, cultural studies' commitment to recognizing and studying the complex legitimacy of lived experience; second, Larry's now widely acknowledged practice of encouraging his graduate students to pursue their own passions. He has often said, "I do not have clones." I am proud to be his first "not a clone."

While Larry was working on the contextual complexities of pop culture, I was dedicated to figuring out how to think about and organize what there was to know about the technological context in a way that would allow me to see and illuminate what mattered, what needed addressing in that sphere, and what policy interventions made sense. My undergraduate work had been in literary criticism, so my initial—and taken for granted—proclivity was to search for a "theme" that ran through everything I was learning about culture and technology. My dissertation, which became my first book, *Communication Technologies and Society* (Slack 1984), considered the contributions of politics, art, literature, economics, ideology, history, philosophy, law, and policy; but it wasn't specifically about any of those.

Although I knew all those pieces were crucial elements of the story, the challenge was to fathom how the elements connected to make a difference to address "the 'so what' question." Long discussions with Marty Allor, another student of Larry's, helped me find a *de facto* theme, a way to connect the elements in the technological context: an alternative view of causality, specifically Althusser's concept of structural causality (Althusser 1970). I was introduced to the idea of structural causality and structures in dominance through cultural studies, via Larry, Stuart Hall, and Fredric Jameson. I knew that what mattered was never just the technologies as material objects, never just the artifacts, even though the material artifacts mattered greatly. What mattered as much were the cultural conceptions of technology and the technological practices that pervaded everyday life that made some things/configurations/imaginings possible and others not. I was interested in how certain practices and kinds of change were rendered conceivable from one causal perspective and inconceivable from another causal perspective.

At this point in my scholarly development, I was explicitly and self-consciously moving into the realm of what we understand to be cultural studies, because, from the very beginnings of what people called cultural studies, the challenge was never just to describe relationships as interesting in and of themselves or as though they were static. There was always a sense that there was something larger at stake: a larger culture to comprehend; relations of dominance and subordination to be revealed; change as possible or in process, and constructive interventions to be identified. Larry's introduction to the early work of Richard Hoggart made those foundational commitments salient for me. In what I understand to be the first attempt to set out a cultural studies method, Hoggart urged us "to move outwards [from artifacts, instances, and practices] into statements about the nature of the culture of a sort which can be discussed with other disciplines." But Hoggart's goal went beyond a description of the nature of culture "to render critical judgment and offer strategies for constructive intervention" (Hoggart 1969, 8). That was Hoggart insisting on "the 'so what' question" as early as 1969.

Looking back on my early work on technology, as I was still deeply influenced by a literary orientation to my nascent practice of cultural studies, I'd arguably and inadvertently identified casualty as something akin to a "structure of feeling" (Williams 1974) that permeated (and still permeates) technology and culture that entailed consequential relations

of dominance and subordination. However, as I completed that work, I was dissatisfied with what I saw as my limited understanding of the complexities of "the precise nature of the relationship" (Slack 1984, 92) among the myriad elements of my analysis. I knew that in the real world, not everything, not all change, not all intervention could be explained by or reduced to causality—or any one "theme," contradiction, or relationship, but I didn't yet have facility with the vocabulary, concepts, or method to back away from the idea of a single organizing principle to fully grasp how to work with a complex, interconnected, differentiated, contradictory, changing "whole" of which every element is was just one part.

I recall fondly that heady moment in the early 1980s when the question of the relationship between the whole and the parts seemed widely shared, when people were reading Althusser and Gramsci, Grossberg and Hall, contrasting structural causality to systems theory, contrasting "no necessary correspondence" with "necessary non-correspondence," and there was excitement about the theoretical problem of how to think about or arrange "all the pieces" (economic, cultural, political, material, etc.) that require consideration to explain the complexities of everyday life. One feature of those discussions was the potential and contradictions of Althusser's concept "unity in difference" (Althusser 1970). While the contradictions were never resolved and Althusser drifted out of fashion, I continued to wrestle with the possibilities and problems it presented, still believed it could provide guidance for political organizing, and continued to search for ways of understanding and working with interconnected, complex, differentiated, contradictory, and changing relationships.

The significant leap I eventually made was to think in terms of articulation. In this I was once again guided by developments in cultural studies, most prominently by Larry and Stuart Hall. The concept of articulation, as they taught it, opened the door to envisioning the dynamic way "elements" of culture can be understood as always already complexly constituted, as coming together and breaking apart with dynamic impacts, and in those processes variously providing opportunities for intervention and change. Once that door was opened it became my major philosophical, theoretical, and practical interest, my way of understanding and engaging culture and change, as well as my primary pedagogical tool for teaching cultural studies.

ARTICULATION, ASSEMBLAGE, CONJUNCTURE, CHANGE

It is possible to read, as I do, the theoretical development of (or at least one key thread of the development of) cultural studies through the lens of the increasing sophistication with which the question of how the elements of culture are connected, disconnected, and reconnected is answered, and of how the consequences of those connections are understood and enacted in practice. There isn't a single question to ask here, with a simple answer, but a multiplicity of questions that invite transdisciplinary influences from areas as disparate as physics, sociology, environmentalism, and mythology. What is an element? How do elements matter differentially? How do elements come together, connect, break apart, and come together differently? How does one potentially study "anything and everything:" the material, the ideological, the political, the economic, the affective, and so on? And even if we have a sense of how to do all that theoretically, how do we make meaningful choices about what specifically to study and what to include in any particular analysis? And, of course, so what? What are the consequences? How do we prognosticate? How do we evaluate? What should we do? How do we best intervene? What are our responsibilities? How do changing circumstances change the answers to all those questions?

Eventually the questions and problems cohered for me under the terms articulation, assemblage, and conjuncture, with each concept building outward from the other, from the micro to the macro, from less complex to more complex, but always with each concept implicating and implicated in the others. The people who most influenced my thinking were Larry, Stuart, and Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari. I had always had access to Stuart's 1983 lectures on cultural studies at the University of Illinois (later published as Hall 2016) because I had rather miraculously recorded them on a tiny portable tape recorder. Articulation figured deeply in the lectures, and I returned to the transcriptions often. Larry contributed significantly to helping people understand articulation, most notably a chapter on articulation in *We Gotta Get Out of This Place* (1992). Finally, reading (and rereading) *A Thousand Plateaus* (Deleuze and Guattari 1987) added immeasurably to the concept of assemblage. Much of my own scholarship has been focused on addressing the theory, method, and practice of articulation, and to lesser degrees assemblage and conjuncture (Slack 1996; Slack 2005; Slack 2016; Slack and Wise 2015).

I want to insist on the importance of understanding that these concepts are deceptively easy to mis-understand. And here I must get a bit more pedagogical to provide chapter and verse, so to speak, to underscore the real power and possibilities of these concepts if—and only if—you take them on deeply and seriously. I have learned from many years of teaching these concepts that it is possible to repeat the words (and pass the tests) but absolutely miss their lived meanings and significance.

To begin with what is most basic: there is an enormous gap between theory and practice in most of what people understand as articulation. To internalize culture as articulation requires that you accept at a deep and lived level that every "element" is constituted of relationships: that things, concepts, relationships, meanings, affects, events, and so on are always already constituted in variously changing relationships, connections, disconnections, and reconnections. Articulation is not systems theory; in systems theory, elements are essentially intact, readily identifiable, taken for granted parts first, which then are put into or subjected to relationships to construct a whole that is the sum of those parts, which then becomes larger than those parts. In articulation the "elements," even what counts as an element, is transformed in and by relationships. Even to say "an element" is misleading, because there is never really "an element" that is separate from the relationships that constitute (and might reconstitute) it. This is difficult to explain, let alone teach, and nobody has done that better than Larry. As he says in one of his most cited statements on articulation:

> Articulation is the production of identity on top of difference, of unities out of fragments, of structures across practices. Articulation links this practice to that effect, this text to that meaning, this meaning to that reality, this experience to those politics. And these links are themselves articulated to larger structures.
>
> Articulation is the construction of one set of relations out of another; it often involves delinking or disarticulating connections in order to link or rearticulate others. Articulation is a continuous struggle to reposition practices within a shifting field of forces, to redefine the possibilities of life by redefining the field of relations—the context—within which a practice is located. (Grossberg 1992, 54)

Building on and with this fundamental understanding of articulation, assemblage and conjuncture operate on different (higher, more complex, more macro) levels of abstraction as they "move outward" to identify significant connections that constitute the culture and the consequences of those connections. Greg Wise (2011), drawing on the work of Deleuze

and Guattari, has elucidated the practice of thinking in terms of assemblage. He insists, in line with how we understand elements in articulation, that "an assemblage is not a set of predetermined parts . . . that are then put together in order or into an already-conceived structure." Nor is it a "random collection of things." Rather it is "a whole of some sort that expresses some identity and claims a territory" (91). Assemblages "select elements" from the context, draw them into relationships, and function; that is, they "do things" and not other things. For example, in *Culture and Technology* (Slack and Wise 2015) Greg and I describe the move from articulation to assemblage with respect to technology:

> Technology as articulation draws attention to the practices, representations, experiences, and affects that constitute technology. Technology as assemblage adds to this understanding by drawing attention to the ways that these practices, representations, experiences, and affects articulate to take a particular dynamic form with broader cultural consequences. (156)

As an example, Greg and I consider the "self-check-out assemblage," which has become prevalent in many facets of everyday life: from shopping to health care, from in person to online. It is possible to think about many consequential features of everyday life in terms of assemblages: cryptocurrency or virtual currency, AI, or working from home, for example.

Larry's proclivity has been to work at the level of the conjuncture, the highest level of abstraction, the most difficult to explain theoretically, define pragmatically, and intervene into politically. It is the place where articulations and assemblages produce a kind of totality as massive and as diffuse as, for example, modernity or post-Deng Xiaoping China. He explains:

> A conjuncture is constituted by, at, and as the articulation of multiple, overlapping competing, reinforcing, etc., lines of force and transformation, destabilization and (re-) stabilization, with differing temporalities and spatialities, producing a potentially but never actually chaotic assemblage or articulations of contradictions and contestations. Thus, it is always a kind of totality, always temporary, complex, and fragile, that one takes hold of through analytic and political work. (Grossberg 2010, 41)

Describing a conjuncture is especially challenging, not only because of its inherent complexity, but because it is, as Larry insists, always a "transitional moment in which the old is dying and the new cannot yet be born" (Grossberg 2019, 38). One strategy to access the conjuncture (one that Larry as well as Greg and I have advocated for) is to search for echoes-- that is, to search for similar problems, crises, contradictions, and

instabilities that appear across what might otherwise seem to be disparate sites, struggles, and concerns. It is, as Larry describes it, the problematic as a "theme" or set of themes that take on the appearance of a general crisis "fought across the full spectrum of social issues and differences" in multiple forms (Grossberg 2010, 42). In 2015, Greg and I identified what we thought were then key current and emergent problematics in the US: knowledge production, privacy and surveillance, environmental degradation, and being human (Slack and Wise 2015, 218–226). That these remain key problematics across cultural sites attests to their potency in contributing to shaping the contours of the shapeshifting conjuncture.

Larry's strength has always been to aim at "getting the conjunctural story right" by telling "the best story possible of what is" as he does, for example, with respect to the American Right in *Under the Cover of Chaos* (Grossberg 2018, xiii). Better stories at the conjunctural level, like the culture they encounter, are contradictory, moving, changing phenomena. Better stories strive to "embrace the complexity and contradictions of what is happening," seek "to find the openings, the possibilities for change, for redirecting events in a different direction," . . . and seek "to speak to people where they are (not where we think they should be)" (13). Larry's ambitions always aim at the most difficult task, which is prone to produce brilliant insights as well as a story that necessarily demands revision, as there will always be a different and therefore better story to be told of what is both temporary and volatile.

In addition to the problematic as a means to access the conjuncture, there is a second, somewhat more accessible method or strategy Larry offers to engage the conjuncture. In addition to being more accessible it is also an easier way to help people experience its power in their daily lives. The strategy is to construct "mattering maps," by which he means literally drawing (diagramming in words and images) the connections among what matters.[5] In "Cultural Studies in Search of a Method, or Looking for Conjunctural Analysis" (Grossberg 2019), Larry offers a diagram of the theoretical task of mapping what matters. He also elucidates the concept of culture as a map of what matters:

> Culture is what makes the materiality of life lived and experienced. It provides the maps that organize the chaos and bring vitality to the material. It consists, at the very least, of competing operations of the constructions and distribution—of meaning, feeling, belonging, mattering, subjectification, value, wealth, authority, differentiations, agency, representation, labour, control, responsibility, embodiment, and care, as well as assumptions about the nature

> of change, individuality, humanity, nature, knowledge, etc. it is more than common sense; it is the taken-for-granted and the ground of assurance that makes our actions possible. It is what makes reality lived. But it is most certainly neither accidental nor inevitable, nor the directly determined effect of other elements, even as it exists in its relations to other operations and struggles. (Grossberg 2019, 40)

I particularly like this version of the conjuncture, read as it is though the less theoretical, more down-to-earth image of mattering maps for its emphasis on lived realities, actions, belongings, as well as the "the conditions of possibility of a specific event, distributed among multiple, fragmented constituencies" (Grossberg 2019, 43). I like the pedagogical potential of such maps. When I have had students literally draw mattering maps they more easily see how seemingly disparate elements are actually connected. They begin with something that is close to them (for example their iPhone) and draw connections: to what they care about; what they engage; what they want; what they don't want; their beliefs. They move from there to how those things are connected to what is further from them: the businesses, industries, institutions, beliefs, and assemblages that intersect with what matters. From there they move to larger structures, beliefs, practices, and assemblages that intersect with those institutions: nations; governments; legal systems, local and global practices, and so on. As the map develops, they move outward from articulations, assemblages, and eventually touch upon aspects of the conjuncture. They begin to be able to identify where change is possible and where change would be more formidable—if sometimes nearly impossible. This take on the conjuncture, then, built as it is on articulation and assemblage, takes us back to the beginning, back to the need, desire, and possibilities for change.

SO WHAT? IT ALL COMES BACK TO CHANGE

The choice of where a cultural studies scholar locates their work, at which level they concentrate, speaks to their ambitions and orientation toward the "so what?"[6] Invariably we ask, "What do I think the work is capable of producing in terms of change?" Larry's prescriptions for change are powerfully pertinent at the conjunctural level: ambitious, necessary, but abstract demands for change. For example, at the conclusion to *Under the Cover of Chaos*, he writes, "we are going to have to create new forms of cooperation, negotiation and organization, new practices of judgment and authority, with differing degrees and measures of fragility, humility and

even temporality, and new models of conversation and communication" (151–152). Absolutely. But how do we get there? Experience suggests we do not "get there" by merely asking for and expecting change at the level of the conjuncture. Getting there demands integrated work at and among all the levels of abstraction, because the work of culture happens in the interaction across those levels. I have found, at least for me, that, though guided by understanding something of the conjuncture, locating my work more closely to the level of articulation and assemblage connects more directly to the everyday practices we engage in, the places where change is more likely to occur, where influence is best exerted, and where efforts have more possibility of bearing fruit. I began my career calling for a formidable, nay nearly impossible, policy of eliminating patent protection in the interest of encouraging technological (including computer software) development and discouraging corporate control and industry domination (Slack 1984). I wasn't wrong, but, as you can imagine, my efforts didn't go so well. There was nobody listening at the level of the conjunctural argument.

It wasn't just in the interest of saving my sanity, but in the interest of trying to get *something* done, that I scaled back my ambitions. Consequently, I have more often advocated for attention to matters closer to the everyday: care not to misuse terms like "pristine" in local organizing against a paper mill (Slack 1998); how to negotiate the contradictions of working as a technical communicator (Slack, Miller, Doak 1993; Slack 2003). I have held art exhibitions combining my original art with text and lectures to encourage people to think about and resist the building of walls in response to the American Right's "Build the Wall" campaign (Slack 2019). And in working with Greg Wise, we have pointed to strategies for thinking about, incorporating, or resisting certain forms of technological change in everyday life (Slack and Wise 2015). My proclivity is to stay close to the everyday work of articulations and assemblages where actions, however small, might make a difference I could at least witness.

Our world in crisis clearly needs dedicated work throughout the range of micro to macro, local to global, concrete to abstract, academic and theoretical to nonacademic and practical. Larry has motivated generations of students, some who identify as cultural theorists, some not. Some who remain in the academy, some who do not. They/we take up the pieces that suit our skills, characters, and ambitions, each adding to the shapes and forms that constitute our transforming conjuncture. The greatest gift to

our teacher(s) is to honor their unique contributions to that work, however they—and we—take it up, as well as to at least try to make our own work matter. And that is enough for a life.

NOTES

1. It is too long a story to tell here, but my first attempt at university failed, as I hadn't yet found a passion to see me through the challenges of academic life. Cultural studies became that passion.

2. As officially an undergraduate student in the English Department, I was not allowed to enroll in a class in the journalism department despite being told by a fellow student that this class would explicitly address the questions I was interested in. My introduction to Larry and cultural studies thus began with a disciplinary fight: I had to lobby aggressively for admission into the class and only succeeded when I wore down the lovely administrator who controlled the class list.

3. Yes, they were blackboards back then, and Larry drew on them with chalk. It was that long ago.

4. Larry did not yet have his appointment in the Institute of Communications Research, where I was a Ph.D. student, so he could not be my chair. The political economist Thomas Guback was my official chair. I owe him a great debt, both for his superb teaching and for his reluctant patience with my stubborn insistence on granting a equal role for culture.

5. I enjoy taking credit for bringing to Larry's attention the term "mattering maps," which I found in Rebecca Goldstein's novel *The Mind Body Problem* (1983).

6. I have neglected the fourth level of abstraction, the epoch, as discussed briefly by Larry, which refers to the centuries-long "'tectonic shifts' in the fundamental conditions of possibility" (Grossberg 2019, 44). I am not aware of any cultural theorist explicitly working at the level of the epoch. Perhaps those exploring the concept of the Anthropocene in the interest of addressing climate change are working at this level.

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Grossber.not(es)

WILL STRAW

To read Larry Grossberg's curriculum vitae—in particular, the lists of lectures and seminars he gave in the late 1980s and early 1990s—is to observe the evolving international radius of a cultural studies rooted in the discipline of Communications Studies. There are other perspectives from which one might tell this story, of course, and I do not mean to suggest that cultural studies sprouted only in those sites of communications studies research in which Larry Grossberg set foot. Nevertheless, in Grossberg's travels during these years, one sees the outlines of emerging connections whose emergence I remember: the ascendant importance of Australia as a locus of English-language cultural studies work, the growth of research clusters in Finland and other Nordic countries, and the solidifying of connections between cultural studies scholars working in Communications departments in Canada and the United States.

It is the last of these developments, unsurprisingly, which interests me here. In the 1980s, while I pursued my seemingly endless Ph.D. work (which took me ten years), Larry played a key role in configuring at least three different communities of scholarship to which I felt connected—those of popular music studies, communications studies and of a more broadly interdisciplinary cultural studies. While a quick reaction to this list would be to note the ways in which they were all nested within each other, in my own intellectual formation they arrived in sequence.

Popular music studies as an interdisciplinary field was institutionalized through the formation of the International Association of Popular Music, on whose executive board (his CV reminds us) Larry served from 1983-1987. My life and career would have been very different if one of my Ph.D. committee members, George Szanto, had not taken advantage of the presence in Montreal of one of his old college friends, the music critic Robert Christgau, to organize a public panel on popular music studies

at some point in the early 1980s. To this he invited the sociologist John Shepherd, who was then teaching at Trent University in Ontario. Then, to round out what became an all-too-typical all-male panel, Szanto invited me to present something as well. I hastily put together my first ever paper on popular music. It was sufficiently well received for John Shepherd to invite me to other events at which I met the emerging community of popular music studies scholars. It was through this involvement that I first encountered Larry Grossberg.

In a file of reading notes that remains on my computer and bears the name "Grossber.not" (from an era when filenames could be no longer than eight characters), I can see myself working through the arguments of Grossberg's 1984 article, "Another Boring Day in Paradise: Rock and Roll and the Empowerment of Everyday Life." In 2024, re-reading my extensive notes on the article—full of recopied passages and my own attempts at summarizing them—I'm struck by the enormous skill with which Larry made music into something like a key cultural form through which communications studies might renew itself. In the year Grossberg's article appeared, television studies were just beginning to get interesting, journalism studies remained an isolated specialty, and media theory more generally had gone into that eclipse from which it would emerge only in the 1990s. Music, Grossberg's writing showed us, might gather around it most of the exciting new ideas on which a theoretically renewed communications studies might find its ground. Until this point, to be honest, I had not really imagined a significant place for music within the study of communications.

In "Grossber.not," I singled out this passage from "Another Boring Day in Paradise" for particular attention:

> The object within late capitalism then exists in the space of the contradiction between these two practices: an ideological mystification which turns it into a commodity and a structural demystification which returns it to the material context. (Grossberg 1984, 231)

Much of the early work of this article is devoted to providing an account of the "affective power" of music, and it is through his advancement of this notion that Grossberg significantly reoriented the ways in which I thought about music in relation to communications. Until that point, I admit, I was convinced that a preoccupation with "affective power" was, in key ways, characteristically American. In Canada, I would argue at the time, musical and other cultural objects always arrived bearing the marks of their arrival

from somewhere else, or, if they were produced in Canada, as too obviously betraying the public policies and derivative practices which shaped them. These objects might well bear an "affective power," but our experience of that power by Canadians was inevitably obscured by our awareness of the geopolitical patterns of circulation which brought the cultural artifact to us. An emphasis on affective power as the primary feature of cultural experience presumed, I felt, too much of a singular coherence to cultural responses, one more easily imaginable in cultural centers where the making and distribution of cultural goods was naturalized.

Rereading "Another Boring Day in Paradise" in 2024, I am ready to revise my response. I am struck by all the resources it offers to the kind of analysis in which I would become invested: one which follows the commodity through its different spaces of circulation, its movement in and out of various states, its passage through different moments and regimes of intelligibility. In my five pages of original notes on the article, I see myself grabbing onto the ideas of boundary, differentiation, commodification, and alliance developed here, convinced that I might deploy and adapt them in works of analysis that need not land on "pleasure" as the cornerstone of political claims. And yet, of course, here Grossberg is already problematizing "pleasure" or, at least, acknowledging the complex, even contradictory ways in which it is organized and lived.

From the mid 1980s into the 1990s, popular music as an interest served to draw connections between many young scholars working in or on the edges of communications studies. In my own professional trajectories, it also served as a bridge between Francophone and Anglophone scholars in Canada, encouraging us to cross linguistic lines in local meetings and at national conferences and etching connections which continue through the present. Through the little community of popular music studies, I met scholars like Line Grenier or Jody Berland, and, while we came from different disciplinary backgrounds, all of us ended up teaching fully or partially within the discipline of Communications.

If our work was in some ways distinct from what was transpiring within US-based communications and cultural studies, this had much to do with two features that we imagined were more distinctly Canadian. One was a concern with spaces of circulation and dissemination, with the distances across which cultural moved and the borders which framed these spaces. Another was the impulse, longstanding within Canadian communications cultural studies, to forever link cultural questions to those of state policy.

In US scholarship, it seemed to us, government intervention was imagined only as a repressive force (most notably in relation to the censorship battles over musical content in the 1980s). In Canada, governments could be imagined as acting in protective and reparative fashion to "correct" some the inequities of a US-based cultural imperialism. Larry Grossberg, more familiar than other US cultural studies scholars with the policy work coming from Australia and Europe (and not just Canada) seemed more attentive to this side of Canadian scholarship than many.

When I moved to Carleton University to take up my first academic position in 1984 (in a Film Studies department), popular music became the first pivot around which an interdisciplinary community identifying itself with cultural studies took shape at that institution. John Shepherd was there, as were the sociologists Ian Taylor and Valda Blundell; Jody Berland and Paul Théberge would arrive later. Larry Grossberg came to several of our conferences, which frequently included members of the broader, international popular music studies community (and, atypically, included several scholars from pre-1989 Eastern Europe).

Larry was a key point of contact between this group and another which emerged at roughly the same time in Montreal, most notably in the Communications Studies department at Concordia University. By the early 1990s, the growth of cultural studies in eastern-central Canada was less centered on popular music, more engaged in the broader sorts of cultural theory pursued by young scholars like Martin Allor (who had studied with Larry) and Elspeth Probyn, and by versions of communications studies in which both feminist and postmodernist theorizing were central.

Larry Grossberg's work was a constant point of reference amidst all of this change. His own work articulated a great many dispersed strands of thought and action: Viennese economics, to be sure, but also a connection to French thought and militantism that was of particular pertinence to those of us living and working in Canada and Quebec. Larry's commitment to the legacies and founding mission of British cultural studies is well known, but should not obscure the wide-ranging interest in other traditions and resources which has marked his work from the beginning.

Re-reading old papers from the period discussed here, I came across one I delivered at the 1990 Dublin conference of the International Communications Association. In my introduction to the paper, I note that I was present because Larry Grossberg, who was to be on the panel, could not make it and asked me if I might replace him. The panel was titled "It's Not

Only Rock 'n' Roll: The Changing Face and Place of Popular Music," and was meant, I was told, to deal with a recently diagnosed "death of rock and roll." My paper, I see, was called "'Keep On Movin'': Logics of Development in the Cultures of Rock and Dance Music," and the pressure of writing it moved my work forward in gratifying ways. I worried that in my dogmatic eagerness at that time to denounce "rockism" in the name of post-punk pop and dance music I might stray away from what I imagined were the panel's founding concerns or Larry's intended intervention. But the panel bore no trace of pre-conceived, "rockist" prejudices and, in every respect, seemed to be about moving things forward.

Larry's invitation for me to take his place was one of innumerable acts of generosity he has extended to me as to so many others. The lessons I take from Larry's legacy include the recognition that intellectual ferment requires the building of institutional structures (like programs, journals, and associations) in which scholars may find community and occasions for collaboration. I thank him for his role in fostering connections and communities that made the adventure of a cultural studies-inflected communications studies interesting and rewarding for so long.

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Shifting the Margins: Larry Grossberg and Australian Cultural Studies

GRAEME TURNER

For some years from the late 1970s into the 1980s, and in most places around the world where it had a presence, the default setting for the practice of cultural studies was effectively that of British cultural studies. The tradition which evolved (largely, but not only) from the school of writers around the Birmingham CCCS and the Open University Popular Culture program, was fertilized by and disseminated through the engagement of British publishers Methuen/Routledge, Edward Arnold, Sage, Macmillan, Hutchinson, and the collaborations around the Open University Popular Culture readers. There was a degree of imperial expansion involved as well—through the considerable influence exerted by the British emigres fleeing Thatcher's Britain—on the formations of cultural studies developing in Australia, Canada, and the US. At the same time, however, there was the contrasting but ultimately more significant development of other, contingent and located, versions of cultural studies as the project migrated, mutated, multiplied and indigenized. As it grew in complexity and influence, cultural studies became both increasingly transnational and more culturally specific.

Larry Grossberg played a major role in both (one might have thought contradictory) components of this history. Of course, Larry Grossberg was the central figure driving the take-up of cultural studies within the US. He served as a connecting point back to the Birmingham CCCS and to the work of Stuart Hall, acting as a critical interlocutor within that tradition as it developed, while advancing the project of building a distinctive theoretical base for cultural studies in the US. The famous conference organized by Larry, Cary Nelson, and Paula Treichler at Champaign-Urbana in 1990,

"Cultural Studies: Now and in the Future," featured an international cast of presenters and a diverse range of approaches that went on to exert significant influence over what (and, inevitably, who) would be identified with the international field of cultural studies into the future. Reaching out for an American constituency for cultural studies, on the other hand, the Routledge collection that came out of the event, *Cultural Studies* (Grossberg, Nelson, and Treichler 1992), was unmissable on American bookstore shelves. Clocking in at 788 pages, and boldly dressed in the eye-catching livery of the pink Cadillac, it even had a moment at the center of American popular culture trend-watching through its featuring on the cover of *The Village Voice*. However, it is in the development of cultural studies in Australia, I want to suggest, where we might see Larry's performance of these two roles interweaving most closely, contributing importantly as they did to the developing sophistication of the local field of cultural studies and to its internationalization.

Larry Grossberg was a regular visitor to Australia in the early days of cultural studies here and was keenly engaged with its debates. His "outsider's" contributions, particularly over the late 1980s and early 1990s, were vigorous and challenging, but always respectful of, and well informed about, the particular historical forces shaping the field's trajectory in Australia. In the early to mid-1980s, when Larry first began visiting, much of Australian cultural studies was dependent upon the writing emerging from the UK. Methuen and Routledge's book series (New Accents and Studies in Communication, for instance), as well as the various Open University course readers from their popular culture program, were beginning to be required reading in teaching programs. The influence of the British expatriates—especially Tony Bennett, John Fiske, John Hartley, and John Tulloch—had been instrumental in securing institutional support for the early programs in Australia, as well as in opening up national and international publishing opportunities for locally based scholars.[1]

At the same time, there were lively debates about the need to more critically examine the orthodoxies cohering around the British tradition, and a strong interest in exploring the value of competing theoretical formations (typically, from Europe). For some, as well, this was enclosed within the more strategic question of how these approaches might be adapted to an Australian context, producing something like an Australian cultural studies. As a complication to such an ambition, that debate was occurring within a field that had, on the one hand, long adopted a principled criti-

cal resistance to the politics of nation and the discourses of nationalism, while, on the other hand, remaining open to the influence of the left-oriented formations of cultural nationalism that was such a considerable force within Australian politics and culture over the 1980s and 1990s.

This was not a unified field, then. While most of the differences were managed respectfully and productively—there was a shared common purpose of making critical and cultural theory a central component of the contemporary humanities and social sciences in Australia—there were still endless debates over terminology, theoretical categories, and the politics of our work. Larry was an enthusiastic participant in these, turning up at seminars and conferences in (at least) Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, and Perth. As an American cultural studies scholar (itself still something of a rarity for us at the time), referencing the writing of James Carey alongside that of Stuart Hall, and a passionate and charismatic personal presence, he brought a unique set of attributes to the table. What was especially notable, for me, about Larry's participation in these events was that he was so fluent in all of their theoretical languages, and so sure-footed in his analysis of their framing assumptions, in their intellectual positioning, and in their implications for the future of cultural studies.

There is a longstanding cultural tradition in Australia which goes under the label of "the cultural cringe." This refers to a habit of underselling the value of Australian culture, and a subaltern relation to the standards and expectations set by the metropolitan centers of European, indeed mostly British, culture. It is arguable that Australian work in cultural studies was initially infected by this: slow to recognize the possibility that there might be something distinctive and valuable in the Australian formations of cultural studies that were in the process of development. Consequently, and for all the shared sense of a common project, Australia was still on the margins of cultural studies, internationally, in the early 80s. Few had put their toes into the water of international publishing, and even fewer had begun to build a reputation outside Australia for the quality of their work or for the distinctiveness of their voice. Larry was something of a provocateur in this regard (I remember him telling me once, early in our relationship, that I "was aiming too low"). His critiques of our work reflected his sense of how much it should be made to matter to those beyond our shores, and particularly in America. He had established strong collaborative relationships with Meaghan Morris and Tony Bennett, in particular, and took their work to an American audience for cultural studies. Meaghan spent time

as a visiting fellow at Champaign-Urbana over that period, and Tony was asked to gather an Australian contingent to present at "Cultural Studies: Now and in the Future."[2]

There are many other points of connection and support that could be cited here, but my point is that the interest and engagement Larry brought, when he came to see what we were doing and to relate it to what was happening elsewhere, was hugely empowering. Not only that, but the unswervingly critical eye he cast over what we were doing couldn't help but show us how we might be doing it better. Never one to hold back on his critique, he became an important catalyst for a version of cultural studies that was not only becoming better at addressing immediate local and national concerns, but also, and more significantly, much better at building on that work as a platform for engaging more directly and productively with the transnational development of the broad field of cultural studies.

It is probably hard to remember this now, but there was a time when it was not readily acknowledged that the politics of cultural studies' theory were going to play out differently in different contexts. A case had to be made that any theoretical assumptions about how cultural studies should go about its work needed to be informed by the specifics of its cultural, institutional, historical, and jurisdictional location. Folks working in Australian cultural studies were among the earliest to make that kind of claim (Turner 1992), but initially it was a hard sell—looking like a form of special pleading to some, or as an unwarranted repudiation of the British tradition to others. Larry Grossberg got it immediately, and was scrupulous about embedding that insight into his highly influential accounts of the coordinates that might be used to map the trajectory of cultural studies internationally. But there was also the implication that it wasn't enough just to argue for the specificity of Australian work; we also needed to "aim higher" and bring that work into a more direct and productive engagement with what was going on within debates about cultural studies elsewhere—to provide a more substantial contribution to the ongoing transnational project of making cultural studies.

Larry is, of course, quite a presence, and always makes an impact on the room. His personal engagement with Australian cultural studies produced many memorable exchanges, but one, brief but effective, example stands out for me. One of the key developments in Australia at the time was cultural policy studies, identified most directly with those working in the Key Centre for Cultural and Media Policy Studies at Griffith

University, led by Tony Bennett. For an American scholar, coming from a place where the kind of productive interaction we had created between the academy and government over the framing of cultural policy was not at all common, this might have taken a while to grasp. However, Larry did come to understand it very quickly, and to develop a longstanding collaborative relationship with Tony Bennett. Respect for this work was hard won, however, and Larry's interrogation of the proponents of cultural policy studies produced at least one standout moment when, typically, he was willing to say what no-one else in the room was prepared to say. During a conference in Fremantle in Western Australia in 1991, he came across one of the less impressive aspects of how some in cultural policy studies chose to put their case at the time. One of the presenters argued for the value of cultural policy studies' consultative engagement with government by making a crudely negative comparison with the more oppositional approach they claimed to be shaping the positions of their critics. The details of this comparison were highly coded and articulated in frustratingly general terms. "Critics" were not named, their positions were not properly elaborated, and it seemed that this was deliberately designed to deflect any challenge to their representation. Larry was having none of this; if we took these differences seriously and thus a confrontation needed to be had, let's have it. His first question to the presenter set the standard for how the debate needed to proceed: "Exactly who is it," he asked, "that you think you are shitting on"?

Of course, Larry Grossberg's influence on the transnational reach of cultural studies involved more than just Australia, and more than just his personal interventions—the mini-diaspora of his former students around the globe has played a substantial part as well. But, for many members of my generation of cultural studies in Australia—the generation that founded it here—Larry Grossberg has a special place in our history: not just as a challenging and powerful representative of the richness and sophistication of the American iterations of cultural studies, but also as a valued "critical friend" of Australian cultural studies and a key enabler of our movement from the margins. Larry is not just a critical friend, though—he is also a genuine friend, a generous and vivid companion who richly deserves the admiration and affection so many of us working in Australian cultural studies have for him.

NOTES

1. Tulloch established a book series for Australian Cultural Studies with local publisher Allen and Unwin, for instance, while Fiske was the driving force behind the establishment of the *Australian Journal of Cultural Studies*, which went on to become the leading international journal, *Cultural Studies*, under Larry Grossberg's editorship.

2. The Australian-based contingent included Tony Bennett, Ian Hunter, Meaghan Morris, and myself.

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Mattering Maps: Cultural Studies and the Politics of the Popular

TONY BENNETT

At some point in 2017, I stumbled across a couple of seminar presentations on popular culture that Raymond Williams and Stuart Hall had given at the Open University (OU) in 1978. When I realized that these had not been published outside the in-house OU newsletter that was on my bookshelf, I sent copies to Larry Grossberg to see if they might merit publication in *Cultural Studies*. He got back to me with an enthusiastic "yes," with the result that the two presentations (Hall 1978; Williams 1978), together with a contextualizing introduction (Bennett 1978), were published in *Cultural Studies* the following year. What I hadn't realized, however, was that this would be the farewell issue commemorating Larry's exemplary leadership of the journal for nearly thirty years. I was, then, pleased to have contributed to this issue as the latest in a long history of productive collaborations that Larry and I have had with one another from around the time he began to edit the journal.

We first met in Brisbane on the sidelines of meetings in which he was involved with the editors of the *Australian Journal of Cultural Studies* (AJCS)—which, established in 1983, ceased publication in 1987 to clear the way for the more international *Cultural Studies*. It was clear that we had a good deal in common, both in terms of intellectual background and current interests. We next met in 1989 when I visited the University of Illinois to follow up on the discussions we had had a couple of years earlier, and then again at the 1990 "Cultural Studies: Now and in the Future" conference that Larry organized together with Cary Nelson and Paula Treichler.

This was a truly defining moment in the development of cultural studies, paying due regard to the continuing influence of its original formulations in the British tradition while also drawing on other theoretical framings of the relations between culture and society. These included, as issues raised in my own (Bennett 1992) and Ian Hunter's presentations

(Hunter 1992), framings of those relations drawing on the Foucauldian problematic of governmentality. Larry helped to further these debates in a number of ways. He invited me to visit the Unit for Interpretation and Criticism at Illinois in 1994, leading to a number of conversations with Larry, his colleagues (especially James Hay), and their students that contributed to the later publication of *Foucault, Cultural Studies, and Governmentality* (Bratich, Packer, and McCarthy 2003). He also took part in the debates around the development of cultural policy studies in Australia when he visited the Institute for Cultural Policy Studies at Griffith University in 1988, contributing to the seminar that led to the publication of *Rock and Popular Music: Politics, Policies, Institutions* (Bennett, Frith, Grossberg, Shepherd, and Turner 1993).

However, perhaps our most significant collaboration was the one into which we entered with Meaghan Morris over the five years planning and writing that led to the publication of *New Keywords* (Bennett, Grossberg, and Morris 2005). While this was mainly indebted to Raymond Williams' work, it also acknowledged the relevance of Foucault's work for cultural studies—something that Meaghan had been the first to identify—in going beyond the methodological principles informing Williams's original *Keywords* project (Williams 1976) to apply the principles of discourse analysis to some of the terms included in the collection.

Which brings me back to the 2018 issue of *Cultural Studies,* which, as well as the essays by Williams and Hall, included Larry's reflections on cultural studies then, now, and to come. It is from this essay, particularly its section on "Consent and the popular," that I take the reference to "mattering maps" in my title. In registering his continuing support for the importance that Hall accorded the study of popular culture as a means of engaging with the politics of "the popular" governed by the struggle between competing political forces for the terms in which popular consent might be organized and mobilized, Larry also urges the need to lend a different inflection to such questions. Viewing the current conjuncture—which he does not universalize; he has in mind the largely post-Trumpian America that he had recently piercingly analyzed (Grossberg 2018b)—he argues that it is one in which "we are faced with the paradox that while progressive forces and values have largely (but not entirely!) won the battle over popular culture, the politics of the popular remain deeply divided and contested" (Grossberg 2018a, 875–876). Given this, he argues the need to accord special significance to "the plane of affect" (876) as an increasingly

vital component in the politics of articulation appropriate to the current conjuncture. For what has to be articulated in the struggle over the terms in which popular consent might be organized are "all the dimensions of embodied, lived intensities, which are structured and expressed in many forms, including will and attention, feelings, emotions, moods, pleasures, desires, belongings, and carings" (877). In elaborating the significance of the plane of affect, Larry relates his concerns to Williams's "structures of feeling" while also adding his own conception of "mattering maps": cultural-political constructions defining what and how things are made to matter in the struggles defining the more fractured and divisive affective landscapes that characterize the current terrain of "the popular."

Reading Larry's essay alongside the 1978 presentations of Hall and Williams revived my appreciation of the formative influence that "the Gramscian moment" has had on the subsequent trajectories of cultural studies. These presentations were given in the early planning stages of the Open University's *Popular Culture Course,* which by and large organized its concerns in terms of the framing of the relations between popular culture and the politics of "the popular" proposed by Williams's and Hall's (somewhat different) reworkings of Gramsci's theory of hegemony. This framing informed a good deal of my work through the 1980s, particularly a study, with Janet Woollacott, of the role played by the political career of James Bond in reconfiguring the British national popular (Bennett and Woollacott 1987).

However, revisiting these debates has also prompted me to ask myself why, while recognizing their continuing significance, my own concerns have since taken a different direction in drawing on Foucault's work to probe the kinds of power exercised by the distinctive forms of authority associated with a range of cultural knowledges: aesthetics, anthropology, and archaeology, for example (Bennett 2013). A part of the reason consists in my sense of the different analytical and political orientations produced by the Gramscian concept of *consent* and the concern with *conduct*, or, more precisely, "the conduct of conduct" that informed Foucault's later work. In focusing on the operation of distinctive forms of discursive and institutional power that work through the forms of "action on the actions of others" that they effect, the problematic of the "conduct of conduct" brings into play a more varied set of concerns regarding the ways in which subjects come to be tangled up in (and contest) the exercise of power relations than those implied by the concept of consent. Understanding these, in

turn, requires an engagement with a more varied set of discursive regimes and (using the term loosely) apparatuses than those associated with the production and circulation of popular cultural forms; and it might also require that different methods be brought to bear on these.

I alluded earlier to how Larry, Meaghan, and I registered the pertinence of these concerns in *New Keywords*. Ben Highmore's (2022) essay on "keywording" adds another dimension to these issues. Concerned, on the one hand, to sing the praises of Williams's keyword project, Highmore is equally alert to its limitations. While going beyond the philological resources provided by the *Oxford English Dictionary*, Williams did so, Highmore argues, mostly by calling on his own extensive knowledge of literary sources. This missed the more radical multi-accentuality of tone and feeling that Mikhail Bakhtin and Valentin Volosinov had captured in their conception of the linguistic sign as being pierced from within by a diversity that constitutes it rather than initially having one meaning and subsequently acquiring others. I think Highmore is right and, moreover, that it is Larry's appreciation of the significance of such multi-accentualities that has characterized his constantly flexible receptivity to the changing registers of the relations between popular culture and "the popular" and, in recent work, the role of affect in these "mattering maps." As one who has always, as one of his titles puts it, had his eye on *Cultural Studies in the Future Tense* (Grossberg 2010)—on what it needs to do, and where it needs to go next—Larry has consistently stressed the need for it to engage with, and take its direction from, the multiple forces shaping where people are, how they see themselves, and the possibilities open or closed to them.

That said, entering into the domain of culture through the perspective of the "conduct of conduct" brings a different set of issues in its tow, ones which require an engagement with how formalized systems of cultural authority act on the actions of others in ways that are not caught by post-Gramscian engagements with the popular. These concerns are highly pertinent to many of the concepts—like will and attention, for example—that Grossberg associates with the "plane of affect." And rightly so. But approaching these issues through the Foucauldian optic that Jonathan Crary (2001) brings to bear on how the relations between the affective and political histories of attention have been tangled up in diverse programs for the government of conduct developed across a dispersed field of scientific authorities—physiologists, psychologists, psychoanalysis, and, toward the end of the nineteenth century, sociologists—opens up the implication

of attention in the exercise of quite different forms of power—ones, to be sure, in which questions of culture were very much in play, most notably those concerning the possibility of an autonomous aesthetic gaze operating in ways that might escape the subordination of attention to the body's neurophysiological constitution and thence to the apparatuses harnessing its capacities to capitalist production. These questions were also ones in which issues concerning the relations between popular culture and the popular were implicated, mainly in regard to how technologies of spectacle related to attention with different consequences across the relations between differently raced, classed, and gendered bodies.

I have brought a similar optic to bear on the discursive and institutional histories of concepts that have contributed to the early development of cultural studies. Although widely viewed as the key foundational concept of cultural studies, the concept of culture as a way of life, when viewed through a Foucauldian lens, has had a more checkered political history given the earlier role it played (in its original Boasian formulations) in the racial politics of twentieth-century America (Bennett 2018a). The distinctive aesthetic patterning of territorially grounded ways of life—a formulation Williams derived from Ruth Benedict—gave rise to a distinctive early to mid-twentieth century cultural politics predicated on the ways in which these spatial and aesthetic aspects of the "culture concept" were differentially distributed across racialized conceptions of bodies and populations. It is, then, unsurprising that at precisely the same time that British cultural studies was embracing the concept of culture as a way of life, and doing so with scarcely a note of caution, American anthropologists were distancing themselves from it in view of the role it had played in the governmental rationalities that shaped the relations between earlier "settlers" and more recent immigrants, and between both of these and Native Americans and African Americans (Handler 2004). These aspects of the concept are also now in play—albeit in a radically different way—in the contested roles that conceptions of the relations between Country and culture play in contemporary processes of reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians (Moreton-Robinson 2003; Muecke and Roe 2020).

Recent work also suggests that the concept of "structure of feeling" might warrant more ginger handling with regard to its functioning in Williams's work while also recognizing the respects in which it has since been connected to ways of engaging with popular culture whose theoret-

ical and political reverberations are not entirely caught by the politics of "consent and the popular." Stuart Middleton addresses the first of these issues in showing how, in Williams's usage, the concept retained "a special role for the writer and critic as legislators of social values" (Middleton 2020, 1151) given Williams's subscription to the view that it is only in works of art that structures of feeling "can be realized, and communicated, as a whole experience" (Williams 1954, 54). And the ways in which Sianne Ngai engages with the relations between affect and a set of popular aesthetic categories—particularly the cute and the zany—best encapsulates what I have in mind in regard to the second issue in view of the ways in which she tethers these categories to the politics of differently constituted workplaces (Ngai 2012; 2022).

There are also, though, areas of convergence between Larry's current concerns and mine, ones that others have taken in directions that lend new dimensions to the politics of consent. They center on the question of habit. The concept of habit has, I have argued, had a remarkably diverse and contentious history when considered in the light of the varied roles it has played in the "conduct of conduct" (Bennett 2023; Bennett, Dibley, Hawkins and Noble, 2021). But Larry raises a different set of questions when he hypothesizes that "an affective landscape is a habitual space" that is built, on the one hand, on the ways in which its repetitions are articulated to "comfort, convenience, and pleasure" and, on the other, to a search for some kind of "balance between forms of individuation and collectivity, between ephemeral values and things that are presumed to have intrinsic worth" (Grossberg 2018a, 878). This is a perspective that resonates with the consequences that the "turn to affect" has had on recent endeavors to re-think habit as a resource for social transformation. Carolyn Pedwell's conception of "revolutionary routines" is exemplary here in looking to how "habits of solidarity" might be nurtured through the production of new "modes of political relationality that can reach a broader range of subjects beyond those willing and able to establish 'positive obligations' and a broader range of actions beyond those defined as fully conscious, intentional, or considered" (Pedwell 2021, 163). In thus bringing together "a politics of feeling and a politics of habit" (148), Pedwell is fully alert to the requirement this entails: of disentangling habit from the socio-material assemblages through which its repetitions have been, and still are, tethered to affective and other attributes characterizing particular regimes

of personhood, but alert also to the need for ways of recruiting participation in progressive programs of social change that are not tethered to an explicit "politics of consent."

Overlapping, then, but not identical pathways: this is something that Larry and I have always recognized about our respective intellectual trajectories. I am, though, clearly not alone in this. Perhaps the most outstanding aspect of the leading role that Larry has played in cultural studies has consisted precisely in his capacity to interact so productively with the wide range of intellectual trajectories whose differing dynamics have shaped its development through the last thirty to forty years. Always engaging creatively with the work of others, he has simultaneously carved his own distinctive and inimitable course. And long may he continue to do so!

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52

The Long Conversation: Clarifying Conjunctural Analysis

JOHN CLARKE

I first met Larry Grossberg in the spring of 1986. He greeted me on my arrival in Champaign-Urbana and we fell into talking. It feels as though we have not stopped talking since—and that means that we have been in this conversation for more than half my life: a fact that delights me. That year, I was taking study leave from the Open University in the UK and using it to spend six months travelling North America to meet and talk with people I knew and people I hoped to know. Few of the encounters were as significant, pleasurable, and life-enhancing as the encounter with Larry. Before my travels I had asked Stuart Hall (we were both working at the Open University at the time) if there were people I should get in touch with and try to meet while I was there. He suggested several but placed Larry at the top of the list because he thought we would probably get on. Not for the first time, Stuart was right.

Over the decades we have talked and talked. We have grown old together, even if we have done so transatlantically. We have talked about many things: about Stuart, about cultural studies, about politics (especially as practiced in the US and UK), about teaching and writing, and, of course, about the thing in which all of those are condensed—the conjuncture. Here, I am going to concentrate on these two facets of our relationship—conversation and the conjuncture—because they are connected in crucial ways. I begin with what conversation means in this context.

BEYOND GRUMPY: THE WORK OF CONVERSATION

As we have grown older together, we have both found ourselves playing with the persona of the grumpy old man. It has offered a way of dealing with the accumulating frustrations of the world, our societies (and their politics), the changing character and tendencies of the university,

the strangeness of academic work (and its disciplinary ordering), and the peculiar frustrations of writing as a way of promoting or engaging in "conversations." Although we have both carried on doing it, writing (in its many forms) feels an increasingly unlikely way of constructing conversation—indeed, it has come to feel rather more like sending a message in a bottle, in the hope that, one day, it will arrive somewhere and someone might read it. Both of us grew up writing with and for others as a basic practice of doing intellectual work: the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies placed a high value on writing things down as "work in progress" that would enable further conversations. Over these decades, our own conversations have remained surprisingly ungrumpy and rancor free. I don't mean we have not complained about things and people, but we have recurrently found ways to think together in expansive and productive ways that allow for disagreement without toppling into difficulty.

I think this commitment to talking together has two foundations. The first is that, simply, we both like talking. Friends and colleagues might think this something of an understatement: our different backgrounds and trajectories have disposed both of us to talk, and then talk some more, about whatever may be at hand. Although it may be less obvious, I think both of us have acquired some listening skills and our conversations rest on an assumption that what the other one has to say will be worth attending to. Certainly, I have never been disappointed. The second foundation is we share a view of conversation as a crucial practice that provides a way of exploring, testing out, and advancing ideas, possibilities, feelings, and more.

David Scott's remarkable book *Stuart Hall's Voice* (2017) clarified this view of conversation for me. Scott teases out Hall's persistent commitment to thinking *again*, not least through the process of thinking with and against others. This is a rare disposition in academic work, given our collective tendency to be much better at thinking against, such that critical thinking is often assumed to mean the dissection, if not demolition, of an analysis or an argument. Scott suggests that

> Clarification is a way of approaching thinking—and learning—that aims to make us more aware of what we are thinking or doing. . . . That is to say, clarification involves endlessly saying the *next* thing, never the last thing. Clarification therefore does not presume the possibility of resolution; on the contrary, there is no presumption of closure, only successive provisional resting points along the way where we gather our thoughts for further dialogic probing. (2017, 16, italics in original)

I find myself frequently returning to this observation. It strikes me as profoundly true about Stuart Hall's practice, highlighting a core element of what made him such an inspiring intellectual, teacher, and collaborator. It also forms a central strand in my relationship with Larry Grossberg. There have been many things on which we have disagreed or have reservations about, but they have never got in the way of talking in that exploratory and open-ended way, often beginning with "what do you think about . . ."? The range of things is wide—from what we are working on; contemporary events; things read, heard, or seen; to recovering lost issues or topics. It's possible to get some sense of this in the chapter of my book, *Critical Dialogues* (2019), devoted to Larry (or better still the audio recording of the whole conversation[1]—which I have had playing while writing this). And, like David Scott's description, it involves turn-taking, exploratory invitations, responses that seek to puzzle a little further, and certainly no presumption of a definitive endpoint. Such conversations are both productive and pleasurable in themselves.

It is fair to say that neither of us have attained Hallian heights of generosity—not least because that always feels like a very demanding standard (great as an ambition but not necessarily attainable). Moments of grumpiness have been threaded through our conversations and we have certainly found ourselves being critically judgmental at times. But the dynamic of the conversation is always both exploratory and clarificatory and I have reveled in it, despite the transatlantic distance and the interruptions it generates. It is a mode of interacting that is profoundly generous and rewarding, recurrently making me think again. I was reminded of just how important it is to me during my efforts to write a book over the last few years (a process much disrupted by the pandemic). In the absence of meeting and talking, Larry read and annotated two complete drafts, generously, thoughtfully, and with a constant commitment to getting me to clarify what I was trying to say. We only got to talk in person near the end of the process, at which point he helped me find a way through a series of unresolved problems and puzzles with characteristic warmth, wit, and care.

THINKING WITH

That book returns to the question that has preoccupied both us over the years—how to think about the current conjuncture. That focal concern connects us in multiple ways: it is our "inheritance" from cultural studies;

it organizes our intellectual, political, and personal relationships to Stuart Hall; and it forms the common ground across which we pursue our conversations. This attention to the conjunctural derives from Hall's complicated relationship to Antonio Gramsci's work, particularly his attention to the work of hegemony as a political-cultural relation and his exploration of the distinction between the organic and the conjunctural (and the elusive relationships between them). In a famous article, Hall (1987) engaged with "Gramsci and us" as the ground for the practice of "clarification":

> I do not claim that, in any simple way, Gramsci "has the answers" or "holds the key" to our present troubles. I do believe that we must "think" our problems in a Gramscian way—which is different. We mustn't use Gramsci (as we have for so long abused Marx) like an Old Testament prophet who, at the correct moment, will offer us the consoling and appropriate quotation. We can't pluck up this "Sardinian" from his specific and unique political formation, beam him down at the end of the 20th century, and ask him to solve our problems for us: especially since the whole thrust of his thinking was to refuse this easy transfer of generalisations from one conjuncture, nation or epoch to another. (16)

In the essay, Hall encourages us to "think with" Gramsci as a way of trying to make sense of the conjuncture (at the high watermark of Thatcherism) through the consideration of the formation of historical blocs, the labor of constructing and sustaining hegemonic rule, and the problems of counter-mobilization (in the face of a "bureaucratic" politics of the Left, embodied, then as now, in the institutions and culture of the British Labour Party). Like his other writing about Gramsci (for example, his essay on Gramsci's relevance for the study of race and ethnicity, 1986), what we get to see is the commitment to finding a way of animating Gramsci to examine our current moment rather than the Gramscian context of Fascist Italy. Beginning from a heartfelt insistence that Gramsci was not a "general theorist," Hall goes on to draw out eight ways in which thinking with Gramsci can illuminate and advance the way we study race, racism, and ethnicity. At the core of these is an insistence on historical specificity, rather than treating every moment as a mere instance of the great historical forces or relations. Hall's appropriation of Gramsci drives towards thinking of the conjuncture as the complex and overdetermined site of multiple and potentially contradictory dynamics.

Larry and I have both been profoundly formed by this Hall-Gramsci axis, even as we have brought other things to it. It remains the point of departure for much of our work, perhaps especially in recent years as we have tried to make sense of the rise of Trump or the reinvention of

authoritarian populism in the recent series of UK Conservative governments (including several Margaret Thatcher tribute bands). Thinking conjuncturally provides a starting point, an approach (loosely conceived), and a profound intellectual-political commitment. It is also, as Stuart Hall often observed, a point of strained intersection with what might (politely) be called more orthodox varieties of Marxism. Cultural studies (and many of its practitioners) have recurrently been assailed as insufficiently Marxist, materialist, or attentive to the central place of economic relations and processes. Hall, in particular, has been variously described as post-structuralist and post-Marxist (e.g., Bhabha 2015; Donaldson 2007; Sparks 1996).

Much of the time, such engaged arguments may be conversational, directed to clarifying arguments, differences, and connections. But that is not always the case. Both Larry and I have been exposed to what I think of Marxism 101: Marxism at its most elementary treated as an "antidote" to the errors of cultural studies (see also Grossberg 1995, on the cultural studies versus political economy "debate"). These pronouncements are conducted as though I/we may never have heard of, much less read or thought about, Marx and Marxism. Similar arguments have swirled around conjunctural analysis, where contending versions lay claim to the "true" Gramsci (Donaldson 2007) rather than the "culturalist" inclination to think with (or, to skeptics, reinvent) Gramsci. A rather different view of Hall—and the version of cultural studies that he offered to us—has been articulated by Gregor McLennan in his introduction to a collection of readings: *Stuart Hall: Selected Writings on Marxism*. Borrowing from Sartre, McLennan describes Hall as a "dialectical mediator" in relation to Marx and Marxism: "He mediated *within* Marxism—structuralism/culturalism; economism/ideologism; class/nonclass social forces—and he mediated *between* Marxism and various non- and post-Marxist discourses and movements" (McLennan 2022, 14). This captures the dynamic practice of "thinking with" in order to advance understanding rather than reproduce orthodoxy. And it is that sensibility—and that practice—that has informed Larry's work. His trajectory is distinctive (and indeed different from mine) but it is grounded in the pursuit of *both* what we need to know *and* how we need to think in order to grasp our present situation.

This is not to suggest that we both think either the same thing or even with the same resources. I have often been struck (and embarrassed) by the range of Larry Grossberg's conceptual hinterland. He has a mapping and

mental library of the thought of "Euro-modernity" that leaves me some way behind. But my embarrassment is always tempered by the sense that this knowledge—this mapping—is always being put to productive use to think through issues, topics, and arguments concerning the present—and how we got here. Indeed, I remember sitting in on a three-hour Master's seminar with his students (a subtle and challenging collective exploration of Hardt and Negri's *Empire*, 2000). It changed my understanding of the book—and of the possibilities of three-hour seminars. In short, he draws on and puts to work an extensive array of conceptual resources to illuminate the conjuncture, not least in relation to the salience of affect in the emergence of political-cultural formations.

But this also marks a point of strain. I have long struggled with his Larry's engagement with Deleuze and Guattari even while appreciating the uses to which he puts their work in thinking about the specificity of affective formations and their enrolments into "meaning and mattering maps." He has also explored and developed their conception of multiplicities. I also have a fascination with multiplicities (especially in relation to thinking conjuncturally) but have never quite been persuaded that it requires the armory of Deleuzian thinking to sustain or advance it. So, from time to time, we talk about it—seeking to clarify our differences over how to think through such concepts and make them work. Such conversations, as David Scott observed, are never conducted in pursuit of the "last word," where the issue will be finally resolved. Rather they are about exploring points of difference in order to better understand both what is at stake and how other ways of thinking may have something to offer. They are certainly not the trials of intellectual strength so central to the usual academic pursuit of "critique."

THINKING CONJUNCTURALLY

It is hardly surprising that many of these conversations have taken place around the question of the conjuncture. Although we encountered the Birmingham Centre and Stuart Hall at different points, and despite our very different academic trajectories since our times there, the conjuncture has remained an organizing issue. Both of us found ourselves constructing academic careers in a world where cultural studies had not established itself as a field of study (or a source of named academic jobs). Where Larry had to work through the margins of communication studies, I learned

to pass first as a sociologist, then as a social policy scholar (albeit one whose proclaimed mission was to convert social policy to cultural studies—I failed). In the process, Larry became a central figure in the global (yet differentiated) rise of cultural studies and was necessarily driven into the articulation of what he thought made cultural studies significant and worthwhile as an approach. My own trajectory was rather different: I largely appeared as a footnote to histories of cultural studies—a position confirmed in a memorable encounter at a conference in Canada when a young man approached me and said, "Excuse me, did you use to be *the* John Clarke?" I confessed.

As a consequence, I feel somewhat displaced from many of the conflicts and controversies that accompanied the proliferation of cultural studies, preoccupied as I was by my efforts to "improve" policy studies. But it was the distinctive (and potent) combination of Larry Grossberg and the question of the conjuncture that drew me back to thinking of myself as a cultural studies person. After our initial encounter in 1986, Larry kept in contact, asked questions, started conversations, and championed my strange work (who else in cultural studies was bothered about welfare states, public spending patterns, and replacement ratios?). He always invited me to talk at UNC, enabling me to meet and spend time with his students. He also gave me the joy of becoming friends with Barbara and Zachariah. And through all of this, the conjuncture, its significance, and how to think about it kept recurring.

It matters still, even though we continue to argue (gently) about how to think about it. I have been admiringly skeptical about his efforts to sketch a method (rather than a methodology) of approaching conjunctural analysis in his 2018 book (*Under Cover of Chaos*) and his contribution to the special issue of *New Formations* on "This Conjuncture" (2019). Although I have a lot of sympathy with his argument that cultural studies has never articulated a systematic version of what it means to do conjunctural analysis, it reminded me that I am in some way allergic to such attempts to formalize things and make them systematic. That is partly a matter of personal disposition: I am usually uncomfortable with systematization as a practice (especially when it generates charts, grids, or boxes). But it is also about the way in which the process, even in skilled hands like Larry's, tends to harden distinctions that—to me—feel both messy and blurry (put more analytically: more contingent?). So, re-reading his *New Formations* piece,

I find myself agreeing with many of its specific arguments (and the provisional ways in which they are formulated) but still feel that it comes out too tidily. For example, I wholly concur that:

> Every conjuncture is the product of an accumulation of multiple contexts, lines of force, determination, resistances, and contradictions, each with different temporalities and spatialities, always fractured and conflictual, along multiple axes and scales. (2019, 51)

But how then are these condensed and entangled multiplicities to be mapped into the boxes of Figure 1 (2019, 43) that separate out the War of Position, the Problem Space, and the Organic Crisis as the elementary forms of the conjuncture? My own solution has been a more narrative practice, trying to trace the different strands as they unfold, in their entangled messiness (and indeed, this is what much of *Under the Cover of Chaos* offers). For me, the process of formalization prioritizes the categories over their dynamics where I would want to give more weight to processes and practices. Nonetheless, I feel admiration for his efforts to bring some pedagogical clarity to the challenge of doing conjunctural analysis, even if my allergy to grids and boxes makes me resist them. Indeed, while trying to write about the current conjuncture recently, I have emphasized just those processes of realignment and reassembling in trying to trace the reactions of dominant blocs and alliances and the strategies they develop in response to their destabilization. Similarly, practices of rearticulation are central both to their political-cultural conflicts over what is at stake in the conjuncture as both dominant forces try to reinvent their dominance and counter movements attempt to challenge and undermine it. And yet, I can't help feeling that the Grossbergian grids also tend to simplify the question of the social formation. I certainly recognize (and use!) all of the terms that appear in the conjunctural part of Larry's Figure 1:

> social relations, cultural identities, coalitions;
> economic formations and structures of identification and differentiation;
> political relations, distributions, formations (e.g., hegemony),
> apparatuses, etc.;
> Cultural—discursive and ideological—struggles;
> Affective landscapes/structures of feeling/mattering maps (2019, 43).

But turning them into lists like this risks missing just how *entangled* these different elements are in the making of social formations and the peculiar mixture of lived and imagined relations that people inhabit within them. Like Larry, I have found it useful to borrow (and bend) the

idea of the social formation from its Marxist origins. It offers a way of escaping the foundational quality attributed to the mode of production (or even multiple modes of production, given that one of the ways of conceptualizing the social formation is the co-presence of multiple modes of production; see, for example, Hindess and Hirst 1977). At its simplest, I think that people do not inhabit modes of production; they live and act in social formations in which multiple relations are always in play. This implies taking the "social" character of the social formation seriously. In particular, it demands attention to the co-existence of different relations of domination and subordination, exclusion and inclusion, as well as multiple forms and sites of power, rather than clearly defined levels or instances (in the Althusserian sense). Some versions of Marxism and much conventional social science like to imagine such separate domains (the economic, political, ideological, cultural, etc.). But while people have to inhabit a world partly constructed by those distinctions (imagine the news without our different experts—economics, politics, social affairs, etc.), they also experience life as more entangled than that: remember the disruptive implications of the claim that the personal is political or the understanding that the climate catastrophe is more than a matter of individual consumer choices.

I have found myself regularly returning to Catherine Hall's observations about the social as field of contested mappings in colonial relations, in which differences, divisions and power were both inscribed and contested:

> The mapping of difference, I suggest, the constant discursive work of creating, bringing into being, or reworking these hieratic categories, was always a matter of historical contingency. The map constantly shifted, the categories faltered, as different colonial sites came into the metropolitan focus, as conflicts of power produced new configurations in one place or another. (2002, 20)

While the colonial relations between Britain and Jamaica may have exemplified these dynamics in a particularly dramatic way, I think the practices she marks have a much wider salience. I find it hard to imagine a social formation in which the social is not constantly at issue in these ways—and in which the attempted allocation of positions, power, and possibilities are not enmeshed in the workings of the apparently separate domains of economy, politics, and society.

TIME, SPACE AND THE CONJUNCTURE

My own worries about how to think conjuncturally have had a slightly different focus, although they also imply the challenge of how to find and approach the conjuncture. I have spent some time puzzling—with Larry and others—about what it means to treat the conjuncture as a space-time formation. This starts from a question about how to define the parameters of this conjuncture (When does it begin? Where do we find ourselves within it? Where does it take place?). In both *Under the Cover of Chaos* and the *New Formations* piece, Larry dates the current conjuncture from the 1960s—which inaugurate the "problem space" that he examines. For me, the current conjuncture emerges in the mid to late 1970s, arising from the collapse of the postwar order and is given life by the emergence of a formation regulated through the strategies of authoritarian populism. This follows the *Policing the Crisis* view of the exhaustion of consent and the emergence of a new hegemonic project. The subsequent forty-plus years have—in the UK, at least—been dominated by apparently endless variations on that theme as the "exceptional (law and order) state" has been normalized; as neoliberal strategies (and their failures) have required more ruthless social regulation; and as new crises of consent, authority, and the state have taken hold (Clarke 2023).

However, I often wonder to what extent our divergence on the question of periodizing the conjuncture is in part a *spatial* effect, rather than a disagreement about temporality. Writing from within the US is not quite the same as writing from within an ageing and increasingly peripheral postcolonial space hanging off the edge of Europe (politically as well as geographically). Trying to understand the UK's recent trajectory has exposed the problem of finding a route between "methodological nationalism" and "methodological globalism." Methodological nationalism has dominated the social sciences, treating nations as self-contained unities (of people, place, and politics), such that nations may be studied in their uniqueness or compared across a range of indicators. The globalizing dynamics of the last fifty years called this container-like view of the nation into question in many ways but resulted in the emergence of a methodological globalism in which national formations were flattened into a homogenized global economy, global society, and global culture. The challenge, as Larry argued in *New Formations*, is to develop a view of the conjuncture that will "allow us to see the complexity and contingency of the nation-state, as an articulation of multiple contexts, usually under

the sign of a particular regime (or regimes) of euro-modernity" (2019, 58). That implies taking geography—or spatiality—more seriously and learning from geographers. My own work (like Larry's) has been indebted to Doreen Massey whose development of a relational view of place creates the conditions for thinking about the nation as a node in a series of multiple relations—and a node that is always in process, shifting, twisting, and, of course, contested. This attention to spatial formations and relations forms a critical part of what Larry insists on as the "radical contextualism" of cultural studies (and conjunctural analysis). Geographers have been taking an increasing interest in the challenges and possibilities of thinking conjuncturally. For example, Gillian Hart has been tracing the outlines of how conjunctural analysis might enable us to address the dynamics of authoritarian populist nationalist political forms emerging across multiple spaces without collapsing them in to either national specificities or globalized uniformity (Hart 2019; 2020).

At this point, however, it is important to return to matters of time/temporality and insert a small warning. One way of making the shift from methodological nationalism to methodological globalisation has been to frame the nation within a binary history: once there were closed national framings (national economy, nation-state, national society) that formed the "spatio-territorial matrix" of Fordism. Such "closed" societies were then supplanted by more open flows in the shift towards post-Fordist regimes of accumulation (see, for example, Jessop 2014). But this—and other non-Marxist versions of the container model of the nation—omit or forget the histories of colonialism and empire which ensured that national economies in the global north were never "closed" and that their national "societies" were formed in the dynamics of colonial relations (however much they tried to repress or deny that condition). Grasping the continuing salience of those relations and dynamics might help us to grasp some of the ways in which the nationalist character of contemporary authoritarian populism—what Valluvan (2019) has called "the nationalist *over-determination* particular to the present historical conjuncture" (15)—has taken hold.

WHERE ARE WE NOW?

Still talking, is the simplest answer. Contemporary formations, current political struggles, the deepening crisis of the academy (and its capacity to sustain intellectual work of critical kinds)—all of these ensure that Larry and I still have much to talk about, despite the frustrations of transatlantic distance and the thinness of virtual encounters. I don't think we have got "beyond grumpy," not least because the accumulating dynamics of current global, national, and local formations have tended to demand rather more "pessimism of the intellect." More generally, the "we" in question remains committed to a cultural studies engagement with the conjuncture—and the increasing urgency of such an approach. This takes us beyond the "we" of Larry and I occupying a conversational space of clarification. It also takes us beyond the (vitally necessary) analysis and dissection of the "we" that is so regularly invoked in regressive nationalist political-cultural projects, for instance in the need to protect "our history" against its many challengers. The question of "we" decisively raises the possibility of a "we" to come—the progressive collective subject that might yet be imagined and forged through the politics of articulation. That possibility is the ground for pursuing intellectual work with a degree of "optimism of the will." The resulting dynamic tension between pessimism and optimism was always at the core of Stuart Hall's view of cultural studies as a project—and it is the inheritance that Larry and I share.

NOTES

1. https://soundcloud.com/bristol-university-press/critical-dialogues-larry-grossberg

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IN MEMORIAM

ROMAN HORAK AND LUTZ MUSNER

Our dear friends Roman and Lutz both passed away a couple of weeks after we had added the final touches to our co-written chapter, Roman in February, Lutz in April 2025. This is a major loss for cultural studies and for all of us.

Roman was the very first of us to explore the British variant of cultural studies and a sincere follower of its social, intellectual, and pedagogical commitment. He also was the one to invite Larry to his first visit to Vienna and thus to establish decades-long cross-Atlantic and cross-disciplinary collaborations and, even more importantly, deep companionship and friendship between each and among all of us.

Lutz was the first architect of the International Research Center for Cultural Studies (IFK) and through his committed intellectual and organizational work provided the basis for its sustainable development. Throughout his academic life he built bridges between cultural studies and Kulturwissenschaften and helped connect the German speaking cultural studies community to the wider global field.

It was a pleasure and a gift to collaborate and spend time with Roman and Lutz over many decades. They were great intellectuals and wonderful persons, gentle and funny, often skeptical and melancholic; both really cared for better stories, above all in the many twists of ordinary people's everyday lives. Roman and Lutz in their very special individual ways were truly committed cultural studies persons and true friends. We will miss them a lot.

—Christina Lutter and Wolfgang Maderthaner

IN MEMORIAM

ELSPETH PROBYN

It is with deep sadness that we note the passing of Elspeth Probyn in early April 2025. A significant figure in feminist queer theory, environmental cultural studies, and embodied research practices, Elspeth leaves behind a remarkable body of work and a legacy of mentorship for many early career researchers. Her scholarship indeed reflected a continuous dialogue with her graduate students and many fellow thinkers and writers. She had a strong connection to Larry; they have been lifelong friends. Her passing is a great loss to cultural studies. We miss her dearly.

—Editors

JONATHAN STERNE

Sadly, Jonathan passed away in March 2025, while this book was in production. He was not only a powerful intellectual force in critical media studies, technology studies, sound studies, and disability studies, but also an incredibly generous mentor and comrade. He left us much too soon, and we miss him more than we can say.

—Editors

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BRYAN G. BEHRENSHAUSEN earned his Ph.D. in Communication at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill under the direction of Larry Grossberg, where he completed a dissertation on the cultural politics of information. He also served as Grossberg's teaching assistant and a managing editor of the journal *Cultural Studies*. His research on video

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