2 Multiplying methods: from pluralism to combination

In this chapter, we ask why methods of cultural study are so diverse. We trace the circumstances that have led to this diversity and the sense (or non-sense) it makes. We do not take methodological diversity as a given, but, rather, propose that understanding *why* a multiplicity of methods is necessary is a part of *our* method. So, in the first part of this chapter, we explore the accumulation of methods in cultural studies in something like their historical sequence. We do not claim any kind of universality for this account, nor do we wish to give it a normative force as representing what everyone should do. We recognize that its immediate basis is a story of cultural studies in the UK, though elements may be recognizable in many different, especially anglophone, cultural contexts, but, whether it seems strange or all too familiar, we hope that our account will stimulate further dialogue. (For reflections on 'where is cultural studies' see Ang, 1998; Schwarz, 1994.)

The second part of this chapter takes a different approach to the diversity of methods. By means of the idea of a cultural circuit, it shows how all the different methods have their own legitimate objects and use as well as how they need to be combined. We are helped in this by drawing on a parallel argument about circuits and methods in the philosophy of hermeneutics.

Methodological pluralism or a Method?

Most writers on method see cultural studies as profoundly pluralistic in its approaches. It is a 'plural field of contesting perspectives' (Barker, 2000: 34) or 'insistently plural' (McGuigan, 1997: 1). For Douglas Kellner, cultural studies should be 'multi-perspectival', using the perspectives of political economy, textual methods and audience reception (1997: 102), while for Pertti Alasuutari cultural studies has a single perspective (taking culture seriously in connection with questions of power), but is eclectic in its methods: 'Cultural Studies methodology has often been described by the concept of bricolage: one is pragmatic and strategic in choosing and applying different methods and practices'(1995: 2).

Of recent writers, only Nick Couldry (2000) – and, more implicitly perhaps, Charlotte Brunsdon (2000) and Paul Willis (2000) – diverge from this methodological pluralism. Couldry argues against Lawrence Grossberg's view that cultural studies 'always and only exists in contextually specific theoretical and institutional formations' and 'has to be made up as it goes along' (Grossberg quoted in Couldry, 2000: 9) and gives priority to questions of disciplinary identity: for him, cultural studies is a discipline and it has a distinctive method.

We want to argue that methodological divergence occurs, in part, because culture has come to matter in different ways. Different methods correspond to the different modes by means of which culture impresses itself on us as an object. This relationship between methodologies and ontologies has already informed our identification in Chapter 1 of the culture-as-power approach, but it holds for differences *within* cultural studies, too. Here, different aims and objects select different research strategies, prompt borrowings from different disciplines and privilege different theoretical frameworks.

Objects and strategies of cultural research

In what follows we distinguish three main ways in which the objects of cultural studies have been defined and explore their implications for method. We start with the familiar definition of culture as a way of life of particular social groups. We trace the emergence of a new interest in cultural formations as a whole. Finally, we look at the contemporary critiques of the idea of culture itself, stemming especially from poststructuralist approaches, and consider some implications of this ongoing revision for questions of method.

Culture as the 'way of life' for groups and nations

Raymond Williams' redefinition of culture as 'ordinary' is more familiar than another feature of his work – the extraordinary range of his connected cultural projects even before 1980. He was interested in art, literature *and* everyday popular creativity, in classic novels and contemporary media. His work was deeply historical, but engaged with present possibilities and hopes for the future. His working-class loyalties were accompanied by a concern for larger cultural formations. He undertook close historical research in *The Country and the City* (1973) and debated general categories in *Marxism and Literature* (1977). He recognized *all* the meanings of culture, including the values of collective development and individual education.

In other versions of cultural research, such as in German intellectual traditions, Williams' various concerns would be assigned to different disciplines: the popular to folklore studies or *volkskunde*, for instance, and the 'high', artistic or philosophical aspects of culture to aesthetics and hermeneutics. As an interpreter of hermeneutics, Gadamer does some of the things that Williams does (Gadamer, 1989). He is an educator, studies words historically and discusses art and aesthetics. He only engages indirectly, however, with ordinary, socially situated

meaning-making, when, for example, he compares artistic representation with learning by experience. Paul Ricoeur, too, takes high forms of culture, such as literary fiction and history-writing, as his examples (1984, 1985, 1988). These comparisons give clues to cultural studies' methodological dilemmas, drawing attention to the tension between the combination and the separation of objects and methods.

Culture as 'a whole way of life' (Williams, 1961) or 'a particular way of life' (Williams, 1965) or as 'a way of struggle' (Edward P. Thompson, 1961) can become a relatively separated object of study of this kind. Here, the specific practices of a particular class or social group are being examined, especially at moments of emergence or self-production. The appearance of 'new' political identities around gender or race in the emancipatory social movements of the 1960s and 1970s powerfully reinforced this cultural model, prompting much research in social history, literary studies and cultural studies and also shaping curricular developments in several subjects.

Behind these New Left revisions lay an older Marxist argument (Lukacs, 1971; Marx and Engels, 1977) that ideas and consciousness are always properties of particular social groups. Class consciousness was an aspect of working-class activism and self-realization, a process by which proletarians, who exist by working for pay, grow from individual victimhood to collective political agency, to heroes who make the world – and history – anew. This dialectical model of collective identity was both enabling and limiting. In the 1960s and 1970s, largely as a result of the influence of E. P. Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class*, a whole school of class-based history-writing was formed, mainly in the anglophone world but also with influence in Continental Europe (Kaye and McClelland, 1990) and India (Chandavarkar, 1997). An analogous model of culture as agency underpinned studies of black people as slaves or colonized people or settlers and survivors in the metropolis (for example, Fryer, 1984; Genovese, 1974). Feminist history and women's studies deployed similar frameworks, while criticizing the gender biases and absences of left-wing social history (D. Thompson, 1976). Early work on sexual dissidents often took the same shape (Weeks, 1977).

Culture as a way of life can also be understood in national terms, so that this framework can be read as a kind of left-wing cultural nationalism. In his formative early work, Williams did not really question these nationalist associations and their ethnic exclusions. His project converged with the rewriting of Englishness in terms of neglected and subordinated traditions of radicalism, popular turbulence and democratic protest by communist and socialist historians (Schwarz, 1982). It was only in the 1980s, as part of a larger revision of this model, that the way of life definition was fully critiqued in cultural studies as a construction of identity underpinned by radicalized conceptions of the nation (Gilroy, 1987, 1993b).

Methods for studying a way of life

Studying a way of life makes particular demands on method. The methodological filter must sift out shared, communal or common elements and patterns of

commonalty within the group, even where internal differences are recognized. *The Making of the English Working Class* is organized around just such a tension between the forging of a common class outlook, which is Thompson's preferred thesis, and the differences within popular forces, some of which his research revealed. Method must be sensitive also to the connections between social consciousness and social being. Culture is the subjective side of social relationships and social experiences; it is a tissue of lives lived under pressure (for key formulations, see E. P. Thompson, 1963, 1978, 1993).

The negative side of this is a strong resistance in much cultural studies work to any method that abstracts aspects of social life from the whole social process. Such resistance initially arose from criticism of the base-superstructure metaphor within orthodox Marxism, associated with Soviet communism or Stalinism's dogmatic distortions of morality and knowledge for oppressive political ends (E. P. Thompson, 1961, 1978; Williams, 1961, 1977). The methodological principle (the resistance to abstraction) has therefore long been tied up with moral and political values, especially with the belief in human agency and grounded concrete knowledge. Indeed, the resistance to abstraction extended into a suspicion of theory as a methodological principle and became an important strand in opposing Althusserianism in the late 1970s (Johnson, 1979b; Samuel, 1981; E. P. Thompson, 1978). At this moment the word 'theory' carried such a concentration of issues that it was hard to untangle them. An interest in theory could, for example, be taken as a symptom of intellectual elitism and disconnection from the 'real worlds' of activist politics, popular agency and empirical controls on speculation. We will return to both the positive and negative aspects of the resistance to abstraction in Chapters 5 and 8.

Methods that privilege the concrete and use rich or thick description can be found in many disciplines, but especially in social history, human geography and anthropological or sociological fieldwork. Some forms of literary study also take texts to represent a way of life or a structure of feeling. The cross-disciplinary continuum of methods often described today as auto/biography (Stanley, 1993) are usually concrete in these senses, too – biography, autobiography, memory work, life history and oral history. Methods adopted from all these sources are found in cultural studies with or without explicit methodological debate (for example, on autobiography, Couldry, 2000; Probyn, 1993). They are discussed in detail in our chapters on specific settings in Part II (the historical, spatial and so on) and particular clusters of method (fieldwork, reading fiction historically and so on). Here, however, we draw attention to two features of these borrowings. First, from the point of view of specialists, they often seem limited – not historical enough for the historians (C. Hall, 1992; Steedman, 1992) or with an ethnography that is particularly thin (Jenson and Pauly, 1997: 165). Second, we can note that these elements are often combined with others. An ethnographic element, for example, may be combined with auto/biography or historical contextualization or, in audience studies, with work on popular media texts.

Methodological combinations, often of an original kind, are a feature of well-known cultural studies texts. Richard Hoggart's *The Uses of Literacy* combined a

kind of half-hidden autobiography and strongly literary mode of reading and writing with an intensity of observation and memory work we *could* call ethnographic. *Resistance Through Rituals* is a study of group cultures, but youth subcultures are interpreted, first, by being set within an ambitious account of post-war hegemony in the UK and, second, by being read textually using a structuralist conception of style as a bricolage, a putting together or pasting in of signs from different sources. In this sequence of studies, perhaps only Paul Willis' and, later, Christine Griffin's work is more fully ethnographic (Willis, 1977, 1978, 2000), though Willis' deep debt to Hoggart's literary methods of reading should also be noted. Even in these most concrete examples, we can see the force of Alasuutari's apt description of cultural studies itself as bricolage.

Culture as cultural formations

In a second version of the cultural, culture is not primarily the product and property of a group or class, but, rather, a level or aspect of social practice within the social formation as a whole. It is an aspect of social organization and domination and resistance. Terms such as 'cultural formation' or 'cultural hegemony' are preferred over 'cultures', because they capture the relations between ways of living and the differences *within* them. Cultural formations are complex or composite, relational rather than expressing single identities. They include free-floating elements – 'public' without being wholly 'bourgeois', 'popular' without being simply working class. Theoretically, this version of the cultural involved what Stuart Hall called 'the break into a complex Marxism', itself involving a rethinking of the base-superstructure metaphor (1980a: 25).

While early New Left theory had rejected this metaphor for a more integrated view of group and culture, the new strategy was to value the big picture but rethink the relations of aspects or levels. Especially attractive were those versions of complex Marxism that enlarged the scope for cultural analysis, either by making the ideological more autonomous from other aspects or cultural processes more effective in the whole ensemble of relationships. In the Althusserian language of the 1970s, 'the problematic of Cultural Studies thus became closely identified with the problem of the "relative autonomy" of cultural practices' (Hall, 1980a: 29).

This shift of emphasis was one of those widespread, transdisciplinary changes we noted in Chapter 1. The middle chapters of Williams' *Marxism and Literature* (1977) address the problem of how to describe large-scale cultural formations in their historical movement and in their relations of dominance, subordination and opposition. Similarly, E. P. Thompson's later histories concern eighteenth-century gentry paternalism as a form of hegemony in crisis (1993). In feminist work, the shift from studying the concrete bits of women's lives to tackling larger formations of gendered and other relations was a similar movement. 'Complex Marxism' also involved a revival of interest in theories of ideology so that the concept was stretched and tested well beyond its limits (Barrett, 1991; Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS), 1977; Larrain, 1983; J.B. Thompson, 1984; and see Chapter 8 below). In cultural studies, the new model was clearest

empirically in *Policing the Crisis* (Hall et al., 1978) – first of the studies of the emergent New Right formation in the UK, which became known as Thatcherism.

The shift from 'cultures' to 'formations' involved a changed relation to theory. Because they theorized totalities (actually *national* formations) in complex, culture-rich ways, Althusser's Marxist structuralism and Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks* were central (Althusser, 1971; Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS), 1977; Gramsci, 1971). As a theorist, teacher, group worker and researcher, Stuart Hall was the major creative influence in the formation of this second version of cultural studies, but, again, larger historical currents provided the changing agenda. By the late 1970s, the new social movements were discovering the limits of their earlier strategies and meeting resistance from counter-movements of the New Right and neo-liberalism in the UK and the United States especially. Shifts in the agenda of cultural research occurred, in part, as a response to some of the most troubling dilemmas of the time.

'Mapping the field': a method for theories?

To many commentators, then and since, the most obvious methodological change of the 1970s was the heightened importance of theoretical work itself and the relative subordination of concrete studies. Although there was no simple substitution, relatively abstract thinking certainly acquired a new importance and perhaps too great a prestige. In Chapter 5 we explore the resulting dilemmas more fully. Here, however, we can note how theoretical clarification was rarely an end in itself and was usually combined with other aims.

It was most often combined with different kinds of contemporary cultural history or 'mapping'. 'Mapping the field' was a kind of laying out of theoretical frameworks or approaches around a particular topic – approaches to ideology, say, or views of art and politics (see Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS), 1973 for an early example). As theories themselves are cultural products, mapping was *doing* cultural studies, not merely preparing for it. Maps nearly always had an argumentative dimension and commonly explored theoretical tensions – between 'cultural materialism' and structuralism, for example (Hall, 1980a; Johnson, 1979a) – in a non-polemical, syncretizing way. At a time when polemical dismissals were common, this was important (Hall, 1980a, 1981; Johnson, 1978, 1979b, 1981; E. P. Thompson, 1978, 1981).

Mapping has limits, though. If the point of view of map and mapper are not reflected on, such overviews imply an all-seeing eye and can canonize a particular set of texts (Johnson, 1999). It could, however, take many different forms. It could draw close to a Williams-like literary history or a contemporary political history influenced by Gramscian theory. It could resemble the formalism of text-based models typical of structuralism or adopt the argumentative types of mapping of 'problematics' or 'traditions' found in Continental European philosophers such as Althusser (1969) or Gadamer (1989). We will return to allied methods in our discussions of theory (Chapter 5), historical cultural studies (Chapter 7) and text/contexts relationships (Chapter 11 especially).

Mapping differences in a field or formation depends on the willingness of analysts to make a temporary abstraction of the cultural elements that are of most interest. This abstraction enables much closer attention to be paid to the text as the vehicle of the languages, codes or discourses by means of which meaning is produced. A similar abstraction underpins the development of a text-based media and film studies that focuses on the features of particular genres. Theoretically, this move in method was reinforced by the absorption of structuralist and poststructuralist approaches from the Francophone intellectual world and was part of the more general reception of European literary and cultural theory. We will discuss the wide-ranging effects of this linguistic turn in the next section as it marks a further shift of object.

The 'local' redefined and contextualized: other combinations

An apparently contrasting and perhaps deliberately compensating development of the 1970s and 1980s was a concentration on particular cultural 'sites' or institutional spaces. This reshaped the earlier interest in local cultural worlds that were beyond or resistant to the dominant public gaze. Before the development of cultural geography (see Chapter 6), the local was specified not in spatial but social terms – the school as a place of child–adult interactions, for example, or the home as the space of 'the housewife' and her media-related practices. Groups, it was assumed, constructed their own identities within such spaces. The sequence of youth studies, for example, runs from the early subcultural studies (Hall and Jefferson, 1976; Hebdige, 1979; Willis, 1977, 1978) through feminist redefinitions (Griffin, 1985; Angela McRobbie, 1991; Angela McRobbie and Nava, 1984; Roman, Christian-Smith and Ellsworth, 1988) to a concern with masculinities and sexuality (Mac An Ghaill, 1994) and the contemporary interest in new ethnicities in the context of racism (Back, 1994; Hall, 1996a; Mercer, 1994) and global youth debates and movements (Skelton and Valentine, 1998). Much of this sequence can be seen in the work of one researcher, Phil Cohen (for example, 1972, 1993). Exchanges with sociology, some forms of anthropology and cultural geography have been intense. Today it is often impossible to say if studies of youth cultures, cultures of schooling and forms of youth-related consumer culture are researched and written by sociologists, anthropologists, educationalists, geographers or (various kinds of) cultural studies persons.

So far, we have identified two rather different definitions of culture in cultural studies. We have also seen how methods depend on objects or methodologies on ontologies. We have also noted that methods are often combined. It begins to look as though *combination* is *characteristic* of method in cultural studies. It has also been associated with *theoretical* dialogue and the combination of theories, which is one of the aims of mapping.

These syncretic moves can also be seen in media studies within this tradition. Cultural studies of the media almost always refer to social groups, textual genres and, sometimes more implicitly, broader historical contexts (see, for example, Brunsdon and Morley, 1978; Hobson, 1982; Morley, 1980). This is especially true of feminist work on women's genres, an especially generative area for the whole

media and cultural studies field (see, for example, R. McRobbie, 1978; Radway, 1984; for a review, van Zoonen, 1994).

A strongly group-specific focus, 'women', remained important through the 1980s, because women and the various relations of gendered power were still persistently absent or marginalized in more universalizing debates. Charlotte Brunsdon has discussed the difficulties of doing work on 'women's genres' in the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) at Birmingham University in the mid-1970s and her study of the development of academic interest in soap opera provides many illustrations of the combinations we are identifying (Brunsdon, 2000). The book itself uses reflective autobiography and biography (interviews with key soap opera scholars) as the main method, but sets interest in soap opera within a larger history of feminist repudiation, reinvestigation and re-evaluation of conventional feminine forms. Soap opera studies allowed feminists in the academy to construct and negotiate relations with 'the housewife' or 'ordinary woman' – a figure who inevitably includes aspects of themselves. The book also traces the shift away from essentialist and exclusionary identifications of women, the feminine and the female and engages with the changing place of soap opera and feminism in the lives of new generations of younger women. The study of soaps aimed to explore and uphold female experiences and agency, but it was also the expression of a kind of feminist desire:

> These examples [of the study of soap opera] reveal a different kind of feminist engagement with the texts of femininity. It is not just a recruitist project – an investigation of the pleasures of others. There is a self – a feminist self – to be investigated too. (Brunsdon, 2000: 27)

Brunsdon's book, like the soap opera studies themselves, uses a combined methodology. We stress *combined* here – because the methods are not just used side by side, they are complementary. They include:

- an autobiographical and biographical starting point and continued self-reflection
- an engagement with texts that are significant for the self and group with whom the researcher does or does not identify
- a self-conscious 'historical' setting in place of the whole interaction
- a wish, also, to narrate retrospectively 'the story so far'
- *and* a desire to map – perhaps – the future possibilities.

These are keynotes that we will want to sound out again in Chapter 3.

The critique of 'culture'

The third set of redefinitions of the objects of cultural studies are harder to summarize and still in process. 'Postmodernism' is a possible but too easy heading. In part, an older story continues, a dialogue between two extended research programmes – the cultural materialist positions already described and

the programme of structuralism and its 'posts'. As Stuart Hall has argued, structuralism amounted to 'a formative intervention which coloured and influenced everything that followed', but it was not '"a fixed orthodoxy" uncritically subscribed to' (Hall, 1980a: 29). There were tensions between the traditions, but structuralist and other theories provided new languages of complexity, just as complex Marxism was being stretched and tested by changing historical conditions.

Structuralism abstracts and privileges language and language-like cultural forms. Cultural agency, or productivity, is ascribed to the forms through which meaning is signified. Later in this tradition, in Michel Foucault's work especially, discourses and discursive formations are viewed also as the main conduits of power (see, for example, Foucault, 1980; Rabinow, 1984).

The underlying abstraction of such work derives from Saussure's original treatment of language as a structure or system of differences. Poststructuralist theories retain some elements of this but actively rethink the rigid binary schemes of classic structuralism. Language is now theorized as looser, more contingent, more associative and always in process, developing early critiques of Saussure and drawing closer to more dialogic or contextual approaches to language (see, for example, Volosinov, 1973). In poststructuralism, however, cultural forms and conventions remain central: they are the sources of meaning, power and, especially, identity and subjectivity. The question of who produces the discourses, where and how, are rarely posed and questions of human and social agency are left unresolved (compare Couldry, 2000; Probyn, 1993). Here, then, are two colliding intellectual and political histories: the struggle of structuralists with simple human-centred ideas of agency and cultural materialists' recovery of the creative self and agency from mechanical Marxism. No wonder relations have often exploded into polemic!

Structuralist thinking, however, was already a presence in the second 1970s formation of cultural studies – notably in a take-up of Barthes' semiotics of everyday life and the semiologically influenced idea of style in the subculture work (Barthes, 1971, 1972, 1977; Hebdige, 1979) and in the complex Marxism of social formations (Althusser and Balibar, 1970). In its British borrowings, structuralism gave a new importance and clarity to culture as an object. It made it harder to go back to economic determinism or reabsorb culture into everything. Moreover, it showed how power was intrinsic to cultural processes, not just reflected or reinforced in them (see especially Chapter 8). Foucault's arguments about subjectivity and the self – as always constructed in discourse – held immense promise for the development of a cultural psychology compatible with the cultural studies project (Foucault, 1979; Henriques et al., 1984).

As these ideas were being absorbed, political problems were becoming more complex. The new political movements had multiplied political agents and extended the sphere of politics – to the domestic and personal especially. At the same time, the political theories of the time tended to organize struggles into straightforward binaries – class against class, women and men, black and white, gay and straight. It was hard to get 'beyond the fragments' or, more accurately, perhaps, beyond the antagonism and competition between movements. Binary

thinking about politics made it hard to see the differences within a single movement or handle relations between movements, each of which claimed priority. In the women's movement – a key locus for these debates – the new theories suggested that the movement had constituted itself as all white, First World and exclusively heterosexual, producing exclusions anew. In the same period, in the academy, class, gender and race-based theories were often placed in intense competition within radical curricula, for want of ways of thinking about them together.

Structuralism and its 'posts' provided new ways of thinking about complexity in this political sense. In particular, it provided ways in which to fundamentally criticize any theory that reduced power to one central location or dynamo. Among the casualties of the critique of essentialist ways of thinking was 'culture' itself, for it implied that ways of life always hold together, are relatively homogeneous, firmly bounded, pure and even organized around an essence or core. Even 'cultural formations', with its concessions to complexity, implies a 'complex unity'. As we noted in Chapter 1, culture in Europe was associated with a more or less explicitly racialized conception of a people, a nation, 'the folk' or '*volk*' (Eickhof, Henkes and van Vree, 2000). This form of cultural essentialism was uncovered in 1980s UK as 'the new racism' (Barker, 1981) and as a white English ethnicity haunting the culture debate (Gilroy, 1987). It has been suggested that it was only the growth of anti-essentialist theories that finally enabled this legacy to be questioned and displaced (Johnson, 2000b: 197–200, 206–7).

So, poststructuralism helped to conceptualize the multiplicity of political subjects, but also, together with psychoanalytical borrowings, deepened thinking about identity and interrelationships. In the old dialectic of social difference, antagonisms were seen as mainly external, one culture or group against another. In the new theories, social identities were seen as deeply relational and internal. The production of a self always involved the production of others, at least partly imaginary and so internal to the self (see, for example, Benjamin, 1990; Bhabha, 1994). The exercise of power was always accompanied by an emotional or psychic labour – expelling the other in fantasy, for example, as well as physically in a real world. Within the older frameworks, too, cultures tended to have relatively fixed and impermeable boundaries. In a world of border-crossing and ambivalence about nations and syncretic cultural activities or mixing and matching, such a theory became a form of oppression in itself, complicit with the policing of ethnicity or nationality (Bhabha, 1994; Brah, 1996; Butler, 1993, 1999; Hall, 1996c). The idea of culture was caught in an interplay of social and intellectual movements. It became a kind of holding term, summing up a tradition, only used perhaps 'where imprecision matters' (Johnson, 1996: 80).

Postmodern fragmentation affected the field of cultural theories, too, with no new dominant paradigm emerging. In this situation, some writers sought new general categories, or simple abstractions to indicate what was distinctive about the cultural – 'the historical forms of consciousness or subjectivity', for instance (Johnson, 1996: 80). Others rethought the cultural as a fluid process of representation and self-composition (Grossberg, 1992; Hall, 1997). Sections of the

anglophone academy continued to learn from the extraordinary philosophical creativity of francophone intellectual traditions, especially from the diverse strands of French feminism, the cultural sociology of Pierre Bourdieu and, in a kind of poststructuralist mainstream, many aspects of Michel Foucault's later work. However, the challenge of difference after difference produced, everywhere, a much more fragmented or dispersed cultural model in which metaphors of 'fields' or 'fragments' or 'rhizomes' replaced the idea of a patterned cultural whole. At most, activist cultural analysis became a way of connecting fragments, linking differences – hence, the currency, in the later 1980s and early 1990s, of the key word 'articulation', with its sense of movement in more than one direction (Grossberg, 1992; Hall, 1986; Laclau and Mouffe, 1985). If terms such as 'formation' are still used (for example, 'discursive formation'), stress is laid on their internal differentiation, movement and relative lack of boundaries, rather than the patterning or 'structure' of a knowable whole.

Poststructuralist methodologies?

It is not easy to trace the effects of this shift on forms of cultural study, but two developments seem important for our themes.

First, the (re)turn to language certainly led to a reinforcement of broadly literary and linguistic methodologies in cultural studies – new forms of 'critical textwork', but with a different agenda. In earlier structuralist-influenced work, the focus was on the conventions of a particular genre or mode of cultural production (the literary, cinematographic, photographic and so on) and the ways in which these produced meaning (see Chapter 9). Poststructuralist interventions shifted interest towards the reader or 'subject' of the text, opening up questions of identity and subjectivity in new ways.

Enquiry focused on the subjective dimensions of the cultural, on discourse or performance as self-production (for example, Butler, 1999; Henriques et al., 1984). Both the main streams of postmodern theory – the Foucauldian and the psychoanalytical – centre on subjectivity in this sense, so that the question of culture is increasingly refocused through the lens of individual and collective identities (see, for example, Du Gay, Evans and Redman, 2000; Hall and Du Gay, 1996). Humanness itself is never a given – like sex-gender identity or race and even the body, the last redoubt of the reductively biological, it is always constructed or produced. Within this broad stream of anti-essentialist thinking, two political agendas stimulated both theory and research. The first – which came to be labelled 'post-colonial' – includes both the critical assessment of the cultural legacies of colonialism and Empire in the West and recognition of the cultural creativity of marginalized migrants and diasporic traditions (see, for example, Bhabha, 1994; Brah, 1996; Gilroy, 1993a, 1993b; Hall, 1996c; Said, 1978, 1990; Spivak, 1994). The second – 'queer theory' – centres on criticism of the older binaries of lesbian and gay theory and the taken-for-grantedness of the heterosexual norm (see, for example, Butler, 1993, 1999; Dollimore, 1991; Sedgwick, 1990, 1994). We will look at the strengths and limits of the (broadly literary) methodologies generated by these redefinitions in Chapter 14 especially.

Second, postmodernism has rightly been identified with a change in intellectual ambitions and styles related to the recognition of difference and process. This is seen in the retreat from the macro – indeed epic – ambitions of the 1970s, a moving away from grasping cultures as a whole, for instance. While such ambitions are alive and well in some versions of social theory, cultural analysis has since become more partial, piecemeal and rather pragmatic, often self-consciously so. At the same time, researchers have become preoccupied with their own forms of cultural work, including writing and the representation of others (see Chapter 4).

We experience both losses and liberations in these changes. Attempts at totality produce theories that are hard to break into with new voices or viewpoints. Today's stress on particularity allows for different starting points and frees up intellectual activity, so that projects are easier to begin – and finish. On the other hand, there has been a loss of dialogue and, we would argue, seriousness about intellectual work. This is reinforced by state and corporate control and the marketization of the academy, all of which encourage instrumental attitudes to writing and research. In this context, it is important to continue to make generalizations so they can be challenged and revised. This is why we value the overview as an aspect of method and why we have employed it in this chapter as a way of recognizing partiality and difference – including our own – while mapping changes and seeking links.

Cultural circuits: cultural studies meets hermeneutics

So far we have sought to understand the multiplicity of methods there are by providing a short history of political pressures and changing paradigms, viewed from a methodological angle. Because we recognize multiplicity, there is no grand finale to this chapter. As Stuart Hall has repeatedly urged, each new episode 'repositions' earlier theories without making them redundant (see, for example, 1992). At the same time, we remain dissatisfied with listing methods in an accumulating 'repertoire', as though they had no relation to each other, and had no history of entanglement.

Another way in which to understand difference and combination is to relate the diversity of methods to a more differentiated view of the cultural process. Perhaps methodological differences arise from the cultural process itself. This involves abstracting a general model that fits most cultural instances. Such an approach has been developed in a series of studies based first in Stuart Hall's reading of the Introduction to Marx's *Grundrisse* (his preparatory notebooks for *Capital*), then on an engagement with models of communication (encoding and decoding) and finally in models or 'circuits' of cultural production and consumption (du Gay et al, 1997; Hall, 1973a; Hall, 1973b; Johnson, 1996). A simplified version is shown in Figure 2.1.

All cultural products go through the moments shown in Figure 2.1, though we can start the circuit at different points. The model fits face-to-face exchanges or forms such as television programmes or useful and meaningful objects such as personal hi-fi. Importantly, everyday life is both a starting point (A) and an end

```
                    ┌─────────┐
                    │ C: Text │
                    └─────────┘
          ┌───────────────┐       ┌─────────────┐
          │ B: Production │       │  D: Reading │
          └───────────────┘       └─────────────┘
                  ┌──────────────────────┐
                  │  A: Everyday life: E  │
                  └──────────────────────┘
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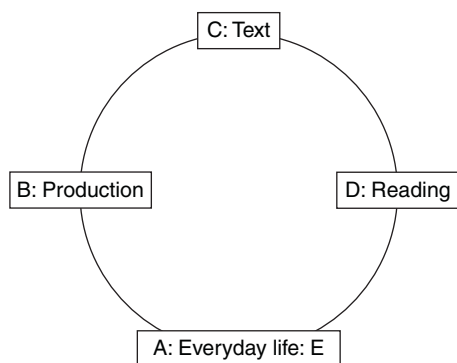
Figure 2.1 Cultural Circuit

point or result (E) of the process. In this model, specialist cultural producers (B) make representations in the forms of texts (C). These are read under definite conditions (D) and have consequences at the level of everyday life (E). There are, however, innumerable cultural circuits, the conditions of which are constantly in process, so they are, perhaps, more spirals than circuits.

This way of thinking is not restricted to cultural studies. As well as paralleling Marx's economic arguments, the circuit model resembles some basic principles of hermeneutics. As Paul Ricoeur puts it.

> It is the task of hermeneutics . . . to reconstruct the set of operations by which a work lifts itself above the opaque depths of living, acting, and suffering, to be given by an author to readers who revise it and thereby change their acting. (1984: 53)

Ricoeur continues by distinguishing hermeneutics from what he sees as the limited agenda of semiotic or structuralist analysis:

> For semiotic theory the only operative concept is that of the literary text. Hermeneutics, however, is concerned with reconstructing the entire arc of operations by which practical experience provides itself with works, authors and readers.

We might add that poststructuralism *is* interested in the reader also, but only as derived from the text, although this may be broadly defined. However, Ricoeur's 'arc' resembles the 'cultural circuit' (see Figure 2.2).

Ricoeur's 'mimesis 1' corresponds to the moment of 'everyday life' in the cultural circuit shown in Figure 2.1. He wants to argue that, before more elaborated acts of representation occur (his mimesis 2), the possibility of representation is present in the 'forms of living' themselves – that is, in the cultural practices of day-to-day activity. In *Time and Narrative*, this is illustrated by the daily experience of time. Everyday living is organized according to the passage of time and so is already narratable in the form of a story of a day, for instance. Storytelling arises from human 'acting and suffering'.
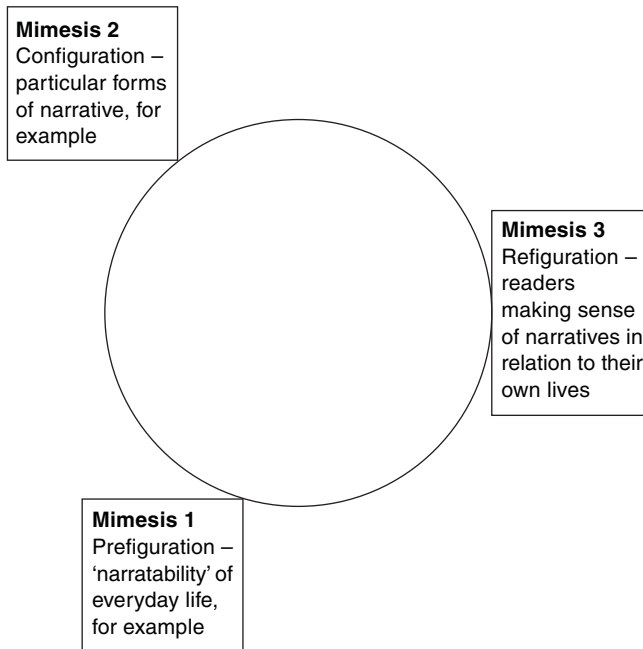
Mimesis 2
Configuration –
particular forms
of narrative, for
example

Mimesis 3
Refiguration –
readers
making sense
of narratives in
relation to their
own lives

Mimesis 1
Prefiguration –
'narratability' of
everyday life,
for example

Figure 2.2 Moments in mimesis
(*Source*: Paul Ricoeur, 1984: 52–87)

Ricoeur's second moment – 'mimesis 2' or 'configuration' – resembles the moment of relatively separated cultural production and textual encoding of Figure 2.1. This involves the abstraction of meaning in a separated text and what Ricoeur calls 'schematization' in the language system according to its conventions and genres. Mimesis 2 involves, for example, *specific forms* of narrative (for example, history-writing, literary fiction) as ways of handling time. Ricoeur does not reflect, as we would, on what is lost or suppressed or unsayable in the passage from mimesis 1 to mimesis 2. Unlike Marx or Gramsci or feminist standpoint theorists, he is not concerned with representation as a form of power. For Gramsci, for instance, the distinction between 'common sense' (popular and practically embedded meanings, close to 'mimesis 1') and 'philosophy' (articulated and critical thinking, close to 'mimesis 2') is central to his account of hegemony and counter-hegemonic activity – counter-hegemony being, from this point of view, an educative work with the 'good sense' of popular common sense.

Ricoeur's 'mimesis 3' is termed 'refiguration'. Like most cultural studies writers, he foregrounds the productive work of readers: 'the reader is the operator par excellence' whose practice unifies the three moments of mimesis. Three aspects are involved here: there are traditions of storytelling that are shared between writers and readers; there is the act of reading itself, which revises what the author gives to the reader; and there is the reader's life, which is also changed.

Circuits and methods

The diversity of cultural methods can be grasped anew by means of these accounts of the cultural which are more differentiated and dynamic than those discussed so far. Like Ricoeur, we believe that cultural processes exert pressures on the ways in which they can be represented or researched, so that the diversity of methods is also produced by the forms and complexity of cultural circuits. Culture is not only represented, it is also representable, in particular ways.

The methods associated with 'the way of life' paradigm correspond to the moment when cultural forms are most embedded in the practices of daily life (at A in our own circuit in Figure 2.1 and at 1 in Ricoeur's, shown in Figure 2.2). Here, cultural production is not a separated practice; it is part of the process of ordinary living. Method configures the nature of this moment by resisting abstraction and insisting on concrete contexts, including often a certain authenticity of representation, against silences or misrecognitions in the public sphere. The representational activity of the researchers themselves, however – in the writing of ethnographies, for instance – conforms to the next moment in the circuit – that of a more specialized cultural production with all its power dimensions.

Specialized cultural production occurs on top of daily practices, selecting for power and significance. This is the standpoint of the artist, cultural organizer or politician, the media professional – and cultural researcher. They are all 'intellectuals' in Gramsci's expanded sense, because they work on and with common sense by representing it publicly. This involves a certain abstraction and 'schematization', which analysts of the local and concrete are right to suspect, but cannot themselves avoid. Representation or 'configuration' (Ricoeur) always adds, selects and transforms. At this moment (B/C or 2 in the diagrams), cultural production and the text that is its product becomes more separated and specialized. The forms of study are also more abstract, concentrating typically on cultural specialists and their products. The study of emergent hegemonic formations, of law-and-order moral panics in *Policing the Crisis*, for example, identified typical agents of hegemony (such as public media, police, the judiciary, political parties) as well as the cultural formations themselves (forms of racism and moral traditionalism, say).

Methods that describe cultural formations also depend on the abstraction involved in producing texts. This allows for an emphasis on the *language* of the text or 'the statement', as though the text says something of itself. This useful illusion is possible because the producer and the conditions of production are rendered absent. As we have seen, however, in poststructuralism, the analyst's concerns move the other way round the circuit, to the pressures that texts put on readers. The text is still central here. This kind of analysis does not start from a concrete reader as it is the reader in and of the text that fascinates the structuralist critic, not what readers bring to texts from their everyday lives.

Other forms of analysis, however, concentrate on the act and context of reading. The many forms of audience or reception study, for example, do just this (for useful discussions, see Ang, 1996; Brunsdon, 2000; Morley, 1986, 1992; and Chapter 14).

Literary,
linguistic/text-based
disciplines,
humanities?

Close
reading

Texts

Critical
text work

Structuralism and
poststructuralism

'Mapping
the field', for
example, of
theories

Reading for
spectator or reader
positions

History of
cultural
formations

Reading for
pressures on reader
– subjectivity

History of
hegemony

Cultural psychology
and cultural
psychoanalysis

Production

Readers

Political
economy of
production

Audience
research

Sociology of
institutions/
intellectuals

Critical
autobiography
and biography

Social history
of groups/
movements

Anthropological
fieldwork

Ethnographies
and biographies
of cultural
producers

**Everyday
life**

Cultural
ethnography
of sites or
groups

Social
disciplines/social
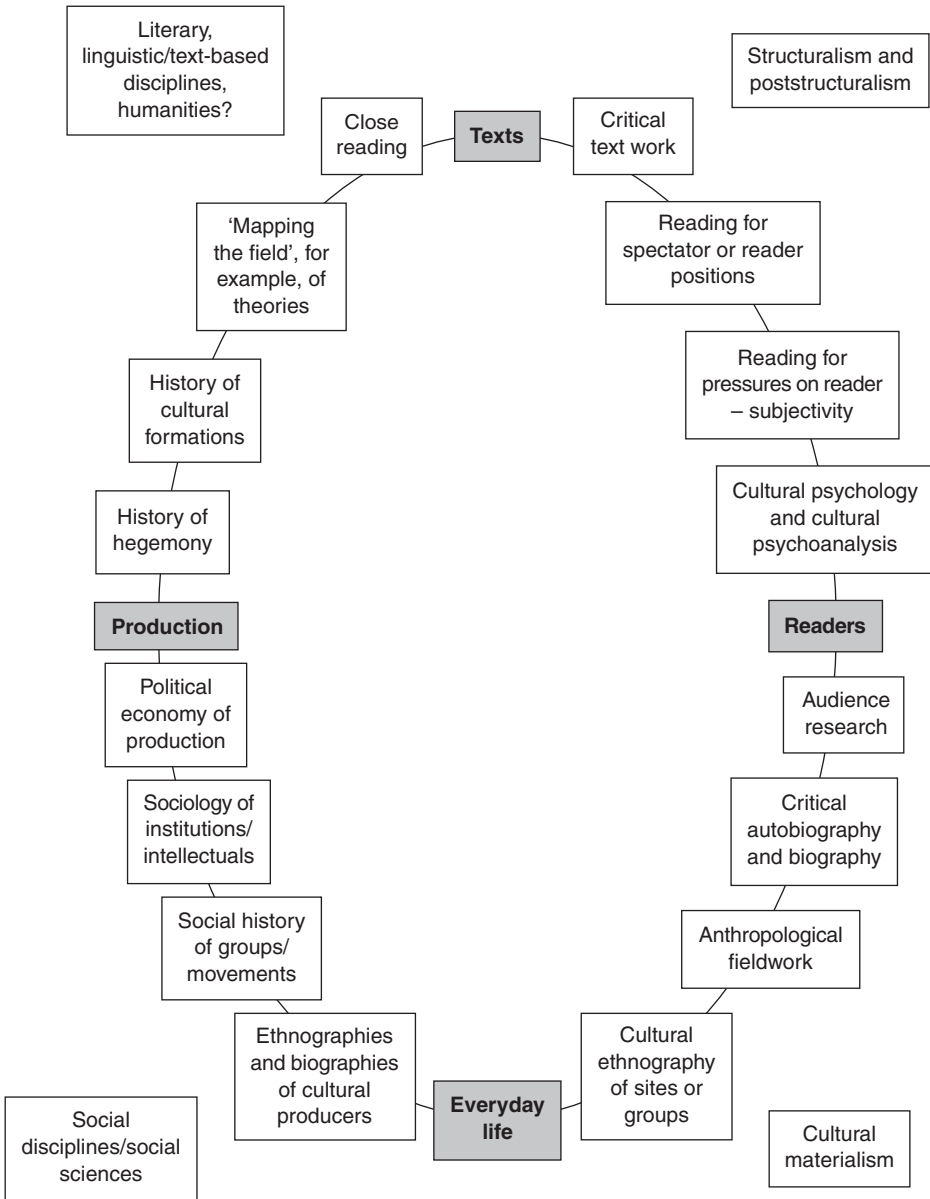sciences

Cultural
materialism

Figure 2.3 The cultural circuit and cultural methods

Audience research may link text and readership by exploring how particular kinds of texts – television soap operas, women's magazines – are consumed by particular kinds of audiences or interrogate how such audiences are produced. In cultural studies, while attention may shift away from the medium itself and towards the everyday lives of users, the text itself remains important in giving clues for lived themes – spelt out more explicitly there, perhaps, than in interviews or conversations. Thus, emergent issues in women's lives have been explored by means of new trends in readership, just as attitudes and assumptions about girls' sex education may be illuminated by exploring their use of magazines (Epstein and Johnson, 1998; Tincknell, van Loon and Hudson, 2003).

Our 'realist' thesis – that the plurality of methods is related to the complexity of the cultural process – can be illustrated in one last way: by trying to map the full range of cultural methods (not just in cultural studies) on to a version of our circuit. This is an illustrative exercise only and we won't explain all our terms, but hope most readers can position their projects and methods somewhere on Figure 2.3.

Conclusion: combined and multiple methods?

We have argued that a multiplicity of methods is necessary because no one method is intrinsically superior to the rest and each provides a more or less appropriate way of exploring some different aspect of cultural process. Our analysis also implies that all methods have limits. If stretched beyond them, they mislead. Cultural analysts rightly resist the implication that the meaning of a text to a reader can be inferred from the conditions of its first production, especially from the fact that it is a mass-produced commodity. This stretches a political economy of production beyond its competence. Similarly, textual analysis of a media form cannot yield an account of production conditions, nor should we infer the way of life of a particular group from its public representation.

Yet, we also want to insist that methods always explore a system of connections and relations and so are themselves connected. The fact that a text is also a commodity, produced under capitalist conditions, is *relevant* to the way we and others read it. Texts themselves, as well as having an abstract form, are an aspect of a larger socio-cultural practice. Is it necessary, then, for every research project to research every moment in the circuit? (This is a question that is often asked by anxious student researchers.) Must an account of a television chat show, for instance, always include research on its audience and their daily lives? This is not possible in every study and not all lines of questioning require it, but *a theoretical awareness* of other moments and methods should inform the research design and the representation of findings – always. Furthermore, methods are often most productive when their rules and conventions are transgressed or combined – when we use close textual analysis to analyse face-to-face exchanges, for instance.

We can conclude that not only do we need a multiplicity of methods but we also need dialogue and exchange between them and, therefore, between different

methodologies, disciplines and paradigms. This is a general requirement, perhaps, for intellectual work in our times, but, as we have also suggested throughout this chapter, methodological combination is a key to cultural studies method more generally. Elaborating this point is a concern of Chapter 3.