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**Name of Designated Person authorising scanning: Adrian Mackenzie**

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**Name of Author: Nick Couldry**

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tastes in television consumption was David Morley's *Family Television* (1986), but the idea would clearly be worth updating now in relation to television and other media.

23 Cf. the important argument of Pickering (1997).

24 Konrad Lodziak (1987), for example, has made this argument in relation to television.

25 On the importance of not isolating how people consume from how, in other contexts, they may be cultural producers, see Radway (1988).

## 4 Questioning the text

I don't read during the day. It's at night-time, when I go to bed . . . And it is only magazines that I read . . . Just have trouble sleeping, which everybody does, and that is what started me reading in bed . . . to put me to sleep.

Mary Croston, interviewee quoted in Hermes (1995: 34)

the world is full of abandoned meanings

Don DeLillo, *White Noise* (1985: 184)

Our cultural life is saturated by texts, especially media texts. Cultural studies cannot, therefore, do without textual analysis; indeed many have argued that textual analysis is the method which distinguishes it from, say, cultural sociology.<sup>1</sup> As elsewhere, I do not spend time debating what is 'the' method of cultural studies, since different methods have their advantages in different circumstances and can, in any case, be combined: textual analysis with interviews, observations, and so on. Instead, I focus on the more general, and more fundamental, question: what does it mean to do effective textual analysis in the context of contemporary cultural studies? More bluntly: what are 'texts'? At what level can we usefully analyse the textual environments we inhabit? In contemporary cultures of exceptional textual density and complexity, serious doubts arise about these questions.<sup>2</sup>

The traditional literary model of textual analysis started out from a limited selection of texts (the 'canon') and aimed either to elucidate their meanings and debate their significance ('exegesis') or to find out how those texts produced their effects ('analysis'), or both. Both exegesis and analysis depend on prior value judgements: obviously about the merit of texts themselves, but also (more subtly) about the judgement of a particular type of reader – the critic or (more recently) the semiotician, that is, someone who is assumed to make correct or authoritative judgements. Cultural studies, emerging as it did from literary studies, has always critiqued the narrowness of such value

judgements.<sup>3</sup> In response, as it were, some literary theorists such as Stanley Fish (1980) have admitted the purely rhetorical status of literary judgements, and refused to disguise them beneath claims about absolute values or cultural necessity.

That might seem to be the end of the matter, since critical discussion about literary value (provided it admits that it cannot be other than partisan and particular) would seem to be an important part of our cultural conversation. But in deciding whether literary models still have anything to offer to cultural studies, we have to ask a further question: what is the *methodological* function of value judgements about texts and readings? They work, I would argue, to limit the complexity and vastness of the textual field: selecting from the range of available texts those to which we have to pay close attention; selecting from the range of possible readings those which can serve as reference points for establishing meanings. Such value judgements are stabilizing devices<sup>4</sup> in textual fields which, in reality, are far from stable – or at least so complex that we have as yet few reliable means of describing where their stability lies.

Ask different, broadly sociological questions – what are the social or cultural effects of particular texts or what does it mean for a text to have social significance? – and these stabilizing or simplifying devices begin to look like part of the problem, not part of the solution. Surely, to put it crudely, we have to allow for the possibility that a particular text (whether a novel, a film or a TV programme)<sup>5</sup> may not matter much at all, or at least not matter in the ways that its ‘expert readers’ expect or think appropriate. The important question becomes not what is a text ‘in itself’, or for a community of expert readers,<sup>6</sup> but how does a text get taken up in particular social and cultural formations? Or in relation to the mass of media texts with which we are confronted: ‘how and when [does] everyday media use become[] meaningful?’ (Hermes, 1993: 493). This raises the interesting possibility that our uses of media texts may not always be ‘meaningful’ at all, in which case *textual* analysis can only ever be part of the point.

It is this sociologically informed approach to texts which, I would suggest, is most useful for cultural studies, although of course it can always draw on the alternative two approaches (exegesis and analysis) to establish the possible meanings and impact of, say, a film and to analyse how formally they are produced. If we are really interested in articulating the connections between culture and power, as cultural studies is (see Chapter 1), then we are simply required to ask: what effects does that text actually have on social practice, what types of cultural experiences are in practice associated with seeing it? This approach can, and should, abandon the older stabilization devices, because they obscure the wider question we want to investigate:

what type of order or coherence (at the level of what texts and whose readings matter) is there in the textual field?

This raises an ontological question (evasive by literary approaches): what is a text, when considered as a social object? It is this question which is so difficult to answer in cultures characterized by a massive proliferation of texts. I argue that cultural studies itself has often neglected this question,<sup>7</sup> and this neglect underlies uncertainties within cultural studies about other problems, whether epistemological (how are we in a position to know about texts?) or methodological (how best, in practice, should we analyse texts?). By focusing firmly on the underlying ontological questions – what is a text? what is a textual environment? – I explore how we can radicalize cultural studies’ approach to textual analysis and make it more adequate to deal with the complexity of the textual cultures we inhabit.

This means de-centring<sup>8</sup> the position of ‘the text’ as it is normally understood (as a discrete unit of analysis: Ang, 1996: 67) – another reason why I am less concerned with which detailed method of textual analysis (say, semiotics or narratology) works better. First, we have to ask: on what terms can we go on thinking, and talking, about ‘texts’ *at all* in cultures where, in a sense, we have too many texts? This difficult question will be explored in each of this chapter’s sections, drawing critically on the work of a number of authors.

### The challenge of too many texts

Early cultural studies, by rejecting the arbitrary barriers which had previously excluded the vast majority of texts as not ‘worth studying’, in a way made things worse – and the problem has intensified. Whereas 1950s cultural theorists addressed a handful of television and radio channels, popular music and novels, and advertisements, by the 1980s and 1990s the field of study was much greater: not only countless TV and radio channels but also video and computer games – and most recently the textual universe of the World Wide Web (with its associated phenomenon of the ‘hypertext’). In addition, cultural theorists became increasingly aware of the phenomenon of *inter-textuality*:<sup>9</sup> the dense network of interconnections between texts, which, arguably, it is as important to understand as the texts themselves.

Let’s take an obvious example. No serious textual study of the *Star Wars* ‘prequel’ *The Phantom Menace* (Lucasfilms, dir. George Lucas, 1999) can avoid analysing many other types of text apart from the film itself: the publicity narratives, the books of the film, the countless merchandising images,

the computer games (*The Phantom Menace* and *Racer*), and many other texts constructed off the back of the film event. My favourite (as an illustration of how the *Star Wars* cover can be used) was an article in the high-circulation celebrity magazine *OK* promoting a visit by a British TV celebrity to the locations where *The Phantom Menace* was filmed: the article came with an invitation to compete for a holiday in Tunisia visiting the locations, itself promoting a travel company.<sup>10</sup> A high-profile media text such as *The Phantom Menace* focuses a whole field of proliferating texts, and this complexity is driven by obvious commercial pressures. If we place *The Phantom Menace* in its own wider context (the *Star Wars* series, all the associated fan literatures and practices, the whole history of cross-marketed merchandise-saturated Hollywood blockbuster films), it is clear that we need to understand not one discrete text but a vast space of more or less interconnected texts, and how that space is ordered. And this is just one of many interconnected regions of contemporary textual production.

In a vast textual universe, we must ask different questions about texts or, at least, address old questions in a different way. As a first attempt at handling the complexity of these issues, let's distinguish three levels: texts, textuality and tactics.

#### Texts

We need to ask: On what scale is it really useful still to talk about 'texts'? In other words: What is the basic unit of analysis in thinking about textual production as a social phenomenon? Can we still talk here about '*the text*'? This may seem a strange question until we realize that, even in literary analysis, the apparent obviousness of treating the book, or play, or poem as the basic unit of analysis rests on certain conventions for thinking about authorship. These conventions continue to be influential of course; to treat the film *The Phantom Menace* as 'the text' 'created' by George Lucas is backed by a certain industry and marketing logic. The problem, however, is that since the actual textual field surrounding, say, a film is so complex and has so many participants, to treat the film text in isolation seems highly artificial from a methodological point of view.

If, as we saw, the canon of highly valued texts was a way of limiting the complexity of the textual field, and making analysis manageable, perhaps we need something similar for the wider textual environment, but based on more transparent criteria. What we need is a criterion for isolating those sites in the vast textual field which are useful 'units' of textual analysis. This is what I mean by the term 'text'; and, as a working definition we can call a 'text' a complex of interrelated meanings which its readers tend to interpret

as a discrete, unified whole. To take a slightly flippant, negative example: the information and commentary on the side of the average cereal packet probably has little significance for anyone as a text in itself; it is merely a potential 'text', mattering only as part of its producer's wider textual strategies to promote the product. It is the wider textual strategy that would be the more useful 'unit' of textual analysis. Obviously it is still possible to treat the words and images on the packet as a text in their own right (like the mythical college professors in Don DeLillo's novel *White Noise* 'who read nothing but cereal boxes', 1985: 10), but it would be largely beside the point.

There is an effectively infinite number of objects which could be studied as 'texts' – from football shirts, to the film text of *ET*. But the important question is: on what scale do readers themselves regard textual order as existing? Put another way, what textual materials in practice function as texts? The more complex the textual universe we inhabit, the less simple our answers to these questions are likely to be, since we have to take into account not only critics' conventions for what is a unit for textual analysis but also the movements which the wider range of readers make across the textual field (see further on this below). Except perhaps in certain limited areas (Biblical or Shakespearean studies), we cannot assume as our starting point '*the text*' (cf. Bennett and Woollacott, 1987: 264).

#### Textuality

This more functionally specific notion of 'texts' connects with questions of textuality. By 'textuality', I mean the different ways in which something can function as a text for its readers, what John Hartley (1996: 35) calls its 'phenomenal form'. Such differences are partly questions of convention, but they affect what expectations readers have of the text and of their own reading of it.

A basic, if oversimplified, example would be the contrast between films and magazines. Most films (or novels) are produced on the assumption that their audience will watch or read them with enough concentration to be aware of whether, and how, the plot is resolved at the end. By contrast, most magazines (and a great deal of radio, TV and press production) assume a quite limited, and discontinuous, degree of concentration in their audiences/readerships.<sup>11</sup> Our textual universe comprises many zones of partly organized distraction.<sup>12</sup> As Joke Hermes in her path-breaking book *Reading Women's Magazines* has expressed it, they are 'putdownable' (1995: 32). When dealing with the second broad type of textuality as cultural analysts, we simply cannot make the same assumptions about how those texts are (should be) read as we would about, say, a film. 'Putdownable' materials are,

of course, highly ordered textual productions, but that does not mean their readers treat them as '*texts*' in the same way as they do films or novels – or even that they treat them as *texts* at all.

Specific forms of 'textuality' have to be investigated in their own right. Inevitably, there are complexities and hybrid cases: not only magazines but also soap operas (at least British ones) can be viewed both as 'putdownable' television (they certainly assume that viewers will go in and out of a storyline) and as a series of programmes that are coherent in themselves. They work both as flow and as individual dramas. Soaps have, therefore, quite a complex textuality, and we cannot be sure (without investigating it further) that different viewers would necessarily agree about how a particular programme should be watched.

We also need to think about types of textuality which have not conventionally been regarded as involving '*texts*' at all, yet are being created in vast numbers under various commercial and technological pressures. I've already mentioned the World Wide Web, which raises the question of whether websites should be understood as '*texts*' and, if so, what sort of '*texts*' are they? Another example (Bennett, 1995) is museum spaces. What are the conventions under which these '*texts*' are read? Are they read as independent, self-sufficient entities, and if so by whom (other than professional cultural analysts and critics)? If not, how are they made sense of? Walter Benjamin's famous idea of art absorbed 'in a state of distraction' (1968: 240) is relevant here, as at least one side of the story.

Textuality in turn raises the question of inter-textuality. Certain types of inter-textual connection are specifically promoted and it is impossible not to be aware of them. I have already mentioned the merchandising extensions of *Star Wars* imagery and characters. There are countless others: for example, the cross-promotion of the *Tomb Raider* heroine Lara Croft in advertisements for drinks (Lucozade, UK campaign, 1999). How are these inter-textual links interpreted by actual readers? Here too, of course, such inter-textual links may be ignored by most or all readers, remaining merely potential 'inter-texts'.

The point, at this stage, is that these questions of textuality and inter-textuality cannot be resolved in the abstract. It is not enough to study texts or inter-texts in isolation; we must look at the actual operations of the contemporary textual field.

#### Tactics

If all of us negotiate a path across vast textual fields, how do we do this? The question has been implicit earlier, since 'potential (inter-)texts' and

'putdownable texts' are a familiar part of a world where readers have too much to read, and selection or screening out is at a premium.

This question was first theorized by the French historian and literary theorist Michel de Certeau in his book *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984) through the notion of 'tactics'. He argued that in the space mapped out by texts with their 'strategic' patterns and order, actual readers make tactical journeys and crossings which are quite unpredictable when seen from the perspective of the texts themselves. Readers may inhabit the space of the text, they make it 'habitable', but they are not simply governed by it. De Certeau's concept of 'tactics' has, unfortunately, tended to be used in cultural studies only in the narrow context of the power relations between textual producers and consumers, with 'tactics' being seen as a form of resistance or alternative cultural production. While this may sometimes be important, it obscures the wider point de Certeau raises: *how do people interact not just with single texts, but with contemporary textual fields?* This is more of an 'environmental' question, than a matter of specific focused readings.

If people in actuality screen out the vast majority of images and texts around them, there will be a great difference between the total textual environment (the field of possible textual interactions for anyone) and the segments of that field with which particular individuals actually interact. One person's 'textual world' will only partially intersect with another's. Surely, therefore, we should know more about what individuals' 'textual fields' are like – how do people select from the myriad texts around them, what common patterns are there in how they select? Yet this is an area where cultural studies has done very little research.

We have moved here a long way from the idea of studying one particular text as a discrete unit in isolation (the literary model).<sup>13</sup> There is no choice, however, if we are to take seriously the complexity of the textual terrain we inhabit. Richard Johnson has characterized this necessary shift very well:

The isolation of a text for academic scrutiny is a very specific form of reading. More commonly texts are encountered promiscuously; they pour in on us from all directions in diverse, coexisting media, and differently-paced flows . . . No subjective [textual] form ever acts on its own. Nor can the combinations be predicted by formal or logical means . . . The combinations stem, rather, from more particular logics – the structured life-activity in its objective and subjective sides, of readers or groups of readers: their social locations, their histories, their subjective interests, their private worlds. (Johnson, 1996: 102 [1986–87], original emphasis)

In thinking about '*texts*' and their social effects, then, we have to address how the vast universe of potentially readable texts around us – and the even

vaster universe of potential connections between them – are negotiated in practice. Our building blocks for textual analysis are, therefore, not only ‘texts’ but also the complexities of ‘textuality’ and ‘tactics’.

### A note on structuralism and semiology

Before we explore these issues further, let us reflect briefly on how they probably could not have been formulated in these terms were it not for the intervention of structuralist approaches to literature in the 1950s and 1960s, which in turn took their main inspiration from the founder of semiology, Ferdinand de Saussure.

It was structuralism (most famously, Roland Barthes’ essays ‘The death of the author’ and ‘From work to text’, both collected in Barthes, 1977) that changed the types of question we ask about texts. Instead of starting from ‘the text’ as a discrete object, created as a coherent unity by an author, Barthes reconceptualized the ‘text’ as a space where textual processes are at work. These processes are not controlled or directed by the author; they are processes that range across countless texts and are closely related to the competences of the reader as well. For Barthes, the site of textual order was not ‘the author’s text’ but the textual culture as a whole and, increasingly in his later work such as *The Pleasure of the Text* (1990) [1973], the practices of actual readers. In that sense, Andrew Tudor (1999) is surely right to argue that the influence of structuralism marks a decisive moment in the historical development of cultural studies.

Why in that case have I not based this chapter more explicitly on structuralist and semiotic models (the same question can, perhaps, also be asked of Chapter 5)? For some writers (such as Tudor) it is precisely the adoption of structuralist insights that characterizes cultural studies, not only in relation to texts but cultural production generally. I believe, however, that it is unhelpful to place so much methodological weight on structuralism and semiotics, for two reasons. First, although I cannot go into the details here, Saussure’s work (which is at the heart of such approaches) has come under quite fundamental attack as an incomplete and even incoherent model of how language works. Such attacks date back to the early work of Volosinov (1986) [1929] in Russia, but have recently been revived in various forms (Tallis, 1988; Jackson, 1993).<sup>14</sup> Their implications have yet to be fully absorbed;<sup>15</sup> for example, Andrew Tudor’s recent and valuable summative work (1999) on cultural studies and structuralism does not discuss them.

Second, structuralist and semiotic approaches to texts, while certainly an

advance on traditional literary analysis, are themselves not immune from what I called ‘the challenge of textual proliferation’. In fact, their analyses also rely on artificially stabilizing the actual complexity of textual fields. Whereas traditional literary analysis relied on ‘the author-function’ (Foucault, 1977a: 125) and the canon of valued texts as stabilizing devices, structuralist literary analysis relies on (a) an artificial concentration on those parts of the textual field where semiotic system seems most plausible, and (b) the value attached to the analytical brilliance of the semiotician.

Taking these points in turn, semiotics seems to be most effective where cultural production has systematic features explained by the industrialization of culture: for example, in the areas of fashion (Barthes, 1983 [1954]), novels produced for a mass audience such as the James Bond novels (Eco, 1981),<sup>16</sup> advertisements (Barthes, 1973), and news photographs (Hall, 1981c). The idea, however, that semiology is a general science for understanding all cultural production (as it is often presented) needs to be examined very critically.

Barthes said, in the 1970s introduction to *Mythologies* (his best known application of semiology to everyday culture), that he had aimed to write both ‘an ideological critique . . . of the language of so-called mass culture’ and ‘an attempt to analyse semiologically the mechanics of this language’ (1973: 9). Barthes’ use of the term ‘language’ here is, I think, profoundly misleading, since it suggests that ‘myth’ is an order of signification which is compulsory, as the rules of language are. Elsewhere in *Mythologies*, however, Barthes makes clear that the huge variety of advertisements, stories and images which he so entertainingly dissects contains nothing like the order of language. ‘Myth’ according to Barthes, ‘is experienced as innocent speech: not because its intentions are hidden – if they were hidden, they could not be efficacious – but because they are naturalised’ (1973: 131, added emphasis).

This raises the question of what happens when certain standard associations (of ideas, of images) cease to be naturalized – that is, we see through them to something else. Clearly they then cease to be ‘mythical’, which implies that semiological analysis of the type Barthes performs can no longer work. But if myth were a system at all like language, that would be impossible. The rules of a language are always compulsory for those who speak or write the language and want to be understood; knowing explicitly the rules of a language does not stop us following them! The analogy between semiology and the science of language is itself a myth (encouraged by Saussure himself) – a myth enormously influential in installing semiology as, apparently, the method of cultural analysis. Even if this point is not accepted, we have to acknowledge how far semiology’s ‘method’ has depended on the authority of its original and most brilliant practitioners, such as Barthes.

and Eco. Yet if we look closely, for example, at Barthes' *Mythologies*, 'semiology' is at best a cover for a wide range of interpretations of standardized texts; some may be completely convincing as objective analyses of naturalized meanings, but others are little more than personal associations (cf. Strinati, 1993: 123–8).

It is not a question of abandoning semiology entirely, but rather abandoning the myth that it is a total 'science' of cultural signs 'in general'. Rather, it is a locally useful way of analysing those aspects of contemporary cultural production which are *naturalized*. In that sense, the detailed uses of semiology are very much a secondary question. At the very least, we need also a method of analysing meanings which are *not* naturalized, and a theory of naturalization itself (how/why do meanings become naturalized, how do they become de-naturalized?).<sup>17</sup> The (only partly naturalized) complexity of the textual universe we inhabit lies, almost by definition, beyond the means of semiology, or indeed of any approach which *assumes* the systematic order at the level of meanings whose existence is precisely what we need to question and investigate.

### Textual analysis after textual proliferation

This discussion of structuralism and semiology has confirmed what was already suggested: if we are interested in textual analysis in an age of massive textual proliferation, our primary object of study is not a limited set of particular texts, but the whole textual environment – how it operates and how readers negotiate it. What conceptual tools do we have, or need, for that task?

#### Re-employing the expert reader?

You can, of course, ignore the problem: take an isolated element from the textual field (say, a film) and analyse it as if it were a discrete object, coherent in itself, and as if the critic were in a privileged position to discern its meaning. Business as usual!

Provided such analysis does not claim to be more than it is – a particular reading of a particular text from within a particular institutional position – there is nothing wrong with it. The problem comes when analyses of a text claim to be more than 'exegesis' or 'analysis', and claim to contribute themselves to the analysis of wider social or cultural conditions. At that point, we

are entitled to ask, along with the media theorist Justin Lewis: 'where's the evidence?' (1991: 49). Without evidence of whether, and in what way, the text is recognized as having those meanings by at least a significant group of readers, this is just social analysis using smoke and mirrors. Unfortunately it is all too common – and completely pointless.

Textual analysis which claims also to be social analysis assumes, among other things, that just because it reads a text one way, this tells us something about how the text is read by anyone else. A fundamental challenge to this occurred in the 1920s when a Cambridge Professor of English, I.A. Richards, published an analysis of the anonymous interpretations by his students of poems which he had handed out at lectures without any contextual information (1956 [1929]). Richards showed that a significant number of these relatively trained readers simply failed to understand the poem's literal meaning, and even if they did understand it, their response to it consisted largely of 'stock responses' (*ibid.*: 12–14). He explained this in terms of declining standards of literary appreciation in a world saturated by too much information (*ibid.*: 319), but it was equally evidence supporting the view that it is mainly through contextual clues (which Richards denied his student readers) that we interpret a text: the text 'in itself' is a myth. At least, Richards had showed the danger of cultural analysts *assuming* that they know how most readers read, or even perhaps how they read themselves.

Variations on the Richards test have emerged on other occasions. There is, for example, evidence to suggest that the way even trained listeners listen to classical music (if left to their own devices) differs radically from how musicology suggests they should listen if they are to appreciate the 'real' structure of the music: formal appreciation of key changes, and so on (see Cook, 1990: ch. 1). And when the social psychologist Sonia Livingstone investigated the variations in viewers' interpretations of a television soap, she found 'a problem in relating interpretations to textual structure' (1990: 187). Her empirical research led her to question, in fact, whether there *was* such a thing as the preferred meaning of a text, as opposed to a meaning which in some cases, but not others, people happened to agree on (*ibid.*).

There is, in other words, a measure of indeterminacy in moving from the text 'in itself' (as analysed by the critic) to how it is actually read. As a result, the individual text simply does not work as a stable reference point. Does that mean we should abandon close textual analysis, or perhaps switch the 'text' concept to another scale entirely where those problems become less apparent? The latter seems to be the strategy underlying the expanded notion of 'the text' in John Frow and Meaghan Morris' introduction to *Australian Cultural Studies*. The following passage is not necessarily typical of their writings elsewhere, but it is symptomatic of a wider problem:

There is a precise sense in which cultural studies uses the concept of *text* as its fundamental model. However, in the working out of this metaphor (at its most abstract, that of the marking or tracing of *pure relationality*), the concept of text undergoes a mutation. Rather than designating a place where meanings are constructed in a single level of inscription (writing, speech, film, dress . . .), it works as an interleaving of 'levels'. If a shopping mall is conceived on the model of textuality, then this 'text' involves practices, institutional structures and the complex forms of agency they entail, legal, political, and financial conditions of existence, and particular flows of power and knowledge, as well as a particular multilayered semantic organisation; it is an ontologically mixed entity, and one for which there can be no privileged or 'correct' form of reading. (Frow and Morris, 1996: 355, second emphasis added)

'Ontologically mixed' is an understatement, since this expanded notion of the 'text' is much too broad to be useful. If a text is nothing more than 'pure relationality', almost any form of cultural order could be a text. In any case, does anyone except cultural analysts read a shopping mall as a text? We need surely *some* notion of text which is tied to how things functions as texts for actual readers.

An interesting attempt to grapple with the complexity of textual production while keeping some role for textual analysis is the work of the British media theorist John Hartley. Much of his work was done in Australia, whose universities have been an important focus for textual theory in cultural studies; not only Hartley, but also Frow and Morris (see above), Ien Ang (1996), and others are working out of Australian universities. I want to look at just one of Hartley's books, *Popular Reality* (1996). Hartley takes the challenge of textual proliferation very seriously. We cannot do textual analysis, he argues, by starting out from the individual text: we have to take account of the pervasiveness, the endless circulation, of meanings (1996: 2). Meanings circulate not just in one medium but in many, with countless connections between them (*ibid.*: 3); we touched on this point earlier in discussing *The Phantom Menace*. Contemporary textual production is 'a gigantic archive of textuality, a huge store of human sense-making' (*ibid.*). And yet, as Hartley forcefully argues, large regions of it have been virtually ignored by cultural studies – in particular, the world of the popular press. At the same time, Hartley sees a role for something like textual criticism – or 'practical criticism' (*ibid.*: 8) – in this wider field. This, he argues, should be able to identify 'emblematic texts or moments' of contact between producers, texts and readers (*ibid.*: 6). To his credit, Hartley takes a long-term historical view of the social centrality of modern media, drawing on material from and including the French Revolution.

Returning to the metaphor that has been used throughout this chapter,

Hartley's 'practical criticism' relies on two stabilization devices. It is these I now question: they are, positively, the concept of the 'mediasphere' and, negatively, a complete exclusion of audience research.

Instead of the individual text, Hartley needs some other (relatively stable) reference point which can anchor textual analysis. The 'mediasphere' (a concept he adapts from the 'semiosphere', as developed by the literary theorist Yuri Lotman, 1990) performs this function. The 'semiosphere' according to Lotman is the 'integrated unity' formed by particular semiotic systems, when considered in their relations to each other (1990: 273, quoted by Hartley, 1996: 1). The 'mediasphere' is Hartley's term for the mediated public-private space of connections which has replaced earlier public spheres: 'Journalism forms a mediasphere which connects readerships not only . . . with the public domain, but also with the culture at large – indeed journalism is one of the chief mechanisms by which different (and sometimes mutually incomprehensible) cultural domains are kept in dialogue with one another' (Hartley, 1996: 28). You do not need to take over Hartley's and Lotman's semiotic framework to see the general usefulness of this idea. Contemporary media do systematically produce connections between many different areas of life which otherwise might not be connected. They connect, for example, readers' possible reflections on their private family life and public issues about sexuality, health and education, whether directly or through the intermediary of celebrity life stories and media fictions such as soaps. In this way, they not only work as flows of texts, but contribute to the 'textualization' of the social world (*ibid.*: ch. 3). This is a kind of order in the textual universe, which Hartley is surely right to argue we must understand better. In addition, newspapers and magazines, for example, because they are widely available and shared, constitute their readerships as a public, focused around their texts; in that way, they create an ordered relationship between the readers themselves (*ibid.*: 72).

So far so good. But Hartley tells us nothing at all about how people negotiate the implications of all this. How many are people apathetic, or cynical about the contents of the mediasphere? More to the point, how much of it do they screen out? What types of connection do they make between the mediasphere and other spheres of social life? We must avoid the functionalist assumption that, just because the media apparently constitute an important 'mechanism' for the structuring of social life ('a technology of society', *ibid.*: 72), this is a mechanism that always works.<sup>18</sup> Actual readers are surely more than oil on the wheels of the media mechanism.

Yet Hartley rules out the possibility of researching the relationship of actual readerships to the mediasphere, except through assumed clues in the texts themselves. Developing a position he has argued elsewhere (Hartley,

1987), he claims that audience research always oversimplifies and pathologizes those it studies, seeing them as in the thrall of media messages, rather than recognizing that audiences are no less sophisticated than researchers and researchers are members of the audience too. While of course these are serious points, they provide no reason for stopping us *thinking* about how people (all of us) read, or watch. If, for example, as Joke Hermes (1993, 1995) argues, a great deal of media use is casual, distracted – barely ‘reading’ at all – then Hartley’s claims for the mediasphere’s centrality to public life would carry much less weight.

Hartley sees the potential problem (1996: 64) but does not resolve it. He makes a lot of claims about the importance, and therefore implicitly the social impacts, of media discourses on sexuality, health, gender, and so on (for example in his chapter on the public profiles of popular models and singers: what he calls the ‘frocks pop’), but without any supporting evidence. That these discourses circulate in prominent media sites (which is all he establishes) is significant, but it is quite unclear *how* significant.<sup>19</sup> Hartley’s work, then, offers at best a half-solution to the challenge of textual proliferation, which omits a major source of complexity under the cover of a new virtuoso ‘reading’ of the social world.

#### A new place for textual analysis

To recap: there is no question of abandoning the idea of analysing texts; it is a matter of rethinking how it fits into our understanding of the wider textual environment. We have to take seriously the difficult question: what is a text (considered as a social object)? That means investigating – not simply assuming – the status that texts have in the environment and the extent to which there are systematic orders of meaning. (Perhaps there is less order than we imagine.) This, in turn, means taking seriously the contribution to these processes of actual readers.<sup>20</sup>

It helps to think of our textual environment as formed by at least three patterns of movement: (a) flows of texts, (b) flows of meanings (across and within texts), and (c) the movements of potential readers within (a) and (b).<sup>21</sup> This complex interchange is represented in Figure 4.1. *There are in principle as many perspectives on that overall pattern of flows as there are readers:* each of us stands at a different point in the flow. We must abandon the idea that there are particular, elevated vantage points (those of the critic or virtuoso semiotician) from which the flow can directly be ‘read’. That is an illusion, based on thinking that the flow itself is a ‘text’ (with a ‘creator’ underwriting its systematicity), when in fact it is only a flow, in which myriad texts and textual fragments move.<sup>22</sup>

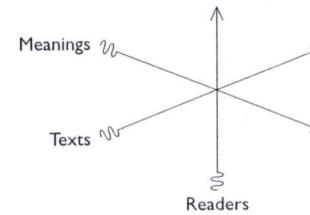


FIGURE 4.1 *The textual environment*

On the other hand, what make the world around us into a textual environment rather than a complete chaos are certain ordering processes, which John Hartley, for example, makes us think about. One is the inter-textual patterns through which texts draw on each other (similarly, each of us in conversation or reflection draws on material we have heard, seen or read elsewhere). I want to concentrate here, however, on the processes which organize the flows of texts and readers themselves. What are these processes? The following is a preliminary list:

- 1 The material structures of textual production (most obviously, the heavy concentration of production in particular institutions, rather than across whole populations).
- 2 The material structures of distributing texts (again highly concentrated).
- 3 The processes which tend to order how we read, what connections we make between texts, what texts we screen out, and so on.

The first two processes are familiar – they are central to any political economy of textual production – but the last is more difficult to envisage. How is our reading ordered? An image may help. There are countless switching processes (or, perhaps, gradients) which, in the overall textual space, make one set of connections more likely than another; they are repeated, resulting in various feedback loops – some small and some massive. Examples would be the authority given to particular ‘expert’ or prestigious sources (critics, commentators, celebrities, governments) or to particular sites where important ‘themes of the moment’ are defined (particular programmes or newspapers; particular events, such as major sporting events).

To understand the textual environment we need, therefore, to track not only texts, but also the processes of ‘textualization’: how particular complexes of meanings come to be treated as texts to be read, within the textual

wider environment.<sup>23</sup> A helpful concept here was developed by Tony Bennett and Janet Woollacott at the UK's Open University in the 1980s, particularly in *Bond and Beyond* (1987), a study of the cultural and social impact of the James Bond story. This book contains a devastating attack on the old notion of studying the text 'in itself' (whether the Bond novels or the Bond films) rather than the inter-textual environment focused around the Bond story. In addition Bennett and Woollacott introduce the concept of the 'reading formation' – the process through which particular texts and particular readers come to be in an ordered relation to each other. The strength of their idea comes from being very clear that this process is not 'natural' or given, but part of what we need to explain: 'The reader is conceived not as a subject who stands outside the text and interprets it any more than the text is regarded as an object the reader encounters. Rather, text and reader are conceived as *being co-produced within a reading formation*' (Bennett and Woollacott, 1987: 64, added emphasis).

The 'reading formation', then, is what brings about a particular reading of a particular text within a particular set of inter-textual associations. This neatly brings together the range of processes listed above. What, in turn, produces the reading formation? '[I]t is the product of definite social and ideological relations of reading composed, in the main, of those apparatuses – schools, the press, critical reviews, fanzines – within and between which the socially dominant forms for the superintendence of reading are both constructed and contested' (*ibid.*: 64–5). The reading formation is, in effect, a working term for thinking about the quite abstract notion of textualization – that is, the processes which lead to certain complexes of meaning, and not others, being read as texts. Crucially, however, Bennett and Woollacott (unlike Hartley) are open to empirical research into readers and reading practices.

Two minor caveats are necessary. We should be sceptical about Bennett and Woollacott's suggestion that a reading formation is always associated with a more or less coherent ideological formation; their language reflects the heavy influence of both Gramsci and Althusser at that time in British cultural studies.<sup>24</sup> There is a danger of overestimating the degree of cohesion that exists even among those who go to see the same film in broadly the same historical and inter-textual context (compare with the argument developed in Chapter 3).<sup>25</sup> Second, we need to bring out a point which is implicit in their writing (*ibid.*: 44), but obscured by the term 'reading formation'. Their argument is relevant to many other practices, which would not naturally fall within our idea of 'reading', such as the influence of 'Bond' on clothes and fashion, talk, even people's everyday performances of identity.<sup>26</sup>

These details aside, the concept of 'reading formation' usefully points to the direction in which textual analysis in cultural studies should move. Our

starting point has to be the actual complexity and fluidity of the textual environment, and from there the question of how certain texts come to be closely read as texts – how 'textual events', as we might call them, occur. We are now in a position to review cultural studies' agenda for text-related research in a post-literary framework.

### The future of text-related research

Broadly there are three main priorities for research: the textual environment, patterns of belief, and textual events. These are discussed in more detail below.

#### The textual environment

If we picture the textual environment as the result of a number of flows (see Figure 4.1), then we need to study: (a) how far stable meanings and associations are produced; (b) what texts are produced and how they circulate; and (c) the various ways in which people use, or negotiate, the vast textual resources around them.

The first task is what cultural studies has always done, except that (as argued earlier) we cannot rely on the authority of semiology (with its quasi-scientific language of 'codes')<sup>27</sup> to legislate for order. A useful area for research would be to look in detail at those whose job it is to produce standardized, naturalized meanings (the marketing and advertising industry). Advertisements are, in effect, experiments with semantic order. It would be crucial, in relation to particular advertisements, to establish through audience research to what extent they were accompanied by a stable set of associations. The same idea could be applied to other areas also. Instead of the armchair science of semiology, we need a more active and open-ended research exploration of the possibilities of order in the field of meanings.

The second task – studying the flow of texts – is also a familiar part of cultural studies, except that our definition of where to look for texts has to expand to match the scale of our textual environment. If, for example, we are interested in discourses around masculinity and technology, or childhood and violence, it is artificial to study films and television in isolation from computer games, comics, toys, advertisements, and so on.<sup>28</sup>

The third task – studying how people actually negotiate the textual environment – should not be consigned to the 'too difficult' bin; it is an

essential complement to the first two tasks. People's negotiations involve active processes. We may screen some material out entirely, and make a more explicit and considered choice about other material. Some texts we may read closely, working hard to connect them with other texts. Or we may read a text with limited attention, incompletely, without any great interpretative work. This is where questions of 'textuality' and 'tactics' come in (see above). There are also 'passive' processes, which affect what texts are available to particular people. These range from material exclusions (economic, educational) to other more subtle forms of exclusion (like people's sense of what is 'appropriate' for them, their 'taste'), which by endless repetition come to have an almost material force (compare Bourdieu, 1984).

Take the active and passive processes together, and you have a rough picture of the complex determinants of each person's perspective on the wider textual environment, their map of the wider space. Different people's maps may differ quite radically. After all, no one (not even the researcher) can claim even to be aware of the whole space – it is too large. It has been in media and cultural studies, if anywhere, that the pioneering work in researching these maps has been done.<sup>29</sup> But we still know surprisingly little, for example, about the many different textual maps with which people operate, and how forms of cultural production (such as music sampling or enthusiasts' collections) are themselves forms of 'remapping' the textual environment.<sup>30</sup> 'Postmodern' theory can, in a sense, be seen as an intellectual variant of such remappings, but as yet far too little attention has been given to the more interesting question of how 'postmodern' cultural environments are actually lived.

Whatever we already know may be transformed soon by a new device for reordering people's awareness of the textual environment: the Internet. I say 'soon', rather than 'already', because it is only when in some countries Internet access becomes widely popularized, probably through digital TV packages, that the Internet will become more than a highly specialized research problem (as usual, we should not believe the hype).

As a research agenda this may sound exhausting but, as argued in Chapter 3, we need to know more about people's competing cultural maps and perspectives, if we are to grasp how our shared textual environment is registered in people's lives. It is also, crucially, here that issues of power – the unequal distribution of the resources of cultural entitlement – emerge most clearly. We should not blithely assume that the textual environment is somehow simply 'shared' on equal terms. That is an old-style 'textualist' illusion that we can ill afford.

### Patterns of belief

Separate from the question of the contents of the textual environment is the question of how particular texts (for example, film texts) are caught up in wider patterns of belief: beliefs about films, of course, and more broadly the media industries, but also patterns of belief in apparently unrelated areas such as the worlds of school, work, sport and leisure, fashion, politics, religion, science, and (bearing in mind the arguments of Chapters 3 and 6) our narratives of ourselves and our families. This of course goes well beyond 'textual analysis' as it has been conventionally conceived, but it is a direct consequence of generating our research questions from the inter-textual environment itself.

Some work has recently emerged in this area: Hartley's (1996) book on 'popular reality' and the media's 'pedagogic' role (cf. also Miller and McHoul, 1998; Miller, 1998). None as yet amounts to a sustained programme of research into how, in practice, people integrate their readings of texts (say, the press or television news) into the formation or reinforcement of wider beliefs. Each tends to stay within a Foucauldian model of discourse analysis that is more comfortable with textual surfaces than social practice (the ghost of the 'expert reader' again). Particularly neglected is the question of people's varying beliefs in media outputs themselves. There have, of course, been many studies of particular types of media enthusiast (that is, fans), but little work done on other points along the scale of belief: indifference, cynicism, active dislike, mistrust or scepticism (about factual or moral claims), and so on.

Cultural studies' adoption – only sometimes and certainly not as much as its cruder critics claim – of a celebratory mode towards popular consumption has obscured the problem in an unhelpful way. For example, how are we to understand the following attitudes to television? The quotes are taken from a 1970s study of working-class San Francisco families (both speakers here are men):

After the kids go to bed and things settle down, we're just here. I guess we watch TV or something. [angrily] What am I saying? It's not 'or something'; that's what it is. It's the same every night; we're just here.

I'm watching, that's all. I'm not thinking about things or anything like that. I sit down and I'm just watching. That's what I do most nights. I come home and die in front of the TV. (Rubin, 1976: 185, 191)

Once again, these quotations raise questions about the differences in people's engagements or beliefs in the textual environment, which link inexorably to issues of cultural power.

### Textual events

It is against the background of continuing research into the first two areas that the analysis of particular texts should take its place.

There are, perhaps, two basic questions to ask of any text (although answering them is rarely easy). First, how did that text come to be one which significant numbers of people engaged with closely as a text? In other words, how has it come to function as a text? This involves looking at the features of the text (its generic features, plot, characters, associations), not in isolation but alongside the other factors which go to make up a ‘reading formation’: marketing and the producer’s industrial strategy; the discourses circulating about the text and its themes; and so on. Second, how is the text read by actual readers (allowing for many different possible readings)?

This is to move away from studying texts as ‘objects’ (complete in themselves) to studying textual processes, or what the American film theorist Janet Staiger (1992: 9) has simply called ‘events’. In vast, complex textual environments, texts which attract a great deal of close reading are not simply ‘there’: they emerge as part of a ‘textual event’ which needs to be studied (Pribram, 1988; Staiger, 1992). Think of the events surrounding the release of any major Hollywood or Bollywood film. Such events are themselves, of course, inter-textual (Bennett and Woollacott, 1987). Indeed, as Georgina Born (1991: 158) has pointed out in relation to music – but the point is a general one – many texts function through the mediation of (texts in) other media. The ‘textual event’ is inherently multertextual and involves multiple media.

At the same time, given the arguments above, we must remember that a function of the media industries (from publishing to film) is precisely to *create* textual events. We need to think about whether (beneath the hype) actual readers are engaged or not with those processes.

It is here also that the complexity of consumption has to be addressed. Countless texts are absorbed in a state of distraction, others are read carefully and then forgotten; but there are also moments when a particular text comes to be read closely and by many people as a coherent unity. Sometimes, at such moments, texts acquire resonances across the whole textual environment. They become agreed means through which history can be ‘read’, as it is formed – and, as such, important historical evidence (Geraghty, 1996).<sup>31</sup> The density of meanings that can be condensed into one text or set of texts has to be studied in its full cultural, social and historical context.

Having said all this, there must somewhere come a point where our questioning of the text stops and we recognize that particular texts *do* exercise power over us, and for reasons that sociological ‘context’ can only partly explain. We take pleasure in programmes, in films, in novels, music and

dance, and these pleasures, while embedded in history<sup>32</sup> (the histories of our own taste and of wider cultural formations), contain something left over which sociology on its own has difficulty explaining: the realm of *aesthetics*.

Throughout this chapter, questions of aesthetics and pleasure have been left to one side, and this emphasis will be unacceptable to some.<sup>33</sup> My aim, however, has been to reorient – as far as possible – the way we think about texts in cultural studies. This has meant leaning heavily in the other direction in order to clarify what else has to be in place before textual analysis and questions of value and aesthetics can be pursued on a satisfactory basis. With this move completed we can perhaps, over time, work towards a wider synthesis of the sociological and aesthetic concerns to which texts give rise.<sup>34</sup>

### Summary

In this chapter, we have explored how the methodological and conceptual framework for conducting textual analysis must be transformed to take account of the actual complexity of textual production. Instead of the simple discrete text–reader relationship, we are looking at a textual environment comprising complex patterns of flows: flows of meanings, texts and potential readers. To understand the effects of that environment, we also have to understand the different levels of engagement that readers may have. And, finally, we have to understand the complex extra-textual conditions which create textual events: the situations where things function as texts for significant numbers of readers.

To read texts in this way, however, is to have de-centred textual analysis in the traditional sense. Instead of the text being the source of certainty, it has become the site of an enigma, or at least cautious exploration. But this is only as it should be: in the vast textual fields we inhabit, it is order rather than uncertainty that we need to explain.

### Suggestions for further thinking

- 1 Develop a map of your own ‘textual world’: what texts you consume, what connections you make between which types of text. Distinguish between texts which you think of as ‘putdownable’ and those with which

you engage more intensely. Compare your map with those of others. How significant are the differences and similarities?

- 2 Take one text that is attracting current attention (an inevitable example at the time of writing in Britain would be *The Phantom Menace*). Using your own observations but also any electronic searches you can (for example, CD-Rom or Internet searches), develop a picture of the inter-textual field in which that text functions. Think about how far that field is ordered: for example, do particular texts have greater weight in generating other texts? (In the case of *The Phantom Menace*, one question would be: have publicity narratives about the film generated more texts about themselves than the detailed narrative of the film itself?)
- 3 Take a textual event and try to identify the range of factors which led to it, including any which have led to the text involved being regarded as having wider historical resonances.

## Notes

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- 1 For example, Frow and Morris (1996: 357).
- 2 This chapter was virtually complete when I heard Martin Barker's stimulating reflections on texts and audiences at the University of North London 'Researching Culture' conference in September 1999, which drew on Barker and Brooks (1998). I was pleased to discover that we were asking similar questions, although pursuing them in different directions. I would also like to acknowledge the very helpful comments of Dave Hesmondhalgh on an earlier draft of this chapter, even though I am sure I have not answered all his objections.
- 3 For a review of the impact of the cultural studies critique on literary studies, see Easthope (1990).
- 4 Cf. Bennett and Woollacott (1987: 68).
- 5 I will use 'text' in the broad sense familiar in cultural studies, which includes not only written texts, but film, television, the visual arts, music – in fact, ordered complexes of meaning in any medium or combination of media.
- 6 There is also the need to ask where the interpretative authority of expert readers comes from: this question was an issue raised by a stimulating presentation by Deborah Chambers and Estella Tincknell called 'The problems and practice of researching culture' at the 'Researching Culture' conference (see note 2).
- 7 On the importance of ontological issues, if questions of method are to be clarified, see Tudor (1995) and, more generally, Archer (1995: 2–3, 20–6). It was Richard Johnson (1996: 96 [1986–87]) who, more than a decade ago, asked the essential question: 'What is a text?'
- 8 Again, see Johnson (*ibid.*).
- 9 Following Bennett and Woollacott (1987: 44–5), I use the hyphenated spelling

- ('inter-textuality') to refer to the relations between texts actually established in specific conditions of reading and production, as opposed to 'intertextuality' (Kristeva) which means the references to other texts which are purely internal to a particular text.
- 10 'The beautiful Gail Porter on the trail of the new "Star Wars" film in Tunisia', *OK*, 170, 16 July 1999, 31–9. For the significance of media locations, see Couldry (2000).
  - 11 The example is clearly oversimplified, since magazines can be read both intensely and casually in different circumstances (McRobbie, 1991c: 142), but it is useful to get the discussion going.
  - 12 Cf. Grossberg (1987) and Morse (1990).
  - 13 Of course, literary analysis in one sense does not treat texts in isolation, but analyses them in the context of the rest of the author's work, and then compares that work to other authors'. Those links, however, always have as their reference point the idea that the text can usefully be treated as a discrete unity 'in itself'.
  - 14 This is without even considering Derrida's deconstructionist attacks on Saussure and structuralist analyses of literature (1976, 1978).
  - 15 On the neglect of Volosinov's critique of Saussure, see Williams (1989c) and Barker (1989: ch. 2, especially page 311, n. 2). As Martin Barker points out, while some acknowledgement of Volosinov was made early on in cultural studies, the trenchantness of his critique of Saussure has not been adequately addressed.
  - 16 As we shall see below, even the Bond case is not simple: see Bennett and Woollacott (1987: 68–90) for a critique of Eco's analysis.
  - 17 Alternatively, you can argue that semiology is simply wrong, and the naturalized system it assumes is imaginary: Barker (1989: 152–5). That goes too far, I believe, but Barker's analysis of the problems in semiology's claims to systematicity is convincing.
  - 18 The functionalism of Hartley's work is a little similar to that of Paddy Scannell's work on radio and television (especially, 1996). For discussion of the problems, see Couldry (2000: ch. 1).
  - 19 There is a broader problem here, common to all Foucauldian or quasi-Foucauldian analyses: their inadequate notion of the reflexivity of the subject. I touch on this again in Chapter 6.
  - 20 There is an echo here of important debates in 1980s feminist media analysis between proponents of an essentializing Screen Theory (based on abstract psychoanalytic models, such as Mulvey, 1975) and writers who insisted on the need to study actual women audiences (Brunsdon, 1981; Kuhn, 1984).
  - 21 I am influenced here by the Swedish anthropologist Ulf Hannerz; this connection is developed explicitly in Chapter 5.
  - 22 By interpreting the flow as a sort of 'text', 'textual' readers of the social repeat (in subtly disguised form) precisely the error Bourdieu once identified in anthropological practice: mistaking the way the social world *must look* to analysts in order to be systematically interpreted, with the way the social world actually *is* (1977: 2).
  - 23 Hartley, certainly, is well aware of this (1996: ch. 3). But by ruling out research into readers, he excludes a major part of the process.
  - 24 Since then, however, Bennett has shifted from a Gramscian to a Foucauldian position: see Chapter 5, note 1.

- 25 Cf. more generally the debate in sociology about the dangers of overestimating the extent to which societies share common values (Wrong, 1961; Mann, 1970).
- 26 On media-related performance, cf. Chaney (1994), and Abercrombie and Longhurst (1998).
- 27 For a critique of the slippery notion of ‘codes’, see Corner (1986). Corner’s argument concerns Hall’s work, but it applies (perhaps more fairly) to semiology in general.
- 28 For such a broader approach, see Kline (1993).
- 29 The best study (dealing with television consumption) remains Morley (1986). For a general precedent, in terms of how people map the cities they live in, see Lynch (1960).
- 30 An important book which opens up a framework for thinking about some of these areas is Willis (1990).
- 31 Note also that to fulfil this function you do not necessarily need a ‘text’ as such, but only an event or series of events which become textualized (such as the O.J. Simpson trial in the USA). Cf. Couldry, 1995.
- 32 For excellent reflections on the complexity of such histories, see Gilroy (1992: 105).
- 33 For a very different approach to the case of music, see Frith (1997).
- 34 For an interesting discussion exploring these possibilities, see Born (1991).

## 5 Beyond ‘cultures’

In a society where the cultural flow is varied and uneven, it is an open question which meanings have reached where and when.

Ulf Hannerz (1992: 81)

A culture that cannot be tied to a place cannot be analytically stopped in time.

Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing (1993: 66)

In Chapter 4, we took a seemingly technical question (‘what is a text?’) and showed how, by carefully unpicking its implications, we might rethink what textual analysis involves. In this chapter, our starting question has a similar form (‘what is a culture?’), yet just by asking it we enter one of the most contested debates in the humanities and social sciences today. It is an urgent question: How can we think about cultural life, yet think beyond the assumption that there are, necessarily, such things as ‘cultures’?

Here, as before, we see that questions which are apparently only methodological also have political implications, and vice versa. The political (or ethical) requirement to listen to the cultural experiences of others introduces an irrevocable degree of complexity to cultural analysis. As a result, cultural theory which seems mainly methodological in orientation (the work of Ulf Hannerz) has implications which are profoundly political; and cultural analysis whose political emphasis is very clear (the work of Paul Gilroy) threatens entrenched methodological assumptions.<sup>1</sup>

We approached some of this territory earlier. Chapter 3 began to unsettle claims about ‘cultures’ from the perspective of the individuals who apparently belong to them. But it left unresolved the crucial question with which I deal here: if cultural life is more than the sum of individual perspectives, what is this ‘more’? This chapter also makes explicit a dimension latent so far: the external relations between cultures or nations – the international or global scale of cultural life. We see that the idea that cultural life must be