Mass Culture and Everyday Life

Edited by

Peter GIBIAN

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Everyday Life: A User's Guide

This collection of lively essays offers a clarifying overview of the development of critical practices in one of the most vital new academic fields—the study of mass culture as it transforms "everyday life." Contributors also provide a detailed, concrete survey of a wide range of the mass cultural phenomena that have come to define our everyday lives in recent years: from baseball cards to college curricula; from Reagan's body to Mike Tyson and Anita Hill; from tampons to exercise fads to visions of angels; from soaps to opera to rhythm and blues; from horror film monsters to the interrelation of cats, pigs, and mothers in *Babe*. Of special note are ground-breaking essays on the boom in talk radio and talk TV and the implications of such "airwaves dialogue" as a new forum for public discourse; on shopping mall spaces and new modes of shopping as cinematic spectacle; and on how "everyday life" in the university has become a key battleground in America's ongoing "culture wars."

This anthology brings together essays by leading theorists in the field, whose writings over the past decades helped to inaugurate the development of "cultural studies" in North America and continue to set the terms for current debates. But the direct, accessible, refreshingly personal essays collected here speak not only to an audience of academic specialists but to a wide general readership. Combining essays on theory and method with an extended series of concrete "case studies" which apply and test theoretical stances, this book offers familiar, compelling, lived examples of the ways in which critical analysis can arise out of the complex negotiations of everyday life practice.

All of these contributors are linked by their various associations with *TABLOID*, a small but seminal journal that emerged in the early 1980s, during the first wave of cultural studies interest in North America. With its critique of "manipulation theory" and of strict dichotomies between high and low culture, or between active cultural producers and passive cultural consumers, its insistence on the need for detailed analyses of everyday life practices from within, and its definition of these everyday life practices as potential sites for active, creative resistance to a dominant order, *TABLOID* made an important break on the one hand from the Frankfurt School—with its somber, angst-filled voice, its pessimistic resignation, and its fear of a monolithic, manipulated, and manipulative mass culture—and from a mindless celebration of pop-cultural liberation on the other. This anthology brings together essays that originally appeared in *TABLOID* with new work reflecting the current concerns of these *TABLOID*-related writers, allowing us to test the problems and possibilities for such a critical engagement with everyday life experience, in the context of developments in both critical and cultural practices over the past fifteen years.

Finally, *Mass Culture and Everyday Life* is meant not as a retrospective but as a call to future work, stimulating all of us to become close, critical readers of the oppressive and progressive political dynamics inherent in even the most seemingly mundane of our daily activities.

Part One

Where Did We Come From? Where Are We Going?

Critical Approaches to Mass Culture and Everyday Life

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The *TABLOID* Story

Between Frankfurt, Birmingham, and Bowling Green—A Genealogy of One Form of Cultural Studies in North America

Jean Franco

Before cyberspace and desktop publishing, a group of us at Stanford University would spend days and days and days putting each issue of the journal *TABLOID* together using a beat-up light table, a messy waxer, impossible Letraset titles, and X-Acto knives and Scotch tape for primitive "collage" graphics. We took turns typing articles into columns on an electric typewriter and then spent hours whiting out typos by hand before taking the copy to the printer. We printed about one thousand copies, lined up at the post office to mail them to our scant list of subscribers, and gave a lot of copies away. But during the five years of the publication of *TABLOID: A Review of Mass Culture and Everyday Life*, from 1980 to 1985, the collective—a group of faculty and graduate students, most of them teaching and studying in literature departments, that got together regularly for brief discussions of editorial business and a great deal of lively talk—did a remarkably efficient job of digging into the motherlode of cultural issues—examining social fantasies, computer games, the use of radio talk shows to promote conservative propaganda, and the serendipitous new urban spaces of shopping malls or demolition sites. In common with other emerging groups, we felt ourselves to be engaged in a moral and political critique of late capitalism—though we did not feel the need to be solemn about it.

A lot of '60s attitudes carried over into the late '70s, when we began work on the journal. Some people still lived in communes where they grew their own food and wove their own clothes. Many still had a penchant for artisanal modes of production; handwritten postcards, string bags, and leather belts were sold from stalls on the campus. Poetry was still read at political meetings. And it was still possible to think of being an independent intellectual, even though these were a dying breed in the United States. Our mode of operation was inspired by the mimeographed and scarcely legible gray pages that reached us from the Birmingham School of Cultural Studies, and we were ini-

tially tutored by the film journal *Jump Cut*, which had huge pages and a small staff, and favored films that were impossible to see, at least in Palo Alto. A companionable network of little magazines published at that time: *Cultural Correspondence*, *Fuse* magazine, *Theoretical Review*, *Metamorphosis*, *Raw* magazine, and *Zippy* 3. Our artisan style (which went along with a nonacademic tone and orientation, and a perhaps crazy sense that we were addressing not only academic specialists but everyday readers, and focusing not on methodology but on concrete, familiar, lived examples of the ways in which critical analysis and creative resistance can arise out of the complex negotiations of everyday life) was not adopted—wisely, as it turned out—by another ally, *Social Text*, which also began publishing as a collective at about this time, but had a far more realistic idea of how to stay in business. *TABLOID* inherited a distrust of the academy, a yearning for community (or a collective), and a preference for the margins. We wanted to engage in critical debate, but playfully; we wanted to be independent of the academy, but without leaving it.

However, this was also a time when the '60s experiments in new kinds of pedagogy were disappearing and when such public intellectuals as existed were increasingly speaking for the right. The kind of oppositional, dropout, holier-than-thou position much cultivated on the left was not a position from which to understand the shift from confrontational politics to culture wars that was already taking place.

We learned the hard way. A roundtable on independent filmmaking addressed to a mythical beast called the "general public" was attended only by filmmakers. Our interview with Michel Foucault turned up so much mutual misunderstanding that it could not be published. Popular culture and resistance? The great man groped for some common ground, and so did we. And it's odd that we didn't find it given that the great panopticon—the Hoover Institution for the Study of War, Revolution, and Peace—was looming right over us. We also made an attempt to engage in debate with the sectors of the left that were then promoting Italy's autonomia movement, expressing a hope "to hear from our readers and to use this debate to further strategies for political resistance in a period of ever-increasing threats from the Right" (winter 1982). There was, sad to say, absolutely no response.

Bruce Robbins's description of the left's "deprived but after all mildly self-flattering self-image of inner exile, alienation, detached and unencumbered oppositionality"[1] aptly describes the place where the *TABLOID* collective at first imagined itself to be, though fortunately it did not stay there. Defying the prevalent anomie, *TABLOID* tried to show that intellectuals could work collectively. But what bonded the *TABLOID* collective was not only a sense of inner exile but their dissatisfaction with the anti-intellectualism of the new left and a consciousness of the disparity between what counted as culture for most people "in the world" and what was dispensed as culture by the institution. What R. Radhakrishnan has criticized in some contemporary culture critics, namely, their suspended animation in "an anomalous scenario in which the

best of progressive theory seems bereft of objects of explanation, while emerging historical realities seem oblivious of high theory,"[2] was our impetus for trying to revive the mass culture debate at a moment when it seemed to have been prematurely foreclosed in the United States. At that time, "mass culture," when spoken about at all, was represented as the "other" of the academy, the place of mindless pleasure and capitalist manipulation. And it was what Andrew Ross calls "the specter of *Kulturpessimismus*" that we set out to exorcise.[3]

TABLOID's first position paper, "On/Against Mass Culture Theories," staked a place between the uncritical, celebratory popular culture studies at that point associated with the Popular Culture Association based in Bowling Green and the manipulation theory of mass culture that still underpinned the empirical research of the vigorous "alternative" communications theories. In the first issue of *TABLOID*, the inclusion of an essay by Herbert Schiller titled "Media and Imperialism" was a recognition of the historical importance of the group of scholars that included Schiller and Dallas Walker Smythe, who were then analyzing the globalization of the media and, more importantly, stressing the cultural impact of U.S. media in what was then termed the periphery.[4] At that time "alternative communications" scholars were engaged, for example, in the UNESCO dispute with U.S. corporations over the latter's disingenuous insistence on the "free flow of information." In contrast to this sort of global analysis, *TABLOID* turned to examination of the micropractices of everyday life, exploring sometimes wild forms of reception, and stressing not only mass culture's capacity to absorb and deploy all possible repertoires but also its potential liberatory tendencies.

A lot of preliminary work went into this first collective paper, which explored and tried to describe these as-yet-elusive forms of "resistance." Mass culture and everyday life were seen here as a multiplicity of practices rather than of manipulative products or artifacts: "The artifact of mass culture is not so smooth and seamless as manipulation theory would have us believe, like a sheer and polished rock face that allows for no scrambling; on the contrary, it is a rough, irregular surface, with fissures that enable one to find footholds." With a certain amount of hubris, we then proclaimed that "discovering those footholds is the first step toward understanding *and* transforming the meanings and political function of mass cultural phenomena."

Given the rapid institutionalization and commercialization of what is now called "cultural studies" in the United States, it is important to pause and consider this particular moment, modest as it was. In England, cultural studies were institutionalized in Birmingham as an at first precarious offshoot of an English department, exploring the possibilities of an interdisciplinary dialogue among sociology, anthropology, and literature. Stuart Hall and his Birmingham colleagues were able to build upon the work of Richard Hoggart and Raymond Williams as well as on structuralism's interruption and questioning of this culturalist tendency in the early seventies. *TABLOID*, on the other

hand, found itself confronting the remnants of a counterculture that had opted for psychedelic mysticism and ascesis. In the first issue of *TABLOID* we paid respectful farewell to the guru of the new left, Herbert Marcuse, though the statement in Carol Becker's obituary that "as the culture begins to admit the profound level of alienation we have reached, it will look more and more to the work of Herbert Marcuse" was, in fact, a line not taken.

TABLOID indeed reclaimed mass culture (a term that was always under erasure) as a network of practices too diffuse and polysemous to be appropriated and always pliable to rearticulation and recombination. The sources were eclectic: Foucault, Deleuze and Guattari, and (with some reservations) Jean Baudrillard and Fredric Jameson. Indeed Fredric Jameson was, perhaps, more important than we explicitly acknowledged. His essay "Reification and Utopia in Mass Culture" had appeared in 1979 and proposed what then seemed a novel way out of the high culture/mass culture binarism that was so deeply rooted in university disciplines. His proposal was to rethink the opposition high culture/mass culture so as to get beyond "the emphasis on evaluation to which it has traditionally given rise—and which, however the binary system of value operates (mass culture is popular and thus more authentic than high culture, high culture is autonomous and, therefore, utterly incomparable to a degraded mass culture) tends to function in some timeless realm of absolute aesthetic judgment."[5] What attracted us to Jameson's work was his respectful and detailed analysis of Hollywood films—*The Shining, Jaws, Dog Day Afternoon*—which took full account of all the mediations of genre, coding, and reception. This kind of reading was current in cinema studies in this period, thanks to such journals as *Screen* and *Jump Cut*, but it had rarely been extended to television, radio, and everyday life. And Jameson's insight that mass culture offered no "primary object of study," no "first time of reception, no 'original' of which succeeding representations are mere copies," helped us to avoid the fetishizing of mass culture.

But out of the enormous spectrum of contemporary culture, how do you select without treating each object of analysis as a portentous "symptom"? *TABLOID* contributors almost always started from fortuitous matches between everyday occurrences, mass cultural trends, and their own lives and tastes. Ed Cohen was a participant in the everyday rites and rituals of the true Dead Heads; Jon Spayde played Space Invaders and pachinko often in arcade holidays from his studies in Japanese literature and culture; the mysterious Emmenagogue Sisters clearly spent a lot of time in the supermarket shopping for tampons. At some point all of them realized that *TABLOID* offered something new: the possibility of seriously discussing, and writing about, these experiences. Wahneema Lubiano, busy with her analyses of English Renaissance literature, found a tremendous release in writing out her ongoing meditations about Prince and the dynamics of African-American subcultures and music—and this has now become a primary area for her research. Similarly, Tania Modleski easily made connections between her studies in the eighteenth-century English novel of sensibility and the groundbreaking writing she would

do on Harlequin romances and television soaps. And Mary Louise Pratt's training in linguistics came into play as, using the pseudonym of Ricky Smith, she sussed out the menace of the letter *x*, while her work in "conversation analysis" led to her fascination with the moment-by-moment interactions of talkers on call-in radio.

Although many of the *TABLOID* pieces were written in the spirit of the *flâneur* guided primarily by a desire for entertainment and distraction, these analyses also always reflected a consciousness of the flow of history beneath the pavement. This was certainly the case with Dana Polan's overview of the telling changes in social vision implied by a new generation of horror films—defining a "paradigm shift" that continues to shape the mass cultural imagination today. And Peter Gibian's study of the Toronto shopping mall Eaton Centre is a journey not only through one particular arcade but also through the history of arcades, exhibitions, and department stores, describing a process of deterritorialization, or abstraction, as the solid and compact edifice of the nineteenth century began to desolidify. Gibian evokes history against the grain of the mall, which seeks to promote "containment and introversion," surface over depth, and timeless revery over any attempts at historical reflection. This cross-hatching of centralized ownership, mobility, isolated environments, and simulation that Gibian discovered in the shopping mall was, at the same time, an invitation to read space differently, something that, though we did not know it yet, was being theorized as "postmodern geography."

The *flâneur* spirit also surfaced in *TABLOID*'s lone attempt to go bicoastal. "New York is a Third World City" was an excursion along the margins of the major global finance capital, at a time when new urban cultures such as hip-hop and rap were being taken over by art galleries and the music industry and when the city was gearing itself to clean up the trains and improve the quality of life. This *TABLOID* issue sported a cover designed by the graffiti artist Lady Pink, showing her on the top of a tagged subway train. Using Pedro Rivera's photographs of the "casitas" (the simulated peasant dwellings of Puerto Rico that no longer exist on the island but were built playfully in the rubble of demolished NYC buildings) and Nancy Guevara's interviews with hip-hop artists, *TABLOID* read New York as a running battle over public space in which resistance was momentary, a quick gesture before the police dogs came down the tunnel.

In this happenstance way we came upon the conservative takeover of the airwaves and picked up on the then almost unnoted phenomenon of talk radio—which fascinated several of us so much that we couldn't help but tune in and tape talk shows for later analysis. We found that while most of us slept, insomniacs all over the country were calling in and demanding that the government nuke Iran. "Hello, You're on the Air" (Franco), "Newspeak Meets Newstalk" (Gibian), and "No, She Really Loves Eggs" (Pratt) engaged with what Gibian termed the "striking garrulity of 1980s America" that had surfaced in the heterogeneous radio call-in talk shows and in talk TV. The new talk media interested us because, in the words of Mary Louise Pratt, who examined

the micro-practices of talk-show interactions, they illustrated the fact that "the improvisatory character [of talk] is a crucial dimension of much mass culture and everyday life activity"; and, as she goes on to point out, this is "a dimension that tends to be obscured by structure-oriented kinds of analysis that can only approach the dynamic of everyday life practices and interactions by first defining and isolating discrete texts or artifacts and monolithic subjects playing fixed roles" (winter 1983). But talk radio also undermined assumptions that dialogue was conducted on an even playing field and the notion that "heterogeneity, disorder and spontaneity" were "inherently beneficial or emancipatory." What we caught was the first groundswell of discontent and vituperation that would make radio call-in shows such a potent recruiting ground for the conservative vote. A pity that we couldn't have bought some airwaves of our own before they were taken over by the likes of Oliver North, G. Gordon Liddy, Newt Gingrich, Pat Buchanan, and World Christian Radio. Even in those days, the talk show provided a place where being politically incorrect could be turned into a virtue. The journalist Diane Rehm commented recently on the fact that talk shows are the places "through which the public's worst suspicions are confirmed daily," observing, for example, that, after the Oklahoma City bombings, "the talk shows were filled with the rage of listeners and hosts around the country who believed the blast had been carried out by foreign nationals."[6] This kind of groundswell we sensed and began to analyze in the early '80s as what seemed to be a new form of participatory dialogue between media and public turned out to be a silencing mechanism that shut out liberal opinion while opening the sluice gates to dangerous and powerful prejudices.

TABLOID's first issue coincided with the moment when "culture" began to be seen as a new kind of politics, especially on the right. Despite our archaic mode of production, and indeed a positive preference for hand-held cameras, pirate radio stations, and the Grateful Dead, it was the first rumblings of this march of those we had considered political dinosaurs that, in retrospect, differentiated our project from that of cultural studies—at least as it later came to be institutionalized in the United States.

The election of Reagan in 1980 heralded conservatism's long and destructive march through the institutions. The second *TABLOID* position paper (winter 1981) registered the transition: "The right now holds the initiative in the United States. In the last few weeks, conservative institutions have emerged like toadstools out of the rain." Under these circumstances, what kind of resistance can be practiced? The virtual impossibility of "an alternative hegemony" in any foreseeable future is implicitly acknowledged in the position paper, which tackled the formation of subjectivities in our racially mixed and class-stratified society. Noting that "relations of race, class, sex and geographical position in the world economy *are all categories used in the overall organization of production*," we concluded that "an alternative hegemony to that of capitalism can come into being only when relations in *all* categories are

changed"—a utopian possibility that now seems as remote as the Planet Rapture described by Jon Spayde in his *TABLOID* piece on evangelical apocalyptics. In reality what seemed to bother us was the difficulty of those desirables—solidarity and group identity—given the serialized experience of everyday life, which was rapidly being intensified by "mobile privatization" of the electronics revolution and struggles over ethnic identities that were leading increasingly to dangerous visions of racial separatism. Our solution was to arrange a forced marriage between (of all people) Foucault and the Sartre of the *Critique of Dialectical Reason*. Foucault's attention to the micropractices of diffused power and his antifoundationalism do not sit easy with Sartre's attempt to account for the formation of groups and societies, especially as Sartre built his theories on the assumption of a sovereign subject. But like our attempt in publishing our own early translation of excerpts from Michel de Certeau's *Arts de faire* (later translated as *The Practice of Everyday Life*)—where cut up passages from de Certeau were placed in a sort of collage dialogue with brief interventions developing *TABLOID* perspectives through North American case studies—the marriage of incompatibles was eventually productive, allowing us to get beyond those unanswerable questions and impossible totalizations and look at what was happening in our own backyard. It was, however, the Republican victory of 1980 that gave us the necessary shove in the direction of examining what we had hitherto denied: the relevance of our institutional base.

The Leland Stanford Junior University had been founded in 1885 by Leland Stanford, the railroad baron, who endowed his university generously, hoping to create an instant West Coast rival to Harvard and Yale, a place where students would be instilled with "an appreciation of the blessings of this Government, a reverence for its institutions, a love of God and humanity."[7] For many decades the university was known primarily for its engineering school; early on, it distinguished itself by making life difficult for sociologist Thorstein Veblen, and this tradition returned in the 1960s as Stanford became notorious for its petty treatment of economist Paul Baran and its unprecedented dismissal of a tenured English professor, Bruce Franklin, for his participation in Vietnam War protests on campus. By the time we arrived in the seventies, then, "the blessings of this Government" and "reverence for its institutions" were not much in evidence at Stanford.

The campus had been built on the site of Leland Stanford's horse-breeding farm. Students referred to it as "The Farm," as if half-consciously ironizing the pastoral yearnings of its founder, who no doubt saw "nature," in the form of acreage, as the appropriate barrier in the spatial deployment of class and racial difference. To this day, U.S. 101 separates the unpaved roads of East Palo Alto from the immaculate gardens and classy shopping malls of the other Palo Alto. And while many American universities separate town and gown, often by a visible barrier, a gate or archway, Stanford's "ivory tower" isolation is especially marked. To leave Palo Alto and enter Stanford's campus, one has to pass

over a moatlike bridge and then follow a long, palm-lined drive through an expansive wilderness of eucalyptus before arriving at the buildings of the Inner Quad (or "cloisters") and the Memorial Chapel. In this other world, the Spanish Mission architecture, termed "romanesque" by some, is implacably symmetrical. The large, beige stone blocks capped by the red-tiled roofs are monumental—to the point where you begin to feel like Aida as she entered the tomb. Then, on the hour, bells clang and a murderous charge of cyclists looking neither to left nor to right bears down from all directions. The most visible landmark is the tower of the Hoover Institution for the Study of War, Revolution, and Peace, a right-wing think tank that housed Kerensky and later Sidney Hook. The dominant sensation in the bleached emptiness of the appropriately named White Plaza, experienced by anyone who has walked on crowded city streets or traveled on buses or subways, is one of extreme disassociation. The questions "Where am I?" and "What am I doing here?" spring readily to the lips, and these were intensified in the late seventies and early eighties by visitations from other planets. Edward Said, Clifford Geertz, Julia Kristeva, Noam Chomsky, and E. P. Thompson dropped in and then almost without a pause for breath winged their way rapidly back to whatever intellectually stimulating environment they came from.

But, as *TABLOID* came to realize, the isolation was in fact imaginary. In 1983 *TABLOID* sent out notices inviting participation in an open forum on the state of the university under the Reagan administration. The forum was attended by faculty and students, including some faculty working at the Stanford Linear Accelerator, and finally resulted in one of the most significant and prescient issues of the journal: "Disciplining the University: Life in Reagan's Backyard" (winter 1984).

"There are ways in which Stanford's privateness and privilege make it an especially revealing vantage point from which to study change under Reagan," we observed, coming to understand that Stanford's ongoing relationship with the Reagan machine in fact made it "an especially apt place to look at how that machine operates when it gets the upper hand." What the *TABLOID* forum and the position paper set out to detail was the conservative project for the university: "We began to ask how one might link together politically based changes in things like the research priorities of funding agencies, with internal changes in intellectual fashions inside particular disciplines. . . . We began to ask what kinds of things political machines and elected governments might need universities for, and what relationships the current administration and Reagan machine in particular were trying to construct with universities." The redefinition of the curriculum, the stress on expertise and other changes, often concealed behind a bureaucratic use of vague language, were taken to be symptomatic of vaster changes "in the relationship between the university, business, and the state, changes that tend to eliminate much of the looseness and space for diversity that academics have counted on in the past."

Whereas the standard conservative narrative has depicted universities as

being held hostage to fanatical feminists and bullying leftists, the reality explored by the *TABLOID* collective showed something very different: a move away from knowledge "as life-enhancing activity" and toward "seeing knowledge as expertise aimed at producing hierarchies of authority." The diffuse sense of alienation felt by faculty and students alike was a symptom of lack of control in an environment in which decisions were made by distant governmental and academic administrations. The resistance that we had looked for within mass culture had turned into a diagnosis of global policies carried out on a local terrain. Indeed, an amazing number of actual and potential battles of local, national, and international importance are registered in the position paper on university life: the struggle over the Hoover Institution's attempt to encroach on the appointment of faculty in academic departments (despite the fact that the Institution was supposedly independent of the university), the proposal for a Reagan Presidential Library at Stanford, and an attempt to tie language teaching to U.S. foreign policy. Although these initiatives from the right were contested and defeated by faculty and students, the very fact that they had to be fought at all demonstrated the seriousness of the struggle for the academy. Another significant sign of major storms to come that was noted in the position paper was the university's reinstatement of the Western Civilization course requirement which, in our view, gave students the impression "that they have grasped the essence of what is pointedly presented as *their* finest cultural heritage, without ever really having been forced to examine the complexities, contradictions, and omissions inherent in the concept of *a* Western Civilization."

The preoccupation with what passed for "Western civilization" was shared by others on the campus, and eventually resulted in a broadening of the requirement. But this initiative, which became the focus of nationwide publicity and mass-media attacks from the right and is still cited as a bad case of so-called "political correctness," was, in fact, a reaction to the threatened reorganization of the university on pragmatic lines.

In a retrospective overview, Stuart Hall said of the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies: "We never produced organic intellectuals. . . . We never connected with that rising historic movement; it was a metaphoric exercise. Nevertheless, metaphors are serious things."[8] I would claim that *TABLOID*, on the contrary, did at least for a moment connect to the rising historical moment in linking the reorganizations and changes in the university to the military economy of the Reagan years, an economy that has left an inheritance of immense national debt. *TABLOID* dissented from an attitude common among academics that their academic interests could be pursued without reference to global change, an attitude that has recently been held up to scrutiny by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak in her book *Outside in the Teaching Machine* .[9]

In retrospect, the folding of *TABLOID* in 1985 is a great pity, because many of the trends attributed by *TABLOID* to militarization and disciplining (in

position papers on "The Militarization of Everyday Life," as well as in the analyses of university affairs) were intensified later by post-Cold War policies. As Rey Chow shows in her essay "The Age of the World Target" (in this volume), deterrence did not stop with the end of the Cold War but led to "a blurring of the boundary between war and peace," ushering in "a new age of relativity and virtuality, an age in which powers of terror are indistinguishable from powers of 'deterrence,' and technologies of war indissociable from the practices of peace." Indeed, as Chow shows, these developments continue to be most evident in the "disciplining" of our modes of academic knowledge: "The United States has been conducting war on the basis of a certain kind of knowledge production, and producing knowledge on the basis of war." As a corollary to Chow's thesis that "the disciplining, research, and development of so-called academic information are part and parcel of a *strategic* logic," one could mention the wide-ranging increase in control, surveillance and censorship in the epoch of the "free market"—censorship of text-books, of "offensive" art, camera eyes in shopping malls and along streets, attempts to control Internet and television viewing. In a recent interview (*New York Times* , March 11, 1996), Dan Rather stated that pressures on the media "are greater today than almost any time in the past, except the McCarthy era or the late 1960s," adding that the reaction of journalists is most likely to be self-censorship.

What Rey Chow sees as the expansion of military strategies into everyday life may look different if we reintroduce the old-fashioned term *contradiction*. Market forces have no respect for religion, tradition, or history. According to an obituary in *La Nacion* of Bogota (March 6, 1996) for a particularly irreverent Brazilian pop group who were killed in an air crash, their songs undermined every conceivable form of human and family values and were especially popular with four- and five-year-old kids. In Catholic Colombia, naked bodies simulate orgasm on cable TV. Sexual liberation, once the pride of the avant-garde and the counterculture, has become part of a visual and auditory repertoire that is too prevalent to shock anyone but pre-school children. The other side of the coin is, not surprisingly, the retreat into fundamentalism, an increase in the number of topics defined as taboo (including the teaching of evolution in some parts of the United States), and a resurfacing of isolationism. Militarization was one overt form of control, but control is now far more dispersed and insidious.

Once the avenue of opportunity, the university is becoming either an ivy-clad walled city or a containment area for minorities, a glaring example of the latter being the City College of the University of New York, once the stepping-stone for aspiring immigrants who wished to enter the professions. A campus building completed in the eighties resembles a high security prison. Apart from the cafeteria, there is no large central meeting place where students can congregate; there are very few places where they can even sit down. A glass-enclosed bridge between two buildings provides a handy vantage-point for surveillance of any overt signs of dissent. But this open vigilance has been accompanied by economic constraints that are making even more significant inroads

into intellectual life. Under the guise of producing a cost-effective university with an emphasis on results (a trend that has been pushed to the point of absurdity in England), the widespread movement toward rationalization and downsizing has emerged as a major force for cultural retrenchment, calling out for new kinds of academic politics, especially as the downsizing most seriously affects those who are unrepresented in the decision-making process. Even as I write, the underpaid administrative and service staff at Barnard College are marching in protest, having been asked to contribute more of their meager salary to pay for their medical benefits. Many of the faculty stand on the sidelines, not daring to intervene.

TABLOID ceased publishing largely as a result of these broad-based movements toward the "disciplining" of university life; group members found themselves increasingly dispersed geographically and harried professionally—the leisure space for "extra-curricular activities" was rapidly shrinking. But *TABLOID* had progressed from its beginnings as a journal operating in the ruins of the '60s to become a remarkably sensitive monitor of a conservative program that has yet to be fully implemented. For this reason it is as relevant in the desperate '90s as it was in the '80s. Even in its earliest critical explorations of emerging everyday life practices—from TV ads to soaps and horror films, from exercise fads to fashion trends, from baseball cards to video games, from talk media dynamics to new modes of shopping—*TABLOID* brought to the fore key questions and issues that we must face with a new urgency today.

Notes

1. Bruce Robbins, ed., *Intellectuals: Aesthetics, Politics, Academics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990), x.
2. R. Radhakrishnan, "Toward an Effective Intellectual: Foucault or Gramsci?" in Robbins, ed., *Intellectuals*, 57.
3. Andrew Ross, *No Respect: Intellectuals and Popular Culture* (NY: Routledge, 1989).
4. See, for example, Herbert Schiller, *Mass Communications and the American Empire* (NY: A. M. Kelley, 1969).
5. Fredric Jameson, "Reification and Utopia in Mass Culture (1979)," in *Signatures of the Visible* (NY: Routledge, 1990).
6. "Time for the Hot Mouths to Cool It," *Washington Post*, reprinted in *Guardian Weekly* (March10, 1996).
7. George T. Clark, *Leland Stanford, War Governor of California, Railroad Builder and Founder of Stanford University* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1931).
8. Stuart Hall, "Cultural Studies and Its Theoretical Legacies," in L. Grossberg, C. Nelson, and P. Treichler, eds., *Cultural Studies* (NY: Routledge, 1992), 282.
9. Spivak, *Outside in the Teaching Machine* (NY: Routledge, 1993).

On/Against Mass Culture Theories

The *TABLOID* Collective

Though we describe *TABLOID* as a review of mass culture and everyday life, neither term precisely designates our area of concern. Like such terms as popular, folk, highbrow, lowbrow, consumer culture or culture industry, mass culture and everyday life are usually deployed in the service of particular ideological positions. Our first task is to criticize them.

People were first referred to as "the masses" when the working class began to gain access to literacy and knowledge and to acquire cultural capital. To some intellectuals, this immediately revealed the dark side of democracy: masses do not think, they react; they do not discriminate, they consume. More significantly, mass obliterates class, race, and sex. Mass society was defined and described by culture critics such as Ortega y Gasset as a society in which the heedless many use the creativity of the few: his "mass man" does not invent, but merely uses other people's inventions. Mass culture would inherit all the negative aspects attributed to "mass man"—programmed, vicious and mindless, a kind of Dracula sucking the blood of a maiden called High Culture. Yet on examination this creature is more an invention of the culture critics than a reflection of reality.

Historically, terms such as folk and popular culture have had a ring of authenticity that came from association with the people. Mass culture, because of its association not only with mass society but also with mass production, invariably implies a dehumanized technology; it is made an instrument in the rationalizing process of capitalism. Indeed it is true that the new technologies produced new cultural forms. The type-revolving press ushered in the nineteenth-century popular press; engraving and photography ushered in the technological reproduction of the image. Then came the phonograph,

This collectively written "position paper" opened the first issue of TABLOID 1:1 (spring–summer 1980): 1–12.

the cinema, radio, television, cable, and video. These offered a potential restructuring of the cultural field and eventually allowed a broader access to music, drama, and literature and, more positively, to new types of cultural participation. But this democratization was contained, precisely because these technologies were deployed within a patriarchal, discriminatory, and class system, which both organized demands and stigmatized popularity. The terms yellow press, penny dreadful, melodrama, canned music, the Hollywood dream machine, the idiot box, express to perfection capitalism's schizophrenia—its elevation of the market and its depreciation of popularity as suspect.

While liberal and conservative culture critics (e.g., F. R. Leavis in England and Dwight McDonald in the United States) rationalized this situation by

"We see mass culture not merely as the source of false consciousness, but also as the source of the collective energy that might help overcome that false consciousness."

carefully discriminating between the creativity of a privileged high culture and the programmed nature of mass culture, orthodox Marxist critics were also dismissive. Leo Lowenthal's study of popular literature and Arnold Hauser's massive study of art both view mass culture as simply a degenerate form of high culture. The first serious criticism from the Left was in fact initiated by Walter Benjamin, Theodor Adorno, and Max Horkheimer, who, along with Herbert Marcuse and others, have come to be known as the Frankfurt School. This group first came together in Germany in the twenties and much of their work was initially directed to the study of the mass phenomenon of Fascism, and its use of radio, film, and spectacle to reinforce and reproduce the norms of the totalitarian state. Despite the Frankfurt School's tendency to see mass culture solely as an instrument of propaganda, Benjamin grasped one crucial factor about the new media that had hitherto been overlooked—namely the fact that they had already modified our ways of seeing, that the work of art was irrevocably changed since mass reproduction inevitably called into question the status of art works as unique and unrepeatable artifacts. Not only were art objects transformed by the media, but so also was audience reception; instead of contemplation, the cinema (for example) encouraged "distracted" viewing. Benjamin's early death meant, however, that these observations remained brilliant insights rather than systematic contributions to mass culture theory. The migration of Adorno, Horkheimer, and Marcuse to the United States led to new theoretical developments as well. Unlike the totalitarian state in Germany, the United States offered the example of democracy in which the legitimation of capitalism came "from below," that is, from the market itself. Instead of the government orchestrating a vast totalitarian spectacle focused on a mythic leader, the democratic process was decentralized, "internalized" in individuals who perceived themselves as exercising discrimination and choice. The process which Max Weber, the nineteenth-century German soci-

ologist, had described as "rationalization" involved the conversion of science and technology into an ideological force that had now gathered its own momentum: traditional values and cultural forms were now deployed not for the sake of ideological control but as tools in an ever-expanding process of production.

Though Herbert Marcuse made the most sweeping analysis of advanced capitalism (see *One-Dimensional Man*), it was Adorno, particularly in his article on popular music, who attempted to show precisely how the formal elements of an art can be pressed into the service of capitalist rationalization. And yet, though *TABLOID* recognizes the pioneer work in cultural analysis done by Adorno, we believe that his rigid distinction between high and low culture, serious and popular art, glosses over a number of important issues raised by mass cultural activity. The drawing of boundaries within culture presumes clear criteria for isolating and then evaluating cultural phenomena. It is our opinion that mass culture questions as much as it confirms. To speak of an absolute separation between great art and mass culture is to ignore unsettling questions about the making and the value of culture. What *TABLOID* intends to develop here and in the future is a field of inquiry that opens up problems and possibilities beyond such restrictive categories.

The American university system has attempted to absorb this problematic area into a recognizable discipline: communications. Since the Second World War, during which a great explosion of electronic media and data-gathering processes took place, communications has grown as an academic discipline to become a science based almost solely on information theory. This development, as well as the more recent one of semiotics (i.e., the study of sign systems), represent efforts to devise an objective and scientific approach to media studies. The isolating of cultural activity from specific contexts and practices, however, has resulted in the seemingly bland and harmless pursuits that characterize the pietistic university department today—pursuits that are remote from the complex strategies of power in which communications plays only one part.

Manipulation Theories

Most discussion of mass culture today, both inside and outside of the university, centers on manipulation theory, that is, the notion that mass cultural artifacts convey to a passive consumer the ideological message that the designing or manipulating class intends to be conveyed. We wish to question the assumptions behind and the applicability of such a notion. This is not to say that *TABLOID* completely dismisses all theories based on the notion of manipulation; to do so would be unrealistic and naive and would lead to the unthinking celebration of mass culture characteristic of, for instance, the *Journal of Popular Culture*. We recognize that the manipulation of desires is intended, attempted, and often successful in capitalistic society. What *TABLOID* objects to is the universal and arbitrary application of the theory to all of mass culture,

as though manipulation were a self-evident fact of mass cultural activity—or worse, as though manipulation were the condition of mass culture itself. On the contrary, capitalist society is too complex and decentered to maintain such unrelieved manipulation of people and their desires. Manipulation is only a part of the picture, and *TABLOID* intends to explore the other parts as well.

Some of the most important studies of culture under capitalism do employ some version of manipulation theory. Two cases in point: Marcuse's concept of a "one-dimensional society" that incorporates and neutralizes liberatory or erotic opposition; and Stanley Aronowitz's depiction of mass culture as a sort of social regulator that functions by creating a system of "pseudo-gratification" for defusing creative energies. Both of these models underline the importance of manipulation theory to the left. Jerry Mander's recent attack on television plays upon a widespread fear of being controlled by the networks—the tube has imprinted the worst that has been thought and said on our brains, dickered with our mental structures, and scrambled all the gray matter: the synapses will never be the same. In a significant elaboration of this line of thought, Fredric Jameson (in his *The Political Unconscious*) has offered a Freudian analysis of mass culture attempting to trace the power of manipulation to its tapping and containment of unconscious energies.

Nearly all mass culture theorists recognize in mass culture a utopian element, which acknowledges real lacks in society and points toward solutions. In the crucial words of Hans Magnus Enzensberger, another critic in the tradition of the Frankfurt School, "the attractive power of mass consumption is based not on the dictates of false needs, but on the falsification of quite real and legitimate ones." Some theorists, such as Jameson, see this utopian element as serving only to further the work of containment of desires; it is the component that ensures the success of the mechanisms of manipulation. Others, like Enzensberger, see in it a great progressive potential. The "real and legitimate needs" spoken for in some mass cultural forms, which give these mass cultural practices their attractive power, are not always and everywhere held in the service of manipulation. Enzensberger resists ceding the power of real needs to the exclusive use of manipulation and control, and rather sees the utopian element as a challenge to the radical critic: "A socialist movement ought not to denounce these needs, but take them seriously, investigate them, and make them politically productive." In Enzensberger's argument lies an implicit criticism of all theories based on the notion of manipulation, because in effect all manipulation theories end up simply denouncing those expressed needs as forms of "false consciousness," not taking them seriously, since those needs are seen to function, finally, as mere accessories to the manipulative crime of mass cultural life. If they have no function apart from their role in drawing the masses in so that they can be more fully and forcefully manipulated, these "needs" can never be "politically productive" in Enzensberger's sense. But Enzensberger's formulation defines precisely the areas of special concern to *TABLOID*: we take the pleasures and attractions of mass culture seriously, and want to investigate these "real needs" with an eye to under-

standing them and opening them to new channels of fuller expression—thus perhaps helping to bring out and give voice to the "politically productive" energies they embody. Following Enzensberger (and also inspired by the crucial, groundbreaking work of Walter Benjamin in his Arcades Project), we see mass culture as a complex process drawing upon multiple contradictory impulses, and so take it not merely as the source of false consciousness, but also as the source of the collective energy that might help to overcome such false consciousness. In our view, the "utopian" urges embedded in mass cultural practices and products can become prime sites for radical criticism of the dominant order. It may be possible, then, after all, to envision forms of engagement with mass cultural life that are also in some ways resistant to its manipulative tendencies.

Manipulation theory, in its various versions, sets up a structure of control (manipulation/containment/repression/regulation) on the one hand and a well of deep energies (fantasies/desires/instincts/needs/creative or liberatory forces) on the other. It reduces mass culture to a well-oiled machine that runs on the steam we provide but that produces nothing of value in return. It assumes that we have all signed on for the duration as zombies, that we like to walk in a straight line, watch, listen, and read as if in a dream. In drawing this scenario, manipulation theory parcels out our humanity in an arbitrary fashion: all the brains go to the mechanisms and mechanics in charge while the involuntary processes, like breathing, are left to us. There is in short no allowance for the possibility of intelligent and conscious and critical participation in mass culture, because only those energies beyond individual control are finally beyond manipulative control. This simple assumption underlies all versions of manipulation theory, no matter what qualities are given to the "deep" energies seen to be working in mass culture. For critics like us who believe that strategies of resistance and productive action can and have been developed within mass culture and everyday life, such a framework for analysis settles all the important questions before they can even be raised.

Mass Culture and "Everyday Life"

"Everyday life" emerged as an important area of inquiry only in the early 1950s (although important precedents may be found in the work of Walter Benjamin and in a certain "rightist" sociological tradition best represented by George Simmel's studies of the sociology of the modern industrial city). In this period, the analysis of daily life was undertaken by French existentialist critics, most notably Henri Lefebvre, motivated by the fear that working classes of the advanced capitalist nations had ceased to be "revolutionary" in the context of a "bureaucratic society of controlled consumption." In their view, the traditional Marxist emphasis on the decisive role of the workplace in the formation of political consciousness had to give way to an analysis of the role of leisure-time pursuits and everyday life. Societal values, they believed, were constituted and reinforced in schools and universities, in stores, at football games, at the

dinner table, in clubs and movie houses, and so on; in these places individuals participated in the policing and containment of their own lives. The term "consumer society" came to replace the older concepts of "class" and "mass" society, and the new media (television in particular) were seen as instrumental in the casting of mass man's fulsome successor: the consumer. Needless to say, certain family traits were preserved. Like his or her amorphous ancestor, the consumer (according to this theory) does not produce, but rather passively and ravenously feeds his (or her) consumer habit.

In the wake of these early efforts two significant contributions to the analysis of everyday life came from the French structuralist camp. The study of sign systems in everyday life, or "cultural semiotics," as practiced for example in the work of the late Roland Barthes (*Critical Essays* and *Mythologies*), has led to elaborate formal analysis of fashion, food, interior decoration, architecture, and a wide range of mass cultural phenomena. These sorts of inquiry, conducted with the sophisticated tools of modern linguistics, have occasionally yielded interesting theoretical results. Yet such studies as "Hubcap and Mag wheel designs as a formalized combinatory system" can hardly be expected to lead us toward an adequate mass culture theory. Cultural semiotics has as a whole tended simply to describe the various codes and systems through which individuals participate in a given society or social class, while ignoring the dynamic interaction that takes place between these individuals and these codes. In short, in the thinking of most cultural semioticians, reception is still a passive ingestion of messages, not, as *TABLOID* believes it to be, participatory.

The work of Jean Baudrillard, on the other hand, represents an attempt to incorporate the analysis of everyday life into a general sociopolitical theory. In *Le système des objets* (1968), for example, beginning with a detailed consideration of furniture design, household appliances, interior decoration, and other elements of daily life, Baudrillard attempts to explode the myth of "consumption" by showing how commodities function as signs in advanced capitalism. Baudrillard increasingly finds (see *The Mirror of Production*) that the traditional "productivism" of Marxist analysis, with its emphasis on the material modes of production as the determinant social instance, leads to the systematic undervaluing of the sociopolitical importance of symbolic, semiotic, and/or linguistic exchanges. In Marx's time it was easy enough to trace the commodity back to its materiality (i.e., the material conditions of its production), and in turn to its use-value and surplus-value. Yet in the age of the media blitzkrieg, when a breakfast cereal can say "I love you," it would certainly seem that we are confronted not with an economy of *production* so much as an economy of *promotion*.

If we follow for a moment the history of the marketplace, Baudrillard's point about the economy of promotion becomes particularly clear. During the nineteenth century, the traditional open-air farmer's market was gradually assimilated into the space of the modern industrial metropolis by a process of progressive *enclosure* and *interiorization*. This initial centralization of the mar-

ketplace led to the further ordering and specialization of its interior space. The modern supermarket, radically specialized and compartmentalized, organizes the competitive multiplicity of vendors and their wares into competing packages. The actual commodity is thus itself "interiorized" as the significance attached to its cosmetic surface grows; it appears first and foremost within the codes of packaging and promotion, and only subsequently in the codes of use and of nature. Producers themselves are led to adopt this new point of view; producing for the code of packaging, they invent such wonders as the flavorless, ruby-red tomato, the perfectly bag-sized carrot. The supermarket interior furthers this process of semantic reversal and accretion by offering itself as a sort of meta-package: establishing a playful dialogue with the discourse of packaging (its calligraphy, its designs, its materials, its surfaces), the supermarket assembles a general "image" that identifies the products themselves as clean, cheerful, true, glossy, modern . . . and appeals to our own self-images.

One of the most notable cultural shifts during the advent of advanced capitalism is this move from a market organized around individual categories of products to one organized around buyers investing in diverse and multifaceted "images," and for whom the actual consumer goods are nothing but a single element in a more general economy of self-identification.

The processes of appropriation (e.g., an advertising jingle becoming a common link between people), and of identification (such as with the cosmetic—"looks," fads—or with brand-name products: Dodge vans, Motown) can help form new social groupings that elude the manipulative control of industry. In such a socioeconomic system individuals can find in commodities meanings that have nothing to do with their uses and functions. Consequently, every act of consumption must be understood as the *active* participation in a set of generalized codes.

Baudrillard's argument, however, fails to live up to its promise, because he attributes such all-embracing power to the code. He refers to the *terrorism* of the code in order to account for the way that the signifier is monopolized by capitalism. Capitalism's appropriation of the signifier is so complete that affirmation and opposition are simply generated as an interplay of signs and can no longer be anchored in any real situation. Real opposition can only come from outside the encoded system: we are left with the spontaneity of revolutionary insurrection and spontaneous free speech as the only viable forms of resistance. Two criticisms can be leveled against this idea. First, the term "code" implies a relatively static system abstracted from any specific use. Second, Baudrillard's theories appear to explain more appropriately a particular aspect of everyday life (i.e., advertising) rather than culture in general. We can agree with his analysis if it is applied in a less sweeping way. For advertising does exist in the absence of any traditionally conceived ideology: instead of basing itself on firm ideological principles, its mode of operation is tactical, strategic, and positional. Its repertory is, to say the least, amazingly versatile: it may recall nostalgic utopian pasts, locate itself within the avant-garde, or affirm its allegiance to all society. Strictures and structures—whether moral, erotic, formal,

historical, social—are all so many stimulants to ensure the effectiveness of its discourse. Advertising may evoke Taboo and Opium; it may celebrate Tsarist Russia (Wolfschmidt's vodka) or describe a product as revolutionary; it may celebrate the exclusiveness of the upper class (the hand-numbered object or the classic book) or the democracy of the common man (everyone has a Bud coming to him). But in the more general life of the culture, when capitalism operates in this sort of "advertising mode," appropriating older belief systems, high cultural forms, popular culture, myth, atavistic fears, and progressive hopes, and redeploying them as signs, it is always involved in a high risk operation—it risks posing seriously the very contradictions that are trivialized by advertising. Far from enforcing the "terrorism of the code," then, advanced capitalism is engaged in a dangerous play.

Stressing Contexts and User Practices over Manipulative Producers and Products

The incorporation of taboos, traditions, and principles into the play of signs is itself ideological, as Fredric Jameson has argued in his article "Reification and Utopia in Mass Culture" (*Social Text* I). In his discussion of the movie *Jaws*, Jameson mentions the many interpretations of the shark, which range from its representing the communist or Third World Other that threatens our society to its embodying the relentlessly organic ("a machine designed for survival"), adding that to fasten on any one interpretation is to miss the ideological point of the shark:

> Now none of these readings can be said to be wrong or aberrant, but their very multiplicity suggests that the vocation of the symbol—the killer shark—lies less in any single message or meaning than in its very capacity to absorb and organize all of these quite distinct anxieties together. As a symbolic vehicle, then, the shark must be understood in terms of its essentially polysemous function rather than any particular content attributable to it by this or that spectator. Yet it is precisely his polysemousness which is profoundly ideological, insofar as it allows essentially social and historical anxieties to be folded back into apparently "natural" ones, to be both expressed and recontained in what looks like a conflict with other forms of biological existence.

According to Jameson, what we now experience in mass culture is a more subtle confounding of our senses than that brought about by the single ideological message. Like the consumer society which produces it, mass culture offers us an array of items to choose from—only, in this case, the items are meanings. Pluralism, the ideological mainstay of late capitalism, is thus reproduced, or re-presented, in mass culture. It is the single message behind all individual interpretations, the pitch behind all freedom of choice. Yet Jameson's example, *Jaws*, is one which depends on the ability of the biological or the natural to organize and dominate all other meanings. In this respect, *Jaws* belongs to a more anachronistic mode of producing the ideological, in which nature

itself as the given and the unalterable is used to effect a closure of meaning. The more sophisticated products of advanced capitalism no longer need these archaic resources, however. And though *TABLOID* believes that Jameson's argument about polysemousness (or multiplicity of meaning) does bear directly on the production of meaning in contemporary mass culture, we would propose shifting the focus of attention from the "deep" symbol, a favorite notion of an analysis basically literary, to the processes that produce the various meanings.

To talk about the symbol and its mysterious capacity to mean several different things seems to us an evasion of the harder and more important question. This harder question is not *where* the plurality of meaning is located, but *how* the plurality of meaning emerges. *Jaws* again provides a sample instance. On the one hand, the shark in *Jaws* takes on diverse meanings from its interplay with other elements of the film. Clearly the most important of these is the response of the three major characters to the shark. If, for example, the shark assumes mythic proportions (Leviathan) or literary status (Moby Dick), this is largely due to the web of meaning spun around the creature by the old salt Quint, who functions both as Jeremiah and Ahab. Similarly, if the shark embodies a threat to bourgeois order (i.e., the smooth operation of the tourist economy as well as the earned enjoyment of the Labor Day holiday), we can look to the actions of Brody the cop as the source of that interpretation. The list also includes interplays specific to the medium of film. If, as some argue, the shark represents some primitive urge to violence in all creatures, including man, the opening sequence in which the audience cruises the shallows with the shark to the accompaniment of the ominous coda might encourage such thinking. In short, thematically and technically, the shark is constituted and given meaning in many different ways.

On the other hand, the meaning of the shark also depends on forces external to the film. An understanding of the context for the reception of *Jaws* must complement the analysis of its internal workings, for its meaning will vary according to the social, historical, economic, and political context in which it is viewed. Needless to say, a manipulative attempt to control the context is elaborately made. Consider the release of *Jaws*, for example. Having made a film with various and intriguing possibilities for interpretation, the people behind *Jaws* then concoct the "right" context for its reception, using all the resources of advertising (terrifying fliers: "Just when you thought it was safe . . . "), of the press hype (reports on movie crowds, shark sightings worldwide), and of commercial retailing (T-shirts, stuffed animals, rubber floats, etc.). The result is an overwhelming vote for the fear of the biological enemy as *the* way to interpret the movie—much as Jameson claims. Yet the point is that the "natural" meaning is not so much pushed forward by the movie itself, as Jameson claims, as it is drawn out by a particular, historical context for viewing, intense and hard sell at the beginning, now no longer with us. Now with the threat of worldwide military violence in view, the blind butchery of a large fish seems almost pastoral in comparison. One wonders what "natural" mean-

ing, what dominant context for reception, takes place under present circumstances.

An examination of specific contexts for reception is one way to challenge the model of meaning production proposed by manipulation theory. As contexts vary, so also vary the different meanings of the mass cultural process, and the possibility of fully manipulating response seems increasingly unlikely. Another more radical strategy is to question the status of what is examined in the study of mass culture. It is customary to speak of mass culture "objects" or "artifacts" or "products." These terms are indispensable in the absence of more precise ones, but they are nevertheless unsatisfactory. In mass culture there is no primary object or "original" to be preserved and reproduced in "mere" copies. To use Fredric Jameson's words, there is in mass culture no "primary object of study," "no first time of repetition, no 'original' of which succeeding representations are mere copies." One commonly finds among mass culture critics a nostalgic demand for those solid, no-nonsense objects that provide the stable reality to which we can return again and again. *TABLOID* takes a different approach. We believe that a notion of *practices*, of determinate activities repeated and redeployed throughout mass culture, comes closer to describing the peculiar nature of mass culture than the other more "solid" terms. The focus of our analysis, then, is the network of interrelated mass cultural practices, not the isolated artifact. As part of the network that links it to other practices, the artifact (another unsatisfactory term) is actually a field or space in which diverse practices—from both "high" and "low" culture—meet and recombine. *Apocalypse Now*, for example, brings together the plot line of a Conrad *novella*, the narrative voice of the hard-boiled detective novel of the '30s, the montage techniques of an Eisenstein film, the sexual titillation of *Playboy*, and the vicarious violence of the newsclip (to name a few) into something we could call a "primary object"—but to what purpose? *TABLOID* would attempt to understand such mass cultural phenomena as a redeployment—repetitions but with differences—of practices, techniques, strategies, fantasies, and so on, that are readily available in capitalist society.

Once the object of our analysis is "dissolved" or, rather, seen for the conjuncture of various practices that it is, we can begin to perceive the tensions and contradictions in mass culture. The artifact of mass culture is not so smooth and seamless as manipulation theory would have us believe, like a sheer and polished rock face that allows for no scrambling; on the contrary, it is a rough, irregular surface, with fissures that enable one to find footholds. *TABLOID* believes that discovering those footholds is the first step toward understanding *and* transforming the meanings and political function of mass cultural phenomena. Identifying and then forcing the contradictions in capitalist society has long been a tactic of radical analysis and activity, but in the field of mass culture, it takes on a new significance. Mass culture and everyday life involve us, obviously, at every turn: there is little chance of escaping the network of meanings and ideology that defines our lives in so many hidden and not-so-hidden ways. Yet to see the contradictions in the supposedly univo-