

The theory of articulation in cultural studies

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(Based on the article by Jennifer Daryl
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The word «articulation» is an old word with a lot of senses beside the cultural one, but in every contexts it means making things together to make a unity.

Articulation is used as a method of cultural studies. Yet, it isn't some definite pattern or algorithm that we can just lay on a researched object or problem. It is a method in a more complex sense.

«Method similarly can suggest rigid templates or practical techniques to orchestrate research. But again, cultural studies works with a conception of method as «practice», which suggests both techniques to be used as resources as well as the activity of practicing or «trying out». In this double sense, techniques are borrowed and combined, worked with and through, and reworked. Again, the commitment is always to be able to adapt our methods as the new historical realities we engage keep also moving on down the road».

In cultural studies three basic definitions of articulation co-exist at the same time.

«However, articulation works at additional levels: at the levels of the **epistemological**, the **political** and the **strategic**. Epistemologically, articulation is a way of thinking the structures of what we know as a play of **correspondences**, **non-correspondences** and **contradictions**, as fragments in the constitution of what we take to be unites. Politically, articulation is a way of foregrounding the structure and play of **power** that entail in relations of **dominance** and **subordination**. Strategically, articulation provides a mechanism for **shaping intervention** within a particular social formation, conjuncture or context.»

Articulation is also both theory and practice as well as it is both since theory and method of scientific research.

««Theory» is a term that often connotes an objective, formal tool, or even a «value-free» heuristic device. Cultural studies resists thinking in terms of the «application» of theory in this sense, where theory is used to «let you off the hook, providing answers which are always known in advance or endlessly deferring any answer into the field of its endless reflexions and reflexivity» (Grossberg, 1992). In place of that conception of theory, cultural studies works of theory as a «detour» to help ground our engagement with what newly confronts us and to let that engagement provide the ground of retheorizing. Theory is thus a practice in a double sense: it is a formal conceptual tool as well as a practicing of «trying out» of a way of theorizing.»

Articulation is a process of making notional and communicative links. It means not only the way some senses dominate the other, become more notable and important, but also coordinating interests of all the discursive actors.

«First, articulation was not «born» whole nor has it ever achieved that status. It has never been, nor should it be, delineated or used as a completely «sewn-up» theory or method. Rather, it is a complex, unfinished phenomenon that has emerged and continues to emerge genealogically. Second, articulation has never been configured as simply one thing. The ways in which articulation has been developed, discussed and used tend to foreground and background certain theoretical, methodological, epistemological, political and strategic forces, interests and issues».

The articulation theory is based on Marxist framework, though it argues the reduction of culture to basis and superstructure.

«In theorizing this space, a number of Marxist theorists are drawn on: most notably Althusser (who drew on Gramsci and Marx), Gramsci (who drew on Marx) and, of course, Marx. Its principal architects have been Laclau and Hall.»

The theory of articulation is not something
restrictly limited or complete, it is a complex
method, that includes a number of sense and
research positions.

«Without having exactly theorized what articulation is and how it works , it becomes the sign that speaks of other possibilities , of other ways of theorizing the elements of a social formation and the relations that constitute it not simply as relations of non-correspondence and contradiction, and how these relations constitute unities that instantiate relations of dominance and subordination. This process of siting the space as a terrain for theorizing accounts to some extent for the difficulties and resistance –that still exist in pointing to what exactly articulation is. The point is that it isn`t *exactly* anything.»

«Articulation is, then, not just a thing (not just a connection) but a process of creating connections, much in the same way that hegemony is not domination but the process of creating and maintaining consensus or of co-ordinating interests.»

Thank you for your attention!