Infrastructures of Feeling
Media, Materialism, and Struggles for the Geographies of Culture

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…“Times Square’s Last Peepshow”

1515 Broadway, 2002
…“Times Square’s Last Peepshow”

1515 Broadway, 2012
“[Culture] is a sort of premature utopia, abolishing struggle at an imaginary level so that [it] need not resolve it at a political one.”

Terry Eagleton
(2000: 7)
Cultural Landscape: Geography as Technology as Geography

- Representation $\leftrightarrow$ Logistic

- Land is not just a representation of dominant/residual/emergent social relations, it is also an actor.

- Shape, morphology, of the land constructs a shared glimpse, an illusion of naturalness, hiding relations of its production

- Materiality of imagination, memory, & ideology
Cultural Landscape: “Hybrid Geographies”

- Circuits of Human $\leftrightarrow$ Non-human actors, socio-nature
- Space is relational
- “Vibrant matter” with “Thing power”
- Things matter, no autonomous “individual”… good, but as (foundation of) an anti-capitalist project…?
Media: The appropriation of time through the transformation of space
Infrastructures of Feeling and the “Right to the [Media]”

“For structures of feeling can be defined as social experience in solution, as distinct from other social semantic formations which have been precipitated and are more evidently and more immediately available.”

Ramond Williams, Marxism and Literature (1977: 133-4).
“First, …they are changes of presence; second, …although they are emergent or pre-emergent, they do not have to await definition, classification, or rationalization before they exert palpable pressures and set effective limits on experience and action.”

Williams (1977: 132)
Tangible, material conditions within which social forms of “feeling,” our social emotions are developed, felt, and communicated—made possible and/or necessary.

They are also the spatial relationships composed by the particular uses of those environments.
the wiring, equipping, privatizing, and constructing social environments so as to create the conditions of possibility for cultural authority at increasingly predictable rates
(Late-)Capitalist Cultural Landscape
Dominant Conditions of Landscape...

- Crisis of Underconsumption, Costs of Circulation (e.g. Branding, Ads)
- Enclosure and Rent (e.g. TiVO, VOD)
- Finance, Risk, and Real Estate (e.g. Cell Towers)
“Under the new order, the windmill goes around and so the wind must blow. It is becoming a matter of general remark that the economic emphasis is changing; it is shifting from how to make things to how to dispose of things that are made so that the machine can be kept in constant operation. The problem before us today is not how to *produce* the goods, but how to produce the customers.”

Samuel Strauss,
“Things are in the Saddle,”
Atlantic Monthly (1924)
The next generation media experience? You’re lookin’ at it. Each MTV platform has distinct strengths. MTV 360° exploits the best of each, then integrates them to maximize the impact of any programming event. One event + three screens = limitless possibilities. Wherever they go, there you [advertisers] are.”
– Paul Lazarsfeld, with Rockefeller support begins projects for empirical methodology for the study of “suggestibility”
– Adorno for Princeton Radio Research Project (1938-40)

- "It appears to me that the guiding interest behind investigations of such character is basically one of administrative technique: How can a given, more or less central agency handle most successfully given groups…"

- “The logical form of such investigation is moulded according to the ideal of a skilled manipulation of masses.”
Today is Qube day.
Public and Private Investment

• 1994: Mayor Giuliani gives $15 million in tax breaks to Viacom to expand operations in Midtown Manhattan.

  • Between 1994 and 1997, Giuliani had given away roughly $700 Million in “corporate retention” deals.

• 1997 MTV constructs new $8 Million Midtown Studios

  → expected to yield a return of $300 million in ad sales for that year, 1997, alone
Geography of the Urban Circuits of MTV

Viacom Building, 44th St. & Broadway

“The Switch,” 60 Hudson St.

Viacom N.O.C., Hauppauge, NY

Manhattan

Brooklyn

Queens

Nassau County

Suffolk County
Landscape of the Urban Circuits of MTV
My TiVo gets me.

We know eyeballs.

“Billboards That Look Back”

http://www.nytimes.com/2008/05/31/business/media/31billboard.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0
“The Ecstasy of [Alienation]”

“We no longer partake of the drama of alienation, but are in the ecstasy of communication. And this ecstasy is obscene.”

Total Request Live: Ecstasy at 1515 Broadway
“All art demands a ‘being-outside-of-one-self,’ an ekstasis…”
“1866   A. Flint Treat. Princ. Med. 628   Ecstasy. In this condition, the mind, absorbed in a dominant idea, becomes insensible to surrounding objects.

“1882   R. Quain Dict. Med. s.v.,   The term ecstasy has been applied to certain morbid states of the nervous system, in which the attention is occupied exclusively by one idea, and the cerebral control is in part withdrawn from the lower cerebral and certain reflex functions. These latter centres may be in a condition of inertia, or of insubordinate activity, presenting various disordered phenomena, for the most part motor.”
TRL and the Spatial Production of Ecstasy
Enclosing “Ekstasis”
“The worker emerges not only not richer, but emerges rather poorer from the process than he entered … He has produced not only the alien wealth and his own poverty, but also the relation of this wealth as independent, self-sufficient wealth, relative to himself as the poverty which this wealth consumes, and from which wealth thereby draws new vital spirits into itself, and realizes itself anew.”
"The secret of aesthetic sublimation is its representation of fulfillment as a broken promise. The culture industry does not sublimate; it represses. By repeatedly exposing the objects of desire, breasts in a clinging sweater or the naked torso of the athletic hero, it only stimulates the unsublimated forepleasure which habitual deprivation has long since reduced to a masochistic semblance. There is no erotic situation which, while insinuating and exciting, does not fail to indicate unmistakably that things can never go that far."

“If you think about our demographic, which is primarily a teenage demographic, you know, self-esteem is always an issue with teenagers. […] And I think that’s what makes the demographic identify with those [mortises] and I think that’s why older people have a hard time understanding what those are all about because they don’t know that this is like their moment to shine. Like when you’re a kid, you just wanna be that person, the most popular kid in class. And for that 15-seconds you were that most popular kid in the audience.”

“You know, just that excitement of being able to see what’s going on in the studio from outside and then, there’s always a chance that the celebrity’s gonna come outside…”
“And in contests when the kid wins, we always have the MTV crew actually go and follow them for the day and they have to be really outgoing, camera savvy, fun…um…not nervous and that they’re just gonna do like a great job reporting for us and being like our TRL correspondent. And…just, like, your average person isn’t capable of doing that. So, it takes a lot more casting really trying to find…people [who] have what it takes to be comfortable in front of a camera.”

“In my speech, I kind of let them know that it’s like live television, how important the energy is for the show. Cuz, I think that the cool vibe of TRL is that you wanna be in that studio; like how amazing is it that these kids are sitting right next to Ja Rule?!?! And for kids who are in Alabama or in Oklahoma, like, [who] would love to be there… So you just want the energy to be amazing.”
The Crisis of Authority

“You never want it to feel like it’s by the numbers. I mean we do a lot of soft-ball interviews because people come by here to promote more than anything, that’s why Tom Cruise is here. Here’s not here to talk about Iraq. He’s here to talk about Minority Report and why you should go see it. It’s finding that balance between promoting that product and making compelling television.”

Rick, Head Writer, TRL

“It’s all about stepping back and looking at it like a 12 year old girl in Montana. Because it’s so easy to take for granted, you know we’re here in New York, I’m thirty, I like in New York City, I know a lot about music, I know a lot about Pop Culture. The average viewer doesn’t.”
“You know, it’s easy to monitor who your demographic is because you have 100 kids out there everyday.”

Greg, Managing Producer, TRL
We go through their music collections. We go to nightclubs with them. …We shut the door in their bedrooms and talk to them about issues that they feel are really important to them. We talk with them about what it's like to date today; what it's like dealing with their parents; what things stress them out the most; what things are really on the hearts and minds of them and their peers. …And then we're allowed to come back and translate that into programming opportunities or just insights in general about what the audience actually does.”

MTV: “…Something is provided for all so that none may escape…”

Todd Cunningham, Senior Vice President of Brand Strategy and Planning at MTV. Quoted in Frontline, 2001.
“Our brands are great navigation tools for our audiences, and this deal with Google will enable us to follow and lead them to new places”

Judy McGrath, President, MTV Networks (2007)
Feedback… Ecstasy as Alienation, Through Alienation.

“The heart of MTV Networks' success lies in connecting targeted, niche audiences with content that speaks to their unique passions, interests and lifestyles…Through [the new] Tribes [strategy], we're giving marketers the opportunity to reach an even greater number of relevant consumers in a targeted and efficient way”

Nada Stirratt, MTV Networks Executive Vice President, Digital Advertising (2008)
Feedback… The Urban Metabolization of Human-Nature

“The new MTV Tribes [ad] network provides us with reach and relevancy along with granular targeting and reporting.”

John Vail, director of Pepsi-Cola North America’s Interactive Marketing Group (2008)
Struggle over the Pop Cultural Landscape
Infrastructures and the “Prince”
• Gramsci, *Avanti*, (1917):

“I give culture this meaning: exercise of thought, acquisition of general ideas, habit of connecting causes and effects. For me, everybody is already cultured because everybody thinks, everybody connects causes and effects. But they are empirically, primordially cultured, not organically. They therefore waver, disband, soften, or become violent, intolerant, quarrelsome, according to the occasion and circumstances. I’ll make myself clearer: I have a Socratic idea of culture; I believe that it means thinking well; whatever one thinks, and therefore acting well, whatever one does. …Let us organize culture in the same way that we seek to organize any practical activity.”
History, which threatens this twilight world, is also the force which could subject space to lived time. Proletarian revolution is the critique of human geography through which individuals and communities have to create places and events suitable for the appropriation, no longer just of their labor, but of their total history. In this game’s changing space, and in the freely chosen variations in the game’s rules, the autonomy of place can be rediscovered without the reintroduction of an exclusive attachment to the land, thus bringing back the reality of the voyage and of life understood as a voyage which contains its entire meaning within itself.
Debord #92:

The fact that anarchists have seen the goal of proletarian revolution as immediately present represents both the strength and the weakness of collectivist anarchist struggles (the only forms of anarchism that can be taken seriously — the pretensions of the individualist forms of anarchism have always been ludicrous). From the historical thought of modern class struggles collectivist anarchism retains only the conclusion, and its constant harping on this conclusion is accompanied by a deliberate indifference to any consideration of methods. Its critique of political struggle has thus remained abstract, while its commitment to economic struggle has been channeled toward the mirage of a definitive solution that will supposedly be achieved by a single blow on this terrain, on the day of the general strike or the insurrection. The anarchists have saddled themselves with fulfilling an ideal. Anarchism remains a merely ideological negation of the state and of class society — the very social conditions which in their turn foster separate ideologies. It is the ideology of pure freedom, an ideology that puts everything on the same level and loses any conception of the “historical evil” (the negation at work within history).
[Humiliation] for Accumulation’s Sake

The settler’s town is a well-fed town, an easygoing town; its belly is always full of good things. The native town is a hungry town, starved of bread, of meat, of shoes, of coal, of light… The look that the native turns on the settler’s town is a look of lust, a look of envy; it expresses his dreams of possession—all manner of possession: to sit at the settler’s table, to sleep in the settler’s bed, with his wife if possible. The colonized man is an envious man.

Franz Fanon, The Wretched of the Earth (1965: 39).
“You need people who are sufficiently like the audience that people can feel that they can invest in them or about them enough, but different enough to feel interesting and exciting…they need to be good looking…they need to be able to be emotionally convincing in terms of what they’re doing even though they are needing to do it in a situation that feels enormously un-genuine…you need to try to find people who will come across in that situation like the cameras are not there, in other words… You get as many people as you can…”

Cyril, Producer, 
Liquidate Your Life and Man Camp

Casting Everyday Life
“They [A&E] wanted to lower their age demographic slightly because it was older than they wanted it to be at the moment. They wanted to tap into the kind of Baby Boomer Generation and the whole idea of checking out of the life you’ve got at the moment, which is very appealing to that age range.”

“They [contestants] are not going to win anything apart from learning about themselves and their life which is in itself quite positive, but they have to take a week off work…[etc…] it’s quite a lot they have to give up in order to do it. So, it’s a difficult sell in some ways.”
You have to have redemption, is like the biggest thing of all, particularly in modern TV. There’s no point having people who are loathsome at the beginning and loathsome at the end, because it just sort of feels like cheap laughs more than anything else. So, what you want are people at the beginning who the audience finds in some way repellant who by the end of their time [on the show]…have learned about themselves and progressed to a point that people think, ‘aw, that’s nice.’”

Catharsis and Redemption

Cyril, Producer, Liquidate Your Life and Man Camp
“every commodity is a symbol, in so far as it is value, it is only the material envelope of the human labour spent upon it.”

Marx (Grundrisse, 1973: 95)

The exploration of the earth in all directions...; the development, hence, of the natural sciences to their highest point; likewise the discovery, creation and satisfaction of new needs arising from society itself; the cultivation of all the qualities of the social human being, production of the same in a form as rich as possible in needs... production of this being as the most total and universal possible social product, for, in order to take gratification in a many-sided way, he must be capable of many pleasures, hence cultured to a high degree – is likewise a condition of production founded on capital.

Marx (Capital V.1, 1992: 95)