Current theoretical shifts in feminist, social and cultural theory provide a renewed framework on which to base a critical media and cultural studies pedagogy. Reconceptualizations of the human subject in cultural studies, feminist, poststructuralist, and postmodernist theories enable a rearticulation of how social subjects are constructed by, actively construct meaning from, and 'read' cultural texts. I will argue here that critical media studies pedagogy can be conceptually based on these theoretical reformulations of subjectivity, identity, and text(s), and that media and 'cultural literacy' ought to be a foundational curricular component in any undergraduate syllabus. By cultural literacy I mean a critical literacy of the cultural present—not of the canonized past—of which media literacy is just one component. This kind of literacy is not the kind advocated by cultural preservationists such as Hirsch (1987), but rather one that focuses on the critical study of the imagery and iconography of contemporary media and popular culture.

This essay begins with an introduction to cultural and media literacy, and then outlines aspects of contemporary social theories which I consider salient to a media and cultural studies pedagogy. I then turn to feminist pedagogy in efforts to link teaching-learning practices to the theoretical templates, epistemological standpoints, and political agendas of feminist, cultural studies, and postmodern theory. In the last part of this essay I discuss recent debates, located primarily among British cultural and media studies scholars, about the politics of pleasure. My aim here is to address the question: 'Critical media literacy: So what?' That work, I argue, points to the need for exploring pedagogical and standpoint choices (Alcoff & Potter 1993; Haraway 1988; Hartsock 1987) in the construction of a politicized media and cultural studies pedagogy.
Critical Media and Cultural Literacy

University students have grown up in a techno-media saturated environment, raised on "Sesame Street" and MTV. They have learned, and learned to learn, from media imagery at least as much as from twelve years of schooling in static print text. Media, particularly TV, provide powerful public pedagogies which shape concepts of self, gender and race identity and relations; ideas about which social groups count as culturally relevant and politically powerful; and what counts as 'history,' 'progress,' 'science,' 'cultural difference,' 'family,' 'individuality,' or 'political processes.' What I wish to argue here, then, is that the commonsense understandings with which students enter our classrooms ought to be part of what academics teach with and about. That is, students' diverse and extensive knowledge of media(ted) and cultural texts, icons and practices needs to be acknowledged as valid and lived experience. But students' knowledges need also to be interrogated and challenged toward a critical reappraisal of their own taken-for-granted assumptions about themselves and 'others.'

A critical cultural literacy challenges how representations of race, gender, class, sexuality, nation and culture disempower some groups while privileging others. It gives students analytic tools with which to read and remake maps of meaning—maps which delineate how people are taught to view themselves and their relationship to others within the dynamics of everyday life in local and larger societal contexts. Cultural literacy, therefore, is integral to the critical study of media and the social. Importantly, it must be focused on the very cultural and political discourses and institutions which enable and limit our knowledge and experience. That is, we must turn analyses on ourselves by examining how research, researchers' methodological and theoretical choices, or the discourse of university textbooks or course content, construct 'communications,' 'the media,' 'the viewer,' 'literacy,' 'media text analyses,' 'cognitive processes,' etc. (Luke 1990). A critical media and cultural studies, therefore, must move beyond analyses of how meaning is produced and circulated (i.e., the study of cultural industries) and created (i.e., the study of audiences), and extend to explorations of how individual and corporate sense-making tie in with larger socio-political issues of culture, gender, class, political economy, nation, and power.

Media texts are intrinsic to the commodity "supersystems" which persons buy into and which structure their everyday reality, whether through the social practices of mall lounging, playing videogames, watching TV, or the daily semiotic construction of the self (Engelhardt 1986; Kinder 1991; Willis 1991, 1994). Media, therefore, cannot be studied as social texts independent of their commodity-based popular cultural artifacts, or the cultural practices people organize around both texts and artifacts.

Part of what a critical social and cultural literacy ought to entail, then, is an analysis of how media texts and their spin-off popular cultural com-
modities shape our understandings of the world, and position persons to take up various social identities, political and cultural positions. And since the undergraduate liberal arts curriculum aims to provide students with understandings about the relationship between individual and society, a cultural studies pedagogy which tackles issues of positionalities within discourses—in theories, social practices, print and media texts—is eminently suited to a range of disciplinary areas. My focus here, then, is not exclusively on the communications or media studies classroom, but takes a broader perspective to critical media studies which, I argue, encompasses a cross-disciplinary orientation.

I now turn to discuss recent theoretical shifts in social and cultural theory, in feminist theory and pedagogy which provide a renewed framework for arguing for a critical media and cultural literacy and pedagogy (Luke 1994a, 1994b; Lusted 1991; Alvarado and Boyd-Barrett 1992). I will take up the contributions of feminist and cultural studies theories first and then outline three aspects of postmodernism relevant to a theorization of media literacy. I then discuss how feminist pedagogy can tie in with some conceptual features shared by cultural studies, feminist theory and postmodernism in the formulation of a critical media literacy agenda.

Feminist and Cultural Studies

Feminist theory has contributed much to current understanding of the masculinist (mis)representation of the feminine as ‘other’ in media texts and imagery, in social and natural science, literary and philosophical discourses (deLauretis 1987; Haraway 1992; Kaplan 1986; Morris 1988; Modleski 1991). Central to feminist theoretical arguments against male textual rule is the near seamless historical repression of a female authorial voice. Women’s historical representations, whether in print or visual texts, have been primarily male authored versions of girls, women, and ‘things feminine.’ The historical silencing of female authorship-authority, in turn, has led to a fetishization and objectification of ‘the feminine’ which, in various textual forms, reflects a collective male gaze and desire. Cultural industries have a long history of male cultural productions of feminine stereotypes and misrepresentations which conceptualize women primarily either as object of male adornment, pursuit and domination, or as mindless domestic drudges, brain-dead bimbos, or saintly supermoms. Feminist scholarship has repeatedly shown over the past two decades that, whether through the eye of the camera or the eye of theory, the socially situated epistemological standpoint of masculinity dominates the ‘making’ of history and the present: materially, textually, visually, and symbolically.

Feminist cultural studies has a number of collocations within cultural studies and within feminism or ‘women’s studies.’ Mindful also of the differences in theoretical and research orientation within American, Australian, and British cultural studies, I draw here only broad outlines of
feminist cultural studies in order to map connections among feminism, cultural studies, and postmodernism. This shared theoretical ground enables us to move beyond the specific concerns of each field of inquiry and to develop a pedagogy based in an epistemological standpoint which acknowledges difference(s) of identity, the cultural constructedness of 'Theory,' 'History,' and 'Truth,' and the cultural dynamics of our own labor as academic researchers and teachers. This epistemological standpoint is a self-reflexive position which takes its theoretical maxim from Foucault's work on power/knowledge regimes as constitutive of the social constructedness of knowledge and the human subject, and from feminism's commitment to a politics of transformation.

Feminist cultural studies is inflected with the poststructuralist methodological and analytic agenda of deconstruction. In the liberal arts classroom, pedagogies of 'critical analysis' have long been commonplace: critical readings of research studies, literary or legal texts, transcripts or policy documents, 'art' or municipal planning blueprints are commonplace student assignment and evaluation fare. However, what differentiates feminist from progressive pedagogies, or a cultural studies from traditional 'criticism,' is feminism's insistence on differences in identity and thus reading positions, and cultural studies' insistence on the cultural location of all texts, all readings, and all models for 'critical' readings.

Foucault's premise that the human subject, social practices and institutions are products of historically situated discourses, social practices, and (embodied) author-authorities, underlies much of feminist and cultural studies theorizing. The speaking and reading subject of feminism is seen as both a cultural product of master discourses and as cultural agent in negotiating and/or contesting the meanings about her, given in the discourses available to her. Women's complex and multiple identities experienced in and through the discourses that define feminine gender identity, sexuality, ethnicity, class, or culture, suggest that an understanding of women and the concept of femininity cannot be articulated in universal principles, but must come from women's individual voices articulated from specific social and cultural locations. Hence, in feminisms generally and in feminist pedagogy specifically, the importance of 'positionality' (Alcoff 1988; Ferguson 1993; Flax 1990; Haraway 1988) of voice and experience is paramount. The gendered politics of speech and silence in the university classroom are thus central theoretical, political, and practical concerns for feminist educators (Belenky et al. 1986; Bunch and Pollack 1983; Gabriel and Smithson 1990; Lewis, 1993; Luke 1994c; Luke and Gore 1992; Maher 1987; Mahoney 1988; Middleton 1993; Pagano, 1990; Stone, 1994; Weiler 1988).

Cultural studies has some similarities with feminist theoretical concerns. However, like all other interdisciplinary fields of inquiry, cultural studies is not a seamless and unified discourse. Differences among cul-
tural studies scholars continue to abound over definitions, methodological and analytic-theoretic approaches. Key concerns include the selection of culture-appropriate and media genre-appropriate methodologies, definitions of culture, and whether culture can be treated analytically as a language (see Franklin, Lury, and Stacey 1991). In other words, since ‘speaking’ and ‘reading’ is fundamentally about interpretation, meaning making and constructions of the self, and since these occur primarily through language and in language communities, should cultural analysis be grounded in linguistic theories? These concerns remain unresolved, but they do have some affinity with theoretical issues over ‘voice,’ ‘meaning,’ and ‘representation’ currently under scrutiny within feminisms, particularly within feminist cultural, psychoanalytic and film theory variants (cf. Erens 1990). Although cultural studies remains primarily in the theoretical custody of men, it is, like feminism, concerned with the specificity of reading positions and cultural productions on the one hand and, on the other, concerned with the politics of power/knowledge regimes.

What this convergence suggests, then, is that epistemologically both feminism and cultural studies question the relations between power and knowledge in the production of universal ‘truths,’ commonsense understandings and everyday practices, and both insist that differences in identity and location are the only legitimate site from which to authorize the self. Both reject the theoretical products of modernist discourse: the (male and European) universal subject, objectivist inquiry and knowledge, and the transparency of language. In that regard, questions of how persons take up cultural texts or how women ‘read’ patriarchal narratives of femininity, are fundamentally concerned with the textual deconstruction of received ‘truths’—whether these be labelled discourses, ideologies, mythologies, or empiricism. This emphasis in feminisms and cultural studies on critical deconstruction and the politics of identity and location, has much in common with current theoretical concerns in several strands of postmodernism which I take up next.

Postmodernisms

Aspects of postmodernist theory relevant to my discussion here fall roughly into three areas: philosophical, cultural, and economic postmodernism. I outline each briefly, mindful that such a brief survey cannot adequately address the complexities of various strands within postmodernist thought. Philosophical postmodernism rejects Enlightenment totalizing theories and cultural ‘stories’ which, as framed in ‘modernist’ narratives, explained the world from a centered and privileged position of male power and knowing. Those master narratives historically associated with the supremacy of the white and male bourgeois subject (e.g., high culture and ‘art,’ objectivity, universalisms, detachment, industrial and military rationality, etc.), have come under the critical scrutiny of
both feminist and postmodernist scholars. This strand within postmodernism claims that modernist explanations could only account for all those not marked as white, male, and of European descent, as 'less' and 'other' than the centered object of study of its own theories which spoke to and for those who authored those discourses in the first place.

Like feminist and cultural studies, then, postmodernism rejects the master narratives of modernity and, instead, argues for multiplicity, difference, heteroglossia, and specificity. This focuses theory and political action on local sites, on micro capillaries of power and oppression, and on the multiple differences that characterize specific contexts and persons. The postmodernist human subject is seen as situated in a collective social body which is constituted through and in differences of identity and location—not sameness. In the media studies classroom, teaching students about the politics of identity formation, difference(s), and reading positions as a prelude to text analysis, can be tied into this epistemological framework with strands in feminism, cultural studies and postmodernism.

Cultural postmodernism views contemporary culture metaphorically as a house of mirrors. Mass media techno-culture of the present is seen as an infinite house of electronic mirror-screens, each deflecting and yet projecting images and symbols of desire and identity on human subjects. The human subject is the 'screen' upon which electronic imageries project symbolic identities, imaginary needs and wants (Grossberg 1984). The subject is seen as a product of cultural symbols and signification systems which are said to have no referent to any concrete 'real' material objects or relations in the world. Images and signs are seen by postmodern cultural theorists to refer only to other images and signs, and it is within this cross-referential system of culturally constructed meanings that the social subject is situated and acts in the world (Baudrillard 1983).

For Baudrillard and others, there is no 'real' dimension to social experience, only 'simulated' experiences and identities. The 'real' time and social relations constructed around watching TV, shopping in malls, constructing an identity through designer labels, or kids playing 'Barbie,' 'Ninja Turtles' or 'Alien,' are simulated experiences which have no concrete referent in the 'real' world. In this regard, the cultural postmodernist position argues that the subject of postmodernity is nothing more than a 'simulacra'—a simulation (Baudrillard 1983). The social subject thus is a cultural artifact and bodily-material ground for the inscription and embodiment of mass produced symbolic meanings and the 'tie-in' commodities which make those meanings concrete through purchase and ownership.

To debate the validity of this position with students, and to explore the epistemological and political differences between a realist and constructivist concept of the social subject and social relations, we might ask them to consider the following. To what extent are semiotic constructions of the self, through available cultural significations, 'real' markers of
political and cultural identities? Are our identity statements—whether ingroup colors or subcultural dress—simulated or 'real' representations of who we are? If cultural experience and identities are mere quotations and floating signifiers, where and how do we claim a standpoint in which to ground identity and difference claims?

The third theoretical dimension of postmodernism relevant here, is best exemplified by Harvey (1989, 1991), Lash (1990), Lash and Urry (1987) who explain the post-industrial moment as post-capitalism or economic postmodernism. The logic of modern capitalism was based on centralization of human and industrial resources; the logic of postmodern capitalism is based on off-shore and decentralized human and resource investments. The worker under industrial capitalism invested in life-time specialization of skills whereas the postmodernist worker is “multi-skilled.” Under modernist capitalism, workers labored under an industrial regime producing the ‘hardware’ of an industrial economy. Postmodernist capitalism, by contrast, is now widely characterized as an information economy in which the primary object and medium of labor and social relations, is information. In the postmodern age, the ‘software’ of information is the privileged currency of exchange. And, unlike print, its simulated, soft- and hardware dependent, electronic character makes it highly permeable across time and space. The intensity, globalization, and intertextuality of information regimes (e.g., stockmarkets and banking, entertainment media, advertising) make having information the core commodity of contemporary capitalist logic.

How, then, do these various postmodernist theoretical positions support arguments for media and cultural literacy? One key aspect of postmodernist theory relevant to a media and cultural literacy is the elimination of the high culture/low culture distinction which characterized the study of popular culture and culture industries since the 1930s (see Horkheimer and Adorno 1972). With the postmodernist turn away from Eurocentric notions of ‘high culture’ and ‘high theory,’ academic inquiry—itself a labor of ‘high culture’ (Bourdieu 1984)—has finally begun to take serious those mass cultural artifacts and practices which are of daily relevance to most people.

A second important insight of postmodern theory is the shift from centrist and relatively static notions of culture to global, corporate, and electronic culture which is in a constant state of renewal and reinvention. That is, the acceleration of change in style, ‘the look,’ and the commodities which enable continuous personal reinvention, is primarily achieved through increasingly globalized and standardized media messages, all of which refer to other sign systems (of status, success, ‘in’-groupness). This shift in transferrability and marketability of culture(s) is enabled and sustained by postindustrial capitalism which has given rise to postmodern economies of culture: anyone anywhere can buy into countless variations of innumerable cultural styles. Kids in Burma wear Chicago Bulls hats,
Soviet kids wear Nike t-shirts, Filipina girls in Manila shantytowns play Barbie, and women in the American midwest sport 'ethnic dress.'

Despite important theoretical differences among modernist and postmodernist cultural theorists, they do agree on the increasingly central role of electronic imageries which appear in increasing intensity and exponential geographic expansion. The pastiche of contemporary cultural life is no longer confined to the urban landscape but has extended its reach into the everyday life and consciousness of persons located in the most far flung regions around the globe. Coke or Mattell toy ads beam into the most remote hamlets around the globe. Homer Simpson, Ninja Turtles, Barbie, Jurassic dinos or the "Beverly Hills 90210" gang are available to kids around the world on TV screens and in their merchandise transformations. Paradoxically, the intensity and global proliferation of primarily Western cultural signs and symbols seem on one level to de-emphasize national cultural differences and interests. Yet the pan-global commodification of cultural symbols and meanings (associated primarily with soft drink, toy, fast food, or entertainment empires) appear also to generate increasing resistance to the globalization of culture and increasing insistence on national and ethnic difference and identity. Failure to teach students about these cultural forms and texts and their socio-political consequences, and how these texts and forms structure cultural experience, knowledge and social relations, is pedagogically and politically irresponsible in an age when current generations are inheriting a technologically mediated world of work and leisure which is significantly different from how most educators raised in the 1950s and '60s grew up.

As I noted above, part of the postmodern moment in academic inquiry is the turn away from the canonization of 'great books,' 'great authors,' and 'great art' precisely because those texts variously excluded, marginalized and denigrated all groups 'other' than the Euro-American male subject. The collapse of distinctions between high and low culture, and the demystification of high culture as a self-referential masculinist myth of self-glorification, has also begun to cast some light on the kind of modernist preoccupation with print text—with 'good' books—in educational institutions. Modernist pedagogy, after all, is organized around print text and print literacy skills which are seen as applicable to and indispensable in a predominantly print culture. However, as we move from an industrial to a post-industrial information economy, one in which print literacy is not obsolete but certainly substantially transformed, then surely we need a broader notion of literacy which includes a study of the intertextuality of imageries, texts and artifacts of media and popular culture.
Feminist Pedagogy

I now turn to feminist pedagogy in efforts to link teaching-learning practices to the theoretical agendas of feminism, cultural studies, and postmodernism. The primary principle of feminist pedagogy is a mode of teaching to enable ways of learning which foregrounds women. First, it foregrounds women's specific social and learning needs as women and as students in terms of their status and identity within a profoundly masculinist university culture. Second, it foregrounds feminine scholarship as a way of centering feminist epistemology and critical practice in efforts to connect women's experience to knowledges which validate, theoretically extend, and politicize women's life trajectories and possibilities. Third, because of feminism's sensitivity to the impossibility of Woman and its commitment to the plurality of women, differences among women students is taken into account through inclusive content delivery in teaching and assigned readings, term assignments, and evaluation strategies. Use of various types of print and media texts and cultural artifacts, collaborative and non-print based assignments and evaluation, broadly characterize feminist pedagogy at university level studies. And, although feminist pedagogy emerged from university-based women's studies and feminist educators in schools and Education faculties, its current theoretical scope and practical application extend beyond the feminist classroom (cf. Ellsworth 1989). Feminist pedagogy extends into anti-racist pedagogies and includes teaching for and about differences not only in terms of gender and sexual identity, but intersecting differences of class, ability and able-bodiedness, race, ethnic, religious, and national identity.

Central to feminist pedagogy are the demystification of the teacher-student relationship, and the politicization of knowledge (Luke and Gore 1992). As Gore (1993, 5) puts it, it is a "focus on the processes of teaching that demands that attention be drawn to the politics of those processes and to the broader political contexts within which they are situated. Therefore, instruction and social vision are analytical components of pedagogy." Feminist pedagogy disavows much of what is taken for granted as part of university culture and ethos. It refuses hierarchical elitism, competitive scholarship, and disclaims theoretical specialism with which to interpret women's allegedly undertheorized experiences. Hence the focus in the feminist classroom tends to be more of a 'bottom-up' than 'top-down' knowledge exchange. In other words, the feminist pedagogue refuses the common equation of teacher as knower and student as unknowing and theoretically naive. The feminist pedagogue does not see herself as authoritative arbiter of student interpretation and understanding. Instead, she emphasizes her own situatedness, her own partial 'take' on the world, and thus acknowledges her own experience and knowledge as no more and no less valid, 'better' or 'authentic' than the diversity of students in her class. What she does offer are a range of knowledge options for her students—from course content to analytic tools, and the research topics and
strategies she offers—in efforts to connect women’s interests, learning styles, social location and identities to a range of feminist discourses. Pedagogically, what follows from this standpoint is a way of teaching which focuses on women’s differences, and her own situatedness as academic teacher-scholar within that grid of differences. It makes knowledge production a collaborative class effort in which the feminist pedagogue has a specific body of knowledge to offer alongside other women’s equally situated knowledges and experiences.

This kind of feminist pedagogy is achieved through the inclusion of diverse women authors on a range of topics which have a relevant bearing on the subject matter, and the selection of evaluation procedures which take the context of the diversity of learners into account. What this might mean, for instance, is less reliance on academic text and a greater inclusion of media and cultural texts which might better represent the cultural interests and possible learning styles of the women in the classroom. Many women, particularly those of color, mature-aged, and from other countries, often find the highly specialized discourse of Western academic texts daunting and alienating, which can erode women’s intellectual self-confidence. This lack of intellectual self-confidence is the result of women’s historical and epistemological exclusion from the patriarchal canons and discourse structures. As Sandra Lee Bartky (1994) points out, women bring into the university classroom a life-time socialized repertoire of guilt and shame, of self-denigrating and self-invalidating ways of positioning her intellect and academic work as inferior, inadequate, and ‘shameful.’ Many women find ways of invalidating their work through linguistic disclaimers, in their failure to take credit for good work, or by prefacing assertions or classroom contributions with self-denigrating comments such as “I’m not sure that I’m right but . . .”; “I don’t know too much about this but . . .”; “I typed this paper up badly . . .,” and so forth.

One way to develop confidence and courage among women is to give them the opportunity to work with textual forms and content which may be more culturally amenable to women. A communications class, for instance, may give women the option of studying or preparing a research paper on the historical styles of women’s communications and storytelling: from weaving, to quilt making, pottery, poetry or music. For example, a cross-cultural investigation into different social organizational and aesthetic style features of women’s weaving (e.g., Navajo, Thai, Maori) would enable not only a feminist study of communications and cultural ‘story-telling,’ but would invariably require critical theoretical and analytic attention to cross-cultural difference, the gendered division of labor, issues of representation, and so forth. Key here is to draw students’ attention to the dynamics of cultural forms as cultural content rather than merely viewing culture as representational content. Other student research topics can include women’s use of the VCR (Gray 1992), telephone or computer networks (Kramarae 1988), rural women’s use of TV (Luke
1993), women's viewer communities (Press 1991), or the history of TV as domestic appliance (see Spigel 1992; Spigel and Mann 1992). A poststructuralist feminist approach to such research topics would encourage students to critique the very communications, historical, or anthropology texts students consult for their research with a view to analyzing how women, women's contributions, or other cultures, are constructed in those text. Their absence or marginality might well teach students larger philosophical and political lessons about patriarchy, historical author-authorities, 'scientific' research and texts.

One other example, here very broadly framed, might help clarify how a feminist and cultural studies approach might dovetail into a subject area which is not explicitly either women's or cultural studies. In an urban planning, architecture, or public policy course, off-air taped material on a new housing development, a media report on the connections between poverty, health conditions and inner-city housing, or documentaries on the 1950s advent of suburbia and the suburban home, might all lead into a feminist and cultural studies analysis of the politics of gendered and racially organized space (Davis 1992; Reekie 1993; Rose 1993; Spain 1992). In other words, any current media coverage of housing crises, postmodern architecture, urban blight and suburban sprawl, public safety, public parks, environmentalism and private and public transport, etc. are texts that both illustrate how current crises in public people management are treated by the media, and yet they can also serve as texts for analyses of the social geographic organization of work, home, leisure, transportation, women, children, and men. How public policy and architectural design is shot through with unexamined assumptions about "location" (racial-regional segregation), and social and informational relations (e.g., the gendered spaces of office, family home or shopping mall design; the location and design of schools and childcare facilities, and women's use of and relationship to such facilities), could be examined from both a feminist and cultural perspective within a broader public policy, architectural, or urban planning analysis.

Such an approach can provide the kinds of research topics which would appeal to female and male students as well as students of diverse ethnic cultural backgrounds. Rather than assigning the interminable end-of-semester essay, students could be encouraged to give voice to their analysis and their own experience of the politics of location by taking the departmental camcorder on the road to produce short documentaries. Business proprietors and long-time residents in ethnic communities can be interviewed with a view to establishing what is it that makes 'Little Italy,' 'Chinatown' or 'Germantown'? How is ethnic-cultural group and individual identity produced and maintained through the symbolic, economic, and social practices and relations of such cultural enclaves? Does 'cultural tourism' impact on the community and in what ways? How do women perceive their cultural and social needs met by a community?
One need not essentialize gender differences to assert that girls and boys are socialized early into very different and highly gendered interests through play and games, adult behaviors and expectations organized around the category gender. These differences are as apparent in the university as in the elementary school classroom. It is the educator's political and pedagogical responsibility to acknowledge those socialized differences among her/his students, and to enable multiple pathways of learning which connect student diversity in situated knowledges to the critical and analytic frameworks presented in a course. Consider, for instance, that some male students may well be more interested than women in research on the political economy of media industries, the corporate and representational organization of sports, sports 'heroes' or sportscasters on TV, or the structuring of 'fact' in news, current affairs, and documentary programming. Some women, on the other hand, might well prefer options that enable them to research issues of concern to them such as: the construction of women's discourse in daytime talk shows, soaps or home shopping infomercials; children's programming, advertising and legislation; or children's popular culture, toy, clothing and videogame industry.

Relatedly, lesbian and gay students need a speaking and research forum in which to critique homophobia through, for example, analyses of lesbian and gay representations in various media forms (cf. Ellsworth 1988). In classes with large numbers of international students, readings and assignments can open up debate and research on the globalization of media and popular culture, the conceptual and visual media treatment of 'foreign' nations, the concept of nation, 'development,' racial stereotyping, postcolonial theory, and so forth. Hence, to open up inquiry into areas that are of particular cultural and political interest to students, is a core aspect of feminist pedagogical practice with direct applications to cultural studies and media pedagogy across diverse disciplinary areas.

In sum, feminist theories of representation and recent work in feminist pedagogy provide the conceptual support for analyzing 'voice,' standpoint and authorship, exclusion, inclusion, and marginalization, and the cultural production of 'the popular,' popular sentiment, gendered desires and identities. What is at stake in the pedagogical and theoretical choices teacher-scholars make, is a politics of (student) voice and (textual) authority. Such choices can variously enable or limit different kinds of access to knowledge and, by extension, a critical literacy of local and global inflections of the cultural present. Such a pedagogical agenda extends beyond narrow disciplinary-based issues and concerns. The critical media literacy presupposed as pedagogical ends of the communications classroom, or the feminist politics of 'raised consciousness' presupposed as pedagogical ends of the feminist classroom, need not be confined to university level communications or women's studies but, rather, can extend across the curriculum in the arts, humanities and social sciences.
Critical Media Literacy: The Politics of Pleasure

One recent development in scholarly debates over school-based media education has been a concern with the politics of pleasure. Media studies scholars suggest that the relocation of children’s and adolescents’ ‘leisure/pleasure’ texts into the classroom for formal intellectual scrutiny, potentially subverts and belittles whatever pleasure kids derive from such texts and the social relations within which such texts are consumed. This debate has circulated mainly among British media studies practitioners and theorists, and is worth discussing here as part of the politics of media pedagogy at university level studies.

Media educators not uncommonly associate media literacy with, for example, the study of soap opera, the Madonna signifier, or ads to ‘expose’ ideology at work from which the teacher will liberate students with the correct analytic tools. These common misperceptions of what media studies is all about ignore the productive and ‘progressive’ potential of teaching with and about media. That is, as long as teachers operate from the marxian ‘false consciousness’ notion of ideology as the fundamental premise of media studies, then all classroom activities based on the study and use of media will remain locked into a model in which media texts are the ideological culprits, and students the ‘duped’ viewers who must be emancipated from ‘bad habits’ and ‘incorrect readings’ (Williamson 1981). This approach positions the teacher as objective knower and interpreter in contrast to students who cannot ‘see through’ the text when, in fact, it is often teachers who cannot ‘see through’ the text beyond its object level representations. Pedagogy then becomes a tool levelled against students’ pleasures derived from TV programs, movies or rock music, and popular culture more generally.

David Buckingham (1990), for instance, has quite rightly pointed out that kids know very well that adults (particularly teachers) disapprove of TV content and, by association, TV viewing. To ask students in the public forum of the classroom to undertake ‘ideology critique’ of the texts that are important to them, unwittingly positions them to reveal and possibly disavow their ‘secret pleasures.’ In other words, by giving students the technical skills with which to dismantle and dismiss ideologically incorrect texts, teachers ask them to expose and confess to their secret pleasures, and publicly to confess their dislike of programs which they probably like a lot. Students then quickly learn to conceal their liking for those texts and practices they are asked to respond to, and merely give the teacher what s/he wants in the way of an ideologically correct reading position and terminology. Getting students to admit to liking anything, then, can easily slip into claiming to like only educationally edifying content such as documentary or ‘quality’ programs, and claiming disdain for ‘lowbrow’ soaps, sit-coms, reality TV, or talk shows. Moreover, by making the familiar unfamiliar by intellectualizing mundane media content through abstract conceptual terminology with which students are to see through
media texts with appropriate analytic lenses, can imply that students cannot
do so on their own, that they are naive and immature viewers duped into
believing that what they watch is real.

Asking students for critical interpretations of mass cultural texts is
likely to cue a critical response which can often be an outright lie. As with
any 'critical' discourse (including that of critical pedagogy, cultural stud-
ies or feminism more generally), students are quick to talk a good
anti-sexist, anti-racist, pro-equity game. As educators are well aware, what
students write in the essay or what they tell us in classroom discussion is
no measure of what goes on in their heads. Men can easily demonstrate
outrage at the sexist media portrayal of women, much as white students
can feign to be appalled at racist portrayal. As Buckingham (1993a,b)
notes, the most damning critics of TV—those students who display the
most contempt for popular TV and, by association, its audiences—usually
win teachers’ praise. Students who can most eloquently and critically dis-
miss popular media texts are often rewarded for those critical judgments
and readings with good grades, not the student who celebrates and defends
the horror, slasher, or reality TV genre.

Social critics and cultural theorists variously dismiss contemporary cul-
ture as a world of artifice, simulations and inauthentic identities.
Nonetheless, the simulated dimension of contemporary cultural life in the
West is indeed a very real part of students’ lived experiences. To take that
experience into the university classroom and show its cultural
constructedness, its ideological fabrication, myths and counter-myths, is
potentially to encourage a critical practice suspicious of students’ mean-
ings and pleasures, and the making of a ‘critical viewer’ who can only
recognize pleasure as a form of deception and for whom there isn’t much
left to enjoy.

One way out of this Gordian knot is, quite simply, self-reflective criti-
cal practice. Although self-reflexivity has become somewhat of a cliché in
educational circles, I am convinced that self-reflexive critique of our own
pedagogies and political assumptions as media educators is paramount if
we wish to avoid mechanistic transmission model pedagogies in which
students are made to reproduce the teacher’s preferred ideological take on
the subject matter. Media and cultural studies is fundamentally about criti-
cal practice and interpretation, and critical pedagogy foregrounds the
importance of teaching with and about texts that are relevant to a diverse
student population. As such, media educators need to be mindful of the
politics inherent in their textual selections and the critical textual practices
they advocate because some choices can easily condemn youth’s cultural
terrain. The point is that a critical media literacy must balance discourse
critique with giving students opportunities for alternative readings, mean-
ings, and text productions.
Pedagogical and Standpoint Choices: Ways Forward

First, educators need to confront and accept the fact that today's students have grown up in a technological and cultural world radically different from generations who have grown up in the 1960s and '70s. An understanding of the media(ted) construction of contemporary culture and social subjects is an essential first step in making educators aware of the profound difference between the lived cultures and experiences of students, and the experiences schooling offers through a fundamentally monologic, linear, static, and text-based curriculum. The move then is towards an understanding of student differences of identities and cultural locations from which students differentially enter into broader mass cultural discourses.

Second, and in specific relation to teaching with and about media and popular culture, unless analyses and production are related to students' own experiences, then media studies will remain a purely academic exercise. Whether popular cultural texts are used as a vehicle into a disciplinary content area or are studied in their own right, the realities of students' and teachers' situatedness in the cultural politics of everyday life ought to remain the pedagogical core of constructing classroom knowledge and final 'learning objectives.' Pedagogically, this includes the need to provide students with open-ended and collaborative, not competitive, learning experiences. A critical cultural and media literacy, divorced from the cultural and often contradictory experiences of everyday life, can readily deteriorate into another set of unimaginative print-based exercises in which students 'do' images of women, race, semiotics or media genres.

Third, teachers need to take serious and acknowledge students' different readings of and pleasures derived from popular culture while guarding against potential slippage into a vacuous celebration of individual 'taste,' 'pleasure,' or 'personal responses.' As I mentioned above, this is not an easy task since so much of progressive and feminist pedagogies valorize the politics of personal voice and difference. However, the postmodern turn to difference, heteroglossia and heterogeneity does not mean that 'anything goes' (Luke 1992). What it does mean is that a commitment to social justice and equity principles should guide the media educator's work in enabling students to come to their own realizations that, say, homophobic, racist or sexist texts or readings, quite simply, oppress and subordinate others. Providing students with theoretically and historically grounded frameworks from which to approach cultural and textual constructs of meaning, gives students the discourse analytic tools with which to interrogate the socio-cultural and historical contingencies of difference, exclusion and marginalization. Student readings, productions, and critical analyses would thereby be framed within a theoretically grounded understanding of the politics of knowledge production. Such theory-grounded critical interrogations should focus not only on media and popular cultural texts, but be turned on the very academic journal and textbook readings we assign students. In short, the discourse analytic skills taught through
media and cultural studies can enable students to question wider issues concerning the politics of textual constructs in theories, conceptual categories, disciplinary and empirical givens such as 'science,' 'the family,' 'sexuality,' 'progress,' 'History,' 'discovery,' 'populations,' 'society and the individual,' and so forth.

The study of media, in cultural, social and political contexts, is important not only because of media's powerful and extensive influence. It is important on at least two other levels. First, because its naturalness easily obscures the politics of its constructedness. That is, the way media seem such a natural and intrinsic part of everyone's daily lives, and the way images and texts appear to reflect 'natural' and commonsense knowledges back to us, detracts from media's hegemonic and socially disciplining power. Second, media and cultural literacy is important because of the ways in which media imagery and information selectively (mis)represent the world around us. In my estimation, how media and cultural images construct our understandings of the world should be part of the common stock of every person's knowledge. Media and cultural studies, therefore, ought to be the cornerstone of a social justice education for responsible citizenship in an age in which all communication and knowledge are increasingly visual, symbolic, polycultural and, importantly, political. If we ignore the social and cultural changes currently underway, and if we continue to conceive of literacy and pedagogy as narrowly print-defined and applicable only to a print culture of an earlier time, then educators will continue to teach generations of students conceptualized according to an outdated concept of the learner and learning—one who has long ceased to sit in front of us in lecture halls.

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REFERENCES


