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Cultural Studies, Multiculturalism, and Media Culture

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Radio, television, film, popular music, the Internet and social networking, and other forms and products of media culture provide materials out of which we forge our very identities, including our sense of selfhood; our notion of what it means to be male or female; our conception of class, ethnicity and race, nationality, sexuality; and division of the world into categories of "us" and "them." Media images help shape our view of the world and our deepest values: what we consider good or bad, positive or negative, moral or evil. Media stories provide the symbols, myths, and resources through which we constitute a common culture and through the appropriation of which we insert ourselves into this culture. Media spectacles demonstrate who has power and who is powerless, who is allowed to exercise force and violence and who is not. They dramatize and legitimate the power of the forces that be and show the powerless that they must stay in their places or be oppressed.

We are immersed from cradle to grave in a media and consumer society, and thus it is important to learn how to understand, interpret, and criticize its meanings and messages. The media are a profound and often misperceived source of cultural pedagogy: They contribute to educating us how to behave and what to think, feel, believe, fear, and desire—and what not to. The media are forms of pedagogy that teach us how to be men and women. They show us how to dress, look, and consume; how to react to members of different social groups; how to be popular and successful and how to avoid failure; and how to conform to the dominant system of norms, values, practices, and institutions. Consequently, the gaining of critical media literacy is an important resource for individuals and citizens in learning how to cope with a seductive cultural environment. Learning how to read, criticize, and resist sociocultural manipulation can help one empower oneself in relation to dominant forms of media and culture. It can enhance individual sovereignty vis-à-vis media culture and give people more power over their cultural environment.

In this chapter, I will discuss the potential contributions of a cultural studies perspective to media critique and literacy. From the 1980s to the present, cultural studies has emerged as a set of approaches to the study of culture, society, and politics. The project was

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inaugurated by the University of Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, which developed a variety of critical methods for the analysis, interpretation, and criticism of cultural artifacts. Through a set of internal debates, and responding to social struggles and movements of the 1960s and 1970s, the Birmingham group came to focus on the interplay of representations and ideologies of class, gender, race, ethnicity, and nationality in cultural texts, including media culture. They were among the first to study the effects on audiences of newspapers, radio, television, film, advertising, and other popular cultural forms. They also focused on how various audiences interpreted and used media culture differently, analyzing the factors that made different audiences respond in contrasting ways to various media texts, and how they made use of media in their personal and social lives in a multiplicity of ways.[1]

Through studies of youth subcultures, British cultural studies demonstrated how culture came to constitute distinct forms of identity and group membership for young people. In the view of cultural studies, media culture provides the materials for constructing views of the world, behavior, and even identities. Those who uncritically follow the dictates of media culture tend to "mainstream" themselves, conforming to the dominant fashion, values, and behavior. Yet cultural studies is also interested in how subcultural groups and individuals resist dominant forms of culture and identity, creating their own style and identities. Those who obey ruling dress and fashion codes, behavior, and political ideologies thus produce their identities as members of specific social groupings within contemporary U.S. culture, such as White, middle-class, conservative American men, or lesbian African American women, for instance. Persons who identify with subcultures, such as punk culture or Latino subcultures, dress and act differently than those in the mainstream and thus create oppositional identities, defining themselves against standard models.

Cultural studies insists that culture must be studied within the social relations and system through which culture is produced and consumed and that the study of culture is thus intimately bound up with the study of society, politics, and economics. Cultural studies shows how media culture articulates the dominant values, political ideologies, and social developments and novelties of the era. It conceives of U.S. culture and society as a contested terrain, with various groups and ideologies struggling for dominance (Kellner, 1995, 2010). Television, film, music, and other popular cultural forms are thus often liberal or conservative, or occasionally express more radical or oppositional views—and can be contradictory and ambiguous as well in their meanings and messages.

Cultural studies is valuable because it provides some tools that enable individuals to read and interpret culture critically. It also subverts distinctions between "high" and "low" culture by considering a wide continuum of cultural artifacts, from opera and novels to soap operas and TV wrestling, while refusing to erect any specific elite cultural hierarchies or canons. Earlier mainstream academic approaches to culture tended to be primarily literary and elitist, dismissing media culture as banal, trashy, and not worthy of serious attention. The project of cultural studies, in contrast, avoids cutting the field of culture into high and low, or popular versus elite. Such distinctions are difficult to maintain and generally serve as a front for normative aesthetic valuations and, often, a political program (i.e., either dismissing mass culture for high culture/art or celebrating what is deemed "popular" while scorning "elitist" high culture).

Cultural studies allows us to examine and critically scrutinize the whole range of culture without prior prejudices toward one or another sort of cultural text, institution, or practice. It also opens the way toward more differentiated political, rather than aesthetic, valuations of cultural artifacts in which one attempts to distinguish critical and oppositional from conformist and conservative moments in a given cultural artifact. For instance, studies of Hollywood film show how key 1960s films

promoted the views of radicals and the counterculture and how film in the 1970s was a battleground between liberal and conservative positions; late 1970s films, however, tended toward conservative positions that helped elect Ronald Reagan as president (see Kellner & Ryan, 1988). During the Bush–Cheney era, there were many oppositional films, such as the work of Michael Moore, and liberal films that featured black heroes and anticipated the election of Barack Obama (Kellner, 2010). For instance, African American actor Will Smith was the top grossing U.S. actor during the Bush–Cheney era, Denzel Washington won two Academy Awards and played a wide range of characters, and Morgan Freeman played a president, corporate executive, crime figure, and even God, attesting that U.S. publics were ready to see African Americans in major positions in all arenas of society. This is not to say that Hollywood "caused" Obama's surprising victory in 2008 but that U.S. media culture anticipated a black president.

There is an intrinsically critical and political dimension to the project of cultural studies that distinguishes it from objectivist and apolitical academic approaches to the study of culture and society. British cultural studies, for example, analyzed culture historically in the context of its societal origins and effects. It situated culture within a theory of social production and reproduction, specifying the ways cultural forms served either to further social domination or to enable people to resist and struggle against domination. It analyzed society as a hierarchical and antagonistic set of social relations characterized by the oppression of subordinate class, gender, race, ethnic, and national strata. Employing the Italian sociologist Antonio Gramsci's (1971) model of hegemony and counterhegemony, it sought to analyze "hegemonic" or ruling, social, and cultural forces of domination and to seek "counterhegemonic" forces of resistance and struggle. The project was aimed at social transformation and attempted to specify forces of domination and resistance to aid the process of political struggle and emancipation from oppression and domination.

For cultural studies, the concept of ideology is of central importance, for dominant ideologies serve to reproduce social relations of domination and subordination.[2] Ideologies of class, for instance, celebrate upper-class life and denigrate the working class. Ideologies of gender promote sexist representations of women, oppressive ideologies of sexuality promote homophobia, and ideologies of race use racist representations of people of color and various minority groups. Ideologies make inequalities and subordination appear natural and just and thus induce consent to relations of domination. Contemporary societies are structured by opposing groups who have different political ideologies (liberal, conservative, radical, etc.), and cultural studies specifies what, if any, ideologies are operative in a given cultural artifact (which could involve, of course, the specification of ambiguities and ideological contradictions). In the course of this study, I will provide some examples of how different ideologies are operative in media cultural texts and will accordingly provide examples of ideological analysis and critique.

Because of its focus on representations of race, gender, sexuality, and class, and its critique of ideologies that promote various forms of oppression, cultural studies lends itself to a multiculturalist program that demonstrates how culture reproduces certain forms of racism, sexism, and biases against members of subordinate classes, social groups, or alternative lifestyles. Multiculturalism affirms the worth of different types of culture and cultural groups, claiming, for instance, that Black; Latino; Asian; Native American; lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, and questioning (LGBTQ); and other oppressed and marginalized voices have their own validity and importance. An insurgent multiculturalism attempts to show how various people's voices and experiences are silenced and omitted from mainstream culture, and struggles to aid in the articulation of

diverse views, experiences, and cultural forms from groups excluded from the mainstream. This makes it a target of conservative forces that wish to preserve the existing canons of White male, Eurocentric privilege, and thus attack multiculturalism in cultural wars raging from the 1960s to the present over education, the arts, and the limits of free expression.

Cultural studies thus promotes a critical multiculturalist politics and media pedagogy that aims to make people sensitive to how relations of power and domination are "encoded" in cultural texts, such as those of television and film, or how new technologies and media such as the Internet and social networking can be used for oppositional pedagogical or political purposes (Kahn & Kellner, 2008). A critical cultural studies approach also specifies how people can resist the dominant encoded meanings and produce their own critical and alternative readings and media artifacts, as well as new identities and social relations. Cultural studies can show how media culture manipulates and indoctrinates us and thus can empower individuals to resist the dominant meanings in media cultural products and produce their own meanings. It can also point to moments of resistance and criticism within media culture and thus help promote development of more critical consciousness.

A critical cultural studies approach— embodied in many of the articles collected in this reader—thus develops concepts and analyses that will enable readers to analytically dissect the artifacts of contemporary media culture and gain power over their cultural environment. By exposing the entire field of culture and media technology to knowledgeable scrutiny, cultural studies provides a broad, comprehensive framework to undertake studies of culture, politics, and society for the purposes of individual empowerment and social and political struggle and transformation. In the following pages, I will therefore indicate some of the chief components of the type of cultural studies I find most useful for understanding contemporary U.S. society, culture, and politics.

Components of a Critical Cultural Studies Approach

As a theoretical apparatus, cultural studies contains a threefold project of analyzing the production and political economy of culture, cultural texts, and the audience reception of those texts and their effects in a concrete sociohistorical context. This comprehensive approach avoids too narrowly focusing on one dimension of the project to the exclusion of others. To avoid such limitations, I propose a multiperspectival approach that (a) discusses production and political economy, (b) engages in textual analysis, and (c) studies the reception and use of cultural texts.[3]

Production and Political Economy

Since cultural production has been neglected in many modes of recent cultural studies, it is important to stress the importance of analyzing cultural texts within their system of production and distribution, often referred to as the political economy of culture.[4] Inserting texts into the system of culture within which they are produced and distributed can help elucidate features and effects of the texts that textual analysis alone might miss or downplay. Rather than being an antithetical approach to culture, political economy can actually contribute to textual analysis and critique. The system of production often determines, in part, what sorts of artifacts will be produced, what structural limits will determine what can and cannot be said and shown, and what sorts of audience effects the text may generate.

Study of the codes of television, film, or popular music, for instance, is enhanced

by studying the formulas and conventions of production, which are shaped by economic and technical, as well as aesthetic and cultural, considerations. Dominant cultural forms are structured by well-defined rules and conventions, and the study of the production of culture can help elucidate the codes actually in play. Because of the demands of the format of radio or music television, for instance, most popular songs are 3 to 5 minutes long, fitting into the format of the distribution system, just as the length of content on YouTube or Twitter has technical constraints. From the early years of the Internet to the present, there have been legal and political conflicts concerning file sharing of music, other forms of media culture, and information, situating media culture in a force field of political conflict. Because of their control by giant corporations oriented primarily toward profit, film and television production in the United States is dominated by specific genres such as talk and game shows, soap operas, situation comedies, action/adventure series, reality TV series, and so on, which are familiar and popular with audiences. This economic factor explains why there are cycles of certain genres and subgenres, sequelmania in the film industry, crossovers of popular films into television series, and a certain homogeneity in products constituted within systems of production marked by relatively rigid generic codes, formulaic conventions, and well-defined ideological boundaries.

Likewise, study of political economy can help determine the limits and range of political and ideological discourses and effects. My study of television in the United States, for instance, disclosed that the takeover of the television networks by major transnational corporations and communications conglomerates in the 1980s was part of a "right turn" within U.S. society, whereby powerful corporate groups won control of the state and the mainstream media (Kellner, 1990). For example, during the 1980s, all three networks were

taken over by major corporate conglomerates: ABC was taken over in 1985 by Capital Cities, NBC was taken over by GE, and CBS was taken over by the Tisch Financial Group. Both ABC and NBC sought corporate mergers, and this motivation, along with other benefits derived from Reaganism, might well have influenced them to downplay criticisms of Reagan and generally support his conservative programs, military adventures, and simulated presidency.

Corporate conglomeratization has intensified further, and today Time Warner, Disney, Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation, Viacom, and other global media conglomerates control ever more domains of the production and distribution of culture (McChesney, 2000, 2007). In this global context, one cannot really analyze the role of the media in the Gulf War, for instance, without also analyzing the production and political economy of news and information, as well as the actual text of the Gulf War and its reception by its audience (see Kellner, 1992). Likewise, the ownership by conservative corporations of dominant media corporations helps explain mainstream media support of the Bush–Cheney administration and its policies, such as the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq (Kellner, 2003, 2005).

Looking toward entertainment, female pop music stars such as Madonna, Britney Spears, Beyoncé, and Lady Gaga deploy the tools of the glamour industry and media spectacle to become icons of fashion, beauty, style, and sexuality, as well as purveyors of music. And in appraising the full social impact of pornography, one needs to be aware of the immense profits generated by the sex industry and the potential for harm endemic to the production process of, say, pornographic films and videos, and not just dwell on the texts themselves and their effects on audiences.

Furthermore, in an era of globalization, one must be aware of the global networks that produce and distribute culture in the

interests of profit and corporate hegemony. The Internet and new media link the globe and distribute more culture to more people than at any time in history, yet giant media conglomerates and institutions, such as the state, that can exert censorship continue to be major forces of cultural hegemony (see McChesney 2013). Yet political economy alone does not hold the key to cultural studies, and important as it is, it has limitations as a single approach. Some political economy analyses reduce the meanings and effects of texts to rather circumscribed and reductive ideological functions, arguing that media culture merely reflects the ideology of the ruling economic elite that controls the culture industries and is nothing more than a vehicle for capitalist ideology. It is true that media culture overwhelmingly supports capitalist values, but it is also a site of intense struggle between different races, classes, genders, and social groups. It is also possible in the age of new media and social networking for consumers to become producers of their own media content and form, including oppositional voices and resistance. Thus, to fully grasp the nature and effects of media culture, one needs to develop methods to analyze the full range of its meanings and effects that are sensitive to the always mutating terrain of media culture and technology.

Textual Analysis

The products of media culture require multidimensional close textual readings to analyze their various forms of discourses, ideological positions, narrative strategies, image construction, and effects. "Reading" an artifact of media culture involves interpreting the forms and meanings of elements in a music video or television ad as one might read and interpret a book. There has been a wide range of types of textual criticism of media culture, from quantitative content analysis that dissects the number of, say, episodes of violence in a text to qualitative study that examines representations of women, Blacks, or other groups, or applies various critical theories to unpack the meanings of the texts or explicate how texts function to produce meaning. Traditionally, the qualitative analysis of texts attended to the formal artistic properties of imaginative literature—such as style, verbal imagery, characterization, narrative structure, and point of view. From the 1960s on, however, literary-formalist textual analysis has been enhanced by methods derived from semiotics, a system for investigating the creation of meaning not only in written languages but also in other, nonverbal codes, such as the visual and auditory languages of film and TV.

Semiotics analyzes how linguistic and nonlinguistic cultural "signs" form systems of meanings, as when giving someone a rose is interpreted as a sign of love or getting an A on a college paper is a sign of mastery of the rules of the specific assignment. Semiotic analysis can be connected with genre criticism (the study of conventions governing long-established types of cultural forms, such as soap operas) to reveal how the codes and forms of particular genres construct certain meanings. Situation comedies, for instance, classically follow a conflict/resolution model that demonstrates how to solve certain social problems with correct actions and values, and they thus provide morality tales of proper and improper behavior. Soap operas, by contrast, proliferate problems and provide messages concerning the endurance and suffering needed to get through life's endless miseries, while generating positive and negative models of social behavior. And advertising shows how commodity solutions solve problems of popularity, acceptance, success, and the like.

A semiotic and genre analysis of the film *Rambo* (1982), for instance, would show how it follows the conventions of the Hollywood genre of the war film that dramatizes conflicts between the United

States and its "enemies" (see Kellner, 1995). Semiotics describes how the images of the villains are constructed according to the codes of World War II movies and how the resolution of the conflict and happy ending follow the tradition of Hollywood classical cinema, which portray the victory of good over evil. Semiotic analysis would also include study of the strictly cinematic and formal elements of a film such as *Rambo,* dissecting the ways camera angles present Rambo as a god or how slow-motion images of him gliding through the jungle code him as a force of nature. Formal analysis of a film also includes how lighting is used to code characters as "good" or "evil," or how any of the technical features of film production can help generate meanings.

Similarly, a semiotic analysis of James Cameron's *Avatar* (2009) would reveal how the images in the film present an anti-militarist and pro-ecological agenda, although the narrative form celebrates a White, male savior, replicating more conservative narratives. *Avatar* also demonstrates how fantasy artifacts can project a wealth of political and ideological meanings, often ambiguous or contradictory. Discussions of *Avatar* have also generated heated debates in the politics of representation, concerning how the film has represented gender, sexuality, race, the military, and the environment, as well as other themes and dimensions of the film (see Kellner, 2010).

The textual analysis of cultural studies thus combines formalist analysis with critique of how cultural meanings convey specific ideologies of gender, race, class, sexuality, nation, and other ideological dimensions. Ideologies refer to ideas or images that construct the superiority of one class or group over others (i.e., men over women, Whites over people of color, ruling elites over working-class people, etc.) and thus reproduce and legitimate different forms of social domination. Ideological textual analysis should deploy a wide range of methods to fully explicate each dimension of ideological domination across representations of class, race, gender, and sexuality, and other forms of domination and subordination and to show how specific narratives serve interests of domination and oppression, contest it, or are ambiguous (as with many examples of media culture). Each critical method focuses on certain features of a text from a specific perspective: The perspective spotlights, or illuminates, some features of a text while ignoring others. Marxist methods tend to focus on class, for instance, while feminist approaches highlight gender, critical race theory emphasizes race and ethnicity, and gay and lesbian theories explicate sexuality. Yet today, the concept of "intersectionality" is often used, and many feminists, Marxists, critical race scholars, and other forms of cultural studies depict how gender, class, race, sexuality, and other components intersect and co-construct each other in complex cultural ways (see Crenshaw, 1991).

Various critical methods have their own strengths and limitations, their optics and blind spots. Traditionally, Marxian ideology critiques have been strong on class and historical contextualization and weak on formal analysis, while some versions are highly "reductionist," reducing textual analysis to denunciation of ruling class ideology. Feminism excels in gender analysis and in some versions is formally sophisticated, drawing on such methods as psychoanalysis and semiotics, although some versions are reductive, and early feminism often limited itself to analysis of images of gender. Psychoanalysis in turn calls for the interpretation of unconscious contents and meaning, which can articulate latent meanings in a text, as when Alfred Hitchcock's dream sequences project cinematic symbols that illuminate his characters' dilemmas or when the image of the female character in *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967), framed against the bar of her bed, suggests her sexual frustration, imprisonment in middle-class family life, and need to revolt.

Of course, each reading of a text is only one possible reading from one critic's subjective position, no matter how multiperspectival, and may or may not be the reading preferred by audiences (which themselves will be significantly different according to class, race, gender, ethnicity, ideology, and so on). Because there is a split between textual encoding and audience decoding, there is always the possibility for a multiplicity of readings of any text of media culture (Hall, 1980b). There are limits to the openness or polysemic nature of any text, of course, and textual analysis can explicate the parameters of possible readings and delineate perspectives that aim at illuminating the text and its cultural and ideological effects. Such analysis also provides the materials for criticizing misreadings, or readings that are one-sided and incomplete. Yet to further carry through a cultural studies analysis, one must also examine how diverse audiences actually read media texts and attempt to determine what impact or influence they have on audience thought and behavior.

Audience Reception and Use of Media Culture

All texts are subject to multiple readings depending on the perspectives and subject positions of the reader. Members of distinct genders, classes, races, nations, regions, sexual preferences, and political ideologies are going to read texts differently, and cultural studies can illuminate why diverse audiences interpret texts in various, sometimes conflicting, ways. Media culture provides materials for individuals and communities to create identities and meanings, and cultural studies work on audiences detects a variety of potentially empowering uses of cultural forms. One of the merits of cultural studies is that it has focused on audience reception and fan appropriation, and this focus provides one

of its major contributions, although there are also some limitations and problems with the standard cultural studies approaches to the audience.[5]

Ethnographic research studies people and their groups and cultures and is frequently used in an attempt to determine how media texts affect specific audiences and shape their beliefs and behavior. Ethnographic cultural studies have indicated some of the various ways audiences use and appropriate texts, often to empower themselves. For example, teenagers use video games and music television to escape from the demands of a disciplinary society. Males use sports media events as a terrain of fantasy identification, in which they feel empowered as "their" team or star triumphs. Such sports events also generate a form of community currently being lost in the privatized media and consumer culture of our time. Indeed, fandoms of all sorts, from *Star Trek* fans ("Trekkies"/"Trekkers") to devotees of various soap operas, reality shows, or current highly popular TV series, also form communities that enable them to relate to others who share their interests and hobbies. Some fans, in fact, actively re-create their favorite cultural forms (see examples in Jenkins, 1992; Lewis, 1992; and Gray, Sandvoss, & Harrington, 2007). Other studies have shown that audiences can subvert the intentions of the producers or managers of the cultural industries that supply them, as when astute young media users laugh at obvious attempts to hype certain characters, shows, or products (see de Certeau, 1984, for more examples of audiences constructing meaning and engaging in practices in critical and subversive ways).

The emphasis on active audience reception and appropriation, then, has helped cultural studies overcome the previously one-sided textualist orientations to culture and also has directed focus to the actual political effects texts may have. By combining quantitative and qualitative research, audience reception

and fandom studies—including some of the chapters in this reader—are providing important contributions to how people interact with cultural texts.

Yet I see several problems with reception studies as they have been constituted within cultural studies, particularly in the United States. Importantly, there is a danger that class will be downplayed as a significant variable that structures audience decoding and use of cultural texts. Cultural studies in England were particularly sensitive to class differences—as well as subcultural differences—in the use and reception of cultural texts, but I have noted many dissertations, books, and articles in cultural studies in the United States in which attention to class has been downplayed or is missing altogether. This is not surprising, as a neglect of class as a constitutive feature of culture and society is endemic in the American academy in most disciplines.

There is also the reverse danger, however, of exaggerating the constitutive force of class and downplaying, or ignoring, such other variables as gender and ethnicity. Staiger (1992) noted that Fiske, building on Hartley, lists seven "subjectivity positions" that are important in cultural reception—"self, gender, age-group, family, class, nation, ethnicity"—and proposes adding sexuality. All these factors, and no doubt more, interact in shaping how audiences receive and use texts and must be taken into account in studying cultural reception, for audiences decode and use texts according to the specific constituents of their class, race or ethnicity, gender, sexual preference, and so on.

Furthermore, I would warn against a tendency to romanticize the "active audience" by claiming that all audiences produce their own meanings and denying that media culture may have powerful manipulative effects. There is a tendency within the cultural studies tradition of reception research to dichotomize between dominant and oppositional readings (Hall, 1980b). "Dominant" readings are those in which audiences appropriate texts in line with the interests of the dominant culture and the ideological intentions of a text, as when audiences feel pleasure in the restoration of male power, law and order, and social stability at the end of a film such as *Die Hard,* after the hero and representatives of authority eliminate the terrorists who had taken over a high-rise corporate headquarters. An "oppositional" reading, in contrast, celebrates the resistance to this reading in audience appropriation of a text. For example, Fiske (1993) observed (and implicitly approved) resistance to dominant readings when homeless individuals in a shelter cheered the violent destruction of police and authority figures during repeated viewings of a videotape of *Die Hard*.

Fiske's study illustrates a tendency in cultural studies to celebrate resistance per se without distinguishing between types and forms of resistance (a similar problem resides with indiscriminate celebration of audience pleasure in certain reception studies). For example, some would argue that the violent resistance to social authority valorized in this reading of *Die Hard* glamorizes brutal, masculinist behavior and the use of physical violence to solve social problems. It is true that theorists of revolution, including Jean-Paul Sartre, Frantz Fanon, and Herbert Marcuse, among others, have argued that violence can be either emancipatory, when directed at forces of oppression, or reactionary, when directed at popular forces struggling against oppression. In contrast, many feminists and those in the Gandhian tradition see all violence against others as a form of brutal, masculinist behavior, and many people see it as a problematic form of conflict resolution. Thus, audience pleasure in violent resistance cannot be valorized per se as a progressive element of the appropriation of cultural texts. Instead, difficult discriminations must be made as to whether the resistance, oppositional reading, or pleasure in a given experience should be understood as progressive or reactionary, emancipatory or destructive.

Thus, while emphasis on the audience and reception was an excellent correction to the one-sidedness of purely textual analysis, I believe that in recent years, cultural studies has overemphasized reception and textual analysis while underemphasizing the production of culture and its political economy. This type of cultural studies fetishizes audience reception studies and neglects both production and textual analysis, thus producing populist celebrations of the text and audience pleasure in its use of cultural artifacts. This approach, taken to an extreme, would lose its critical perspective and put a positive gloss on audience experience of whatever is being studied. Such studies also might lose sight of the manipulative and conservative effects of certain types of media culture and thus serve the interests of the cultural industries as they are presently constituted.

No doubt, media effects are complex and controversial, and it is the merit of cultural studies to make the analysis of such effects an important part of its agenda. Previous studies of the audience and reception of media privileged ethnographic studies that selected slices of the vast media audiences, usually from the sites where researchers themselves lived. Such studies are invariably limited, and broader effects research can indicate how the most popular artifacts of media culture have a wide range of effects.

One new way to research media effects is to use Google, or databases that collect media texts, to trace certain effects of media artifacts through analysis of references to them in the journalistic media. Likewise, a new terrain of Internet audience research studies how fans act in chat rooms or on fansites devoted to their favorite artifacts of media culture. New media such as Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, and other social networking sites produce forums for more active audiences, as well as new sites for audience research. As audiences critically discuss or celebrate their preferred artifacts of media culture and, in some cases, produce their own versions, disseminated to audiences throughout the Internet and via new digital technologies, media culture expands its reach and power while audiences can feel that they are part of their preferred cultural sites and phenomena. Studies are proliferating in this field, examining how Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, and other new media are used by individuals and groups in diverse ways, from sharing pictures and media content to social networking to political expression and organizing and pedagogical purposes (Kellner & Kim, 2010).

Toward a Cultural Studies That Is Critical, Multicultural, and Multiperspectival

To avoid the one-sidedness of textual analysis approaches or audience and reception studies, I propose that cultural studies itself be multiperspectival, getting at culture from the perspectives of political economy, text analysis, and audience reception, as outlined above. Textual analysis should use a multiplicity of perspectives and critical methods, and audience reception studies should delineate the wide range of subject positions, or perspectives, through which audiences appropriate culture. This requires a multicultural approach that sees the importance of analyzing the dimensions of class, race and ethnicity, and gender and sexual preference within the texts of media culture, while also studying their impact on how audiences read and interpret media culture.

In addition, a critical cultural studies approach attacks sexism, heterosexism, racism, and bias against specific social groups (i.e., gays, intellectuals, seniors, etc.) and criticizes texts that promote any kind of domination or oppression. As an example of how considerations of production, textual analysis, and audience readings can fruitfully intersect in cultural studies, let us reflect on the Madonna phenomenon.

Madonna came on the scene in the moment of Reaganism and embodied the materialistic and consumer-oriented ethos of the 1980s ("Material Girl"). She also appeared in a time of dramatic image proliferation, associated with MTV, fashion fever, and intense marketing of products. Madonna was one of the first MTV music video superstars who consciously crafted images to attract a mass audience. Her early music videos were aimed at teenage girls (the Madonna wannabes), but she soon incorporated Black, Hispanic, and minority audiences with her images of interracial sex and multicultural "family" in her concerts. She also appealed to gay and lesbian audiences, as well as feminist and academic audiences, as her videos became more complex and political (e.g., "Like a Prayer," "Express Yourself," "Vogue," etc.).

Thus, Madonna's popularity was in large part a function of her marketing strategies and her production of music videos and images that appealed to diverse audiences. To conceptualize the meanings and effects in her music, films, concerts, and public relations stunts requires that her artifacts be interpreted within the context of their production and reception, which involves discussion of MTV, the music industry, concerts, marketing, and the production of images (see Kellner, 1995). Understanding Madonna's popularity also requires focus on audiences, not just as individuals but as members of specific groups—such as teenage girls, who were empowered by Madonna in their struggles for individual identity, or gays, who were also empowered by her incorporation of alternative images of sexuality within popular mainstream cultural artifacts. Yet appraising the politics and effects of Madonna also requires analysis of how her work might merely reproduce a consumer culture that defines identity in terms of images and consumption. It would make an interesting project to examine how former Madonna fans view the superstar's evolution and recent incarnations, such as her many relationships

and marriages and ongoing world tours, as well as to examine how contemporary fans view Madonna in an age that embraces pop singers such as Beyoncé and Lady Gaga.

Likewise, Michael Jackson's initial popularity derived from carefully managed media spectacles, first in the Jackson Five and then in his own career. Jackson achieved his superstar status, like Madonna, from his MTV-disseminated music videos and spectacular concert performances, in which promotion, image management, and his publicity apparatus made him the King of Pop. While, like Madonna, his frequent tabloid and media presence helped promote his career, media spectacle and tabloids also derailed it, as he was charged with child abuse in well-publicized cases. After his death in 2009, however, Jackson had a remarkable surge in popularity as his works were disseminated through the media, including new media and social networking sites.

Cultural Studies for the 21st Century

As discussed above, a cultural studies that is critical and multicultural provides comprehensive approaches to culture that can be applied to a wide variety of media artifacts, from advertising and pornography to Beyoncé and the *Twilight* series, from reality TV and *World of Warcraft* to Barbie and *Avatar*. Its comprehensive perspectives encompass political economy, textual analysis, and audience research and provide critical and political perspectives that enable individuals to dissect the meanings, messages, and effects of dominant cultural forms. Cultural studies is thus part of a critical media pedagogy that enables individuals to resist media manipulation and increase their freedom and individuality. It can empower people to gain sovereignty over their culture and struggle for alternative cultures and political change. Thus,

cultural studies is not just another academic fad but, rather, can be part of a struggle for a better society and a better life.

Notes

1. For more information on British cultural studies, see Agger (1992); Durham and Kellner (2012); During (1992, 1998); Fiske (1986); Grossberg (1989); Grossberg, Nelson, and Treichler (1992); Hall (1980b); Hammer and Kellner (2009); Johnson (1986–1987); O'Connor (1989); and Turner (1990). The Frankfurt school also provided much material for a critical cultural studies approach in its works on mass culture from the 1930s through the present; on the relation between the Frankfurt school and British cultural studies, see Kellner (1997).

2. On the concept of ideology, see the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (1980), Kellner (1978, 1979), Kellner and Ryan (1988), and Thompson (1990).

3. This model was adumbrated in Hall (1980a) and Johnson (1986–1987), and guided much of the early Birmingham work. Around the mid-1980s, however, the Birmingham group began to increasingly neglect the production and political economy of culture (some believe that this was always a problem with their work), and the majority of their studies became more academic, cut off from political struggle. I am thus trying to recapture the spirit of the early Birmingham project, reconstructed for our contemporary moment. For a fuller development of my conception of cultural studies, see Kellner (1992, 1995, 2001, 2010).

4. The term *political economy* calls attention to the fact that the production and distribution of culture take place within a specific economic system, constituted by relations between the state and economy. For instance, in the United States, a capitalist economy dictates that cultural production is governed by laws of the market, but the democratic imperatives of the system mean that there is some regulation of culture by the state. There are often tensions within a given society concerning how many activities should be governed by the imperatives of the market, or

economics, alone and how much state regulation or intervention is desirable to ensure a wider diversity of broadcast programming, for instance, or the prohibition of phenomena agreed to be harmful, such as cigarette advertising or pornography (see Kellner, 1990; McChesney, 2007).

5. Influential cultural studies that have focused on audience reception include Ang (1985, 1996), Brunsdon and Morley (1978), Fiske (1989a, 1989b), Jenkins (1992), Lewis (1992), Morley (1986), and Radway (1983). On "fandom," see Gray, Sandvoss, and Harrington (2007).

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