

Introduction

Film, Politics, and Education: Cinematic Pedagogy Across the Disciplines

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Introduction

Considerable debate has occurred across much of the second half of the twentieth century concerning the value of cultural studies to the field of education generally, and within particular classrooms specifically. Debate continues to this day, suggesting an incomplete or inconsistent definition of “value” where utilization of pop cultural output is the measure, strangling attempts to generate useful new pedagogical tools within educational systems that are sorely in need of revision. Here in the early twenty-first century, with the clear ascendancy of technologically mediated pop cultural output as a dominating presence in youth culture, it would seem logical, if not imperative, that educational policy-makers, researchers, and theorists embrace curriculum design that recognizes this dominance while using it for its value as a teaching and learning tool.¹ From my perspective within the academy, and specifically within a graduate school of education, I’m afraid that just the opposite may be true: those in positions of power within the education establishment who actively oppose the use of popular film, music, video

games, comic books, videotapes, and other pop culture fragments as aids in the educational endeavor, still hold considerable sway.

This is no small charge, but I am led to level it as a result of my own teaching of graduate and undergraduate students in education for the past four years, a small fragment of time relative to many of my peers in the academy, but more than enough to gather the anecdotal and empirical evidence from students, teachers, and researchers reporting on the opposition educators face—from parents, principals, department heads, superintendents, and sometimes, if rarely, students themselves—to the use of pop cultural output in the contemporary classroom. This text grows out of my frustration with that situation, and my engagement with six classes of graduate and undergraduate students who chose to take my courses on the use of film in education. I hope, with this text, to reinforce in readers my belief in the imperative for popular culture output to be used in the teaching of young people, and for popular film in particular to become a more standard and accepted part of the educational arsenal.

My interest in the use of film in the classroom grows principally from my passion for education rather than my passion for film. While I share with my cinemaphilic colleagues a love for a good story rendered in the moving cinematic image, I am far more concerned about teachers facing unequal competition from popular film and music for the attention of the young people they are charged with educating. Given the ease and accessibility of DVDs, CDs, television, and now the Internet, each of which offers films of potent interest to school-aged children, the completion of teacher-assigned homework, the reading of literature, the repetitive practice and thought that we educators hope our students will engage in while not in our presence are less likely to happen spontaneously. There are far too many more exciting activities within arms' reach. In my scholarship and teaching practice, I concentrate on the use of film as a *supplement* to contemporary methods of teaching because I believe in the power of film to convey information critical to my students' understanding of important ideas. Film, to my mind, must not become a substitute for good teaching, but can be an aid to passionate and well-informed teaching. As a classroom tool, it can catalyze a valuable discussion, or display in visual form a critical idea that might remain too abstract or remote when encountered in

discussion, literature, or debate. And film, given its potential to connect to our emotional center, and as a device for pleasure-seeking, for fantasy, or for the experience of alternative ways of thinking or being, can help teachers connect with their students along the important but often ignored dimension of joy.² I equate joyful learning in the classroom with good teaching; I equate good teaching with resourceful educators and engaged students. In contemporary Western culture, film can engage students in such a way as to advance a deliberate, pedagogically critical engagement with knowledge and with the world at large.

I have gone a long way toward advancing a broad argument in these first paragraphs without laying out critical definitions or backing my arguments with important historical and empirical references the reader may find of value. So, with that in mind, I'll begin at the beginning, again.

Film

Film, Politics, and Education brings together the work of eight educators from a variety of academic backgrounds who collectively agree on the wisdom of pedagogic interface between elements of popular culture and teaching/learning strategies in the classroom. Collectively, the authors represented here are specifically enamored with the power of film to transmit knowledge visually in a way that literary or oral transmission alone cannot, and with the depth, breadth, variety, and popularity of film as cause for its use in education. From my perspective, film represents a tool that educators can wield to advance any academic subject within any classroom. The reasons I advocate for its use grow from my observation of its power within the culture of the contemporary West, a power anchored in its ubiquity and cultural embrace. Film's clear visibility, the way it allows for the consumption of knowledge and ideas with the eye, its potential for touching our emotions, and, with the rise of technology in education, the growing ease of its use in the classroom, augers well for its pedagogical use.

For the last forty-five years, first a small, then a growing literature has tracked the use of film in the classroom. Although Bergdoll (1993), in this volume, points to the use of film in art and architecture

classrooms as early as the 1920s and 1930s, instances in which undergraduate and graduate professional schools utilized advanced technology in narrowly focused elite environments, the history of film and education in the public school classroom tracks closely the evolution of technology easily accessible to the elementary school teacher. As early as 1937, Hoban, Hoban, and Zisman argued that various newly formed classifications of audiovisual materials allowed teachers to determine what audiovisual materials actually were, and then how best to use them within any given context, suggesting that audio and projection technology was finding its way into dialog about public classrooms in the first half of the twentieth century. At that time, even a field trip was considered a type of audiovisual experience; in today's jargon, this same trip might be called "experiential education," but the point is the same. Both student and teacher, at some remove from traditional classroom practice, engage a nontraditional teaching and learning paradigm, one which assumes that a variety of educational experiences best illustrates both the diversity of the world and the ability of various models of teaching and learning to be effective in passing on knowledge. Using film, as opposed to taking a field trip, required the teacher—or an assistant—to be conversant with the technology that allowed for the use of film. Today, of course, the DVD, the video recorder, and the computer are the projection/display devices of choice.

By the 1960s, with filmstrips and projected moving images finding their way into public classrooms, the contemporary basis for using film in the classroom can be said to have solidified, in no small part because of the ease of use and access to the technology for cinematic projection. Indeed, by the late 1950s, Lefranc (1959) could write in a UNESCO publication for the United Nations that "the place of the filmstrip in most school systems seems to be fairly well defined," though he also cautioned that

... the filmstrip takes a modest though useful place between material that is not screened or which can be screened with an episcopescope, and the cinema and television. (p. 13)

Though the subject of this text is the use of the moving image in education, I mention filmstrips here because, as Lefranc also points out, in the

early years of films' use in the classroom, filmstrips often accompanied the film, with "each of the stills [serving] as a visual summary of a scene or sequence" (p. 24). The filmstrip thus updated the much longer use of still photography in the classroom, and was often used in conjunction with film as the moving image found a place in the same classrooms. Besides showing an interesting overlap in display technologies as used in the classroom, Lefranc also reveals how technology impacts the way teachers have chosen to use film, as well as the constraints and opportunities it has presented within the classroom.

By the 1970s, with the presence of film projectors growing in number within Western public schools, teachers found themselves confronted by school libraries that increasingly stocked educational films on which they could draw to enhance—or replace—lessons on a variety of subjects. Texts such as Amelio's (1971) *Film in the Classroom: Why Use It; How to Use It*, or Miller's (1979) *Films in the Classroom: A Practical Guide* set out the basic parameters for showing mainly educational films in schools. Katz's (1972) *A Curriculum in Film* is one of many texts of that time which broadened the theme of films' use in the classroom by considering the notion of visual literacy, the study of film as a subject in its own right, and by identifying the value that a number of films, both popular and instructional, might have in the classroom. As early as 1965, the National Council of Teachers of English published a text titled *The Motion Picture and the Teaching of English*, encouraging its members to consider how film might enhance the teaching of literature in the intermediate and high school classroom. Ross's (1970) edited text, *Film and the Liberal Arts*, reflected the depth to which the film had penetrated the liberal arts on American college campuses by the beginning of the 1970s, preparing that generation of teachers that finds itself ensconced in k-12 classrooms across the country today, as well as in positions of power in the educational establishment.

Politics

By the 1980s and 1990s, well into what many theorists have called the late modern or postmodern era, one in which the global saturation of

societies by spectacular and technologically mediated mass entertainment reached new levels of pervasiveness, the call for new forms of visual literacy, the weight of mass culture on research in all fields of study, and the sheer volume of films released by Hollywood for the large and small screens made the use of film in the classroom almost impossible to ignore. That did not mean, however, that film was embraced at all levels of education or in all fields of educational endeavor. Indeed, while Denzin (1995) could point to the birth of the “cinematic society”³ in the second half of the twentieth century, we have yet to fully embrace the use of film as an important component of teaching and learning. This is where I believe “politics” enters the equation of film in the classroom.

Without entering into the long and contentious debate over the direction that the so-called culture wars have taken in the last twenty years, we need not be reminded too often that our society—indeed, all societies—is a formation of blocks of power, formal and informal contestations of legitimacy and rights, fragments and justifications of truth and history. With the history of cultural studies firmly rooted in a Marxist vision of the world, a vision that contests the right of capital to control labor and resources, and that seeks to understand where, how, and by what means power is exercised over the masses in all societies, we who seek to use elements of popular culture in the classroom confront the history of this contestation. Further, the intellectual might of the Frankfurt School⁴ theorists, whose long argument against the value of mass culture or pop culture artifacts weighs heavily upon the notion of film in the classroom, and thus upon the educator who seeks to conflate high culture and low, intrudes in many cases. In short, the use of film as a component of popular culture falls on the wrong side of contemporary history, and as a result, fights an uphill battle in recognition and pedagogical value within systems of educational power.

I have used the word “politics” in the title of this text, and in the title of my course of the same name, to identify elements of the environment that teachers may face when seeking to use film in the classroom. If, as I argue, the prevailing opinion within the elite establishment of educational researchers and policy makers is that advanced by the Frankfurt School, then some educators will find it difficult if not impossible to properly advance a teaching and learning strategy that utilizes popular

film within the contemporary classroom. Politics, from the perspective of the teacher, can take the form of disciplinary questions, active dissuasion on the part of superiors, expressed concern and/or consternation on the part of parents or colleagues, or downright hostility from any individual quarter. Despite the depth of literature that addresses the importance of cultivating visual literacy, or which advances a positive notion of engagement with popular culture in many individual fields of study, or which recognizes the value popular film can have in a classroom environment, a political dimension that is antithetical to the cinematic presence in the classroom is always a possibility. Indeed, though I write these words while sitting in a large northeastern U.S. city, where many of my students work as teachers, I have met many who hail from much smaller regions of the country where traditional teaching does not include the use of popular film. It remains important, therefore, to continue to beat the drum of education and cultural studies generally, and film and education specifically, if we are to broaden the diversity of teaching styles to include some of what pop culture is producing for general consumption.

Education

In this text, education is broadly defined. Although most of my students teach pre-k through twelfth-grade public school curricula, my film and education methods can be used outside of these boundaries, in post-secondary and graduate education, professional education, adult and lifelong education, and every field taught in the technical or liberal arts. I have coined the term *cinematic education* to refer to teaching and learning infused with the moving image. Cinematic education does not refer exclusively to the projection of feature films on a screen in a classroom for 120 minutes, after which discussion is held about the contents of said film. This method is best left to film educators, though the work of film educators can rightfully be called, by my definition, cinematic education as well. In my own work, I have been far more interested in finding ways of using “pieces” of film to allow my students to enter into discussion and debate with the clarity of a visual image as the catalyst. Rarely do I show a film in its entirety during a class period. I find it

better to assign the watching of film as an at-home task well before or after formal class time.

Aesthetically and philosophically, I am more concerned with small visual elements in film, with scenes, scenery, and architecture cinematically rendered; with colors and sound, with title sequences and flashes of light, with the races, genders, sexual orientations, religions, and ethnicities of the characters as they appear before me on screen. These “pieces” of film, shown in small bits, with the classroom lights off or on, with the sound muted or loud, in regular, fast, or slow motion, are the elements of cinematic education, the *vocabulary* of a cinematic pedagogy. Combined with each educator’s individual pedagogical style, and with an academic intention behind a given lesson plan, the cinematic can add visual and intellectual rigor unparalleled by other modes of expression. Expanding Ellsworth’s notion of “mode of address,” film speaks to us in a way that lectures, readings, and argumentative orality cannot. This is, to my mind, the value of cinematic education in today’s classroom.

Examples of Cinematic Education

To better illustrate the point I am trying to make, I will endeavor to describe two moments of teaching and learning that highlighted for me the dynamic nature of using film in the classroom. Each of these examples is taken from one of the six classes in film and education I have taught over the last four years, and highlighted for me the value of training teachers to utilize film in their respective classes. In both cases, I did not use a film scene to point to a topic specific to the fields in which my students taught, but merely opened an intellectual space in which film might act as a catalyst for discussion on whatever topic emerged from the viewing of that piece of film.

The first example draws on the Chinese film *Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon* (motion picture) (Lee, 2000). Midway through the movie, the two main characters—a man and a woman—are involved in a chase scene through a forest, the woman, in this case, chasing the man. The Hollywood magic that imbues this film allows characters to fly through the air as if weightless, and thus allows them to skip over bodies of water, walk upright into the branches of trees while defying

gravity, and otherwise perform acrobatic feats generally impossible for ordinary human beings. The scene I used lasts approximately two minutes on screen.

I chose to show this chase scene in three separate modes: with the sound turned off, so that viewers could only guess at the dialog being used; with the sound on, but only after discussion of the scene viewed with the sound off; and finally, with the sound on, but with the screen facing the classroom wall, such that all one could hear was the sound track, which in this case included both dialog and music.

After the first two-minute viewing, with the sound turned off, I asked students to write what they believed the characters were saying based on what they had seen them doing in the scene. The ensuing discussion highlighted the beauty of the cinematography, the way the director chose to highlight certain aspects of the attractive features of the male or female characters, how the color of the landscape, which was green, gave the scene a natural feeling even though the characters were behaving in a way physically unnatural for humans. There were at least six or seven different viewpoints related to the class by students, and each viewpoint had validity as a topic of discussion within my classroom. We then watched the scene again, this time with sound.

Some of my students had seen this film before class, and therefore understood the context in which the scene took place within the film. For my purposes, this was unimportant. Some of those seeing the film for the first time, upon hearing the dialog coupled with the scene, were surprised at the types of sounds associated with the action. In several cases, points of the action did not appear to call for specific sounds—a grunt, for instance, or a laugh—that the film did, in fact, contain. So we discovered that discontinuities between sounds and images were possible, and that created opportunity for a discussion on the realms of sound and activity. Several art teachers in the room found utility in this new concept—using film to highlight disjunctures between action and sound in a film—for activities they would create in their own classrooms. Other students pointed to the way sound was used to create an inequality between the male and the female characters, an inequality that matched some of what was visible in the scene on its first viewing. So, in this case, sound accentuated the disjuncture in the characters’

relative power. This point, in turn, led to discussion about how men and women in society are portrayed in film, magazines, television, and other visual media as weaker than men even if their skills, or skill sets, are relatively even.

The final use of this clip, listening to the soundtrack without seeing the television screen, provided a different terrain for the imagination of my students. Now, having seen the scene in two different contexts, would listening rather than seeing and listening together provide yet another dimension of analysis?

After listening to the scene, several students found themselves thinking of other ways the director (or director of photography) might have shot the scene while conveying the same message about the characters. Others considered how little about the sound track would lead one to believe that the scene took place within the branches of trees deep in a forest, which is the actual location in which the scene takes place. Still others pointed out that the music, together with the dialog, did more than either of them—music or dialog—could have accomplished alone, thereby highlighting the various dimensions sound can take within the context of a contemporary film.

When I asked students to consider how this single scene could be used in the context of their respective fields, much like the art student had mentioned her recognition of disjunctures between sound and action, there were many ideas. A high school physics teacher suggested that on watching this scene, she could envision asking students to enumerate the physical theories that the characters broke in order for the scene to take place in the way that it did. A civics teacher made mention of the environment—the lush, green forest in which the scene plays out—and suggested that upon watching this scene in his classroom a conversation might ensue which might point to the value of certain conservation measures which would allow forests like that witnessed in the film to survive on earth for another thousand years or more. Indeed, that same civics classroom could also consider how the scene would look if conservation measures are not taken in this century. A junior high school English teacher considered that her students might be asked to write the dialog for each character after watching the scene without sound, and in so doing, cultivate an affinity for understanding

dialogical address between characters in a screenplay as opposed to that found in a novel or stage play. And finally, an elementary school art teacher found the dominating color scheme—forest green—a wonderful element on which to build a lesson on color: what it can mean, how it can be witnessed, what the natural earth gives us to dwell upon, and how color is important in conveying certain ideas to a viewer.

I have described this sequence of activity and discussion in some depth to drive home the diversity of viewpoints, fields of study, age groups, professions, and ideologies that a single two-minute scene can be used to underscore, using the simplest of technologies (tv/vcr) and one of the most powerful elements of popular culture: film. In my classes in cinematic education, I screen dozens of films, some for as little as five seconds, extracting minutiae that some might find unusual, but which, in many cases, leads to discussions about possibilities few in the room had before attending this class. This is not a pat on the back; indeed, I have always come from instances of these classes having learned something I didn't know before I went in. This, to my mind, is the nature of teaching and learning when both student and teacher are in a position to be recognized as both. What I do hope I've demonstrated is the breadth of uses to which film—small segments of film—can be put in a variety of subjects across all age groups. It remains only for you, the teacher, to recognize moving pictures as malleable instances of activity capable of being mapped to your individual ideas and expressions, all for the benefit of enlivening a sequence of intellectual exchanges in your classroom that may allow both you and your students to blossom in ways you can now only imagine.

I wish to mention another example of the type of discussion that can arise with the use of film in the classroom. In this case, the discussion was around the film *Kill Bill Vol. II* (motion picture) (Tarantino 2004) and the level of violence the director Quentin Tarantino associated with his characters.⁵ My class, in this instance, was comprised of graduate education students, most of whom were women; indeed, all but one student were female. The subject of gendered violence arose: to what extent did Tarantino place women in a position to violently confront one another in ways that many people associate with men? In this case, two of the main female characters—Uma Thurman and Daryl Hannah—engage

in a scene of swordplay, with one violently killing the other in a death match we have seen acted by male characters tens of thousands of times in the movies. But in this case, two attractive, blond women were having a go at each other with swords.

Most of my students raised the issue of Tarantino himself, and considered this scene a proper extension of his bloody cinematic corpus, regardless of the character's gender. But one student remarked on the value of the scene for girls and women, who often operate in a world where friends and enemies wear the same smile. She made mention of her own life, and the number of times when girls she believed were her friends—in school, in the neighborhood, and so on—often turned out to be working, in some way, against her. In the fight scene from *Kill Bill Vol. II*, the fact that each woman knew the other was an enemy, and was prepared to have it out with her to settle the score, was seen as a step above the backbiting, hypocritical activity my student had witnessed in her own life. Several other students in the room agreed wholeheartedly.

As a male, and as the instructor, I must admit that I was a little taken aback. I had never heard an argument like this before, but I found it fascinating in the context of a class on film and education. But regardless of your view toward this student's self-revelation, it is this type of serendipity that constantly arises when filmic displays are taken out of their traditional context and placed side by side with ideas, sounds, books, exams, photographs, pencils, paint, and the many other tools for teaching and learning. By raising issues of gender violence in a small piece of popular film, a conversation opened on the dynamics of female-female relations generally, one that my students thought might be very useful in a number of ways. While it is important to recognize that certain scenes of violence and sexual activity—overt or implied—should be kept out of many classrooms, there are means by which the utility of otherwise unnoticed scenes may be broadened by the creative use of film in the classroom.

Chapters

The seven educators besides myself who address the cinematic as a valuable aspect of contemporary education do so from a number of

perspectives, representing the sheer diversity of styles, fields, and intellectual currents with which the cinematic can be blended in order to teach. In *Chapter 1*, John Broughton gives us a picture of the history behind the use of film in the classroom, drawing upon both philosophical theories and practical classroom experience.

Taking issue with arguments made by scholar Nadine Dolby in an influential *Harvard Education Review* article, Annette Bickford uses *Chapter 2* to contest the wholesale acceptance of popular culture output as inherently democratic, pointing out that a more nuanced view of all cultural output—popular or elite—should frame any discussion of democracy and its practice in the West.

Chapter 3 draws on the interdisciplinary work of Elizabeth Ellsworth to unfold the notion of “mode of address,” the give and take between film and audience in which each member of that audience is identified by the film being viewed. As a concept anchored in film studies, Ellsworth nevertheless marks its importance as a point of intellectual geography, allowing astute users of the cinematic to wrestle with yet another nuance film brings to the pedagogical arena.

In *Chapter 4*, Barry Bergdoll combines his experience as an instructor of art history and architecture with the cinematic to reveal the history of these two fields and their encounter with film, and his own observation of how history, technology, and philosophy have had an impact on the teaching of architectural history. While architecture and film may not seem a natural alliance, Bergdoll gives sound reason why the two have not only had a pleasant alliance across the twentieth century, but also why this alliance might indeed be growing deeper here in the twenty-first century.

Chapter 5, by human rights educator Peter Lucas, considers how film has “seeded” peace education in Brazil, allowing educators to raise difficult subjects within an emotionally scorched environment with the use of film.

In Chapter 6, Chyng Sun takes the Gramscian concept of hegemony and marries it to Disney's film *The Lion King* (motion picture) (Allers & Minkoff 1994), producing an insightful take on the popular animated film. While a separate series of texts could be devoted to animated film and education, Sun's work represents an important instance of

mapping contemporary cultural theory to popular cinematic fare in ways that both enlighten us to the density of animated film and excavate tissue of cultural and intellectual value from this fascinating artifact of modern life.

The final chapter, rendered in dialogical style, is located in the text as an Afterward. Following an earlier unfinished public conversation I held with scholar and cultural critic bell hooks at Columbia University in the fall of 2003, she and I reexamine her beliefs about the importance of film in popular culture generally and in education specifically. Having followed bell's work on film across several decades, it was good to confirm that hooks still believes in the power of film to push us toward greater critical thinking, particularly in light of the reign of less activist cinematic work than has been produced by Hollywood in the 1960s and 1970s. bell hooks reminds us of the leveling power of film, its ability to reach both into the ivory tower and out to the people on the street, bridging divides of class, religion, education, and power in a way that few elements in Western culture can so naturally achieve.

Conclusion

I mentioned earlier in this introduction that the use of film in the classroom can in no way become a substitute for good teaching, and it is worth mentioning here again. Dedicated teachers, given the resources they require, combined with a small classroom of motivated students eager to learn, has become the ideal for parents, teachers, and those who would hire them to teach. However, those of us who has recently engaged children in classrooms across the age spectrum, in all parts of the country, in multiple fields of learning, are certain that much needs to be done to aid the Western system of education before we collectively achieve the ideal everywhere.

What this text posits is that, given the tremendous power of popular culture output, with its visceral connection to both pleasure seeking and mass activity, the educational establishment might be well served to consider how film can enliven, diversify, deepen, enrich, and legitimate mass education for a large swath of the young public. Further, in

postsecondary education, professional graduate education, and lifelong education being considered by our increasingly older, re-training population, models of curriculum-design that bring the cinematic into the pedagogical fold can be a welcome and necessary update to models of teaching that are a century old or more.

As this text shows in academic prose by the diversity of its chapters, scholars are increasingly considering the benefits of a cinematic education paradigm, one that advances cinematic education as a valuable conceptual tool in the arsenal of educators across multiple fields of endeavor. At Teachers College, Columbia University, John Broughton and I work within *FERA—The Film & Education Research Academy*—to catalog the myriad ways film can add positively to the teaching experience for both student and teacher.⁶ This research, along with that conducted by dozens of our colleagues worldwide, brings promise to those who look forward to a time when cinematic elements of popular culture enliven the admixture of pedagogy in public and private classrooms to a much greater extent than they do today.

Notes

1. By pop cultural output, I am referring to those creations of what Adorno (1991) called the "culture industry" that include television shows, radio programs, popular film, popular recorded music, comic books, video games, and other forms of mass entertainment. I should also point out that competing definitions of mass culture and popular culture militate against these terms being used interchangeably in this text. For examples of these competing definitions, see page 3 in Alvermann, Moon and Haygood (1999), and Chapter 1 in Strinati's (1995) "An Introduction to Theories of Popular Culture."
2. Alvermann, Moon, and Hagood (1999, p. 31) refer to the "politics of pleasure" as a vital concern of which educators must be aware when venturing onto the cultural terrain of young people in order to use it to teach.
3. Denzin was quoting Hitchcock, who suggested that the cinematic society was "that twentieth century social formation that knows itself through the cinematic apparatus." See Denzin (1999, p. 1).
4. Explanations of the Frankfurt School theorists and theories can be found in numerous sources, but for a succinct definition and overview, see Edgar and Sedgwick (1999).

5. Given their subject matter, most Tarantino films are best used, if at all, in classrooms of adults rather than young people of high school age or below.
6. See <http://www.filmandeducation.org>. Those wishing to contribute to the research of the Academy, or merely wishing to be in contact, should e-mail either John Broughton or myself at jmb61@columbia.edu (John) or kss2008@columbia.edu (Kelvin).

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Chapter Three

Mode of Address: It's a Film Thing

ELIZABETH ELLSWORTH

I didn't study the field of education in graduate school. I studied movies. Hollywood movies, mostly. But because I was a teaching assistant from the first day of grad school, I was also trying to figure out how to teach. Most days in grad school, I would watch a movie like *Young Mr. Lincoln* or *Meet Me in St. Louis*. I would read and try to "get" Althusser or Lacan or Eisenstein or Kuhn or Mulvey or Barthes—folks who wrote about images and stories and meaning and desire and social change. I would try to teach a discussion section of undergraduate students how to analyze the form, style, genre, and ideology of the film they had just seen. And I would be fascinated and reinvigorated by the social, political, and aesthetic power of the movies.

I got hired out of communication arts and into a school of education to teach video production and media criticism for educators. It's been a cross-cultural experience. I didn't speak the language of educational research. I didn't know the stories or characters of the field.

Most alien and alienating of all was having to learn the theories and practices of this new academic world called "curriculum and instruction" in the complete absence of suspense, romance, seduction, visual

pleasure, music, plot, humor, tap dancing, or pathos. Everything I had learned about contemporary theories of linguistics, literary criticism, semiotics, feminism, and culture was learned in the presence of—in the light of, in the pleasure of, in the wake of—some movie's story, metaphors, stars, images, and mode of address.

But education wasn't like the communication arts of film or television. It wasn't in the humanities. It was more like the sociology classes I took—the ones taught through programmed workbook textbooks. The field of education was, I found out, a social science.

What I've learned most from my decade-long encounter with education as an academic field is, I don't want to teach or learn in the absence of pleasure, plot, moving and being moved, metaphor, cultural artifacts, audience engagement and interaction.

That's where mode of address comes in. It's been 20 years since I started working as a teaching assistant in an introduction to film course. I'm 14 years into trying to figure out what people think they're doing in this academic field of education and why they've made that field into what it appears to be. And I'm thinking again about modes of address.

Mode of Address in Film Studies

Mode of address is a film studies term with a lot of theoretical and political baggage attached to it. I learned about it in classes on film and social change. What it boils down to is this question: Who does this film think you are?

Here is a selective reading of some of the theory and politics behind this question, and behind the concept of mode of address. I'm not interested in trying to define exactly what mode of address is through this revisit to my academic roots. I'm interested in why, when I think as an educator about pedagogy these days, I keep thinking about it in terms of mode of address. I'm wondering how educators might in turn be educated by encounters with various notions of mode of address, including the one in film studies.

Film theorists have developed the notion of mode of address to deal, in a film-specific way, with some huge questions that cut across film studies, literary and art criticism, sociology, anthropology, history,

and education. Those questions have to do with the relation between "the social" and "the individual." Questions like, What is the relation between a film's text and a spectator's experience? A novel's structure and a reader's interpretation? A painting and a viewer's emotion? A social practice and cultural identity? A curriculum and learning? What is the relation, in other words, between the "outside" of society and the "inside" of the human psyche? How can it be equally true that "people act in self-directed and intentional ways," and yet, the patterns that inform their actions—how they think, what they "see," what they desire—are already aspects of social being" (Donald, 1991, p. 2)?

These are big questions. They're also key for people interested in social change. Once you figure out the relationship between a film's text and a spectator's experience, for example, you might be able to change or influence, even control, a spectator's response by designing a film in a particular way. Or, you may be able to teach viewers how to resist or subvert who a film thinks they are, or wants them to be.

For over 25 years, film theorists have been using the notion of mode of address, in some form or other, to grapple with these issues. Here, I'm going to trace some of the meanings that this notion has had for film theorists. This selective reading starts with mode of address as a concept that refers to something that is "in" a film's text, which then somehow acts on its imagined or real viewers or both. Then there's a moment in the logic of film theory when some film theorists begin to see mode of address less as something that is in a film and more as an event that takes place somewhere *between* the social and the individual. Here, the event of address takes place in the space that is social, psychic, or both, between the film's text and the viewers' uses of it. This shift from locating mode of address inside a film's text to understanding it as an event will propel my selective reading of mode of address out of film theory and into education, cultural studies, and psychoanalysis.

Who Does This Film Think You Are?

Films, like letters, books, or television commercials, are *for* someone. They have intended and imagined audiences. Now, film directors, scriptwriters, studio producers, and theater owners are often far removed

from “real” or “actual” moviegoers. The distances can be economic, temporal, social, geographical, ideological, gendered, raced. In addition, films go through many alterations between script and screening. Yet most decisions about a film’s narrative structure, “look,” and packaging are made in light of conscious and unconscious assumptions about “who” its audiences “are,” what they want, how they read films, which films they’ll pay to see next year, what makes them laugh or cry, what they fear, and who they think they are in relation to themselves, to others, and to the social and cultural passions and tensions of the day.

Films have intended and imagined audiences. They also have desired audiences. Some films, like *Jurassic Park*, are produced with the desire to attract the largest possible “mass” (worldwide) audience. Others, like *Go Fish*, are produced to appeal to the people who go to the Sundance Film Festival and are made with the hope of getting bookings in small hip urban “art” theaters attended by people on ideological, sexual, racial, and political fringes.

The concept of mode of address is built on this contention: In order for a film to work for an audience, in order for it to simply make sense to a viewer, or make her laugh, root for a character, suspend her disbelief, cry, scream, feel satisfied at the end—the viewer must enter into a particular relationship with the film’s story and image system.

Here is one way to conceptualize this process: There is a seat in the movie theater to which the movie screen “points,” a seat for which the cinematographic effects and frame compositions were designed, a seat at which the lines of perspective converge—giving the fullest illusion of depth, movement, “reality.” It’s from that physical position that the film looks the best. Likewise, there is a “position” within power relations and interests, within gender and racial constructions, within knowledge, to which the film’s story and visual pleasure is addressed. It’s from that “subjective position” that the film’s assumptions about who the audience is work with the least effort, contradiction, or slippage.

For example, films intended for 12-year-old white boys who live in the suburbs are pitched to the positions that such boys are assumed to occupy (or desired to occupy by producers of films and spin-off merchandisers) within contemporary social relations, market tastes, sexual fantasy and desire, gender, and racial construction. In order for those

boys to “catch” the film and run with it, they have to be in the place that the film is pitched to. In order for them to become part of the structure of relations that make up the system of looks, desires, pleasures, expectations, narrative setups and payoffs that make up the film-going experience, they have to be there. In order for them to “complete” the film as its producers hoped they would complete it, they have to assume the positions offered in those systems—at least for the length of the film, at least imaginatively.

“Hey, You!”

Thus, filmmakers make many conscious and unconscious assumptions and wishes about the who that their film is addressed to and the social positions and identities that their audience is occupying. And those assumptions and desires leave intended and unintended traces in the film itself. To some schools of film study, a film is composed, then, not only of a system of images and an unfolding story. It is also composed of a structure of address to an imagined audience.

The “traces” of this structure aren’t visible. They don’t offer themselves up for study on the screen like aspects of a film’s style, such as composition of objects and people in the frame, use of color, movement, editing, lighting, and so on. A film’s mode of address is more like the film’s narrative structure than its image system. Like story or plot, mode of address is not visible.

Nor does someone in the film literally say: “Hey, you! You 12-year-old white suburban boy! Watch this! It’ll be fun. And you’ll want to buy the toy. And you’ll feel older and more powerful—and taller—than you are and the whole world will seem to be centered around you. And when the film ends, you’ll feel that being a white American suburban 12-year-old boy is the best thing in the world to be.” Not a literal visual or spoken moment, mode of address is a structuring of the relationships between the film and its viewers that unfolds over time.

Film scholars who have focused on mode of address have come up with ways of talking about this invisible process of “hailing” a viewer into a position from which to read the film. Critics who study film narrative have borrowed concepts from literary criticism and theater

and invented others so that they can name and analyze the intangible experience of story on film. These include plot, character, subtext, genre, causal links, point of view, and so on. Similarly, critics interested in mode of address have come up with concepts that name and analyze aspects of their ideas about being hailed. "Audience positioning" is one of them. Masterman (1985) describes it this way:

[W]ithin the visual media, we, as audience members, are compelled to occupy a particular *physical* position by virtue of the positioning of the camera. Identifying and being conscious of this physical position should quickly reveal that we are also being invited to occupy a *social* space. A *social* space is also opened up for us by the text's mode of address, its setting, and its format. Finally, the physical and social spaces which we are invited to occupy are linked to *ideological* positions—"natural" ways of looking at and making sense of experience. (p. 229)

Masterman (1985) then gives an example of audience positioning in television news programs:

As the news opens, we are addressed by a news reader who looks directly at the camera and delivers "the facts." Each viewer is given the role of direct addressee. We cut to a filmed interview. Our position changes. We are no longer directly addressed, but cavedrop, watch and judge. The different positions assure us that some aspects of experience must be accepted (facts), whilst others (opinions) require our judgment. The highly questionable distinction within journalism between fact and opinion is sewn into the ways in which we are positioned in relation to different aspects of experience. (pp. 229–230)

What Masterman (1985) is suggesting is that in order to make sense of films or TV news on *their own terms*, the viewer must be able to adopt if only imaginatively and temporarily—the social, political, and economic interests that are the conditions for the knowledge they construct.

An educational film's address to the student, for example, invites her not only into the activity of knowledge construction but also into the construction of knowledge from a particular social and political point of view. This makes "viewing experience" and the sense that we make of films not simply voluntary and idiosyncratic, but relational—a projection of particular kinds of relations of self to self, and between self, others, knowledge, and power.

So, part of a 12-year-old boy's experience of and relationship to a film such as *Jurassic Park* is a response not only to its style and story. It is also a response to the ways in which its structure of address solicits, demands, even, a certain reading from him. His experience of the film includes the conscious and unconscious one of being addressed—through, for example, camera positioning and the social space it constructs "for" him—as if he were who the film wants him to be, thinks he is, or both.

"Who, Me?"

However, he never is exactly who the film thinks he is—12 years old, an American, white, suburban boy. None of these things ever means just one thing. None of these social positions is ever a single or unified one. Maybe he's a gay 12-year-old boy. What does that do to the usual assumptions about his 12-year-oldness, his whiteness, his suburbanness, his boyiness? Maybe he's a mixed-race boy who is often "mistaken" for "white." Maybe he's 12 years old and the son of an abusive parent and has never really experienced being 12 years old. Maybe he lives in the suburbs but wishes he lived in the city and goes there every chance he gets.

The viewer is *never* only or fully who the film thinks s/he is. (The viewer is never exactly who s/he thinks s/he is either, but we'll save that one for later.) Depending on how far off the mark the film is about who we think we are, the experience of a film's mode of address ranges from "meeting/missing" the film from two seats to the left of the ideal seat in the theater, to meeting/missing it from the front row last seat against the wall. Both off-center seats require some reworking on the part of the viewer to bring the film into focus—some rewriting, reviewing, in order to get it from off center by imagining oneself to be at its center of address. Watching a film from frontrow last seat against the side wall solicits constant perceptual translation of the image—prompts the viewer to project herself into that perfect seat in the center of the theater and imagine how much better and more pleasing it must look from the place she "should" be sitting in.

So, too, being slightly or hugely missed by a film's mode of address requires what some film scholars have called "negotiation" on the part of the viewer. What does being 12 years old and a girl mean for getting

pleasure from the story of *Jurassic Park*? But this negotiation is never a simple or a single thing either. Because just as the viewer is never exactly who the film thinks s/he is, the film is never exactly what *it* thinks it is. There's never just one unified mode of address in a film.

If *Jurassic Park* had been addressed strictly and solely to 12-year-old white American suburban boys, the rest of the planet would have been less likely than it was to go to see it. There was something in that film that was intended for who the filmmakers imagined me to be. (My guess is that the strong, brave, intelligent woman scientist was pitched to a part of me—even if it felt like she was put in grudgingly, and as an afterthought. And even if she was a much watered-down version of the woman scientist in *Jurassic Park*, the book.) So my negotiation of *Jurassic Park*'s modes of address was not simply a matter of having to imagine myself as a 12-year-old boy in order to get the film and enjoy it.

Multiple entry points into films is a commercial necessity. This complicates the whole notion of mode of address.

Angela McRobbie (1984) points this out in her study of how teenage girls responded to watching *Flashdance* and *Fame*. According to McRobbie, in both films, the dance scenes seem to be addressed primarily to two groups of heterosexual male spectators: those within the films' stories and those who watched the films in the theater. The musical numbers seem organized (through camera angles and placement, shot-reverse-shot editing) to appeal to the desires and visual pleasures that such an audience supposedly gets from watching women dance for them.

Yet, there are aspects of the stories of both of these films that are addressed primarily to women in the audience and to what the filmmakers consciously and unconsciously imagine to be women's desire for control over their bodies and for feeling pleasure and power in their bodies and lives. So a tension is set up *within* the modes of address of these films—a tension between who the dance numbers think you are and who the story thinks you are.

Both films' stories then complicate the issue of who the women are dancing "for" in the *spectacles* of the films' musical numbers. Teenage girls' pleasures in watching these films may come from reading the dancers as "really" dancing for themselves, not for the men who nevertheless are watching. Or, more complexly, teenage girls' pleasures may come from reading the dancers as "really" dancing for *both* themselves

and the men watching them. The mode of address of the spectacle of the dance performances rubs up against the mode of address of the unfolding story line, and these two modes of address don't necessarily work together compatibly. Different formal and stylistic systems in a single film can have different modes of address. Multiple modes of address can be going on simultaneously.

Furthermore, once real live audiences come into the theater, a film's mode of address becomes just one among the many that make up a viewer's day. The position that a viewer "takes up" in relation to a film, and from which she makes sense of it and gets pleasure from it, shifts drastically depending on surrounding and competing modes of address. Is she watching a video of *Flashdance* with a group of girlfriends on a sleep over, in a theater with a boyfriend on a date, with her lesbian lover, as a student in a film class, as an African-American woman who rarely sees other African-American women on the big screen?

Mode of address in film, then, is about the necessity of addressing any communication, text, action, "to" someone. And, given the commercial interests of filmmakers, it is about the desire to control, as much as possible, how and from where the viewer reads the film. It's about enticing a viewer into a particular position of knowledge toward the text, a position of coherence from which the film works, makes sense, gives pleasure, satisfies dramatically and aesthetically, sells itself and its spin-off products.

But, as film scholars have tried to match up the mechanisms of address in a particular film's text with the readings that an actual audience has made of that film, they have had to become more and more attentive to the complications and paradoxes of the filmgoing experience. Audiences are not simply "placed" by a mode of address. Yet, to make any sense of a film or to enjoy it even minimally, they must engage with its mode of address. However minimally or obliquely, a film's mode of address is implicated in audiences' pleasures and interpretations—even in their refusals to go see a film at all.

"Yes, You."

This is where power relations and social change come in. Mode of address is not a neutral concept in film analysis. It's a concept that comes out of an approach to film studies that is interested in how filmmaking

and film viewing get caught up in larger social dynamics and power relations.

While audiences can't simply be placed by a mode of address, modes of address do offer seductive encouragements and rewards for assuming those positions within gender, social status, race, nationality, attitude, taste, style, to which a film is addressed. No one in the global audience for *Jurassic Park* is its imagined and desired 12-year-old white American suburban boy. Yet, that subject position, however much it is mythical as a norm, is linked in the film to powerful fantasies of potency, prerogative, and control.

Most film scholars have liked some of the subject positions offered in popular films, and they haven't liked others. Those working from, for example, Marxist or feminist or humanist perspectives have used the concept of mode of address to "prove" that most popular films repeatedly offer a narrow and systematically biased range of subject positions. This narrow range excludes all sorts of other social and cultural perspectives and experiences. (Where are all the coming-of-age or adventure films addressed to 12-year-old girls—of any racial or ethnic background? Why does it seem right to place this question within parentheses?)

But the sins of mainstream Hollywood films are not just sins of omission. They are also sins of repeatedly implying, through exclusion, or through narrative ridicule or punishment, that being a girl (or being black or Asian or gay or fat or Spanish speaking or being a girl *and* one or other of these) is not the thing to be. Or, being a particular kind of girl or boy or Latino/and or fat kid may be OK, but being another kind is not OK.

To ask the question, Who does this film think you are, or want you to be? then, is to pose a loaded question. It's a question formulated by film scholars who think that who particular films think you are or want you to be may contribute to unequal power relations and the unconscious formation of individuals in society. And there are some individuals—masculinist sexist men and women, racists of any color, exploitative rich and powerful people, for example—and power dynamics that some film scholars don't want to see "formed" or rewarded by films' narratives and image systems.

"Not Me!"

Some filmmakers who are convinced that social and power relations may be affected by making and viewing films have launched experiments in various kinds of "counter cinema." Some feminist filmmakers, for example, have turned Hollywood conventions against themselves. They try to both call attention to and deny pleasures of film viewing that have relied on objectifying women's bodies and repressing women's agency.

Chantal Akerman, for example, in a 3½-hour-long narrative film that she made in 1975 titled *Jeanne Dielman*, documented three days in the life of a Belgian woman, a petit bourgeois widow, housewife, and mother. This is how Annette Kuhn (1982) describes the film:

Her movements around her flat, her performance of everyday chores, are documented with great precision: many of her tasks are filmed in real time. Jeanne's rigid routine includes a daily visit from a man—a different one each day—whose fees for her sexual services help maintain her and her son. ...

Domestic labor has probably never been documented in such painstaking detail in a fiction film; for example, one sequence—shot about five minutes in length shows Jeanne preparing a meat loaf for dinner on the third day ... the refusal of reverse shots in the film entails a denial of the "binding-in" effect of the suture of classic cinema: the spectator is forced to maintain a distance in relation to both narrative and image, constructing the story and building up narrative expectations for herself. (pp. 173–174)

The idea is that a film like *Jeanne Dielman* is more "open" and less manipulative in its positioning of its audience than is a Doris Day film about being a housewife. It refuses to use typical Hollywood modes of address that "bind" the spectator into one way of interpreting the film.

For example, Akerman refuses to take shots from Dielman's optical point of view. She refuses to use this convention of camera work familiar to audiences and often intended to rouse their empathy for and imaginative collusion with a character's intentions, experiences, goals. Being supposedly more open and less manipulative, *Jeanne Dielman*'s mode of address theoretically "empowers" the spectator to construct the story and build up narrative expectations for herself.

Experiments in counter cinemas have produced a whole host of strategies for addressing the audiences that are seldom or never seen

in Hollywood films (such as the 5-minute-long static shot of Dielman making meat loaf). Such experiments have expanded the narrative and visual lexicon—and audience expectations—available to filmmakers. And, in some cases, these innovations have changed the politics of representation that reign in Hollywood (or, such innovations have been co-opted, depending on your allegiances).

The revolutionary hope was that changing modes of address in films might change the kinds of subject positions that are available and valued in society. Films like *Jeanne Dielman* might even produce new subjects of society—new kinds of “women,” for example, empowered women who construct their own stories and expectations. Such films might, in other words, produce social change for the better.

But, this hasn't turned out to be a simple or direct matter, either. Films like *Jeanne Dielman* are hard to read when you're so used to reading Hollywood films. And when hard-to-read films that deny the usual and expected (sexist, racist, escapist) fantasies and pleasures become part of an intentional political strategy, well, as one film critic put it:

The line between estrangement as a kind of passionate and thinking detachment and estrangement as alienation in the worst sense is obviously thin. (Cook, 1985, p. 220)

In other words, some films produced in the name of counter cinema and the empowerment of spectators were difficult to read or were alienating because of how they denied and negated conventional film viewing pleasures. Even worse, some of their intended audience didn't necessarily want to give up their guilty pleasures. Pleasure and fantasy may be political, but that's not all they are.

“Yes, Me (1), and Me (2), and Me (3), and ...”

Judith Mayne (1993) is a feminist film scholar. She's the kind of woman viewer to whom, it might be said, many of the feminist experiments in counter cinema were addressed. She writes:

I may be an informed spectator, but that has not lessened my pleasure in what some consider inferior products, like Arnold Schwarzenegger films. Rather,

the study of spectatorship has made me cognizant, in quite commonplace and everyday ways, of the kinds of contradictory impulses that comprise pleasure. For as much as feminism, for instance, is fully part of my everyday life, I have somewhat peculiar (peculiar, that is, to my friends and family; not to me) regressive fantasies about male adolescence which are given perfect expression by Schwarzenegger. Spectatorship is one of the few places in my life where the attractions to male adolescence and feminist avant-garde poetics exist side by side. For Chantal Akerman's particular approach to spectatorship, for instance, engages me in different but equally satisfying ways as Arnold Schwarzenegger's. (p. 3)

As a filmgoer, Mayne is not only capable of acting against what her feminist friends and she herself would probably call her “best interests” “as a woman” in a male-dominated culture. She's also capable of desiring and enjoying such acting out even as she's doing it.

Now, that poses a big problem for people who think that mode of address can make the difference between spectatorship that is “critical,” reflective, and passionately detached; and spectatorship that, as Mayne (1993) puts it, “makes me act out and forget” (p. 3) and actually collude in dominant and unjust cinematic and cultural practices, pleasures, and desires. Obviously, a film's mode of address isn't all-powerful.

Some film scholars have taken up the emphasis on reading in reader-response theory, and shifted the power in meaning-making to the viewer. They have conducted audience studies to try to understand and recognize the agency that viewers have always exercised at the movies. No matter how much the film's mode of address tries to construct a fixed and coherent position within knowledge, gender, race, sexuality, from which the film “should” be read; actual viewers have always read films against their modes of address, and “answered” films from places different from the ones that the film speaks to.

This shift in focus from the text's mode of address to the viewer's response to it has raised the issue of different readings not only within the same spectator—such as in Mayne's adolescent boy and feminist readings. It also raises the issue of different readings between different “kinds” of audiences.

Mayne and other film theorists have used black spectatorship and gay spectatorship as examples of places of film viewing that supposedly

differ drastically from those addressed by mainstream cinema. How do audiences that are "black," "gay," or both, for example, read films never addressed to them?

Mayne (1993), for example, looks at this issue through James Baldwin's description of resistant black spectatorship of the film *The Defiant Ones* (1958). That film

tells the tale of two escaped prisoners, one white (Tony Curtis) and one black (Sidney Poitier). During most of the film they are handcuffed to each other and through their relationship a parable of race relations in North America is told. (p. 155)

Because the film is a white myth of black and white relations, it contains numerous "blind spots" (to use the language of 1970s film theory) wherein Poitier's character acts, not as a black man, but as a white image of what a black man is. (p. 155)

The "truth" of Poitier's "blackness" was placed, in this film, at the mercy of the "lie" of the narrative's myth of black-white relations, its inability to "get it right." Yet, the truth of his blackness also foils the power of the narrative to completely have its way with Poitier's performance and the black audience's experience of it. To show that this is so, Mayne quotes James Baldwin's (1976/1990) description of "liberal white viewers" as cheering when Poitier jumped off the train at the conclusion of the film, "sacrificing his own chance to escape to remain with his white buddy" (p. 156). The "black Harlem audience" that Baldwin describes was, however, "outraged," yelling: "*Get back on the train, you fool!*" (Baldwin, 1976/1990, p. 76).

"Who Do You Mean ... 'We'?"

So film theorists recognize that all audiences are not the same, and that different audiences make different readings and get different, often opposing, pleasures from the same film. But this recognition has produced its own problems. For one, an unspoken assumption of much film theory is that if the targeted social position of Hollywood movie-making "is assumed to possess the attributes of 'dominance'—white,

male, heterosexual, middle-class, etc." and Hollywood addresses itself to that position, then "dominant" spectators [like the liberal white audience of *The Defiant Ones*] melt symbiotically into the screen" (Mayne, 1993, p. 159). "Dominant" spectators are assumed to "naturally" and unproblematically step into the position within the ideology and pleasure offered to them.

All "others" (like the black Harlem audiences) are considered marginal and resistant. And because resistance is not only interesting but also necessary to most political projects in film theory, audience studies have tended to focus on the so-called marginal and subcultural spectators. Typical research questions include the following: Do resistance and difference exist in the face of Hollywood's seductive and homogenizing address? Where? Who resists? Who is different? How do they resist and maintain difference? How can we cause difference and resistance to spread?

The problem with this approach, Mayne (1993) argues, is that it sets up a "dualism of 'dominant' spectators versus 'marginal' (and therefore resisting ones)," and it "perpetuates the false dichotomy of us and them" even as it tries to alleviate it. "Defining the other as the vanguard of spectatorship only reverses the dichotomy" (p. 159).

Further, it's still not clear to those working in the field of film studies just "what" an "audience" "is." Using notions of identity and identity politics to study what various social groups supposedly do with films hasn't made things much clearer. To speak of a gay audience, for example, suggests that "all gay men and lesbians share some specific identification patterns ... or some kind of inherent capacity to read against the grain" (Mayne, 1993, p. 166). But it's just as impossible to identify a common experience of gay male or lesbian viewing (not to mention, therefore, gay and lesbian) as it is to identify a single mode of spectatorship for blacks, women, or 12-year-old white boys. In fact, literary critics and film scholars are not arguing that there are strong homosexual currents in *all* reading and film spectatorship, and that an African-American presence informs *all* U.S. cultural texts in ways that shape white readers' experiences of themselves and others (Sedgwick, 1990; Morrison, 1992). So much for the usually applied distinctions between center and margin.

Still, Mayne (1993) argues, academic writing about the "politics" of critical spectatorship usually remains locked into an either/or scenario. Either we're talking of a micropolitics of the viewer or the marginal social group, where every reading is a contestatory act because the film's mode of address never fits perfectly. Or, because such localized, subcultural acts of resistant reading supposedly don't add up to social change, we're talking a "macropolitics where nothing is contestatory unless part of a globally defined political agenda" (p. 172).

As in all academic endeavors, political interests drive theories of how people view films, and how they *should* view films. As Mayne (1993) puts it, "the very purpose of academic spectatorship studies was to encourage the development of critical spectatorship, certainly to the extent that the large majority of those who write film scholarship also teach" (p. 165). By "critical," Mayne does not mean merely educated or informed spectatorship. She means spectatorship that actively resists colluding with mainstream films in producing meanings that simply reinscribe the objectification of women's bodies and lives, heterosexual "normality," economic exploitation, and racist stereotypes, for example.

Many of the people studying and teaching films have wanted to better understand how audiences read films so that audiences can be better taught how to read films resistantly. Underlying these studies is the desire, as Foucault (1979) might have put it, to discipline and stylize viewers' (students') uncritical readings into critical readings.

But most of us who are interested in fostering social change suffer lapses in critical spectatorship—like those of Mayne's indulgences in adolescent boy fantasies via Schwarzenegger films. And these (pleasurable, partially welcomed) lapses point to some of the dilemmas that dog most theories of social change and trouble the political and education strategies launched in their names.

Mode of Address as Event

In the absence of predictable and controllable "fits" between modes of address and spectator experience, some film theorists have stopped trying to pin a "kind" of resistant spectatorship to each kind of (marginalized)

audience as it responds to various kinds of modes of address. They have shifted their attention from mode of address as a relatively static aspect of a film's text to mode of address as a more fluid aspect of the contexts in which viewers *use* films. Mayne (1993) describes this shift in emphasis as one away from questions such as, How do gay and lesbian audiences resist mainstream films' modes of address; and towards questions such as, What part does film watching play in how people and groups imagine and constitute various social and cultural identities and cultures? How do modes of address themselves get taken up and used, along with a wide-ranging web of texts and contexts, including rumor and gossip, in the construction of identities, cultural practices, and organized, politicized groups? How does camp, for example—which could be understood as an exaggeration of the ways that modes of address miss everyone—work as a shared social pleasure within gay and lesbian communities? How does film viewing get used in constituting lesbians and gays as a political force—such as when gays organize as a consumer group to challenge homophobic representation in films (p. 166)?

Mode of Address—Unresolved Issues

By asking, Who does this film think you are? Film scholars have come up with some pretty interesting ideas and arguments about the workings of narrative structures and visual systems in actual films. It's hard, for example, to disagree with the claim that films speak from somewhere within currently circulating ideas, fantasies, anxieties, desires, hopes, events—that "somewhere" can be located by looking at the ways certain characters, voices, points of view, discourses, and actions are visually and narratively privileged and rewarded over others in the film.

It's also hard to disagree with the claim that such privileging and rewarding through mode of address is an attempt by filmmakers to anticipate and speak to a desired audience's anxieties, fears, tastes, hopes, and ways of making sense. It seems clear that by speaking to these, a film tries to meet its imagined and desired audience at the place of its fears and hopes. Even if the audience is never in the place that the film speaks to, the place that the film addresses does seem to exist as an abstract and

shareable "there," an imagined subject position within power, knowledge, and desire that the conscious and unconscious interests behind the making of the film "need" audiences to fill. Abstractly or not, films seem to "invite" actual viewers into such positions and "encourage" them to at least imaginatively assume and read the film from there. And viewers appear to be "rewarded" (with narrative pleasure, with happy endings, with coherent reading experiences) for "taking up" and acting from that imagined position as they interpret the film.

Yet, most film theorists would agree that questions about the relationship between the abstract position supposedly assigned to the film's viewers by its mode of address and the actual person who watches a movie, have not been resolved. Our pleasures in the movies stubbornly refuse any rigid dichotomies between simple, pure acts of highly receptive, complicit reproduction of the positions offered us on the one hand, and critical resistance to or refusal of those positions on the other.

What does seem clear to me after 25 years of film studies is that the relationships between how film texts address their audience, and how actual film spectators read films, are not neat or tidy—nor are they linear or causal. And the search for neat and tidy, linear and causal relationships is not an innocent one. As Mayne (1993) puts it, the kinds of questions about mode of address that film researchers have framed have been "haunted" questions. They are questions haunted by desires to fulfill "the possibility of spectatorship as a potential vanguard activity" for progressive political agendas (p. 172). Such desires are driven by a totalizing politics: Your interpretations of film are either resistant and therefore revolutionary or complicit and therefore reactionary. Film studies are now grappling with the meanings of the postmodern stance that a totalizing politics—even if it's intended to be progressive—is not attainable, and perhaps, ultimately, not desirable.

Film studies still have not got convincing answers to the questions, What difference does a film's mode of address make? Does the mode of address make a difference to who the viewer consciously and unconsciously thinks s/he is? What difference does who a viewer thinks s/he is make to how s/he acts in the world? Can different/other modes of address provoke or encourage different/other ways of being and acting in the world?

Can social change, in other words, start from or be fueled by the ways in which audiences are addressed by films, or both?

And because all education is about change, as an educator I rewrite some of these questions: Can social change or individual changes in the ways someone understands the world start from and be fueled by the ways students are addressed by curriculum and pedagogy?

Can—do—teachers make a difference in power, knowledge, and desire, not only by *what* they teach but also by *how* they *address* students? These are unresolved questions in film studies. And they are questions unasked in education.

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Afterword

On the Topic of Film and Education: A Conversation with bell hooks

BELL HOOKS AND KELVIN SHAWN SEALEY

As part of a series of public interviews held on the campus of Columbia University, I had the opportunity to speak to bell hooks about her cinema scholarship in November of 2004. On that day, in her trademark style, bell made a number of provocative statements about film and her many years of academic engagement with the cinema. Not having the time then and there to probe as deeply as I wanted into some of her comments, I took the opportunity to record another shorter private dialog I held with her two years later. The transcript from that conversation is printed below, and continues the theme found throughout this text relating to the potential for pedagogical engagement between cinema and its viewers.

—KELVIN SEALEY

Kelvin Sealey: Our conversation today will be for the final chapter in the book, *Film, Politics and Education*. I'm interested in looking at what could be called bell hooks' educational theory, your conceptualization of education, particularly from a Frieran perspective. What I'd like to throw into the mix is the extent to which cinematic images, or a set of cinematic images built into your educational theory, suggest a larger, more robust theory of pedagogy.

bell hooks: We have to start with the fact that my pedagogical theories, while influenced by Friere, are also deeply influenced by feminist thinking and practice.

KS: Please continue ...

bh: Different from Camus. Even though he came [into it] late in life. It didn't really inform his earlier work.

KS: Okay—so, shouldn't we look at both your conceptualization of critical theory, then how feminist theory informs your educational theory, and then the extent to which a cinematic perspective might inform either of those or even a blend of the two? I'm not quite sure how to bring those three together, but let's do this as an experiment, since I want to believe that particularly with film, politics, and education, that critical pedagogy, that the cinematic, what I call cinematic education or pedagogy infused with the moving image, and feminist theory, can form a trio, a pedagogical trio, that allows us to use all three in a liberating way.

bh: My approach is more basic. I basically believe that media is the pedagogy of our times, and so because I feel like most of what people are learning about gender, race, class is coming from media and especially movies, to me movies become the perfect tool for film for teaching critical thinking and critical theories. Because people will, when you explain something to them just coldly, theoretically—a lot of times my students will say, well I don't get it. But if they watch a film and I begin to break down with them to deconstruct with them what's happening in the film, they see things completely differently, which is why film is one of the best tools for critical pedagogy. Because it allows people to, in a sense, have this space of consternation between what they think race, gender, class is all about and what perceived pedagogy is, and there is a challenge there. A good example is this recent film *Crash*. Where many people I talked to initially said, "This is a great film about race in America." And I would say, "Well how can you say this is a great film? Look at what it does with race, look at what it does with class." But also, when we really break down what it's doing with race, you know, it's almost a "Birth of a Nation" film, it's, it's the same old tropes. That we get who the hero is in the classical sense, but these are things that most people, I found, didn't see when they first look at the film. And so they began to ask those critical thinking questions—who, what, where, when, and why—suddenly they see a totally different film altogether.

KS: So when we consider film from an entertainment perspective, we're not as sensitized to the dimensions of power, of gender, of class that might imbue the film. But to the extent that a film is shown alongside a desire to build a critical pedagogy within the audience of students and perhaps the wider society, then we become more, then we begin to see with a critical pedagogical eye how a film might be used as a critical tool.

bh: Well, I don't accept the dichotomy between entertainment and awareness because I think one can be deeply entertained and fully critically aware. I don't think that the people who thought that *Crash* was a brilliant discussion of race actually thought they were being so much entertained as their awareness, their critical awareness, is so shallow as I think our nation has a very shallow, superficial understanding of race and white supremacy and how it works. So that it's, I mean part of what I'm always telling my students, because my students used to say to me, "You hate Spike Lee"—no, I actually find a lot of Spike Lee's work very compelling, but I'm critical of it in different ways, which doesn't mean that I'm not entertained by it, that I don't enjoy it. So I think partially the challenge in critical pedagogy, and moving beyond dualism, is that one doesn't accept that dualism entertainment. That there is some break between the entertainment, critical awareness of what we're seeing on the screen. Because one can simultaneously be very critically conscious as you're watching a film and at the same time be very entertained by it. Like *Kill Bill*, which I thought on so many levels was, in terms of critical awareness, I found reprehensible, but at the same time there was an aspect of pure enjoyment of the structure of the film. The beauty. The action.

KS: The aesthetics.

bh: The cinematography.

KS: Yeah, well, it almost sounds as if you believe it is possible to have a critical audience be entertained and that aspect of the entertainment that should be critiqued, the tropes and stereotypes, what one could say are reprehensible, are actually accepted as being reprehensible while still being entertaining. Does that not suggest that the critical audience can not only distinguish between what is entertaining and what is critical but dismisses what needs to be criticized? Or dismisses that portion and accepts that portion that needs to be internalized as entertainment? I'm not sure. How do we create that bifurcation?

bh: I think by not having a bifurcation. By not having a sense of a wholeness, just as in our daily lives we balance seemingly paradoxical situations, so that the critical eye also has that. You know, it's as if you're operating on two levels simultaneously, and I think that, in part, what I believe about critical consciousness, in a way critical consciousness teaches people how to operate on multiple levels at any given moment in time, so that one recognizes multiple intentionalities.

KS: Yes. How would a Friiran critical pedagogy of film aid the subject?

bh: Well, I mean, since I don't see myself as a Friiran, I don't feel like I could answer that. But what I have often imagined, for example. Let's take a group like unemployed black men.

KS: Okay ...

bh: I've thought to myself, I mean one of the things we know is that black men are swiftly becoming the most illiterate group in our nation. So I thought, well, one of the ways that we could teach critical literacy to black men is that, if we would use theaters, you know, normally closed down during the day, and show films, and talk about what's happening in those films, again on levels of, you know, the film itself, on levels of the relationship to you and how you live your life. What do you see, you know? Experiments conducted in Africa among people who were not highly literate, [suggested] that viewers saw a totally different film than people who were literate.

So, identify unemployed black men with low levels of literacy. You want to bring them into critical consciousness and critical literacy, to be able to look at what they are seeing, and know what they do see. Because I remember that one of the things that happened when we showed this [particular] film, people saw, the group of people watching it, was that people were very entertained by "the mouse." But [the researcher] didn't know what they were talking about and they had to look at the film over and over again to see that, indeed, evidently while this was being filmed, there was a mouse running around and that the visual gaze of a person who's not literate is very different from the gaze of somebody who is. So I think working initially with what is that gaze and see how you begin to enlarge the scope of that gaze. I think one could use... I think about Friere's work, it would be possible to use that, and in my case, since I would be much more interested in a larger model

that would get at the issue of domination of, and gender and race and class combine all of them. Begin to look at that. How do they move from this narrow case to a fuller gaze? A narrow understanding of self to a fuller understanding of self.

KS: The suggestion being that a fuller gaze upon the self, with this population, staying with this population, a fuller understanding of self ...

bh: With low levels of literacy.

KS: With low levels of literacy, would allow them to enter more fully into an understanding of reclaiming themselves?

bh: Well, and fundamental to both, I would use the phrase to talk about my work, "engaged pedagogy," as we begin to think critically. And I think that, part of that as we begin to think critically about our lives and we gain a critical consciousness, we are always in the process of becoming subjects. We think of that particular group of men, of black males we've identified as being very objectified by the culture and by the nation in their objectification. Then we would have to know that any beginning of critical consciousness is really, the beginning of critical consciousness is the beginning self-making and connecting self to a world beyond the self.

KS: Yes, I like that. Part of the pedagogy that we're considering is a reconceptualization of space, as well as a reconceptualization of how film can enter into the lives of people, helping to build the human subject.

I want to take a minute, though, and go in the direction of feminism, particularly with regard to film. In conversations we have had, you suggested that you stopped writing about film academically because you felt yourself confronting the same images, the same ideas, the same problems, the same tropes. At the same time it seems to me we're becoming an even more visual culture and that with DVDs and videos compounding the fact that on the small screen [tv], we're now seeing these images multiple times delivered in multiple modes. Only a few weeks ago Steve Jobs introduced the video ipod so people will be walking around with these things, they'll be fed to us almost continually. So, it does seem as though feminist intervention, in this, in this mediated, heavily mediated space, would have some value to women, young women, girls, attempting to free themselves from these images that we know they're consuming now in ever greater quantities

bh: Well, I think in part that what I meant about not writing academically about film is that I felt that I was articulating the same, in a sense, the same frame dominator culture, how it structures itself in the end and that, in a way the process was the same for whatever film. If you would take the frame from how you would look at it. I would be writing through that same lens, and I guess what I've been struggling with is the possibility of a different language, a different articulation. I found myself, for example, struggling with the film *Capote*. I felt that there was a tremendous homophobia underlying the film, but I felt that I had or at least struggled with, articulated what I mean by that. Just in thinking of the political, does a film have any kind of political responsibility in the sense that having a film focusing on a gay male that never really names his gayness, but that only actually gives us the shadow side of his personality? So, we have a familiar cinematic portrayal of gayness, that of people pathologically narcissistic willing to go to, you know, extremes to wound others and yet, and it's so skillfully done because in a way by the refusal to have a narrative of gayness overt in the film, it seeks to make it seem like, underneath that. For everyone who comes in with the knowledge that he's gay, then that's like saying gay is evil, inherently depraved. You know, what is his lust, because, you know, there's also a way that the film is about lust, or this young man of color. You know, Perry who's defined as "Indian." The other. I mean it's all so you begin to think. I mean, I saw so many people who urged me to go see that film, it's really a film about a writer's process, one of the best things in the film is about being a writer, and again, complete erasure that we're not just talking about the portrait of a writer, but the particular portrait of a gay writer, at a very homophobic point in our nation's history.

All of that kind of gets erased, and so, made me want to go back to writing about film and to try to find a language that is more relevant to our times. Just as we're talking about how film has been changing, the modes of access have been changing, the language has to change to the earlier language writing about these issues as they pertain to film. And so I thought that I would only go back to writing if I could come up with a more useful language extended, because otherwise I felt that people would use these other paradigms and bring them to films that they see.

KS: How do you come up with a new language? I'm digging into that notion as I'm speaking to you—how do you build a new language—that extends the old but at the same time breaks from the old?

bh: This is something we get from the vernacular. People who are not schooled or are not highly literate, reshaping words and reshaping language every day. I mean, a real problem of the bourgeoisie decorum of academic writing and academic thinking is that we're often not able to break through and come up with terms that redefine or defamiliarize ourselves. For example, a term like "dissing," which defamiliarizes the concept of showing disdain or contempt. We have a much harder time I think in academic culture because we are taught certain kinds of jargons.

... with coming up with new ways to speak on what we're talking about, a new way. I even mean like me, I struggled with this, "How do I name this?" Well, how would I begin to talk about this unspoken reality of the film? You could say it's both, it's film that's presented, you know, just as Capote said he was writing the nonfiction novel from the kind that becomes a nonfiction fiction portrait of his own reality, functions both as a documentary but then also a, quote, "entertaining film." Or also it will go down, no doubt go down in history as the gay film.

KS: Let's push that notion of the vernacular just a bit farther because it creates an interesting intersection between high culture and low culture that the academy has often found problematic.

bh: Well, let me say, before you continue, that one of the reasons why I have focused on film, is precisely because of the way film is sought across class, all classes, and I identify film as a pedagogical site more than, say, books or certain forms of music. Because people, across class, especially through the amazing world of home video, watch films that may or may not, that at a certain point may or may not be the kind of films they would have gone to a movie certainly to see—that array of the working class and unemployed members of my family stumble across films that they can see at home, felt like they could go to a movie theater to see. So that I think that film on video, for example white people who don't know any black people, never been into the home of a black person, but can now bring that film to their own homes.

KS: I'm thinking of *Ray*, about the musician Ray Charles.

bh: *Ray* is a good example. You can bring that film, you can bring that right into your bedroom. You can bring those black people right into your bedroom. You would, you would keep away from the intimate structure of your life.

KS: Do you think that's an integration of space?

bh: I actually see that as a, no, as a new kind of colonialism. A way, the fact that you bring those images into your space that you also get to control.

You don't have to be part of a collective when you're sitting in the movie theatre, and I was trying to remember, even with *Crash*, some people told me that they were afraid to go see *Crash* in the movie theater because it might lead to riots or to, you know. And I was thinking about how, frankly, that rationalized fear that often arises when films have to deal with—I mean nobody talks about Kronenberg's *History of Violence*—oh maybe that will incite people in the film. So when I say, "White people can bring *Crash* into their bedrooms, in their dens, or wherever in their intimate spaces," recognize that because you can, if an image is uncomfortable to you, not be a collective part of that image. Part of why I still love to go to the movies when it is packed with people, is to have that collective sense of mutually watching something and mutual response gauge, like when people are laughing at a particular point and be able to respond.

So I think that that kind of recolonization of attempt at control of the image, it's also an attempt I think to keep alive the dominator culture hierarchy, in real life. In real life, all black people are not poor. In fact, a significant, a number of black people in our culture are very wealthy. You know, choose your films in such a way so that you can sort of teach people underneath, or you talk back to those films. In your homes, as friends tell me their relatives do where you can, you know, "Oh look at those niggers," or this is just how they are, so you can keep alive the white supremacy but it becomes a narrative, an internal narrative.

KS: Privately.

bh: Yeah, narrative that you have control over that you don't have to worry that you'll be overseen, overheard, interpreted.

KS: Exactly.

KS: Vernacular, especially as embraced by the academy; popular culture kept at arms length, which rises from masses, can inform and give vocabulary to have a global conversation.

bh: It is, in a sense, the democratic place of pedagogy. One of the reasons I latched on to film more than any other pedagogy is it's democratic nature. That is to say you don't have to be literate to

see a film, but also it was my fundamental belief talking to people on street corners, that everyone that sees a film thinks something critically about it whether or not they are articulating to themselves what they think of it. The whole apparatus at work there is that people who read, who may know, but rarely read, may not bring to that written text, but may bring to that visual text.

KS: You're speaking to unintentional pedagogy, passive learning, because by and large film is passive.

bh: Oh, absolutely.

KS: But it's learning, it can be critical learning nonetheless.

bh: Or it can be a place that can seek one out for greater understanding. I oftentimes see people ...

KS: Everyone that sees a film thinks something critically about it. There's a critical apparatus at work there.

bh: Race is always divided out over everything, which is why we switch in narrative. I think, for example, in my feminist theory class, getting them to analyze Katrina from a feminist standpoint. First, but it wasn't about gender, it was about race. Black. Well, two categories that are profoundly gendered but I especially took....

As we close I want to pen the thought that film is a pedagogical structure.

Well, don't you think it's a great meeting place in the academy where intellectuals, academics in the academy, share something with people not of their same class, their same educational background? We don't share the same neighborhoods or the same foods, we don't even share in the same kinds of, you know, day-to-day life practices often, but we have film, again, as a meeting place is why it's so powerful.

KS: Which is why I was going to say Kindergarten–12th Grade. There's also potentially great resonance for film as a pedagogy as well. But you still have an entrenched bureaucracy.

bh: I would say you have a very conservative bureaucracy when video was first popularized. All of a sudden TV screens appeared in ...

KS: Classrooms.

bh: In the public school system, we thought, "OK, education is about to be completely recolonized," and then of course, most of those screens are empty most of the time.

KS: Exactly.

bh: They represent a threat to the planned lessons, the planned, directed mode of thinking. The Third grade teacher is directly the mode of thinking of someone seeing an image that disrupts the need for a conservative world view.

KS: Well, that's exactly the point I want to make: politics in the educational system.

bh: Let's focus on a recent film, a Christian film, I'm forgetting the name.

KS: You mean that Mel Gibson directed?

bh: Exactly. Now, here's a case that, I don't know if you're aware of this, black people—my mother, who's in her seventies, has not been to the cinema in twenty years, went to see that film.

KS: And ...

bh: Went out of their houses, churches, all around the nation, black churches as well, buses with people to see that film. So that poignantly describes film as a site of pedagogy, that cuts across class, have all these elderly people, many of whom are on a fixed income, all around this nation that went and paid their little money to see this film. Why, I mean what was it at this film? There were other films with a Christian theme, that sort of radical reinscribing of Christianity with our government. Very much pushing the imperialism of Christianity. Here's a film that has this subversive, pedagogical edge because people allow it to. How does it go from being this little film in many ways to, you know, working-class poor blacks in churches being compelled to spend their money to see this film? So what it shows us is that everyday people, ministers, understand film to be an important site that whatever they believe would happen with the witnessing of that film, a nation, a recommitment to fundamentalist Christianity. They were able to make everyday people see film, a conservative narrative but, in fact, imagery.

It was blasphemy to witness and I just want us to call attention—somewhere, someone recognizes how powerful film is as a pedagogical tool. Because it's not as if the producers of that film went around saying, "Take your church." It shows, again, I guess what I think about a lot are, what are our pedagogies, what are our critical pedagogies that move beyond the academy that have their birth

somewhere outside the academy, in fact return to us, galvanize us, to think more deeply. Because whatever, the pedagogy that began here, it began outside. It even began outside the film world so that it comes back to us. Think about, if this could happen, how can we have other films move people and motive people and transform people? How do we get that energy going and the place of again? One doesn't have to read and write adequately to see a film. Again, one doesn't have to read or write adequately to watch a film.

KS: No you make an excellent point. I'm not going to tax you here anymore here this morning. You've raised a number of points that I feel personally I need to follow up on—I don't know if you've raised some that you yourself want to follow up on, particularly with respect to films you've mentioned.

bh: I would just close by saying I'm very interested right now in how, in a sense, I would say, "Kelvin, more conservative forces acknowledge such a tremendous pedagogical possibility." That's why I think those of us who are progressive don't see using film as a means of sharing film as a way of sharing insight, pushing people to a higher, toward greater critical thinking, because I think there is a way in which the democratic nature of cinema and much of media actually makes intellectuals and academics look down on it like it's not really serious enough. In fact, it's that those conservatives that are saying, "Yes, it is." Just how powerful it is. We would do well as leftist people or people on the left, people concerned about the anti-intellectual, would do well to seek to recognize film as the site of multiple intentionality and possibility.