

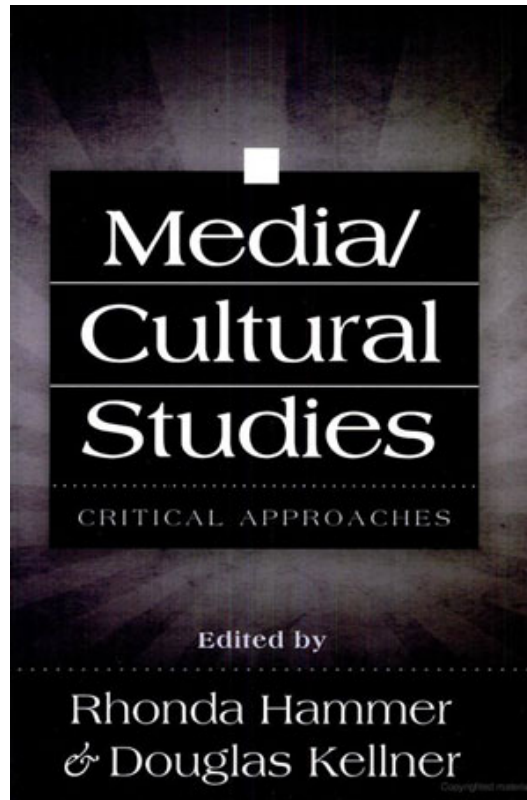


Coming of Age in Media/Cultural Studies: Critical Approaches

By Dennis Lo

"This is the bridge to our village. It is the only way into Balyam, and it is the only way out. Our bridge is 3 meters wide and 10 meters long." - Perfumed Nightmare (Dir. Tahimik, 1977)

Targeted to a wide audience of both students and instructors, Rhonda Hammer's and Douglas Kellner's Media/Cultural Studies: Critical Approaches explores popular media artifacts from a contemporary cultural studies perspective.¹



Comprised of a new generation of authors ranging from communications scholars to high school teachers and literary critics, the anthology does not take a single approach to cultural studies, but explores a whole slew of writing and pedagogical strategies for politicizing user participation in media production and reception in the global age. As many of the writers of the anthology themselves discover through their innovative forms of self-reflexive, autobiographical, and autoethnographic writings, how one approaches the issue of re-politicization is no easy task. In these modes of investigation, one's position as a writer is not only made transparent, but also constitutes part of the "context"; thus providing a system of checks and balances on the conclusions of one's research. Cultural studies should, as contributor Lawrence Grossberg writes, "incorporate into its object of study a critical account of its own motivating questions."² Significantly, self-reflexive modes of writing puncture the membrane separating theory from practice, and re-engage with

media artifacts in such a way that demonstrates how the media produces and is produced by cultural relations of power.

To better demonstrate how this mode of writing is not merely a stylistic, but primarily a methodological strategy, I will approach Media/Cultural Studies in two parts. First, an overview of the anthology's primary sections lays out the authors' primary concepts. Second, I will interweave my own experiences of discussing cultural studies with a taxi driver in Taiwan with the semi-autobiography of Kidlat Tahimik, a jeepney (modified U.S. military jeeps used in the Philippines for taxi services) driver in his film, Perfumed Nightmare.³

This associative mapping will demonstrate similar challenges the authors of this anthology faced when advocating cultural and media studies as tools for political awareness and action. Through this mode of critical associative and self-reflexive writing, I will "field-test" the concepts drawn out by the authors in truly globalized, yet everyday settings like the streets of Taiwan and the bridge connecting Kidlat Tahimik's town, Balyam, to the rest of the world. The goal of this approach is to transgress an essentialist or reductive evaluation of how Media/Cultural Studies succeeds or fails in situating "subversive" against "hegemonic" discourse. Rather, I proceed in the spirit of what Lawrence Grossberg calls "radical contextualism," or incorporating the contexts as voices to be "articulated" in a critical space where meaning is "located ... in relations but assumes that such relations, while always real, are never necessary."⁴ Before embarking on our own journey, it is necessary that we first chart the terrain of the anthology.

Mapping Media/Cultural Studies

Media/Cultural Studies is divided into four parts: defining media/cultural studies, critical pedagogy, applying media and cultural studies to socially and politically relevant case studies, and new media. Part I provides an overview of the history, methodologies, and numerous definitions of cultural and media studies, wherein authors describe cultural studies as "a contextual discipline that situates its object in concrete relations of power and domination."⁵ Chris Rojek contributes to this section in "Stuart Hall on Representation and Ideology" by describing how cultural studies had originated from British Cultural Studies, a school spearheaded by Stuart Hall that extended Marx's notions of ideology to "include gender, race, sexuality, and other key markers of identity which are constructed in media texts."⁶ While British Cultural Studies was formed under the context of the political movements in the 1960s, the emphasis on high culture and the binary thinking of "encoding/decoding" is said to foreclose the study of unprecedented forms of media production and consumption.

Today, a theory that pursues politics for its own sake is clearly out, just as the lack of contextual engagement seems in retrospect to be rather unethical. Thus, politically effective pedagogy is more than just a matter of identifying "correct" or "incorrect" representations. In his call for politicizing cultural theory in "Cultural Studies, Critical Pedagogy, and the Politics of Higher Education," Henry Giroux writes, "pedagogy in this instance is defined as a cultural practice that must be accountable ethically and politically for the stories it produces, the claims it makes on public memories, and the images of the future it deems legitimate."⁷ Thus, theory, practice, and critical vision stand no longer on pedestals of distinguished schools of thought or high cultural media artifacts. In this regard, of particular note is John Caldwell's "How Producers 'Theorize': Shoot-outs, Bake-offs, and Speed-Dating," where the "encoders" are seen to "decode" themselves (e.g. by writing blog entries about their own films, and holding industry conferences that celebrate the craftsmanship in the industry) in order to survive in a media environ increasingly democratized by new digital technologies. Here, cultural studies extends beyond academia and is practiced by producers not only as marketing ploys, but also as pedagogical tools.

Part II explores the pedagogical strategies of cultural studies in greater breadth by stressing the importance of critical media literacy, including the ability to actively interpret, produce, and critique media texts towards socially progressive and politically engaging means, where neither the text nor the context is privileged over the other. Instead, the ability to simultaneously produce, participate in, and critique everyday media texts is emphasized. For instance, Jeff Share, in "Young Children and Critical Media Literacy," argues that critical thinking is encouraged via a "shift in education from a purely cognitive psychological model to one in which psychology embraces sociology in the understanding of literacy as a social process."⁸ In other words, by exposing the processes behind media production and interpretation, critical media pedagogy creates experimental teaching situations where children are taught to view media and technology less as "neutral conveyors of content for transmission" than as mediums in which the convergences, paradoxes, and tensions between numerous discourses may create opportunities for social and political justice.⁹ Theory is again dethroned as it becomes a byproduct of pedagogy rather than a rigid guideline for axiomatic thinking.

Parts III and IV take up the bulk of Media/Cultural Studies, and adopt these critical and pedagogical considerations to apply context-driven, politically motivated, self-reflexive, and interdisciplinary modes of writing to a wide array of social issues. These range from the gendered social geographies of Los Angeles in Kathleen McHugh's "Women in Traffic: L.A. Autobiography," and the everyday applications of autoethnographic media production in Allan Luke's "Another Ethnic Autobiography? Childhood and the Cultural Economy of Looking," to studies of the politics of production and consumption in new media, including video games, social networking sites, YouTube, and the circulation of popular images on the internet. I will investigate these and other works in greater depth in the second part of the essay where cultural/media studies scholars will constitute a few of the critical "voices" conversing with myself, the Taiwanese taxi driver, and Kidlat Tahimik.

Conversations with Taxi Drivers

I must admit that the wide array of options one may have to be "self-reflexive" is quite staggering. For instance, I may describe how my assessment of the ways the works of this anthology theorize and practice critical cultural studies is conditioned by my experiences as a teaching assistant deconstructing "transcultural" filmic texts for undergraduate sections. But to evaluate the challenges and successes of

radical contextualism via its own methods seems to be a rather risky undertaking. Indeed, a meta-critique is dually divorced from the cultural artifacts studied in this anthology, thus causing one to be theoretically "prescribed," or prone to reproducing conclusions already constrained by one's mode of discourse. Working down into the belly of the beast, it is easy to forget that the only way in was also the only way out.

"The bridge as allegory. Bridge as social affirmation. It is our bridge of life," says the voiceover of the omniscient narrator of Perfumed Nightmare. How does one bridge the challenges of "re-politicizing" cultural studies in a space of movement lying partially within, yet exterior to, the discussions of contexts and critical binaries? Perhaps, as our omniscient narrator suggests, through its social effects and affects. A radical contextualism not through theory but through a series of dialogues.

It is here that I recall a conversation in southern Taiwan I had half a year ago with a taxi driver, who spoke of how his livelihood (as well as the history of the city in which he works) had been threatened by the possibility of increased labor trade between Taiwan and China, a political decision that had been distorted in the media in such a way that would make cooperation seem absolutely utopian. Evidently, I happened to fall upon a fellow media studies scholar. It became clear, however, that there was as much to be disheartened by as there was to learn from this unlikely traveler. He asked me to reconsider exactly how unbiased and "objective" the state media's representations of the visiting Chinese diplomat-entrepreneur actually were. By pointing out the pros and cons of increased cross-strait commercial cooperation, while supporting his views by citing his college level background and experiences abroad, he was an instructor of critical pedagogy par excellence.

But this was not simply a political diatribe. Like many taxi drivers, he felt the need to connect this incident to his personal past, present, and future. He lamented the loss of his pet dot-com project that he pursued in California, and pointed fingers at not just the failure of the government to support the interests of the educated working class, but at his own faults in not being able to rise out of the vicissitudes of historical materialist oppression. Our critical media instructor has shifted into the autobiographical mode taken by the authors of this anthology. But, unlike the empowering tales of cultural and gender appropriations of media texts and geographies, my taxi driver instead highlighted how his failed mastery of media texts had produced a dysfunctional hybrid identity caught in a perpetual loop between desire, the production of fantasy, and consumption.

"The Spanish soldiers built the bridge after destroying the original bamboo bridge built by my grandfather. Then the U.S. army engineers wanted to widen it for the military convoys, but they failed because of the strong winds of Amok Mountain nearby. But the bridge is used by everybody. It is used by those with big profits, and it is also used by those who make small profits." - Perfumed Nightmare

Our brief encounter comes to a close when we drive off the highway exit to the high-speed rail station. Constructed in dire economic times and, at least in some minds, a monument to the self-serving interests of the governing upper class, the utopian space of high-speed train "maglev" movement is yet another reminder of the socioeconomic, political, and class dysfunctions surrounding mobility. I unsuccessfully remind him that his knowledge of social power relations, however seemingly meager, is already an indication that he may be able to trespass that fog of self-obsessive historic fatalism. While this deeply imbedded notion of knowledge as self-empowerment is one that the authors of Media/Cultural Studies likewise propound, I found myself simultaneously offended and shamefully self-righteous as I caught a glimpse of him sighing and lowering his head. Walking, frustrated yet empathetic, towards the station entrance, I am reminded that he will be living out the effects of political, social, and cultural discourses in his fatalist psycho-geography of street-level Taichung, Taiwan, while I jet-set across the Pacific to assume my role as the meta-geographer of culture in a land far, far away.

Implicitly, it is exactly this distance between the "sophisticated" media educator and the public that the authors of Media/Cultural Studies have sought to bridge, and it is precisely the difficulty of such a project that is ultimately frustrating. For instance, even before considering the social contract between the educator and the audience, when one teaches cultural representations in media, the experience of selecting an appropriate text and context for the immediate audience is already simultaneously tricky yet seemingly intuitive. How best to reference complex and multiple historical, political, economic, and social contexts while still producing meaning that is pedagogically clear, all the while perplexed about the distance one should take with the audience? As Douglas Kellner notes in "Toward a Critical Media/Cultural Studies," "each critical method focuses on certain features of a text from a specific perspective, and each individual perspective illuminates some features of a text while ignoring others."¹⁰ An entirely sensible proposition, this seems to be one of the only methods of making the study of cultural artifacts manageable, but the fear of not being "complex enough" still haunts us, especially when the individual perspective that is being "ignored" is our own. If radical contextualism is indeed to be practiced to its fullest extent, at what point, if there is one, does the multiplicity of meaning become so complex that it is pedagogically unsustainable? At what point do theory, practice, and instruction go their separate ways?

Some may even argue that the intense devotion to media pedagogy at all levels of theory and practice is perhaps targeted at those who have not had much experience with deconstructing a media text, or at least at a depth necessary to uncover an entire network of power relations. In this regard, I felt as if I was being condescended to when my taxi driver proceeded with didactically deconstructing the trade reports of the local economy, with the assumption that I had no knowledge of the constructed nature of media. He had usurped my position as the cultural studies scholar upon realizing that I had not made an occupation out of navigating a literal network of power relations. In other words, if critical pedagogy often remains at the level of exposing hegemonic social constructs and proposing subversive representations or appropriations, is it all that "cutting-edge" for scholars who claim to be beyond the issue of the quantity or types of counter-hegemonic representation?

One might be attracted, for instance, to Meenakshi Gigi Durham's discussion in "Ethnic Chic and the Displacement of South Asian Female Sexuality," of the seemingly insidious "system of pastiche" where complex representational practices cause the South Asian body to supplement, rather than be sexually exoticized by, the white female consumer as one would conventionally expect. In light of the discussion of such unconventional cultural and gender appropriations, claims such as Toby Miller's in "Children and the Media," may seem relatively underdeveloped in arguing that "cultural studies must present a counter-history to these narratives, one that brings back the specificities of space and time, to what has been a sorry story of misrecognition."¹¹

In other words, the existence of multiple possible historical narratives mocks the naivety of the political awareness of critical pedagogy. Rather, the production of meaning, what constitutes meaningful production, and the means of production, are related together through the organization of discourses of power, rather than to the construction of necessarily coherent histories. New media's promiscuity, in its defiance of both spatial and temporal restraints, is particularly enlightening in this regard as Mark Poster so aptly captures through the example of "evil Bert" which was originally created on a web site in Manila and "accidentally" became a part of a pro-Bin Laden collage. Furthermore, discourses of power materialized in the usage of technologies such as Google Images (which was used to find the images for the collage), naturalized the often invisible or illusively transparent processes of encoding and decoding so that the ways in which the production, distribution, and reception of cultural artifacts either remain separate, or become intertwined. Cultural studies, then, becomes a study of the conditions in which such encodings and decodings are produced, as well as the bodies that live, perceive, and conceive these spaces of mediated communication.

In typical self-reflexive flair, one might ask not only how it is that a text should be seen as subversive, but rather why the instructor, or writer has chosen the specific text(s) and context to reveal the underlying power constructions at work. But, what does "cutting-edge" and self-reflexive work do to transform the social environs, or the social mobility of our self-effacing taxi driver? Does it really matter if I told my taxi driver that I was a Ph.D. student studying cinema studies, or would that perhaps contribute to a negative ethos? Not surprisingly, I found my own intellectual sophistication undermined when I asked my taxi driver why he had chosen to deconstruct only the right wing and local rather than the leftist or international channels, to which he replied that the political economy of the early 90s had coerced him into the menial occupation of taxi driving. It was almost as if he had grasped that the least appealing answer to me was yet another affirmation that one discourse of power could be explained, but ultimately encaged, within yet another discourse of power. I had once felt a theoretical grasp of his endless game of replaying of discourses, one developed to explain another, but my mastery slipped away as I had no way of generating any direct social or political value in this intellectual pursuit. At this point, one's notions of what is "theoretically sophisticated" seems to fall through the roof, as even kindergartners, Jeff Share writes in "Young Children and Critical Media Literacy," are trained media critics when they realize the potential for classroom activism. When "the interests in the marginalization of vegetarians led the students to discover the complete absence of books about vegetarians in their school library," one can only ask, identity politics in kindergarten?¹² It is apparently never too early to start.

"I first tried to cross the bridge alone when I was 3 years old." - Perfumed Nightmare

Perhaps disciplinary identity is less fractured when it is properly historicized. Our omniscient narrator could at least assume that his attempt at spatial appropriation was a worthy one because he narrativized his identity as a process of personal development. Yet, more questions than answers arise when the context involves oneself as a media educator. Critical media theorist, and co-editor of Media/Cultural Studies, Rhonda Hammer highlights the paradox in critical pedagogy that:

The dialectical and radical nature of critical media courses... indicate that they do not and cannot conform to a predesigned syllabus but rather are ultimately determined by the lived and scholarly experiences of the specific instructor. Thus each course is framed by the individual instructors' own 'personalities,' and therefore no critical media literacy courses are alike.¹³

While this speaks to a freedom in the multiplicity of meaning, this challenges and indeed places even greater responsibility on the educator to ensure that one's identity, methodology, and critical discourse is transparent. We are assured that this bridge is the only way in, as well as the only way out.

"I am Kidlat Tahimik. I choose this vehicle, and I can cross this bridge." - Perfumed Nightmare

Who? Our omniscient narrator reveals his identity, methodology, and discourse via a single confession in the beginning scene of Perfumed Nightmare. Here, Kidlat is shown holding a string, first pulling a model jeepney (converted civilian jeep used in the Philippines), then a rideable toy jeepney, and finally an actual jeepney, over a local bridge in Balayan, Philippines. This scene in particular describes an oral history of personal development, from Kidlat as a local consumer of globalized products, to one who makes a living as a jeepney driver literally connecting local with global spaces. An autoethnographic travelogue that he both acted and directed, Perfumed Nightmare is also politically incisive, as Kidlat becomes increasingly disillusioned with Western modernization and developmental strategies when he realizes that the same highways crisscrossing the urban modernist spaces of Paris are also responsible for destroying or threatening Balayan's pastoral way of life. Most importantly, as a producer of the filmic representation of his hybrid postcolonial identity, but simultaneously a consumer of the fantasy of modern development, Kidlat embodies an entrepreneurial spirit masked within the figure of a nomadic poet, and teaches us to question how different, or truly divorced, is a subversive reading of a text from a self-reflexive mode of production. But perhaps just as important as his mode of storytelling, is who or what his story is being told for! Who are his fellow travelers?

"The bridge is also used by promoters of Miss Universe contest." - Perfumed Nightmare

Halfway across the globe, in "How Producers 'Theorize,'" John Caldwell discovers in his study of the autoethnographic practices of Hollywood's corporate culture, that decoding becomes encoding as the conditions of production, distribution, and reception are set into play by producers-as-consumers and consumer-as-producers who have participated in "corporate cultural jamming" as a means of survival. In "Another Ethnic Autobiography? Childhood and the Cultural Economy of Looking," Allan Luke also writes on the "cultural bricolage" of Asian American experience in Hollywood production. He argues "that we really own and control the media – even when we can barely afford the light bills – is the best folk wisdom around for survival in fast capitalism that my parents could have given me – perhaps better than if I had learned Cantonese properly."¹⁴ Thus, texts are not only interpreted, but also appropriated and indigenized, where hybrid identities are both fashioned and contested, producing rituals and being produced ritualistically in the imagining of a community. By tying the individual with the community, real bodies rather than theoretical binaries shape the debate between text and context. By orating history to an imagined audience, real bodies take on the majestic quality of nomadic flight.

"Again, I tried to cross the bridge by myself when I was 4 years old. I am Kidlat Tahimik. I choose my vehicle, and I can cross any bridge." - Perfumed Nightmare

Another restatement of agency, this time more pronounced, and still uttered in a single breath. A certain obstinacy and hubris of being able to cross any bridge surfaces alongside the coming of age of Kidlat's identity. Thelma and Louise, on the other hand, would not cross just any bridge, but decide to drive off a cliff than be captured by the police. In Kathleen McHugh's exploration of auto mobility's gender discourses, Thelma and Louise end up in neither a mangled accident nor an escape but rather in a freeze frame, whereby:

Relinquishing the usual affective and narrative tropes that define and confine femininity, either at rest (spectacle) or in motion (romance and maternity), the film seems to push the association between women and cars beyond conventional subjective anchors by refusing to name or resolve the social contradictions it invokes.¹⁵

Must a body always be threatened for an identity to emerge? If it must, what should be the most effective form of resistance, and must such resistance, like Thelma and Louise, be fated to a self-unraveling narrative?

"The bridge is used by the leaders who promote discipline, and uniformity. It is also used by the followers. It is our bridge of life." - Perfumed Nightmare

The move from the text of self-identity to the context of political use, accompanied by a shift from the individual speaker to a communal act, is a rhetorical strategy that seems to suggest how followers can be leaders, just as leaders are ultimately followers. Is this the voice of our postcolonial taxi driver speaking, or is it an echo of a familiar adage in critical pedagogy? As Merri Johnson advocates in "Ladies, Love your Box," disciplining and being disciplined are processes that when exposed and appropriated can be experienced pleurably, much like Kidlat's playful juxtapositions between his metaphorical crossings of the bridge and the many other communal, political, and economic functions of the bridge that may only at first seem totalizing. Indeed, Johnson claims, "the reason why the feminist critiques concerning regressive representations in advertising have not been very successful; they have not recognized the basis of its attraction."¹⁶ Therefore, not only is the political act a series of self-reflexive appropriations that confound binary divides, but it is also an experience of pleasure in the mastery of knowledge. With the burden of representation aside, the consumer is now free to conjure up, as Shirley Steinberg fantasizes in her work on the gender politics of Barbie, the ridiculously humorous "Homeless Barbie, the Abortion Barbie, the Alcoholic Barbie, or the S&M Bondage Barbie," or in Kidlat's case, a parodied and redubbed representation of the American colonizer.¹⁷ Pleasure indigenizes social, sexual, and cultural hegemonies.

"Today I am still trying to make that final crossing to Freedom. I am Kidlat Tahimik. I choose my vehicle, and I can cross all bridges." - Perfumed Nightmare

All bridges? Is Kidlat adopting the developmental rhetoric of his colonial oppressors? By claiming an ability to cross all bridges, Kidlat foreshadows how a minor identity in the process of becoming is easily tempted into becoming a monumentalist autobiography. This occurs when he reifies his fantasy of the push towards Freedom into a totalizing discourse, which provides him with the methodology to tower over both the postcolonial and the colonizing subjects of the third cinematic space. For instance, in his imaginative appropriation of discourses of western modern development, best epitomized by his obsessive search for Werner Von Braun, a Nazi rocket scientist who in his eyes is merely "the man who built the bridge to the moon," Kidlat conflates developmental technology and fantasies with the pursuit of freedom. In so doing, Kidlat dismisses how western developmentalist ideology has itself structured the very possibilities for his fantastical engagement with freedom. Without Radio Free America, how could a voiceover of Neil Armstrong's famous phrase be played over the images of ox and rice fields? Thankfully, as a critical, autoethnographic flaneur, Kidlat soon learns of the fallacy of his sense of agency, seeing that in himself lies the very same seeds of ambition that have led to the destructive developmental, colonizing, and zoning practices of those he abhors.

Herein re-emerges the mirrored "other" of a cultural studies scholar, made seemingly invisible and momentarily put to death when I sped away on the high-speed train back in Taiwan. Through the meticulous production of knowledge I had hoped to navigate perhaps not entirely above, but at least with a certain degree of agency within, the sociopolitical terrain that produces the figures of the producer-as-consumer, or consumer-as-producer; but lurking amidst these discourses of agency is a pressing fear of political disillusionment. That regardless of whether or not the subject is endowed with knowledge of the power discourses at work, knowledge is not enough to invoke actual political or social change. The project of re-politicizing a so-called "Post-Feminist" age is doubtless a

precarious one.

What if Kidlat's illusion all along was not that he lacked a critical understanding of western developmentalist "texts," but that he failed to comprehend how the imagination of freedom is by itself not an innately political act? As Chon Noriega cautions in "Waas Sapping?," New Latin American Cinema "did not just speak to an underlying issue of underdevelopment, it transformed underdevelopment into an aesthetic logic aimed at conceintizacion and cultural decolonization."¹⁸ Thus, the political is not so easily assimilated, but immediately spectacularized. Seeking to discover the politics of how the political is contextualized only seems to lessen the immediacy of this particular vein of radical contextualism; but if it is not enough to endorse resistance, indigenization, appropriation, and pleasurable experience as practices within the production of knowledge and meaning in the weaving of multiple histories, all bets are off. It becomes debatable, as the Taiwanese taxi driver had already resigned himself, whether the project of self-reflexive and radical contextualism may ultimately live up to its political aspirations.

As our brief ride comes to a close, what are we to tell our archetypal taxi drivers? That their political aspirations are imagined rather than enacted? Or that they operate, in the eyes of the cultural studies scholar, only as meditational symbols, like the French woman in Noriega's textual analysis of Born in East L.A., who "embodies the dual or double-edged notion of 'liberty'?"¹⁹ Surely not, for it would make for a possible increase in taxi fare; but perhaps it is time for us to listen to the taxi drivers' laments rather than to conjecture towards our own disillusionment.

Significantly, they have taught us that the political is not simply reactionary, and lies not only in the discursive or purely representational spaces, but in the haptic as well. A space where dialogue between text and context is no longer transparent, but performed over, constituting the very terrain over which the producer-as-consumer playfully maps. As the authors of this anthology suggest, this may very well take the form of a critical pedagogy that transforms knowledge and awareness into both critical reflection leading to action and the means to survival that a marginalized subject naturalizes in order to form an identity in the process of becoming; but it should take care never to be totalizing. In other words, the interrogation of the political nature of theory through critical pedagogy and (con)textual criticism can indeed be performed when space is made for individuals and communities to inhabit the otherwise seemingly hostile compartments of cultural representation. Appropriately, Giroux notes that "history is not an artifact to be merely transmitted, but an ongoing dialogue and struggle over the relationship between representation and agency."²⁰

The key here is that history is ongoing, especially since it is the very transcription, or the interruption, of these historical processes into discursive or representational formations that often deprives them of their political agency. Just as Kidlat's omniscient narration of his aspirations entraps him within the postcolonial discursive space while my taxi driver's insistence on his knowledge of conspiracy theories self-constrain his economic and social mobility. Yet, would a sophisticated understanding of historiographic dilemmas truly offer much to these self-ethnographers? Indeed, the notion that deeper excavations of meaning should break the stranglehold of cultural representation speaks more truthfully to the passionate critical instructor than to the dejected taxi driver. Indeed, in light of multiple existing histories, contested significations, and the ethnographer's involvement in framing, shaping, and living in these (con)textual spaces, to what extent cultural studies can reside comfortably with the acceptance of the critical distance one must take in evaluating the production of meaning is still up for debate. Excavating a polyphony of fragmented voices from the rubble of political disillusionment, all of which seem to be in dialogue with another, but none of which are entirely in accord, Media/Cultural Studies has truly come of age.

NOTES

1. Hammer, Rhonda and Douglas Kellner, eds. Media/Cultural Studies: Critical Approaches. New York, NY: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., 2009.
 2. Grossberg, Lawrence. "Cultural Studies: What's in a Name? (One More Time)." Hammer and Kellner 43.
 3. Perfumed Nightmare. Dir. Kidlat Tahimik. Flower Films. 1978.
 4. Grossberg, Lawrence. 36.
 5. Hammer, Rhonda and Douglas Kellner, eds. Media/Cultural Studies: Critical Approaches. 2.
 6. Ibid. 3.
 7. Giroux, Henry. "Cultural Studies, Critical Pedagogy, and the Politics of Higher Education." Hammer and Kellner 97.
 8. Share, Jeff. "Young Children and Critical Media Literacy." Hammer and Kellner 130.
 9. Ibid. 136.
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 11. Miller, Toby. "Children and the Media: Alternative Histories." Hammer and Kellner 247.
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 17. Steinberg, Shirley. "Barbie: The Bitch Still Has Everything." Hammer and Kellner 272.
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 19. Noriega, Chon. "'Waas Sapping?': Narrative Structure and Iconography in Born in East L.A.." Hammer and Kellner 446.
 20. Giroux, Henry A. "Cultural Studies, Critical Pedagogy, and the Politics of Higher Education." Hammer and Kellner 96.
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He is currently crafting his prospectus on a comparative spatial history of post-1978 Chinese and Taiwanese national cinemas, where he intends to examine the trope of travelling as a cultural symptom of both overlapping and dissimilar elements of the nations' cultural geographies.

In effect to his interest in mapping Chinese and Taiwanese cinematic spaces, Dennis Lo has also previously published work on the Taiwanese Roadtrip Genre and spoken at conferences on spatial studies of national cinemas. Other related interests and published works include the sexual politics of Ang Lee's cinema, as well as the role of popular music in post-Taiwanese New Wave films shown during the 2008 Taiwan Film Festival.



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