

Spring 1-1-2012

Critical Media Literacy in Action: Uniting Theory, Practice and Politics in Media Education

Benjamin Joseph Thevenin

University of Colorado at Boulder, benjamin.thevenin@colorado.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholar.colorado.edu/jour_gradetds



Part of the [Civic and Community Engagement Commons](#), [Education Commons](#), and the [Mass Communication Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Thevenin, Benjamin Joseph, "Critical Media Literacy in Action: Uniting Theory, Practice and Politics in Media Education" (2012). *Journalism & Mass Communication Graduate Theses & Dissertations*. 6.
https://scholar.colorado.edu/jour_gradetds/6

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by Journalism & Mass Communication Program at CU Scholar. It has been accepted for inclusion in Journalism & Mass Communication Graduate Theses & Dissertations by an authorized administrator of CU Scholar. For more information, please contact uscholaradmin@colorado.edu.

CRITICAL MEDIA LITERACY IN ACTION:
UNITING THEORY, PRACTICE AND POLITICS IN MEDIA EDUCATION

by

BENJAMIN JOSEPH THEVENIN

BA, Brigham Young University, 2006

MA, Florida State University, 2008

A dissertation prepared for:

Dr. Stewart Hoover (chair)

Dr. Shu-Ling Chen Berggreen

Dr. Lynn Schofield Clark

Dr. Chad Kautzer

Dr. Janice Peck

Dr. Pete Simonson

Faculty of the Graduate School of the
University of Colorado in partial fulfillment
of the requirement for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
Journalism and Mass Communication

2012

This dissertation entitled:
Critical Media Literacy in Action:
Uniting Theory, Practice and Politics in Media Education
Written by Benjamin Thevenin
has been approved by Journalism and Mass Communication

Dr. Stewart Hoover

Dr. Shu-Ling Berggreen

Date _____

*The final copy of this thesis has been examined by the signatories, and we
Find that both the content and the form meet acceptable presentation standards
Of scholarly work in the above mentioned discipline.*

IRB protocol # 11-0691

Thevenin, Benjamin Joseph (Ph.D., Communications, Journalism and Mass Communication)

Critical Media Literacy in Action: Uniting Theory, Practice and Politics in Media Education

Dissertation directed by Professor Stewart Hoover

As media literacy is a growing field, there exist a number of distinct approaches to media education with varied political significance. Approaches such as protectionism, media arts education, and critical media literacy draw upon diverse theoretical traditions. Often overlooked in these traditions is the Critical Theory of the Frankfurt School. By implementing some key theoretical concepts from the work of the Frankfurt School into the design of a media education program, this project intends to test an approach to media literacy education that encourages critical political participation among young people. This program was conducted at an high school in Denver. Students engaged in Youth Participatory Action Research-oriented media education project in which they used media analysis activities to gather information on issues facing their community. They then worked in groups to create alternative media that somehow addressed these issues. The project—including the pedagogical methods and student praxis—were documented using participant observation, in-depth interviews, and journals. These materials were then analyzed to determine the relative effectiveness of the program in encouraging the development of students' critical consciousness and civic engagement.

To Emily, Damon and Cade for your
amazing love and support.

Table of Contents

Introduction.....	1
Chapter 1 – Media Literacy and Civic Engagement: The State of the Field.....	7
The Protectionist Approach.....	11
Media Arts Education.....	17
The Media Literacy Movement.....	22
Critical Media Literacy.....	28
Addressing the Civic.....	34
Research Questions.....	39
Chapter 2 – Restoring the Political to Media Literacy Education.....	40
Critical (with a Capital ‘C’) Media Literacy.....	40
A Preface.....	40
The Dialectic.....	44
The Culture Industry.....	47
Praxis.....	50
The Repoliticization of Media Literacy Education.....	53
Plato.....	53
John Dewey.....	61
Chapter 3 – A Multi-Layered Methodological Approach.....	67
Conceptual Foundations of Research.....	68
The Experimenting Society.....	68
Critical Theory.....	70
Philosophical Pragmatism.....	72
Action Research.....	73
Practical Methods of Research.....	75
Evaluative Research.....	75
A Multi-Layered Methodological Approach.....	77
Layer 1 – Methods of Praxis.....	77
Layer 2 – Pedagogical Methods.....	80
Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR).....	80
Critical Media Literacy (CML).....	83
Layer 3 – Evaluative Methods.....	87
Critical Ethnographic Research.....	88
Practical Ethnographic Fieldwork.....	91

Chapter 4 – The ‘Media Literacy and Civic Engagement’ Project: A Description...97

South High School.....	97
Digital Media Club.....	100
‘Media Literacy and Civic Engagement’ Project: An Introduction.....	102
The Dialectic.....	106
The Culture Industry.....	118
Praxis.....	140

Chapter 5 – The ‘Media Literacy and Civic Engagement’ Project: Findings & Discussion.....156

Layer 1 – Student Praxis.....	158
Critical Consciousness.....	158
Discussion.....	170
Civic Engagement.....	180
Discussion.....	185
Layer 2 – Pedagogy.....	196
Implications for Theory.....	196
Implications for Teaching.....	203
Layer 3 – Evaluation.....	208

Conclusion.....212

Appendix

A. Promotional Flyer.....	216
B. Weekly Lesson Plans.....	217
C. Unity/Uniformity Cheat Sheet.....	237
D. Is vs. Ought Worksheet.....	238
E. Pre-Production Worksheet.....	239

Bibliography.....240

Figures

1. NCLB 2011 Annual Report for SHS – Performance Indicators.....	111
2. NCLB 2011 Annual Report for SHS – Trends, Needs, Causes.....	111
3. Is & Ought Diagram.....	131
4. <i>Inception</i> stills.....	134
5. Particular representations of peace.....	135
6. Particular representations of femininity.....	136
7. Ezana’s image of the ‘school to jail track’.....	137
8. Abel’s image of the east African drought.....	138
9. Jennifer’s posters.....	143
10. Stills from students’ restorative justice video.....	147
11. Facebook page for the South chapter of Padres y Jovenes Unidos.....	148

INTRODUCTION

INT. HIGH SCHOOL CLASSROOM – DAY

A STUDENT sits at his desk, head down, and intently saws at an action figure's plastic limbs with a dull pair of scissors—perhaps representative of his own feeling of being tortured by the teacher's lecture on media effects.

This scene introduced my first attempt to address the effectiveness of media literacy education—a short film documenting my experience as an instructor for Brigham Young University's Hands on a Camera Project. In 2004, as an undergraduate student majoring in Media Arts, I helped develop and implement a media education program in a local alternative high school. The students involved—a group of about fifteen, mostly tenth and eleventh graders who had been unsuccessful, for whatever reason, attending public school—engaged in a number of media analysis activities and then worked in groups to produce short documentary films on aspects of their community. I worked with one group students who chose to focus their lens on the work engaged in by the school's cafeteria staff, and along the way, I used my own camera to document the students' (and my own) experience.

As the short description of the opening scene from my documentary may suggest, the relative interest and engagement of the students involved in the project varied quite a bit. Many students lost interest before the program's close and failed to produce a final film, and the group with whom I worked walked a fine line between giving voice to and making fun of the school's lunch ladies. After the conclusion of the project, I recall sharing my own finished film with an administrator in BYU's Media Arts department, and his response to my work has stayed with me ever since:

“So, are you saying that this project is working or not?” he asked, somewhat sternly, probably due to his concern that department funds and the time and effort of a number of students and faculty might have been wasted in creating an ineffective project.

“I don’t know,” I replied. “I guess I’m trying to say that it’s complicated.”

“Hmmpf,” he sighed.

His apparent dissatisfaction with my response perturbed me. My film was not—and was not intended to be—a ‘puff piece’ promoting the department’s new media education initiative. It was instead my attempt at an earnest cinematic depiction of the messy reality of running a media literacy project in a high school. And in many ways, this dissertation is my re-engagement with this issue—*What constitutes effective media literacy education? And then, how can effective media literacy education be implemented and evaluated?*

Now, it is no wonder that I struggled with these questions in my own scholarship for nearly the last decade. The objectives, pedagogical methods and effects of media education have been the subject of a discourse engaged in by scholars and educators that long predates my own interest and involvement in media literacy education. As Chapter 1 illustrates, within the field of media education there exists a number of competing approaches drawing upon theoretical traditions as varied as Greek philosophy or Marxist political economy. However, there is a perspective gradually emerging from the mix of voices that constitute the field that now is a critical moment in the evolution of media education. Scholars Gianna Capello, Damiano Felini and Renee Hobbs describe this moment as follows:

The new millennium has increased consciousness of the public’s role in a mediated society, and with the complicity of political, cultural, and

educational organizations and the increased ease of international exchange, a shared theoretical framework for the current paradigm [of media literacy education] is emerging. (Capello, Felini and Hobbs 2011, 68)

While I agree that now is a particularly crucial time in the evolution of the field, I am reluctant to claim, as these scholars do, that this is due to the emergence of a ‘shared theoretical framework’ for media literacy education. My own experiences—participating in conferences, reading the scholarship, and interacting with students and educators—while engaging and enjoyable, have not led me to believe that we have reached a consensus. Instead, my interest in this moment is largely due to contextual factors—the contemporary social, cultural, political and technological conditions within which we are working.

As my description of the project I conducted (Chapter 4) demonstrates, those factors that make this moment in media education particularly critical are not the bridging of disciplinary boundaries or institutional divides, but the unique (although, sometimes alarming) circumstances in which we are doing this work. While conducting this research, I witnessed the ten year anniversary of 9/11, the end of a war in Iraq, the continuation of our military involvement in Afghanistan, revolutions across the Middle East and north Africa, the continuation of a global recession, the worldwide Occupy movement, the beginnings of a presidential election, among many, many other occurrences. During the same time, I have witnessed a number of interesting intersections of these political and economic issues with the media—a scandal involving the British press, police, and Parliament, the Kony 2012 campaign, the Treyvon Martin murder case, Facebook going public, not to mention the incredible proliferation of digital media technologies (and subsequent public uses of these technologies, some of which have been

incorporated into political participation). *If there has* been a move towards increased unity in the field of media literacy, I argue that it is less likely due to the increased coordination of scholars, practitioners and media producers, but rather the result of their growing recognition that media education, in each of its divergent forms, must account for the complexities of the political, economic, social and cultural life we are now experiencing.

And so my response to the question—*What constitutes effective media literacy education?*—is the following: *One that helps the public use media to understand and engage with the challenges that face our contemporary global society.* In Chapter 1, I discuss at length how different approaches to media education have provided varied conceptualizations of this understanding and engagement. The *protectionist approach*, *media arts education*, the *media literacy movement*, and *critical media literacy* all offer—sometimes complementary and other times contradictory—explanations of media, society, and political participation. However, I argue that careful analyses of each approach reveal some potential contributions to the establishment of a critical, political media literacy education.

In Chapter 2, I discuss how the Critical Theory of the Frankfurt School—a scholarly tradition acknowledged but not yet embraced by any existing approach to media education—may provide the necessary theoretical foundation for a more critical, political perspective on media education. The Frankfurt School’s discussions of concepts like the *dialectic*, the *culture industry*, and *praxis* are echoed by scholars like Plato and John Dewey, Neil Postman and Paulo Freire whose work has informed media education efforts for decades. But I argue that a more explicit engagement with these theoretical concepts

give teeth to media education as a means of political preparation and to citizens and consumers as agents of transformative social change.

In Chapter 3, I discuss the methods by which I have both theoretically and practically engaged with this subject of media, education, and political participation in the ‘Media Literacy and Civic Engagement’ project. This chapter and the two that follow, can be understood as my attempt to answer my second question—*How can an effective media literacy education be implemented and evaluated?* I describe how my project was informed by these theoretical concepts, and explain my ‘multi-layered methodological approach.’ Essentially, the project consists of three levels of engagement—(1) the methods of praxis by which my students use media to engage with social issues that affect them, (2) the pedagogical methods by which I introduce the concepts and facilitate the students implementation of their learning in their engagement with these issues, and (3) the evaluative methods by which I have discussed the relative effectiveness of the project.

In Chapter 4, I go into detail about my experience conducting the project at South High School in Denver, Colorado. I partnered with both university and high school students and faculty to conduct a project in an after-school program in which a group of a dozen or so students worked in groups to use media analysis and media production activities as means of identifying, researching and engaging with an issue affecting their community. South High School’s incredibly diverse student body provided an interesting opportunity for the project—especially in regards to the unique social issues chosen by the students. For example, one group, comprised entirely of refugees from Ethiopia, Somalia, and Libya produced a video about the drought affecting East Africa. This

chapter describes the class discussions and activities in which the students were introduced to each of the theoretical concepts—the *dialectic*, *the culture industry*, and *praxis*—as well as the students’ application of this learning in their media production projects.

Chapter 5 contains an analysis of the students’ participation in the project in order to determine to evaluate how their participation in the project facilitated (or not) their development of *critical consciousness* and *civic engagement*. Analyzing their weekly video journals, interviews, class discussions and finished group projects, I demonstrate how students achieved these objectives, and offer how factors such as each student’s basic literacy skills, media use, interest in political and social issues, and sense of empowerment influenced his/her development. I then reflect on these findings, and discuss some potentially beneficial modifications to the project’s theories and pedagogical methods. And finally, I conclude with a brief reflection on this experience and discuss future directions for this type of research.

CHAPTER 1

MEDIA LITERACY AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT: THE STATE OF THE FIELD

Despite the American public's growing acknowledgment of the importance for young people to critically engage with the media they are surrounded by, the concepts, objectives and methods of media literacy are still hotly contested. Competing paradigms of media education—as varied as *cyberliteracy*, *ICT literacy*, *youth media*, and *21st century skills* (among many, many others)—define media literacy as promoting technological proficiency, critical interpretation, aesthetic appreciation, inoculation against harmful media effects, or engagement in social change. Jhally and Earp respond to the scattered nature of media literacy, writing

The result is that media literacy in this country remains a fragmented field, a series of splinter groups united by a common belief that media are a worthy subject of analysis but divided by fundamental differences at the level of basic definition. The history of media literacy in the United States is, in many ways, a history of competing ideas and assumptions about the very nature, value, and purpose of media, education and literacy itself. (Jhally & Earp 240)

In fact, there is a good deal of scholarship devoted to identifying these divisions within the field and labeling these splinter groups. Anderson (1980) identified the competing theoretical constructs of 'critical viewing education' (the term *media literacy education* was not yet commonly used) as *intervention* (drawing upon media effects research), *goal-attainment* (drawing upon uses and gratifications research), *cultural understanding* (drawing upon cultural studies), and *visual literacy* (drawing upon semiotics). A decade or so later, at the National Leadership Conference on Media Literacy, a group of scholars and practioners met to find some common ground among disparate understandings of and approaches to media literacy. The 1992 report reads, in part,

...the fundamental objective of media literacy is critical autonomy relationship to all media[.] Emphases in media literacy training range widely, including informed citizenship, aesthetic appreciation and expression, social advocacy, self-esteem, and consumer competence. (Aufderheide 1992)

In 1998, the International Communication Association held a Media Literacy Symposium, with a similar purpose as the Aspen Conference, in which scholars from competing paradigms (including William Christ, W. James Potter, Renee Hobbs, Sut Jhally, David Buckingham and Paul Messaris, among others) continued this discourse—each scholar voicing a unique perspective on the aims and methods of media education. Hobbs’ contribution to the symposium, “The Seven Great Debates of the Media Literacy Movement” (1998), explicitly highlights certain divisions within the field, drawing attention to debates surrounding the conceptualization of media education as protectionist, the involvement of media production as part of media education, the ideological or political underpinnings of media literacy, etc. And in 2008, Hobbs further discussed these debates, naming new disciplinary approaches to media education—*ICT* or *information literacy*, *media literacy*, *critical literacy*, and *media management* (Hobbs 2008).

But for the purposes of this project, I find Douglas Kellner and Jeff Share’s taxonomy of approaches to media literacy education to be the most skillful slicing of this long picked-at pie. The categorizations articulated by Kellner and Share—the *protectionist approach*, *media arts education*, the *media literacy movement*, and *critical media literacy*—are each founded in competing theoretical conceptualizations of media

and society, and subsequently forward different objectives and pedagogical approaches of (all of which I will explore shortly) (Kellner and Share 2005; 2007a; 2007b).¹

One challenge faced by media literacy education, then, is that as such a divided field, it is very difficult to make substantive changes to treatments of media in educational institutions; organizations and practices of media institutions; policies governing media issues, audience conceptions of and interactions with media; and (probably most importantly) social institutions, relations and practices that influence (and are, in turn, influenced by) the media. Whether or not Anderson, in 1980, foresaw the debates that would continue in the field of media education in the decades that followed, he is justified in concluding his discussion of media education, writing “innovation in social institutions is at best a glacial process” (Anderson 1980). Now, this project’s intention is not to overemphasize or lament the divided nature of the field, nor does it claim to make any attempt to finally unify the existing fragments of media literacy under a singular banner. (In fact, I am unsure how such an effort would be possible and whether such a result would be beneficial.) However, an understanding of these divisions is helpful at understanding how the varied approaches address what I see as the defining principles of media literacy.

In this chapter I demonstrate how thinkers as diverse as Plato, John Dewey, Marshall McLuhan, Paulo Freire, and Henry Giroux—all commonly cited by scholars and practitioners from each existing approach to media literacy—all emphasize education as the means of encouraging citizens’ *critical consciousness* and *civic engagement*

¹ For additional discussions of the development of and divisions of media education, see Tyner 1992; Buckingham 1998; Hobbs 1998b; Livingstone 2003; Rosenbaum 2003; Rosenbaum, J., J. Beentjes, R. König 2008; Martens 2010; Plette, & Giroux 1997.

(although, *the extent to which* these principles are addressed in the varied approaches is still a matter of discussion). These defining principles of media literacy were articulated early on in the development of the field by British media scholar Len Masterman—in *Teaching the Media* (1980), Masterman emphasizes that a ‘truly participatory democracy’ will require the development of citizens “to take control, become effective change agents, make rational decisions (often on the basis of media evidence) and to communicate effectively... through an active involvement with the media” (Masterman 60). So, in addition to the commonly cited definition of media literacy as the ability to “access, analyze, evaluate and produce” media, Masterman—drawing upon the discussions of the civic by thinkers like Plato, Dewey, etc.—articulates the primary purpose of developing and exercising these skills: *democratic participation* (Aufderheide 1992, v). And given that citizens’ conscious, critical participation in media analysis, production and activism is, then, essential to their democratic participation, critical media literacy education is essential to the realization of democracy.²

It should be noted that while I openly acknowledge my own predilections towards certain theories, objectives and methodologies present in the different approaches, I do not intend to use this survey of the field to simply play favorites or knock down straw men. Rather, I echo the concern of media scholar and intellectual historian Tony Bennet who, in his “Theories of Media and Theories of Society” (1982/1990), writes

...my concern is to show how the sorts of assumptions made about the broader structure of society within different bodies of theory have

² Media literacy’s relationship to civic engagement has been explored in a number of different ways, by a number of scholars including, but not limited to Calabrese 2003; Gerbner 1960; Hall & Whannel 1964; Jenkins et al. 2007; Jenkins 2006; Kahne, Lee & Feezell 2012; Kubey 2004; Levine 2008; Martens & Hobbs 2012; Rheingold 2008.

determined both the sorts of questions that have been posed in relation to the media and the way in which those questions have been pursued. (31)

Through an examination of the theoretical foundations, objectives and methodologies of each of these four educational approaches, this chapter identifies *how* certain approaches have addressed what I have defined as the two primary principles of media literacy—*critical consciousness* and *civic engagement*—and *what* may constitute a more critical, political media literacy education.

The Protectionist Approach

Our politics, religion, news, athletics, education and commerce have been transformed into congenial adjuncts of show business, largely without protest or even much popular notice. The result is that we are a people on the verge of amusing ourselves to death. (Postman 1985, 3-4)

Neil Postman's *Amusing Ourselves to Death* (1985) is perhaps the work that best exemplifies the protectionist approach to media literacy. Sometimes called *interventionist* (Hobbs 1998, 2008) or *the inoculation approach* (Halloran and Jones 1964), protectionist education attempts to mitigate the perceived negative effects of the content and conventions of contemporary (especially televisual) media on our society (especially the children). This perspective on culture and communication, however, does not originate in Postman but can be traced back to the philosophical musings of Plato, the early work on media education by F.R. Leavis and Denys Thompson, and media effects research like that of the Payne Fund Studies of Motion Pictures and Youth.

Among Plato's ideas that are commonly drawn upon by those scholars and practitioners working within the protectionist approach³ is his concern with how modes

³ See Provencal 2004; Sontag 1977.

of communication and the content of cultural expression shape society. For example, in his conversation with Phaedrux, Socrates is critical of the new mode of communication: *writing*.

I cannot help feeling, Phaedrux, that writing is unfortunately like painting; for the creations of the painter have the attitude of life, a solemn silence. And the same may be said of speeches. You would imagine that they had intelligence, but if you want to know anything and put a question to one of them, the speaker always gives one unvarying answer. (Plato *Phaedrus* 47)

At the heart of Plato's critique are the limitations that this new medium of communication—specifically, the static nature of the written word—place on the pursuit of truth. As evidenced in the interactions between Socrates and various philosophical figures that comprise Plato's work, the philosopher values dialogue as a means of working toward synthesis, and one-way communication like that of writing (or even oratory) does not allow for such a dynamic dialectic to take place.

Plato is also concerned about potentially negative effects of the representations of emotional indulgence and immoral behavior in poetry and art. In Book X of the *Republic*, he challenges representational art and poetry, claiming that

...in all of [these attitudes and behaviors] poetry has a like *effect*: it feeds and waters the passions instead of drying them up; she lets them rule, although they ought to be controlled if mankind are ever to increase in happiness and virtue. (Plato 2005, 37; emphasis added).

If Homer tells of a hero "who is drawling out his sorrows in a long oration, or singing, and smiting his breast," or, for that matter, engages in any behavior perceived by Plato as being immoral or unfit for a member of his Republic, Plato argues that this representation may negatively affect those listening to the tale and ultimately prevent humankind from achieving enlightenment (Plato 2005, 36). Here, the connections between the form and

content of communication, the cultivation of citizens and the creation of a just society—in this case, Plato’s Republic—are made explicit.

Now, Plato’s warning has been probably echoed by cultural critics throughout the ages at the advent of each new communication technology, but perhaps the most notable (and notorious) translation of the Greek philosopher’s ideas into contemporary society is attributed to F.R. Leavis and Denys Thompson. Their seminal book *Culture and Environment: The Training of Critical Awareness* (1932) identifies the threat that new communication media (in this case not writing, but instead film and radio) pose to ‘traditional culture’ and then seeks to prepare students to “discriminate and resist” these new negative influences. The perception of modernity as ‘mass society’ is implicit in the approach to education that they develop, treating new means of communication (both in form and content) as antagonistic to traditionally-held cultural, aesthetic, moral and (most importantly for our discussion) political values.

Plato’s discussion of the influence of the form and content of communication on the public is also carried on by mass communication research devoted to measuring media’s *effects*. Lasswell’s question—“Who says what in which channel to whom *with what effect?*” (1948, 84)—provides a foundation on which a good amount of mass communication research in the United States rests. Among the first of these attempts to identify the effects of media was the Payne Fund Studies of Motion Pictures and Youth (1933), a large scale study of the effects of film-viewing on children, contemporaneous with (and complimentary to) the work of Leavis and Thompson. Implicit in the first statement of the study’s findings is a protectionist perspective like that voiced by Plato, Leavis and Thompson--

Motion pictures are not understood by the present generation of adults. They are new; they make an enormous appeal to children; and they present ideas and situations which parents may not like. Consequently when parents think of the welfare of their children who are exposed to these compelling situations, they wonder about the effect of the pictures upon the ideals and behavior of the children. (Charters v)

The research is clearly motivated by the anxiety felt by adults about the perceived negative effects of new media (in this case, movies) on impressionable young people.

The study, then, examines what influence the content of movies and frequency of movie attendance has on children's "information, attitudes, emotions, health, and conduct" (Charters 5). Unsurprisingly, direct correlations (let alone causal relationships) between the content of movies or the children's attendance to movies and anti-social behaviors, loss of sleep, absences from school, etc. were difficult to determine. However, despite the study's somewhat mixed findings, one attempt was made to mitigate any potentially negative effects of movie-going—education. A textbook and curriculum were designed as a means of "teaching adolescents how to discriminate among motion pictures—to help them enjoy good art and drama more deeply and criticize bad pictures more intelligently" (Charters 1933, 60). So, like Leavis and Thompson, the Payne Fund Study determined identified education as the means preparing a "discriminatory" audience to judge between good and bad media.⁴ And the Payne Fund Studies would be just the beginning of a century's worth of mass communication research in the United States that, in its various forms (i.e., uses and gratifications, agenda-setting, framing,

⁴ While a similar imperative exists in media art education, 'good' and 'bad' for the type of protectionist education proposed by the Payne Fund Studies addresses moral values while media arts education emphasizes aesthetic value.

cultivation research, etc.), provide the justification for a mountain of protectionist scholarship⁵ and reactionary popular discourse.⁶

Though, this tendency of protectionist media education to position education in opposition to media culture is perhaps best exemplified in the work of Neil Postman. While Postman recognizes the importance of media literacy, asking “who will teach our students how to look at television, and when not to, and with what critical equipment when they do” (153-4), he does not so much advocate for particular pedagogical objectives or methods as he does criticize existing perspectives on media, specifically television. This reactionary thinking is evidenced in his response to the confidence McLuhan has in media as means of extending and expanding traditional literacy. Postman writes “To make such a mistake in the matter at hand is to misconstrue entirely how television redefines the meaning of public discourse. Television does not extend or amplify literate culture. It attacks it” (83-4). The protectionist approach, then, is not so much positively defined by Postman’s work as it an attempt to account for the critique he makes (following the tradition of Plato, Leavis and Thompson) that media are superficial, inaccurate, and/or immoral. Revealing is the reference Postman makes to laws that governed the early American colonies which in the policies mentions, “Satan, whose evil designs, it was supposed, could be thwarted at every turn by education” (32-3). Since Plato, this conservative moralism has been among the defining characteristics of the protectionist approach.

⁵ See Abelman, R. & J. Courtright 1983; Austin and Johnson 1997a, 1997b; Austin et al. 2002; Keller and Brown 2002; Steyer 2002; Cantor and Wilson 2003; Gonzales et al. 2004; Huesmann et al. 1983; Potter 2004; Nathanson 2004; Rich 2004; Scharrer 2005, 2006; Banerjee and Greene 2006, 2007; Pinkleton et al. 2007; Timmerman et al. 2008; Byrne 2009; Byrne, Linz and Potter 2009; Pinkleton et al. 2009; Primack et al. 2009.

⁶ See Bauerlein 2009, 2011; Carr 2009, 2011; Keen 2008, 2012.

Now, that is not to say that the protectionist approach is devoid of progressive political content. The approach does not just try and protect its students from the so-called moral degradation of contemporary media culture, but also utilizes media effects research to draw correlations between media consumption and social problems like “violence, materialism, nutrition and body image, risk-taking behaviors, distortion and bias in reporting, and racial, class, gender, or sexual identity stereotyping” (Hobbs 1998, 19). Thus, current educational initiatives using a protectionist approach resemble some of their more critical counterparts in their attempts to address problems facing society.

However even when used as a means of finding solutions to social problems, the protectionist approach is often criticized for its overly simplistic and elitist perspective on media culture and education. The approach’s reliance on media effects research is criticized by cultural scholars who challenge the causal relationship between media consumption and individual attitudes and behaviors that this work implies (Jenkins 1997; Buckingham 2003, 2005, 2008). Others criticize the approach’s “instructor-focused classroom, where the teacher tells the student the ‘facts’ about media’s negative influence, about the manipulation of messages, and the student listens quietly and takes notes for the test” (Hobbs 1998, 19). Such an undemocratic pedagogical approach—implied in the work of Plato, Leavis and Postman—is regarded as antithetical to a progressive, political approach to media literacy. Some have argued that a protectionist approach to media literacy education might be effective in promoting critical consciousness and civic engagement *if* it addressed “the naturalizing processes of ideology and the interrelationships with social injustice, *but*” as Kellner and Share

conclude “it is deeply flawed when it does so through dogmatic orthodoxy and undemocratic pedagogy” (Kellner & Share 2007b, 61, emphasis added).

Ultimately, the criticism voiced by critical cultural studies-oriented scholars and practitioners of media literacy education is that the protectionist approach is fundamentally flawed in its conception of the power relation between the (powerful and often immoral) media industries and (especially young and particularly vulnerable) audiences. This criticism is nicely articulated by Henry Jenkins, who in his article “Empowering Children in the Digital Age: Towards a Radical Media Pedagogy” (1997) calls for

...a new kind of radical media education based on the assumption that children are active participants within popular culture rather than passive victims. We need to help our children become more critically reflexive about the media they use and the popular culture they embrace, yet we can only achieve this by recognizing and respecting their existing investments, skills, and knowledge as media users. In the end, our goals must be not to *protect* our children but to *empower* them. (32; emphasis added)

This emphasis of *empowerment* will be one of the defining characteristics of the work of scholars like Jenkins, Buckingham, Hobbs and others associated with the media literacy movement.⁷

Media Arts Education

Among the approaches to media literacy, media arts education is arguably the least theoretically-grounded, and perhaps then, least unified. In many cases, those engaged in this approach draw from semiotic theory as it has been traditionally applied in

⁷ Other criticisms of the protectionist approach include Halloran and Jones 1968; Masterman 1985; Buckingham 1998.

film studies—emphasizing formal analysis, aesthetic appreciation, studies of genre and authorship—as well as media production. In this chapter, the theoretical foundations of media arts education are traced to the studies of cinema conducted by critics and filmmakers like Sergei Eisenstein and those involved in the French New Wave’s *Cahiers du Cinema*, scholarship on visual communication by individuals like Ernst Gombrich, Rudolph Arnheim and Erwin Panofsky, and the work of media scholars like Paul Messaris on *visual literacy* and Herbert Zettl on *media aesthetics*.

The integration of media criticism and production—perhaps the defining characteristic of media arts education—is best exemplified in the work of filmmakers and critics like Sergei Eisenstein, Francois Truffaut and Jean-Luc Godard. Sergei Eisenstein is among the most prominent Soviet filmmakers and is credited for the development of the ‘montage method’ of filmmaking. His films *Battleship Potemkin* (1925), *October* (1927), and *Alexander Nevsky* (1938) (among many others) practice the juxtaposition of strikingly dissimilar images as a means of producing specific responses in the audience. This technique is probably most famously demonstrated in the Odessa staircase sequence from *Battleship Potemkin* in which shots of marching Cossack soldiers are cross-cut with scenes of fatally injured peasants and crying children. However, this approach to editing as a means of communicating a political message and inciting audience responses was not only practiced by Eisenstein. He , along with Lev Kuleshov, theorized this ‘montage method’ which has been widely used by filmmakers around the globe since. Eisenstein wrote extensively—in his books *The Film Sense* (1942), *Film Form: Essays in Film Theory* (1949) and numerous essays—about the use of visual language to communicate revolutionary ideology.

Shortly after Eisenstein, another group of artists engaged in a similar experiment in integrating film criticism and filmmaking. Writers for the French periodical *Cahiers du Cinema*—enamored with the Italian Neo-Realist and classical Hollywood films of the 1930s and '40s—implemented the theories that they had developed regarding *mis en scene* and *le auteur* in the creation of their own films. Among this group were French New Wave filmmakers like Francois Truffaut and Jean-Luc Godard. Interestingly, while the French New Wave filmmakers continued the tradition of film criticism and filmmaking pioneered by Eisenstein, their approach to and objectives for filmmaking are dramatically different. While Eisenstein theorizes and practices *montage*—quick, often abrupt, always resolute edits—Truffaut and Godard emphasize *mis en scene*—careful composed scenes, often with long duration and great depth of field. And while Eisenstein developed his method as a means of propagating the Russian Revolution, the French New Wave was more concerned with revolutionary aesthetics than politics. Despite the differences in the two approaches, these Soviet and French filmmakers and critics are often credited for the genesis of a media arts education—practiced in film schools for the last several decades—that emphasizes learning ‘film language,’ developing aesthetic appreciation, engaging in formal analysis and media production.

Now, many of the theories and methods developed by these filmmakers, critics and educators were appropriations of existing studies and practices of *visual communication*—in painting, sculpture, photography, etc. It follows then, that today scholars like Messaris and Zettl reference concepts associated with semiotics. Again, theoretical approaches to media arts education vary quite a bit, but among the most commonly cited scholars of visual communication are Ernst Gombrich, Rudolf Arnheim,

and Edwin Panofsky. Drawing upon the semiotic theories of Ferdinand de Saussure, Claude Levi-Strauss, Charles Sanders Peirce and others, these thinkers are interested in the meaning-making process involved in visual communication. And among their primary objectives for this inquiry is to better prepare (especially young) people to correctly interpret visual signs. Arnheim writes “The clarification of visual forms and their organization in integrated patterns as well as the attribution of such forms to suitable objects is one of the most effective training grounds of the young mind” (1951, 8). And while these thinkers advocate a theoretical approach that is more concerned with cognitive science, psychology and linguistics than their social theory- and cultural studies-oriented counterparts, they are nonetheless concerned with grounding this theory in artistic practice and educational exercise. For example, Arnheim points to the necessary combination of creative production and theoretical inquiry, writing “Good art theory must smell of the studio, although its language should differ from the household talk of painters and sculptors” (1971, 5).

This tradition is further developed by Paul Messaris who defines *visual literacy* as “greater experience in the works of visual media coupled with a heightened conscious awareness of those workings” (2). The characteristics of ‘mature interpretational ability,’ and thus the emphases of media arts education, are *reflective viewership* as well as awareness of *authorial intent* and *formal conventions*. Aesthetic appreciation requires the individual to consciously consider their reading of a media text, to identify the ‘authorial presence’ or intention of the text, and to determine how this intention is achieved (or not) through the utilization of formal conventions. Zettl (1998) develops Messaris’ conception of visual literacy, drawing even more heavily upon the structuralist semiotic tradition in

his argument that a media literacy founded on ‘contextual media aesthetics’ includes an understanding of *aesthetic elements and structures of screen images*, how these elements and structures are processed by our own *mental maps*, and how those mental maps function within larger *intellectual and cultural frameworks* (84).

Also, both scholars argue that these objectives are best achieved when media arts education involves the development of media production skills. Messaris writes

In a world as permeated by attempts at visual manipulation as ours is, these findings point to one possible avenue for increasing viewers’ awareness of intent: training in production. (183)

Media production does not just provide the means of self-expression or dissemination of information, but it also enhances the individual’s ability to adequately interpret media texts through increased knowledge of their inner workings.

Now again, because media arts education has a less unified theoretical tradition, individual media arts programs vary in their political significance. Individual media arts projects may emphasize empowerment through increased self-expression, engagement with political issues *or* they may simply prepare individuals for participation in the media industry. Eisenstein’s approach to media scholarship and production was to develop the means to most effectively encourage revolutionary consciousness among the masses using deliberately crafted cinematic propaganda. Messaris, on the other hand, describes the potentially political significance of media arts education in protectionist terminology, writing “it equips the viewer drawing inferences about the broader social implications of images, and it can also be assumed to make one less vulnerable to their influence” (138). Ultimately though, it is media art education’s more typical, apolitical stance that limits its ability to promote positive social change. Kellner and Share (2007b) write

Many of these programs tend to unproblematically teach students the technical skills to merely reproduce hegemonic representations with little awareness of ideological implications or any type of social critique. (61)

Media arts education would have greater political significance, if it were just as concerned with social and ideological implications of visual communication as it is with aesthetic appreciation and technical proficiency.⁸

Media Literacy Movement

If the new reality of our time is in the main a collective dream or nightmare brought about by the mechanization of speech...then we must learn the art of using all our wits in a dream world, as did James Joyce in *Finnegans Wake*. (McLuhan 1962/2004, 342)

The media literacy movement in the United States—probably best exemplified in the work of scholars like Renee Hobbs, Faith Rogow, and Henry Jenkins—sees media literacy as the ability to “access, analyze, evaluate and communicate” media messages and thereby meaningfully participate in today’s media-saturated society (Hobbs 1998a, 16). While the media literacy movement’s theoretical roots are broad, central to its scholarship is the emphasis of media’s democratic possibilities voiced by thinkers like John Dewey and Marshall McLuhan, the cultural studies of the Birmingham School in the U.K., and media scholars drawing from these traditions such as David Buckingham and Sonia Livingstone.

The media literacy movement emphasizes the following ‘core principles’: media texts are constructed; they use particular conventions for particular purposes; and media audiences are influenced, to some degree, by these texts depending on the particular interpretive skills and perspectives they bring to their reading of these texts (NAMLE

⁸ For other examples of media arts education scholarship and practice, see Messaris 1998; Meyrowitz 1998; Natharius 2004; Van Driel & Klinkenberg 1989.

2007). As articulated in NAMLE's 'Core Principles,' the media literacy movement does not solely emphasize media texts (like media arts education) or media effects (like the protectionist approach). Rather, it emphasizes audience's interactions with and interpretations of media. So, while the approach acknowledges the potential influence of media—producing, in the words of McLuhan, “consequences for our most ordinary perceptions and habits of action”—it emphasizes the power that individuals may wield *if* they are conscious of this influence, making their participation with media a means of empowerment (1962/2004, 30). And it follows that this consciousness is cultivated by education.

Now, this emphasis on media education as preparing individuals to use communication for individual empowerment can be traced back to the educational philosophy of Dewey, through the McLuhan's discussions of media, and British cultural studies. In *The Public and Its Problems* (1927), Dewey diagnoses modern society with what the Chicago School of sociologists termed *social disorganization* (Thomas & Znaniecki 1918-20). Due to the increased urbanization, immigration, transportation and mass communication of the modern era, there was “too much public...and there [were] too many publics...” for there to exist any nation-wide cultural or political consensus (Dewey 1927a/1954, 137). Interestingly, while he acknowledges that the advent of new communication media contributes to this crisis, Dewey asserts that “communication alone can create a great community” (142).

This curious mixture of criticism and optimism evidenced in Dewey's work is echoed decades later in McLuhan's explanation of new media as both the obstacles preventing and the means of producing a 'global village.' McLuhan notes that “when

communication devices have achieved the speed of light, there occurs a social and historical simultaneity, as well as a local and temporal one. And...the immediate effect of modern communication in overlaying all of these is to create dislocation and distress” (1952/2001, 342). Yet despite this critique, he sees the acquisition of literacy, here applied to ‘televisual’ media, as the primary means of overcoming this ‘dislocation and distress’ and the establishment of a worldwide ‘Great Community’ (in the words of Dewey).⁹

Both Dewey and McLuhan’s emphasis of media audiences’ informed exercise of agency as a means of establishing a just society is something similarly stressed by another school of thought—British Cultural Studies. The Birmingham School of Cultural Studies, established in the mid twentieth century and led by progressive scholars like E.P. Thompson, Richard Hoggart, Raymond Williams and Stuart Hall, sought to reorient studies of culture towards the ‘lived practices’ of individuals and communities. So, for example, Hoggart’s *Uses of Literacy* (1957) examines the media consumption habits of the British working class. Interestingly, while studies such as Hoggart’s were conducted at the same time George Gerbner and Albert Bandura conducted their own studies of media effects in the U.S., the results were quite different. While the Birmingham scholars acknowledged the growing influence of mass communication on social, cultural and political life (otherwise, why would they be so concerned with examining media culture?), their studies consistently emphasized the role of the individual and the community in interpreting and interacting with media, rather than simply being affected by them. Stuart Hall (1980) succinctly articulates this defining principle of the School’s

⁹ In fact, it may be fitting to note that McLuhan is attributed to be the first to use the term ‘literacy’ in regard to the critical consumption of modern media.

approach, writing “before this message can have an ‘effect’...it must first be appropriated as a meaningful discourse and be meaningfully decoded” (165).

And while the Birmingham School as such, no longer exists, its influence can be seen in cultural studies throughout the world, and, in relation to this project, particularly in the work of British media scholars David Buckingham and Sonia Livingstone. Buckingham, for example, emphasizes media literacy not as the ability to resist the influences of media, master its conventions, or appreciate its aesthetics, but “to reflect systematically on the process of reading and writing, to understand and to analyze [one’s] own experience as readers and writers” (2003, 41). The Youth Media movement, for example, draws upon this conceptualization of media education as a means of self-empowerment. The work of scholars such as Kathleen Tyner and JoEllen Fisherkeller, as well as practitioners such as Steven Goodman, see young people’s reflections on and analysis of their own experiences as the central aims of media education (and a necessary prerequisite to the kind of critical political participation in which this project is interested). Youth Media programs, like Goodman’s Educational Video Center, work to “provide young people with the intellectual, social and technical knowledge and skills they need to use, comprehend and evaluate media, but especially, to create and circulate media in a critical, appreciative and proactive manner.” (Fisherkeller 2009, 22). Youth Media—often informed by the cultural studies perspective characteristic of the media literacy movement—emphasizes media production (not unlike media arts education) but does so with the intention of the young people’s personal self-development.¹⁰

¹⁰ Resources on Youth Media include the bi-monthly journal *Youth Media Reporter*, as well as Campbell, Lesli and Perlman 2001; Fisherkeller 2009, 2011; Goodman 2003;

Although while Sonia Livingstone—another prominent figure in media education in the U.K.—reinforces the value of this cultural studies perspective, she clarifies that its intention is not to overemphasize the power of the individual. “Rather than conceiving of powerful texts and passive viewers or indeterminate texts and powerful viewers, what is required is a negotiated position that recognizes the complexity of the interaction between text and viewer” (1993, 249). Then, media education, as defined by this cultural studies perspective, intends to unpack this complex interaction between text and viewer, analyze the experiences of reading and writing, in an effort to empower the individual.

Now, in regards to its politics, the media literacy movement has had a tenuous relationship with the cultivation of critical consciousness and civic engagement. Probably most notably in “The Seven Great Debates of the Media Literacy Movement” (1998), Renee Hobbs defines media literacy’s political objectives rather narrowly: media analysis is a means of encouraging students’ critical autonomy or the ability to use reason to come to autonomous decisions; classrooms are democratically organized, with teachers facilitating students’ learning rather than dictating it; media analysis activities challenge textual authority and encourage students to come to self-generated critical conclusions. “This agenda is radical enough” Hobbs argues “without adding additional baggage associated with other explicitly formulated political or social change objectives” (Hobbs 1998, 23). She argues that a more progressive political approach to media literacy education would find opposition among a politically-divided public and would compromise the realization of the democratic pedagogy at the heart of the movement. And this approach to media literacy has since been relatively accepted within the

Hahn 2002; Hobbs 2008; Hobbs and Yoon 2008; Jeffers and Streit 2008; McDermott et al. 2007; Soep 2006a, 2006b; Tyner 2008, 2009.

movement, Faith Rogow (2004) writes that “at its best, media literacy education is nonpartisan...” (32). And while NAMLE’s “Core Principles of Media Literacy Education in the United States” (2007) includes among media literacy’s objectives the development of “informed, reflective and engaged participants essential for a democratic society,” this definition functions as an empty signifier, advocating an ideal ‘good citizen’ but without any idea of what that citizenship implies ideologically or entails practically (NAMLE 1).

Now, even predating statements in 1998, the movement’s explicitly apolitical approach to media education was met with opposition from those within the camp of critical media literacy. They argue that a media literacy education that solely emphasizes media analysis lacks the practical, experiential, and political knowledge that Dewey championed (Dewey 1916). While such a nonpartisan approach is less controversial and therefore more likely to be instituted in educational institutions, that does not mean that it is good. And while such a more explicitly political approach might require students to consider how media institutions, messages and practices relate to the creation and maintenance of a free society, that does not mean that such a ‘critical pedagogical’ approach is undemocratic. On the contrary, critics note that “such avoidance of thorny political territory is to sidestep widespread citizen concerns and to miss an opportunity to demonstrate the valence and necessity of not merely understanding the world but of changing it” (Jhally & Lewis 226).

Now, perhaps as a result of this scholarly discourse on the relation of media literacy to critical thinking and civic engagement, Hobbs and many of the scholars associated with the media literacy movement have become more willing to address the

political significance of the media literacy movement. Henry Jenkins, in his work on media audience communities and practices, has embraced the fan community as a promising site for the creation of new political perspectives and practices. Jenkins sees these communities as having such potential because fan participation is fun (and definitely more fun than traditional political activism) and its stakes are relatively low. He writes

Children need a safe space within which they can master the skills they need as citizens and consumers, as they learn to parse through messages from self-interested parties and separate fact from falsehood as they begin to experiment with new forms of creative expression and community participation. (Jenkins et al. 2006, 16)

For Jenkins, youth engagement in popular media—through educational initiatives and their own recreational uses—function as such a space. And he is not alone. Other new voices of the media literacy movement share Jenkins' enthusiasm about this connection of media and politics. Paul Mihailidis, for example, notes that few media literacy programs, even when acknowledging the importance of 'good citizens,' are successful in encouraging civic engagement. Instead, these same programs often increase students' cynicism regarding both media and political institutions (2008, 2009a). In response to this failure, Mihailidis advocates an approach to media education "as the core of a new civic education," one that sees "media literacy [as] a way to combat social problems and human injustices..." (2009b, 24). This emphasis of the civic at the center of media education (or perhaps vice versa) is something that critical media literacy argues as well. And lastly, in 2010 Renee Hobbs amends her previous comments on the political potential of media education, writing in "Digital and Media Literacy: A Plan of Action" (2010)

When people have digital and media literacy competencies, they recognize personal, corporate and political agendas and are empowered to speak out on behalf of the missing voices and omitted perspectives in our communities. By identifying and attempting to solve problems, people use their powerful voices and their rights under the law to improve the world around them. (17)

Here, Hobbs acknowledges the role media literacy may play in the identification of and engagement with social problems, demonstrating the media literacy movement's increasing awareness of the political potential of media education.

Critical Media Literacy

Critical media literacy...constitutes a critique of mainstream approaches to literacy and a political project for democratic social change. This involves a multiperspectival critical inquiry, of popular culture and the cultural industries, that addresses issues of class, race, gender, sexuality, and power and also promotes the production of alternative counter-hegemonic media. (Kellner & Share 2007b, 62)

Critical media literacy—as defined by scholars and educators like Douglas Kellner, Jeff Share, and Sut Jhally—aims to prepare people to “become sophisticated citizens rather than sophisticated consumers” of media (Jhally & Lewis 225).¹¹ Like the media literacy movement, critical media literacy involves media analysis and production, however its objective is much more explicitly and unapologetically political. Drawing upon the work of Antonio Gramsci and the *critical pedagogy* of Paulo Freire, Henry Giroux, and Peter McLaren, critical media literacy emphasizes education's emancipatory potential.

¹¹ Other examples of critical media literacy scholarship include Carr & Porifilio 2009; Chung & Kirby 2009; Freire & Giroux 1989; Giroux & Simon 1988; Hammer 1995, 2006; Higgins 1999; Kellner 1995, 2002, 2004, 2005; Kellner & Kim 2010; Leistyna & Mollen 2008; Levine 2008; Luke 1994, ?; Preston 2008; Quijada & Collins 2009; Rael 2009; Sholle 1994; Sholle & Denski 1994, 1995; Share 2006; Smeltzer & Gryzb 2009.

Italian scholar and activist Antonio Gramsci, who would later heavily influence the development of critical pedagogy, uses the social theory of Marx and offers some rather specific educational reforms as a means of enhancing education's emancipatory potential—both in the ideological content taught and the methods by which this teaching and learning takes place. Specifically, Gramsci argues that the school should challenge societal conventions and 'common sense' knowledge, emphasize civic education, and foster creative, active learning.

First, Gramsci (1971) emphasizes the fact that students are not simply 'blank slates', but rather reflections of "social and cultural relations which are different from and antagonistic to those which are represented in the school curricula..." (35). Therefore, in order for the educator to successfully encourage critical consciousness among her students, she must account for the disparity

...between the type of culture and society which [s]he represents and the type of culture and society represented by [her] pupils, and conscious of [her] obligation to accelerate and regulate the child's formation in conformity with the former and in conflict with the latter. (35-6)

This acknowledgment of "is" versus "ought" is an essential foundation on which any critical pedagogical program can succeed (and one which will be discussed in detail in Chapters 2 and 4). Second, Gramsci emphasizes that in addition to elementary education and vocational training, schools should include in their curriculum something that has been previously neglected: "'rights and duties', ...the first notions of the State and society as primordial elements of a new conception of the world which challenges the conceptions that are imparted by the various traditional social environments" (30). In other words, Gramsci stresses the importance of a *civic education* which would not simply inculcate ideas of dutiful citizenship, but encourage self-directed, critical, political

participation. And third, Gramsci challenges traditional education's separation from life experience. Not only must the school be 'related to life,' but it must encourage learning through creative, practical activity—a concept later developed by Paulo Freire in his *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970). Gramsci writes that

...learning takes place especially through a spontaneous and autonomous effort of the pupil, with the teacher only exercising a function of friendly guide...Hence in this phase the fundamental scholastic activity will be carried on in seminars, in libraries, in experimental laboratories. (33)

Here, Gramsci emphasizes that not only the content of education but also its methods must change if the students are to be able to successfully achieve emancipation. By organizing the classroom as equitably as possible—transforming the teacher from disciplinary authority and intellectual expert into 'friendly guide' and encouraging activities that encourage the students to acquire knowledge through exploratory learning, Gramsci allows students and teachers to practice democratic engagement in their classroom interactions.

Decades later and across the globe, another Marxist scholar, educator and activist, Brazilian Paulo Freire, drew from Gramsci's work (as well as John Dewey's, actually) in his creation of what is now known as *critical pedagogy*. In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970), Freire emphasizes the development of *conscientizacao*—roughly translated as *critical consciousness*—as one of the primary objectives of education. He writes

The central problem is this: How can the oppressed, as divided, unauthentic beings, participate in developing the pedagogy of their liberation?...The pedagogy of the oppressed is an instrument for their critical discovery that both they and their oppressors are manifestations of dehumanization. (48)

Freire recognizes the necessity of an education that prepares its students to realize the public good, which in this case is the humanization of all members of society. And

explicit within Freire's theory of education is the idea that in order to achieve such humanization, students must participate in transformative social change. In their development of critical consciousness, they "must perceive the reality of oppression not as a closed world from which there is no exit, but as a limiting situation which they can transform" (49). Critical pedagogy, then, enlightens its students to the injustices in the social order, enables them to envision a society free of those inequities, and encourages them to participate in the achievement of such change.

One way that Freire—and scholars like Henry Giroux that follow in the critical pedagogy tradition—argue that this cultivation of critical consciousness and civic engagement is possible is, again, through the democratic restructuring of the classroom. Like Gramsci, these scholars argue that instead of the functioning as a microcosm for an authoritarian society with the teacher reigning over the students, the classroom should be a place in which student-teachers and teacher-students collaborate and share knowledge in order to reach common objectives. Giroux and Simon (1998) write "pedagogy is simultaneously about the practices students and teachers might engage in together and the cultural politics such practices support. It is in this sense that to propose a pedagogy is to construct a political vision" (12). Equitable relations in society (at least, in part) start with equitable relations in the classroom.

Drawing on these principles of *critical pedagogy*, critical media literacy's educational approach involves comprehensive critical analysis, radically democratic classroom relations, and efforts to practically engage in social change. And in addition to the media analysis emphasized by the media literacy movement, critical media literacy

seeks to unite studies of media texts and audiences with those of the media production and institutions. Jhally and Earp write

Both the conditions and the context through which meaning gets made must also be central...Solely considering inherited institutional conditions or contexts leads to a consideration of power and manipulation only. Looking solely at how people make their own meanings leads to undue emphasis on individual freedom and choice. (266)

The inclusion of discussions of the political economy of communication media and the expression of institutional interests in media content provide even greater context for the students' study of media texts and audiences.

Also like critical pedagogy, critical media literacy departs from hierarchically organized classrooms, but this critique is not limited just to the relations between teachers and students. It also extends to the definitions of 'legitimate' knowledge itself. In traditional educational settings, legitimate knowledge is limited to the established 'canon,' and subsequently excludes experiential and popular cultural knowledge on which students are often experts. In response to this anti-democratic hierarchy of knowledge, Arnowitz and Giroux (1991) argue that

popular knowledge, even if it does not possess the same apparatus of inquiry that has marked legitimate academic knowledge, is nevertheless a form of intellectual knowledge," and therefore a truly democratic education, like that strived for by critical media literacy, acknowledges the legitimacy of various forms of knowledge (18).

And lastly, drawing on Freire's emphasis of education as a site of political praxis, critical media literacy emphasizes that media analysis alone is insufficient. Freire writes "Knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other" (72). Thought and action, theory and praxis, media studies,

production and activism must go hand in hand (in hand). So, rather than solely learn to deconstruct media texts, students of critical media literacy should be engaged in “deconstructing injustices, expressing their own voices, and struggling to create a better society” (Kellner & Share 2007a, 19-20). The production of alternative media, with the objectives of giving voice to marginalized peoples and confronting issues of injustice, is essential to an effective critical media education.

My critique of critical media literacy is somewhat limited because of my own inclinations toward its radical political agenda. However, that is not to say it is without potential improvement. For example, certain voices of critical media literacy adopt a media-centric perspective that sometimes fails to address greater societal issues. For example, Jhally and Lewis’s define critical media literacy’s primary objective as follows—“Media education should certainly teach students to engage with media texts, but it should also, in our view, teach them to engage—and challenge—media institutions” (225). Media activism—through the production of alternative media or confrontation with media institutions themselves—is a necessary part of critical, political engagement, but social problems are not limited to issues of media ownership or representation. Rather, because these issues are indications of larger social conflicts—those of class, race, gender, and power—students must ‘engage and challenge’ not just media institutions, but any social institution, relation, or practice that does not support a just society.

Addressing the Civic

Now, the emphasis of the civic at the heart of media literacy education is best understood given the growing interdependence of citizen’s understandings of media

institutions, message and practices and their development of informed political perspectives and engagement in civic life. After all, as Kubey (2004) aptly points out, media function as

...the precise means by which citizens receive nearly all of their information about political processes and elections. One can scarcely even think today about civics, elections, government, the constitution, or the Bill of Rights without also thinking about the media through which we learn of one issue, conflict, or campaign after another. (70).

But how media represent political life is not the only, or even primary, reason for evaluating the way the different approaches to media education address civic matters. Instead, at the heart of this survey of the political significance of these approaches is another debate, one that predates the development of media literacy education. Before this age of *prosumers* and *digizens*, *transmedia* and *Twitter*, scholars and educators deliberated over the definitions for and objectives of *literacy*—among them, Hirsch’s *cultural literacy* (1987), Milner’s *civic literacy* (2002), Freire’s *critical literacy* (1968; 1987), and other studies conducted by scholars like Harvey Graff (1987), Donald Macedo (1994/2006), Brian Street (1985), etc. This debate over *literacy* is essentially one of determining what constitutes meaningful and equitable social relations and how individuals and communities may be adequately prepared to communicate and participate in such a society. Livingstone (2003) connects the debates over media education to this larger struggle, writing

This relationship among textuality, competence and power is grounded in a centuries-old struggle between enlightenment and critical scholarship, setting those who see literacy as democratizing, empowering of ordinary people against those who see it as elitist, divisive, a source of inequality. *Debates over literacy are, in short, debates about the manner and purposes of public participation in society.* (8, emphasis added)

So, underlying this debate among different approaches to media education on how best to address concepts like *critical consciousness* and *civic engagement* is preceded by a debate on *what these concepts really mean*.

Now, perhaps due to the “widely perceived crisis in democratic life and citizenship [especially among young people] in America,” there is a wealth of research on civic education that examines this exact question. (Abowitz and Harnish 2006, 654). The landmark study conducted by Langton and Jennings on “Political Socialization and the High School Civics Curriculum in the United States” (1968) provides a nice starting point. While the study’s primary intent is to determine the relative efficacy of high school civics classes and students’ development of attitudes and behaviors associated with democratic citizenship, the authors acknowledge that measuring this political development is a tricky business. They write

While most educators can agree that the development of good citizenship is important, the ‘good citizen’ is something of an ideal type whose attitudes and behavior vary with the values of those defining the construct. (852)

While the study found little evidence to suggest that civic education was especially influential in the political socialization of youth, it did find that that two general types of ‘good citizens’ were emphasized in the civics curricula being taught—‘loyalty and obedience to authority’ and ‘politicized participation.’ While the former emphasizes adherence to existing political institutions, values and practices, the latter implies a more active role in shaping those elements of civic life. And these two competing definitions of citizenship reveal a duality (or perhaps a spectrum) that is observed in subsequent studies.

For example contemporary studies by Westheimer and Kahne (2003), Abowitz and Harnish (2006), and Bennett, Wells and Rank (2009) all find similar divisions within

civics education courses on the definition of a ‘good citizen.’ Westheimer and Kahne note that while competing approaches to civic education (much like the competing approaches of media literacy) often draw upon similar theoretical foundations but they often work towards very different objectives.

The work of John Dewey, for example, which has probably done the most to shape dialogues on education and democracy, has not led to resolution. Rather, scholars and practitioners have interpreted his ideas in multiple ways, so no single conception emerges. In large part, this diversity of perspectives occurs because the stakes are so high. *Conceptions of ‘good citizenship’ imply conceptions of the good society.* (2, emphasis added)

Among the different definitions of the ‘good citizen’ identified by Westheimer and Kahne are those that are *personally responsible*, *participatory*, and *justice-oriented*. Similar to Langton and Jennings’ findings, the *personally responsible* citizen obeys laws, recycles, gives blood, donates to charities, etc.; the *participatory* citizen engages in collective efforts to improve his/her community; and the *justice-oriented* citizen engages in similar collective efforts to specifically address social injustices. Abowitz and Harnish (2006) similarly identify competing definitions of citizenship—*civic republican*, *liberal*, *feminist*, *reconstructionist*, *cultural*, *queer* and *transnational*. Again, these ‘contemporary discourses of citizenship’ can be plotted along the same spectrum of conservative to liberal to progressive. And lastly Bennett, Wells and Rank (2009) neatly categorize existing approaches to civic education as emphasizing either *dutiful citizenship* or *self-actualizing citizenship*.

Now, each of these studies, despite the variance in the categories applied to discourses of citizenship, consistently found that more conservative definitions of the ‘good citizen’—*loyalty and obedience to authority*, *personally responsible*, *civic*

republican and *liberal*—were particularly dominant in civic education programs.

Abowitz and Harnish (2006) write

Critical...discourses of citizenship raise basic questions about identity (who we are as citizens), membership (who belongs, and the locations of the boundaries), and agency (how we might best enact citizenship)—questions debated in political life across the globe by activists and scholars, political thinkers and neighborhood organizers. However, [they] are marginalized in the curricular texts that define the standards and prominent meanings of citizenship taught in schools. The diminution of these discourses in the taught curriculum means that much of our schooling in citizenship fails to reflect the continual struggles of democratic politics. (657)

This tension between notions of ‘public participation in society’ that perpetuate the existing social order and those that seek to critique, reform or radically transform existing social relations, practices or institutions has been the subject of a number of arguments among critical cultural scholars.¹²

So, it makes sense that there would be similar divisions among the varying approaches to media literacy education. Protectionism openly endorses a preservation of traditional literary culture and conservative morality. Media arts education, even in its most political manifestations, shares the protectionist approach’s conservatism. And when such efforts are ‘apolitical,’ they still implicitly support a conservative perspective by limiting their objectives to technical skill acquisition and aesthetic appreciation. The media literacy movement’s objective of preparing ‘active citizens’ is, arguably, best categorized as a liberal conception of citizenship. Only critical media literacy’s emphasis on media analysis, production, and activism as a means of battling injustice reflects the more politicized, participatory and critical conceptions of citizenship.

¹² Among them are Horkheimer 1937; Lazarsfeld 1941; Barber 1984, 2002; Lewis and Jhally 1998; Mihailidis 2009b.

Ultimately, this project attempts to test the viability of using media education as a means of introducing and exercising these more critical conceptions of civic engagement. If the decrease in civic engagement among young people is due, at least in part, to the disillusionment experienced as a result of their recognition of the gap between their teachers' understandings of citizenship and their own, between the methods of civic engagement taught in the classroom and those experienced in their own lives, then it is vitally important that educational initiatives attempt to close these gaps and better empower these youth to critically engage in civic life (Abowitz and Harnish 2006; Bennet, Wells and Rank 2009).

This study, then, addresses the following research questions:

RQ: How can media literacy initiatives better prepare students to engage in social change?

- a. How can existing theoretical approaches, pedagogical methods and objectives be improved to facilitate students' critical political participation?
- b. What new theoretical approaches, pedagogical methods and objectives may facilitate students' critical political participation?

The following chapters will discuss the theoretical approaches and pedagogical approaches, and research methods that will be used to address these questions in relation to the "Media Literacy and Civic Engagement" project.

CHAPTER 2

RESTORING THE POLITICAL TO MEDIA LITERACY EDUCATION

Interestingly, despite the Frankfurt School's influential work in critical cultural studies, scholars like Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno, Hebert Marcuse and Walter Benjamin are not often cited as influences within the various approaches to media literacy. By drawing upon the theoretical concepts developed by the Frankfurt School—namely that of *the dialectic*, *the culture industry*, and *praxis*—and emphasizing similar arguments made in current theories of media education—namely, those of Plato, John Dewey and scholars that have followed in their traditions—I argue that media literacy education may more effectively encourage critical consciousness and civic engagement.

Critical (with a capital C) Media Literacy

A Preface

Before I argue that a return to the Critical Theory of the Frankfurt School would provide the theoretical foundation for a media literacy education specifically concerned with the development of critical consciousness and encouragement of civic engagement, I feel I must address some anticipated critiques of such a maneuver—specifically that the work of the Frankfurt School is *irrelevant*, *reductionist*, and *pessimistic*.

The Frankfurt School as irrelevant. Horkheimer and Adorno wrote the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, as exiled German Jews, living in Hollywood during the Holocaust. From this unique (and it would seem, agonizing) perspective, the horrors experienced in their homeland were all but eclipsed by the jazz music and movie stars produced by American popular culture. The particularity of these circumstances (as if any historical

context is without particularity) has lent credibility to the argument made by cultural scholars that the critique Adorno and Horkheimer offer is no longer (if it was ever) a valid understanding of modern culture. The agency exercised by active audiences, so often emphasized in cultural studies, magnified by the development of increasingly interactive media technologies and participatory media practices of today's 'convergence culture' (to borrow a term from Henry Jenkins) seems evidence of the inapplicability of a concept like the 'culture industry.' And the contrast between the monopoly capitalism of the early twentieth century and today's global capitalism, and all of its particularities, seems to demonstrate the inadequacy of critiques of the 'capitalist mode of production.' This chapter does not ignore these significant changes in culture and society. Rather, it attempts to demonstrate how a return to the critiques offered by the Frankfurt School can, despite the differences in context, still offer substantial insight into the structures, conventions, ideologies, practices, etc. of contemporary media culture (especially as they relate to our discussion of education and citizenship). I echo Shane Gunster (2000), who writes of his own re-examination of the work of the Frankfurt School

...we should also find ourselves much better equipped to assess the continued relevance (or irrelevance) of this thesis for a seemingly diverse postmodern culture that often seems to bear little resemblance to the monolithic simplicity of the mass culture that summoned forth such a devastating polemic from the Frankfurt School in the first place. (42)

Applying these arguments to the challenges facing media education today, this chapter attempts to identify the continuities of (and contradictions in) Critical Theory.

The Frankfurt School as reductionist. Now, a century's worth of Marxist scholars—including, but not limited to, the Frankfurt School, Lukacs, Gramsci,

Althusser, Williams, Sartre and Harvey—have worked to resist economic deterministic readings of Marx and refine his conceptualization of base and superstructure. Despite these efforts, the problem remains that Marx’s materialism is often read as an insufficient explanation of the complexity of modern life—especially by those scholars examining media and culture, practice and ideology. Just recently, this question was raised by Gianna Capello, Damiano Felini and Renee Hobbs (2011), specifically in relation to media literacy education. They ask, “How do we hold tight to a critical media literacy education (in the Frankfurtian sense) without falling into the traps of economic and ideological reductionism?” (71). Again, Gunster offers a helpful interpretation (in perhaps a redemptive reading) of the work of the Frankfurt School, and specifically the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, arguing that

Theirs was not an empirical investigation, and it should not be misinterpreted as such. Rather, like the modernist art that Adorno admired so much, their work was consciously employed exaggeration as a technique to bring into bold relief the hidden authoritarian *tendencies* of a popular culture that proclaimed itself to be and appeared to most at the time as nothing less than the cultural instantiation of the freedom and democracy won in the triumph of liberal capitalism over fascism. Their extreme discursive style was the only possible way of adequately theorizing the terrifying logic of commodification: the timid, cautious methods of conventional social science were simply not up to the task. (41, emphasis in original)

Understanding concepts like that of the *culture industry* or the *one-dimensional man* as calculated hyperbole which functions as both an empirical analysis of observed reality and an expression of the authors’ (sometimes, very personal) disgust with contemporary conditions and which works (not unlike the work of their comrade Bertolt Brecht) to incite a response from their audience. With this understanding, my project’s practical implementation of the work of the Frankfurt School is intended to demonstrate the

applicability (and even, necessity) of their Critical Theory. And perhaps more importantly, it seeks to demonstrate (in the words of Adorno) how “critical-theoretical thought can both learn from and be corrected by empirical social research” (1992, 80).

The Frankfurt School as pessimistic. Faced with what Axel Honneth later identifies as the “integrative achievement of late capitalism,” Adorno and Horkheimer paint a picture of a culture industry which, through the production of uniform cultural commodities, insists on the perpetuation of capitalist society and ultimately contributes to the ‘defeat of the thinking subject’ (Honneth 1995; Adorno and Horkheimer 1947/2002). It is no wonder that this theoretical move is perceived as pessimistic. However, as discussed in the previous paragraphs, I argue that it is helpful to read the culture industry thesis as not simply a caricature, using broad brushstrokes to depict a dystopian society from which there is no escape, but rather a consciously stylized portrayal of contemporary crisis. Unfortunately, this reading of their work is not widely held, even among scholars of Critical Theory. Douglas Kellner, for example, writes of the failures of contemporary cultural criticism to unite theory and practice and conceptualize a means of transforming the conditions (instead of just critiquing them):

The Frankfurt School, for instance, developed a powerful critique of the cultural industries and the ways that they manipulate individuals into conforming to the beliefs, values and practices of the existing society, but the critical theorists lack theories of how one can resist media manipulation, how one can read against the grain to derive critical insights into self and society through the media, and how one can produce alternative forms of media and culture. (1995, xiv)

I acknowledge Adorno and Horkheimer retreat (especially in their later work) from political praxis and do not adequately challenge the critique that their critical intellectual

work reveal a *performative contradiction* (Habermas and Levin 22). However, to accuse the Frankfurt School of pessimism is to overemphasize the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* at the expense of a large body of work from theorists like Walter Benjamin, Herbert Marcuse, Leo Lowenthal and even (to some extent) Jurgen Habermas, and it is to confuse their brutal (but nonetheless empirical) critique of contemporary society with merely the complaints of your slightly paranoid, cantankerous old uncle. This chapter intends to illustrate how while the political praxis of *some* of the Frankfurt scholars is limited to (sometimes defeatist) intellectual production, efforts have been made by other critical scholars to theorize and realize positive social transformation.

The Dialectic

In Horkheimer's seminal essay "Traditional and Critical Theory" (1937), he identifies the primary objective of the critical theoretical project that he and his associates will spend the following decades pursuing:

To strive for a state of affairs in which there will be no exploitation or oppression, in which an all-embracing subject, namely self-aware mankind, exists, and in which it is possible to speak of a unified theoretical creation and a thinking that transcends individuals—to strive for this is not yet to bring it to pass. (241).

The project is a critique that challenges oppressive power relations in modern society and encourages the public's development of critical consciousness. The dialectical nature of this critique is evident in that the achievement of this end, *unity*, is only possible through an ongoing struggle between *universal* and *particular*. While used most famously in the philosophical works of German Idealists like Kant and Hegel, this concept of the dialectic actually finds its origins in classical Greece. The term *dialektikos*

refers to the attainment of truth through dialogue, and this etymology is helpful in understanding the term's use by Horkheimer and its application to media literacy education. Just as Socrates' dialogues illustrate the process of philosophical inquiry through the back-and-forth of competing, contradictory ideas, Horkheimer (in the Left Hegelian tradition) sees this same back-and-forth between the *universal* conceptualization of freedom and *particular*, historically-contingent material and social conditions. This dialectic, then, functions as the engine of history, in which humanity seeks to recognize and overcome the contradictions within the material conditions and social relations of the given historical moment. Critical theory is social critique that emphasizes this dialectical process of social change—the production and re-production of material conditions, the creation and recreation of social relations—and works towards the achievement of unity—a free society—by making conscious humanity's role in this process and encouraging enlightened human action that realizes that end.

This concept of the dialectic has two important applications to media literacy education—(1) all knowledge is historically contingent, and (2) as a result it must be constantly subject to criticism. First, a dialectical social critique recognizes that knowledge is a product of its social and material conditions; it is a *particular* understanding of social reality, not its *universal* explanation. Adorno even goes so far as to state that the purpose of dialectical social critique is “*to cock a snook* at the sound views held by...powers that be on the immutability of the course of the world” (2005, 72, emphasis added). So for example, an analysis of media representations, informed by critical theory, recognizes gender stereotyping or bias in reporting not simply as bad or unfair, but as manifestations of contradictions between a *particular* representational

practice and a *universal* concept of freedom or justice. Rhonda Hammer's (limited, sometimes convoluted, but nonetheless helpful) efforts to theorize a more critical media literacy education reinforce this dialectical approach as a means of enlightening and empowering students. She writes

As critical educators, we work with the conviction that an interrogation of the dialectic as a form of communication will enable teachers to rethink social problems in a more contextual and critical way, and thus employ an affective pedagogy of media literacy. (1995, 39)

In this case, it is of lesser concern to protect a student from the effects of such a contradiction as it is to encourage the student to identify this contradiction, the conditions that brought it about, and the means by which it can be overcome. This process has historical precedent, indicated by Horkheimer, who writes "Slaves, vassals, and citizens have cast off their yoke...In the course of history men have come to know their own activity and thus to recognize the contradiction that marks their existence" (1937, 212).

Now, given this understanding of the historical contingency of knowledge, it is necessary that media literacy informed by critical theory necessarily subject itself to this same ongoing critique. To some degree the historical development of the competing approaches to media literacy reveal a kind of dialectical process—media arts education, which celebrates the aesthetic achievements in media texts, responds to the more anti-media protectionist approach; critical media literacy challenges the media literacy movement's perceived complicity with media institutions. And even within a single approach, this progress can be seen. The evolution of the role Hobbs' gives media literacy in promoting social change—from "this agenda is radical enough" in 1998 to "improve the world around them" in 2010—is further evidence of the presence of this process (1996, 23; 2010, 17). However, simply changing one's mind does not indicate an

overcoming of contradictions. So, in this example, in order for a dialectic to be identified, one would need to understand how the apolitical position of the media literacy movement was shaped by conditions in the U.S. fifteen years ago—in the scholarly discourse, economics, politics, culture, etc.—and what new contextual factors might account for this change in position. It is this ongoing effort to recognize and overcome contradictions within media literacy education that would identify it as informed by critical theory and prevent it from becoming the ‘absolutized’ knowledge of the social order. Adorno warns of this, writing

The standpoint of totality is adopted in order, with a schoolmasterly That-is-not-what-I-meant, to deprive one’s opponent of any definitive negative judgment, and at the same time violently to break off the movement of concepts, to arrest the dialectic by pointing to the insuperable inertia of facts. (2005, 247)

This dialectical process is seen in the dialogues between Adorno and Benjamin (Wohlfarth 1979; Gunster 2000) or between political economy and cultural studies (Garnham 1995; Grossberg 1995). And the constant ‘movement of concepts,’ evident in the dialectical development of media education itself, will, in part, enable media literacy education to effectively encourage transformative social change.

The Culture Industry

Horkheimer and Adorno’s *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1947/2002) argues that through the production of culture by industry, the contradictions of contemporary capitalist society are no longer able to be identified and challenged by humanity. The culture industry is the means by which the public’s recognition of the dialectic between universal and particular is halted and social change is impeded. Horkheimer and Adorno

write that this achievement of the culture industry is manifested, for example, in the *uniformity* of culture:

Culture today is infecting everything with sameness. Film, radio, and magazines form a system. Each branch of culture is unanimous within itself and all are unanimous together. Even the aesthetic manifestations of political opposites proclaim the same inflexible rhythm. (94)

Any perceived difference between cultural products is only superficial because ultimately they all ‘proclaim the same inflexible rhythm’—that of the perpetuation of the capitalist mode of production. And the culture industry’s ‘integrative achievement’ is not one solely identified by Horkheimer and Adorno. In his *One-Dimensional Man* (1964), Herbert Marcuse also identifies this achievement, writing of the role of media in this ‘closing of the universe of discourse’:

Its language testifies to identification and unification, to the systematic promotion of positive thinking and doing, to the concerted attack on transcendent, critical notions...(85)

The media’s emphasis of ‘identification and unification,’ overwhelms the individual and overcomes any ability to identify and challenge contradictions in contemporary capitalist society.

Now, the culture industry thesis has obvious application to studies of media and culture. However, without the proper understanding of these foundational theoretical concepts, one may unintentionally promote a ‘mass culture’ argument in which a passive public is manipulated by a monolithic media system (which may lead to an endorsement of media education like that forwarded by the protectionist approach). That argument is neither critical nor theoretical. Instead, a media literacy informed by critical theory would—in its analysis of the complex and contradictory interests of media institutions, the aesthetic and ideological aspects of media texts, and the varied readings of these texts

by diverse audiences—seek to emphasize the “false identity of universal and particular” the products of culture industry encourage (Horkheimer and Adorno 95).

First, in regards to the analysis of media institutions, attention must be given to the political economy of media industries and its influence on the production of media messages. However, this critique must keep in mind the totality of the system, and not get mired in the specifics of institutional interest and authorial intent. While the individuals who produce media content and the corporations that fund these productions may have agendas, ultimately it is capital’s interest in perpetuating the existing mode of production that is of import. An analysis of the biases of one news organization versus another provide interesting and insightful glimpses at issues of ownership and intent, but it is the production of oppressive ideology across all media industries which concerns critical theory.

Next, one aspect of Horkheimer and Adorno’s critique of the culture industry that often goes unnoticed, but is very applicable to textual analysis conducted in media literacy education, is the achievement of *unity* within individual cultural products. More often understood is the *uniformity* of culture—

distinctions between A and B films or between short stories published in magazines in different price segments, do not so much reflect real differences as assist in the classification, organization and identification of consumers. Something is provided for everyone so that no one can escape. (Horkheimer and Adorno 96-97)

As discussed previously, this uniformity is of concern to a media literacy informed by critical theory. Unity is distinct from uniformity in that not only are cultural products the same as each other, but they are the same *within themselves*. Part and whole, the detail and the work, the representation and reality are seemingly but only superficially unified.

And as a result, because such products of the culture industry are without spontaneity, defining details, apparent contradictions, or representations of suffering, they do not require reflection from the audience. Horkheimer and Adorno contrast this contrived unity to the tension of the Expressionist painting. A work of art by Munch, for example, includes stylized depictions of despair which work to awaken the individual (through both form and content) to the ills plaguing society and to demand a response to these ills. Media analysis activities informed by this discussion of unity, then, engage in analyses of narrative conventions or stylistic mechanisms as a means of determining how these constructions inhibit rather than invite reflection, and at what cost.

Lastly, according to Horkheimer and Adorno, the cost of the creation of *uniform*, *unified* cultural products, consumed in a state of distraction rather than reflection, is the ‘defeat of the thinking subject’ (116). The stakes of media literacy are greater because media is understood not as causing anti-social behavior or even just inaccurately representing reality, but contributing to the abandonment of humanity’s critical capacities. Critical media literacy education, then, is genuinely ‘empowering,’ not just because it encourages self-expression, but because it may be the rescuing human consciousness and allowing for human emancipation.

Praxis

Despite the threat posed by the culture industry, certain voices within the Frankfurt School emphasize the possibility of resistance. After all, Horkheimer states that the objective of his critical theoretical work “is not simply the theory of emancipation; it is the practice of it as well” (233). Now, while the necessity of praxis is a fundamental

aspect of the tradition, it is described differently by each critical theorist. In his essay “On the Fetish-Character in Music and the Regression of Listening” (1938), Adorno recognizes the rise in popular music and the regression of music listening as evidence of the public’s loss of authentic expression and critical consciousness. However, he concedes that, “it could suddenly turn around if art, in unity with the society, should ever leave the road of the always identical” (298). Artistic expression—conscious of and resistant to the *uniformity* and *unification* of the products of the culture industry—and a public—who actively reflect on cultural products and critique those representations as well as material and social conditions—can together facilitate change¹³. And in his *Arcades Project* (1999), Walter Benjamin—arguably one of the more optimistic but also more ancillary figures of the Frankfurt School—states in powerful metaphors his vision of praxis:

To cultivate fields where, until now, only madness has reigned. Forge ahead with the whetted axe of reason, looking neither right nor left so as not to succumb to the horror that beckons from deep in the primeval forest. (456-7)

Like Adorno, Benjamin emphasizes the reclaiming of reason as a means of combating the ills of modern society. And he too recognizes the potential of politicized art (even including that of popular culture) to challenge norms and change minds (Benjamin 1955/1969).

And lastly, Herbert Marcuse, perhaps the most politically active of the Frankfurt scholars, finds hope for social transformation in both art and education (two sites of praxis also discussed by John Dewey, whose work will be addressed shortly). Like

¹³ However, I acknowledge that in Adorno’s later work, he retreats from a theorization of any practical political action; see Richter 2002.

Benjamin, Marcuse identifies art as grounded in “the need to create images of the possible ‘other’”—that is, artistic expression can be the means of envisioning a freer society (1978, 56). Additionally, Marcuse offers the most explicit discussion of the role of education in encouraging political engagement. For example in 1971, Marcuse defended his student Angela Davis—imprisoned for her associations with the Black Panthers—describing her efforts as the embodiment of the German concept of *bildung* that is so often unachieved in traditional education:

[S]he could not confine herself to the classroom, to the relatively same formation and isolation of the campus. She took the truth (her truth, our truth) outside: she protested, she demonstrated, she organized, and she did not conceal her political affiliations. (quoted in Kellner 2009; 16)

Here Marcuse identifies in Davis how education has the potential not only to raise consciousness but to initiate political protest.¹⁴

Now, something implicit in existing approaches to media literacy (but not often articulated in the theoretical work that informs them) is the dialectical nature of media themselves. Media have their own internal contradictions—they are identified as both the means of ideological oppression and potential political praxis. Sholle and Denski (1995) identify this complicated relationship between media, education and society, writing

...the structures of media production, and the corresponding educational structures within which the creators of media products are trained, may be approached as sets of complex social practices which (to varying degrees) either serve to reproduce existing social inequalities or serve to overcome these inequalities in support of an emancipatory democracy. (7)

The creation of alternative, counter-hegemonic media is not considered simply an exercise in self-expression, an attempt at more accurate media representation or even

¹⁴ Jurgen Habermas’ *Theory and Practice* (1973) provides another valuable resource in regards to the Frankfurt School’s theorization of praxis.

engagement in public discourse. Instead, this work is understood as an effort to overcome these contradictions and reclaim media as “products which in principle should be under human control and, in the future at least, will in fact come under it...” (Horkheimer 209).

In conclusion, while the existing approaches to media literacy education have certain political significance, each has, well, *contradictions* that prevent it from effectively promoting social change. By introducing some theoretical concepts developed in the critical theory of the Frankfurt School, I think that a more successful, critical media literacy education is possible.

The Re-Politicization of Media Literacy Education

Now, in emphasizing the Critical Theory of the Frankfurt School as the theoretical foundations of a more critical, political media literacy education, I do not mean to suggest that those theories currently employed by media literacy scholars and practitioners are wholly without benefit. I will not, as they say, ‘throw out the baby with the bathwater’; rather, I would like to emphasize how existing approaches to media literacy education have overlooked the critical political content in the theories they draw from. I call this process the ‘re-politicization of media literacy education’ because I argue that a return to the foundational philosophies of Plato and John Dewey will reveal their commitment to the creation of a just society through critical civic engagement, and therefore encourage the theoretical conceptualization of a newly-politicized media literacy education.

Plato

The writings of Plato provide some of the most foundational theoretical principles underlying Western thought in general, and the fields of communication and education in particular. To distill the entirety of Plato's philosophical work into a few key concepts is inevitably inadequate. But for the purposes of this chapter, I have identified some salient themes from some of Plato's most well-known writings in an effort to identify how his discussions of communication and education (and the work of contemporary scholars like McLuhan and Postman that continues these discussions) correspond with issues of social critique and civic engagement introduced by the Frankfurt School. I argue that media literacy scholars and practitioners may more effectively use the work of Plato—specifically his discussions of (1) how communication media may enable or inhibit dialectical critique and (2) how education may overcome obstacles to the establishment of a civil society—as theoretical foundations for media education and thereby may identify objectives and pedagogical methods that more effectively enable communities to develop critical consciousness and to engage in civic life.

'Dialektikos' in Philosophical Inquiry. As noted in the last chapter, among the most prominent themes among Plato's philosophy is his concern with how the *form and content of communication* may inhibit the pursuit of truth and the practice of citizenship. Socrates' dialogue with Phaedrus regarding the weaknesses of written communication and Plato's discussions of the potentially negative effects of the immoral and emotionally excessive content of Homer's epic poetry both demonstrate this concern. I argue, though, that at the core of Plato's argument is his recognition of the dialectical nature of philosophical inquiry. As noted earlier, the dialectic discussed by Hegel, Marx and the

Frankfurt School finds its roots in the Greek concept of *dialektikos*. This concept is most obviously employed in Plato's staging of philosophical argument as dialogues between Socrates and various contemporaries, but Plato also explicitly addresses the value of the dialectic in philosophical discourse and in education. For example, in order to prepare citizens for participation in his Republic, Plato advocates for education in which the "dialectic [is placed] at the top of the other subjects like a coping stone" (2005, 522). This placement of the knowledge and use of the dialectic at the pinnacle of citizens' learning is indicative of the value that Plato places on this method of interpreting reality and arriving at 'truth.'

As the last chapter demonstrated, the themes addressed by Plato provide the foundation for some of the existing approaches to media education. Marshall McLuhan and Neil Postman attempt to identify how emerging communication technologies, specifically that of television, potentially influence human comprehension, philosophical discourse, and social and political participation. But unfortunately the educational approaches that draw on this work emphasizes media effects at the expense of the dialectical method at arriving at truth. For example, Plato's concern that written communication "will create forgetfulness in the learners' souls, because they will not use their memories" is echoed in Postman's discussion of media effects. (Plato 2001, 46) In the following passage, Postman reflects on how the conventions of televised nightly news ("And now this...") affects young people's perceptions of the world. He writes

One can hardly overestimate the damage that such juxtapositions do to our sense of the world as a serious place. The damage is especially massive to youthful viewers who depend so much on television for their clues as to how to respond to the world. In watching television news, they, more than any other segment of the audience, are drawn into an epistemology based on the assumption that all reports of cruelty and death are greatly

exaggerated and, in any case, not to be taken seriously or responded to sanely. (105)

Postman's talk of the 'massive damage' televised news inflicts upon our youth—and similar reactionary rhetoric employed by conservative cultural critics—clearly resemble Plato's own alarmism. But protectionist education's overemphasis of this concern unfortunately ignores Plato, Postman and McLuhan's more nuanced treatments of the subject.

For example, Postman, quoting Karl Marx, emphasizes that new media do not simply influence individual perceptions of reality, but restructure public discourse. He writes

'Is the Iliad possible,' [Marx] asks rhetorically, 'when the printing press and even printing machines exist? Is it not inevitable that with the emergence of the press, the singing and the telling and the muse cease; that is, the conditions necessary for epic poetry disappear?' Marx understood well that the press was not merely a machine but a structure for discourse, which both rules out and insists upon certain kinds of content and, inevitably, a certain kind of audience. (42-3)

Invoking Marx's historical materialism, Postman emphasizes how new media technologies (whether the printing press or the television) do not simply affect people's attitudes and behavior, but delimit public discourse. In particular, Postman argues that new media's reliance on images, headlines and sound-bites presents information as decontextualized fragments, and as a result "we are deprived of access to a historical perspective" (137). Here we may understand Postman's celebration of literary culture and written communication as not merely the actions of a Luddite. Rather, he emphasizes how the (especially long-form) written text is able to provide detail and context, communicate history and theory, and encourage the audience to practice dialectical

critique (through repeated, close and careful examinations of the text), while the tabloid headline, music video, or televised news segment is unable to do so.

McLuhan (1962/2004) also emphasizes the value that Plato—and centuries later, Thomas Aquinas—ascribe to the dialectic, writing

Socrates stood on the border between that oral world and the visual and literate culture. But he wrote nothing. The Middle Ages regarded Plato as the mere scribe or amanuensis of Socrates. And Aquinas considered that neither Socrates nor Our Lord committed their teaching to writing because *the kind of interplay of minds that is in teaching is not possible by means of writing*. (23, emphasis added)

This reference to the ‘interplay of minds that is in teaching’ can be interpreted as dialectical critique. McLuhan emphasizes the importance of the *medium* of the message, but (unlike Postman) he expresses optimism that contemporary communication technologies may be the means of social cohesion and global peace—not because of these technologies’ inherent good or democratic nature, but *because of how they facilitate such critical dialogue*. Truly, he echoes Plato’s optimism about effective dialectical communication as the means of emancipation and enlightenment.

And when the eye of the soul is really buried in a sort of barbaric bog, dialectic gently pulls it out and leads it upwards, using the crafts we described to help it and cooperate with it in turning the soul around. (Plato 2005, 521)

So, rather than simply try to conserve ‘traditional’ communication media for their own sake, Plato, and the scholars who follow in his tradition, argue that effective means of communication, whatever the medium, must encourage dialogue.

The Allegory of the Cave. Plato’s argument for dialectical critique as the means of enlightenment and emancipation is so urgent because of the unfortunate state in which he

locates humankind. This argument is made in one of Plato's most commonly recognized works—the allegory of the cave. In a few words, Plato's allegory consists of a number of prisoners chained down in a dark cave and forced to view the shadows of figures on the cave wall.

They've been there since childhood, fixed in the same place, with their necks and legs fettered, able to see only in front of them, because their bonds prevent them from turning their heads around. (Plato 2005, 504)

If a prisoner were to escape his bondage, he would initially struggle accepting the reality of his new environment, but when newly enlightened, he would be obligated to lead his former fellow captives to freedom. Plato's metaphor ultimately argues that the public is generally ignorant of truth, and the escaped prisoner (the philosopher) is thus compelled to lead the quest for mass enlightenment. Now, undoubtedly the chains Plato refers to are symbolic of many aspects of society that inhibit philosophical discourse, but I argue that among these is mass communication. And this reading of the allegory as a critique of mass communication helps contextualize a statement made by Socrates in his discussion with Gorgias: “what cosmetics is to gymnastics, sophistry is to legislation, and what pastry baking is to medicine, oratory is to justice” (Plato 2007, 184) Here, Plato emphasizes the role of oratory—perhaps the predominant mode of mass communication in Plato's day—in falsely contributing to social justice.

Now, this argument that mass communication—whether it be oration, print, or film—inhibits justice has been further developed by a number of philosophers and scholars since Plato, but probably most notably by the Frankfurt School. Despite the obvious disparity between the philosophical perspectives of Plato and the Frankfurt School, Horkheimer and Adorno's discussion of the *culture industry* interestingly

resembles the enslavement in Plato's cave. Like Plato's allegory, the culture industry thesis emphasizes the social construction of false consciousness as a means of perpetuating injustice.

And while some efforts have been made to draw the connection between Plato's allegory and the way in which contemporary media may function in obscuring the truth (Sontag 1977; Provencal 2004; Robison 2007), the political implications of this connection have gone relatively unexplored. Plato's critique is not simply of *miscommunication*. The enslavement of Plato's cave-dwellers is not due to a *misrepresentation* of reality in the shadows that dance across the wall, but to the prisoners' *inability to differentiate between accurate and inaccurate representations of reality*. And Plato is not just concerned about the personal welfare of the prisoner. The 'death of the thinking subject' personified by the prisoner is not an individual crisis but a global public state of emergency. In order for Plato's Republic to succeed, the entire citizenry must escape from this enslavement, and only then,

...the city will be governed, not like the majority of cities nowadays, by people who fight over shadows and struggle against one another in order to rule—as if that were a great good—but by people who are awake rather than dreaming... (Plato 2005, 509)

And Plato argues that only education can provide the emancipation and enlightenment necessary for such a citizenry.

Emancipation and Enlightenment through Education. Lastly, Plato identifies education as the practical means of freeing the masses from their enslavement and preparing them for critical political participation. And again, this argument can be understood in relation to the Critical Theory's conceptualization of education as praxis.

Like Plato's philosopher who endeavors to liberate the captives by "go[ing] down again to the prisoners in the cave and share their labors and honors," the critical intellectual is obligated to work toward the "awakening of the subject" (Plato 2005, 509; Horkeimer and Adorno 5)¹⁵. A comparison of the metaphorical language used by Plato and Walter Benjamin in describing this emancipatory education further reveals the striking similarity between their perspectives. In the *Republic*, Plato writes

The power to learn is present in everyone's soul and that the instrument with which each learns is like an eye that cannot be turned around from darkness to light without turning the whole body...Then education is the craft concerned with doing this very thing, this turning around. (2005, 508)

Education, then, is when the philosopher facilitates the reawakening of critical thought in the public. Centuries later, Walter Benjamin, quoting Rudolf Borchardt, articulates his own conception of revolutionary pedagogy: "To educate the image-making medium within us, raising it to a stereoscopic and dimensional seeing into the depths of historical shadows" (1999, 458). Evident in both of these passages is the understanding that education is the primary means of overcoming the obstacles faced by an oppressed public.

Now, it is no wonder that Plato's discussion of the enslavement and eventual enlightenment of the cave-dwellers has been referenced in studies of contemporary media—the visual of a crowd watching flickering images of a contrived reality on the wall of a dark room almost exactly prefigures the contemporary cinematic experience. And issues of power, ownership, ideology, and citizenship—evident in the work of both

¹⁵ Immanuel Kant's seminal essay "What is Enlightenment?" (1990) is another helpful text in tracing this argument for the use of reason as a means of emancipating the public from classical philosophy to the work of the Frankfurt School.

Plato and the Frankfurt School—comprise part of the media analysis emphasized in many media literacy initiatives. But again, an understanding of the nature of this enslavement is necessary to effective educative emancipation from it. As the imprisonment of those in the cave represent the ‘death of the thinking subject,’ effective media education must not simply deconstruct media texts, but as Kellner and Share write, “deconstruct injustice” (2007, 20).

John Dewey

John Dewey, pragmatist philosopher and arguably the most greatest American educator and social theorist, also makes substantive arguments about the role of education in political participation. And Dewey’s work, as discussed in the last chapter, is commonly drawn upon in the field of media education. Again, in an effort to re-politicize media literacy education, I have identified a few fundamental principles in Dewey’s philosophy of education that correspond with the Critical Theory of the Frankfurt School. Namely, Dewey argues that (1) social change (realized primarily through communication) is a dialectical process; (2) in order for change to take place, individuals must resist the distractions and see past the disinformation often provided by mass media; and (3) these critical capacities are primarily developed through democratic education.

The Dialectical Nature of Social Change. First, while his critique of society differs from that of the Frankfurt School, Dewey, like the critical theorists, recognizes the dialectical process by which positive social change takes place. Like the Frankfurt School scholars, Dewey (along with a number of the Chicago School sociologists) is influenced

by the writings of Hegel, and particularly the dialectical relationship between self and society, theory and practice. And his conceptualization of dynamic democratic citizenship is particularly helpful in identifying this Hegelian tradition within his philosophy. For example, in *The Public and Its Problems* (1927a/1954), Dewey discusses the need for the public to—in the spirit of dialectical self-criticism—continually re-examine their *particular* efforts to realize the *universal* concept of democracy. He writes

The old saying that the cure for the ills of democracy is more democracy is not apt if it means that the evils may be remedied by introducing more machinery of the same kind as that which already exists, or by refining and perfecting that machinery. But the phrase may also indicate the need of returning to the idea itself, or clarifying and deepening our apprehension of it, and of employing our sense of its meaning to criticize and remake its political manifestations. (144)

Here, Dewey's criticizes philosophical and political efforts which involve simply 'introducing more...refining and perfecting that machinery' (revealing a particular parallel between philosophical pragmatism and Horkheimer's critical theory, which will be discussed in the next chapter). Instead, he emphasizes the importance of examining the tension between 'the idea itself' and 'its political manifestations' and then engaging in productive work to achieve unity between this universal and particular. And not only does Dewey identify dialectical critique as the means of realizing a truly democratic society, but he also locates the dialectic as an essential process of human development and social acculturation. He asserts that "To learn to be human is to develop through the give-and-take of communication an effective sense of being an individually distinctive member of a community" (154). In this respect, then, the dialectic operates on both a societal and an individual level.

Contemporary Communication as Distraction and Division. Similar to Horkheimer and Adorno's discussion of the culture industry, Dewey and a number of his fellow Chicago School sociologists voiced concern over the distracting and dividing influences of contemporary mass media. While his perspective on modern communication is generally optimistic—Dewey asserts that “communication alone can create the Great Community” (142)—it does acknowledge (particularly popular entertainment) media's participation in what is termed ‘social disorganization’ (Thomas and Znaniecki 1918-20). Now, while the culture industry thesis critiques the *sameness* that infects modern culture and society, and the ‘social disintegration’ argument essentially argues the opposite—that there are “too much public...and too many publics” both schools of thought share a similar perspective on the role of the media in these crises. (Dewey 1927a/1954, 137). Dewey writes

The increase in the number, variety and cheapness of amusements represents a powerful diversion from political concern...The present era of ‘prosperity’ may not be enduring. But the movie, radio, cheap reading matter and motor car with all they stand for have come to stay. That they did not originate in deliberate desire to divert attention from political interests does not lessen their effectiveness in that direction. (138-9)

So, while Dewey does not go so far as to say (as the Frankfurt scholars might) that popular media are intentionally created to pacify the public, he is clearly critical of the manner by which they distract people from political concerns.

And this critique is not directed at just popular media, but all institutionalized mass communication, including that of education. A disinterested and disempowered public is the product of both mass media and public education which, according to Dewey, “ignores its social necessity and its identity with all human association that affects conscious life” (1916, 9). Students are receiving instruction both in schools and

the movie theater, but critical democratic engagement (nor anything of real significance) is not included in the content being delivered.

And even beyond the diversion they provide, the effect Dewey attributes to contemporary communication is strikingly similar to that of the ‘defeat of the thinking subject’ described in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Despite what Dewey identifies as the pronounced differences that mass communication, urbanization, and the mechanization of society create among the public, they are united as a ‘bewildered’ mass who “feel their hollowness even if they cannot make their feeling articulate...Thought is brought to a standstill and action paralyzed” (1927a/1954, 135). So, while arguably more confident in the possibility of positive social change than his German contemporaries, Dewey shares a similar critique of mass communication.

Democratic Education and Practical Political Engagement. Now, it should be noted that while Dewey and the Frankfurt School share some perspectives in their respective analyses of contemporary society, Dewey does not share Critical Theory’s critique of capitalism. While Horkheimer is explicit in his declaration that Critical Theory is “the intellectual side of the historical process of proletarian emancipation,” and therefore, its success will be indicated by class revolution and the establishment of a new mode of production, Dewey makes no such argument (Horkheimer, quoted in Honneth 2007, 65). While Dewey also emphasizes the importance of practical engagement in the improvement of society, he does not advocate for such a dramatic shift in the social order as his Marxist comrades. For example, Dewey argues that the solution to the crisis plaguing contemporary society is an effort of revitalization not revolution—“The highest

and most difficulty kind of inquiry and a subtle, delicate, vivid and responsive art of communication must *take possession of the physical machinery of transmission and circulation and breathe life into it*" (1927a/1954, 184, emphasis added).

That being said, Dewey's pragmatist approach to democratic education shares a number of similarities with the praxis-oriented education theorized by some members of the Frankfurt School. Similar to Marcuse (who was a scholar of Dewey, actually), Dewey advocates for a practical, political approach to education that would be the means of fostering critical consciousness and encouraging social change. He writes in *Democracy and Education* (1916)

As a society becomes more enlightened, it realizes that it is responsible not to transmit and conserve the whole of its existing achievements, but only such as make for a better future society. The school is its chief agency for the accomplishment of this end. (24)

The dialectical process of social change is, at least in part, due to effective education. And this is a perspective on education implemented in critical media literacy education today. Jhally and Earp write that Dewey's work to reform education (and thereby, reform society) "signals a crucial difference between a philosophy that sees education as a way of helping people adapt to things as they are and a philosophy that sees education as a means of inspiring and equipping students to identify threats to democracy" (243).

Now, as discussed in the last chapter, media literacy scholars and practitioners have drawn from Dewey's democratic education and Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy to create classrooms in which democracy is practiced—legitimizing student's experiential knowledge (rather than solely referring to canonic works) and reorganizing class relations (rather than relying on traditional hierarchies of teacher over students). However, key to both Dewey and Freire's pedagogical methods is the use of the dialectical critique as a

means of encouraging critical consciousness and enabling activist efforts. It is the continual struggle engaged in by students to assess, implement, and re-assess their knowledge that is key to successful praxis. Like Plato, Dewey and Freire (as well as the media scholars and educators that follow in their tradition) recognize the importance of subjecting their pedagogical objectives and approaches, critical inquiry and analysis, political perspectives and activist efforts all to continuous critique.

Ultimately, the Critical Theory of the Frankfurt School—particularly their discussions of the *dialectic*, *culture industry* and *praxis*—provide particularly helpful perspectives in the developing a more critical, political media literacy education. And a careful examination of the work of Plato, Neil Postman, Marshall McLuhan, John Dewey, and Paulo Freire reveals that these same concepts—although often overlooked—are addressed in theories often cited by media literacy scholars and practitioners. By combining the critical political components of this scholarship with the Critical Theory of the Frankfurt School, I argue that we may develop a media literacy education that more effectively encourages critical consciousness and enables civic engagement. And it is this interesting blend of critical approaches that provide the theoretical foundations of the “Media Literacy and Civic Engagement” project.

CHAPTER 3

A MULTI-LAYERED METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

In order to appreciate the significance of the methodological approaches I draw from in this research, it is first necessary to have a basic understanding of my project. The “Media Literacy and Civic Engagement” project involves the implementation and assessment of a civic-oriented media literacy initiative. My objective in conducting the project was to determine the relative effectiveness of combining Youth Participatory Action Research and Critical Media Literacy education to encourage young people to (1) think critically about social issues that they face, (2) identify how media institutions, messages, and practices relate to these issues, (3) develop informed opinions of these issues based on data they collect through various methods (including media analysis), and then (4) engage in activist efforts (specifically through the production of alternative media) with the purpose of realizing some social change. While I facilitated the project, it was largely student-directed: students in small groups selected challenges that faced their community, selected methods of gathering information about this issue, developed their own critical perspective on the issue, and then engaged in a self-selected media production project to work toward some solution to this problem. This process—the research and activist efforts engaged in by the students as well as the pedagogical methods I employed as their teacher—were documented and assessed using critical ethnographic methods including interviews, journaling, and participant observation.

This chapter will first include a review of the theoretical underpinnings of my proposed critical media literacy project including Donald Campbell’s *experimenting society*, Max Horkheimer’s *critical theory*, John Dewey’s *philosophical pragmatism*, and Kurt Lewin’s *action research*. Then, it will review the multi-layered methodological

approach—including methods of praxis, pedagogical methods and critical evaluative methods—with which I conducted my research.

Conceptual Foundations of Research

While there is quite a bit of difference between the intellectual traditions with which Campbell, Horkheimer, Dewey and Lewin are associated, each thinker provides valuable conceptual foundations of social scientific research. Most importantly, they all recognize the necessity that methodologies employed must be consistent with the study's theoretical understandings and research objectives. And each scholar, in his own way, is committed to the idea that the best research—despite any differences in type of data collected or the manner of collecting it—is conducted as a means of bettering human society in some concrete way.

The Experimenting Society

Donald Campbell's 1971 lecture "Methods for an Experimenting Society" provides some of the key theoretical principles on which evaluative research is founded today. As critical assessment, Campbell's *experimenting society* stresses the importance of the rigorous evaluation of all aspects of society. Campbell describes this critical imperative, writing

The experimenting society will be one which will vigorously try out proposed solutions to recurrent problems, which will make hard-headed and multidimensional evaluations of the outcomes, and which will move on to try other alternatives when evaluation shows one reform to have been ineffective or harmful. *We do not have such a society today.* (1991, 223, emphasis added)

The lack that Campbell identifies, then, is one not only of effective means of evaluation but also one of a society that is self-reflective. Effective evaluation (and the society that practices it) must be ‘nondogmatic’—constantly re-examining its objectives, methods and findings. And in order for an *experimenting society* to be realized, this method must be applied to every aspect of social life—“It will be an honest society, committed to reality testing, to self-criticism, to avoiding self deception” (224).

The evaluative method theorized by Campbell would be, in its practical application, best demonstrated in the creation and assessment of ‘pilot programs’ (not unlike the ‘Media Literacy and Civic Engagement’ project). However, Campbell differentiates these programs from those existing today, noting that “the job of the methodologist for the experimenting society is not to say what is to be done, but rather what has been done” (228). That is, while in today’s society a researcher may be invested in and advocate for a particular approach to a social problem as *the best approach*, in the experimental society, researchers would not adhere to any principle except that of rigorous evaluation, and therefore be more likely to provide honest evaluation. “Negative results, a failure of the first program,” writes Campbell “would not jeopardize his job, for his job would be to keep the problem until something was found that worked” (1969, 410)

Now, given that Campbell advocates for the development of an experimenting society founded on the principles of critical self-assessment, the practical political implications of his theory are evident. He notes that “the motive of honesty in political reform, revolution, and personal heroism has been generally neglected,” emphasizing that while social action does take place, it lacks the ‘honesty’ that evaluative method requires

(1991, 224). He does acknowledge the 1956 Communist uprisings in Hungary as potential applications of his theory, but ultimately he concludes that “the ideas described as characterizing the experimenting society are for the most part ideals that all of today’s major ideologies claim as their own...endorsed in both capitalist and communist countries” (226). Competing social orders profess their emphasis of honest and critical evaluation—a point evident in the correlations between Campbell’s work and that of both Dewey and Horkheimer—but ultimately, the experimenting society does not explicitly value one existing economic, political or social system over another. Rather, Campbell’s theory of the experimenting society, fundamental to evaluative research today, embraces a seemingly objectivist stance, envisioning social change not through the advocacy of any particular political agenda but through the practice of honest evaluation.

Critical Theory

Max Horkheimer’s seminal essay “Traditional and Critical Theory” (1937) describes an approach to social scientific research that includes some interesting parallels to (and significant differences from) Campbell’s theory. Horkheimer discusses the potential for *critical theory* to (well) *critically* assess social problems by contrasting its methods and objectives from those of ‘traditional theory.’ While traditional theory—that is, positivistic approaches to scientific inquiry—sees its work as revealing ‘absolutized,’ ‘ahistorical’ truths, critical theory understands itself as produced by and potentially contributing to material and social conditions. Horkheimer argues that by acknowledging that scientific inquiry is “an activity that goes on, ultimately, not in the savant’s head but

in industry,” and is therefore embedded in social reality, critical theory is able to more effectively identify social problems and advocate for change (196).

It is important to note that Horkheimer does not see this critical endeavor as a purely intellectual one. He writes, “The issue, however, is not simply the theory of emancipation; it is the practice of it as well” (233). Again, a comparison traditional and critical theory is helpful in understanding the necessity of this practical application. Traditional theory’s emphasis on the division between subject and object, researcher and (in this case) society presupposes a separation of two things that are in actuality thoroughly interpenetrating. In contrast, critical theory

...contains both a protest against this order of things, a protest generated by the order itself, and the idea of self-determination for the human race...If we think of the object of the theory in separation from the theory, we falsify it and fall into quietism and conformism. Every part of the theory presupposes the critique of an existing order and the struggle against it along lines determined by the theory itself. (229)

Critical theory, therefore, necessarily involves practical ‘protest’ and ‘struggle’ against the existing social order.

And in regards to political praxis, if this last quote by Horkheimer is not explicit enough in its emphasis of critical theory’s role in transformative social change, he also states that critical theory is “dominated at every turn by a concern for reasonable conditions of life” (199). Whereas Campbell conceives of the experimenting society’s form as implicitly dictating its content (that of a freer and more honest society), Horkheimer makes no distinction between form and content—critical social inquiry inherently involves critical political participation in the establishment of a freer society.

Philosophical Pragmatism

John Dewey provides another interesting voice to this dialogue between Campbell and Horkheimer in the development of a critical, practical, political approach to social evaluation. Like Horkheimer, Dewey distinguishes his *philosophical pragmatism* from existing modes of scientific and philosophical inquiry by emphasizing its critical potential. For example, he attributes the lack of results achieved in the positivistic sciences in the United States to an over emphasis of ‘facts.’ He writes

We forget that facts are only data; that is, are only fragmentary, uncompleted meanings, and unless they are rounded out into complete ideas...they are as helpless as are all maimed things and as repellent as are needlessly thwarted ones. (1927, 8)

Facts are only helpful when properly contextualized, both in theoretical conceptualizations and within social and historical context. Philosophical pragmatism, because it places facts in these contexts, is capable of critique and therefore takes on an “additive and transforming” role in the history of civilization. (6)

Like Campbell and Horkheimer’s interest in social science’s practical intervention in and/or transformation of social reality, Dewey emphasizes philosophical pragmatism’s wedding of theory and practice. “Theory separated from concrete doing and making is empty and futile,” Dewey argues, because as he sees it, the most pressing dilemma faced by humanity is “the question of how intelligence may inform action, and how action may bear the fruit of increased insight into meaning” (281). One specific circumstance in which Dewey emphasizes the necessity of applying theory to practice is in his discussions of educational reforms. He laments traditional education’s emphasis on the acquisition of ‘facts’ at the expense of the development of practical, experiential knowledge. According to Dewey, this “ordinary notion of education...ignores its social

necessity and its identity with all human association that affects conscious life” (1916, 9). In this example, the failed application of theory to practice is identified both in traditional application’s failure to acknowledge experience as a legitimate site of knowledge production, and in educational institution’s failure to reform education to address this problem.

And in regards to political praxis, Dewey, like Horkheimer, resists Campbell’s idea that more ‘honest’ evaluation will necessarily coincide with positive social change. He states, returning to the example of education, that

As a society becomes more enlightened, it realizes that it is responsible not to transmit and conserve the whole of its existing achievements, but only such as make for a better future society. The school is its chief agency for the accomplishment of this end. (1916, 24)

The explicit purpose of the school, not its likely result, is the establishment of a ‘better future society’ through a critical, practical and political education.

Action Research

And lastly, the theory of *action research* developed in Kurt Lewin’s essay “Action Research and Minority Problems” (1946) provides a final voice to the theoretical conversation informing the methodological approach of my critical media literacy research project. Lewin calls for the development of social scientific research that engages in critique that goes beyond the assessment of systemic contradictions and looks at their particular, on-the-ground manifestations.

How is economic and social discrimination to be attacked if we think not in terms of generalities but in terms of the inhabitants of that particular main street and those side and end streets which make up that small or large town in which the individual group worker is supposed to do his job? (Lewin 34)

Action research, like Campbell's experimenting society, is characterized by the critique of social reality through intervention and, then, the subsequent critique of the intervention itself, determining "the strength and weakness of certain weapons or techniques of action" (38).

Given that Lewin identifies this approach *action research*, it is no surprise the emphasis he places on the practical application of knowledge gained through critical assessment. He succinctly states that, "research that produces nothing but books will not suffice," meaning that unless the results of critique are applied to interventions in or transformations of social institutions, processes, etc., they are essentially irrelevant (35). Among the actions advocated by Lewin is the training of researchers in this action-oriented approach to social science.

The training of large numbers of social scientists who can handle scientific problems but are also equipped for the delicate task of building productive, hard-hitting teams, with practitioners is a requisite for the progress in social science as well as in social management of intergroup relations. (42)

In order for action research in particular, and social science in general, to be successful, it must apply this critical, practical approach to the development of its own researchers.

And lastly, if the title of Lewin's essay's reference to 'minority problems' is not indicative enough of his concern with issues of race and inequality, action research is fundamentally committed to the critical assessment of and practical intervention in social and political issues. He recognizes that while in the U.S. there exists among the public a "great amount of good-will" at addressing social, political, and economic inequalities, citizens nonetheless lack the means of articulating the specific nature of these problems and engaging in effective solutions to them. "They feel in the fog on three counts," writes

Lewin. “1. What is the present situation? 2. What are the dangers? 3. And most important of all, what shall we do?” (34). Action research is the means of clearing that fog.

Practical Methods of Research

With some understanding of the conceptual principles forwarded by Campbell, Horkheimer, Dewey and Lewin, it is possible to appreciate the research objectives and methodologies that this critical media literacy project draws upon. However, given that that my multi-layered methodological approach—while obviously related to existing approaches to evaluation research—is somewhat more complex, a basic introduction to evaluative research is helpful in understanding the nuances of the evaluative means employed in this project.

Evaluative Research

Evaluation research is systematic, data-based inquiry to determine the merit or worth of a program, product, organization, intervention, or change effort. Evaluation research applies social science and related inquiry methods for the systematic collection of information about the activities, characteristics, and outcomes of change efforts to inform judgments about goal attainment, improve program effectiveness, identify costs and benefits, and/or inform future discussions. (Patton “Evaluation Research”)

Patton’s description of evaluative methods is informed by the tradition of evaluation research in the U.S., perhaps finding its roots in the Great Society legislation of the 1960s. Government programs initiated to combat poverty needed to be assessed in terms of their costs relative to their effective alleviation of suffering. Walker argues that given evaluation research’s interest in assessing these programs through the application of collected data to potential, practical improvements in their implementation, researchers

are “apt to align themselves with pragmatism”: he writes “They will probably strive to be neutral and objective at each stage in the research process and thereby generate findings that are valid and reliable...and potentially generalizable to other settings” (Walker “Applied Qualitative Research”). This commitment to ‘utility, feasibility, propriety and accuracy,’ anchors the tradition in both the experimenting society of Campbell and the philosophical pragmatism of Dewey.

The objectives of evaluation research can be placed in three different categories: *instrumental use*, *process use*, or *conceptual use*. Instrumental use refers to evaluative method’s potential for improving the implementations of a program. This objective was especially significant in the assessment of the Great Society programs. Patton writes “Evaluators were called on not only to offer final judgments about the overall effectiveness of programs but also to gather process data and provide feedback to help solve programming problems along the way” (“Evaluation Research”). This objective contrasts that of *process use*, which rather than focusing on the results of the evaluation to determine changes in program implementation, finds significance in the evaluative process itself. Both of these approaches, however, benefit the specific program they assess, whereas *conceptual use* focuses on the bigger picture. It “on the other hand, increases knowledge so that evaluation findings can influence thinking about issues, options, or policy alternatives” (Patton “Evaluation Research”). Much like Campbell’s methodologist who works tirelessly experimenting with different solutions to a proposed social problem, the researcher concerned with the *conceptual use* of her evaluations is not so invested in the success or failure of a specific program, but the understanding of social reality in which that success or failure is experienced.

Methodologically, evaluation research employs a number of specific qualitative and quantitative methods. In fact, Patton acknowledges that most evaluator acknowledge the necessity of “know[ing] and us[ing] a variety of methods in order to be responsive to the nuances of particular evaluation questions” (“Evaluation Research”). Evaluators, then, often engage in multidisciplinary research approaches including surveys, statistical analysis, in-depth interviews, focus groups, and ethnographic research.

A Multi-layered Methodological Approach

My critical media literacy project differs from traditional evaluative research projects in that it includes three levels of concurrent methods. While a more conventional evaluation would involve measuring the anticipated outcome of a given action, my project includes three levels of action and thus three levels of assessment—(1) that of the methods of political praxis engaged in by the students, (2) the pedagogical methods engaged in by the teachers, and (3) the evaluative methods engaged in by me, the researcher. Lewin offers a fitting description of this type of research project, writing that it “proceeds in a spiral of steps each of which is composed of a circle of planning, action, and fact-finding about the result of the action” (38).

Layer 1 – Methods of Praxis

For apart from inquiry, apart from the praxis, individuals cannot be truly human. Knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other. (Freire 72)

The following discussion of the methods employed by the student participants to research and practically engage with their chosen social issues is undoubtedly the most

speculative because I made a concerted effort in my conceptualization of student praxis to explicitly define (and as a result, unfairly influence) the student's development of critical consciousness and civic engagement. Underlying this student-teacher, research-activist approach is Paulo Freire's theory of *critical pedagogy*. However, in this layer, it is not the teacher's facilitation of students' critical consciousness that I intend to stress, but instead, the actions taken by students to address the challenges that face their community. Now, the history of 'organically-developed' social movements will not be discussed in this chapter, as it would seem to be present in every political revolution, indigenous uprising, and progressive social movement in human history. However, Freire's argument that the methods of praxis must be generated by the 'oppressed peoples' themselves, not given to them by so-called enlightened intellectuals, is at the heart of these historical social changes. He writes in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970)

Even if the people's thinking is superstitious or naïve, it is only as they rethink their assumptions in action that they can change. Producing and acting upon their own ideas—not consuming those of others—must constitute that process. (108)

Then, while a later chapter will include my analysis of the praxis engaged in by the student participants during the project, this outline of the projects' methodologies avoids any type of speculation of the objectives worked toward and the methods employed by my students in their critical inquiry of and engagement with their chosen social issues, as such speculation would serve to impede the organic nature of their praxis. However, as I will discuss later, as the students engaged in inquiry and activism and then were forced to 'rethink their assumptions,' the evaluative component of this layer of method was made visible. While I, as the teacher and researcher, made specific efforts not to determine the

students' research methods or activist efforts, I did encourage them to critically evaluate their own work.

This emphasis of praxis is something, as discussed in earlier chapters, often discussed in critical media literacy scholarship. Jenkins et al. (2006), for example, notes that students today require more than the ability to simply read and write (whether it be text or the 'reading and writing' of new media); in order for them to meaningfully participate in society, they must develop skills of critical inquiry. They write

Beyond core literacy, students need research skills. Among other things, they need to know how to access books and articles through a library; to take notes on and integrate secondary sources; to assess the reliability of data; to read maps and charts; to make sense of scientific visualizations; to grasp what kinds of information are being conveyed by various systems of representation; to distinguish between fact and fiction, fact and opinion; to construct arguments and marshal evidence. If anything, these traditional skills assume even greater importance as students venture beyond collections that have been screened by librarians and into the more open space of the web. (20)

Especially given the amount of un-verified information available on the Internet, students need to gain experience analyzing information and developing informed opinions, not just as ends in themselves, but as means of engaging in efforts to improve society. In this project, students examined journalistic coverage (both text and image), political communications (statements by governmental bodies or special interest groups), representations in entertainment media, social media, advertising and public relations campaigns that related to their chosen social issue. They practiced the analytical skills they gain in class discussions and activities (which will be discussed shortly) to parse through these media messages, better understand the varied perspectives on the issue which were voiced in the public sphere, and then develop their own informed opinions on the issues. And they practiced the media production skills they gain in class activities

(which will also be discussed shortly) to contribute *their own perspectives* in *their own voice* to this discourse, as a means of bringing recognition to or attempting to address the issues.

Layer 2 – Pedagogical Methods

Now, perhaps foreshadowed in the previous discussion of the work of Paulo Freire, the pedagogical methods employed in my project draw heavily from critical pedagogy. However, an explanation of this project's application of Freire's work would be somewhat disingenuous because the pedagogy I employ in my project accesses Freire through two existing fields of study—Youth Participatory Action Research and Critical Media Literacy. Through a discussion of the origins, objectives and methods of each of these pedagogical approaches—including their connection to critical pedagogy—the correlations to and differences from the traditional evaluative methods will be demonstrated.

Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR)

...YPAR is typically undertaken as critical scholarship, by multi-generational collectives, to interrogate conditions of social injustice through social theory with a dedicated commitment to social action. (Fine 213)

Drawing on Freire's conceptualization of education as the primary means of promoting transformative social change through the cultivation of 'conscientazao,' Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) engages in pedagogical methods that encourage students' engagement in critical civic praxis. A typical YPAR project is conducted in a school, after-school program, or community or activist organization; involves the

participation of individuals of various ages; and is directed at the research of and engagement with social problems that affect its participants. “This view of youth” write Ginwright and Cammarota, “acknowledges structural constraints in their communities...but also views them as active participants in changing debilitating neighborhood conditions” (694).¹⁶

Historically, YPAR originated in the field of action research inspired by Lewin, and was developed in social movements throughout the world. Among the most significant examples of action research in the U.S. are the collaborations of social researchers in key legal decisions involving desegregation, sex stereotyping in the workplace, the death penalty, and affirmative action (Fine 218-220). And because of the various contexts in which these movements have taken place, they inevitably draw upon a variety of conceptual understandings of research and society. Dewey’s (perhaps obvious) statement “Action is the means by which a problematic situation is resolved,” and the Chicago School sociologists’ project to use social research as a means of overcoming social disorganization provide some evidence of a link between action research and philosophical pragmatism. In other instances, “participatory action researchers claim to have been inspired by the ideals of historical materialism” in which the social action advocated by YPAR is placed within the context of the ‘class struggle’ spoken of by Marx and later Horkheimer (Rahman 118).

¹⁶ Other examples of YPAR and related efforts include Akom, Ginwright & Cammarota 2008; Cammarota & Fine 2008; Ginwright and James 2002; Irizarry 2009; Kirshner, Strobel and Fernandez 2003; Park 1993; Penuel and Freeman 1997; Torre and Fine 2007. YPAR has been explicitly cited in the media literacy scholarship of Amy Petersen Jensen (see Jensen 2008) and Lynn Schofield Clark (see Clark 2012).

Michelle Fine succinctly defines the objective of YPAR as “float[ing] new air into unjust systems, circulating possibilities for different tomorrows” (214). At first glance, the ‘systems’ that YPAR seeks to transform seemingly refer to oppressive material conditions, but that is not entirely the case. “This is certainly a necessary task,” writes Rahman “but domination of masses by elites is rooted not only in the polarization of control over the means of material production but also over the means of knowledge production” (119). While the substance of the projects engaged in by YPAR involves social change—which may include a re-establishment of means of production—the methods which they use in this effort—that of legitimizing the experiential knowledge of young people—is also transformative on (to use Marx’s terminology) ‘superstructural’ level.

That being said, it is important to remember that YPAR, by its practitioners’ own admission, is not a ‘method’ per se--

Scholars of participatory action research have relied upon and utilized surveys, logistic regressions, ethnography, public opinion polls, life stories, testimonies, performance, focus groups, and varied other methods in order to interrogate the conditions of oppression and surface leverage points for resistance and change. (Fine 215)

Rather, YPAR is framed as a ‘radical epistemological challenge’ to traditional social scientific research. This challenge, referring specifically to what it considers ‘legitimate knowledge,’ questions both *who* conducts the research and *how* it is conducted. Echoing Freire, Rahman notes that young people engaged in YPAR must “develop their own endogenous process of consciousness raising and knowledge generation” (119). The knowledge often attributed to young people—experiential, popular cultural, etc.—is considered valid contributions to and means of critique. Pedagogical approaches in

YPAR, then, typically encourage adults to promote youth-directed research and activist efforts—through what Ben Kirshner calls *facilitation, apprenticeship* and *joint work*—rather than to direct these efforts themselves (Kirshner 2007). Also, the methods of gathering information depart from those employed in traditional social research in that they favor critical subjectivity over scientific objectivity. Fine explains that, in YPAR, “Biases are not to be denied, but displayed, dissected, challenged and pooled” (223). Not unlike the social research conceptualized by Horkheimer and Dewey, YPAR sees effective social critique and change as necessarily contextualized within social and material conditions (not oblivious or impervious to these conditions). So, while Youth Participatory Action Researchers’ specific methods may vary, their defining characteristic is this challenge to so-called ‘legitimate’ knowledge production.

Critical Media Literacy (CML)

Critical media literacy...constitutes a critique of mainstream approaches to literacy and a political project for democratic social change. This involves a multiperspectival critical inquiry, of popular culture and the cultural industries, that addresses issues of class, race, gender, sexuality, and power and also promotes the production of alternative counter-hegemonic media. (Kellner & Share 2007b, 62)

As discussed earlier, the field of media literacy is fragmented into competing approaches (media arts education, protectionism, the media literacy movement, etc.), but what distinguishes Critical Media Literacy (CML) is the role that it plays in “helping people to become sophisticated citizens rather than sophisticated consumers” of media (Jhally & Lewis 225). Now, while media literacy can be traced to the alarm felt in early twentieth century America over the negative effects of film viewing on children, the development of film criticism as an academic discipline, or the rise of new media

industries, Kellner and Share note that critical media literacy, as such, “is in its infancy; it is just beginning to produce results, and is more open and experimental than established print-oriented pedagogy” (2007b, 64). In fact, the “Media Literacy and Civic Engagement” project is an illustrative example of this tinkering with the objectives for and methods of CML.

Like YPAR, CML’s pedagogical methods can be traced through Freire’s critical pedagogy to the influences of both philosophical pragmatism and critical theory. Jhally and Earp discuss how Dewey’s calls for educational reform have striking similarities to the call for a more critical, political media education. They write that Dewey “sees education as a means of inspiring and equipping students to identify threats to democracy” just as they see media education as a ‘democratic imperative,’ equipping students to identify how media institutions, representations, etc. may act as threats to democracy (Jhally & Earp 243). Kellner and Share emphasize CML’s roots in the ‘multidisciplinary field of cultural studies’—

This is a field of critical inquiry that began over a century ago in Europe and continues to grow with new critiques of media and society. From the 1930s through the 1960s, researchers at the Frankfurt Institute for Social Research used critical social theory to analyze how popular culture and the new tools of communication technology induce ideology and social control. (2007b, 64)

As noted earlier, the critical theory of the Frankfurt School thinkers is only occasionally cited among media literacy scholarship, but even when these influences go unacknowledged, the influence of thinkers like Freire, Dewey and Horkheimer on CML’s objectives and methods is evident.

As noted in the first chapter, CML’s objective is explicitly political. Jhally and Earp state

...the abiding goal of media education should be to link explicitly critical viewing and thinking skills, aesthetic considerations, and production skills to a democratic understanding, critique, and transformation of media institutions, information, educational institutions, and the very notion of literacy. (241)

This emphasis of education and inquiry as a means of addressing problems facing society can be traced back to CML's roots in Marxist social theory. In his famed eleventh Thesis on Feuerbach, Karl Marx states "The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point, however, is to change it" (1978, 145).

Here, Marx emphasizes the role of critical thought in social change—which informs CML's Freire-ian notions of transformative social change—however, the pedagogical methods used to achieve this objective are still being tested. CML seeks to engages students in textual analysis, ideological critique, political economic analysis of media institutions and, finally, the production of 'alternative counter-hegemonic media.' And like YPAR, this approach to pedagogy hinges on the same 'radical epistemological challenge' to knowledge production. CML values the contributions of its younger participants—"teaching critical media literacy should be a participatory, collaborative project" rather than resemble the 'banking model' of education criticized by Freire (Kellner & Share 2007a, 17). Steven Goodman's Youth Media program, the Educational Video Center, of CML, nicely exemplifies this approach; he writes "teaching kids critical literacy requires that programs value and engage them as active participants in community problem-solving and as full partners in their own learning and growth" (2003, 103). While the frequent but often empty uses of the term 'empowerment' in fields of media and civic education has led to a critique of the concept itself (Livingstone 2003), I

feel justified in citing the ‘youth empowerment model’ practiced by the EVC as an inspiration for this project.

And lastly, just as YPAR challenges the standard of ‘scientific objectivity’ in social research, CML challenges the standard of ‘political neutrality’ in education, invoking that (familiar but still substantive) metaphor of ‘not standing still on a moving train.’ The impossibility of politically neutral education is critiqued by Giroux, who writes “the notion that theory, facts and inquiry can be objectively determined and used falls prey to a set of values that are both conservative and mystifying in their political orientation” (quoted in Kellner & Share 2007a, 8). Unlike Campbell, who seems to suggest that in social research political orientation is ancillary to methodological evaluation, scholars and practitioners of CML emphasize the necessity of explicitly acknowledging and even confronting political issues in education.

Now, this discussion of methods must be accompanied by a disclaimer—implicit in both YPAR and CML’s theoretical roots in Freire’s critical pedagogy is the expectation that in order for education to effectively cultivate critical consciousness and encourage civic engagement, its methods must be continually re-assessed. Freire emphasizes the attainment of knowledge through dialogue even to the extent that he includes in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* an invitation to the reader “to correct mistakes and misunderstandings, to deepen affirmations and to point out aspects I have not perceived” (39). If even Freire recognizes the necessity of qualifying his published work as only the beginning of a conversation, subject to criticism, it would then follow that he would advocate for the same dialectical method to be applied to the development of critical pedagogical methods. That being said, the methods of pedagogy presented here

are intended not as any definitive approach to critical media literacy education, but one effort to experiment with making such education more efficacious.

Layer 3 – Evaluative Methods

Now, in order to justify the use of critical ethnography as the means of evaluating my critical media literacy project, it may be beneficial to briefly discuss the relative benefits of qualitative/quantitative and interpretivist/objectivist methodological approaches to my area of study. Now, it should be noted that none of the theories informing my project explicitly favor quantitative or qualitative methods. In fact, as discussed previously, Campbell, Dewey, Horkheimer and Lewin all stress the potential benefits of an interdisciplinary approach to social research. Dewey and Horkheimer both criticize positivistic, or ‘fact-oriented’ research methods because they fail to account for the necessary relation between the data and the social and material contexts in which they are collected. These scholars do not, however, challenge the validity of quantitative research, given that it meets this standard.

That being said, because of (1) YPAR and CML’s challenge to traditional knowledge production, (2) the complexity of my project, and (3) the objective of the project’s evaluation, I argue that qualitative methods, and particularly critical ethnography, provide a more appropriate methodology for this research. (1) As discussed earlier, scholars and practitioners of YPAR and CML emphasize how their approach departs from traditional social science’s standard of ‘scientific objectivity’ and traditional education’s standard of ‘political neutrality.’ Again, while quantitative methods could, arguably, be employed in such an approach, I think that because of the opportunity that

qualitative methods—particularly the journals of and in-depth interviews with students—offer the participants in the study to engage in an open, ongoing dialogue about issues of subjectivity and political orientation, a qualitative approach is a better fit for such a consciously self-reflexive project. (2) Next, given that the project requires the simultaneous implementation and assessment of multiple layers of method, a qualitative approach to evaluating the project seemed the most effective, and accessible, means of accounting for and presenting such complexity. (3) And given that the evaluation of the project is not solely intended to serve an *instrumental use*—improving this specific approach to media literacy education—but also a *conceptual use*—better understanding larger issues of social inequality, critical pedagogy, media literacy and youth activism—it is essential that the evaluation does not overemphasize specific successes or failures of the project, but rather it must address the dialogues, processes, interactions and reflections that the project makes possible. Again, qualitative methods seem to provide a more effective means of accounting for such elements.

Critical Ethnographic Research

Ethnography refers in its broadest sense to the systematic description of customs, habits, and points of reference of social groups. Some view it as limited solely to participant observation, while others see it as any research that displays characteristics of group culture, whether obtained through direct observation of social groups or content analysis of social artifacts... Only as a historically embedded practice, however, does ethnography take on axiological, ideological, and practical content. (Thomas 478)

Ethnographic research can be traced back to the early anthropological work of scholars like Margaret Mead, Bronislaw Malinowski and E.E. Evans-Pritchard. However, Robert Park and Ernest Burgess' application of these research methods to the social

sciences, perhaps, provides a more fitting origin for the type of critical ethnographic fieldwork this project attempts to practice. Colleagues of John Dewey at the University of Chicago, Park and Burgess directed a number of students' efforts of documenting urban social life, developing 'a massive theoretical tapestry' of modern social life (Deegan 13). The objective of their work was to provide explanations for and potential solutions to what they called *social disorganization*—the increased diffusion and diversity of modern society (Thomas & Znaniecki 1918-20). The research objectives and methods established in the work of the Chicago School inform the practice of ethnography today, but as Thomas (1983) notes, "it has lost any semblance of a critical or even reformist program...that once guided the Chicago school" (484). Today's typical ethnographic approaches rarely engage in the type of comprehensive critical inquiry, motivated by a desire to overcome challenges facing society, that Park and Burgess envisioned.

Efforts in recent decades to re-envision ethnography as a means of critical social research have incorporated theoretical concepts like those introduced by Lewin and Horkheimer. For example, the efficacy of the action research programs conducted by Lewin was, in part, determined by daily 'evaluation sessions' in which participants would record their observations of the dynamics of group interactions, progress towards objectives, etc. (Lewin 42). This frequent journaling is among the methods now employed by critical ethnographers to assess individual subjects' perceptions of social reality (and the journaling method is utilized in this project as well).

Others argue that critical ethnography's attention to social interactions complements critical theory's attention to social structures and that together these two methods are capable of "bridging the two positions and correcting at least some of the

problems identified in both” (Thomas 488). Axel Honneth, current director of the Frankfurt School even goes on to say that previous to his development of the culture industry thesis, Horkheimer had envisioned an analysis of culture that “was to have empirically investigated those ‘moral customs’ and ‘life-styles’ in which the everyday communicative practice of social groups finds expression” (1995, 69). According to this argument, critical ethnographic fieldwork, while abandoned by Horkheimer, was a fundamental but unrealized part of the Frankfurt School’s interdisciplinary social inquiry.

The objectives of critical ethnographic research can, again, be traced to the foundational work of the Chicago school. According to Thomas, Park and Burgess, while definitely not working within the Marxist tradition, embraced

a social reformism, in which ‘disorganized’ cultures and corresponding deviant behaviors could be ‘corrected’ with proper application of research-informed social policy, which in turn presupposed a view of human nature (consistent with a Marxian perspective) in which human nature is malleable and can be reformed when the ‘proper’ social conditions are obtained... (Thomas 483)

While their standards of critique differentiate from those of historical materialism, the objective of their work—defined by Dewey as the establishment of a ‘better future society’—parallels the emancipatory aims of Marxist critical theory.

In regards to method, the Chicago school ethnographers engaged in what they called ‘triangulated methods’ in which the collection of quantitative data—for example the mapping of populations in geographic areas—was combined with qualitative data—like life histories and even auto-ethnographic research. This method of triangulation is similar to the ‘dialectical’ method of critical ethnography forwarded by Thomas—analyzing both social structures and social interactions, this research is able “to discover how various entities are related, to describe the movement and transformation of social

relations, and to reconstruct an image of the intricate settings in which social behavior exists” (486). Critical ethnographic research like the kind this project uses to evaluate its approach to critical media literacy education is not unlike Park and Burgess’s ‘triangulation.’ It employs a multi-method approach which combines critical historical and political economic research of educational and media institutions (which provides an understanding of social structure) with interviews, journals, and participant observation (which provide an understanding of social interactions, identity formations, etc.) By providing an understanding of particular individuals *within the context* of material and social conditions, critical ethnographic research offers a more comprehensive picture of social reality and then (in the case of this research) a more successful critical evaluation of my project.

Practical Ethnographic Fieldwork

What the ethnographer is in fact faced with...is a multiplicity of complex conceptual structures, many of them superimposed upon or knotted into one another, which are at once strange, irregular, and inexplicit, and which he must contrive somehow first to grasp and then to render. And this is true at the most down-to-earth, jungle field work levels of his activity: interviewing informants, observing rituals, eliciting kin terms, tracing property lines, censusing households...writing his journal. Doing ethnography is like trying to read (in the sense of ‘construct a reading of’) a manuscript—foreign, faded, full of ellipses, incoherencies, suspicious emendations, and tendentious commentaries, but written not in conventionalized graphs of sound but in transient examples of shaped behavior. (Geertz 10)

Geertz’s (1973) concepts of *thick description* and *inscription* provide some helpful guidance for the ethnographic fieldwork involved in this research project. In his explanation of ‘thick description’ (a term he borrows from Gilbert Ryles), Geertz emphasizes that successful ethnography situates the researcher’s observance of

individuals, events and behaviors within an understanding of the context (much like the Chicago School's 'triangulation'). Geertz is careful to qualify the necessary inclusion of contextual data not as a means of simply explaining observed experience, but providing a nuanced perspective of it. He writes "culture is not a power, something to which social events, behaviors, institutions, or processes can be causally attributed; it is a context, something within which they can be intelligently—that is thickly—described" (14). Through thick description of both the observed experience and the context in which this experience takes place, ethnographic fieldwork is able to more effectively examine the complexities of lived experience.

Next, Geertz's *inscription* is another helpful concept in the project's critical analysis of ethnographic data. Emphasizing the constructed nature of any ethnographic researcher's documentation of observed experience, Geertz writes

In short, anthropological writings are themselves interpretations, and second and third order ones to boot...They are, thus, fictions; fictions, in the sense that they are 'something made,' 'something fashioned'—the original meaning of *fictio*—not that they are false, unfactual, or merely 'as if' thought experiments. (15)

Thus, like Horkheimer's critical theory and Dewey's philosophical pragmatism—Geertz's ethnography requires a certain amount of self-awareness from the investigator. Documentation of observed experience must be understood by the researcher as interpretations of actual events, behaviors, etc. and not objective representations of them.

Participant Observation & Video Documentation. The majority of the data collected as means of evaluating the efficacy of the project in meeting its objectives came from documentation—both written notes and video recordings—of class activities and discussions. This use of both written field-notes and video documentation provided

opportunity for the researcher to more effectively provide *thick description*, as discussed by Geertz. I made field-notes during and following weekly sessions, recording my observations of the class itself—activities and discussions, student attitudes and behaviors—as well as environmental factors such as events that may have occurred during the school-day, current affairs addressed by the media, the weather, the time of the school year, etc. I was also aided in documenting this experience by the video footage. Each week, after having written a comprehensive summary of my experience with the class, I viewed and logged the video footage, taking careful note of anything that I may have missed in my own observations of the class (and the contextual factors surrounding the class).

This self-reflexivity was especially important in acknowledging the *inscription* of video documentation. Because video documentation does not rely on the memory and perspective of the individual observer *per se*, it could be considered a more ‘objective’ representation of experience. However, this video documentation must be understood in relation to Geertz’ concept of *inscription*—*Who* operates the camera (researcher/ volunteer/ student) influences the implicit perspective of the footage. *What* the cameraperson chooses to film, in terms of content, and *how* this is filmed, in terms of form, influences the representation of the experience. When I reviewed my own field-notes and the video footage, I made a conscious effort to acknowledge the particular perspectives being represented in these documentations, and by implication, the perspectives that were absent from them.

Student Interviews. Throughout the course of the program, interviews were conducted with individuals and groups of students. The objective of these interviews was

to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the students' perspective on the program, and specifically whether/how the program was (1) encouraging them to think more critically about the challenges their community faces, the media, and the relationship between the two and (2) enabling them to effectively participate in civil society.

Interview questions addressed the students' perception of the teaching methods, class activities, class discussions, their group work, group dynamics, information they gained, perspectives that they held, perspectives that they learned about, etc. Student responses informed the continued implementation of the program—influencing what activities and discussions the teacher led in class and how these were facilitated, what concepts needed to be clarified, what group dynamics needed to be addressed, etc. Efforts were made so that each student was part of at least two interviews (either individual or group) so as to provide some means of following-up with questions or concerns voiced previously.

Interview transcripts and video documentation of the interviews provided the primary data, and, again, the researcher's analysis of this data acknowledged Geertz' *thick description* and *inscription*. After each interview, the researcher reviewed the interview transcript and video or audio documentation, taking notes on student responses. Students' verbal responses to questions was the primary focus of these interviews, but attention was also paid to non-verbal or extra-verbal cues (body-language, inflection, eye contact, etc.) and to context (when, where and under what circumstances was the interview conducted). Video documentation aided the reviewer in the identification of these other elements, but again, a certain amount of self-reflexivity was exercised. I tried to be conscious of how my questioning of and responses to the students directed the interview in particular ways. And again, what the video documentation represented

(content), how it was represented (form), and what perspectives were included/omitted from this representation were acknowledged.

Video Journals. Lastly, observation and interviews were accompanied by journals. And like the previously discussed methods of data-collection, these journals utilized video-recording technology. At the conclusion of each weekly session, students were requested to record short (2-5 minute) video journals using the lab's personal computers. Students were asked to reflect on their experience of the day, discussing the information they discovered, their interactions with the teacher and other students, the strengths and weaknesses of the class activities and discussions, successes or failures experienced in their group projects, etc. After each weekly session, I also recorded video journals, reflecting on my own experience preparing and leading the class discussions and activities. I recorded my thoughts on the teaching methods and class activities, my rapport with the students, students' engagement in the program, etc. These video journals helped me articulate my thoughts on the program's progress and these journals influenced the way in which I continued to conduct the class, modifying my teaching style, altering assignments or activities, and influencing my interactions with the students.

In regards to Geertz' *thick description*, the video journals provide a particular means of documenting more personal perspectives than those voiced in interviews or observed in class discussions. The insight that this 'confessional' model of documentation provides into the individual student's (and researcher's, for that matter) meaning-making process would be difficult to achieve using other means of ethnographic research, and therefore, it provides an added layer of *thickness* to the documentation of the project. Geertz' *inscription* is almost self-evident in the use of the video journal,

especially those recorded by myself. Here, I openly acknowledge, through this technique of self-documentation, my own role in constructing meaning from my experience with the project. I was also able (at least, to some extent) to step back, able to review my notes and video journals and identify how my position as researcher and teacher leaned toward certain perspectives of the project (and was blind to others).

And lastly, my analysis of each of these types of ethnographic field data is intended to determine the relative success of the “Media Literacy and Civic Engagement”—specifically, in its utilizing the Critical Theory of the Frankfurt School as a foundation of a YPAR-informed Critical Media Literacy education that seeks to encourage young people’s development of critical consciousness and civic engagement. The students’ participation in and responses to the program were closely examined in an effort to identify patterns that might suggest certain successes or failures of the project. Specifically, these forms of data—participant observation, interviews and journals—were examined to determine (1) to what extent does student praxis exhibit characteristics that may be understood as the students’ development of critical consciousness and civic engagement, (2) what factors contribute to the achievement of these objectives (or lack thereof), and (3) how might the theoretical and pedagogical approaches utilized in the project be modified to more effectively encourage the achievement of these objectives. Lastly (4), upon the completion of this analysis of the students’ methods of praxis and the instructor’s pedagogical methods, the methods of evaluation themselves were examined to determine how they might be modified to more effectively evaluate the success of similar media literacy education initiatives in the future.

CHAPTER 4

THE ‘MEDIA LITERACY AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT’ PROJECT: A DESCRIPTION

The ‘Media Literacy and Civic Engagement’ project was conducted at South High School, a public school located in Denver, Colorado that particularly serves students whose primary language is something other than English or Spanish. South High School’s history, diverse student body, and the involvement of educators—from the high school as well as the nearby University of Denver—in encouraging experiential learning-based media education provided a unique opportunity in which to conduct the project. As part of the school’s Digital Media Club, the “Media Literacy and Civic Engagement” project introduced the theoretical concepts emphasized by the Frankfurt School—the dialectic, culture industry and praxis—and encouraged the students to develop critical consciousness and engage in critical political participation by learning about and engaging in a challenge that faced their community.

South High School

Some understanding of South High School’s impressive history and diversity provides some context for the interesting opportunity that it was to conduct the project at the school. While South’s first classes were held in 1893, the building in which classes are currently held was built in 1923. It is a four-story brick structure, with a bell tower, large Romanesque arches and decorative sculptures. The first time I approached the school’s main entrance, I was particularly impressed by the stone-carved frieze above the doors which depicts a number of educators dressed in Classical costume defending the school’s students from various mythical creatures. Inside, South is less distinguishable

from other public high schools with its long, loud linoleum-floored hallways and rows of metal lockers. I recall the first day of the project, walking down the hallway and noticing the posters dotting the walls—flyers for our Digital Media Club were accompanied by announcements for the Gay-Straight Alliance (quoting Lady Gaga’s “Born This Way” in large glittery letters) and posters publicizing the school’s upcoming production of the musical *Evita*.

South’s campus is adjacent to Denver’s Washington Park and only a short distance from the University of Denver. The neighborhood—called Wash Park by locals—has a mix of college students, professionals, families, and South’s students, many of whom bus in from other parts of the city. My weekly commute to South included the long stretch of freeway through the open space surrounding Boulder, past the suburban communities surrounding Denver, through industrial and business districts of the city, to Denver’s south side. In the Wash Park neighborhood, high school students having just left school hung out at bus stops and joined the locals across the street at the park. Each spring afternoon, people were jogging, walking dogs, playing tennis and lounging on the park’s spacious green lawns.

However, South High School’s most unique characteristic is the incredible diversity of its student body. A part of Denver Public Schools which practices ‘open enrollment,’ South has opened its doors to students living within the district who would like to attend (limited, obviously, to the school’s maximum number of registered students). And this invitation is particularly attractive to the large number of students from families who have recently immigrated to the United States. In 2010, *The Denver Post* reported that South High School’s student body represented over forty countries and

spoke over sixty languages (O'Connor 2010). According to DPS, as of 2011, roughly forty percent (39.22%) of the student body is enrolled in the school's English Language Learners program¹⁷. In fact, each school year, the school holds an International Festival in which students volunteer to represent their countries. They dress in clothing traditional to their native cultures, create booths presenting information about and food from their home countries, and put on an assembly for their peers, parents and invited community members showcasing music and dance from each nation. The event is clearly a valued tradition in the community, providing such a diverse group of young people to share their native cultures and customs with their teachers, classmates and the greater Denver community.

But despite its historical significance and incredible diversity, South's students also face some serious challenges. According to Denver Public Schools' 2011 report, over seventy three percent (73.88%) of South's student population at the school is eligible for free or reduced lunch¹⁸. DPS's Safety and Discipline report reveals that during the 2009-10 school year, almost a quarter of South's student population (22.41%) was subject to some type of serious disciplinary action (including in-school suspension, out-of-school suspension, expulsion or referral to law enforcement)¹⁹. And according to South's No Child Left Behind School Performance Framework Report from 2011²⁰, the school does not meet the national standards in any areas of Academic Achievement

¹⁷ http://planning.dpsk12.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/02/2011_ELL_SPED_count_by_School.xlsx

¹⁸ http://planning.dpsk12.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/02/OC_FRL_Report_2011.pdf

¹⁹ http://planning.dpsk12.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/02/Report_of_Suspensions_and_Expulsions_09_10.pdf

²⁰ <https://cedar2.cde.state.co.us/documents/SPF2011/0880%20-%208086%20-%201%20Year.pdf>

(these findings will be discussed in greater detail later in the chapter). Needless to say, South—not unlike most diversely populated high schools in lower-income, urban areas—faces a number of significant challenges.

Perhaps because of the unique strengths of students at South, combined with the incredible difficulties they face, the school’s students and faculty have some received some national attention. In 2009, first lady Michelle Obama visited South High School as part of a mentoring initiative aimed to help young girls succeed. And in his 2011 State of the Union address²¹, President Barack Obama praised principal Dr. Kristin Waters for her work in transforming Bruce Randolph High School—another Denver school where Waters served as principal previous to her appointment at South—from one of the lowest performing schools in the state to a school where, in 2010, ninety-seven percent of seniors received their diploma. And in her short time at South, Dr. Waters has led the school in making similar progress at South. Clearly, the history, the diversity, and the challenges faced by the school provided a unique opportunity for the realization of the “Media Literacy and Civic Engagement” project.

Digital Media Club

In addition to the contextual factors related to the school, its history, location, students and culture, those individuals engaged in experiential learning-based media education at South provided even further opportunities for this research project. In the spring of 2011, University of Denver professor Lynn Schofield Clark partnered with Ben Peters, an educator contracted to work at South through Goodwill, to develop some type

²¹ <http://www.whitehouse.gov/state-of-the-union-2011>

of media-oriented project at the school. Dr. Clark is an author, Associate Professor, and Director of the Estlow International Center for Journalism and New Media at DU, and Mr. Peters is an author, an educator and the director of a social-justice oriented social media marketing firm. In cooperation with a number of other faculty, undergraduate and graduate students from the University of Denver, Dr. Clark and Mr. Peters developed The Digital Media Club which provided an opportunity for students interested in media studies and production to practice media analysis, develop some basic media production skills, and interact with university students studying media and professionals working in the media industries. The club was held each Thursday, during the school's early-release period, and activities included field trips to the local television news station and to a public-access television station, a collaboration with DU students to create a promotional video for South's website, and the student-led production of short films documenting South's diversity, history, and unique academic and extra-curricular programs. In developing the Digital Media Club, Dr. Clark contacted me to determine whether I would consider participating in the project because of my interest and experience in media literacy education. During the fall of 2011, I attended the club a number of times, helping plan and lead a few media analysis activities and developing a relationship with the students and faculty from South and DU who attended. Knowing that I was in search of a venue for my own media literacy project, Dr. Clark offered to allow me to lead the Digital Media Club and conduct my research in the spring of 2012.

South High Schools Digital Media Club was held in a computer lab in the rear of the school, adjacent to Mr. Peters' office. The lab is a windowless room that holds close to forty iMac desktop computers and multiple digital projectors. During the school day

the room is used by the video production, professional preparation, and technology courses. This access to technology was helpful as I was able to share visual presentations, video and audio clips via the projector, and each student had the ability to use their own computer to do research online, record and edit video.

Media Literacy & Civic Engagement Project: An Introduction

On March 1, 2012, we launched the “Media Literacy and Civic Engagement” project as part of South High School’s Digital Media Club. To promote student participation in the project, we announced it to students who had been frequently attending the club, posted flyers in the school with information (Appendix A), and aired a short video promoting the club on South’s weekly student-produced news broadcast, The Rebel Report. In all of the promotional efforts, the civic component of the project was particularly emphasized—for example, the promotional video featured short video clips of influential figures in global social movements (Martin Luther King, Mahatma Gandhi and Nelson Mandela among them), interspersed with information about the club’s civic emphasis, and accompanied by a song from the Denver-based, socially-conscious hip-hop group, the Flobots. The emphasis of civic engagement in these promotional efforts was especially effective in encouraging attendance among those students who were particularly interested in using media analysis and production to be more involved in solving problems facing their community.

As seen in the lesson plans (Appendices B1-B9²²), the project's curriculum was roughly structured in three phases—(1) Media and Civic Life, (2) Media Studies, and (3) Media Production. In the first phase (Appendices B1 - B2), class discussion and activities centered on the interrelation of media and civic life. Students learned about how media may be understood as both perpetuating challenges facing our communities and potentially providing the means of engaging with these challenges. In the second phase (Appendices B3 - B5) class discussions and activities explored media messages, media institutions and media audiences. Students learned how the form and content of media messages work to communicate a certain perspective to its audience. They learned how media adheres to certain conventions, in part, as a result of the media industries emphasis of profits. And they learned how media can potentially influence their audience's attitudes and behaviors, and how media education and alternative media production are means of empowering media audiences. And in the third phase (Appendices B6 – B9), class discussion and activities primarily focused on each groups planning and execution of their media production projects. Students developed and practiced their media production skills, while making efforts to implement the concepts and strategies they learned in the previous phases into their group projects.

While student participation fluctuated a great deal from week to week—some weeks as few as five showed up, while other weeks over a dozen students participated—a core group of nine students consistently participated in the project. Abel is a seventeen year-old male, eleventh grader who recently emigrated from Ethiopia. Anise is a fifteen

²² There are only nine lesson plans included as appendices because the last two weeks of the project were entirely devoted to the students' production of their alternative media projects.

year-old male, tenth grader of Libyan decent. Said is an eighteen year-old male, twelfth grader born in Somalia, and raised in Kenya and the U.S. Abdiaziz is a seventeen year-old, eleventh grader also from Somalia. Yonas is a seventeen year-old male, eleventh grader born in Ethiopia, but raised in New York and Denver. Ezana is an eighteen year-old male, eleventh grader also recently immigrated from Ethiopia. Jennifer is a fifteen year-old female, ninth grader who recently immigrated from Taiwan. David is a fifteen year-old male, ninth grader of Native American decent from Denver. Gio is a fifteen year-old, Latino American male, fifteen year old ninth grader also from Denver.

Perhaps not surprisingly, given the various cultures and backgrounds of the student participants, the uses of and preferences for certain types of media vary widely among the group. Yonas, for example, prides himself on watching the NBC nightly news with Brian Williams, while most other students note that any news they do view is most likely shared with them by a friend via social media. David and Gio both spend a lot of time playing first-person shooter video games on their consoles at home and very rarely use Facebook if at all, whereas other students admit to constantly checking their Twitter and Facebook pages using their smart phones but rarely playing video games. Jennifer does not often watch movies, listen to music, nor does she have a television in her home; instead, she uses Facebook to mostly chat with her friends from Taiwan. Whereas, students like Abel, Yonas, and Anise often post song lyrics, quotes from movies and TV shows, and other popular memes to their Twitter, Facebook or Tumblr pages.

In addition to the students' different cultures, native languages, media uses and preferences, their involvement in extracurricular activities also varies quite a bit. Perhaps because they are obligated to stay on campus until their afternoon track practice, a

majority of the participants—Abel, Anise, Said, Abdiaziz, and Ezana—are on the track and field team. At the start of class, they can often be found looking up local news stories about recent meets, and watching YouTube videos of collegiate runners that they admire. David and Gio are a part of South’s JROTC program, and practice with the drill team after school. They also often search online for military-related video-game and movie clips. Ezana and Yonas are members of South’s chapter of Padres y Jovenes Unidos²³—a community organization that addresses the incarceration of urban youth—as well as participate in the student government. Jennifer, brand new to the school and the country, was referred to Digital Media Club by one of her teachers who (because of Jennifer’s interest in art) thought that she might be interested in and benefit from the experiences provided by the project.

Perhaps tangentially, I feel it necessary to acknowledge the curious lack of female student participants in the project. While in previous semesters of the Digital Media Club, there had existed a larger proportion of male student participants than females, the number of female participants dropped even lower as this project began. While the students who consistently attended were constantly inviting their friends—male and female—to participate in the club’s activities, those who continued attending were male, and the only female student who consistently attended the club was Jennifer. This issue of gender will be discussed in greater detail in the following chapter.

Now (as discussed in a previous chapter) given critical media literacy education’s foundation in the theoretical concepts emphasized by the Frankfurt School and found in the writings of Plato, John Dewey and those social theorists and media scholars that

²³ Learn more about Padres y Jovenes Unidos at <http://www.padresunidos.org/>

follow in their traditions, the class activities, discussions and assignments were specifically designed and implemented with these concepts in mind. By introducing the concepts of the *dialectic*, the *culture industry* and *praxis* to the students, and then giving them the opportunity to engage with these concepts in their media analysis and production, the program's intention was to use media education as a means of encouraging the students' development of critical consciousness and civic engagement. The remainder of the chapter includes descriptions of the discussions and activities that address each of these concepts.

The Dialectic

If, according to Horkheimer's "Traditional and Critical Theory" (1937), the objective of the Frankfurt School's dialectical social critique is "to strive for a state of affairs in which there will be no exploitation or oppression, in which an all-embracing subject, namely self-aware mankind, exists..." then critical media literacy education must encourage students (1) to identify and work to overcome the contradictions within society, (2) to understand the media's role in perpetuating (and ultimately overcoming) these contradictions, and (3) to be conscious of their own participation in the perpetuation of and/or potential emancipation from these contradictions. During the course of the project, we engaged in class activities and discussions specifically designed to address each of these three aspects of the dialectic.

(1) In order to encourage the students to identify and work to overcome the contradictions within their society, the phrase "Is vs. Ought" was commonly repeated in class discussions. The curriculum's emphasis of this comparison of 'is' and 'ought' was

intended to encourage students to evaluate existing social practices, institutions, relations, etc. according to a universal standard of equitable, intersubjective social relations²⁴. This concept was initially introduced, though not explicitly, in the first activity held the first week of the project. In order to introduce the how media and civic life are interrelated, I shared a clip from the movie *Be Kind Rewind* (2008) in which the characters use media production as a means of addressing a challenge that faces their community. In order to raise money to save the local video-rental store from foreclosure—a symbolic act initiating the gentrification of the neighborhood and the displacement of its citizens—a diverse group of neighbors collaborate on the production of a quasi-documentary film chronicling the life of jazz musician Fats Waller in their town.

Following the clip, we first identified the challenge facing the community—the gentrification of the neighborhood and displacement of its residents. I explained that this challenge provided the *is*—the video-rental store *is* being threatened with foreclosure, symbolizing the residents’ loss of this place and its history. Then, we identified the efforts engaged in by the members of the community to address this challenge—the collaborative production of a film about the town’s history to raise awareness of and funds for their cause. I then explained that this effort addressed the *ought*—communities *ought* to be able to exercise some right to the place where they live and the history it has. This point is nicely articulated by one of the film’s characters who—while acknowledging the factual inaccuracy of Fats Waller’s life in the neighborhood—claims

²⁴ This is not to suggest that the students’ conceptualizations of ‘ought’ were purely subjective. In many cases, the students’ critiques shared some affinity with the pre-theoretical foundations of the Frankfurt scholars’ social critiques—Horkheimer (labor), Habermas (discourse), and Honneth (recognition). Despite this similarity, students’ self-directed social critique (understandably) lacked the theoretical rigor of the immanent critique conducted by these scholars.

ownership of this local history. She says, “Our past belongs to us. We can change it if we want” (*Be Kind Rewind* 2008). So, by altering the history of *their* neighborhood in *their* fabrication of facts for *their* documentary, these members of the community are thereby making efforts to alter *their* future. I then paraphrased the previous quote, stating that ‘their future belongs to them and they can change it if they want.’ And furthermore, given that the struggle that the film’s characters are engaging in is one of embodied space, they are also claiming ownership over their neighborhood and resisting others’ efforts to alter it. Again, I paraphrased, stating that ‘their community belongs to them and they can refuse changes to it if they want.’

Having discussed the significance of the clip, we participated in an activity in order to practice the type of dialectical work engaged in by the film’s characters. In order to determine what *is* happening in the community versus what *ought* to be happening (both at South and in the surrounding neighborhoods), the students first identified challenges that they observed facing their community. Students suggested a shortage of textbooks, limited public transportation for students, and poor attendance among students (among others). Each having identified a challenge that *is* facing their community, students were then encouraged to propose what *ought* to be happening instead. Their responses were, respectively, sufficient resources and adequate transportation for students as well as education of and incentives for students to attend class regularly. Having begun to recognize some contradictions plaguing their community in South, the students then divided into small groups and canvassed the campus, interviewing students and faculty about what they felt were the greatest challenges facing the community. Abel’s interview with one faculty member was particularly interesting in the way in which it modeled

dialectical social critique. In the following exchange, the faculty member identifies a challenge that *is* facing South High School and what *ought* to be done to change that.

Abel: And what are, like, the strengths of South High School and what are the weaknesses of South High School?

Faculty: Well, I think that the strength of our school is in our diversity and the great teaching staff we have here. I think the weakness is that [Denver Public Schools], by and large, refuses to recognize that you cannot cookie-cut policy. You cannot make one policy working at one school and think that it will work district wide. And I feel that that needs to be addressed. I think that the individual learning needs of our kids need to be addressed on a more individual level.

Here, the faculty member notes that while South's diverse student population is among its greatest strengths, district policies that assess student proficiency in reading and writing, for example, present a challenge to a school with roughly half of its students enrolled in an ESL program. Requiring a school with such diversity to meet the same standards as other schools unjustly affects the learning of its students.

Abel: And what can we do to prevent that or to change that, from the students' and the teachers' perspective?

Faculty: Communication. I think that students and teachers need to write, call, show up at school-board meetings, call school-board members, write school-board members, write to the superintendent, call the superintendent, and tell him or her, whoever it may be as superintendent or board member. Let them know that you cannot make—like, for instance, AP policy. AP policy does not consider either the hard work you do in the classroom or the diversity and language skills of its students. And that is very much something that needs to be addressed.

Now, as the conversation continued, Abel—perhaps as a result of the previous conversation about the lack of resources such as textbooks experienced by the students at South—asked the faculty member whether South *ought* to receive some sort of financial assistance to address this problem.

Abel: And when you say we need to talk about it, communicate about it, does it have to do with finances? Money?

Faculty: No. It's just, 'This is not okay.' You need to consider the population of each school when you make policy. And it doesn't need a financial boost. It just needs recognition, and I don't think that occurs here. We are so test-driven that we don't consider the hard work that these kids do in the classroom. We're so standardized test-driven that that's all we see—a number. And it's a shame.

This dialogue, not unlike those of Socrates and his fellow Greek philosophers, demonstrates the power of the dialectic at identifying and seeking to resolve the challenges that face society. In this case, a student and teacher recognize the difficulties faced by South students due to seemingly unjust school district policies. The teacher proposes more individualized learning plans for South students. The student responds with a question of whether this might be accomplished through a redistribution of resources. And the teacher answers that awareness and advocacy on the part of students, parents and teachers would be a more effective solution than an increase of funding.

(2) The following week, students organized into small groups and developed pitches for the projects that they would work on for the remainder of the semester. Essentially, students were to choose a social issue that interested or affected them, participate in media analysis activities to determine what part the media play in perpetuating this problem, and create their own media message to somehow raise awareness for or otherwise address this problem. In order to demonstrate a successful project pitch, I used Abel's interview with the faculty member as the basis of my proposed project. First, I shared the faculty member's concern about these policies, and his suggestion that members of the school's community advocate to the administration about changing these policies. To provide some context for this issue, I introduced the No

Child Left Behind Act to the students, and provided South High School's most recent annual report from NCLB. In the 2010-11 school year, NCLB performance indicators based on students' standardized testing results determined that South High School did not meet expectations for academic achievement in reading, mathematics, writing, or science (see Figure 1).

Performance Indicators							Level: High School	
School: SOUTH HIGH SCHOOL - 8086							(1 Year****)	
Academic Achievement	Points Earned	Points Eligible	% Points	Rating	N	% Proficient/Advanced	School's Percentile	
Reading	1	4		Does Not Meet	628	33.6%	3	
Mathematics	1	4		Does Not Meet	633	33.0%	10	
Writing	1	4		Does Not Meet	631	20.9%	6	
Science	1	4		Does Not Meet	324	20.1%	7	
Total	4	16	25%	Does Not Meet				
Academic Growth	Points Earned	Points Eligible	% Points	Rating	N	Median Growth Percentile	Median Adequate Growth Percentile	Made Adequate Growth?
Reading	3	4		Meets	511	58	87	No
Mathematics	3	4		Meets	512	57	99	No
Writing	3	4		Meets	511	57	97	No
Total	9	12	75%	Meets				
Academic Growth Gaps	Points Earned	Points Eligible	% Points	Rating	Subgroup N	Subgroup Median Growth Percentile	Subgroup Median Adequate Growth Percentile	Made Adequate Growth?
Reading	14	20	70%	Meets				
Free/Reduced Lunch Eligible	3	4		Meets	349	58	97	No
Minority Students	3	4		Meets	394	56	95	No
Students w/ Disabilities	2	4		Approaching	38	52	95	No
English Language Learners	3	4		Meets	287	58	99	No
Students needing to catch up	3	4		Meets	327	56	99	No
Mathematics	15	20	75%	Meets				
Free/Reduced Lunch Eligible	3	4		Meets	349	60	99	No
Minority Students	3	4		Meets	396	56	99	No
Students w/ Disabilities	3	4		Meets	38	58	99	No
English Language Learners	3	4		Meets	287	58	99	No
Students needing to catch up	3	4		Meets	413	57	99	No
Writing	14	20	70%	Meets				
Free/Reduced Lunch Eligible	3	4		Meets	349	56	99	No
Minority Students	3	4		Meets	394	55	99	No
Students w/ Disabilities	2	4		Approaching	38	47	99	No
English Language Learners	3	4		Meets	287	58	99	No
Students needing to catch up	3	4		Meets	398	55	99	No
Total	43	60	71.7%	Meets				
Postsecondary and Workforce Readiness	Points Earned	Points Eligible	% Points	Rating	N	Rate/Score	Minimum State Expectation	
Graduation Rate: 4yr/3yr/9yr/7yr	2	4		Approaching	348/365/328/375	61.8/66.1/70.4/63.5%	80%	
Dropout Rate	3	4		Meets	2,873	2.6%	At/below State average	
Colorado ACT Composite	1	4		Does Not Meet	269	16.4	At/above State average	
Total	6	12	50.0%	Approaching				

Figure 1: NCLB 2011 Annual Report for SHS – Performance Indicators

According to the report, this failure to meet expectations is due, in part, to the fact that the school puts “limited focus on sustained writing strategies,” and therefore students have difficulty writing short responses to test questions in all subject areas (see Figure 2).

Performance Indicators	Description of Significant Trends (3 years of past data)	Priority Needs	Root Causes
Academic Achievement (Status)	Our three year trend of students scoring proficient or above on CSAP tested areas has remained relatively flat (reading, writing, math and science).	Improve writing in all content areas with a focus on short constructed response questions	Writing was less of a school-wide focus. The focus has been on reading across all content areas.
	9 th Writing '08 18% , '09 23%, '10 20 % 10 th Writing '08 22, '09 22%, '10 21%	Increase writing proficiency at least 5% on CSAP in all content areas where the focus is on short constructed responses.	Based on the reading data, there was a focus on reading and a limited focus on sustained writing strategies.

Figure 2: NCLB 2011 Annual Report for SHS – Trends, Needs, Causes

The report, then, lists among the school's priority needs to "Improve writing in all content areas with a focus on short constructed response questions" (see Figure 2). Then as part of my sample project pitch, I compared the two contrasting analyses of the situation. While both the interviewed faculty member and the NCLB report essentially dealt with the same issue—the struggle between the students' individual learning needs and the education they experienced at South—their identifications of the challenge (*is*) and the solution (*ought*) varied greatly. While the faculty member identified the school district's policy as failing to adequately ensure students' learning, the NCLB report identified the education students received at South as failing to adequately meet the policy standards. And while the faculty member suggested that the community engage in conversations about how to shape policies that acknowledge the individual strengths of South's students, the NCLB report proposed the school teachers' and administrators' increased attention to developing students' writing skills. I then added that if this were an issue that I chose to pursue on my own, my project would entail determining which analysis most adequately addressed this situation and then engaging in an effort to bring about a solution. I would read/watch news coverage of education, research educational policies, and maybe watch documentaries like *Waiting for Superman* (2010) or *American Teacher* (2011) that addressed the crisis in education in the U.S. Having gathered and critically analyzed information on the issue, I would then choose a media production project that I felt would best introduce my own perspective to the public conversation about the issue.

Following the presentation of my sample project pitch, the students met briefly in their groups, assembled some facts, images and other materials to help illustrate their

arguments, and then presented their own pitches. The issues addressed in the groups varied—Jennifer presented on the need for a recycling initiative at South, citing the high percentage of un-recycled waste produced by Denver residents. Jennifer described the significance of her project saying, “I think it’s important because if you don’t recycle, the world will...all of the country will be all trash. And we will live in the trash. And everywhere will be pollute.” Ezana and Yonas presented on the issue of the policing of public schools and the incarceration of urban youth, issues that they were familiar with already due to their participation in *Padres y Jovenes Unidos*. Abel and Anise (later joined by Said and Abdiaziz) presented on the drought affecting east Africa, and discussed how this was a challenge not only for those currently living in the affected nations but also the students at South whose families came to the U.S. as refugees as a result of the crisis. And in a following meeting, David and Gio presented on the issue of the mistreatment of youth of color by law enforcement. Gio described their project, saying “the project we are working on is about police brutality, I guess, around the U.S. or anywhere around the world. How the law mistreat, or misabuse its name and what it represents, because of its acts of cruelty towards such innocents, or whatever.” Each of these pitches was interesting because for many of the students, this was their first real engagement with these issues. So, while the challenges they discuss and the solutions they propose were somewhat superficial, this engagement with the issues was a significant first step in the students’ journey toward recognizing and addressing the contradictions face by their community.

(3) In order to encourage the students to more rigorously engage with the complexity of their chosen social issues, a few weeks later we had a follow-up activity

which revisited this theme of ‘Is vs. Ought.’ First, I played an excerpt from the radio program *This American Life*, in which two teenagers at a youth correctional facility engage with their own, somewhat alarming, challenge. “Hi, I’m Joey,” the segment begins, “and I ate somebody’s urine” (“20 Acts in 60 Minutes”). The two young documentarians investigate the truthfulness of a rumor that another youth urinated in the pudding served in the center’s cafeteria. In order to learn more about the problem and, if necessary, work toward a solution, the two teens interview one of the adult employees supervising the cafeteria. As a class, we discussed how these teens, Joey and Jake were not unlike the South students: they identify a problem—someone *is* peeing in their pudding—and work toward a solution—those responsible for their food *ought* to ensure that it is safe to eat. However, as we continued to listen to the clip, the complexity of this situation became evident. When asked about the potential contamination of the food, the employee, Mr. Wyman, immediately gets angry at the teens and shows them an incredible lack of disrespect.

Joey: Excuse me, Mr. Wyman? I was wondering if I could interview you and talk to you about people putting—if it happened—glass in our pancakes and peeing in the pudding and stuff. We was wondering what you had to say about that.

Wyman: They don’t. Nobody does that. You kids don’t handle the food at all.

Joey: We heard that it was brought up at briefing that somebody put glass in the pancakes.

Wyman: No, it wasn’t glass. It was a piece of plastic. It came from one of the glasses out there in the dining room that you kids had.

Joey: Do you know how it got into the pancake batter?

Wyman: It didn’t get into the pancake batter. It was put in there afterwards.

Jake: Well, we heard different from other kids.

Wyman: You heard different? Do you know anything about it?

Joey: We heard that it was—

Wyman: Do you have any idea, whatsoever, what's going on?!

Jake: That's why we came to you, to get an idea.

Wyman: No. That's not why you came to me! You came to me because you thought it was true!

Jake: Yeah—

Wyman: And you kept it going!

Jake: If somebody said that they messed with your food, joking or not, wouldn't you want to know what really happened or not?

Wyman: No! I would totally go with the kitchen crew and what you guys have been told.

Jake: So, you would believe the kitchen crew over the person, no matter how much credibility you can give them? You believe the kitchen crew over them?

Wyman: Of course! Because you don't cook the food! You think its funny, don't you! You really think it's funny!

Jake: No, I really don't think it's funny.

Wyman: Then why are you grinnin' like a Cheshire cat?

Jake: Because you're going, friggin', zero-to-ten just because we're asking a bunch of questions.

Wyman: No, it's not what you're asking. It's how you're asking the same thing over again, and you're trying to get an answer. But there isn't any answer there.

Joey: Alright, this is obviously not working.

(“20 Acts in 60 Minutes”)

At this point, we discussed as a class how the teens' progress from identifying a challenge to working toward a solution is disrupted by their recognition of a larger problem—the lack of respect among employees of the facility for the young offenders. In order for any problem at the facility to be overcome, this underlying issue of the employees disrespect for the teens needs first to be addressed. As a class we identified that there *is* a culture of disrespect in the facility, and that this was the greater challenge.

Following this discussion, each group completed a 'Is vs. Ought Worksheet' (Appendix C) designed to help the students implement this concept of critique in their engagement with their chosen social issues. First, the students identified the initial problem (*is*) and a commonly pursued solution to this problem (*ought*). In many cases, the solutions the students listed reflected what they said *ought* to be happening in their project pitches from just a few weeks prior. For example, in response to the crisis in East Africa, Anise and Abel had initially proposed a project designed to encourage students at South to donate their spare change to drought relief. Reflecting upon the group's pitch, Anise said in his video journal the day of the pitch,

Alright, hello. My name is Anise and today in Digital Media Club we were learning about how we are affecting the community. And I think that some of the ideas that the students gave in this club were pretty inventive, and I really liked some of them. *And my idea is how can we help the East African drought, you know, how we can donate money to help them all out. And then me and my partner Abel were thinking of making those little donation boxes by the water fountains so they can donate money.* And I really liked the other students' ideas about recycling and how to take students out of jail... Yeah, I really liked today's Digital Media class, and I think it'll be really successful. Bye. Thank you.

Next, each group was encouraged to use the knowledge they had gained in the research they had done on their issue in the past few weeks to identify an underlying challenge (*is*) that prevented this initial solution from being effective. For example, Abel

and Anise wrote that, “The media focus on what grabs people’s attention. Media isn’t interested in the whole problem.” During their research, Anise and Abel realized that the media coverage of the drought in East Africa fails to represent some of the complexities of the problem, and therefore the global public is unaware of the most effective means of administering aid to the affected nations. And lastly, in response to this underlying challenge, the students then identified a solution (*ought*) that would address not just their initial challenge but, more importantly, the larger problem that contributed to it. Anise and Abel recognized that for the public to be meaningfully involved in overcoming the challenges associated with the drought, that they have to be given more accurate, detailed information. This newly recognized need—the development of media content that more effectively informs the public of the challenges facing East African nations—then became Abel and Anise’s primary objective and replaced the donation campaign that they had proposed in their pitch weeks earlier. They wrote on their worksheet:

We need to focus on the whole problem. Show the whole story. Telling others the consequences of what will happen if they don’t help. Make a video [with] more data and sources on what’s going on at East Africa and to focus on more of East African drought than just only focusing on Somalia.

Thus, by engaging in a dialectical social critique, Abel and Anise were able to recognize the inadequacies of their initial project proposal and revise it to more effectively engage with larger, more systematic problems contributing to the crisis in East Africa.

And as discussed in the last chapter, Anise’s initial reflection on the project quoted above was just one of the first of many video journals the students recorded during the course of the project. In order to document the students’ learning and have constant feedback on their participation in the project, students recorded weekly video

journals at the end of each session. Not only did this exercise provide me with a clearer understanding of their comprehension of the concepts introduced in our discussions and their development of critical consciousness, it also encouraged students to speak about their individual learning progress and to critically reflect on their participation in these issues of media and civic life. While the substance of these journals varied greatly from student to student, week to week, their participation in this activity did seem to prepare them to critically reflect on their engagement in the project (something that will be addressed shortly). Ultimately, the *dialectic* served as a guiding principle through all stages of the project—in the students’ learning and praxis, the pedagogical methods and the evaluative approach I employed.

The Culture Industry

In addition to of the Frankfurt School’s emphasis of the dialectic as the means of social critique, Horkheimer and Adorno’s discussion of how mass communication functions in contemporary capitalist society also informed the activities and discussions that we participated in class. They write

Culture today is infecting everything with sameness. Film, radio and magazines form a system. Each branch of culture is unanimous within itself and all are unanimous together. Even the aesthetic manifestations of political opposites proclaim the same inflexible rhythm. (94)

Drawing from this description in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, I introduced the concept of the culture industry to the students in terms of (1) the *unity* within media messages, (2) the *uniformity* across media messages, and (3) the *interests* of media industries.

(1) First, in order to introduce the concept of *unity* within media messages, I compared the happy endings experienced by characters in popular entertainment media

versus the consequences faced by individuals in similar situations in reality. I began the discussion by referencing some Hollywood movies that might be familiar to the students—*The Pursuit of Happyness* (2006), *The Blind Side* (2009), and *The Karate Kid* (2010). I explained that in each of these movies, the main characters are young black men from urban areas who, despite enormous challenges facing them (poverty, racism, violence, etc.) achieve incredible success in their chosen area of interest (whether it be accounting, football or kung-fu). Then, I asked the students—all of them being urban youth of color—about the reality of these representations, and the astuteness of David’s response took me by surprise.

Instructor: So, if we look at these three movies, what do these three movies, what do their endings say about what young black men can do? If you’re poor and you’re black and you’re a man and you live in a city, what can you do?

Anise: Anything.

Instructor: You can do anything you want? Okay, so they all have very happy endings.

David: Except for one.

Instructor: Which one?

David: That case on the East coast, where that kid got shot.

Instructor: Treyvon Martin?

David: [nods]

Instructor: Okay. That’s exactly—you guys are reading my mind. [I switch to the next slide of the presentation that includes a photo of Treyvon Martin.] Exactly. Treyvon Martin. This is a story about a young black man, alright? And what happened?

Anise: He got shot.

Instructor: Yeah, he was seventeen years old. He got shot.

Anise: And he only had Skittles and an Arizona Iced Tea drink.

Instructor: That's right.

David: Walking down the street with a hoodie.

During the project, there was constant media coverage of the death of Trayvon Martin and the trial of his shooter George Zimmerman. And this current event—beyond just providing an opportunity for us to discuss the Hollywood's misrepresentation of the urban, African-American experience—sparked the interest of David and Gio, who after this discussion, decided to focus on issues of racism and violence in their project. After discussing Trayvon Martin's death and then conducting some research online about other instances of racism and police brutality, both students shared similar experiences.

David: And there's different ways to judge people, like on how they look, too. Like what happened in that case, he was a young male African-American walking alone at night, and they judged him on his appearance. Like recently, a couple of days ago, I was at the market, and they actually called the cops on me. It was because I was the youngest that was there, and they thought I was trying to shoplift. And I wasn't. And that's kind of messed up, that they judged me on my appearance.

Gio: People thought I was robbing a house.

Instructor: People what?

Gio: One time, people thought I was robbing a house.

Instructor: Why?

Gio: So, I just wanted to see our new house, or whatever.

Instructor: You were just walking by the house?

Gio: It was an empty house. What am I supposed to take from it?

Instructor: So, they thought, just because you were looking at the house...

Gio: And it was at night too. They called the cops.

Instructor: Somebody called the cops?

Gio: And I had to talk to the cops about it.

In both David and Gio's circumstances, their age and appearance contributed to their being falsely accused of crime and reported to the police. And while these incidents are admittedly minor compared to the death of Trayvon Martin (especially given that the rate black male teenage homicide victims in the U.S.—while on the decline—is seven times more than the rate among their white counterparts²⁵), these students clearly responded to the contrast between the unity represented in Hollywood movies and the complexities of their own individual experiences.

(2) Second, in order to draw the students' attention to the *uniformity* across media messages, we identified and discussed examples of 'sameness' in popular culture. I began the discussion by referencing a recently released film that many of the students had just seen in theaters, *The Hunger Games* (2012). My introduction was as follows:

The Hunger Games is getting a lot of crap because supposedly the story of *The Hunger Games* is very similar to a number of other stories. And so people feel like, basically, they're just ripping off these other stories. So, it's kind of like *Survivor*. In *Survivor*, everyone's stuck in this certain place, and they're trying to win, and it's a game show on TV. That's kind of like *The Hunger Games*. *The Hunger Games* is about in the future, there's this game show in which kids are chosen to come into this arena and fight to the death, and the whole thing is on TV. It's kind of like a movie I saw when I was younger with Arnold Schwarzenegger called *The Running Man*, where he's wrongly accused of a crime. So, then he has to go on a TV show and basically do the same thing—like, fight people to the death. There's this Japanese manga that became a movie called *Battle Royale* where a bunch of school children are captured and are, basically, forced to fight to the death and kill each other. And this idea comes from movies like the *Gladiator*, or not even movies but what actually happened

²⁵ <http://bjs.ojp.usdoj.gov/content/pub/pdf/htus8008.pdf>

in ancient Rome. They would get people together, and for the sport of the masses, they would have people kill each other in the arena. It's kind of like books you may have read like *The Giver* or *1984* where it talks about future societies in which society has kind of collapsed and people are oppressed by their governments... So, you can see that, like, I don't know if *The Hunger Games* really ripped all of these things off, but there are a lot of similarities. In some ways, all these things are kind of uniform.

In response to my introductory discussion of the similarities between these media narratives, the students came up with their own examples of uniformity. First, Abel offered the example of Spiderman. At the time, *The Amazing Spiderman*—a reboot of the Spiderman film franchise—was being heavily promoted in preparation for its release that summer. With suggestion, the students named other superhero movies that had been produced in the last few years—*Iron Man*, *The Avengers*, *The Green Lantern*, *The Green Hornet*, *Captain America*. Then, Anise offered the example of the television show *X Factor*. We then discussed how song and dance competition shows—including *American Idol*, *So You Think You Can Dance*, *The Voice*, *The Sing-Off*, and *Dancing with the Stars*—were being produced by all of the television networks. Anise, whose family is from Libya and speaks Arabic, even offered that there is an Arabic version of *American Idol*, highlighting that this uniformity is not specific to American or Western popular culture, but is a global phenomenon.

Next, we applied our new understanding of uniformity to the 'sameness' found not just in entertainment media, but news coverage of some of the issues the students were interested in. First, I offered my own recollection of the media representations of the Occupy Wall Street movement in the fall of 2011. I remarked that especially early on in the Occupy protests, media outlets could not seem to comprehend that Occupy was a leaderless, non-partisan, democratically-organized movement of diverse people with

different perspectives on a variety of issues related to economic inequality. Instead, commentators on the news repeatedly asked about its leadership and its objectives. I continued, saying

And so, if you're talking about uniformity, you could say that the news coverage—the way that the news was covering Occupy—they're always saying the same thing. Without exception, they were always saying, 'We don't understand this because there's no leader. You need to have a leader. You need to have, like, a piece of paper that says the point of your protest, and then we'll take you seriously.'

Sameness, then, is not simply a characteristic of popular movies and television programs, but also present across news coverage of social and political issues.

We continued our discussion by discussing a similar example of uniformity in the news coverage of the *Kony 2012* campaign. Just weeks prior to our discussion, the charitable organization Invisible Children's sensational documentary film about the atrocities committed by the war-lord Joseph Kony against the children of Uganda had gone viral, gaining the issue (and the campaign itself) enormous media attention. During previous weeks, the students had engaged in long discussions about the Kony 2012 campaign, debating the veracity of the claims made by the filmmakers and the manipulative strategies used in the film. Because of their age, enthusiasm and use of social media, the students were among the demographic targeted by the filmmakers to raise awareness about the issue, but the unique circumstances of the students (many of them being African refugees who only recently immigrated to the U.S.) made their readings of the film and the issue even more complicated and interesting.

For example, when students Ezana and Yonas, as well as Dr. Lynn Clark, were asked to discuss the uses and effects of social media as guests on the local PBS affiliate's

program *Studio 12*²⁶, the complex (and sometimes contradictory) nature of their understandings of an issue like *Kony 2012* become evident. The following is an excerpt from their televised conversation:

Host: Once you get your news information, do you then have conversations around it. And then does that nugget of fact, sort of, turn into something else, an opinion versus something that started as an actual news piece, particularly when you're Tweeting?

Ezana: I mean, personally, once that media reaches an individual, it does spread around. I mean, in teenage kids, it does spread around. And it affects how the other person sees it. I mean, if they already had a perception of what they learned from the media they got, in the way they present themselves to tell other people—like if it's 'cool' or if everybody's doing it...An example you can see with this was the Kony 2012. I don't know if you heard about that?

Host: Oh yeah...

Ezana: They've been doing this protesting thing for a while, but they came up with an idea and they saw how teenage kids were being affected by social media. So, they had a campaign to get him famous. And part of their campaign was to go on Facebook, Twitter and to just talk about him. And it affected people because you started suddenly seeing everybody's profile picture was Kony 2012. Everybody was talking about it, and you just got curious. Everybody just went along, saw the video, and...

Yonas: If I may say something, this kind of Kony thing reminds me of history repeating itself again, but now in a different context. Just like how the U.S. went over to Vietnam and everything. Everyone was riled up against it, even though we have problems in inner cities and within the country itself. How can you go to a different country and try to help out? Or even try to do something when there are horrible things facing the U.S.?

Host: ...when we have problems here. Right...So, do you think that there's a way that that message—or maybe it already has—that message can be sent via social networking—this counter-viewpoint that you have of the Kony video?

²⁶ To view their conversation on *Studio 12*, visit <http://video.cpt12.org/video/2228942292>.

Yonas: I definitely disagree with it. So much, that I made it my Twitter background because I was making fun of it. Because it just didn't help the right people that it's supposed to help...

Host: So, being able to use social media, you were able to get your point of view out?

Yonas: Yeah.

Ezana: And a good example is right here. I mean, [Yonas] really has a different view on Kony 2012. I mean, he's not for it. He's not that much against it, but he doesn't really believe in it. That's what he's told me. But as you can see, a lot of people don't believe the same thing that Yonas does.

(“Social Media Impact”)

Here, Ezana simultaneously critiqued how particular perspectives on current events can be popularized using social media, especially among young audiences, while acknowledging that he himself has been influenced by the *Kony 2012* campaign's representation of the crisis in Uganda. Yonas, on the other hand, chose to focus on how the popularization of the Kony 2012 video distracts the American public from the challenges facing youth living in inner cities (as he proudly wore his Padres y Jovenes Unidos t-shirt). Social media, in his case, was a means of voicing his own critique of the Kony campaign—through his ironic appropriation of the imagery and the tweets he shared on the subject. For example, during the beginning of March, when the Kony 2012 campaign video first went viral, Yonas tweeted the following two messages—“My passion for humanity far exceeds Kony. U might B able to persuade a 17yearoldkid to buy a peace kit. But not a 17yearoldman.” and “If you think my background is to support the ‘Kony movement’ slap yourself.”

The students' diverse perspectives on and participation in media surrounding *Kony 2012* provided a definite contrast to the uniformity of the news coverage covering

the campaign. In order to demonstrate this ‘sameness,’ I showed a clip from *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* in which footage from a number of cable news programs was edited together in sequence. In each consecutive clip, the commentators essentially said the same thing—that while journalists had been covering the story in Uganda for several years, the issue did not gain traction among the public until the *Kony 2012* video went viral. And in this case, the uniformity of news coverage provides the setup for a good joke—Stewart follows the sequence with an impersonation of the frustrated journalists, whining, “I mean, what the [bleep]? I mean...I mean...We’re handsome. We’re on TV. Why won’t Rihanna re-tweet our Kony stories?” (“My Little Kony”).

Having identified the tendency for the mainstream media to uniformly represent issues like the Kony campaign, we then discussed how this observed sameness in media messages might function as a reminder of the imperatives of media institutions. In the following exchange, we discuss the motivations for film studios and television networks to produce such uniform content.

Instructor: So, Jon Stewart was saying that if we look across all the news coverage of Kony and we think about the things that are the same—the things that are uniform—they’re always saying, ‘Why does no one pay attention to us when they’re paying attention to this new video? We’ve been talking about this for a long time.’ So, that gets us to the question: Why would TV stations make *American Idol* and *The Voice* and all of these shows that are practically the same?

Anise: And not help out some kids that...

Instructor: And not do something else, something that’s more interesting or something that matters more.

Anise: Because they’re after the money.

Instructor: Because they’re after the money. Okay. So, why would news outlets, like all of these news outlets that cover, for example the Kony campaign, why would they be like, ‘Why didn’t you guys listen to us?’

Why didn't you listen to us? We've been talking about this for a long time.' Why would they say that?

Abel: Because that's their job. Because they get paid just to do that.

Instructor: Exactly.

Abel: And the more viewers they have, the more their status goes up.

Anise: And money. You know, on YouTube they pay six cents for every viewer...

Instructor: So what happens if all the people our age—you know, everyone under thirty—if we stop watching the news and just watch YouTube? What happens to the news?

Abel: YouTube gets richer.

Instructor: And what happens to the news?

Anise: They'll go out of business.

Abel: They'll start new shows, different shows.

Abel and Anise's observations about the financial motivations of the news media would prefigure the discussion we would have shortly about the interests of media industries.

And lastly, we participated in an activity in which each student found a news story online—whether it was from a newspaper, a local TV newscast, or an independent journalist—and then compared their chosen piece with the stories the other members of their group found. As a group, the students then filled out the 'Unity/Uniformity Cheat Sheet' (Appendix D). Based on their research, they determined what types of sources, images, facts, styles, and structures were commonly used and what types of interactions were commonly encouraged across the new coverage of their issue—what was *uniform*.

And then based on this brief meta-analysis of the media representations, they then

identified what types of sources, images, facts, etc. *ought* to be used and what interactions *ought* to be encouraged (note the return to the previous concept of the dialectic).

Students recognized the unity and uniformity present in the news coverage of their issue and how the emphasis of certain voices or facts or responses (and the absence of others) inadequately represented the issue that they had been learning about. Jennifer, for example, noted that in local television and print news' coverage of Denver's recycling efforts, government officials and waste management experts were interviewed, while citizens' voices were not heard. Emphasis was placed on the statistics regarding the amount of waste the Denver community recycled, rather than on more DIY approaches to how citizens could repurpose recyclable materials in their everyday lives. As a result of her research, Jennifer chose to make posters that demonstrated to South students how they could reuse certain items to make art or for more utilitarian purposes. Abel and Anise were similarly motivated by their research. As noted earlier, they were surprised at how news coverage of the drought in East Africa often focused on Somalia, rather than looking at all of the affected nations. In addition to this observation, they noted that "The people that are suffering aren't talking," and "They aren't' telling you to come and volunteer, but they are telling you to donate money." So, in order to give voice to those affected by the drought, Anise and Abel decided to interview South students who recently immigrated from East Africa as a result of the crisis and ask them how the global community could best help those nations. Ultimately, students shaped their projects to compensate for the absence of those perspectives and that information in the uniform media representations of their issue.

(3) The last aspect of the culture industry that I addressed as part of the curriculum was the *economic interests* of media industries and how their adherence to these interests have social consequences. First, in order to illustrate the concept of the economic interests of media industries, I discussed the phenomenon of ‘selling out’ using the popular musician Cee-Lo Green. I described to the students how, as a teenager growing up in Atlanta, I listened to OutKast and Goodie Mob—two Atlanta-based hip-hop groups that were instrumental in popularizing Southern hip-hop. Cee-Lo Green was one of the founding members of Goodie Mob, and with them, he produced (again, in my opinion) some real quality Southern hip-hop music. Later, he collaborated with the producer Danger Mouse as part of a group called Gnarls Barkley, and their debut single ‘Crazy’ was enormously popular—topping the charts and earning them a Grammy for Best Urban/Alternative Performance in 2007. Most recently, Cee-Lo appeared in commercials promoting 7-Up and Las Vegas, made a guest appearance (as himself) on the popular NBC drama *Parenthood*, and is now a judge on the NBC singing competition show *The Voice* (the network’s response to Fox’s *American Idol*). I explained to the students that from my perspective, Cee-Lo’s transition from making local hip-hop music to appearing in commercials and judging televised singing contests makes him a ‘sell out.’

In response to my discussion of Cee-Lo’s ‘selling out,’ students offered their own examples, including Jay Z, Adele, Drake, Metallica, Blink 182, LeBron James and European soccer star Samuel Ito. They felt that each compromised their art or their integrity in their efforts to become more popular. But the reasons behind these individuals’ choices to ‘sell out’ were still unclear.

Instructor: So, if we were thinking of Cee-Lo and the guys you were talking about, like Drake or Blink 182 or whatever, as artists. If these people care about their art, their music, what would cause them to go from making music that they really care about to going on a crappy, second-rate version of *American Idol* as a host? Why would Cee-Lo Green do that?

Anise: He wants others voices to be heard?

Abel: Because he's getting old. He wants to get more money.

Instructor: Okay, yeah.

Abel: It's about money. Like, at first it's about the music. Then when they get to that level, they start forgetting about the music and they start worrying about the money. That's what I think. Because all of them, Jay Z and them and every artist that I saw, they start good. And when they have the money, they start going down.

Anise: When the money comes, they start caring more about the money than the music.

SHS Faculty: To play devil's advocate, maybe he just doesn't want to travel anymore.

Instructor: He's like, 'I'd rather just stay in L.A. and hang out with Christina Aguilera.'

Abel: But he can still make good money.

SHS Faculty: He needs a steady paycheck, you know, with his kids and stuff.

Abel: He wants a *fat* check...It's about him making money. Everything that they do in there is just money.

Note that even though the Anise's initial response to my question regarding the motivations of the 'sell outs' who we identified was to let 'other voices be heard,' when Abel brings up the economic interests behind these musicians' choices, Anise is quickly persuaded—"When the money comes, they start caring more about the money than the music." The students' immediately determined that the economic interests of the media corporations clearly play a part in compromising the integrity of their favorite artists.

These ‘sell outs’ are just symptoms of a system of cultural production that values profits over artistic expression, devotion to fans, etc.

Next, we further explored this concept of the economic interests of media industries by looking at the large corporate structures behind the students’ favorite musicians. This brief activity in media ownership provided the students with an interesting introduction to the political economy of communication. Anise, for example, discovered that his favorite hip-hop artist, Rick Ross, is signed with Warner Music Group, which is owned by Access Industries, a multinational investment company that, in Anise’s words, “does natural resources, chemicals, media and telecommunications, and real-estate.” Anise joked that obviously the company that was backing his favorite musician is more concerned with making good money than it is making good music. Similarly, Abel and Jennifer realized that their two favorite (and very different) musicians—Lil’ Wayne and A-mei (a Taiwanese pop singer), respectively—were signed with labels that were both owned by Vivendi, a French multinational multimedia conglomerate. We then discussed how despite these artists’ integrity (or lack thereof), they are backed financially by large corporations with structures that are wholly dependent on profit-making.

Now, in order to demonstrate the social consequences of media industries’ adherence to economic interests, I recalled our previous discussions of the dialectic—of *is* and *ought*—and drew a diagram on the board as a visual reminder of this concept (Figure 3).

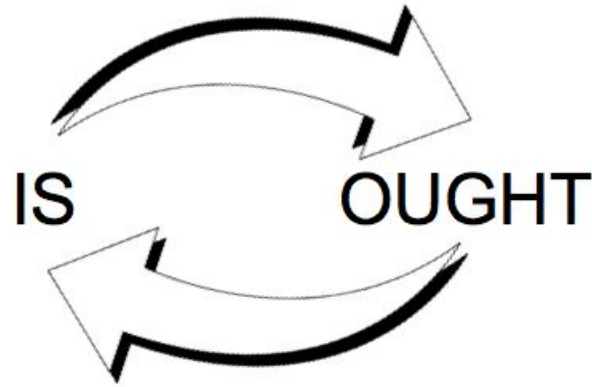


Figure 3: Is & Ought Diagram

I revisited our previous conversations about how social change is reliant upon our continuous critical self-reflection, and how media might function to either encourage or inhibit this dialectical process of social change. We discussed how our ‘Is vs. Ought’ and ‘Unity and Uniformity’ activities helped identify how media’s reliance on profits often encourages unified and uniform, sanitized and sensationalized representations of society that inhibit, rather than encourage social critique and change. And the students’ projects reflect ways in which alternative media production can be the means of raising awareness about issues that mainstream media do not, from the students’ perspectives, adequately address. This allowed us to talk about how the economic interests of media industries inhibit representations of certain issues and therefore result in the ‘common characteristics’ we identified in our Unity & Uniformity activity.

In order to further demonstrate the power of media at inhibiting dialectical social transformation, I shared a clip from the blockbuster film *Inception* (2010). In the clip, the main character Cobb is explaining to a new recruit the process of dream-building. In the film’s fictional world, the technology exists to design dreams and invite others to enter those dreams—in the case of Cobb, as a means of stealing secrets from or implanting

ideas in the minds of his targets. Interestingly, this cinematic narrative provides a compelling metaphor for how the mainstream media function as a culture industry—misrepresenting reality, perpetuating false consciousness, and inhibiting social transformation.

Cobb: Now, in a dream, our mind constantly does this. We create and perceive our world simultaneously. And our mind does this so well that we don't even know it's happening. That allows us to get right in the middle of that process.

Ariadne: How?

Cobb: By taking over the creating part. Now, this is where I need you. You create the world of the dream. We bring the subject into that dream, and they fill it with their subconscious.

(Inception 2010)

As Cobb describes dream-building to Ariadne, he draws a diagram (Figure 4.1) not unlike the diagram of the dialectic that I used earlier (Figure 3). And while Cobb's drawing refers to our mind's simultaneous creation and perception of a dream, it can easily be understood metaphorically as the dialectical process of action and reflection, particular and universal. Now, I explained that if this cycle is to be understood as the process by which we continuously critique and transform society, then Cobb's incursion into the dream-world—his "taking over the creating part"—disrupts this process of social change (thus the line he draws through the cycle in Figure 4.2). To reinforce this connection between the film clip and our discussion of media and society, like Cobb, I drew a similar line through my diagram on the board—representative of the way media might interrupt this dialectical process of social critique and transformation. So, Cobb—representative of the culture industry—inhibits this dialectical process by creating a false representation of the world, one in which the productive tension between action and

reflection, particular and universal is disrupted. This is “the false identity of universal and particular” to which Horkheimer and Adorno refer (95).

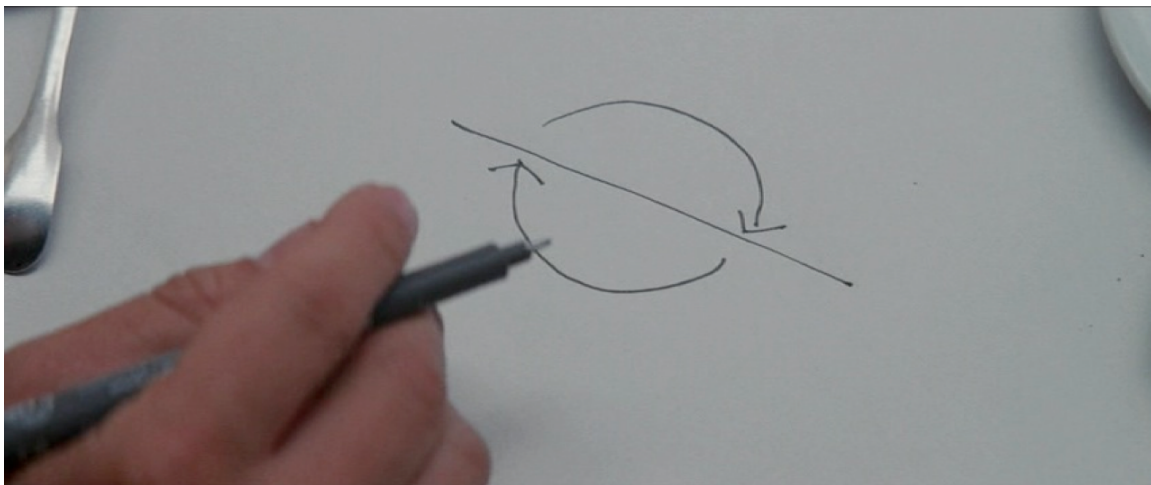
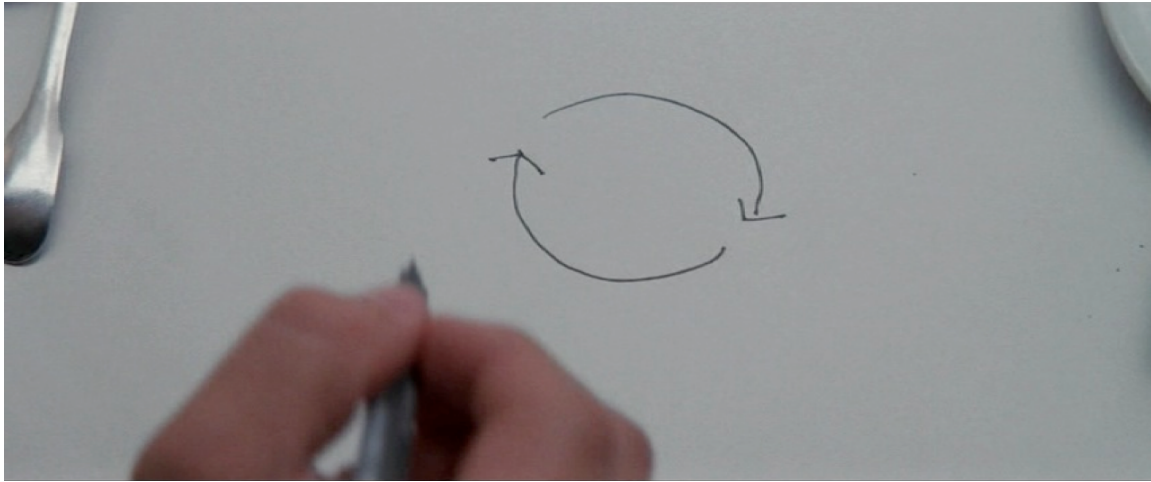


Figure 4.1 and 4.2: *Inception* stills

In order to explore how media may operate in this way—pursuing profits, misrepresenting reality and therefore inhibiting social critique and transformation—we continued our discussion of particular and universal. First, I asked the students to think about their understanding of the concept of *peace*. Then, I showed them a number of particular perceptions of peace often represented in the media, including photos of a Vietnam anti-war protest, the signing of the Oslo peace accords, the Tiananmen Square protester, and U.N. peacekeeping troops (Figure 5). Then, in order to further emphasize

the point, I then asked the students to think about their understanding of the concept of *femininity*. Then, I showed them a number of particular perceptions of femininity often represented in the media, including the Virgin Mary, a Barbie doll, Rosie the Riveter, and Lady Gaga (Figure 6). Following these two exercises, I discussed how by representing particular perspectives as universally-held understandings, media may limit our ability to think about alternative means of establishing peace, new ways of defining femininity, or, in our case, effective approaches to improving our communities.



Figure 5: Particular representations of peace.



Figure 6: Particular representations of femininity.

Following this discussion, each group searched online for images associated with the issues that they were learning about. Students were encouraged to find particular images that they felt more adequately represented their issue than the more typical representations seen in mainstream media. Then, each student was asked to share with the class how the particular image they chose ‘framed’ their issue. Some of the students’ responses were particularly insightful. Ezana, for example, explained the significance of the image he chose to represent the issues of the policing of public schools and the incarceration of urban youth (Figure 7).

I got this picture. It has more of a metaphorical meaning. You see how big the cop is but you see how little, how small the people are? And that kind of shows how he’s in charge and he has control. And then you see the handcuffs over the school and how it’s, like, affecting it.



Figure 7: Ezana's image of the policing of schools and the incarceration of urban youth

Ezana astutely observed how the aesthetics of the image—the juxtaposition of the large police officer and the small schoolchildren and the composition of the handcuffs surrounding the school—promoted a particular perception of this issue. Interestingly, Ezana would advocate that his group's project, rather than focus on the problems of policing of schools and incarceration of urban youth, emphasize the efforts of *Padres y Jovenes Unidos* to work towards solutions to these problems. Abel offered a similarly insightful explanation of the image that he found, which would also influence the direction of his group's project. He discusses the significance of his photo representing the East African drought (Figure 8).

Most of the people—even though there is no water. But if they try to get water, they have to go far away. And it's not, like, clean water. They just get it from the dirt. And that's basically it. It's not clean water, you can tell. The thing with the donkeys and the stuff shows that they have to go far away so they can get some water. And the kids are very thirsty.



Figure 8: Abel's image of the East African drought.

Abel and the other members of his group had recognized the startling lack of images and voices of those affected by the crisis in East Africa in the news media coverage they found. This image, unlike the maps of affected areas and charts of casualties that Abel encountered in his research, represented the African people and the conditions they experience. In response to the under-representation of this insider perspective on the drought, Abel and his group chose to include in their video interviews with students from South whose families had experienced the crisis firsthand. In each of these student's explanations they acknowledge the tension between a particular media text and the larger issue being represented, and use this tension as motivation to create their own, more substantive, media representations of the issue.

And lastly, we discussed how as a result of their pursuit of profits, media might not only misrepresent the issues facing our communities, but perhaps more importantly, fail to attend to these issues in the first place. We discussed how by emphasizing stories dealing with celebrity break-ups or political sex scandals, the news media, for example, direct attention away from greater, more damaging issues facing our communities.

Instructor: Or anytime Lindsey Lohan does anything—like, if she gets a parking violation—that’s on the news, when there are probably more important things. But news outlets know that if they report certain stories about celebrities and stuff—

Anise: --they’ll pay attention.

Instructor: Yeah, people are going to watch, and they’ll make more money.

Gio: So, you’re saying that after a conflict, or whatever, they’re just trying to choose which is the most popular.

Instructor: Yeah. So it may not be the most important. It may not mean what matters to us most. Like, one of the things that matters most to us in here is the economy. But if you watch a day’s worth of CNN and track how much is about jobs and the growth of the economy versus other things—we could say that there are other things that are more popular that aren’t maybe as important as whether or not, you know, my dad’s going to have a job or something like that.

Gio: But some important conflicts should be popular. Say, if we went to World War III, of course everybody would throw out any popularity in the media or whatever and mostly focus on World War III—like what we’ll suffer from it and how it’ll affect us.

Instructor: Gio, you make a perfect point. That’s kind of the point of our projects. You guys have each found issues that you think are important that may not be popular. Like, not many people know about the drought in east Africa or about the problem of incarcerating urban youth. Those aren’t popular, sexy issues that are on the news all of the time. Instead, we focus on Lindsey Lohan. And so, one of the things that you guys are going to want to do is think about how important your issue is and try to find ways to raise awareness about it, to make more people know about it and realize its importance.

Our discussions of unity within media, uniformity across media, the economic interests of media industries, and the social consequences of these interests gave the students the opportunity to learn about their chosen social issues, to determine the strengths and weaknesses of the media coverage of those issues, and to develop a project in which they

could contribute their, often very unique, perspectives to the greater public conversations about those issues.

Praxis

Given Horkheimer's objective of critical theoretical work "is not simply the theory of emancipation; it is the practice of it as well," it is necessary that the class discussions and activities of these concepts of the dialectic and the culture industry be followed by some practical engagement with the social issues about which the students learned (233). Now, in order to encourage the projects to work towards a unity of theory, practice and politics, the students were encouraged to use these concepts to guide (1) the development of their projects, (2) the production of their media texts, and lastly, (3) their reflections on this experiment in civic engagement.

(1) First, students were encouraged to use our discussions of the dialectic (*is* and *ought*) and the culture industry (*unity*, *uniformity* and *economic interests of media*) to inform the development of their media production projects. So as discussed earlier, as part of our discussion of Media Audiences, each group of students was encouraged to complete an 'Is vs. Ought' worksheet (Appendix C), in which they first identified the immediate problem and a typical response to this problem. Then, students identified the underlying problem that inhibited the typical response from being effective, and a greater response that would address the underlying problem. The final line on this worksheet—referring to the greater response to the underlying problem—then, provided the objective for the group project they planned to create. For example, Jennifer noted on her worksheet that while students at South did not recycle their waste as often as they should,

the underlying problem is that they did not realize the many, often creative, ways to recycle, beyond simply tossing their water bottles in the designated bins. As a result of this realization, she records as the objective of her project to “Show people to use recycling to make art and useful things.” Ezana and Yonas identified what they termed the “school to jail track”—referring to the policing of public schools and the incarceration of urban youth—as the challenge that they wanted to address. And while they acknowledge that this challenge is complex, including issues of school funding and policy, student behavior and community involvement, they determined that the greatest need was to raise awareness among South’s student body of the efforts of organizations like Padres y Jovenes Unidos to address these issues. In both these cases, the students recorded the objectives of their project—informed by our discussions of the dialectical process of social change—on a ‘Pre-Production Worksheet’ (Appendix E), which would serve as a guide during the completion of their projects.

Also as part of the planning stage of their group projects, the students revisited the discussion of the culture industry and the ‘Unity/Uniformity Cheat Sheet’ (Appendix D) which they had completed. As discussed earlier, students conducted a mini meta-analysis of the media coverage of their chosen social issue, identifying the common characteristics of these pieces as examples of uniformity and unity. Finally, students recorded what voices, images, facts, etc. were absent from this coverage. These observations provided some outline for each group as to what their projects should and should not include. For example, in David and Gio’s research on racism and police brutality, they found that often absent from news coverage were the voices of those negatively affected by these issues. As discussed earlier, each of these students had experienced, to some extent, being

unfairly accused of crimes due to others' judgments of their appearance. So, among the 'defining characteristics' of their project which they recorded on their 'Pre-Production Worksheet', David and Gio included stories of "how the people been [sic] treated by authorities." Again, in both of these cases, the class discussions of the culture industry and the media analysis activities that followed informed the development of their engagement with these issues in their media production projects.

[2] A textual analysis of the each of the group's finished projects also demonstrates how the students' engagement in media production was informed by the theoretical discussions we had early in the project. First, as discussed earlier, Jennifer was interested in creating posters that could demonstrate to the community at South not only the importance of recycling, but the creative ways that individuals can repurpose recyclable materials to create art or useful things. She produced two posters (Figure 9) that combined images she found online with her own text and hand-drawn illustrations. Each poster includes the title "Make recycle objects be useful" accompanied by the provocation "It's good to recycle but do you know recycled objects can be used in useful art?" against a light green background with an image depicting the Earth encircled by the familiar recycling symbol. Below, each poster includes text describing different uses of the recyclable materials (a cardboard box and a plastic water bottle) along with visual representations of these potential repurposed materials (a pencil box, art, or a napkin holder; a bank, a water rocket or art).



Figure 9: Jennifer's posters

Jennifer's posters demonstrate her practical implementation of some of the theoretical concepts addressed during the project. First, by acknowledging the importance of recycling, but emphasizing more unconventional recycling practices, the posters reflect the necessity of critique as part of the dialectical process of social change. As discussed earlier, Jennifer's particular approach to recycling is informed by her meta-analysis of news media coverage of recycling in the Denver area. The stories Jennifer found commonly emphasized the statistical evidence supporting increases in recycling rates in the city, which she identified as a uniform aspect of media coverage of the issue. However, Jennifer's posters depart from this normative media representation of recycling and, instead, highlight a more humanistic perspective on the issue. So, while the statistics indicate that Denver residents regularly dispose of recyclable materials in designated containers, Jennifer's project anticipates that South's students will be even more likely to

recycle if they are aware of the creative opportunities that recycling can provide. Also, rather than simply provide information, Jennifer's posters are designed to empower its audience to recycle more, a further demonstration of the project's (perhaps limited but nonetheless) practical political implications. For example, by using the words "*We* can use..." and then introducing specific examples of how to repurpose recyclable materials, the posters both give the viewers a sense of collective creative power and then invite them (at least, implicitly) to participate by providing simple, accessible ideas for creative recycling. So, while the impact of these posters on South students' recycling practices may be limited, Jennifer has clearly made efforts to implement her understandings of dialectical social critique and critical analysis of media messages into her project.

Next, Gio and David were interested in sharing the experiences of South students who have been mistreated by law enforcement as a result of others' misjudgment of their appearance. They recorded video telling their own stories, selected a heavy metal song and collected a number of images depicting police brutality, but because of their limited involvement in the project towards the end of the semester, they were unable to edit together a final cut of the video. Despite the lack of a final product, however, Gio and David's engagement in media production does demonstrate their attempt to practically implement some of the concepts they learned during the project. For example, Gio and David's plan to juxtapose their personal experiences with images of police brutality was motivated by a desire to bring to light the 'rage' (in David's words) that communities affected by these issues of racism and abuses of authority collectively feel. From their own meta-analysis of media coverage of the issue, Gio and David (along with Dr. Clark) identified that the voices of the victims of police brutality or related abuses were often

absent from the news stories. Implicit in their analysis is that the absence of this perspective limits the information made available and inhibits the audience from identifying with the victims, recognizing the problems and organizing around the issue in any productive way. And while they were not able to complete the video, Gio and David's reflections on the project indicate their desire to use the project as a means of raising awareness about and even mobilizing the public around the issue. Gio noted that the objectives of their project were informed the connection that he made between his reading of *To Kill a Mockingbird* and the activism he witnessed surrounding the shooting of Treyvon Martin. He explained this connection:

To Kill a Mockingbird started off with a little girl named Scout who learns to coming of age through, like, how she starts learning about hate in the world around her towards races. Racism and police brutality, and the Great Depression and all that—where people, let's just say, don't get along too well together. And she learned why people are like that towards each other, and what she experienced from that. And the Treyvon Martin case, let's just say, was an act of brutality. But actually, people learned about that case and stood up against something that was cruel. And while Scout learned about cruelty in the world, she knew to try to avoid it, and all that. While the people in the Treyvon Martin case stood up against the cruelty that was committed.

Gio identified in both his critical readings of *To Kill a Mockingbird* and the media coverage surrounding the Treyvon Martin case a common theme—the opportunity (and even necessity) of individuals and communities to recognize and challenge issues of racism and violence. And in David's discussion of the project, he indicated that by linking their stories to the greater issue, he hoped that he could help his community—“Just by not having the authority throw you around, and try not to have them think that you're just a little person. Honestly to me, if it wasn't for us, those people in governments would not last.” So, while their video will, likely, not be completed or viewed by anyone in their community, both Gio and David's engagement in media production reveals their

efforts to implement their understanding of theoretical concepts in their project and provide a perspective on the issue (through the telling of their own stories) that, while important, is often absent from media coverage.

Ezana, Yonas and Yaniq's project uses video and social media to promote South's chapter of Padres y Jovenes Unidos and raise awareness about issues related to the 'school to jail track.' In collaboration with other members of PJU at South, they scripted, acted in, shot and edited a short video (Figure 10) demonstrating how restorative justice provides an alternative approach to address disciplinary problems among students. Again, a textual analysis of the video reveals some of the students' attempts to implement their understanding of some of the theoretical concepts in their media production efforts. For example, the narrative structure of the short video nicely illustrates the students' conversations about how the concept of 'Is vs. Ought' relate to their chosen social issue. In the video, two students get into a fight in the hallway at school (Figure 10.1) and are sent to the dean (Figure 10.2). As a consequence for their having fought, the students are both threatened with police citations and suspension from school. The dean (played by Abel) says, "You will both get five days suspension and a police ticket. I hope not to see you boys again or in the school ground or else I'm going to write you guys a trespassing ticket." However, the dean also presents an alternative to police action—the two students can meet with a mediator (played by Yonas) to resolve the situation using restorative justice.

Mediator: No interrupting. Now, I want to hear from both of you what really happened. Benjamin, you go first.

Benjamin: We bumped into each other, and that pissed me off so we just started fighting. He looked at me, and I looked at him, and we just started fighting.

Mediator: Now Ezana, I want to hear your side of the story. Tell me what happened.

Ezana: Well actually, that was a lie. *He* bumped into *me*, and that's why I fought him. So, yeah.

Mediator: There must have been something before this that actually happened. What compelled both of you to want to get at each other?

Ezana: So, I was walking during passing period, and my friend told me that he was giving me a dirty look so I just punched him.

Mediator: So, what are the effects of your actions?

Benjamin: Um, I had to miss school for three days. And my mom came that day to pick me up. She missed her work just to pick me up from school, just because I was suspended. She was very disappointed in me. And I missed a lot. In my science class, we had a test that day. I couldn't take it, and I just missed a lot of schoolwork.

Mediator: Okay, and what about you?

Ezana: Well, I also missed a math test, so I'm not eligible to run now.

Mediator: So, obviously this fight affected you and your families in a negative way. How are you two feeling responsible for your actions?

Benjamin: I didn't need to give him that dirty look. I mean, we fought and missed a lot of schoolwork. I think we shouldn't fight, and that's all.

Mediator: Is there anything that you could have taken back?

Ezana: Well, I should have been mature about it, and not started a fight.

Mediator: Now, you guys have accepted your failures and your mistakes, right? Now, how are you guys going to make up for this?

Benjamin: All I can say is that I'm sorry for embarrassing my mom.

Ezana: And I'm going to go talk to my teacher and apologize for why I missed the test.

Mediator: Well, I trust you guys to follow the restorative justice agreement. And I'm very disappointed in you, but I hope you guys fix it.

The video's three 'acts' represent the problem (violence in schools) and the typical response to the problem (a referral to law enforcement), and then it provides an alternative solution (restorative justice). By exploring what 'is' happening in schools and then proposing what 'ought' to occur instead, the video is a simple, but effective demonstration of the process of dialectical social critique. And in order to more effectively use their media production as a tool for increased community awareness of and involvement in issues surrounding the 'school to jail track,' the group accompanied their video with community outreach, both online and in person.





Figure 10.1, 10.2, 10.3 – Stills from students' restorative justice video

Additionally, Ezana and some of the other students who participate in PJU were able to screen the video and present some of the work that the organization is involved with at a community meeting in which parents, teachers, and other interested citizens attended. And Yonas and Ezana then created Facebook (Figure 11) and Twitter pages for South's chapter of PJU, and posted their video on the pages as a means of informing and engaging with their classmates and the greater community about the issue.



Figure 11 – Facebook page for the South chapter of Padres y Jovenes Unidos

Lastly, students Abel, Anise, Said, and Abdiaziz—themselves all immigrants from various African countries—were interested in sharing information about and encouraging community engagement with the drought in East Africa. As discussed earlier, they discovered in their meta-analysis of media coverage of the crisis that most of the stories fail to provide the proper context for the crisis, focus on Somalia (rather than include all affected nations), and emphasize statistics over personal stories from those suffering. They also noted that when a story includes an opportunity for audience involvement, it is most often limited to the contribution of money for drought relief. Departing from the more typical representations of the drought in mainstream media, Abel, Anise, Said and Abdiaziz scripted, shot and edited a short documentary film that addressed those aspects that they felt were missing from the uniform media coverage. For example, their film begins with scenes of Somalia previous to the drought—scenic vistas with palm trees, beautifully designed buildings, and scenic views are accompanied by Said’s narration—“Imagine a beautiful Italian village with sandy beaches, roads lined with palm trees, the teasing song of the monkeys mixed with the gentle sounds of the calling of the prayer. This is Somalia. Somalia before the civil war and the drought.” The sequence functions to dispel the global misconception observed by the group that the region is constantly battling poverty, famine, war and other disasters and so the drought is nothing new. Next, the film includes images of the drought and its effects on the land, livestock and people, juxtaposed with an interview with a South student, also from Africa. Said’s narration continues, “Experts say we are out of the drought. But for how long?” The film concludes with some proposed solutions including collaboration with the United Nations to build reservoirs to help prevent future crises and increased dialogue

about the complexity of the issues facing these African nations. And like the previously discussed projects, the film includes an invitation for participation—viewers are encouraged to visit the group’s Facebook page to share personal stories, discuss potential responses to the crisis, and learn about ways to become more involved. Again, the project implements some of the learning the students’ experienced during their media analysis activities and highlights the opportunity for alternative media to inform viewers and encourage political activism.

(3) Finally, after having completed their media production projects, students were encouraged to reflect on their experience using media to engage in the public conversation about these issues. And the critical self-reflection varied greatly from student to student. For example, Jennifer remarked how pleased she was to have learned a new skill in the creation of her project—

I wanted to use posters to do my project, because I think it is easy to do it. But now I know how posters don’t just need to use drawing. You can use the computer to make the poster. But I still like to use the colored pencils to draw on the poster.

Jennifer did acknowledge, though, that she hoped to have the opportunity to learn more video production and graphic design when she continued participating in the project in the following semester. In contrast, Ezana and Yonas reflected not on their acquisition of new media production skills, but rather on how they were able to use media to raise awareness about the ‘school to jail track’ among members of their community. For example, Ezana discussed how he felt that the presentation of their video was an effective means of introducing restorative justice to the community:

We got the script done and we shot the whole video—like, everything that we wanted. So, we involved students from PJU, members, and we had people from the community that were in the meeting. And I think by them

looking at the video, they can get, like, a vivid image of what it's like for students to be ticketed for minor offenses. And it also shows what it can be like if you use the restorative justice system.

In response to this positive experience, both Ezana and Yonas discussed how their involvement in the Digital Media Club during the coming school year would involve them improving and expanding upon their current project. While their production and the presentation of the video and their creation of the social media pages are a good start, Yonas discussed how they must work to use these tools to create a genuine community, in which students from different schools (and even different nations) can discuss these important issues that they face:

I would love to accomplish getting more schools being involved in it because South is just one school. It could be like a 'e pluribus unum' effect—'one out of many'—where all students go through the many trials and tribulations that any high school student does, but we never get to talk about it and face it. Especially nowadays, when things are starting to change rapidly, we have this big tool—digital media. And we can use this tool to get in contact with a lot of students—using Facebook and everything—around the nation. Not just in Denver, but around the nation and even around the world. As we do that, we can get people into larger stuff and be more aware.

Appropriately, not all of the students' reflections were positive. Many students, for example, discussed how the limited time frame of the project inhibited their ability to accomplish all that they would have liked. Yonas, Yaniq and Ezana were unable to make the promotional video they initially intended to produce. Gio and David were unable to complete their presentation. Abel, Anise, Said, and Abdiaziz spent time during the first weeks of their summer break to edit their video, and still they felt like they had to cut out too much due to time constraints. Said, a graduating senior, discussed how some of the critical content of their project had to be cut in order to complete it in time, and he notes

that if they were to really effectively voice an ‘African’ perspective on the crisis, they would need to include many more people’s voices:

I wish we had more time because we have a lot of voice over and footage, and we have to cut some of them because in our time frame we want to put everything together and finish it as quickly as possible...I would have liked to get more interviews with people, ask more questions and get more information. Ask people—maybe even go back to the countries and interview people there, just to show their perspective and what they know about it.

Abdiaziz echoed this sentiment as well, even acknowledging that their video was not as good as they would have liked it to be because of the lack of interview footage that they were able to collect.

Yeah, we needed a lot of people to interview, but we only got one person for an interview. So, it would be better if we got many people from different countries, like Somalia, Kenya and Ethiopia. But we only have one person that we have interviewed. So, I don’t think it’s that good, but at least we tried our best to make it good.

This recognition of the importance of the process over the product—“but at least we tried our best to make it good”—was another common theme among the students’ responses. While many were eager to continue improving their projects in their participation in the club next year, they recognized that despite any perceived inadequacies in their final projects, they benefited a lot from the experience. Abel, for example, discussed how despite the fact that it was difficult to complete their video due to the school year ending, he learned a lot from his participation in the project.

We picked—actually, I wasn’t the one. Anise picked it. I didn’t even know nothing about it. Anise picked it. He was like, “Let’s do the East African drought.” And we took a vote and we voted for the East African drought. And I learned a lot of things. Like, when I Googled it, it’s supposed to talk about, you know, East Africa, but it talked about Somalia. It was supposed to focus on the whole East Africa.

Having no knowledge of the crisis in East Africa prior to the project, Abel became arguably the most informed and outspoken of the student participants.

And when asked to reflect on how their participation in the project may potentially inform their future engagements with media and community, the students' responses were definitely optimistic. David, for example, discussed how his participation in the club and his interactions with the other high school and university students sparked his interest in creating a community of his own. When asked what his participation in the club taught him about solving problems in his community, David said, "I'm trying to start a club for Natives, or if you want to learn about Native history. And I'm trying to see if I can start that...[Because] so much people don't know, and the people that want to are actually not Native." So, despite the fact that David and Gio's project was not completed, David interest in preserving and sharing his Native American culture through the creation of a community clearly demonstrates his engagement in a type of political (or at least cultural) praxis. And as the next chapter will discuss in greater detail, a few students were optimistic about not only their continued participation in the club during the next school year but also how they might utilize the skills and knowledge they gained during the project in their future. Both Said and Yonas, for example, expressed interest in returning to their home countries of Somalia and Ethiopia and using media as a means of bringing attention to the problems faced by the people there. "I'm interested in becoming a filmmaker and studying multimedia," said Said about the learning experiences that the project provided, "and this was a good way to start, a good place to start." So, as demonstrated in their planning and production of and later reflections on their media projects, the student participants made visible efforts to use the concepts introduced in the

discussions and activities to address, in some concrete way, with the issues facing their community. And for some of these students, their participation in the club was only the beginning of their efforts to engage in critical political praxis.

In conclusion, South High School provided a particularly interesting setting for the “Media Literacy and Civic Engagement” project. The history and diversity of the school, the challenges faced by its students, and the efforts of educators like Dr. Clark and Mr. Peters contributed definite strengths, and some challenges, to the realization of the project (a number of which will be discussed in the following chapter). The theoretical concepts of the *dialectic*, the *culture industry* and *praxis*, when introduced in accessible activities that addressed familiar popular media texts and practices, gave students’ critical insights into the interrelation of media and society. And the students’ learning, coupled with practical application in their media production projects, provided a great opportunity for them to wed theory, practice and politics, to develop critical consciousness and become civically engaged.

CHAPTER 5

THE ‘MEDIA LITERACY AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT’ PROJECT: FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

Before I delve into the findings of this self-evaluation of the “Media Literacy and Civic Engagement” project, I feel it necessary to briefly provide some context of my own roles in the project. Having surveyed the field, selected the theoretical and methodological approaches, designed the curriculum, taught the classes, interviewed the students, and analyzed the data, I am clearly embedded in the many layers of this project. In fact, Geertz’ term *inscription* may not be entirely adequate in describing the active role that I have had in the planning, execution, and evaluation of the project. That being said, while I clearly am invested in this project, I have tried in the following analysis to empirically analyze transcripts of class discussions, students’ video journals, interview responses, and final group projects, and identify the strengths and weaknesses of the theoretical, pedagogical, and evaluative approaches used as a part of this research. I am essentially attempting to implement the concept of critical self-evaluation, key to any dialectical critique, in regards to the relative success of this project to, specifically, encourage the student participants’ development of critical consciousness and civic engagement.

And this approach is not unprecedented. In Jeffers and Streit’s (2003) comprehensive survey of evaluative approaches used by youth media programs, they conclude that such efforts to self-evaluate projects such as mine are often effective. They write,

Regardless of their focus, programs that integrate self-evaluations into all aspects of their programming have been the most successful at communicating, both internally and externally, progress toward their

stated goals. They are also able to use the knowledge gained in the evaluation process to refine their work and thereby advance the field. (36)

In this chapter, I try and accomplish such an evaluation. I return to the original research question:

RQ: How can media literacy education better prepare students to engage in social change?

- c. How can existing theoretical approaches, pedagogical methods and objectives be improved to facilitate students' critical political participation?
- d. What new theoretical approaches, pedagogical methods and objectives may facilitate students' critical political participation?

By examining each of the three layers outlined in Chapter 3—*student praxis*, *pedagogy*, and *evaluation*—I intend address these questions and discuss how this project—both in its successes and failures—may contribute to the development of media literacy education that effectively prepares students to engage in social change efforts.

First, I analyze the political praxis of the student participants, by defining both critical consciousness and civic engagement according to the literature discussed in previous chapters and then using those definitions as standards of evaluation for the students' participation in the project. I connect the students' successful development in regards to these two areas to particular activities and discussions they participated during the course of the project. And then I identify a number of factors that either negatively or positively contributed to the students' development. Next, based on these findings, I discuss how the pedagogy employed in the project could be potentially modified in future iterations of the project, so as to maximize the students' development of critical

consciousness and civic engagement. Specifically, I address the strengths and limitations of the theories I drew upon in the design of the curriculum and weaknesses in the teaching methods I employed in the classroom. And then lastly, I briefly address the strengths and weaknesses of the evaluative methods utilized in the project and discuss how these methods might be modified in future iterations of the project.

All that being said, I do not pretend to be a neutral, ‘objective’ observer. However, in this evaluation, I have tried to adhere as closely as possible to Campbell’s conceptualization of the experimenting society—“It will be an honest society, committed to reality testing, to self-criticism, to avoiding self deception” (1991, 224). Part of this honesty involves the acknowledgment of my role as an educated, white male from an upper-middle class family, native to the U.S. but not local to Denver, who volunteered to come into South High School and conduct this project, in part, because of my interest with the incredible diversity of the students there. So, while I made great efforts to organize the classroom democratically and facilitate student-directed, experiential, and community-based learning and action, I am clearly not a native of the same community as my students. Thus, my position of power (even with my democratic approach) as a non-native, a white male, the instructor, etc. needs to be acknowledged. And my outsider status absolutely colors my observations, understandings and ultimate evaluation of the project. So, please read the following findings and discussion with this acknowledgment of the particular context of the project, and my place in it, in mind.

Layer 1 – Student Praxis

Critical Consciousness

While the previous chapters' discussions of the work of scholars like Horkheimer, Adorno, Marcuse, Freire, Kellner and Jhally (among others) imply the particular definition of 'critical' that this project employs, I feel it may be necessary to clarify how this concept of critical consciousness differs from more standard discussions of 'critical thinking.' Peter McLaren is particularly helpful (and somewhat stinging) in his articulation of this issue. He writes:

In their discussion of 'critical thinking' the new conservatives and liberals have neutralized the term critical by repeated and imprecise usage, removing its political and cultural dimensions and laundering its analytic potency to mean 'thinking skills.' By defining academic success almost exclusively in terms of creating compliant, productive, and patriotic workers, the new conservative agenda for a 'resurgent America' dodges any concern for nurturing critical and committed citizens. (1989, 161)

So, in contrast to education that creates 'compliant, productive and patriotic workers' who employ 'critical thinking skills,' this project has worked to help student participants develop a critical consciousness consistent with Freire's *conscientizacao*—students “must perceive the reality of oppression not as a closed world from which there is no exit, but as a limiting situation which they can transform” (Freire 49). Key, then, is the students' practice of social critique and social action. In the context of this particular project, this means specifically that students should learn (1) to identify contradictions within their communities, (2) to practice media analysis as a means of developing an informed perspective on those issues, and (3) to demonstrate an understanding of the reciprocal relationship between media forms and social and political relations—acknowledging how media may function simultaneously to obscure or enlighten, inhibit understanding or encourage engagement. First, the students' participation in class discussions, video journals, interview responses and final projects will be used to demonstrate their

development of these three dimensions of critical consciousness. Following the discussion of these findings, I will provide further explanation of how some contextual factors contributed to the students' development of critical consciousness.

(1) First, in order to demonstrate their development of critical consciousness, students must learn to identify contradictions within their communities, and within the greater national and global society. Ezana provided arguably the most explicit indication of the development of this first dimension of critical consciousness. When asked about which discussions he found to be most valuable, he specifically addressed the value of social critique in the context of their projects.

Well, we discussed what was happening and what ought to be happening. And I liked that discussion because it helped us come up with what are the issues that are happening right now and what should be happening and how can we use media to solve them and how is media affecting the people in that issue. So, that was pretty cool.

Clearly, Ezana feels that the project encouraged him and the other students to identify the contradictions that contribute to the challenges facing their community. And the previous chapter's discussions of each student project's engagement with the concept of dialectic social critique (through the 'Is vs. Ought' discussions and activities, for example), I think, plainly demonstrate that fact.

But while Ezana's response is a type of meta-reflection on the process engaged in by the students throughout the project in learning to identify and address the contradictions within their community, most students did not as articulately express this point. Rather, their development of critical consciousness is evident in specific moments of recognition they experienced throughout their participation in the project. For example, during the discussion about the lack of unity between mediated representations

of urban life and incidents like the shooting of Trayvon Martin, the following exchanged occurred:

Anise: The lady that threw flour at Kim Kardashian got sent to jail. That's crazy. [laughter] And the guy [George Zimmerman] that killed a person doesn't get sent to jail?

Abel: ...He [Trayvon Martin] didn't do nothing. Even if you're police, and they're running away from you, you can't shoot him.

Anise: Even the police wouldn't shoot him. They can't shoot him. They just run after him and catch him.

This conversation between Anise and Abel is particularly helpful in demonstrating how discussions of the critical theoretical concepts, and their application to current events, helped encourage the students' recognition of contradictions. Anise's first statement is a humorous, but tragic, illustration of the contradiction between how justice was exercised in the cases of Kim Kardashian and Trayvon Martin. At the time of this conversation, George Zimmerman had not been charged with any crime, and yet Kim Kardashian's 'attacker' was convicted of assault. And then, the following exchange between him and Abel reveals a further contradiction—the shooting of Trayvon Martin would not be justified even if Zimmerman were actually a member of law enforcement. In both cases, the class discussion facilitated the students' critical reflections on both the theoretical concepts and the current event, and articulate their understanding of the contradictions underlying these circumstances.

As discussed earlier, David and Gio were particularly affected by the case of Trayvon Martin and went on to tell their own stories related to racism and police brutality. During this same discussion of the lack of unity between media representations and lived realities, David articulated a rather insightful parallel between the potentially

racist motivations behind the killing of Trayvon Martin with other events in American history. He said,

It's like the old days. It's like I remember back when the Europeans 'supposedly' discovered America, they torched, like, thousands of people—supposedly 'ethnic emancipation' or witchcraft and that. Just because some people maybe were smarter or maybe born in a different way, and they assumed that they were from the devil or that they were involved in witchcraft. And they torched thousands of those people because they were different. And to me, every person is different from everybody. I mean, it's nice that we're different.

David not only recognizes the contradiction within the case of Trayvon Martin—that an innocent young man of color was killed without justification and without consequence—but he also likens this event to other violent treatments of cultural difference that plague of our nation's history. As I will discuss later, the connection David makes between contemporary and historical practices of racism and violence is particularly interesting, and perhaps particularly appropriate, given his recently renewed interest in his Native American heritage. Ultimately though, the students' media production projects and their participation in class discussions and activities demonstrate their efforts to identify contradictions within their community.

(2) Next, students' development of critical consciousness was further demonstrated by their practice of media analysis and their examination of issues surrounding media production, texts and audiences. For example, in regards to production, an interview with Anise reveals how class discussions and activities have contributed to his understanding of how media messages, and specifically journalistic content, is constructed.

Anise: I learned a lot, like news, and TV shows, edit their things to make a story. Just to get peoples attention, to persuade them to watch the news.

Interviewer: Do you think that all bad though? Movies are edited so we can understand them.

Anise: Yea, but its different when it's a movie, because it's fiction. News is, like, real life.

Interviewer: So, they shouldn't change it?

Anise: Yeah.

Interviewer: So, if you were to do it [the news], you wouldn't change it?

Anise: No.

As a result of his participation in the project, not only does Anise recognize the process by which media messages are produced—both entertainment and journalistic are edited to communicate particular narratives and perspectives—but he also adopts an ethic of media production based on that understanding (something that will be addressed further shortly).

This understanding of media content as consciously constructed by individuals and institutions encouraged students to also consider issues of form and content, aesthetics and ideology in media texts themselves. Abel, for example, noted that his participation in the club enabled him to be more conscious of how formal elements of media are used to invoke particular responses from their audience. When asked about whether he views media differently after having participated in the club, he said

Yeah, for example like, I was with my friends, like Ezana and them, and I went to the movies with them. And every time something happens, like, I can tell. Because let's say, if something bad is going to happen, I can tell before they know. Like, the music—if it's going to be scary in the movie, you can know it by the music. Or you can know it by the facial expressions. All that kind of stuff. That's the first thing I learned—what to choose when you're making a video—what music you have to choose, the people's reactions. How is it going to affect them? How are you going to tell it, you know? What's going to happen and how is it going to happen?

Like Anise, Abel not only recognizes how certain uses of music, cinematography or acting are used to communicate emotions or ideologies, but he also attempts to implement this new understanding of form and content in his own media production practices.

And lastly, students' engagement in media analysis allowed them to more consciously consider the participation of media audiences. Echoing Anise and Abel's comments, both Said and Ezana discussed how their participation in the project encouraged them to think more critically about their own use of media. For Said, this was most evident in how his media consumption habits have changed. He noted that since his participation in the project,

Now I look at all sources of news. If I look at certain news, I'll go look at that news in a different place because every news will have the same news, but they will portray it differently. So, it's good to look at different sources of news. Not just one.

Our discussions and activities, along with the research conducted by Said and his group, encouraged him to recognize how institutional imperatives, authorial intent and production practices influence both the form and content of media messages, and that the particular narratives and perspectives voiced in these messages may potentially influence audiences' understanding of issues that concern them. Said's response to this new understanding is to seek out diverse perspectives in news coverage, so as to take a more multi-perspectival approach to learning about certain issues. Ezana (like Anise and Abel) voiced how his practice of media analysis has encouraged him to be more conscious of his own media production practices. In response to the question of how his participation in media has changed during the course of the project, he responded

Yeah. I definitely see it differently, you know. Before Digital Media Club, I didn't really know how its impact on people, how media had an effect on people. And now, if I'm trying to convey a message or if I'm trying to send out an image for a certain type of thing, I know, like, what the people see it as and how it can be best portrayed.

Ezana's recognition of the potential for media to affect audiences in certain ways convinced him to be more deliberate in how he communicates certain messages via media.

(3) And lastly, students' development of critical consciousness was, perhaps, most significantly manifested in their ability to merge these first two dimensions—demonstrating their understanding how media may be deliberately used either to perpetuate or solve challenges facing their community. Not unlike Ezana's meta-reflection on the dialectical process of social change in one of the previous sections, the following comment by Gio very nicely illustrates this dialectical relationship between media and society. When asked about the potentially positive and negative role of media in society, he responded with the following:

Media is all the different aspects of our society, or whatever, of both good and bad. Media is what we make it, what we want it to be, and all that. Media can be used to our advantage to get the upper hand in our lives, or whatever, but not too many people have been getting that advantage. But media is useful in many ways. It's basically where you have another world in there, where you can contribute yourself towards it and be a part of it as well. But it depends on the person how he contributes towards media, how he displays media as a contribution towards him, or whatever. So, it really depends on the person, how he or she is involved in media. Like I said, media isn't a bad thing, nor a good thing. Let's just say that it's basically a neutral thing.

Gio's discussion of media as grounded in human practice—both 'bad' and 'good'—provides an appropriate introduction to the other students' engagement with this issue. And because the dialectical relationship between media and society is a tenuous one, in

order to adequately understand it, students must strike a delicate balance between ‘strong effects’ and ‘active audience’ arguments. The following examples illustrate how each student seemed to navigate between these two opposing perspectives in his/her own way.

Said noted at the conclusion of his exit interview that his ‘take-away lesson’ from the project was the power of media to manipulate audience’s opinions on certain issues.

He said

I learned that there are all sorts of news and media, and the media is manipulative. It makes people biased and will make you feel a certain way. Every article, every news has an objective. So, everything that is written or shows the objective, that person is trying to get their objective across to you. That journalist or writer is trying to get that point across to you, and that is what he believes in. And what you believe in is different. So, don’t be manipulated by the media. You should find your own truth in it.

Now, one could argue that this statement demonstrates Said’s gravitation toward effects-oriented or—perhaps given the theoretical foundations of this project’s approach—a type of Althusserian view of media as ‘Ideological State Apparatus.’ However, the last two sentences in Said’s response indicates that while media may potentially manipulate audiences’ attitudes and behaviors, he believes that we are capable of resisting such influence. And Said’s own interest in creating social justice-oriented films (discussed in the previous chapter) further demonstrates his understanding of media as either a means of deception *or* emancipation.

Yonas expressed a similar understanding as Said of the potential of media to negatively influence audiences’ attitudes and behaviors; but also like Said, this was, in some respect, balanced by his own desires to use media to serve his community.

Throughout his participation in the project, Yonas was very open about his intentions to return to Ethiopia as an adult and use his media and business-related skills to improve his

home country (something that will be further addressed later in the chapter). However, when asked about the positive and negative effects of media on communities, Yonas responded with the following:

I think its both ways. Because, somebody might post a Facebook picture or whatever, and a lot of people like it? That person, or his friend, will say “if I post something like that, I will get a lot of likes too!” And they are impacted too, and that’s how the culture is. Like for example, girls that are degrading themselves put bras on and posting it on Facebook, some girls will get over 200 likes or whatever. And then other girls will do it too. And that impact their culture and the way they look at it, and that degrades themselves...

Yonas’ discussion of the negative impact of social media use on, in this case, issues of body image and self-esteem among young women, contrasts the optimistic outlook of media as the means of social change which he typically voiced during his participation in the project. Key though, is Yonas’ first sentence in the previous statement—“I think its both ways.” He, along with the other students, recognize how media may participate—for ‘good’ or for ‘bad’—in social issues—whether they involve the students’ self-image, the actions of law enforcement, or a crisis faced by a foreign nation.

Another example is provided by Anise who, after the discussion of unity and uniformity in Week 4, recorded a video journal in which he very articulately discussed how media may function both to inhibit or encourage public recognition of contradictions within our communities. He said,

And we talked about all the problems that are happening, and why some problems aren’t as important as others. Like, celebrities are more well known than other problems that are in the world. For example, if a celebrity dies, like Whitney Houston or something, then everyone knows about it, and it’s all over the world. But three million people die in the East African drought, and no one doesn’t really care. That’s about it, and we’re trying to find out how to persuade other people to come and help out.

Anise contrasted the media coverage of the death of Whitney Houston with that of the deaths of millions of drought victims in order to establish how the ‘agenda setting’ function of mainstream media can hinder the public’s recognition of and engagement with issues like the crisis in east Africa. However, Anise’s last statement about his group’s efforts to address this problem, again, reveals his perspective that alternative media production, if guided by social change objectives, can be a means of confronting these issues of misrepresentation.

But perhaps the most explicit engagement with this relationship between media and society occurred when the students engaged in a mock debate around the issue of media effects. During our discussion of media audiences in Week 5, students divided into two groups, and each group was assigned a particular approach to understanding media’s effects on audiences. Abel was chosen as the spokesperson for the group arguing a ‘strong effects’ perspective, while Ezana represented the group arguing an ‘active audience’ perspective. After discussing the issue with their group, the two students presented their opening arguments and then engaged in a rather interesting debate. Abel’s opening statement focused on the precautions taken by parents to limit their children’s exposure to certain types of media because of the perception that young people will be negatively affected. To illustrate his argument, he used the example of why I might choose to play violent videogames but would not allow my two-year old son to do the same:

Abel: Because you know what’s right and what’s wrong and you know the consequences, but they don’t. So, it just shows that they don’t care whether it’s good or bad. They’ll do it because they saw what’s happening. And they want to do it in real life and that’s basically it.

Instructor: Good. Good argument. Ezana's got an opening statement also. And remember, anything that either of you say, you can voice a rebuttal afterward...

Ezana: Alright. So, what we talked about was like, mainly things you see in media, but how it affects people around us. So, when you see... One example we used was when you see hot girls or rappers or anything on TV, you basically just have an imagination that all girls should look as hot as her or all rappers should be as good as him or you should rap like him, or something. So, people really get brainwashed from what's presented in TV. And we also talked about how to fix that in ourselves. Like, you know that it does that. You see me? He asked me how come I'm not brainwashed by that and how come I don't think all girls have to be hot, like a ten and shit... Oh, sorry. But it's because I know what it does to affect us, so we believe that if we educate people on how, like, it affects them, then they know how to prevent it and they can tell themselves that that's not the right reality.

While they both agreed on the potentially negative influence of certain types of media on audiences, the two groups differed in their proposed efforts to counter such influence.

Abel's group argued for a protectionist approach in which potentially vulnerable audiences are shielded from certain media while Ezana's group argued for an empowerment approach in which audiences may be educated to become more critical, conscious consumers of media. Later, Said developed the idea voiced by Ezana of the value of media education—how critical media literacy education may be the means of encouraging critical readings (in this case) of news coverage of social issues, and subsequently influencing the content of this coverage itself.

Right now kids don't know that. They just believe in the news. It's *the news, the media*. They're like, 'It's *the media* so it must be right.' And if that's what's going on, everybody will just believe in that. But if they learn more about it, if they have more classes where they're teaching about the harmful ways the media is doing to teenagers and how it's manipulating the people while giving bad news or giving not accurate news, people should know about it. *So, then they should have very accurate news.*

Media education, paired with the type of alternative media production that Said is so interested in, is the means whereby audiences are able to navigate this tenuous relationship between media and society, recognizing how these representations can work to perpetuate or to overcome injustice. And then Said concludes that as audiences' knowledge of and participation in media increases, this progress will necessarily affect the accuracy of news (and by implication, the positive role that media fulfills in relation to addressing injustice).

Discussion

Now, the variance among the students in their development of each of these aspects of critical consciousness may be explained by a number of contextual factors including each student's (1) basic literacy skills, (2) cultural background, (3) personal experiences, (4) personal uses of media, (5) interest in political and social issues, and (6) relative engagement in the project.

Basic literacy skills. Especially given South High School's diverse student body and large percentage of English Language Learners (ELLs), each student's basic literacy skills—the comprehension and employment of verbal and written English—influenced his/her development of critical consciousness. Jennifer and David—two students who struggled to some extent with basic literacy skills—provide some understanding of this issue. As discussed in the last chapter, Jennifer was a freshman whose family moved from Taiwan three months previous to the start of the project. She had some knowledge of English previous to her arrival in the U.S. but participated in the ELL program to further develop her language skills. While Jennifer was attentive during class discussions

and activities, she rarely offered her opinions, even when prompted by the instructor. Due to the fact that she was still developing her English language skills, Jennifer's development of critical consciousness appeared to be limited primarily to the comprehension of basic concepts. For example, when asked about what she had learned from class discussions, Jennifer responded with the following—"Um. I learn some of the movie has the same, same of things. Like some of the things is the...um, the Princess. Some are the same." And on another occasion, she answered, saying,

I learned about how in music you need many people to do it. Like you need the people who write the music, the people who sing...the people who make advertisements, the people to design, the actors, and other people to do things.

Evident in Jennifer's responses is a basic understanding of some of the concepts we discussed in class. For example, the first quote refers to our discussion of the uniformity of popular media, in which I specifically mentioned the recent surge of screen adaptations of Snow White—*Mirror Mirror* (2012), *Snow White and the Huntsman* (2012), and the television program *Once Upon a Time*. Jennifer's second answer refers to a discussion we had about media production during Week 6, in which the students listed all of the individuals involved in producing a music video. Now, while both of Jennifer's answers demonstrate some understanding of these concepts introduced in class discussions, a comparison of her responses with those of some of the other students (who have more experience communicating in English) is telling.

For example, a comparison of the following statements by Jennifer and Yonas reveal a relative gap in the two students' abilities to articulate their understandings of the concepts introduced during the project. Yonas reflected on what he gained from the project, saying

I've been able to learn that language reaches a lot of people in different demographics and brings them together. That's one thing I definitely realize because back in my neighborhood, I'm a community organizer for youth and everything. So, I will realize that if I want to get one specific, special group, I have to target what that group likes...And if you target the right people with the right advertisement, per se, you can attract them to something good.

And Jennifer responded to the same question with a similar, but, perhaps because of her limited language skills, more cursory explanation of what she had learned.

I can use media to make a movie or make the project be interesting. Or I can use media or other systems to make the project. And you can use movies, act in the community, and make people be more interested in it.

Ultimately, the students' basic literacy skills influenced, to some degree, their ability to comprehend the concepts and then articulate their understanding of these concepts in their participation and projects.

Now, the pedagogical and research methods employed during the project, in some respects, anticipated this challenge. For example, Buckingham (1993) notes that while

...most media syllabuses require a written log or diary to accompany practical projects... the emphasis on a written log discriminates against students who have problems with writing—yet these may be precisely the students who have contributed most effectively to the success of the practical work itself. (148)

The project's inclusion of video journals (rather than written diaries) was intended as one means of engaging with students who were still working to develop basic English language literacy skills. And while the project obviously included a number of activities and assignments predicated on the students' abilities to read and write (the 'Is vs. Ought' and 'Unity & Uniformity' handouts being just two examples), the curriculum's frequent use of visual media—photographs, charts and diagrams, film clips, televised news stories, advertisements, etc.—provided those students, despite any literacy delays, with some

opportunities to participate in somewhat sophisticated analyses of media. But given the contrast between the articulation of understandings of theoretical concepts between students with varying levels of literacy, greater efforts could be made in future projects to take into account each students' proficiency with the English language (or lack thereof).

Cultural background. Next, given that most of the participants had relatively recently immigrated to the US, they may be better understood as *global citizens* rather than American citizens. Thus, the students' identification with American popular culture and their readings of American media are complicated by their identities as hybrid citizens and media consumers. The complexity of their relationship with American culture—demonstrated, for example, in the last chapter's discussion of their varying perspectives on the *Kony 2012* campaign—may have facilitated the students' critical analysis of the content and context of media in the US.

When asked about the relationship between their unique experience as refugees and their participation in the club, a number of the students were very forthcoming about what advantages they experience as (mainly African) immigrants. In regards to their perception of challenges facing society, some students expressed that their experiences with poverty and war in their home countries give them a broader perspective on the reality of the challenges that communities face. For example, Said contrasted his perspective as a Somali refugee with a more typical American teenager's perspective, saying

...the way I think is very different from the way that Americans, or people that are born here, think. Because I've seen a lot of things where I grew up—war, people dying, getting shot by guns and all that. And since I moved from it and got away from it safely, I'm thankful for that. And I don't take life for granted. And I know that I'm privileged to have this, that there are far worse people. And I know that I'm lucky to be here. And

most people don't know that because they've never experienced it. And their biggest problem is basically getting grounded or getting suspended from school while other people are suffering far more serious problems.

Because some of his classmates have not been as fortunate (or perhaps, unfortunate) to witness some of the problems that he has experienced, Said feels that they are less equipped to recognize and engage with these issues; instead, he feels they are more likely to be overwhelmed by minor problems.

Both Yonas and Abel, both immigrants from Ethiopia, expressed that their background provided a greater context for the relationship between media and civic life. For example, Yonas discussed how his experience in Ethiopia encouraged him to be more critical of media's complicity with authoritarian governments. He said, "Growing up in a third world country, or whatever, you see yellow journalism everywhere because the government wants you to view it this way, you know, their way and not the other way." And Abel argues that their experience with propaganda encourages critical reflection on not only media's relationship with politics but also the nature of democratic discourse in such a society. When asked to reflect on how his experience as a refugee influenced his perspective on issues of media and civic life addressed in the club, Abel answered,

I mean, back home, you can't talk about stuff. I mean, you can't show them your feelings because no one's going to listen to you... There is no freedom... People will only listen to the government. You can't even say, "What's happening? What's the president doing? How can we do this? How can we do that?"

Both Abel and Yonas attributed part of their practice of critical media literacy skills to their first-hand experiences with media that explicitly operate to perpetuate oppressive governmental rule and suppress democratic dissent. While students like Gio and David—who grew up in the U.S. and had less experience with such overt forms of propagandistic

media (although this statement may be the grounds for some debate)—were, perhaps, not as capable of (or at least not as vocal about) critiquing media’s role in perpetuating social inequalities. This is not to say, however, that simply because some students were not immigrants from Africa that they were incapable of developing critical consciousness, as the following paragraphs will demonstrate.

Personal experiences. Given that many of the students are refugees, come from working class families, and/or live in urban areas, their personal experiences may encourage more critical engagements with certain issues (like police brutality, racism, the incarceration of urban youth, etc.) than students who do not share those same experiences. For example, a number of the students were motivated to select a particular social issue for their project because of their personal experiences with that problem. As discussed earlier, David and Gio related to the story of Trayvon Martin and chose to focus their project on issues of racism and police brutality because of somewhat similar experiences that each of them had as youth of color. Another example is Ezana and Yonas’ reasons for producing a project on the ‘school-to-jail track’ issue. Both students acknowledged that among their motivations for their participation in PJU and their work on the restorative justice video and accompanying social media campaign were their personal experiences with this problem of over-policed schools. When asked whether he had witnessed the effects of the policies that PJU challenged, Yonas responded,

Definitely. More than once. I’ve seen a lot of students get put in handcuffs in front of my face and just walked out the back door. And I think, I know there were situations where it could have been handled the right way, in an ethical way, rather than handcuffing somebody’s children and putting them in jail.

Students who have not witnessed the same police actions, and have not been subject to the same school policies (like myself, having attended high school in a wealthy suburban area) may not be as prone to recognize and engage with these types of social issues. And this is just one example of how cultural, economic and geographic context clearly influences students' development of critical consciousness.

Interest in political and social issues. The students' practice of critical inquiry of and engagement with social issues and media representations is also influenced by their familiarity with social and political issues. Yonas and Said's shared interest in current events, Yonas and Ezana's participation in PJU, and Jennifer's experiences volunteering for environmental efforts in Taiwan contributed to their engagement with these issues of media and civic life. For example, Jennifer discussed how her selection of the recycling initiative for her project was informed by her previous participation in the issue. She reflected on her project saying,

I choose recycle because when I was in Taiwan I joined a group and their goal is about environment. So I would do it with my mom. And I saw some of the places didn't do well in recycle. So, I want to let people know when you do recycle, the place will become more beautiful. I have done some recycle when I was in Taiwan and we go to a beach to take the trash and say which one is recycle things. And it is fun to have many people together to do recycle.

Jennifer's enthusiasm about her engagement in issues of recycling contrast with students like David or Anise who—while obviously engaging with the theoretical concepts as they relate to the social issues they addressed in their projects—had previously expressed little interest in current events and limited participation in activist efforts. As a result of their lack of interest, these students were, perhaps, less informed on their issues, and subsequently were at a relative disadvantage. The students' prior knowledge and

experience—in this case, specifically related to issues of media and society—play a part in their development of critical consciousness.

Uses of media. Students' ability to critically engage with social issues and media representations is also influenced by their use of media. For example, the students whose typical participation in media was limited to consumption had less experience critically reflecting on media messages or using media to express themselves. David, for example, discussed how his typical use of media was limited to playing video games and watching videos on YouTube, and perhaps because of his rather limited experience actively participating with media, he was at a relative disadvantage in his development of critical consciousness. For example, when asked whether he thought he would be able to utilize any of the skills or ideas he learned during his participation in the project in the future, his response was somewhat limited.

I think I probably will. Just in case, like, I'm looking a job up, doing some research on them. It'll help me do that. Just go on their main website and I can actually look up their history or anything.

David's response indicates that the primary application of the learning he experienced during the project is being able to search the Internet to learn about potential jobs in the future. And while being able to successfully use search engine is undoubtedly a useful skill, it is no indication of critical consciousness.

On the other hand, students who were more active media users were more comfortable with and capable of critically engaging with media and thoughtfully producing their own media texts. For example, Said's experience both critically reflecting on news media and doing video production work himself seemed to enable him to more critically evaluate issues of media and society. For example, when asked what was the

most significant thing that he learned during his participation in the project, Said answered with the following:

I learned that you can use digital media to show problems that you're community is facing, or your country like we're doing with the drought in Africa. So, we're using digital media to show that to the people because every news source says different things, and we wanted to show it from our perspective.

Based on these examples, the students' development of critical consciousness seemed to be influenced, at least to some degree, by their habitual uses of media, and those students who were more comfortable using media as a means of communication, expression and self-reflection (rather than simply consumption) were more likely to demonstrate critical consciousness.

Engagement in the project. Ultimately though, one of the key contextual factors that contributed to the students' relative 'success' in developing of critical consciousness was their commitment to the project. A number of students attended most (if not all) lessons, were instrumental in choosing their group's social issue, and saw their projects to completion. Given that students' exposure to critical concepts precedes their understanding and implementation of these concepts in their projects, it follows that their attendance—and as a result, their participation in activities and discussions around theoretical concepts—influenced their ability to develop critical consciousness. For example, students like Said and Abdiaziz missed earlier conversations but were more involved in the latter, production-oriented phase of the project. These students were less familiar with some of the concepts that were addressed during those discussion, and as a result, there existed some differences of opinion about the objectives and defining characteristics of their group's final project. Abel and Anise, who more consistently

attended the club and were more involved in conducting research about the crisis in east Africa, were more invested in implementing these concepts in the creation of their projects than Said or Abdiaziz, who were less involved in the media analysis activities. In fact, at the conclusion of the project, Abel voiced his disappointment with how some students' inconsistent attendance in the club seemed to prevent the completion of some of the projects.

It's not difficult. Just do what's you're supposed to do. If you're supposed to meet every Thursday, just come every Thursday. I mean, you don't have to join it if you're not going to be there, you know? If you don't want to be a leader, you don't have to come to it. So, you got to have a commitment before you come. That's basically what I want to say.

Given that the project was held during the school's early-release period and it concluded the week of final exams, it was not too surprising that student interest and attendance waned a bit, especially toward the end of the school year. Yonas—perhaps a little more sympathetic than Abel to those who attended less often—acknowledged the obstacles that prevented students from being more committed to the project:

Yonas: I wish it was part of an everyday class and everything. That's the only thing. If this was a regular class, do you know how many kids would be in here bustin' their ass to get into that door?

Interviewer: You think?

Yonas: Yea, because Thursday after school, people go home, go eat... go chill, go practice. Its an inconvenient time for most people, I really got interested in it, so I gave up things to be part of this group. But, I promise you, if this was a class? There would be a lot of kids.

The dedication to the project that Abel, Yonas, and others' demonstrated could be due to these students' work ethics, their interest in the material, their enjoyment of the activities, or their interactions with the other students and instructor. But whatever the motivations

for their attendance (or lack thereof), the students' engagement in the project contributed to their development of critical consciousness.

Civic Engagement

Again, while the previous chapters' discussions of competing conceptualizations of citizenship underlying the different approaches to media education suggest the type of critical political participation inherent in my use of the term *civic engagement*, please allow me to briefly explain what this entails. Drawing from Abowitz and Harnish's (2006) discussion of *reconstructionist citizenship*, this project is primarily concerned with the students' practice of identifying and then working to overcome injustice as it is manifested in cultural practice, media representations, social relations, and political institutions. They write, "To reclaim democratic institutions for the poor and marginalized, reconstructionist citizenship discourse embraces critical thinking, conflict, and controversy" (672). Now, as this statement suggests, the reclamation of democracy often implies some radical revisions to the existing social order. So, echoing the work of Sholle and Denski, the intention of the project was to encourage a particular type of civic engagement among students that did not "serve to reproduce existing social inequalities [but] serve to overcome these inequalities in support of an emancipatory democracy" (1994, 7). In the context of this particular project, this means specifically that students should (1) understand and embrace their role as citizens who critique and actively contribute to civic life, and (2) engage with social issues, through their media analysis and production activities, in an effort to transform existing relations, representations, institutions and ideologies to reflect their own understandings of a just society. As Arnowitz and Giroux (1991) profoundly stated, "Freedom consists in the capacity of

people and groups to *transform knowledge in accordance with their own plans*” (22, emphasis added). First, the students’ participation in class discussions, video journals, interview responses and final projects will be used to demonstrate their development of these two dimensions of civic engagement. And following the discussion of these findings, I will provide further explanation of how some contextual factors contributed to the students’ civic engagement.

(1) First, the students’ critical political participation is contingent upon their understandings of *citizenship*. To clarify, students were not expected to adopt a particular partisan approach to political issues; rather, they were encouraged to embrace their role as citizens who critique and contribute to civic life in accordance with their own understandings of a just society. Student responses to the question of how they defined citizenship were analyzed not for their political content, but their critical, transformative potential. So for example, when asked about what constituted a ‘good citizen,’ both Said and Ezana stressed the responsibility to work to solve problems that face one’s community. Said answered,

A good citizen is helping out your community, taking part in the leadership in your community and your country. And if there’s a problem, you try to find a way to help it or contribute to solving the problem because it’s your community and you’re a part of it. And you’re responsible for helping the country and the community too.

And Ezana shared a similar response to the same question, saying,

I think a good member of the community should identify the issues that are going around in the community and try to fix them, you know, as a group, as a community. It’s better to work together. And in order to make your community better, you have to first identify what’s wrong with it. And once you do that, put in an effort to make it better. I think that makes you a good citizen in your community.

Both Said and Ezana defined a ‘good citizen’ as one who is critical of the challenges facing society and active in working towards solutions to these challenges—fairly general, but still consistent with Abowitz and Harnish’s discussions of reconstructionist citizenship that informed the project.

Yonas, on the other hand, voiced a somewhat different explanation of citizenship, defining the responsibility of the citizen as that of minimizing the burden that he/she might unfairly place on the greater community. For example, when asked to explain the ‘school-to-jail track’ issue, Yonas discussed what he saw as the negative consequences of the over-policing of schools.

But [those that institute these policies] don’t see that there is a future outcome, a very bad outcome to that. And that outcome is kids going to jail or whatever. That’s going to ruin their future. And the more kids who ruin their future, the more kids that the American tax system will have to pay. The more the tax system will have to pay, the more regulations and everything will have to go up. The more regulations that will go up, it will have more of an effect on people who work harder than the kids who did get in trouble and that could have worked hard. So, people like you or I or some other people would have to carry that burden. So, it would be worse of a burden rather than dealing with it immediately and having that person be a benefit to society.

While Yonas first acknowledges the negative effects of such policies on the kids themselves, the majority of his explanation addresses how these policies unfairly burden hard-working, tax-paying “people like you or I.” Now, in order to minimize the burden that certain individuals place on the greater community, Yonas advocates for more effective, equitable school discipline policies. But interestingly, he describes this effort to promote justice as the means to an end—that of relieving the greater community of subsidizing the imprisonment of these youth.

On another occasion, when we listened to the radio program with the two teenagers investigating the potential contamination of the food at the youth correctional facility (discussed in the previous chapter), Yonas shared a possible explanation for the disrespectful manner in which the staff member responded to their inquiries. When asked how the teenagers might effectively address this problem, Yonas responded with the following:

I think, like, it's mostly the kids' fault getting thrown in their own faces. Just like, you treat someone the way that you want to be treated, it's a matter of respect. Because if they're treating each other with such irresponsibility, such disrespect, obviously the other people that see that are going to happen... So, rather than trying to go up the ladder and complain, you should first try and fix yourself and see what you're doing wrong.

In this case, Yonas sees an immediate solution in increased critical self-reflection on the part of the imprisoned youth. Citizenship, in this case, does involve efforts to solve social problems, but those efforts start with self-examination and –improvement.

But to be completely fair to Yonas, I think that at the heart of his perspective on these issues of youth incarceration is the obligation he feels personally to contribute to the greater good of his community (rather than some sort of misplaced, conservative indignation against youth in prison). For example, when asked to define a ‘good citizen,’ he initially responded with someone who “put[s] the nation first.” He continued, discussing how “if you keep on thinking back to yourself, the nation will crumble, and if you put yourself in the backseat, the nation will progress, and you’ll definitely be one of the people to go with it.” The self-examination that he encouraged in the instance of the mistreated pudding detectives could then be understood as Yonas’ understanding of the good citizen as one who’s first recourse to solving social ills is self-improvement. But

that is not to suggest that, for him, civic engagement is limited to self-discipline or self-sufficiency. I argue that his active participation in promoting restorative justice through both his involvement in PJU and his work during this project is evidence of that.

(2) While their conceptualizations of citizenship obviously *contribute* to the students' critical political participation, the primary determinants of civic engagement are the efforts that students make to engage in public discourse about challenges facing their community and to transform existing relations, practices, representations or institutions. As discussed in the last chapter, the student projects are nice (little) demonstrations of media praxis in which they implemented the theoretical concepts into the production of media messages and used these messages to raise awareness about or otherwise address their chosen social issues. Jennifer designed posters to promote recycling among South students, not by emphasizing the facts and figures typical of environmental rhetoric but by suggesting more unconventional re-purposing of items like cardboard boxes or water bottles. She gives her audience examples of creative recycling efforts and invites them to join the fun. Abel, Anise, Said and Abdiaziz produced a short video to raise awareness of the crisis affecting east African countries. Rather than focus solely on Somalia and emphasize the number of deaths, they addressed the crisis more holistically, acknowledging all of the countries affected and including interviews from individuals who had been affected by the drought. They provided information and voices not typically included in news coverage of the issue, and they invite audience to continue the conversation on their Facebook page.

David and Gio shared their own experiences being misjudged and mistreated by law enforcement, and while they were unable to complete their final project, their

intention was to use their presentation to motivate others to share similar stories and explore how best to address issues of racism and police brutality. And lastly, Ezana and Yonas produced a video demonstrating the value of restorative justice and presented it to school officials, community members and the news media to drum up support for their organization Padres y Jovenes Unidos. They created Twitter and Facebook pages for South's chapter of PJU, posted the video to each, and invited students and other members of the community to participate in an online discussion about the problem of the 'school-to-jail track.' Each of these projects exemplifies civic engagement, in different ways and to different degrees. The following section will address what factors contributed to the efficacy of the students' civic engagement.

Discussion

Now, each student's development of these aspects of civic engagement was influenced by certain factors including his/her (1) understanding of theoretical concepts, (2) implementation of these concepts into their media production, and (3) interest in future involvement in media and/or politics, as well as (4) the contextual power relations among the students along lines of race, culture and gender.

Understanding of theoretical concepts. Given that I have defined civic engagement in relation to reconstructionist citizenship, it follows that in order for a students to be truly engage in political praxis, they must have some grasp of the critical theoretical concepts. The previous discussion of critical consciousness reveals some variance among the students' individual understandings of these concepts, due to each students' basic literacy skills, cultural background, attendance to class discussions,

interest in political and social issues, etc. It follows, then, that each of the factors that contribute to the students' development of critical consciousness would subsequently contribute to their civic engagement as well.

For example, Jennifer's lack of proficiency with the English language not only presents a challenge to her understanding of some of the more sophisticated theoretical concepts (and therefore limit her ability to implement these concepts in her project), but it also could potentially prevent her audience from comprehending or identifying with her message. The mistakes in grammar in the text on her posters, while minimal, may serve to distance her audience, rather than invite them to engage with the issue. Or David's lack of active participation with media may not only hinder his engagement in media analysis activities (and therefore gather the information necessary to inform his own project), but it may have also contributed to his group's failure to complete their media production project. As a result, their stories will not be shared with an audience beyond the confines of our classroom, and little impact will be generated on the public perception of the issue. Or as a final example, Anise's failure to attend the last few weeks of the project (which at least in part, motivated Abel's insistence on more dedication among student participants), not only prevented him from learning the concepts discussed during those meetings, but it ultimately resulted in the exclusion of his voice and his labor from the final, finished project. Consistent with the understanding of praxis as the wedding of theory and practice, knowledge and action, students who struggled in their development of critical consciousness were less prepared to practice civic engagement.

Implementation of concepts in project. Even when students demonstrated some understanding of the theoretical concepts introduced during the project, their civic

engagement was still (at least partly) contingent upon their ability to implement the concepts into their media production efforts. Hammer (1995) provides a helpful explanation of the role of media education in this bridging of theory and practice, knowledge and action. She writes,

Most adults and children know about socio-political and economic practice; they know about class relations and their position in it; they know about bigotry and inequality. What they don't know is how to talk about them...Media literacy teachers, therefore, need to assist students to understand dominant value patterns and power relationships (and metarelationshps) in a dialectical contextual manner. (36)

In the context of this project, the students' ability to "know how to talk about" these issues included how they implemented the concepts and information they gained in class in their creation of alternative media. And as the last chapter's discussion of praxis indicated, a number of steps were taken to encourage students' to be successful in that regard. Students' use of the 'Unity and Uniformity,' 'Is vs. Ought,' and 'Pre-Production' worksheets all encouraged a direct implementation of their learning into the planning of their projects, and the textual analysis of each group's final project revealed some of the students' accomplishments in doing so.

However, I feel it is necessary to qualify the students' efforts to implement theory into practice, knowledge into action, in two ways: Students' civic engagement efforts were often limited by the way in which their media production projects reproduced (rather than challenged) some aspects they had, in their research identified, as hegemonic media representations; and students' civic engagement was negatively affected by the their failure to understand their media production projects as making a difference in their chosen social issue.

First, while the students' made visible efforts to identify the uniform characteristics of news coverage of their issues, and then include information, voices, images, etc. that were typically excluded from these mainstream representations in their own alternative media production, some of the projects still struggled—both in regards to their form and their content—to present a legitimately counter-hegemonic representation of the issue. While the theory informed their research and planning for the project, it was not always present in the execution of the project itself. For example, in the project that addressed the east African drought, Abel, Anise, Said and Abdiaziz had observed how mainstream news coverage of the crisis did not often include the perspective of those living in affected countries. And while they had planned to include a number of interviews with individuals who recently immigrated from these areas and who could share personal witnesses of the negative effects of the drought, their final project only included one interview with a student who, while African, had immigrated to the U.S. before the onset of the drought, and therefore did not have firsthand experience with its effects. The group's inclusion of this interview may have been an improvement on more conventional coverage of the issue, that emphasizes facts and figures over human voices, but they nonetheless failed to include the alternative perspectives that they had identified were essential to a more complete understanding of the problem (and therefore to a more effective engagement with the issue). Interestingly, the project, while making efforts to include content that was typically excluded from coverage of the issue, was formally quite similar to more conventional representations of such issues.

This issue of evaluating the formal attributes of students' practical work is addressed by Buckingham (1993). He writes,

Examiners typically argue that practical work should be critical rather than imitative of dominant media, although how this might be identified remains unclear. Good practical work often appears to be that which adopts a modernist aesthetic: a pastiche of Eisenstein or Godard is likely to gain much better marks than a pastiche of an Arnold Schwarzenegger movie. (148)

Given that most students chose somewhat conventional modes of communication for their projects—advertisement, documentary, etc.—I did not anticipate the projects to adopt a modernist aesthetic. However, I do question the effectiveness of some of the more ‘imitative’ aspects of the student projects in contributing to positive social change.

For example, Abel et al.’s video includes a sequence of photos depicting the terrible consequences of the drought—malnourished children, herds of dead livestock, etc.—accompanied by the Sara McLachlan song “Angel.” Now, the selection of this song is complicated for two reasons. First, the song has famously been used to invoke sympathy for another cause—it was included in a (I would argue a particularly emotionally manipulative) television advertisement for the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. So, while the students’ in the group had planned to use music and images to encourage identification with those affected by the crisis in east Africa, the selection of this particular song may have been a reproduction of a somewhat heavy-handed approach employed in advertisements like that for ASPCA. Second, the selection of the song invokes sympathy, but as it is a western pop song sung by a white, Canadian artist, it seems to promote the very perspective that the students criticized in mainstream news coverage of the drought. While conventional representations adopted an ‘outside-in’ perspective of the crisis (the representation of African peoples as silent victims or the emphasis of facts and figures as potentially dehumanizing the people suffering), the group’s inclusion of ‘insider’ perspectives was an effort to challenge this

approach and humanize those individuals. However, I think that the selection of the song—both in its imitation of existing advertising campaign and its implicit adoption of an outsider’s perspective—might have limited the video’s potential to challenge hegemonic media representations of the crisis. (To be completely fair, I discovered on later inquiry that the song was a suggestion by a faculty member from South who worked with students on other multimedia projects)

The video on restorative justice, produced by Ezana, Yonas and other student members of Padres y Jovenes Unidos, provides another example of how students struggled to implement certain theoretical concepts in their practical work, and subsequently struggled in their civic engagement efforts. Most notably, the restorative justice video excluded female perspectives on the issue. As the images and transcript from the video in the last chapter illustrate, each of the primary characters in the video are male—Ezana, Benjamin, the dean (played by Abel) and the mediator (played by Yonas). While there were a few female students who were instrumental to the production of the video—one of them, an active member of PJU, served as the skit’s director—no females appear on camera. Now, this lack of representation may be a somewhat accurate representation of the problem that the video seeks to address. Ezana did note that the research conducted by PJU revealed that the ‘school-to-jail track’ affected mostly students of color; however, he did not address the gender distribution of those students. But even so, the lack of any female characters, even in roles like the dean or mediator, seems to perpetuate the perspective that issues of violence, disciplinary action, law enforcement, incarceration—especially in racially diverse, urban areas—are problems that predominately affect males. So, while the video effectively presents an alternative to

the current disciplinary policies of schools which under-serve students, it may have been more effective as a civic engagement effort had it been more conscious of the role of gender in the issue. In this case, the students' particular representation of the 'school to jail track' problem, might have unintentionally limited the audience's perception of the greater issue.

And addressing the second point, it became evident as they reflected on their projects that some students were not able to make the connection between their efforts and any possible practical solution to the problems they had identified. Now, this disempowered perspective may or may not have contributed to the students' enthusiasm to engage in such efforts, but I find it significant that that students simultaneously worked on these projects and questioned the efficacy of such work. For example, the following excerpt from an interview with Anise reveals this interesting, complicated relationship between the students' civic engagement and their anticipated effects of these efforts.

Interviewer: So, what have you learned about your *role* in relation to these concerns that you are talking about. So, what have you learned about what you could do?

Anise: Oh...

Interviewer: For something like *bad* news....

Anise: I don't know. I mean, you can't really do much...

Interviewer: You can't do much?

Anise: Like, if news has a story, you know that story is not completely correct, or they aren't saying the whole truth, you can't just to them and say, "Oh, you gotta change that," because it takes more than one person to do that.

Interviewer: But you could do something like that, right? You could make a video.

Anise: Yeah.

Anise's disconnection between his civic engagement (the video addressing the drought) and the potential resolution of these issue (mainstream media's more detailed, complex coverage of such crises) was also echoed by David, Gio and others. Now, this perspective could be due to cynicism or a feeling a lack of empowerment or simply a 'realistic' understanding of power relations (youth-produced alternative media vs. big media; activist efforts vs. the status quo; individual agency vs. institutional authority). Or it might be the result those students' felt lack of social capital (something that will be addressed shortly). For example, the students' confidence in being able to influence others may be influenced by how they see themselves within the hierarchical social relations of their community. Or this failure to successfully connect the theories of empowerment discussed in class with the students' actual experience of empowerment could be due to an inadequacy of the project curriculum to adequately emphasize the students' potential role in shaping media representations of and public discourse about social issues that affect them.

Interest in continued engagement with media and/or politics. Another factor that contributed to each student's civic engagement during the course of the project was his/her intention to be involved in media or politics in the future. Some students, while perhaps enjoying and benefiting from their participation in the project, expressed little interest in pursuing media or politics in education or their careers. Some students, like Ezana, acknowledged that "no matter what kind of career you choose to follow or anything, if its business-wise or anything, you can learn a lot from Digital Media Club." But students like Yonas and Said—who voiced specific interests in using media to

address particular political and social issues—were arguably more motivated to use the project to practice civic participation. As noted in the last chapter, Yonas discussed how he felt that his experience in Digital Media Club and with Padres y Jovenes Unidos would prepare him to return to Ethiopia and build his own civic-minded corporation. “I want to educate and develop the country,” he said. “And I want to continue to spread that wealth and knowledge.” A number of times throughout the project, Yonas referred to how he planned to implement some of the skills he was learning in these future efforts, so it makes sense that, because of this interest, he would be particularly engaged in the activist-oriented aspects of the project.

Said shared Yonas’ interest in using his newfound knowledge and skills in his future, and specifically, in his efforts to raise awareness about challenges facing his home country. He said,

I want to go to school and obtain a Bachelor’s degree in film production. And I want to show the real stories, tell true stories of what’s going on and not be influenced by everybody who wants just to sell it. I want to be able to go against the odds and say something that might get me in trouble even, saying that this is not right...So, I want to show what’s going on in my home country, what people are facing, what immigrants are facing, and a lot of stuff that’s been going on. I want to show that through film.

Said clearly saw his participation in the project, and specifically his involvement in the production of the video about the crisis in east Africa, as preparation for this future goal. This was probably most evident in the fact that Said returned to the school a number of times after having received his diploma to ensure that the video was edited and the project was completed. Efforts like this, from students with explicit interests in media and politics, demonstrated greater civic engagement than those of students who were

somewhat ambivalent about their participation in the projects, let alone future engagement in these issues.

Contextual power relations among students. Given the diverse student body at South High School, it is no wonder that issues of power along lines of race, culture and gender would contribute to the students' feelings of empowerment and their subsequent civic engagement efforts. Perhaps it is of no surprise that students organized themselves into groups which were fairly consistent with racial, cultural, and gender identities. But these divisions seemed to perpetuate the arguably unequal power relations that existed between racial and cultural groups in the school. And as a result, some students' may have felt less empowered in their civic engagement. For example, Ezana and Yonas (both black young men from Ethiopia) formed a group, and Abel (from Ethiopia), Anise (from Libya), Abdiaziz (from Ethiopia), and Said (from Somalia) formed a group. While there is some diversity among these two groups of guys, they all clearly identified as African immigrants (demonstrated, for example, in the one group's choice to represent an 'insider's' perspective on the east African drought). And as the excerpts from class discussions may have illustrated, this large group of mostly black, all male, all African students often dominated the class discussions, perhaps preventing the rest of the students from fully participating. This majority of the student participants, perhaps because of their shared racial and cultural identities, were enthusiastic in their participation in the club and as a result were more empowered to engage in civic discourse and action.

Some of the attitudes voiced by Gio (Latino American) and David (Native American), who also formed a group, contrast the confidence expressed by the other

students. For example, David acknowledged that even at a school like South which clearly valued diversity, he felt marginalized—“It’s a little harder for Natives because I feel like sometimes I’m on the outside of everybody else.” As one of the few Native American students at South, it was more difficult to socialize with students from his own ethnic and cultural background. During the school’s International Day, over three-dozen nations were represented in song, food, dress and dance, but none of the First Nations was among those included. And while there is a relatively large group of Latino American students at South, Gio also felt isolated and less empowered. When asked whether he felt that problems racism and police brutality could be overcome, Gio responded with the following:

I think that no matter what we tried, I don’t think the world can get back to a better place or whatever, a peaceful place. The world chooses how it wants to be, or whatever. It chose to. And no matter what we try, it’s not going to give up its ultimate sacrifices, what it did to benefit us so many years. It’s not going to give that up, knowing that those benefited us is what destroyed us the most.

This lack of empowerment may have played a part in their failure to complete their media production project and subsequently add their voice to public discourses around racial justice.

And lastly, Jennifer, the only female who consistently participated in the project, and one of the very few Taiwanese immigrants at South, worked alone on her project. The following exchange provides some insight into the isolation felt by Jennifer, not just in the project but in her overall experience at South.

Interviewer: What about your community? Do you have friends or do you know other people from here or from Taiwan that you and your family like to hang out with, spend time with?

Jennifer: No...no.

Interviewer: Not really. How about the Taiwanese students here at school? Do you ever talk to them? Do you ever hang out with them?

Jennifer: No.

Interviewer: Not really. Okay, so most of the time when you're interacting with your friends, it's online with your friends from home?

Jennifer: I use Facebook.

The fact that the students' choice of groups and topics seemed to further isolate Jennifer from the other students rather than foster community among them is unfortunate. And while Jennifer's project was successful in that it implemented the concepts and information she gained in her research to raise awareness about and invite participation in issues of recycling, I cannot help but wonder if Jennifer would have felt more empowered, and therefore been more effective in her outreach, if she had shared these efforts with other students. Ultimately, I think that in the case of each of these issues described in this section, further examination and implementation of critical theories of media and culture might strengthen this approach to a politically-oriented media literacy education and provide sounder, conceptual foundations for future iterations of the project.

Layer 2 - Pedagogy

Implications for Theory

Given that pedagogy is understood not just as the teaching methods employed in the classroom, but as how both the form and content of teaching are informed by bodies of theory and practice, the following discussion addresses both the theoretical implications of the project's findings, and their practical pedagogical implications. First, in regards to the theory which provided the foundation for the project's curriculum

pedagogical methods, I address whether the theory adequately addresses (1) issues of individual difference and contextual variance in student praxis, (2) the embodied experiences of and emotional responses to the challenges facing their communities, and (3) what exactly constitutes critical reading, counter-hegemonic media production or transformative social change. In response to each question, I suggest additional scholarship that might enrich the theoretical approaches used in this project and enable future projects to be more successful in promoting student praxis.

Does the theory adequately account for issues of individual difference and contextual variance that contribute to student praxis? The students' basic literacy skills, interest in political and social issues, uses of media, their cultural background and other personal experiences clearly contributed to their 'success' in developing critical consciousness and civic engagement. However, I do not know if the theoretical foundations of the project—in the work of Plato, Dewey or The Frankfurt School—fully account for such variance. For example, among Plato's principal contributions to classical philosophy was his notion of ideal forms—that physical entities, organic and inorganic, are imperfect manifestations of idealized concepts. His discussions of citizenship, then, are influenced by an absolutist perspective that, I think, might be inconsistent with the radical democratic pluralism needed to account for the incredible diversity of voices represented among the project's student participants. Next, Dewey's association with the Chicago School sociologists suggests a certain sympathy towards the *social disorganization* argument, which sees the increased urbanization and diversification of the U.S. (of which, I think, South High School is the perfect contemporary example) as the most pressing problem of the modern era. While this

argument acknowledges the type of diversity exhibited in the project's participants, this diversity is understood as an obstacle to societal unity. And lastly, the work of the Frankfurt School, and specifically Horkheimer and Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, forwards an argument that (even when understood as calculated hyperbole as Gunster suggests) limits the possibility that contextual factors or individual differences might complicate or contribute to the development of critical (or class) consciousness. In fact, according to Horkheimer and Adorno, the culture industry anticipates these differences, and as a result offers a variety of cultural products that "do not so much reflect real differences as assist in the classification, organization and identification of consumers. Something is provided for everyone *so that no one can escape*" (96-97, emphasis added).

In order to find an adequate theoretical explanation for how the diverse experiences of the students might complicate or contribute to their development of critical consciousness and civic engagement, we might return to the work of critical pedagogues like Arnowitz and Giroux (whose work was briefly discussed in Chapter 1). In *Postmodern Education* (1991), the authors suggest a definition of consciousness, for example, that satisfactorily attends to such difference. They write,

Consciousness must take itself as its object, recognize that the process of forging an identity should be tied not to representations of what should be the goals to which students should aspire, but to what students themselves want, what they think and feel, and—most important—*what they already know*. (37, emphasis added)

Successful critical media literacy informed by this perspective, then, would not seek out the most effective means of acculturating students to or emancipating them from particular ideologies. Instead, critical media literacy must acknowledge the diverse experiences of each student, and encourage him to determine for himself what might

constitute critical consciousness or civic engagement. And of course, the dialectic's emphasis of continuous critical self-evaluation would not be abandoned—students would be encouraged to continually revisit and revise these definitions. But an adherence to any particular critical theoretical approach, at the expense of an acknowledgment of the individual differences among students and the shifting political, cultural, and economic contexts in which they exist, is ineffective in promoting real praxis. Ultimately, students' range of diverse experiences must be embraced as something that actively contributes to their development as critical citizens and consumers of media.

Does the theory adequately account for the students' embodied experiences of and emotional responses to the problems that they face in their communities? As chapter 2 attempts to demonstrate, all of the theories that informed the project are concerned in some respect with the public's ability to recognize and confront contradictions in the society. However, much of these theories emphasize intellectual development and practical political engagement without adequately acknowledging emotional response or embodied experience.

Arnowitz and Giroux, again, may be helpful in addressing this problem. Their use of “what they *want*, what they think and *feel*” from the quote above seems to acknowledge the emotional dimension of social struggle. Additionally, I think Axel Honneth—the current director of the Institute for Social Research in Frankfurt but not someone whose work was particularly influential in the planning of the project—might be helpful in this respect. Honneth's work intends to carry on the tradition of Critical Theory—as conceptualized by Horkheimer and further developed by Habermas—by

more effectively grounding it in lived experience: human labor, human interaction, *and* human emotion. He writes of his approach:

...this model asserts a close connection between the kinds of violation of the normative assumptions of social interaction and the moral experiences subjects have in their everyday communication. If those conditions are undermined by the fact that people are denied the recognition they deserve, they will generally react with moral feelings that accompany the experience of disrespect—shame, anger or indignation. (2007, 72)

By emphasizing the experience of disrespect as the pre-theoretical motivation for political praxis, Honneth attempts to contextualize theory and practice within the personal, even corporeal, experiences an individual has as a result of social injustice. And given the feelings expressed by the students during the course of the project, this acknowledgment of emotion might be helpful in explaining to students the reasons for these emotions and then encouraging them to think and act in response to those emotions.

For example, when asked to describe his group's project, David responded with the following: "My project that I'm trying to do right now is about *rage*, I guess. Like, how people *feel* about this." Especially considering David's experiences being unfairly treated by law enforcement, his critical inquiry into issues of racism and police brutality seems to start on a gut level. He feels 'rage'—about being mistreated, about the death of Trayvon Martin, and about the other abuses of authority from U.S. history and those he learned about during his research—and this emotional response motivates his engagement with the issue. Now, David and Gio's project was left incomplete, despite their strong feelings toward the subject. However, had the project drawn more from work like that of Honneth, which attempts to make the connection between individual experiences of disrespect and collective social action efforts, David and Gio might have

been more equipped to translate their personal experiences and emotions into critical analysis and activism.

Does the theory adequately explain what constitutes critical reading, counter-hegemonic media production or even transformative social change? Lastly, because of the rather elusive nature of terms like critical consciousness, there exists some difficulty in determining whether these objectives are successfully achieved. For example, are Yonas' sometimes politically conservative perspectives on social issues evidence of his failure to develop critical consciousness? Is the drought video's use of aesthetic techniques typical of mainstream media representations evidence of the group's failure to produce counter-hegemonic media? Is the presentation of the restorative justice video to a small group of school officials and concerned citizens evidence of transformative social change? The previous analysis of the students' development of critical consciousness and civic engagement was my, somewhat haphazard, attempt at answering these questions. In Dean's (2008) analysis of her own feminist-oriented activism project, she reflects on a similar dilemma.

Of course, I have no way to measure the ongoing impact of the project on my students, just as I have no way to measure what impact their various awareness campaigns might make... These dilemmas raise important questions about what qualifies as activism... [A]re awareness campaigns activism? Is the potential for individual transformation (or consciousness-raising) through such awareness campaigns as much a form of 'activism' as the objective of taking direct action to transform the world? (355)

As Dean's very applicable commentary suggests, doing qualitative research to promote (and then evaluate) issues like consciousness-raising is a messy business. And in the case

of this project, I think that my theoretical approach may have contributed to this challenge.

Now, I would argue that critical theorists and pedagogues intentionally resist explicitly defining critical consciousness or political praxis, not wanting to impose universal standards upon such complicated, contextual matters. In fact, Adorno's retreat from political praxis may be understood as his resistance to the 'actionism' he observed in the student movements of the 1960s. Observing how others had appropriated his theories for ineffective, unreflective activist efforts (which he dubbed 'left-wing fascism'), he withdrew from what I am calling 'civic engagement':

Recently I said in a television interview that, even though I had established a theoretical model, I could not have foreseen that people would try to implement it with Molotov cocktails...[M]y thinking has perhaps had practical consequences in that some of its motifs have entered consciousness, but I have never said anything that was immediately aimed at practical actions. (Richter 15)

And so, while at the start of Chapter 2, I attempted to address how, despite the perceived 'pessimism' of work like Adorno's, the Critical Theory of the Frankfurt School could provide helpful theoretical foundations for such an activist-oriented project, I understand now that such a project may benefit from theory that more specifically addresses the concrete manifestations of critical consciousness or civic engagement.

So, for example, efforts like that of Rael (2009)—significantly less theoretical and more practically-oriented than Adorno—that evaluate the efficacy of youth media initiatives can be helpful to the degree that they rely on questions like “‘How was the community served?’ And, ‘What did the youth producers learn about an issue or about the community?’” to determine whether or not these elusive objectives have been fulfilled (168). However, an adoption of such standards for projects like this may be

disheartening. While the students clearly demonstrated their learning about their chosen social issues and about media industries, texts and audiences, their projects barely, if at all, benefited their community in any concrete way. Ultimately though, the project could definitely benefit from theoretical foundations that more adequately identify what constitutes alternative media production or social change.

Implications for Teaching

Now, in regards to the curriculum design and teaching methods which constitute the other half of the project's pedagogy, I address whether the methods employed adequately facilitate (1) the organization of a democratic classroom, and (2) the students to understand and meaningfully engage with the social problems they face. Again, in response to each question, I suggest additional scholarship that might enrich the pedagogical approaches used in this project and enable future projects to be more successful in promoting student praxis.

Does the pedagogy adequately encourage democratic social relations among the students? As demonstrated by the previous discussion of how issues of race, culture and class influence students' feelings of empowerment, students' civic engagement is influenced by their experience of power relations in the classroom. The pedagogical approach employed in this project was developed specifically to resist what Freire criticized as the 'banking model' of education and to create a teaching environment in which teacher-student relations are not hierarchically organized. In regards to these two objectives, I argue that the project's pedagogy was successful. In fact, a few of the

students expressed their appreciation with how the teaching methods used in the project departed from those typically employed in their classes. Yonas was pleased that in contrast to his other classes, the project “actually let [the students] pick our activities and what we want to do.” Yonas valued the opportunity to choose his own group, select his own topic and project, do his own research, and work according to the schedule he created. Abel shared a similar response to the democratic pedagogy employed in the project. When asked about one of the most valuable things he learned from his participation, he responded with the following:

Like you guys do—just listen to the people. Listen to what their needs are. That’s the most...Like, you guys don’t just assign us work. You guys have us talk about it. Like, sometimes it’s good to disagree with people’s stuff. You get more ideas and stuff. Basically, in the future, I’m just going to listen to the community and how can I solve their problem, you know? That’s the most important step, just listening and then doing it.

Like Yonas, Abel was not only appreciative that the project allowed him and the other students greater freedom to openly discuss and then decide on their projects, but he was confident that this experience prepared him to more effectively engage with problems facing his community and meaningfully participate in democratic life.

However, as the experiences of students like David and Jennifer demonstrated, there were aspects of the project’s pedagogy that, perhaps, failed to adequately address power relations—not necessarily between students and teachers, but among the students themselves. In his *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970), Freire discusses that “One of the gravest obstacles to the achievement of liberation is that oppressive reality absorbs those within it and thereby acts to submerge human beings’ consciousness” (51). Some scholarship that evaluates community-based action research efforts (not unlike this project) have observed how this issue addressed by Freire can impede the progress of

such efforts (Chavez et al. 2003; Minkler 2004). In these cases, participants felt disempowered due to their ‘internalized racism,’ and as a result, were less likely to exhibit the same development of critical consciousness and civic engagement.

Interestingly, while among the project’s objectives was to encourage students to recognize their own participation in social injustice—their absorption into this ‘oppressive reality’—unfortunately, this effort was focused more on the chosen social issues, not the power relations among the students themselves. Acknowledging, for example how students’ identification with certain races, ethnicities, religions, cultures, gender or sexual orientations may, depending on the context, situate themselves as ‘oppressed’ or ‘oppressors’ among their classmates, would help address the feelings of disempowerment. Jennifer, a Taiwanese female, and David, a Native American, were, essentially, minorities within a community of minorities. And pedagogical strategies that acknowledge this power dynamic would serve to facilitate their feelings of empowerment in the classroom.

Does the pedagogy give adequate opportunity to the students to develop an understanding of the concepts and meaningfully contribute to a solution to a social problem? “I think we just need more time,” Abel responded, when asked how to improve the project in its future iterations. As noted earlier, the project was conducted over a period of eleven weeks, in a two-hour block of time during the school’s early-release period each Thursday. That makes less than a total of twenty-four hours to introduce concepts, engage in critical analysis, plan and execute theoretically-informed media activist projects. Given these time constraints (and the complicated understandings of

what constitutes ‘alternative media production’ or ‘political activism’ which I discussed earlier), I now question the feasibility of the students to adequately address any social problem during the project’s short duration. The questions Dean (2008) considered about her feminist pedagogy are made even more problematic when considering the limitations that the project’s curriculum and program management place on the achievement of its goals.

But even if the project’s limited time frame hindered students’ ability to engage in significant social change efforts, they seemed to have benefited from the time spent considering these concepts, researching the social issues, and planning their media production projects. Abel, again, noted that despite the pressure his group felt to finish their work before the end of the school year, he appreciated the emphasis the project placed on deliberate planning and reflective action.

That’s what I learned from this year’s group—talk about it first before you just do a project. Plan. Like you gave us so many plans before we did our work, which, when we were doing our work, it came in handy—it was easy. So, give them a plan. Guide them through how to do it...The more you guide them, the more interest they have to do the work. And the more interest they have, the more they’ll come and do their work in the classroom...Talk about it. Show them what has to be done. And make them feel like they’re a leader. That’s the most important.

Abel’s statement emphasizes that while his group struggled to complete their project on time (and others failed to complete a final project at all), the solution is not to emphasize the students’ practical work at the expense of their research and planning. This understanding, I think, relates to existing debates among media literacy scholars and practitioners concerning the evaluation of programs based on *product* or *process*. For example, Renee Hobbs (2008) discusses the difficulties in evaluating youth media programs, writing

Some educators value the educational process of learning to compose using media tools and technologies over the ultimate quality of the video or multimedia product actually produced, while funders tend to value the distribution of a quality production as an important benchmark. (438)

While the ‘distribution of a quality production’ was never a concern for this project, this issue of whether a media education effort anticipates and facilitates students’ personal development *or* more concrete results is definitely applicable to this project. This project’s twin goals of critical consciousness and civic engagement, I still think, are legitimized by the scholarship and necessary for any effective critical, political media literacy education, but I suppose ‘uniting theory, practice and politics in media education’ is easier said than done.

One redemptive reading of this inadequacy of the project’s pedagogical methods and objectives may be found in the work of Henry Jenkins. His examination of the political significance of fan cultures suggests that even when young people’s efforts do not specifically result in a visible transformation of social institutions, government policies, etc., they may, through their creative efforts and social interactions, have contributed to the generation of new cultural and political practices or social structures. He writes,

...we may also want to look at the structures of fan communities as showing us new ways of thinking about citizenship and collaboration. The political effects of these fan communities come not simply through the production and circulation of new ideas (the critical reading of favorite texts) but also through access to new social structures (collective intelligence) and new models of cultural participation (participatory culture). (2006, 246)

Not unlike the fan practices that Jenkins studies, this project encouraged the students’ engagement because it was fun and because the stakes were low. But beyond producing feminist fan-fiction or participating in online fan communities, my students’ efforts were

not limited to the sphere of popular cultural consumption. Students engaged with real challenges affecting their communities, and while they may not have contributed to any concrete changes in these conditions, they may have generated new ideas, social structures, and/or models of cultural (or political) participation, in the process.

Layer 3 – Evaluation

A number of the strengths and weaknesses of the evaluative methods employed in the project have been addressed previously in this chapter. Using video journals and interviews to help document the students' meaning-making process was helpful in that it encouraged those students who struggled with basic literacy skills to be able to discuss their participation in the project. However, even given these efforts, some students struggled to articulate their thoughts and feelings. The textual analysis of the students' final projects yielded some helpful understandings of how the class discussions and activities helped inform the students' engagement in their chosen social issues. However, the issue of process vs. product just addressed complicates the significance of some of these findings. Students whose final projects were left incomplete or not sufficiently 'counter-hegemonic' may have benefited from their participation in the process of critical inquiry, but struggled to practically implement their learning in their production projects.

One aspect of the evaluative approach that I feel still needs to be addressed is the use of video journals. Throughout the course of the project, the video journals provided me with a type of running commentary from the students on their learning process. However, because most students' journals were quite short (1-2 minutes on average), their responses did not often provide the type of in-depth insight that would have been

helpful in my analysis of the effectiveness of the project. The following response from Abel exemplifies the type of journal the students typically recorded.

Um, today we worked on our projects with Said and Anise about the East African drought. And its about how, in east Africa they need water. And we took some pictures and showed the class how bad it looks and the ground and how far the kids have to walk to go get some water. And the water is very dirty. And its very difficult for the people to get some water...So, our work right now is just talking about it, but in the future we're trying to do more work and more stuff. Anise showed a good picture where a kid had to wait in line to get water, and his facial expression...And Said talked about how the ground looks like and how it's cracked and all that. And I talked about how the water was dirty. And our job or what we're trying to perform is raise some money for the people to get them clean water. And Anise is working the same thing. That's our project.

Much of Abel's, and most students', video responses included a description of the activities they participated in and a reiteration of the objectives of their project. So, while the journals were helpful as a means of monitoring the students' attention to some of the primary concepts introduced in the discussions and their progress on their projects, they did not often facilitate the critical self-reflection that I had hoped.

On a related note, in both journals and interviews, students did not often feel comfortable providing constructive criticism about the project curriculum, teaching methods, classroom dynamics, etc. Even though I frequently invited feedback from students about how to improve the project, they very rarely felt comfortable voicing their concerns. Now, the students' hesitancy to critique the curriculum or the instructor—as well as their tendency to describe rather than reflect on the project in their video journals—could be attributed to the culture of conformity they experience in their other classes at South. Especially given the orientation of public education towards standardized-tests (described to some extent in Chapter 4), I would imagine that students

are accustomed to regurgitating content delivered in classes rather than critically reflecting on the concepts, teaching methods or their learning processes. In future iterations of the project, this issue may be addressed by more effectively helping students realize their role as active participants in the project—both in the shaping of class discussions and activities and in accounting for their individual learning processes.

Continuing her explanation of the difficulties faced by those who evaluate media education programs cited earlier, Renee Hobbs concludes that

These sources of tension will be resolved as research is better able to contribute to our understanding of how different approaches to youth media production best support and enhance the development of young people intellectually, socially and emotionally. (439)

Now, while the purpose of this critical self-evaluation is to engage with the theories, methods and objectives of this project and thereby contribute meaningful to the advancement of the field of critical media literacy education, I wonder if the ‘resolution’ referred to by Hobbs is possible, or even consistent with the type of dialectical self-critique that this approach requires. I hope that this analysis—the recognition of the project’s strengths and weaknesses, the moments of student progress and the areas for improvement—may positively contribute to future efforts to engage in critical, political media education efforts. Ultimately though, I anticipate that my continued engagement in this field and refinement of this approach will reveal entirely new problems. After all, as Giroux and Simon (1988) note,

Such problems are symptomatic of the fact that a critical pedagogy is never finished; its conditions of existence and possibility always remain in flux as part of its attempt to address that which is ‘not yet,’ that which is still possible and worth fighting for. (22)

And I think that this continuous recognition of the productive tensions within critical media literacy education is something to look forward to and its goal to prepare young people to critical engage with media and society is definitely something ‘worth fighting for.’

CONCLUSION

Thankfully, I never observed any of the student participants during this project sawing off an action figure's limbs during any of our discussions or activities. However, I cannot say that this research project has completely answered those questions I first confronted during my participation in the Hands on a Camera project—*What constitutes effective media literacy education? And then, how can effective media literacy education be implemented and evaluated?* In the previous chapters, I have made an earnest attempt to conceptualize what a media education program, specifically designed to encourage critical political participation, might look like; to describe how the bodies of theory and scholarship contributed to the realization of the “Media Literacy and Civic Engagement” project; and to determine what aspects of the theoretical, pedagogical and evaluative approaches employed in the project contributed to its success (and which might have hindered this success). However, I recognize this research project as a particular attempt to address a more universal issue, and like Freire, I invite readers “to correct mistakes and misunderstandings, to deepen affirmations and to point out aspects I have not perceived” (39). While the conclusion of this project and the publication of this manuscript signal a type of end to the research, I hope that it may serve to initiate further thought, discussion, research and action. I am eager to see similar curricula implemented in different contexts and with participants of different demographics. I am interested in exploring how a mixed-methodological approach, combining qualitative and quantitative research, might enrich our understanding of the effectiveness and significance of such an approach to critical media literacy education. And recalling Chapter 3's discussion of *process use*, I am enthusiastic that this and subsequent studies might contribute to greater understanding

of the myriad of issues—whether they be political participation, media production, economic policy, cultural practice, etc.—that face contemporary society.

Acknowledging the excitingly rigorous work that lies ahead, I am comfortable arguing—especially after the relative success of designing, implementing and evaluating this project—that effective media literacy education is one that successfully encourages *student praxis*. And my efforts to use the theoretical concepts addressed by the Frankfurt School (as well as Plato, Dewey and other scholars) are encouraging in that regard. It was remarkably easy to find examples from popular culture to help demonstrate the applicability of the concepts of the *dialectic*, the *culture industry* and *praxis*. And I think that given the current historical conditions, these concepts will only become more commonly used to address contemporary issues of media and politics and more accessible to an increasingly critical (or at least disenchanted) public. For example, Renee Hobbs’ most recent book *Digital and Media Literacy: Connecting Culture and Classroom* (2011) modifies the familiar axiom of media literacy scholars and practitioners “access, analyze, evaluate and communicate” in a manner that reflects some shift towards a more Critical Theoretical conceptualization of media literacy (Aufderheide 23). The newly defined media literacy Hobbs articulates includes *access*, *analyze*, *create*, *reflect* and *take action*—these last two dimensions emphasizing the role of citizens and consumers of media to demonstrate social responsibility and work towards a freer society. Civic engagement informed by critical inquiry is now essential to a comprehensive development of media literacy. This is a far cry from Hobbs’ 1998 comment that “this agenda is radical enough” (23).

And this recent, subtle but significant, gravitation towards a more critical theoretical engagement with issues of media and politics has not been limited to scholars of media education. Journalist and radio personality Brooke Gladstone's most recent (comic) book *The Influencing Machine* (2011) functions as a 'media manifesto' that argues "that the media are not the "influencing machine" of popular imagination, but rather a mirror. We can change the reflection, but it's very hard to do" (Gladstone, "The Influencing Machine"). Gladstone's work, which formally combines text and drawn images, successfully strikes that delicate balance between media's 'strong effects' and our efforts as 'active audiences' and forwards an accessible, but theoretically substantive, argument for a dialectical understanding of media and society. And just recently, New York Times film critic A.O. Scott reviewed the blockbuster movie *The Avengers* (2012) using some language that (perhaps not intentionally but nonetheless notably) invokes the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Comparing the film to some of director Joss Whedon's less mainstream, more irreverent creations, Scott writes

"I aim to misbehave," Malcolm Reynolds famously said in "Serenity." But for all their maverick swagger, the Avengers are dutiful corporate citizens, serving a conveniently vague set of principles. Are they serving private interests, big government, their own vanity, or what? It hardly matters, because the true guiding spirit of their movie is [the villain] Loki, who promises to set the human race free from freedom and who can be counted on for a big show wherever he goes. In Germany he compels a crowd to kneel before him in mute, terrified awe, and "The Avengers," which recently opened there to huge box office returns, expects a similarly submissive audience here at home. *The price of entertainment is obedience*. (Scott "Superheroes, Super Battles, Super Egos", emphasis added)

The equation of entertainment to obedience has Adorno written all over it. And it is interesting that someone so thoroughly embedded in the media industry like Scott is able to so openly articulate the sinister character of popular cultural products. Movies like *The*

Avengers are essentially the real-life manifestations of a comic book villain whose intention is “to set the human race free from freedom.” (And Scott’s statement is made only more significant given *The Avengers*’ worldwide box-office numbers of close to \$1.5 billion. That’s *a lot* of obedience). I bring up these, at least implicit, references to the Frankfurt School from intellectuals like Hobbs, Gladstone and Scott to underscore the growing, public recognition of the necessity to critically engage with media and politics and of the potential success that critical media literacy education, informed by Critical Theory, might have in that regard. To return to the quote from Len Masterman that sparked this effort, I hope that this project, and the research, from myself and others, that will continue to develop this critical political approach to media literacy education will be instrumental in preparing the public “to take control, become effective change agents, make rational decisions (often on the basis of media evidence) and to communicate effectively... through an active involvement with the media” and work to establish not only a ‘truly participatory democracy’ but a free society as we understand it (Masterman 60).

Appendix A

Promotional Flyer



**SHS
DMC**

South High School - Digital Media Club
Thursdays 1:15 - 3:15pm in Room 155

Gain skills in Media Production!
Become involved in Helping your Community!
Participate in a research study by a CU Student!

Thur. March 15th
KNOW YOUR COMMUNITY!
Find out how you can use Media to
Confront Challenges facing Your Community

For more info, talk to Mr. Ben Peters in #156

Appendix B1
Week 1 - March 1, 2012
Introduction to Media & Civic Engagement

Distribution of consent forms (5 min.)

Ice-Breaker Activity – Video Introductions (25 min.)

Purpose:

- Evaluate students' familiarity with video-recording software.
- Evaluate students' ability to perform task in given amount of time.
- Get to know students.
- Understand motivations for students' participation in project.
- Introduce instructor.
- Introduce students to video journaling.

Concepts:

- video journaling

Materials:

- My video introduction
- Personal computers with video recording hardware and iMovie software

Procedure:

- Show my own video introduction (2 min.).
- Students record their own video introduction using iMovie (13 min.).
Introductions should include the student's first name, and may including the following information:
 - o cultural/ethnic background
 - o favorite subjects, hobbies, activities, etc.
 - o favorite media (movies, TV, music, websites, videogames, etc.)
 - o motivation for participating in the Digital Media Club
- Students shares their video introductions (10 min.)

Lesson – Media & Community (20 min.)

Purpose:

- Encourage students to draw connections between media representations and community problems.

Concepts:

- media, community

Materials:

- *Be Kind Rewind* clip

Procedure:

- Digital Media Club's purpose is to help students become smarter media consumers, skillful media producers, and more informed and active citizens.
- This project's focus is on how we can better understand and address problems in our community by reading, watching, thinking about, talking about and then making our own media.

- Set up clip from *Be Kind Rewind* by asking the students what kind of media representations do they typically see of working class, ethnically diverse populations living in urban communities.
- Show clip from *Be Kind Rewind* in which the diverse members of the community collaborate on a film documenting the ‘history’ of their town in response to their local video store being shut down.
- Discuss with the class how the common media representations of these communities were present/absent in *Be Kind Rewind*.
 - o How do media representations influence our understandings of our community?
 - o In what way is this helpful/unhelpful?
- Discuss what role *Be Kind Rewind* shows that media production can play in our communities.
 - o How can media production be a means of fostering community?

Group work – Community Interviews (55 min.)

Purpose:

- Give students experience with drafting questions for an interview.
- Give students hands-on experience with audio/video recording an interview.
- Encourage students to think about challenges faced by those in their community and how media may provide a means of raising awareness about or even finding a solution to those challenges.

Materials:

- sample community interview
- audio/video recording equipment for each pair of students

Procedure:

- Share sample community interview (5 min.)
- Students work in pairs to draft questions for their community interview. (15 min.)
 - o Interviewers must introduce themselves, explain their purpose in interviewing the subject, and ask for subject’s permission to be recorded.
 - o Interview subjects should introduce themselves (first name only).
 - o Questions should be open-ended.
 - o Students should anticipate types of answers and be prepared with follow-up questions.
 - o Students and subjects should speak clearly and loudly within a good distance to the audio/video recording technology.
 - o Students should thank the interview subject for their time at the conclusion of the interview.
- Students go in pairs to interview someone from their community at the nearby park. (30 min.)
- Students return with footage and share with class their experience. (10 min.)
 - o Who did you interview?
 - o What questions did you ask?
 - o What were his/her responses?

- What thoughts do you have about challenges in the community?
- What technical difficulties, etc. did you experience?

Appendix B2
Week 2 – March 15, 2012
Community Challenges & Critical Citizenship

Collection of Consent forms (5 min.)

Ice-breaker Activity/Lesson – Universal vs. Particular (20 min.)

Purpose:

- Introduce students to the dialectic between universal (concepts of justice, freedom, equality) and particular (media representations, government policies, social institutions, interpersonal relations).
- Encourage students to consider how the gap between media representations and values like democracy, equality can potentially cause misunderstanding, conflict or even oppression (through the assertion of particular particulars as ‘truer’).
- Demonstrate how recognizing the gap between universal and particular can be the means of us better understanding these concepts.

Concepts:

- universal & particular

Materials:

- computers with Internet connections and PowerPoint (or other slideshow software)
- sample images/concepts

Procedure:

- Discuss how at the heart of many challenges we face in society is a misunderstanding among people about how universal concepts should be instituted in government, represented in media, or applied in our interactions with one another.
- Show slides illustrating diverse understandings of concepts like *peace* (ex: depictions of military efforts, diplomatic negotiations, non-violent protest, etc.) or *femininity* (ex: supermodel, confident career-woman, pregnant mother, etc.)
- Invite the students to think about how they think about concepts like *nature*, *success*, *freedom*, *fairness*, etc. Encourage them to be specific—What real-world practices, institutions, etc. would illustrate their attitudes about these concepts? Have students find an image that represent their understanding of each concept and create a slideshow with these images.
- For each concept, have each student share the image they selected to represent their attitude. Encourage the students to point out similarities and differences between how each chose to represent their attitude about the concept.
 - o What do these differences/similarities suggest? What is included/excluded in each student’s image?
 - o What misunderstandings could potentially emerge as a result of conflicting attitudes toward these concepts?
 - o How might we revise our attitudes about these concepts with an understanding of the conflicting attitudes of others?

Group work – Project Pitches (60 min.)

Purpose:

- Give students experience in researching and presenting an idea for a project.
- Determine what issues interest the students, and organize students in groups according to these interests.
- Help the students organize responsibilities within their groups democratically, creating a ‘role schedule’ in which each the students rotate fulfilling different roles each week.

Materials:

- sample pitch
- personal computers with internet access, Microsoft Power Point
- ‘role schedules’ for each group

Procedure:

- Share a sample pitch (5 min.)
- Students work individually or in pairs to create a sample pitch (20 min.).
Pitches may include the following:
 - o A description of the social issue (relating to the lesson on *universal & particular*)
 - o A statistic to help illustrate the issue’s importance
 - o A media text (from last week’s community interviews, an image from internet, a chart/graph, a piece of video or audio, etc.) to help illustrate the issue’s importance
 - o A personal experience to help illustrate the issue’s importance
- Students pitch their project ideas (no more than 3 min. each) (15 min.)
- Students vote on which projects they would like to work on (prioritizing first, second, and third choice) (5 min.)
- Create groups (3 – 4 students per group) (5 min.)
- Students establish a role schedule (determining when each will be facilitator, note-taker, documentarian, and interview subject) (10 min.)

Video journaling (10 min.)

Appendix B3
Week 4 – March 22, 2012
Media Messages

Collection of consent forms (5 min.)

Ice-breaker Activity – Student Snapshot (10 min.)

Purpose:

- Give students experience composing photographs.

Concepts:

- form & content, authorial intent

Materials:

- digital cameras/mobile phone cameras for each student

Procedure:

- Students divide into pairs/trios and take a snapshot of one another that captures some unique aspect of him/her.
- Introduce the concept of *authorial intent*. *Authorial intent* is...
 - o What aspect(s) of your partner do you find unique and would like to represent in the snapshot?
- Introduce the concepts of *form* and *content*. *Form* is...*Content* is...Encourage students to be creative but deliberate with their framing, point of view, lighting, composition, etc.
 - o What appears in the photo?
 - o What does this communicate about this person?
 - o What stylistic choices were made in taking this photo?
 - o How does this style help communicate something about this person?
- Each pair of students shows the photos and explains how the form and content of the photo communicates a unique aspect of the individual's personality.

Lesson – Media (Mis)Representations (? min.)

Purpose:

- Introduce students to ways in which media (mis)representations may influence public understanding of people, issues.
- Encourage students to consider their own experience with stereotypes, framing.
- Introduce concepts of inequality due to issues of gender, race, class, etc.

Concepts:

- stereotypes, framing

Materials:

- *I'm Glad I'm a Boy! I'm Glad I'm a Girl!* by Whitney Darrow, Jr.
- cropped photos of Great Depression and Civil Rights movement

Procedure:

- Read *I'm Glad...* with students and solicit student responses to the book.
- Discuss how in this case that while *authorial intent* may be well intentioned (to present children with potential careers, roles), the message is problematic

(women and men are placed in opposition to each other, men are placed in a position of dominance, etc.).

- Introduce the concept of a *stereotype*. A *stereotype* is...Ask students what stereotypes are they familiar with, have they been subjected to, have they bought into, etc.
- Discuss how media messages often contribute to our understanding of others, but limited, incorrect, or negative representations prevent adequate understanding.
- Discuss how stereotypes in media may contribute to the challenges that each group has identified. People facing social challenges (the poor, the uneducated, people of color, immigrants, women, the disabled, etc.) are often stereotyped. Discuss the effects of and reasons for such stereotypes.
- Introduce the concept of *framing*. “*Frames* are principles of selection, emphasis and presentation composed of little tacit theories about what exists, what happens, and what matters” (Gitlin 1980; 6). In this case, not only people, but anything can be misrepresented.
- Show cropped photos of Great Depression and Civil Rights movement. Discuss how the style of the message and the language of the medium always shapes the representation in some way.
- Have students return to the student snapshots and discuss what is being left out. Discuss the effects of and reasons for such framing.
- Discuss how framing of issues in media messages may contribute to the challenges that each group has identified. Social problems are often framed in certain ways. Discuss the effects and reasons for such frames.
- Relate the discussion of stereotypes and framing to the discussion of *universal & particular*.

Group work – Appetite for Deconstruction

Purpose:

- Introduce the students to the concept of deconstruction.
- Give the students the opportunity to deconstruct photographs, analyzing form and content, stereotyping and framing, as a means of better understanding the media representations of their chosen social issue.

Concepts:

- deconstruction

Materials:

- computers with internet access

Procedure:

- Introduce the concept of *deconstruction*. *Deconstruction* “focuses on a text as such rather than as an expression of the author’s intention, stressing the limitlessness (or impossibility) of interpretation and rejecting the Western philosophical tradition of seeking certainty through reasoning by privileging certain types of interpretation and repressing others.” (New Oxford American Dictionary)
- Each group locates 2-3 photographs from journalistic sources that relate to their issue, and then deconstruct the photo, asking the following questions:

- What is being represented?
- How is it being represented?
- What is left unrepresented?
- What are some possible motivations for such a representation?
- How could this representation influence public understanding of this issue?
- What new understanding of the issue does this image provide?
- How might this photograph be taken to represent what you would consider to be a more accurate representation of the issue?
- Each group shares their photos and their findings with the rest of the class. Students from other groups are encouraged to ask questions, offer critique, or provide supplemental information or experience.

Video journaling (10 min.)

Appendix B4
Week 4 – April 5, 2012
Media & Institutions

Collection of consent forms (5 min.)

Ice-breaker Activity – Selling Out (20 min.)

Purpose:

- Help students recognize the role of profit-making in media culture (sports, television, movies, music, art, journalism, etc.).
- Help students recognize the potential conflict between the intent of the individual and the interest of the institution that employs him/her and the potential compromises made as a result of this conflict.

Concepts:

- profit, authorial intent, institutional interest

Materials:

- ‘sell out’ example
- computers with internet access
- media ownership chart

Procedure:

- Share ‘sell out’ example.
- Ask the students to share if they have had a favorite musician, actor, artist, athlete, etc. who has ‘sold out’.
 - o Who is he/she? How did he/she ‘sell out’?
 - o What does ‘selling out’ mean?
 - o What compromise is made when someone sells out?
- Discuss how corporations (especially publicly-funded ones) exist to generate profits, and therefore institutional interests often prioritize profitability over artistic integrity, fan loyalty, moral belief, political perspective or public interest.
- Locate the ‘sell out’ example on the media ownership chart. Discuss motivations for the ‘sell out’ to abandon his/her integrity for pursuit of profits.
- Each student locates his/her ‘sell out’ (or another favorite media figure) in the media ownership chart by doing some research on the internet. Example:
 - o What label is the band signed with?
 - o What record company is the label owned by?
 - o What multinational corporation is the record company a part of?
- Encourage each student to consider what conflict may exist between the *authorial intent* of the individuals and the *interest of the institution* that employs them.

Lesson –

Purpose:

- Help students recognize that as a result of the profit-making interests of media institutions, media content demonstrates uniformity and unity.

- Help students recognize that the result of the uniformity and unity is an overrepresentation of a particular reality that does not necessarily reflect (universal) conditions.

Concepts:

- *uniformity, unity, oligopoly*

Materials:

- Power point presentation

Procedure:

- Introduce *uniformity* with examples of from Hollywood—*The Hunger Games*, *Batman*, *Mirror Mirror/Snow White and the Huntsman*, etc. *Uniformity* is when the same form and/or content is repeated in media messages. Ask the students for other examples of uniformity in entertainment media.
 - o Why do media institutions repeatedly represent the same stories?
 - o What is the significance of these same stories being told repeatedly?
- Discuss uniformity in the news media, in addition to entertainment media, using examples of Occupy Wall Street and Treyvon Martin. Ask the students about other examples of uniformity in news coverage of certain issues/events.
 - o Why do news media repeatedly represent the same perspectives?
 - o What is the significance of these same perspectives being told repeatedly?
- Introduce *unity* with examples from Hollywood—*The Pursuit of Happyness*, *The Blind Side*, every romantic comedy ever, etc. *Unity* is when media messages represent reality as seamless, without contradiction, conflict or suffering. Ask students for other examples of unity in entertainment media.
 - o Why do media institutions repeatedly represent stories depicting unity?
 - o What is the significance of these stories depicting unity being told repeatedly?
- Discuss unity in the news media, in addition to entertainment media, using examples of (?) and (?). Ask the students about other examples of uniformity in news coverage of certain issues/events.
 - o Why do news media repeatedly represent stories depicting unity?
 - o What is the significance of these stories depicting unity being told repeatedly?

Group work –

Purpose:

- Help students apply their understandings of the uniformity and unity of media messages to the representations of their chosen social issues in the media.
- Help students apply their understandings of deconstruction, framing, and stereotyping (from last week) in media messages to representations of their chosen social issues in the media.

Concepts:

- *uniformity, unity*

Materials:

- personal computers with internet connection
- 'Cheat Sheets'

Procedure:

- Students divide into their groups and search online for news coverage (video, print, photography, etc.) of their chosen social issue.
- Each group discusses their findings—what aspects of the news coverage is the same across different representations? Distribute 'Cheat Sheets' with the following helpful hints:
 - o Sources – Who is talking?
 - o Images – What is being shown?
 - o Facts – What evidence is provided?
 - o Style – What kind of voice or tone is used?
 - o Structure – How is story concluded?
 - o Interaction – What kind of action is encouraged?
- Each group then lists on the 'Cheat Sheet' 3 to 5 common characteristics among the news coverage of their chosen social issue.
- Each group shares with the rest of the class their 'common characteristics' and discusses possible significance of these examples of uniformity and unity.
- Then, each group brainstorms about what aspects of their issue is the news coverage NOT including in the different representations? These aspects may include:
 - o Sources – Who is NOT talking?
 - o Images – What is NOT being shown?
 - o Facts – What evidence is NOT provided?
 - o Style – What voice or tone is NOT used?
 - o Structure – How is the story NOT concluded?
 - o Interaction – What kind of action is NOT encouraged?
- Each group then lists on the 'Cheat Sheet' 3 to 5 notable absences from the news coverage of their chosen social issue.
- Each group shares with the rest of the class their 'notable absences' from the discusses possible significance of these examples of uniformity and unity.

Appendix B5
Video journaling (10 min.) Week 5 – April 19, 2012
Media Audiences

Collection of consent forms (5 min.)

Ice-breaker Activity – Media Effects Debate

Purpose:

- Introduce students to the discourse around media effects. Encourage them to determine what kind of influence they think the media have.
- Give students an opportunity to gather evidence and present an argument for or against the traditional conception of media effects.

Concepts:

- media effects, active audience

Materials:

- 1938 *War of the Worlds* radio show

Procedure:

- Play a clip from the 1938 *War of the Worlds* radio show, and describe the audience's reactions to the segment. Ask the following questions:
 - o Does this *prove* media's effect on audiences? Why or why not?
 - o What would happen if a similar trick were to be done today?
- Discuss that the show has been re-enacted a number of times, most of the time the audience recognizing it as an homage to the original show. Discuss, the audience response to the shows aired in Quito, Ecuador in 1949 and in Buffalo, New York in 1968.
- Introduce the concepts of *media effects* and *active audience*. *Media effects*, as mass communication research in the US has used the concept, is the influence media messages have on attitudes and behaviors of audiences. *Active audience* is a term used in cultural studies to describe the audience's participation in the meaning-making process. Discuss how this is an ongoing debate among educators, media producers, policymakers, artists, etc.
- Divide the class in half and assign each group to gather evidence (10 min. max) that supports either the traditional concept of media effects OR the concept of the active audience.
- Conduct a debate between the two groups, each group providing an opening statement and then having the opportunity to offer a rebuttal.
- Conclude with a brief discussion how while we all generally agree that media have *some* influence on attitudes and behaviors, how to demonstrate this influence is difficult.

Lesson – 'Is' VS. 'Ought'

Purpose:

- Remind students of the productive tension between *is* and *ought*. Introduce how media representations may discourage this realization and subsequent change.

Concepts:

- particular (is) and universal (ought), ‘death of the thinking subject’

Materials:

- *Inception* DVD
- Prison abuse power point pres.
- *This American Life* – Episode #241 – 20 Acts in 60 Minutes

Procedure:

- Remind students of the concepts of *is* and *ought*. If we are constantly re-evaluating aspects of our society (law, education, media representations, etc.) according to what *is* happening vs. what we think *ought* to happen, then we can work to improve our society.
- But sometimes, media, among other things prevent us from seeing that difference and trying to make positive changes.
- Play the clip from *Inception*. Discuss how this concept of dream-building is not unlike media messages that represent society in ways that obscure the difference between *is* and *ought*. In order to get the target (in this case, the media audience) to believe a certain idea, something that *ought not* to be happening is represented as natural, normal, etc.
- Share media examples of prison abuse – *Prison Break*, *Raising Hope*, etc. In each of these cases, the answer to the abuse is either to be released from or escape prison NOT to reform the prison system, etc.
- Discuss how this demonstrates how media can obscure what changes ought to occur, and as a result audiences are less likely to recognize the difference between *is* and *ought* and act upon it. OR the issues that are recognized and acted upon miss the point and ignore the greater problem.
- Share clip from *This American Life* (#241 – 20 Acts in 60 Minutes)
- Fill out a sample ‘IS/UGHT’ worksheet with this problem in mind (IS = Someone is possibly urinating in the inmates’ food; UUGHT = Food ought to be uncontaminated).
- Discuss how the inmates’ interviews with the warden, the kitchen staff, etc. demonstrate greater problems than someone contaminating their food.
 - o What are these greater problems?
 - o How could the inmates (and/or us) go about addressing these problems?
- Continue filling out a sample ‘IS/UGHT’ worksheet with this problem in mind (IS = Detention center staff shows little respect/concern for inmates’ well-being, etc. UUGHT = Detention center staff ought to show more respect to inmates., etc.)
- Discuss how the inmates’ investigation of the initial problem revealed underlying problems. Our investigation of social issues will reveal greater problems—ones that the media may not be willing/able to address.

Group work –

- Divide into groups. Have each group discuss their issue and come up with the initial problem (IS/OUGHT). Then encourage the groups to determine what underlying problems might contribute to these issues, but are not being addressed in the media coverage they have seen/read (IS/OUGHT).

Video journaling (10 min.)

Appendix B6
Week 6 – April 19, 2012
Pre-Production I

Collection of consent forms (5 min.)

Ice-breaker Activity – It Takes a Village to...

Purpose:

- Introduce students to the division of labor within media production, and encourage them to see the invisible human efforts behind their favorite films, TV shows, websites, videogames, etc.

Concepts:

- pre-production

Materials:

- *Inception* DVD

Procedure:

- Introduce the students to the concept of pre-production. Pre-production is a term commonly used in the film and television industries that refers to the planning and preparation that takes place prior to filming. Part of the pre-production process is a division of responsibilities among those producing the media.
- Have the students name as many roles on a movie set as they can (director, producer, actor, etc.).
- Watch the closing credits for *Inception*. Encourage the student to find a role that they are unfamiliar with while they watch. Then discuss the number of individuals involved in the production of the film compared to the list that the class made.
- Have each student very briefly look up the role that they identified while watching the credits, and find out what that responsibilities the person in that role has. Each student will then share their findings with the rest of the class.

Group work – Pre-Production Worksheet

Purpose:

- Encourage students to understand the importance of pre-production, not just in the production of a Hollywood movie, but also their group projects.
- Help students make a plan for their media production project, including research they need to conduct, skills they need to acquire, and work they need to accomplish.
- Help students create a division of labor among the students in their group and create a sense of accountability for individual responsibilities among the group members.

Concepts:

- objective, defining characteristics, media, mode, form, content, division of labor

Materials:

- Pre-Production Worksheet

Procedure:

- Explain that pre-production is not just necessary to produce feature-length films. Whether they are making a short film, creating a website or social media presence, designing promotional posters, etc., they will need to establish a plan and a division of responsibilities.
- Distribute the IS/UGHT and the UNITY/UNIFORMITY worksheets from weeks 4 and 5. Based on each group's responses on these two sheets, they should have a rough outline of their project's *objective* and some of its *defining characteristics*.
- Distribute the production schedule worksheet. Have each group fill out the *objective* and the *defining characteristics* based on these previous worksheets. Then encourage the students to think about what *media* (film, website, print, etc.) and *mode* (news story, documentary, PSA, etc.) would best fit these objectives and characteristics.
- Once the students have decided on their project's *media* and *mode*, encourage them to discuss the project's *content* (What will the project represent?) and *form* (How will it be represented?).
- Then, encourage students to establish some *division of labor* among group members. Each group member will be expected to contribute something to the group project, based on their time, interest, and skills.
- Lastly, each group will fill out a *production schedule* for the remaining weeks of the project. Encourage students to keep one another accountable for staying on task and completing their responsibilities according to their production schedule.

Video journaling (10 min.)

Appendix B7
Week 5 – April 26, 2012
Pre-Production II

Collection of consent forms (5 min.)

Ice-breaker Activity – Form & Content II

Purpose:

- Re-familiarize students with *form* and *content* (from Week 3), and the relationship of these concepts to the stated objectives and defining characteristics of their project.

Concepts:

- form, content, objective, defining characteristics, media, mode, style/tone

Materials:

- Animal rights PSA (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fm8FJ8la2VU>)
- Animal rights advertisement (<http://cdn.bikyamasr.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/03/Dia-Mirza-Condemns-Exotic-Skins-In-PETA-Ad-News.jpg>)

Procedure:

- Remind students of the Student Snapshot activity from Week 3 in which students took photos of a partner in order to represent a unique characteristic of that person.
- Remind students of the concepts of form and content. *Content* is the substance of the media message—information, narrative, etc. *Form* is the *media* (website, video, graphic, text, etc.), *mode* (documentary, PSA, news story, etc.) and *style/tone* (humorous, informational, inspirational, etc.) by which this message is communicated.
- View animal rights PSA. Have students identify the content (Animals are not souvenirs) and the form—media (video), mode (public service announcement), and style (humorous).
- Invite students to discuss why the producers of this message chose to use this particular form (media, mode, style/tone) to communicate its content. Is the use of form & content effective?
- View animal rights advertisement. Have students identify the content (Exotic skins kill. Wildlife belongs in the wild not in your wardrobe) and the form—media (image & text), mode (advertisement), and style (provocative).
- Invites students to discuss why the producers of this message chose to use this particular form (media, mode, style/tone) to communicate its content. Is the use of form & content effective?
- Remind students of their objective and defining characteristics from the Pre-Production Worksheet. These roughly make up your messages content. Then remind students of the media and mode they chose. Invite students to discuss whether their media and mode best communicate their message and achieve

their objective. Make changes to this plan if necessary. Then, invite students to discuss what type of style/tone their message should have. Add this to the worksheet.

Group Work – Pre-Production II

Procedure:

- Students work in groups to revise their Pre-Production Worksheet in an effort to achieve unity of form and content.
- Students work in groups to start the work listed in their production schedule.

Video journaling (10 min.)

Appendix B8
Week 8 – May 3, 2012
Production I

Collection of consent forms (5 min.)

Ice-breaker Activity – Unity & Uniformity II

Purpose:

- Re-familiarize students with unity and uniformity (Week 4), and the relationship of these concepts to the stated objectives and defining characteristics of their project.

Concepts:

- unity, uniformity

Materials:

- power point slides from Media Institutions discussion

Procedure:

- Remind students of our discussions of the unity and uniformity of popular and news media (*Hunger Games*, *The Blind Side*, Treyvon Martin, Kony 2012, etc.).
- Remind students of the uniformity and unity that they identified in the news coverage of their group's issues, and the defining characteristics that set their proposed project apart from these mainstream representations.
- Emphasize the importance of making sure that as they engage in production, they are continually mindful of these defining characteristics that make their projects personal, unique, and effective alternative media.

Group Work – Production I

- Students work in groups to revise their Pre-Production Worksheet in an effort to make sure that their projects/schedules are informed by their identification of unity and uniformity in media coverage of their issue.
- Students work in groups to continue the work listed in their production schedule.

Video journaling (10 min.)

Appendix B9
Week 9 – May 10, 2012
Production II

Ice-breaker Activity – Media Effects II

Purpose:

- Re-familiarize students with our previous discussion of media effects and active audiences (Week 5) and the relationship of these concepts to the production of their projects.

Concepts:

- media effects, active audience

Materials:

- N/A

Procedure:

- Remind the students of the debate we held concerning media effects and active audiences. Have an individual from each of the groups summarize some of the argument that they made in the debate.
- Encourage students to consider how their audience will be influenced by or respond to their media project.
 - o What are some potential audience responses to your project?
 - o How would you like the audience to receive your project?
 - o What can you do in the production of your project to encourage such a response?

Group Work – Production I

- Students revise their Pre-Production Worksheet in an effort to make sure that their projects/schedules are informed by the response that they anticipate from their audience.
- Students work in groups to continue the work listed in their production schedule.

Video journaling (10 min.)

Appendix C Unity/Uniformity Cheat Sheet

Group member names: _____

Ask the following questions about the news coverage of your issue.

Sources – Who is talking?

Images – What is being shown?

Facts – What evidence is provided?

Style – What kind of voice or tone is used?

Structure – How is story concluded?

Interaction – What kind of action is encouraged?

List 3 – 5 common characteristics of the news coverage of your issue.

Ask the following questions about the news coverage of your issue.

Sources – Who is NOT talking?

Images – What is NOT being shown?

Facts – What evidence is NOT provided?

Style – What voice or tone is NOT used?

Structure – How is the story NOT concluded?

Interaction – What kind of action is NOT encouraged?

List 3 – 5 notable absences in the news coverage of your issue.

Appendix D
IS / OUGHT WORKSHEET

Group member names _____

What IS happening? (What is the INITIAL problem?)

What OUGHT to be happening? (What is the solution?)

What IS causing this to happen? (What is the UNDERLYING problem?)

What OUGHT to be happening? (What is the solution?)

Appendix E
PRE-PRODUCTION WORKSHEET

Group member names _____

Objective (bottom line of IS/UGHT worksheet):

Defining Characteristics (bottom line of UNITY/UNIFORMITY worksheet:

Media: _____

Mode: _____

Division of Responsibilities:

Group member

Responsibilities

Production Schedule

Apr. 26 _____

May. 3 _____

May. 10 _____

May. 17 _____

May. 24 _____

Bibliography

- “20 Acts in 60 Minutes.” Narrated by Ira Glass. *This American Life*. NPR. September 4, 2011.
- Abelman, R. and J. Courtright. (1983). Television literacy: Amplifying the cognitive level effects of television’s prosocial fare through curriculum intervention. *Journal of Research and Development in Education* 17(1).
- Abowitz, K. and J. Harnish. (2006) Contemporary discourses of citizenship. *Review of Educational Research*, 76(4), 653-690.
- Adorno, T. (1938). On the fetish-character in music and the regression of listening. In *Aesthetic theory and cultural criticism*.
- Adorno, T. (1992). *The culture industry*. Ed. J.M. Bernstein. London: Routledge.
- Adorno, T. (2005). *Minima moralia: Reflections from a damaged life*. New York: Verso.
- Akom, A.A., Cammarota, J., & Ginwright, S. (2008). Youthtopias: Towards a new paradigm of critical youth studies. *Youth Media Reporter* 2(4).
- Anderson, J.A. (1980). The theoretical lineage of critical viewing curriculum. *Journal of Communication*, 30(3), 64-71.
- Arnheim, R. (1951). In *Aspects of form: A symposium on form in nature and art*. L.L. Whyte (Ed.). London: Lund Humphries.
- Arnheim, R. (1971/1974). *Art and visual perception: A psychology of the creative eye*. Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Arnowitz, S. and H. Giroux. (1991). *Postmodern education*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Aufderheide, P. (1997). *Media literacy: A report of the national leadership conference on media literacy*. Aspen, CO: Aspen Institute. <http://www.medialit.org/reading-room/aspen-media-literacy-conference-report-part-ii>
- Austin, E. and K. Johnson. (1997a). Effects of general and alcohol specific media literacy training on children’s decision making. *Journal of Health Communication* 2(1): 17.
- Austin, E. and K. Johnson. (1997b). Immediate and delayed effects of media literacy training on third graders’ decision making for alcohol. *Health Communication* 9(4): 323.

- Austin, E., A. Miller, J. Silva, P. Guarra, N. Geisler, L. Gamboa, O. Phakakayai, and B. Kuechle. (2002). The effects of increased cognitive involvement on college students' interpretations of magazine advertisements for alcohol. *Communication Research* 29(2): 155-179.
- Banerjee, S. and K. Greene. (2006). Analysis versus production: Adolescent cognitive and attitudinal responses to antismoking interventions. *Journal of Communication* 56(4): 773-794.
- Banerjee, S. and K. Greene. (2007). Anti-smoking initiatives: Effects of analysis versus production media literacy interventions on smoking-related attitude, norm, and behavioral intention. *Health Communication* 22(1): 37-48.
- Barber, B. (1984). *Strong democracy: Participatory politics for a new age*. Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Barber, B. (2002). The educated student: Global citizen or global consumer? *Liberal Education, Spring*: 22-29.
- Bauerlein, M. (2009). *The dumbest generation: How the digital age stupefies young Americans and jeopardizes our future (Or don't trust anyone under 30)*. New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher/Penguin.
- Bauerlein, M. (2011). *The digital divide: Arguments for and against Facebook, Google, texting, and the age of social networking*. New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher/Penguin.
- Be Kind Rewind*. DVD. directed by Michel Gondry. 2008. New Line Cinema.
- Benjamin, W. (1955/1969). The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction. In *Illuminations*. H. Arendt (Ed.). New York: Schocken.
- Benjamin, W. (1999). *The arcades project*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Bennett, T. (1982/1990). Theories of media, theories of society. In *Culture, society and the media*. Michael Gurevitch, Tony Bennett, James Curran, and Janet Woollacott (Eds.). Routledge.
- Bennett, W.L., C. Wells, and A. Rank. (2009). Young citizens and civic learning: Two paradigms of citizenship in the digital age. *Citizenship Studies* 13(2), 105-120.
- Buckingham, D. (1998). Media education in the UK: Beyond protectionism. *Journal of Communication*, 48(1).
- Buckingham, D. (2003). *Media education: Literacy, learning and contemporary culture*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.

- Buckingham, D. (2005). The media literacy of children and young people: A review of the literature. London: Centre for the Study of Children, Youth and Media, Institute of Education, University of London. Available at http://stakeholders.ofcom.org.uk/binaries/research/media-literacy/ml_children.pdf
- Buckingham, D. (2008). Children and media: A cultural studies approach. In *The International Handbook of Children, Media and Culture*. Sonia Livingstone (Ed.)
- Byrne, S. (2009). Media literacy interventions: What makes them boom or boomerang? *Communication Education* 58(1): 1-14.
- Byrne, S., D. Linz, and W. Potter. (2009). A test of competing cognitive explanations for the boomerang effect in response to the deliberate disruption of media-induced aggression. *Media Psychology* 12(3): 227-248.
- Calabrese, A. (2003). The political significance of media literacy. In *Beyond the Digital Divide: Reducing Exclusion, Fostering Inclusion*. Eds. B. Cammaerts, L. Van Audenhove, G. Nulens, C. Pauwels. Brussels: Brussels University Press.
- Cammarota, J. and Fine, M. (2008). *Revolutionizing education: Youth participatory action research in motion*. New York: Routledge.
- Campbell, D. (1969). Reforms as experiments. *American Psychologist* 24(4): 409-429.
- Campbell, D. (1991). Methods of an experimenting society. *Evaluation Practice*, 12(3): 223-260.
- Campbell, P., Lesli, H. & Perlman, L. (2001). *Sticking with my dreams: Defining and refining youth media in the 21st century*. Monograph. Groton, MA: Campbell-Kibler Associates, Inc.
- Cantor, J. and B. Wilson. (2003). Media and violence: Intervention strategies for reducing aggression. *Media Psychology* 5(4): 363-403.
- Capello, G., D. Felini, and R. Hobbs. (2011). Reflections on global developments in media literacy education: Bridging theory and practice. *Journal of Media Literacy Education* 3(2): 66-73.
- Carr, N. 2009. Is Google making us stupid. In *Why Do We Educate: Voices from the Conversation*, Vol. 107, Part 2. Eds. Mark A. Smylie and Gary D. Fenstermacher. New York: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Carr, N. 2011. *The shallows: What the internet is doing to our brains*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc.

- Carr, P. and Porfilio, B. (2009). Computers, the media and multicultural education: Seeking engagement and political literacy. *Intercultural Education* 20(2), 91-107.
- Charters, W. (1933). *Motion pictures and youth: A summary*. New York: The Macmillan Company.
- Chavez, V., B. Duran, Q. Baker, M. Avila, N. Wallerstein. (2003). The dance of race and privilege in community-based participatory research. In *Community-Based Participatory Research for Health*. Eds. M. Minkler and N. Wallerstein. San Francisco: Josey-Bass.
- Chung, S. and Kirby, M. (2009). Media literacy art education: Logos, culture jamming, and activism. *Art Education* 62(1), 34-39.
- Clark, L.S. (2012). Cultivating the media activist: How critical media literacy, community engaged partnerships and critical service learning can reform journalism education. *Journalism: Theory, Culture, Critique*. [forthcoming]
- Deegan, M. (2001). The Chicago school of ethnography. In *The Handbook of Ethnography*. Eds. Paul Atkinson, Amanda Coffey, Sara Delamont, John Lofland, Lyn Lofland. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- Dewey, J. (1916). *Democracy and education*. New York: The Free Press.
- Dewey, J. (1927a/1954). *The public and its problems*. Chicago: Swallow.
- Dewey, J. (1927b). The role of philosophy in the history of civilization. *The Philosophical Review*, 36: 1-9.
- Dewey, J. (1929). *The quest for certainty*. New York: Minton, Balch & Co.
- Eisenstein, S. (1942/1969). *The film sense*. New York: Harcourt Brace & Company.
- Eisenstein, S. (1949). *Film form: Essays in film theory*. New York: Harcourt Brace & Company.
- Fine, M. (2008). An epilogue, of sorts. In *Revolutionizing education: Youth participatory action research in motion*. Eds. Julio Cammarota and Michelle Fine. New York: Routledge.
- Fisherkeller, J. (2009). Youth media around the world: Implications for communication and media studies. *Communication Research Trends* 28(3), 21-25.
- Fisherkeller, J. (ed.) (2011). *International perspectives on youth media: Cultures of production and education*. New York: Peter Lang.

- Freire, P. (1970) *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York: Seabury Press.
- Freire, P. and H. Giroux. (1989). Pedagogy, popular culture and public life: An introduction. In *Popular culture: Schooling and everyday life*, ed. H. Giroux & R.I. Simon. New York: Bergin & Garvey.
- Freire, P. and D. Macedo. (1987). *Literacy: Reading the word and the world*. Granby, MA: Bergin & Garvey.
- Garnham, N. (1995). Political economy and cultural studies: Reconciliation or divorce? *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 12(1).
- Geertz, C. (1973). *The interpretation of cultures*. New York: Basic Books.
- Gerbner, H. (1960). Mass communication and the citizenship of secondary school youth. In *The adolescent citizen*. F. Patterson (Ed.). Glenco, IL: The Free Press.
- Giroux, H. and R.I. Simon. (1988). Schooling, popular culture, and a pedagogy of possibility. *Journal of Education* 170(1), 9-26.
- Ginwright, S. and J. Cammarota. (2007). Youth activism in the urban community: Learning critical civic praxis within community organizations. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* 20(6): 693-710.
- Ginwright, S. and T. James. (2002). From assets to agents. In Youth participation: Improving institutions and communities (Eds.) B. Kirshner, J. O'Donoghue and M. McLaughlin. *New Directions for Youth Development: Theory, Practice and Research*, no. 96, Winter. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Gladstone, B. (2011). *The Influencing Machine*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company.
- Gladstone, B. May 18, 2011. "The Influencing Machine." *Slate*.
http://www.slate.com/articles/arts/culturebox/features/2011/the_influencing_machine/the_influencing_machine.html
- Gonzales, R., D. Glik, M. Davoudi, and A. Ang. (2004). Media literacy and public health: Integrating theory, research, and practice for tobacco control. *American Behavioral Scientist* 48(2): 189-201.
- Goodman, S. (2003). *Teaching youth media: A critical guide to literacy, video production & social change*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Graff, H. (1987). *The legacies of literacy: Continuities and contradictions in western culture and society*. Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.

- Gramsci, A. (1971). *Selections from the prison notebooks*. New York: International Publishers.
- Grossberg, L. (1995). Cultural studies vs. political economy? Is anybody else bored with this debate? *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 12(1).
- Gunster, S. (2000). Revisiting the culture industry thesis: Mass culture and the commodity form. *Cultural Critique* 45: 40-70.
- Habermas, J. (1973). *Theory and practice*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Habermas, J. and T. Levin. (1982). The entwinement of myth and enlightenment: Re-reading Dialectic of Enlightenment. *New German Critique* 26: 13-30.
- Hahn, C. (2002). Valuing evaluation: Youth media begins proving itself. *Youth Media Reporter*, Soros Foundation.
- Hall, S. (1980). Encoding/decoding. In *Culture, Media, Language*. Eds. Stuart Hall, Dorothy Hobson, Andrew Love, and Willis. London: Hutchinson.
- Hall, S. and P. Whannel. (1964). *The Popular Arts*. London: Hutchinson.
- Halloran, J. and M. Jones. (1968). Learning about the media: Media Education and communication research. *Communication and society Vol. 16*. Paris: UNESCO.
- Hammer, R. (1995). Rethinking the dialectic: A critical semiotic meta-theoretical approach fro the pedagogy of media literacy. In P. McLaren, R. Hammer, D. Sholle, and S. Reilly (Eds.) *Rethinking media literacy: A critical pedagogy of representation*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Hammer, R. (2006). Teaching critical media literacies: Theory, praxis and empowerment. *Interactions: UCLA Journal of Education and Information Studies* 2(1).
- Higgins, J. (1999). Community television and the vision of media literacy, social action, and empowerment. *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media* 43(4), 624-644.
- Hirsch, E.D. (1987). *Cultural literacy: What every American needs to know*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company.
- Hobbs, R. (1998a). The seven great debates in the media literacy movement. *Journal of Communication*, 48(1).
- Hobbs, R. (1998b). Democracy at risk: Building citizenship skills through media education. In *The public voice in a democracy at risk*. Eds. M. Salvador and P. Sias. Westport, CT: Praeger.

- Hobbs, R. (2008). Debates and challenges facing new literacies in the 21st century. In *The International Handbook of Children, Media and Culture*. Sonia Livingstone (Ed.)
- Hobbs, R. (2010). *Digital and Media Literacy: A Plan of Action*. The Aspen Institute.
<http://www.knightcomm.org/digital-and-media-literacy/>
- Hobbs, R. (2011). *Digital and Media Literacy: Connecting Culture and Classroom*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.
- Hobbs, R. and Yoon, J. (2008). Creating empowering environments in youth media organizations. *Youth Media Reporter* 2(4), 149-164.
- Hoggart, R. (1959). *The uses of literacy*. London: Chatto & Windus.
- Honneth, A. (1995). *The fragmented world of the social*. Charles Wright, ed. New York: SUNY Press.
- Honneth, A. (2007). *Disrespect: The normative foundations of Critical Theory*. Malden, MA: Polity.
- Horkheimer, M. (1937). Traditional and critical theory. In *Critical theory: Selected essays*. New York: Continuum.
- Horkheimer, M. and Adorno, T. (1947/2002). *Dialectic of enlightenment: Philosophical fragments*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Huesmann, L.R., Eron, L.D., Klein, R., Brice, P., & Fischer, P. (1983). Mitigating the imitation of aggressive behavior by changing children's attitudes about media violence. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, 44(5).
- Inception*. DVD. directed by Christopher Nolan. 2010. Warner Bros. Pictures.
- Irizarry, J. (2009). Reinvigorating multicultural education through youth participatory action research. *Multicultural Perspectives* 11(4), 194-199.
- Jeffers, L. & Streit, T. (2003). *Self evaluation in youth media and technology programs*. Newton, MA: Education Development Center.
- Jenkins, H. (1997). Empowering children in the digital age: Towards a radical media pedagogy. *Radical Teacher* 50: 30-5.
- Jenkins, H. (2006). *Convergence culture: Where old and new media collide*. New York: New York University Press.
- Jenkins, H., K. Clinton, R. Purushotma, A. Robson, and M. Weigel. (2006). *Confronting the challenges of participatory culture: Media education for the 21st century*.

- Retrieved from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation website:
http://digitalllearning.macfound.org/atf/cf/%7B7E45C7E0-A3E0-4B89-AC9C-E807E1B0AE4E%7D/JENKINS_WHITE_PAPER.PDF
- Jensen, A.P. (2008). Beyond mediatized transmissions of youth culture: A study in digital citizenship. *Youth Theatre Journal* 22(1), 94-107.
- Jhally, S. and J. Earp. (2006). Empowering literacy: Media education as a democratic imperative. In *The spectacle of accumulation: Essays in culture, media & politics*. Sut Jhally, ed. New York: Peter Lang.
- Jhally, S. and J. Lewis. (2006). The struggle over media literacy. In *The spectacle of accumulation: Essays in culture, media & politics*. Sut Jhally, ed. New York: Peter Lang.
- Kahne, J., N. Lee, and J. Feezell. (2012). Digital media literacy education and online civic and political participation. *International Journal of Communication* 6.
- Kant, I. (1990). *Foundations of the metaphysics of morals and, What is enlightenment?* New York: Macmillan.
- Keen, A. (2008). *The cult of the amateur: How blogs, MySpace, YouTube, and the rest of today's user-generated media are destroying our economy, our culture, and our values*. New York: Doubleday.
- Keen, A. (2012). *Digital vertigo: How today's online social revolution is dividing, diminishing, and disorienting us*. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Keller, S. and J. Brown. (2002). Media interventions to promote responsible sexual behavior. *Journal of Sex Research* 39: 67-72.
- Kellner, D. (1995). Preface. In P. McLaren, R. Hammer, D. Sholle, and S. Reilly (Eds.) *Rethinking media literacy: A critical pedagogy of representation*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Kellner, D. (2002). New media and new literacies: Reconstructing education for the new millennium. In L. Lievrouw & S. Livingstone (Eds.), *The Handbook of New Media*. London: Sage. Pp 90-104.
- Kellner, D. (2004). Technological transformation, multiple literacies, and the re-visioning of education. *E-Learning* 1(1), 9-37.
- Kellner, D. (2005). Multiple literacies and critical pedagogy in a multicultural society. *Educational Theory* 48(1), 103-123.

- Kellner, D. and Kim, G. (2010). YouTube, critical pedagogy, and media activism. *The Review of Education, Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies* 32(1), 3-36.
- Kellner, D. and J. Share. (2005a). Toward critical media literacy: Core concepts, debates, organizations, and policy. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education* 26(3), 369-386.
- Kellner, D. and J. Share. (2007a). Critical media literacy, democracy, and the reconstruction of education” *Media literacy: A reader*. Eds. Donaldo Macedo and Shirley R. Steinberg. New York: Peter Lang.
- Kellner, D. and J. Share. (2007b). Critical media literacy is not an option. *Learning Inquiry* 1:59-69.
- Kellner, D. (Ed.) (2009). *Marcuse’s challenge to education*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.
- Kirshner, B. (2008). Guided participation in three youth activism organizations: Facilitation, apprenticeship and joint work. *The Journal of the Learning Sciences* 17:60-101.
- Kubey, R. (2004). Media literacy and the teaching of civics and social studies at the dawn of the 21st century. *American Behavioral Scientist* 48(1): 69-77.
- Langton, K.P. and M.K. Jennings. (1968). Political socialization and the high school civics curriculum in the United States. *American Political Science Review* 62(3), 852-867.
- Lasswell, H. (1948). The structure and function of communication in society. In Lyman Bryson (Ed.), *The Communication of Ideas*. Harper & Bros.
- Lazarsfeld, P. (1941). Remarks on administrative and critical communications research. *Studies in Philosophy and Science* 9: 3-16.
- Leavis, F. and Thompson, D. (1933). *Culture and environment: The training of critical awareness*. London: Chatto & Windus.
- Leistyna, P. and Mollen, D. (2008). Teaching social class through alternative media and dialoging across disciplines and boundaries. *Radical Teacher* 81(1), 20-27.
- Levine, P. (2008). A public voice for youth: The audience problem in digital media and civic education. In *Civic life online: Learning how digital media can engage youth*. W.L. Lance Bennett (Ed.). Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Lewin, K. (1946). Action research and minority problems. *Journal of Social Issues* 2:34-36.

- Livingstone, S. (2003). The changing nature and uses of media literacy. London 2003. Available at:
http://www.lse.ac.uk/collections/media@lse/pdf/Media@lseEWP4_july03.pdf
- Livingstone, S. (1993). The rise and fall of audience research: An old story with a new ending. In *Defining media studies: Reflections on the future of the field*. New York: Oxford University Press. 247-54.
- Luke, C. (1994). Feminist pedagogy and critical media literacy. *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, 18(2), 30-47.
- Macedo, D. (1994/2006). *Literacies of power: What Americans are not allowed to know*. Boulder: Westview Press.
- Marcuse, H. (1964). *One-dimensional man*. New York: Beacon Press.
- Marcuse, H. (1978). *The aesthetic dimension: Toward a critique of Marxist aesthetics*. New York: Beacon Press.
- Martens, H. (2010). Evaluating media literacy education: Concepts, theories and future directions. *Journal of Media Literacy Education* 2(1): 1-22.
- Martens, H. and R. Hobbs. (2012). *How media literacy supports civic engagement in a digital age*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the International Communication Association. Phoenix, AZ.
- Marx, K. (1978) Theses on Feuerbach. In Max Tucker, ed. *The Marx-Engels reader*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company.
- Masterman, L. (1985/2001). *Teaching the media*. New York: Routledge.
- McDermott, M. et al. (2007). Youth media and social change: One perspective from the field. *Youth Media Reporter*, Print Volume 1.
- McLuhan, M. (1952/2004). Technology and political change from *International Journal* (1952). In *Mass communication and American social thought: Key texts, 1919-1968*, eds. John Durham Peters and Peter Simonson. Rowman and Littlefield Press.
- McLuhan, M. (1962/2004). *The Gutenberg galaxy: The making of the typographic man*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Messaris, P. (1994). *Visual literacy: Image, mind and reality*. Boulder: Westview Press.
- Messaris, P. (1998). Visual aspects of media literacy. *Journal of Communication* 48(1).

- Meyrowitz, J. (1998). Multiple media literacies. *Journal of Communication* 48(1).
- Mihailidis, P. (2009a). Beyond cynicism: Media education and civic learning outcomes in the university. *International Journal of Media and Learning* 1/3 Summer (MA, Cambridge: MIT Press).
- Mihailidis, P. (2009b). The new civic education: Media literacy and youth empowerment worldwide. A report for the Center for International Media Assistance at the National Endowment for Democracy. Washington DC: September 2009: <http://cima.ned.org/reports/media-literacy-empowering-youth-worldwide.html>
- Mihailidis, P. (2008). Beyond cynicism: How media literacy can make students more engaged citizens. A Report for the World Association of Newspapers (WAN). Paris, France. October 21, 2008.
- Milner, H. (2002). *Civic literacy: How informed citizens make democracy work*. Hanover: University of New England Press.
- Minkler, M. (2004). Ethical challenges for the ‘outside’ researcher in community-based participatory research. *Health Education & Behavior* 31(6), 684-697.
- “My Little Kony.” *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart*. Comedy Central. March 12, 2012.
- Nathanson, A. (2004). Factual and evaluative approaches to modifying children’s responses to violent television. *Journal of Communication* 54(2): 321-336.
- Natharius, D. (2004). The more we know, the more we see: The role of visuality in media literacy. *The American Behavioral Scientist* 48(2).
- National Association of Media Literacy Education (NAMLE). (2007). “The Core Principles of Media Literacy Education in the United States.” 2007. <http://namle.net/publications/core-principles/> Accessed Oct 26, 2011.
- O’Connor, C., “60 Languages, One High School.” *The Denver Post*, August 20, 2010, http://www.denverpost.com/education/ci_15834496
- Oquist, P. (1978). The epistemology of action research. *Acta Sociologica* 21(2): 143-163.
- Patton, M. Q. "Evaluation Research." *Encyclopedia of Social Science Research Methods*. 2003. SAGE Publications. 30 Sep. 2011. <http://www.sage-ereference.com/view/socialscience/n301.xml>
- Penuel, W. and T. Freeman. (1997). Participatory action research in youth programming: A theory in use. *Child and Youth Care Forum* 26(3), 175-185.

- Piette, J. and L. Giroux. (1997). The theoretical foundations of media education programs. In *Media literacy in the information age. Current perspectives: Information and behavior*. R. Kubey (Ed.). New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction.
- Pinkleton, B., E. Austin, M. Cohen, A. Miller, and E. Fitzgerald. (2007). A statewide evaluation of the effectiveness of media literacy training to prevent tobacco use among adolescents. *Health Communication* 21(1): 23-34.
- Pinkleton, B., E. Austin, M. Cohen, Y. Chen, and E. Fitzgerald. (2008). Effects of a peer-led media literacy curriculum on adolescents' knowledge and attitudes toward sexual behavior and media portrayals of sex. *Health Communication* 23(5): 462-472.
- Plato. (2001). Phaedrus. In *The Norton anthology of theory and criticism*, Ed. Vincent B. Leitch. New York: W.W. Norton & Co.
- Plato. (2005). The Republic. In *Readings in Ancient Greek Philosophy: From Thales to Aristotle*. Third Edition. Eds. S. Marc Cohen et al. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc.
- Plato. (2007). Gorgias. In *The Critical Tradition: Classic Texts and Contemporary Trends*. Third Edition. Ed. David H. Richter. New York: Bedford/St. Martin's.
- Postman, N. (1985). *Amusing ourselves to death: Public discourse in the age of show business*. New York: Penguin Books.
- Preston, L. (2008). A space of our own: MySpace and feminist activism in the classroom. *Radical Teacher* 81, 14-19.
- Primack, B., J. Sidani, M. Carroll, and M. Fine. (2009). Associations between smoking and media literacy in college students. *Journal of Health Communication* 14(6): 541-555.
- Provencal, J. (2004). Plato's dilemma and the media literacy movement. *Studies in Media & Information Literacy Education* 4(3): 1-10.
- Quijada, A. and J. Collins. (2009). Youth media curriculum for justice. *Youth Media Reporter* 2(5), 165-167.
- Rael, R. (2009). Social justice radio: A strategy for long-term change. *Youth Media Reporter* 2(5), 167-170.
- Rahman, A. (1985). The theory and practice of participatory action research. In *The challenge of social change*. Ed. O. Fals-Borda. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications.

- Rheingold, H. (2008). Using participatory media and public voice to encourage civic engagement. In *Civic life online: Learning how digital media can engage youth*. W.L. Lance Bennett (Ed.). Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Rich, M. (2004). Health literacy via media literacy: Video intervention/prevention assessment. *American Behavioral Scientist* 48(2): 165-188.
- Richter, G. (2002). Who's afraid of the ivory tower? A conversation with Theodor W. Adorno. *Monatshefte* 94(1).
- Robison, A. (2007). Teaching the new media literacies. *Journal of Media Literacy*.
- Rogow, F. (2004). Shifting from media to literacy: One opinion on the challenges of media literacy education. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 48(1), 30-34.
- Rosenbaum, J. (2003). *How media literacy is defined: A review*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the International Communication Association, San Diego, CA.
- Rosenbaum, J. (2007). Measuring media literacy: Youngsters, television and democracy.
- Rosenbaum, J., J. Beentjes, R. Konig. (2008). Mapping media literacy: Key concepts and future directions. *Communication Yearbook* 32.
- Sandlin, J. and Milam, J. (2008). "Mixing pop (culture) and politics": Cultural resistance, culture jamming, and anti-consumption activism as critical public pedagogy. *Curriculum Inquiry* 38(3), 323-350.
- Scharrer, E. (2005). Sixth graders take on television: Media literacy and critical attitudes of television violence. *Communication Research Reports* 22(1): 325-333.
- Scharrer, E. (2006). "I noticed more violence:" The effects of a media literacy program on critical attitudes toward media violence. *Journal of Mass Media Ethics* 21(1): 69-86.
- Scott, A.O. "Superheroes, Super Battles, Super Egos," *The New York Times*. May 3, 2012. <http://movies.nytimes.com/2012/05/04/movies/robert-downey-jr-in-the-avengers-directed-by-joss-whedon.html>
- Share, J. (2006). *Critical media literacy is elementary: A case study of teachers' ideas and experiences with media education and young children*. Doctoral dissertation, UCLA.
- Sholle, D. (1994). The theory of critical media pedagogy. *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 18(2), 8-29.

- Sholle, D. and S. Denski. (1994). *Media education: The (re)production of culture*. Westport, CT: Bergin.
- Sholle, D. and S. Denski (1995). Critical media literacy: Reading, remapping, rewriting. In P. McLaren, R. Hammer, D. Sholle, and S. Reilly (Eds.) *Rethinking media literacy: A critical pedagogy of representation*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Smeltzer, S. and A. Gryzb. (2009). Critical media pedagogy in the public interest. *Democratic Communique* 23(2), 1-22.
- “Social Media Impact.” *Studio 12*. Colorado Public Television 12. Denver, CO. April 25, 2012.
- Soep, E. (2006a). Youth mediate democracy. *National Civic Review*, 34-40.
- Soep, E. (2006b). Youth media citizenship: Beyond youth voice. *Afterschool Matters*, Spring, 1-11.
- Sontag, S. (1977). *On photography*. New York: Picador.
- Steyer, J. (2002). *The other parent: The inside story of the media's effect on our children*. New York: Atria Books.
- Street, B. (1985). *Literacy in theory and practice*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.
- Thomas, J. (1983). Toward a critical ethnography: A reexamination of the Chicago legacy. *Urban Life* 11(4): 477-490.
- Thomas, W.I. and Znaniecki, F. (1918-20). *The Polish peasant in Europe and America*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Timmerman, L., M. Allen, J. Jorgensen, J. Herrett-Skjellum, M. Kramer, and D. Ryan. (2008). A review and meta-analysis examining the relationship of music content with sex, race, priming and attitudes. *Communication Quarterly* 56(3): 303-324.
- Torre, M. and Fine, M. (2007). Don't die with your work balled up in your fists: Contesting social injustice through participatory research. In *Urban girls revisited: Building strengths*. (Eds.) Bonnie J. Ross Leadbeater and Niobe Way. New York: NYU Press.
- Tyner, K. (1992). The media education elephant. In Cary Bazalgette, *Proceedings of the 1992 Unesco conference on media education*. London & Paris: British Film Institute and CLEMI.

- Tyner, K. (2008). Mapping the field: Results of the 2008 survey of youth media organizations in the United States. *Youth Media Reporter* 2, 101-136.
- Tyner, K. (2009). *Media literacy: New agendas in communication*. New York: Routledge.
- Walker, R. "Applied Qualitative Research." *Encyclopedia of Social Science Research Methods*. 2003. SAGE Publications. 30 Sep. 2011. <http://www.sage-reference.com/view/socialscience/n18.xml>
- Van Driel, H. and S. Klinkenberg,. (1989). Semiologie en media educatie (Semiology and media education). *Massacommunicatie*, 17(1), 74-83.
- Westheimer, J. and Kahne, J. (2004). What kind of citizen? The politics of educating for democracy. *American Educational Research Journal* 41, 237-269.
- Wohlfarth, I. (1979). Hibernation: On the tenth anniversary of Adorno's death. *Modern Language Notes* 94: 956-87.
- Zettl, H. (1998). Contextual media aesthetics as the basis for media literacy. *Journal of Communication* 48(1): 81-95.