In the past decade radical educators have begun to take seriously the issue of student experience as a central component in developing a theory of schooling and cultural politics. [1] The way in which student experience is produced, organized, and legitimated in schools has become an increasingly important theoretical consideration for understanding how schools produce and authorize particular forms of meaning and implement teaching practices consistent with the ideological principles of the dominant society. Rather than focusing exclusively on how schools reproduce the dominant social order through social and cultural reproduction or how students contest the dominant logic through various forms of resistance, radical educators have attempted more recently to analyze the terrain of schooling as a struggle over particular ways of life. In this view the process of being schooled cannot be fully conceptualized within the limiting parameters of the reproduction/resistance model. Instead, being schooled is analyzed as part of a complex and often contradictory set of ideological and material processes through which the transformation of experience takes place. Schooling is understood as part of the production and legitimation of social forms and subjectivities as they are organized within relations of power and meaning that either enable or limit human capacities for self-and social empowerment. [2]

Although the theoretical service that this position has provided cannot be overstated, radical educational theorists have nonetheless almost completely ignored the importance of popular culture both for developing a more critical understanding of student experience and for examining pedagogy in a critical and theoretically expanded fashion. The irony of this position is that, even though radical educators have argued for the importance of student experience as a central component for developing a critical pedagogy, they have generally failed to consider how such experience is shaped by the terrain of popular culture. Similarly, they have been reluctant to question why popular culture has not been a serious object of study either in the present school curriculum or in the curriculum reforms put forth by critically minded liberal educators. This lacuna can be partly explained by the fact that radical educators often legitimate in their work a theory of pedagogy in which the ideological correctness of one’s political position appears to be the primary determining factor in assessing the production of knowledge and exchange that
occurs between teachers and students. Guided by a concern with producing knowledge that is ideologically correct, radical theorists have revealed little or no understanding of how a teacher can be both politically correct and pedagogically wrong. Nor can there be found any concerted attempts to analyze how relations of pedagogy and relations of power are inextricably tied not only to what people know but how they come to know it in a particular way within the constraints of specific social forms. [3]

We argue that the lack of an adequate conception of critical pedagogical practice is in part responsible for the absence of an adequate politics of popular culture. Within critical educational theories the issue of pedagogy is usually treated in one of two ways: as a method whose status is defined by its functional relation to particular forms of knowledge or as a process of ideological deconstruction of a text. In the first approach, close attention is given to the knowledge chosen for use in a particular class. Often the ways in which students actually engage such knowledge is taken for granted. It is assumed that if one has access to an ideologically correct comprehension of that which is to be understood, the only serious question that needs to be raised about pedagogy is one of procedural technique, that is, should one use a seminar, lecture, or some other teaching style? [4] In the second approach, pedagogy is reduced to a concern with and analysis of the political interests which structure particular forms of knowledge, ways of knowing, and methods of teaching. For example, specific styles of teaching might be analyzed according to whether or not they embody sexist, racist, and class-specific interests, serve to silence students, or promote practices which deskill and disempower teachers. [5] In both approaches, what is often ignored is the notion of pedagogy as a cultural production and exchange that addresses how knowledge is produced, mediated, refused, and re-presented within relations of power both in and outside of schooling.

In our view the issue of critical pedagogy demands an attentiveness to how students actively construct the categories of meaning that prefigure their production of and response to classroom knowledge. By ignoring the cultural and social forms that are authorized by youth and simultaneously empower or disempower them, educators risk complicitly silencing and negating their students. This is unwittingly accomplished by refusing to recognize the importance of those sites and social practices outside of schools that actively shape student experiences and through which students often define and construct their sense of identity, politics, and culture. The issue at stake is not one of relevance but of empowerment. We are not concerned with simply motivating students to learn, but rather establishing conditions of learning that enable them to locate themselves in history and to interrogate the adequacy of that location as both a pedagogical and political question. [6]

Educators who refuse to acknowledge popular culture as a significant basis of knowledge often devalue students by refusing to work with the knowledge that students actually have and so eliminate the possibility of developing a pedagogy that links school knowledge to the differing subject relations that help to constitute their everyday lives. A more critical pedagogy demands that pedagogical relations be seen as relations of power structured primarily through dominant
but always negotiated and contested forms of consent.

The basis for a critical pedagogy cannot be developed merely around the inclusion of particular forms of knowledge that have been suppressed or ignored by the dominant culture, nor can it center only on providing students with more empowering interpretations of the social and material world. Such a pedagogy also must attend to ways in which students make both affective and semantic investments as part of their attempts to regulate and give meaning to their lives. [7] This is an important insight that both makes problematic and provides a corrective to the traditional ways in which radical educators have explained how dominant meanings and values work. The value of including popular culture in the development of a critical pedagogy is that it provides the opportunity to further our understanding of how students make investments in particular social forms and practices. In other words, the study of popular culture offers the possibility of understanding how a politics of pleasure addresses students in a way that shapes and sometimes secures the often-contradictory relations they have to both schooling and the politics of everyday life. If one of the central concerns of a critical pedagogy is to understand how student identities, cultures, and experiences provide the basis for learning, we need to grasp the totality of elements that organize such subjectivities.

We shall particularly emphasize that, while the production of meaning provides one important element in the production of subjectivity, it is not enough. The production of meaning is also tied to emotional investments and the production of pleasure. In our view, the production of meaning and the production of pleasure are mutually constitutive of who students are, the view they have of themselves, and how they construct a particular version of their future.

In what follows, we first want to argue that critical educators need to retheorize the importance of popular culture as a central category for both understanding and developing a theory and practice of critical pedagogy. In developing this position we examine some conservative and radical views of popular culture and then analyze the pedagogical practices implicit in these positions. Second, we will attempt to develop the basic elements that constitute a theory of popular culture, one that would support a critical pedagogical practice. Third, we will analyze a particular Hollywood film as a popular form, treating it as an exemplary text in order to demonstrate how the formation of identities takes place through attachments and investments which are as much a question of affect and pleasure as they are of ideology and rationality. Finally, we will discuss the implications of this analysis for the practice of a critical pedagogy.

**RADICAL AND CONSERVATIVE APPROACHES TO POPULAR CULTURE**

Historically the concept popular culture has not fared well as part of the discourse of the Left or of the Right. [8] For the Left, two positions have held center stage in different instances of Marxist theory. In the first, popular culture lacks the possibility for creative, productive, or authentic forms of expression. In this view, popular culture simply represents a view of ideology and cultural forms imposed by the culture industry on the masses in order to integrate them into
the existing social order. Within this discourse, popular culture becomes commodified and produces people in the image of its own logic, a logic characterized by standardization, uniformity, and passivity. The structuring principle at work in this view of popular culture is one of total dominance and utter resignation. People become synonymous with cultural dupes, incapable of either mediating, resisting, or rejecting the imperatives of the dominant culture.

The paradigmatic example of this position comes from Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, two major theorists of the Frankfurt School. For Adorno and Horkheimer, popular culture is equated with mass culture. This is seen as a form of psychoanalysis in reverse; instead of curing socially induced neuroses, mass culture produces them. Similarly, popular forms such as television, radio, jazz, or syndicated astrology columns are nothing more than ideological shorthand for those social relations that reproduced the social system as a whole. For Adorno, in particular, popular culture is simply mass culture whose effects have no redeeming political possibilities. The people or “masses” lack any culture through which they can offer either resistance or an alternative vision of the world. Adorno is clear on this issue:

The total effect of the culture industry is one of anti-enlightenment, in which, as Horkheimer and I have noted, enlightenment, that is the progressive technical domination of nature, becomes mass deception and is turned into a means for fettering consciousness. It impedes the development of autonomous, independent individuals who judge and decide consciously for themselves....If the masses have been unjustly reviled from above as masses, the culture industry is not among the least responsible for making them into masses and then despising them, while obstructing the emancipation for which human beings [might be] ripe. [10]

Adorno’s remarks summarize one of the paradoxical theses of the Frankfurt School theorists. Reason is not only in eclipse in the modern age, it is also the source of crisis and decline. Progress has come to mean the reification, rationalization, and standardization of thought itself, and the culture industry plays a key role in transforming culture and reason into their opposite. Within this perspective, the distinction between high culture and mass/popular culture is preserved. In this case, high culture becomes a transcendent sphere, one of the few arenas left in which autonomy, creativity, and opposition can be thought and practiced. While arguing that mass culture is an expression of the slide into barbarism, Frankfurt theorists such as Adorno and Horkheimer fall back upon a unfortunate legitimation of high culture in which particular versions of art, music, literature, and the philosophic tradition become a Utopian refuge for resisting the new barbarism. [11]

The elitism that informs this view degenerates into a politics and a pedagogy characteristic of their conservative counterpart, which also subscribes to such a distinction. In the conservative case, the refuge of political insight and engagement is no longer open to those contemptuously labeled as “the people.” In this perspective, popular culture has little to do with complex and contradictory notions of consent and opposition, which necessitate exploring the pedagogical
principles that structure how people negotiate, mediate, affirm, or reject particular aspects of the
terrain of the popular. Instead, the popular collapses into an unproblematic sphere of domination
where critical thought and action remain a distant memory of the past.

The second view of popular culture predominant in Marxist theory is developed mostly in the
work of historians and sociologists who focus on various aspects of “peoples’ history” or the
practices of subcultural groups. In this view, popular culture becomes a version of folk culture
and its contemporary variant, that is, as an object of historical analysis, working-class culture is
excavated as an unsullied expression of popular resistance. Within this form of analysis the
political and the pedagogical emerge as an attempt to reconstruct a “radical and…popular
tradition in order that ‘the people’ might learn from and take heart from the struggles of their
forebears,” or it appears as an attempt to construct “‘the people’ as the supporters of [a] ‘great
culture’ so that they might eventually be led to appropriate that culture as their own.” [12]

A similar and more contemporary version of this discourse opposes the high or dominant culture
to the alternative culture of the working class or various subcultural groups. This is the culture of
authenticity, one which is allegedly uncontaminated by the logic and practices of the culture
industry or the impositions of a dominant way of life. At work here is a romantic view of popular
experience that somehow manages to escape from the relations and contradictions at work in the
larger society. This view falls prey to an essentialist reading of popular culture. It deeply
underestimates the most central feature of cultural power in the twentieth century. In failing to
acknowledge popular culture as one sphere in a complex field of domination and subordination,
this view ignores the necessity of providing an understanding of how power produces different
levels of cultural relations, experiences, and values that articulate the multilayered ideologies and
social practices of any society. [13]

Both of these traditions on the Left have played a powerful role in defining popular culture
within a theoretical framework that helps to explain why the people have not risen up against the
inequities and injustices of capitalism. Ironically, the Right has not ignored the underlying logic
of this position and, in fact, has appropriated it for its own ideological interests. As Patrick
Brantlinger points out, the category of popular culture has been “just as useful for helping to
explain and condemn the failures of egalitarian schools and mass cultural institutions such as
television and the press to educate ‘the masses’ to political responsibilty.” [14] Conservative
critics such as Arnold Toynbee, José Ortega y Gasset, Ezra Pound, and T. S. Eliot have viewed
popular culture as a threat to the very existence of civilization as well as an expression of the
vulgarization and decadence of the masses.

A contemporary version of this position can be found in Allan Bloom’s best-selling book, The
Closing of the American Mind. Bloom criticizes popular culture, especially rock and roll, as a
“nonstop commercially prepackaged masturbational fantasy,” [15] which has caused a spiritual
paralysis among today’s youth. In Bloom’s terms popular culture occupies a terrain marked by
the debilitating escapism of the Walkman radio and the pulsating sexual energy mobilized in rock
music. Reading Bloom, one gets the impression that popular culture has ruined the imagination of contemporary youth who, incited by the base and vulgar passion of rock and roll, appear to be electronically wired and and constantly poised to copulate. Today’s youth provide for Bloom the evidence of social decay and a new form of barbarism. Of course, Bloom’s position is not new and in many ways echoes Bernard James’s attack on the counterculture of the 1960s. James writes:

Where the external barbarian pounds at the gates of civilization with battering ram and war club, the internal barbarian insinuates values and habits that degrade civilized life from within. I interpret much of the so-called counterculture we witness about us today as evidence of such internal barbarism. [16]

In the conservative attack on mass and popular culture, the category of true culture is treated as a warehouse filled with the goods of antiquity, waiting patiently to be distributed anew to each generation. Knowledge in this perspective becomes sacred, revered, and removed from the demands of social critique and ideological interests. [17] The pedagogical principles at work here are similar to those at work in the Left’s celebration of high culture. In both cases, the rhetoric of cultural restoration and crisis legitimates a transmission pedagogy consistent with a view of culture as an artifact and students as merely bearers of received knowledge. Though starting from different political positions, both left and right advocates of high culture often argue that the culture of the people has to be replaced with knowledge and values that are at the heart of ruling culture. In these perspectives, the modalities of revolutionary struggle and conservative preservation seem to converge around a view of popular culture as a form of barbarism, a notion of the people as passive dupes, and an appeal to a view of enlightenment that reduces cultural production and meaning to the confines of high culture. Questions regarding the multidimensional nature of the struggles, contradictions, and re-formations that inscribe in different ways the historically specific surface of popular cultural forms is completely overlooked in both the dominant radical and conservative positions.

Dominant left views of popular culture have not provided an adequate discourse for developing a theory of cultural analysis that begins with the issue of how power enters into the struggles over the domains of common sense and everyday life. [18] Nor do such accounts provide sufficient theoretical insight into how the issues of consent, resistance, and the production of subjectivity are shaped by pedagogical processes whose structuring principles are deeply political. Of course, in the exaggerations that characterize popular culture as either imposed from above or generated spontaneously from below there are hints of the political reality of cultural power both as a force for domination and as a condition for collective affirmation and struggle. The point is not to separate these different elements of cultural power from each other as oppositions but to capture the complexity of cultural relations as they manifest themselves in practices that both enable and disable people within sites and social forms that give meaning to the relations of popular culture.

HEGEMONY AS A PEDAGOGICAL PROCESS
The work of Italian Marxist theorist, Antonio Gramsci, represents an important starting point for both redefining the meaning of popular culture and advancing its pedagogical and political importance. Gramsci did not directly address himself to modern manifestations of popular culture, such as cinema and radio, nor did he write anything of profound worth on the symbolic forms of popular culture that existed in the urban centers of Europe in the early part of the twentieth century, but he did formulate an original theory of culture, power, and hegemony which provides a theoretical basis for moving beyond the impasse of viewing popular culture within the bipolar alternatives of a celebratory popularism or a debilitating cultural stupor. Gramsci’s theory of hegemony redefines the structuring principles that maintain relations between dominant and subordinate classes in the advanced capitalist societies. For Gramsci, the exercise of control by the ruling classes is characterized less by the excessive use of officially sanctioned force than it is through what he calls “the struggle for hegemonic leadership” – the struggle to win the consent of subordinate groups to the existing social order. In substituting hegemonic struggle for the concept of domination, Gramsci points to the complex ways in which consent is organized as part of an active pedagogical process within everyday life. In Gramsci’s view such a pedagogical process must work and rework the cultural and ideological terrain of subordinate groups in order to legitimate the interests and authority of the ruling bloc.

Gramsci’s concept of hegemony broadens the question of which social groups will hold and exert power. More importantly, it raises a number of theoretical considerations regarding how power as a cultural, economic, and political set of practices works to define, organize, and legitimate particular conceptions of common sense. Gramsci’s hegemony is both a political and pedagogical process. Moral leadership and state power are tied to a process of consent, as a form of practical learning, which is secured through the elaboration of particular discourses, needs, appeals, values, and interests that must address and transform the concerns of subordinate groups. In this perspective hegemony is a continuing, shifting, and problematic historical process. Consent is structured through a series of relations marked by an ongoing political struggle over competing conceptions and views of the world between dominant and subordinate groups. What is worth noting here is that this is not a political struggle framed within the polarities of an imposing dominant culture and a weak but “authentic” subordinate culture(s). On the contrary, by claiming that every relation of hegemony is necessarily an educational relationship, Gramsci makes clear that a ruling bloc can only engage in a political and pedagogical struggle for the consent of subordinate groups if it is willing to take seriously and articulate some of the values and interests of these groups.

Inherent in this attempt to transform rather than displace the ideological and cultural terrain of subordinate groups, dominant ideology itself is compromised and exists in a far from pure, unadulterated state. Needless to say, the culture of subordinate groups never confronts the dominant culture in either a completely supine or totally resistant fashion. In the struggle to open up its own spaces for resistance and affirmation, subordinate cultures have to negotiate and compromise around both those elements it gives over to the dominant culture and those it maintains as representative of its own interests and desires.
From this view of struggle within the hegemonic process, it is clear that the relationship between popular culture and the processes of consent requires rejecting any concept of popular culture articulated in essentialist terms. That is, the concept of popular culture cannot be defined around a set of ideological meanings permanently inscribed in particular cultural forms. On the contrary, because of their location within and as part of the dynamics of consent, the meaning of cultural forms can only be ascertained through their articulation into a practice and set of historically specific contextual relations which determine their political meaning and ideological interests. Break dancing, punk dress, or heavy metal music may be sufficiently oppositional and congruent within one social and historical context to be considered a legitimate radical expression of popular culture and yet in another social field may be mediated through the consumer ideology and investments of mass culture. What is important to recognize here is: the key structuring principle of popular culture does not consist in the contents of particular cultural forms. Stuart Hall illuminates this issue well:

> The meaning of a cultural form and its place or position in the cultural field is not inscribed inside its form. Nor is its position fixed once and for ever. This year’s radical symbol or slogan will be neutralised into next year’s fashion; the year after, it will be the object of a profound cultural nostalgia. Today’s rebel folksinger ends up, tomorrow, on the cover of *The Observer* colour magazine. The meaning of the cultural symbol is given in part by the social field into which it is incorporated, the practises with which it articulates and is made to resonate. What matters is not the intrinsic or historically fixed objects of culture, but the state of play in cultural relations. [23]

We want to extend this insight further and argue that not only are popular cultural forms read in complex ways, they also mobilize multiple forms of investment. In other words, the popular has a dual form of address: it not only serves as a semantic and ideological referent for marking one’s place in history; it also brings about an experience of pleasure, affect, and corporeality. This is not to suggest that these forms of address posit a distinction in which pleasure takes place outside of history or forms of representation. What is being posited is that the popular as both a set of practices and a discursive field has a variety of effects which may be mediated through a combination of corporeal and ideological meanings or through the primacy of one of these determinants.

It must be recognized that while popular cultural forms are productive around historically constructed sets of meanings and practices, their effects may be primarily affective. That is, how these forms are mediated and taken up, how they work to construct a particular form of investment may depend less on the production of meanings than on the affective relations which they construct with their audiences. Pleasure as a terrain of commodification and struggle never exists completely free from the technology of gendered and racist representations but its power as a form of investment cannot be reduced to its signifying effects. This means that the practices associated with a particular cultural form such as punk can never be dismissed as being merely
ideologically incorrect or as simply a reflex of commodity logic. The importance of both the semantic and the affective in the structuring the investments in popular cultural forms provides new theoretical categories for linking the terrain of the everyday with the pedagogical processes at work in the notion of consent.

In summary, we claim that there is no popular culture outside of the interlocking processes of meaning, power, and desire that characterize the force of cultural relations at work at a given time and place in history. This suggests that popular culture is not to be understood as simply the content of various cultural forms. Quite divergently, the concept of popular culture must be grasped in terms of how cultural forms enter into the ideological and institutional structuring relations which sustain differences between what constitutes dominant culture and what does not. In North America today, underlying this struggle to maintain both a difference and an accommodation of dominant and subordinate cultures is a set of institutions, ideologies, and social practices that mark a generic distinction between the realms of popular and dominant culture.

In the context of this distinction, popular culture is an empty cultural form. Its form or representation does not guarantee an unproblematic, transcendent meaning. At the same time, popular culture can be understood as a social practice constituted by a particular site and set of features which point to a distinctive field of political action. The general distinctiveness of popular culture as a sphere of social relations can be made more clear by further elaborating its basic theoretical features.

A theory of popular culture has several cogent features which we wish to re-emphasize. First, the concept of hegemony clarifies how cultural power is able to penetrate into the terrain of daily life, transforming it into both a struggle over and accommodation to the culture of subordinate groups. Second, the cultural terrain of everyday life is not only a site of struggle and accommodation, but also one in which the production of subjectivity can be viewed as a pedagogical process whose structuring principles are deeply political. Third, the notion of consent which lies at the heart of the process of hegemony underscores the importance of specifying the limits and possibilities of the pedagogical principles at work within cultural forms that serve in contradictory ways to empower and disempower various groups. In what follows, we want to extend these insights by pointing to those features and activities that illuminate more specifically what constitutes popular culture as both a site and field of pedagogical work.

**CULTURE AS A SITE OF STRUGGLE AND POWER RELATIONS**

We enter the process of theorizing the relation between popular culture and critical pedagogy by arguing for educational practice as both a site and form of cultural politics. In this regard, our project is the construction of an educational practice that expands human capacities in order to enable people to intervene in the formation of their own subjectivities and to be able to exercise power in the interest of transforming the ideological and material conditions of domination into
social practices that promote social empowerment and demonstrate possibilities. Within this position we are emphasizing popular culture as a site of differentiated politics, a site with multiple ideological and affective weightings. It represents a particular historical place where different groups collide in transactions of dominance, complicity, and resistance over the power to name, legitimate, and experience different versions of history, community, desire, and pleasure through the availability of social forms structured by the politics of difference. Some of the theoretical and political implications at work in this view of popular culture are captured in Larry Grossberg’s discussion of a theory of articulation:

[People are never totally manipulated, never entirely incorporated. People are engaged in struggles with, within, and sometimes against, real tendential forces and determinations, in their efforts to appropriate what they are given. Consequently, their relations to particular practices and texts are complex and contradictory: they may win something in the struggle against sexism and lose something in the struggle against economic exploitation; they may both gain and lose something economically; and while they lose ideological ground, they may win a bit of emotional strength. If peoples’ lives are never merely determined by the dominant position, and their subordination is always complex and active, then understanding [popular] culture requires us to look at how they are actively inserted at particular sites of everyday life and at how particular articulations empower and disempower its audience. [24]

The key theoretical concepts for further specifying popular culture as a particular site of struggle and accommodation can be initially organized around a category we label “the productive.” In the more general sense, we use the term productive to refer to the construction and organization of practices engaged in by dominant and subordinate groups to secure a space for producing and legitimating experiences and social forms. The term productive points to two distinctly different sets of relations within the sphere of the popular.

The first set of relations refers to the ways in which the dominant culture functions as a structuring force within and through popular forms. In this case, the dominant culture attempts to secure – both semantically and affectively, through the production of meaning and the regulation of pleasure – the complicity of subordinate groups. Rather than merely dismiss or ignore the traditions, ideologies, and needs that emerge out of the cultures of subordinate groups, the dominant culture attempts to appropriate and transform the ideological and cultural processes that characterize the terrain of the popular. At issue here are processes of selective production, controlled distribution, and regulated notions of narrative and consumer address.

In the second set of relations, productive refers to the ways in which subordinate groups articulate a distinct set of contents and/or a level of involvement in popular forms that is less distancing and more social in nature than that found in the cultural forms of dominant bourgeois groups. This articulation and set of relations are characterized by a refusal to engage in social practices defined by an abstract rationality, a theoretical mapping, so to speak, that structures
cultural forms through a denial of the familiar affective investments and pleasures. For the
dominant class, such refusal is often understood as a surrender to the moment, the fun of the
event, or the “horror of the vulgar.” A more critical reading might suggest that the affective
investment and level of active involvement in popular forms such as neighborhood sports, punk
dancing, or working-class weddings represent an important theoretical signpost. In this case, it is
a particular form of sociality that signals something more than vulgarity, co-option, or what
Bloch calls the “swindle of fulfillment.” Instead, the sociality that structures popular forms may
contain the unrealized potentialities and possibilities necessary for more democratic and humane
forms of community and collective formation. [25] This can be made clearer by analyzing the
structuring principles that often characterize dominant cultural forms.

Pierre Bourdieu argues that the cultural forms of dominant bourgeois groups can be characterized
by the celebration of a formalism, an elective distance from the real world, with all of its
passions, emotions, and feelings. The social relations and attendant sensibility at work in
bourgeois cultural forms are those which maintain an investment of form – a celebration of
stylized detachment. On the other hand, there is often a space in the cultural forms embraced by
subordinate groups that is organized around a sensibility in which the needs, emotions, passions
of the participants largely resonate with the material and ideological structures of day-to-day life.
Underlying these social relations one can find a richly textured collective investment of play and
affective engagement in which there is no great disjunction or interruption between the act and its
meaning. In other words, there is an active, communal set of experiences and social practices at
work in subordinate cultural forms, including a form of public participation in which the
dominant practice of distancing the body from reflection is refused. This is the productive
moment of corporeality. Mercer illuminates this point in his discussion of Bourdieu’s concept of
“popular forms”:

“Nothing [argues Pierre Bourdieu] more radically distinguishes popular spectacles —
the football match, Punch and Judy, the circus, wrestling or even in some cases the
cinema—from bourgeois spectacles, than the form of participation of the public. For
the former, whistles, shouts, pitch invasions are characteristic, for the latter the
gestures are distant, heavily ritualised—applause, obligatory but discontinuous and
punctual cries of enthusiasm—‘author, author’ or ‘encore’.” Even the clicking of
fingers and tapping of feet in a jazz audience are only a “bourgeois spectacle which
mimes a popular one” since the participation is reduced to “the silent allure of the
gesture.” A certain distance, Bourdieu argues, has been central in the bourgeois
economy of the body: a distance between “reflexion” and corporeal participation. [26]

Since corporeality may be inscribed in either repressive or emancipatory actions, any uncritical
celebration of the body is theoretically and politically misplaced. At the same time, a discourse of
the body is needed that recognizes a sensibility and set of social practices that both define and
exhibit a possibility for extending unrealized and progressive moments in the production of
corporeality. For example, punk culture’s lived appropriation of the everyday as a refusal to let
the dominant culture encode and restrict the meaning of daily life suggests the first instance of a form of resistance that links play with the reconstruction of meaning. This particular popular form, filled as it is with abortive hopes, signifies within bourgeois culture a “tradition of the scorned.” That is, punk culture (for that matter, any lived relation of difference that does not result in dominance or infantilization) ruptures the dominant order symbolically and refuses to narrate with permission. It is scorned by the bourgeoisie because it challenges the dominant order’s attempt to suppress all differences through a discourse that asserts the homogeneity of the social domain. However, it also presents the possibility of a social imaginary for which a politics of democratic difference offers up forms of resistance in which it becomes possible to rewrite, rework, recreate, and re-establish new discourses and cultural spaces that revitalize rather than degrade public life. Whether conscious or not, punk culture partly expresses social practices which contain the basis for interrogating and struggling to overthrow all those forms of human behavior in which difference becomes the foundation for subjecting human beings to forms of degradation, enslavement, and exploitation. Of course, there is more at work in punk culture than the affirmation of difference; there is also the difference of affirmation, that is, affirmation becomes the precondition for claiming one’s experience as a legitimate ground for developing one’s own voice, place, and sense of history. It is this dialectic of affirmation, pleasure, and difference that constitutes some of the basic elements of the notion of the productive. Pierre Bourdieu is helpful here, for he defines the productive as that dialectical mixture of pleasure, consent, and unselfconscious involvement that maps out a significant aspect of the popular within everyday life.

The desire to enter into the game, identifying with the characters’ joys and sufferings, worrying about their fate, espousing their hopes and ideals, living their life, is based on a form of investment, a sort of deliberate “naivety,” ingenuousness, good-natured credulity (“we’re here to enjoy ourselves”) which tends to accept formal experiments and specifically artistic effects only to the extent that they can be forgotten and do not get in the way of [the affirmation and dignity of everyday life]. [27]

As we have stressed, it would be a political mistake to place too much faith in the level of participation and nature of spontaneity that characterize many cultural forms of subordinated groups. Many of these are not innocent. As an area and site of exchange between the dominant and subordinate classes, popular culture embodies a violence inherent in both sides of the processes of hegemony as well as the unrealized potentiality of those needs and desires which reflect a respect for human dignity and a commitment to extend their most ethical and empowering capabilities. We stress here that innocence is not an intrinsic feature of the popular. There is a violence inextricably inscribed in popular forms that must also be addressed as part of the multilayered and contradictory investments and meanings that constitute its changing character.

**POPULAR CULTURE AND CONSENT: THE DIALECTIC OF IDEOLOGY AND PLEASURE**
If the popular is to be understood in terms of the unrealized potentialities that inform it, critical educators need to analyze how the production of subjectivity and cultural alliances can emerge within the grammar and codes that make the terrain of the popular significant in peoples’ lives. Popular culture as a site of struggle and possibility needs to be understood not only in terms of its productive elements, but also in terms of how its forms articulate processes through which the production, organization, and regulation of consent take place around various social practices and struggles at the level of daily life. These processes can be elaborated through the category we call “the persuasive.” In the most general sense, the term refers to the ways in which hegemony functions through a variety of pedagogical processes that work not only to secure dominant interests but to offer as well the possibility of a politics of resistance and social transformation.

The notion of the persuasive illuminates the insight that political power never works without an ideological mediation. By introducing the element of persuasion – how ideological mediation actually functions as a pedagogical process – domination along with resistance can be connected to a broader notion of cultural politics in which the very act of learning can be analyzed as a fundamental aspect of hegemony. More specifically, the category of the persuasive provides a starting point for understanding how the complex relations of dominance and resistance are organized and structured through particular pedagogical forms and practices. Theorizing popular culture in this way lays bare the practical grounds on which transformations are worked and represented through the important and related categories of consent, investment, ideology, and pleasure.

Consent is an important feature of the practice of persuasion. As the term is generally defined in radical theories of hegemony, it refers to two somewhat different perspectives on how people come to be engaged within the ideologies and social relations of the dominant culture. In the more orthodox version, consent refers to the ways in which the dominant logic is imposed on subordinate groups through the mechanizations of the culture industry. In the revisionist radical version, consent is defined through more active complicity, in that subordinate groups are now viewed as partly negotiating their adaptation and place within the dominant culture. In either case, as imposition or as negotiated complicity, consent defines the relationship between power and culture as nothing more than the equivalence of domination. We want to modify these notions of consent so as to illuminate its dialectical importance as a political and pedagogical process.

To us, the notion of consent rightly points to the ways in which people are located within and negotiate elements of place and agency as a result of their investments in particular relations of meaning constructed through popular forms. At work in this notion are the central questions of what it is that people know, how they come to know, and how they come to feel in a particular way that secures for the hegemonic or counter-hegemonic order their loyalties and desires. This perspective is important as a political and social practice and as a framework of inquiry because it raises important questions about how the modern apparatuses of moral and social regulation, as
well as resistance and counter-discourse, define what kind of knowledge counts, how it is to be taught, how subjectivities are defined, and how the very dynamic of moral and political regulation is constantly worked and reworked. The political implications of these insights for a politics of popular culture are significant and need further theoretical elaboration.

That consent is learned begs the question of what kinds of pedagogical processes are at work through which people actively rather than passively identify their own needs and desires with particular forms and relations of meaning. Unfortunately, the pedagogical issue of how people come to learn such identities and pleasures through particular forms of identification and cathexis has not been the central focus of study in most radical analyses of culture. Instead, radical analyses usually focus either on deconstructing the ideologies at work in particular cultural forms or on how readers organize texts according to their own meanings and experiences. In both cases, pedagogy is subordinate to and subsumed within a rather limited notion of ideology production. In this approach, the concern over ideology is limited to a particular view of consent in which the study of popular culture is reduced to analysis of texts or to popular culture as a form of consumption. 

Ideology as a pedagogical process thus is restricted to how meanings are produced by texts and mediated by audiences or to how the market organizes needs in order to commodify popular culture.

What is noticeably missing from these perspectives is the question of how cultural forms can be understood as mobilizing desire in a way that elaborates how such forms are engaged. Through what processes, for example, do cultural forms induce an anger or pleasure that has its own center of gravity as a form of meaning? How can we come to understand learning outside of the limits of rationality, as a form of engagement that mobilizes and sometimes reconstructs desire? We can see that pedagogy is not so neatly ensconced in the production of discourse; rather, it also constitutes a moment in which the body learns, moves, desires, and longs for affirmation. These questions also suggest a rejection of the pedagogy of modernism, one which serves up “ideal” forms of communication theory in which the tyranny of discourse becomes the ultimate pedagogical medium, that is, talk embodied as a logic disembodied from the body itself. In opposition to the latter position, we need to reemphasize that the issue of consent opens up pedagogy to the uncertain, that space which refuses the measurable, that legitimates the concrete in a way that is felt and experienced rather than merely spoken. In this argument, we are not trying to privilege the body or a politics of affective investments over discourse so much as we are trying to emphasize their absence in previous theorizing and their importance for a critical pedagogy. The relationship we are posing between affective and discursive investment is neither ahistorical nor ideologically innocent. Nor do we suggest that ideology and affect as particular forms of investment can best be understood by positing a rigid conceptual opposition between meaning and desire. The cultural forms that mobilize desire and affect along with the struggles that take place over re/producing and investing desire, pleasure, and corporeality are constructed within power relations which are always ideological in nature but which produce an experience or form of investment that cannot be understood merely as an ideological construction – an experience re/presented and enjoyed through the lens of meaning rather than through the primacy
of pleasure and affect. Put another way, interpellations in the Althusserian sense are not merely ideological, they also summon particular forms of pleasure, which are always historically situated but not discursively privileged. In what follows, we will argue that by retheorizing the notion of ideology through a reconstructed theory of pleasure, educators can begin to develop a pedagogy that offers a more critical possibility for addressing the purpose and meaning of popular culture as a terrain of struggle and hope.

We are arguing that the relationship between power and complicity is not framed simply around the organization of knowledge and meaning. The power of complicity and the complicity of power are not exhausted by registering how people are positioned and located through the production of particular ideologies structured through particular discourses. The relationships that subordinate groups enter into with respect to cultural forms cannot be understood only through what often amounts to a search and destroy mission based on uncovering the particular meanings and messages that mediate between any given film, popular song, or text and its audience. The limits of ideology and rationality as the interests which structure behavior and move us within particular social forms is neither understood nor made problematic in this position. This position represents a basic misrecognition of the central and important role that pleasure (or its absence) plays in structuring the relationships and investments that one has to a particular cultural form. Colin Mercer emphasizes this point:

Barthes has it that “ideology passes over the text and its reading like the blush over a face (in love, some take erotic pleasure in this colouring)” and this signals something of the contemporary concern for the contradictory play of ideology. There is a general unease that, within the plethora of ideology analysis which has emerged in recent years, something has quite crucially been missed out: that it may now be important to look over our shoulders and try to explain a certain “guilt” of enjoyment of such and such in spite of its known ideological and political provenance….Any analysis of the pleasure, the modes of persuasion, the consent operative with a given cultural form would have to displace the search for an ideological, political, economic or, indeed subjective, meaning and establish the coordinates of that “formidable underside” (i.e., pleasure, joy)….because what we are really concerned with here is a restructuring of the theoretical horizon within which a cultural form is perceived. [30]

Drawing upon the work of Walter Benjamin, Roland Barthes, and others, Mercer calls attention to an issue that is central to a politics of popular culture. He has focused on the ways in which consent is articulated not only through the structuring of semantically organized meanings and messages, but also through the pleasures invoked in the mechanisms and structuring principles of popular forms. The theoretical insight at work in this position is in part revealed through the question of why “we not only consent to forms of domination which we know, rationally and politically, are ‘wrong,’ but even enjoy them.” [31] The importance of this issue is made somewhat clear in the limits of an ideological analysis that might reveal the sexist nature of the lyrics in a popular song or video. Such a critique is important, but it does not tell us or even seem
capable of raising the question as to why people enjoy the song or video even though they might recognize the sexist ideologies that the latter embody. At stake here is the recognition that an overreliance on ideology critique limits our ability to understand how people actively participate in the dominant culture through processes of accommodation, negotiation, and even resistance.

The investments that tie students to popular cultural forms cannot be ascertained simply through an analysis of the meanings and representations that we decode in them. On the contrary, affective investments have a real cultural hold, and such investments may be indifferent to the very notion of meaning itself as constructed through the lens of the ideological. This suggests a number of important political and pedagogical principles. First, in hegemonic and counter-hegemonic struggles, the production and regulation of desire are as important as the construction of meaning. This means that the constitution and the expression of such desire compose an important starting point for understanding the relations that students construct to popular and dominant forms. Second, the idea and experience of pleasure must be constituted politically so that we can analyze how the body becomes not only the object of (his patriarchal) pleasure, but also the subject of pleasure. In this case “pleasure becomes the consent of life in the body,” and provides an important corporeal condition of life-affirming possibility. This argues for a discriminatory notion of pleasure that is not only desirable in and of itself, but which also suggests “at one and the same time…a figure for utopia in general, and for the systemic revolutionary transformation of society as a whole.” Third, we must recognize how popular culture can constitute a field of possibilities within which students can be empowered so as to appropriate cultural forms on terms that dignify and extend their human capabilities.

We realize that this raises enormously difficult questions about how, as teachers, we come to analyze a politics of feeling within sites that are at odds with the very notion of the popular. To make the popular the object of study within schools is to run the risk not only of reconstituting the meaning and pleasures of cultural forms but also of forcing students into a discourse and form of analysis that conflicts with their notion of what is considered pedagogically acceptable and properly distant from their lives outside of school. At the same time, the popular cannot be ignored because it points to a category of meanings and affective investments that shape the very identities, politics, and cultures of the students we deal with. Subjectivity and identity are in part constituted on the ground of the popular, and their force and effects do not disappear once students enter school. The political issue at stake here and its pedagogical relevance are suggested by Larry Grossberg:

> It is only if we begin to recognize the complex relations between affect and ideology that we can make sense of people’s emotional life, their desiring life, their struggles to find the energy to survive, let alone struggle. It is only in the terms of these relations that we can understand people’s need and ability to maintain a “faith” in something beyond their immediate existence. [35]

In the section that follows, we will consider a particular Hollywood film as a demonstrative text.
in order to illuminate how the formation of multiple identities takes place through attachments and investments which are structured as much by affect and pleasure as they are by ideology and rationality. The importance of this cultural text is in part due to the opportunity it offers for further elaborating the elements of a critical pedagogical practice and our affirmation of the centrality of the body in the processes of knowing and learning.

**INVESTMENT AND PLEASURE IN DIRTY DANCING**

We have argued throughout this chapter that popular forms both shape and are mediated through the investments of rationality and affect. In attempting to make this observation more concrete as both a way of analyzing popular forms and of using them as part of a critical pedagogical process, we want to take up a specific consideration of the film, *Dirty Dancing*, written by Eleanor Bergstein and released into the North American market during the summer of 1987.

As we stressed earlier, the concept of popular culture cannot be defined around a set of ideological meanings permanently inscribed in particular cultural forms. Rather, the meaning of cultural forms can only be ascertained through their articulation into a practice and set of historically specific contextual relations which determine their pleasures, politics, and meanings. This position straightforwardly implies Roland Barthes’s encouragement that “whenever it’s the body which writes, and not ideology, there’s a chance the text will join us in our modernity.”

Thus our comments on the text of *Dirty Dancing* are not offered as abstract observations without an observer but as a fully embodied account. The pedagogical significance of this statement should not be minimized. It means that when we engage students through a critical consideration of particular cultural forms (whether they be commodity texts like films or lived social relations like local peace or environmental movements) we must begin with an acknowledgment and exploration of how we – our contradictory and multiple selves (fully historical and social) – are implicated in the meanings and pleasures we ascribe to those forms. The interest here is not so much self-knowledge as it is the understanding and consideration of the possibilities and limitations inherent in lived social differences.

The following interpretation of this particular popular text has been produced, in part, through our own investments in this film. This combination of reason and pleasure is organized not only by our shared work as educators interested in elaborating the complexities of a critical pedagogical practice but as well by biographies within which our earliest sense of social contradiction was formed by the juxtaposition of body movements, textures, timbre, and clothing. We have lived our lives within and against the grain of very different conjunctions of class, gender, and ethnic relations. For Simon, this experience of difference and desire was organized, in part, through being born the son of a marriage constituted across class divisions. Thus, the infrequent visits and family celebrations with working-class relatives and the more frequent moments when adult bodies (father and friends) – in the syntax, semantics, and very volume of speech; in the expansive gestures and use of space – articulated forms of passion and pleasure
suppressed by the detachment offered with middle-class rituals of politeness and formalism. For Giroux, the experience of having a different culture inscribe the body in terms that were at odds with his own social positioning occurred when affiliatons organized through high school sport led to hanging out with working-class blacks. Attending weekend parties, dancing to the music of black blues singers such as Etta James, and learning how to dance without moving one’s feet made manifest the fact that the body could speak with a rhythm vastly different from that which structured the Catholic Youth Organization dances for white working-class youth. In both situations, our bodies were positioned within different sets of experiences and practices that incorporated contradictions that we neither understood nor were able to articulate. Although our youth was shaped within and against the grain of very different class relations, what we have shared is the shock, awe, and production of desire in confronting bodies that know something we did not.

Unlike many of the teenage films currently sweeping the American and Canadian markets, Dirty Dancing locates the formation of youth within a material and social set of contradictory and conflicting practices. This film does not treat youth as an isolated social stratum lacking any wider referent than itself. Questions of class and sexism, culture and privilege come together in a tapestry of social relations that emerges within the unlikely location of an affluent summer resort for the families of the rising class of Jewish businessmen and professionals.

The year is 1963, and Frances “Baby” Houseman, her sister, mother, and father arrive at Kellerman’s Resort for their summer vacation. We sense after a few moments into the film that Baby (who is soon to start a university program in the economics of international development and later plans to join the U.S. Peace Corps) is bored and alienated from the pleasures and pastimes of the nouveau Jewish-bourgeoisie who make up the majority of the patrons at Kellerman’s. But we also quickly learn that Baby’s idealistic political commitments to equality and fairness are just as surely rooted in the rhetorical discourse of liberal democracy historically embraced by her class (embodied particularly by her physician father). Baby is proudly introduced as someone who “is going to change the world” and do it with reason and intelligence.

Except for the college men hired by Kellerman to work the dining room, the hotel staff consists of young people whose experience and corporeality define a location across a solid class and ethnic barrier that marks the landscape of the resort. Such barriers are familiar to us: collectively we have been on both sides.

One evening after escaping the inanities of “entertainment night” at Kellerman’s, Baby wanders the grounds and inadvertently discovers an unknown, astonishing and mesmerizing corner of the terrain of the popular, the site of “dirty dancing,” a form of music and movement whose coded desires and productive pleasures crumble what to her seems like an empty bourgeois body, only to reconstitute it with new meanings and pleasures. What Baby discovers at this working-class party is the overt sensuality of rock and soul. She learns, in Barthes’s words, that “the human...
body is not an eternal object, written forever in nature…for it is really a body that was constructed by history, by societies, by regimes, by ideologies.” [37]

The articulations between Baby’s class position and the class location of the employees at Kellerman’s are first felt as differences of affective investment in the body. By placing her body within the terrain of working-class pleasures, Baby begins to feel and identify her body as a site of struggle, one which suggests a need to reject her family’s view of bodily pleasure and desire for the more pronounced sexuality and bodily abandonment offered by the culture of the working-class staff parties. It is through the sociality of “dirty dancing” that Baby first engages her own class-specific cultural capital and attempts to reclaim her body through a redefined sense of pleasure and identity. For Baby, the body becomes the referent not only for redefining and remaking a sense of her own class and gender identity, but also for investing in a notion of desire and pleasure that reconstitutes her sense of self and social empowerment.

From this position – amazed and attracted to a particular body knowledge – the film’s narrative begins to unfold. Baby is drawn to both the male and female personifications of the new cultural terrain, the dance instructor, Johnny Castle, and his partner, Penny. As the story proceeds, Baby is transformed both by a new body knowledge and a new knowledge of her body and its pleasures. Baby seems to embrace the “abandon” of working-class cultural terrain, finding in it perhaps an arena of feeling and emotion that cannot be totally colonized by the expectations of rationality within which her identity has been formed. [38]

Baby learns that Penny is pregnant and that money is needed to abort (illegally, then) the pregnancy. A “doctor” is only available on the night Penny and Johnny are to perform at a nearby hotel. If they miss the performance, Penny would most likely be fired. Deceiving her family (who place perfect faith in her reason and honesty), Baby obtains the abortion money from her father and agrees to take Penny’s place as Johnny’s partner. As Johnny begins to teach her the dance routine, their relationship develops.

Baby’s substitution for Penny as Johnny’s partner is a form of lived fantasy that works a reconstitution of explicitly who and what she is. As McRobbie has written:

Dance evokes fantasy because it sets in motion a dual relationship projecting both internally towards the self and externally towards the “other”; which is to say that dance as a leisure activity connects desires for the self with those for somebody else. It articulates adolescence and girlhood with femininity and female sexuality and it does this by and through the body. This is especially important because it is the one pleasurable arena where women have some control and know what is going on in relation to physical sensuality and to their own bodies. Continually bombarded with images and with information about how they should be and how they should feel, dance offers an escape, a positive and vibrant sexual expressiveness. [39]
That Baby’s investment in the dance of the Other is being anchored through affect seems clear enough from the often-cliched dialogue. As Johnny emphasizes, “It is not enough to know the steps; you have to feel the music.” And Baby acknowledges as their relationship deepens, “I’m afraid of never feeling the rest of my whole life as I do when I’m with you.”

Even in a setting so well defined to privilege the wealthy, the constraints of class and power move across the terrains of pleasure and work so as to lay bare the relationship between wider social constraints and the formation of differentiated class-specific dreams. In *Dirty Dancing* the desire mobilized by relations of domination runs both ways. Johnny confides to Baby “I dreamt you and I were walking along and we met your father and he put his arm around me just like Robby [one of the Kellerman dining room staff who attends medical school].”

Baby’s new investments, however, are not independent from the identity position regulated and organized by liberal discourse. Within the complications of the plot (when Johnny is falsely accused of theft) she acts on the belief that she can and should help those in trouble and less fortunate than herself, fully expecting Johnny and his friends to be treated with the same credibility and fairness as anyone else. When they are not, her naiveté is shattered, and the film seems about to conclude with an honest appraisal of the relations of class power. Even though he is cleared of the theft charge, Johnny is fired when Baby admits to their relationship. They say good-by to each other, and he drives off.

But author Bergstein was evidently unsatisfied by such a limited sense of possibility. Consequently, she closes the film with what can either be dismissed as Hollywood schmaltz or celebrated as a glimpse of Utopian hope keyed by the recognition of the importance of investments in the pleasures of sensuality. Johnny returns to find the season-closing Talent Night in progress. Confronting Baby’s parents, he leads her on to the stage for a final dance performance which evolves into total audience participation. The film thus ends magically, erasing all social divisions (including the patriarchal one between Mr. and Mrs. Houseman) as all the assembled staff and guests rock and roll to the final dissolve into the film’s credits.

This concluding scene constitutes dance as a collectivizing process within which individual differences disappear. Rock and roll, like religious singing, seems deftly to bind people together, uniting young and old, performer and audience, white and black, the rulers and the ruled, in a expression of celebration of the American dream in which the relationship between social power and inequality simply fades away.

What then does our understanding of *Dirty Dancing* display regarding the processes of persuasion. Our argument is that Baby’s lived relation to the working-class people she engages is mediated by a dual investment mobilized by both the subject position she takes up within the discourse of liberalism and the popular cultural forms of working-class life within which she experiences the pleasures of the body. The point of emphasis here is the importance of popular cultural forms in constituting the identities which influence how we engage new challenges and
construct new experiences. In this context we are referring to popular culture as a field within which investment is mobilized which is an elaboration of how any given cultural form (text, song, film, event) is engaged. It is worth noting how important it is to be able to hold analytically separate both semantic and affective aspects of investment since they can be mutually contradictory. Thus, it is not uncommon to experience contrary investments in relation to a specific cultural text, e.g., rock music can provide pleasure while being comprehended as very much sexist and racist. Such internal contradictions are integral to experiences of guilt. [40]

**IMPLICATIONS FOR CRITICAL PEDAGOGICAL PRACTICE**

Everyday moments of teaching…incorporate the minds and bodies of subjects, as knowers and as learners. When we are at our best as teachers we are capable of speaking to each of these ways of knowing in ourselves and our students. We may override precedents in the educational project that value the knowing of the mind and deny the knowing of the heart and of the body. Students, the partners in these enterprise of knowing, are whole people with ideas, with emotions and with sensations. The project must not be confined to a knowing only of the mind; it must address and interrogate what we think we know from the heart and the body. [41]

Even in agreement with McDade, it is important to clarify that when we consider the relationship between popular cultures and pedagogy, we have a particular form of teaching and learning in mind. This is a critical pedagogical form that affirms the lived reality of difference as the ground on which to pose questions of theory and practice. It is a form that claims the experience of lived difference as an agenda for discussion and a central resource for a pedagogy of possibility. [42]

The discussion of lived difference, if pedagogical, will take on a particular tension. It implies a struggle over assigned meaning, over in what direction to desire, over particular modes of expression, and ultimately, over multiple and even contradictory versions of “self.” This struggle makes possible and hence can redefine the possibilities we see in both the conditions of our daily lives and those conditions which are “not yet.” This is a struggle that can never be won, or pedagogy stops. [43]

What we are stressing is the absolutely crucial dimension of a critical pedagogy in which knowledge is conceived as an integral aspect of teaching/learning. As David Lusted writes:

> Knowledge is not produced in the intentions of those who believe they hold it, whether in the pen or in the voice. It is produced in the process of interaction, between writer and reader at the moment of reading, and between teacher and learner at the moment of classroom engagement. Knowledge is not the matter that is offered so much as the matter that is understood. To think of fields or bodies of knowledge as if they are the property of academics and teachers is wrong. It denies an equality in the relations at moments of interaction and falsely privileges one side of the exchange, and what that side “knows” over the other. [44]
This position does not require teachers to suppress or abandon what and how they know. Indeed, the pedagogical struggle is lessened without such resources. Within this position, however, teachers and students are challenged to find forms in which a single discourse does not become the locus of certainty and certification. Teachers need to find ways of creating a space for mutual engagement of lived difference that does not require the silencing of a multiplicity of voices by a single dominant discourse. This is precisely the pedagogical motive for our insistence that Dirty Dancing be seen as an embodied interpretation that provides an invaluable resource from which to engage lived difference as a possibility for critical dialogue and self- and social formation.

What might teachers need to understand in order to engage in such a struggle? What might they wish to find out? If we take popular culture as that terrain of images, knowledge forms, and affective investments within which meaning and subjectivity function, there are several questions teachers might pursue. What are the historical conditions and material circumstances under which popular culture practices are pursued, organized, asserted, and regulated? Do such practices open up new notions of identities and possibilities? Are they disorganized and excluded? How are such practices articulated with forms of knowledge and pleasure legitimated by dominant groups? What interests and investments are served by a particular set of popular cultural practices and which are critiqued and challenged by the existence of such? What are the moral and political commitments of such practices and how are these related to one’s own commitments as a teacher (and if there is a divergence, what does this imply)?

What all this means is that we think the analysis of popular culture is not simply a question of “reading” ideology from either commodity forms or forms of lived everyday relations. Rather, we are moving toward a position within which one would inquire into the popular as a field of practices that constitute Foucault’s indissoluble triad of knowledge, power, and pleasure. At the same time we want to raise a note of caution. Teachers engaged in a pedagogy which requires some articulation of knowledge and pleasure integral to student life walk a dangerous road. Too easily, perhaps, encouraging student voice can become a form of voyeurism or satisfy an ego-expansionism constituted on the pleasures of understanding those who appear as Other to us. So, we must be clear on the nature of the pedagogy we pursue. Popular culture and social difference can be taken up by educators either as a pleasurable form of knowledge/power which allows for more effective individualizing and administration of physical and moral regulation or such practices can be understood as the terrain on which we must meet our students in a critical and empowering pedagogical encounter.

As teachers committed to the project of a critical pedagogy we have to read the ground of the popular for investments that distort or constrict human potentialities and those that give voice to unrealized possibilities. This is what the pedagogical struggle is all about – opening up the material and discursive basis of particular ways of producing meaning and representing ourselves, our relations to others, and our relation to our environment so as to consider possibilities not yet realized. This is a Utopian practice, to be embraced for its urgent necessity and scrutinized for its inherent limitations. John Berger captured the sentiment in his short story,
“The Accordion Player.”

Music demands obedience. It even demands obedience of the imagination when a melody comes to mind. You can think of nothing else. It’s a kind of tyrant. In exchange it offers its own freedom. All bodies can boast about themselves with music. The old can dance as well as the young. Time is forgotten. And that night, from behind the silence of the last stars, we thought we heard the affirmation of a Yes.

“La Belle Jacqueline, once more!” the dressmaker shouted at Felix. “I love music! With music you can say everything!”

“You can’t talk to a lawyer with music,” Felix replied. [46]

NOTES


8. For a historical treatment of this theme, see Patrick Brantlinger, *Bread and Circuses: Theories of Mass Culture as Social Decay* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983). This subject has been treated extensively, and we cannot repeat all of the sources here, but excellent analyses of the theoretical and political shortcomings of left and right positions on popular culture can be found in Stuart Hall, “Deconstructing ‘the Popular,’” in *People’s History and Socialist Theory*, Raphael Samuel, ed. (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981); Tony Bennett and Graham Martin, eds. *Popular Culture: Past Present* (London: Croom Helm/Open University, 1982); Bennett, Mercer, and Woollacoot, eds., *Popular Culture and Social Relations*. It is worth noting that Postmodernism’s disdain for the “masses” is a more more recent version of left cultural elitism that disdains popular culture; this is particularly true in the writings of Jean Baudrillard, such as *In the Shadow of the Silent Majorities*, Paul Foss, trans. (New York: Semiotext(e), 1983), and *Simulations*, Paul Foss et al., trans. (New York: Semiotext(e), 1983).


11. Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of the Enlightenment*.


19. Lawrence Grossberg provides a useful theoretical elaboration of hegemony as a struggle for the popular:

Hegemony is not a universally present struggle; it is a conjunctural politics opened up by the conditions of advanced capitalism, mass communication and culture….Hegemony defines the limits within which we can struggle, the field of “common sense” or “popular consciousness.” It is the struggle to articulate the position of “leadership” within the social formation, the attempt by the ruling bloc to win for itself the position of leadership across the entire terrain of cultural and political life. Hegemony involves the mobilization of popular support, by a particular social bloc, for the broad range of its social projects. In this way, the people assent to a particular social order, to a particular system of power, to a particular articulation of chains of equivalence by which the interest of the ruling bloc come to define the leading positions of the people. It is a struggle over “the popular.” Lawrence Grossberg, “History, Politics and Postmodernism: Stuart Hall
20. By focusing on the relationship between power and domination, on the one hand, and consent and struggle, on the other, Gramsci highlights not only the contradiction between the interests of the ruling bloc and the powerlessness of subordinate groups, but also the contradiction between the choices that subordinate groups make and the reality of the conduct they live out. Thought and action, common sense and lived experience, become for Gramsci elements of a contradictory consciousness that should be at the heart of political and pedagogical struggle. Gramsci clarifies what he means by contradictory consciousness in the following passage:

The active man-in-the-mass has a practical activity, but has no clear theoretical consciousness of his practical activity, which nonetheless involves understanding the world insofar as it transforms it. His theoretical consciousness can indeed be historically in opposition to his activity. One might almost say that he has two theoretical consciousnesses (or one contradictory consciousness); one which is implicit in his activity and which in reality unites him with all his fellow workers in the practical transformation of the real world; and one, superficially explicit or verbal, which he has inherited from the past and uncritically absorbed. But this verbal conception is not without consequences. It holds together a specific social group, it influences moral conduct and the direction of will, with varying efficacity but often powerfully enough to produce a situation in which the contradictory state of consciousness does not permit of any action, any decision or any choice, and produces a condition of moral and political passivity. Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from Prison Notebooks*, Q. Hoare and G. Smith, eds. (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1971), p. 333.

For Gramsci, it is the terrain of the everyday and the popular that need to be understood in their contradictory representations of the world; moreover, as the basis for critique, common sense is treated as a discourse which becomes meaningful only if it is linked to those affective investments, practical activities, and elements of daily life that provide the basis both for understanding hegemony and for transforming it.

34. Ibid., p. 13.
38. The worst aspect of Dirty Dancing is its construction of the polarities of reason and passion as congruent with the class dichotomy portrayed in the film.
42. Simon, “Empowerment as a Pedagogy of Possibility.”