

Breaking into the Movies: Pedagogy and the Politics of Film

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Without a politically guaranteed public realm, freedom lacks the worldly space to make its appearance.

—Hannah Arendt

My memories of Hollywood films cannot be separated from the attractions that such films had for me as a young boy growing up in the 1950s in Smith Hill, a working-class neighborhood of Providence, Rhode Island. While we had access to the small screen of black-and-white television, it held none of the mystery, fascination, and pleasure that we found in the five or six grand movie theaters that populated the downtown section of Providence. Every Saturday afternoon, my friends and I would walk several miles to the business district, all the while making plans to get into a theater without having to pay. None of us could afford to buy tickets, so we had to be inventive about ways to sneak into the theater without being caught. Sometimes we would simply wait next to the exit doors, and as soon as somebody left the theater we would rush in and bury ourselves in the plush seats, hoping that none of the ushers spotted us. We were not always so lucky. At other times, we would pool our money and have one person buy a ticket. At the most strategic moment, he would open the exit door from the inside and let us in. Generally, we would sit in the balcony so as to avoid being asked for a ticket if the ushers came along and spotted us.

Hollywood film engendered a profound sense of danger and otherness for us. Gaining access to the movies meant we had to engage in illicit behavior, risking criminal charges or a beating by an irate owner if caught. But the fear of getting caught was outweighed by the lure of adventure and joy. Once we got inside the theater we were transported into an event. We were able to participate in a public act of viewing that was generally restricted for kids in our neighborhood because films were too expensive, too removed from the daily experiences of kids too poor to use public

transportation, and we were too restless to sit in a movie theater without talking and laughing and allegedly too rough to inhabit a public space meant for family entertainment. Silence in the movie theaters was imposed on us by the fear of being noticed. Yet, the thrill of adventure and the expectation of what was about to unfold before us was well worth the self-imposed discipline (that is, the contained silence and focus that such viewing demanded). Back on the street, the movies enabled a space of dialogue, criticism, and solidarity for us. Movies were a source of shared joy, entertainment, and escape. Although we were too young to realize it at the time, they were a source of knowledge—a source of knowledge that, unlike what we were privy to in school, connected pleasure to meaning. Sometimes we saw as many as three double features in one day. When we left the movie theater, the cinematography and narratives that we had viewed filled our conversations and our dreams. We argued, and sometimes actually fought, over their meaning and their relevance to our lives. Hollywood films took us out of Smith Hill, offered narratives that rubbed against the often rigid identities we inhabited, and offered up objects of desire that both seduced us and also left us thinking that the movies were not about reality but were fantasies, remote from the burdens and problems that dominated our neighborhoods. Film pointed to a terrain of pseudo-freedom located in an inner world of dreams, reinforced by the privatized experience of pleasure and joy offered through the twin seductions of escape and entertainment.

All of these memories of my early exposure to Hollywood films came rushing back to me during a recent visit to Universal Studios in Los Angeles. While I was on one of the tours of the studio lots, the guide attempted to capture the meaning of contemporary film by proclaiming, without hesitation, that the great appeal of film lies in its capacity to “make people laugh, cry, and sit on the edge of their seats.” Surely, I believed this as a child, as much as the tourists listening to the guide seemed to believe it almost forty years later. My first reaction was to dismiss the guide’s comments as typical of Hollywood’s attempt to commodify experience through simplification and reification, relieving pleasure of the burden of thinking (let alone engaging in critique) and positioning the public as passive tourists traveling through the Hollywood dream machine. However, there was something about the guide’s comments that warranted more than a simple dismissal. While the mythic fantasy and lure of entertainment demands a challenge to the utterly privatized realm of mass-mediated common sense, it also requires more than the arrogance of theory, which too often refuses to link the pleasure of film-viewing with

the workings and structures of the public domain. Film does more than entertain; it offers up subject positions, mobilizes desires, influences us unconsciously, and helps to construct the landscape of American culture. Deeply imbricated within material and symbolic relations of power, film produces and incorporates ideologies that represent the outcome of struggles marked by the historical realities of power and the deep anxieties of the times; it also deploys power through the important role it plays in connecting the production of pleasure and meaning to the mechanisms and practices of powerful teaching machines. Put simply, films both entertain and educate.

In the 1970s, I began to understand, though in a limited way, the constitutive and political nature of film—particularly how power is mobilized through its use of images, sounds, gestures, talk, and spectacle—in order to create the possibilities for people to be educated about how to act, speak, think, feel, desire, and behave. Film provided me with a pedagogical tool for offering students alternative views of the world. Of course, film not only challenged print culture as the only viable source of knowledge; it was an attractive cultural text for students because it was not entirely contaminated by the logic of formal schooling. As a young high school teacher, I too was attracted to film as a way of challenging the constraints imposed by the rigidity of the text-based curriculum. In opposition to the heavy reliance on the lock-step, traditional curriculum, I would rent documentaries from a local Quaker group in order to present students with a critical perspective on the Vietnam War, poverty, youth-oriented issues, the Cold War, and a host of other social concerns. Film became a crucial text for me, useful as a resource to offset dominant textbook ideologies and invaluable as a pedagogical tool to challenge officially sanctioned knowledge and modes of learning.

The choices I made about what films to show were determined by their overtly educational content. At that point in my teaching experience, I had not figured out that every film played a powerful role pedagogically not only in the schools, but also in the wider culture as well. Nor did I ever quite figure out how my students felt about these films. Far removed from the glamor of Hollywood, these documentary narratives were often heavy-handed ideologically, displaying little investment in irony, humor, or self-critique. Certainly, my own reception of them was marked by ambivalence. The traditional notion that film was either a form of entertainment or the more radical argument that dismissed film as a one dimensional commodity seemed crass to me. One option that I pursued in challenging these deeply held assumptions was to engage film

performatively as a social practice and event mediated within the give and take of diverse public spheres and lived experiences. My students and I discussed the films we viewed both in terms of the ideologies they disseminated and how they worked to move mass audiences and break the continuity of common sense. In addition, film became important to me as a way of clarifying my role as a critical teacher and of broadening my understanding of critical pedagogy, but there was a price to pay for such an approach. Film no longer seemed to offer me pleasure inasmuch as my relationship to it was now largely conceived in narrow, instrumental terms. As a subversive resource to enhance my teaching, I focused on film in ways that seem to ignore how it functioned as a site of affective investment, mobilizing a range of desires while invoking the incidental, visceral, and transitory. Film unconsciously became for me a formalized object of detached academic analysis. I attempted to organize the study of film around important pedagogical issues, but in doing so I did not use theory as a resource to link film to broader aspects of public life—connecting it to audiences, publics, and events within the concrete relations of power that characterized everyday life. Instead, I used theory as a way of legitimating film as a social text, rather than as a site where different possibilities of uses and effects intersect. I wanted students to read film critically, but I displayed little concern with what it meant to do more than examine how a given film as a relatively isolated text was implicated in the production of ideologies. Missing from my approach, then, was any sustained attempt to address how both documentary and popular film might be used pedagogically to prepare students to function as critical agents capable of understanding, engaging, and transforming those discourses and institutional contexts that closed down democratic public life. In addition, by being overly concerned with how film might be used as an alternative educational text, I failed to understand and impart to my students the powerful role that film now played within a visual culture employing new forms of pedagogy, signaling different forms of literacy, and exemplifying a mode of politics in which, as Lawrence Grossberg says, “culture [becomes] a crucial site and weapon of power in the modern world.” (*Bringing* 143).

I am not suggesting that films are over burdened by theoretical discourse per se or that they should be removed from the sphere of engaged textual analysis. But I do want to challenge those versions of textuality and theory that isolate film from broader social issues and considerations that structure the politics of everyday realities. Drawing on a distinction that Grossberg makes, I am more interested in theorizing

politics than in a politics of theory, which suggests less an interest in theory as an academic discourse than as a resource strategically deployed in relation to particular projects, contexts, and practices that both makes pressing problems visible and offers the tools to expand the promises of a substantive democracy.

At the same time, as film (particularly Hollywood film) becomes more commodified, ubiquitous, and increasingly abstracted from serious forms of critical analysis, it is all the more important to engage the varied theoretical discourses around film studies produced by feminists, mass culture theorists, Marxists, and others. These approaches have performed an important theoretical service in enabling us to understand the aesthetic and political significance of film texts on the one hand, and, on the other, the specific industrial and economic formations that shape how they are produced and consumed.¹ However, while academic film studies dramatically offsets the commonplace assumption that film is either simply about entertainment or not worthy of serious academic analysis, such discourses have often become so narrow as to find no way to talk about film as a public pedagogy or to fully engage how film relates to public life. These discourses often treat film in a manner that is overly formalistic and pretentiously scientific, trapped in a jargon that freezes the worldly dimension of film as a public transcript that links meaning to effect, and forged amidst the interconnecting registers of meaning, desire, agency, and power. The refusal to fully engage film as a public medium that, as Gore Vidal points out, provides both a source of joy and knowledge is all the more problematic, especially since film has become so prevalent in popular and global culture as a medium through which people communicate with each other.

The potency and power of the film industry can be seen in its powerful influence on the popular imagination and public consciousness. Unlike ordinary consumer items, film produces images, ideas, and ideologies that shape both individual and national identities. The power of its reach and the extent of its commodification can be seen as film references are used to sell t-shirts, cups, posters, bumper stickers, and a variety of kitsch. At the same time, however, the growing popularity of film as a compelling mode of communication and form of public pedagogy—a visual technology that functions as a powerful teaching machine that intentionally tries to influence the production of meaning, subject positions, identities, and experience—suggests how important it has become as a site of cultural politics. Herman Gray captures this sentiment in arguing that “culture and the struggles over representation that take place

there are not just substitutes for some ‘real’ politics that they inevitably replace or at best delay; they simply represent a different, but no less important, site in the contemporary technological and postindustrial society where political struggles take place” (6).

As a form of public pedagogy, film combines entertainment and politics, and as I have attempted to argue, lays claim to public memory (though in contested ways given the existence of distinctly varied social and cultural formations). Yet, films are more than “vehicles of public memory.” Mining the twin operations of desire and nostalgia, they are also sites of educated hopes and hyper-mediated experiences that connect the personal and the social by bridging the contradictory and overlapping relations between private discourses and public life. While film plays an important role in placing particular ideologies and values into public conversation, it also provides a pedagogical space that opens up the “possibility of interpretation as intervention” (Olson and Worsham 29). As public pedagogy, it makes clear the need for forms of literacy that address the profoundly political and pedagogical ways in which knowledge is constructed and enters our lives in what Susan Bordo calls “an image-saturated culture” (2). For progressive educators, this might mean educating students and others to engage the ethical and practical task of critically analyzing how film functions as a social practice that influences their everyday lives and positions them within existing social, cultural, and institutional machineries of power; it might mean educating students in how the historical and contemporary meanings that film produces align, reproduce, and interrupt broader sets of ideas, discourses, and social configurations at work in the larger society (see Gray 132).

Addressing how we think about film as a public pedagogy and a form of cultural politics is all the more crucial as traditional, if not oppositional, public spheres such as religious institutions, schools, trade unions, and social clubs become handmaidens to neoliberal social agendas that turn such noncommodified public spheres into commercial spaces (see Hill and Montag). The decline of public life demands that we use film as a way of raising questions that are increasingly lost to the forces of market relations, commercialization, and privatization. As the opportunities for civic education and public engagement begin to disappear, film may provide one of the few media left that enables conversations that connect politics, personal experiences, and public life to larger social issues (see Giroux *Public*). Not only does film travel more as a pedagogical form compared to other popular forms (such as television and popular music),

but film carries a kind of pedagogical weight that other media do not. Films allow their ideologies to play out pedagogically in a way that a three-minute pop song or a twenty-two minute sitcom cannot do and by doing so offer a deeper pedagogical register for producing particular narratives, subject positions, and ideologies. In addition, young people inhabit a culture in which watching film demands a certain degree of attention, allowing them to enter into its discourse intertextually in a way that they cannot or often refuse to do with television programs and other electronic media. Often a backdrop for a wide range of social practices, television, video games, and popular music are a kind of distracted media that do not offer the pedagogical possibilities that appear relatively unique to the way in which film mobilizes a shared and public space.

Using film in my classes during the last decade, I have come to realize that film connects to students’ experiences in multiple ways that oscillate between the lure of film as entertainment and the provocation of film as a cultural practice. On the one hand, many students—feeling powerless and insecure in a society marked by a cutthroat economy, increasing privatization, and a breakdown of all notions of public life—find a sense of relief and escape in the spectacle of film. On the other hand, many students see in the public issues addressed by film culture a connection to public life that revitalizes their sense of agency and resonates with their sense of the importance of the cultural terrain as both an important source of knowledge and of critical dialogue. At best, film offers students an opportunity to connect the theoretical discourses we engage in classes to a range of social issues represented through the lens of Hollywood movies. Reading about youth seems more compelling when accompanied by a viewing of Larry Clark’s film *Kids*. Theorizing masculinity in American society becomes more meaningful and concrete when addressed in the context of a film such as *Fight Club*, especially since many students identify with the film and only after seeing and talking about it as part of a critical and shared dialogue do they begin to question their own investment in the film. Film no longer merely constitutes another method of teaching for me, a view I had held as a high school teacher. It now represents a new pedagogical text, one that does not simply reflect culture but actually constructs it, one that signals the need for a radically different perspective on literacy and the relationship between film texts and society. The power and pervasiveness of film not only calls into question its status as a cultural product, but also raises serious questions about how its use of spectral pleasure and meaning work to put into play people’s attitudes and orientations toward others and the material circumstances of

their own lives. The importance of film as a form of public pedagogy also raises questions about the educational force of the larger culture. Moreover, it recognizes that the effort to make knowledge meaningful in order to make it critical and transformative requires that we understand, engage, and make accountable those modes of learning that have shaped students' identities outside of school. Of course, there is always the risk of using popular cultural forms such as film as a way of policing students' pleasures and in so doing undermining the sense of joy and entertainment that film provides. As Margaret Miles points out, however, it would be an ethical and a pedagogical mistake to allow students to believe that film is merely about entertainment, or, at the same time, that the pleasure of entertainment is identical to the "learned pleasure of analysis" (14). Scrutinizing the pleasure of entertainment in film, James Snead points out that it never has been enough "to just see a film—and now, more than ever, we need, not just to 'see,' but to 'see through' what we see on the screen" (131). Snead is not denying that students make important affective investments in film; rather, he wants educators to recognize that such investments often work effectively to connect people and power through mechanisms of identification and affect that undermine the energies of critical engagement. Snead's comments suggest that students must think seriously about how film not only gives meaning to their lives but also how it mobilizes their desires in powerful ways. Seeing through film means, in this sense, developing the critical skills to engage how the ideological and affective work together to offer up particular ways of viewing the world in ways that come to matter to individuals and groups. Film assumes a major educational role in shaping the lives of many students, and bell hooks is correct in claiming that the pedagogical importance of film (both in terms of what it teaches and the role that it can play as an object of pedagogical analysis) cannot be underestimated. Hooks' comments about her own use of film is quite instructive:

It has only been in the last ten years or so that I began to realize that my students learned more about race, sex and class from movies than from all the theoretical literature I was urging them to read. Movies not only provide a narrative for specific discourses of race, sex, and class, they provide a shared experience, a common starting point from which diverse audiences can dialogue about these charged issues (2).

As a teaching form, film often puts into play issues that enter the realm of public discourse, debate, and policy-making in diverse and sometimes

dramatic ways—whether we are talking about films that deal with racism, challenge homophobia, or provide provocative representations that address the themes of war, violence, masculinity, sexism, and poverty. Uniquely placed between the privatized realm of the home and other public spheres, film provides a distinct space in which a range of contradictory issues and meanings enter public discourse sometimes in a subversive fashion that addresses pressing and urgent issues in American society. As a space of translation, film also bridges the gap between private and public discourse, plays an important role in putting particular ideologies and values into public conversation, and offers a pedagogical space for addressing how a society views itself and the public world of power, events, politics, and institutions.

Engaging film as a form of public pedagogy in my recent work, I have not been particularly interested in defending film as an art form. Aside from the residue of nostalgia and elitism that guides this position, it is a view that seems particularly out of date, if not irrelevant, given the important role that popular culture, including film, now plays pedagogically and politically in shaping the identities, values, and broader social practices that characterize an increasingly postmodern culture in which the electronic media and visual forms constitute the most powerful educational tools of the new millennium. Similarly, I have avoided addressing or taking up film within the disciplinary strictures of contemporary media and film studies, which are designed, in part, to legitimate film as a serious academic subject. Thus, I choose not to position my particular approach to discussing film in relation to what is admittedly a vast literature of film theory and response theories. Absent from the analysis I recommend is a sustained focus on those specialized film theories that engage film as a self-contained text or that largely focus on film through the narrow lens of specific theoretical approaches such as semiotics, Lacanian psychoanalysis, or feminist theories of pleasure. Film and media studies are bound up with a complex philosophical debate surrounding the meaning and importance of film theory, and while such work is enormously important I point to these traditions in my classes but do not address them with any depth because of the specialized nature of their focus. At the same time, I often provide students with resources to address such traditions in ways that do justice to the complexity of such work. While this work is enormously important, my aim pedagogically is much more modest. I try to address film more broadly as part of a public discourse, cultural pedagogy, and civic engagement that participates in a kind of ideological framing and works to structure everyday issues around

particular assumptions, values, and social relations. I make no claim that there is a direct correlation between what people see, hear, and read and how they act, between the representations they are exposed to and the actual events that shape their lives. However, I do argue that film as a form of civic engagement and public pedagogy creates a climate that helps to shape individual behavior and public attitudes in multiple ways, whether consciously or unconsciously.

The entertainment industry is the second largest export—second only to military aircraft—and it is estimated that 10,000,000 see a successful film in theaters, and millions more see it when it is aired on cable and exported to foreign markets (Asner ix). The film industry is controlled by a very limited number of corporations that exercise enormous power in all major facets of movie-making (production, distribution, and circulation in the United States and abroad) (see McChesney). At the same time, the media is not an unchanging, monolithic bastion of corporate culture and ruling-class power; a critical approach to media and film requires an understanding that film is not monolithic nor are its audiences passive dupes. Film, like other media, work to gain consent and operate within limits set by the contexts in which they are taken up. Moreover, as numerous film scholars have indicated, audiences mediate such films rather than simply inhabit their structures of meaning. In my own writing and teaching, I use film to address a number of important social issues and to address educators, students, and others who want to explore film in their classes and other educational sites as part of an interdisciplinary project aimed at linking knowledge to broader social structures, learning to social change, and student experience to the vast array of cultural forms that increasingly shape their identities and values.

Rather than focus on film theory in my classes, I am more concerned with what it means to situate film within a broader cultural context as well as with the political and pedagogical implications of film as a teaching machine. Theory in this approach is used as a resource to study the complex and shifting relations between texts, discourses, everyday life, and structures of power. Rather than reduce the study of film to an academic exercise rooted in a specific theoretical trajectory, I attempt to analyze film in ways that link texts to contexts, culture to the institutional specificity of power, pedagogy to the politics of representation, affective investments to the construction of particular notions of agency, and learning to public intervention. By taking up a given film intertextually, I attempt to foreground not just questions of meaning and interpretation but also questions of politics, power, agency, and social transformation.

The ubiquity and importance of film as a mode of public pedagogy offers educators both an opportunity and a challenge to connect film as a cultural practice to broader public issues, social relations, and institutional formations. How films derive their meanings and how specific claims are made by different audiences on films must be addressed not through the narrow lens of film theory or through the somewhat limited lens of reception theory but through an assemblage of other cultural texts, discourses, and institutional formations. Meaning should not be sutured into a text, closed off from the myriad contexts in which it is produced, circulated, and renegotiated. Nor should the primary signification exist at the expense of engaging material relations of power. On the contrary, a given film becomes relevant as public pedagogy to the degree that it is situated within a broader politics of representation, one that suggests that the struggle over meaning is, in part, defined as the struggle over culture, power, and politics. I purposely avoid in my pedagogical practices focusing exclusively on films as isolated texts, and I also avoid using film in what Doug Kellner refers to as a narrowly and one-sidedly ethnographic approach to audience reception of texts (199). These approaches are important, but they do not necessarily yield a productive way of dealing with film as a form of public pedagogy. Rather, they often fail to address questions of effects because they do not theorize the relationship of meaning to historical and institutional contexts and consequently largely ignore the material and power-saturated relations that structure daily life and provide the context that films both reflect and help to construct. Often missing from such analyses are the ways in which films are located along a circuit of power that connects the political economy and regulation of films with how they function as representational systems implicated in processes of identity formation and consumption.² The problem is not that a film can be understood in multiple ways, but that some meanings have a force that other meanings do not; that is, the problem is that some meanings gain a certain legitimacy and become the defining terms of reality because of how well they resonate and align under certain conditions with broader discourses, dominant ideologies, and existing material relations of power.

In my own approach to the pedagogy of cultural politics, I emphasize in my classes that I approach film as a serious object of social, political, and cultural analysis; moreover, as part of an attempt to read films politically, I make it clear that I bring a certain set of assumptions, experiences, and ideas to my engagement with film. At the same time, however, I try to emphasize that in doing so I am not suggesting that my

analyses in any way offer interpretations that make a claim to either certainty or finality. Not only do I encourage a critique of my own interpretations and analyses of film, but I also urge students to develop their own positions as part of a critique and engagement with varied positions (including my own) that develop amidst class dialogue and in conjunction with outside readings and critical reviews. The pedagogical challenge in this instance is to make a convincing case, through the very process of autocritique and student engagement, that my analyses of films are necessarily partial, incomplete, and open to revision and contestation. Rather than closing down student participation, my own interpretations are meant to be strategic and positional. I eschew the notion that any type of closure is endemic to my perspective on particular films; at the same time, I use my own position to encourage students to think more critically about their interpretations as they enter into dialogue about films. Critical analysis under such circumstances is not replaced or shut down but expanded by encouraging students to enter into dialogue both with the films and with the interpretations that frame them; thus, students engage the meaning, function, and role of film as a pedagogical, moral, and political practice that can only be understood within a range of theoretically constructed practices, relations, and frameworks. Addressing film within a framework that is both defined and problematized, I try to signal to students the pedagogical value of their taking a position while not standing still.

Film both shapes and bears witness to the ethical and political dilemmas that animate the broader social landscape, and it often raises fundamental questions about how we think about politics and political agency in light of such a recognition. Critique—as both a form of self-analysis and as a mode of social criticism—is central to any notion of film analysis that takes seriously the project of understanding just how cultural politics matters in the everyday lives of people and what it might mean to make interventions that are both critical and transformative. Film can enable people to think more critically about how art may contribute to constructing public spaces that expand the possibilities for both pleasure and political agency, democratic relations, and social justice. At the same time, film as a form of public pedagogy provokes students and others outside of the academy to examine critically how Hollywood film—in spite of its unquestioned fetishization of entertainment, spectacle, and glamour—encourages us to understand (or misunderstand) the wider culture and how it influences us to live our lives.

In every class that I teach, I use films that are not only widely

accessible to the public but that also deal with complex and provocative topics that highlight a number of important social issues, problems, and values that provoke the public imaginary and that, in many cases, generate substantial controversy. In addressing film as a form of cultural politics and an important mode of public pedagogy, progressive educators may engage the pedagogical and political practice of film in ways that render due account of the complexities of film culture itself. At the same time, such educators must challenge a voyeuristic reception of films by offering students the theoretical resources necessary to engage critically how dominant practices of representation work to secure individual desires, organize specific forms of identification, and regulate particular modes of understanding, knowledge, and agency. Taking film seriously as a vehicle of public pedagogy means, in part, examining how a given film's practices and values embody relations of power and ideological assumptions—admittedly in contradictory ways—that both mirror and construct the interests, fears, longings, and anxieties of the periods in which it was produced. Accordingly, this insight suggests developing pedagogical practices that promote political engagement, that challenge conventional ways of thinking about film as simply entertainment, and that use film as a cultural text to bridge the gap between the academic discourse of the classroom and those social issues and public concerns that animate the larger society.

As a young boy going to the movies in Providence, Rhode Island, I believed that film only provided the diversion of entertainment. I had no idea that it also played an active role in shaping my sense of agency and offered me a moral and political education that largely went unnoticed and uncontested. Film has been a great source of joy throughout my lifetime. Now it not only provides pleasure, but it also enables me to think more critically about how power operates within the realm of the cultural and how social relations and identities are forged. All films disseminate ideologies, beckon in sometimes clear and always contradictory ways toward visions of the future, and encourage and stultify diverse ways of being in the world. Most importantly, film constitutes a powerful force for shaping public memory, hope, popular consciousness, and social agency and as such invites people into a broader public conversation. As Miriam Hansen suggests, film offers a horizon of “sensory experience and discursive contestation” and engenders a public space in which knowledge and pleasure intersect, which is no small matter as public life becomes increasingly controlled and regulated, if not militarized (312; see also Giroux, *Public*). It is in this promise of education and sensuality

that films become other, gesturing toward public spheres beyond those spaces offered by the presence of film, spaces in which critical dialogue, pleasure, shared interaction, and public participation flourish. Film, in this instance, registers a public dialogue and set of experiences that offer the opportunity to revitalize those democratic public spheres in which the popular intersects with the pedagogical and the political in ways that suggest that film cannot be dismissed simply as a commodity but now has become crucial to expanding democratic relations, ideologies, and identities.

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Notes

1. For a representative example of film studies scholarship, see Carroll; Denzin; Gledhill and Williams; Hollows et al.; and Perez. Although their focus is not on cinema, Durham and Kellner provide a very useful perspective through which to understand film within the larger body of theoretical work produced around media and cultural studies.

2. Here I am drawing on the “circuit of culture” paradigm developed by Hall and others in the Culture, Media, and Identities series published by Sage.

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