

**Media Culture, Social Theory, and Cultural Studies**  
**1996 symposium on Media Culture – A Response**

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It is with great pleasure that I remember my visit to the University of Alberta in Fall 1995, and I would like especially to thank Eric Higgs, Andrew Light, and Ray Morrow for making my visit an especially memorable one. During my visit, we participated in a series of seminars on postmodern theory, critical theory, media culture, cultural studies, and the philosophy of technology and not surprisingly these themes were the focus of the symposium of my book *Media Culture*, which we are now committing to print. Accordingly, I shall respond to each of the three commentators, focusing on the themes which they highlighted. This will enable me to clarify my positions on media culture, the philosophy of technology, and the Internet (Higgs); social theory, media culture, and cultural studies (Morrow); and media culture, identity, and identity politics (Light). The interconnection of these issues in *Media Culture* and my work in general points, I would argue, for the need to develop transdisciplinary theories to confront the issues, problems, and challenges of the contemporary moment as we negotiate the troubled terrain between the modern and the postmodern.

Media Culture, the Philosophy of Technology, and Social Practice: A Reply to Eric Higgs

I am grateful to Eric Higgs for sympathetically outlining the goals of my book *Media Culture*, for accurately describing its content, and for raising some challenges to further articulations of my project of analyzing the intersection of media culture, politics, and society in the present age. Higgs quite astutely discerned the failure to adequately articulate the relations between technology and media which I now see as the chief theoretical lacunae of the text. I certainly do not want to claim that technologies are neutral, as Higgs suggests I do in his commentary, nor do I want to see technology and media as dichotomous. In addition to being businesses and cultural artifacts (which they certainly are in our society), the mass media of information and entertainment are technologies. But they are technologies that are constructed within historically specific relations of production and social systems. Thus, film technology could have been developed as an educational and documentary tool to investigate socio-historical reality and serve primarily as a vehicle of education and enlightenment. But from the time of Thomas Edison's early films, it was developed as a technology of entertainment subject to the imperatives of capitalist business culture.

Yet today film technology can be used to reproduce or challenge existing systems of domination and subordination. Films can glorify and celebrate existing social reality, reproduce existing relations of domination, or contest and subvert dominant ideologies and forms of oppression. And so the media technology is relatively autonomous, it can be and has been used for a variety of purposes, it has complex and sometimes contradictory uses and effects. Thus, it would be a serious mistake, I think, to condemn film and television per se because they serve as opiate for the masses, as distraction and escape, or, worse, as instruments of hegemonic power and domination. For as Brecht, Benjamin, Enzensberger, and many others have discerned, they can

be used as instruments of enlightenment, democratization, and progressive social change, as well as instruments of ideology and distraction.

Further reflections on technology and media in the present moment take us to another salient point which Higgs raised concerning "a strange omission from the list of media: What happened to the Internet?" Actually, Higgs himself cites a reference to computer technologies in my book in his commentary and notes my reflections on Gibson and Baudrillard which engage the issues of new technologies and cyberpunk fiction. Yet Higgs is correct that the issue of the Internet is so important that it should be the topic of focused and sustained study. Indeed, upon completing *Media Culture* in 1994 (it was published by Routledge in early 1995) I began preparing lectures on the fundamental role of media culture in the contemporary economy, politics, social life, culture, and construction of individual identity -- topics suggested in *Media Culture* without being systematically developed. While presenting these lectures I came to the conclusion that everything that I said concerning the centrality of media culture in every fundamental domain of social life could be said concerning computers, the Internet, and new technologies. I am indeed currently investigating the ways that synergies between the huge media consortiums and the information industries are the harbingers of a new stage of technocapitalism marked by proliferation of new information and entertainment technologies and industries, and is thus both an expansion of media culture, the Internet, and their coming synthesis.

And so I agree with Higgs that it is a mistake to analyze media culture without central focus on the Internet and the changes in the media industries and every domain of life that the great transformation of global capitalism currently underway is inflicting upon us. Indeed, I would argue that the feverish promotion of the "information superhighway," the "global economy," corporate downsizing, and Internet culture are all part and parcel of a global restructuring of capitalism, of the production of a new stage of technocapitalism. It will be our fate to live out this adventure and surely philosophy and social theory today should reflect seriously on the expanding role of technology and capital in every domain of social life.

These reflections also bring us to confront what Higgs saw as a serious political lacunae of my book: failure to adequately articulate my political conclusion "to support reform proposals that have any chance of success." In fairness to a central thrust of my own work over the past two decades, I have been long aware of the primacy of communications technology and media in contemporary politics, have written several books charting these developments (Kellner and Ryan 1988; Kellner 1989a and 1989b; Kellner 1990; Kellner 1992; and countless articles) and have developed in some detail my proposals for a media politics and using the media to promote progressive change in several books and many articles (see, especially, Kellner 1990). I have also, as Higgs notes, co-produced a public access television program since 1978 which has produced over 600 programs and am currently a computer activist. In the conclusion to *Media Culture* I wanted to signal these concerns, yet did not have the space to adequately delineate my perspectives on politics and media activism.

Yet I would acknowledge the limitations of my previous perspectives on politics and media activism in the light of the surprising and dramatic development of Internet politics and the political potentials (and dangers) of new technologies (but see Kellner 1995b and 1996 where I am beginning to address these issues). Computer technologies are producing a new public sphere

where individuals can participate in public debate, produce their own cultural and political web sites and mailing lists, and thus expand dramatically the range and variety of voices and visions in our culture. Yet there are also myriad dangers of getting lost in the hyperreality of cyberspace, of replacing Internet politics with "real world" struggles, and of the proliferation of information, messages, and opinions imploding into mere "noise."

Finally, in relation to this complex future, I definitely do not advocate the facile optimism that Higgs suggests I fall prey to (i.e. "Professor Kellner appears convinced that progressive forces will triumph as people seize hold of what he regards as inherently democratic forms of technology (e.g. the internet)"). I do believe that the Internet and new technologies contain potentials for producing a better future with a more diverse and democratic society and culture, but it could easily be the case that corporate and reactionary forces will control and dominate both media culture and cyberculture, that social domination and alienation will be even greater, that inequalities and social conflict will mushroom, and that the most pessimistic and apocalyptic visions of cyberpunk fiction will be the unhappy reality for the great majority of the world's citizens.

In a forthcoming book with Steve Best on *The Postmodern Crossroads*, we will attempt to delineate some of the choices we now face and sketch out different scenarios for the future. In general, I believe that the future is open, that we do as individuals and a society face significant alternative choices, and that we can help to shape a better future. Eric Higgs complains that I do not adequately explicate my vision for the future and I will address this issue in my concluding engagement of Andrew Light's comments on identity politics and the politics of Media Culture. First, however, I want to confront the issue of social theory, media culture, and normative critique raised by Raymond Morrow. I have long believed that critical social theory is fundamental to every academic and political endeavor and that it is impossible to do cultural studies without critical social theory. In the next sections, I will argue that philosophy is also an important part of developing critical social theory and cultural studies. Thus, I believe that we need transdisciplinary perspectives to engage the problems of the present and future and will sketch out my own perspectives in the following discussions in response to Morrow's and Light's criticisms.

### Social Theory, Media Culture, and Cultural Studies: A Response to Raymond Morrow

I am grateful to Raymond Morrow for accurately situating my own work within the tradition of the Frankfurt School, calling attention to the continuing importance of this tradition, and citing some of the ways that I have reconstructed the Frankfurt School heritage to make it more adequate to the theoretical and political issues of the day. Morrow correctly notes that the Frankfurt School has been generally ignored in most contemporary presentations of cultural studies and I attempted to compensate with this neglect by highlighting its importance early in *Media Culture* (as well as to signal my own theoretical background and allegiances). I also agree with Morrow that a pernicious heritage of the theory wars of the past two decades has been the bifurcation of the field of cultural studies into an empirically-oriented communications research contrasted to a text and then audience-oriented cultural studies and I have recently published some articles on this problem (Kellner 1995b and 1996). I also, with Morrow, found problematic the turn toward audience research in cultural studies which romanticized individual resistance

and attempted to mediate the dichotomy between a Frankfurt School manipulation approach that grounds social power in the media and external institutions contrasted to an audience-approach that roots social power in the individual's ability to construct meaning and identity out of media materials.

The result in *Media Culture* is an attempt to develop a multiperspectival model of cultural studies which combines analysis of the production of culture, with textual analysis, and audience reception studies within the context of a critical social theory that contextualizes cultural production and reception in the dynamics of contemporary society. Morrow agrees with these synthesizing moves as well as my attempts to mediate the 1970s impasse in social theory between structuralist approaches and approaches that stressed agency. But then he begins raising a series of difficult and important problems concerning my theoretical positions. He notes several times that I do not adequately develop my perspectives on social theory in *Media Culture*, leading students to miss the theoretical perspectives for the readings in cultural criticism. I would answer that I develop my theoretical positions in more detail in other works such as my book on critical theory (Kellner 1989a), on Baudrillard (Kellner 1989b), on Television and the Crisis of Democracy (1990) and The Persian Gulf TV War (1992) and (with Steve Best) *Postmodern Theory* (1991) and *The Postmodern Adventure* (forthcoming). Taken together, Morrow would surely agree that these works exemplify the sort of "transdisciplinary style of work" that he himself promotes, and I would argue that especially my books on the media and democracy (Kellner 1990 and 1992) exemplify an "interpretive structuralist approach" that Morrow also affirms.

Morrow correctly sees that my work refuses Horkheimer and Adorno's "dialectic of Enlightenment" approach that see modernity, technology, and rationality, primarily as instruments of domination, and he also affirms my attempts to reconstruct critical theory to avoid the "one-dimensional pessimism" of some Frankfurt School approaches (though I would hold onto an important dimension of negativity and indeed do not understand why I am constantly accused of excessive "optimism"). But after favorably presenting my project he raises a series of provocative questions. Morrow worries how a transdisciplinary and multiperspectival approach is to be carried out in practice and taught to students, and he sees the project as viable only within the confines of "the formation of communities of researchers" as opposed to "exotic, but difficult to breed lone-wolf border transgressors."

As a life-long border transgressor who has often gone it alone, sometimes with collaborators and small groups, and as a student of the history of the Frankfurt School, I can only agree with Morrow that the establishment of "communities of researchers" engaged in a common project of developing a critical social theory and multicultural cultural studies is a desirable and indeed hoped-for project, but it is often utopian in the current era of downsizing and budget cuts. In terms of training graduate students, if one has enough students and colleagues who can be deployed -- and desire to be -- in common research projects, then this is excellent, though it is sometimes impossible. In such situations, all one can do as a graduate and undergraduate teacher is to teach some philosophies, social theories, and methods of cultural criticism and try to get students involved in worthwhile projects. I would also note that, pedagogically, while I myself see theories as optics and tools to use for specific problems and projects, and while I argue that the more tools one has at their disposal the more one can do, for beginning students I think it is

important to become proficient first in limited perspectives, such as Marxism and critical theory, feminism, poststructuralism and postmodern theory, Deweyan pragmatism, and whatever, and then add weapons of critique to one's critical arsenal, refining and developing one's tools as one proceeds.

I have been engaged in this project for over twenty years and can confidently say that all of the theoretical work that I have done has been valuable and that the more theories one has at one's disposal the better work one can do. But Morrow is concerned that such multiperspectival approaches can collapse into "mere eclecticism" or, as it is sometimes argued, into "liberal pluralism." Morrow is also unsatisfied with my claims that which methods one deploys is a question of one's specific projects and context, so that if one studies the Gulf war they will deploy one set of theories and methods, while the study of Madonna may require another set. Morrow demands "mediating principles" and "criteria for empirically (and normatively) setting priorities for the relative significance of various perspectives."

In fact, I attempted to explicate "mediating principles," some of which Morrow himself cited in his review (i.e. I set forth a version of cultural studies that was critical, multicultural, and multiperspectival). A critical cultural studies "attacks oppression" and is multicultural, affirming cultural differences, diversity, and richness. One needs a standpoint of critique and I suggested that one should criticize all cultural representations and texts that promote oppression and hierarchy, arguing that society is structured across axes of domination in which some cultural representations promote oppression and domination and others resist it. In these cases, I would positively valorize criticisms that attack sexism, racism, the stigmatizing of minority groups and cultural differences, stereotyping, and distorted representations. I believe that I operate with a stronger notion of ideology critique than Morrow suggests I do, as I define ideology as representations and discourse that legitimate social domination and hierarchy, and thus make ideology critique a central part of my project à la the Frankfurt School (see Kellner 1995a: 55-62).

I also attempt to chart out more positive visions of democracy, multiculturalism, and a good society in my writings and here is where philosophy comes in, explicating and defending one's values and epistemological positions, setting out one's normative vision of a good life and a good society, and providing a grounding for critique. My philosophical perspectives, however, are contextualist and historicist, believing that rights, justice, and values like equality are the product of specific social struggles, that they can and should be defended but not absolutized, and that one's value commitments will change and be variable in different projects. Morrow is worried, however, that this "contextual pragmatism" does not adequately provide grounds for affirming one's values or epistemological positions, or provide strong enough normative positions, and raises a series of troubling issues for my historicist perspective.

For instance, he claims that my affirmation of a democratic multiculturalism raises the question of whether it should be "extended to all oppressed standpoints, including those of religious cults, fundamentalists, survivalists, and even the 'redneck Bubbas' who suffer from class domination?" I would answer that any group that pursues its own interests and agenda without harming other groups should be tolerated, but that one should draw the line at fundamentalists who try to oppress members of other groups in abhorrent ways (such as bombing abortion clinics or

murdering doctors, or rightwing militia members who carry out terrorism or the politics of hate against other groups). Groups who do not follow the rules of the democratic game, who themselves promote hate and oppression, should not be tolerated (though one should try to understand the positions of misguided fundamentalists or unemployed "Bubbas" who are otherwise decent folks) and can legitimately be criticized and struggled against.

In each case, one needs to develop criteria that would adjudicate between conflicting value claims, just as one would need to develop criteria to adjudicate between conflicting empirical claims. In the former, one appeals to arguments and values that are going to be different, according to the context and argument. In the latter case, one appeals to purported empirical facts or data, which are, of course, subject to interpretation, qualification, and contestation. It is extremely difficult to articulate more general criteria that would transcend specific contexts, though if Habermas, Morrow, or others would come up with such criteria, and if they were found useful in practice, I would use and support such criteria myself.

On the other hand, I would not agree to an "anything goes" pluralism or extreme epistemological relativism. I have suggested some principles and criteria that would oppose a value relativism or pluralism, and would argue for a contextual relativism (i.e. that everything is relative to context), but not an absolute relativism of a sort associated with some extreme postmodern positions (or classical extreme skepticism). But ultimately I do not believe that such issues can be resolved on an abstract level and that one must defend their specific value or empirical claims within specific contexts and situations, thus I will turn in conclusion in my response to Morrow to some of his specific criticisms of my project in Media Culture.

Morrow draws contrasts between "diagnostic critique," "ideological critique," and "immanent critique" in my work and suggests that I downplay the role of ideological critique and am not clear enough in my normative position, especially in relation to "immanent critique" which I described as a preferred strategy of the Frankfurt School in the 1930s in my book on critical theory (Kellner 1989a). "Immanent critique" takes the values of existing society as one's norms of critique and uses them to criticize the society's failure to realize its own values, or uses them to criticize attacks on the existing order by reactionary forces, as the Frankfurt School uses immanent critique against fascism in the 1930s. From this perspective, immanent critique is a form of ideology critique that uses existing norms (i.e. freedom, individualism, equality, multiculturalism) to criticize representations or discourses that attack these norms from reactionary positions. I occasionally use immanent critique of this sort in my work, although a radical critique, as the Frankfurt School discovered, must go beyond immanent critique to legitimate more radical social transformation -- a topic that I'll take up in the next section.

While Morrow correctly perceives that I avoid the ideological connotations of "mass culture" (pejorative) and "popular culture" (often celebratory) in adopting the term "media culture," he worries that I "equate cultural studies with media culture tout court." This is certainly not my intention and in my forthcoming *The Postmodern Adventure* (with Steve Best) we explicitly argue for a cultural studies that engages a wide-range of cultural forms from the most popular and familiar forms of media culture like television to avant-garde modernism, painting, and other forms of so-called "high-culture" (while rejecting the normative distinction between "high" and "low" culture). In current work, I am also engaging some of the forms of media culture that

Morrow found missing in the book under discussion (i.e. Chicano culture, sports, children's culture, global media, etc.). Obviously, one cannot address every relevant issue in a book on contemporary culture and covering the wealth and diversity of issues requires a series of studies (and probably the sort of research center and program that Morrow advocates).

Finally, Morrow raises some questions concerning the politics of my project and how the theoretical positions are to be transformed into political practice. Throughout, I assume that contemporary capitalist societies are a contested terrain with different social groups struggling for social power. Morrow suggests that I "mystify" social struggle, but my reading of contemporary U.S. society, for example, since the 1960s is that of a society riven by (growing) cleavages between race, class, and gender, with competing social groups struggling for power and against domination in all of these fields. My concept of "diagnostic critique" attempts to delineate the conflicting social forces, using cultural studies to analyze the forces of domination and resistance by reading artifacts of media culture that either advance ideologies of domination or contest them; in this way, ideology critique is an integral part of what I see as diagnostic critique and also suggests why critical social theory is an integral part of cultural studies as I conceive it, as well as radical politics. But to further discuss this latter issue let me turn to addressing Andrew Light's commentary.

#### Media Culture, Identity, and Identity Politics: A Response to Andrew Light

I want to especially thank Andrew Light for facilitating the invitation to the University of Alberta, helping to organize the symposium on my book, and administering the set of responses published here. I am also grateful to Light for what I hope is a productive dialogue on media culture, identity, and identity politics which has been going on now for over a year via personal and public discussion, exchange of articles, email conversation, and now written texts. Light has forced me to clarify my position on these topics and address his own positions, which are the topic of a forthcoming work that he cites. I imagine that this discussion will continue and that neither of us will currently accept the other's position, but it is often through the articulation of differences that theoretical progress and insight is made.

Light focuses on the theme in Media Culture of "the role of media technology in shaping cultural and personal identity and hence as a locus of identity politics (such as the politics of groups identifying themselves by race, gender, or sexual orientation)." Light challenges my analysis of the links between media-constructed identities and identity politics, my critical appraisal of identity politics, and my failure to articulate an adequately robust "prescription that resists capitalism." In my response, I will address these critiques, as well as Light's own position on identity politics.

While I do not question Light's general presentation of identity politics, I do not argue or believe that "identity politics is in large measure a product of media culture and in that sense serves the pernicious interests of global capital." In fact, I think that identity politics arose in the 1960s as a result of failures and fragmentation of the Left in which single issue feminist, black and brown power, gay and lesbian liberation, environmentalist, and other "new social movements" arose to replace "the movement" for systematic social transformation that emerged as a response to the Vietnam war and other problems of American society. But it should also be remembered that the

"new social movements" of the 1960s frequently pursued a coalition and alliance politics, that only in the 1970s with the complete fragmentation of the movement at the end of the Vietnam war did the movements pursue resolutely single-issue politics, and, I would argue, only in the 1980s did identity politics in the full-blown culturalist sense that I will address it below emerge.

Thus, I would not say that identity politics emerged as a product of media culture or global capitalism, but as a result of the fragmentation and defeat of the Left in the 1960s within the vicissitudes of media culture and global capitalism. No doubt, from the beginning the media and consumer capitalism exploited and nurtured a nascent identity politics, producing media products and product lines geared toward the counterculture, "liberated" women, racial and ethnic minorities, and even gays and lesbians. There is little doubt that consumer capitalism promoted life-style identities in which one gained social identity according to one's style, look, and image - - as I argue in *Media Culture*. There is also little question but that the media fostered identification with countercultural, race, gender, sexual preference, and even environmentalist politics due to intense coverage and publicity and the articulation of these identities in popular music, film, video, and other forms of media culture, sometimes oppositional (see Kellner and Ryan 1988). But although I would argue that the media attached identity to "a range of commodity choices," I did not claim that this linkage of identity with commodity choice alone defined identity politics which involves identification with the politics and struggles of specific groups, as well as life-style choices.

Furthermore, I am not as hostile toward identity politics as Light alleges and am in agreement with some aspects of his position, in that I do think that there is a relative justification for a qualified sort of identity politics. That is, it is understandable that members of racial groupings discriminated against, or women oppressed by men, or individuals with sexual preferences under assault by straight society would organize, gain parts of their identities through strong identification with those groups struggling against the forms of oppression that they themselves have experienced, and thus engage in a form of identity politics. In this sense, identity politics flows directly from people's experience of oppression and forges links with those who share the specific form of oppression (e.g. blacks, women, gays and lesbians, etc.). This forges identity in terms of the form of oppression one is suffering and identification with groups struggling against this oppression.

Light's distinction between "attached" and "detached" identities helps clarify this point. Those who because of their skin color, gender, or fundamental sexual identity suffer discrimination and oppression are going to be naturally attracted to some form of identity politics (Light's "attached identities"), whereas those who choose identification with a social movement "that are freely embraced and not determined by any kind of internal criteria" (Light's "detached identities") enters into identity politics from, in Light's analysis, "external," rather than "internal" determinations. Obviously, those with "attached identities" are driven by the force of circumstances into identity politics, while in other cases one constitutes one's identity through political choices, commitments, and actions.

While I accept a modified form of Light's distinction, I do not think that this distinction can be maintained as clearly as he delineates it. For instance, while for some gays and lesbians their sexual preference is fundamental and a defining trait of who they are, for others it is merely a



choice, subject to change and modification (i.e. from gay to bi-sexual, to heterosexual, or some combination thereof). Also, whereas Light sees environmentalism as "only cultural in orientation, and hence detached," I know environmentalists who so totally identify with environmentalism that it is a fundamental aspect of their being, determining their relation to nature, animals, food, and total life-style practice; I can imagine some individuals who grew up in a labor or socialist culture who so fundamentally identify with these cultures that it becomes something like an attached identity, rather than something one can detach at will and by choice.

One problem with identity politics in the individuals marked by Light's "attached identities" is the temptation to single-issue politics and to identification with merely one determinant of one's identity, neglecting other determinants. Indeed, identity is multiple and overdetermined: we are defined by our gender, class, race, sexual preference, politics, and many other markers, and it is fetishistic to embrace one marker to the exclusion of others. Identity politics often falls prey to the temptation to fetish one single, defining determinant, to the exclusion of others in a similar light, thus promoting a divide and conquer attitude and blocking a politics of alliance.

While one experiences certain identity markers that produce oppression in a powerful way, one needs to abstract and discern that there are links between different modes of oppression, that there are common forces of oppression, and shared common interests in emancipation and justice. Thus, whereas identity politics may be a powerful starting point to mobilize individuals, a progressive politics of solidarity today needs to discover that common and higher ground that will bind together groups in struggle against their common enemy and for their common interests. Thus, a progressive politics of solidarity will need to affirm both cultural difference and particular interests and identities, as well as moving toward articulating links between oppressed groups, guided by common interests and a shared vision of multiculturalism, justice, and a good society.

The key question concerning identity politics, however, is whether the form in question is progressive or regressive, separatist or coalitional, part of a special interest politics, or a politics of solidarity. One should not in general be affirmative or dismissive of identity politics, but should analyze the claims and effects of identity politics within specific constellations. Many forms of black, women's, or gay and lesbian identity politics may be progressive and emancipatory, whereas other forms of identity politics may be reactionary and objectionable (such as the white male identity politics of militia groups, rightwing fundamentalists, etc.; see Best and Kellner, forthcoming). Of course, this requires precise analysis of what is progressive or reactionary in specific situations and thus requires concrete normative and political analysis.

Light, however, objects to my equating of identity politics in the films of Spike Lee with an "identity politics of consumerism," and my critique that Lee equates cultural radicalism with style and cultural identity mediated by consumption, writing: "The critique of Lee offered by Kellner is that Lee's notion of identity politics is often reducible to a politics of fashion with little substance." I think it is indeed true that Spike Lee's films tend to engage in a culturalist identity politics "which subordinates politics in general to the creation of personal identity." Whereas it is fine and unproblematic for individuals to link their politics with the creation of personal identity, the problem is when cultural politics and creating personal identities in terms of cultural style or identity overwhelms or even replaces political action. The problem, then, with Spike Lee's

version of identity politics is that it displaces political struggle into cultural identity and assertion, replacing cultural and racial assertion against political action and organization.

On the other hand, one could argue, as Light does, that the very creation of films within the Hollywood system of production by young blacks like Spike Lee allows voices to be articulated within mainstream culture that were previously excluded and thus is in itself progressive. Indeed, from the perspective of a democratic multiculturalism, which I would support, it is very important for members of groups previously excluded from cultural production to participate and one should welcome such diversity and alternative voices. Certainly, the films of Spike Lee are one of the most impressive cinematic accomplishments of the past decade, and his success with initially low-budget films also enabled other young blacks and members of groups excluded from film production to gain entry to funding and distribution for their work, thus greatly enriching the American cinema.

Yet, I think that the Spike Lee phenomenon does disclose some of the limitations of identity politics in the present age that reduces politics to cultural style and displaces political struggle and organization with cultural radicalism. A similar displacement was found in the O.J. Simpson trial with African-Americans displacing demands for racial justice with identification with O.J. Simpson and support for him against the "justice" system, or feminists displacing energies to combat sexual discrimination and violence onto anger against Simpson. Of course, such events are themselves complex and multi-sided and the Simpson case itself dramatized a series of racial injustices, as well as the issue of wife-battering and domestic violence and thus has had contradictory effects (see the study in Best and Kellner, forthcoming).

Another problem with identity politics that I was trying to articulate was the propensity to limit politics to demands for justice for one's own group while neglecting or even denigrating other group's demands. I have indeed become increasingly disturbed by the derogatory representations of Jews, Hispanics, gays, and other social groups in Lee's films which often deploy prejudicial stereotypes for cheap laughs; the depictions of Jews in 'Mo Better Blues was sharply criticized and I found the representation of Jews, Hispanics, and gays extremely disturbing in Crooklyn (1994), which appeared after serious criticisms of Lee's racial stereotyping were published. And Lee's sexual politics have been a subject of heavy debate.

So while I agree that it is important for social groups to define their own identities, politics, and culture, I take it as a legitimate form of cultural criticism to engage these forms in dialogue. And while I agree with Light that we should allow "a certain amount of deference to the agents of specific identity formations when it comes to questions of how they choose to go about creating the ground of their own identity," I think it is appropriate to have critical dialogue about those grounds. Indeed, it is ironic that Light would criticize my reservations about Lee's films on the grounds that they do not overcome the ethos of consumer capitalism when he is criticizing me for not articulating a politics sufficiently critical of capitalism. So in conclusion, let me take up this point.

Light worries that my argument that "better identities may be produced through media democracy" may not pose serious challenges to "global capitalism," "may not necessarily get us a prescription that resists capitalism." Indeed, it may ultimately turn out that a multicultural

media democracy such as I would advocate might end up strengthening global capitalism, creating a better and stronger capitalist system. As Stuart Hall reminds us, radical politics is "without guarantees" and we cannot be sure what the effects of our political discourse and action will be. I would say, however, that it is my opinion that the history of the United States and many other so-called capitalist democracies over the past two centuries has seen numerous struggles between democracy and capitalism and that democratic struggles have in significant ways helped individuals cope with a highly predatory and destructive social environment and that therefore we should continue struggling for democracy against capitalism, that struggle for democracy and ways that capitalism impedes democracy should be part of our critical vision and criteria for cultural critique (Kellner 1990).

Thus, in response to Light and Ray Morrow, I would suggest that my own position affirms an anti-capitalist radical democracy, that I criticize certain forms of media culture because they promote capitalist and consumerist values, while downplaying democratic ones and the creation of a positive multicultural democracy. I would urge that media culture and new technologies be used to promote the interests of democracy against capitalism, to promote a multicultural democracy by giving voice to the excluded and oppressed, by widening the democratic dialogue to those who have been traditionally excluded. This involves continued struggle for a non-commodified Internet, system of public broadcasting, public access television, community radio, and alternative forms of culture in the construction of a democratic public sphere and oppositional culture. This is one of the principles that guided my critiques in *Media Culture* and part of the vision of an alternative society that represented part of the standpoint of critique.

I am therefore excited by the dramatic proliferation of new technologies and venues of culture and communication which would create an expanded and robust public sphere. I agree with Light that this forces us to rethink the concept of the public sphere and in recent publications have tried to do so (Kellner 1995b and 1996a). Crucially, it forces us to think through the intersection of technology and capital, the ways that capital is developing and using technology to create a new global high-tech information and entertainment society, and the potentials for democratization and manipulation. Obviously, these technologies can be used by both existing corporate and government forces to strengthen hegemonic power, as well as by highly reactionary and well as progressive social forces. But it is up to those wishing for a better future to sketch out visions of a good life and good society using technology to reconstruct our economy, society, and culture in positive ways and struggling against what we deem regressive ones. This requires social theory and radical cultural criticism to become seriously normative, concerning ourselves with values, justifying our critical standpoint, and defending our own values and visions (which may involve construction of new models of socialism in the light of the failure of Soviet communication; see Kellner 1995c).

And so, once again, philosophy has new functions and challenges, in particular to think through the role of technology in the contemporary world, to see how technology contains the potential to create better modes of production, social interaction, and culture, as well as threatening human freedom and well-being. Our future is intimately connected with technology and the global restructuring of capitalism and it is our challenge to chart these developments and to point the way toward a better future, while using technology to promote emancipatory social change and the politics of solidarity.

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