

Pleasure and meaningful discourse: An overview of research issues

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Abstract

The concept of pleasure has emerged as a multi-faceted social and cultural phenomenon in studies of media audiences since the 1980s. In these studies different forms of pleasure have been identified as explaining audience activity and commitment. In the diverse studies pleasure has emerged as a multifaceted social and cultural concept that needs to be contextualized carefully. Genre and genre variations, class, gender, (sub-)cultural identity and generation all seem to be instrumental in determining the kind and variety of pleasures experienced in the act of viewing. This body of research has undoubtedly contributed to a better understanding of the complexity of audience activities, but it is exactly the diversity of the concept that is puzzling and poses a challenge to its further use. If pleasure is maintained as a key concept in audience analysis that holds much explanatory power, it needs a stronger theoretical foundation. The article maps the ways in which the concept of pleasure has been used by cultural theorists, who have paved the way for its application in reception analysis, and it goes on to explore the ways in which the concept has been used in empirical studies. Central to our discussion is the division between the 'public knowledge' and the 'popular culture' projects in reception analysis which, we argue, have major implications for the way in which pleasure has come to be understood as divorced from politics, power and ideology. Finally, we suggest ways of bridging the gap between these two projects in an effort to link pleasure to the concepts of hegemony and ideology.

The concept of pleasure has emerged as a multi-faceted social and cultural phenomenon in studies of media audiences since the 1980s. The use of the concept draws on a range of intellectual traditions and its diversity is exemplified by the synonyms for pleasure appearing in the literature. Mercer, for example (1986: 50), refers to 'entertainment, comic, laughter, enjoyment' as the 'accomplices' of pleasure, to which we could add concepts such as leisure, motivation, enthusiasm, gratification and desire. Theories of media pleasure also have a diverse provenance including textual and contextual approaches, and sociological, historical, cultural and psychoanalytical accounts.

Studies of television audiences have drawn variously on these theories to inform investigations of the viewing process. Genre and genre variations, as well as (sub-)cultural identity on the basis of class, gender, ethnicity and generation, all seem to be instrumental in determining the kind and variety of pleasures experienced in the act of viewing and finding expression in the way people choose, watch and interpret what the media have on offer. By showing the scope of audience activity this body of research undoubtedly has contributed to a better understanding of the complexity of what we call reception, but it is exactly the diversity of the concept that is puzzling and poses a challenge to its further use.

Despite the long tradition of the use of the concept of pleasure and the vast number of empirical contributions in the area, one of the most striking observations is the absence of a systematic approach to the concept. Moreover, there have been few new insights and no sense of advancement in the literature, despite the stock-taking on reception in recent years (cf. Abercrombie and Longhurst, 1998; Alasuutari, 1999; Hay et al., 1996; Nightingale, 1996). Pleasure seems to have become a taken-for-granted concept that needs no further exploration.

In an attempt to address this absence of reflection on the issue, we will map the ways in which the concept of pleasure has been used by cultural theorists who have paved the way for its application in reception analysis, where it is now firmly established as an important concept. We will then explore the way in which the concept has been used in empirical studies. Central to our discussion is the division between the 'public knowledge' and the 'popular culture' projects in reception analysis which, we argue, had major implications for the way in which pleasure has come to be understood as divorced from politics, power and ideology. Finally, we will suggest ways of bridging the gap between these two projects in an effort to link pleasure to the concepts of hegemony and ideology.

Pleasure and cultural criticism

The analysis of pleasure in reception studies has drawn to some degree on more generalized theories of pleasure that were being developed by cultural critics throughout the 1970s and 1980s. Early on in this endeavour the difficulties of theorizing the concept of pleasure had been acknowledged by writers such as Frith (1982), who claimed that because pleasure is a socially embedded phenomenon, it cannot be subsumed under a single, all-embracing theory. In his view, there cannot be a single theory of pleasure because:

the concept refers to too disparate a set of events, individual and collective, active and passive, defined against different situations of displeasure/pain/reality. Pleasure, in turn, is not just a psychological effect but refers to a set of experiences rooted in the social relations of production. (Frith, 1982: 503)

A number of theorists have recognized the social nature of pleasure and have developed concepts, models and theories of pleasure within the contemporary social formation of capitalism. Pleasure is linked here to utopian desires. Jameson (1979) has claimed that the products of both 'high' and 'low' culture:

have as their underlying impulse, albeit in what is often distorted and repressed unconscious forms – our deepest fantasies about the nature of social life, both as we live it now, and as we feel in our bones it ought to be lived. (1979: 147)

Dyer (1981), in the context of analysing popular entertainment, suggested that the enjoyment of what is commonly regarded as entertainment is based on people's utopian sensibilities, and he developed a model of socially based pleasures in his analysis of the entertainment value of musical films. He observed that media forms acquire their signification 'in relation to the complex of meanings in the socio-cultural situation in which they are produced' (1981: 3) and went on to advance a typology of social tensions and utopian solutions appropriate to capitalist society. The ideals of entertainment, he suggested, imply wants that capitalism itself promises to meet. In other words, entertainment provides alternatives to capitalism which will be provided by capitalism. The solutions are offered through a number of textual practices and representations. For example, he could see the scarcity/abundance problem and solution being expressed in TV news through the technology of news-gathering (satellites and so on); in the doings of the rich; in spectacles of pageantry and destruction; and in serials through the conspicuous material wealth and comfort of the characters' existence.

Starting from a different point of view, Lefebvre (1979) nevertheless expressed similar ideas about the role of utopian desire in media use by suggesting that popular media representations responded to a real need for happiness with fictitious happiness and that radio and TV presentations give the illusion of simultaneity, truth and participation. Genres such as women's magazines are then characterized by a fundamental ambivalence, at the same time confirming and transcending the narrow prescription of what is considered the 'woman's world' (Lefebvre, 1986).

A more specific and nuanced understanding of the pleasures of particular societal groups and subcultures has been offered by those cultural theorists who have examined the class-based pleasures of cultural consumption through an analysis of the aesthetic form of popular cultural products. Corrigan and Willis (1980) have commented on the media pleasures associated with working-class culture in Britain. They claimed that the pleasures of TV for the working class are related to a mental/manual split and a rejection of the mental, which is embodied in 'cultural forms, activities, symbols, interaction and routinized attitude' (1980: 306). According to Corrigan and Willis, certain features of popular TV parallel working-class cultural forms and these features not only appeal to the working-class audience but are also recognized and implemented by programme makers.

Bourdieu (1980), in a wide-ranging theoretical and empirical investigation of contemporary French society, offers a class-based theory of aesthetic disposition that helps us to understand some of the pleasures of media use. Particular cultural competences are acquired, in his view, through the setting of the family and/or school. The competences relating to the consumption of artistic and cultural products vary according to social class position. The bourgeoisie learns to value form rather than substance or function, whereas the working class ('les classes populaires') learns to

favour substance and function over the form of cultural products. The bourgeois or dominant class learns to like things that are distanced from the experiences and practices of the subordinate class; distanced from all that they perceive to be common, vulgar and popular. The denial of the inferior, coarse, natural pleasures includes the affirmation of the sublime and the elevated character of those who find enjoyment in the sophisticated, distinguished and disinterested pleasures. The response, according to Bourdieu, is for the dominated or working class to reject the dominant culture of distanced contemplation and to construct, in opposition, an aesthetic that rejects form at the expense of subject and function. It refuses to judge works of art or cultural practices in their own terms, but judges them according to the social and ethical values of the class ethos that values participation and immediate semi-sensual gratification.¹ For Bourdieu, then, popular pleasure

is characterized by an immediate emotional or sensual involvement in the object of pleasure. What matters is the possibility of identifying oneself with it in some way or another to integrate it into everyday life. In other words, popular pleasure is first and foremost a pleasure of recognition. (Ang, 1985: 20)

Sensuality has also been taken up by Roland Barthes in his influential *The Pleasure of the Text* (1990, originally 1973). The importance of his essay lies not only in his disassociating pleasure and politics, but, above all, in the implied shift from textual production to the reception process (cf. Jameson, 1983). Barthes' distinction between pleasure ('plaisir') and bliss ('jouissance') affirms the value of unsublimated pleasures (cf. Connor, 1992: 215). Although mass culture, which Barthes distinguishes from the culture of the masses, holds the possibility of pleasure (for example, in the aberrant reading practices of stereotyped productions), it is a product of the *petit bourgeois* and cannot convey bliss. The text of bliss is linked to a bodily sensation; it is asocial and always surprising; it is the 'text that imposes a state of loss, the text that discomforts, unsettles the reader's historical, cultural and physiological assumptions, the consistency of his tastes, values, memories, brings to a crisis his relation to language' (Barthes, 1990: 14).

For Barthes, this text cannot be created by the established genres, be it advertisements, soaps or news. As a consequence, Barthes' distinction is theoretically insightful, but poses severe problems when used in audience studies (cf. Hepp, 1998: 99–116). Certainly, Barthes, like the other theorists discussed so far, was centrally concerned with the issue of the pleasure of popular culture which stimulated and informed empirical studies of media audiences, although he was not engaged in reception analysis as such.

The pleasure of meaning

Reception analysis was characterized by the emergence of two distinct and separate paths. On the one hand, the 'public knowledge' project grappled with issues of ideology and the public sphere, citizenship and the informational role of broadcasting. Corner (1991) described this strand of research as being 'concerned primarily with the media as an agency of public knowledge and "definitional" power, with a focus on news and current affairs output and a direct connection with the politics of information and the viewer as citizen' (1991: 268).

On the other hand, the 'popular culture' project explored the pleasures of fictional genres. It was 'concerned primarily with the implications for social consciousness of the media as a source of entertainment and is thereby connected with

the social problematics of “taste” and of pleasure (for instance, those concerning class and gender) within industrialised popular culture’ (1991: 268).

The ‘public knowledge’ project

The initial theoretical emphasis in British cultural studies was on the ideological power and influence of the media rather than on media pleasures, because the members of the Birmingham School were strongly influenced by Marxist and neo-Marxist theory and politics. Meanings/signification focused primarily on issues of hegemony and the dominant ideology. These concerns can be witnessed in Hall’s (1973) seminal work on encoding and decoding, which was to become the model for much subsequent empirical audience research in the cultural studies tradition. Hall proposed that media messages could be read in any one of three ways: dominant, negotiated or oppositional.

This framework informed Morley’s *Nationwide* audience study, which was the first study to test Hall’s decoding model empirically. It was a benchmark study in reception analysis as it not only rekindled an interest in empirical reception analysis but also set the agenda for subsequent studies of audience responses to TV news, current affairs and documentary programming (cf. Morley, 1980, 1992; Morley and Brunson, 1999). Because Morley worked with the idea of a ‘preferred reading’ and of a dominant or hegemonic message, he concentrated by and large on audience decodings in terms of acceptance or rejection of specific ideological messages or, in other words, with the more cognitive aspects of audience signification. However, it is possible to detect an important, though implicit, reference to the relationship between pleasures and meanings in Morley’s work. He differentiated between the groups’ responses to the ‘ideological problematic’ and what he termed the ‘mode of address’ or the tone or style of the programme and went on to develop a typology of the relationship between both. He constructed ‘mode of address’, as he did the ‘ideological problematic’, in terms of audience acceptance or rejection, but he might have equally and fruitfully constructed it in terms of the pleasures of specific aesthetic forms and taste.

There have been a number of suggestions for improving and enhancing the decoding model (for example, Corner, 1983; Morley, 1981, 1992; Wren-Lewis, 1983), but these are still in terms of actuality texts. Dyer (1977) was perhaps the first to suggest its application, or at least a variation of it, to fictional genres, in so doing claiming a relation between audience pleasures (enjoyment) and more ‘ideological meanings’. He called for an expansion of the tripartite model of dominant, negotiated and oppositional readings following his textual analysis of the film *Victim*, and he posited at least six possible ‘preferred readings’ of the film based on enjoyment in addition to responses to its ideology. He thought that a distinction should be made between: ‘negative and positive readings of the text – that is, between those that reject it (dislike it, are bored with it, disagree with it) and those who accept it (enjoy it, agree with it, feel involved with it)’ (1977: 20). Empirical research often failed in the attempt to assign a limited number of reading positions to actual readers, thus hinting at problems with the tripartite model suggested by Hall (for a detailed discussion, cf. Abercrombie and Longhurst, 1998; Lewis, 1991). This was especially obvious in the studies focusing on fictional genres.

The ‘popular culture’ project

The interest in understanding the pleasures of fictional genres originated primarily from two sources in cultural studies: the first was a concern with the relationship

between ideology and pleasure, and the second was a turn in audience studies towards women's genres. The first source was a reaction to the idea of a dominant 'preferred reading' of media messages, which claimed that audience meanings and pleasures were 'complicit' with a dominant ideology. Pleasure, then, was merely a function of ideology because it implied the acceptance of the ideological message of a text.² In an attempt to extend the scope of cultural analysis by including the gendered aspects of media entertainment, Lovell (1981) differentiated between the cognitive and extra-cognitive dimensions of art and introduced the concept of 'structures of feeling and sensibility'. According to her, the almost exclusive focus on ideology was detrimental to the development of audience studies and should be complemented by pleasure as an equally important area of study. Moreover, pleasure could not be seen as a concept dependent on ideology because both were related in complex and contradictory ways. Discussing the soap opera genre, she singled out narrative, plot and character structure that reverse patriarchal norms and validate the interest and concerns of women as sources of pleasure for its female audience.

The relationship between ideology and pleasure was examined further by Fiske (1987), who advanced an alternative model of 'active audiences'. Rather than accepting the ideological messages of a text or simply interpreting its meaning, audiences were actively engaged in constructing media texts so that in Fiske's approach the reader became truly a writer. The pleasure of viewing TV, then, is a pleasure of making meaning. The sources of pleasure that specific genres offer to their audiences are linked to the genres' textual characteristics and their intertextual possibilities. The popular texts, Fiske has argued, are sufficiently 'open' or polysemous to allow for a 'semiotic democracy'. Although he later gave more attention to the power relationships that frame the media-based social discourses (cf. Fiske 1990a, 1996), Fiske's work has been widely critiqued for his lack of precision about what an 'active audience' is – one might ask who comprises the 'inactive audience'? – and the conflation of 'active audience' with resistance.

Feminist scholars were also interested in media pleasures and dealt specifically with the pleasures derived from 'women's genres' such as TV soap opera, women's magazines and romantic fiction. This research tradition was stimulated by the question of whether the trivial media products were indeed as bad and conservative as the critics had always claimed and why women so numerously turned to them. Throughout the 1980s a large number of theoretical and empirical studies were completed and a wide range of pleasures, textual and contextual, were outlined and theorized. Ang (1985) dealt at some length with the theoretical and historical aspects of pleasure, although there were amazingly few attempts to arrive at a more general definition of the concept.

Studies of soap opera highlighted the diverse sources of pleasure afforded to its recipients by what was then called the 'women's genres' (Klaus, 1998: 337–46). *Aesthetic* or genre-specific pleasure is linked to the viewers' knowledge of the rules and the narrative style of a genre and its variations. Another source of pleasure is *content-specific* and is based on viewers' familiarity with the characters, the plot and the location of a specific soap opera. Genre conventions and content-specific pleasures both in turn stimulate the *communicative* involvement of soap opera fans. Brown (1994), drawing extensively on Fiske in the theoretical framing of her study, shows how soap opera reception can be integrated into existing networks of women and can serve as a means of interaction, gossip and mutual reassurance. This is possible since TV in general, and the soap opera specifically, adopt an oral rather than

a literary mode of address. Most prominently, however, *fantasy* and *realism* have been identified as sources of pleasure.

In her study of romance reading Radway (1987, originally 1984) identified *fantasy* as a driving force of the reader's motivation. According to Radway, romance reading is a way for its readers to reduce tension resulting from their life as caretakers since the escape into fantasy enables women to symbolically gratify specific needs that are not met in real life:

By participating in a fantasy that they are willing to admit is unrealistic in some ways, the Smithsonian women are permitting themselves the luxury of selfindulgence while simultaneously providing themselves with the opportunity to experience the kind of care and attention they commonly give to others. Although this experience is vicarious, the pleasure it induces is nonetheless real. (1987: 100)

Radway clearly brought a concern with the pleasure in fantasy to the forefront of feminist studies, but, for her, fantasy remained a mere illusion and she focused her interest solely on the ideological function of pleasure. In a critique of this position Ang (1988) has called for an analysis that loosens the unidirectional link between ideology and pleasure and that takes the pleasurable of pleasure seriously. She held that fantasy was something between utopia and reality. It is neither simply illusionary nor political per se but can be a site of resistance to patriarchal demands since it entails a playful and enjoyable way of transcending reality.

Drawing on Dyer's typology mentioned earlier, Geraghty (1991: 107–30) provides an exploration of the pleasure of popular entertainment. The fantasies afforded by soap opera, the romantic novel and the Hollywood women's movie all stress intensity and transparency of feeling. Two studies on the pleasure of viewing *Dallas* confirm Geraghty's textual analysis, but the authors phrased their findings somewhat differently when they identified the tragic (O'Connor, 1990) and melodramatic (Ang, 1985) 'structure of feeling' as the prime source of the female viewers' pleasure.

Ang further claimed that *Dallas* possesses an emotional realism for its audience. The fans are familiar with the dramatic changes in feeling because of their own life experiences, and they can evaluate the story against this background. The *realist* pleasure of soap opera involves both emotional and cognitive-rational processes. Viewers bring their life experience and rational reasoning to bear when they judge the authenticity of the stories (Cornelißen, 1994; Livingstone, 1990; Mikos, 1994). The pleasure of soap opera viewing is dependent on the plausibility of the characters, their emotions and their interaction, and on the possibility of the events happening in real life. As a consequence, there are few social issues or political problems that soap operas do not address. Hobson (1982: 122–4) claimed that the then popular soap opera *Crossroads* could get viewers involved in the discussion of social and political events in a way that news programmes could not:

The combination of the familiarity of the characters with the unexpectedness of the events carries the 'message' more effectively than the same incidents happening to someone of whom the audience knows nothing, and which is reported and expected in a news programme. (1982: 124)

The realist pleasure thus points to the fact that fiction and non-fiction might be useful categories in the production of programmes, but become fundamentally problematic when their implicit dualism is applied to the reception process (Klaus,

1996). Fiction can pave the way towards a recognition that social and political issues are personally important and thus can play an important part in the cultural discourses surrounding such matters. Although Hobson's phrasing can give the impression that the pleasures of the soap opera or other genres are *always* political, it is important to recognize that news and soap may be supplementary rather than contrary genres as far as the viewing process is concerned. This is an issue we will return to.

Linking politics and pleasure

Despite the large number of empirical audience studies devoted to women's media pleasures, the issue of the relationship between the pleasure in 'women's genres' and feminist politics, and more generally between media pleasures and ideology, remains unresolved. Two main trends can be identified in the studies discussed above. One is a celebratory approach to women's media pleasures. Here one can detect a tendency to posit pleasure as exclusively positive in response to the trivialization and marginalization of 'female genres' in both popular and elite culture. The different sources of pleasure are then reinterpreted as progressive. In this way pleasure in fantasy is seen as a utopian possibility (Geraghty, 1991), pleasure in the conventions of the genre as potentially liberating (Nochimson, 1992), the communicative pleasure as resistive (Brown, 1994), the content-specific pleasure as politically subversive (Fiske, 1990b) and the realist pleasure as potentially feminist (Seiter et al., 1989). However, there is no justification for romanticizing pleasure unless the link between ideology and pleasure is closely investigated and questions of the public sphere, politics and ideology are taken up, which these studies have not done.

However, there is one obvious link between power/ideology and the audiences' pleasure in the popular genres because this has consistently been devalued and regarded as inferior. Some scholars have addressed the apparent contradiction between the pleasures afforded to women by the popular fictional genres and the 'negative' way in which they are represented (for example, Ang, 1985; Lovell, 1981; Radway, 1987). But while the complex and contradictory relationship between pleasure and ideology is recognized, the discussion has remained largely at a speculative and abstract level and points to the need for more precise empirical investigation.

Whereas Radway (1987) and Modleski (1984) in their early studies of women's genres applied the model of female subjectivity developed by Chodorow (1978), other research ignored the subconscious aspects of pleasure and did not refer to the psychoanalytic tradition. The absence of the work on subjectivity, sexual difference and unconscious desires from reception research (and developed in feminist film studies) has lately been subject to criticism (cf. Brunson, 1996; Nightingale, 1996; Penley, 1992). Penley argues most forcefully that, 'you can't do this kind of ethnographic work without some psychoanalytic understanding of desire, identification, fantasy, and subjectivity' (1992: 499).

Another lacuna observed by Gallagher (1992) and Livingstone (1991) in feminist media studies is the neglect of the issue of social power. They, along with others, called for a return to questions of politics by giving more attention to non-fictional genres (cf. Geraghty, 1996; Van Zoonen, 1994). They argue that feminist scholars, by limiting their interest largely to the 'women's genres' and a concern with pleasure, are in danger of an essentialist reconstruction of gender and a stereotypical view on the gendering of the reception process. However, we do not consider a move towards the 'public knowledge' project an adequate response to these problems if this means abandoning the 'popular culture' project and the valuable insights gained from

this research tradition. This would in no way challenge the dualism between pleasure and ideology, emotion and cognition and their gendered subtexts. Rather, we think the task is to bridge the gap between the two traditions in reception analysis both on the theoretical and empirical level.

The meaning of pleasure

In cultural studies the issues of media pleasure and media ideology have, as we have seen, developed in distinct and separate ways. The 'public knowledge' strand has focused on audience readings of non-fiction media texts and has paid little attention to the concept of pleasure, whereas the 'popular culture' project has been concerned centrally with 'tastes' and the pleasures of fictional genres and less with questions of ideology.

This separation of spheres wasn't arbitrary. Arguably, because the decoding model was developed with direct-address actuality texts, it was more difficult to apply to the relatively more 'open' fictional genres. But, more importantly, the division was indicative of a more profound gendering of cultural analysis generally, and media reception analysis in particular (Gray, 1999). Hermes (1997) has convincingly argued that the public knowledge project is dogged by an implicit masculinist bias characteristic of modernism generally and theorized most influentially by Habermas (1981). The division that he claims between public and private spheres, and the association of the former with men, production, rationality and the latter with women, consumption, emotion is both limiting and sexist, as has been argued by Fraser (1994) and Benhabib (1992).

In media reception debates these divisions correspond roughly to positing men as citizens actively interested in accessing information for rational debate in the public sphere and women as private persons turning passively to dubious fictional genres for entertainment and gossip as it relates to the private sphere (cf. Klaus, 1996). One of the fundamental flaws of this model is the distinction made between reality and fantasy, between cognitive rationality and emotional sensuality in the process of knowledge acquisition and understanding. For example, Corner (1991: 276) has posited that fiction and non-fiction mark two distinctive communicative spheres. According to him, text-viewer relationships in non-fiction genres are characterized by 'kinds of knowledge' and rational insights, whereas those in fiction genres are characterized by 'imaginative pleasure', the particular pleasures of dramatic circumstance and character. Although Corner is right to try to arrive at a more precise conceptualization, his concept of 'knowledge' is extremely limited and does not include knowledge that is prereflexive and/or extra-cognitive, though rational. The concepts also ignore the possible links between pleasure and knowledge.

At the same time as the studies of popular genres have revealed the realist moments and cognitive dimensions in the reception process, some suggestive and useful comments have been made on the pleasures of actuality/information/public knowledge. In a study on news reception, Lewis (1991) found that audience groups could not recall many news items and generally found the news boring (as has been found by many other studies of prime-time news programmes in different countries). The main reason for this, according to Lewis, is that one of the central pleasures of narrative TV lies in the use of the hermeneutic code, but that TV news is an exception to the rule in that it adopts instead the structure of print journalism in which the main facts of the story are given at the outset. He compared audience response to two news items and found that the audience groups had a greater recall and greater understanding of the one in which the reporter used the hermeneutic code than in the

story in which he didn't. Similar results were obtained in a German study by Hamm and Koller (1992), although they also stressed the importance of educational level for recall and understanding. Differential understanding is also supported by Langer (1992, 1998). Analysing what he considers to be less valued news items such as stories on disaster, crime or human tragedy, he has pointed out that this type of news offers real pleasure to its audiences. However, he broadened the scope of Lewis' analysis by suggesting that these pleasures are also involved in the reception of the more legitimate news items, but are less recognized.

From an ideological perspective, then, there are 'weak moments' and 'strong moments' where the message makes either less or more sense to audiences and this sense-making is dependent on the aesthetic forms and codes used in production as well as on the social and cultural positioning of particular audiences. The more that TV uses the codes with which people are familiar, the more likely it is that people will be able to construct news reports into a story that they will understand, that will have a resonance for them, and which they will experience as pleasurable.³ Dahlgren (1988) found that, among a number of audience discourses around TV news, one was associated with the pleasure of watching⁴ – 'TV news is simply an enjoyable experience' (1988: 296). According to Dahlgren:

This goes beyond the dutiful citizen position, and actually conflicts with it, since the discourse of the dutiful citizen gains its legitimacy precisely in the idea of social obligation rather than pleasure. Sometimes this discourse will reveal an awareness of this discrepancy and express a slight embarrassment about TV news being fun to watch. (1988: 296–7)

While Dahlgren himself is in danger of reconstructing the division between 'public knowledge' and 'popular pleasure', from his study we have empirical evidence of a link between emotion and cognition. Theoretical evidence of such a link stems from the critical tradition of studying the news narrative as myth.

Quite a few communication scholars have hinted at the mythic quality of news, their symbolic-ritualistic meaning and their function as 'society's story-teller' (for example, Koch, 1990; Schmitz, 1996; Teichert, 1987). Dahlgren (1988) put this in a broader perspective when he argued that TV news is better understood as a cultural discourse rather than as information: it has a ritualistic, symbolic and mythic rather than an informational manner and is characterized by extra-rational sense-making. He considers story-telling the primary link between actuality programmes and popular culture:

To posit a story-telling continuum, between serious and tabloid news, between fact and fiction, between journalism and popular culture, is a subversive de-differentiation and contests the claims of journalism to anchor itself fully in the rational domain and be something wholly distinct from, say 'entertainment'. (1992: 15–16)

This conceptualizing entails a move away from a primary interest in ideology in the tradition of the public knowledge project to a concern with sensemaking and meaning-construction.

Fiske (1987) intimately linked the two prototypical genres by pronouncing news a male soap opera. Although this contribution in no way questions the idea of the private as the women's sphere and the public as the men's legitimate place, Fiske nevertheless suggests one way of overcoming the public knowledge/popular

entertainment division. His analysis shows how fruitful it can be to examine the non-fictional genres with the categories and concepts applied formerly only to the fictional ones and vice versa. Furthermore, taking into account the flow of the TV programme, its vertical intertextuality, then news has to be characterized as a popular genre. This view is supported by a study that showed that categories of conflict and topoi (themes) distilled from literary analysis can be applied to the news items of newspapers, magazines and TV (McCartney, 1987). There is some evidence that the converse might also be true. Buonanno (1993) applied news values to fictional programmes and found that they predict rather well the criteria for choosing story lines. These findings suggest that we can begin to move away from a sole concern with ideology in the tradition of the popular knowledge project to a concern with sense-making and meaning-construction.

Hermes (1995) has defined the process of meaning-construction as follows:

By 'making meaningful' I mean the process of making sense of a text by recognizing and comprehending it and assigning it associative signification . . . , as well as giving it a place in one's knowledge and views of the world. This last level of meaning production consists not only of cognitive thought processes, but also of a reader's imaginative response and the practical and/or emotional and fantasy uses to which she or he anticipates putting the text. (1995: 7)

Emotion and cognition, entertainment and information, pleasure and ideology, fact and fiction all seem to be intimately linked in the process of sensemaking. Pleasure directs cognitive processes and determines attention and selective awareness. It is the emotional, sensual and imaginative feeling that leads audiences to actively turn to and process a given content. This is a prerequisite for understanding – without selective attention no cognition would be possible – but at the same time it limits the scope of people's interpretative practices because pleasure is socially embedded and intimately linked to social relations of dominance and cultural hegemony. ⁵

Condit (1989) has argued that the social order imposes limits to the 'semiotic democracy' since 'oppositional and negotiated readings require more work of viewers than do dominant readings' (1989: 109) and this reduces the pleasure of the viewing process. The pleasurable nature of a media event is not arbitrary, but is linked to social positionings and contexts of media use. Grossberg refers to culturally produced structures of pleasure (Grossberg, 1992: 55). These influence fundamentally how the different sources of pleasure outlined above intersect and shift. We can then conceive of tastes as the patterns of pleasure different subcultural groups experience and could describe these empirically. As pleasure links into the public sphere, taste links into cultural citizenship. Hermes (1997) has suggested the idea of 'cultural citizenship', which she borrows from Allor and Gagnon (1994), as a way of transcending the 'public knowledge' and the 'popular culture' projects. Allor and Gagnon link 'cultural citizenship' to both producers and consumers. Hermes thinks that the concept could function as

a crowbar to pry apart practices and identities, or as a means to mix in issues of pleasure with issues of politics, it could help redefine the boundaries of the public and the private in a firm insistence on how both are articulated on the level of the everyday and are reciprocally involved in how we constitute ourselves in relation to society. (1997: 88)

Hermes argues, in relation to the consumption of popular media, that the kinds of subjectivity and self-knowledge produced by women's magazines, romance fiction and so on should be taken seriously rather than discounted in the public sphere. These include hopes, fantasies and utopias. The concept of 'cultural citizenship' embraces both aesthetic and emotional aspects in addition to rational and moral argumentation and could expand and revitalize critical analysis of the public sphere. Klaus (1994) has defined the public as that realm in which we spell out, enact, reinforce or change ideological prescriptions and hegemonic meaning. The public then encompasses all those everyday activities and communicative events through which people confirm their common culture, reconstruct their social identity and rework the norms and values regulating behaviour. This occurs in parliamentary debates as well as in the neighbourhood chat, in the news reception as well as in the soap opera fanship network. Media offer the means for this ongoing endeavour in both their fictional and non-fictional programme because social and cultural communication on all levels is media drenched. 'Cultural citizenship', then, could integrate the more hidden aspects of the formation of a public since it points to the everyday activities by which we make sense of the world and construct a common culture.

Empirical work that bridges the gap between the 'popular culture' and the 'public knowledge' projects is as yet preliminary and fragmented but is promising. The concept of 'cultural citizenship' should encourage us to cross the boundaries drawn between the two projects. Pleasure and ideology can then be conceptualized as two aspects of this wider social process of meaning-construction and sense-making.

Notes

1. In Bourdieu's analysis, there is the implicit dualism between the objective and the subjective, the rational and the sensual, echoing to some degree the split in media debates between the 'public knowledge' and 'popular culture' projects.
2. This binding of pleasure to the acceptance of the existing power relationship has a long tradition in critical theory. In Adorno and Horkheimer's analysis the cultural industry was a pleasure industry that prevented people from seeing the true nature of society and their place therein; it pacified people into accepting their domination.
3. In many ways this is similar to Morley's distinction between 'modes of address' and 'ideological problematic', but Lewis is posing the questions in terms of pleasure/enjoyment rather than in terms of acceptance or rejection.
4. The apparent contradiction between Lewis's account of the general absence of pleasure in news-viewing and Dahlgren's account of news-viewing as pleasurable points to the need for more systematic research on this aspect of viewing and on the relationship between 'pleasure' and 'sense-making'.
5. At this point in our discussion another issue arises. The role of displeasure and disgust in the reception process has not been examined as yet in audience studies, but would merit some attention.

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