White women audiences in the First World. Numerous studies produced in the eighties and early nineties have analyzed white women's interactions with popular culture (Ang, 1985; Brown, 1994; Brundson, 1981; McRobbie, 1990; Press, 1991; Radway, 1984; Thurston, 1988), but the publication of audience research on women of color and non-Western women is still a fairly recent phenomenon (Bobo, 1995; Gillespie, 1995; Duke, 2000; Durham, 1999; Parameswaran, 1999; Valdivia, 2000). Disturbed by the elision of race and ethnicity in studies of film and television spectatorship, Valdivia (2000) enjoins feminists to forge a multicultural vision that rejects the hegemonic allure of racial binaries (White and Black women only) to make visible a range of diverse immigrant women's popular culture experiences.

To date, despite the popular and widely-cited text *Cultural Studies*' (Grossberg, Nelson, & Treichler, 1992) claim that the field was witnessing an international boom (the text included few studies outside the US, UK and Australia), we have only initiated the process of describing and analyzing media structures, texts, and audience reception in Latin America, Asia and Africa. Commenting on the powerful discourses of nostalgia and closure in the First World, which promote audience research as an enterprise of the past that has outlived its potential, Juluri (1998) writes, "As someone entering the field in the mid-1990s, I wonder what it means that the high moment of audience studies seems to have passed, perhaps to travel, like old American sitcoms, to the rest of the world" (p. 86). Deconstructing the politics of race, class, and location that invisibly structures the games of publication, canonization, and contestation in the academy, Juluri urges critics in metropolitan Western academies where "the world is written into knowledge" to be aware of discourses and practices that render research on the Third World as a cross-culturalist footnote or appendix (p. 85).

For postcolonial feminist ethnographers in audience studies, it seems ironic that just as they have launched efforts to record non-Western women audiences' responses to popular culture, media studies is eager to "pack up" and herald the demise of the audience as an object of study. The capricious politics of temporality and canonicity, which produces the dilemma of "catching up" (Juluri, 1998, p. 87) for postcolonial audience researchers is in one sense similar to the discomfort that women's studies scholars and critical race theorists expressed when radical postmodernism began heralding the death of space, subjectivity, history, and resistance. While evaluating the strengths of postmodernism, Kumar (1994) adopts a cautious approach to arguments that advocate a return to pure discourse and genealogy because she finds it important to "retain the subject for, let us say, political reasons, being unable to live up to the epistemological task of giving up subjectivity on having been denied it for so long and just discovering it" (p. 8). Similarly, Braidotti (1987) notes skeptically the coterminous rise of postmodernism and the increasing numbers of immigrants and women of color within the humanities and social sciences, "in order to announce the death of the subject, one must have first gained the right to speak as one" (p. 80). For postcolonial media ethnographers, empirical audience research offers an opportunity to generate

alternative knowledges of the non-West, knowledges that revise, revisit, and complicate the narratives that have been fashioned by European/colonial anthropologists and administrators. Proposing a sense of audience representation as deeply linked to intellectual practice, Juluri (1998) argues, "I am particularly invoking those of us who share the burden and privilege of certain kinds of colonialized and racialized subjectivities that allow us to speak as both insiders and outsiders, as transnational intellectuals and as representatives of specific national and or/local constituencies. I am concerned with the possibilities that are enabled in audience research for a politics of representation involving third world/diasporic scholars of media as well as Third World audiences" (86).

In searching for alternatives to the political paralysis implicated in certain strains of postmodernism, feminist audience researchers cannot fall into the trap of authentic essentialism or nostalgia for originary and utopian moments of pre-modern/pre-colonial belonging. Orchestrating a polycentric vision of multicultural feminism, Shohat (1998) writes that we are "obliged to . . . work through a politics whereby the de-centering of identities" does not prevent us from examining the power asymmetries that privilege a few and disenfranchise many others (p. 6). Multicultural feminism, as Shohat envisions, transcends national and disciplinary borders to not only emphasize a range of distinct cultural subjectivities, but to also engage the fissures and dialogical relations *within* and between ethnicities, classes, and nations. Inspired by Shohat's efforts to seek a balance between resisting analytical binarisms and negotiating the straitjacket of identity politics, our attention to audiences in the rest of the world must offer more than a vacuous, corporate vision of multiculturalism or a frenzied inclusive empiricism. As Shohat argues, simplistic models of global diversity based in the "flavor of the month" paradigm reduce feminists of color into native informants who collect new and exotic forms of Third World subalternity for regular consumption in the First World (p. 16).

Our investment in progressive racial politics and goals of achieving a radically global perspective need not lead to the mere addition of African, Indian, or Malaysian women to the smorgasbord of existing audiences in the canon. Firstly, rather than being a "guilty" afterthought, ethnographic audience studies in Asia or Africa can engage with questions that are germane to a new politics of audience research that interrogates the modes and practices of global capitalism *and* avoids essentialized models of the viewing/reading process. For instance, Valdivia (2000) questions models of feminist media reception that assume viewer/reader identification to be a linear, one-way process of horizontal gender correspondence where men relate to men and women to women (p. 155). Hence, research on Third World women's consumption of Western media, which predominantly represent the lives of White characters, would demand an analysis of media consumption that accounts for audiences' contradictory experiences of affiliation and alienation. Secondly, audience research must stress the relational web of porous social formations within which the media constitute viewers' identities. Therefore, when we study communities of color as spectators of

mainstream popular culture, we are not only studying race as "blackness" or "brownness," but also as the circulation of whiteness and vice versa. Foregrounding race in examining a group of White middle-class American girls' playful consumption of Hispanic dolls can tell us volumes about the ways in which powerful discourses on immigration and citizenship percolate the quotidian practices of everyday life (Acosta-Alzuru & Kreshel, 2000). Finally, in negotiating the fine balance between power/ideology and agency/resistance in audience research, feminists can adopt a modified Foucauldian approach that views women as historical subjects who are molded by authoritative (and persuasive) media discourses, but are not "passive recipients" of dominant messages (Kumar, 1994, p. 21).

Gender, Resistance, and Colonial History

In my project on young urban middle- and upper-class Indian women's leisure reading practices, I analyze the cultural space occupied by the practice of popular romance fiction reading in women's everyday lives. I conducted ethnographic research for five months in Hyderabad, a city in South India and the capital of the state of Andhra Pradesh, among women between the ages of 17 and 21 years old. As part of my fieldwork, I moderated discussions about romance novels among seven groups of women; women in each group were friends before my arrival, and some women had known each other since their childhood. I conducted two- to three-hour-long interviews with 30 regular romance readers and read over a hundred novels they recommended. To gain insight into the discourses about romance reading that young women encountered, I interviewed parents, teachers, library owners, publishers, and used-book vendors. My involvement in readers' everyday routines included "hanging out" with them at their colleges; joining their visits to lending libraries, restaurants, and movie theaters; accompanying them on shopping trips and picnics; and eating meals with women in their homes.

Typically, women from urban English-speaking middle- and upper-class communities read imported Western romance novels in India. Historically, middle-class urban Indian communities gained power and status through their access to economic and cultural capital – private school instruction, university education, and professional employment – during the colonial period. As members of the expanding Indian middle- and upper-classes, the women readers who shared their time with me belonged to a socioeconomic bloc whose purchasing power and desire to consume fueled the processes of economic liberalization and globalization (Varma, 1998, pp. 170–1). In the media's hegemonic visions of upward mobility for Indian citizens, the fantasy lifestyle of the urban Indian middle classes is widely promoted as a symbol of postcolonial modernity. Hyper-visible images of middle- and upper-class urban Indian women circulate in the imaginary economies of consumerism and state discourse. These "modern" women

who represent the ideal subjects of success in models of national development shape the aspirations of poor, working-class, and rural women.

Media critics sympathetic to the project of refining ethnographic audience studies have argued for radically historicized and socially contextualized analyses of the processes that shape readers' identities (Ang, 1996). Commenting that audiences, not just media products created for consumption, are socially constructed and influenced by economic and social changes, Schudson (1987) urges researchers to unravel the historical constitution of audiences because "audiences are not born but made" (p. 63). In his thoughtful essay on ethnography and media reception research, Gibson (2000) proposes a model of audience studies that would allow researchers to avoid the trap of becoming ensnared in the semiotic worlds of popular culture's fans and devotees (p. 253). Arguing for deep contextualization of audience activity while drawing from the writings of Morley (1986) and Hall (1980), Gibson proposes a three-pronged approach to understanding how readers' interpretations are located within and against shifting fields of alliances, articulations, and historically-produced structures:

> three important sites of analysis that must be explored if the context of audience meaning-making is to be reconstructed. These three sites include (1) the media text and its discursive structures, (2) the overdetermined social positions occupied by readers of texts, and (3) the social context of use and interpretation. (p. 261)

As Gibson notes, when considered together these three sites underscore the profound importance of context because "the context of a practice or discourse is not the background necessary for analysis, it is the product or goal of analysis . . . analyses of the audience, then should rebuild the historical and social context – in essence the context of prior articulations – which structures a particular text/audience relationship" (p. 261). While Gibson's model subtly over-emphasizes the need to analyze the ways in which historically determined structures *constrain* the production of meaning, that is, induce audience *passivity*, what would an ethnography that historicized *resistance* against domination reveal? How can our knowledge of the historical formation of reading publics code particular leisure practices as "resistance" far before feminist ethnographers arrive in the field eager to discover women's everyday acts of resistance? What new light can the history of colonial modernities in the Third World shed on our understanding of global women audiences' consumption of Western media? In the case of romance reading in India, my project's ethnographic exploration of Indian women's interpretive agency was enriched by accounting for the impact of colonial reading histories on postcolonial leisure practices.

Although, on the surface, the circulation of romance novels in India offers evidence of global/Western media's economic power to become *present* in non-Western settings, in a historical sense, women's consumption of "trashy romances" in postcolonial India can be traced to the resistance the Indian reading public expressed against nineteenth-century British colonial elites' project of civilization

for the colonies. The sheer volume of print culture's material artifacts in urban spaces – hardcover fiction displayed in the windows of plush chain bookstores, magazines hung outside small bookstores in busy strip shopping areas, brightly-colored comics laid out on vendors' carts at train stations, and faded, damaged paperbacks spread out on pavements by used booksellers – offers a glimpse of the vibrancy and range of leisure reading practices in postcolonial India. Urban Indian women's contemporary English-language romance reading, coexisting alongside other reading practices, is historically linked to the arrival of print technology, the establishment of colonial educational institutions, the introduction and dissemination of the English language, and the importing of British novels into eighteenth- and nineteenth-century colonial India. Together, these political and economic events marked the ushering in of colonial modernity, the triggering of new forms of national consciousness, and the creation of reading publics in British India (Dharwadker, 1997; Joshi, 1998; Paddikal, 1993; Viswanathan, 1989).

Historicizing questions of Western domination that have preoccupied media scholars' writings on cultural imperialism in the post-World War II era, Joshi (1998) excavates data on urban Indians' reading preferences in the mid-to-late nineteenth century to "uncover the complicated processes at work in the transmission of culture between Britain and India" (p. 198). Questioning the politics of colonial histories that yield bland narratives of "imperial zealots" and "compliant natives," Joshi argues that an excessive emphasis on British imperial policies and pronouncements has concealed a more complex portrait of cross-cultural exchange that was taking place on the ground in colonial India. Combining the methodological insights of the history of the book and the sociology of reading, she attempts to document urban Indians' selective appropriation and consumption of British literature during colonialism, a process that challenges unidimensional propositions about Western cultural conquest in nineteenth-century India.

Following the establishment of the English Education Act of 1835 by Baron Macaulay, who proposed that English language and literature would be instrumental in creating a "class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect," British book imports to India gradually increased, and between 1850 and 1900, printed matter from Britain constituted almost 95 percent of all book imports into India (Joshi, 1998, p. 207). Initially, the colonial government encouraged publishers and booksellers in Britain to produce and export paperback editions to India by offering financial incentives. Gradually, as English-language literacy spread throughout urban Indian centers of commerce and politics, the growing numbers of readers in India became a highly lucrative market for British publishers. Colonial policies that elevated the English language over vernacular languages and the subsequent steady flow of printed material from Britain into India point to the potentially powerful effects of cultural and economic imperialism. However, Joshi argues that archival records of import statistics maintained during colonialism document

the conditions of the colonial market, not the precise content of this market or the "archaeology of consumption" that emerged due to the creative agency expressed by Indian readers.

Turning to reading data contained within book advertisements and book reviews published in Indian newspapers between 1861 and 1881, Joshi demonstrates that contrary to the elitist/ethnocentric model of citizenship propagated in colonial education policies, urban Indians did not seek out those novels the colonial administration listed as ideal instruments to inculcate the best "English" values among the natives:

> For one, the "good" English novels that were part of the colonial curriculum and were entrusted with creating an Indian who was English in "taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect" were in practice not the novels sought out by Indian readers for leisure reading. The canon of popular literature and the books most avidly and spontaneously consumed by Indian readers were increasingly disjunct from those prescribed by the Department of Public Instruction. (p. 204)

Throughout the colonial period, Indian readers avidly sought out sensational, gothic, and melodramatic serial novels – middle-brow and pulp fiction – rather than novels authored by Dickens, Austen, Eliot, Thackeray, Meredith, and the Brontes, which the colonial elites held in high esteem. Rejecting the confining codes of high realism in "good" English novels, Indian readers enthusiastically consumed anti-realist literary forms because these fictional genres shared a symbolic and structural affinity with older Indian literary forms, and as such "paradoxically bridged the gulf between the premodern world and modernity" (p. 213). These anti-realist tales that were reminiscent of pre-modern Indian tales, myths, and epics permitted Indian readers entry into their fantasy worlds with few cross-cultural restrictions. Furthermore, numerous books of such minor authors as G. W. M. Reynolds, Marion Crawford, Marie Corelli, and G. P. R. James were translated into Marathi, Hindi, Urdu, Bengali, Tamil, Kannada, and Telugu, thus reaching a much wider audience of Indian readers than the populace that could read in English. Joshi argues that ultimately, on probing the interstices between colonial policies and native readers' responses, scholars will have to acknowledge that the success of the novel and the emergence of the leisure reading public in India are rooted in the "failure of British high culture to penetrate fully the Indian marketplace of ideas" (p. 216). In Joshi's historical analysis of colonial interventions into India's reading culture, Indian readers' subtle yet significant practices of counterproduction became evident in their selective appropriation of specific forms of colonial modernity that could be easily assimilated into pre-existing indigenous imaginary landscapes.

What if my project's analysis of leisure reading moved from one historical site, which precipitated cross-cultural negotiations between West and non-West, to another historical moment in India's reading culture, one that points to the contentious debates that took place over gender, class, and women's consumption

of pulp fiction *within* Indian communities? As Priya Joshi's work demonstrates, the Indian reading public's tastes for fiction subtly subverted the priorities of colonial imperatives to a certain degree. However, as fiction reading spread rapidly in the early part of the twentieth century, urban Indian readers' voracious appetite for pulp novels did not go unnoticed by elite Indian male intellectuals, who were at the vanguard of creating a nationalist, anti-colonial culture for the Indian middle classes. In the southern state of Tamilnadu, a flood of novels, including adaptations and translations of popular British detective, romance, and melodrama series fiction, deluged Tamil society in the mid-1910s. Analyzing editorials, essays, and advertisements pertaining to fiction reading in Tamil periodicals between 1910 and 1930, Venkatachalapathy (1997) documents the reception accorded to vernacular fiction that closely imitated the styles of Western fiction among Tamil community leaders, writers, poets, and politicians.

Venkatachalapathy notes that Indian male public intellectuals expressed alarm and deep concern for the damaging effects that fiction reading would have on the average "gullible" reader, who supposedly lacked the critical skills to distinguish between fantasy and reality. Arguing that serial fiction would destroy Indian culture, these intellectuals argued that newly available popular pulp novels would only encourage unbridled Western materialism, corrupt spirituality, promote the use of poor language, and eventually limit the range of vocabulary used in Indian prose and poetry. One leading Tamil writer, who had no reservations about the impact of cheap novels on Tamil literary production, wrote unequivocally: "Contemporary novels spread the habits, customs, and attitudes of foreign countries and send the Tamil people tumbling into the abyss of immorality. The Tamil people who know not the true novel are gobbling up this trash like fowls eating termites" (quoted in Venkatachalapathy, 1997, p. 59).

Drawing attention to the gendered discourse that characterized intellectuals' strident criticism of fiction reading, Venkatachalapathy writes that the most scathing comments in Tamil periodicals were reserved for the devastating impact sensational escapist narratives would have on *Indian women*, and hence the very moral fabric of a newly emerging national Hindu culture. As novels were published in increasing numbers and women flocked to read them, discourse in Tamil periodicals on women's fiction reading became deeply implicated within Indian elite males' fears over the unshackling of Indian women's sexuality by colonial modernity, a contaminating force that had the potential to fracture the essence of Hindu identity. In one text on Tamil womanhood, a prominent Tamil writer went so far as to entreat women not to physically "touch" these tales of titillation: "Young women should not be permitted to hear titillating stories, pseudo-novels, and other such stuff; nor should they even touch these books. Parents should take special care in this regard . . ." (quoted in Venkatachalapathy, 1997, p. 62). Furthermore, Tamil authors who reproduced the styles of Western pulp fiction in vernacular novels, defended their work by strategically deploying women's sexual subjectivity as the litmus test for claiming respectability:

"Dear readers, like my other novels this one too does not contain any repulsive aspects or words that are not fit to be read by chaste women" (quoted in Venkatachalapathy, 1997, p. 64). Following the agenda outlined by community leaders, elders in families, pandits, and officials in educational institutions began to forbid young women from reading fiction, and strove to prevent women's access to novels.

On shifting from one cross-cultural historical experience, which engendered the formation of an Indian reading public under conditions of Western domination, to another "internal" historical articulation, we see that Indian women readers struggled with the ideological authority of patriarchal discourses; ideas of besieged female sexuality and endangered Hindu morality became vehicles to convey male elites' passion for preserving the authenticity of indigenous culture. Middle-class Indian women's early leisure reading experiences thus represented a gendered form of resistance against structures of domination on two levels – against high culture Western modernity and against the Indian patriarchal power structure that sought to control "native" women. Together, these two contexts point to the intricate associational network of historical events and discourses that organize the trajectories of contemporary cultural phenomena.

On returning to my project's goal – investigating Indian women's pleasure in consuming imported English-language romance fiction in postcolonial India – we can infer from the above discussion that audience ethnographies cannot be coded as naive voyages of discovery or recovery that hinge only upon the empiricist desire to reveal "real" (and contemporary) women informants' oppositional forms of resistance. A thick ethnographic reconstruction of contemporary reading practices in India would have to acknowledge, at the outset, that fiction reading is embedded within and shaped by the historical constitution of the Western text/non-Western audience relationship in colonial India. Regardless of the kinds of empirical data I hoped to gather in the field, data that would be eventually analyzed as evidence of resistance, submission, or coping mechanisms, my discussion of the subject positions occupied by Indian women romance readers had to engage with prior historical articulations against Western imperialism and local patriarchy.

While an extended discussion of young Indian women's interpretations of Western romance fiction is not possible here, a few examples will suffice to illustrate how strategies of resistance or compliance in women's contemporary leisure practices are suffused with the legacies of historical articulations. Many young Indian women who participated in my ethnographic study argued that they resented their parents' and English teachers' repeated admonishments that they should read English-language high culture – Shakespeare, Wordsworth, and Jane Austen – to improve their reading comprehension and language skills. In discussions that were held away from the presence of teachers and parents, Indian women's "hidden transcripts" of resistance located romance reading within socially legitimate practices of literacy (Scott, 1990). Calculatedly invoking utilitarian, middle-class discourses of productive labor, some women insisted that

authority figures in their lives were ignorant of the redemptive and didactic qualities of formula fiction. Claiming instructional value in romance reading, these women suggested that new and difficult words, descriptions of far away lands, and details of material life in Western romance novels trained them for careers, marriage, and cosmopolitan life in a rapidly modernizing India. Furthermore, in defense of their romance reading as a culturally permissible ritual, some women claimed a seamless affinity between Western narratives of romance and the elaborate traditions of erotic love and courtship in Indian (Hindu and Islamic) poetry and mythology.

Speaking to the gendered aspects of women's fiction reading, many concerned parents, elders, and teachers cast young women's romance reading as a transgressive practice that flouted codes of middle-class feminine respectability. Negotiating parental expectations of appropriate behavior at home, a few young women revealed that they covered romance fiction with newspaper, read in the privacy of their rooms at night, and ensured that their novels were never casually exposed in living and dining room areas. For some Indian women, much like the midwestern sixth grade girls in Finders' compelling study of underground literacies, these elaborate ruses to hide their novels from teachers and parents became the basis for intense allegiance with other women in their groups (Finders, 1997). Finders' ethnography of girls' covert and extracurricular literacy practices shows that complicated expressions of agency and intricate power plays related to reading and writing characterize the subculture of feminine adolescence. Documenting girls' "literate underlife," multiple practices of literacy that disrupted sanctioned literacies recognized by authorities, Finders argues that reading and displaying specific magazines and books, writing notes, and preferences for sharing or not sharing written assignments were a crucial means for traversing boundaries between rebellion and conformity. Engaging the histories of Indian women's postcolonial practices of "literate underlife" deepened my empirical observations of the ambivalent ways in which they maneuvered romance reading to ally with and oppose discourses of authority.

Othering the West: Sexuality, Gender, and Agency

How can ethnographic audience studies in non-Western locations affirm the promise of robust interdisciplinarity? How can feminist audience research on non-Western women's consumption of Western popular culture enrich and modify existing paradigms of First World–Third World relations? How can historicized research on women's encounters with discourses of tradition and modernity challenge the bifurcated ways in which scholars have approached resistance and compliance? Revealing the cross-cutting and overlapping texture of multiple social identities, women audiences' discourses of resistance can sometimes become complicit with the very ideologies that sanction control over female sexuality. As the ensuing discussion of my research illustrates, non-Western women audiences'

resistance against Western media narratives can simultaneously announce allegiance to another power structure – the troubling resurgence of patriarchal nationalisms based in religious fundamentalism. Identifying one of the greatest paradoxes of the current epoch, Castells (1997, pp. 27–32) observes that the age of globalization, standardization, and universalism is also the age of fragmented and heterogeneous cultural and ethnic nationalisms. By accounting for questions of cross-cultural reception to Western media images in the midst of nationalist discourses, feminist audience studies has much to contribute to ongoing interdisciplinary concerns with Orientalism and Occidentalism, and hence to our knowledge of the discursive relations between East and West.

Edward Said's controversial *Orientalism*, a pioneering literary contribution to postcolonial theory, sought to map out Europe's discursive construction of the Middle East (and the non-West) during Western colonial expansion. Deeply influenced by Foucault's arguments about the inextricable links among representation, ideology, and cultural/economic practices, Said explicitly approached his work as a political intervention into the relations of domination and hierarchy between East and West. Describing Orientalism as a discursive body of knowledge that facilitated Europe's colonization of Asia, Africa, and the Middle East, Said (1978) defines Orientalism, a regime of hierarchical representations that originated during colonial expansion, as a "Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient" (p. 7). Since the publication of *Orientalism* in the late seventies, numerous scholars in anthropology, history, comparative literature, film studies, and Women's Studies have drawn inspiration from Said's theoretical insights to deconstruct Othered/Orientalist representations of the non-West in a wide range of Western cultural texts.

Gradually, some postcolonial critics also began to modify, challenge, and revamp Said's paradigm of discursive domination because it subtly reproduced the epistemology of colonial discourse. As these critics argued, Orientalism was a binary, bifurcated mapping of the world into the stable oppositional categories of East–West, representer–represented, and powerful–powerless. Literary critic Porter (1994) writes that in his eagerness to confront Western hegemonic discourses, Said asserted the unified character of diverse European texts and experiences at the expense of counterhegemonic European voices that lingered at the periphery of the colonial empire. Porter suggests that Said's diagnosis of Orientalism was predicated on the very same problematic representational techniques he identified in Western images of the Middle East; over-generalization of diverse experiences, lack of attention to contradictions within European texts, and homogenization of texts across time and space. Locating the traffic in theory within the currency of academic capital, Aijaz (1994) proposes that Third World intellectuals seeking to position themselves within "hip" First World discourses on marginality (the race–gender matrix) have promoted Orientalism/colonialism as their legitimate badges of oppression. The warm reception accorded to Orientalism and related postcolonial scholarship, according to such critics, has more to do with the petty struggles for legitimacy within the academy rather

than a radical politics that is genuinely interested in dismantling the West's cultural and economic domination of the world.

Notwithstanding such cynical musings about the institutionalization of postcolonial studies in the Western academy, other scholars have pointed out that Said's textual analysis of Orientalism in literature and art elides crucial questions of the colonized subject's agency. Examining discourses and practices of Othering *within* metropolitan China that were targeted at the Miao, a rural ethnic minority community living on the periphery of China's economy, Schein (2000) writes, "Pitting East and West as opposites in a dyadic, but unequal relation stopped short at the conclusion that the East is muted and therefore, by extension, rendered incapable of othering" (p. 103). Schein suggests that in accepting Said's formulation of Orientalism, scholars may unwittingly reproduce the East as a mute, passive participant in history, one that is incapable of producing or negotiating its own discourses of power and hierarchy. In her analysis of Japanese imperialism, Robertson (1995) points out that such critiques as Orientalism "privilege Euro-American intellectual and theoretical trends as universal and obfuscate and neutralize the histories and legacies of non-Western imperialisms and associated 'othering' practices" (p. 973). Furthermore, as Schein (2000) and Nader (1989) argue, Said's analysis of Orientalism fails to explore how gender – the trope of the feminine – becomes a compelling cultural hinge of Otherness in Western views of the Eastern world and vice versa.

Underscoring the disturbing tendency in social science media research to ignore the analytical insights of the humanities, Said's work has been rarely, if ever, discussed in empirical studies of non-Western audiences or in international communication debates that consider the impact of Western media on the Third World. For example, Said's analysis of the imperial West's proliferating images and products, discursive representations that predated the global ubiquity of contemporary Western consumer culture is conspicuously missing in John Tomlinson's critique of "hypodermic needle" models of cross-cultural reading and viewing practices. Although Tomlinson (1992) examines the implications of nationalism for media reception in the Third World, he does not raise the possibility that cultural imperialism can be cross-cut and mediated by Occidentalism, an obvious by-product of the non-Western world's steady exposure to Western media.

Defining Occidentalism as ideologically related to Orientalism, Chen (1995) writes, "Orientalism has been accompanied by instances of what might be termed Occidentalism, a discursive practice that, by constructing its Western Other, has allowed the Orient to participate actively and with indigenous creativity in the process of self appropriation, even after being appropriated and constructed by Western Others" (pp. 4–5). Chen notes that the seemingly unified discursive practice of Occidentalism exists in a paradoxical relationship to the discursive practices of Orientalism, and in fact, shares with it many ideological techniques and strategies. Urging scholars to examine the mobile meanings and strategic uses of Occidentalism in specific locations, Chen argues that non-Western

discourses on the Western world can become a means to enable liberation or oppression depending on the context within which it is articulated. Distancing himself from postcolonial paradigms that promote Orientalism and cultural imperialism as unified discourses of uninterrupted and homogenous power, Chen writes that Occidentalism, in some cases, can even become a metaphor for liberation from indigenous forms of oppression.

Pointing to the little knowledge we have of how the East constructs the West, Nader (1989) comments that the West has been accessible to non-Western peoples through a wide variety of global media forms, but the contours of Occidentalist discourse still remain a mystery. Lamenting the neglect of ethno-Occidentalism, that is, essentialist renderings of the West by members of the "primitive" non-Western societies that anthropologists have studied, Carrier (1992) argues that although fieldworkers have informally recorded constructions of the West among "natives," such data has rarely entered the world of published scholarly work. Carrier writes that non-Western informants' impressions of Western culture have remained scribbles in researchers' fieldnotes because this data was deemed to be marginal to the larger enterprise of producing knowledge on Western modernity's impact on Third World societies. Building on recent interdisciplinary responses to Said's arguments, feminist media ethnographies, which explore the ways in which non-Western audiences read and (mis)read representations of the West, can offer significant contributions to questions of cultural imperialism, gender, and audiences' agency.

My reception research suggests that the mechanisms underlying the production of Orientalist discourse – homogenizing, distancing, and exoticizing the racial object of desire – were also deeply implicated within non-Western women's descriptions of Western culture. Young women readers' interpretations of Western romances certainly showed some evidence of Western media's hegemonic authority; however, Indian women's Occidentalist descriptions of Western culture also drew on Hindu nationalist ideologies to construct the West as immoral, inferior, and homogenous. My discussion of Indian women's views of the West and white women, intertextual interpretations that oscillated between the "fantasy" of romance fiction and the "reality" of the Western world, does not intend to resurrect dyadic, binary ideas of East versus West. Rather, I want to demonstrate the self-conscious, historically specific and contingent ways in which Indian women readers deployed a specific form of Occidentalism – a pre-colonial legacy of Othering the West in India – to explain their tremendously productive responses to Western popular culture.

Middle-class urban Indian women's fascination for modernity disguised as Western material culture became apparent in their strong dislike for and rejection of mythological/historical romance novels. Most readers expressed their categorical preferences for romance fiction that described contemporary culture in the United States, the United Kingdom, and other metropolitan tourist locations. As Mallika explained, she found the contextual details in historical romance novels "boring, bland, and distracting" and besides, as other readers

claimed, in their rapidly modernizing urban milieu in India, they were better off learning about the codes, practices, and symbols of Western cosmopolitan life. In a style reminiscent of consumer advertising (beauty products, food, and tourism), the "favorite" novels that many readers recommended to me were filled with details of gourmet food, designer clothing, bathing rituals, cruises and vacations, landscaped gardens, and expensive homes. Young women strongly identified with the consumerist middle-class white heroine whose material and romantic fantasies were realized as she is gradually incorporated into the upper-class world of the affluent hero. Speaking in sharply gender-inflected narratives, some women informants argued that Western-style consumerism mapped onto the bodies of white heroines in romance fiction allowed them to pursue individualistic "selfish" pleasure and thus gain temporary respite from the selflessness their families and communities expected from them as dutiful, honorable daughters.

Although Indian women expressed unqualified admiration for Western consumerism, their interpretations of the West shifted when they began sharing their opinions on courtship and sexuality in Western romance fiction. Explaining their reasons for turning to these novels for relaxation and entertainment, some women insisted that these "simple" stories allowed them escape from the restrictive norms of middle-class Hindu femininity that constrained the possibilities of romance in their own lives. I soon learned that Indian women readers' identification of romance fiction as "simple" was an insider classification that had little to do with my own judgment of these books as enacting a relatively simple and standard formula. Gently pointing out my mistake, several readers patiently clarified that the stories in Western romance fiction were simple because of the marked absence of secondary characters – parents, community members, family, and clergy – who exerted pressure on the heroes and heroines to conform to traditions or social conventions. Contrasting the unbounded quality of white heroines' pursuit of romance with the complexities and tensions of accommodating religious, class, and ethnic boundaries in their own lives, some women insisted that courtship in Western culture was a matter of free choice. Individuals in Western culture, some women claimed, had no obligations to family or kin, and did not have to fear isolation, exile or loss of family support because the penalties for disregarding tradition were non-existent or minimal. Seamlessly conflating fiction with reality, Indian women readers produced Occidentalism here through their construction of romance novels as transparent representations that reflected the West as a homogenous cultural space where social differences and hierarchies were invisible and easily surmounted.

If the fiction of romance in the West as a practice that transcended socio-economic hierarchies proved to be convincing to women, interestingly, they scornfully dismissed other ingredients of fictive representations in the very same popular novels as unrealistic fantasy. Women's skeptic evaluations of Western romance fiction as perpetuating "false" and inaccurate images, which distorted the disturbing truths they knew about the West, revolved around white heroines'

virginal persona and the requisite happy endings that promised to last forever. Challenging the veracity of fictional descriptions of white heroines' sexual innocence, several women were surprised to hear that romance fiction was popular among women in many Western countries – this particular piece of fiction, according to them, bore little resemblance to their knowledge of "real" white women's sexuality. Several young women argued that, contrary to the representations of virginal white heroines in romance fiction, "real" white women were immoral and sexually promiscuous. In women's ideological distilling of Occidentalist difference, white women, in their essentialized and intractable Otherness, became problematic symbols of unregulated Western modernity.

Similarly, the happy endings in romance fiction became another site of Othering where women intertextually referred to "credible" sources of reality (the news, relatives living in the West, and travelers' stories) to foreground their concerns about the lack of morality in Western culture. Some readers argued that the "objective" news information they had about AIDS, divorces, teenage pregnancies, and child abuse in many Western nations exposed the happy ending in romance fiction as pure farce, a mere figment of authors' imagination. Women's discussions about moral chaos in Western culture were frequently accompanied by contrasting statements about the superior stability of Indian culture – Indian marriages lasted forever and Indian families were close, supportive, and united. Previous research shows that such constructions of the West as culturally/morally inferior exist across regional, ethnic, and class boundaries in India. In her ethnography of Indian viewers' responses to television, feminist anthropologist Mankekar (1999) recounts that working-class and lower-middle-class viewers who lived in and around New Delhi in North India passionately defended India's greatest strengths as located in the loving and enduring Indian family and the loyal Indian wife and mother. Mankekar's informants asserted their national identity by comparing the superior quality of moral life in India to the immoral and decadent West.

My informants' Occidentalist discourse, perceptually filtered through their immersion in Western popular literature, offers a counterpoint to Said's discussion of Orientalism. As critics of Orientalism have suggested, we have to account for the possibility that the West may become the Othered object of its own Others. What are the implications of Indian romance readers' Othering of the West for debates over cultural imperialism? Demonstrating the importance of approaching cultural imperialism as multi-layered and multi-dimensional, Indian women's responses demonstrated the power of Western culture at the level of fantasies related to transnational consumerism, but on another level, in the realm of the private sphere – family, kinship, and moral character – the West became an object of contempt and scorn. However, before feminist ethnographers prematurely celebrate non-Western women audiences' critical observations about Western culture as resistance against cultural imperialism, they would have to "radically contextualize" the oppositional content of such Occidentalist responses (Ang, 1996, p. 70).

Advocating for deep contextualization in ethnography, Carrier (1992) writes that if scholars want to avoid essentializing concepts such as Occidentalism, what we discover in fieldwork must be situated against the backdrop of local structures and processes: "Attention to relationships will help sensitize researchers to just how a particular society is linked to the larger world. Just as important, it will help motivate researchers to recognize the incongruities in what they observe" (p. 206). On applying Carrier's advice about deep contextualization to Indian women's statements about the West, we can begin to understand the contradictory impulses in audiences' resistance to structures of power. When situated against the social fabric of elders', parents', and teachers' discourses of disapproval, my informants' Occidentalist responses can be interpreted as a strategic form of emotional justification. While they readily agreed to interviews, some women were eager to reassure me (and other authority figures) that their absorption and pleasure in reading romance fiction would not transform them into sexually active "white women." Many women spoke about the subversive tactics – hiding romance novels in textbooks, reading books when parents were away at work, and combining visits to lending libraries with other womanly/domestic chores – they had devised so they could avoid constant surveillance. Reading romance fiction thus allowed these Indian women to partially resist norms of chaste Hindu middle-class femininity, yet in order to minimize and distance their feelings of guilt they turned to Occidentalism. Transposing promiscuous sexuality onto white women's bodies becomes a strategic defense to repress feelings of guilt, experience moral superiority, and respond to charges that these sexually explicit narratives could corrupt their minds.

Going beyond the immediate milieu of their experiences within families and communities, women's Occidentalism is also related to the ideological context of middle-class Hindu nationalism. Over the past decade, the exclusionary myths of religious Hindu fundamentalism have gained a remarkable foothold among the Hindu middle classes. Tensions around religion, communalism, and culture have become highly public issues in India, especially since the early nineties with the outbreak of violence and rioting between Hindus and Muslims during the Babri Masjid incident (Appadurai & Breckenridge, 1995; Basu et al., 1993; Basu, 1996; Nandy et al., 1995; Rajagopal, 1996; Setalwad, 1996). The Babri Masjid or Ramajanmaboomi incident took place on December 6, 1992, when a mob of Hindus belonging to various political and religious groups destroyed a mosque in the city of Ayodhya in Uttar Pradesh. Religious leaders, who coordinated the destructive campaign, claimed that the mosque had been built by Muslim invaders on a sacred site that was the original birthplace of the Hindu god Ram (Basu et al., 1993, p. viii). Since the Babri Masjid incident, the Bharatiya Janata Party (the Hindu nationalist party), and other associated Hindu revivalist organizations have been gaining political power and popularity among Hindu communities. Promoting Occidentalist views of the West, Hindu fundamentalist politicians and clergy have celebrated the enduring chastity and fidelity of the loyal Indian wife and mother, whose virtue, they have argued, distinguishes India from the West.

Analyzing contemporary Hindu nationalism in India and its continuities with nineteenth- and twentieth-century anti-colonial struggles, feminist scholars have critiqued the patriarchal representation of Indian womanhood that male social reformers strategically constructed to counter colonialism (Kandiyoti, 1991; Katrak, 1989; Mazumdar, 1994). Eager to challenge British colonizers' Orientalist descriptions of Indian culture as barbaric and heathen, upper-caste Indian male reformers began to fashion a rhetoric of defense that emphasized cultural traditions, gender relations, and family values. As carriers of tradition and symbols of India's resilient national spirit in the face of numerous invasions, middle-class Indian women were glorified as devoted mothers and wives. Chatterjee (1990) locates the idealization of middle-class Hindu women as pure/virtuous within the ideology of Hindu nationalism, which proposed a powerful distinction between "inner/outer worlds," and correspondingly between "home, private/material world, public." Seen as part of home, the private world, Indian women became symbols of this unpolluted inner life, and hence the ground for establishing difference from Western society. Even more importantly, as Chatterjee notes, the desexualization of the bourgeois Hindu woman in post-independent India was achieved by displacing active female sexuality onto European and local racially and economically marginalized Others. The purity of the upper-caste Hindu woman was pitted against two opposing images – the vulgar and sexually accessible low-caste, poor Indian woman (Rege, 1995) and the immoral and sexually licentious Western woman (Chatterjee, 1990). Middle-class Indian women readers' Occidentalist mapping of promiscuous sexuality on white women's bodies is thus a pernicious legacy of nationalist ideology that continues to inflect numerous vernacular popular culture accounts of wholesome Indian romances, families, and communities.

Indian women's reliance on Occidentalist discourses to defuse criticism of their romance reading and declare their loyal alliance to their own culture reveals the contradictory qualities of audiences' resistance. From a feminist standpoint, Indian women's contrastive strategy of Othering the West is fraught with contradictions; seeking distance from the "promiscuity" of white women reiterates the very forms of control over their sexuality that they seek to disturb and rupture. Occidentalism and Orientalism are thus discourses of power that ultimately serve as mechanisms of control over women in the *West and the East*; both these discourses of domination use the comparative method of describing women's inferior status in the East or West to convince "native" women that they should be content with the status quo because they are "better off" or superior to "those" women. Discussing the ways in which covert and overt nationalisms deploy cultural comparison (Orientalist and Occidentalist) to control women, Nader (1989) writes, "Misleading cultural comparisons support contentions of positional superiority, which divert attention from the processes, which are controlling women in both worlds" (p. 323). To date, Occidentalism may not have the global economic power of Orientalism; however, it does have power within specific national contexts where dominant religious groups gain power by promoting a

return to the glorious days of tradition, a period when the nation in the guise of the "native" woman was unpolluted by imperialism.

The Politics of Representation and Resistance

How can concerned critics advance the field of media studies in a manner that does not silently reiterate racial/neocolonial power and privilege? To what extent does the promotion or marginalization of specific research agendas, at the expense of paying attention to the locations and ideological positions from which we speak, legitimize the hegemony of the West? These questions demand a candid assessment of academic fashion's significant impact on emergent intellectual developments and debates. The interrelated ingredients that drive academic fashion in the First World – the economy of celebrity stardom and fan clubs, a market-driven university system, a promotional ethos of worship and attack, and the hierarchical circulation of cultural capital – can often militate against cultural and media studies' fundamental interests in encouraging scholarship that is sensitive to global geopolitics (Moran, 1998). Citing acute self-reflexivity in knowledge production as one of the driving forces in a postcolonial approach to communication and rhetoric, Shome (1996) urges scholars to continuously situate academic discourses within the larger political and economic practices of nations:

> What is the ideology that operates in us that makes research agenda A seem more significant than research agenda B? How are we always already "interpellated" into examining A but not B? What does that interpellation say about our role in reproducing and participating in the hegemonic global domination of the rest by the West? (p. 46)

Examining the challenges that globalization poses for research practices and theorization in feminist communication scholarship, Hegde (1998) writes, "Research is an expression of our location in a world connected by lines of power and cultural asymmetry" (p. 285). Taken together, Shome and Hegde point to the political critique of knowledge as the foundation for creating an academic space where scholars interrogate the modes through which we establish disciplinary authority. By unpacking the assumptions that invisibly guide the trajectories of our research practices and rejecting monologic models of writing and speaking, media scholars can lay "the epistemic basis for a genuine multiculturalism" (Hegde, 1998, p. 275) that facilitates the democratization of knowledge production.

This essay is one effort towards "decentering" and foregrounding global and racial hegemony in recent efforts to shape agendas for future critical media studies research. Predicting the premature death of audience studies because we believe the field has produced "enough" knowledge of media reception or because we cannot imagine better ways of conducting empirical research only reiterates

a limited vision of multiculturalism that does not question power differentials. Recognizing the urgency of "outing" the silent ways in which racial privilege permeates popular media, Shome (2000) calls upon communication scholars to deconstruct the ways in which "whiteness remains the organizing principle of the social fabric and yet remains masked because of the normativity that this principle acquires in the social imaginary" (p. 367). Destabilizing the invisible authority of whiteness, as Shome argues, can perhaps propel whites to begin acknowledging their privileges as members of a globally dominant group, even if they accrue these privileges unintentionally.

Similarly, I suggest that feminist media critics in the First World (regardless of racial/gender affiliations) must be aware of which specific audiences' voices and experiences we have recorded before we begin to sing requiems for the audience or recommend a shift to other "more important" objects of study. Research in audience studies has barely scratched the surface of the exploding mediascape in numerous non-Western locations where "global audiencehood" (Juluri, 1998) is implicated simultaneously within a range of Western media *and* local, vernacular cultural productions. Highlighting the widespread global media presence of Western nations, a phenomenon that we have only begun to investigate, Said (1993) comments, "Rarely before in human history has there been so massive an intervention of force and ideas from one culture to another as there is today from America to the rest of the world" (p. 319). Recuperating the insights of postmodernism and postcolonialism for a more nuanced feminist analysis of women's lived experiences in the era of globalization, Hegde (1998) writes, "The commitment to globalize the theoretical scope in communication needs an engagement with the meaning of experience" (p. 287).

Rather than stretching, adding, or extending the canon whereby the problematic contours of the canon itself remain unchanged, how can audience studies in non-Western locations resuscitate the practice of feminist media ethnography? Drawing from constructive critiques of audience research, feminist ethnographers can avoid the uncritical reproduction of well-rehearsed, banal mantras of resistance, agency, and the active audience. A feminist rethinking of audience research in postcolonial contexts would emphasize the vital importance of engaging local historical discourses as a constitutive element of women's national/gender identities. Historicizing middle-class Indian women's romance reading shows us that contemporary cultural practices in urban India are shaped by and articulated within the ideological contexts of colonialism and nationalism. On the one hand, despite the obvious evidence of cultural imperialism that could be inferred from the ubiquitous material presence of global Western media, Indian women readers' consumption of imported serial romance fiction belongs to a history of Indians' subtle resistance against the civilizing mission of colonial high culture. On the other hand, unlike Indian men, the reading of pulp fiction for Indian women, who are interpellated as symbols of purity in nationalist ideology, invoked resistance against two structures of power – against colonialism and religious patriarchy. The feminist critical enterprise in the non-Western world,

as Chow (1993) points out, has to contend with more than the legacies of colonialism alone, "While for the non-Western world that something is imperialism, for the feminist it is also patriarchy" (p. 59).

Moreover, a critical feminist ethnography of media reception must acknowledge that the "process of weaving in and out of gendered systems of meaning is punctuated with contestation and resistance, as well as acquiescence" (Hegde, 1998, p. 288). Outlining an anti-essentialist approach to studying women's experiences, Hegde writes, "It is important when portraying the material conditions of cultural others that we do not impose a false unity by essentializing a cultural core and thereby produce lives as artifacts or, for example, romanticize the woman as victim (Hegde, 1998, p. 289). Along with exploring women's resistance to global commodity culture, feminist media ethnographies should also document the constraints on women's agency, that is, our analyses must interrogate how equally important and sometimes dominant class/religious/national identities are woven together in the subjective space that constitutes "woman." In India, as well as in other postcolonial locations, religious nationalism, which draws from the gender ideologies of nineteenth-century nationalism, is masquerading as a grassroots response against Western imperialism and globalization. In Indian women's active engagement with virginal white heroines as false reflections of real white women's promiscuous sexuality, romance reading becomes a site of mis-identification and Othering; these popular culture texts provoked readers to resurrect the binary configurations of East and West, which are embedded in Occidentalist *and* Orientalist ideologies. Although middle-class Indian women's efforts to read romance novels signified resistance against norms that attempted to control women's sexual pleasure and agency, articulating their resistance through an emphasis on the immorality of "foreign/Western women" simultaneously endorsed Occidentalist Hindu nationalism.

For postcolonial feminist ethnographers, scholarship in a multicultural context thus cannot be limited to the deconstruction of Western imperialism alone if the goal of our audience research in the non-West is to engage politically with difference – across nations, but also within the hegemonic context of the nation itself. Navigating the complex relationality between local culture and global media flows, postcolonial feminism's deconstruction of Eurocentrism and the emancipatory patina of globalization must include a vigorous critique of nationalism's limited promises of salvation (Shohat, 1998, p. 52). Theories of the "Big, Bad West" cannot explain why Indian women, who repeatedly expressed a desire for freedom and escape from the demands of family and community, should resort to nationalism's Occidentalist renderings of the West. Distinguishing themselves from "real" white women while identifying with white heroines, these readers insisted that romance reading was theoretical knowledge in the service of future matrimony (*not* for pre-marital sex). Radical contextualization of audience ethnographies in postcolonial locations thus involves probing the problematic ideologies of colonial regimes, neo-colonial economies, *and* local nationalisms. Challenging nationalism along with imperialism becomes a crucial task for

postcolonial feminist media ethnographers because "native chauvinism" (Dirlik, 1990, p. 401) with its regressive models of "native" women's identities and reversed binaries of "us" versus "them" only reproduces the epistemological legacies of colonial modernity.

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CHAPTER **SIXTEEN**

The Changing Nature of Audiences

From the Mass Audience to the Interactive Media User

Sonia Livingstone

Changing Media, Changing Audiences

Modern media and communication technologies possess a hitherto unprecedented power to encode and circulate symbolic representations. Throughout much of the world, though especially in industrialized countries, people routinely spend a considerable proportion of their leisure hours with the mass media, often more than they spend at work or school or in face-to-face communication. Moreover, leisure is increasingly focused on the media-rich home, a significant shift in a matter of a single generation. Despite the popular anxieties that flare up sporadically over media content and regulation, it is easy to take the media for granted precisely because of their ubiquity as background features of everyday life. Yet it is through this continual engagement with the media that people are positioned in relation to a flood of images and information both about worlds distant in space or time and about the world close to home, and this has implications for our domestic practices, our social relationships, and our very identity. This chapter overviews current debates within audience research, arguing that although developments in technology may threaten to overtake these debates, audience research will be better prepared to understand the changing media environment by adopting a historical framework, looking back the better to look forward. But let us begin with a scenario from the future:

> You'll go to the electronics store and buy a "home gateway" box the size of today's VCR for maybe $300. You'll hook it to a broadband cable, then connect it to your wired or wireless home network. You'll call the cable provider and sign up for its custom-TV digital recording service for maybe $50 a month. You'll hang a flat plasma display . . . on the living-room wall and connect it to a wall socket that also

> taps into the home grid. You'll put modest displays in other rooms, too. As you leave the bedroom you'll say "off" to its screen, and as you enter the kitchen you'll say, "Screen, show me my stock numbers." During a commercial you'll use a little wireless remote to instruct the hidden gateway box to find, download and play an original *Star Trek* episode. When the episode ends you'll grab the game controller off the coffee table, become Captain Kirk on the plasma screen and engage in a live, on-line dogfight in the Neutral Zone with an opponent from Tokyo. (Fischetti, 2001: 40)

Notwithstanding the hazards of attempting to predict the future, it is notable that such futuristic – or realistic – scenarios are becoming commonplace. Moreover, in certain respects, this quotation neatly illustrates what is, perhaps, happening to "the audience," at least in industrialized countries, my focus here. It reflects an already-present pressure to develop and market intelligent, personalized, flexible information and communication technologies that increasingly bring the outside world into the domestic space. These technologies converge on the electronic screen, while screens are themselves increasingly dispersed throughout the home. We are promised the satisfaction of our egocentric desires to have our individualistic tastes or fandom precisely catered for, whether on television, computer games, etc., thereby permitting us the satisfying shift from passive observer to active participant in a virtual world.

Contextualizing technological change in everyday life

There is a tension, however, between such visions of radical technological change and our knowledge of the slow-to-change conditions that underpin identity, sociality and community. Hence it is imperative to put media, especially new media, into context, so as to locate them within the social landscape, to map the changing media environment in relation to the prior communicative practices which, in turn, shape that environment. The very multiplicity of contextualizing processes undermines the simple account of the impacts of technology on society which circulate in popular discourses. The practices of our everyday lives, both material and symbolic, are dependent on structures of work, family, economy, nation, and cannot be so quickly overturned by technological change. For example, changes in disposable leisure time, in working practices or in the gendered division of domestic labor profoundly shape the ways in which new information and communication technologies diffuse through society and find a place in our daily lives.

Furthermore, given what we already know from today's technology, the above scenario leaves open some crucial questions. Where is everyone else in this scenario – the people we live with, the people who want to watch something other than *Star Trek*, who laugh us out of our pretence at being Captain Kirk or who, irritatingly, have lost the wireless remote? The history of researching mass communication is a history of how the mass mediated world relates to the social

world of the viewer and, even in the short history of the Internet, research has already moved beyond characterizing the supposedly autonomous on-line world towards exploring its complex connections with the off-line world (Slater, 2002). Surely, the social consequences of new technologies will be mediated through existing patterns of social interaction. Further, how does our protagonist know in this scenario that he or she likes *Star Trek*? We know we like it because that was what everyone watched on Wednesday evenings for years, so that it became embedded in our daily lives as we compared the different series with friends, laughed at the clothes, and followed the lives of the stars on the talk shows. For the generations with a common culture already established, this individually tailored future may be enticing. But how will the new generation establish content preferences in the first place, faced with an overwhelming range of unfamiliar choices? And once they've made their choice, how will they share the experience with others, drawing media into the common discourses of playground and office?

This is not to say that the media have no influence on society, but rather that such processes of influence are far more indirect and complex than popularly thought. Central to recent work on media audiences is an analysis of the ways in which people can be said to be active in shaping their media culture, contributing to the process of shaping or co-constructing their material and symbolic environments. Today, such research has two main foci, one centered on the contexts of media *use*, the other on the *interpretation* of media content. Though one or other of these foci tends to dominate the agenda at any point, it is assumed in this chapter that both are integral to an adequate theory of audiences. In adding a reflexive spin on the consequences of both social and technological change, Pertti Alasuutari (1999: 6) argues that "the audience" as a social phenomenon "out there" must be replaced by the recognition that the audience is "a discursive construct produced by a particular analytic gaze." Hence the analysis of audiences must also include the very discourses which construct people as audiences (or publics or markets, etc.), including "the audience's notions of themselves as the 'audience'" (p. 7).

History does not stand still

While in the main, media research restricts itself to the contemporary, it is clear that researchers are studying a moving target: what were once "new" media become familiar while yet newer media emerge. Changing social and cultural contexts also shape audience practices. Consider the shift from the physically contiguous mass spectatorship of the eighteenth-century theater or show to the spatially separated "virtual" mass of press and broadcasting audiences in the nineteenth and twentieth century. Even the half century of national television – which in the USA, Europe, and many other countries spans the period from the 1940s to the 1990s – has witnessed major social transformations, including world war, postwar austerity and then consumer boom, the unsettling conflicts of the sixties, the rise of free-market ideology and, now, *fin-de-siècle* uncertainty, these

affecting all aspects of society from economic globalization to the patterns of family life.

Yet, too often media researchers talk of "television" – and, by implication, "the television audience" – as if it were unchanging over its own history. Thus throughout the many decades of audience research, researchers have asked important questions about the uses of media, and about the effects of the media (McQuail, 1997). Yet audience research has shown too little inclination to seek a historical explanation for research findings, though this may help to explain the often unwelcome variation in findings. Only since the 1990s – or a little earlier in some countries – has "television" been so transformed by the expansion in channels, especially global and narrow-cast ones, by the crisis in public service – especially in Europe – and by the advent of new technologies such as the VCR and now digital television, that it has become obvious that specifically new questions are arising for the audience as much as for the medium (Becker & Schoenbach, 1989; Neuman, 1991). What will these changes mean for audience theory? And could it lead to a new sensitivity towards interpreting audience findings in relation to the specific period within which research studies are, or were, conducted?

Making audiences visible in media theory

Media theory has always been committed to the integrated analysis of production, texts, and audiences. While traditional approaches to mass communication analyze each as separate but interlinked elements in the linear flow of mediated meanings, cultural and critical approaches stress the interrelations of these elements in the (re)production of cultural meanings (Hall, 1980). But in practice it has too often been the case that the analysis of production and texts has been primary, while the interpretative activities of audiences has been neglected (Livingstone, 1998a). Audience research rectifies this tendency by fore-grounding the cultural contexts within which meanings are both encoded and decoded and acknowledging the importance of the socially shared (or diversified) aspects of those contexts. As Klaus Bruhn Jensen (1993: 26) argues:

> Reception analysis offers insights into the interpretive processes and everyday contexts of media use, where audiences rearticulate and enact the meanings of mass communication. The life of signs within modern society is in large measure an accomplishment of the audience.

Thus, audience research asks, how do the media (through institutional policy, genre conventions, modes of address, etc.) frame relations among people as one of "audience"? Indeed, do certain kinds of texts or technologies produce certain kinds of audience? Or, to put the opposite question, how do the social relations among people, at home, in the neighborhood or the nation, shape the communicative possibilities (electronic or otherwise) of those locales, enabling some and inhibiting others?

During the 1980s and 1990s, empirical audience research became prominent in media studies. I have argued that this success was due to the productive convergence of several traditions, within each of which compelling arguments led inexorably towards empirical research on audiences and, especially, their interpretive activities (Livingstone, 1998b). Indeed, for a while, the perception was that "the concept of audience is more importantly the underpinning prop for the analysis of the social impact of mass communication in general" (Allor, 1988: 217), and that the audience is "a potentially crucial pivot for the understanding of a whole range of social and cultural processes that bear on the central questions of public communication . . . [which are] essentially questions of culture" (Silverstone, 1990: 173).

Things move fast in audience studies, and one may now observe with some disquiet various attempts to retell this convergence as a linear, indeed canonical narrative in which audience reception studies provide a stepping stone in the rise of cultural studies (Alasuutari, 1999; Nightingale, 1996). As Vincent Mosco (1996: 251) observes, "cultural studies reminds political economy that the substance of its work, the analysis of communication, is rooted in the needs, goals, conflicts, failures and accomplishments of ordinary people aiming to make sense of their lives, even as they confront an institutional and symbolic world that is not entirely of their own making." Important though this claim is, by subordinating audience research to the heroic narrative of cultural studies, audience research has in turn become separated from some of the diverse interdisciplinary traditions that stimulated its development, and whose potential contributions have yet to be explored fully. So, let us review briefly the central arguments of these diverse traditions.

Multiple traditions of audience research

We may begin by noting the crucial influence of literary and semiotic theory for the understanding of popular culture. Particularly, in developing the concepts of *the implied reader* or *model reader*, reception–aesthetics theorized how texts anticipated, invited, and so were fitted for, readers with a specific interpretive repertoire of codes, presuppositions, and interpretive frames. Thus Umberto Eco (1979) stressed how readers must strive to realize the necessarily virtual meaning of a text by drawing on their own cultural resources during the process of interpretation. Or, as Wolfgang Iser (1980: 106) put it, "the work itself cannot be identical with the text or with its actualization but must be situated somewhere between the two . . . As the reader passes through the various perspectives offered by the text, and relates the different views and patterns to one another, he sets the work in motion, and so sets himself in motion too."

A parallel argument, encapsulated by Stuart Hall's (1980) *encoding/decoding* paper, began by rejecting the linearity of the mainstream, social–psychological model of mass communication in order to stress the intersections but also the disjunction between processes of encoding and decoding, contextualising both

within a complex cultural framework. Influenced by Eco, Hall (1980: 131) incorporated elements of reception-aesthetics into his neo-Marxist account of popular culture, proposing that "the degrees of 'understanding' and 'misunderstanding' in the communicative exchange – depend on the degrees of symmetry/asymmetry (relations of equivalence) established between the positions of the 'personifications', encoder-producer and decoder/receiver." On this view, mass communication is understood as a circuit of articulated practices – production, circulation, reception, reproduction – each of which represents a site of meaning-making (see also Morley, 1992).

Crucially, this cyclic process contrasts with the widespread metaphor of communication transmission (Carey, 1989) that assumes that communication merely requires the more-or-less efficient transport of fixed and already-meaningful messages in a linear manner from sender to receiver. However, the social–psychological tradition attacked by Hall and others relaunched itself through the promotion of the *active* or *selective audience*, making choices about media use. Thus uses and gratifications researchers saw audience reception research as setting the scene for building "the bridge we have been hoping might arise between gratifications studies and cultural studies" (Katz, 1979: 75; see also Blumler et al., 1985), while the social constructivist paradigm in social psychology applied itself to understanding mediated, rather than just face-to-face sources of social influence, thereby uncovering the "*sense-making*" activities of audiences in negotiating the conventions and rhetorics of media texts. Through such concepts as the interpretive "frame," social constructionist researchers sought to understand how people's tacit or local knowledge variously "filled the gaps" or re-framed the meaning of media texts, resulting in divergent interpretations of the very same texts (Gamson, 1992; Hoijer & Werner, 1998; Iyengar, 1991; Livingstone, 1998a and b).

Research on these sense-making activities was appropriated by critical communications research in its advocacy of the *resistant audience* as part of the theoretical shift from dominant ideology theory to the hegemonic struggle between attempts to incorporate audiences into the dominant ideology and sources of resistance to such incorporation, even if this resistance remains tacit or implicit. Although for some, the evidence for resistance or divergence has been overplayed (Curran, 1990; Schiller, 1989), this argument was partly fueled by a desire to uncover the limits of cultural imperialism through an exploration of the sources of local resistance to imported meanings (e.g. Liebes & Katz, 1995). As David Morley (1993: 17) concludes, "local meanings are so often made within and against the symbolic resources provided by global media networks." Also influential among critical theories, particularly in identifying resistant audiences engaged in the construction of alternative cultural rituals and practices, feminist approaches to popular culture promoted a reconsideration of the often vilified popular culture audience within cultural theory, developing a revaluation of, and the giving of a voice to, hitherto *marginalized audiences* (Ang, 1985; Radway, 1984).

Making sense of television

Having argued that media texts are polysemic, that meanings emerge from a context-dependent process of interpretation and so will be mutually divergent (Fiske, 1987), it became obvious that research should investigate the activities of actual audiences in order to know how they interpret programs in everyday contexts. Hence, the stimulating convergence – or at least intersection – of these arguments in favor of empirical audience research produced something of a research "boom" in the 1980s and 1990s. Yet the generation of a sound basis for understanding the activities of audiences was accompanied, theoretically, by a move away from a careful consideration of particular reception theories such as those of Iser, Eco or Hall to a looser grounding in the blanket notion of "reception theory" or "audience reception analysis." This project quickly justified itself through findings showing that audiences indeed do differ from researchers in their reception of media content, and that audiences are themselves heterogeneous in their interpretations – even, at times, resistant to the dominant meanings encoded into a text (in the form of a "preferred reading"; Hall, 1980). This further undermined any claims to presume audience response from a knowledge of media content alone, or of arguing for a direct link between the meanings supposedly inherent in the text and the consequent effects of those meanings on the audience.

As a result of these arguments, attention was redirected to studying the interpretive contexts which frame and inform viewers' understandings of television. Hence, empirical reception studies have variously explored the relationships between media texts – typically the television genres of soap opera, news, among others (Hagen & Wasko, 2000; Hodge & Tripp, 1986; Livingstone, 1998c; Tulloch, 2000; Wilson, 1993) – and their audiences. Audience interpretations or decodings have been found to diverge depending on viewers' socioeconomic position, gender, ethnicity, and so forth, while the possibilities for critical or oppositional readings are anticipated, enabled or restricted by the degree of closure semiotically encoded into the text and by audiences' variable access to symbolic resources. The point is not that audiences are "wrong" but that they construct their interpretations according to diverse discursive contexts which are themselves socially determined. As a result of this now considerable body of work, audiences are no longer thought of according to the popular image which always threatens to recur, as homogenous, passive and uncritical or vulnerable to the direct influence of meanings transmitted, and perhaps manipulated by, the mass media.

Media-centric research?

Critiques of audience research have grown in tandem with its success, centering on the supposed untenability of the central concept of the audience itself: how can we define it, measure it, place boundaries around it, and in whose interest is it if we do so anyway (Ang, 1990; Erni, 1989; Seaman, 1992)? One outcome has

been a charge of media-centrism (Schroeder, 1994), attacking audience research for defining its object of study purely in terms of a technological artifact (the television audience, the movie-goer, etc.). This critique has force partly because an increasingly ad hoc collection of objects is included in the category of "media," and partly because if audiences are defined in relation to technology, researchers are drawn into tracking how audiences change as technologies change rather than as society changes. Hence, one may ask whether anything, apart from the label "audience research," integrates such diverse projects as identifying the pleasures of video games, investigating the agenda setting role of the press, incorporating the Internet into schools, or exploring the role of music in peer culture?

The defense from reception studies, I suggest, is that there is indeed a consistent focus underlying these questions, one centered on *communication*. Each is concerned with the conditions, contexts and consequences of the technological mediation of symbolic communication among people (Thompson, 1995). It is charting the possibilities and problems for communication (i.e. for relations among people rather than relations between people and technology), insofar as these are undermined or facilitated, managed or reconstituted by the media, that offers a challenging agenda, and one which puts audiences at the center of media and communication research, rather than locating them – or worse, deferring their study – as the last stage in a long chain of more interesting processes.

The ethnographic turn

> The qualities and experiences of being a member of an audience have begun to leak out from specific performance events which previously contained them, into the wider realms of everyday life.
>
> (Abercrombie & Longhurst, 1998: 36–7)

An influential response to doubts over media-centrism has resulted in a further strand of audience research, namely a more systematic exploration of the *contexts* of media use, thereby moving ever further away from the medium itself in search of the local sites of cultural meaning-making which shape people's orientation to the media. Several arguments led to this focus on context. As Robert Allen (1987) argued, once textual and literary theorists had made the crucial transition to a reader-oriented approach, context flooded in for two reasons: first, the shift from asking about meaning of the text in and of itself, to asking about the meaning of the text as achieved by a particular, contextualised reader (i.e. the shift, in Eco's terms, from the *virtual* to the *realized* text); second, the shift from asking about the meaning of the text to asking about the intelligibility of the text (i.e. about the diversity of sociocultural conditions which determine how a text *can* make sense). Thus the crucial transition was made, from text to context, from literary/semiotic analysis to social analysis (Morley, 1992).

Of course, these should not be posed as either/or options, for the moment of reception is precisely at the interface between textual and social determinations