REMAKING ENGLISH IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS: CROSSING BOUNDARIES BETWEEN LITERATURE AND POPULAR CULTURE

by

Anna Louise Foster

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Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto

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ABSTRACT

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Anna Foster
Graduate Department of Education
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education
University of Toronto

The boundaries that have traditionally existed between texts that are read inside the English classroom and those that are read outside the walls of the class become blurred as the theory of Cultural Studies is introduced into English curricula. This thesis explores the possibilities offered by popular culture to the ways in which students read print texts in secondary English classrooms. ‘Reading’ popular culture through the processes of representation, regulation, consumption, identity and production in class opens gaps in traditional curricula that allow students to engage with literature. This thesis demonstrates the possibilities for creativity, resistance and questioning in the classroom through an examination of the ways in which the study of popular music and clothing can offer a pedagogy of reading that is useful in reading the novels of Toni Morrison in the secondary English classroom.
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Anna Foster
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education
University of Toronto

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Chapter 1

Introduction: Cultural Studies and English in the Secondary School

Deep down in the jungle, so they say
There's a signifying motherfucker down the way.
There hadn't been no disturbin' in the jungle for quite a bit,
For up jumped the monkey in the tree one day and laughed,
'I guess I'll start some shit.' (Kid in Abrahams 149-151)

The territory of the academic discipline of English is changing. Has changed. English is changing in universities, colleges, and gradually, at the secondary school level. Teachers at all levels are questioning, or are coping with questioning. For example, they are debating texts traditionally taught, the 'great' works of Shakespeare, Dickens, Hemingway, the 'great' works written by the authoritative white males. The canon that teachers have trusted, analysed and understood, is being carefully reanalysed and debunked. Questions of gender and race are being raised, by teachers as well as students in literature classes, and such questions begin to demand answers and still further interrogation. The role of the English teacher is thus changing as their subject area shifts around them. The area within the institution that English now occupies is becoming more difficult to define, as teachers by necessity must cross borders between traditional texts to meet the demands, experience and curiosity of their students, who, often by necessity cross borders between 'high' and 'low' culture as they enter the classroom.

The subject of English is changing out of necessity, for its survival. While many schools and teachers remain steadfast in their choice to teach Shakespeare and other traditional, 'canonical' texts, and despite conservative tendencies that arise in all communities that cry for the upholding of tradition, English must change, if only slowly in some places, to include the work of women, of people of colour, and to hear the voices of those who are marginalised. In
addition, English must realise the ways in which it has to connect with the lives lived outside the classroom. Increasingly, the media play a large role in the lives, not only students, but of teachers. We are perpetually inundated by advertisements, magazines, films, television and the internet; increasingly these media have become integral to our lifestyles. It is difficult, therefore, to ignore these as intertexts to the texts of the English classroom, and it is important to acknowledge not only works traditionally accepted by the institution as 'Good English Literature'. In this thesis, then, I will explore the relationship between two of the popular texts that have traditionally been excluded from English curricula, music and fashion, and work that is considered canonical, in this case, the most recent works of novelist Toni Morrison.

There are also long-standing divisions between 'high' and 'low' culture that need rethinking. 'High' culture is generally privileged in the schools and 'low' or popular culture is viewed as substandard, almost rebellious for those intending to maintain a 'cultured' appearance. Stuart Hall addresses this long-existing division between the popular and 'high' culture:

Capital had a stake in the culture of the popular classes because the constitution of a whole new social order around capital required a more or less continuous, if intermittent, process of re-education, in the broadest sense. And one of the principal sites of resistance to the forms through which this 'reformation' of the people was pursued lay in popular tradition. That is why popular culture is linked, for so long, to questions of tradition, of traditional forms of life - and why its 'traditionalism' has been so often misinterpreted as a product of a merely conservative impulse, backward looking and anachronistic" (Hall 227).
With Hall’s argument in mind, we must move our English curricula forward to accommodate not only what has traditionally been conceived as the canon, but texts written and used by those who have been marginalised and texts that are used in the ‘popular’ sense by young people in particular. It is my intention in this thesis to show that the ‘traditional’ literary texts read in the secondary English classroom can become sites of reconstruction and resistance for students when read through the theoretical nexus of cultural studies. One means of understanding important theoretical concepts is learning to read using popular texts, such as music and fashion. The use of popular texts within the classroom provides students with an accessible point of departure for a theory of reading that begins to make possible the reading of all types of texts, including the traditional. This ‘cultural’ approach to reading begins to validate student experience outside the classroom, thus making the reading they do within the parameters of the curricula a site where they can resist and reconstruct a variety of types of text, literary and otherwise. In other words, the study of popular culture helps to make traditional texts a useful and engaging site of learning.

In order to read in such a manner, then, we must establish what ‘culture’ entails in the classroom. For cultural studies to be a useful practice in the classroom, it must not simply remove the established divisions between ‘high’ and ‘low’ culture, but it must also cross borders and redefine the boundaries of ‘culture’. Thus, the definition of ‘culture’ has changed as the context in which it is understood has altered. Berlin and Vivion note that,

Since the eighteenth century, culture has commonly stood for a sphere of human behaviour regarded as in some sense separate from the categories of the economic and the political ... Culture was thus characterized as a reflex of economic behaviour, as a
totally determined and mechanically predictable sphere of dependent activity. In contrast, for institutional English studies in Britain and the United States, culture has usually been regarded as an autonomous category of experience manifested in an exclusive set of canonical literary texts and particular ways of reading them. These texts and readings were both regarded as completely free and independent of economic and even political activity (Berlin and Vivion viii).

In the fifties, the work of Williams and Haggard began to change this definition of culture. They argued that culture reflected not exclusively economic and political conditions, but was involved in the lived historical conditions of the people at the time. They began, via a definition that encouraged the crossing of societal borders, to see that the divisions between canonical texts and other cultural texts should be broken down, and that all forms of representation can be considered worthy of study by cultural workers (Berlin and Vivion viii). If Williams and Haggard's approach is the one from which we begin to work, it is clear that the traditional definition of 'Literature', or that which we consider worthy of studying within the institution of English itself, must be not only challenged, but fundamentally reworked. The English curricula used in secondary schools must be broadened to include the 'lived' culture of students.

Widening the spectrum of texts that are 'read' in the classroom to include a variety of media will teach students to firmly establish their positions as readers. Young people gain academic confidence as the texts which are a part of their lived experiences are brought into the school and are offered as 'valuable' sites for learning, resistance and creativity. As students decentre the teacher's traditional position as 'giver of knowledge' and as they potentially begin to value their own social, economic and political positions in relation to popular texts, they will be better
prepared to study the texts that are a part of the more traditional English curricula. Through the study of popular culture, adolescents will begin to be aware of the 'importance' of their lived cultures and the ways in which the experiences of these cultures are 'valid' not only in reading popular texts, but in approaching more traditionally read texts in the English classroom.

Traditionally, literary texts have not been construed as part of a process, but rather are seen as a direct expression of the world or of the author's world view. Criticism, then, has seen texts as constructed rhetorically but not socially, and 'evaluated' them on the basis of their truth or expressiveness. Conventional criticism of texts has seen them almost exclusively in terms of an author's genius, and not as a work created and influenced by a historical specific social network (Belsey 127). It is beyond this notion of criticism and of textuality that I wish to work.

Educators need to begin to expand our notion of the text to include not only literature, but the electronic media which play such a large role in modern life. Not only does our idea of 'text' expand, but the way in which we view its creation and the way in which we see ourselves as readers must move beyond the boundaries that have traditionally confined text, author and reader. We must move across these boundaries in part in order to recognise the multiple lived identities of students. Students are no longer limited to written or literary texts when they are outside the school. Teachers now need to draw upon students' abilities to read a variety of texts within the classroom as well. My position is similar to Tony Bennett's who says, "Although my primary concern is with the reading of written texts, especially fictions, I intend the term 'reading' in the more general sense of referring to the means and mechanisms whereby all texts - literary, filmic and televisual, fictional or otherwise - may be 'productively activated' during what is traditionally, and inadequately, thought of as the process of their consumption or reception"
Like Bennett, I will refer to both the 'popular' and the 'cultural' as arenas of textuality. I examine both popular texts, such as music and fashion, through a cultural framework that allows me in turn to study novels, even canonical texts in a new manner, interrogating the ideology of the discourses that constitute these works. Luke notes: "As we move from an industrial to a post-industrial information economy, one in which print literacy is not obsolete but certainly substantially transformed, then surely we need broader definitions of knowledge, literacy and pedagogy which will include study of the intertextuality of imageries, texts, icons and artifacts of new information economies, of media and of popular culture" (27). It is from and toward this new, more encompassing definition of knowledge and signifying practices that I work in this thesis as I study both popular culture and 'high' culture in the form of Toni Morrison's three most recent novels about the history of African America.

In talking about books, Foucault offers me a place to begin as I reconsider what is termed 'Literature' and the ways in which we practice the teaching of it in the classroom:

The frontiers are never clear-cut; beyond the title, the first lines, and the last full stop, beyond its internal configuration and its autonomous form, it is caught up in a system of references to other books, other texts, other sentences: it is a node within a framework .... The book is not simply the object that one holds in one's hands; and it cannot remain within the little parallelepiped that contains it: its unity is variable and relative. As soon as one questions that unity, it loses its self-evidence; it indicates itself, constructs itself, only on the basis of a complex field of discourse (Foucault 23).

Foucault's argument is useful not only in understanding books and novels, but for ways of
approaching any text that might be taught in the classroom. No text works in a self-contained manner, free from the context in which it was created, or indeed from the context in which it is received. Each text we bring into educational institutions reveals itself to be multi layered and any reading forces readers to move between levels of discourse to understand the layers of ideology that comprise a given text.

As a means of understanding texts in terms of the context in which they were created and the context in which we understand and teach about them, I use a specific theoretical approach to read both popular texts and Morrison’s novels. Cultural Studies does not invite the total dissolution of the text, but rather its interest is in the boundaries that surround any text. This theoretical framework places the reader in a specific relationship to a text, both being determined by external factors that they bring to bear on each other. Tony Bennett refers to this relationship as one between a 'culturally activated' reader and a 'culturally activated' text. Inevitably, as Bennett notes, in this relationship the interaction between text and reader is "structured by the material, social, ideological and institutional relationships in which both text and readers are inescapably inscribed" (216).

Cultural studies, as a theory or as a methodology of reading, avoids, by its very nature, final definition. The theory of cultural studies demands multiple layers of questioning and multiple layers of understanding, thus making its definition a variable one. Such a theoretical position is indeed a difficult one to teach in a secondary school classroom. It is, nonetheless, important to allow students to explore a means of reading that privileges them as complex beings encompassing more than one simple identity. Indeed, students must be acknowledged as hybrid creatures. Cultural studies offers teachers the advantage of seeing students as having
multiple identities that are mobile, caught up in ongoing processes of 'becoming'. As educators, we need to allow students to be a part of the creation and construction of all texts that are introduced in the confines of the classroom. Unquestionably, such a fluid approach to instruction may be a difficult one. Some of these difficulties and the possibilities that they offer for resistance and engagement in the English classroom that I address in this thesis.

Giroux offers a concise description of the intent of the project of cultural studies that helps to define the theoretical project that I undertake in this thesis:

It is generally argued that cultural studies is largely defined through its analysis of the interrelationship between culture and power, particularly with regard to the production, reception, and diverse use of texts. Texts in this case constitute a wide range of aural, visual, and printed signifiers. These are often taken up as part of a broader attempt to analyse how individual and social identities are mobilized, engaged, and transformed within circuits of power informed by issues of race, gender, class, ethnicity, and other social formations. All of these concerns point to the intellectual and institutional borders that police, contain and engage meaning as a site of social struggle. Moreover, one of the emerging theoretical features of cultural studies is to refute the notion that the struggle over meaning is primarily about the struggle over language and textuality (5).

Cultural studies explores the importance of the historical conditions of production of a text and the ideological conditions in which it is received, but by no means does the theory ignore the importance of language as a mediating and signifying practice that enables the reader to engage with any given text. Cultural studies asks teachers and readers to explore the relationships and borders between the discursive practices that make up the texts we read and to understand the
ways in which these discursive practices are always negotiated through relationships of power related to gender, race, age, sexuality, and class.

Clearly, the theory of cultural studies brings with it a degree of ambiguity and many unanswered questions. It becomes evident after attempting to define the intent of the project of cultural studies that the theory need not be confined to the English curriculum. Indeed, cultural studies would not be out of place as a framework for the study of many of the subjects commonly studied in institutions as 'the humanities'. It seems, however, that the use of a cultural studies framework has been taken up mainly in departments of sociology and English. Despite this, the project remains a rather interdisciplinary one. Moreover, departments of English examining literary and popular texts are not only points of departure for cultural studies, but often also serve as a site of resistance to it as well.

Cultural studies can be seen as a process of examining the interaction of meaningful social practices. It is essential that in the classroom cultural studies not be regarded as stable or unchanging, but as an approach that questions the discourses and ideologies with which it interacts and as an ideology that typically aims to defy the traditional boundaries created by the institution.

Cultural studies encourages a mobile existence for both text and reader. While the theoretical implications of such instability, particularly in the classroom, appear difficult (and they are), duGay and Hall, in their book *Doing Cultural Studies: The Story of the Sony Walkman*, offer a model for the representation of the cultural processes which interact with each other constantly within the theoretical framework of cultural studies. It is to this diagram (please see following page), or articulation of culture, to which I will refer throughout this paper.
as I examine a variety of texts, and it is through this diagram that students might begin to understand the ways in which a text is represented, the social identities that are identified with it, the ways in which it is produced and consumed and the mechanisms that regulate how the text is distributed and used:
The circuit of culture

Fig. 1. The Circuit of Culture. *Doing Cultural Studies: The Story of the Sony Walkman.*

This circuit of culture demonstrates for students that creating and using meaning does not begin and end at fixed points - meanings are constantly being negotiated as a reader interacts with a text. The concern of the department of English then becomes the ways in which meanings are produced and received, and the ways in which the very practice of meaning making is itself inscribed with meaning. In light of the intertwined nature of these processes, it is evident that as readers we are constantly moving to and fro and back again across different processes that are a part of the circuit of culture. Included in these oscillations are the ways teachers themselves mediate an understanding of the manner in which a text, from the canonical to the popular, is represented, the ways in which it is produced and consumed, the forms in which social identities affect and are affected by the reading of a specific text. They are also, in their position of authority in the classroom, in charge of the regulation, use and understanding of any text. The teacher thus plays an integral role in facilitating the movement of discussion around a text through taking up, or not, the various processes that make up this 'circuit of culture'.

The processes involved in the ‘circuit of culture’, representation, identity, production, and consumption, ensure that the making of meaning, or reading, in the classroom does not happen simply. The making of meaning is a continually active process. This model does not allow the teacher a position of unique authority in the classroom. Rather, he or she must become a part of the process or the ‘circuit’ of engagement, construction and resistance of culture. As teachers, if this model of reading is to be successful, we must engage with each of the processes on the circuit.

The cultural processes outlined by duGay and Hall offer a place for the English teacher to begin, regardless of the text studied, popular or traditional. The circuit encompasses the way
in which the text is represented, orally and visually, within the culture in which it is being read. Understanding the representation of a text allows us to locate, position and giving meaning to a text within a whole culture. In turn, it is through such specific uses and contexts that identities are constructed. Partly, cultural and social identities are developed in relation to the cultural texts that the individual reads, inside and outside the classroom, and that the individual then positions him or herself with and against. That with which consumers or readers identify also motivates the production of goods. Production regulates and partially determines consumption. It is the practices involved in production that are represented in the ‘cultural’ text that is read by students and that becomes a part of their cultural identities through the practice of reading, questioning, resisting and accepting. Consumption, as the next process on the circuit, is concerned with the way in which the product, or text in this case, is used. Consumption cannot be clearly defined in terms of any single text, for as the social, political, and economic contexts in which a given text is read change, so does the meaning that is produced from it and thus the experience of the consumer. The context in which a text is read or received depends upon the resources of the reader as well as their environment. As a text is ‘read’, students and readers are able to either resist or engage with what the text has to offer in the specific context of its reception. Lastly, regulation follows consumption on the ‘circuit of culture’. All objects or texts are classified or regulated as they become part of a culture. They assume certain values through language and representation which give them meaning within specific contexts. Such regulation of representation leads us to understand that texts and objects do not necessarily have one meaning, but that they may have several. Meaning is mobile for both text and reader, depending upon the space in which the text is constructed and understood relationally by groups of readers,
thus gaining significance and signification within a specific cultural context.

It is important to remember, however, that this 'circuit of culture' with its five processes does not stand in isolation. One circuit, of necessity, interacts with another. The 'circuit of culture' overlaps with another circuit, that of the sites where readers engage with texts. Such a circuit would include sites such as the home, the school, the church, theatres, and the home. This circuit of 'cultural zones' in turn overlaps with a third circuit, one that involved processes of power, allowing the reader to engage a variety of axes of sameness and of difference within and against the text that is being 'read'.

The 'circuit of culture' and the circuits that overlap it provide a new methodology for approaching texts in the English classroom, of translating both the new and the popular as well as those traditionally taught. In addition to changing the manner in which we view and teach English literature, cultural studies asks that its readers take an active role in engaging with and bringing meaning to texts. Studying texts and their readers through each of the processes of the 'circuit of culture' allows the classroom, the text and the reader to potentially become sites of resistance and engagement to traditional ways of reading and teaching. McCormick elaborates:

Reading is never just an individual, subjective experience. While it may be usefully described as a cognitive activity, reading, like every act of cognition, always occurs in social contexts...Reading is always over determined, that is, it is produced by many, perhaps an unaccountably large, number of factors that work in different combinations to produce different interpretations. A text is always a site of struggle: it may try to privilege a certain reading position as 'natural', but because readers are subjects in their
own histories, they may not produce that seemingly privileged reading. Yet readers do not possess absolute autonomy: like the texts they read, they too are sites of struggle, caught up in cultural determinants that they did not create and in which they strive to make meaning (69).

Engaging with texts in the classroom as ‘sites of struggle’, sites of resistance, and of construction of identity through text, necessarily involves an understanding of the theory that influences and generates the energy between the processes on the 'circuit of culture'. ‘Struggling’ with texts creates linkages between the use of language in the texts and in articulating theory about the texts and the processes that work together to form part of the project of cultural studies. Moving to and fro between the processes on the ‘circuit of culture’ when reading texts in the English classroom allows students to ‘become’ as they both engage with and resist the text, whether it is a popular text with which many students may be familiar, or one that has traditionally been a part of the English curriculum. It is this ‘struggle’ of which McCormick speaks that is necessary for English curricula. The identity of student, rather than teacher, should be privileged as the text is consumed within the regulated environment of the school. It is the student who, in order to bring significant meaning to the text, must bring their own experience to bear upon the context of the object or text within the classroom. In doing so, an engaging learning experience may occur, one that may translate from one text to another and from the discipline of English across others.

Thus, language, theory and the texts we read in the classroom, whether popular or literary, become inseparable as they move through processes of representation, identity, production, consumption and regulation as they are questioned and constructed by students.
Catherine Belsey explains the manner in which theories of language are indivisible from the theory of cultural studies:

Ideology is inscribed in specific discourses. A discourse is a domain of language-use, a particular way of talking (and writing and thinking). A discourse involves certain shared assumptions which appear in the formulations that characterize it ... Ideology is inscribed in discourse in the sense that it is literally written or spoken in it; it is not a separate element which exists independently in some free-floating realm of 'ideas' and is subsequently embodied in words, but a way of thinking, speaking, experiencing (5).

Through Belsey's argument, then, we can understand that every text we read, view or listen to is laden with layers of discursive ideologies with which a reader may engage or resist.

Unavoidably in the English classroom we must allow room for multiple levels of interrogation of a text as well as multiple readings, since despite our traditional authoritative position as teachers, the discourses of literature require us to actively utilise theory as we move through the processes of the 'circuit of culture'. Students in this model, then, must be considered to be 'hybrid'. Students bring multiple identities and several layers of varied experience to the classroom and to the texts which are read inside the institution. Curricula, as well as teachers, should recognise the culture and context that exists outside the school and that is an important part of students' lived experience.

It is impossible to teach English in a vacuum, practising the method of finding the 'right' answer solely within the text. This is so because every student brings with them to each text a different life experience and thus a different reading naturally ensues. While such an approach unquestionably complicates practice in the English classroom, the entanglement of theory and
practice is becoming more necessary as students bring different types of experience as readers of a greater variety of texts. Belsey pointedly argues,

There is no practice without theory, however much that theory is suppressed, unformulated or perceived as 'obvious'. What we do when we read, however 'natural' it seems, presupposes a whole theoretical discourse, even if unspoken, about language and about meaning, about the relationships between meaning and the world, meaning and people, and finally about people themselves and their place in the world (4).

This theoretical discourse is a part of our reading practice and is equally entwined with teaching practice. Our classrooms are laden with layers of theoretical discourse, even before students arrive, since texts are selected, to the moment when students open those texts and begin to read, allowing their own layers of discourse and ideology to meet those of a given text within the context of a specific classroom with its own privileged discourses. Such an approach to teaching and to reading brings a new level of depth and scope of inquiry for both teacher and student. It also brings a level of instability as well, since the teacher can no longer present the 'correct' meaning of a text to a class, allowing them to fill notebooks with authoritative opinions on textual meanings.

In this approach, both student and teacher are removed from the roles they once fulfilled within the institution. The teacher moves from a position of academic authority as the primary knowledge-giver, to the role of facilitator. No longer does the teacher simply provide information that must be learned in a rote manner, but the teacher guides and stimulates discussion that allows students to engage their own life experiences within the context of their lives, schooling and a given text. Not only is this new role challenging for the teacher, but it is
also demanding for the student, for whom expectations as a result of this theoretical model soar. The student is no longer the passive receptacle that receives knowledge, but assumes a new role that involves bringing their own social, political, racial, economic, etc. contexts to those of a text, regardless of whether it is a popular text, or a literary one studied in classrooms for hundreds of years. With this decentering of traditional roles of course comes uncertainty with regard to the ways in which student and teacher are to meet in the classroom to produce meaning.

As traditional roles of teacher and student shift, another set of difficult questions arises. These include the ways in which student and teacher can work together to establish their positions and identities in relation to cultural processes, including representation, production, regulation, and consumption in the secondary classroom. If we use the 'circuit of culture' as the starting point for a new approach to reading both popular and literary texts in the classroom, the questions that are raised are difficult. They are difficult, for the questions, like the circuit, are mobile. Luke asks:

If cultural experience and identities are mere quotations and floating signifiers, where and how do we claim a standpoint in which to ground identity and difference claims? How, in the production of knowledge in classroom encounters, does the teacher claim a standpoint of authority on issues of identity difference, reading positions and what counts as discriminatory and offensive cultural representations or student readings? Is one student's critical interpretation more or less valid than another's? How does a teacher arbitrate what Dianne Fuss (1989) calls the 'hierarchy of oppressions' that often surface among students in identity-based knowledge productions? (27).
Luke's questions are raised when reading occurs through the theory of cultural studies in the English classroom. Indeed, rather than clarifying the ways in which connections can be made between students and teacher, and across 'high' and 'low' cultures, these questions appear to take us further from easy answers. Moreover, it is, I believe, impossible to answer Luke's difficult questions in a unilateral manner that will work for all students and all teachers in every context. Attempting to offer answers to such complex questions increases the layers of theoretical discourse through which we must already travel in the classroom. Despite this, offering tentative answers is a worthwhile investigative project, for it demonstrates the level of engagement required on the part of both teacher and student. It is my project, in this thesis, to show that while these questions are important, they can be addressed, even integrated into English curriculum through the use of both popular and literary texts.

Luke asks where the standpoint from which difference and sites of resistance lies in the classroom, and it is with hesitance that I answer that each student must establish their own ground and standpoint from which they find resources for their identity. In an age where we are inundated by visual, musical and literary texts, it is no longer possible to offer a single answer or explanation to students about the meaning of a text. This abundance of media also entails that students bring multiple selves into any given classroom and that they receive texts in multiple ways. If the project of cultural studies and the mobility of each of the processes on the circuit of culture is to remain fluid, then students should be allowed to ground themselves in relation to each text they approach in the classroom. They should be able to do so in terms of both similarities with and differences from the ideologies that they engage and resist within the texts that are read. Such differences and similarities potentially create places for students to
question, as well as to work with and against the text being studied. Each student's conception of difference will vary according to the life experience they bring to the classroom as well as to the text being read. This answer, then, means that there are multiple sites of resistance and places of departure where identity may be grounded in any given class. Each individual in the English classroom will be encouraged to understand the processes involved in reading differently. Moreover, each individual will find sites where he or she resists or engages with the text based not only on which other texts that they have read both within and without the classroom, but also on the other sites in which they read and grapple with texts and ideologies of all types in other aspects of their lives. The teacher is therefore no longer the sole locus of authority. He or she still provides tools, such as the context in which texts, popular or literary are produced and read. It is the teacher who can often elaborate on the ways in which they are and have been regulated in the past, but it is the student, ultimately, who consumes the text in terms of their own context and whose identity is further shaped by its reading. I provide this answer with 'hesitation' for it is not an easy one to implement in practice. Indeed, it further decentres the teacher by allowing each student to locate him or herself, as opposed to having the teacher create and establish a standpoint where student and reader identity is idealistically grounded.

The teacher's role is to guide, perhaps even referee, discussion and understanding. It is certainly not to provide specific answers. Instead, the teacher should allow for multiple understandings. It is in this way that I begin to respond to Luke’s question of the point at which a teacher must claim a standpoint of authority. While the teacher may not allege to be an authority on the text, or on the processes of culture, the teacher nonetheless, in most cases, sets
parameters for the class in terms of curriculum, texts and the time and manner in which these are received. It is nearly impossible in many public secondary schools to shift the teacher’s command over these variables. What reading via cultural studies theory, however, may begin to achieve in English classrooms is a change in curricula, as teachers and institutions adjust to the notion that texts are mobile and that students’ responses to them are as well. As classes becomes accustomed to the notion that there are many 'acceptable' readings of visual, musical or literary texts, discussion may become less argumentative since potentially students can explain their own positions and become more interrogative about them as well. The only exception to this rule, naturally, would be when the work of the students in the class begins to violate school policy regarding material that is acceptable in the classroom. Each teacher must choose at what point they have crossed a boundary that endangers their own ethical and philosophical position to a point that the discussion is not useful nor safe in that institutional context. When discussion and work reaches this point, it likely not only violates community ethical values, but also endangers the teacher’s employment. It is, therefore, only an individual teacher in a specific situation who is able to determine whether a situation is discriminatory and/or offensive, and the limits and boundaries that are to apply in the context of their own classroom. Again, I must emphasise that as students become acquainted with discussion in terms of the concepts of discourse and ideology that are raised through engaging a text across the processes of culture, the classroom is more likely to become a site of resistance and creativity in which difficult discussions may occur. As discussion becomes imbricated with theory, it will, in my experience, become more substantial and less likely to move into a realm that may be construed as discriminatory or offensive, such that it endangers the identities of students or risks the
Lastly, it is essential to address the issue of the validity of opinion and the hierarchy of oppression that necessarily accompanies any discussion or interaction with questions of value. Cultural studies, in its ideal form, allows each student the opportunity to move through an analysis of the circuit of culture by understanding and interrogating representation, identity, consumption, production as well as regulation. Such an ideal setting will only be achieved with the willingness of the teacher to accept multiple voices and meanings. In order to allow students to work from equally valid contexts, teachers and institutions must be conscious of the role that they play in the creation and validation of each student's identity. It is this degree of self awareness on the part of the educator in terms of their practice that potentially offers all students an opportunity to bring their own experiences and knowledge to understanding this circuit as they read, discuss and write about popular and canonical texts in the classroom. One point of entry for both teacher and students into understanding the processes of culture and sites of learning that may be used in the English classroom is the use of "popular teenage culture" as a part of the curriculum.

Hall and Whannel note that "teenage culture is, in part, an area of common symbols and meanings, shared in part or in whole by a generation, in which they can work out or work through not only the natural tensions of adolescence, but the special tensions of being an adolescent in our kind of society" (62). It is the fact of these common symbols and meanings that make using popular culture in the English classroom valuable. Understanding theoretical discourses and discussing so-called 'common meanings' tends to occur more easily in the classroom through the use of teenage culture than may be achieved with the novels traditionally
selected for the English classroom. While these potential commonalities in the meanings of texts provide some advantages, it is important for teachers to remember that seemingly straightforward meanings are actually infinitely limited in scope. Students do not arrive at secondary or even post-secondary institutions with identities that are securely fixed in specific positions. Each brings a series of identities with them to the institution. These identities are established in relation to texts of all varieties which interact at multiple sites of culture and engagement, from the street, the home, the cinema and the television, to name a few sources. Even these identities, developed at several sites, are layered and hybrid. Thus students constantly move to establish a position that functions within the various contexts in which they work. This includes schools: "Schools are fully implicated in the formation of the identities they seek to proscribe and that, for both teachers and students, considerable effort should be applied to identifying many of the routine assumptions about social and sexual identity made in the institutional context" (Richards 149). It is necessary that teachers not only recognise multiple voices in their classrooms, but that they foster the development of such voices, creating a place for resistance and engagement with issues of gender, class, sexuality and ethnicity. This necessity stems from acknowledging the diverse experiences that students bring with them to the institution of school. It is this knowledge, the mobility and the complexity of the discursive layers within each individual, that makes reading popular and canonical texts in the classroom exciting. Due to the many commonalities among young people in a given country or locale, it becomes far too easy to fail to recognise or celebrate the differences between student identities when reading in the English classroom.

Yet the differences in identity and the gaps that ensue from such difference are also what
make possible connections as well as the resistance of readers. In the gaps, or places of marginality, students are able to exercise the relevance of their own experiences in relationship to the texts that they are required to read by the regulated English curricula. It is therefore essential to practising the theory of cultural studies that teachers understand the vital and changing nature of student identities and experiences. The study of English literature in the secondary school has remained virtually stagnant in comparison to the rapid rate of change in culture beyond the walls of the classroom. Television, music, computers, fashion and clothing all influence the multiple identities that comprise students today. The opportunity exists for teachers to engage both themselves and their students in this ‘lived culture’, to ‘validate’ the knowledge that students bring to the English classroom and that they may even begin to transcend specific types of texts and traditionally defined disciplines.

Willis puts forth an important argument about adolescents and the ways in which their identity is formed.

We are thinking of the extraordinary symbolic creativity of the multitude of ways in which young people use, humanize, decorate and invest with meanings their common and immediate life spaces and social practices - personal styles and choice of clothes; selective and active use of music, TV, magazines; decoration of bedrooms; the rituals of romance and subcultural styles; the style, banter and drama of friendship groups; music-making and dance. Nor are these pursuits and activities trivial or inconsequential. In conditions of late modernization and the widespread crisis of cultural values they can be crucial to the creation and sustenance of individual and group identities, even to cultural survival of identity itself. There is work, even desperate work in their play (Willis 2).
Willis is calling upon us to recognise the importance of the adolescent years, when young people establish themselves with and against others, creating identity through similarity and difference. It is at this time of life, in first-world cultures, that people engage in activities that will help to define them not only for themselves, but also for others. The young people who are taught in English classrooms are constantly in a process of reconstructing themselves and in so doing creating an identity. For this reason, as Willis argues, we must pay heed to the 'work' of young people, to the wide variety of texts they read, view and listen to. We value the work and the play of students when we allow their chosen texts to enter the institution and to be considered within a theoretical nexus. In this thesis, I demonstrate that valuing this work, through the specific examples of music and fashion, allows us to engage students through the practice of the same processes of theoretical understanding in works that have been considered 'canonical' or that are an 'ingrained' part of the institution of secondary English education. This approach suggests the importance of all the texts that young people consume in the creation of their identities.

Recognising and accepting the work of young people in the creation of identity means moving popular culture from the realm of the inconsequential into that of the valued - by them. Teachers have the ability to change the practice of the trivialisation of the popular by making room for in their classroom, and by also making choices in terms of the deconstruction of the traditional canon by creating a place for popular culture. Teachers can choose to recognise the possibilities for popular culture in understanding processes such as consumption, regulation and identity for young people. Doing so will offer gaps and bridges that ease the mobility between the sites and processes of culture for students as they read a variety of texts. The fluid nature of the relationships across texts and cultural processes becomes clear as I explore the possibilities
for the theory of cultural studies across popular music, fashion and clothing, as well as the ‘literature’ of Nobel prize winning author, Toni Morrison. In the past, popular culture has not been accepted as ‘serious work’ by the academy or by teachers of English. It has been rejected as the culture of the ‘masses’, or culture without ‘inherent value’. This narrow approach to culture is slowly changing, albeit not by the choice of all teachers, since provinces, such as Ontario, impose media literacy requirements as a part of their English curricula (Morgan 107).

It is far from my intention to restrict the work of popular culture by suggesting it influences young adults alone, for few people in North America remain untouched by billboards, music, television, contemporary clothing or fashion. Hall says definitively in his "Notes on Deconstructing the Popular" that, “popular culture ... is an arena of consent and resistance. It is partly where hegemony arises, and where it is secured. It is not a sphere where socialism, a socialist culture already fully formed - might be simply 'expressed'. But it is one of the places where socialism might be constituted. That is why 'popular culture' matters" (453). Popular culture is important not only because it provides us a way of introducing theory about the workings of ideology and discourse to our students in a way that is accessible and interesting, but also because it is in the sphere of the popular that people, young and old, understand, accept and resist the different ways in which culture and society develop and change.

Popular texts play an integral part of the lives of most students inside and outside of school environment. Accepting so-called ‘low’ culture as part of English curriculum may help to reveal new connections and discordances, levels of discourse and forms of identity that have been previously disregarded within the institution of schooling. As Bennett notes, "popular texts are usually studied, and not infrequently condemned, for their effects on 'other people' without
making any real attempt to take account of the specific readings produced outside the academy and at a considerable remove from the critical discourses that circulate within it" (219). Popular culture must not be excluded from public institutions, for it has much to offer for theoretical analysis, and inevitably exerts a potent influence over all other texts admitted to classrooms. It is seeing culture as a site of 'consent and resistance to hegemony' that makes popular culture invaluable to the English classrooms. My only concern, is that a careful use be made of the popular so that pleasure is not lost, but instead becomes integral to the study and acceptance of the popular in schools. Pleasure is an essential aspect of the work of popular culture and it must not be forgotten when supposedly 'low' culture is assimilated into curricula and the popular is theoretically engaged. It is the taking up of the popular in schools that will gradually allow us to problematise forms of authority and permit us to cross boundaries long established between what is considered 'good' and 'bad', 'useful' or 'trivial' by those currently in positions of authority within public institutions. The study of the popular may also help students to engage with a variety of discourses that govern aspects of their lives. Understanding cultural processes is a part of teaching students to think critically and to ask questions regarding choices that are made for them, and by them, in the institutions in which they spend a significant part of their time. The ability to think in a mobile manner, to cross boundaries between consumption and personal identities, to understand your own identities as hybrid and many, for example, is relevant to understanding the ways in which borders are defined and transgressed through traditional print texts and disciplines in schools. Cultural studies, through an understanding of processes such as those in the 'circuit of culture', begins to make room for a complex dialectic of acceptance and resistance to texts regulated and assigned within English curricula.
My interest in introducing popular culture into the classroom is the transgression and transformation of the boundaries that have traditionally defined English as a school subject. Using popular culture as a gateway to understanding important contemporary cultural processes introduces students to a host of questions that are relevant not only to the 'high' culture of the English classroom, but that also forces a move across boundaries between previously separated subject areas. Specifically, cultural studies invites students to break down divisions that exist between the areas of history, politics, economics, and sociology; it renders these areas inseparable, invaluable to each other. Students will be able to transgress these boundaries through forms of thinking developed in the exploration of the discourses of popular culture, an object of inquiry that is likely to be both interesting and meaningful for most young people.

In this thesis, I therefore explore the 'value' for English teaching of examining popular culture, especially via music and forms of clothing. The questions raised through utilising the 'circuit of culture' are applied to music and fashion; they are also extended to reflecting upon the reading of more traditional texts, such as novels. In this case, I have chosen Toni Morrison's three most recent texts which operate as a trilogy to illustrate some of the possibilities for an English curriculum interested in developing a cultural studies approach. In part, these novels are an appropriate place to turn since Morrison openly acknowledges that, 'having at her disposal only the letters of the alphabet and some punctuation, she must provide the places and spaces so that the reader can participate" (Rootedness 341). She thus actively values the context that her readers bring to the novels, intentionally leaving gaps in her work so that the reader is not only invited but forced to create meaning in order to understand her stories. It is this ability to create meaning through an understanding of social discourses, historical ideologies and the everyday
experiences that readers must bring to texts that I hope will demonstrate the ability of cultural studies work, and its application to forms of popular culture studied in English classrooms.

Cultural studies is thus for me an important project for the future of English curricula. The theoretical framework of cultural studies does, in many ways, provoke the English curriculum in a way similar to the signifying monkey in the jungle in Kid’s 1964 poem: "disturbin' and starting some shit". And while such a challenge may be difficult to understand and to accept for some who hold positions of authority within schools, particularly those who have resisted other kinds of change such as pedagogical methods, cultural studies offers the English curriculum a way to develop, in effect to be 'disturbed' in a meaningful way. Cultural studies either through the use of popular texts, or well-read novels and traditional thematic criticism, allows us to practice a methodology that involves historical specificity for both texts and readers. It encourages students and teachers to work together to create a series of meanings valuable not because they offer a 'correct' answer, but since they demonstrate an understanding of the relationships that exist between the layers of discourse in any given text.

The next two chapters explore the curricular possibility for the inclusion of music, fashion and clothing in the English classroom, and the ways in which the theory of cultural studies alters the manner in which students and teachers read these popular texts inside and outside the school. Next, I explore the relationship between popular culture and the context of literary texts more traditionally studied in the classroom. Specifically, I attempt to show that the methodology of reading offered by cultural studies revalues the place of music, fashion and even ‘canonical’ novels, such as those of Toni Morrison in the secondary English classroom. Through discussion and comparison I illustrate that with reflective and informed practice,
teachers do not have to deny the authority of their position or that of the text that they have chosen to study in the classroom. Rather than using this authority to provide answers to students in the academy, it may be more usefully implemented by encouraging students to think critically and interrogatively about the texts they read, from the popular to the canonical, within and without the English classroom, and across all school disciplines.
Chapter 2

Finding the Groove: Popular Music in the English Classroom

Media culture is becoming an essential part of both everyday life and of standard secondary English curriculum. In Ontario, in fact, it is mandated that teachers incorporate the media in one form or another into thirty percent of their lessons. Such a shift from print media to other communicational forms is inevitable as an understanding of television, film, radio and fashion become more integral to our survival in the modern world. Kellner explains:

Media culture is the dominant culture today; it has replaced the forms of high culture as the centre of cultural attention and impact for large numbers of people. Visual and oral forms of media culture are supplanting forms of book culture, requiring new types of media literacy to decode these new cultural forms. Moreover, media culture has become a dominant force of socialization, with media images and celebrities replacing families, schools, and churches as arbitors of taste, value, and thought, producing new models of identification and resonant images of style, fashion and behaviour (17).

Many educators view these newer media as threatening, for the values, taste and style that they offer defy the tradition embodied in the canonical texts historically taught in the English classroom. As a result, whether from fear and a lack of knowledge, or from a carefully thought out opposition to the ‘values’ ‘taught’ by the media, many teachers of secondary English avoid both the media and the mandated component of their curriculum dedicated to the teaching of media culture. I will argue that not only does the media offer much to students through television, music and fashion, but that the critical thinking skills that students can develop in working in these pleasurable areas will allow them to return to traditional print media in a more
reflexive and transformative way in the English classroom. Specifically, in this chapter, I explore the implications of teaching popular music and music video in the English class and the possibilities that such a curriculum may offer to the teaching of commonly read short stories and novels.

Despite the fact that teachers are required to teach media, many feel unable to teach 'popular' culture as it is seen as demeaning not only the literary canon, but also the classroom context. Many view popular music in the same fashion as Adorno does in his essay, "On Popular Music":

A clear judgement concerning the relation of serious music to popular music can be arrived at only by strict attention to the fundamental characteristic of popular music: standardization. The whole structure of popular music is standardized, even where the attempt is made to circumvent standardization. Standardization extends from the most general features to the most specific ones...Complications have no consequences. This inexorable device guarantees that regardless of what aberrations occur, the hit will lead back to the same familiar experience, and nothing fundamentally novel will be introduced (in Cultural Theory and Popular Culture 197).

Educators are not alone in believing that there is no inherent 'value' in popular culture. The notion of 'mass' media is not unique to our time, and while it is important for views such as Adorno's to be recognised when we study popular music, we must also recall the history of any new medium, music, print or otherwise:

The paradoxical effects of the capitalist penetration of cultural production are a matter of conscious concern for certain groups outside the point of production itself - the
ideologues and the professional guardians of public morality who swell the ranks of Gramsci’s ‘traditional intellectuals’. Every successive penetration of capital into cultural production has produced an outbreak of ‘moral panic’ in its wake. In the eighteenth century the rise of the novel produced widespread attack, allegations that it was morally pernicious in its effects upon weak-minded women and servants who were avid consumers of the new form. It was universally slammed, from pulpit to review. The same spectacle was repeated in our century over film in the thirties, and television in the fifties. The panic this time centred on equally weak-minded children and adolescents, for fear they would indulge in an orgy of imitative violence on exposure to the media.

Effects studies have been the meat and drink of the media specialists ever since (Lovell in Cultural Theory and Popular Culture 481).

The effects of the ‘evils’ of the media have been fodder for many, but as the media become more meaningful in daily life, it is time to move beyond a preoccupation with ‘high culture’ within schooling. Not only is it necessary to move beyond the level of moral panic to popular culture, but as the media are now an inextricable part of the lives of teachers and students, it is necessary to accept popular texts as worthy of study within schools. This thesis will show that, first and foremost, ‘popular culture’ is indeed worthy of study within schooling as ‘valuable’ text; in addition, ‘popular culture’ may act as a point of theoretical entry for re-reading of the literary ‘canon’, providing a new methodology of reading through understanding the mobility of the cultural processes; representation, identity, production, consumption and regulation.

School curricula must abandon its mission of transmitting ‘high culture’ that reaches beyond nationality and class and is seen as equally ‘relevant’ to ‘all’ students (Shuker 13).
Curricula need to recognise the experience of young people today and may do so by accommodating and acknowledging this experience via a variety of texts both within and without the confines of the institution of schooling. As students become involved with life outside school and home, popular culture becomes all the more ‘relevant’ to their experience and thus impacts upon the information that they bring to bear upon that which they study in a school context, causing the boundaries between the cultures of schooling and of lived experience to interpenetrate each other. Shuker notes:

Although a high-low culture distinction is still very strongly evident in general public perceptions of ‘culture’, the traditionally claimed distinction between ‘high’ and ‘low culture’ has become blurred. High art has been increasingly commodified and commercialised, while some forms of popular culture have become more ‘respectable’, receiving State funding and broader critical acceptance. That said, clear distinctions and cultural hierarchies remain widely held, not least within particular cultural forms, by those involved in their production and consumption (5).

Through the study of popular music, teachers may offer students critical thinking skills and students can offer teachers an understanding of the pleasure involved in ‘their’ mass media and will inform educators about the distinctions and hierarchies they espouse and create within the realm of popular music and video. Teachers and students should not need to put aside or even reject our own ideals when meeting and discussing music in such a context. Bourdieu argues that,

Rejecting the ‘human’ clearly means rejecting what is generic, i.e. common, ‘easy’ and immediately accessible, starting with everything that reduces the aesthetic animal to pure
and simple animality, to palpable pleasure or sensual desire. The interest in the content of the representation which leads people to call ‘beautiful’ the representation of beautiful things, especially those which speak most immediately to the sense and the sensibility, is rejected in favour of the indifference and distance which refuse to subordinate judgement of the representation to the nature of the object represented. It can be seen that it is not so easy to describe the ‘pure’ gaze without also describing the naive gaze which it defines itself against, and vice versa; and that there is no neutral, impartial, ‘pure’ description of either of these opposing visions (in Cultural Theory and Popular Culture 440).

Thus the study of popular culture has a bearing upon the investigation of ‘high’ culture in the classroom, and the opening created by the discussion of music potentially allows spaces for students to learn to engage fiction in the same critical manner. As students become familiar, for example, with the ‘circuit of culture’, presented in the first chapter of this thesis, and the cultural processes that move ‘through’ that circuit, they will begin to understand not only the processes, but the contexts and the questions involved in beginning to receive and resist information as they read texts. This theoretical methodology of reading may help students to understand the multiple layers of discourse that comprise any text, regardless of whether it is ‘popular’ or ‘literary’. Students may develop awareness as that both they and the text are situated in historically specific contexts. Each individual will meet texts differently as a result of the multiple discursive levels in both text and student, thus ensuring a mobile and hybrid identity for each within the context of reception and reading.

Music can work as a point of departure in the secondary English class because it is a
form of media in which many students invest themselves and form their social identities.

Students bring meaning and experience with them to discussions about music through both what is a part of the music or music video, as well as what is left out from the music being discussed. As their understanding of cultural processes grows, teenagers are able to engage both the music or music video and the gaps within the music that allow them to distance themselves or to resist the text that they are ‘reading’. Young adults, through their identification with the music, begin to locate themselves as a result of understanding the context, or the site of culture, in which they are working - socially and academically, thus recognising the processes of representation, consumption, production and regulation. David Buckingham explains:

To claim particular tastes in music is thus to claim a particular social identity - or, in some cases, multiple identities...young people use music as a means of locating themselves socially, historically and politically. Music may provide access to a more complex system of symbolic meaning than that which is available locally, in the peer group or the family. In this way, it can provide a means of claiming a positive status for identities that are rejected or undervalued; of rejecting the official identities proposed by the family, school or workplace; and of negotiating or aspiring to new identities beyond those that seem to be on offer (122).

Buckingham also suggests that music offers students access to new meanings while referencing and establishing their own social, historical and political identities. Through the study of the processes of culture and through the development of an understanding of identity within cultural life, students may begin to rupture meanings in texts and to engage not only the music, but themselves and the institution in which they are exploring the ‘meaning’ of the music.
Popular music, or popular texts, bring to the classroom the advantage of a sense of familiarity for students. Moreover, popular texts are not produced, represented, consumed or regulated in historical, economic and social contexts that are unknown to students. This familiarity generates a sense of agency within the reader that allows them to potentially discover gaps in a text. Through the questioning and disrupting of texts within the classroom students investigate and create discourses not only of identity, but of curriculum through engaging with and questioning the ideologies of popular texts, particularly those of music.

This sense of rupture can induce the readers of texts, literary or otherwise, to understand that, as Grossberg notes, “particular instances of rock and roll may represent different things for different audiences in different contexts.” (in the Subcultures Reader 477). Grossberg’s notion that different students will understand different texts differently in specific situations is one that is useful in the English classroom for understanding a critical practice applied to both media texts and literary texts. In order for such critical and transformative learning to occur, however, educators must abandon the notion of the student as an empty vessel awaiting knowledge, for each reader of each text brings different meanings into the classroom as their own experience and context becomes acknowledged as ‘valid’ in the reading of a text. Teachers must be prepared to understand that students bring individual understandings of their environments, their economic, social, political and historical environments into the classroom when they study mandated texts. While students may not at first be fully aware of these ‘contexts’, it is the task of the teacher to make students aware of such contexts, as well relevant contexts for the texts that they are studying, in order to understand that particular texts have meant particular things in specific instances.
The Ontario curriculum clearly encourages students to think critically and encourages teachers to bring mass media into the English classroom. It is not unusual for Canadian English teachers to integrate aspects of popular culture into their curricula, whether it is by choice, or whether it is mandated. I explore here the important notion that media and popular culture must not be brought into the classroom incidentally, but purposefully, as part of a serious and rigorous curriculum that offers connections not only to the literature studied in the classroom, but to other contexts in which students live and engage. Practising and understanding media and popular culture can be a vital part of an approach to both cultural studies and literature in the English classroom. The 1989 Media Literacy Resource Guide, for example, states that students should “decode media products in order to identify and examine the cultural practices, values and ideas contained in them” (7 - my emphasis). Activities in the guide come under headings such as “Decoding: Content, Values and Aesthetics” and activities include, for example, the finding of videos that contain ‘value messages’ of which students approve or do not approve. Such an approach is concurrent with one outlined by Len Masterman: “A central aim in television teaching is demystification - an examination of the rituals, conventions and practices through which a dominant ideology is disseminated via the medium” (142). Demystification, or decoding, are not uncommon in the practice of studying popular culture. Such methods invite readers to identify the ‘dominant’ message in the text, which they often find and read with ease, since texts frequently reflect the established practices and conventions of the culture in which we live.

The approach of the Ontario curriculum needs to be pushed further in order to understand not only the ‘content’ of the media studied, but also the context of the creation of the
text, as well as the institution in which it is being read. If such a curriculum is to be ‘useful’, it should allow students to bring their knowledge acquired in sites other than the school into the context of the school, in order that they may understand the text and thus the curriculum in a way that is meaningful for them. For this reason, cultural studies, through a ‘processes of culture’ model, becomes a means by which texts, located traditionally within the realms of ‘low’ and ‘high’ culture are read, resisted and understood in a manner which is challenging for all readers, whether they are in the position of ‘teacher’ or ‘student’. Shuker leads us toward the nexus of cultural studies when he explains:

Media institutions have been examined by asking of media texts: Who produces the text? For what audience? In whose interests? What is excluded? Such an interrogation necessitates examining particular media in terms of their production practices, financial bases, technology, legislative frameworks and their construction of audiences (Shuker 25).

Such questions invite the view that the ‘decoding’ position taken by the Media Literacy Guide is somewhat problematic. To understand how we can raise questions about the practice of reading to uncover a ‘universal’, or ‘underlying message’ in a text through ‘decoding’, the possibilities of cultural studies as a theoretical position from which popular music can be studied.

Each of the processes in the circuit should be considered within its social, political and economic contexts. The aims and history of this theoretical nexus are summarized by Kellner:

The major traditions of cultural studies combine - at their best - social theory, cultural analysis, history, philosophy, and specific political interventions, thus overcoming the standard academic division of labour by surmounting specialization which bifurcates the
field of study of the media, culture, and communications. Cultural studies thus operates with a transdisciplinary conception that draws on social theory, economics, politics, history, communication studies, literary and cultural theory, philosophy, and other theoretical discourses.

Transdisciplinary approaches to culture and society transgress borders between various academic disciplines. In particular, they argue that one should not stop at the border of a text, but should see how it fits into systems of textual production, and how various texts are thus part of systems of genres or types of production and have an intertextual construction. Transdisciplinary approaches thus involve border crossings across disciplines from text to context, and thus from texts to culture and society. Crossing borders inevitably pushes one to the boundaries of class, gender, race, sexuality, ethnicity, and the other characteristics that differentiate individuals from each other and through which people construct their identities. Thus most forms of cultural studies, and most critical social theories, have engaged feminism and the various multicultural theories, enriching their projects with theoretical and political substance derived from the new critical and multicultural discourses that have emerged since the 1960s (28).

It is this version of cultural studies which I advocate not only for the study of popular culture, but also as a theory that can migrate from popular media and music to the study of 'literature'.

As Kellner argues, the boundaries of class, gender, race and sexuality are returned from text to context. It is this notion in particular that is useful for my project of understanding the ways in which the theory of cultural studies may be useful in reading texts, popular and literary, within a secondary English classroom. Cultural studies requires the acknowledgement of all
types of identities - from gender, class and race to sexuality. Breaking down the boundaries also changes the context of the traditional English classroom where the teacher imparts knowledge or 'truth' to the students. It shifts the position of the educator to that of a guide, one able to ask and answer questions regarding context. It decentres the notion that students or teachers alone are able to draw definitive conclusions from the reading of a text, in part since each text 'holds' different meaning for different readers from diverse contexts.

The historical and social conditions of the production and consumption of each text are important, as is the context - social, political and historical - of the audience who reads the text. Meaning is thus created through the interaction of the processes of culture in the places where reader, contexts and text meet. As Toni Morrison argues: "What is left out is as important as what is there" (341). Both readers and texts contain gaps, spaces in the process whereby meaning is produced and consumed. It is in these gaps that the possibility for critical thinking and transformative learning can occur. Indeed, cultural studies opens an arena for the reader to bring his or her own experience to a specific text, asking questions of that text and of themselves about what is included or excluded from the text in question.

Allowing popular culture into the classroom may be a very difficult step for many teachers. Doing so involves not only changing previously established curricula, but asks them to recognise the culture of students and changes their theoretical approach to teaching literature. Such change is indeed radical. Yet radical change is needed in the English classroom. Outside of the school, students are exposed and react to many texts, from advertisements to music video and the internet. As the world around students changes, curricula must change to accommodate and increase understanding of the that which exists outside the classroom walls. Along with
such change, students must learn to think critically, not only about traditional texts consumed in a regulated fashion in school, but about the popular ones around them. For this reason, it is essential that teachers begin to acknowledge ‘popular’ culture within their curriculum.

Popular music is one means, then, of teaching and of students gaining an understanding of the theory of cultural studies in the English classroom. It provides a site that is readily accessible to students through their own experience and pleasure. Lawrence Grossberg describes the location of fans of popular music: “Rock and roll locates its fans as different even while they exist within the hegemony (of society). The boundary is inscribed within the dominant culture. Rock and roll is an insider’s art which functions to position its fans as outsiders” (in the Subcultures Reader 483). Rock and roll offers listeners a place to resist the hegemonic culture of North American society. Students today have hybrid and multiple levels of identity. For many students, there are few places to resist the dominant ideology perpetuated in this culture largely by white males. Bringing rock and roll or popular music into the school context places students in a position of privilege that they do not often experience in this institution. Allowing them an opportunity to discuss an area of their experience that lies most often outside the institution, yet one they are well-versed in and find pleasurable, is an excellent way to engage them in the challenges that a substantial version of cultural studies involves in the classroom.

Relevance and meaning will be established as lived culture is shown to be a valid field of concern within the institution alongside of more traditional ‘high’ art and literature. This ‘lived culture’ may include all texts that influence students outside the classroom, those students experience on a daily basis in sites without the shelter and regulation of the school.

Inviting lived culture into the institution raises dilemmas and issues about pleasure. It
also places teachers in the difficult position of determining what ‘types’ of ‘lived culture’ are appropriate within their own school and classroom. They must decide which ‘lived’ texts to read and where the limits in this area lie so that reading, discussion and writing remain ‘appropriate’ for the specific school and local community. Primarily, lived culture engages students in the hybrid nature of the mass media and of their own identities. As students become able to read popular culture through the theory of cultural studies, they are able to bring to bear a theoretical nexus on other contexts. It is the aim of this theory that students will read not only popular culture, but literary culture through the theory of cultural studies.

Popular music is not a straightforward text that is simple to introduce in the classroom. Frith and McRobbie explain:

As a cultural product, a rock record has multiple layers of representation. The message of its lyrics may be undercut by its rhythmic or melodic conventions and, anyway, music’s meanings don’t reach their consumers directly. Rock is mediated by the way its performers are packaged, by the way it is situated as radio and dance music. Rock reaches its public via the ‘gatekeepers’ of the entertainment industry, who try to determine how people listen to it. The ideology of rock is not just a matter of notes and words (in On Record 373).

The combination of the complex ideology of the text itself, and the difficulties of attempting to integrate a new theoretical nexus into the curriculum can understandably be overwhelming for many teachers. In his book, Understanding Popular Music, Roy Shuker concisely outlines issues that can work as a point of departure for the use of cultural studies in understanding the mass media and popular culture. He argues:
The study of rock music is situated in the general field of cultural studies, which addresses the interaction between three dimensions of popular culture: lived cultures, the social being of those who consume popular cultures; the symbolic forms, or texts, that are consumed within the lived culture; and the economic institutions and technological processes which create the texts (14).

The following five issues noted by Shuker, which I have abbreviated, offer opportunities for the engagement of the discourse of popular culture in the secondary English classroom. It is essential to recall that cultural studies acknowledges that these complex issues are overlapping and interwoven, and the way in which each reader responds to a specific text will be different:

1. The tension between the economic, market determinants of popular culture and the consumer sovereignty exercised by those who actually buy, view, read, and listen to mass marketed television, films, magazines, bestsellers, and pop/rock music.

2. The nature of the lived cultures and the interrelationships between particular cultural preferences and factors such as class, gender, ethnicity and age.

3. The ideological role of popular culture in perpetuating dominant values, and the possibilities for subverting and opposing such preferred readings.

4. The nature of the appeal of popular culture (the pleasures of the text), and its role as a form of cultural capital.

5. The frequent ‘moral panic’ reaction to popular culture, and the associated notions of effects and causality at work in such episodes (46).

The above issues do certainly not denote a comprehensive view or understanding of any text, but offer places to engage the discourse of popular music through question, pleasure, opposition, dissension, understanding and creation.

Any song could be used to begin a cultural studies discussion of popular music. The
essential element of the chosen song, whether picked by teacher or student, is that the reasons for its selection are recognised by the teacher and by the readers. As students and teacher read any given text, they must be aware of the processes of production, consumption, identity, representation and, particularly at the outset of the project, regulation. All readers in the classroom should be aware of the context of the selection, as well as the intentions for selection, thus making them aware of the ways in which even traditional print curricula are regulated within a classroom. The songs I have selected below were chosen to elaborate key aspects of the theory of cultural studies. I have, however, chosen songs written and performed by bands of which I am a fan, and in addition, the songs neatly serve my intention of demonstrating that understanding theory conveyed by meaningful examples brings pleasure when thinking through cultural theory in any segment of the curriculum.

I will examine two songs and one music video in this context of approaching theory through pleasure. It is my intention to demonstrate that integrating music and music video into curricula will deepen understanding of both theory and traditionally studied literary texts. I begin with a discussion of Shuker’s five points that reach across the specific divisions between songs and video. One of these is from a British ‘alternative’ and ‘independent’ band, the second and third of which are from an American ‘mainstream’ but still ‘alternative’ band.

A discussion of the economic and market determinants of popular culture can be a powerful one when embarked upon with young adults as they begin to understand how meaningful these contexts are to the culture that structures their lives. An essential item to note at the beginning of this discussion is that in the 1990s, the political economy of the production of the medium of popular music is strongly tied to music video and channels such as Much Music.
and MTV, which arguably play what are essentially advertisements for singles and albums nearly twenty four hours a day. Videos are required marketing tools for artists since MTV began in the early 1980’s as the record industry began to flag and searched for a tool for recovery. The music industry introduced the video first through dance clubs and then through television as a means of once again engaging young people in the music, in a manner that would encourage them to buy records and tapes. Video introduced adolescents to a culture which began not only to include the music, but the clothing worn by the artists, and in many cases, a ‘lifestyle’ that appeared to be espoused by the artist in the video. No longer was the album sold with a single print image, or a concert tour, but with a series of connected images that created a specific narrative through the video. Therefore, videos have become not only a marketing tool for music, but also for clothing, and in some cases, for a way of living in a specific cultural site. In addition to the videos, we must also bear in mind the somewhat ironic fact that advertisers favour music cable stations as a means of reaching consumers in their particular viewing demographic. Such facts complicate the idea of consumer sovereignty in making choices. It becomes clear that the viewer/reader of the music is indeed engaging in a consumerist subculture, but a place where there are also gaps that allow for resistant and creative discourses, within the realm of the dominant ideology of the culture and within its capital-motivated political economy.

The fact is that the music industry is centrally owned, largely by six companies (EMI, Sony, Time Warner, Bertelsmann, MCA and Philips). Each of these companies is in turn an entertainment conglomerate, dealing each with several facets of the entertainment industry, and indeed each of these conglomerates is motivated economically and ideologically to stay at the
top of corporate success in this industry. Yet there is still room for dissension, working with and against the text in question, as well tensions between signifieds, or meanings that result from interpretation. The frustration for the consumer lies in the fact that even if one listens to music that counters the ‘main stream’, or that offers what appears to be a ‘truly alternative’ subculture to the mainstream, one has learned about the music on a radio or television station that is supported by advertisers or on one of the music cable stations during an ‘alternative’ hour. Mostly adolescents end up at the cash register, purchasing a CD that has been reproduced by one of the six ‘majors’.

However, it is through lived culture, culture experienced at sites each day by ‘consumers’, that the resistance and/or acceptance of the ideologies related to popular music marketed by radio, television and the record companies occurs. It is the relationship between the cultural preferences of a largely adolescent audience and factors such as their class, gender, ethnicity, age, race, and sexuality that truly determine the ultimate ‘meaning’ of the discourses that are consumed. These factors also cause considerable differentiation within the terms ‘adolescent’ and ‘young adult’. As a result, there is also a significant differentiation in the ways in which pop music and video are read. I refer here to ‘reading’ in the sense of interpreting, interacting with, and beginning to understand any given text through the series of processes that comprise the ‘circuit of culture’.

Lived culture and experience, combined with cultural factors create ‘fans’ for different types of music. In turn, ‘fans’ consume and represent the music that is produced which appeals to their sense of cultural identity. This music is then taken up in an enormous variety of contexts, which consequently makes it difficult to precisely define the role or position of a ‘fan’
without a knowledge of their particular lived local culture. Each listener/reader will bring different information to bear on these issues; and thus a diversity of readings of any given text will occur.

Next, we must understand the role that popular music plays in perpetuating the ideology of the dominant culture and its values, as well as the possibilities that some of this music offers in subverting these values. It is on this area that the Ontario Media Literacy Guide focuses its interest, and while this strand is very important, it is only a single one in a complex web of questions that need to be asked around any issue concerning popular media. ‘Media literacy’ has traditionally been understood to be the cultivation of abilities in students to draw out the inherent meanings in a ‘popular’ text, and as a result, be able to resist its persuasive message.

It is also fascinating to compare the roles that rock and television have played in creating subcultures: “Television is traditionally a medium of family entertainment, collapsing class, gender, ethnic and generational differences in order to construct a homogeneous audience held together by the ideology of the nuclear family. Rock in contrast, has traditionally presented itself as being about ‘difference’; emphasising individual tastes and preferences” (Shuker). This explanation begins to suggest some of the means by which young people use familiar forms to negotiate new identities and their ways of moving away from a ‘homogeneous’ audience. Shuker’s point is partially true, for we must remember that dissenting groups of listeners have made ‘individual’ choices through listening to the radio or watching Much Music, which, although these media tend to perpetuate the dominant culture, do offer as well small spaces to manoeuvre. This aside, however, music is an integral part of the way in which young people form their identity and their peer groups; it is often through music that they begin to recognise
their own cultural experience. Various discourses that frame student identities are influenced by and implicated in popular music. Popular music, then, is a useful ‘tool’ in helping students to understand the theory of cultural studies.

When a text that is ordinarily ‘used’ outside the institution is brought ‘inside’ it to be read, it is vital to recognise the nature of the various types of appeal of this text and the pleasure factor that is associated with its use. Popular music and music videos impart a particular type of pleasure and knowledge for young people; this knowledge is important, as it is a part of what helps young people to define and locate themselves in culture. With this in mind, if the primary educational goal is to give meaning to the text for each reader and to simultaneously begin to conceptualise the theoretical framework of cultural studies, then the actual text read is not always of most significance. Therefore, in a classroom context, students or teacher should select a text from which pleasure is likely to be derived and with which most readers are likely to engage.

However, having said that, teachers must proceed with caution, for in one sense, these texts ‘belong’ to young people. We have seen that pop music plays a part in the identity of young people and the issue of its pleasure must therefore be negotiated with care so that this aspect of the ‘meaning’ of a musical text is not lost for listeners or viewers. Teachers must, therefore, tread carefully as they read any text through a cultural studies nexus in the English class. While a student’s ability to understand, engage or resist a text should not be underestimated, the teacher must exert care that the text is not read in a way that robs the student of the pleasure they derived from reading popular texts, even if some pleasures will inevitably be critiqued. It is this mobile line between theory and pleasure that is most difficult for a teacher to
respect and negotiate. Therefore, teachers should necessarily be acutely aware of student identities and local contexts in order to understand the limits of theory and the importance of pleasure.

Associated with pleasure is also the issue of ‘moral panic’ that is often connected to popular culture. ‘Moral panic’ is a phenomenon that results in communities when a popular text is seen as promoting questionable ‘morals’ and ‘values’ and it is taken up by young people. Often, the panic is perpetuated through the over-reaction of a small group of people who successfully mobilise a section of the community against a particular text. Such panics have resulted from the school use of books like Salinger’s The Catcher in the Rye, Joyce Carol Oates’ Foxfire, or from reactions to the lyrics of some popular songs. In the United States CDs with lyrics that are considered ‘inappropriate’ or ‘vulgar’ are often labelled with stickers identifying them as such. Thus ‘moral panics’ affect the discourse of popular music and video whether the text is read inside or outside the institution of schooling. Such ‘panics’ have co-existed with popular culture historically, from fiction to films and television, but are especially prevalent in the domain of music. Madonna’s videos and lyrics, and her subsequent “Sex” book were the cause of a public uproar. Today, Marilyn Manson is the bane of parents who oppose his appearance, his lifestyle and the messages that he advocates during performances. In part, it is precisely this moral panic that allows young people to position themselves against the dominant homogeneity and locate themselves within an opposing subculture. Indeed, perhaps it is the moral panic that gives some adolescents the form of pleasure that they locate in popular music. Issues concerning ‘moral panic’ must therefore be addressed and problematised when listening to such texts, particularly within schools. Public panics therefore simply offer an area of tension
and negotiation that needs to be addressed critically.

Consumption and production of music, or of any popular text, are closely linked. Part of teaching an understanding of popular texts means cultivating students’ awareness of the economic and market determinants that play a part in the ways in which a text is distributed and engaged with in specific contexts. Reception and representation of a text are further influenced by social, political and historical factors, as well as by the reaction of the community around the reader who is appropriating this text. Popular texts are also cultural sites that make possible the subversion and opposition of the ideology of the dominant culture. Similarly, the regulation of text is particularly important to the way in which it is read in school. As a result, a conscious awareness of the process of regulation in its various forms (state, local, educational, etc.) is essential to understanding the role of popular texts. In order to understand the ways in which these processes work together within specific texts and how they may be useful to a cultural studies approach within schooling, I examine three songs: the first written and performed by the “Beautiful South”, the second by the American band, “R.E.M.”, and finally video produced to market another of “R.E.M.’s” songs.

‘The Beautiful South’ is a British band, originating from Hull, in the North of England. The band has six members, and is considered an ‘alternative’ group. ‘The Beautiful South’ are not known for fantastic musical work, but are renowned instead for their lyrics. I would like to examine a song entitled “Woman in the Wall” recorded on the 1994 CD2 of the “Carry on up the Charts” album. (This CD2 is a limited edition CD, a fact worth noting if one is discussing issues around pleasure, fandom, consumer behaviour, identity and selection). If this text were brought into the English classroom to be read as an introduction to a related piece of literature, or as part
of a media unit, all of Shuker’s issues would need to be carefully discussed with regard to the site of production (Britain), the macro site of reception (North America in this case), and the local context of the listeners, or teenagers, with regard to this song. The processes of consumption, regulation, representation, identity and production would all need to be explored and understood in terms of both the text and its readers. The song is of interest to me due to the connections and tensions that it potentially holds with a much anthologised short story, “The Yellow Wallpaper”, written by Charlotte Perkins Gilman.

The song itself offers many issues that could be discussed in the context of an English classroom, as is evident from a sampling of its lyrics:

He was just a social drinker but social every night
He enjoyed a pint or two or three or four
She was just a silent thinker, silent every night
He’d enjoyed the thought of killing her before

......
Cry freedom for the woman in the wall
Cry freedom for she has no voice at all
I hear her cry all day, all night
I hear her voice from deep within the wall
Made a cross from knitting needles
Made a grave from hoover bags
Especially for the woman in the wall (Beautiful South “Carry on up the Charts”)

Without much effort, it easy for the class to note issues around alcoholism, family violence, passivity, feminism and women's rights in our modern world. Any specific reader’s particular relation to the above issues will affect the manner in which they hear this song.

Set beside Perkins Gilman’s short story, written in the late 1800s, the song takes on yet another dimension and is wrought with a different set of tensions. Perkins Gilman’s story is of a woman who is experiencing post-partum depression and who has been taken to a country house
for a time so that she may experience some respite and return to 'normalcy', according to her physician husband. As the protagonist of the story is left to her own devices without the child on the upper level of the house, she secretly attempts to write a journal as a release. She is forbidden to write by her husband since he has deemed that it affects her negatively, over-activating her already fragile mind. As she writes and sits in the room she becomes increasingly disturbed by the pattern of the wallpaper covering the walls. The main character seems to fall slowly into madness, and as she does so, begins to see women in the walls of the room in which she is confined. In an attempt to free the women from the wall, the protagonist rips all the paper from the walls. Arguably, the woman is really seeing her own shadow on the walls; it is thus herself she is attempting to free from the confinements of a husband, a child and of socially induced madness. The story takes on a further meaning when we learn that it reflects, in many ways, the life of Charlotte Perkins Gilman herself. When contextualised in the late nineteenth century, this 'imprisonment' of the depressed woman is normalised. It was not uncommon for women to be confined and separated from family as a result of post-partum depression. In addition, it was not uncommon for women to be forbidden to engage in the 'work' of writing. Perkins Gilman's short story then, potentially provides a new context, meaning and possibilities for hearing the 1994 song by the Beautiful South.

“Woman in the Wall” is a song that speaks to some of the issues commonly engaged with in the late twentieth century, and it can most certainly be read or understood within a modern context. Many readers responding to the discourses of this song may have life experiences that will influence their reading of this work. However, when the song is read alongside “The Yellow Wallpaper”, the reader/listener is able to make connections with the
protagonist in the short story being caught in the wall. This approach thus depends upon an
effect of intertextual layering. Indeed, reading Gilman's short story alongside this popular
musical text offers one means of understanding the historical context in which the story was
originally produced. Students will be able to grasp some of the social conditions which are
represented by each text, and the ways in which such conditions connect with their identities.
The students' consumption is thus a more informed one, allowing them to read in a more
historically active way that allows the questioning of the ideologies at the site of production, as
well as at the site of reception. It is in this fashion that a larger context, a study of historical,
social and economic conditions of each period may be brought to bear upon the reading of a
given text, not necessarily making this reading correct or incorrect, but allowing it to develop a
more insightful questioning and a deeper exploration of some of the spaces left undeveloped by
the author, thus allowing the audience to engage and further elaborate a text in a more full
historical manner.

R.E.M. is another 'alternative' band that has enjoyed phenomenal success within the
realm of popular music after having played together for eighteen years. The time that they have
worked together has brought them much recognition, as they have now been 'popular' across
two generations of young people, and thus, in spite of the 'alternative' label they appear to have,
they are very much a part of the mainstream of popular music. This fact returns us to Shuker's
argument that while rock and roll may help adolescents in particular to resist the ideology of the
dominant culture, most music is produced, regulated, represented and consumed within the
boundaries of hegemonic culture. This is certainly the case with all but the most independent
musicians. While many musicians are labelled 'alternative', if they are to make their music a
profitable enterprise, it is essential that their music be played by mainstream radio stations and that they produce videos to accompany their music in the hope of receiving air time on channels like Much Music and MTV. Therefore, despite the frequent ‘alternative’ designation, most musicians work within economic constraints, conventional genres and social boundaries in order to achieve popular social and financial success. R.E.M. has worked successfully within and against these boundaries simultaneously.

Michael Stipe, the lead vocalist of the band, has been regularly criticised for his confusing and incomprehensible lyrics, which despite their difficulties, can make them an interesting case to study. In establishing a context for the band, one discovers that all the members are active in a variety of the arts and all are highly politically active as well. These factors create lyrics that generally make for strong social commentary, even if they are not easy to sing along with. Stipe appears to create spaces for his listeners to participate, intentionally leaving moments of tension and confusion so that listeners must create their own meanings via their location and experience. When questioned specifically about the abundance of a variety of literary, social, political and historical references in his lyrics, he acknowledges their existence, but refuses to elaborate (“Birth of a Monster” 1993).

The 1988 album “Green” is an example of work that the band has produced which has social, historical and political implications. The title indicates that the album revolves around a concern for an environment rapidly decaying in the late twentieth century. The album also contains commentary on political leaders of in the late nineteen eighties. “World Leader Pretend”, for example, addresses the potential for everyone to lead a country, directing criticism explicitly at the Republican party in the United States, a view actualised when the band publicly
endorsed Bill Clinton for president. The song "Orange Crush" provides another set of lyrics with fascinating implications. The title of the song refers to a widely marketed drink, one that most North Americans are familiar with. The intent of the song is clear from the chorus:

Follow me, don't follow me
I've got my spine, I've got my orange crush
Collar me, don't collar me
I've got my spine, I've got my orange crush
We are the agents of the free
I've had my fun and now it's time to
Serve your conscience overseas (over me, not over me)
Coming in fast, over me ("Green" 1988)

With a knowledge of the Vietnam War and the U.S. defoliant, Agent Orange, this song acquires new meaning for the listener. Certainly, set in the context of the Vietnam War, this pop song takes on more tensions than are suggested by the simple title of the song. Stipe is making a commentary on the U.S. involvement in the war - again, part of the conditions under which he wrote the text. Thus the conditions the text was produced and written within, as well as the historical context of its contemporary reception, all play a role in the meaning that the text takes on for a listener. Whatever the author's intention, in music or in literature, it is the context and experience that the reader brings to the text that ultimately creates meaning. The meaning of this song is furthered through knowledge of the defoliant's role during the war, extended further still when we learn Stipe's father flew for the Air Force during the war, and pushed again when we reconsider the title of the album the song is a part of, to say nothing yet of the specific conditions in which the text is now engaged.

In research for this thesis, I read a British analysis of another R.E.M. song, entitled "Star 69". The author writes that "The 'Star' in the title is presumably referring back to 'Star Me
Kitten’ (ie. ‘Fuck’); ‘69’ refers either to the year, or to oral sex” (Hogan 88). In fact, my own North American context, combined with listening to and reading the lyrics, leads me to believe that the title refers to a service offered by American phone companies which allows customers to dial *69 as a means of accessing the telephone number of the last person to dial their own number. Without this cultural knowledge, however, Hogan, utilising his own experience and understanding, has created a reading of the lyrics that is well articulated and meaningful within his own context. Indeed, it is the cultural capital, the experience and knowledge of a given culture, that any reader brings to a text in order to engage with it and give it meaning.

Finally, another R.E.M. song, “Everybody Hurts”, which appeared on the 1992 album, “Automatic for the People”, reveals complex forms of hybridity between music, television and film. The video for “Everybody Hurts” demonstrates the ways in which the processes of production, consumption and representation work within a text. It shows how one text moves across modalities and is not simply confined to a single meaning, identity or genre. The video crosses boundaries as it acts not only as a commercial product intended to sell singles, an album or a music video on television, but is also a complex cultural performance as well. The meaning of the lyrics is not disputed, which is not usually the case with many R.E.M. songs. The band has clearly stated that the song is about death and hope for survival. It was spawned during rehearsals as the band contemplated the number of friends that they had lost to AIDS. As a response to this grief, Stipe chose to write a the song with a ‘message’ that would “reach teenagers and not be misunderstood. You don’t want something that needs a Math degree to go through when you’re trying to reach a seventeen year old and say, ‘It’s OK - things are tough but they get better’. There’s not a line out of place in there” (Hogan 77). Stipe sings that
“Everybody hurts sometimes, so hold on, hold on and take comfort in your friends” ("Automatic for the People” 1992). While the song seems relatively straightforward, raising some difficult questions about death, the video proves far more interesting from a cultural studies perspective.

The video for “Everybody Hurts” is set upon a highway in the midst of a traffic jam. Throughout the video, the camera pans from car to car, allowing the viewer to see different passengers. Meanwhile, subtitles for the lyrics, interspersed with the thoughts of the passengers run across the bottom of the screen, much as they do in a foreign film. The passengers in the vehicles are frustrated and depressed, even hopeless about life as they sit in the traffic. It is only at the end of the song, when Stipe’s lyrics urge them to “hold on” that all the passengers get out of their cars, abandoning the traffic jam, and walk down the highway. The video concludes with a ‘newsclip’ documenting the strange occurrence. The music video cleverly aligns the lyrics with images of hopelessness, of suicide and of death, and provides much fodder for discussion and questioning without most viewers being aware of its relationship to Wim Wender’s film, “Wings of Desire”. Stipe’s video resonates with many of the images and themes used in Wender’s film, from depression and death, to the idea of angels existing on earth, down to details such as the subtitles, necessary in a ‘foreign’ film, and a means of playing with language and cinematography in the video. So here again, one’s cultural capital or experience of a culture can change the way we locate a video, as well as how we locate ourselves when we view it and the ways in which we question the ideologies that surround it. The “Everybody Hurts” video is an interesting example of the manner in which a commercial form borrows from other cultural texts, here a high culture ‘art film’, and becomes a part of mainstream culture through its airing on Much Music and MTV. By playing with our culture’s conception of death, in addition to
using strong connections to a German film that is certainly not a part of mainstream North American culture, the video subverts our notion of what is traditionally included within the realm of the dominant culture. It subverts in part through its introduction of a series of discourses that allow multiple readings of the text, creating space for the reader or viewer to resist and create meaning in relation to their own experiences of anxiety and social angst.

Andrew Goodwin makes an argument about video that is of relevance to “Everybody Hurts”. He says: “In order to understand the relation between sound and image, song and video, we need first to consider whether some visual signifiers are stronger than others in fixing meaning. One important factor here would be the different emotional investments that listener/viewers bring to a song or video, depending on whether they are ‘fans’ of that artist. Second, we would need to remember that visual images are polysemic, too, and that meanings will never be frozen in time, or fixed for everyone” (408). The idea that each viewer/listener/reader brings different experiences to their engagement with the text is an essential one. Each reader is a socially constructed individual, whose identity is born from her/his cultural knowledge and culturally discursive experience. Importantly, for the study of popular culture within an institution, the meanings of the texts chosen by the teacher are never fixed, they cross boundaries for each reader and will, if carefully read through a cultural studies framework, also transgress borders in the institution between traditionally imposed curricula. As texts are ‘read’ through the theory of cultural studies and are understood as part of a ‘circuit’ of the cultural processes of representation, identity, production, consumption and regulation, then each text comes to have a unique meaning specific to the site at which it is read and received. More generally, however, texts must be understood in terms of the context in which they were
created (social, historical, political and economic) and the contexts in which they are read. Each
text that is read within the English classroom, then, is mobile, unstable, able to move beyond the
'limits' of the English curriculum, to work outside of boundaries of academic disciplines and of
the school.

In approaching the practice of teaching popular culture, literature, or anything else in the
secondary English classroom, we need to recall that viewers/readers are socially constructed,
influenced by the culture around them and the texts which they have read previously. Readers
are interdiscursive subjects who are not without agency, balanced between determinism and
autonomy. Readers themselves in fact can be regarded as such, socially constructed from the
discourses that make them hybrid creatures with multiple identities. Texts, of all types, are
neither containers of meaning nor infinitely pliable but are rather always already 'in use'.
Produced under determinate conditions, which viewers need to learn about, they are reproduced
under another set of determinate conditions, and not read 'faithfully' or solely from a personal
perspective. Moreover, ways of reproducing texts have consequences. Agency and power can
be given to the readers of popular culture within an institution by giving the texts themselves
agency by admitting them into the institution, not as 'low' culture, but as important culture,
artefacts which play with and against the dominant culture of our society. Recognising the
possibility for the spaces between the dichotomies of what have been considered 'high' or
dominant, and 'low' or popular culture within schools makes possible theoretical progress in the
recognition of the experience and knowledge that everyone brings to the institution and in the
possibilities for exciting transgression across the borders we have created between 'high' and
'popular' culture. In turn, this blurring of boundaries allows students in the English classroom to
read and understand texts, from music and fashion to 'canonical' literature, in a newly transformative, critical manner.
Chapter 3

Growing ‘Roots’ in the Classroom: Clothing, Identity and Literature

The secondary English classroom is a site of constant struggle and contestation as students and teachers engage with a variety of texts. The school and its curricula is imbued with constructed relationships between knowledge, experience and identity. Questions of consumption, production, representation and identity are often grappled with in the English classroom as students work to understand the meaning of literary texts. The theory of cultural studies offers a new way of practicing English. The theory displaces the teacher’s traditional position as ‘transmitter’ of information and implicates them in the “dynamics of social power and knowledge that they produce, mediate and legitimate in their classrooms” (Giroux in Canaan and Epstein 32). Through the example of popular music, I have shown that popular media is one way of beginning to understand social power and privilege within the discipline of English and across others, inside and outside the school. Theory in the English classroom must give meaning to everyday issues as well as to ‘literary’ texts. Curriculum must be linked to the experience of students. Useful curriculum within an English classroom integrates texts, written, in visual and audible forms, from ‘outside’ the classroom with texts that have been used ‘inside’ the classroom for decades. Using popular texts is one means of helping to understand, through theory, that all texts are tied up in the discourses of social power and privilege through the cultural processes of representation, consumption, production, regulation and identity, whether they are read or received at the school or at any other cultural site.

Knowledge and questions developed in the English classroom should be consequential for students. In order for student knowledge to be meaningful in this way, schools and curricula
must be aware that culture is always in process and that identity is mobile. Consequential knowledge may begin in the English classroom as the authoritarian position of the teacher is decentred and as students begin to feel empowered across social, political, historical and economic differences. This may happen through the reading of a variety of texts, from popular to what is considered ‘valuable’ or ‘high’ culture. Students should first be allowed to experiment with the questioning and understanding of the theory of cultural studies using texts that are a part of their own cultural capital, or experience. In other words, popular culture can be a meaningful point of entry for both teacher and student into theory and into literary works. It is one of the ways of beginning to understand that the subject of English involves understanding the agency and context of social and historical conditions in the production and consumption of texts.

The study of fashion and clothing, like the study of music, can be valuable to English curriculum through its invitation to understand the series of processes that are involved in the creation of any cultural text. Fashion and clothing, in particular, encourage changes within curriculum to concede that students arrive at school with varied experience and multiple identities, and are thus hybrid individuals. This is indeed a change to English curricula, indeed most curricula, which as Giroux notes have traditionally been “actively engaged in forms of moral and social regulation, schools have had presupposed fixed notions of cultural and national identity” (in Canaan and Epstein 28). Power has been inseparable from curriculum. Schools have perpetuated, through curricula, patriarchal ideas of history, identity and cultural experience, disallowing voices of those students whose cultural capital was not a part of that of the hegemonic curricula. Cultural studies works to avoid exclusionary curricula, allowing multiple
histories and thus multiple identities within students. Through fashion, I demonstrate that students may work through the 'circuit of culture' to discover that identity is discursively varied, that it is dynamic and that a fixed identity, of text or of reader will not be achieved. Through the study of clothing, students will learn to understand theory that will be of use not only in reading other texts and literature, but that will be useful across disciplines and in even divergent cultural sites.

Fashion is an inherently cultural practice that imbues our lives with aspects of subjectivity as we necessarily practice aesthetics and consumerism through coding bodies via clothing. Cunningham and Voso Lab note the importance of fashion in our society: “Clothing helps to substantiate the manner in which we order our world of cultural categories such as class, status, gender and age, and express cultural principles such as the values, beliefs and ideas which we hold regarding our world” (5). They go on to argue that “the fashion system invents new cultural meanings through opinion leaders who help shape and define cultural meaning. Opinion leaders are individuals held in high esteem (movie stars, celebrities, nobility, etc.) Their behaviour is emulated by those who admire them” (13). Fashion and clothing, therefore, directly impact on the subjectivity and identities of the young people in secondary schools. Whether they forage through fashion magazines for a new ‘look’, or watch Much Music and choose to emulate or resist the costume of popular musicians, or simply follow or counter the ‘style’ of peer groups at school, young people use clothing and fashion in order to make their bodies culturally visible and recognisable. As adolescents use clothing to (re)construct their bodies, they also use fashion in determining identity, through the consensus, dissension and the questioning of social practices. Clothing offers young people to construct and resist the identities that are offered
through the dominant social ideology, through hegemonic histories and through traditional curricula. The study of fashion offers the opportunity to realise the liminal and hybrid nature of the discourses of both identity and culture. Culture is an always dynamic intersection of the processes of production, consumption, regulation, representation and identity. Important issues of representation are also raised in studying clothing by its relation to the dynamics of ethnicity, gender, class, age, sexuality and race. These issues are explored in this chapter through an examination of the ‘Roots’ Canada line of clothing, one that achieved a very high profile and popularity during the 1998 Winter Olympics. Sartorial issues are relevant, not only to the ways in which we understand culture and identity, but also because they raise questions work to develop ‘critical’ readers of other types of texts, including of traditional print texts studied in the English classroom.

The discourse of clothing is one of many that helps to establish ‘teenage identity’. Its nature of functionality means that young people engage with and make choices around the discourse daily, creating an ideology of identity around the person they are at school, at home, and with friends. Clothing is an integral part of life in North American culture. It is necessarily a part of the everyday lives of students. It is therefore a vital cultural site for students, making it a good point of entry to the theory of cultural studies in the English classroom. Identities and culture are linked through fashion for young people. Fashion works to create the community in which this young adult ‘identity’ may develop through questioning, understanding and experimentation. Hall and Whannel explain:

Because of its high emotional content, teenage culture is essentially non-verbal. It is more naturally expressed in music, in dancing, in dress, in certain habits of walking and
standing, in certain facial expressions and ‘looks’ or in idiomatic slang.... Certain attitudes seem not only to recur with emphasis in the provided culture, but to have found some specially appropriate physical image or presence among teenagers themselves. This teenage ‘look’ can be partly attributed to the designers of mass-produced fashions and off-the-peg clothes and to the cosmetic advice syndicated in girls’ and women’s magazines ... The very preoccupation with the image of the self is important - pleasing, though often taken to extremes. Dress has become, for the teenager, a kind of minor popular art, and is used to express certain contemporary attitudes” (Hall and Whannel 65).

In the secondary school, where many teenagers spend the bulk of their time, image is preoccupying, and dress is indeed an art. Regardless of the peer group or cultural environment in which the teenager circulates, individuals carefully cultivate the ideology of their identity, as adolescents tend to have social need to be recognised, through acceptance or through conscious dissension, by their peers. As young people are socialised in the school environment, they learn the appropriate modes of behaviour and dress that are required of them to fit into such specific peer groups.

I will address the question of the constitution of a youth identity in the context of this ordinary cultural practice: fashion. My discussion centres on the iconography, style and construction that supports the creation of a particular ‘Canadian’ clothing line, Roots. Using examples of this clothing, I will explore Roland Barthes’ argument that a normally hidden set of rules, codes and convention through which meanings particular to a specific social group are rendered universal and ‘given’ for the whole of society through dress. In this case, I will examine
the ‘meanings’ generated by the symbols depicted on Roots clothing. Roots has, in a sense, colonised the iconography of the Canadian understanding of the ‘North’, has packaged it and has sold it back to Canadians successfully because of the country’s ‘national stress’, its persistent fear of hybridity, of crossing boundaries, and thus an ensuing necessity of maintaining a homogeneous Canadian identity based upon the geography and images generated by the Northern parts of the country. I hope that my discussion will reveal the part that clothing plays in the constructed nature of youth and Canadian identity, and will problematise the notion of a unique and singular identity, while simultaneously revealing the importance of the ideology of image and identity for young people. The discussion must also demonstrate the need, in understanding ‘teenager’ identity, to ask multiple questions through a nexus of discussion centring upon the concept of cultural studies and hybridity. In doing so, I hope to reveal that the theoretical framework which makes up the field of cultural studies, one that argues for the necessity of the concept of hybridity and its useful implications for the English classroom, not only in the introduction of the popular texts, such as music and fashion, into the curriculum, but also in the reading of ‘literature’ prescribed by the regulated curriculum.

As I begin, I must make clear the ways in which identity is a constructed ideology and the ways in which this can be understood through thinking about the discourse of hybridity. It is time for us, Canadians in particular, to push beyond the notions of a unique identity centred around multiculturalism to a discussion around the impossibility of fixing identity, and thus move to questions and ideas around issues of hybridity and of multiple identities. Homi Bhabha suggests that,

The ‘beyond’ is neither a new horizon, nor a leaving behind of the past....Beginnings and
endings may be the sustaining myths of the middle years; but in the *fin de siècle*, we find ourselves in the moment of transit where space and time cross to produce complex figures of difference and identity, past and present, inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion. For there is a sense of disorientation, a disturbance of direction, in the 'beyond': an exploratory, restless movement caught so well in the French rendition of the words *au-delà* - here and there, on all sides, *fort-da*, hither and thither, back and forth.

This moment of transit or of uncertainty offered by Bhabha frees young people of the rigid nature of defining a specific identity related to their cultural location, even if not of those identities which are ascribed, such as race, age and gender - it does offer places for cultural inclusion as well as for exclusion. The moment of transit redefines the notion of boundaries - geographical, political, linguistic, and cultural - that surround notions of identity. Derrida, like Bhabha, would argue that it is not possible to position or locate oneself specifically within or without one of these borders, but that the subject moves constantly between positions, and thus the subject becomes a hybrid creature.

Stuart Hall posits:

Cultural identity is not a fixed essence at all, lying unchanged outside history and culture. It is not some universal and transcendental spirit inside us on which history has made no fundamental mark...It has histories - and histories have their real, material and symbolic effects. The past continues to speak to us...It is always constructed through memory, fantasy, narrative and myth. Cultural identities are the points of identification, the unstable points of identification or suture, which are made within the discourses of
history and culture (in Naficy 172).

Angela McRobbie concurs as she speaks about youth specifically:

In recent work on identity and subjectivity it is argued forcibly that, since full identity is never achieved, the question of the self is never resolved and fixed and is therefore always open to change, to transformation and to realignment. This work challenges notions of full subjectivity and replaces it with fragile, 'shaggy', hybrid identities. It is surely significant that it is young people who seem to be at the forefront of exploring and inventing these categories, often within the language of popular music, and that, as Paul Gilroy has pointed out, such new identities show signs of endless diversity and intensive cultural cross-over.

Different, youthful subjectivities, for all the reasons of generational and institutional powerlessness which are the product of dependency, require and find strong symbolic structures in youth cultural forms, through which 'who you are', 'who you want to be' and 'who you want to go out with' can be explored, not in any finalised way, but rather as an ongoing and reflective social process. This is to suggest that there is no clear sociological divide between 'lived experience' and 'texts and representational forms' (42-43).

It is this understanding of identity that I wish to bring to the English classroom through the study of fashion. Readers must understand that there is room for identification with culture, for disidentification, as well as for counter-identification (Pecheux); they must understand that there is a possibility of working with the dominant culture, as well as for working on and against dominant ideologies. In the classroom, teachers must allow their practice to permit students to
reject texts, to resist them and to engage them through the acceptance of the discourse that is offered through the text. Gaps for acceptance and resistance of identity within texts are essential if students are to develop ‘consequential’ knowledge through reading the regulated English curriculum. It is these questions of identification and of cultural process, then, that I hope to explore with a discussion of Canadian Roots clothing. Do young Canadians use clothing to belong to a culture or to society? Do they use Roots clothing to work against the dominant ideologies that work upon them?

Clothing is integrally linked with notions of identity for young people, whether they view their identity as ‘established’ or whether they view it as ‘shifting’. Cunningham and Voso Lab note that,

Being able to maintain a fashionable appearance has some influence on our self-concept. The concept of self refers to a stable, all encompassing idea of who we are, based on information received through socialization, self-expression and identity. We have some indication of who we are from the sum of all our past experiences, interactions, and feedback from others. Clothing helps to define our identity by supplying cues and symbols that assist us in categorizing within the culture. Status symbols serve to identify or socially ‘place’ an individual (11).

Fashion does indeed locate us culturally, whether we are working with or against the dominant ideologies of the culture. Fashion is often seen as a system of signs combined to communicate a specific message. Bhabha observes about the construction of culture, and of fashion, through its signs and symbols,

Becomes crucial to distinguish between the semblance and similitude of the symbols
across diverse cultural experiences and the social specificity of each of these productions of meaning as they circulate as signs within specific contextual locations and social systems of value...The natural(ized), unifying discourse of ‘nation’, ‘peoples’, or authentic ‘folk’ tradition, those embedded myths of culture’s particularity, cannot be readily referenced. The great, though unsettling, advantage of this position is that it makes you increasingly aware of the construction of culture and the invention of tradition (172).

It is this awareness that must be realised within institutions, particularly within the realm of the English class, if students are to develop a knowledge of texts that is consequential. An awareness of the cultural processes that make up the text of clothing will travel across disciplines and will move beyond the confines of the school.

The Roots company capitalises upon Canadian ‘traditions’ and icons, in addition to producing garments appropriate for the weather and the geography of the Canadian landscape, all while playing upon the myths of our ‘particular Canadian culture’. The use and choice of Canadian icons by Roots is far from innovative. The success and novelty of Roots clothing has come through the use of such images on specific clothing and the ways in which they are marketed to maintain an identity. Thus it is the ‘social specificity’ of the Roots icons within ‘specific contextual locations’ that make them of interest in a study of fashion and youth identity.

In studying icons, or clothing in general, we must remember that all objects are loaded with meanings (clothes, music and books - anything that we bring into the classroom) and that “together, object and meaning constitute a sign, and within any one culture, such signs are
assembled, repeatedly, into characteristic forms of discourse” (Hebdige 104). Volosinov argues:

A sign does not simply exist as part of reality - it reflects and refracts another reality. Therefore it may distort that reality or be true to it, or may perceive it from a special point of view, and so forth. Every sign is subject to the criteria of ideological evaluation...The domain of ideology coincides with the domain of signs. They equate with one another. Whenever a sign is present, ideology is present too. Everything ideological possesses a semiotic value (in Hebdige 13).

Roots takes the icons of the ‘Canadian North’: the maple leaf, the canoe, the beaver and the landscape, and has popularised such images on its clothing. It is the ideology that surrounds these seemingly simple icons that compose the Roots ‘lifestyle’ and invest its clothing with meaning that needs to be examined. Repeated exposure to the signs, or icons, of Roots, has begun to create a discourse of identification for Canadians who are familiar with the clothing. I would like to emphasise the importance of iconography to the creation of ‘identities’ and ‘histories’, whether national, or personal. The use of such icons on mass-distributed clothing does indeed have the potential to influence notions of identity.

Barnard observes that “most obviously, then, fashion and clothing are forms of non-verbal communication in that they do not use spoken or written words” (26). Communication, verbal or non-verbal, involves an individual or subject as a member of a community. “Communication as a ‘social interaction through messages’ constitutes an individual as a member of a group” (Barnard 29). While the power of fashion to communicate is evident, it is also essential to realise “what happens as each reader brings their own cultural experience and expectations to bear on the garment in the production and exchange of meanings. Meanings are
generated, then, and positions of relative power established in and through the process of communication” (Barnard 31). Fashion may be seen as simple semiology and as a way of communicating an identity, but it must be further examined and understood, as are literary texts, as a specific site of cultural production and as a place where meanings are generated around notions of identity. As clothing is worn, or received through the gaze of another, it is caught up in the dynamic of culture. The ways in which the processes of the ‘circuit of culture’ move depend upon the site at which the clothing is produced, worn and received. Context and cultural experience are vital to the meaning that is generated by the wearer or viewer of the clothing.

Fashion is often relegated with the trivial or as inconsequential popular culture. The ways in which young people use fashion are far from inconsequential. Indeed in Canada, fashion, and Roots clothing in particular, are used extensively as sites of production of a 'national' identity. Willis explains that what is often perceived as ordinary culture is, in fact, rather extraordinary:

We are thinking of the extraordinary symbolic creativity of the multitude of ways in which young people use, humanize, decorate, and invest with their meanings their common and immediate life spaces and social practices ... In conditions of late modernization and the widespread crisis of cultural values they can be crucial to the creation and sustenance of individual and group identities, even to cultural survival of identity itself. There is work, even desperate work, in their play (2).

The practice of teachers and the regulated nature of English curricula often excludes the culture, or life experience of students in favour of the study of ‘vital’ and ‘valuable’ works of literature. Students now ‘read’ far beyond the context of the classroom, everywhere from the internet to
television. The reading that occurs outside the classroom is invested with meaning, just as English teachers hope their practice invests the work of Shakespeare. For texts within the school to be received by students as consequential, the practice of English teachers must work to reflect the wider variety of texts produced and consumed in modern society. Teachers must recognise the value of student cultural work and identities without the boundary of the classroom.

Barnard addresses the importance of the culture of fashion specifically:

Every day we make decisions about the social status and the role of the people we meet based on what they are wearing: we treat their clothes as 'social hieroglyphics' to use Marx's term, which conceal, even as they communicate, the social position of the wearer. Fashion and clothing, that is, may be the most significant ways in which social relations between people are constructed, experienced and understood. The things that people wear give shape and colour to social distinctions and inequalities, thereby legitimating and naturalising those social distinctions and inequalities (7).

Fashion plays a part in the construction of group identity. While it marks difference, fashion can also constitute similitude within a given group, creating a sense of homogeneous identity, as is the case with Roots garments as they work to create a semblance of a unique but universal 'Canadian' identity and ideology. As Barnard suggests, the wearing of Roots clothing may reveal much about the wearer. Roots clothing is not inexpensive, and is generally purchased new by young people who are a part of the middle class. The clothing, with its logos and icons, reveals that the wearer is aware of his or her Canadian 'identity' and is prepared to sport a logo that identifies them as such. In addition, while the marketing of Roots clothing does much to connect it with 'Northern' Canada and the environment, Roots clothes are generally suited for
urban wear, not for wear in the more rugged northern regions of the country. Clearly, clothing and fashion are far more than simply popular culture, for they offer much to the understanding of the 'work' of young people and the cultural processes that this work involves.

The teenage years are a time of complexity and importance in the formation of identity. It is necessary to acknowledge that many later forms of behaviour are established during this time. Danesi explains: "Language, dress, musical tastes and other symbolic codes become the concrete means for identifying with peers. Indeed, teenagerhood is implanted in a psychosocial time-frame that channels the physiological and emotional changes that occur at puberty into peer-shaped and peer-sanctioned patterns of symbolic behaviour" (xi). Young people are particularly active in the creation of an ideology around clothing. Willis observes:

The teenage and early adult years are important from a cultural perspective and in special need of close 'qualitative' attention because it is here, at least in the first-world Western cultures, where people are formed most self-consciously through their own symbolic and other activities. It is where they form symbolic moulds through which they understand themselves and their possibilities for the rest of their lives. It is also the stage where people begin to construct themselves through nuance and complexity, through difference as well as similarity (7).

It is important to understand that while Roots clothes can be pivotal in the formation of one youth 'identity', it can also play a role in the creation of a 'national community'. Roots clothing is also instrumental in the construction of difference.

A geographically colonized country for many years, and as one currently colonised through mass media by the United States, Canada, and especially its young residents, now more
than ever, are urgently trying to establish themselves through similarities to and differences from the colonisers of the past. Canadians are engaged in a constant struggle to maintain a unified country, as various provinces, Quebec in particular, are actively trying to separate from the rest of the nation. Canada, as a nation, is constantly in the process of working towards a 'unified' identity, whether it is through the resistance of past colonisers, or whether it is through the acceptance of the identities offered up by the United States. Canadians are currently in a social and historical context of national uncertainty that makes many people receptive to the illusion or feeling of national unity. The importance of this need for unity was demonstrated though the phenomenal national support and physical presence in Montreal for the 1995 referendum on Quebec's separation. This sense of a need for a national 'identity' (in fact mythology) was perpetuated through the popularity of the iconographic Roots clothing at the 1998 Winter Olympics. Roots clothing does play a role in creating one of the 'symbolic' Canadian identities.

As a means of asserting an identity, fashion, too, can be seen in terms of a hybrid discourse. Barnard concludes that,

Fashion and clothing exist in the conceptual space or difference between so many oppositions that it is tempting to explain the ambiguous profile that they present as being the product of a sort of generalised undecidability. Fashion and clothing are not simply either private or public phenomena, for example, the are 'on the borderline between subject and object. They represent something like a border or a margin between a public, exterior persona and a private, interior identity ... clothing marks an unclear boundary ambiguously, and unclear boundaries disturb us (173).

Roots garments serve not only to create a cohesive group of people with similar senses of
'national identity within 'Canada', but they also serve to differentiate 'Canadians' from those outside the borders of the country. Fashion is a transformative discourse as it is culturally signified through the processes of representation, identity, production, consumption and regulation.

We have established that "fashion and communication symbolically tie a community together". The unifying function of fashion and clothing serves to communicate membership of a cultural group both to those who are members of and to those who are not" (Barnard 56).

Craik speaks to the issue of cultural specificity with regard to clothing. This is important as we begin to look at a specifically Canadian example of clothing and how it relates to youth identity. "At a general level, fashion is technique of acculturation - a means by which individuals and groups learn to be visually at home with themselves in their culture. Given the local character of fashion milieux, acculturation is not a single-society process. Rather, fashion relates to particular codes of behaviour and rules of ceremony and place. It denotes and embodies conventions of conduct that contribute to etiquette and manners of social encounters ...

Particular meanings vary historically and are culturally specific, since the rules, codes and language of the garments and how they should be worn are definite and limited in scope" (Craik). As concerns around nationalism rage within Canada, and a 'Canadian' identity remains as elusive as ever, it is interesting to examine Roots garments as a culturally specific example of the ways in which the ideology of a 'Canadian' identity is created and played with and against by the wearers of the clothing.

The histories and philosophy that lie behind the Roots name are integral, it seems, to the success of the company and of the images and identity that they market. The current image of
the company rests in the hands of the co-owners of the manufacturing and retail operation.

Posner elaborates upon the history of the co-owners arrival in Ontario:

It was Lou Handler - a semiprofessional boxer, violinist, photographer and naturalist from Detroit - who, in 1955, carted around a little 16-mm film of Algonquin Park and persuaded the parents of Don Green and later of Michael Budman to rescue the palpable evils of Motor City by sending them to Tamakwa - a summer camp that ‘Unca Lou’, as he was known, owned on Tea Lake. And it was in that sacred temple of wood and water, three hours north of Toronto, that Handler and his partner, the late and legendary canoeist Omer Stringer, introduced the boys to nature and taught them to survive in the great outdoors... So without Lou Handler, there would have been no Roots, the little counterculture shoe store that the entrepreneurial young Americans opened in August 1973, immediately and cleverly appropriating that most of Canadian of logos - the beaver (52).

The importance of the idea of 'North' to 'Canadian culture', the ideology surrounding camping and the respect for nature instilled in the boys by Handler. Even the Roots web site reflects the ideology of camping espoused by the organisations in Algonquin Park. It is essential to recall that the ideas of ‘North’ and of ‘Canadian nature’, are part of a mythos that was carefully constructed by the Europeans when they arrived in and explored Canada. Camps and campers are quick to espouse the ideologies of the Native peoples who first inhabited northern Canada. The Europeans created a mythology around the Native peoples; mythology around their understanding of and peace with the land, as well as a calm and harmonious sense of self and community. It is these discourses that are espoused by many camps in Algonquin Park and that
are in turn conveyed through the wearing of ‘team’ Roots clothing.

This success in creating the notion of a ‘unified’ identity for culturally isolated Canadians was evident in the aggressive Winter 1997 marketing campaign, which used volunteer Canadian celebrities to model the new Roots line. The campaign used prominent members of the ‘Canadian national community’ to market the unifying clothing. The celebrities, themselves ‘Canadian’ icons, worked to sell the logos and images to the larger community. Much in the manner suggested by Cunningham and Lab earlier, these opinion leaders are being used by Roots in the hope that others wishing to identify with a ‘star’ will emulate the clothes that they wear. This was particularly evident during the 1998 Winter Olympics in Nagano, Japan, where Roots held a contract requiring Canadian athletes to wear Roots Olympic gear at the opening ceremonies. The athletes took to the clothes that they had been given and were captured by the media in ceremonies and on the podium sporting Roots clothing. As a result of the widespread and partially unexpected advertising opportunity, Roots has enjoyed a rush for their ‘poor boy’ hat, always worn backwards, and a healthy resurgence in business, with everyone from average teenagers to Prince Charles caught wearing Roots garments in the months since the Olympics.

What the film, the website, the marketing, the mass production and immense popularity of the clothing do is point to the fact that the discourse surrounding the name Roots is much larger than the simple communication of a style through clothing. These names and logos, carefully imbued with meanings, have become signifiers for the much larger ideology of a ‘Canadian national identity’. Many Canadians, grasping for a sense of a ‘unified’ identity, no matter how unattainable, have found this sense of identification with others through the communication offered by the iconography of Roots clothes. Reaching an understanding of the
reason for the importance of the creation of the illusion of identity, particularly a 'national' identity may bring a clarity of the processes of representation, identity and consumption that are useful to multiple discourses in the English classroom.

Roots clothing is comfortable, casual, well-made, but not exceptional apparel. Logos and icons make Roots clothes recognisable around the world and in the more than 20 years of the company's operation have prompted a sense of a homogeneous identity, for some Canadians, linked with northern nature and a common camping or cottaging experience. Posner writes:

With that native American genius for marketing, the Roots boys have turned what might have been just another clothing chain into a legitimate cultural icon. It says something about the crisis of identity in contemporary society, the desperate longing to belong to something ... Even more remarkably, they have somehow managed to transplant the ideology of conservation onto its very antithesis - the act of consumption, making the purchase of a Roots sweatshirt synonymous with selfless ecological virtue and oneness with Nature. They've packaged the wilderness and sold Canadians back their own myths (52).

Through the processes of representation, identity, production, consumption and regulation, the Roots company has sold the myth of a 'Canadian identity' to Canadians. This seems a passive acceptance of marketing strategy and image on the part of Canadians. Despite this appearance, it is the dynamic of the cultural processes at work in the current Canadian social and political contexts that have made some, especially young people receptive to the sense of a 'national' identity that is on offer through the wearing of Roots clothes.

It is important, then, to have a look at a few specific logos and to attempt to understand
the implication of their use on mass produced clothing. While most of the logos used by Roots denote obvious images, such as an animal or leaf, it is their connotation that is of particular interest. Barnard writes:

Connotation is sometimes called a second order signification or meaning. It may be described as the things that the work or the image makes a person think or feel, or as the associations that a word or an image has for someone. Technically, or semiotically speaking, it is the denotative sign (the unity of signifier and signified), considered as a signifier. The signified of this signifier will vary from person to person, as the word or image will have more or less different associations for different people. Words and images will have different associations, or connotations, for different people because those people are different. They may be different sexes, genders, ages, classes, nationalities (83).

Yet Saussure reminds us that the relation between signifier and signified is not just a matter of individual choice (Barnard 85). While the images played upon on Roots clothes may vary in their local meanings around the world, for 'Canadians', they are clearly symbols of 'nation' and of belonging.

The beaver logo and the actual 'Roots' name logo itself probably appear the most frequently on Roots clothing and leather goods. The beaver's role in European Canadian history harkens back to the days when Native Canadians traded beaver pelts for goods and products accessible to them only through European explorers and settlers. Today, this appropriation of the beaver to benefit commerce and trade continues. Green and Budman have played upon the continuing role of the animal in Canadian culture (Vincent Massey listed the beaver, as well as
the maple leaf in his list of Canadian images). The beaver has long served a functional role in
the lives of Canadians, and is represented widely, for instance, on the Canadian nickel. Roots
has played upon the cultural capital of the beaver and has marketed it widely as a 'Canadian'
symbol associated with their name.

An interesting development to note in Roots' use of their logos began in 1996 and can be
seen emerging once again in the images used in their Summer 1997 line. The often used maple
leaf is represented here a large 'R' in its centre. The Roots name has become synonymous with
'Canada' and popularised to the extent that the whole name no longer needs to be used - the
clothing is recognised as Roots simply through the appropriated maple leaf and the 'R'. The
ability to market this type of t-shirt has come from building upon and cannibalising the cultural
capital of 'Canadians' for many years. Roots has established itself as representative of the
'Canadian identity' through the appropriation and successful marketing of the imagery of the
wilderness - a use of those plants and animals common to our geographic location.

The significance of icons signifying 'Canadian cultural capital' on the Roots clothes is
clear, and through aggressive marketing, it is almost indisputable that part of the clothing's
function is to work toward the construction of a unified 'Canadian identity'. The company has
borrowed already established links between images such as the beaver and the maple leaf and
the Canadian land, taking them from their original historical context and has re-contextualised
the images in a manner that is useful in creating a new 'myth' of identity. It is the study of this
process of the creation of identity that may be useful in the English classroom, both to the study
of popular culture and to the study of literature, through the examination of the specific creation
of identity and the meanings that students bring to it.
The notion of 'North' is clearly an integral part of the success of the marketing of Roots clothing. And indeed, geography, too, is integral to the notion of Canadian 'identity': "Developed or not, the North remains all important to the Canadians' self-image. It makes their country the second largest on earth... Above all, its brooding physical presence over the land is a warning that Canadians have not yet conquered their universe" (Government of Canada in Shields 193).

The idea of ‘North’ is a constructed cultural text, as is the text of fashion. The ‘North’ has been historically created and defined racially and geographically by the hegemony of the Southern regions of the country. Images of the 'North' have been popularised and romanticised to create the illusion of a 'Canadian identity'.

Long have southerners imposed myths of honesty, of rugged hard work, of nature and of wilderness upon an area of this country which they know relatively little about. Much of the South's sense of identity and belonging to the North is a sense of imperial control, obtained through the marketing of images and the marketing of ideologies. Shields argues that there are reasons that the northern sections of our landscape are largely unexplored and unmapped: "The literal re-territorialisation of the North, the re-drawing of maps, would make the North suddenly someone's, a place where people dwelt and appropriated the land as their own. It would no longer be an 'empty space' but a territorialised place, a place of communities, a landscape made meaningful by personal biographies, and acknowledged as such" (198). Southerners have conquered the 'North' in many ways other than its physical colonisation: Roots has appropriated its images and have provided us with a form of symbolic imperialism over the North that allows a sense of common conquest, achievement and community through the simple wearing of an article of clothing.
Through their logos and their rugged garments, the Roots company has sold a seemingly homogenous identity to Canadians. In her discussion of the need for locality, for a strong sense of place (in this case, a sense of identity through place), Doreen Massey writes: "A 'sense of place', of rootedness, can provide stability and a source of unproblematical identity. In that guise, however, place and the spatially local are then rejected by many progressive people as almost necessarily reactionary. They are interpreted as an evasion; as a retreat from the (actually unavoidable) dynamic and change of 'real life'" (151). Canadians have located the ideology of identity in the landscape as a means of defining themselves within and without their colonisers. As a result, despite regional differences, the Roots company has been able to market what appears to be a unique and unifying identity to Canadians through the images reproduced on their clothing.

As I showed at the start of this chapter, schools have historically sought to practice the notion of a 'national' curriculum. Such a curriculum empowers the practice of teachers of English, History and Geography to assume a position of authoritarian knowledge in the classroom through the offering of one single and solid identity. The theory of cultural studies and the development of an understanding of DuGay and Hall's circuit of culture unsettles the notion that a unified national identity is useful, or even consequential. Identities are fluid and are multiple. Therefore, while Roots may market a seemingly unique identity, it is merely one of several used by certain individuals in particular contexts for their own specific purpose, which may or may not include a sense of 'belonging' to Canada's geography and people.

Identity, as we established earlier, is by its very nature fragmented and liminal. Barnard explains Derrida's idea of the bricoleur: "He says that nobody can be the origin of their own
discourse, nobody can 'construct it...out of whole cloth'. There is no one, no discourse, that does not have to use the language, the materials and the tools with which they are landed in order to operate, and to this extent, everyone and every discourse is *bricoleur*" (168). Everyone and every discourse is hybrid - purity is simply impossible as we negotiate the discourses of everyday life. While Roots clothes appear to transgress such impurities, my study reveals that the 'homogenous identity' that has been created through the clothing is in fact based upon long and complicated histories of ideologies of landscapes and cultures.

As culture shifts rapidly around and with us through the media, we must recognise that the discourse of identity and the ways in which we engage with this discourse are constantly moving and evolving as well. Luke notes:

There is an acceleration of change in style, 'the look', and the commodities which enable continuous personal reinvention, is primarily achieved through increasingly globalized and standardized media messages, all of which refer to other sign systems (of status, success, 'in'-groupness). This shift in transferability and marketability of cultures is enabled and sustained by post-industrial capitalism which has given rise to postmodern economies of culture; anyone anywhere can buy into countless variations of innumerable cultural styles (in Buckingham Teaching Popular Culture 26).

The media have both enabled and necessitated the hybridisation of identity as young adults become able to buy into a variety of cultures, through television, marketing and the world-wide web. Roots, for example, carefully packages the idea of 'Canadianness', and sells their Canadian icon-clad garments in Asia, Australia and the United States.

It is fashion in this shape-shifting and discourse-defying hybrid mode that is of use to
English teachers. The questions we learn to ask around fashion, through cultural studies, through an understanding of the ways in which fashion and clothing work through representation, identity, production, consumption and regulation, lead to an understanding of the possibility for transgressing boundaries, such as those that exist within institutions, for instance fashion and schools, as well as those that exist in our reading of novels in the English classroom.

Notions of text are changing as technology influences readers, students, as new media are introduced and are more rapidly becoming accessible to everyday users. As availability of texts outside the school grows, it becomes necessary to redefine the borders of traditional ideas of knowledge. For pedagogy, the implications of these changes are dramatic. Teachers must begin to adjust their curricula to privilege the vast amount of cultural experience that students bring from sites other than the school into the English classroom. The study of popular culture in the secondary classroom becomes essential as the number and variety of texts available to most people receive grows. For teachers, this means that traditional assumptions about knowledge in the classroom will be and must be challenged. In order for students to engage in a meaningful and critical way with the prescribed curriculum, they must be encouraged to question the texts they read. They must locate themselves with and against the text in order to find agreement and dissension within themselves and within the text. Students must be aware of their own cultural context and position, as well as the cultural context in which the texts they read are produced and are consumed in order to meaningfully engage and resist the meanings that are created. In this engagement and dissension, identity is negotiated constantly in a manner that means we can only understand ourselves and our students as hybrid entities. This complex theoretical notion of culture and hybridity becomes more accessible to students through an invitation to examine
their ‘own’ social texts, music and fashion in the classroom. An understanding of popular culture, the recognition that their social interests are as ‘valuable’ as what the traditional literary curriculum has to offer will likely bring students to the English classroom ready to engage with a variety of discourses, including the school curriculum and its required texts in a more meaningful way.

It is in this state of hybridisation that discourses such as the one of identity created by Roots are useful pedagogical resources and curricula. The realisation that identities are meaningfully constructed with purpose and intent through a series of social and cultural processes denies them the purity that they require in order to remain above and beyond questioning. Acknowledging that all identities are liminal and shifting in meaning allows us to ask questions of representation about the discourse of identity that may, with careful practice and a degree of luck, result in understanding, further questions and consequential knowledge for students. Examination of identities such as those the Roots company attempts to create provides an opportunity to attend to the gaps and the spaces that remain in the seeming homogeneity of student identity. It is essential, especially in regulated pedagogies and curricula of English, that we recognise the gaps that abound in discourse and begin to address them so that we may start to rupture them and that we may begin to learn to transgress the boundaries and borders that silence us.

As students understand the constructed nature of popular texts, whether through the study of music, fashion, or both, it becomes possible for them to allow that the same gaps that exist within the culture with which they are familiar exist within culture that has often been reserved by the curriculum. In the English classroom, it is poetry and prose that have been regulated by
teacher and school. As cultural theory becomes more accessible to students through popular culture, this knowledge may move across culture to the study of literature. I demonstrate the manner in which the processes of culture, which I have explored through popular music and clothing transgress ‘low’ culture and allow students to think in the same transformative ways about ‘canonical’ literature. In the next chapter I demonstrate this possibility concretely, by examining the work of Toni Morrison through this same theory of cultural studies.
Chapter 4

Make Me, Remake Me: Toni Morrison and the Theory of Cultural Studies

I have argued that popular texts may be analysed by examining the interchange of the processes of representation, regulation, consumption, production and identity. In secondary schools, the concept of identity is a good point of entry to this circuit of culture and often linked to identity formation for adolescents is the realm of ‘popular’ as opposed to ‘high’ culture. For this reason, I have suggested that popular art forms coupled with a basic understanding of some of the theory of cultural studies allow an introduction to the way that the circuit of analysis works. In this chapter, I intend to explore the three most recent novels written by an African American novelist - Toni Morrison. Through an investigation of her works, I attempt to show how some of the processes of culture that I have examined in the context of popular culture may, with the assistance of cultural studies theory, work in many of the same pedagogical, critical and transformative ways when applied to the study of fiction in the secondary English classroom.

Indeed, Morrison, a writer who, arguably writing from the margins, is producing texts which are now quickly canonized through their acceptance in university level course curricula. This work was further recognised when Morrison was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1993. In this manner, therefore, Morrison has crossed borders as an author - from marginal to canonical. As a writer, Morrison is able to create bestselling works, acclaimed by reviewers, featuring content and themes that are often construed as ‘difficult’. Morrison engages and recontextualises American (his)stories through her fiction. It is the hybrid nature of her position as a writer, her ability to move between stories, that allow her multiple identities. This
hybridity, along with the intentional gaps and absences that Morrison leaves in her novels make her work of interest to English curricula. These gaps in the fiction give her work a particular interest when reading via the processes DuGay and Hall outlined at the beginning of this thesis. The spaces in the writing allow the reader to bring experience and understanding to her work, to create meaning and to produce knowledge in the English classroom that is of consequence both inside and outside the school.

Using three of Morrison's novels, I explore the usefulness of a cultural studies framework, earlier understood through popular culture, in studying 'Literature', as well as some of the ways in which what we traditionally conceive of as 'Literature' is in fact a hybridised phenomenon - constantly moving across the 'borders' between 'high' and 'popular' culture, and between historical document and imaginative fiction. I also explore the implications this may have on the ways in which we view, read and teach texts within institutional contexts.

Toni Morrison is an African-American author whose primary concern in the three novels examined in this thesis is the history of her people in the context of a racist United States. Her novels tell strong stories about the survival of African-Americans, through community and culture, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Morrison herself has commented that, "The music kept us alive, but it's not enough anymore". Anthony Berret responds to this:

Morrison implies that African Americans require not only literacy and verbal skills but also a solid literary culture in which they can find themselves represented and integrated into modern society. Morrison helps build this culture in her novels, and to facilitate the transition from music to literature, she carefully works musical images into her stories. However, African Americans are not the only Americans for whom music is a crucial
element of culture. Morrison's remarks also apply with some qualifications, to students in general. Contemporary youth and young adults rely on music, especially rock and its derivatives, to define their selfhood and structure their world. Music is the main art form of their subculture. So as they try to integrate themselves into a wider culture through formal education, it is worthwhile to encourage them to relate music to the other forms of that culture, especially literature. They could thus bring to literature what they know and like about music, and they could apply to music, even the music of their subculture, some of the analytic skills that they learn from the study of literature" (Berret 113).

Berret's premise that analytic skills may move from literature to the music of students' subcultures is consistently with my claims in chapter two about the need for interchange between these forms. In fact, I have argued that the analytic skills acquired through thinking about identity, production, consumption, regulation and representation are easily transported across all forms of popular culture, including music, fashion and the more traditional study of literature.

Toni Morrison says of the artist, "that's his job - to enlighten and to strengthen ... So now I think novels are important because they are socially responsible. I mean, for me a novel has to be socially responsible as well as very beautiful". In addition, she has never regarded narrative as entertainment, but as one of the principal ways in which we absorb knowledge (in Matus 13). It is this absorption of knowledge through the novel that is important to transformative practice in the English classroom. The English classroom can thus become a locus for social change and for the growth and understanding of identities and their mobile nature. Morrison's most recent novels, *Beloved*, *Jazz*, and *Paradise* provide a potential site for the English teacher to elicit such
change through the study of novels through and via the lens of cultural studies. The novels are rich not only through their language, but through the spaces Morrison makes integral to her narratives whereby readers are given an opportunity to share in the creation of meaning, much in the way they might with popular texts. It is in these gaps that the concept of the ‘popular’ and the historical memory used by Morrison’s terms find similar ground. Into the gaps in both types of text students insert their own understandings combined with their own cultural contexts to produce meanings that are consequential and ‘valuable’ for themselves. Students are therefore required to read beyond simple comprehension and beyond searching for the author’s ‘intention’. In this chapter I therefore examine the ways in which the novels of Toni Morrison can be read, much in the same way that the popular texts were ‘read’ earlier in this thesis, that is through understanding, and engaging with the theory of cultural studies.

Morrison’s novels work together to form a trilogy. Beloved was published in 1987, Jazz in 1993, and finally Paradise in 1997. Chronologically, the three novels tell the story of African Americans participating and moving through American history, from slavery until our own time. Beloved tells the story of a runaway slave, Sethe, the community in which she lives, and the circumstances in which she chooses to kill one of her children in an attempt to avoid her daughter experiencing slavery. Sethe, her daughter Denver, and a fellow slave who knows Sethe, Paul D., must work together, first without, but later with the help of their community to understand the appearance of Beloved, a character we gradually come to understand as the ghost of the daughter Sethe killed. The story is set in the aftermath of the Civil War and records the effects of slavery on individuals, families and communities.

The second novel in the trilogy, Jazz, is set in the context of the Harlem Renaissance,
continuing the (his)story roughly where Beloved ends. Jazz takes place in New York City in 1926, but as with the other novels, (re)memories related by the characters and the narrator move freely forward and backward in time. The novel tells the story of a couple, Violet and Joe, and their move from the South, away from their families to the city, where they will find work. The city is alive; this is made clear throughout the text through the many references to music. The novel begins with Joe’s murder of a young woman named Dorcas. The murder intertwines the communities that surround each of the individuals, thereby entangling their (his)stories. The story winds backward to the couple’s childhoods, through their move to Harlem, through the murder and on to the future that they will live out in the city.

The most recent novel, Paradise, tells the story of an isolated community, Ruby, in the centre of Oklahoma. Ruby is comprised of the descendants of ex-slaves who were forced to create their own place because of their ‘blackness’. Ruby is an independent community, operating without police, gas stations and cemeteries, as nobody has ever died ‘in’ Ruby except Ruby herself whose death occurred shortly after the village was founded. Outside the community there is an old Convent where five women live together. They are brought together by their individual tragedies and work together to understand their pasts. The spiritual community of Ruby and the community at the Convent each have stories and histories, each affected by the events of the past. While the connections between the geographically close communities seem at first to be tenuous, as the stories intertwine, the border between the two places breaks down, with the Convent and the women who live there eventually being associated with the evil that inevitably reaches the innocent people of Ruby who have been previously untouched even by death. The novel begins and moves in a circular fashion, ending with the
same murderous act of violence done by the men, or ‘pillars’ of Ruby against the women who have bonded together to form their own family, or community at the Convent.

It is important to address at the outset that these are not necessarily ‘straightforward’ novels to read or to teach either from a structural, thematic or a content point of view. Indeed Morrison has said, “Twice it’s been mentioned or suggested that Paradise will not be well studied, because it’s about this unimportant intellectual topic, which is religion ... That always strikes me - it makes me breathless - to be told that this is ‘difficult’ writing. That nobody in schools is going to want to talk about all of these issues that are not going on now” (www.salonmagazine.com). The subject matter of the novels, which includes slavery, murder and rape, may definitely be construed as difficult for the English classroom. In many ways, however, Morrison’s comment issues a challenge: her novels broach history, each one is based upon an initial, very real, historical event. She challenges us to ignore history, to condemn it as ‘too difficult’ for the classroom, at our peril. It is in fact in the classroom that we should be facing, questioning and beginning to understand our pasts and the (his)tory which we, and our ancestors, have supposedly left behind us. Within the regulated space of the school, the practice of the teacher and the structure of the curriculum can help students to understand the dynamics of cultural texts, the ways in which complex texts may cut across disciplines, sites of reception, and signifying practices. In many ways, the English classroom is the ideal place to interrogate these interconnections, a site where we might welcome the ‘difficult’ subject matter Morrison invites us to confront.

There are many ways of reading or approaching any given literary text. For example, a schema theory of reading, derived from the cognitive tradition, has three main tenets as outlined
by Kathleen McCormick in her book, *The Culture of Reading and the Teaching of English*:

First, the theory assumes that mental representations are abstract, not literal copies, that is, that people do not remember and 'store' information just as they receive it, but rather categorize it according to the knowledge that they already possess about a subject...Second, schemata are thought to serve as the basis of comprehension and memory. Numerous studies have demonstrated that if readers are unable to 'access' an appropriate schema, they will have difficulty understanding a text...Finally, schemata are said to enable readers to make inferences when they are reading. Any text, even the simplest, leaves much information out (19).

While schema theory does have possibilities for ways of reading, it is, in fact, also very limiting. The concept of 'appropriate schema' presumes that there is one right answer to be found within a text. Clearly, success with schemata depends upon knowledge about the subject, which the teacher would be required to 'have' or to 'acquire' in order to teach the text 'properly'. Schema theory does not allow for multiple readings of any one text, as it might, since each reader is likely to bring different schema to bear upon a text. Rather, the teacher of the text must 'teach' the class the 'correct' or 'authoritative' meaning of the text, disallowing students their own meanings or experiences of a text.

Next, the 'Expressive' model of reading privileges the reader, as a text really only exists through its interaction with a particular reader:

'Expressivist' theories are those that see reading primarily as an activity in which readers create their own 'personal' or 'subjective' meanings from the texts they read. Like the cognitive model of reading, the expressivist model argues that the reader's cultural
context is important. However, unlike the cognitive model, which most often uses this argument to 'give' students the 'right' background knowledge so they can develop 'correct' readings of a text, expressivist theories emphasize the richness and uniqueness of students' backgrounds and encourage students to develop their own 'individual' and 'authentic' responses to texts (McCormick 30).

This model assumes the reader is active in the process, bringing a life of experience to the text they are reading. Expressivism would allow much more freedom for both teacher and students in the choice of texts that are read in the classroom. It would also abandon unwanted intrusions into the reading process - comprehension questions would not be asked as the text was read, for example. While privileging the experience of the reader, however, this theory of reading fails to recognise that the classroom is not necessarily a level playing ground, for students do not all have access to the same discourses or information. Experience and 'knowledge' may both be enhanced or lacking in a student due to social factors, such as class, gender or race.

Lastly, the Reader-Response model has been an important model of reading for modern classrooms. In his article on a reader-response approach to reading *Beloved*, Phelan explains this model:

One of the challenges and pleasures is finding the 'right translation', uncovering a code that allows us to claim cognitive understanding of the text, to hear the 'click' of the numerous signals of the text rearranging themselves into our new system of intelligibility. Virtually all texts, to one degree or another, present some obstacles to the interpreter, some material that initially seems resistant to whatever translation schema the interpreter is employing. We academic interpreters naturally gravitate toward
recalcitrant material, but we typically assume that all recalcitrance can yield to understanding, even if all that is finally revealed is the inevitability of recalcitrance” (229).

Reader-response theory posits that the text is not an objective container of meaning. In fact, it is simply an ‘evocation’ from which a reader selects ‘ideas, sensations, feelings and images’ drawn from their own experience, in essence to ‘create’ the text, to find the ‘right translation’, one different for each individual reader. (McCormick 37) Nevertheless, the reader-response model moves one step closer to recognising both the reader and the text as co-determinant. It makes valid the reader’s experience, allowing him/her to bring this experience to the text in an effort to create meaning. What the reader-response model does not do, however, is allow the text to be given any sort of framing context: historical, political, social or economic. Nor does it provide a fuller context for understanding systemic responses. For this reason, I have chosen to examine and use a Cultural Studies framework in pursuing ways of reading Toni Morrison’s trilogy.

Cultural studies, as we have seen, gives credence to both text and reader through paying attention to the different cultural processes on our ‘Circuit of Culture’. It is essential to push beyond other models of reading in order to recognise the possibilities for and importance of both the text and its reader. Allowing students to enter into the gaps and differences in texts, bringing their own experience and cultural context, will help to make the process of reading not only meaningful, but consequential for young people. Marilyn Sanders Mobley comments on Morrison, explaining the author’s project in this regard:

Morrison enters the series of conversations with a narrative project to tell stories that have not been told, to tell old stories in a new way, and to speak the ‘unspeakable things’
that have been left unspoken. Although each writer enters into this series with her or his own narrative poetics, to a certain extent each responds to questions of race, gender, class, history, identity, and community as reflected in her or his own cultural moment (142).

The point here is that as teachers and as readers, we must learn to read in terms of not only our own cultural specificity, but we must also come to understand how we meet the cultural context, ‘the moment’, in which a particular text was created and why. Readers must acknowledge the cultural specificity of texts and their authors, as well as attending to their own cultural moment in order to create meaning.

If readers and viewers are regarded as active producers of meaning, within specific cultural constraints, it follows that rather than positioning students as mere passive receivers of knowledge, schools should encourage them to engage actively in the production of knowledge and meaning: schooling should enable students to articulate their own readings of cultural objects and introduce them to discourses that can help them explore the ways in which cultural objects are historically and socially produced. Further, if students are to become ‘active makers of meaning’ of texts, they must also be given access to discourses that can help them to historicize their own reading position, to see reading as a process of production in dialectical relation to other readings in the past, and to enable them to make the text address their own historical condition (McCormick 55).

In other words, students should engage with the ways in which ‘readings’ themselves are texts which are represented, regulated, produced, consumed and identified with in systemic ways.
Relevant here therefore are the ways in which class, gender, race and age affect the manner in which they engage with a text. It is this ability to engage with a text from a variety of perspectives that makes popular culture important material for the English classroom. Through the ‘reading’ popular culture, students can begin to understand the ways in which these texts cut across disciplines and the signifying practices. It is this process of questioning and engagement, developed through a careful reading of popular culture, that students may bring to their reading of fiction and even of ‘canonical’ literature.

Readers must work to understand the ways in which the operation of culture affects both the creation and reading of texts, multiple contexts for the work we read, the complex layers of discourse, signs and signification that are at work in them; and the ways these help to produce historical identities and communities. All these points are implicit in Morrison’s work (Mobley 141). In the classroom, establishing multiple contexts for reading results in multiple meanings since each student’s context is brought to bear upon a work. This moves the teacher from a position of authoritative knowledge giver or ‘vessel-filler’, to a guide who participates in discussions, helping to illuminate linkages and gaps in discussion. Goldberg addresses one of the implications of this position:

As the teacher cannot speak from the position of objective ‘knowledge’, neither can knowledge itself be removed from the cultural ideals and biases that construct it. The way to establish such embodiment of knowledge in the classroom is to self-consciously and deliberately discuss it with students... Even as educators work to change the canon and to transform power relations in the classroom, we often still present material to students as though it is a given, natural, The Curriculum (170).
Just as we ask students to recognise the constructed nature of the texts that they read and to be reflexive about their own identities in order to read a work in a transformative fashion, as teachers, an awareness of the constructed nature of English curricula also needs to be developed. Through reflexive practice, choices for the selection of texts should be clear and the reasons that motivate the promotion of these texts to the institution of ‘Literature’ be explicit. When teachers make students aware of our choices and the motivating factors behind them, it makes “The Curriculum” more accessible, and invites student participation and engages their participation in its creation and in its use. Once students are aware of the construction of the knowledge that they ‘receive’, they can also begin to engage with more difficult subject issues, such as the suppressed histories broached in Morrison’s novels. As students begin to understand the mobile nature of the cultural processes that work across all texts, they may be able to think transformatively, not only about popular culture, but about ‘Literature’ as well.

In her book, Playing in the Dark, Toni Morrison specifically addresses the nature of literary ‘knowledge’ and the ways in which it is taken up:

For some time now I have been thinking about the validity or vulnerability of a certain set of assumptions conventionally accepted among literary historians and critics and circulated as ‘knowledge’. This knowledge holds that traditional, canonical American literature is free of, uninformed, and unshaped be the four-hundred-year-old presence of, first, Africans and then African-Americans in the United States. It assumes that this presence - which shaped the body politic, the Constitution, and the entire history of the culture - has had no significant place or consequence in the origin and development of that culture’s literature. Moreover, such knowledge assumes that the characteristics of
our national literature emanate from a particular 'Americanness' that is separate from and unaccountable to this presence. There seems to be a more or less tacit agreement among literary scholars that, because American literature has been clearly the preserve of white male views, genius, and power, those views, genius, and power and are without relationship to and removed from the overwhelming presence of black people in the United States (5).

In many ways, it is the issue of which ‘knowledge’ is important that Morrison takes up in her trilogy. She is (re)writing the history of African Americans; giving individuals within that community voices of their own - recognising that ‘knowledge’ is not solely the domain of white males. Nancy Peterson pushes this notion of (re)writing history one step further: “The goal of her fiction has been not just to recover details of African-American history, but to choose which details are useful for the village or the community in the struggle to create a past that can enable African Americans to have, in the words of Beloved, ‘a livable life’ in the present and future” (202). In my study of the three novels, below, then, I explore Morrison’s confounding of Western ways of reading, how her approach requires active reader participation, and how, through a cultural studies framework, we may better understand her (re)writing of history. I will also attempt to draw out some of the connections between the ‘popular’ culture we have examined and the ‘high’ culture of the novels, as well as the impact that this type of reading may have on literary pedagogical practices, and theorising in the classroom.

Morrison has often said that she leaves gaps intentionally in her novels, spaces where she invites readers to participate in the making of meaning. The reader must share with author and characters the creation of the history and story. The conventional boundaries that exist between
author, characters and reader are blurred in all three of the novels. At the end of *Jazz*, the narrator addresses the reader of the novel: "That I love the way you hold me, how close you let me be to you. I like your fingers on and on, lifting, turning. I have watched your face for a long time now, and missed your eyes when you went away from me. Talking to you and hearing you answer - that's the kick" (229). She goes on to invite the reader to "make me, remake me" (229). The narrator's words show us how important each participant is to the fiction that Morrison is writing. We, as readers, are asked in each of Morrison's books not only to listen carefully to the words of the novel, but to bring our own stories to the novel, making (his)tory open to multiple readings and multiple levels of engagement. In a sense, at a very basic level, as readers we experience the African practice of call-and-response in storytelling. Morrison issues multiple calls through the course of her novels, and as readers, we must actively respond to them in order to make meaning, to form a unity from the story for ourselves. In *Dangerous Freedom*, Philip Page notes Morrison's technique:

In her novels, time is nonlinear, the forms are open, multiple voices are heard, and endings are ambiguous because Morrison insists on the necessity of continual and multiple reworkings - for characters, narrators, author, and readers. Forming an identity, authoring a text, telling a story, and reading or listening to a text must be ongoing, not fixed in time, place or position. Since wholeness is illusory and division is endemic, one must explore the fragmentations through multiple visions" (35).

Thus, in the three novels multiple readings are encouraged, even required of the reader. This fragmentation and crossing of boundaries in 'Literature' is akin to the methods evident in cultural studies theory. This sense of division and fragmentation has much to offer the English
classroom, encouraging transient and multiple ways of reading that require an understanding of the historical contexts of text, writer and reader, as well as their engagement with each other in creating meaning.

The stories Morrison tells in *Beloved* are wrought with ambiguity. The accounts of Sethe, her daughter, Denver, her former fellow slave and now lover, Paul D, and the daughter that she killed, Beloved, all become intertwined with each other and with an historically extended community as they move forward and back across time to tell their stories. Indeed, the novel retells the time following the Civil War from a slave’s point of view - a point of view much different than those of the slave narratives that were written during that time period.

Many of the contemporaneous narratives written by slaves were written for ‘political’ reasons. Often they were written to serve the purposes of someone other than the writer. Many, for instance, were written to exonerate ‘masters’ of their cruel acts through their show casing of a slave who could read and who could write and who therefore was ‘uncertainly’ not only ‘educated’, but ‘respected’. The novel takes up the issue of representation, for most histories of slavery have been written by white men, and those that were written by slaves were often endorsed by a white man. Rice elaborates:

The force of the slave narrative was predicated on the narrator’s claim that his or her story was not unique, that it represented countless others as well. In large measure, the point of the narrative was not free expression, but rather political maneuvering. And as well-intentioned and vital as that maneuvering might have been, it still did not allow the slave to stand before an audience and explain the particularity of his or her situation.

The ex-slave author was often merely a persona for the editor and co-author - the
abolitionist (103).

Beloved represents slavery both by moving toward and away from the traditional slave narrative. Morrison does tell the story of Sethe and Paul D’s experience of slavery, but each character is given a voice that allows them the opportunity to explain their own position and situation.

One character in the novel, Beloved, in fact, does not just explain the particularity of her situation, but of several situations, forcing the reader to question the identity of her character and to produce multiple meanings around this character. Beloved appears in Sethe’s yard one day while Sethe, Denver and Paul D are at the fair. Due to the circumstances of her appearance and disappearance, Beloved is most often conceived of as a ghost. The ambiguity of the character lies not in the fact that she is a ghost, but in the question of whose ghost is she. Strong evidence in the text suggests that she is the daughter that Sethe killed to save from slavery. Her name is taken from a word engraved on the tombstone of the dead child; she has scars in the places Sethe cut the child to kill her, and she is very attached to Sethe - her love for her is ‘thick’. Beloved, however, also has an intriguing monologue in the novel which makes clear that she has experienced the Middle Passage. She travelled on a slave ship and saw many others die, including her mother, who leapt from the side of the ship. When Denver and Sethe ask questions of Beloved, (What was it like being over there? - in other words, what was it like being dead?) She is able to answer in terms of several characters, and the text carefully supports these possibilities since the language of the experience of death and that of the Middle Passage overlap (Darling 247). In creating such a character, Morrison has left her readers with no option but to allow for multiple identifications and representations. “By means of this double intent designed for Beloved, Morrison hoped, as she says, to bridge the gap between African and Afro-
America and the gap between the living and the dead and the gap between the past and the present” (Carmean 85). Through narrative structure and character, then, Morrison has undercut the traditional ways of reading a literary text, and it is by necessity that as readers we must address questions of representation, production of meaning and identity in her three novels. Spaces in the narrative make Morrison’s fiction a site to which students must bring their own identities, social and historical. These multiple identities, combined with an understanding of the cultural processes implicated in the creation and dissemination of a text, help to generate both individual and collective meanings for students as they engage and resist texts in the classroom.

Beloved’s story is not pure revelation of history to readers, for the present in the novel, like Beloved’s appearance, continually interrupts and is interrupted by the telling of background stories. Taken together, these ‘background’ stories lead the reader to question what is included in and what is excluded from the histories that we read. Nancy Peterson argues that,

The danger of narrating monumental history lies in creating a master narrative in which there is no space to articulate any local narratives that run counter to it: a historical master narrative has a grand resolution whose outcome has already been decided, and so individual players are unimportant except as they contribute to this final already-determined conclusion. Individual lives, outside of such a grand narrative, however, are much more chaotic, contradictory, and unpredictable - which creates a necessary space for resistance, agency and counternarratives (209).

It is these individual lives Peterson speaks about that Morrison is asking us to acknowledge. She requires us to move beyond understanding slavery through one master ‘History’, allowing
instead individual lives and stories to become a part of the narrative.

Morrison rewrites history using (re)memory to help the reader understand its pain, particularly through her use of language. In Beloved, Jazz and Paradise Morrison intertwines the stories of individuals, families and communities. Through the specific his(tories) of these characters, she is able to tell a larger story of the past life of African-Americans. Morrison makes clear the difficulties of telling the stories of her characters through her language, through her choice of words previously unspoken in the ‘Master’ narratives of the experience of slavery by African-Americans. Handley notes that,

Although we may be creatures of language for whom, as Walter Benjamin writes, ‘meaning is encountered ... as the reason for mournfulness’, Beloved does not merely bear out a linguistic predicament ... language and meaning also constantly remind us of ‘unspeakable thoughts, unspoken’, of historical ruptures around which our language, our stories and myths, structure figurations and fictions that perform an impossible and yet necessary task of mourning and reincarnation (681).

In a sense, Morrison has issued a historical ‘call’ through the language in her novel, and a contemporary ‘response’ is required of her readers. As the narrative structure and the language of the novel demonstrate, slavery is not only limited to its physical manifestations, but is also evident in social and psychological ways. Paul D asks Stamp Paid, an established elder in the community, “Tell me this one thing. How much is a nigger supposed to take? Tell me. How much?” (235) Stamp replies: All he can. All he can” (235). Beloved’s language, too, reveals this pain through her use of language and the necessity of (re)telling history from the perspective of African Americans. This is particularly evident in the monologue that occurs when the three
women, Sethe, Denver and Beloved, have been isolated from the community and must learn to love and survive with each other. Here is how Beloved describes her experience during the Middle Passage:

We are not crouching now we are standing but my legs are like my dead man’s eyes I cannot fall because there is no room to the men without skin are making loud noises I am not dead the bread is sea-colored I am too hungry to eat it the sun closes my eyes those able to die are in a pile (211).

The story this monologue tells is moving and disturbing, but what makes it most interesting are the physical gaps in the writing. Morrison uses a language filled with spaces that the reader must complete. She not only invites, but insists upon the reader’s active, even physical, participation in her work. The reader must understand that there are social, political and historical consequences in the present to the events portrayed in this monologue, and in reading it, he/she is responsible for creating/completing its meaning.

Unavoidably, the experience of creating meaning for the novel involves the author, her characters and the reader. Knowledge and understanding of any cultural text are impossible to achieve without the engagement and/or resistance of the reader. Handley argues regarding Morrison that,

When she speaks of the shared experience between the reader and the novel’s population, as well as the absence of a guiding author, she describes the functional and communal aspect of African art, in which the Western division between speaker and audience is not present, much as the Greek chorus, antiquated in the West, sings its lines and unites the audience and the actors in a communal performance of a culture’s understanding of
itself. The sound of her novel, Morrison writes, ‘must be an inner ear sound or a sound just beyond hearing, infusing the text with a musical emphasis that words can do sometimes even better than music can’ (698).

Music, and the idea of music, is indeed important to each of the novels in the trilogy. In this area, particularly, the study of popular music and the related cultural processes has much to offer the study of literary works in the English classroom. As Beloved progresses, music becomes central to our understanding of the novel. At the beginning of the story, the music is Paul D’s as he works: “He was up now and singing as he mended things he had broken the day before. Some old pieces of song he’d learned on the prison farm or in the War afterward. Nothing like what they sang at Sweet Home, where yearning fashioned every note. The songs he knew from Georgia were flat-headed nails for pounding and pounding and pounding...But they didn’t fit, these songs. They were too loud, had too much power” (40). Through the novel, music is connected to the past, to (re)memory. It is associated with motherhood and childhood; lullabies, for example, hold clues to the past. Slowly, the music begins to unlock the past.

It is only at the end of the novel, however, that the music moves from ‘belonging’ to one’s individual past or identity, and becomes that of a community’s story. For example, as a chorus of music frees the community from an enslaved past and allows them to look forward to tomorrow. Sethe, Denver and Beloved have isolated themselves from the community and it is only after Denver realises that Sethe will die if she does not reach out for help that the community chooses to take action against the ghost sucking the life out of Sethe. The women of the community gather together to rid 124, Sethe’s house, of the ghost, Beloved. They gather together outside 124 in prayer, but find their real strength through song:
They stopped praying and took a step back to the beginning. In the beginning there were no words. In the beginning there was sound, and they all knew what sound sounded like...As the voices grew louder, Beloved sat up, licked the salt and went into the bigger room. Sethe and she exchanged glances and started toward the window...Together they stood in the doorway. For Sethe it was as though the Clearing had come to her with all its heat and simmering leaves, where the voices of women searched for the right combination, the key, the code, the sound that broke the back of words. Building voice upon voice until they found it, and when they did it was a wave of sound wide enough to sound deep water and knock the pods off chestnut trees. It broke over Sethe and she trembled like the baptized in its wash (261).

In this way, music has the power to change not only' history', since music tells its own specific story, but music has the power to change life itself, to alter the future for a group of people.

Denver and Sethe issued a call to the community, and the women responded by taking them back to the beginning - when there was just sound. The women of the community do not simply sing the blues as an expression of pain, but their music soothes memory and in turn the pain Sethe suffered through slavery.

It is perhaps here, then, in this ‘difficult’ moment of reading that Morrison has created, that the study of popular music may help students to articulate the ways in which this passage, and even the book as a whole can be re-read. If they understand the context of the author, setting of the novel and their own reading position, a particular ‘History’ of slavery years after the individuals who suffered it seem to have become a mass, no longer a distinct number, then reading for students can become important and consequential in the English classroom. The
importance of the music, for instance, in Morrison's novels suggests significant linkages with the study of popular music in the classroom.

In asking readers to position themselves in relation to her text, anchoring their identities and experiences in its open narrative structures, Morrison is asking readers to read in a manner that can be termed 'responsible'. The novels are riddled with ambiguities with which Morrison invites the reader to play. Readers must determine for themselves whether Beloved is a 'real' person, or whether she is a ghost, and even whether she is the daughter that Sethe chose to kill in attempt to save her from slavery. Morrison makes the task of reading 'difficult'. The reader must bring his or her own constructed identity to that of the text and is forced to become aware of him or herself through the reading of the insistent language of the 'story'.

Morrison deconstructs the idea that reading's impossibility is universal and inevitable and betrays its historical roots for African Americans, the ruptures that necessitate Sethe's reading and misreading of the ghost who is both her daughter and not her daughter. As far as the effect on her readers is concerned, however, Morrison can at best summon them to hear the ghost in the machine that is the cause of their historically racialized blindness, as well as their insight. Acknowledging their variously racialized limits, Morrison's readers encounter insights into the ethics of their own activity in accounting for an absence that they can neither know nor forget but know that they have heard. It is this recognition of otherness, as I have suggested, that is involved in responsible reading (Handley 696).

I understand the term 'responsible reading' in my own context of reading through the nexus of the theory of cultural studies to mean that the reader must be self-aware at all times, of historical
context, of partial representations and self-interested productions of identity. I agree that in order to bring meaning to the absences in the text and to understand the othering that occurs throughout the narrative, readers must be vigilant and engaged with the material they are reading, with their own identities and the signifying practices of their society and context. Handley goes on to emphasise that,

Morrison suggests that we enact a linguistic crossing-over that structurally repeats the cultural rupture effected by slavery. While reading a narrative is always a complex encounter with alterity, Morrison wants to emphasize how this foreign experience has, within the African American perspective, a historical analogue, and so she reverses that rupture by bringing the reader into a literary landscape filled with traces of the African slave’s experience. African Americans, Morrison argues, ‘are not, in fact, other. We are choices’ (697).

The level of engagement demanded by the novel, by the historical fact of slavery and all the brutality that accompanies it, along with the structured gaps that demand our attention, make teaching Beloved to young people an unquestionable challenge. With the novel, Morrison actively moves her readers away from any possibility of a single ‘master’ narrative of the history of slavery. She demands that the reader enter the story through its fractured languages and then requires her readers to work themselves into the spaces in the story which she has left. No longer is the novel a ‘simple story’; instead, it is a complex series of intertwined narratives that, with the reader’s assistance create a ‘new history’. She defies the notion that (his)story can be written simply about and for African-Americans. No one person will write this story, but many will engage it. Her novels themselves defy a traditional teaching methodology - even critics are
at a loss to fill in many of the absences in the novel with one set of authoritative answers. Beloved herself is perhaps not even a ‘real’ character. She is not one of the living, she is simply manifested by them. She is created by her community to help tell a ‘story’, and through the telling of the story to help this community move beyond some of the oppression of the past to reach a point where the community is able to work together to ‘rewrite’ their (his)story. The question then becomes, as Holland and Awkward note, “How do we teach that - how do we demonstrate and uncover multi layered relations between spirit and flesh, mother and child, lover and beloved in the novel?” (45). And to answer simply, it is not easy to teach, let alone understand the layers of relationship between characters, history, narrative and reading investments in Beloved. As students work through the theory of cultural studies as a way of reading texts, beginning at first with popular ones, they begin to understand the linkages and the layers that are unavoidable in all texts, not in novels alone. They will encounter the many discourses that animate the clothes they wear, the music they listen to and the programmes they watch on television. While they may not be able to use DuGay and Hall’s Circuit of Culture to ask all of the same questions they ask of popular culture, they will indeed gain critical tools to ask questions appropriate to Beloved’s project, to start to understand the context of the novel itself and their particular relationship to it. Understanding levels of meaning in discourse and ideologies of popular culture, the dynamic, multiple layers of processes bound up in the creation of any cultural text, is a useful exercise for students reading ‘traditional’ texts in the English classroom. Students should not have difficulty accepting the notion that there is no single meaning that can be ascribed to ‘History’. It is students, as readers, who will have to bring their own context to bear on the ‘History’ of a novel like Beloved in order to create meaning that is
useful and consequential inside and outside the classroom.

Jazz, like Beloved, works to understand identity through presenting multiple layers of narrative time. The story of Jazz begins roughly where Beloved finishes in 1873. As violence against African Americans escalated in the southern states, a large number of people, including the characters in Jazz, Joe and Violet, migrated to the North where labour was in demand due to increasing industrialisation. African Americans began to fight for citizenship rights, became involved in the military, began to write, become ‘accepted’ in the Arts, and significantly for this novel, jazz music begins to spread across the country to New York City.

Again, in Jazz, questions of ‘History’ are important for Morrison. The author, through character and language, questions the ways in which history is both written and received. She asks, whose stories are important, why are they told and then construed as ‘History’? In this second novel of the trilogy, however, it is a self-reflexive narrator who moves us through the past, providing us with a commentary on and a re-telling of the past, reminding readers that ‘History’ is essentially a particular set of stories that continually we retell. Peterson talks about the possibilities for an African American ‘history’ emerging from Morrison’s work:

Morrison’s emphasis on the mutual and collective construction of the story is not an invitation to radical historical relativism, but an insistence on a necessary, collective support for counternarratives in order for them to become something other than marginalized or alternative or muted perspectives. In the ending paragraphs of Jazz, as in the concept of rememory so central to Beloved, Morrison claims the power of engaging and compelling narratives and stories to contest and displace disabling hegemonic narratives in a culture’s memory. In essence, Jazz repairs the dislocations and traumas of
the past for African Americans so stunningly portrayed in Morrison’s novels by
beginning a communal, collective project, the ongoing reconstruction of a genuinely
useful African-American history (217).

In contrast to Beloved, which ends with two somewhat powerless characters at a new beginning, Jazz ends with three strong survivors. It ends on a high and energetic note, embracing a past that has brought a future (Hardy and Martin 96).

Much of the responsibility for the (re)telling of stories in this novel is in the hands of the narrator. The narrator in Jazz is a woman who starts the story of Joe’s affair with the young Dorcas, and his subsequent murder of her. The consequences of the murder lead the narrator on an upwardly and downwardly spiralling tale of the multiple pasts and presents of a community of characters. While the characters do not physically form a community in the sense of a close neighbourhood, they do form a tight community through links that cause their lives and stories to work with and against each others. The narrator begins the novel in a strong and authoritative way. She says, “Sth. I know that woman...Know her husband too” (3). Due to the musicality and the assertive nature of the narrative, as readers, we believe the narrator and the histories and stories she is about to relate to us. As the novel continues, however, her certainty becomes tenuous as she reveals that she is truly ‘telling a story’. She says of a character, Golden Gray, who is searching for his father, “Now I have to think this through, carefully, even though I may be doomed to another misunderstanding. I have to do it and not break down. Not hating him is not enough; liking, loving him is not useful. I have to alter things” (161). Clearly, she has revealed that she does have power in the creation of this particular ‘History’. At the end of the novel, the narrator admits that all she believed, and made her readers believe, was wrong:
So I missed it all together. I was sure one would kill the other. I waited for it to happen so I could describe it. I was so sure it would happen. The past was an abused record with no choice but to repeat itself at the crack and no power on earth could lift that arm that held the needle. I was so sure, and they danced and walked all over me. Busy, they were, busy being original, complicated, changeable, human, I guess you’d say, while I was the predictable one, confused in my solitude into arrogance, thinking my space, my view was the only one that was or that mattered. I got so aroused while meddling, while finger-shaping, I overreached and missed the obvious (220).

Morrison has used her narrator to make her readers reconsider questions of history, of writing (or finger-shaping) and of (re)memory. Whose history is reliable? Whose history is right? Who has the right to write a ‘History’? We leave the novel understanding that history and story are not definitive, but instead are always incomplete processes. This is most evident when the narrator invites the reader, in the last paragraph, to “Make me, remake me” (229). Morrison is actively inviting the reader to engage with the novel and its characters, but more importantly, with the history of African American people.

An important part of history to Jazz, as the title suggests, is the jazz music that surrounds the characters in Harlem in the 1920s. Each of the characters in the novel is specifically influenced by music. Joe and Violet, the main characters, for instance, when travelling to New York in 1906, are afraid until they begin to feel the rhythm of the train beneath them, and they begin to dance. The connection that the couple has in terms of respect and friendship with neighbours and customers gradually erodes as Joe meets Dorcas. The erosion occurs as Joe instigates an affair with the young woman, Dorcas, with whom he retraces his relationship with
his own elusive mother, and whom he ultimately kills. Despite this, the community manages to hold together, as Harding argues, "If in Jazz other community functions have eroded, music has become the major factor in community coherence. All the rhythms of community life have their musical accompaniment, from changes in the weather to changes in mood. Only music can express the complex chemistry of life in the City - people's appetite for life and their anger at what life denies them" (100). In New York, as in Beloved, there are choric voices. They are comprised, for example, of impromptu music on the street, women talking in the beauty parlour and organised parades through the city. The music encountered and listened to by the characters reflect their feelings and their mood as they live out their stories in Harlem. The connective role the music plays for individual characters is important in particular, as Williams explains,

The particularized, individual experience rooted in a common reality is the primary thematic characteristic of all blues songs no matter what their structure. The classic song form itself internalizes and echoes, through the statement/response pattern, the thematic relationship between individual and group experience which is implied in these evocations of social and political reality'. The blues articulation, then, expands into a public realm what had hitherto been a private experience of suffering, taking the individual outside of himself and his private pains, which might otherwise make the self so achingly present that the world disappears (Williams in Boudreau 23)

The frustration and desolation that Violet and Joe experience after Dorcas' death is reflected in the records they listen to, the music they hear. Throughout the novel, as with the Blues, their pain and suffering enters the public realm and they are able to share their story and their pain with their community, allowing them to move ahead to a stronger future.
It is interesting to note that in *Jazz*, clothing, or fashion is closely linked with music and thus with the narrative. Older women in the novel worry about the connections they fear exist between the scandalous dress of young women, the music that frees their bodies and the ‘necessarily’ resulting sex:

Not just ankles but full knees in view; lip rouge red as hellfire; burnt matchsticks rubbed on eyebrows; fingernails tipped with blood - you couldn’t tell the streetwalkers from the mothers ... They did not know for sure, but they suspected that the dances were beyond nasty because the music was getting worse and worse with each passing season the Lord waited to make Himself known. Songs that used to start in the head and fill the heart had dropped on down, down to places below the sash and the buckled belts. Lower and lower, until the music was so low down you had to shut your windows and just suffer the summer sweat... (57).

Music, in the novel, is thus inextricable from the characters, the way they dress and the ways they live their lives. Identities within the novel are formed and influenced by the music produced around them, and the way in which they react to the regulation of their music is partly expressed through their consumption of clothing and the manner in which they present their bodies.

The narrator of *Jazz* is very much tied to the identities of the characters and this music. These linkages within the narrative make this novel of particular use in the English classroom as the theory of cultural studies would recognise the importance of these multiple processes at work within the novel. While the narrator is never clearly identified as a character, she clearly plays a central role in the novel. Readers are thus left with questions surrounding her character:
"Where is the narrative voice located? In a real character? In the author? The living pages? Morrison’s apparent answer is that the narrator is to be found in all three, plus in the imaginative mind of the reader. Her narrative strategy is actually a radical extension of her characteristic call on griots and participatory readers" (Carmean 85). Carmean here refers to Morrison’s use of the traditional African story-telling technique of call and response, which requires the participation of the audience in order for the story to continue. For Morrison, the reader, or respondent, is so closely linked with the story and history that when the reader holds the novel, they are holding the narrator and the characters. In reading, we become a living part of the story, and become intertwined of necessity with the various layers of discourse that run through it. Page discusses Derrida’s notion that any book must be “ceaselessly begun and taken up again on a site which is neither in the book nor outside it, because in that repetition, that bottomlessness of infinite redoubling, or tracing, what disappears is the self-identity of the origin, the deadening lack of play of self, presence, and origin” (Page 64). The author defies the reader’s desire for a ‘master’ story or narrative that can be, as in the cognitive model of reading, ‘conquered’. Instead the reader must transgress traditional ways of reading in order to interact with the narrative, giving it meaning and local context.

Paradise is the third novel in the trilogy and it moves Morrison’s ‘History’ of African Americans into the present day. Morrison has stated that the novel is about realising that Paradise is not beyond the imagination - that Paradise is an earthly place, but that if we know no dread or appreciation, there can be no Paradise (Amazon.com). Morrison believes that ‘Paradise’ is attainable in life. People must suffer through stories of difficulty and struggle to understand and appreciate the ‘Paradise’ some people are able to experience on earth. This
novel also begins with an act of violence that spirals through the story to the end, with the same act done against the five women who live in the convent outside of Ruby. As with the first two novels in the trilogy, this story was motivated by a newspaper article that Morrison read. It outlined the westward emigration of slaves to find new lives and carefully told ex-slaves: Come Prepared or Not at All (Time Online 1998). The people of Ruby came prepared and suffered many hardships as they founded first Haven, then Ruby. Slaves who experienced these difficulties are the ancestors of the current residents of Ruby. These ancestors leave a legacy to the people of Ruby, a standard that must be not only lived up to, but carefully adhered to despite the changes in the world around the small town. As Morrison points out, this makes a Paradise, which the people of Ruby feel they have, impossible, for they know no dread of the changing world and therefore are unable to appreciate what they have at the outset of the novel. There has never been a death in Ruby, until the murder that is central to the novel, young people do not do drugs, families all work together to make the town a 'paradise', or at least an illusion of such 'perfection' is maintained in Ruby. This perfection is 'destroyed' in the eyes of the 8-rocks (the ancestors of the founding fathers of the town - those residents who are deep black in colour) when a group of women living together in a convent find respite for themselves and for women in the town as they work together to meet needs that were not met, or even violently disallowed, elsewhere. The community of Ruby worked for generations to survive in racial isolation and independence. At the centre of this independence is an Oven; it was used originally for cooking, and other necessary tasks. Gradually, however, it became a place for baptisms, a symbol of ancestry, and the values that the elders believed the God-fearing community should stand for. Older community members argue that the words on the Oven are "Beware the Furrow of His
Brow”, while younger members can read that it simply says, “...the Furrow of His Brow”. They are quite unprepared to take the religious command at the word of an elderly woman and, instead, are ready to use the Oven in their own way as they write their own ‘history’. Steward Morgan, one of the most respected 8-rocks who thus has power in the town, makes clear that neither the Oven, nor the story of Ruby are to be tampered with by the young people: “If you, any one of you, ignore, change, take away, or add words in the mouth of that Oven, I will blow your head off just like you was a hood-eye snake” (87). The Morgan brothers, who own the bank and who are seen as ‘pillars’ of the community, believe that their ancestors have created an idyllic paradise for African Americans and will, it turns out, do much to defend what they believe they have.

Richard Misner is a minister who preaches and lives in Ruby, but who came from outside and has no relation to the founding families. It is through Misner, that Morrison has the opportunity to raise questions about the representation of history and identity. As life in the community becomes more restless, the narrator comments on Misner:

Now, it seemed, the glacial wariness they once confined to strangers more and more was directed toward each other. Had he contributed to it? He could not help admitting that without his presence there would probably be no contention, no painted fists, no quarrels about missing language on an oven’s lip ... And absolutely no runaways. No drinking. Even acknowledging his part in the town’s unravelling, Misner was dissatisfied. Why such stubbornness, such venom against asserting rights, claiming a wider role in the affairs of black people? They, of all people, knew the necessity of unalloyed will; the rewards of courage and single-mindedness ... Didn’t they?” (161)
Misner's questions are answered, though he does not know it, when Pat, the 'light-skinned' teacher in the town decides to burn her family history of Ruby that she has carefully maintained for years, a text which adds insightful details and comments as families in the community grew. She observes: "Did they really think they could keep this up? The numbers, the bloodlines, the who fucks who? All those generations of 8-rocks kept going, just to end up narrow as bale wire? Well, to stay alive maybe they could, maybe they should, since nobody dies in Ruby" (217). In an interview, Morrison corroborates the way the people in the town feel about themselves. She says, "Our view of Paradise is so limited: it requires you to think of yourself as the chosen people - chosen by God, that is. Which means that your job is to isolate yourself from other people. That's the nature of Paradise: it's really defined by who is not there as well as who is" (Amazon.com 1). In fact, it is the histories, stories and cultures, particularly the fact of popular culture, especially its music, clothing, drugs, and alcohol, all the excitement of the outside world which affect the history of Ruby, influencing both the young people in the town and the women at the Convent. The music and the clothing in the novel provide these two groups in particular, with a set of resources, a gap in which to resist the solid identity of Ruby. As these marginalised groups begin to locate their own identities within the story of the town, the past, the present and the future of the town, in the opinion of the 8-rocks, are jeopardised. The 8-rocks were taught and believed a 'unifying' story of the town they understood to be 'paradise'. As the young people engage the outside world, they not only risk losing the racial purity and solid identity of the town, they are risking the seeming 'paradise' that has taken generations of African-Americans to build.

The outside world affects Ruby in many ways, including through music, bodies and the
clothing that young people consume in order to identify themselves in the town. Music in particular raises issues connected with the Oven: “The oven whose every brick had heard live chords praising His name was now subject to radio music, record music - music already dead when it filtered through a black wire trailing from Anna’s store to the Oven like a snake” (111). The music is seen as almost ‘evil’, disrupting the history which the ancestors had laid out for the town. At a community wedding, for example. the women from the Convent come into Ruby playing Otis Redding too loud on the car radio - leaving the wedding guests convinced that the town is already in a state of decay. Clothing from ‘outside’ is also seen as ‘evil’: “Either the pavement was burning or she had sapphires hidden in her shoes. K.D., who had never seen a woman mince or switch like that, believed it was the walk that caused all the trouble. Neither he nor his friends lounging at the Oven saw her step off the bus, but when it pulled away there she was - across the street from them in pants so tight, heels so high, earrings so large they forgot to laugh at her hair” (53). Thus non-traditional music and clothing are both seen as threatening to the town. Since from the time of the ancestors arrival in the town, the community has consumed only community goods, carefully regulating the identities of its residents so that they maintain their ‘standards’ of representation for each other and against people from outside.

The women at the Convent, including Gigi who arrived on the bus, are blamed for bringing the outside world or ‘the devil’ to Ruby. These women are all somewhat transient, arriving at the Convent by accident, but choosing to stay there with conviction. The women are not from Ruby, so it is only natural that they have brought with them new clothes and energy. The issue that is most disturbing to the 8-rocks, however, is the confidence that these women have in themselves - the confidence that allows them to listen to music as loud as they want to
and to wear, or not wear, the clothes they want to. The women at the Convent feel strong together, they are impenetrable to the point that they feel “saved” and able to use religion in non-traditional ways. Even the reader, while knowing more about the women than the people of Ruby do, is not quite able to penetrate the world at the Convent, for while we do know that there are five women at the Convent, that one of them is white, we do not know who this woman is. The reader is invited to wonder about this question from the opening line of the novel which reads, “They shoot the white girl first” (3). Morrison never privileges the reader by providing an answer to the question - instead she leaves us wondering about the important question of race, for she cleverly shows us that while race may provide information for the reader, it is not necessarily useful information. It is this flagrant display of confidence, the bringing of popular “outside” culture into the community along with the freedom to use religion in meaningful ways that is the final un-doing of the 8-rocks. Yet such changes also bring the men of the 8-rock families to the Convent with guns to murder the women.

In Paradise, as with the other novels in the trilogy, Morrison forces us to consider our own practices of reading and of understanding ‘History’. She challenges us to read in the way that memory works, spiralling and weaving, as opposed to the linear and straightforward routes we usually take when reading or understanding stories and ‘Histories’. Page argues:

Morrison’s polyvocalism implies that many voices are required to tell her tales because each tale transcends any one perspective. When the narration is split, the form of Morrison’s novels recapitulates the divided duals, families, and communities within those cultures ... Morrison’s comments about her novels emphasize this constructive dimension of their form. Repeatedly, she declares her interest in the ambiguity of
presumed dualities, and she insists that her novels remain open-ended, not as final authoritative statements but as maps or as texts with plenty of holes and spaces so the reader can come into them (Dangerous Freedom 31).

Paradise, like the other novels, encourages us to transcend traditional ways of teaching literature. Each of the novels ends in an open fashion - requiring the reader to bring their own experience to the novel and its characters to determine the actual end of the story. Paradise, in particular, as Page notes, is ambiguous, laden with spaces at the end and meaning of the story. The women at the Convent are indeed shot by the 8-rocks, but beyond that, even the characters in the novel are unable to agree on what happened. The bodies of the women disappear, leaving the reader to question whether or not they were in fact killed as the men believed. Within the narrative, Morrison plays with issues of identity and representation, challenging and defying her readers to redefine the story and History. The author’s playfulness with these processes is challenging for both teacher and students in the English classroom. To rise to the challenge, students must be able to think about the processes of consumption, production, regulation, identity and representation critically, and to accept multi layered discourses working at many levels of ideology across issues of race, gender, culture, narrative and History. Teachers will need to encourage students to ask questions and to tolerate multiple answers in order to form a provisional answer for their own particular context. Students must be willing, as Paul D was willing to do for Sethe in Beloved, ‘to lie their story down’ beside that of the text in order to create a meaningful story of their own for the context in which the novel is appropriated and lived.

Other than their time continuum, some connections may seem tenuous between the three
novels in the trilogy. Yet insistent questions of community, gender and love run through all of 
these texts. Community is of extreme importance, both for Morrison as a writer and for the 
characters in her books. She states that she is ‘writing fiction for the tribe’. On the one hand she 
wishes to address the loss of the values of the village as these are subverted by urban values, 
seeing her own job as preserving the lore of the village and the African American community 
(Otten 95). To achieve this, as Harding and Martin point out:

She places the centre of her fiction right in the middle of her community’s enduring 
dilemma, embracing both past injustices and present confusion. And the picture she 
addresses to her people is enriched with the complexities they have had to incorporate. 
The sufferings of a community fertilize the extortions of another, and a new culture is 
outlined, which is not a denial but a displacement of the oppressor’s. Morrison counters 
the depersonalizing dictate of the dominant with an invitation to ‘see double’ and live 
multiple lives. As a response to their individualistic credo, she re-forms individuality in 
the community mould (180).

On the other hand, in writing this lore of the village, Morrison requires her reader’s involvement 
in creating a new community, paying heed in particular to unique histories, and not allowing a 
rote response to an authoritative historical narrative. Morrison is unprepared to let the suffering 
of the African American ‘community’ in the United States fall prey to the story of a ‘master’ 
narrative. The author is determined to (re)write stories that decentre those written by white 
people in an authoritative voice. Her stories invite entry at multiple points in the narrative in a 
variety of ways on the part of each reader who must engage and resist aspects of her novels. She 
says,
The reader and I invent the work together...It’s a total communal experience...I want somebody to say amen! At the end of every book, there is an epiphany, discovery, somebody has learned something that they never would otherwise ... You know that something has come full circle, something has clicked, a door is shut. Life is like that ...

Whether it shakes you or quiets you, depends on what the thing was itself” (in Otten 97).

The learning that occurs in the novels often occurs through a conflict, whether murder, religion or otherwise, and these conflicts are generally mediated through a community’s ancestors. Morrison truly does write about village, tribe and community, even when the setting of her novels is a large city. In Morrison’s novels, it is the past that allows a community to move forward to the future, but they cannot do so without both their ancestors and their readers. The narrative of Morrison’s work is not complete without the stories offered up by ancestors. Nor is the narrative complete without the participation of each reader, entering, engaging, and resisting the intentional gaps that make the story meaningful, as that reader brings his or her own cultural experience into the novel.

The condition of women, their strengths and weaknesses, are also important to the unfolding of Morrison’s project. The author makes this clear in a conversation with Gail Caldwell with regard to Beloved.

What was on my mind was the way in which women are so vulnerable to displacing themselves, into something other than themselves. And how now, in the modern and contemporary world, women had a lot of choices and didn’t have to do that anymore. But nevertheless, there’s still an enormous amount of misery and self-sabotage, and we’re still shooting ourselves in the foot. It occurred to me that I’d read these stories
about black women because we were at the forefront of making certain kinds of decisions, modern decisions that hadn’t been made in 1873. The past, until you confront it, until you live through it, keeps coming back in other forms. The shapes redesign themselves in other constellations, until you get a chance to play it over again (241). Morrison’s novels do offer women the opportunity, as readers and as characters in the work, to be made and remade. All of Morrison’s women, from Beloved to Paradise, are vulnerable in some way, ways often related to love. Despite this vulnerability, however, the women make strong decisions regarding their futures and claim their particular place in the community. This is evident at the end of Paradise, when the five women at the Convent are strong and deliberate in their lives after having arrived at the Convent from disparate places and situations. The women feel saved from confining pasts and confident in their futures. After the women are shot, the community follows the men to the Convent to witness the violence and to clean the bodies. They arrive at the Convent to discover that only the oldest body remains: the others have all disappeared. Questions clearly arise for the community as well as the readers: Did the women die when they were shot multiple times? Did they manage to live and drive away? Did their interior strength and their strong spirituality allow them to come back to life? Have they flown away, as in African mythology, and are still able to have a presence on earth? We do know, from the passage that ends the novel, that the women are not ‘dead’ in the conventional way, for they are able to revisit their pasts. I prefer to think that while the women were killed, it was their strength and conviction in their own beliefs that saves them, allowing them to continue on in an earthly ‘Paradise’ understanding both grief and appreciation, intimately knowing the past, the future and the importance of community.
Lastly, questions around love are raised in all three books of the trilogy. In all of the stories, women love outside of themselves more than they love themselves. The value of life was never inside the woman’s body, it was always elsewhere. This perspective changes only at the very end of the trilogy when the women at the Convent, together, manage to find strength within themselves. Morrison is constantly exploring love in its depths, probing its details to understand the ways in which it might work. Through the characters she investigates ways of loving deeply outside oneself without sabotaging the person that you are. In Beloved, as Paul D says, Sethe’s love for her children is ‘too thick’. Dorcas and Violet, in Jazz, sacrifice themselves for Joe. But as Baby Suggs in Beloved observes, ‘Everything depends on knowing how much, good is knowing when to stop’(43). This is certainly the case with the women in each of the novels in the trilogy. It is only at the end of Paradise, after Sethe loves Beloved too deeply, after Violet loses herself and Dorcas dies because of Joe, that women are able to form a community and realise that there love for their men, their children and their community has been ‘too thick’, and that they must look inside themselves for the strength an earthly Paradise requires.

In her critical work, Playing in the Dark, Toni Morrison talks about her role in a genderised, sexualised and racialised world, and states, “for me, imagining is not merely looking or looking at; nor is it taking oneself intact into the other. It is, for the purposes of the work, becoming” (4). Indeed in Beloved, Jazz, and Paradise, Morrison does work with her characters and her audience on the process of ‘becoming’. Readers must work with levels of memory and discourse and in understanding these, bring their own context to the novels to generate salient meanings. As students understand the processes of regulation, consumption, production, identity and representation through exploring ideologies with which they are familiar, such as those
within popular culture, they may begin to transfer these skills to the work of Toni Morrison. They are likely to gradually begin asking 'educated' questions that result in consequential knowledge as a result of their willingness to allow a part of themselves to become invested in 'literature' through the same theoretical nexus that engaged them in the study of popular culture. As students engage actively with such fiction, raising questions around race, community and gender, they may also begin to make connections between the various processes that link the circuit of culture together. In the end, they may be able to return to a traditional 'novel study' in a transformative way, one that allows them to actively enter the spaces and gaps that Morrison invites her readers to come in to, only now applied to novels in general.
Conclusion: ‘Becoming’ a Reader

This project, in a sense, has worked to redefine the curricular space of English. Utilising some of the theories of cultural studies, teachers may begin to practice a socially critical curriculum that places students at the centre of the process of making meaning. As the world beyond schools changes, the curricula within schools must change to admit the everyday role that technology and media play in their lives. While schools move ahead with new technologies, such as computers, curricula in subject areas such as English and History must change also. In the discipline of English, there is the possibility for greater social awareness and a changing, responsive curriculum. Reading via the theory of cultural studies is one way in which the study of English may change to accommodate the everyday cultural experiences that students bring into the classroom. Students engage, resist and question texts as they read them across processes of consumption, production, regulation, identity and representation. What is most important for a cultural studies project is that the processes involved in reading all types of texts produce not simply knowledge, but knowledge of consequence to students. It is my hope that this ability to think critically, creatively and transformatively, once developed in the English classroom, will motivate and enable students to approach other disciplines and curricula in the same manner.

Traditionally, secondary school educators have been concerned not only with the content of the areas they teach, but with the development of young people’s identity. The adolescent years, are a time of importance for the development of young adults. It is a time when teenagers identify themselves through the codes and signifying discourses of language, dress and music. Such identities, as I have argued, are not inherent or intrinsic to individuals, but are created and built through resistance and commitment across all the cultural sites which they encounter both in the classroom and in their everyday lives outside the school. Hall describes the processes
involved in the formation of identity,

Precisely because identities are constructed within, not outside, discourse, we need to understand them as produced in specific historical and institutional sites within specific discourse formations and practices, by specific enunciative strategies. Moreover, they emerge within the play of specific modalities of power, and thus are more the product of the marking of difference and exclusion, than they are the sign of an identical, naturally-constituted unity - an ‘identity’ in its traditional meaning (that is, an all-inclusive sameness, seamless, without internal differentiation) (Hall 1996, 4).

The identities of students, then, are part of the processes of a culture. Identities are unfinished and constantly negotiated as meanings are created and rejected or accepted. Students never simply ‘receive’ knowledge, and therefore their sense of identity. Meaning is made through the curriculum only by negotiating information and texts with young people. Teenagers bring valid life experiences that influence the ways in which they read the discourses of any text. Educators should thus guide students in finding the gaps in a text, places of inclusion and exclusion, engagement and difference, so that identities may be generated and consequential knowledge produced.

Identity plays a part in DuGay and Hall’s ‘circuit of culture’. It is a process that is inseparable from the reading of any text, popular or literary. As students engage in the processes of consumption, production, representation, and regulation, they are actively working on the identities offered by a given text. Working on the processes of identity can be difficult in the English classroom, as the extramural context (political, social, and historical) for each student is a part of the development of their identity. The inclusion of such experience and local context
may perhaps be most easily achieved through the study of popular texts. This thesis has explored the possibilities offered by reading popular texts through a lens of the theory of cultural studies. The classroom use of music and fashion provide students opportunities to engage, question and resist the discourses offered by popular culture, texts in which they are invested. As students learn to create consequential knowledge through the pleasure of questioning and playing with popular culture, they acquire critical tools useful in studying other cultural texts. The study of novels, such as those of Toni Morrison, is then able to move beyond the realm that traditional literary criticism. With cultural studies approaches, students are not asked to comprehend the language of the text; they are actively involved in creating signification within and against any text they read. This approach of resistance and engagement, of inclusion and exclusion, engendered via a cultural studies reading practice depends on a set of questions in which each student will arrive at different answers. Cultural Studies therefore provides a methodology for reading that hopefully results in critical and transformative learning that will move with students across disciplines and beyond formal schooling itself.

The theory of cultural studies, then, encourages mobility and hybridity across cultural processes, and between texts and students. This ambitious and ambiguous terrain presents difficulties for many teachers, but is worthwhile if knowledge of consequence is produced in the classroom. Cultural studies also requires a self-reflexive practice on the part of the educator. Ideally it removes most hierarchial distinctions in the classroom and creates an awareness of the between and across knowledge, identity, culture and power. This allows the teacher to teach for difference, with difference. Such a methodology for the production of knowledge values diversity in experience, identities and reading positions, ideally allowing those in the English
classroom to enjoy, theorise and practice all at once.

While lauding the potential of cultural studies, it is essential to recognise the limitations of the idealism involved in such an approach to teaching for social change and understanding. First and foremost, teachers must understand the difficulty of achieving success in removing the borders between traditional discourses in the classroom. For example, while cultural studies advocates the centrality of the student, the teacher will, in virtually all cases retain the ultimate authority, in the form of grading student work, for example. Indeed, a difficulty that may arise is the resistance of students to the teacher's sense of the curriculum. The teacher may appear to enact a decentred form of authority, but may still be a teacher who regulates the texts, the time and the space of the classroom. While teachers may work at accepting the hybridised identities of their students marks in contrast often normalise differences. We must, therefore, as educators, be reflexive in our practice with regard to the idealism involved in the theory and practice of cultural studies, the distance that must be covered in moving from theory to practice. Simply, teachers must not let their pedagogy be too easily convinced of the potential for immediate social and political change within the regulated space of the English classroom.

Despite the above cautions, this thesis still endorses the possibilities that cultural studies can offer the practice of teaching English. The linkages that have been established between the study of popular culture and traditional print literature can be transformative in an English classroom. While revolutionary social and political change may not result from understanding DuGay and Hall's 'circuit of culture', nonetheless a knowledge of the dynamic nature of all signifying practices across all types of texts almost certainly will occur in students. It is the ability to work across boundaries, to admit hybridity, and to negotiate culture in a manner that is
both critical and pleasureful that makes the practice of cultural studies worthwhile for any English classroom.
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