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CULTURAL STUDIES AS PRAXIS: (MAKING) AN AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL CASE

Abstract

This autobiographical essay `takes cultural studies personally', drawing on experience, identity and the personal to indicate how and why the author is proponent of and is working on developing a model of cultural studies as social justice praxis despite the constraints academia in general and of the university as an institution in particular. The paper travels roughly from the author's student and teacher days in Sierra Leone through his graduate student days in Canada to his current role as university teacher in the USA. He selectively concentrates on his experience as a teacher of literature (and African multi-role utilitarianism), education and cultural studies (using one of his cultural studies courses and students' questions about the utility of cultural studies as example), his shifting and overlapping racial/ethnic identities (African/black) and the politics of identity, and his thoughts on the place of theory in cultural studies and a black approach to theory (black ambivalent elaboration) as contributory factors. While this account acts in its own way as an argument for conceptualizing cultural studies as praxis, the primary focus is more modestly on my own autobiographical account as a specific case. In fact, an autobiographical approach is employed precisely to be specific and in the attempt to avoid the pitfalls of over-generalization and the authority of authenticity.

Keywords

service learning; praxis; identity politics; autobiography; pedagogy; black ambivalent elaboration
Introduction: the road not taken

When Daniel Matos invited me to contribute a paper to a session he was organizing on "Intellectual Practices in Culture and Power: Transnational Dialogues" for the Fourth Crossroads in Cultural Studies Conference (June/July 2002, Tampere, Finland), I readily agreed. After all, one of my graduate level cultural studies courses, "Issues in Cultural Studies", reflected a concrete attempt to address such issues as theoreticism in cultural studies and the conceptualization of cultural studies as a form of social justice praxis (inextricably linking theory and practice, exploring issues of power, blurring the boundaries between the academy and the community, and working for equity and social justice). Cultural studies for me is not merely a body of knowledge nor simply an inter/anti/post/disciplinary approach to the study of culture: it is also, and more importantly, an intervention in institutional, sociopolitical and cultural arrangements, events and directions. My conception is reflective of and informed by Meaghan Morris (1997) attempt to turn our attention from the passive, albeit important question, "what is cultural studies" (Johnson, 1986/7; Storey, 1996), to the more active, even potentially activist question, "what does cultural studies do?"

I understood from some of my e-mail exchanges with Daniel that these were issues he was also interested in addressing and that I could discuss the course I had developed as a minor example of the kind of work Daniel was interested in having the panel put forward and discuss (i.e. work that went beyond the university and academic writing, which was interdisciplinary and critiqued the division of labour between the academy and the community). In short, the topic was of considerable interest and I had some thoughts on and a concrete example to discuss.

I therefore proposed a paper that was to make a case for cultural studies as social justice praxis, mention a number of projects from around the world that could be readily identified as involving cultural studies as praxis and discussing my course as an example of local work on cultural studies as praxis. The paper was to be built on two related premises: cultural studies as praxis work and cultural studies as praxis is endangered by theoreticism. I was going to point to both the proper place and role of theory in cultural studies and identify various projects representative of cultural studies praxis around the world. Then I was going to focus on a graduate course I teach at the University of Tennessee that brings together theory and international and regional examples of cultural studies work, empirical research and service learning as an example of a model that constructs and promotes cultural studies as social justice praxis work.

However, I quickly became uncomfortable about several aspects of the proposed paper, from how readily I was taking and inviting others to take for granted the danger of theoreticism and the notion that cultural studies is a form of praxis and should explicitly address social justice issues to the presumption
that there is a definitive proper place and role for theory in cultural studies and that I could pinpoint that place and role, from the ad hoc identification of a few projects from around the world as examples of cultural studies as praxis to the awkward and potentially immodest juxtaposition of that international set of models with my own individual course as a model in and of itself. Compounding these problems was the fact that some of the central aspects of this project involved mere reiterations (for example, the conception of cultural studies as praxis is well established and the danger of theoreticism has become a perennial problem in cultural studies, one Stuart Hall (1992a) had been cognizant of as long ago as the 1970s and warned of the dangers of in the early 1990s).

**Seeking a path less travelled**

No longer comfortable undertaking the project in the form I had initially proposed, I nevertheless was and continue to be quite passionate about every element of it. I do believe that cultural studies ought to be a form of social justice praxis work, and that this conception is perennially under threat because academic work in general and, ironically, critical discourses in particular tend to sway us toward theory and theorizing as privileged and prestigious ends in and of themselves. Quite aware that these are not novel arguments, I nevertheless believe strongly that the need for cultural studies praxis and the endangerment of cultural studies as praxis means they can bear reiteration. I also believe it is important to point to concrete examples of cultural studies as praxis, not only because this grounds and substantiates an otherwise ethereal argument for praxis but also these examples can inform future cultural studies as praxis work. Finally, while it may have originated with one course, the idea of articulating theory, empirical research, and service learning as interrelated elements of cultural studies work my students undertake is coalescing for me as a viable model of cultural studies as social justice praxis.

In terms of the panel and this special issue of *Cultural Studies*, a discussion of cultural studies as social justice praxis work in general and the course and evolving model in particular offer an opportunity to point to ways in which the rigid dichotomies between the academy and the community, academic and non-academic work, theory and practice, text and lived cultures, etc., can be breached. What is emerging for me as a viable means of bridging these dichotomies is an approach that juxtaposes cultural studies, empirical research and service learning.

What was my motivation for initially proposing a paper that one the one hand undertook a potentially 'ho-hum' reiteration of cultural studies positions and on the other presumed to outline a singular 'correct' approach to cultural studies? Why am I interested in presenting and promoting cultural studies as social justice praxis, even in the face of these potential pitfalls? What role has
experience and my identity played in my passion for this conception of cultural studies? How was I to discuss such personal issues, my course and the model of cultural studies praxis I have been developing, all of which I am passionate about, without slipping into issuing imperatives and making exaggerated claims?

As I reflected on these questions, it became clear that using the third person and employing the (dis)stance and language of the disembodied subject would be particularly inappropriate for this paper. As is evident by now, I decided to speak personally, autobiographically, not only at the conference presentation but in this paper. Initially frowned upon by early cultural studies figures such as Richard Hoggart, autobiography is becoming increasingly prominent in progressive academic work, from the reflexive turn and the rise of autoethnography in research to feminist assertions of women's ways of knowing and articulating knowledge and is even being utilized and theorized in cultural studies work (Hall, 1992a; Prohyn, 1993).

This change in presentation strategy is accompanied by a change in the substance of the essay. Instead of an in-depth discussion of what constitutes cultural studies as praxis, international versions of cultural studies as praxis and of the model of cultural studies as social justice praxis I see evolving at my institution, I concentrate here on a much more modest examination of what leads me to advocate and promote cultural studies as praxis. This personal, autobiographical account works in its own way to advocate cultural studies praxis but operates primarily as a case study primarily concerned with explicating how one individual has come to prefer and advocate cultural studies as social justice praxis.

Part of what I am interested in addressing, in this paper, though not directly, is the split between the university and academic work on the one hand and political, activist and performative work in the community and society on the other. In an earlier paper (Wright, 1998), I stressed the need for cultural studies to revive the praxis conceptualization and pointed out that even the early CCCS work was limited in terms of undertaking such work and that non-academic work, including 'cultural studies in the streets', ought to be more readily acknowledged and taken up as cultural studies work. In her response to my paper, Maureen McNeil (1998) rightly pointed to the constraints we operate under in the academy and how being subjects of the university as an institution limited CCCS work and continues to limit university-based cultural studies' ability to undertake the kind of praxis work I was advocating. Part of what I am interested in here is to indicate that while the university does constrain what can he done as praxis work, some of the work we undertake in the academy can serve to bridge the gap between university and community and academic and intellectual work. In addition, I want to reiterate that the university itself must not be overlooked as a site of praxis, a site where issues of difference, representation and social justice, and even what constitutes legitimate academic work are being contested.
Taking cultural studies personally

Part of my rationale for making the shift in emphasis from the larger picture of an international scope of cultural studies as praxis to my own individual case as proponent of cultural studies as praxis is the realization that with the original project I might well be preaching to the choir of those who readily acknowledge that cultural studies is or ought to be a form of praxis on the one hand and presenting an argument to the (leaf cars of those who prefer not to conceptualize cultural studies as praxis on the other. Rather than simply make generalized recommendations of and exhortations about cultural studies as praxis, my amended project is a more personal exploration of the source and rationale for my recommendations, the role experience and identity have played in my attraction to, relationship with and conception of cultural studies, as well as how I position myself and am positioned as a teacher, especially a postcolonial African migrant teacher of cultural studies in the USA. In sum what I am interested in here, following Gregory Jay’s (1995) idea and strategy of ‘taking multiculturalism personally’, is taking cultural studies personally. In part, the essay addresses what brings me to cultural studies, what I ask of cultural studies and the ways in which cultural studies responds (sometimes adequately, sometimes inadequately) to my expectations and what all of this means for how strongly I feel about and advocate cultural studies as praxis. Essentially, I am attempting to undertake work here based on the feminist maxim that the personal is political without being essentialist, which means taking seriously Grossberg’s (1992a) caveat that the political cannot be reduced to the personal.

Questions of experience, identity and representation and the autobiographical are central in this text and it is important to point out at the outset that for me these are not given, fixed notions nor sources of authenticity but rather constructed, procedural, multiple, overlapping, contradictory and performative. Ann Gray (2003) sums up the conception of the relationship between experience and identity I am working with rather well when she explains that ‘experience can be understood as a discursive “site of articulation” upon and through which subjectivities and identities are shaped and constructed.’ (2003: 25). Even as I personalize this discussion of cultural studies as praxis and speak autobiographically, I do so with a conception of the personal and my identity as cultural studies teacher not as authentic and authoritative but as a performance, even, following Jane Gallop (1995), as an impersonation.

Furthermore, I speak autobiographically and to my experience, not in an attempt to claim the authority of authenticity - precisely the opposite. In the introduction to his autobiographical essay, Stuart Hall asserts that ‘autobiography is usually thought of as seizing the authority of authenticity. But in order not to be authoritative, I’ve got to speak autobiographically’ (Hall, 1992a: 277). Following Hall (1992a), I speak autobiographically here in an effort to avoid the pitfalls of overgeneralization, assumed authenticity and authority and the various
burdens of representation in cultural studies. In my case, given that both my collective identity and the areas of cultural studies I work on are distinctly underrepresented (in both senses of the word), there is the danger that an account may be taken up variously as the authentic and authoritative representation of blacks, Africans, black cultural studies, African cultural studies or cultural studies in education.

Identity, experience and cultural studies

The elements I believe are important to explore here are my own identity as multiple, shifting and contradictory identifications in relation to cultural studies, including how I position myself and am positioned in the North American academy. (I'm working here with a conception of identity, not as given, stable, singular and essentialist category, but as a number of 'identifications come to light' (Fuss, 1995), as a concept which though 'under erasure' can be usefully deployed strategically (Hall, 1996a) with the caveat that any declaration of identity be recognized as positional, selective, and provisional.) Put more specifically: factors that have influenced my interest in cultural studies as social justice praxis include the primacy of the performative in African literature and the concept of African multi-role utilitarianism; my identification as African and transition from Africanness to blackness (and overlapping of the two); being located in the contradictory space of the third world in the first world that is the Appalachian region of the USA; being located in the centre that is the US academy but undertaking work at the dual margins of cultural studies that are African cultural studies and cultural studies in education, and the standpoint approach to theory that I am calling black ambivalent elaboration.

Since my days as both a student and high school teacher of literature in Sicr Leone, I have been fascinated by the dichotomy between the Anglocentric, predominantly aesthetic-based conception of literature and the image of lone writer in the attic on the one hand and the African-centred, predominantly utilitarian conception of literature and the image of the writer as politicized communalist on the other. I not only favour the African multi-task utilitarianism (the utilitarian conceptions of the author and literature), but readily embrace Anthony Easthope's (1991) exhortation, 'literary into cultural studies'. In my doctoral and subsequent work, I have utilized this conception in making a case for a transition from a literary studies to a cultural studies approach to literat studies in Africa (e.g. Wright, 1996a, 1996h, 2000, 2004). My argument included the need to acknowledge and incorporate traditional African oral and new media and popular culture texts, the expertise of non-academic teachers (e.g. traditional griots), an emphasis on performance and the utilization of literature in African development. The result is a discourse and praxis that obfuscates borders between text and lived culture, the academy and the...
community, the canonical and the popular, the literary and the socioeconomic, electronic and traditional texts.

African multi-role utilitarianism is the term I use to indicate that most African writers have eschewed singular identities and roles and have instead routinely taken on multiple simultaneous roles (e.g. Nigeria's Wole Soyinka as poet, dramatist, literary critic and political activist; Ghana's Ama Ata Aidoo as dramatist, literary critic and politician, and Kenya's Ngugi wa Thiong'o as novelist, community activist, theatre developer, literary critic, university professor). Underscoring this conception of author as someone necessarily involved in multiple roles has been the fact that a majority of African literary critics (Izevbaye, 1971; Ngugi, 1981, 1988; Irele, 1990; James, 1990; Soyinka, 1993) and certain Africanist (Gugelberger, 1985) critics are in agreement that African literature and literary criticism are driven by utilitarianism as much as, if not more than by aesthetics. This is not to suggest that African writers and critics eschew aesthetics completely. Rather, it is the art-for-art's-sake conception of aesthetics that is eschewed in favour of a utilitarian and highly politicized conception that Udenta Udenta (1993) has described as African 'revolutionary aesthetics'. Literature and orature are taken up primarily as 'texts' for performance (often with an assumption of active audience participation).

Jostein Gripsrud (1994) has rightly pointed out that, 'the construction of cultural identity is always an intellectual enterprise. Ordinary folks normally don't care very much. [In fact] Intellectuals as a rule have a hard time convincing people about the relevance of these identity constructions' (1994: 220). Continental identities are even more esoteric: like most Africans, I had not strongly nor even consciously identified as African while living in Sierra Leone (gender, ethnic and territorial identities and identifications were much more meaningful and important in that context). Interestingly, in the move from Sierra Leone to Canada and then the USA, I have been assigned and have taken up not only African identity but also 'black' identity.

The complexity of identity means that rather than being singular or merely replacing one form of identity with another (e.g. ceasing to be Krio and becoming 'black') identity is a series of complimentary and contradictory identifications operating simultaneously, with some coming to the fore or receding depending on context. I live and work in the USA but am not an American citizen; I am 'black' but not African American; I am simultaneously a continental and a diasporic African.

Issues of identity and identification and considerations of the complexities of essentialist, anti-essentialist, and anti-anti-essentialist conceptualizations have made identity a central problematic for me. I have therefore always considered the exploration of identity and the politics of identity an integral, even pivotal aspect of cultural studies work (Wright, 2002). Rather than seeing postmodernist and poststructuralist critiques of essentialist identity politics as reasons to consider identity passe, if not dangerously limited and limiting, I view
them as providing caveats that press us to articulate more nuanced conceptualizations of identity and emphasize its strategic deployment (e.g. Gayatri Spivak’s (1990) notion of strategic essentialism, Stuart Hall's (1996a) assertion that identity is still useful if deployed strategically, and David Blades (2000) nautical strategy of tacking back and forth between the modernist/humanist and the postmodernist).

While cultural studies is a useful discourse for exploring issues of identity and the politics of difference as important political issues in and of themselves, it is also the case that identity can in turn be used as an incisive tool to critique and contribute to the development of cultural studies. The feminist and black interventions in general at the CCCS (Women’s Studies Group, 1978; CCCS, 1982) and the work of Paul Gilroy (1991, 1993) in particular, especially his There Ain’t No Black in the Union Jack served as both early examples and inspiration for me for undertaking work that utilized identity to both critique the status quo of cultural studies for its failure to represent and include certain marginalized groups and to begin to indicate what cultural studies might look like if it did include those voices and perspectives. Thus, part of the answer to Morris’ (1997) question, ‘what does cultural studies do’, is that it enables the exploration of identity and the politics and significance of socio-cultural difference while incorporating identity and the politics of difference to enrich and expand its own discourse.

**Trajectories of cultural studies and the migrant academic**

My move from Sierra Leone to North America is, in academic and postcolonial terms, a move from the margin to the centre, from the underdeveloped world to the overdeveloped world. The transition, however, is not a definitive one that automatically brings with it all the privileges (some of them rather dubious) of being located at the centre. Spivak captures the positioning of migrant post-colonial academics well when she describes herself, not as firmly located in the centre but rather as ‘still scratching at the rift between global postcoloniality and metropolitan migrancy’ (1999: 375). What does this mean for how we are positioned in the western academy? Spivak explains it thus:

Strictly speaking, we have left the problems of post-coloniality, located in the former colony (now a ‘developing nation’ trying to survive the ravages of neo-colonialism and globalization) only to discover that the white supremacist culture wants to claim the entire agency of capitalism - re-coded as the rule of law within a democratic heritage - only for itself; to find that the only entry is through a forgetfulness, or a museumization of national origin in the interest of class mobility; or yet coding this move as ‘resistance!’

(Spivak, 1999: 398)
In terms of international academic work in general and conferences in particular, she rightly observes that 'the privileged inhabitant of neo-colonial space is often bestowed a subject-position as geo-political other by the dominant radical (one is most struck by this when planning or attending international conferences)' (Spivak, 1999: 339). In sum then, as a migrant post-colonial academic my position is one that is always already politicized. Not surprisingly, therefore, a substantial aspect of the attraction of cultural studies holds for me is that it is explicitly politicized academic work concerned with representing the marginalized other and working for social justice. While it is true that in the USA, cultural studies politics (especially its neo-Marxist underpinnings and its explicit social justice agenda - O'Connor, 1989; Pfister, 1996) has been considerably downplayed in many circles, there are some of us for whom the politics of difference is virtually unavoidable and for us, therefore, cultural studies remains, as Stuart Hall has cogently described it, 'politics by other means'.

Through its own success and institutionalization in the academy around the world cultural studies has evolved from being not only interdisciplinary but also distinctly anti-disciplinary to becoming, in Tony Bennett's words, a 'reluctant discipline'. As it has gone global, a little-discussed hierarchy of regions has emerged, with British (especially English) cultural studies and American versions apparently battling for peak position (British cultural studies can claim originary status while American cultural studies, through the size of its academy and greater financial resources, can claim current prominence) and Australian and Canadian cultural studies attempting to articulate distinct national/regional versions of cultural studies in the shadow of the very dominant British and American versions respectively. Cultural studies is also spreading in Europe, Asia and Africa, though these regional versions remain distinctly marginal.

Arguably, African cultural studies is the most limited in terms of resources and presence, institutionalized substantially only in South Africa (e.g. the Centre for Media and Cultural Studies in Durban, the journal Critical Arts and the work of figures such as Keyan Tomaselli (1998a, 1998b, 2001)). Thus, to work on African cultural studies as I do is to work on the margins of a once globally marginal discourse and to contribute to the attempt to move African cultural studies 'from margin to centre' (hooks, 1984) of international/transnational cultural studies. Holding cultural studies to its much vaunted openness, what is at stake in this project is not only the trajectories and the evolution of international/transnational cultural studies but also its history and narratives of origin (Wright, 1995, 1996, 1998). Because of the African emphasis on utilitarianism, African cultural studies tends to emphasize praxis (Tomaselli, 1998b) and thus contribute to the evolution and promotion of transnational cultural studies as praxis.
Black ambivalent elaboration

There are at least two principal sources of the threat of theoreticism in cultural studies. First, there is a general academic valorization of theory, especially high theory, as privileged, prestigious and an end in itself, and hence understandably insular (divorced from practice and politics) and self-referential. Academic cultural studies is not immune to this conception and there is a constant danger that students (and faculty) and the discourse of cultural studies itself will be engulfed by the attractions of ‘facility’ with theory (with specific difficult concepts, bodies of theory, the work of specific theorists) and with armchair theorizing as an end in and of itself. Second, the western, especially US, turn to the right in terms of popular culture and politics (Grossberg, 1992b) has resulted in the left’s retreat from politics proper to cultural politics (Rorty, 1998), and to theory for its own sake via arcane language, the apolitical discourses of postmodernism and poststructuralism and the discursive turn (McChesney, 1996). While there is no denying the centrality of theory and theorizing in cultural studies work, the simultaneously modest and expansive approach recommended by Hall (e.g. the image of reading theory being like ‘wrestling with angels’, his suspicion of facility with theory and the decidedly functionalist role he sees for theory) remain good guides against theoreticism.

As I have worked on how to take up theory in my own work, I have identified and utilize a phenomenon and approach I label ‘black ambivalent elaboration’. Both a standpoint and a reading strategy, black ambivalent elaboration articulates Homi Bhabha’s ‘ambivalence’, Gramsci’s elabore, and a healthy dose of ‘critical scepticism’. This is an international phenomenon that ought to give progressive postie theorists considerable pause since it is not based on ideological differences and in fact originates from presumed allies. Black cultural studies figures such as Stuart Hall (Hall, 1992a, b, 1996; Drew, 1999), Manthia Diawara (1996) and Paul Gilroy (1993) have put forward black suspicion of cutting edge theory very directly. Hall asserts that ‘[The] theoretical encounter between black cultural politics and the discourses of Eurocentric, largely white, critical cultural theory which in recent years, has focussed so much analysis of the politics of representation . . . is always an extremely difficult, if not dangerous encounter. (I think particularly of black people encountering the discourses of post-structuralism, postmodernism, psychoanalysis and feminism)’ (Hall, 1996a: 443). In a similar vein, Diawara has asserted that ‘many black thinkers have a suspiscious attitude toward poststructuralism and postmodernism in part because they interpret the emphasis that these theoretical projects put on decentering the subject politically-as a means to once again undermine the black subject’ (1996: 306). Paul Gilroy is decidedly wary of blacks catching what he describes as ‘the postmodernism fever’ (1993: 107) and considers the application of postmodernism to the appreciation of black art a rush to ‘premature black postmodernism’ (1993: 127).

Examples of black ambivalence in particular include Barbara Chris’ academics are involved in ‘a race for that African Marxist literary critics of the other’ (Hall, 1992b: 23). In the same vein, Dyson insists on the importance of postmodernism. The other side of this position, Soyinka has himself been accused of creative work and his criticism that Africans for whom he claims to be extensively in her work but is also the post-structuralism in particular as both black elaboration of the posties’ in particular. It is both the elaboration of the discourses of Eurocentric, largely white, critical cultural theory which in recent years, has focussed so much analysis of the politics of representation . . . is always an extremely difficult, if not dangerous encounter. (I think particularly of black people encountering the discourses of post-structuralism, postmodernism, psychoanalysis and feminism)’ (Hall, 1996a: 443). In a similar vein, Diawara has asserted that ‘many black thinkers have a suspiscious attitude toward poststructuralism and postmodernism in part because they interpret the emphasis that these theoretical projects put on decentering the subject politically-as a means to once again undermine the black subject’ (1996: 306). Paul Gilroy is decidedly wary of blacks catching what he describes as ‘the postmodernism fever’ (1993: 107) and considers the application of postmodernism to the appreciation of black art a rush to ‘premature black postmodernism’ (1993: 127).
Examples of black ambivalence about theory in general and the posties in particular include Barbara Christian's (1990) dismissive assertion that many academics are involved in 'a race for theory'; Wole Soyinka's (1976) assertion that African Marxist literary critics interested in high theory constitute a 'Leftocracy'. Michael Eric Dyson has asserted that we need to 'dirty language, to dirty theory, to make more gritty the realities that so smoothly travel from European culture to American theory, especially as they are applied to African-American culture' (in Dobrin, 1999: 92). Then there is Stuart Hall's ambivalence about postmodernism's ambivalent fascination with difference and his declaration that 'there's nothing that global postmodernism loves better than a certain kind of difference: a touch of ethnicity, a taste of the exotic, as we say in England, "a bit of the other"' (Hall, 1992b: 23). Finally, there are Gayatri Spivak's assertions that 'deconstruction cannot found a political programme of any kind.' (Spivak, 1990: 104), and that we, Third World people, have been called to speak by postmodernism.

The other side of this position is that having expressed these reservations, Soyinka has himself been accused of using such esoteric language in both his creative work and his criticism that he cannot be understood by the majority of Africans for whom he claims to write. Spivak not only utilizes deconstruction extensively in her work but is also widely regarded as a leading deconstructionist. Dyson insists on the importance and applicability of the work theorists like Foucault and Derrida, and Hall selectively employs aspects of the discourses of these theories in his work (e.g. his insistence that race be conceptualized not only as a discourse but more specifically as a floating signifier (Hall, 1996c). What we have in these examples then is an ambivalent, wary use of theory in general and the posties in particular. It is both a suspicion of and yet a wary willingness to elaborate these theoretical frameworks to apply to black subjectivity and issues of concern to blacks. I subscribe to this simultaneous suspicion and wary utilization and black elaboration of theory in general and postmodernism and poststructuralism in particular as both a black standpoint and strategy in what I am calling black ambivalent elaboration. It is black ambivalent elaboration as a standpoint and strategy that I utilize in my own approach to theory in undertaking cultural studies work.

Cultural studies and education

I was introduced to cultural studies as a doctoral student at the University of Toronto's Ontario Institute for Studies in Education. With a continuing interest in both literature and education, the intersection of cultural studies with both literature studies and education became a dual focus of mine and the following are a few reflections on the latter area.

In historicizing cultural studies, the dominant narrative has referred to a
series of crises in the humanities and social sciences as the context and impetus for the emergence of the discourse (e.g. Bratlinger, 1990, Gray and McGuigan, 1993). Raymond Williams' (1989) much more specific assertion is that cultural studies emerged from within the field of adult education. This more specific narrative has been eschewed in favour of the more expansive narrative of the crises, the latter being more attractive undoubtedly because it involves several and more prestigious disciplines.

Though education was an integral aspect of the concerns of the CCCS (e.g. Willis, 1977; CCCS Education Group, 1981; Education Group 2, 1991), the field of education has been marginalized in the process of the globalization of cultural studies and education now appears to have become cultural studies old aunt in the attic. Probably seen as overly practical and pedantically pedagogical, education is the close relative that cultural studies is embarrassed to acknowledge, especially when good company like postmodernist, poststructuralist and psychoanalytic theory come calling. Education, equally uncomfortable, appears to see cultural studies as a snobbish young upstart given over to theoreticism and of rather limited relevance to educational issues. Even critical educational theorists have mixed feelings about cultural studies: Shirley Steinberg and Joe Kincheloe (1997), for example, declare: 'We are enthused by the benefits of cultural studies of childhood yet critical of expressions of elitism within the discourse of cultural studies itself- a recognition made more disturbing by the field's claim to the moral high ground of a politics of inclusivity' (1997: 6).

The consequence of these perceptions cultural studies and the field of education have of each other has been a mutual wariness which Henry Giroux has described thus: 'educational theorists demonstrate as little interest in cultural studies as cultural studies scholars do in the critical theories of schooling and pedagogy.' (1994: 279). It is hardly surprising then, that when disciplines and fields that have and continue to contribute to cultural studies work are discussed, education is often ignored in edited collections that undertake to indicate cultural studies wide disciplinary roots and connections (e.g. Nelson and Gaonkar, 1996) and underrepresented at conferences with the broadest sweep of topics (Maton and Wright, 2002). To work on the intersection of cultural studies and education as I do, is to work at the margins of cultural studies. However, because education work tends to emphasize practice, especially pedagogy, my work on the intersection of cultural studies and education means undertaking cultural studies as praxis, especially in relation to taking pedagogy seriously.

**Strategies for engendering cultural studies praxis**

There are at least three principal strategies for engendering cultural studies as praxis, namely engagement with policy, performative acts and empirical research. In terms of policy, Tony into cultural studies' is particular rating policy issues as part of cut cultural studies into a form of cut acts include the work of figures su Isaac Julien (1992), both of whom identity but have made films that research and, indeed what forms the work of Ngugi waThiong'o (I and literary critic but was a poll involved in the building of a com play. Finally, empirical research h studies work since the days of the Willis who produced one of th ethnographies (Willis, 1977) an ethnography (Willis, 2000) exem Although cultural studies is `the (Nelson et al., 1992), it is obvio in particular have been favoured most recent hook underscores ethnography and cultural studies approach to 'doing' cultural study means of engendering cultural st stud
In terms of policy, Tony Bennett’s (1992) advocacy of ‘putting policy into cultural studies’ is particularly significant as it involves not only incorporating policy issues as part of cultural studies work but the transformation of cultural studies into a form of cultural policy studies. Examples of performative acts include the work of figures such as Trinh Minh-Ha (1989, 1991, 1992) and Isaac Julien (1992), both of whom have not only written theoretical essays about identity but have made films that depict, trouble and theorize about identity, research and, indeed what forms theory can take. To such figures I would add the work of Ngugi waThiong’o (1981, 1986), who has not worked as a novelist and literary critic but was a political activist (jailed for his activism) and was involved in the building of a community theatre and the writing and staging of a play. Finally, empirical research has been a principal means of grounding cultural studies work since the days of the CCCS and the work of a figure such as Paul Willis who produced one of the earliest and most influential cultural studies ethnographies (Willis, 1977) and continues to conduct and theorize about ethnography (Willis, 2000) exemplifies research based cultural studies praxis. Although cultural studies is ‘theoretically’ very open in terms of methodology (Nelson et al., 1992), it is obvious that qualitative approaches and ethnography in particular have been favoured since the days of the CCCS. Ann Gray’s (2003) most recent book underscores this point and in making explicit links between ethnography and cultural studies and identifying ethnographic research as an approach to ‘doing’ cultural studies serves to endorse empirical research as a means of engendering cultural studies as praxis.

**Conclusion: issues in cultural studies and the unexpected pedagogue**

My work on the relationship between cultural studies and education in general and my experience with designing and teaching the course ‘Issues in Cultural Studies’ lead me to propose two additional strategies for engendering cultural studies as praxis, namely pedagogy and service learning. Although it is part of the work of academic cultural studies, pedagogy is, for the most part, not only taken-for-granted but also overlooked as a strategy for engendering cultural studies praxis. In fact, outside of the field of education, most academics including those in cultural studies (with Larry Grossberg (1994) being a notable exception) would rather not openly discuss let alone theorize about pedagogy. As Jane Tompkins once put it, pedagogy is ‘exactly like sex’, ‘something you weren’t supposed to talk about or focus on’ (1990: 655).

If cultural studies were to seriously engage education and pedagogy, it would mean acknowledging that cultural studies emerged in fact not only from the field of adult education but also more specifically from the pedagogical encounters between Williams and his students. It was their questions about the relevance
and appropriateness of the texts and approaches being employed in his extra-
mural classes that led Williams to begin to develop what we now acknowledge
as early cultural studies work. In short, taking education and pedagogy seriously
in cultural studies means acknowledging that cultural studies originated as
praxis.

Service learning is, at first blush, a rather unusual suggestion for engendering
cultural studies praxis, especially since it is supposedly a decidedly liberal and
undertheorized discourse and practice (Carver, 1997; Hepburn, 1997) principally
concerned with fostering civic participation by having students volunteer
with corporations and community groups and reflect on their service in a class-
room setting. However, at the University of Tennessee, a Community Partnership
Center was established by two progressive faculty, John Gaventa (sociology) and
Fran Ansley (law), which forged links between the university and progressive
community groups and promoted a decidedly radical form of service learning
labelled ‘service learning for social justice’ (Fisher, 1997). It is service learning
for social justice, with a strong component of fostering town-gown relationships,
that I blend with cultural studies and empirical research in the model of cultural
studies as social justice praxis I am developing (Wright, 2001/2002).

My recent (re)engagements with Dorothy Smith’s (1987, 1990a, 1990b)
sociology for women in general and her institutional ethnography (IE) and the
derivative political activist ethnography (PAE) in particular (G. Smith, 1990) -
as well as with academics and activists undertaking IE and PAE work - have led
me away from my initial tendency to collapse service learning and empirical
research into a version of activist cultural studies or cultural studies praxis
(Wright, 2001/2002). I am now more inclined to believe cultural studies works
best as praxis when it is juxtaposed and thus held in productive tension with
service learning and ethnography in general or institutional ethnography in
particular.

As an African and even as a black person teaching at a decidedly white
institution, I am the unexpected colleague and teacher. The cultural studies in
education programme in which I teach utilizes cultural studies as an umbrella
discourse for undertaking a critical approach to graduate studies of both sport
and education (social foundations of sport and sport psychology and social
foundations of education) and also involves cultural studies as an area of special-
ization. Cultural studies is still a rather novel approach to education in the USA
and even more so to sport studies. Many students have no previous conception
of cultural studies. (I think of myself, therefore, as the unexpected pedagogue
teaching the unexpected discipline). The silver lining to this situation is that
students in general and those with a strong practice orientation in particular (e.g.
those interested in teacher education and in sport psychology) consistently ask
such questions as ‘what is the relevance of cultural studies to my field?’ ‘How can
I utilize cultural studies in my practice?’ ‘Where are the examples of local and
regional cultural studies work?’ ‘How can we do cultural studies and yet find
opportunities to work with athletes?’

References

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opportunities to work with athletes/teachers and the community? Apart from my own interest, it is these questions and probings from practice-oriented students that has kept my focus on the development of courses like 'Issues in Cultural Studies' and a model of cultural studies as social justice praxis.

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