trying to deal with Blacks out of their assigned place. Show Boat is intended to make White feel good about themselves: those who are full of this must bear some responsibility for the outcome of this disaster. Show Boat is the depression exercise in insensitivity and racism, because the wave of change the heart of the depression and deep up are to live lives of dignity, will not die. It may go underground, but it will not go away.

My arguments linking the production of certain works, like Show Boat, to the status of society is further supported by looking at when this particular show boat has set sail.

1927: stage premiere — the romantic racism typical Black as exotic pets and highly sexualized people has gained some prominence, but scholars like Franz Boas are mounting a challenge to the theories of racial character differences.

1929: silent film — this is the year in which Black Friday occurs and the U.S. stock market collapses; 1933: the Depression has begun.

1936: Universal film — the depression continues.

1947: Broadway production — World War II has ended and Blacks are returning from the war with increased demands: they have fought for America and they want something in return; women too have had a taste of independence and the return of the "lighting men" will drive them back to the home front.

1951: MGM film — the civil rights movement has got underway.

1954: on opera — this is the year of the landmark decision, Brown v. Board of Education which ended segregation in education in the USA.

1966: a stage production at the Lincoln Center in Washington — this is the year following the assassination of Martin Luther King.

1983: a Broadway production and an opera in Houston — both the economy of the US has begun to go into a tailspin; inflation is on the rise. In fact between 1980 and 1985 there has only been a 2% wage gain for workers in North America.

The pattern that results from this analysis may be purely coincidental: if it is not, coincidence with a capital C. My intent is drawing links between the production of this "sweated classical" and wildly crises within US society is not to suggest that there is some sort of free-floating consciousness among the productions that are explicitly looking at society and making artistic decisions based on what is happening there. I am suggesting that the more complex and nuanced set of factors that are at work, and if we understand that culture is at its most effective when it appears to be on its own and that we understand how Show Boat has become an invisible but crucially important part of the fabric of a white supranational society. Producers and impresarios, like Farber and Kern were, are a part of society; they feel the tensions and cries as members of the cultural fabric and unconsciously work to "integrate" the personality and unite the individual... with society and its traditional values.

The result of this sort of analysis shows what happens when, as Morrison argues, we "over the critical gaze from the racial object to the racial subject: from the described and imagined to the describers and imaginaries: from the serving to the served." We begin to ask other questions which yield fruitful answers. Because when whites are creating images of Blacks and other subjected groups they are, in fact, creating images of themselves.

The various groups — I am tempted to say cabals — that form part of the network of power in Canada, have decided that 1980 and 1985 are the new prices; that it comes cheap; they are also telling us that they are anxious, worried and concerned.

The attempt on the part of Lewst, Garth Drabinsky's company, to sell Show Boat as a re-teaching tool to educate Canadians about racism, would be laughable if the stakes weren't so high — namely the education of children who are in an emergent. These educational packages are nothing but an attempt to justify and rationalize the exercise of power in bringing a racist show to Toronto. The best example and lesson is racism that exists is what has transpired to date in this city around the production of Show Boat.

While education is crucial around issues of race, in highly charged situations like those it can have limited impact as was borne out by what happened on the air on occasion when Merchant of Venice played there some years ago; some members of the audience threw pens from the balcony.

Furthermore, the involvement of a noted right-wing personality like William F. Buckley, who has openly expressed contempt for Blacks, and continued to do so when interviewed in Toronto recently, does not bode well for any "educational process" undertaken by the producers of Show Boat.

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Black Studies, Cultural Studies: Performance Acts

Manthia Diawara

One of the most important, and appealing, aspects of cultural studies is its critical, or even polemical, attitude toward every form of theoretical orthodoxy. The term, as I have used it to the limits of Marxism, captures the sense of critical attitude I have in mind here. Elaboration has become, within cultural studies, a means to make use of some of the approaches and methodologies of poststructuralism while being critical of its emphasis on institutionalized discipline. Cultural studies often delineates ways of life by elaborating them quite literally, by dressing and coiling previous theoretical understanding of those forms of life. This ethnographic approach has helped cultural studies position some of its key concepts in material conditions for example, uneven development, cultural articulation, postcoloniality, and specificity. Through the "literal reading of events," cultural studies explicates the material bases and implications of world views we assume, and analyses identity politics as moments of difference and rupture in the hegemonic status quo described by the discourses of Marxism or psychoanalysis.

I want to follow the evolution of the practice of elaboration from its development by early practitioners at the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, University of Birmingham, through its use by London-based black artists and writers to its deployment in the United States, particularly in departments of black studies and in feminist studies. I would like to distinguish what I call the London-based British cultural studies from the tradition derived from work at the Birmingham Centre. In the 1950s and 1960s researchers at the Birmingham Centre were mainly interested in the British working class and in an attempt to constitute a unique and alternative British Marxist theory around that subject. They were concerned to generate a British Marxism that would challenge the theoretical work of Louis Althusser, Claude Levi-Strauss, and the Frankfurt School. In contrast, the theorists black filmmakers, artists, photographers and writers were decomposing and reconstituting the terms of Britishness using race as the modality through which to read class. Black British cultural studies took as its main subject the elaboration of Black Britishness over and against ethno-national absolutism in Britain, the construction of a hegemonic blackness by black Americans, and
other manifestations of diaspora aesthetic.

London-based black cultural workers found the language specific to their condition of black Britishness by subverting to a critical reading not only the texts of the white left, which often ignore race, but also texts from the black diaspora. Some of the most fascinating moments in Paul Gilroy’s Three Apples In the Union Jack (1987) involve a critique of the work of George Orwell and Raymond Williams for their English essentialism. In order to carve out a space for blackness in Britain, Gilroy had to denounce Williams and Orwell in a similar way that he denounced British right-wingers such as Enoch Powell for their nostalgic celebration of a mythic, homogeneous way of life of the English working class. Ian Jack also similarly developed his film language through a critical reading of the avant-garde cinema. Julian states that:

On the left of avant-garde is pleasure, which the avant-garde itself denies, clinging to the puritanism of its contemporaries, repressing itself against a refusal to indulge in narrative or emotions and indeed, in some cases, refusing representation itself, because all these systems of signs are fixed, entrenched in the "sin or evil" of representation. The high moral tone of this discourse is based on a kind of masochistic self-worthiness that remains on the indulgence of a colonial history and a post-colonial history of cinema or white representations based on our black absence. The problematic surfaces when black filmmakers experiment with the idea of black film text and the subjective gaze is that subjectivity implies contradiction. But this is not, in itself, fixed.

(Undercut: A magazine for independent video and filmmakers, 1988, p.36)

Black British cultural workers also engage with the black American culture of the 1960s and 1970s and elaborate it into something energetic and specifically British. Some of the most significant discursive influences on black British cultural studies have been the works of Black Americans such as Juan Jordan, whose Civil Wars (1981) helped young black British thinkers to theorise "policing" in their own context: Manning Marable, Cedric Robinson, James Baldwin, Toni Cade Bambara, Ntozake Shange, and Toni Morrison. Caribbean influences included C.L.R. James, George Lamming, Wilson Harris, Frantz Fanon, Alme Cesaire, Edward Brathwaite, and Jumoke Wallcott, and Africentric influences included Ngugi wa Thiongo and Oumou Sambene. But these discursive texts were articulated with and recontextualised in a way that was attentive to the fluidity of identities, classes, and sexual politics in the British context.

While the "Birmingham School" - an economic, class-based cultural studies - and a "black British school" - a race - or ethnic identity-based cultural studies - may be difficult to maintain in light of the fact that figures such as Stuart Hall, Gilroy, and Dick Hebdige played and continue to play a key role in our understanding of both these strands of thought, it is a useful distinction to consider if we want to understand why in the U.S. academic context there appear to be two different kinds of cultural studies even though both are said to be derived from "British cultural studies."

One prevalent strain of cultural studies in the U.S. posits race at its center and uses metaphors of racial construction to bring to light the ways of life of oppressed groups. It is concerned with issues such as black appropriation of the discourse of modernism, the performative character of the construction of identity, cross-over texts, cultural carnivalesque, and anxias and homophobic in black communities. Thus, it combines elements of what we might call "oppression studies" - historical and sociological work that has concerned itself with uncovering the various modes of oppression of black men and women, the black family, etc. - with descriptive and semantic study of the ways of life and artifacts of black individuals and communities. Writers such as bell hooks, Michele Wallace, Martin Higgins, Wahlima Lahunia, Tom Lott, Henry Louis Gates Jr., Houston Baker Jr., Cornel West, Jane Gaines, Cora Cooper, Hailst Casby, and Herman Gray, to name a few, have entered into dialogue with the strand of black British cultural studies that focuses on issues of hybridity, essentialism, etc. - for example, with the work of Paul Gilroy, Kobena Mercer, Sonia Boyce, David Bailey, and Barbara, the Black Audio Film Collectives. The December 1988 conference "Black Popular Culture," organized by the Dia Center in New York City, brought together many of these critics and reasserted the centrality of the discourse of blackness to cultural studies. The other cultural studies in the U.S. implicitly links itself to the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies. Taking as one of its primary projects the description of people's whole way of life, it focuses on cultural practices and texts such as rock music, Hollywood and independent films, and so-called new ethnicities. Practitioners of this form of cultural studies also describe the impact on culture of, for example, the medical profession, leisure industries, and corporate control of electronic media. While these theorists maintain a strong anti-essentialist perspective, their abstract discourse belies the fact that they have been more influenced by certain strains of poststructuralism than by the second developments in the black strand of cultural studies. The conference "Cultural Studies Now and in the Future," held at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign April 2-9, 1990 represented not only the best and the highest levels of abstraction in the discourse of this brand of cultural studies, but also its tendency to evacuate race and gender as primary issues.

This genealogy of cultural studies obviously oversimplifies the field: for example, the forms I have described are not simply in opposition: many cultural workers cross the boundaries of many of these approaches. The purpose of constructing a typology is that comparing and analyzing loci of each form will facilitate exposing its advantages as well as its limitations. For example, British cultural studies theorists have criticized some black cultural workers for essentializing blackness by relying black ways of life even as they debunk the ethnocentric assumptions that tie them to an anti-essentialist critique of black cultural work suggests how an emphasis on identity politics can encourage people to forge the project of coalition building and actually fragment revolutionary struggle.
school tradition and of black cultural studies have much to learn from black studies and feminist studies as they have been developed in the U.S. Black British writers, for example, the implications of postmodern films or theories of global systems might do well to look at work that has been done to such issues as Africentric studies, Asian studies, and Latin American studies before declaring that we are beyond history, development, and recovery. The perspective of British cultural studies researchers on such issues as essentialism and binarism would also be complicated by examination of case studies produced by U.S. feminists and African American scholars on racism, oppression, and exclusion.

The challenge of black feminism is now to engage British cultural studies and to develop cultural work that addresses issues such as the plight of inner-city youth as well as what Cornel West calls the "institutions of caring" in the black community (Cornel West, "Nihilism in Black America," Diwan, Spring 1991, p.229). To analyze effectively the specificity of the black public sphere in the U.S. black studies must engage both the ethnographic approach of the Birmingham school and the core-centered approach of the black British school. We must ground our cultural studies in material conditions. We cannot wait for Hall or Gilroy or Boyce or Julien to tell us how to do this. On the contrary, we have to elaborate the U.S. context in light of the work of Hall and other black scholars, not just repetitions of their ethnographies or observations. We must read their work in such a way that they do not recognize themselves. Cultural studies in our hands should give new meanings to terms such as hybridity, essentialism, archive, race, identity politics, and the black community.

Black studies in the U.S.

If the Birmingham "Black Popular Culture" conference is any indication, the careful integration of elements from both streams of cultural studies promises to enable black studies in the U.S. to expand in a manner as well as depth, shifting its emphasis from "oppression studies" to what I call "performance studies." "Oppression studies" has historically done much to uncover and decipher the exclusion of blacks from the inventions, discourses, and emancipatory effects of modernity, and much still needs to be said about this. A great deal of contemporary work seeks to continue this line of study, and is furthermore concerned to respond to the critiques of poststructuralism and cultural studies. In an effort to break down the so-called "black community," these theorists focus analysis on subgroups delineated through such categories as class, sexuality, gender, etc. The importance of specificity in narratives about discrimination and oppression is undeniable. However, the coexistence of these subjects on "the black woman," "the young unemployed black male," "the black gay or lesbian," "the middle-class black," within the mainstream cultural discourse is an apparent danger to the construction of black studies. The fragmented perspective of such narratives can exacerbate political divisions in responses to events such as the Mike Tyson trial or the Clarence Thomas/Anti Hill hearings that may call for unity across lines of class, gender, and sexual orientation.

Furthermore, "oppression studies" need not overlook the actions of black people that helped to refine the tools of solidarity and advance its democratic ideals. Black "performance studies" would mean study of the ways in which black people, through communicative acts, created and continue to create themselves within the American experience. Such an approach would contain several interrelated notions, among them the notion that "performance" involves an individual or group of people interpreting an existing tradition—reinterpreting themselves—in front of an audience, or public; and that black agency in the U.S. involves the redefinion of the tools of Americanness. Thus, the notion of "study" expands not only to include an appreciation of the importance of performative action historically, but also to include a performative aspect itself, a reconstruction of a text or a style or a culturally specific response in a different medium. At the "Black Popular Culture" conference, for example, Greg Tate explored a new realm of urban life calling his knowledge of jazz, funk, and science fiction to his familiarity with the dramatic, audience-involving traditions of preaching and music within black communities. Such a "performance" is both political and theatrical; it refers to and draws on existing traditions; represents the actor as occupying a different position in society and interacts with the audience's responses to emerging images of black people.

In the U.S. today writers, artists, and performers such as Ishiki Rose, Lisa Kennedy, Jorja Oxen, and Tate are interested less in what legal scholar Reginal Austin has called cross-over dreams and the narratives of the "dream deferred" as in the notion of a black public sphere. These cultural workers are heirs of the civil rights movement and the black nationalist movement of the 60's, but defer significantly in focus and perspectives from both. They are different from the civil rights intellectuals and activists in that they are not as concerned with forwarding integration and the development of "oppression studies," which dominated black studies, women studies, and Chicano studies in the 70's. Their ideology is also significantly different from the black nationalism of the 60's which in the context of white supremacy developed strong strains of sexism, racism, and homophobia.

These thinkers are motivated by social and economic changes among black communities occasioned by the combination of post-World War II patterns of migration and urbanisation and the civil rights movements. This growth has created a new generation of analysts and activists who are more deeply engaged in questions of racism among blacks, who earlier depended on the church and popular music as their primary areas for cultural expression. The result has been an explosion of artistic activity among blacks, with some artists now engaged in the black public sphere not just for aesthetic ends or for personal expression, but to assert a distinct voice, a different way of being heard, of being received in the world, of being recognized as black. This is a critical moment in American life, it is a moment of change that is precipitated in large part by the economic and social changes, it is a moment of consolidation and change, a moment of resistance and celebration, a moment of conflict and resolution, a moment of self-definition and self-assertion.

include an engagement with the material conditions of culture in the U.S.
Instead, seeing one’s life reflected at the center of books, films, visual arts, and music takes precedence. Indeed, the shift to the new black public sphere has been accompanied by the evolution of a new variant of black nationalism. The traditional exclusionary themes of black nationalism are transformed in the works of writers such as Terry McMillan and filmmaker Spike Lee. The themes of African American culture are reinscribed in contemporary material and cultural conditions to construct a different black version of the American dream. Today, black activists, from rap musicians to filmmakers and writers, are deriving fame and success from exploiting the themes of a black public sphere. As Public Enemy has pointed out, if a “black planet” is the essence of art about the black “good life” society, it is not only both black and white, but also anti-essentialist. This “good life” has become the object of interest, and even envy, of Americans of different origins and races.

Civil rights activists feared that black nationalism would enhance ghettoization. But young and international audiences have become increasingly fascinated by cultural production that calls itself authentically black. Reasons for this attraction range from the pull of the exotic to the incorporation of liberation themes into resistance to parent ethnic cultures that position themselves on a universal. Rap, for example, has moved from the underground toward the center, making it the subject of incorporation by white pop musicians as well as the object of parody by “Deadheads” and country musicians.

As the work of younger scholars has already shown, cultural studies of the black British variety can make an important intervention in the analysis of the new arts produced about the black good life society. Emphasis on hybridity, cross-over, and the critique of homogenization yields tools with which to check the repressive consequences of Americanism. Black British cultural workers have a love and hate relationship with black Nationalist culture. This both enables the British to use American culture as raw material for its own critical and creativeendeavors, and provides the British to critique American culture for being obsessed with the discourse of race and sexuality, for being nationalistic in the worst sense, and for not being reflexive or self-critical. Black British viewers do not identify with the notion of a black good life society, let alone with the consumers of Spike Lee’s films.

I submit that a measure of identification with the U.S. black public sphere, its cultural consumers and producers, is necessary for the production of engaging texts on the black good life society and its arts. In addition, it is not sufficient to analyze only the art of the good life society and the consumers of that product. One must understand the forms of life of blacks and whites in the U.S. in order to appreciate the techniques that black artists engage in transforming well-established white meanings.

Conditions of black life in America have resulted in a black American response to modernity that is both inventive and mimetic. Blacks have constantly redeployed the meanings imposed on the tools and products of modernization by a linear and often destructive Eurocentrism. For example, the acts of black leaders such as Ida B. Wells, Frederick Douglass, and Martin Luther King Jr. served as a backdrop to the rewriting of history that were written to protect the rights of whites only. At the same time, being entrenched at the margins, black people observed the advancement of the most efficient modernity in the world upside down. As a result, black people have provided—and continue to provide—some of the most important critiques of modernity through what might be called techniques of reversibility. Thus, for example, black people’s iconoclastic redirection of instruments used in classical music and army bands, which violated many levels of order to create jazz, the music of modernity.

I suggested earlier that the civil rights movement contributed to mass literacy among black people, but the failure of civil rights polices of integration has left this mass starved for black-centered books, films, painting, music, etc. At the same time, black nationalism’s legacy of emphasis on identity, political struggle, and self-determination cannot be placed in the shadows, for it survives in the structures of the new black public sphere. In fact, many black thinkers have a suspicious attitude toward postmodernism and modernism 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. The historical and ideological discontinuities between those giving voice to the black good life society and their predecessors in the civil rights and black nationalist movements need to be understood urgently in order for the black public sphere to continue to develop its black-centered perspectives and techniques.

To reproduce itself, the new black public sphere needs both an economic base that provides jobs for young people and defusions and discussions of the culture it is producing. U.S. black studies can develop performance studies as a mode of interpolating people in the black cultural sphere, positioning the people of the black good life society as “ideal readers.” Such a method of elaboration promises a way to nurture the break with the tenets of the civil rights movement and black nationalism, and move on to higher levels of abstraction along the lines of sexual politics, class, and labor relations.

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