

trying to deal with Blacks out of their assigned place. *Show Boat* is intended to make whites feel good about themselves: those who are lulled by this must bear some responsibility for the outcome of this disastrous exercise in insensitivity and racism, because the wave of change, the heartfelt and deep urge 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 state of society is further supported by looking at when this particular show boat has set sail.

1927: stage premiere — the romantic racialism typing Blacks as exotic pets and highly sexualized people has gained some prominence, but scholars like Franz Boas are mounting a challenge to the theories of inherited racial characteristics;

1929: silent film — this is the year in which 'Black' Friday occurs and the US stock market collapses;

1932: the Great 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 but the return of the 'fighting men' will drive them back to the home 'front';

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

1954: an opera — this is the year of the landmark decision, *Brown vs the 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 Malcolm X;

1983: a Broadway production and an opera in Houston — by 1983 the economy of the US has begun to go into a tailspin; inflation is on the rise. In fact between 1980 and 1990 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 it is, coincidence with a capital C. My intent in drawing links between the production of this "revered classic" and wider crises within US society is not to suggest that there is some sort of free floating conspiracy of impresarios who are consciously looking at society and making artistic decisions based on what is happening there. I am suggesting a far 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 harmless and organic - merely happening - then we understand how *Show Boat* has become an invisible but crucially important part of the fabric of a white supremacist society. Producers and

impresarios, like Ferber and Kern were, are a part of society; they feel the tensions and crises 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 "avert the critical gaze from the racial object to the racial subject; from the described and imagined to the describers and imaginers; 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 Black pain has a price — that it comes cheap; they are also telling us that they are anxious, worried and concerned.

The affront at the heart of *Show Boat*, beginning with the book with its negative and one-dimensional images; the colossal and deliberate omission of the Black experience, of the pain of a people traumatized for four centuries of genocide and exploitation; the anger at seeing our music appropriated and turned to the profit of the very people who oppressed us; all that is still very alive today — the 'Ol' Man River of racism continues to run through the history of these productions, and is very much a part of this production. It is part of the overwhelming need of white Americans and white Canadians to convince themselves of our inferiority — that our demands don't represent a challenge to them, their privilege and their superiority.

The attempt on the part of *Livent*, Garth Drabinsky's company, to use *Show Boat* as a teaching tool to educate Canadians about racism, would be laughable if the stakes weren't so high — namely the education of children who are targeted in this enterprise. 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 in 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 these it can have limited impact as was borne out by what happened at Stratford on some occasions when *Merchant of Venice* played there some years ago: some members of the audience threw pennies at Shylock.

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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Julie Dash, director of *Daughters of the Dust*

Black Studies, Cultural Studies PERFORMATIVE 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, *elabore*, used by Antonio Gramsci to stretch and test 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 it as an institutionalized discipline.

Cultural studies often delineates ways of life by elaborating them quite literally, embarrassing and baffling previous theoretical understanding of those forms of life. This ethnographic approach has helped cultural studies ground some of its key concepts in material conditions: for example, uneven development, cultural articulation, positionality, and specificity. Through the "literal reading of event," cultural studies explicates the material bases and implications of world views we assume, and analyzes 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 black British cultural studies from the tradition derived from work at the Birmingham Centre. In the 1960s and 1970s 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, in the 1980s black filmmakers, artists, photographers and writers were decomposing and restructuring 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 ethnic absolutism in Britain, the construction of a hegemonic blackness by black Americans, and



other manifestations of diasporan aesthetics.

London-based black cultural workers found the language specific to their condition of black Britishness by submitting 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 *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack* (1987) involve a critique of the work of George Orwell and Raymond Williams for their English ethnocentrism. 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. Isaac Julien similarly developed his film language through a critical reading of the avant-garde cinema. Julien states that:

On the left of avant-gardism is pleasure, which the avant-garde itself denies, clinging to the puritanism of its constructed ethics, measuring 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-censorship that relies on the indulgence of a colonial history and a post-colonial history of cinema or white representations based on our black absence. The problematic that surfaces when black filmmakers experiment with the idea of black film text and the subjective camera 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 diasporic influences on black British cultural studies have been the works of Black Americans such as June Jordan, whose *Civil Wars* (1981) helped young black British thinkers to theorize "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, Aimé Césaire, Edward Braithwaite, and Derek Walcott, and African influences included Ngugi Wa Thiongo and Ousmane Sembéne. But these diasporic texts were articulated with black Britishness to create new approaches that were attentive to the fluidity of identities, class, and sexual politics in the British context.

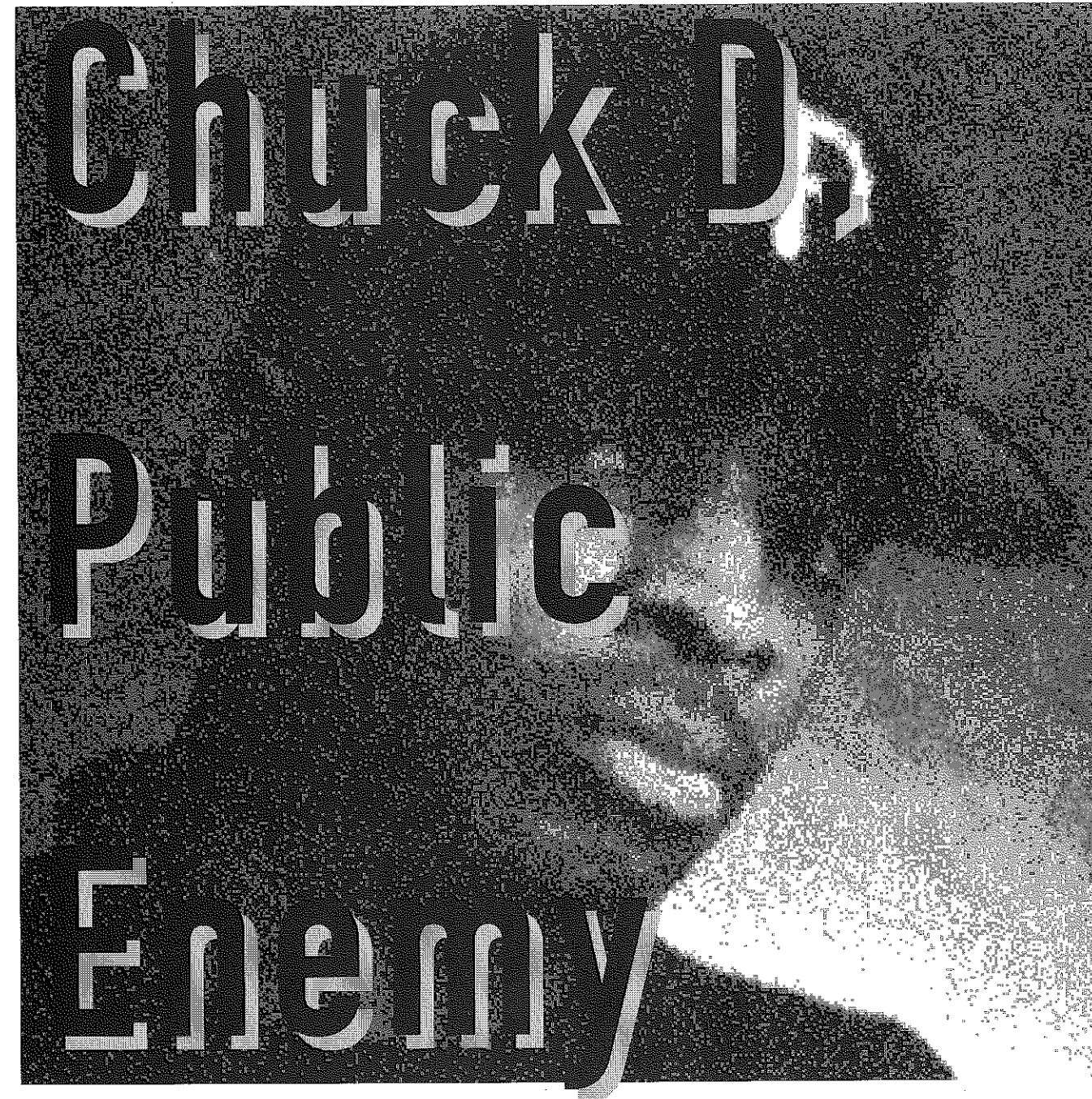
While the distinction between the "Birmingham school"—an economic, or class-based cultural studies—and a "black British school"—a race—, or ethnic

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 key roles 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 ambivalence, and sexism and homophobia 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 semiotic study of the ways of life and artifacts of black individuals and communities. Writers such as bell hooks, Michele Wallace, Marlon Riggs, Wahneema Lubiano, Tom Lott, Henry Louis Gates Jr., Houston Baker Jr., Cornel West, Jane Gaines, Cora Caplan, Hazel Carby, 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, Sankofa, and the Black Audio Film Collective. The December 1991 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. explicitly 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 recent 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 4-9, 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.

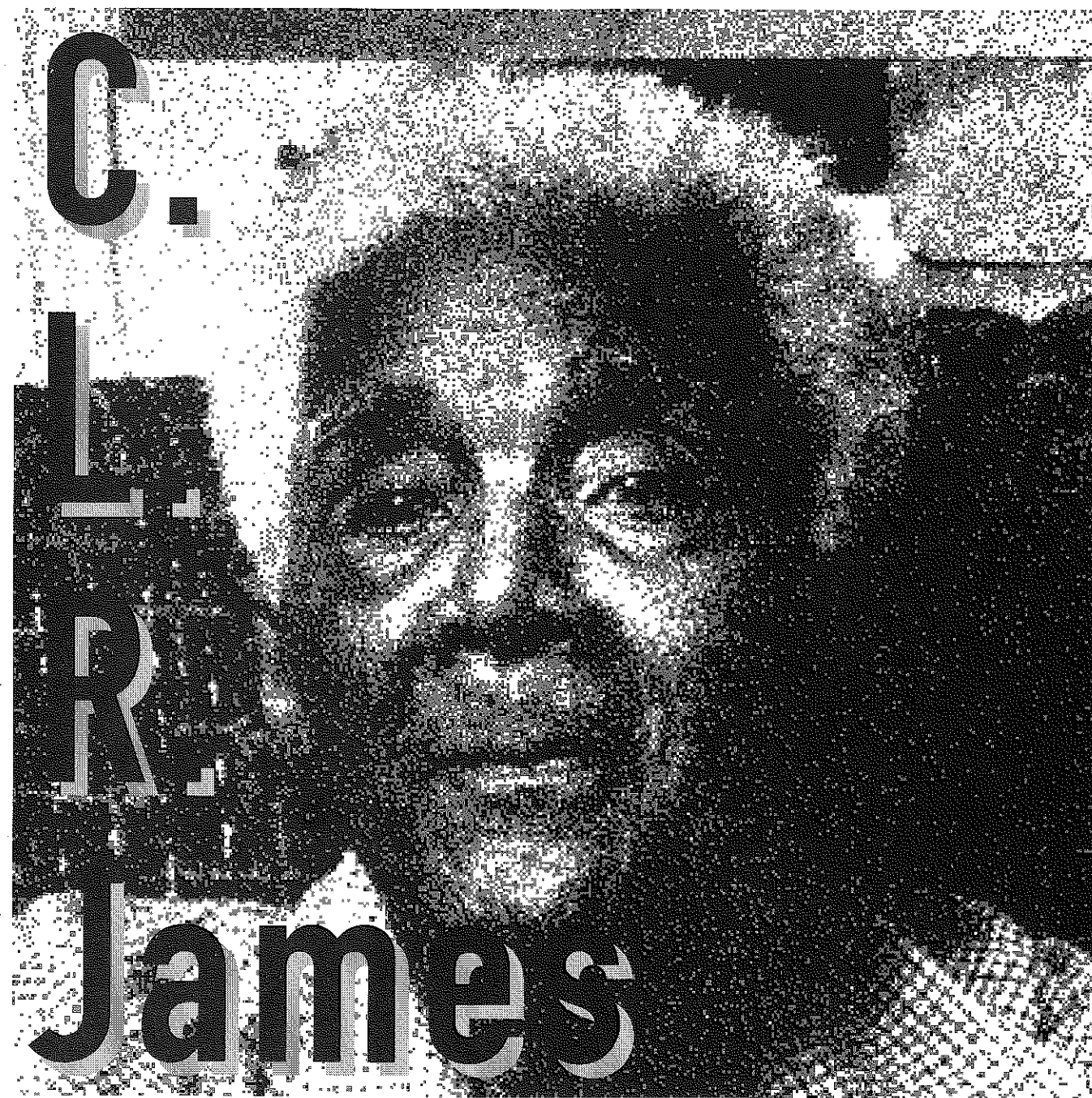
This genealogy of cultural studies obviously over-



simplifies 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 foci of each form facilitates exposing its advantages as well as its limitations. For example, British cultural studies theorists have criticized some black cultural workers for essentializing blackness by reifying black ways of life even as they

debunk the ethnic absolutism they associate with Englishness and black nationalism. This anti-essentialist critique of black cultural work suggests how an emphasis on identity politics can encourage people to forego the project of coalition building and actually fragment revolutionary struggle.

Similarly, contradictions within U.S. cultural studies underlie the fact that the importation of theoretical traditions of the Birmingham Centre to the U.S. must



include an engagement with the material conditions of culture in the U.S. Unfortunately, a good deal of U.S. cultural studies that invokes the Birmingham Centre disengages theory from its spaces of application. The perspectives of the Birmingham school cannot simply be lifted and applied to the U.S.—where traditions of family, nation and spectatorship, for example, are quite different—without a negotiation and reapplication of the tools of ethnography and analysis in the context of U.S.

social and material conditions. In their attempt to replace deconstruction with cultural studies as a new academic discipline, its practitioners have made anti-essentialism their strongest critical tool, and turned their backs on the theoretical and methodological contributions of Marxism, feminism and black studies. The anti-essentialism of this cultural studies has become an essentialism of its own kind: the reification of discourse.

At the same time, practitioners of the Birmingham

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 studying, for example, the implications of postmodern films or theories of global systems might do well to look at work that has been done in such areas as African 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 Americans 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," *Dissent*, Spring 1991, p.223). 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 race-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 British scholars, not find replications of their ethnographies or abstractions. 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, ambivalence, identity politics, and the black community.

Black studies in the U.S.

If the Dia "Black Popular Culture" conference is any indication, the careful integration of elements from both strands of British cultural studies promises to enable black studies in the U.S. to expand in purview 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 identification of study subjects as "the black woman," "the young endangered black male," "the black gay or lesbian," "the middle-class black," within the larger political context has posed a danger to 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/Anita Hill hearings that may call for unity across lines of class, gender, and sexual orientation.

Furthermore, "oppression studies" need not overshadow the actions of black people that helped to refine the tools of modernity and advance its democratic ideals. Black "performance studies" would mean study of the ways in which black people, through communicative action, created and continue to create themselves within the American experience. Such an approach would contain several interrelated notions, among them that "performance" involves an individual or group of people interpreting an existing tradition—reinventing themselves—in front of an audience, or public; and that black agency in the U.S. involves the redefinition 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 reenactment 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 realism of urban life adding 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 theoretical: it refers to and draws on existing traditions; represents the actor as occupying a different position in society; and interpellates the audience's response to emerging images of black people.

In the U.S. today young writers, artists, and performers such as Trish Rose, Lisa Kennedy, Jacqui Jones, and Tate are interested less in what legal scholar Regina Austin has called cross-over dreams and the narrative 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 '60s, but differ 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 '70s. Their ideology is also significantly different from the black nationalism of the '60s 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 urbanization and the civil rights movements. This period saw the growth of an unprecedented mass literacy among blacks, who earlier depended on the church and popular music as their primary arena for cultural and political debate. This broad cultural shift to a new black public sphere set the stage for an environment in which books, films, the visual arts, and music no longer principally exhibit an interest in the project of integration, or in belonging to the society of the "good life," which is increasingly recognized as being white.



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 version of black nationalism. The traditional exclusionary themes of black nationalism are transformed in the works of writers such as Terry McMillan and filmmakers as diverse as Reginald Hudlin, Spike Lee, Julie Dash, and Charles Burnett into the themes of a black "good life": elements of black nationalism are reinscribed in contemporary material and cultural conditions to construct a different black version of the American dream. Today black artists, from rap musicians to filmmakers and writers, are deriving fame and success from exploiting the themes of a black public sphere, or as Public Enemy puts it, a "black planet." The consumers of art about the black "good life" society are not only both black and white, but exist internationally. 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 white youth and an international audience 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 liberatory themes into resistance to parent ethnic cultures that position themselves as 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 homophobia yields some tools with which to check the regressive consequences of any nationalism. Black British cultural workers have a love and hate relationship with black American culture; this both enables the British to use American culture as raw material for its own critical and artistic endeavors, and prompts the British to criticize American culture for being obsessed with the discourse of race and slavery, 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 a Spike Lee film.

I submit that a measure of identification with the U.S. black public sphere, its cultural consumers and reproducers, 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 innovative and antimodern. Blacks have constantly redefined 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 the background to the rewriting of laws that were written to protect the rights of whites only. At the same time, by being situated 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 reversability. Take, 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' politics 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 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. 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 addressed 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 definitions and discussions of the culture it is producing daily. 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 its "ideal readers." Such a method of elaboration promises a way to narrate 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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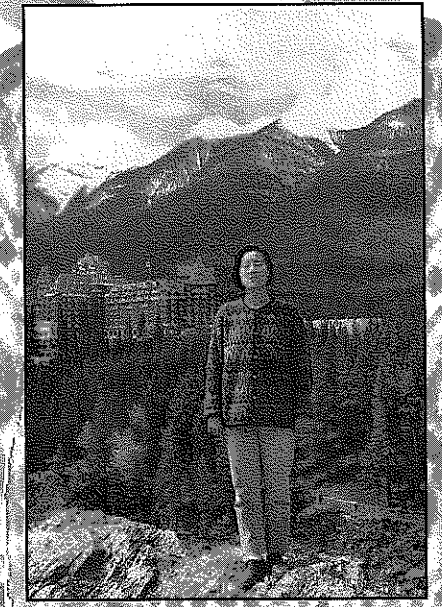
Souvenirs of the Self: A project of six postcards by Jin-me Yoon



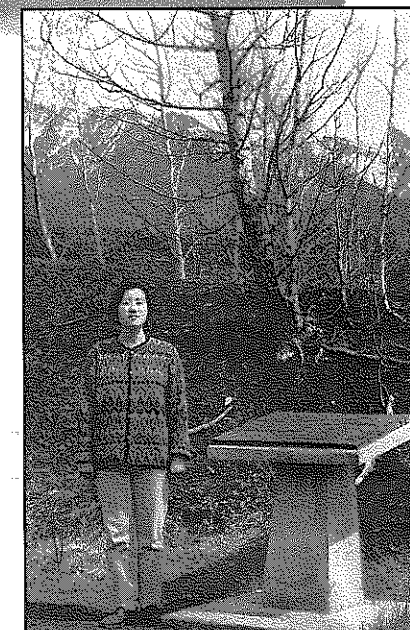
Rocky Mountain Bus Tour – Come and enjoy the great Canadian wilderness. As they parted she wished them all a safe journey home.



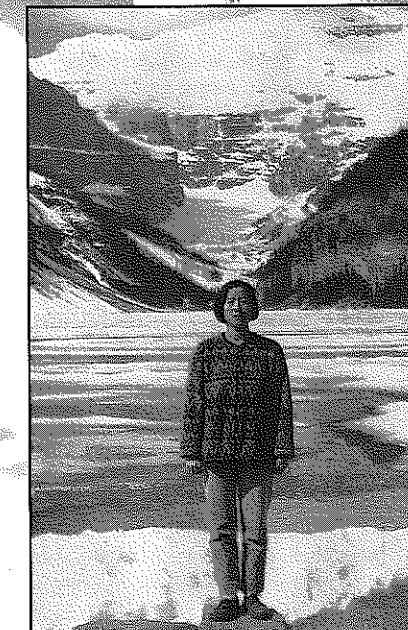
Banff Park Museum – Marvel over the impressive collection of Western Canada's oldest natural history museum. She looks with curiosity and imagines life beyond the rigid casings.



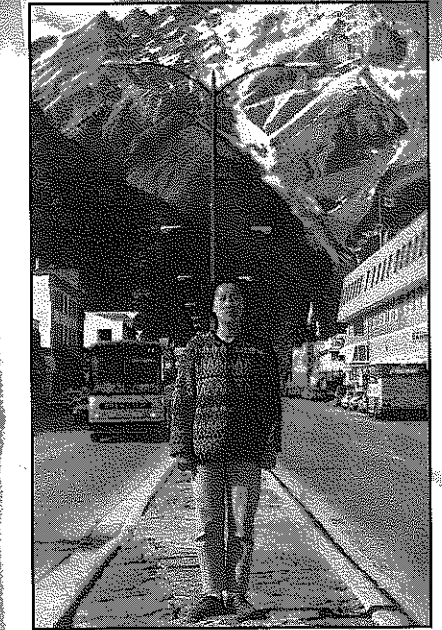
Banff Springs Hotel – Indulge in the European elegance and grandeur of days gone by. She remembers being told that tradition is something you can always count on.



Bankhead (1904-1922) – Explore the riches to rags drama of this historic coal mining town. She discovers that Chinese workers lived on the other side of the slack heaps.



Lake Louise – Feast your eyes on the picturesque beauty of this lake named to honour Princess Louise Caroline Alberta, daughter of Queen Victoria. She discovers the lake on a sunny day before that she did not exist.



Banff Avenue – Banff has been charming visitors from around the world for over a hundred years. She has trouble finding that perfect souvenir for herself.