English Studies and Cultural Power: Towards a Recognition of Mediated Practices

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Summary

This paper suggests that the shifts of content and practice which characterise South African English studies are attributable to certain multicultural imperatives, the least acknowledged of which is the mass media. Yet I do not perceive English and cultural studies to be synonymous. While recognising that the "literary" is a category constructed in conflictual relation to other discourses, I argue for an English studies which, unlike many cultural studies critiques, admits the validity of people's imaginative, emotional and aesthetic investments in their responses to culture. The term "mediated" is used to designate not only forms such as televisual and print media, but the mediated nature of our identities as students and teachers as they relate to pedagogic practice.

Opsomming

Hierdie referaat suggereer dat die inhoud- en praktykverskuiwings wat Suid-Afrikaanse Engelse studies kenmerk, toegeskryf kan word aan sekere multikulturele imperatiewe waarvan die massa media die minste erkenning ontvang. Dog beskou ek nie Engelse en kultuurstudies as sinoniem nie. Terwyl ek toegee dat die "literêre" 'n kategorie is wat in konflikverhouding met ander diskoerse gekonstrueer is, argumenteer ek ten gunste van 'n Engelse studie wat, anders as in die geval van baie kultuurstudiekritieke, die geldigheid van mense se verbeeldingryke, emosionele en estetiese betrokkenheid by kultuur erken. Die begrip "bemiddeling" word gebruik om nie alleen die invloed van vorms soos televisuele en gedrukte media aan te dui nie, maar verwys ook na die bemiddelende aard van ons identiteit as studente en dosente wat betref pedagogiese praktyk.

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It might be melodramatic to assert that English studies is "in crisis", given that debate and conflict are said to be definitional features of the discipline (e.g. Frith 1992; Graff 1989; Guy & Small 1993 and Widdowson 1990). Yet in the varied contexts of South African tertiary education, we cannot but recognise that the cultural capitals traditionally invested in "English" and

"Literature" are undergoing significant revaluations: Literature in relation to literacy; English as foundational reading skills; literature as a humanising force integral to a general Humanities curriculum. What is the object of "English Studies"? What is the point and what is the field of inquiry? Or might both purpose and focus most valuably be designated by the search for questions, contingent definitions, and tasks, rather than the transfer of coherent bodies of knowledge?

Within the shifting cultural frames attempting to contain English studies, for instance, there is already the growing acknowledgement that literacy might be conceptualised more broadly than mere functional reading or familiarity with "Received High Culture", however important it might be for students to possess communicative competence, and have critical access to influential cultural constructs such as "Western Civilisation". Literacy is beginning to be understood as ideologically and culturally embedded, interrogative and disputational, rather than as a monolithic concept whose practice, E.D. Hirsch wanted to assert, was fundamentally academic and intellectual. In seeking to explore, however raggedly, what might in time become a more thoroughly conceptualised, "multicultural" response to the break-up of a white middle-class tertiary educational constituency, it seems that teachers of English could be confronting another version of the discursive instability typical of "English" as a "discipline".

Such instability can give rise to both advances and confusions. At the University of Natal, Durban, various departments and centres, including the Department of English, offer subject-specific and/or interdisciplinary courses on various cultural ecumenes described in the calendar as English, English Language Studies, Reading and Interpretation, Knowledge Production, Literary Studies, Cultural and Media Studies, Literature and Translation, and Twentieth Century Poetry and Social Relevance. Where does this leave the Department of English, which at present attempts, rather unevenly, given the evidence of its undergraduate and postgraduate programmes, to fulfil most of the "cultural" functions referred to above? (It offers coursework Masters in "South African English Literature" and "The Teaching of South African Literature", for instance, issue-orientated second-year programmes with titles such as "Colonial Encounters: Empire and Response", while the entry-level programme has over several years been modified to accommodate various conurbations of "high" and "popular" culture.)

Using UND as a convenient point of reference, it is perhaps not surprising that manifold, contradictory perceptions of "the English department" abound. By some, an English Department which is attempting to recast its cultural capital is believed to have initiated the kinds of development and curriculum innovation needed across the faculty; others maintain that

"English" should assume a university-wide, language-service responsibility. And yet others are sceptical concerning "English" as a paradiscipline which either lacks or, worse, has wilfully forfeited, a coherent object of analysis. And whatever the evidence to the contrary, some recalcitrants determinedly construct "English" in terms of a Practical Criticism and cultural mandarinism habitually associated with colonial English departments in their capacities as surveyors and purveyors of Received High Culture.

The scope of this paper is limited, and falls short of demands made by various educationists for the development of the practical methodology required if post-"prac.crit." English studies academics are to implement major changes in institutional practice. Yet my discussion *is* shaped by the exigencies of multicultural teaching situations and the need for a reconceptualised English studies pedagogy. The paper gestures towards several realignments in the disciplinary languages and cultures of South African English studies. In one sense, this could involve reworking, in the new, multicultural South African context, explanations concerning "L/literature" as a centripetal force in the definition, articulation and dissemination of an invented but supposedly self-evident national culture: how might South African writing evoke the imagined community of Anderson's "nation", for example, and how might this intersect with the practical needs of a diverse student population, whose reading cultures differ substantially, and differ substantially from the Culture once assumed by proponents of English as a bastion against cultural anarchy? (Whatever his elitist leanings, we may recall that even T.S. Eliot allowed that an awkward mix of popular and high cultures contributed to a hybrid "British" national culture: in a conception prescient of Williams's "culture as a whole way of life", Eliot imagined "Englishness" to encompass not only texts as traditionally defined, but the range of social practices "characteristic of a people":

> Derby Day, Henley Regatta, Cowes, the twelfth of August, a cup final, the dog races, the pin-table, the dart board, Wensleydale cheese, boiled cabbage cut into sections, beetroot in vinegar, nineteenth-century Gothic churches and the music of Elgar.
>
> (Eliot 1948: 31)

Yet to raise questions about the literary enterprise in relation to debates about the validity of national and regional agendas is also to invoke implicitly the supposedly *transnational, non-literary* absence - or spectre, as many academics would have it - of mass or popular culture. How might literature, for instance, if conceived as constituent and constitutor of national identity, accommodate the tensions which exist "between the fixity of the national and the plurality of the popular" (Donald 1992: 51)? How might

"English" studies intersect with the so-called globalisation of cultural experience attendant upon the proliferation of mass cultural forms? In contemporary English studies, what relationships might be envisaged between literary art and mass mediated expression; between the teaching of a conventional book culture and the ephemera of popular magazines? Although Williams early acknowledged "culture" to be a slippery term, it has become evermore contested in the South African academic context, where, as Nethersole puts it:

> ... despite the much quoted "culture of violence" which ravages our country at the moment, we, as producers of cultural capital and purveyors of cultural goods - or at least as "cultural workers" - ... contribute to the much hoped for "culture of learning".
>
> (1995: 206)

Notwithstanding the individual circumstances and histories of different local English departments, which entail that "English" and "literature" may also function within particularised, regional symbolic systems, it is interesting to speculate that changes in the disciplinary constitutions of South African English studies have been informed by several multicultural pressures. Allowing for a degree of caricature, let me draw the following trajectories: During the late Seventies through to the Eighties, provoked by the rise of black and feminist politics and associated theory, the fundamentally monocultural English department witnessed the demand for courses on "others", on previously marginalised cultures and silenced voices which included black writing/women's writing/working class texts/black women's writing/-the cultures of orality. Influenced by the gathering momentum of a heterogeneous student population, such pressures have continued in modified forms through the Eighties, and "English" has needed to address language-literacy imperatives, and to accommodate faculty attempts to explore and institutionalise development programmes designed to bridge disparities between the academic cultures of the university and the ostensibly ordinary experiential cultures of non-intellectual life. The most recent multicultural exigency, I suggest, has seen "English" further destabilised by a plethora of mass cultures traditionally relegated to the margins - or beyond - of academic interest.

In South Africa, this move has been sporadically visible since the Seventies, but it has acquired a greater cogency with the growth of both post-modern theory and mass-mediated culture within new congeries of global exchange, and with South Africa's "re-entry" into the international sphere. (It has become increasingly inadequate, as this paper will suggest, merely to argue that mass culture is synonymous with a monocultural coca-colonisa-

tion of the globe inimical to multicultural endeavours. Appadurai (1993) and others, for instance, have pointed to the surprising misreadings and popular re-appropriations of the "global" product which occur in diverse local contexts, and what might emerge from my own discussion is the potential for English studies to effect surprising alliances between popular, commodity culture and critical pedagogy.)

That the importance of mass/contemporary culture is gradually being admitted by English studies is evidenced by the various courses which are, or have been, taught at a number of South African universities. The English departments of the University of Natal at Pietermaritzburg, the University of Durban-Westville, and UNISA, for instance, have all experimented with first-year courses which engage with subjects such as the adventure novel, the magazine, the newspaper, the Bond phenomenon, etc. As I shall suggest, however, the mere addressing of a "popular" content is not necessarily unproblematic, and one must also remark the determined attempts to corral the study of contemporary mass and popular culture within *first-year* or even *practical* English teaching initiatives. A truly serious attempt to theorise such culture within tertiary English studies, would surely involve the searching out of productive interstices between contemporary cultural agendas and the "South African Literature" or "Postcolonial" emphases which characterise a number of local Masters coursework programmes and proposals for southern African studies Centres.

So from the outset we need to be aware of the pitfalls associated with attempts to reconstitute English studies in relation to a *mediated* understanding of multicultural experiences and subjectivities. Cultural diversity is not in itself commendable, and not much can be gained by the addition of a few "popular" texts to a fundamentally traditional syllabus. Even in English departments which promote themselves as innovative by virtue of syllabuses and philosophies which take account of experience as culturally mass mediated, new canonicities may be quick to form. When the engagement is merely with a new *object* of study, English studies teachers rapidly master an expanded repertoire of texts and terms, satisfied that this represents sufficient acknowledgement of "modernity" and of contemporary agendas. And, in a strategy historically familiar within English studies, the mass or popular text can in the teaching situation function as an index of the obviously inferior: lacking the moral complexity of literature and, unlike the literary, hopelessly compromised in its circumstances of production (capitalist) and reception (easy, escapist). Without conscious attempts at structural realignments of knowledge, the "popular" may also be subsumed into representative *generic* categories - the magazine, the news bulletin, the soap opera - each pedagogically assimilable according to a number of formal

criteria which may peripheralise the often contradictory practices of "consumption" in generating meaning, and fail to ask "popular" for whom? why? when? While curricula constraints possibly necessitate such metonymic figuring - from the generic example may be extrapolated typicalities of form, patterning and even content - this approach could de-emphasise links amongst various forms of popular and high culture, and might make it less likely that the complexities of production and reception will be debated. It does not take long, if an abstract formalisation is granted primary emphasis, for the new "popular" syllabus to collapse. If authority cannot be located in the moral worth and subtlety of the text *per se* - even if we are not falling back on the hagiographic, sacerdotal authority associated with canons - many English studies academics find themselves unable to invest the object of analysis with any convincing cultural belief, and resort automatically to a hermeneutic of suspicion.

In (re)claiming for English studies the broadened field of "cultural analysis", I am clearly situating teachers of English within a political project which seeks to mediate between "ordinary" and "academic" life worlds. Yet it should also become evident that I am not arguing for the kind of normative, dystopian critique according to which value is measured against an activist communication practice, and predetermined democratic principles. (For a well-intentioned but ultimately facile example, see Bruck and Raboy's introductory comments to *Communication For and Against Democracy* (1989)). If, somewhat adapting Giroux's conception of what it means to study culture, I see potential for English studies as a field which offers scope for rethinking education "as a form of cultural politics and ... a discourse of intervention and possibility" (1992: 164), I am also convinced that intervention and possibility are not neatly correspondent with macropolitical ideals.

Instead, there are gaps, fissures, oscillations, slippages, small and large inconsistencies, between the ideals of democratic projects and cultural experience. And the acknowledgement that experience is always in excess of political claims, even for the most committed "activist", for the most radical text, has important consequences for the mediation of cultural practice in the context of English studies.

Since mass culture is not amenable to recuperation within any immediately relevant political agenda - and indeed to many has seemed merely the excresence of a manipulative culture industry - it is perhaps understandable that the turn to contemporary culture has yet in any assertive way to manifest itself within South African English studies. We should also recognise that it is consumer culture, burgeoning both on campus and beyond the university's immediate sphere of influence, which has the potential most

dramatically, and for some, threateningly, to challenge the academic corpus. The Academe generally, and particularly the English department as a moral-cultural bulwark, has been instrumental in systematising, sustaining and legitimising contrasts between low culture, high culture, media culture and so on. But given what Jameson (1991) has called the cultural volatilisation accompanying the rise of electronic and mass-mediated forms of culture, and the attendant mutations of boundaries between various forms of cultural expression, practice and grouping, conventional academic divisions of knowledge have been rendered less tenable. This is not to claim that cultural distinctions have disappeared; rather, it is to question (once again) the validity of several assumed differentiations, to recognise that culture involves ongoing processes of decentering and *recentering*, dissolution and *reformulation* into new assemblages: if Eagleton, for instance, is but one of the many theorists to have highlighted the difficulties of continuing to assert Literature as an intrinsic category, this does not negate the attempts of a South African magazine such as *Tribute*, through the publication of short stories, poetry, and columns by prominent literary personages, as well as through the awarding of literary prizes and the invocation of "classic" standards of cultural excellence, to manipulate "the literary" as a mark of superior self-signature. Nor should we scorn the possibility that the "literary" assertions in any single issue of the magazine often co-exist with affirmations of ethnicity, Africanness and a global cosmopolitanism. Instead, an English studies pedagogy might attempt to develop ways in which to popularise the recognition that

> culture depends upon discourses which construct it in conflicting, often contradictory ways, according to ... interests and values ... as they struggle to legitimize themselves as privileged forms of representation.
>
> (Collins 1989: xiii)

To consider this from a slightly different perspective: the University, in its historical tendency to envisage and enforce rigorous distinctions between high culture and low culture, intellectual and ordinary experience, has been concerned to replicate social stratifications and guarded hierarchies of expertise tied to class, as well as race and gender. But academic insulation from mass culture can also be seen to be illusory - in relation to English studies, for instance, witness the contradictory recuperation of mass culture into the academe via the valorisation of culturally iconoclastic energies derived from a modernist avant-garde. Or, more generally, the pleasurable convenience of electronic inroads into campus such as MTV and ATMs. Various academic projects at South African universities, moreover, are the

beneficiaries of endowments from such corporate bodies as Amalgamated Beverages (Coca Cola), The Hub Club, and Reader's Digest. Clearly, cultural groupings are less and less easy to demarcate.

The South African university of the Nineties is likely to face evermore pressure to address a broader cultural terrain and a more heterogeneous audience, and at least one of the concomitants will be the necessity for traditionally "independent" (read "untainted") disciplines such as English studies to address market forces, and to justify, even within the university community, the viability of their practices and principles. (Paradoxically, the study of mass culture is still widely discredited by business and academic interests. It is perceived as a sop to youthful ignorance and a compromising of excellence, even as disciplines such as English studies are being forced into difficult negotiations amongst the never quite binaries of careerist rhetoric and pedagogic principle, and drives towards curricula democratisation concurrent with what is called the "maintaining of standards".) Whatever the utilitarian dangers of a university unself-reflexively enthralled to big business economic imperatives, there is a sense in which all academic discourses are necessarily becoming more visibly implicated in a nexus of capitalist exchange. Disciplines such as English studies, then, may from at least one vantage point be viewed as themselves being forms of commodity on sale to new types of student/employer/donor consumer. I might mention, here, the understandable attraction for recent South African English studies graduates of comparatively recent fields such as cultural studies. Whereas many English departments remain rather squeamish about mass culture, rendering themselves in many student minds "outdated", cultural studies is regarded by graduates as a potential growth area. The limitations of the field are either not seen, or are outweighed by what students perceive to be the field's bold engagements with the contemporary cultural scene, and attempts to deconstruct conventional divisions between intellectual and experiential cultures.

In reformulating the role of the university as a cultural agency, Geyer, for his part, argues that "the dissemination of knowledge about the world has ... become a function of the entertainment industry rather than of the knowledge industry" (1993: 527), and it has become reasonable to claim that

> knowledge of the world now has less to do with the traditionally monocultural "Western" authority of the university, than with TV entertainment, newspapers, documentary spectacles, radio talk shows, magazines, advertising, film, lifestyle supplements; [all of which] have developed a power that is commensurate with university education.
>
> (Geyer 1993: 512)

As this relates to English studies, this power would perhaps be more evident were English departments to acknowledge the difficult reciprocities and interlinkages of the three multicultural trajectories referred to above, i.e. the addressing of "other" cultures, the fostering of an academic development culture, and the proliferation of mass culture. While undeniably important, for instance, it is not enough to accommodate in the syllabus an apparently counter-hegemonic "book culture" which highlights discourses of race, gender, and class: Alice Walker's *The Colour Purple*, say, cannot reasonably be taught independently of the popular Hollywood version of the novel, or, in South Africa, as disjunct from the film's history at the hands of government censors anxious to repress images which popularise not only black (female) defiance, but a transgressive lesbian sexuality: questions need to be staged concerning the shifting collocations of dominant, alternative and oppositional discursive formations which mobilise the meanings granted to any cultural form. We must begin to envisage, for example, how such undeniably political practices as ESL strategies, the teaching of reading and interpretation skills, and the construction of "appropriate" syllabuses, intersect with the mass-mediated versions of multiculturalism through which students situate their experience. To allow Giroux's point: the irony is that while radical educators have claimed

> the importance of student experience as a central component for developing a critical pedagogy, they have generally failed to consider how such experience is shaped by the terrain of popular culture.
>
> (1992: 181)

And it is precisely this terrain which may provide ways of re-framing what is for many students a very real psychic and emotional shock accompanying their entry into an academic environment: educators need to think seriously about the kinds of syncretic cultural lexicons which students "bring" to university, and to imagine intersections between hybrid forms of knowledge and experience. The cries of some minibus taxi-drivers to "Go for the *Bold*!' might not be an imperative within the cultural-grammatical repertoires of most academics, for instance, but *The Bold and The Beautiful* is a television serial hugely popular among black urban audiences, especially women. If the example is not unproblematic - many critics would argue that it indicates simply co-option, rather than the creative re-energising of an "American" experiential model - popular cultural practices such as fantasy and romance, widely designated fatuous among the academic cognoscenti, also intersect with ambivalent constructions of female desire and pleasure. It is difficult to deny, moreover, that the mass media have themselves

articulated previously repressed voices and disseminated new images, and that since these will at different moments seem to function as dominant, oppositional and/or alternative cultural registers, they cannot simply be dismissed as capitalist expedience. Black power, rap, academic and colloquial feminism and other cultures find their ways unevenly into the texts and structures of what we might once have conceived of as a homogeneously dominant culture industry, with the result that mass cultural forms may be at once the source of apparently circumscribed stereotypes, and the sites of struggle over meanings ascribed to human experience.

Am I assuming, then, that "English studies" should transmute into "Cultural Studies"? Well, no. Instead, rather paradoxically, the reverse might be claimed, for as Colin MacCabe maintains:

> The challenge facing cultural studies is nothing less than to become the discipline that English, in its ideological form, always claimed to be, but to undertake this task at the intersection of different disciplinary concerns in their engagements with the contemporary world.
>
> (1991: 33-34)

In its genealogy and its present forms, English both is and is not cultural studies, an oxymoron which we could consider further. Any survey of English as a discipline, for instance, will reveal its nature as "cultural studies". In practice, English studies has

> always been multidisciplinary, drawing on social and art history, on philosophy and political theory. The history of English as a discipline is not a history of a single way of doing things, disrupted every now and then by a Kuhnian conceptual revolution (New Criticism, Deconstruction) .... Its essence has always been a methodological pluralism.
>
> (Frith 1992: 7)

In relation to more contemporary understandings of "cultural studies", we might also allow that the English studies practitioner can advantageously rework several concepts popularised in the academic world by those working in the break-away field of cultural studies. As often used within cultural studies "hegemony", for instance, valuably admits discursive difference, but it might be developed in English studies in a form which more readily allows for schisms in "the dominant" which *cannot* by definition co-opt or accommodate even the most conflictual of cultural engagements. It is ironic, in fact, that cultural studies in its most vigorous South African manifestations, tends not to have developed to logical pedagogic and theoretical purpose its valuable initial gains against the moral conservatism and

text-bound horizons of "English".

In seeking to chart the relation and differences between South African English studies and cultural studies, it is important to remark, of course, that "cultural studies" in South Africa has on the one hand tended to be an extremely dispersed collation of practices, rather than a coherent discipline. Such disciplinarily disparate researchers as Hofmeyr, Walker, Bertelsen, Muller, Green, Tomaselli & Tomaselli, Couzens, Brown and Criticos, for instance, have all produced work which analyses aspects of South African cultural life. In *Crusoe's Footprints* (1990), Brantlinger claims this "dispersal" as a valuable rather than disabling feature, arguing that the transgressive quality necessitated by a truly detailed, contextualised study of culture is best encouraged by interdisciplinarity, by the crossing of professional and intellectual boundaries and methodologies. On the other hand, however, perhaps the most energetic South African attempt to codify cultural studies as a specific discipline has been made by Tomaselli et al., *via* the formation in 1986 at the University of Natal of a Contemporary Cultural Studies Unit which even in its nomenclature points to the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies as an "originary" impulse. (The unit has metamorphosed into The Centre for Cultural and Media Studies, with a slant towards technical media skills and the production of media professionals.)

In trying to claim space for a reconceptualised English studies as "against" Cultural Studies, it would be wrong-headed to imagine that the CCMS has not been impressive in re-shaping the terrains of South African cultural research. The Centre has sought to distinguish its practices, for instance, from the mechanistic, decontextualised, materially-impoverished information flow models which seem to have determined "mass communication" scholarship especially in Afrikaans "Communications Studies", and the interdisciplinary openness of the journal *Critical Arts* has given increased academic prominence to South African and international media issues. From a primarily sociological orientation, one might be inclined to agree, with Badenhorst, that the Centre *has* in fact illustrated that the "battle for hegemony ... embraces the struggle for meaning in language, words, slogans, songs, and gestures" (1992: 59). Yet whatever Badenhorst's claims, or Steadman's assertions that the "most important achievement of the hybrid field called Cultural Studies has been to articulate the relationship of symbolic discourses to political change" (1989: 113), this position in fact tends *not* to have been prominent in the academically-dominant forms of South African cultural studies research. Without rehearsing in this paper the nuanced lineage of Cultural Studies (either nationally or internationally), it seems permissible, if provocative, to suggest that if local Cultural Studies

affiliates have usefully resituated cultural practices, including literature, within terrains of politics and power, the preferred epistemology of "cultural policy" and "political economy" could be seen to have over-emphasised "hard news" journalism, audio-visual formats, structural controls, and media production, as well as supposedly alternative and/or marginalised subcultures, focusses which have relegated consumption and commodification to the margins of morality and hence of valid, sympathetic research. As I argue in the course of this paper, an effect of this has been to underplay the role of the imagination in the creation of popular cultural spaces and audience alignments.

Within the most visible version of South African Cultural Studies - somewhat ironically, given its repeated critiques of English departments for their subscription to "the literary" as a transcendent category - the cultural *form* and its initial production seem often to assume an immanence and authority which are severed from the shifting, contradictory *practices* through which meaning - both as production and reception - is mobilised. Indeed, Cultural Studies has tended to presume a somewhat straightforward correspondence between medium and ideology, and there remains a distinct predilection not to allow the realms of the contemporary or modernity their theoretical-empirical logic. This entails a construction of cultural authenticity and "the popular" predicated upon the "side-stepping [of an] examination of middle-class, mass-mediated cultures" (Warren 1993: 178).

If English studies *can* make creative use of a vocabulary of hegemony, incorporation and ideology most familiar to us from Cultural Studies, this may best be achieved in conjunction with endeavours to take seriously the possibilities and constrictions of mass cultural life as they relate to identity, esteem, anxiety and desire. Despite Steadman's praise of Cultural Studies, his argument could be seen simultaneously to highlight some of the implicit limitations which have in the past characterised the field, when he explains that social scientists in South Africa are increasingly (i.e. only recently)

> finding in the "softer" areas of cultural consciousness important signifiers of the "harder" matters of class formation and political alignment.
>
> (Steadman 1989: 113)

While I might wish to challenge the hierarchised authority and differentiated seriousness implicit in Steadman's use of the appellations "soft" and "hard" - "soft" as lack or absence, as but precursor to the important "hard" stuff - suffice it to say that an axiom of Cultural Studies' preferences for the hard, the serious, the political, the visibly democratic, has generally been the turning to a dystopian ideology critique rather than to the recognitions

of multivalent complicities and investments informing, for instance, the compellingly unorthodox Marxisms of critics such as Ernst Bloch and Walter Benjamin. Both theorists turned to everyday cultural sites such as the shopping street and the fun fair in order to imagine how within the commonplace, the ostensibly banal and degraded, traces of fantasy could embody utopian longings for society's transformation. Fantasy, here, was understood as the site of mutually-implicated hopes and fears, and the very fragmented, sporadic nature of Benjamin's focus and approach, for instance, could be suggestive of the multiple, vacillating investments which people make in any cultural form.

Whereas Willoughby (1991) perceives in Tomaselli's South African Cultural Studies a "joyless reductionism", an English studies reconceptualised to allow for the uneven interanimations of various multicultural trajectories is, I believe, well-placed to offer symbolically nuanced understandings of the ways in which cultural phenomena are rendered relevant through people's appropriations and negotiations. Both Willoughby (1991) and Trump (1989), in reviewing volumes produced by members of the CCMS, can offer but tempered praise. If Trump, for example, lauds *Narrating the Crisis* as "quite simply the best book I have read on the South African press", one which suggests the failure of local English departments to include media studies *per se* in the curriculum:

> ... one of the notable weaknesses in the ... book occurs where the authors are too little concerned - despite the volume's title - with the narrative features of media representation ... [t]here is far too little textual analysis of articles ... to support the frequently persuasive and sophisticated arguments.
>
> (Trump 1989: 162-3)

Trump repeatedly acknowledges in his review the discursive instability of the "literary" as a cultural category, yet he is driven by the aporias of sterile ideology critique to confess: "What one misses, I guess, is a 'literary' touch'" (1989: 163). For Willoughby, a major signifier of a "literary" sensibility is the ability to grant the cultural form in question, an imaginative power which extends beyond the routinely explicable parameters of context, production etc., and he argues that cultural criticism

> needs to be incorporated within literary studies, for it is within literary studies (rejuvenated, as it has been, by various theoretical elixirs in recent years) that the real business of cultural recovery is to take place in the future; and it is as a

> vital, reconstituting element of literary research, rather than as a sort of adjunct of sociology ... that the study of popular culture will most usefully regain the academy.
>
> (Willoughby 1991: 165)

In a South Africa of the mid 1990s, then, "mass" or "popular" culture cannot become part of a transformational English studies while envisaged as the manipulative commodity of state capitalism; nor can a transformational English studies attempt to recuperate positively the adjective "mass" simply by eliding "popular" with the cultural expression of a homogeneously delineated "black experience", or with various forms of indigenous oral performance which are upheld as exemplars of popular cultural authencity. (I consider these points in more detail elsewhere (Murray 1994)). Even contemporary development strategies, I believe, risk constituting the black subject within the academe via discourses characteristic of an earlier totalising identity politics. Black students are too often by definition located within teachers' conceptual frames as a disadvantaged, ESL constituency which requires extraordinary cultural amelioration. And, as I have indicated, recent South African education initiatives may have emphasised the need to effect reciprocal realignments between primarily *black* student experience and the administrative and pedagogic infrastructures of the university, which within English departments have often taken the form of introductory language courses, and a syllabus revised to give prominence to texts by black writers. Yet there has been scant acknowledgement that academic student experience - black or white - is not intrinsically separate from other non-academic forms of engagement.

Indeed, in an increasingly urbanised environment - even one which remains structured upon glaringly unequal wealth and access to cultural capitals - all South Africans live variously in and through the contradictions of an uneven modernity. What we need, as teachers of English in relation to unstable literary, popular, and mass cultural experiences, is to bring into new conjunctures with the academe the texts and cultural formations of a "middle-class", "capitalist dominant", still widely construed by academics as stereotypical indices of consumer excess. If we pursue Warren's (1993) argument, developed in a paper on shopping malls and theme parks, landscapes of leisure and entertainment have begun to function not so much as segregated, class-specific sites separate from the rigours of daily life, but as modes which saturate contemporary cultural geographies. They blur the distinctions between leisure, entertainment and commodity; history and fiction; individual and community; tradition and modernity. As Kipnis claims, "theories of popular culture that search out the ever decreasing

corners of uncommodified life as a positive ground have more to do with left asceticism than a politically viable theory of the popular" (quoted in Frith 1993: 5). In reading contemporary culture, we need to engage not only with subcultures, or "repressed" groups, or "the subordinate", but with what has been presented as the "mainstream", and with the ways in which such categories of experience serve particular, often academic, purposes. Nor should we disregard at least one of the implications of the turn in contemporary cultural research towards the visual regimes associated with filmic "ethnographies" and "anthropologies" of residually primitive communities such as "the Bushmen". Does this represent a nostalgia for cultural authenticity, a hankering after a premodern pastoral perfection in which primitive communities "on the verge" of extinction, or at least irrevocable cultural change, provide a mythic cultural centre - and a reassuring guarantee of intellectual control - for the otherwise displaced modern sensibility? Does this interest entail a turning away from any sustained analysis of "modernities" under a fascination - however theoretically informed - with a premodern other? It has been suggested, of course, that even influential theorists such as Jameson and Eagleton, whose work includes the analysis of decidedly contemporary cultural forms and practices, nevertheless invoke by implication a terrain of "folk" or "untainted" cultural experience somehow beyond mass-mediated constrictions, which is premised upon a version of the cultural lament which has long shaped defences of Culture against mass philistinism. Yet the point, surely, is not to deride and cynically debunk such continuing preoccupations as inherently ideologically suspect or naive, but to re-imagine the kinds of intellectual, professional, emotional, psychic and other investments which we as teachers make in the very forms and practices with which we engage.

Such pedagogically "self-conscious" relationships with cultural construction generally and with commodified contemporary experience specifically seems set to become demanded of an English studies which seeks common ground with new student populations. For it assumes that we, as teachers and "authorities", are ourselves fashioned by the cultures which we teach and experience; we are not somehow beyond the inscriptions of ideology and hegemony, disseminating to culturally impoverished students true Cultural knowledge in pure, unmediated forms. There is still much work to be done, then, in addressing the positionality, pleasures, professional and emotional allegiances of teachers and critics in their teaching and research.

With regard to all of these shifting cultural capitals, one of the issues for the "English" department, I suppose, which continues to have a vested interest in the genealogical construction, and even the active defence, of "the literary", is quite where to place L/literature as an "object", as a key

locus of value, or as a cultural process among others. Whatever the modifications and mediations of "Literary Studies" in relation to English studies - even if we are provisionally content to construct literature in terms of what Carter and Nash (1990) have called "clines of the literary" - the notion of "the literary" continues to be invested with *symbolic* value and currency. In considering the potential contributions of English studies towards a transformational pedagogy, I continue, for instance, to invoke categories such as narrative, image, patterning, sign, and similar terms familiar from the study of literature. My very position illustrates the paradox which seems inevitably associated with attempts by English studies to address contemporary cultural forms: how to situate "literature" within cultural discursivity while simultaneously retaining some sense of "literary" engagement as one form of valuable social practice.

However much current research and pedagogy demonstrate the value of disciplinary transgressions, the professional stakes attendant upon an institutionalised disciplinarity are likely to ensure that English studies practitioners continue to invoke if not a residual, then at least a reconceptualised,"literariness" by means of which to define their interests in relation to fields such as Cultural Studies and Social Anthropology. In teaching, in English studies, popular material alongside more traditional literary material, the point is not to transhistoricise textuality or textual terms by taking refuge in the concept of "text". Whatever Easthope's (1991) anxieties, we *can* be alert to various "textual" strategies within different formal and historical contexts without ignoring the different signifying practices which are involved in the reading, say, of a lyric poem by Ingrid de Kok, a Dickensian novel, and a postmodern leisure resort. Nor need the necessary endpoint of structuralist and poststructuralist initiatives which extend the concept of "text" to facilitate the analysis of cultural forms and practices as diverse as architecture and national cuisine, become merely fashionable style, elegant yet sterile, and evincing too little concern for the structural constraints on individual action.

The continued interest in discourses which are mobilised on behalf of "the literary" may have positive as well as negative repercussions. This is especially so if we assert the conflictual character of literariness, i.e. the embeddedness of all cultural production within larger social realities, and the highly unstable paradigms and protean tactics of reception and meaning production in terms of which "the literary" is constructed. What productive understandings might the cultural researcher with an understanding of the constructedness of literary discourses bring to the analysis of culture: the narrative patternings and conventions which variously and contextually inform all "textual structure"; the role of the imagination in managing human power relations; the rhetoric used to represent social facts and

fictions; the potential for human agency and empowerment in the imaginative remobilisation of politically compromised cultural forms. Willoughby states that in our analysis of culture there

> are other factors to be borne in mind beside economics merely; theories of reception, mythic and conventional patterning, rhetorical features, sign systems, the traces or tropes of power and desire - these are all the bustling province of the literary critic. To see films (or books, or newspapers, or any artefact) as merely indexes of social and political forces ... is to shrivel the (muddled, vital, insistent) place and point of cultural expression. We need to assert an aesthetics, not deny one, in re-presenting popular media; otherwise, we ... simply ... find in cultural products precisely those ideological currents we put there.
>
> (Willoughby 1991: 70)

It seems to me necessary to allow that the new media culture provokes the need for critical languages predicated not by definition on dismissal and derision, but on an awareness of the ambiguous constructions of subjectivity, collectivity, pleasure and desire.

In English studies, I suggest, we can begin to approximate these languages of affective and critical identification by encouraging new alignments of the energies which characterised "English" in its original "ideological form", with re-envisaged understandings of "the imagination". As Appadurai (1993) allows, within contemporary societies the role of the imagination must be re-conceived as the shifting interrelationship of mechanically produced images as conceived by the Frankfurt School, imagined communities as discussed by Anderson, and the French notion of the imaginary or "imaginaire" as a field of collective aspirations which is mediated through the refractions of modern media. Accordingly, the imagination must be understood as a social fact and practice central to all forms of agency; it is no

> longer mere fantasy (opium for the masses whose real work is elsewhere), no longer simple escape (from a world defined principally by more concrete purposes and structures), no longer elite pastime (thus not relevant to the lives of ordinary people) and no longer mere contemplation (irrelevant for new forms of desire and subjectivity), the imagination has become an organized field of social practices, a form of work both in the sense of labor and of culturally organized practice) and a form of negotiation between sites of agency ("individuals") and globally defined fields of possibility.
>
> (Appadurai 1993: 327)

Appadurai's claims, then, might allow us to move beyond the difficult to measure notions of resistance and transgression as the locus of popular cultural value. They might also counter arguments which de-legitimate

certain forms of culture as too much of an "easy read", for instance, conveying by implication that it is the edifying mental, rational activity which is central to textual response, while sensation, feeling and appeals to the body are to be dismissed as mere unregenerate spontaneity. If we admit the manifold permutations of the imagination implied by Appadurai's argument for the positioning of texts and audiences, it follows that however much pedagogy may seek to demystify a cultural product, for instance, there will always be a life beyond the critical explication, a mystery and imaginative pulse which resists codification. Somehow, we as teachers seem embarrassed even to "contemplate" such slippages, especially at an historical juncture which demands from texts and methodologies a (preferably) visible measure of democratic commitment.

Accordingly, it becomes important for the often idealist English studies academic who is teaching popular culture, to recognise from the outset the impossibility of enforcing an exact correspondence between self and society. Any reading of any culture within English studies, I would think, should encourage the recognition that identity is a contingently constructed, and variously mobilised social category. "I" am in different situations and discourses part of the dominant; the marginalised; the uncommitted; "I" may be now oppositional, now alternative, now co-opted: the

> self does not pre-exist the forms of its social recognition; it is a heterogeneous and shifting resultant of the social expectations targetted upon it, the social duties accorded it, the norms according to which it is judged, the pleasures and pains that entice and coerce it, the languages according to which it is spoken about and about which it learns to account for itself in thought and speech.
>
> (Mauss, quoted in Donald 1992: 93)

Therefore, in education's regulating of the individual so as to inculcate moral and ethical norms, there is a disjunctive liminality, for the boundaries of self, society, and culture are never firmly fixed: sometimes "the pedagogic and the popular coincide, sometimes they overlap and sometimes they are in conflict" (Donald 1992: 15). There will always be discrepancies between the pedagogic and what Bhabha (1994) has called "the performative", between the machinery of education and the quirks of agency. Whatever our intention as educators in addressing contemporary culture,

> pupils' tactics of reinterpretation, resistance, rejection and overinvestment suggest both how the deployment of social and symbolic norms structures their field of action, but also that they are not simply internalized.
>
> (Donald 1992: 47)

As I've said, for instance, the teaching of "popular texts" in the English studies syllabus can ignore the paradoxical dynamics of addressing "the popular" in the "academic" context, and the strategies according to which the text is re-produced within the constraints of pedagogy. Clearly, the term "mediated" in the title of this paper must refer not only to cultural forms such as televisual, filmic and print media, but to contexts of reception and to the especially mediated nature of a pedagogy which addresses popular culture. For example: it has, on the one hand, become a truism (even if seldom explicitly invoked in the teaching context) that in teaching and studying a course which includes popular cultural texts and events we academicise the terrain and constitute an audience removed from the intended; we invest differently in the product than we would in our own homes, say, or at the movies. And we have come tentatively to admit, without quite knowing the practical implications, that a different set of strategies may become applicable in our reception of the material, with any text being granted a number of interrelated experiential authorities - academic, colloquial, physical, psychic. Yet on the other, we cannot quite bring ourselves to accept that even in the terrain of non-academic life people make critical distinctions amongst various popular contemporary cultural forms and practices. It is not only within the academe, then, that Colin MacCabe's claim may have validity: "... there can be no useful analyses of popular culture which are not also evaluative" (quoted in Frith 1993: 6).

The teacher of popular culture must negotiate difficult mediations of pedagogical practice. While my academic engagement with mass-mediated culture does not inevitably denigrate the meanings which any of us as "ordinary people" might generate, I write and teach also as a lecturer from within a university, a cultural agency charged with responsibility for education, and at least one important function of a tertiary education is to "promote" the development of critical consciousness. This has been especially true of English studies. And English studies, even in a reconceptualised form, will *still* seek to retain for itself the cultural and symbolic authority to guide, if not to "police", the moral welfare, relevant knowledges, and potentially subversive pleasures of its constituency. It may well be tautologous to grant credence to people's readings of popular culture while simultaneously assuming the role of critical reader of popular culture, but as Adorno once ventured, the cultural critic can hardly avoid the imputation that she or he has the culture which the culture lacks. If we are not willing to make automatic formal distinctions between authentic and inauthentic versions of popularly consumed culture, must the individual teacher endorse what she might perceive to be reactionary and/or expedient uses? As Frith argues, even if we wish to refute the cluster of assumptions

associated with the once widely held belief that the properly discriminating reader is "a well-schooled - Oxbridge - white man", in re-imagining the roles of the popular in academic study "we have to tread a fine line between cultural celebration and dismissal. The 'popular' raises its own questions of taste and discrimination, its own confusion of aesthetic, political and moral issues" (1992: 19).

As this paper has emphasised, perhaps one way towards the development of a transformational English studies which addresses the popular without automatic condescension or, alternatively, celebration, is to recognise the negotiated investments we make in culture, to recognise the sometimes perverse pleasures and fears we invest in the material we are teaching. The English studies teacher, then, needs to allow *real* force rather than mere lip service to the by now commonplace acknowledgement that she is not a vatic authority. As "English" teachers, we see ourselves as necessarily promoting a critical engagement with "the world"; but we must also grant real credence to the understanding that analysis and experience, the rational and the emotional are not part of a mutually exclusive binary. The mediations of identity and subjectivity which are especially attendant upon the teaching of popular culture in its history as academic bogey, then, take place not merely through intellectual *discourse* but "through attachments and investments that are as much a question of affect and pleasure as they are of ideology and rationality" (Giroux 1992: 183).

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